

Flourishing Relationships with Consulting Clients

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by

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No man is an iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee....

John Donne, Meditation 17, Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, 1624

Abstract

Some relationships go quite well - others less well. In this dissertation I explore consulting relationships that flourish and how such a bond develops between consultant and client. I distil the essence of my and some other practising consultants' experience of flourishing relationships using transcendental phenomenological methods. Unlike quantitative analysis, the description obtained in this way retains the complexity of our experience and I present it as a series of dialogues, mirroring the form of the conversations from which it was drawn.

In the flourishing consulting relationships I researched, I found firstly that consultant and client mark out some fundamental common ground they have with one another in terms of their beliefs, interests and behaviours. They check that something is at stake that both value. While they do so, they discover ways to mutually engage, to let each other in. They came to like, respect, trust and feel accepted by one another. They enter into each other's emotions and perspectives, empathising deeply with the other. Neither feels superior. They become energised about what they are doing. They maintain a strong sense of personal connection despite the peaks and troughs experienced thereafter.

Then, as a partnership develops, they become a dyadic unit, one in spirit. They co-own their project, embedded together in it. They ask for and value each other's opinions, given honestly. They feel responsible for one another. They share the work, their skills and experience synergised. Finally, operating as a team, they are able to act in concert as they engage with the outside world to further the purpose of the assignment that brought them together. They have a common purpose, aim, plot and script, within which they can both improvise.

A summary description of the phenomenon is presented, accompanied by diagrams showing the underlying structures. I apply my findings to my own practice and reflect on how they help me, what I have learned about myself and how I relate to others, and the contribution I hope my inquiry makes to knowledge.

A paper summarising this dissertation has been published in the peer-reviewed Work Based Learning e-Journal international, published by Middlesex University (Davis, 2015).

Contents

Abstract	2
Contents	3
Chapter 1 – Introduction.....	6
Topic and structure of the dissertation	6
My interest in consultant-client relationships	7
My attitude to relationships	15
What is flourishing?	18
Flourishing and relating in our contemporary world.....	22
Enhancing the quality of my inquiry	23
Chapter 2 – Existing scholarship	26
Flourishing and Positive Psychology	26
Concepts of relating	35
Consulting relationally	46
My research question becomes.....	54
Chapter 3 – My phenomenological methodology	56
Transcendental phenomenological research.....	56
Epoche: setting aside preconceptions	58
Participants and data gathering.....	62
Phenomenological Reduction: what presents itself	64
Imaginative Variation: finding the underlying essence.....	65
Relationally synthesising descriptions of the phenomenon	68
Treating participants ethically.....	69
Phenomenological validity	70
Chapter 4 - First fieldwork cycle	74
Engaging, and finding common ground	75
Peaks and troughs.....	78
A dialogue	79
Valuing each other	81
Trust	82
Powerfully different	84
Sharing common ground.....	87
Taking stock from the first cycle: the textural themes	88

Going inside the consultant-client relationship	90
Chapter 5 – Second fieldwork cycle	92
Synergy, empathy, intimacy, integrity and affection	93
Acceptance, love and responsibility.....	95
Plot, script, improvisation and meaning	97
Joined at the hip.....	102
Structural themes, summary description and model of the phenomenon	111
Chapter 6 – Application of research findings to my practice.....	117
Phenomenology and practice	117
Validity considerations for practical knowing.....	118
Questions I can hold whilst practising	120
Practical experience consulting with my questions in mind.....	121
Application beyond consulting relationships.....	129
Summary of application	132
Chapter 7 – Conclusions.....	134
Final validity considerations.....	134
Contribution to scholarship	135
Further insights and opportunities for new research	136
Expanding methodology	145
Consulting today, in Cambodia	146
The change in me	147
Chapter 8 – Postlude: Transcending my inquiry	150
Introduction	150
Influences on me as the researcher.....	150
My experience of personal attachment.....	151
Reflection	154
New possibilities	158
Phenomenology as a methodology	159
Processes and Progress	161
Epoche.....	162
Texture and Structure	163
Participative Inquiry	165
Positivism, “I-It” thinking and relating	166
2 dimensional diagrams	167

Buber and Dialogue.....	169
The ineffable and transcendental	171
Conclusion	172
References.....	174
Appendix 1 – Newspaper article on flourishing and relationships	183
Appendix 2 – An example of a research conversation and its phenomenological analysis	185
Conversation with Geoff, 5 th October 2012	185
Phenomenological Reduction and Textural Description.....	203
Imaginative Variation and Structural Description.....	206
Synthesised Description	209

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Topic and structure of the dissertation

The topic of this dissertation is when relationships with clients flourish in the practice of organisation consulting. Several practising consultants assisted me as co-subjects in the research I will describe. I used phenomenological methods to understand and synthesise our experience into a description and model of the flourishing consulting relationships we have.

This first chapter introduces the dissertation. The section following this explains why I became interested in consulting relationships and came to choose their flourishing as my topic. The section after that looks at my personal stance on relationships. In the fourth section of the chapter, I explore the idea of flourishing in more depth. Then I say something about the connections between my topic and the contemporary discourse about wellbeing; and in the final section of this chapter I look at how I have pursued quality in my inquiry. In Chapter 2 of the dissertation I examine the existing literature surrounding my topic, firstly on the psychology of flourishing, then on relating and relational practice. I also look at the literature on consulting and allied professions from a relational perspective. The purpose of this chapter is to show the scholarship on which I am building and the gap in it I intend to fill. At the end of the chapter I identify my research question. Chapter 3 explains the phenomenological methodology I use for data gathering with the participants in the research and subsequent analysis, and how I applied the processes, stage by stage.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I present the results of my two cycles of phenomenological fieldwork. These chapters are a synthesis of depictions of flourishing relationships between consultants and clients, created from the phenomenological analysis of a series of conversations with participants in my research. Into the depiction is layered reading and reflection, the whole presented as a dialogue between inquiry participants, scholars and myself. Chapter 5 builds on Chapter 4 by going deeper into the emerging relational structure of flourishing consulting that the participants describe. At the end of Chapter 5, I propose a summary description of the phenomenon of flourishing relationships between consultants and clients.

Chapter 6 looks at how I applied the propositional knowledge gained in Chapters 4 and 5 to my consulting practice, analysing my experience of relationships in a recent assignment. In Chapter 7, I round off the dissertation with a summary of all my findings, related back to the starting points to the inquiry and the literature base. Then I look at the possibilities raised by my research, for me, for other consultants and for further research.

Chapter 8 was inserted after the dissertation was examined. In it I respond to the examiners' comments, *transcending* my experience of relationships to reveal a spiritual factor and looking at my work's methodology and links to scholarship anew.

My interest in consultant-client relationships

This first section of Chapter 1 summarises early inquiries, the probing I undertook before I settled on the topic of this dissertation: when consulting relationships with clients flourish. I describe the sort of consulting I do and some of my previous consulting experience; I explain why that experience prompted me to do research into consulting; and I tell you about the ideas I explored before I made my choice of topic.

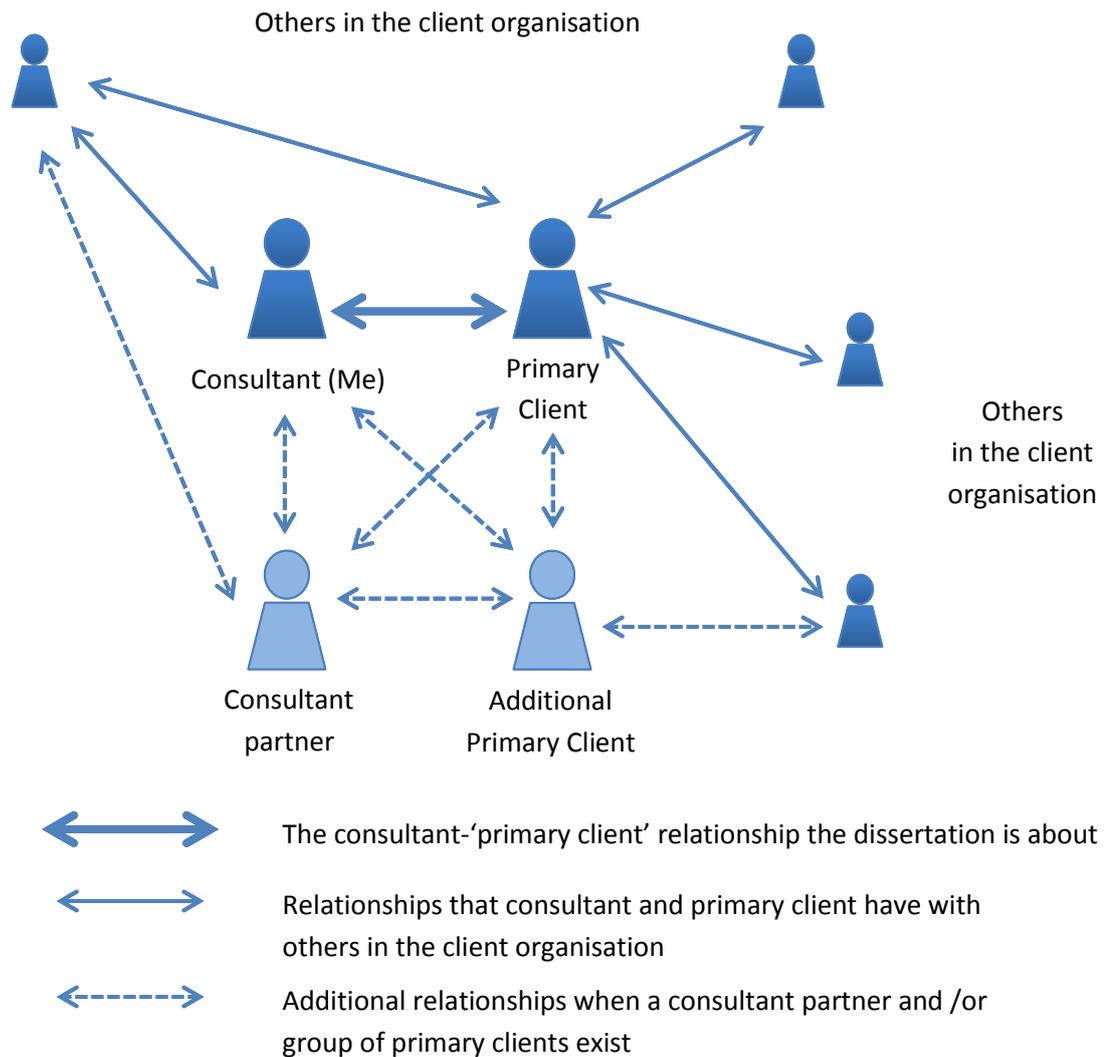


Figure 1: My world of consultants and clients

I am a consultant who assists management clients to address organisational changes they wish to make. Those changes may relate to new ventures, organisational improvements or challenges they are facing. I have worked as a consultant in organisations varying in size from a handful of people to hundreds of thousands, in a range of sectors including development, health, defence, information technology, shipbuilding, education, small businesses and financial services. My assignments look at various aspects of how people organise themselves in their work, including their

planning, team structures, communications, business processes, evaluation schemes and information resources. I have worked as an internal consultant and as an external consultant - both as a member of consulting practices and independently.

Within a client organisation, clients can have different roles in the consultation process. The various relationships between them and consultants are shown diagrammatically at Figure 1. Schein (1997, p. 203) defines as a consultant's *primary client*:

the individual(s) who ultimately "own" the problem or issue being worked on; they are typically also the ones who pay the consulting bills or whose budget covers the consultation project.

I normally work most closely with the individual - or sometimes the small group of people - acting as the 'primary client' in the way defined by Schein. This primary client takes the lead in his or her organisation for the particular assignment I have been engaged to work on. This person may be the leader of the client organisation, but if not then he or she will often be accountable directly to the leadership of the organisation for the initiative I am supporting. I also get involved from time to time directly with other people in the client organisation; these people Schein calls *intermediate clients* (Schein E. H., 1997, p. 202). Sometimes I work with other consultants. Then there is the rest of the client organisation, the people who Schein (1997, p. 203) calls *unwitting, indirect and ultimate clients*, who may be affected by the consulting assignment although the consultant does not work directly with them. The subject of this dissertation though is the relationship between consultant and primary client.

After several years working in consultancy, I became concerned that clients were not always benefitting from the assistance of the consultants who had been engaged to help them. Sometimes I experienced this first hand as the consultant involved. These assignments left me feeling disappointed and dissatisfied, with a sense that something important was missing. In informal conversations with fellow consultants, they expressed similar concerns and wondered whether we were consulting in the best way. It was this kind of experience that led me to investigate consulting more deeply with the purpose of developing my practice.

Various problems with consulting are found in its literature. For instance, Bloch (1999) notes the *con* in consulting when consultants appear to know a lot but don't have knowledge relevant to their client's actual needs. Williams (2004, p. 775) records that consultants are often criticized for peddling management *fashions* or *fads* to their clients in *consultobabble*. Shapiro et al (1993) add that consultants are often censured for telling clients what they want to hear; telling them what they already know; using senior people to get the business and then handing over to juniors; constantly trying to expand the length and scope of their work; and making recommendations that only they the consultants can implement.

To explain how my own thinking developed from considering what I saw going wrong in consulting, into the topic that I have chosen for this dissertation, I will use short vignettes to illustrate some of my points. These stories are not part of the data used for

the phenomenological analysis reported later in this dissertation; rather they come from earlier and help explain why I chose my research question. Here are the first two examples drawn from my experience . . .

I am a member of a mixed group of internal and external consultants contracted to support project teams throughout an organisation. A pair of consultants is assigned from the group to each team to assist its managers with a thorough review of their project. In one of my reviews, it quickly becomes apparent that two projects in the organisation are similar. A fellow internal consultant and I are supporting one of the projects, whilst a pair of external consultants supports the other. My partner and I can see that it makes sense to consider combining the two projects, but when we approach the pair of external consultants assigned to the second project to seek their co-operation, they are polite but unenthusiastic and look uncomfortable. They argue that the option of combining projects is outside the terms of reference of our assignments. We suspect that they are really worried about losing a paying assignment for their firm. The idea of combining the two projects never sees the light of day and the potential benefits are never realised.

Second, I join a company as an internal consultant with a brief to improve its operational performance. I feel a bit like a new boy at school, unsure of myself, feeling my way in. I have never used the fashionable improvement methodology the company uses, and neither am I familiar with their business sector. I invite the company's board to identify operational problems for a first tranche of projects. What the directors put forward are mainly issues for which I know the methodology is not designed, so I feel in a fix. The problems they have identified are depressing the company's performance and I feel a responsibility to help solve them. I don't have enough experience of the methodology to help me decide whether it could also work in these other situations and I don't know enough about the company to suggest alternative projects that would better fit the bill. Afraid I might be found wanting, I decide to take a risk and put all my energy into making the projects succeed. Most of them don't.

In both the two examples above, self-interest strongly drove the behaviour of the consultants, including me. Therefore I started to use as a handrail the notion that consultants should always act in the interests of their clients, as is laid down in codes of conduct for consultants' professional bodies (e.g. IMC, 2008). So, as I developed the topic of my inquiry, I looked back and considered occasions in my consulting experience when I tried intentionally to act in my clients' best interests. Here is a story to illustrate a typical example of what happened when I did . . .

I am supporting project teams in a large organisation again and consultants are asked by the senior people in the organisation to facilitate the introduction of certain new procurement practices. Right from the beginning of the assignment there appears to be a marked difference between some of these new practices and what many of the project managers think is best for their projects. We are

telling the project managers that they have freedoms that in reality they think they are unable to exercise. They have to appear to go along with the new practices because senior managers are not making them optional. But at the same time, if they feel previous ways of working are actually needed to make their projects successful, they tend to follow these and step round the inconsistencies with the new practices. In time we find out why: we help a project manager devise procurement arrangements that provide better value for money in his project, only for them to be over-ruled by a government minister because the solution adversely affects employment in his constituency. Our efforts to work in our clients' interest fall prey to conflicting interests amongst those in the wider 'client organisation'.

In this case, despite my attempt to act in the interests of my primary clients, I still didn't find what happened meaningful. The primary clients and others in the wider client organisation to some extent had different interests. Focussing exclusively on a narrow perception of the primary clients' interests had the effect of ignoring the needs of others in the client organisation on whom the primary clients depended for support, so the approach turned out not actually to be in the primary clients' interests after all.

Instead for a while I took another approach to my consulting. In my working experience generally, including the three vignettes above, I have felt a strong sense of wanting to serve my clients properly and I think that desire lay behind my keenness to work in their best interests. For a while, the main focus of my approach as a consultant was on being of service to my clients. I cannot find any literature on consulting as a form of service. However, Robert Greenleaf has written about leadership as a form of service, which he calls *Servant Leadership* (a servant being literally one who gives their service):

The servant leader is servant-first . . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. If their needs are being served they become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous. (Greenleaf, 2002, pp. 27,28).

A definition of service in terms of clients' *needs* rather than the more conceptual idea of clients' *interests* seems more applicable to the existential reality of consulting, more grounded in what makes a difference for clients. My time in the *Armed Services* also leads me to think about work in terms of service to others: servicemen and women talk about their *servicing* in a particular unit or theatre of operations. Thinking in terms of being of service to others draws attention to relationships that focus on what people need rather than relating that is functional and transactional. But the notion of service can also imply a compliant attitude in the servant, even a sacrificial one. Whilst those being served may become, as Greenleaf says in the citation above 'healthier, wiser, freer and more autonomous', it does not necessarily follow that the servant will also become these things: if having a sense of service heightened my sensitivity to the needs of my clients, I was concerned that at the same time that could make me over-dependent on clients' acceptance for my emotional wellbeing. Even as a servant, I still needed to feel I was putting my personality and ideas into a consulting relationship and that they

mattered to the client whatever they were. I wanted to feel needed by the client as me, Richard.

I also noticed a strong sense of *duty* in the way in which I approached my early consulting assignments, and of trying to behave *ethically* towards my clients; but as with *service*, all these constructs seemed to cover only part of how I actually practised consulting. For me, the central problem with these concepts is that they infer an asymmetry in the consulting relationship, in which the consultant has the slightly passive role of only responding to the client's ideas. What drew me to consulting originally was seeing consultants working closely alongside clients and being encouraged by them to contribute their insights. I also prefer to consult as a partner with my client by actively intervening with him or her in the client organisation.

The literature touching on what makes consultant-client relationships successful is somewhat sparse. In her article "Contrasting successful and unsuccessful OD consultation relationships", Kellogg (1984, p. 161) found that the three most important factors contributing to the quality of consulting relationships in the eyes of consultants are *role clarity*, *liking* and *respect*. Applebaum & Steed (2005, p. 77) found that the 'critical success factors' in the relationship were

- Competent, professional consultants
- A focus on clear, well-communicated outcomes for the client organisation
- Consultants finding out and adapting to the client's situation and priorities
- An incremental approach
- Consultants and clients working in partnership throughout the changes taking place

Most recently, Ben Gal & Tzafrir (2011, p. 667) found that two constructs to do with the consultant-client relationship play a major role in shaping the success of an organisational change in which consultants are employed. The first is the level of *trust* between consultant and client, which in turn supports the second, the *commitment to change* engendered jointly by both parties. This *commitment to change* is described as being at a *dyadic* level whereas *trust* is positioned as taking place at an *individual* level. ('Dyadic' here refers to the parties working as a unit.)

The three papers I have just referred to (Kellogg; Applebaum & Steed; Ben Gal & Tzafrir) highlight different factors leading to success in consultant-client relationships. Yet all of these factors could be valid and together they provide a richer picture of successful consulting relationships than each does on its own. The type of methodology used may account for some of the differences between the findings. All three studies used quantitative techniques: the views expressed by research participants were categorised in some way – for instance as the choices for the answers in a questionnaire - and then counted. There are problems attendant in such methodologies: the terms used by participants can be conflated in order to fit them into a manageable number of categories for quantification; it is assumed that the more times a factor is mentioned the more important it is; and there is little or no sense of sequence about the way in which

relationships develop. Quantitative study is sometimes a search for a few variables that are deduced to have a decisive effect. I find this approach unhelpfully reductionist. In what I find to be in reality a complex world, I wonder if as a professional community, consultants could be well served by a model of successful consultant-client relationships that has been derived qualitatively and is as rich as the experience of those contributing to it.

I notice something else about the three articles. The first two (Kellogg's and Applebaum & Steed's) make no distinction between a successful outcome to a consulting intervention and a successful consulting relationship. Ben Gal and Tzafrir actually posit that the nature of the consulting relationship could be the 'secret' to the success of the intervention. A close connection between the consulting relationship and the outcome of consulting is found in all three - indeed I can find no literature that takes a different line to there being a close connection between them. I make this point because it has also been my experience in consulting that this close connection exists (for an example see page 97). I have come to believe that a successful relationship and a successful outcome are bound together in that a consulting relationship exists to facilitate an outcome. I find it difficult to imagine how a successful outcome could be achieved without a successful consulting relationship, unless it is in fact the result of some unconnected and unexpected stroke of good fortune.

Previously in this section I discussed how acting in clients' interests, service, duty and acting ethically were all inadequate in my experience as strategies for successful consulting. Searching further for an idea that encapsulates what I was looking for, I was reminded of an example of my work that was not a piece of consulting, yet was notably successful . . .

As a young military engineer, I am responsible for managing the technical aspects of a contract with a manufacturer who is building advanced satellite terminals for the Armed Forces. I join the project about a year after the contract has been placed and find that, since then, progress with production has all but halted. There has been a plethora of requests for changes from various parts of the Armed Forces and the supplier is now expending a lot of his effort assessing and negotiating these changes. All communication about the changes between customer and supplier is taking place very slowly and formally through contracts officers. I assess the situation and wonder what I can do to get things moving, so that the terminals can enter service and meet the need for which they were ordered. One of my principal frustrations is that the Army's project manager discourages me from having a direct dialogue with the supplier's engineering staff. This means that I have a very poor idea of the feasibility and cost-drivers of each technical change being assessed. On a working trip to Belgium to conduct some trials on the equipment, I get to know my opposite number in the manufacturing company, its chief design engineer: Howard. I discover that Howard is also frustrated. He doesn't know the priorities of the changes being requested by the users and he has no way of making suggestions of his own about changes that might prove advantageous. Both of us are jumping through

the bureaucratic hoops set up by our organisations, feeling that we are bound only to increase the complexity and cost of the design and that little will ever be resolved.

I like Howard; I enjoy working with him and while we are abroad we get to know each other a bit. As we talk in the bar of our Brussels hotel about our frustrations with the project, I realise that, like me, what motivates Howard is getting a good job done. For both of us, this means providing users with the equipment they need. We believe that the situation we are in is not only failing to produce worthwhile equipment for users, but actually confounding both our organisations' priorities too. So I propose to Howard that we set aside the formal rules of engagement between our organisations and instead discuss the requested changes between us directly. That way I can explain the users' priorities and Howard can explain the impact on design and cost, engendering a dialogue that might be generative. We take the paperwork and a bottle of whisky up to one of our hotel rooms and work into the small hours going through all the proposed changes in this way. I relinquish requirements whenever I see from Howard's description of the design implications that the cost of change does not warrant the advantage to users it provides. Howard explains the biggest cost drivers in the design and suggests changes that would substantially reduce the cost, which I accept wherever I know there would be no significant penalty to operational performance. In the early hours of the morning, we arrive at a new specification for the satellite terminal that Howard knows he can build within budget and I know meets the users' priorities. We then take the new specification back to our contracts officers and invite them to formalise it in place of the previous specification, instead of processing all the pending requests for change. They bluster for a while but do this, perhaps not least because it gets everyone else off their backs for holding up progress on the project. Production proceeds on the basis of the new specification, the satellite terminals are delivered quickly into service and the users are delighted with the communications they give them - indeed they play a role in the direction of Gulf War One which takes place the following year. I learned a lot and today, many years later, I still receive recognition from colleagues for the role I played in making this project successful – and for its contribution to the capability of the Forces. Howard's company benefited too: from unblocking its revenue stream, enhancing its reputation and winning further orders for the successful product.

The experience I have just related, held out to me the prospect of a better way of working and I wondered whether I could carry that across into consulting. A relationship that grows and is successful – like the one I have just described - we could call an association that 'flourishes'. In such a relationship, the 'flourishing' of whatever the participants in a relationship are engaged in together can mirror the 'flourishing' of the relationship itself, as I found with Howard in the previous story. Considering human relations generally, Cooperrider and Fry (2012b) note a connection between being engaged in flourishing activities and being in flourishing relationships:

We define mirror flourishing as the consonant flourishing or growing together that happens naturally and reciprocally to us when we actively engage in or witness the acts that help nature flourish, others flourish, or the world as a whole to flourish (Cooperrider & Fry, 2012b, p.8).

I think my relationship with Howard flourished as we overcame the difficulties with the project and that we grew together in the process of doing so. We became successful with what we were doing, in terms acknowledged as such by those around us and ourselves. But before starting this research project, I had not experienced any consulting that 'flourished' in these terms. I had made my living as a consultant and had several clients who professed themselves happy with the outcomes of my assignments - but my work had not been very satisfying. Clients did not give me a sense – nor did I have the sense myself - that I had been useful to them. So why did they use me? I think in some cases because they were told to use a consultant by their superiors and in other situations in order to gain the additional authority of having a consultant supporting their case.

I said just now that my relationship with Howard flourished as we became successful at what we were doing. Now in consulting, in an important way, relating is what the participants do together - consulting and relating are both ways of describing the processes of communication going on between them. So focusing on relating makes sense in consulting. I have experienced more fulfilling assignments since I have been researching flourishing consulting relationships with clients, and I will be exploring one of them - with a client called Mike - in Chapter 5 on page 102. In practice now I find the flourishing of a consultant-client relationship a very useful indicator of effective consulting going on. Whether the outcome of a consulting assignment is what had been expected at its inception is at best a backward-looking indicator of its effectiveness, whereas the process of a consultant's relationship with his or her client can provide a real time indicator of effective progress being made. The context of the consultant and client's work is constantly evolving and the objectives of the consulting need to be kept in step with the changes. Furthermore, I experience the attitude of people in the client organisation towards the change being pursued by the consultant and primary client being projected into the consulting relationship. So the flourishing of consulting relationships seems to be a good 'leading' (predictive) indicator of effective consulting being in process.

To recap this section, I have discussed my choice of topic, the flourishing of consulting relationships with clients, drawing on incidents that have been figural in my experience of work. My sense of disappointment with early consulting experiences led me to concentrate in turn on the interests of clients, being of service to clients, duty and ethics, but none of these gave me the insight I was looking for. The burgeoning of the consultant-client relationship seemed a more rewarding angle and was closely linked to the success of the assignment as it developed. I decided I should use my doctoral inquiry to understand more about flourishing relationships in consulting. My purpose in doing so has been to improve the effectiveness of my craft as a consultant.

My attitude to relationships

In this section, I am going to explore in more depth my expectations of relationships, not particularly in consulting but connections with other people in general. I am doing this firstly to know myself - I am the instrument of my inquiry and my predispositions pervade it: I make decisions about what evidence to use and analyse it according to what I believe. Transcendental phenomenology seeks to minimise this effect through the process of *epoche*, which I explain fully in the section beginning on page 58. Essentially though, the basis of *epoche* is that if we can understand our assumptions about a phenomenon we are investigating then to some extent we can set them aside.

I am also examining my attitude to relationships, with you - the reader - in mind. Why should you pay any attention to this exploration of my chosen topic? When do I trust another's judgement on anything? Two things help me: practical experience of the matters in hand and evidence of critical thinking about them. I want my openness about myself to enhance my credibility as a researcher. I also hope that knowing me will help you decide to what extent my work is relevant to you and others.

As I look back over the life I have led so far, many of my relationships have been happy and provided me a rich sense of fulfilment: my marriage, parenthood, friendships and fellowship with colleagues. I feel deeply grateful for what I have and have had with these people. On the other hand, some associations have not flourished. These ones have been tense rather than convivial; our appreciation of each other and what we were doing together was limited. Thrown together by circumstances - often by a job - we just found a way to get on, taking small pieces of satisfaction from working together when we could - and going our own way for much of the time. This experience of unsatisfying relationships has always intrigued me. I have always been curious about many things, wanting to follow a lead and see where it went. This doctorate provided the opportunity to do so, in particular in respect of my consulting interactions.

I think I formed a view early in life that relationships could frequently be more detached than I wished them to be. An eldest child, relations with my three younger siblings often felt distant - I think may have copied my parents' slightly strict attitude towards them, when they wanted a brother who was a friend. At my schools I did not make friends easily either. Not as extrovert as others, I would wait for gestures of amity from those around me rather than myself reach out to them. I thought and acted the loner more than others. Forming connexions was made harder because when I moved schools, to university and then Sandhurst, none of my previous social circle came with me, so I had to start again when others in these places already knew some of the crowd.

Nevertheless, even though feeling awkward, I generally strove to get involved in activities with others. It was tough. I was smaller physically than most of my contemporaries until my later teenage years. I was not a natural sportsman nor had any other popular talent with which to attract others. Yet I got stuck in to everything and had a go, earning respect from others for my persistence and determination. Throughout my life I have been keen to respond to opportunities and challenges. I am

industrious, did well at school and on courses, and was an effective team organiser. In many relationships, I settled for being respected rather than becoming close to another. When in positions of leadership during my education and in the Army, I observed that my authority derived more from my skill in the job than from an emotional connection with those I led. When attention was bestowed on me, I could be a bit surprised and suspicious. I was always conscious of my potential inadequacies.

In the summer between university and Sandhurst, I became a committed Christian. In some ways this again set me apart from those around me. Others could see me as morally inflexible, not willing to go along with the crowd. However, my faith brought me a profound sense of closeness in relationship with God and in fellowship with other believers. I also found I began to look out more for others: for instance, I would take an interest in the personal issues my soldiers brought to me, console friends in difficulty, give time or money to good causes; even stop to pick up hitchhikers. Maybe faith reinforced an earlier sense of responsibility I felt for other people, but the commission to care for my neighbour has been a strong theme in my make-up ever since.

My Army career brought me a great deal of fulfilment. I joined for the glamour, the opportunity to be in a leadership position at a relatively young age, and because I wanted to escape from London. The Army kept me supplied with a succession of interesting appointments for over twenty years and I only left when I wanted new challenges again. I had several positions in command of units: in these I was judged competent and enjoyed the sense of responsibility they brought. But in such positions of line authority, I was not always at ease in my relations with those I led or with those I reported to. Having found early in life that I could succeed based on my own effort and expertise, I expected a similar level of application in those on whom I relied. If I suspected that my boss or someone who worked for me was not up to the job, in particular if they seemed to be expecting me to take the job more seriously than they were, I could be quite hard on them - people told me that I "did not suffer fools gladly". But deflecting others in this way also sometimes led me to miss things, to get caught up in myself, and not to appreciate things they were trying to bring to my attention. I talk about how now I hope more to perceive instances like this on page 129.

In the Forces, I had more roles of a staff or technical nature without much line responsibility for others and more freedom to go my own way, and in these appointments I tended to shine and feel more sure-footed. This too has been the nature of my work since the Army in fifteen years of consulting. I have generally had more positive relationships with peers, including clients, than with those with positional authority (up or down); I have been more relaxed, less demanding, with peers and instead have just worked to gain their respect. Several have become friends. One such client is Mike and I explore our relationship beginning on page 102.

Although intellectually I relish challenges, I used not so much to enjoy challenging others or them challenging me, or people disputing with each other. Such instances have made me feel uncomfortable, that something was 'not right'. My response would be either to challenge back - insist on my point of view, refusing to listen to alternative perspectives -

or to clam up, judging that I would not be heard. Only when others showed sensitivity towards me, providing me with affirmation and support, would I be happy to have an open-ended dialogue. Otherwise such situations made me feel vulnerable, as if my much-valued competence and authority were at stake. I would not notice when an abrupt response from me caused offence, assuming that I was more sensitive to the effect people had on me than I imagined I had on them, although I would not check if this was true. I could adopt a 'take it or leave it' attitude when offering an opinion to others. If I found another's case unsound, I would be reluctant to engage with what they were saying, telling myself that they would find out for themselves anyway. Furthermore as I have always enjoyed doing new things and taking risks, I could be scathing towards those who did not share this attitude. Those I love and my friends put up with it, but some colleagues could find this behaviour towards them off-putting.

I was drawn into organisation consulting when - working on engineering projects for the Armed Forces - I came to the realisation that most of the issues in these projects were not technical in nature but do with the relations between the people involved. Those ineffective relationships started to become the focus of my attention. As a consultant, I had no positional authority allowing me to decide a course of action irrespective of the views of my client. I found it intriguing that my competence was to some extent measured by my ability to connect emotionally with clients as I dealt with their presenting issues in some way they recognised and appreciated. And my technical competence was not absolute – all depended on the situation as seen by the client because the issue was the client's, not mine. So I learned to try all the time to see the situation through the clients' eyes and to empathise with the emotions the situation generated in them. Good consulting I came to judge good only if it was useful to the client. I could only make a difference if the client thought so. If not, I could easily find my course diverging from the clients and ending up in a cul-de-sac. And so, my performance as a consultant has improved. From in the early days trying to sell pre-packaged solutions or methodologies, I then started to try to understand what the client really sought and what the constraints were on him or her.

How do all these perceptions make me a more credible researcher of flourishing relationships between consultants and clients? I have found out in the course of my inquiry that flourishing relationships require a range of capacities, some of which I already had when I entered consulting – such as my ability to apply myself and to challenge – and other capacities I have had to develop. In my case, I had to learn that flourishing relationships benefit from an emotional engagement, from being vulnerable and engaging in dialogue. Whilst before I could get away with, for instance, being abrupt with people, I found I could not get away with such behaviour any longer and be an effective consultant. My focus became consulting relationships that function well, and that is the subject of my inquiry.

What is flourishing?

In this section I look more at what *flourishing* means. I am doing this because the word in all its forms (*flourish, flourished, etc.*) may be one we do not use frequently and so we may not be very conscious of the meaning we associate with it. When as a result of beginning this inquiry I started using the words in everyday conversation more, I noticed that people often thought a bit before responding to what I said. Yet they did reply - and were positive about the idea of flourishing. *Flourishing* appears to be something we generally take to be important in life, something people usually, steadily, aspire to.

My own understanding of *flourishing* is that it is a process that generally we hope takes place for individual living beings and their groups, activities and relationships. I think we apply the term to the way in which the lives of beings are changing as they interact with the context in which they live. The word suggests that this interaction is generally positive, which makes it aspirational. This piece of 'waterfall' writing that I did at Ashridge in 2010 is one of the first things I wrote about what I thought *flourishing* meant:

At the heart of my inquiry is this which has never left me: a sense of possibility, of potential, of hope that wonderful, special things can happen, and that the essence of life is the processes of bringing forth these wonderful, special things, of keeping the embers alive when the cold and damp of routine, despair and lack of imagination gang up to drive out life, and of finding the PUFF to eventually make life flare up, dazzling, beautiful, bright, moving and swirling. I believe that in every group of people in every situation there exists some possibility of them flaring into new life and starting a fire which moves outwards and upwards bringing others into its light and warmth, not destructive but enlivening, a beacon, a source of live-giving warmth to the communities in which they live. And I want to be an instrument of the life-giving process for organisations, a catalyst in the chemical reaction which changes them, someone who gives the nudge at the tipping point which disturbs the existing pattern of a group and moves it along exponential curves (Bateson, 1972) into a new, better, happier, more productive pattern.

This piece of writing is idealistic: it extends my ideas beyond the process of delivering a consulting assignment into the realm of our humanity - it is about values and beliefs.

I wanted to explore experiences of flourishing in groups with my academic colleagues, so I ran an exercise in our doctoral 'Master Classes' at Ashridge in which we rehearsed and put on performances of short scenes from Shakespeare. Props and costumes were borrowed, enthusiasm displayed, fun clearly had. Afterwards, we fed back that we felt we had a common purpose: we wanted to work well together *and* to produce a good performance, the outcome of our work. As we became familiar with our lines, we spent more time responding face-to-face to each other and noticed how this improved the dialogue. We built well on each other's suggestions: swapping parts, props and positions on the set. Josie said that once she decided she was going to participate, she just surfed

the energy wave this gave her. Andrew drew attention to our frivolity, teasing, fun and playfulness. We took risks, accepted discomfort and insecurity, and were rewarded by entertaining and moving performances. The exercise added to the richer understanding of interpersonal flourishing I was building, for instance how people overcome their individual fear of participating to gain the reward of being in a group performing well.



Figure 2: Flourishing, performing Shakespeare at Ashridge

Corey Keyes describes the flourishing of individuals as the presence of *mental health*, “a syndrome of positive feelings and positive functioning in life” (Keyes, 2002, p. 208). This definition is typical of the ‘positive psychologists’ view of flourishing which has dominated recent scholarship and which I explore further in the section beginning on page 26. Going back much further, Aristotle (2005) described something like a capability for flourishing as *eudemonia*. As with Keyes, *eudemonia* was more than having positive feelings - Aristotle said *eudemonia* was an *ability that suffices for living well*. This suggests to me making the best of circumstances, using what one has to good effect, realising inherent potential and making good choices. Aristotle described the ability that suffices for living well as being ‘good’, not in the sense of being morally correct but in the sense of behaving well, having a good character, displaying the *virtues* (which he gave as courage, temperance, tolerance, generosity, honour, aspiration, patience, truthfulness, humour, friendliness, modesty and conscience).

But is the ability to live well enough to ensure success in life? I don’t think so. I question the idea that being virtuous in any way assures flourishing. We may be prevented from making the best of what happens to us: it is difficult to construe being killed crossing the

street into somehow flourishing. The philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe criticises Aristotle's proposition that:

the flourishing of a man consists in his being good for it is a bit much to swallow that a good man in pain and hunger and poor and friendless is flourishing (Anscombe, 1981, pp. 41, 42).

I think that an ability to function well is necessary - but not sufficient - to ensure flourishing: circumstances also have to be conducive to success. Aristotle thought this too insomuch as he identified other 'goods' such as friends, wealth and power as also important in a life that is eudemonic (Aristotle, 2005). On the other hand, fortunate circumstances alone are also insufficient: a fortunate person can have every advantage and still not flourish because they cannot function well enough to take advantage of their fortune. I am more interested in the process of flourishing rather than the circumstances of it, since I may be able to do more about the former. But I cannot ignore the circumstances; stuff happens. I think the process of flourishing must be to at least some extent about how we respond to the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

I noted just now that Keyes describes the flourishing of individuals as the presence of *mental health*, "a syndrome of positive feelings and positive functioning in life" (Keyes, 2002, p. 208). One way in which I think flourishing is different to just feeling positive (happiness) is that flourishing is a process evolving over time, whereas happiness is an emotional state at points in that time. Happiness often occurs while flourishing, but not always, and flourishing seems to be about a lot more than happiness. A vine flourishes after it is pruned, when branches are cut off it; humans often flourish as a result of what they learn in periods of difficulty and stress. The flourishing I am interested in is grounded existentially in what is going on around us. Happiness can also arise from what we experience but ideas can lead to an isolated euphoria. I think Nietzsche (2009) was referring to this threat when he said:

Nobody will very readily regard a doctrine as true merely because it makes people happy or virtuous – excepting perhaps the amiable "Idealists" who are enthusiastic about the good, true and beautiful, and let all kinds of motley, coarse and good-natured desirabilities swim about promiscuously in their pond (Nietzsche, 2009, p. 39).

Nietzsche also argues that it is suffering rather than happiness that is indispensable in life, and that the value of suffering should be recognised as such:

The discipline of suffering, of GREAT suffering – know ye not that it is only THIS discipline that has produced all the elevations of humanity hitherto? (Nietzsche, 2009, p. 225) (capitals in original text)

Maybe Nietzsche overstates his case, but I can see how vulnerability acknowledged, misfortune overcome and suffering endured can indeed help people to flourish.

In my view, whether a person gains positive feelings as they flourish is also a matter of that individual's beliefs and values. At the extremes for instance, a hermit or a martyr

may believe her or himself to be flourishing in circumstances that others would certainly not. To some extent, I think we can adopt the attitude we wish towards our circumstances and look for opportunities whatever our situation is. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggests this:

Happiness is not something that happens . . . It does not depend on outside events, but rather on how we interpret them. Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person. People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 2).

Our interpretation depends on what we choose from our experience to believe, but it also depends on the experience itself. Our situation may be so bad that we cannot be happy in it. Nevertheless, we can still flourish to some extent without being happy if we can still find meaning in what we are doing. We can still attempt to function well in dire surroundings in order that we realise an element of human possibility. Finding meaning in any condition is a natural human desire. Victor Frankl, who found significance in his existence in a Nazi concentration camp, wrote:

Man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked (Frankl, 2004, p. 113).

In other words the meaning of life is not a general question for all, but a question for every individual.

Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life (p. 106).

How then can we recognise meaning when we see it?

The perception of meaning boils down to becoming aware of a possibility against the background of reality – becoming aware of what can be done in a given situation (p. 145).

Frankl also connects finding meaning with how we are with others. This points to the relational nature of flourishing:

Being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself – be it a meaning to fulfil or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself – by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love – the more human he is and the more he actualises himself (p. 115).

At work and in consulting, we are used to the idea of 'a cause to serve' in the goals and objectives of our organisations and their initiatives and projects. Frankl has also introduced the notion of *love*; but what does love mean in this sense? C. S. Lewis (1977) differentiated 'Four Loves':

- Affection (familiarity – in Greek *Storge*)

- Friendship (a common bond – *Phileo*)
- Romance (emotional love – *Eros*)
- Unconditional love (charity – *Agape*)

The 'love' Frankl refers to is the last of these, the unconditional form of love, the simple human capacity of wanting better for others and giving to achieve it. But as well as this love, I also often find affection and friendship in flourishing workplace relationships (see the accounts in Chapter 5 beginning on page 92).

Taking all I have said so far about flourishing together, it sounds almost necessary to life - but that's putting it too strongly. I think we can survive without flourishing. But flourishing is something we are naturally drawn towards doing as individual beings, and flourishing relationships are a vital part of the social fabric that holds us together. Nevertheless, making this a focus might distract attention from more basic priorities, most vitally survival. Another shadow cast by flourishing is that the flourishing of some can entail misery or misfortune for others. One of the earliest organisational change initiatives in which I participated was a 'successful' public sector outsourcing in which hundreds of people were unwillingly transferred to the private sector and subsequently lost their jobs. This kind of reality cannot be ignored.

To summarise, the starting point for my understanding of flourishing in this section was that it is a process of relating with enlivening, creativity and growth, and leads to success. I have added to my understanding further in this piece: with my peers I found that group-flourishing involves trying things out together, taking risks, accepting fears and supporting each other. In the literature, flourishing is functioning optimally and successfully and this requires favourable circumstances, which we only control to some extent. It is not just being happy or feeling generally good: happiness is a state, whereas flourishing is a process that incurs at times feeling good and at times feeling that things are difficult. Finding meaning in life appears to be another important component of it. It often involves other beings, and the flourishing of one being is often dependent on the flourishing of another. However the flourishing of one being can also be detrimental to another; nor does it describe what we need just to survive in life. Flourishing seems to be something worth understanding better.

Flourishing and relating in our contemporary world

In this section of the chapter, I want to note that flourishing and relating are subjects of interest to many in our contemporary world. In the media, and in conversation, I notice a growing recognition that human flourishing does not come from pursuing pleasure, affluence, power or self-sufficiency, alternative goals in life. The newspaper article (The Telegraph, 2012) at Appendix 1 on page 183 is just one example of this trend of thought. Based on the work of George Vaillant, the article is aligned with ideas I hear expressed in general social conversation and themes in the contemporary media. The article recognises a public interest in finding long-term happiness and fulfilment and moreover

that academia can contribute to our understanding of these things. It emphasises relating and the strong connection made between flourishing and relating well.

Fuelling the public conversation about flourishing and relating well could be a sense that these are phenomena undervalued in much of contemporary culture. The opportunities provided by information and communication technologies are a major force changing human culture globally and permit richer forms of interaction, a more connected world. Robert Wright (1999) suggests that our social structures are always evolving to realise the potential of new tools, but that there is no guarantee that this will happen straight away. New technologies are often initially seen as threatening, or they get used exploitatively; they can easily be divisive, even fuelling conflict. So we have to consider carefully how our increasing interconnectedness can be used to promote rather than hinder social flourishing.

Another force for change in society is the attention to sustainable global development. Cooperrider and Fry (2012b) suggest that sustainability as a concept may be being replaced by flourishing, for:

When sustainability is constructed or defined simply as surviving, it loses its capacity to inspire. But when sustainability is seen not as surviving, but thriving, whole new vistas rapidly emerge including a reunion with the spiritual dimensions or higher reaches of humanity's sense of meaning, purpose and significance (Cooperrider & Fry, 2012b, p. 9).

The significance Cooperrider and Fry construe from this idea for the individual is that:

As people come together to accomplish 'doing good' out there – that is concentrating and connecting their strengths in the service of building a better organisation or city or world – they begin to activate . . . mechanisms for their own and others' flourishing (Cooperrider & Fry, 2012b, p. 7).

and in relational terms that:

Corporate citizenship is a global construct practised through interpersonal relationships (Cooperrider & Fry, 2012a, p. 3).

My research interest is in flourishing interpersonal consulting relationships, but this section shows that this topic has links with other contemporary research and social interest, both in the flourishing of individuals and of global society and the planet.

Enhancing the quality of my inquiry

The last of the starting points I'm going to cover in this chapter is a consideration of how I can make my inquiry one of quality.

In part I pursue quality by relating my findings to the limited context of my research, rather than making universal assertions. I also acknowledge that I am the main instrument of my inquiry, and therefore I explored my own beliefs in some detail in the section beginning on page 15.

Research is always carried out by an individual with a life and a lifeworld . . . a personality, social context, and various personal and practical challenges and conflicts, all of which affect the research, from the choice of a research question or topic, through the method used, to the reporting of the project's outcome (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 4).

My *lifeworld* (a phenomenological term) includes my preconceptions about my topic, whether I can acknowledge them or not, and is also affected by the other participants in my inquiry (who I introduce in Chapter 3 on page 62) and the ideas I encounter in the literature. I acknowledge as much as I can these contextual influences in the methodology I use for my research, which is also described in Chapter 3. Not least - based on my own prior inquiries - I now have preconceived notions about what flourishing is in a consulting context. But,

Realising that there are limits to any account we can give does not offer us licence to give no account. Quality is thus about becoming rather than being . . . Quality is also shown in the nature of our engagement with others. It suggests that we are open to experiencing and hearing what is going on, that we are paying attention, that we create the conditions for open mutual engagement; and that we open communicative spaces (Marshall & Reason, 2007, p. 369).

Relationships with others are not only the topic and context of my inquiry, but their flourishing is also my motivation for it. So I want to do more than recognise that research is an engaged human, social and political activity that requires us to seek to account for these aspects in our researching and representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). From a quality standpoint, I want to be actively inquiring *into* relating.

If I acknowledge the influences of my lifeworld explicitly in my writing and you my readers acknowledge your own lifeworld, you can make choices about how my findings are relevant to you. We can do this partly through self-reflection:

In this view, quality becomes having, or seeking, a capacity for self-reflection, so that we engage our full vitality in the inquiry and attend to the perspectives and assumptions we are carrying. (Marshall & Reason, 2007, p. 369).

or

we might quite simply ask, "is the researcher there?", as an awake, choiceful, reflective human person, rather than as a researcher working strictly in role and with techniques to follow (Marshall & Reason, 2007, p. 370).

This point about techniques is perhaps particularly relevant because I am going to employ quite prescriptive phenomenological methods.

Lincoln (1995) suggests that in an inquiry of quality, inquirers pay attention to where, when and how they evidence the following qualities (in this sense *attributes*) in qualitative research:

- Positionality
- Community
- Voice
- Critical subjectivity
- Reciprocity
- Sacredness (about that which nourishes and sustains us as humans)

As I will demonstrate throughout the dissertation, some of the ways I evidence these qualities are:

- Positionality – by exploring my own position and at times setting it aside in order to understand better what others are offering me
- Community – by extending participation in the inquiry to colleagues
- Voice – by expressing what really goes on for us as consultants and clients
- Critical subjectivity – by reflecting deeply on my findings
- Reciprocity – by caring about the participants in my inquiry
- Sacredness – in my topic, by pursuing human flourishing

I note that all these considerations of quality are actually relational in nature, which emphasises the importance of making a human inquiry social. Because they are social they are therefore also ethical considerations, a point I explore further in the section beginning on page 69.

Lastly, Lather argues that we must build into our research designs, *triangulation* of methods, data sources and theories (Lather, 1986, p. 78). Triangulating compass bearings to landmarks is a technique I have often used to find my position when navigating at sea and on land. In this dissertation I have attempted to arrange my material so that points and literature that are relevant to each other can be seen close to each other where possible. In addition, I return periodically to check what appeared to be the most useful insights against more recent information, and cross-reference points within the document.

To summarise this section, the themes that stand out for me from an initial consideration of how I will make my inquiry one of quality, are *acknowledging* and *connecting*. The quality of what I do depends on me acknowledging the sources of my insights, and doing so clearly enough for you my reader to join me on the journey. Then I need to connect what I see in such a way that it becomes a coherent whole, to fit the pieces together so that something is built out of them. This will be the intellectual work that I offer as doctoral research.

Chapter 2 – Existing scholarship

This chapter reviews the existing scholarship relating to my topic, on which my research and its findings could build. I have divided this literature into three sections. The first of these covers the recent work on flourishing sparked by the Positive Psychology movement. The second section draws together a broad range of theory concerning relating and the third looks at consulting from a relational perspective. There are various overlaps and connections between the three sections.

In the chapter, I am going to both present the knowledge there already is and point out areas that have yet to be addressed. This is rather like working on a large but incomplete jigsaw puzzle, where new pieces need to be constructed to fill the gaps. So in this chapter I will make the edges of the current scholarship as clear as possible so that you can see where I am enlarging and clarifying the picture. Finally in this chapter I will define the specific research question I am going to answer – the hole in the puzzle that this dissertation is designed to fill.

Flourishing and Positive Psychology

In the section of Chapter 1 beginning on page 18, I introduced some ideas about flourishing, drawing on my own experience and a variety of sources. I said there that my understanding of flourishing had become that it is a process of enlivening, creativity and growth that we experience relating to other living beings. Flourishing involves functioning optimally and successfully and this requires favourable circumstances that we can only control to some extent. I said that the emotions experienced whilst flourishing are not just happiness or generally feeling good, but that flourishing is a process and incurs states of both feeling good and at other times feeling that things are difficult. Finding meaning in what we do and who we are appears to be another important component. Flourishing often involves others and the flourishing of one being is often dependent on the flourishing of another. There is also a shadow side: the flourishing of one being can be detrimental to another; and flourishing does not describe what we need just to survive in life. Nevertheless flourishing is something we see as desirable and pursue.

In this chapter, I explore the recent research into flourishing. As I will show, the Positive Psychology movement of the last decade or so has largely stimulated this work. In a seminal article at the birth of Positive Psychology, its leading exponents (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) explicitly linked their work to flourishing:

We predict that positive psychology in this new century will allow psychologists to understand and build those factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 13).

Positive Psychology's starting point was that psychology's purpose had mostly become limited to reducing the suffering of those with mental illnesses (Seligman &

Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This they framed as a psychology addressing the negative. Instead they sought an opportunity for the discipline of psychology to help humans have an enhanced sense of wellbeing and fulfilment whether they are mentally ill or not, which they argued would be a psychology of the positive. I have already cited Corey Keyes, the early Positive Psychology researcher, in Chapter 1 (the section beginning on page 18). Keyes (2002), proposed that an individual's flourishing equated to the possession of mental health. He proposed that mental health has a separate 'continuum' to mental illness, this 'mental health continuum' exists between the absence of mental health which he characterised not as illness but as *languishing*, and the presence of mental health which he characterised as *flourishing* (Keyes, 2002, p. 207). He derived from his research an 'index' of flourishing mental health. The index measured emotional wellbeing plus positive psychological and social functioning. The measures of positive psychological functioning were self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, personal growth, and autonomy, whilst the measures of positive social functioning were social coherence, social integration, social acceptance, social contribution and social actualization. This is a definition of flourishing in which it is seen as being made up of a number of discrete components, an approach typical in Positive Psychology scholarship. As with Keyes, prominent among the components of flourishing found in Positive Psychology literature are usually positive emotions and positive psychological functions (for instance in Seligman, 2011).

In the early years of the Positive Psychology movement, positive *emotion* was the most prominent component of flourishing. For instance, Seligman's first book laying out ideas about Positive Psychology was called *Authentic Happiness* and in it he identified flourishing very closely with attaining happiness (Seligman M. E., 2003). I noted the danger of this oversimplification in Chapter 1 (in the section beginning on page 18), where I said that happiness is an emotional state whereas flourishing is a process in which negative and positive emotions are both present. Several critics suggest that the ideal of a Positive Psychology is fatally ungrounded because, by concentrating on the positive, the reality of the negative and its impact are ignored. In a video-recorded lecture by Ehrenreich (2010), she says Positive Psychology exhibits a 'wilful ignorance of negative things'. Schneider (2011) says Positive Psychology 'neglects the tragic dimension' in life. Held (2004) talks about the 'tyranny of the positive attitude'. McDonald and O'Callaghan (2008) frame the Positive Psychology movement as attempting to use a distinctly negative coercive power in its insistence on the positive. Hedges (2009) excoriates the impact of Positive Psychology, saying: "this flight into self-delusion is no more helpful in solving real problems than alchemy" (Hedges, 2009, p. 119). In general, the Positive Psychologists come across as relentlessly upbeat but some of them acknowledge a role for the negative. In particular, Fredrickson & Losada (2005) tried to quantify the influence of the positive emotions component on the positive psychological and social functioning components, in Keyes's (2002) index of flourishing. They devised an emotional 'positivity ratio' measuring the incidence of positive to negative emotions experienced by people. The emotions they counted as positive included amusement, awe, compassion, contentment, gratitude, hope, interest, joy,

love, pride and sexual desire, whilst the negative emotions included anger, contempt, disgust, embarrassment, fear, guilt, sadness and shame. Fredrickson & Losada then correlated people's positivity ratios with those people's rating on Keyes's index of flourishing mental health (less the emotional well-being component). Their empirical evidence from two samples of people was that those who were flourishing had positivity ratios averaging 3.2:1 and 3.4:1 (i.e. 3.2 – 3.4 times as many positive emotions as negative emotions), and that the group who were languishing had positivity ratios averaging 2.3:1 and 2.1:1. In the same paper, Fredrickson & Losada then attempted to use non-linear mathematical models to show that there was a *critical positivity ratio* of 2.9:1, below which people tended to languish and above which they flourished. The same mathematical model also predicted that if the positivity ratio exceeded 11:1 then flourishing would not take place any longer. Fredrickson & Losada make of this prediction that:

Appropriate negativity is a critical ingredient within human flourishing that serves to maintain a grounded negentropic system [a system that becomes more ordered] (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005, p. 684).

In other words they argued that some negative affect is essential to the continuance of flourishing. The mathematical model Fredrickson and Losada used to derive the ratios of 2.9:1 and 11:1 has now been discredited by Brown et al (2013), although they find no reason to challenge Fredrickson and Losada's empirical findings about the correlation between the emotional positivity ratio and the flourishing-languishing scale. But other scholarship outside Positive Psychology also points to an essential role for negative affect in flourishing, just as in physics forces of 'negative feedback' act to stabilise systems. Frankl, whom I cited in Chapter 1, suggests that negative emotion is used to maintain mental health in this way:

To be sure, man's search for meaning may arouse inner tension rather than inner equilibrium. However, precisely such tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health (Frankl, 2004, p. 109).

Critics such as Taylor (2001) and Held (2004) have challenged the value Positive Psychology places on emphasising a distinction between positive and negative. Lazarus (2003) questions what he says is the implicit message of Positive Psychology that positive can be separated from negative:

A positive or optimistic thought is apt to be modified by the realities of what is happening, and vice versa – the negative realities are often mitigated by positive thinking (Lazarus, 2003, pp. 95-96).

Lazarus questions whether positive emotions only generate – and are only generated by – positive experiences. McNulty & Fincham (2012) say that Positive Psychology relies on the assumption that certain psychological traits and processes are inherently beneficial for well-being, but show that studies into marriage demonstrate that four ostensibly positive processes – forgiveness, optimistic expectations, positive thoughts and kindness – can either benefit or harm well-being depending on the context in which they are

used. For instance in an abusive marriage, the victim showing forgiveness to the abuser can result in further abuse whereas a refusal to show forgiveness can ameliorate the abuser's harmful behaviour. They go on to suggest that whether psychological traits and processes have positive or negative implications depends on the context in which they operate.

My experience is that both positive and negative traits, affect, processes and functioning are present in most encounters and that all can play a positive role or a negative role in the outcome. For example, when I embark on a new venture I may be excited but also feel vulnerable. Feeling vulnerable may appear to be a negative emotion but may in fact be positive. That sense of vulnerability or insecurity may turn out to be an integral part of my creativity – it heightens my awareness and helps me process ideas and foresee outcomes more quickly. This, I believe, is what Frankl was saying (cited above) when he wrote about the value of tension to mental health. I could conclude that there is no value then in distinguishing positive from negative but I would suggest instead that what we regard as positive is not what we feel but what we value. In the example I just gave about starting a new venture, I value novelty and also personal equilibrium, but cannot always have both at the same time. I may have to choose which I value more. I am alert to any tendency to conflate the positivity of traits, affect, processes, functioning and outcomes. I need to make sure in my research that the role of the negative is not underexplored; one way of doing this would be to make sure that my research is fully grounded in people's experience.

Another of the shadows an overly positive construction of flourishing might cast is that it distracts attention from the lower human needs noted by Maslow (1954), such as the need to survive. Fear is an emotion that is central to our ability to survive yet Fredrickson and Losada labelled it a negative emotion. We cannot flourish without surviving, and, to that extent at least, flourishing depends on something negative. The corrective role of 'negative feedback' keeps us away from danger and shows that negative *affect* does not imply a negative *effect*, but that on the contrary negative affect can have a positive effect.

Next, I want to turn to the relational dimension of flourishing. I said earlier that Keyes (2002) included in his 'index' of flourishing mental health, positive relations with others and positive social functioning including social coherence, social integration, social acceptance, social contribution and social actualization. He says for instance:

*positive functioning includes **social** challenges and tasks . . . to be flourishing is to be filled with positive emotion and to be functioning well psychologically **and socially** [my emphasis] (Keyes, 2002, pp. 209-210).*

Early on in the development of Positive Psychology, Ryff & Singer (2000) proposed what they called *interpersonal flourishing* as an agenda for psychological wellbeing generally. Similarly Reis & Gable found that:

Relationships are an important, perhaps the most important, source of life satisfaction and emotional wellbeing (Reis & Gable, 2003, p. 129)

and add the tantalising thought that,

Relating well is not the same as not relating badly (Reis & Gable, 2003, pp. 151-152)

which chimes with the positive observation Keyes (2002) noted earlier that mental health is about more than the *absence* of mental illness. Recognition of a relational dimension to flourishing is therefore present to some extent in Positive Psychology. The branch of the Positive Psychology movement that has most embraced its social dimension is Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS). POS focuses primarily on groups rather than individuals. For instance, one of the members of this school, Jane Dutton, writes in the book *Energize your Workplace* (2003) about:

activating and renewing energy in the workplace by building and sustaining high-quality connections with co-workers and others. Energy is what enables excellence in organisations. High quality connections are marked by mutual positive regard, trust and active engagement (Dutton, 2003, p. v).

Dutton does not use the word *flourishing*, yet the notion of energy she introduces is one I identified in my own thinking in Chapter 1 (the section of beginning on page 18), that flourishing is enlivening and generative, fuelling the personal growth which is also in Keyes's (2002) index. Like Keyes and others already mentioned, Dutton also identifies the importance of good personal relationships ('connections') to the performance of groups.

Barbara Fredrickson, already mentioned for her co-operation with Losada on the 'positivity ratio', is known for her 'broaden-and-build' theory (2003) in which she suggests that positive emotions *broaden* people's modes of thinking and action, which over time *builds* their personal and social resources. Gaffney puts this concept of Fredrickson's this way:

Positive emotions help you to develop better coping strategies. Because feeling positive makes you more cognitively and socially flexible, you are more likely to be open-minded and less defensive when you have to deal with problems, and therefore less likely to ignore or distort information that does not fit in with your preconceptions (Gaffney M. , 2011, p. 59).

In her contribution to Positive Organizational Scholarship (2003), Fredrickson extends this idea from the individual to the group, arguing that positive emotions can fuel upward spirals toward optimal organizational functioning, that transformation becomes possible because each person's positive emotions reverberate through other members. Optimal functioning, I said at the beginning of this section on page 26, is one of the definitions of flourishing. Cooperrider & Sekerka (2003) incorporate the 'broaden-and-build' theory into a model for positive organisational change in which positive emotions, relatedness to others and the level of inquiry made by members into the 'appreciable

world' [the facets they want more of] sustain and energize each other. (The principle that positive images lead to positive action underpins the theory of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider D. L., 2001).) In these ways, the scholarship around Positive Psychology makes connections between positive emotions, the flourishing of groups and positive organisational change.

As an aside, on the influence of negative emotion, which I noted earlier as often present in flourishing, Rathunde (2000) argues that as well as the broadening function of positive emotion suggested by Fredrickson, the narrowing function of negative emotion plays an important role in the creative process:

research on the creative process, anecdotal accounts of eminent creators, and my own work experience suggest that some amount of stress and anguish — although not extreme and prolonged — is part of the full dynamic picture of building novel skills. . .
Defocused attention (i.e., attention that broadens information through a spontaneous and associative process) is characteristic of primary process and the first stages of creativity, namely, preparation and incubation. Focused attention, on the other hand, is characteristic of secondary processes and is needed in the later stages of creativity, such as verification and elaboration (Rathunde, 2000, pp. 3,4).

Although Rathunde makes his point about stress and anguish in the creative processes of individuals, In my opinion, he might just as well have made it about the creative processes of relationships and groups. I agree that a degree of subtle negative *affect* often plays a direct role in flourishing, and when the *effect* is not so subtle we can learn better how to flourish from our reverses. In recent research, North et al (2014) found that responding to failure by accepting negative emotions and re-engaging with new, intrinsically meaningful goals was associated with greater subsequent flourishing.

Returning to my consideration of the the relational dimension of flourishing in Positive Psychology, Seligman called his latest book *Flourish* (2011). Moving well beyond his earlier concentration on positive affect, Seligman now posits that an individual's wellbeing (or flourishing) has five measurable 'PERMA' elements that count towards it (more like Keyes's (2002) index of mental health than Seligman's earlier simple definition), including 'Positive Relationships'. The elements of his 'PERMA' are:

- *Positive emotion* (of which happiness and life satisfaction are elements, plus)
- *Engagement* (defined as absorption in a task or *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990))
- *Positive Relationships*
- *Meaning, and*
- *Achievement* (Seligman M. E., 2011, pp. 16-20).

Seligman describes 'positive relationships' in terms of the kindness, desire to serve and capacity to be loved of the participants and the harmony between them. He talks about the imperative for all living creatures to work together in social groups if they are to

survive. But in flourishing rather than survival, relationships are for Seligman only one of five possible elements. I don't get a sense from his writing that any of the five elements are essential on their own or integral to the others. Seligman asks - but leaves unanswered - this question about what for him are the other four elements of flourishing:

Would we bother pursuing positive relationships if they did not bring about positive emotion or engagement or meaning or accomplishment? (Seligman M. E., 2011, p. 22)

As this quote shows, in the discipline of Positive Psychology flourishing is generally theorised as a process that goes on in individuals somewhat independently, rather than a process that is inherently relational and involves all the parties relating to an individual. Perhaps this emphasis has a heritage in what is sometimes called the *cult of the individual* (Marske, 1987); it belongs to a tradition of thinking centred on the individual rather than on society. Only Cooperrider and Sekerka (2003) seem to explicitly link individual flourishing, through relatedness, to positive organisational change: they offer a model for positive organisational change in which positive emotions, relatedness to others and the level of Appreciative Inquiry sustain and energize each other (referred to on the previous page).

The question sitting with me is the converse of Seligman's unanswered one. Can flourishing take place *without* the presence of largely positive relationships; is all Positive emotion, Engagement, Meaning and Accomplishment ('PE_MA') actually bound up with positive Relationships? I see humans working together in groups to both survive and thrive, and I ask myself whether we are possibly even wired so that our sense of wellbeing *depends on* our relationships? I have experienced much Positive emotion in relationships, Engagement in a task has often involved doing things together with others, I have found great Meaning in relating to others, and my sense of Achievement is often about what I achieve with or for others. Gaffney in her book, called *Flourishing* (2011), offers her own list. Gaffney's four elements are:

- *Challenge*
- *Connectivity (being attuned to what is happening inside you and outside you)*
- *Autonomy (freedom)*
- *Using your valued competencies* (Gaffney M. , 2011, p. 6ff.).

Again, at first glance, I see more individuality than relationality in the way these elements are expressed; yet when I look at Gaffney's detailed descriptions of them, there are plenty of connections with relating:

- Challenges are often challenges to do something for or with others
- Connectivity outside us is relating with others (even being attuned to what is happening within us is relating to ourselves)
- Autonomy is not isolation from others, but balancing personal power with the power of others, feeling free to act for oneself and for others
- The competencies we value include communicating with and inspiring others

The most recent conceptual framework for flourishing I can find in the literature is offered by Huppert & So (2013) who offer competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive emotion, positive relationships, resilience, self esteem and vitality as ten features of positive well-being. (In the literature the terms *flourishing* and *well-being* are often used interchangeably.) Again, 'positive relationships' are treated as just one of several elements but I want to shine a light on this relational dimension of flourishing that those around Positive Psychology have begun to identify and see what I find. The current themes in Positive Psychology research, such as in the *Journal of Positive Psychology*, are not about its relational dimension but concern definitions (like Huppert and So (2013)), interventions, linkages, measurement, the search for meaning and the subject of mindfulness (e.g. Vowinckel et al (2015)).

Others have recognised that there is insufficient attention in the literature to the processes of relating positively (Caughlin & Huston, 2010). But I don't want to research relating in groups like the Positive Organisational Scholars. Instead I want to concentrate on relating between individuals, because I am interested in 1:1 consulting relationships. In my view, what it means for relationships to flourish is necessarily different from what it means for individuals to flourish because relationships have no intelligence or agency of their own. So I am going to draw on the literature of relating as well. For instance, from work in the field of psychotherapy, the seminal importance of relationships to *functioning well* (one of the definitions already offered for flourishing) is expressed like this:

Relational-cultural theory offers an alternative to traditional theories of psychological development. Whereas traditional theories view mature functioning as characterised by movement from dependence to independence, relational-cultural theory suggests that maturity involves growth toward connection and relationship throughout the life span (Jordan J. V., 2001, p. 92).

Having considered the role of the negative and the relational dimensional of flourishing, both as I see them underplayed in Positive Psychology, I am going to finish this section by considering the limitations of the scientific paradigm in which Positive Psychology is situated.

One of the antecedents of Positive Psychology was the Humanistic Psychology movement of which Abraham Maslow was a prime mover. (In the first edition of Maslow's *Motivation & Personhood* (1954), the final chapter is actually entitled *Toward a Positive Psychology*.) However, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) deprecate what they say has been the lack of an empirical base in Humanistic Psychology and advocate a more scientific basis for Positive Psychology. Taylor, an early critic of Positive Psychology (2001, p. 15), says its scientific basis is actually exclusively 'positivist' science, characterised by objectification, experimentation and quantification, a 'reductionist epistemology'. Schneider (2011) agrees; he describes Positive Psychology as 'methodologically narrow', leading to it being 'susceptible to the expedient' and 'oversimplifying the experience of human flourishing' (Schneider, 2011, pp. 32-38). The

methodology I use for the research in this dissertation is phenomenology (Chapter 3 on page 26), which is from a different scientific tradition to positivism and therefore can, I hope, throw a light on flourishing that Positive Psychology cannot. The distinction I am making is that phenomenology seeks to describe the existential experience of a phenomenon whereas positivism seeks to define and account for it. Explaining why he says Positive Psychology needs Humanistic Psychology, Taylor (2001) suggests:

To be able to influence the core of experimental psychology, positive psychologists could take a page from the existential humanist's study of the phenomenology of the scientific method. Phenomenology could become the new standard on which research is conducted (Taylor, 2001, p. 26).

What I understand Taylor to be advocating is the use of phenomenology to strengthen the overall science of psychology by identifying questions experimental research can then take on. My phenomenological contribution to the knowledge about positive experience could be used in this way.

I am now going to conclude my review of what the recent scholarship about flourishing - dominated by Positive Psychology - has to say.

I have noted that in the early years of the Positive Psychology movement, positive emotion was a prominent focus. Fredrickson & Losada (2005) found that flourishing people had 'positivity ratios' above around 3:1. This raised the question of whether any negative emotion is necessary to flourishing. Rathunde (2000) argues that the narrowing function of negative emotion plays an important role in the creative process. A number of critics (Held, 2004) (Schneider, 2011) have pointed out that the positive role of negative emotions and negative psychological functions and processes is generally underemphasised in the literature of Positive Psychology.

Keyes's (2002) index of flourishing measures three areas: emotional wellbeing, positive psychological functioning and positive social functioning. In addition to Keyes placing positive social functioning in his index of flourishing, Ryff & Singer (2000) proposed what they called 'interpersonal flourishing' as an agenda for psychological wellbeing generally. Fredrickson's (2003) 'broaden-and-build' theory suggests that positive emotions broaden people's modes of thinking and action, which over time builds their personal and social resources. Cooperrider & Sekerka (2003) incorporate the 'broaden-and-build' theory into a model for positive organisational change in which positive emotions, relatedness to others and the level of Appreciative Inquiry (built on positive images) sustain and energize each other. Seligman (2003) (2011) has changed his stance to acknowledge that positive relationships are one the main elements of flourishing, but only one of five discrete elements. I wonder whether, given that humans exist together in groups, we are wired so that our sense of wellbeing depends on positive relationships and that this actually mirrors the success of our work together. This seems to be part of what Cooperrider & Sekerka (2003) are suggesting in their work on positive organisational change.

Lastly, the positivist science of Positive Psychology (Taylor, 2001) excludes the contribution that could be made by other epistemologies. The use of phenomenology in my own research may therefore be able to shed new light on flourishing.

To summarise this section, I have moved on from the broadly philosophical meaning of the term *flourishing* which I introduced in Chapter 1 on page 18; Positive Psychology offers detailed ways of assessing whether flourishing is taking place in components of emotional wellbeing, psychological functioning and social functioning, but the role of the negative is underplayed. It is acknowledged that the components of flourishing are linked but the complexity of the processes that link them is unclear so that the link between flourishing and relating positively is ambiguous. Because of its positivist approach, Positive Psychology cannot tell us what flourishing is actually like to experience qualitatively as a process. In summary, I am interested in these edges to what the literature offers us about flourishing: (1) the role negative emotion plays, (2) the role of relationships, and (3) a qualitative understanding of the process.

In the next two sections of this chapter I will show how my inquiry is situated with respect to the literature of relating and then relational consulting.

Concepts of relating

In the previous section, I noted that positive social functioning, positive relationships, ‘interpersonal flourishing’ and relatedness are seen by Positive Psychologists as elements of, or stimulants to, positive psychological functioning, positive organisational change or flourishing generally. I also said in the section beginning on page 7 in Chapter 1 that my relationships with others are important features of my life and work and have been strongly connected with my personal flourishing. Again, I noted on page 22 that good relationships are becoming acknowledged in the media as important to the wellbeing and sustainability of society.

In this section I will explore concepts of relating to understand what my research can build on. I draw on Attachment Theory (1979), the writings of Martin Buber (1937), feminist psychology, Relational-cultural Theory and relational practice (e.g. Jordan, 2001); and I introduce the ideas of *relational constructionism* (Hosking, 2011) and *relational knowing* (Bouwen, 1998).

At the most raw, basic level, Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1979) describes the strong human need to relate that starts at birth. Bowlby puts the importance of this need being supplied, like this:

A feature of attachment behaviour of the greatest importance clinically . . . is the intensity of emotion that accompanies it, the kind of emotion that accompanies it, the kind of emotion aroused depending on how the relationship between the individual attached and the attachment figure is faring. If it goes well, there is

joy and a sense of security. If it is threatened there is jealousy, anxiety and anger. If broken there is grief and depression (Bowlby, 1988, p. 4).

Attachment Theory is formed from evidence about the way young children relate to their mothers but Bowlby suggests the need for attachment remains when children grow up. The need to attach themselves to each other may – or may not - be more figural for parents and young children than it is for consultants and their clients, yet if we accept that everyone has some natural need for attachment, it means we should be interested in the processes by which we relate to others. For instance, this description of attachment behaviour is one I have seen occur in consultant-client relationships:

Briefly put, attachment behaviour is conceived as any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual, who is usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser (Bowlby, 1979, p. 129).

After physical safety, Maslow (1954) identified love and belonging as the next most important needs of humans. The consequences of some broken relationships also draw attention to the importance of the human need for attachment. For example, analysing psychological trauma in the light of Relational-cultural Theory (which I mentioned at the end of the previous section), Birrell and Freyd (2006) write:

The fragmentation and silence that occurs as a result of relational trauma is not confined to the individual psyche. The violation of deep human bonds results in what has been called a state of condemned isolation (Birrell & Freyd, 2006, p. 53): The most terrifying and destructive feeling that a person can experience is isolation. This is not the same as ‘being alone’ in the more straightforward sense. It is feeling locked out of the possibility of human connection (citing Miller, 1988, p. 1).

In the extreme:

Insanity [is] . . . the results of the complete closedness of the I to the Thou, a condition in which neither word nor love is any longer able to reach the individual. As a result the psyche turns in on itself, loses real connection with concrete others and gropes in a maze which loses itself in a deeper and deeper way (citing Buber, 1937, p. 70) (Birrell & Freyd, 2006, p. 53).

I find the picture of the opposite extreme to relating well, painted by these words, startling in its intensity and implications. The consulting analogy of this vivid portrayal might be a situation in which there was no connection between consultant and client; each would be trying to work in isolation, with crucial uncertainties about the other. Such situations have been my experience on occasions and they were certainly not relationships I would call flourishing; neither were they relational ‘languishing’ (to borrow Keyes’s (2002) word). Instead they were relationships which did not function properly, a sort of ‘relational illness’ analogous to mental illness in individuals (Keyes, 2002). So my study of Attachment Theory strengthens my desire to find out more about

what flourishing relationships with clients are like. I hope to understand how the human need for attachment acts to stimulate flourishing relationships, avoiding the situation of isolation described by Birrell & Freyd (2006).

I recognise two main pillars to the literature of relating which inform my inquiry. The first pillar is the feminist literature of Jean Baker Miller (1976) and her colleagues and successors leading to Relational-cultural theory (Jordan J. V., 2001). By looking at how the psychology of women differs from men, they highlight the importance of the relational and describe its processes. The second pillar is the work of René Bouwen (1998) and his colleagues on relational knowledge and practice, which focuses attention on what is produced by relating. But underpinning both pillars, I recognise the philosophical and theological influence of Martin Buber (1937) in articulating basic concepts of relating.

In his work *I and Thou* (1937), Buber's described the way our relational selves operate by identifying what he called a twofold attitude of man: *I-It* and *I-Thou*:

*The I of man is . . . twofold. For the I of . . . I-Thou is a different I from that of I-It. I perceive something. I am sensible of something. I will something. I feel something. I think something . . . This and the like establish the realm of It. But the realm of Thou has a different basis. When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object. For where there is a thing there is another thing. Every It is bounded by others; It exists only through being bounded by others. But when Thou is spoken, there is no thing. Thou has no bounds. When Thou is spoken, the speaker . . . takes his stand **in relation** [my emphasis] (Buber, 1937, pp. 3,4).*

Buber challenges me not to think of my client – or any other person – as just someone else: as an object (albeit a very human object); as another being whom I categorise with various labels about how I think she or he behaves; or even as another person with whom there is a process going on of gesture and response (Stacey, 2003). I am challenged by Buber also to think of my fellow being as part of my own subjectivity, as one with whom I am *in relation*, which is some form of union or unity. What does it mean to be *in relation*? I feel invited to think of myself as bound up with another person, as merging and mingling with them with no clear boundary or distinction between us. It feels intimate, open and vulnerable all at once. But this ontology raises an epistemological challenge. How can I know another if I cannot experience him or her in some way?

*The world is not presented to man by experiences alone. These present him only with a world composed of It and He and She and It again.
If I face a human being as my Thou, he is not a thing . . . a specific point in space and time . . . not a nature to be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. But . . . whole in himself he is Thou.
Thou is more than It realises.
- What, then, do we experience of Thou?
- Just nothing. For we do not experience it.*

- *What, then, do we know of Thou?*
- *Just everything. For we know nothing isolated about it anymore.*
- The Thou meets me. . . I step into direct relation with it* (Buber, 1937, pp. 5-11).

So is Buber here inviting us to somehow know someone without experiencing him or her? Not in this sense:

Every Thou in the world is by its nature fated to become a thing, or continually to re-enter into the condition of things. Everything in the world, either before or after becoming a thing, is able to appear to an I as its Thou (Buber, 1937, p. 17).
No man is pure person [i.e. relational] and no man pure individuality (p. 65).
 A baby exists in *I-Thou* relations with others before *I-It*. *I-It* comes about as the baby's experience of others develops into meaning about them for it (pp. 24-31).

But if the paradigm in which we work expects knowledge to be derived from experience, what can we know about being in relation with a *Thou* – as opposed to in the attitude of *I-It* - if that means we are not experiencing the *Thou* as another person? How did Buber know what to write about *I-Thou*? I can experience being in a relationship with someone and this is distinct from experiencing him or her as a person. When I work closely with a principal client in a large organisation, we experience a mutual sense of loyalty and trust if our relationship works well. These are qualities of our relationship rather than of the people in it; for one thing, qualities of how we are when we are *not* together as well as when we are. Buber says the *I-Thou* is about knowing others holistically rather than fragmentarily. Using the *I-Thou* - *I-It* distinction, I can see a potential in my inquiry to explore relationships with clients in different ways.

I also find Buber's description of *I-Thou* an attractive way of thinking about relating. It recognises every relationship and every person, including me, as unique. I find that recognition affirms as humans. Intuitively, I sense their uniqueness is conducive to the flourishing of individuals and relationships.

Every real relation with a being or life in the world is exclusive. Its Thou is single (Buber, 1937, p. 78).

But a real, exclusive relationship could just as easily be negative as positive. Oppressive and demeaning relationships between individuals occur. Researching an adverse relationship could yield lots of useful data about relating, but might not be so affirming. I explore the attitudes of *I-It* and *I-Thou* in a relationship that seems at times quite poor on page 129.

To summarise what I have understood from Buber so far, attitudes of both *I-It* and *I-Thou* can exist with another person in a relationship. Sometimes we experience the other person (*I-It*) and sometimes we experience the relationship we are in (*I-Thou*). Paying attention in a relationship to our *I-Thou* as well as to the individuals *I* and *Him* or *Her*, could yield much richer data about relating.

Buber does not write like an academic or in common prose. His translator, Smith (Buber, 1937), describes *I and Thou* as a *philosophical-religious poem*. Kaufmann (cited by Zank in an online academic encyclopaedia entry, 2008) criticizes *I and Thou* as “more affected than honest”, written in a state of “irresistible enthusiasm”. Buber’s style is grand, containing frequent arresting assertions such as this:

So long as the heaven of Thou is spread out over me and the winds of causality cower at my heels, and the whirlpool of fate stays its course I do not experience the man to whom I say Thou (Buber, 1937, p. 9).

I find passages like this as much inspirational as illuminating. Nevertheless, with a detailed study of his less flowery passages, a coherent meaning of his *I-It – I-Thou* distinction has become clear to me, as I hope I have shown, and provided useful insights on which I can build in my inquiry.

Buber’s work also has an overt spiritual angle. Buber saw the *I-Thou* relation with another human as a simile for man’s relation with God (Buber, 1937, p. 103). He draws firm parallels between the inter-subjectivity between people and the inter-subjectivity between God and people (and also between people and nature). I draw comfort from the sense of fellowship and interdependence that the concept of *I-Thou* conveys about the possibilities for my relationship with all beings and stimulated to understand relating better.

Buber (1947) later said that his work on relating was counterbalancing the traditional Freudian attention in psychoanalysis on the individual and his or her drives (such as their *libido*):

The instinct for communion . . . is something greater than the believers in the “libido” realize: it is the longing for the world to become present to us as a person, which goes out to us as we to it, which chooses and recognizes us as we do it, which is confirmed in us as we in it (Buber, 1947, p. 104).

In recent decades, a ‘relational turn’ (Mills, 2005) has occurred in psychoanalysis:

The centrality of interactions with others, forming relationships, interpersonally mediated experience, human attachment, the impact of others on psychic development, reciprocal dyadic communication, contextually based social influence, and the recognition of competing subjectivities seem to be theoretical postulates underscoring the relational perspective (Mills, 2005, p. 158).

Mills points out however that paying more attention to the relational amounts to ‘decentring intrapsychic activity over relational interaction’, and can:

draw into question the separatedness of the self, the pre-existent developmental history of the patient prior to the treatment, the prehistory of unconscious processes independent of one’s relatedness to others (Mills, 2005, p. 160). *For the intersubjectivists, the individual mind becomes this ephemeral ether that evaporates the moment one enters into dialogue or social relations with anyone*

(Mills, 2005, p. 162).

By the *intersubjectivists*, Mills is referring to those who look to the relational, contrasting them with those who concentrate on the *intrapsychic* of the individual self. He argues for a balance between these two schools of thought, not ignoring what one has to offer at the expense of the other. Using Buber's language this would be to pay attention to what is going on in *It* (i.e. *Him* or *Her*) as well as what is going on in *I-It* and *I-Thou*. In consulting, this balance would be struck between inquiring into the parties (consultant and client) and the relationship between them.

Feminist writers (often - as I will show - citing Buber's influence) have gained insights about relating by studying the differences between the psychologies of women and men. Their work has now been brought together as *Relational-Cultural Theory*. These scholars also note the limitation of traditional psychoanalysis that I have already referred to:

Unlike Freud's construction of boundary as a place of resisting intrusion from the outside, Relational-Cultural Theory sees the boundary as a place of meeting, learning, differentiation, and exchange (Jordan J. V., 2009, p. 13).

Jean Baker Miller (1976) contrasted women's tendency towards cooperation with men's tendency towards competitiveness, as well as women's tendency towards emotional awareness and relatedness with men's tendency towards active rationality. She concluded that:

Men's only hope lies in affiliation, too, but for them it can seem an impediment, a loss, a danger, or at least second best. By contrast, affiliations, relationships, make women feel deeply satisfied, fulfilled, 'successful', free to go onto other things (Miller, 1976, p. 91).

Carol Gilligan (1982) ascribes the different psychologies of women and men to their development as they grow up. She says that generally for a girl,

her world is a world of relationships and psychological truths where an awareness of the connection between people gives rise to a recognition of responsibility for one another, a perception of the need for response (Gilligan, 1982, p. 30).

Yet in my opinion, for both men and women, we need to balance relating with individuation and recognise that they are actually interdependent. Benjamin (1990) says about how babies develop:

The need for recognition entails this fundamental paradox: in the very moment of realising our own independent will, we are dependent upon another to recognise it (Benjamin, 1990, p. 190).

In the working world, Darlene Ehrenberg (1974) writes that in the psychotherapeutic

relating between a therapist and her client she seeks an *intimate edge*. For Buber, she says, “the most profound growth and change can only occur in the context of this kind [the *I-Thou* kind] of “personal relation”.” (Ehrenberg, 1974, p. 423). Ehrenberg goes on .

It [I-Thou] requires mutual confrontation, and he [Buber] calls it unfolding the “dialogical”: that condition of genuine dialogue which involves bringing oneself fully into it, without reduction or shifting ground and without holding back relevant thoughts or withdrawing (Ehrenberg, 1974, p. 423).

By “intimate edge” I mean that point of maximum and acknowledged contact at any point in a relationship without fusion, without violation of the separateness and integrity of each participant . . . Ideally the “intimate edge” thus becomes a point of maximum self-expression and maximum awareness of the individuality and boundaries of self and other for each participant (p. 424).

Explaining why she seeks this intimate edge as a therapist, Ehrenberg says:

In the analytic situation studying moment by moment shifts in the quality of relatedness and experience between analyst and patient, permits exploration of individual patterns of reaction and particular sensitivities. (Ehrenberg, 1974, p. 425).

The therapist is concentrating on how she and her patient are relating as they explore the patient’s issues and is using the quality of their relating to steer her analysis. Signs cited by Ehrenberg as indicating the quality of relating is diminishing include *failure to touch, inauthenticity* and *collusion*. Should a consultant seek the sort of intimacy Ehrenberg advocates with a client? As Mills (2005) points out about Ehrenberg’s emphasis on the articulation of an analyst’s own experience:

We do not require much effort to imagine how this dictum could potentially lead to disastrous consequences, including ethical behaviour and gross boundary violations (Mills, 2005, p. 179).

I think though, that the professional intimacy Ehrenberg is writing about is in the service of better understanding another, not intimacy *per se*. It is not about the therapist being open about everything; just what might improve the therapy for the client. In consulting, it would be being open just about what might promote the objective of the assignment. I would like to know more about how this restricted intimacy might work in consulting.

Ehrenberg talked in the citation immediately above about relying on the ‘mutual experience’ of therapist and client. I want to explore this concept of mutuality a bit more. Judith Jordan (The Meaning of Mutuality, 1991b) writes:

In a mutual exchange one is both affecting the other and being affected by the other; one extends oneself out to the other and is also receptive to the impact of the other. There is openness to influence, emotional availability, and a constantly changing pattern of responding to and affecting the other’s state (Jordan J. V.,

1991b, p. 82).

This sounds quite similar to Ehrenberg's description of the 'intimate edge'; Jordan's mutuality is an intimate mutuality. Jordan also builds on Buber's *I-It – I-Thou* distinction:

When empathy and concern flow both ways, there is an intense affirmation of the self and, paradoxically, a transcendence of the self as part of a larger relational unit (Jordan J. V., 1991b, p. 82).

Jordan sees mutuality as a process in which what happens between individuals strengthens them as individuals. Jordan has also now brought in the idea of empathy, which is something Ehrenberg was also clearly writing about.

Through empathy, and an active interest in the other as a different, complex person, one develops the capacity at first to allow the other's differentness and ultimately to value and encourage those qualities that make that person different and unique (Jordan J. V., 1991b, p. 82).

Both empathy and differentness arise here as important to mutuality. Mutuality involves people both empathising, and being empathised with, in the same encounter. They retain their individuality however for mutuality is not sameness. Indeed their differentness is essential to them being able to change each other:

I accommodate to your experience and therefore am changed by our interaction. I am touched by your experience (Jordan J. V., 1991b, p. 89).

In another piece called *Empathy and Self Boundaries* (1991a), Jordan writes:

Empathy is central to an understanding of the self which involves we-ness, transcendence of the separate, disconnected self. It is, in fact, the process through which one's experienced sense of basic connection and similarity to other humans is established . . . the human echo. Without empathy, there is no intimacy (Jordan J. V., 1991a, pp. 68, 69).

So empathy is a process that enables mutuality and intimacy. How does empathy work?

In order to empathize, one must have a well-differentiated sense of self in addition to an appreciation of and sensitivity to the differentness as well as sameness of the other. Experientially, empathy . . . allows the perception of the other's affective clues followed by surrender to affective arousal in oneself. Self-boundary flexibility is important, since there is an "as if", trying-out quality to the experience, whereby one places one's self in the other's shoes or looks through the other's eyes. There is a momentary overlap between self and other representations as distinctions between self and other blur experientially (Jordan J. V., 1991a, pp. 67-70).

I think Jordan is arguing that in a relationship of mutuality, the interpersonal process of empathy and the intrapersonal process of arousal can set each other off continually.

However, writing of *Empathetic Communication in the Psychotherapy Relationship*, Alexandra Kaplan (1991), acknowledging Ehrenberg, makes this distinction between feeling for the other and being made to feel by the other:

The cognitive component of empathy follows a different, essentially contradictory, course from that of the affective. Specifically, while there may be an interpenetration of affect, identity remains differentiated (Kaplan, 1991, p. 47).

Kaplan is saying that while feeling for another we can still reason as ourselves. So whilst our common experience allows us to empathise, our different experience allows us to contribute ideas to each other.

The theory I have described of Miller, Jordan and their colleagues has now been brought together under the banner of 'Relational-cultural Theory' (Jordan J. V., 2009), and it expressly promotes relating that leads to growth, which I understand to be a component of flourishing (see the section beginning on page 18):

Relational-cultural theory (RCT) arose from an effort to better understand the importance of growth-fostering relationships in people's lives (Jordan J. V., 2009, p. 23).

Echoing the generalisation I cited earlier about men's psychology (Miller, 1976), Relational-cultural theory also recognises that not everyone is able to benefit from growth in their relationships:

their fear of engaging with others leads to keeping aspects of their experience out of connection . . . The individual alters herself or himself to fit in with the expectations and wishes of the other person, and in the process, the relationship itself loses authenticity and mutuality (Jean Baker Miller Training Institute, 2015)

This is called in RCT the Central Relational Paradox. As with the criticism of Positive Psychology that it eulogizes flourishing, I am reminded that relating is not always straightforward.

The *cultural* emphasis in RCT is explained this way:

The insight that relational development is always completely suffused with social and cultural identities has been central to the development and practice of RCT (Jordan J. V., 2009, p. 23).

I discuss the importance for consultants of understanding culture in the workplace further in the section beginning on page 75. Hartling and Sparks (2010) say that sometimes a culture that aspires to relating well may in practice find itself defeating its own purposes:

Pseudo-relational cultures suppress, deny, or avoid differences and conflicts in order to maintain the illusion of connection (Hartling & Sparks, 2010, p. 170). [A *pseudo-relational culture* is one Hartling and Sparks say can develop in

workplaces that are sincerely concerned about the quality of human relationships, such as institutions with religious affiliations, community service agencies, grassroots organisations and volunteer groups.]

I take this as another warning about privileging some aspects of flourishing relationships over others, in this case favouring connection over growth.

RCT also holds that some disconnection is not only inevitable but necessary in relationships because in renegotiating relationships following disconnection they become more useful for the participants. And RCT recognises the effect of power in relationships and advocates moving to a state of *mutual empowerment* (Jean Baker Miller Training Institute, 2015).

Overall from reviewing RCT, I am interested to know how these concepts - intimacy, cognitive and affective empathy, the self-boundary, differentness, disconnection, renegotiation and mutual empowerment – contribute to, and develop in practice, in flourishing consulting relationships.

Joyce Fletcher (1998) links women's gender to the way they relate to others at work, which she calls 'relational practice'. The setting of Relational Practice is explicitly everyday organisational life in the workplace - the domain of my inquiry.

Work is seen as being in a masculine, public sphere, as contrasted with a feminine, private sphere which is characterised by love, emotion, and groundedness (Fletcher, 1998, p. 166).

Relational practice – a way of working that springs from a stereotypically feminine belief system (p. 163).

Fletcher (2001) proposes a model of relational practice, which both sexes can use:

Relational theory suggests that although the prevailing models of adult growth and achievement are based on public-sphere characteristics such as separation, individuation and independence, there exists an alternative model, called growth-in-connection, that is rooted in private-sphere characteristics of connection, interdependence and collectivity.

Growth-fostering interactions are characterised by mutual empathy and mutual empowerment, where both parties recognise vulnerability as part of the human condition, approach the interaction expecting to grow from it, and feel a responsibility to contribute to the growth of the other (Fletcher, 2001, p. 31).

Fletcher also links relational practice with flourishing in the form of growth. (The word *flourish* deriving from the same root as *flower* (in French: *fleur*), has within it a strong sense of physical growth, blooming, blossoming and thriving. Furthermore for flowering to occur, many plants are dependent on insects to pollinate them and some insects depend on the pollen as a source of their own nutrition. This places flowers and insects in a relationship that makes them dependent on each other.) Fletcher also points to the *responsibility* taken for others in relational practice, echoing Lévinas (1985), who I cite

with other sources on responsibility in the next section of this chapter.

René Bouwen and colleagues have further theorised relational practice at work, including when consulting. For instance, Steyaert and Van Looy (2010, p. 1) conceptualise “the study of organization within an ontology of becoming” and “people as being embedded within a network of possible connections”. I understand these phrases to mean that we can view an organisation as what is being formed by the processes of relating going on between its people.

Hosking (2011) uses the term *relational constructionism* for the concept of relational processes constructing relational realities. This constructionism is not so much epistemological as ontological; she says relational constructionism gives ontology to construction processes and is largely empty of content. She is suggesting that understanding the processes of relating between people is a way of understanding their practice, their work, and their contributions to organising. Bouwen (1998) writes about knowing as a process going on among people. Like Hosking he also refers to a blurring of epistemology and content when thinking relationally. Words, says Bouwen, “take on their meaning in a relational context” (1998, p. 301), or to put it another way, in the light of the circumstances in which they are being used to communicate. “Knowledge generation and application are no longer split apart” (Bouwen, 1998, p. 317); they are going on, he says, at the same time in the process of relating. In a subsequent article, Bouwen talks about relational knowing being a ‘frame-breaking interaction’ - in other words a process of relating that changes the participants’ assumptions. He contrasts relational knowing with creating explicit knowledge and then trying to embed it as implicit knowledge in communities of practice (Bouwen, 2001). This latter model, trying to embed new practices, was one with which I experienced much difficulty in my early consulting career, as I described in short stories in Chapter 1 (the section beginning on page 7).

Gray & Schrujjer, also from Bouwen’s school, post a warning about a peril of relational practice. There is a danger that the parties will collude:

Collusion stands for unconsciously agreeing not to confront reality. (Gray & Schrujjer, 2010, p. 127).

If a consultant and client put getting on well first, I can imagine that they could indulge themselves in collusion with the result that the ‘job does not get done’. Such behaviour would not be in the interests of their relationship according to my review of flourishing in the previous section – flourishing is definitely about getting the job done and is about much more than feeling good. Earlier in this section too, Ehrenberg noted that collusion diminished the potential in a relationship.

To summarise my review of conceptual work on relating, I have drawn on Attachment Theory, the philosophical-theological work of Martin Buber, the feminist psychological concepts of Jean Baker Miller and others, and the ideas about relational practice of

Fletcher, Bouwen and colleagues. Buber's *I-Thou* attitude offers an alternative construct to that in which we as subjects relate to each other as objects. It is a co-subjective construct in which we can open ourselves to another in order to be of value to each other, become a working unit without necessarily losing a sense of ourselves as individuals. The feminists balance the masculine tendency to individuate and compete by demonstrating the connections that women value between people, using terms including cooperativeness, emotional relatedness, intimacy, empathy and mutuality; they point to the role of relating in promoting growth, which I said in the previous section is part of human flourishing. Relational practice is a standpoint that emphasises that all knowledge in organisations is created in relationships. One criticism of relational thinking is that it ignores the individual self and the self's needs. Another is that mere connection is favoured over growth. So we need to be alert to the dangers of regarding consulting as just relating.

Where is the edge of the jigsaw here? How can I build on the scholarship of relating, including relational psychoanalysis, to help me understand flourishing consulting relationships? As in the previous section, I can see an exciting potential to know what being in a flourishing relationship is like and how it develops. It could include features I have noted in this section, such as intimacy, empathy and mutuality, but it will be specific to the situation of consulting. But first I am going to see to what extent that has already been done in scholarship.

Consulting relationally

Peter Block, a popular writer on consulting, says:

Consulting is primarily a relationship business (Block, 2000, p. 327).

And from Ashridge Consulting:

'Relational' means for us acknowledging the inherently mutual of all social process, and therefore prioritising the importance of the co-created, 'here-and-now' relationship as the central vehicle for development and transformation (Critchley, 2010, p. 851).

I wonder whether this relational nature of consulting is one that other consultants and I value enough – or that we sell to our clients? It feels quite novel - like taking a positive approach, taking a relational approach is counter to the prevailing attitude I have experienced in several consulting environments, as I described earlier (the section beginning on page 7), often overshadowed by either consultant or client trying to protect their personal position.

In this section, I draw further on the writing of René Bouwen and his colleagues, as they address relational practice specifically in a consulting context. I also identify some relational points made in texts on the general practice of consulting by Schein, Block and de Haan. I find connections between relational practice and flourishing. I identify

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as an organisation development approach practised by consultants that promotes organisational flourishing inasmuch as it amplifies the positive in organisations. I examine the important role of differentness in relational consulting as explained from a Gestalt standpoint by Nevis. Finally I look at the literature on relational coaching to see what parallels can be drawn with consulting.

Edgar Schein, one of the best-known writers on consulting, defines consulting (he calls it “process consulting”) as this:

Process Consulting is a set of activities on the part of the consultant that help the client to perceive, understand and act upon the process events that occur in the client’s environment in order to help improve the situation as defined by the client (Schein E. H., 1988, p. 11).

But in this definition, I have no sense of the client as an active participant in the consulting process. My experience is that consulting only succeeds when the client is fully engaged in the work. The stories of unsuccessful consulting in Chapter 1 (section beginning on page 7) include several instances where clients were not fully engaged. In a recent interview, Schein describes consulting as an attitude of *humble inquiry* (Lambrechts, Bouwen, Grieten, Huybrechts, & Schein, 2011). By this he means that a consultant should be modest about his or her understanding of a client’s situation. But the word *humble* could also suggest that the consultant is a supplicant prepared to take whatever crumbs the client throws to him or her. I have certainly felt like that on occasions as a consultant. Erik de Haan’s definition (de Haan, 2004) of consulting is closer to my own thinking than Schein’s:

A temporary collaborative relationship between a client or client organisation and a consultant, the objective of which is an improvement in the client’s fortunes (de Haan, 2004, p. 1).

Both Schein’s and de Haan’s definitions contain an aspiration to a positive outcome, so there is a connection being made with flourishing in both. But de Haan’s definition points to a closer relationship than Schein’s. Comparing *process consulting* (Schein’s) and *relational consulting*, Lambrechts et al (2009) say:

Within process consultation the shaping of the reciprocity is more imbalanced. It is the consultant helper who engages in the inquiry process of the client as a clinical inquirer; they are not equal partners.

[In] the relational practice view . . . the emphasis is on engaging in a joint activity, where both sides have a contribution and a proper stake in the encounter. It is a more inclusive perspective. It stresses the importance of enacting reciprocal relationships between mutually responsive co-actors . . . Co-actors are jointly involved in each other’s inquiry process as partners. The process is driven by mutually acknowledging and supporting each other’s needs . . . A consultation session is considered as ‘good’ if partners are not only reflecting on how to do things differently but really do things differently, i.e. more jointly and generatively, enacting more relational quality. There is more

emphasis on doing things together than on reflecting or diagnosing. Framing and reframing is jointly done. (Lambrechts, Grieten, Bouwen, & Corthouts, 2009, p. 44).

I notice that in selecting this literature I am saying as much about the sort of consulting I do as about how I think consulting should be done. The 'clinical inquirer' 'process consulting' role is good in my experience for investigating technical matters. My consulting, however, is more about people, and in this area I find my attention increasingly drawn to what is going on between them. Lambrechts *et al* provide the fullest description I can find in the existing literature of what a relational approach to consulting is like. What I notice as particular to relational consulting in the view of Lambrechts *et al* are equality, inclusion, reciprocity and mutuality. In their description above, they go on to talk about when consulting is 'good', linking the *quality* of the consulting relationship to the quality of the work. They reinforce this point:

Within a relational practice perspective the quality of interaction, and relationships, is seen as the most active carrier of the quality of organizing and change processes (Lambrechts, Grieten, Bouwen, & Corthouts, 2009, p. 44).

Joyce Fletcher, again writing specifically about consulting as *relational practice* (Fletcher, 2001), identifies some of the skills required, skills that enable the underlying processes of relating that I explored in the previous section to this.

Relational practice is a way of working that reflects the relational logic of effectiveness and requires a number of relational skills such as empathy, mutuality, reciprocity and a sensitivity to emotional contexts (Fletcher, 2001, p. 84).

The argument being made for quality relating by Fletcher and Lambrechts *et al* in these citations feels somewhat utilitarian; it provides a rationale for quality relationships rather than valuing relationships in themselves. My experience is that consultants and clients want to have quality relationships **and** want to do work of quality together. Whether that is a common experience could be researched. I also wonder what quality consulting looks like from the perspective of how client and consultant enact successful organisational change together.

In the section before this, I looked at relational theory as it is applied in psychoanalysis. Desirable features such as mutuality and reciprocity, mentioned above by Fletcher and Lambrechts *et al* about relational consulting, were also asserted previously about therapeutic relationships. But consulting relationally could be different for the reason that these relationships involve the participants spending a lot more time together. It could be that this means consultant and client become closer.

Particular *values* and *beliefs* also figure in my approach to consulting. Our values are where we find meaning in what we do. I believe that for us to flourish we have to acknowledge a basic responsibility for each other. Emmanuel Lévinas (1985) expresses a similar belief:

Responsibility is the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity . . . Since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him, without even having taken on responsibilities in his regard; his responsibility is incumbent on me. It is responsibility that goes beyond what I do . . . I am responsible for his very responsibility.

In this sense, I am responsible for the Other without waiting for his reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is his affair. (Lévinas, 1985, pp. 95-98)

In a way, Lévinas is going further than Buber's (1937) I-Thou idea of relating, to a relating defined just by Thou. That is a daunting idea and some will find it extreme. I can hear them saying that they do not feel themselves responsible for others, and that if they did, they would feel exposed, overwhelmed or lack the means to fulfil the responsibility. I accept that. Maybe they could try it though. Is it so difficult to believe that we are responsible for the way we respond to others? Frankl (2004) proposes that responsibility for others provides meaning in life:

Man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked . . . he can only respond by being responsible . . . responsibility [is] the very essence of human existence . . . "the self-transcendence of human existence" . . . Being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself – be it a meaning to fulfil or another human to encounter. The more one forgets himself – by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love – the more human he is and the more he actualises himself (Frankl, 2004, pp. 113-115).

I have a value, possibly nurtured in the close-knit world of the Army, that I have a responsibility for the people I work with. I have experienced and enjoyed the strong mutual interdependence that grows up in a military unit, a 'Band of Brothers'. I value teamwork and believe that groups perform highly when the members hold themselves mutually accountable to each other (Katzenbach & Smith, 1992).

De Haan (2004) writes at length on the sense of responsibility felt by a consultant for the outcome of an assignment, something I evidenced in my own consulting in Chapter 1, but also his belief that the client needs to have a matching sense of responsibility if their work together is to succeed:

The phenomenon of passing responsibility onto others is well known in management literature . . . The same fate can befall the unwary consultant (de Haan, 2004, p. 5).

A symmetrical relationship [parent-parent, adult-adult or child-child] is to be preferred. In such a relationship, both parties are aware of their shared responsibility (de Haan, 2004, p. 31).

Block agrees:

In most cases, the client comes to you with the expectation that once you are told what the problem is, you provide the solution . . . [However] responsibility

for what is planned and takes place has to be balanced – 50/50 (Block, 2000, p. 14).

De Haan points to aspects of the value to be had from balancing responsibility in a relationship:

Moreover, the rivalry and creativity the relationship invites can be put to good use (de Haan, 2004, p. 31).

Again this has a somewhat utilitarian logic to it and I wonder what happens if instead of valuing a relationship for what it can deliver, I also value it for itself. Block (2000) explores the value of the love (in the sense of caring) that consultants can hold for their clients:

Consulting at its best is an act of love: the wish to be genuinely helpful to another (Block, 2000, p. xix). Consulting cannot be done well without genuine caring for the client (p. 327).

This reminds me of my desire as a consultant to serve my client, to care for them in that way, as I also discussed in Chapter 1. Similarly, I want my clients to care about me – it's not just one-way. But that desire to love or care about or serve, like the parallel sense of responsibility, comes with a shadow side:

*There is a self-serving aspect to each act of service . . . The cost of our generosity . . . is that it carries within it our wish for dominance and gratitude. To be seen as wise and right, to be first with the insight, to claim credit for the changes in another **are not gifts** [my emphasis]. They are subtle demands on a client to pay for our help with a currency more costly than money (Block, 2000, p. xix).*

When I first read these words, it hurt me to think that my consulting could be construed as meeting my needs as the consultant as well as meeting the needs of my clients. Yet of course consulting does meet needs in me – I say more about these needs of mine in the section beginning on page 58.

Consulting, relating well and flourishing are all linked by Kathleen King in her thesis *Relational Consulting* (King, 2004) about her personal experience of consulting:

'Relational consulting' is my current articulation of my consulting practice as a contribution to human flourishing (King, 2004, p. 573).

Echoing Joyce Fletcher (quotation earlier in this section), Kathleen highlights the quality of relationships and finds a connection between the quality of relationships and flourishing consulting. I want to find out more about the nature of these consulting relationships that contribute to human flourishing.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an organisational improvement methodology, used by consultants and others, that places its attention squarely on amplifying what is already

going well in an organisation (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003). Its proponents differentiate AI from problem-solving approaches to organisation development:

Appreciative Inquiry is a strength-based, capacity building approach to transforming human systems toward a shared image of their most positive potential by first discovering the very best in their shared experience (Barrett & Fry, 2005).

‘Transforming human systems toward a shared image of their most positive potential’ sounds close to how I have previously defined flourishing in this paper. AI has, I suggest, the most to say at the moment about how organisations can flourish that is useful to consultants because it offers a methodology for enhancing what is positive in organisations (Barrett & Fry, 2005). AI’s track record of successful interventions in organisations supports the case for paying attention to flourishing in consulting assignments. AI is relational to the extent that it emphasises inclusion and collaboration with respect to the groups participating in an inquiry; but AI does not offer any guidance about the relating of AI consultants to their clients. AI’s positive rationale is similar to that of Positive Psychology and Positive Organizational Scholarship, and AI writers make connections with these movements (Cooperrider & Fry, 2012a), (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003).

I noted in the first section of this chapter the important role that can be played by the negative in flourishing and AI perhaps limits itself unhelpfully to amplifying the positive in organisations. If a consulting client’s objective is exclusively about eliminating a deficiency in his or her organisation’s performance, that work is surely still positive? As Cooperrider (cited by Johnson, 2011) has also pointed out, all that is negative reflects the absence of something which if present would represent the ideal state and could therefore be reframed as a positive opportunities. In a book chapter entitled ‘Transcending the Polarity of Light and Shadow in Appreciative Inquiry: An Appreciative Exploration of Practice’ (2013), Johnson looks also at the negative *emotions* which inevitably arise during an AI intervention, irrespective of the positive framing of the goal:

To the extent that AI turns up the intensity of the light in an organisation like a theatre spotlight, it is inevitable and natural for shadow to emerge (Johnson, 2013, p. 192).

Asking someone to repress difficult emotions or critical perspectives is like asking someone to amputate some significant part of his or her being – it is neither affirming or appreciative (p. 191).

To the extent that we as AI practitioners try to subvert the negative emotions and darker realm of human experiencing, perhaps we lose an important possibility for transformative and appreciative change (p. 196).

There is energy in anger and it can be harnessed in the direction of vision you want to achieve (p. 197).

One of the main ideas on which AI is based is that the energy associated with positive emotions is more likely to be positively transformative than the energy associated with negative emotions (Cooperrider D. L., 2001). I think what Johnson is saying is that both

positive and negative responses to change are inevitable and both carry important meaning about the situation, so should be addressed. I said in the first section of this chapter that both positive and negative emotions are present in flourishing.

Whether the response is positive or negative, I believe all consulting relies on something different being brought by the consultant to the client's attention. Drawing on the concept of change at boundaries in Gestalt therapy, Edwin Nevis (1987) offers this analysis of organisation consulting:

It is important to realize that, by definition, an intervener is different in some important aspect from the members of the client organization. (Nevis, 1987, p. 49).

To be effective the consultant must be able to display and use his or her differences while appearing acceptable to the "alien" client system. If one is very like the system, the consultant-client relationship will be highly confluent. If the consultant is very different, the relationship will be fraught with misunderstanding or conflict. The most useful stance implies a balance; one affiliates with the system yet is clearly autonomous and apart. This provides the consultant with the opportunity to be a powerful force in the client system. (Nevis, 1987, p. 179).

It seems to me that I ought to be continually seeking to understand how my experience, perception and ideas are different to my clients', and how I can productively deploy these things to their benefit. De Haan talks about consultants being *complementary* and *challenging* as well as *symmetrical* and *supportive* (de Haan, 2004). Block (2000) describes a subtle relationship between interventions that could be construed as positive and negative:

Supporting and confronting can almost come in the same sentence . . . To give the client support does not commit you to agree. It means you have listened. The confront statement then identifies the difference between how you see a situation and how a client sees the situation (Block, 2000, p. 226).

One of the reasons I consult for a living is because I believe I can help my clients make a difference. That difference manifests itself, inevitably and understandably, in various tensions of which both my client and I must be mindful. People often find new ideas and change unsettling. A consulting intervention is a relational inquiry into what is taken for granted, into non-reflexivity and the unknown, by challenging and by connecting (Maas, Stravers, & Baar, 2010). Dewulf & Bouwen (2012) describe various interaction strategies people use to deal with differences in issue framing that they describe collectively as 'Doing Differences'. Some of the strategies are dialogical and so produce new knowing for the parties involved; others are disconnecting or polarising and do not result in any meeting of minds. In my experience, clients can often rise above consultants setting off negative reactions in them and look to the new possibilities the interaction offers. I would like to know more about the circumstances in which this takes place and the strategies consultant and client adopt.

Coaching, like consulting, has relationships with clients at its core. De Haan and Sills (2010) write about the 'relational turn' in coaching:

In this field of "executive coaching", which is supposed to be "all about the client", there is a strange bias towards describing models, approaches and, more generally, the coach – as opposed to the client.

We have seen the emergence of a countervailing force to reckon with, a force that both directs us back to the diversity and uniqueness of our clients and also especially to the relationship between coach and client. This "relational turn", as it is called . . . (de Haan & Sills, 2010, pp. 1,2).

They go on to identify questions about relational coaching that could also be relevant to consulting:

How do we strengthen . . . the relationship? What happens between coach and client that helps to build the sort of empathic connection that is so important? Knowing that it is the relationship that counts, and that coach and client are engaged in a process of mutual influencing, how far should the coach go in living out a "radical" mutuality, with substantial focus on self and self-disclosure? Might this distract from the core agenda of the client? Might the essential asymmetry of the coaching contract get lost? How does the coach manage the ethics and boundaries of a relationship that is mutual but not symmetrical? (de Haan & Sills, 2010, p. 5)

As Critchley (2010) notes in respect of this last question:

Coach and client are engaged in a process of reciprocal influence, whether they like it or not. If such a process is to be generative, I am suggesting that the person of the coach must be fully involved; to attempt to withhold him or herself in the interests of impartiality or detachment merely attenuates the creative possibility inherent in the process of fully relating (Critchley, 2010, p. 860).

Also addressing coach-client relations, Critchley says:

The dynamic of the relationship between coach and client needs to be explicitly attended to, as it is the main means through which change takes place (Critchley, 2010, p. 862).

It's interesting, given that consulting, like coaching, is also about work, that the relational potential that Ehrenberg and others noted (see the previous section of this chapter) in the therapeutic relationship is also being seen in coaching. It adds to the case for looking harder at consulting relationships.

To summarise this section, the literature of consulting contains references to the relational values of taking responsibility for, and caring about, one's clients. There is some mention of relational quality. The literature on relational practice identifies useful

relational skills such as empathy, mutuality, reciprocity and sensitivity to emotional contexts. Relational processes appropriate to consulting include supporting each other's needs, working generatively, framing and reframing jointly. There is an assumption, often unstated, that consulting from a relational perspective contributes to human flourishing (King, 2004). Yet the organisational development technique with potentially the most to say about flourishing, Appreciative Inquiry, does not focus on detailed processes of relating between consultants and clients. In coaching though, some of the recent literature takes a relational view.

I said, from my reading on relating in the previous section, that the edge of the knowledge jigsaw I had found was the potential to know 'what being in a flourishing consulting relationship is like and how consultant and client experience it developing'. In this section, other questions I have identified connect with this question, such as:

- Do consultants and clients aspire to quality relationships?
- How do consultants and clients do work of quality together?
- What values and beliefs do consultants and clients need to share?
- How do consultant and client use their differentness?

The issue raised about the boundaries of mutuality is also connected with first question but may well be unanswered looking at it. It seems to be a different and quite specific question about how much of their experience consultants should disclose to clients.

I have also found a potential congruence that could be exploited between flourishing consulting relationships and Appreciative Inquiry.

My research question becomes

In the first section of Chapter 1 on page 7, I accounted for my choice of the topic, drawing on incidents that have been seminal in my experience of work. I said that when consulting relationships flourish has become for me an indicator of effective consulting and I decided therefore that I wanted to use my doctoral inquiry to understand more about them. In this chapter, I have explored the existing literature on flourishing, relating and relational consulting.

Having reviewed the literature, the question I find most interesting is phenomenological. It takes a different approach to the research I have considered up to now and simply asks, '**What is being in a flourishing consulting relationship like and how do consultant and client experience it developing?**' Instead of trying to isolate a determining causal factor for flourishing consulting relationships, this question just synthesises people's experience. There is a bias in the question inasmuch as it assumes that consultants and clients experience their relationships flourishing, but I have also demonstrated from the literature and my own experience why it is reasonable to believe that we naturally pursue flourishing relationships with others. I explore further the influence of assumptions and preconceptions about the research question in the section beginning on page 58.

How I set about using this question to get at the experience of flourishing consulting relationships is the subject of the next chapter. I present my answers to the question in Chapters 4 and 5, starting on page 74. In Chapter 7 on page 135 I suggest what contribution to scholarship I have made based the literature I have reviewed in this chapter.

The other questions raised during this chapter, I also return to in Chapter 7 to see to what extent the question I chose illuminated them as well and what opportunities they present for further research. This is the section beginning on page 136.

Chapter 3 – My phenomenological methodology

In Chapter 1, I explained my choice of topic for this dissertation; in Chapter 2, I formed my specific research question by appraising the boundaries of existing scholarship. I also justified researching the question phenomenologically, the phenomenon in this case being flourishing consulting relationships. In this chapter I set out the detailed phenomenological research processes used for the fieldwork phase of the inquiry. The fieldwork itself is then documented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Firstly I will introduce and explain my choice of ‘transcendental phenomenological research’ in preference to other phenomenological methods. Secondly I describe the first process in the transcendental method and how I applied it; this is the process of *epoche*, which identifies the biases introduced by the research question. Next I describe the participants in my research, the questions I put to them and the data gathering process. Then, in separate sections, I explain each of the three analytical processes of transcendental phenomenological research, and how I carried each one out. The final two sections are about ethics and validity respectively.

Transcendental phenomenological research

Phenomenology is the study of experience to find the essence and meaning of phenomena. It uses as its data how things appear existentially in their raw state as they enter consciousness. “Existence comes before essence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1948 cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 19). The critical idea of existentialism is that a person’s experience is primary (Peterson, 2006). Critchley (1997) describes phenomenology as the methodology of existentialism.

I employed for my fieldwork, methods based on the transcendental phenomenological research methods documented by Clark Moustakas (1994). These methods provide structured ways to:

- Consciously set aside, as much as is possible, preconceptions about the phenomenon being investigated before collecting data on it; this setting aside is known in phenomenological inquiry as the process of *epoche*.
- Identify the *texture* of people’s experience of the phenomenon in the terms in which it is revealed to them, known as the process of *phenomenological reduction*.
- Build up a picture of the underlying *structures* of the phenomenon: what lies behind what is directly experienced. This process is known as *imaginative variation*.
- *Synthesise* the textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon, across a range of people experiencing it.

I considered several options before settling on the transcendental phenomenological research methodology documented by Moustakas. The other methods I considered

were Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and Heuristic Research (Moustakas, 1990). Here I shall compare these methodologies with the one I chose.

The role played by interpretation or *hermeneutics* differentiates Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis from Transcendental Phenomenological Research. The founding fathers of phenomenology, Husserl and Heidegger, fell out over the extent to which interpretation could be avoided. Heidegger said that it was inevitable and should be embraced, whilst Husserl maintained that it worked against phenomenology's ability to get at the essence of being (Lavery, 2003). Finlay (2009) distinguishes between interpretation *pointing to* the meaning of something and interpretation *pointing out* the meaning of something. The transcendental method leads the researcher to *point to* meaning in the data gathered. In hermeneutic phenomenological methods the interpretative faculties of the researcher are intentionally harnessed to *point out* meaning. Explicating the phenomenon, 'reading between the lines' is how this is done, saying what a subject has left unsaid, accounting for their experience.

I acknowledge that interpretation is a natural, unavoidable and extremely valuable process. But, as I noted in the section beginning on page 18, in my initial inquiries I found hesitation about what the word flourishing meant. I therefore prioritised capturing what the phenomenon of flourishing consulting relationships meant to people, over how their experience could be interpreted. In my fieldwork, I wanted to consciously set aside, as much as is possible, my own and others' assumptions and presuppositions about flourishing. As I noted above, this setting-aside is known in phenomenological inquiry as the process of *epoche*, and is the first stage of transcendental research. It clears the way to focusing on the meanings, essences, texture and structure of the subjects' experience of the phenomenon, rather than on seeking to interpret their experience, as one would do even at this early stage in a hermeneutic inquiry. Later on, in writing phenomenological descriptions, I use literature and my own experience to *point to* meaning in the subjects' experience. But I do not attempt to *point out* why they had their experience.

Heuristic Research was the other phenomenological methodology I considered. Heuristic research, whilst it can also involve others, is orientated primarily towards informing *personal* experience. I do indeed want to inform my personal experience. However, because when I began my inquiry the nature of flourishing consulting relationships appeared to be so vague, I want first of all to establish as best I can some agreement about what the phenomenon is. So I chose transcendental phenomenology because it synthesises the experience of a number of participants. I also wanted to leave open the possibility of an array of answers to my research question; I anticipated that several insights would appear. Heuristic research allows for just one main insight to occur in its inquiry process.

In summary, I chose transcendental phenomenology to research the phenomenon of relational flourishing between consultants and clients because it offers processes

leading to a rich depiction of the essence of this phenomenon from several participants.

Epoche: setting aside preconceptions

On the plane home from a business trip to Cyprus I am boning up on Moustakas's *Phenomenological Research Methods* (1994) whilst in the two seats next to me a young couple kiss, cuddle, chatter and play a game together on their i-Pad. They sound as though they may be Greek-speakers, so when their attention is momentarily not on each other - which happens eventually - I point to the word *epoche* in my book and ask them how it is pronounced. If the process of epoche is going to have such a significant role in my inquiry, I want to know how to say it.

“Ay-poch-ee” the couple says, “It means ‘season’.”

Feeling, and no doubt looking, confused, I say, “I thought it meant ‘to stay away from’ or ‘to abstain’”.

“Oh, that’s “À-poch-ee””, the couple says. “There are two letter E’s in Greek. We couldn’t tell which you meant.”

All of which sounds like a good reason for the meaning of *epoche* I intend, the second of these. Epoche in phenomenological research is the process of surfacing and setting aside presuppositions and assumptions so they don’t sully the process of gathering evidence. It’s a bit like cleaning the equipment before conducting a chemistry experiment, so that foreign matter that has accumulated on the apparatus doesn’t change or taint the chemical reaction being investigated. Epoche allows us “to suspend or step back from our ordinary ways of looking” at something, in order that we can look afresh at the phenomenon unencumbered by the baggage of our existing ideology about it (Ihde, 1977, p. 32).

To try out the process of epoche, I asked myself about a relational phenomenon that is very present in my life: my marriage. First, I focused on what I *thought* being married meant to me, how I *comprehended* my marriage. This is a summary of what I wrote:

I think of my marriage as being about my wife and I being together, taking each other into account in how we live our lives; sharing many things, including the relationship with our children; showing affection to each other and caring for each other.

This was my epoche of being married. I put it to one side and then allowed my *experience* of being married to present itself to me over the course of several days. This is a summary of what I wrote after that:

What I find is that I want to be in connection with my wife. We encourage each other and turn to each other for support. I miss her when we’re apart and I have a warm confidence that we will be contented when we are with each other

again. I enjoy being with her and I can easily visualise her presence with me in the future.

The second statement is a change to the first. It does not just reproduce my preconceptions but instead puts things differently. For instance, my presumption was that marriage was being 'together' whereas I describe my experience of marriage as, when apart, still being 'in connection'. The epoche lists actions: taking into account, sharing, showing affection and caring. The experiential statement contains feelings - missing someone, confidence, pleasure – and imagining; it's more human and richer. This trial run reassures me that whilst the epoche process sounds clinical and objective, it is capable of exposing what may otherwise lie hidden. The point I take from this exercise is that applied to a familiar everyday phenomenon like marriage, one moreover that is relational, the process of *epoche* can work. It allows me to stand back from my preconceptions and find something new in my experience.

The exercise raises another point about inquiry into relationships. Although I decided not to invite my wife to participate in the little exercise above, that did not mean that useful data could not be gathered from one party, me. In my inquiry about flourishing relationships between consultants and their clients, I choose to gather data mainly with consultants because they are more accessible to me than clients. I still find out things that are useful. But it would be reasonable to assume that conversing with more clients - particularly the clients of the consultants I interviewed - would further enrich my understanding. With my limited resources I have simply chosen a small research group and the field is open for others to broaden it in due course.

During my fieldwork, I used the process of *epoche* firstly to surface my own assumptions about relational flourishing before I had conversations with others. I did this in order to be aware of when potential responses in conversation might be influenced by my preconceptions, or when I might skew my analysis of the data towards the views I already privileged. To use the process of *epoche* on myself, I asked myself what I assumed relational flourishing was and recorded my responses. From the recording, I identified the components of relational flourishing which as a concept I appear to adhere to, and I summarise them here:

Before my fieldwork my personal ideology about relational flourishing is that it occurs when people intentionally act to form a bond between themselves, a mutual dependence, in order to pursue some shared endeavour. Relational flourishing arises from an initial resonance between people and develops into mutual affirmation, regard and – crucially – trust, which provides enough security so that risks can be taken for and with each other. The individuals feed reciprocally off each other, building on what each offers, like a team. Relational flourishing is fulfilling; it resembles friendship.

When having the research conversations, I sought not to allude to any of the preconceptions in this statement, or any other assumptions I thought might be questionable.

I described my personal background with respect to relationships more broadly in the section of Chapter 1 beginning on page 15. That piece indicates more of my biases. In respect of relationships with clients, I say that I believe in accepting them as they are, empathising with them and viewing my effectiveness through their eyes. None of these things are at odds with the understanding of flourishing I have gained so far in Chapters 1 and 2. However, features like enlivening, creativity and growth, which I have also already come to understand as features of flourishing, are not present in what I say about my experience of relating in the section on page 15. I must be careful at this stage not to assume that a flourishing relationship is even necessary in consulting.

The process of *epoche* seems a useful one: I imagine that without consciously following an *epoche*, I could easily ask the participants in my inquiry, questions that sought confirmation for an answer I had already formed. Furthermore, enjoying talking to people as I do, I could easily start offering them my opinions and this would then influence the subsequent conversation. I am alert to these possibilities now as I gather data on the experience of my inquiry participants. The surfacing and setting aside of preconceptions in order to be open to what is actually experienced, has prepared me to be open to what the participants in my inquiry have to say to me, and to influence them as little as possible.

I was also prepared to use the process of *epoche* with my research participants, to clear their existing conceptual standpoints on relational flourishing with clients to one side and encourage them to dig deeply into the phenomenon as they actually experience it. A dual *epoche* of both the researcher and co-researchers is not specifically mentioned by Moustakas, or used in two theses I have obtained (Humphrey, 1989 and Stratman, 1989) which Moustakas cites as examples of phenomenological methods. However, it seemed to me, it might be required if the intention of the *epoche* process was to be realised. In practice, I found that the participants had already grasped what type of data I needed from what I said in the preparatory letter I sent them. I checked with them at the start of our conversations whether they had understood that I was only interested in what they actually experienced of flourishing relationships with clients, not with how they might have conceptualised them. Alf, for instance, said:

It's [the research is] kind of to do with the feelings that certain situations evoked. I want to talk about the actual experience because we are not talking about the mechanics of flourishing consulting. We could get a checklist and that would be dreadful and it would be completely useless to be honest.

I was therefore reassured that going through a formal *epoche* with Alf was not required in order for him to give me an unvarnished account of his experience. I had similar exchanges with the other participants and I found that each had grasped the difference between talking about their preconceptions and talking about their actual experience. Because they had understood this, I did not push them to undertake an *epoche*, because I imagined there was a risk that talking first about their preconceptions could have the opposite effect to that intended. I was concerned that having brought their preconceptions to the fore, these prejudices might so dominate their thinking that their

access to raw experience became disabled, and their position cemented. In practice I found that the participants spoke to me first about their actual experience and then from time to time started to conceptualise it as well, although I would attempt to steer them away from any sort of abstraction.

I found it impossible to completely avoid suggesting my preconceptions to the participants. For instance, when the influence of power relations between consultant and client came up in conversation, by asking for more information I could have indicated that I thought power relations were significant to relational flourishing; I would have been suggesting that addressing this construct could be revealing. But I tried to put my questions as openly as possible and especially not to appear to hint that there was an answer I was looking for. Nevertheless, the paradox of *epoche* is that:

without some – at least general – idea of what and how one is to look at a thing, how can anything be seen? Yet, if what is to be seen is to be seen without prejudice or preconception, how can it be circumscribed by definition? (Ihde, 1977, p. 31)

So I also wondered whether relational flourishing is tangible enough as a topic to my participants for them to be able to attribute their experience to it. In other words, when I presented the words *flourishing relationship* to them, did something definite present itself to them from their experience? I notice that my contributors sometimes struggled to understand what I meant by my research question. For instance, early in our conversation Geoff said:

I'm not quite sure how you'd define the concept of flourishing.

His honesty resonated with me. After all, the research question itself was shaped by uncertainty about what flourishing is. The methodological issue here is that of phenomenological *intentionality* (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28): to inquire into a phenomenon requires that the consciousness be intentionally focussed onto it as an object. If we can't positively identify it, can we be sure we are describing it? At the beginning of our conversation, Olivia tried for twenty minutes to answer my research question and it became clear that she was struggling to do so. I wondered why. It did not feel like our relating, a parallel process, was flourishing either. I was concerned that we might not be getting anything useful out of the conversation. So I decided to question one of my assumptions about the situation and said:

I suppose my premise is that if I say to you and others, 'a flourishing relationship with a client', it causes instances of that happening in your past to come to mind that you could describe to me. That's what I'm really after. Is that true?

Olivia replied:

Not really. I can remember plenty of difficult clients. If we talk about waiters in a pub or in a restaurant, once the client has paid the bill, that like completes the transaction and that client is completely forgotten about and done and everything, and I think it's something of that for me in that client relationships

that go really well, that's it. They come to an end, they finish and I don't kind of store them up as a sort of wasn't that a marvellous time or anything. I probably still work on and process things that maybe haven't gone so well or that are still on going but are proving troublesome and stuff, because that's what niggles at me.

So I said:

I'm just as interested in those. Do you think what's not flourishing or what inhibits flourishing is more meaningful to you?

And she replied:

It is, yeah. Definitely, that's more meaningful to me because yes, I want things to be as good as they can be.

Olivia and I went on to have a conversation about relationships with clients when they were *not* flourishing and this also provided me with a lot of useful data. After his hesitant start, Geoff also got into his stride. My response to his point:

I'm not quite sure how you'd define the concept of flourishing,

was:

Well, in a way that's a good thing because I'd rather come at it from an angle of the way it [flourishing] comes to us, rather than some pre-formed concept or theories about what it is.

Although I also experienced a temptation to tell Geoff what I thought flourishing was, I resisted the lure and eventually Geoff went on and spoke confidently about his own experience of it. *Flourishing* is not a word that we use frequently and so making it an intentional object is not always easy. I think this difficulty points to the instability of flourishing as a concept, which after all is part of my rationale for researching the question. When I heard participants hesitating, I tried to curb myself from telling them my answer and instead allow them to connect with the term in their own way. Then, I always found that the contributors had plenty to talk about. Something intentional did appear in their consciousness when I asked them about flourishing, and raw experience could be heard.

Participants and data gathering

I did not determine the number of participants I should involve before starting to work with them, although I had in mind that phenomenological studies usually involve at least six participants (Morse, 1994 cited in Mason, 2010). Marshall (1996) suggests that the factors to be taken into account in determining the number and composition of a sample of contributors in qualitative research are:

- When *saturation* of emerging themes and theoretical frameworks starts to occur
- A range of backgrounds
- Convenience (practicality).

Straight after each conversation, and before the next one, I took the data from it right through the processes of phenomenological analysis described further on in this chapter. After analysing the data from four consultants - Alf, Geoff, Olivia and Chris - I judged that no further themes were emerging, so I decided to deepen my research question in order to inquire more closely into the theoretical framework that was starting to appear. I then had five further conversations: a second one with Chris building on the first, talks with fellow consultants Robin and Kim. Finally, I had a talk with my client, Mike – supplemented with one with myself - about our relationship during the work we were doing together at that time. After these five conversations, I judged that no further theoretical frameworks were emerging. I decided then that Marshall's criterion of saturation had been met for both textural themes and theoretical frameworks.

Moustakas uses the term 'co-researcher' for those who provide the data of a phenomenological inquiry. But the participants in my research were not co-researchers in the sense that they 'generate ideas about its focus, design and manage it, and draw conclusions from it'; rather they were, with me, 'co-subjects, participating with awareness in the activity that is being researched' (Reason, 1994, pp. 41-42). I approached the practical issue of selecting participants by contacting consultants, from a range of backgrounds, who I already knew and with whom I had been in recent contact. They all practise organisation consulting focusing on their clients as groups of people in dynamic relationships, rather addressing clients' issues as technical information or process matters (Maister, Green, & Galford, 2000). From our previous contact, I had found none of those I approached inimical to practising relationally (Lambrechts, Grieten, Bouwen, & Corthouts, 2009), which I have with other, more technical consultants. Two of the participants hold doctorates and three masters' degrees, all in disciplines relevant to organisation consulting (for instance psychology or management). The consultants (including me) came from the following backgrounds:

- A principal consultant in a medium-sized consultancy working with defence organisations
- An independent consultant working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- A principal consultant in a small consultancy working with defence-related organisations
- An independent consultant working with small businesses
- A managing consultant in a large consultancy working with technology and oil companies
- An independent consultant working with large public sector organisations
- An internal consultant in a faith-based organisation

Together with my client at the time, Mike, there were eight participants in the inquiry including me. All the colleagues I approached agreed straightaway to participate. I had nine informal research conversations, including one with myself and a second one with Chris.

The participants in my inquiry do not represent consultants as a body or are even representative of consultants I am acquainted with. They are people I respect - and get on with - and I did not mind asking for their help because I would not mind if they asked me for mine. They are therefore to some extent probably like me, although they do though have a range of backgrounds. My research simply suggests that a group of consultants, including me, has certain shared perspectives on flourishing consulting relationships with clients and that articulating these common perceptions may be of value to me, to them and to others.

I wrote to participants in advance notifying them of the main question I was going to put to them, which was, **'As consultants, how do we perceive and describe our experience of flourishing relationships with clients . . . and also what is our experience of those relationships which don't flourish?'** When we met I asked them to answer the question by recalling specific episodes, situations or events, prompting them to describe their actual thoughts, feelings and actions. In our second conversation, I asked Chris what was in the 'space shared' by consultant and client. In addition to the main question, I also asked Kim, Robin and Mike what connects consultant and client in flourishing relationships. These ideas of space and connection were emerging theoretical frameworks from the first four conversations, as you will see when I show you the results in Chapters 4 and 5. I recorded the conversations and had them transcribed.

I will now describe in detail the three analytical processes of transcendental phenomenology and explain how I employed them. One of the complete transcriptions and its analysis is at Appendix 2 on page 185 as an example.

Phenomenological Reduction: what presents itself

The process after epoche in the methodology of transcendental phenomenology is Phenomenological Reduction. This is about pointing to the themes articulated about the phenomenon in the raw data. What the process of phenomenological reduction yields should be the *texture* (or *noema*) of the phenomenon, how it appears at the surface or what it is noticed as. The product of the process of Phenomenological Reduction is a description of the texture of the phenomenon, which is incorporated into the Synthesis (next but one section).

To carry out this process, I took the transcribed conversations I had with the participants in my inquiry, and focused just on the reported experience of the phenomenon that is my subject (a phenomenological technique known as *bracketing*). With this focus, I used my intuition to pick out the phrases that were used by the participants to describe the phenomenon (a process of identifying what are known as *horizons*, or *horizontalisation*).

I have introduced the term *intuition* here. I understand the participants in my inquiry and I to be using our intuition to recognise relational flourishing and that I am using my intuition in the process of phenomenological reduction. What do I mean by intuition?

Intuition is the beginning place in deriving knowledge of human experience; it is the capacity to discern 'what presents itself' (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32).

What is important here [using intuition] is that the student stays at the level of pure intuition of imagery, of its total pattern, its ontological declaration, its correspondence with other patterns of experience, without trying to conceptualise or analyse any of these things. (Heron, 1999, p. 291).

At Appendix 2 to this dissertation is the transcript of the conversation I had with one of my participants, Geoff. I have included it for you to be able to understand in detail the processes I followed in my phenomenological analysis, starting with Phenomenological Reduction and going on through Imaginative Variation to Synthesis.

In the process of phenomenological reduction, the phrases used by the participants about the phenomenon are all given equal weight: in other words repetition is not, on its own, taken to imply greater importance (this procedure is known as *delimiting*). Then *themes* are identified: *horizons* (phrases) that are closely connected in their meaning are grouped and given labels. This is a process of *ideation*, standing back a little way in order to see all of the data, reflecting on the meanings found, and being able to distil out their *essence*. In practice, I identified themes by compiling a series of statements with this beginning and form:

Being in a flourishing relationship with his client, means to X that . . . [the main idea]

To produce the first version of the textural description, which is the product of phenomenological reduction, I used these thematic statements as the initial sentences of paragraphs and followed them with phrases (*horizons*) from the data to enrich the description of the theme identified. In this form, I found the resulting description somewhat depersonalised the experiences related by the participants to me. A participant also pointed this out to me, Olivia; she said that she did not recognise her own voice from my initial description of her experience. So I then rewrote the descriptions, changing from third person to first person, essentially going back and using actual sentences the participants had spoken. This worked much better, resulting in descriptions that sound more alive, personal and authentic.

Imaginative Variation: finding the underlying essence

Imaginative Variation is a further process of analysing the data that adds a further and deeper layer of ideation. Its purpose is to identify the *structures* or *noesis* of experience. The product of the process of Imaginative Variation is a description of the structure of the phenomenon that is then incorporated into the Synthesis (next section).

Gurwitsch (1967, cited in Moustakas, 1994) provides an example of something experienced in the physical world - the phenomenon of a house - to illustrate the concepts of *texture* and *structure*. To paraphrase Gurwitsch:

Someone in the street experiencing (seeing) a house sees only the texture of an outwards facade. The whole structure of the house cannot be directly experienced, only imagined, but every time the observer moves and looks at the house from a different angle, the structure - though still hidden - becomes clearer to them. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 31).

Merleau-Ponty (1968) wrote about the visible (or sensible) and invisible (or sentient) qualities of phenomena as respectively their *texture* and *flesh*. Of the idea of *flesh*, which is similar to that of *structure*, he says:

Between the alleged colours and visible, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a 'flesh' of things (Merleau-Ponty M. , 1968, p. 133).

It suffices that I look at a landscape, that I speak of it with someone. Then through the concordant operation of his body and my own, what I see passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own, I recognise in my green his green, as the customs officer recognises suddenly in a traveller the man whose description he had been given. An anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal (Merleau-Ponty M. , 1968, p. 142).

At the frontier of the mute or solipsist world where, in the presence of other seers, my visible is confirmed as an exemplar of a universal visibility, we reach a second or figurative meaning of vision, which will be the intuitus mentis or idea, a sublimation of the flesh, which will be mind or thought (Merleau-Ponty M. , 1968, p. 145).

I feel Merleau-Ponty inviting me to examine more deeply what I recognise in a phenomenon. What is the idea that makes a colour that colour; for instance, what makes red red - what is redness? What is it in a face that allows someone to recognise it? What is it about relational flourishing that makes it relational flourishing? But the term *structure* – or indeed *texture* – is not particularly appropriate in describing something like a relationship, because it is much more than its physical presence, and I struggle with these terms. When it comes to a phenomenon that has no material existence, then I find that the terms texture and structure have less meaning.

In her thesis on the immaterial phenomenon of personal power, Stratman (1989) has this go at explaining what texture and structure mean:

Personal power is like a tapestry which is created by the artist throughout her life. The themes and textures are like the woof. They are the thread used to

weave in and out between the cords of the warp. Textures vary in shape, thickness, color, and are characteristic of the particular artist. The structures are like the warp. They provide the form, the continuity, and the substance of the tapestry [and are invisible once the wool is fully woven]. Without structure, the tapestry would be a tangle of yarn. Structure gives meaning to the work of art (Stratman, 1989, p. 105).

Wool and *warp*, physical features like *texture* and *structure*, help me understand the principals of phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation. But for an intangible phenomenon like relational flourishing, instead of *texture* I find greater meaning in using the words *defining characteristics* or *qualities*, or just *likeness*; and instead of *structure* I think of *underlying conditions*, *composition* or *organisation*. It might be helpful if a guide like Moustakas's assisted those researching phenomena which do not have a material presence as much as those which do have one. Furthermore, not only does my phenomenon not have a material presence, but it is also relational, so attention needs to be focussed on what is being experienced of the relationship, not just what is being experienced of the other individual in the relationship.

I find that my participants describe to me what appears to be some of the *structure* of their experience as part of the textural narrative they sketch. But I also find the concept of a *structure* or *flesh* helpful in allowing me to identify themes in the *context* of their experience as well as the direct sensing of it. Like Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation is also about *meaning* and *essence* but now in terms of *how*, *when* and *why* rather than *what*. I try to bring its idea to life by forming questions to prompt my imagining of the *noesis*:

- how does relational flourishing occur?
- when does it occur?
- why might it occur?

In the first cycle of conversations, I largely intuited answers to these questions about structure from the experience of the texture described by the participants. In the second cycle I sought the structure of relational flourishing more directly: firstly, I invited participants to pick up on the idea of a relational space shared by them and their clients and to say what they experienced was in it in flourishing relationships; then I asked them what connected them with their clients. Several different structures fitted, which is fine in phenomenology; the purpose is not to identify a simplistic cause and effect relationship that accounts for every instance in what is inherently complex, but to characterise various circumstances and conditions in which the phenomenon takes place.

To produce descriptions of the structure of each the participants' experience of flourishing relationships with clients - similar to way I described texture - I began by composing statements beginning with a particular phrase. The sentences ran like this:

Flourishing relationships with clients take place when X . . . [main idea]

Each statement was followed by phrases used by the participant that indicated a general condition or circumstance. I found though that this form of did not sound very penetrating. Therefore, as I did in the textural descriptions, I changed my technique to quoting the participant directly in structural descriptions.

After producing the Synthesis (next section), I considered both it and the literature at length, using Imaginative Variation to derive a structural framework (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). Onto the framework, I mapped the themes from the Synthesis to provide a summary description and model of the phenomenon, in the words of the participants.

Relationally synthesising descriptions of the phenomenon

The fourth of the processes of phenomenological inquiry is Synthesis: both the synthesis of the textural descriptions derived from Phenomenological Reduction and the structural descriptions derived from Imaginative Variation, and the synthesis of the descriptions of different participants' experience. This is the bringing together of the textures, structures, meanings and essences of several people's experience into a single, synthesised description painting a picture rich in content and depth (Moustakas, 1994).

After some experimenting, I adopted a dialogical form to present my synthesis of the phenomenon of flourishing consulting relationships. I saw that the form in which I presented the phenomenon could be congruent with the form (Marshall J. , 2007) in which consulting relationships are enacted in practice, which is as dialogues between their participants. I also wanted a longer form than the typical phenomenological synthesis, in which I could present more of the original data. My form arranges selected discourses between the participants in my inquiry into themes that present the emerging phenomenon. The discourses were selected using the processes of Phenomenological Reduction and Imaginative Variation already described in this chapter. Each point is personally attributed and is chosen from exactly what the participant said. My own reflections on what they said are also shown in the dialogue. Together with my framing of the presentation, the overall result is something like that described by Susan Weil in her piece entitled 'from the other side of silence: new possibilities for dialogue in academic writing',

In essence, I had three first-person voices [her researcher voice, her reflexive voice and her voice in her field record], which together with participant voices, offered a multi-textured narrative (Weil, 1996, p. 229).

I have not seen a synthesis of any other phenomenological inquiries presented in the way I present my synthesis in this inquiry. The dialogical form could though be a helpful way for other researchers to present phenomenological syntheses of dialogical relationships.

I also insert into the dialogues forming my Synthesis, excerpts from the literature that I used to stimulate my perception of the meanings and essences being uncovered during

my analysis. So the Synthesis is written as though participants, scholars and I are in conversation, noticing and pointing to emerging themes, clarifying terms and triangulating. The effect of this is that the sense I make of the participants experience is informed closely by relevant scholarship. When I came to splice the literature that I had found most significant at this stage of my inquiry to the field data, I noticed an uncanny synergy: without any conscious prior intention to do so, I used almost all of some thirty excerpts I had chosen once and only once in the dialogue. I make sense of this by noticing the parallel processes going on in me of working with the literature and the fieldwork data and the resulting conscious and subconscious connections I made. I think I was constantly weighing up ideas and ordering them into themes and theoretical frameworks as I went along.

After presenting my Synthesis in its extended, relational form, I also offer in Chapter 5 a summary (which is in the more usual form of a synthesis) and a model showing the key points.

I had promised the participants in my inquiry confidentiality but I kept their real names in the text of the dissertation as I was developing it. I found that keeping their real names in allowed me easily to recall their faces and the conversations we'd had. Because of that, I found that I could use their words closer to the way I think they used them. Their words remained more theirs, belonging to their personalities, their experience and to the context in which they expressed them. By keeping their real names before me, I think I was less likely to misinterpret their words, or even be tempted to bend them to suit concepts I was forming. I remained grounded in them. Then, when I had finished working on the dialogues, I changed the participants' names to pseudonyms.

Treating participants ethically

Kvale suggests that ethics are criteria for the validity of an inquiry (Kvale, 1995). Lincoln writes about quality criteria also being ethical standards (Lincoln, 1995). It is normal and correct in research involving others to ensure they we adopt an ethical stance towards them and to explain what was done in pursuance of that stance. I made the ethical provisions recommended by my university: I wrote to the participants explaining in advance what I wanted to do, obtaining their conscious consent in the form of a response agreeing to the terms of my invitation; this offered them and their clients confidentiality; I did not put any additional pressure on them to participate; I treated them and what they said in the conversations with respect; and I gained their agreement to the descriptions of their experience which I took forward as the outcome of my fieldwork.

My actual ethical stance is however motivated by something more than the requirements of the established code of conduct for researchers. I related in Chapter 1 the experiences that have shaped my sense of honour and duty and also earlier the philosophical proposition of Lévinas that we have a

fundamental responsibility for others. I recognise this responsibility for my clients and inquiry co-participants as also being my felt ethical stance in this inquiry. I have been guided by what I feel is likely to promote their flourishing, and the flourishing of my relating with them. That could sound a bit idealistic and possibly patronising. I am not saying I am good at it or that I find it easy. But I feel more whole as a person having a stance towards others in my inquiry congruent with the rest of my life.

Building on the work of Lévinas, Zygmunt Bauman (1993) points out that an ethical code for anything is only necessary because of the distance and asymmetry that occurs when more than two people relate to each other:

When the Other dissolves in the Many, the first thing to dissolve is the Face. The Other(s) is (are) now faceless. They are persons (persona means the mask that-like masks do – hides, not reveals the face) I am dealing now with masks (classes of mask, stereotypes to which the masks/uniforms send me) not faces (Bauman, 1993, p. 115).

In a face-to-face relationship, the alternative Baumann offers is this:

A postmodern ethics is one that readmits the Other as a neighbour, as the close-to-hand-and-mind, into the hard core of the moral self, back from the wasteland of calculated interests to which it had been exiled . . . an ethics that recasts the Other as the crucial character in the process through which the moral self comes into its own (Bauman, 1993, p. 84).

My ethical stance towards the participants in my inquiry is therefore the same as it is to my clients and anyone else and me - put simply, **I hold myself responsible for our flourishing**. This responsibility is a fundamental driver of my *modus operandi* as a consultant and, as I shall show in the fieldwork, it is also important for other consultants who work relationally.

Phenomenological validity

How will I know whether my phenomenological descriptions of relational flourishing are valid? There are several validity considerations that I have identified from a number of scholarly sources. The first is whether it is relational flourishing that participants are describing.

Validity refers to the truth and correctness of a statement . . . “The commonest definition of validity is epitomised by the question: Are we measuring what we think we are measuring?” (Kerlinger, 1973 cited in Kvale, 1995, pp. 21-22).

Kvale says that one aspect of validity in inquiry is the craftsmanship of holding the focus on the phenomenon being researched (Kvale, 1995, p. 26). So as I talk and write about relational flourishing, I am continually asking myself whether what I am talking and

writing about is what the participants perceive as relational flourishing, and taking out anything else we veer off into when we lose focus.

Then I need to consider whether I have accurately perceived the data I am picking up about the phenomenon, acknowledging the subjective nature of that process. The tests set by Giorgi are:

when does a human subject apprehend a state of affairs as it really is, and when does a human subject distort a state of affairs by over imposing subjectivity on it, or by not grasping sufficiently because the subject was too little present or inattentive to the state of affairs. The former would be valid knowledge and the latter two would be invalid (Giorgi, 2002, pp. 8,9).

I wrote in the Epoche section on page 58 about my preconceptions about flourishing relationships and how I tried not to over impose my subjectivity on the experience of other participants.

The next consideration is whether I am merely noticing the things I perceive, or ascribing meaning to them – this being the purpose of phenomenology. Moustakas (1994) describes this important distinction using Husserl's ideas of *signitive* and *intuitive acts*:

The signitive intention is "empty" and points to something that lies beyond itself, and the intuitive intention points to something directly and fulfils it to some degree. Intuitive intention hits the target and makes possible apprehension of the intentional object in some feature or quality and ultimately as a whole, but signitive intention refers to something in its absence. It announces that something has the possibility of appearing or that exists within the intuitive . . . The signitive makes its appearance and in doing so points to and may trigger an expression that has been just out of awareness, or it may connect with an intuitive grasp of something and thus bring the intuitive into expression (Moustakas, 1994, p. 77).

This is the only reference to validity in Moustakas's book on *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Husserl adds a test of precision to the process of intuition:

Thus, for Husserl, validity is achieved when an act is experienced wherein the fulfilling material matches the signifying meaning precisely (Giorgi, 2002, p. 13).

Another consideration is whether what I make of my evidence is actually evident.

if it is to be called 'knowledge' in the narrowest, strictest sense, it requires to be evident, to have the luminous certainty that what we have acknowledged, is, that what we have rejected is not (Husserl, 1900/1970 cited in Giorgi, 2002, p.11).

'Luminous certainty' sounds like a lot to expect. But then we are evaluating what we read and hear all the time. You my reader, are evaluating as you read this. Maybe in

seeking certainty, Husserl asks for more than is possible; perhaps just the sense of something being evident in the context described is enough to work with.

To summarise these considerations about validity, these are the questions I hold in my mind as I work with my data to obtain the best possible description of the relational flourishing between consultants and clients:

- How conscious am I in general to the encounter, to what I am hearing?
- Do I notice what is relevant (significant) to my research question?
- Do I fully engage my intuition to bring what is relevant into expression?

Because flourishing is a sign of the quality of a relationship (Cooperrider & Fry, 2012b), therefore it is also a validity consideration. My conversations with the participants, like the subject of them - working as consultants with clients, were relational experiences. So I was keen to use them as additional opportunities for understanding relational flourishing. I was alert throughout the data gathering process - from initial contact to gaining their comments on my analysis - to whether my relationship with a research participant was flourishing, what was telling me this and what choices that gave me. For instance, I picked up in our conversation that one of the participants, Olivia, was not very engaged with questions about when her consulting relationships flourished. She said she wasn't interested in when they did because she was only concerned if they did not. So instead we talked about that and I drew on this data to help me understand what happened for her in relationships that did flourish. The realisation that our relationship was not flourishing had helped me to steer the conversation into more fruitful avenues.

As a further example, afterwards when I sent Olivia the initial synthesis, she gave me this feedback:

I'm sorry to say I don't really recognise myself in this summary, I am particularly opposed to labelling things as right or wrong, some bits sound fair - for example being more alert to non-flourishing but the tenor on the whole is not how I really want to be presented.

Something doesn't work for me in the breaking down into pieces, which is similar to the whole premise of relationships being described in a binary manner as flourishing/not-flourishing. Relationships ebb and flow, peak and trough but in a much more musical analogue pattern that doesn't seem (to me at least) to be reflected in your writing. The difference for me is whether there is some underlying quality that enables us to 'hang in there' with each other through the times when I might feel sad or low energy, believing in each other's fundamental good intentions, recognising that we might not always make it easy for each other, at times we might need to be there to be dumped on and we might need to use that as data, as indicative of a pattern or just as a temporary measure, but that there is a goal that we both believe in or an interdependency or different objectives that can be accommodated side by side.

This exchange became further data about flourishing relationships and you can see what I made of it in Chapter 4 in the section beginning on page 78. I found it very helpful data: paying attention to the flourishing of our relationship in the research conversation helped me with my appreciation of the flourishing of consultant-client relationships.

Chapter 4 - First fieldwork cycle

This chapter and the next present my Synthesis of the phenomenon of flourishing consulting relationships, as experienced by the participants in my inquiry. I explain the form I adopted for the Synthesis in the section on page 68. The fieldwork took place in two cycles of data gathering and analysis, and the synthesis of each round is in a separate chapter. In Chapter 5, at the end of the synthesis, I also present a summary description of the phenomenon and a model of its development. Here is the model:

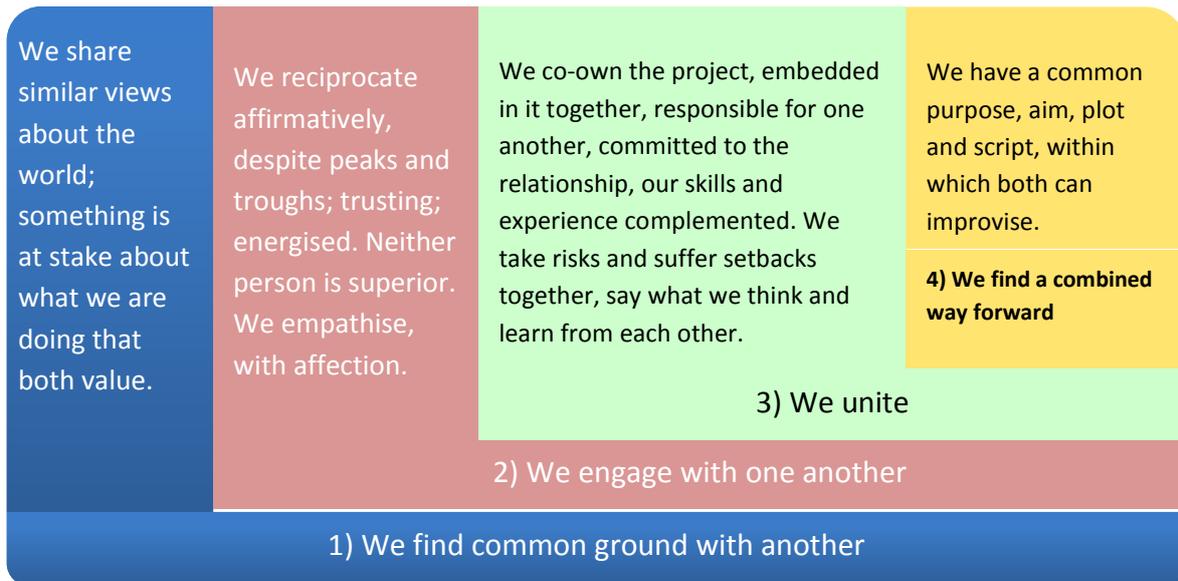


Figure 3 – Model of flourishing consulting relationships, as they develop

The first round of fieldwork was immediately preceded by my *epoche* of my topic, that is the surfacing and setting aside of my own preconceptions, which I described on page 58. In the first round, the question I put to each of the participants was the research question I chose in Chapter 2 on page 54, “**What is being in a flourishing consulting relationship like and how do consultant and client experience it developing?**” I did not ask any other substantive questions, just prompted further detail on the answers provided by the participants to that question. I had individual research conversations with four fellow consultants in the first round - Chris, Geoff, Olivia and Alf. I stopped after Alf because I thought I had achieved saturation (Marshall M. N., 1996), that is that no substantially new answers were emerging. After each conversation, I took it right through the analytical processes of transcendental phenomenology - these processes were described in detail in the previous chapter and an example of how I applied them to the data gathered with Geoff is at Appendix 2 on page 185.

This chapter then is the *synthesis of textural and structural descriptions* obtained as the final output of the processes of phenomenological analysis for the first round of fieldwork. I present the synthesis in a relational form, as a dialogue between the

participants; the words said by the participants are their own, taken from the individual conversations we had. These speeches are examples of what they and other participants said that had a similar essence. Interposed with the participants' speech is the sense I make of what they have said. In places, I have also inserted into the dialogue, scholarship that provokes me to further reflect on the conversations. I have ordered the dialogue by grouping the texture that was revealed into *themes*, shown as bold **headings**. However, where participants introduced several themes in the same sentence, I have not broken the sentence up, so material about one theme may appear in the dialogue for a different theme, and the Synthesis should be read as a whole.

The Synthesis begins here. The first textural theme in the participants' experience of flourishing consulting relationships that I noted was **engagement** based on **finding common ground** . . .

Engaging, and finding common ground

- Me: What is being in a flourishing consulting relationship like and how does it develop from the consultant's and client's experiences of each other?
- Alf: I think of the flourishing relationships I've had with clients as being the ones in which there was a 'relational clench' between us, connecting at a soul or emotional level. In a relationship which isn't flourishing I am bored, unengaged, lacking in energy, and I feel as though I don't know what the client really wants.
- Chris: It means to me that there is strong rapport between us. He is receptive to what I say, gives lots of affirmation and expresses interest; there is genuine engagement, a two-way conversation. I am always trying to go deeper to establish a sense of rapport, warmth, mutual respect and understanding in order for us to be able to figure out how each other think. If it's just a one way transmit from me and there are polite nods but no sort of information coming back then I suspect the client is just killing time with me. There may even be outright hostility or an antagonistic, suspicious, closed relationship. And there's a whole raft of middle ground where people are holding back; then I sense that clients are weighing me up through what I am saying and deliberately not giving signals as to whether or not they agree with me. I nevertheless try to encourage a rapport between us and may in some measure get it, but still feel that in the context of the power dynamic between us that the client would be unwilling to explore all the bits and so hold back from the best - most radical - solution.

The participants say they experience flourishing as genuine engagement and talk about connection, reciprocation, empathy and liking. They interpret the absence of any rapport between them and their clients as meaning that the client has chosen not to engage yet, or that the client feels he or she is unable to engage with them.

Me: Why is this sense of engagement so important to you, Chris?

Chris: I find a flourishing relationship powerful, extremely fulfilling for me and an enriching dynamic within my working life. The client could be someone I would enjoy talking with, love to have a pint with or go on a weekend with. There is a sense of common interests, a similar mind-set, a sense that a person is coming from broadly the same direction. It could be a warm relationship with fondness and affection. That has nothing to do with the business in hand but nevertheless it pads out the relationship and though we might not agree completely on everything, a situation of respect develops and it opens up the channels for a greater depth of relationship.

Participants' enjoy having high quality relationships so they pursue good relationships at work. They also want to be with people who are in some way like them.

Geoff: I talk to my clients about general business affairs and what's in the news. We become generally comfortable with each other. We share similar views about the world; we see eye-to-eye on issues.

Identifying shared values, common ground, agreeing about how they see the world, provides participants with a basis for deeper engagement with their clients on the issues in the consulting assignment. They think their clients recognise some of themselves in their consultants and this helps to cement their relationships.

Chris: I think you can have very strong relationships in a work context but that probably, rarely, does that translate to strong personal relationships outside of work, and I suspect that if a client were to become a friend over a sustained period that then the edges of the common ground between us would matter more. If we have some common values and behaviours then we enrich each other with a sense of wellbeing and flourishing coming from a relationship which is a friendship, a looser entity.

Chris may be suggesting that friendship is an ideal model for a flourishing relationship but that making friends with our work colleagues is a lot to expect. We can however look at what aspects of friendship are nevertheless present in the participants' common experience of flourishing consulting relationships. The idea of common ground is noticeable: all the participants talk about values and behaviours they share with their clients; they notice edges to the common ground they share with a client. Chris adds that these edges matter more if consultant and client want to become friends.

Culture is one way of expressing how people relate to each other. Edgar Schein has recently been interviewed (Lambrechts, Bouwen, Grieten, Huybrechts, & Schein, 2011) about his idea of a *cultural island*. This is a meeting, held between people who want to work together, for the purpose of establishing the common ground people need to be able to undertake tasks together in a team context:

What might be a powerful approach when a multicultural team is supposed to get to work is to start with a dialogue format in a cultural island setting. Sitting around the "campfire," each person just tells to the campfire, "In my world, if I disagree with the boss, this is the kind of thing I do." As a leader you then say, "Leave it there, and now, the next person, tell what you do." As they each tell their stories, they will begin to have some level of mutual understanding . . . That's the kind of information they need to have in order to identify how they might begin to work together (Lambrechts, Bouwen, Grieten, Huybrechts, & Schein, 2011, p. 134).

So, when I say cultural island, I'm saying more task-related culturally oriented communication and building new norms of dealing with authority and trust (p. 137).

If the concept of a cultural island is applied to just two people working together - like a consultant and his or her client - their culture comes into focus: the behavioural norms they establish in their particular relationship, and the values they share and don't share in their association. My own experience is that recognising each other's patterns of behaviour and values are both important in establishing and maintaining any sort of relationship. Finding common ground then involves recognising and being sensitive to each other's outlooks - not necessarily agreeing with them - in order to work well together.

Chris: There isn't always that same degree of rapport when a client and I are different - different personalities, different interests, different backgrounds, and different temperaments - but there still can be a great rapport. In our initial conversations I fish for where the client is coming from in terms of their own attitudes and as I find common ground, I expand the net a little. If the client is on side, there is obviously room to talk. I don't dive in with the most controversial subjects. I try to find some common ground and gradually expand it and find where the edges are, and then work out whether or not those are going to be problematic or whether they are things that are just part of the rich tapestry - the diversity - of life, and could actually add to the relationship ultimately because they are a point of interest without knocking the core relationship off course. The pace at which the relationship develops is key.

In phenomenological terms, the *texture* of flourishing relationships I wish to draw attention to from this section is the nature of the connecting that goes on between participants and their clients. In the process of engaging, they establish what common ground there is between consultant and client, and as well where they are *not* on common ground. As they do this, they are evaluating whether the ground common to them has in it what they need to be able to work together. The *structure* of their engagement includes processes of connection, recognition, reciprocation, empathy and liking, and the structure of the common ground they establish includes the outlook, values and experience they share.

The next theme I noted was that the participants' consulting relationships had ups and downs . . .

Peaks and troughs

Me: Olivia, when you talk about flourishing, our conversation seems staccato and lacking in energy.

Olivia: Flourishing is not a word I use much. It has an old-fashioned feel to it, like Victorian poetry. I prefer to use phrases like 'generative', 'on the same page', and 'getting through the good and the bad and developing together'. In consulting, flourishing in relating with my clients is about how well I understand and am meeting their needs, enabling them to achieve things they would otherwise be unable to achieve and are anxious about. When I know what to do and say then I feel comfortable, able to accept challenge from the client and take risks with her.

Participants described flourishing as something they cannot measure in the moment in a consulting relationship; that it's a process of development that involves going through good and bad times, ups and downs, together. To flourish, the degree of challenge introduced into the relationship by either party has to be balanced with the level of anxiety caused by challenge. This idea of a process of development is an important insight about the *structure* of flourishing.

Olivia: I find it easier to recall incidents when relationships were not flourishing. Not flourishing is feeling bad about what I am doing, miserable and reluctant to carry on. When a relationship is not flourishing I start to doubt my ability or what I am doing, and search my soul to see where it has gone wrong; then I need reassurance even though I don't like appearing to need it; I look inwards, attending consciously to myself instead of looking outwards, and so am less aware of the external environment.

Me: And what you remember is these times of *not flourishing*, when you feel vulnerable?

Olivia: Something doesn't work for me in the whole premise of relationships being described in a binary manner as either flourishing or not flourishing. Relationships ebb and flow, peak and trough but in a much more musical analogue pattern. The difference for me is whether there is some underlying quality that enables us to 'hang in there' with each other through the times when I might feel sad or low in energy, believing in each other's fundamental good intentions, recognising that we might not always make it easy for each other, at times we might need to be there to be dumped on and we might need to use that as data, as indicative of a pattern or just as a temporary measure, but that there is a goal that we

both believe in, or an interdependency or different objectives that can be accommodated side by side.

Olivia names some more underlying elements in the phenomenological *structure* of participants' flourishing consultant-client relationships: believing in each other's fundamental good intentions, recognising behavioural norms, having shared goals, being interdependent and accommodating individual objectives side by side. But what I notice particularly is that one of the structures of their flourishing relationships is a process of growth and development that depends on both positive and negative emotions in its texture. It would be naïve and misleading to believe that flourishing relationships only exhibit positive emotional states.

Me: Olivia, you talk differently about incidents in the past to the way you talk about your current work.

Olivia: I am in a better space. Now I find consulting is often about managing anxiety, both clients' and my own, in order to keep a space open where things can flood in and emerge. I have become more confident about things not going well and hanging in there for the longer term, knowing that something might be excruciatingly uncomfortable for a while but holding that tension.

I have only quoted Olivia in this section but she speaks for the emotional ups and downs in the *texture* of flourishing consultant-client relationships experienced by all the participants. She has become increasingly focused on the quality of the relating between her and her clients: in the *structure* of her experience she is sensitive to her client's level of comfort with her; she looks for trust, fair treatment and reassurance from her client, expects challenging times as well as harmonious ones, and perhaps that enough of the latter are needed to balance out the former if the relationship is to be a flourishing one.

A dialogue

Alf: I don't want to feel that the client expects me to always come up with a perfect solution or that I am under threat or scrutiny; if I am then the work becomes mechanical in nature. A flourishing relationship with a client is for me a participative relationship; and in a participative relationship the opportunity occurs to throw ideas around, to try them out.

Knowledge or knowing is a process going on among people. By interacting, people make meaning for each other and the relationship is the carrier of the meaning-in-the-making (Bouwen, 1998, p. 300).

Knowing from within [a relationship] is knowing sui generis that cannot be reduced to either of the other two [i.e. the knowing of the individuals in a relationship] (p. 303).

The participants say that the relationships they have with their clients flourish when they create solutions (new knowledge) *together*, ideas that come from the interaction between them. Bouwen points out that all knowledge is constructed relationally. If consultants accept this, perhaps we can use it to make our consulting more effective: we can think of the process of consulting as the process of constructing knowing relationally between consultant and client, privileging the shared knowing emerging from the processes of interacting with our clients.

But I notice as well that for a dialogue to take place, we need to feel able to offer each other our ideas, and that sometimes we hold back from doing so. What stops us?

Geoff: If I think of the client that I probably do the most work with and I've had for quite a long time, we aren't necessarily close but there isn't any awkwardness between us. I enjoy being in a relationship with a client like that and I feel that we work well together then.

It is the quality of the knowledge-creating relationship that is also the carrier of the energy and willingness to change and adapt mutually (Bouwen, 1998, p. 317).

Darlene Ehrenberg (1974) writes this about the *quality* of therapists' relating with their clients:

Human life and humanity come into being in genuine meetings. The most profound growth and change . . . can only occur in the context of this kind of "personal relation" (Buber, 1958). It requires mutual confrontation, and he [Buber] calls it unfolding the "dialogical": that condition of genuine dialogue which involves bringing oneself fully into it, without reduction or shifting ground and without holding back relevant thoughts or withdrawing (Ehrenberg, 1974, p. 423).

Ehrenberg's 'genuine dialogue' sounds like Bouwen's 'knowledge-creating relationship' working well. Ehrenberg offers as a condition for being dialogical, what she calls being at the 'intimate edge':

By "intimate edge" I mean that point in a relationship without fusion, without violation of the separatedness and integrity of each participant. Ideally the "intimate edge" becomes a point of maximum self expression and maximum awareness of their individuality . . . for each participant. (Ehrenberg, 1974, p. 424).

The therapeutic potentiality of meeting at this "intimate edge" is heightened if the analyst is willing to be open about his own reactions to the mutual experience (p. 426).

Geoff: As the relationship grows, after a while I tread less carefully with the client and am more relaxed about bringing up contentious matters with him where I might have felt constrained before.

When the participants become confident in their relationships with clients, they lower their guard and turn their attention to themselves, to what they are feeling, imagining and thinking. That in turn allows consultants to contribute more to the process of constructing knowledge between consultant and client. Alexandra Kaplan (1991) offers another insight, from therapy:

It is the capacity to maintain a sense of self that permits the therapist, while being deeply affectively connected, to make the complex clinical judgements that must be made. For example: what is the source of the patient's reactions? . . . Is this a point at which I should intervene and, if so, how? (Kaplan, 1991, p. 47).

The texture of flourishing relationships between consultants and clients revealed by the participants is this: fresh knowing being produced by them in their relating, useful to both of them. The phenomenological *structure* of this dialogical experience is the conditions in which it takes place. It happens in an atmosphere of openness and trust, even intimacy. Both consultant and client feel free to express themselves to each other, that the other will give them a hearing. They feel able to disturb each other, confident that doing so will be generative.

Valuing each other

Alf: On some assignments I wake up in the morning feeling positive and looking forward to getting to work. I don't roll out of bed as I have done in other projects and think "here we go again". In flourishing relationships, we both feel energised and passionate about what we are doing. We feel like we are on a crusade together.

Me: So you feel strongly motivated to work with them and have a sense of sharing a common purpose with them?

Alf: The assignments I'm interested in are those in which something is at stake that both I and my client value deeply, not just when we're making money and the assignment is judged successful on those grounds alone. So when work has been of an organisational restructuring nature, I've felt unfulfilled.

Geoff: Sometimes you come away from things and you think you've done something good, that you've helped them; that they're going to get some value. It is also about sharing moral values: I mean sometimes business people don't care about anybody or anything other than making as much profit as they possibly can even if it means that people are made redundant and go on the streets to starve.

Somewhat differently, Schein (1989) describes consulting as 'helping':

Helping is a general human process that applies to parents, friends, teachers, and managers, not just to consultants or therapists whose central role is to help (Schein E. , 1989, p. 2).

'Helping' sounds human and relational, but it also sounds a bit sterile and unidirectional; there is not much energy in it, energy generated participatively.

In process consulting the shaping of the reciprocity is more imbalanced. It is the consultant-helper who engages in the inquiry process of the client as a clinical inquirer; they are not equal partners. (Lambrechts, Grieten, Bouwen, & Corthouts, 2009, p. 51).

I found that my research participants talked powerfully about their role in flourishing consulting relationships and that it involved a deeper, more interactive relating with clients than 'helping' them. The participants said that flourishing relationships take place when they can tell they are being of value to clients and *vice versa*. If consultants and clients do not value the other – for example when consultant thinks client has not got much idea about what he or she wants - then they say that the consulting relationship does not flourish.

The attitude of the participants towards me as a researcher was a testament to their valuing others in general, as this passage shows:

- Me: Geoff, what have you made of the conversation we've been having?
- Geoff: I think it's important that what I've given you is going to be of help. I hope it is anyway.
- Me: Well that's good, thank you, but I'm also wondering what you've got out of it?
- Geoff: Well I wasn't expecting to get anything out of it. No, I've come at it more giving rather than getting, which is what I thought it was about.

Geoff attaches value to being of value to others. The texture of flourishing relationships between participants and their clients that is depicted in this section is the sense of doing something of value, something that matters. The structure that appears to lie behind this mattering is that consultant and client share a value that is at stake in the assignment; they agree about the values the outcome they are striving for together speaks to.

Trust

- Chris: I think that people strive for a sense of security, of safety, and trust is a key building block in that. When we are getting to know each other I think both sides are figuring out whether we can trust each other. As the relationship develops what I look for is for trust to build. When I was a client I had several consultants who knew that just because they argued with me it

didn't mean I was going to switch off the contract: we had a healthy relationship. But a significant breach of trust would tell me that the relationship was unsafe. A serious breach of trust would include a sustained failure over a period of time, perhaps lots of little things from which a pattern is set up. My clients have to trust me to deliver what I have promised to deliver and deliver it well, and I have to trust my clients that when they say they will do something that they also will, because I am putting a lot of work and time in and need to know that it is likely to bear fruit: when that works, trust is developed.

Olivia: I also want to feel trusted by my client and fairly treated by her.

A 'Trusted Advisor' indicates both a deep relationship between consultant and client, and that thereby a broad range of business issues can be addressed by the two together. In contrast, a relationship in which a consultant offers only a particular expert service characterises an undeveloped relationship. The trust of the client in the consultant is seen as the key determinant in deepening the relationship and broadening the range of issues which the client exposes to the consultant (Maister, Green, & Galford, 2000, p. 189).

To start with, though, trust has to be earned by providing a service. It cannot be assumed on the basis of reputation. Timing is crucial (pp. 17-26).

Maister et al here suggests that a deeper and more beneficial relationship can be developed in circumstances of trust, but that trust needs developing.

My research participants noted that other parties have an effect on the trust between consultant and client:

Me: What happens to the dynamic when a third party is present with the consultant and client, like another member of the client organisation? How does the presence of an additional person affect the relating between the consultant and the primary client?

Chris: There is a different dynamic when there is someone else in the room. There may be a very strong dynamic between my client and the third party and I am inclined to respect that; I would not want to compromise it: I would want to affirm my client. I acknowledge that my client only has so much autonomy and has to go to others for support and that in these situations he may be dealing with difficult tensions, so he may be looking for active support from me. If the conversation is a negotiation which impacts on me, my support has to be conditional because I am going have to deliver what is decided, and where I don't agree or where I think the proposal is being stretched beyond that which I can deliver, I intervene in a way that isn't going to rupture the relationship with my client by compromising him in front of the other. So when I contribute to the discussion I deliberately look

at my primary client to see what his reaction is because I know that as soon as I start to lose his trust our relationship is going to become tricky.

Chris describes a structure within trust of three simultaneous, interdependent relationships in action here: (i) consultant to primary client, (ii) primary client to secondary client, and (iii) consultant to secondary client. Each party is engaged in relating with two other people at the same time, and in so doing responding to the third relationship – the one between the other two parties to them. Thus the relational complexity is greater and more challenging than the simpler 1:1 consultant-client relationship. Occasions when other parties are present with consultant and client are common in my experience, and in the piece about Mike and me (on page 102) I describe some. In these situations, I find like Chris, that to support them as a consultant I need to pay attention both to my relating to each client, and to the relating taking place between them. My participants recognised that trust needs developing with different clients in the same client organisation and that what they do with one client affects the trust between them and other clients and between the clients themselves.

The other obvious *structure* of trust we heard about (in Chris's first speech of this section) is its process of development over time as relating takes place: trust is built as people deliver on the positive expectations they establish of each other.

Powerfully different

I noticed the ways difference is used in my research participants' experience of flourishing relationships with clients, how consultants introduce potentially destabilising issues in ways that can actually lead to positive outcomes. This section illustrates how participants go about criticizing a client in a relationship that flourishes.

Geoff: When my client stops and listens, then you can tell that he's taking note of what I say and I think then he values my experience. Then I feel able to make the client uncomfortable when I need to challenge him about things that I think he knows he needs to do but he doesn't want to do or finds hard to do. I can 'take the Mickey' out of him and tell him when he drifts away from what we've agreed needs doing; I can tell him what I think his failings are.

As the quotations below assert, most consulting involves pointing out differences between consultants' and clients' perception of their situation, in other words being critical.

Criticism of the client is by definition part of the job [original authors' underlining]
(Maister, Green, & Galford, 2000, p. 28)

Five 'trajectories' can be identified in intervention which forms a relational practice of reflexivity enacted through:

- *Problematizing or questioning taken-for-granted actions*
- *Searching for participants' non-reflexivity*
- *Enriching the situation by asking questions to increase participants' understanding*
- *Challenging those involved and connecting to contexts*
- *Connecting to the outside via activities and networks* (Maas, Stravers, & Baar, 2010).

Chris: I have been a client in a flourishing relationship with a consultant and had a very honest, sometimes combative, relationship yet one that was fruitful and productive; I tried to have an on-going dialogue in our relationship, encouraging my consultants to challenge me, my statements and assumptions, to go and research evidence, and I signalled to them all the time that if the evidence came back out of kilter with where I initially thought things were, that I was willing to change. This involved the consultants developing strong relationships with my stakeholders, which was scary because I didn't quite know what was going to come back that I was then going to have to manage up the chain.

Me: You asked to be challenged, and it was important to you that the challenge was evidence-based, but you also acknowledge that receiving challenges made you feel vulnerable. How did you as a client respond to being challenged?

Chris: At times it was messy because what would happen was that the consultants would be honest, objective in a good way, and sometimes they would come up with solutions that did not align necessarily with higher level strategic ideas about the way things were going to have to go. Then I was faced with deciding whether to take the matter to my bosses and challenge their direction or instead recognise that the higher-level view was going to prevail.

So there was a tension wider than whether the client would listen to criticism; this was about the position the criticisms put the client in with respect to other influential people. Being completely 'honest' became challenging the unchallengeable – that which Chris thought it was not possible to change. Chris's consultants do not appear to have taken account of the context in which he as their client was working. Had they done so, they might have criticised differently.

What the participants, like Geoff above, described in flourishing consulting relationships was a more aware approach to criticism, an approach more like reframing issues so that they present themselves to clients in different ways:

Interactional issue framing works through arranging and rearranging the elements of an issue such that its meaning is altered, a process that involves selecting certain issue elements as part of the frame while leaving out others and

putting particular issue elements into focus while leaving only a marginal role for other elements (Dewulf & Bouwen, 2012, p. 170).

Also when talking about criticism, participants brought up issues of power. Poor criticism was about ‘who is going to get their own way’ rather than ‘what’s the best thing to do?’

Chris: When a client myself, I was always conscious that the power relationship between me and my consultants needed to be managed carefully because if it became too unbalanced, there was then the danger then that I would get told what the consultants thought I wanted to hear. I think that when there is a consultant-client relationship in which the client has a lot of power and the consultant basically does what he’s told, that the client can feel ‘safer’. The problem with that is it might not be the right thing to do, it might not be the best solution at all. What I wanted to do was create a culture in which I got the truth: an honest, objective view.

Is an “objective” view ever possible? Perhaps what Chris actually sought from his consultants was just openness, for them to provide him with a view that was just ‘telling it as they saw it’ and did not miss out anything they thought was important.

Dian Marie Hosking (2011) pulls together Dewulf and Bouwen’s reframing approach with recognising the power in every situation:

The Relational Constructionism orientation sees relating as always re-constructing more or less stable, local, relational realities as ‘content’. These can be theorized as multiple ‘regional ontologies’ and relations – as ontologies that open up certain possibilities whilst rendering others less likely. The fate of an identity claim . . . will depend on whether or not it is warranted as ‘real and good’ . . . The fate of a statement depends on others . . . Others have to be enrolled . . . Processes of construction are power-full [original author’s underlining] (Hosking, 2011, p. 54).

Chris said his interest was in whether power gets in the way or not. This suggests that a flourishing relationship can take place when he makes himself aware of the power relationships between consultant and client, and the power context of both client and consultant organisations, taking all of that into account in what he says and does.

Me: Chris, you think that flourishing relationships with clients take place when the power of the client over the consultant is kept in check. So what part does contracting play in the power relationship? It presumably in some way sets it up.

Chris: The best relationships are ones where it is possible to park the contract once it’s made and then get on with the relationship and the solution.

In summary, criticism is part of the texture of flourishing relationships that participants experience, but not all relationships involving substantial challenge flourish; challenge

can make participants feel deeply vulnerable, powerless, and hence unhearing and defensive. The structure of the relationships that do flourish is to do with how challenge is deployed. When it works it is honest, substantiated, and recognises the context of the client and consultant. It both forms - and needs to take into account - the power relations between consultant and client, and between clients and consultants.

For the final textural theme, I return to idea of common ground expressed in the first theme . . .

Sharing common ground

Me: Chris, you said that flourishing relationships take place when you are able to get on with your clients even though they are different to you.

Chris: That enables more to happen. If I don't get on with a client then I sense that good stuff that could have happened gets blocked before it has an opportunity. We do not need to be the same type of people; our habits and background can be very different and if our differences are not important to me in our work then I put them to one side and look for the common ground between us. I think that the best relationships take place when we know where the edges of our common ground lie. What tells me that we are at an edge is when I can tell from the client's words and body language that they have very different perspectives on a particular subject. I do not unnecessarily try to go onto the ground which we do not share - unless the professional need dictates that this be explored - for fear of causing discord, but I just recognise it, even perhaps celebrate our diversity.

Me: You said earlier, "I suspect that if a client were to become a friend over a sustained period that then the edges of the common ground between us would matter more." I think you're saying that knowing the whole person becomes more important if the relationship is going to go deeper than a 'working alliance' (Nuttall, 2004)?

Chris: If a contact does not develop into an on-going relationship then the pragmatic context that the client is in may have been the issue rather than our relationship. When I have been a client, I have been aware that from my consultant's perspective I was a source of revenue and, at times, I was conscious of a sense of the consultants understandably fostering the relationship because it was good from their point of view.

Participants say that relationships with clients need to have a common, mutual purpose that allows both parties to get something they need from the relationship. If that basis is not there, then there is no transaction possible. Robin points out (in the section of Chapter 5 beginning on page 95) that relationships start in a transactional mode, and it is only later that they are able to develop into something closer and more effective.

Olivia: We can become close, although not necessarily friends.

Alf: Flourishing relationships occur when the client lets me in and we find a way forward in the same direction together. We like each other, talk the same language, feel a strong sense of personal connection and even conspire with each other. That doesn't occur if either of us feels superior or wants to be in charge.

The relational practice view is a practical performance perspective from the position of all the actors involved. The emphasis is on engaging in joint activity. It is a more inclusive perspective than process consulting by a consultant. Attention is centred on jointly produced activity or co-constructed events which are strongly embedded in context. Co-actors are jointly involved in each other's inquiry process as partners. The process is driven by mutually acknowledging and supporting each other's needs (Lambrechts, Grieten, Bouwen, & Corthouts, 2009).

In phenomenological terms, the idea of sharing common ground is more about the underlying *structure* of relational flourishing than the *texture* it presents. The sense of getting on with someone, having things in common, being on the same page, going in the same direction or having a common purpose is the actual *texture* of this experience.

If I imagine the concept of common ground as a *structure* of flourishing relationships, then I can picture two other structural features. The first is the overlapping of individuals' ground; grounds that have properties identified in this chapter, such as objectives and values. The other feature is the edges of the common ground, edges of which it is important to take account. We probably never have completely common ground with another person, and if we don't know where the edges are then we are in danger of believing we are on the same ground when in practice we are not.

The Synthesis is interrupted here whilst I take stock, refocus the research question and conduct a second round of data gathering. The synthesis resumes in Chapter 5 on page 93.

Taking stock from the first cycle: the textural themes

The textural themes I identified in my first four research conversations were these:

- That flourishing relationships between consultants and clients involve a deep sense of engagement between the participants: they establish a firm connection and find common ground
- That there are peaks and troughs in these relationships
- That the participants construct knowledge that is useful *dialogically*, at an 'intimate edge' in their engagement
- That the participants experience being of value to each other and being valued by each other
- That they trust each other

- That they use their 'differentness' positively, ensuring that it is used in a balanced power relationship

These themes are all highly inter-related and my presentation of them shows only one possible sequence of the points. I moved the text around a great deal in forming the dialogues, attempting to provide a sense of a coherent argument developing, but in practice something else became apparent. The research conversations themselves dotted to and fro, iterating, dropping threads and later recovering them. We work all the time with a number of concepts, in parallel trains of thought. So I think there are many possible arrangements of the themes that could provide a synthesis of the phenomenon. The position of *engaging* and *finding common ground* at the beginning, and *sharing common ground* at the end, is because they developed a particular significance in terms of the emerging structure of the phenomenon as you will see as you read on. Look also at #1, #2 and #3 in the model (Figure 3) on page 74.

To summarise the points about the textural themes:

Engaging is the consultants and their clients connecting with each other at the start of flourishing relationships. This engagement between them continues to support the relationship throughout its course. The relationships begin with connecting with each other, for instance reciprocating gestures, showing affirmation of each other's ideas and demonstrating empathy for one another - at least consultants empathising with clients. The feminist writers Miller (1976), Gilligan (1982), Jordan et al (1991) and Fletcher (2001) have made clear the importance of connection to people's growth and development and I explored this in Chapter 2 in the section beginning on page 35.

Engaging also has overtones of liking and being liked. All the participants made the point that liking their clients, and sensing that their clients like them, contributed to the flourishing of their relationships. This resonated with my experience of consulting. But I wonder if this is the general case. We may wish to believe - some may feel it is a professional stance to hold - that it makes no difference whether we like our client or not, to whether we can do a good job with them, but my evidence appears to be that it matters to us a lot. Why we like them might relate to other themes I identified such as feeling valued, being able to trust, and ***sharing common ground***.

Relationships ebb and flow, have ***peaks and troughs***. They are not permanently on a high.

Being of ***value*** is a theme in two ways, firstly in the client and consultant valuing each other, but also in pointing to the underlying values that the participants find they share in a flourishing relationship. Empathy requires an understanding of the other's beliefs in order to be able to see things from his or her perspective. The participants say that sharing values does more: it builds commitment and affirmation, which lay foundations for working successfully together. Shared values are in the common ground that was the final theme.

Trust shone through very quickly in the participants' accounts as a feature of flourishing consulting relationships, so clearly that I was tempted to present it as the dominant trait, as do Maister et al (2000) and Covey (2006). Trust is like the glue that holds the consulting relationship together when the differentness of the participants might pull it apart.

Paradoxically, whilst the things they share hold consultant and client together and are important to the flourishing of their relationship, the **differences** between them, their 'differentness', is essential to the consultant being able to help the client. By differentness, I mean that their different experience and abilities are what enables generativity. Differentness is also challenging though; the unexpected perspectives offered by one person to the other in dialogue often cause feelings of vulnerability which need to be held and worked through.

The literature of René Bouwen (1998, 2001) and Dian Marie Hosking (2011) on relational practice and *relational constructionism* reinforces my participants' evidence that in a flourishing consulting relationship, knowledge is born out of **dialogue** (Bohm, 1996) between consultant and client. Knowledge is not owned or only acknowledged by one person and not the other. I think of relational constructionism as focussing of the concept of social constructionism (Gergen K. J., 1999) into relationships between small numbers of people; the on-going creation of knowledge as people relate closely with each other over time. Participants talked about creating solutions relationally rather than a solution being delivered from one party to the other, and that this is essential to effective action being taken.

The list of themes I have presented is not exhaustive. Two others which could have been included were *respect* and *openness*, but they overlap strongly with other themes. Chris mentions mutual respect several times. Feeling and showing respect is characteristic of the way in which consultants and clients in flourishing relationships engage with each other and support the growth of confidence and trust in each other. Showing respect demonstrates to another one's sense of responsibility for him (Lévinas, 1985). Willingness to be open is another feature of successful relationships to which some participants refer. They say that openness is essential to creating effective dialogue but it is often dependent on trust existing. Ehrenberg (1974) suggests that, in psychoanalysis, openness should not be restricted to clients: there is therapeutic potential in psychoanalysts being willing to be open about their own reactions to the mutual experience with their clients.

Going inside the consultant-client relationship

At this stage of the fieldwork, I decided to sharpen my focus in order to inquire more deeply into the emerging structure of the phenomenon. The common ground the participants talked about sharing with their clients in relationships that flourish particularly attracted my attention, because it seemed to be enabling what was in the space between consultant and client in flourishing relationships. As I explored in Chapter

2 in the section beginning on page 35, Buber offered two ways of looking at relating (Buber, 1937). In the usual way of looking at relating, each individual experiences the other, what Buber called *I-It* (or *I-He* or *I-She*) relating. In contrast, as *I-Thou* the participants experience what is going on in the space between them that they share as a unit, duality or dyad.

When I talked to the participating consultants - as I did in this first round of conversations - about what being in a flourishing relationship with a client meant to them and what their experience of it has been, the *texture* of their answers was their directly perceived experience. By imagining the *structure* that sits behind the descriptions they gave, I also get at some of what we *share* with our clients. However, as I now consider the potential of facing the world as *I-Thou*, I sense I have only begun to understand this hidden structure of flourishing relating, the invisible *flesh* which joins the parties (Merleau-Ponty M. , 1968). This first round of conversations started to surface deeper properties such as *shared values* and *empathy*. What else might be in this shared space between consultants and clients, as yet invisible, propelled me forward into a further round of research conversations related in the next chapter. In these conversations I narrowed my intentional focus on the phenomenon of flourishing relationships between consultants and clients to the shared space they occupy and what connects them in it. Participants have already talked about the 'common ground' between them and their clients. By asking participants directly about the shared space I hope to deepen my understanding of the structure of flourishing consulting relationships.

Chapter 5 – Second fieldwork cycle

In this chapter I present the synthesis of textural and structural descriptions from my second round of fieldwork about flourishing consulting relationships. In this round, I focus on what goes on between consultant and client in the space shared between them, the *flesh* that invisibly connects them (Merleau-Ponty M. , 1968), the phenomenological *structure* (Moustakas, 1994) of their relationship.

First I talked to Chris again because in the first round of the fieldwork (related in Chapter 4) he said a lot about the common ground he shared with his clients. The question I asked Chris this time was, **“What do you experience is in the space shared by consultant and client in a flourishing relationship?”** The question depended of course on the extent to which the words ‘a space shared’ by people had some meaning for him. They did appear to mean something to Chris and he responded, allowing me to get more directly at the underlying structure of his relationships. Nevertheless, I reflected that being in a shared space is quite an abstract idea and the question I asked the remainder of the participants was, **“What connects consultant and client in a flourishing relationship?”** The remaining conversations were with two new consultant participants, Robin and Kim, and finally with Mike, a recent client of mine, and myself as his consultant.

I remained mindful that the phenomenological method demands that I invite the participants to talk about their experience as it happened, not encourage them to conceptualise it. Conceptualising their experience is what I do as the researcher subsequently in finding its structure. One way I think about what *structural* means is simply what is less obvious. (One structure is the skeleton: it gives a body its structure yet is mostly invisible to the eye, although some of a person’s skeleton is more discernible: hips, ribs, collarbones, limbs and skull.) Although I asked the participants to tell me about the *texture* of flourishing relationships they experience, they sometimes anyway offered me points about its structure as well. What I hope asking about a more obvious feature of the structure will do, is to point the way to its less obvious features - maybe not yet said but becoming apparent - that will fill out the structure.

In this chapter, I have not rearranged the material into themes but presented the synthesis as separate discourses with each participant; I do this because as the conversation gets deeper I find it is more important to preserve its flow. The material in each dialogue concentrates on particular structural points, and a good deal of duplication between the participants has been taken out. I summarise the emerging structural themes at the end of the chapter. In the synthesis of the second round I will not repeat the points made by the participants which simply reinforced what was said in the first round. I will select what is new, and is being revealed through directly asking about the shared space and connection.

In this second round, my own participation in the research is also more obvious. Not only do I bring my experience of flourishing consulting relationships into my sense making in the dialogues, but later, in the final dialogue on page 102, I place a personal

experience of a flourishing consulting relationship alongside that of the client concerned.

My overall synthesis of the texture and structure of participants' experience of flourishing consulting relationships resumes at this point from where it left off on page 88. First, I pick out what Chris says about synergy, empathy, intimacy, integrity and affection as structural points. Then I go on to present dialogues bringing out different points with Robin and Kim.

Synergy, empathy, intimacy, integrity and affection

Chris: Inside the space which consultant and client share, we could swap places. There is a real synergy possible if we do not emphasise the role of being the consultant or being the client, but instead work on an equal footing. In the best relationships you forget who's the consultant and who's the client and you're just engaged with each other, you're just two people who are trying to solve a problem or reach a solution and you wrestle with it together.

Notice that Chris here mentions *synergy* between consultant and client contributing to the flourishing of the relationship between them. That seems to be one element of its structure.

Chris: It's not a transactional relationship. You are not detached from whether it's successful or unsuccessful. You are both, equally, emotionally engaged and committed. You enter into the mind, the emotions and the perspective of each other, and try genuinely, intuitively to empathise.

Judith Jordan (1991a) says this of *empathy*:

Experientially, empathy begins with some general motivation for interpersonal relatedness that allows the perception of the other's affective clues followed by surrender to affective arousal in oneself.

Empathy is central to an understanding of that aspect of the self which involves we-ness, transcendence of the separate disconnected self. It is, in fact, the process through which one's experienced sense of basic connection and similarity to other humans is established. Heinz Kohut (1978) has described empathy as "a fundamental mode of human relatedness, the recognition of the self in the other; it is the accepting, confirming and understanding human echo." (Jordan, 1991a, pp. 68-69)

I hear Chris and Jordan both talking about opening up to the feelings of another person. They say that this changes the nature of the relationship, making it more satisfying (Chris) and intimate (Jordan). Satisfaction and intimacy point to needs we have in ourselves. Intimacy is also about the closeness, the depth of knowing another, which ensues from empathising. (Later, Chris also says that affection can also occur.)

Kohut (1959) has referred to empathy as “vicarious introspection”, and Shafer has spoken of generative empathy as the “inner experience of sharing in and comprehending the momentary psychological state of another person” (Shafer, 1959). In order to empathise, one must have a well-differentiated sense of self in addition to an appreciation of and sensitivity to the differentness as well as sameness of the other (Jordan, 1991a, p. 69).

I covered in Chapter 4 on page 84, participants’ experience of making a difference as a consultant by being different to their clients. For me, the differentness between my client and I is more than being a separate person to him or her, more than acting perhaps as a mirror for the extended reflection of his thoughts. My experience is that in flourishing relationships with clients my craftsmanship as a consultant is also part of my differentness, and part of my craft is the skill of empathising with clients. In this respect, consultant and client may not be able, as Chris says, to swap places.

Chris goes on to talk about *integrity*:

Chris: In my current work, my clients and I share spiritual values: we have a common tenure in faith [Chris now works in the Church] and this converges with the work we are doing. A fundamental difference between my old world [in industrial projects] and this one is that before, when I was the client, my consultants were being paid serious amounts of money. When the relationship was really good, the money was parked and it felt as though they were not only engaged and committed but willing to give a perspective which may be seriously in conflict with my own. This was not always the case though, particularly when I felt the consultant was pursuing another agenda set by a senior leader in my organisation.

I too have experienced a common faith being a bond between a client and consultant and this is another example where holding similar values and beliefs helps people work well together. I wonder if this is because values and beliefs provide frameworks for empathising with those who share them. However, I have also experienced some pretty conflicted relationships in faith-based organisations. On the whole though, I agree with Chris’s point that suspicion about external motives such as money may be reduced where people share common beliefs and values. (In the next conversation, Robin mentions faith as well, this time as it influences his sense of responsibility and care for his client.) I think the point Chris makes about agendas is a more tactical aspect of relating and I talked about that under the theme of trust on page 82.

Chris: One expression of integrity is an expectation that people will say what they really feel. There are of course limits to that, as in any relationship, but it helps immensely when you feel there is a high level of personal honesty and transparency. I am looking for someone who will articulate what they honestly think about a proposal or an idea. I don’t care if it’s at odds with what I think as long as they’re being honest rather than advocating a ‘party line’.

Chris describes integrity as being truthful to another; I think it's also about acknowledging to oneself the pressures which are at play, the party lines and agendas which are bound to have an influence on what one says. It would surely be naïve and counterproductive to expect a consultant always to say everything that is in his mind to his client: that's not my experience of any relationship. What I think matters are that the client believes that what you choose to say to them is true and that you are saying it because you have their interests at heart.

Chris: When I think back to the richest consulting relationships I have had, they embraced both respect and friendship. I can think now of individuals for whom I have developed over time a deep personal affection, in which the prominence of the legal, contractual roles has diminished and the strength of the personal relationship has increased, serving to enhance transparency. The common purpose, the common aim all flow out of that.

Sensitivity to the affect of another can develop into *affection* for them. This doesn't happen all the time by any means but in my experience when it does, it can strengthen the relationship and amplify the motivation of consultant and client to work together for each other (see also my later conversation with Mike on page 102). The relationship mustn't become too cosy though, compromising honesty between one other.

Acceptance, love and responsibility

Me: Robin, what connects you to your clients? What's in the space shared by you?

Robin: When I first meet a client I like to spend a lot of time just getting to know them. Then we need to keep in touch between meetings. Every organisation has a myriad of issues and given all the other stuff they've got going on, I have to acknowledge that what I'm involved in is only a small part of their work. There's a Malawi proverb, 'Many, many are the bees, but tell me about the ones which are stinging.' You can point out the next ten steps ahead but it's the next one or two steps that matter at that moment and looking ten steps ahead can paralyse. So what matters is what's next for the organisation, and at a pace that they can cope with. The fact that I would love to get it all neat and tidy is irrelevant. It's what happens to them that matters not what happens to me. If they've got much bigger stuff to deal with, then they deal with it.

Me: You try hard to be with your clients where they are, to be aware of their situation, to understand the world through their eyes.

When the therapist climbs into theory and certainty, instead of responding empathetically to the specific client, her or his specific history, and the specific moment, the therapist often emotionally abandons the client (Jordan J. V., 2009, p. 53).

- Robin: I have learned that for an organisation to change there needs to be a sense that I accept it as what it is, just as on an individual level we change when we feel accepted and loved rather than when all that is pointed out to us is our faults. We both have to ask, “Do we like each other?” I have to ask, “Does the client feel I am arrogant and pushy?” and “Do I see the good in what the client is doing?” That is not to say that negative feedback isn’t constructive and there isn’t a time and place for it, but it’s got to be in the context of a relationship in which we feel accepted by each other.
- Me: So acceptance, even liking, is also needed as the basis of a flourishing consulting relationship for you.
- Robin: Initially a client might trust my competence to help her. But what keeps the relationship going is her knowing that I have got her best interests at heart. How much trust she feels she can put in me depends also on our shared faith and shared beliefs and values [Robin does some of his consulting work with faith-based organisations].

Like Chris, Robin acknowledges a faith dimension to his consulting and the effect of sharing beliefs and values with his clients. Their shared beliefs could however presumably be secular beliefs instead of - or as well as – religious beliefs, as Geoff related in the section on engaging and finding common ground, beginning on page 75.

Next, Robin looks beneath the texture of trust:

- Me: Robin, you also raise the issue of trust.
- Robin: Trust is built and maintained when people do what they say they are going to do. When people don’t do what they say they are going to do – for whatever reason – there’s a sense of disappointment in me. I start to feel ownership of the clients’ issue myself. So at the end of a visit to a client, I make sure the commitments we make to each other are clear and time-bound. I can get edgy, frustrated or pushy when the client asks me to do something and then doesn’t do their part.
- Me: You say about trust that it’s very much a two-way thing as co-participants in the work. You feel ownership of the client’s issue yourself, perhaps sometimes more than the client does. I have done that too. What’s interesting to me about that is that you are very open about your need to trust your client as well as for them to trust you.
- Robin: When I am with a client I feel a sense of responsibility, call it wanting the best for them, call it love, and that’s easier in some situations than in others. It’s about wanting the best for them, even if it isn’t going to make you look as good as you could. That’s about holding some stuff back and about extending yourself on another’s behalf. In the contracting process I am asking myself, “Do I like them enough to love them?” I am also asking whether I am going to be able to give of my best or whether they are

merely inviting me to collude with them in doing something they have already decided.

Gray and Schruijer (2010) say this of the relationship between collusion and trust:

Collusion stands for unconsciously agreeing not to confront reality . . . Facing rather than avoiding differences in parties' interests and ideas can create conflict, but this is necessary conflict if one is interdependent and wants to benefit from collaboration . . . Coping with collusion requires trust, which needs to be built over time (Gray & Schruijer, 2010, pp. 127-134).

Of the things that Robin says in this conversation, acceptance, love and responsibility are the additional structural points I discern about flourishing consulting relationships. Acceptance seems to me a crucial point. How often have I preferred to imagine that clients are different to the way they actually are? How often have I observed other consultants appearing to ignore parts of what their clients are telling them as if it didn't fit a model they had? Acceptance of the client is just about being grounded, about seeing things as they really are rather than bending the facts in an attempt to make life easier.

Responsibility and love are closely connected. I talked in Chapter 2 in the section beginning on page 46 about my philosophical standpoint that responsibility and love define us as human beings. Now I see responsibility and love emerging as part of the structure of flourishing relationships.

The idea of responsibility is to be brought back from the province of specialized ethics, of an "ought" that swings free in the air, into that of lived life. Genuine responsibility exists only where there is real responding . . . to what happens to one, to what is to be seen and heard and felt (Buber, 1947, pp. 18-19).

Plot, script, improvisation and meaning

The main new structural points I take from the dialogue with Kim that follows are about what he calls 'plot, script, improvisation' and meaning, but he also makes some illuminating points about the quality of relationships and trust, which I begin with:

Kim: In my head, good work and the relational go together, which is not to say that those were my 'best' pieces of work [work which was relational] but that they are the ones I remember. There may well have been pieces of work where there was a good outcome and the client was absolutely delighted but I don't recall them as well because there wasn't a strong relational component with the client. When my work has been at its worst is when there has been a high need in clients for control: "This is what we want you to do and this is how we want you to do it."

Relational theory suggests that although the prevailing models of adult growth and achievement are based on public-sphere characteristics such as separation, individuation and independence, there exists an alternative model called growth-in-connection that is rooted in private-sphere characteristics of connection, interdependence and collectivity (Fletcher, 2001, p. 31).

The work Kim does is helping his clients to improve their relationships with each other. He mirrors this focus by taking a relational approach with them. But Kim said that a client with whom there was not a “strong relational component” could also be “absolutely delighted” with their work together. Maybe this client was dissimulating and didn’t want a strong relationship with Kim because he didn’t want Kim to understand what was really going on. Or the client might not have wanted other people in his organisation to talk to someone outside it who might see the issues the organisation was facing differently. The client might have felt that if that had happened they would have lost control. Kim does not value work with such clients.

Kim: My relationship with a client starts off being very professional and task focussed and then you can find yourself stepping out of the professional context and you go out for a meal together and it becomes almost a friendship. If I think about what connects me with Lisa, first she was a participant in one of our programmes and she liked it. I guess what started to shift was that it became a helping relationship. I started mentoring and training her and I was always a person that she could talk to about what she was doing. And because of that, we talked about our processes rather than the content. We started to talk about the things that happen and don’t happen and the conversations that happen in the breaks and how you are with the people in the room. Our conversations became less task-focused. With Lisa now it’s very easy . . . we don’t need to be ‘professional’ with each other any longer; we know we’re credible to each other. I can just pick up the phone and say “Hello my friend, how are you?” or send a casual text. When Lisa calls now she says, “Have you got a moment to talk” and if I say, “I’m just taking Erica to school”, she says, “Can you call me back”, because I have let her into my world and she knows that Erica is important to me. With other clients, I wouldn’t put the phone down on them but with Lisa I’m just being myself and I think that characterises our relationship. That very human level of relationship enables me to do better work; I don’t have to dress it up. It’s less of a transactional piece.

Me: You contrast relational work with transactional work. Work tends to begin in a primarily transactional way and, when it endures, it becomes primarily relational.

Kim: Work when it’s not very satisfying and not very good is very transactional. That’s when there’s a piece of work that needs doing and the client says, “We want you to come in and do it, we’re going to tell you what to do and we’re going to pay you to do it.” That for me is the least rewarding. When I

am unsatisfied yet they are happy, they're not looking to develop a relationship with me and my organisation, they're just looking to fix a problem. And they do fix it; at least they get insight into the problem. They've taken what they needed from me and they're grateful and that's where it starts and finishes. They get what they want. They tend to be people who are task-focussed, problem solving, who don't think in a systemic relational way.

One such client, Willie, told me that he thought our proposal would have more impact than our competitor's but that he didn't think he could sell it to his Board. He wanted something 'packaged' that he could sell. We had different world views and when it hasn't been great, it's been that different perspective, being held at arm's-length or there being a lack of trust. In those situations I can't do as much as I would like. I could be smarter at saying "No" to this type of work, trusting my instinct that it's not going anywhere.

The sense of trust in flourishing relationships came up in the first round of conversations on page 82. Vangen and Huxham (2003) say this about the process of building trust and taking risks:

Trust and risk form a reciprocal relationship. Trust leads to risk taking . . . risk taking in turn buttresses a sense of trust . . . Arguments about expectations, risk and vulnerability imply that trust building must be a cyclic process. Each time partners act together, they take a risk and form expectations about the intended outcome and the way others will contribute to achieving it. Each time an outcome meets expectations, trusting attitudes are reinforced. The outcome becomes part of the history of the relationship, increasing the chance that partners will have positive expectations about joint actions in the future. The increased trust reduces the sense of risk for these future actions (Vangen & Huxham, 2003, p. 11).

Kim: Lots of things are coming together around work and trust. The last piece of work I've just done has been a very trusting relationship: they put a lot of confidence in me because they let me loose with some very senior people and if it went wrong it would have reflected badly on both of us.

Issues concerned with power relationships seem to be significant contributors to mistrust and to the hampering of trust building. (Vangen & Huxham, 2003, p. 13).

Kim now goes off on an interesting new tack:

Kim: One of the things Lisa and I share is our triangular framework: *Plot, Script and Improvisation*. The plot is what we agree a workshop is really all about. The script is what we agree we will do on the day; it's what the client sees. The bit on top is improvisation, because if I just stick to the script I might

lose the plot. So Lisa knows that if I go off piste then I am responding to something in the room, because the script hasn't worked and we've gone off plot. When she's off on her own, doing what I've trained her to do, what unites us is still a plot because there's a plot for each workshop and there's the bigger plot. So the plot for the workshop is, say, people not talking to each other and the bigger plot is that people on the site need to develop relationships with each other and to aspire to a style which is not macho and is about understanding each other; because there are so many projects that are struggling, the behaviour has become very macho and counter-productive. We both fundamentally think that that's the case. We both fundamentally agree that there's a better way of behaving that will get the end result. So the bigger plot that unites us is that that is important.

Plot, script, improvisation is part of the structure of the relationship between Kim and his client Lisa. The plot is either the shared vision for the assignment or the objectives of an intervention; the script is the intended way of achieving the objectives; improvisation is the relational response to what is experienced once the intervention gets under way. It's like Kim and Lisa are actors in a play in which any plots and scripts in the wider client group are not the same as theirs. Free play (improvisation) takes place as Kim and Lisa respond to the wider group in the moment. Chris also talked in the section beginning on page 82 about the situation when other parties are present, and I take that up in the next section after this, the dialogue I have with Mike.

Kim: I have a deep affection for my work [with Lisa's organisation] and it's a mixture of things. It was the first big piece of work I was given to look after so it was important and it was good and I got a lot of kudos from it and I grew massively as a result of it so I feel I owe it something: there's a debt of gratitude. It does something at a very human level, which is the fundamental point about the work that we do. There is a tone of voice I use when I am presenting to a client that I have affection for. I was doing an event on Wednesday and there were some people that I knew in the room. Because our relationship was more than just professional, I was just able to talk more personally to them. There's a tone of voice that wasn't me putting on an act and it was because of that deep sense of affection. I care about the people there and what they're doing. So I want to help them; it sounds very altruistic and it's also very seductive. I want to be the person they ask for help. We all want to be wanted so when I get the call, "Kim will you help us out with something", it's great: it's not consulting, it's me they want. It's a big boost. Then there are other clients who I don't like but I have to find some form of attachment to sustain myself, otherwise I become one of those consultants who comes in, tells them what to do, and goes again. That's not what it's about for me. When we talk in our consultancy practice about our feelings for our clients, Gail will say to me, "Have you fallen in love with them yet?"

Kim is talking about affection for and from his clients here, just as Chris, Alf and Robin did in previous sections – and I will shortly. Kim also demonstrates the potentially shadow side of that affection which I cited Peter Block pointing out in Chapter 2, which is that consultants can make subtle demands on their clients for their gratitude instead of being content with doing a good job (Block, 2000). But these things are not mutually exclusive. To the extent that mutual affection is part of the structure of a flourishing relationship between consultant and client then it may well be contributing to the flourishing of their work together.

Kim: In the unifying space between me and my client can be plot, affection and meaning – it needs to motivate me beyond the transactional. If I'm slapping up and down the motorway and spending time away from home, I have to think my work means something more than that it pays the mortgage. I want to want to do my work, I want my clients and colleagues to want to work with me, because if you have a shared sense of "this is important" then it's exciting and you think creatively and you come up with new ideas and you don't worry about stuff, you go for it.

Reader, please hold onto that thought about what is important: Kim will pick it up again in a few lines time.

Me: And how have you related to me in this conversation, Kim?

Kim: It's been an easy relationship with you in this conversation because relating is something I think about. I remember the workshop on the Management Conference [which Kim and I jointly facilitated] when we asked the delegates why they were on the project. You remember one old ship builder who said that when he was a boy he had been to the launch of a ship his grandfather had built and how he wanted to take his grandson to see the ship we're building being launched: that brought a tear to my eye.

Kim is talking here about how important it is to him - as it is to me - that we do work that has meaning for us. Meaning is a relational idea too. Humans find meaning in relating to each other, the boy to his grandfather and the consultant to his client, and to what others stand for. When we enter each other's lives we begin to share all manner of things and we become responsible for the affect we arouse in each other, and the effect we have on each other's lives. The assignment having shared meaning has emerged here as structure of the common ground between consultant and client in flourishing consulting relationships.

The other main new structural point I take from this dialogue with Kim is his 'plot, script and improvisation'. He also adds texture to the themes of engagement and trust already identified in Chapter 4.

Joined at the hip

The research conversation synthesised next is with Mike, my primary client during the period I was carrying out the fieldwork for this dissertation. It adds into the pot of data, both my personal consulting experience and that of a client. It offers evidence about a flourishing consulting relationship from both the parties to it. I worked with Mike and his organisation on an assignment lasting about eighteen months. As you will hear, Mike and I felt energised and fulfilled by the assignment; the work had meaning and we felt able to contribute a lot to it. The work had the successful outcome for the organisation that had been hoped for, despite considerable challenges. My consulting relationship with Mike flourished during the assignment, and our relationship has continued since as one of friendship.

This dialogue has been constructed from two research conversations held shortly after Mike and I finished working together. The first was with Mike and the second I staged with myself. The words directly quoting me come from this second conversation and therefore are my directly expressed experience of my relationship with Mike. My sense making (the unquoted text) ranges more freely.

Me: The first time I remember seeing you was in the office when you appeared beside me to speak to a colleague at the next desk. I soon discovered that you preferred to come over and speak face-to-face when others would e-mail. My impression of you was of a friendly chap, professional and focused too.

I quickly pick up on Mike's relational approach to work and it draws me towards him. His friendly approach obviously meets a need in me. Other clients can be more formal, though, and I may want to work with them as well.

Me: You had volunteered to lead on some change work involving the whole organisation. I was excited to be in on it: new ventures are the sort of challenges I enjoy and this was one I really believed in. And it was high-octane stuff: there was a lot of interest in what we were doing. And you seemed like a good guy to work with.

Mike: I got what the initiative was about, a few others saw what was required, but I needed you to come and show us how to make it happen. You boosted my optimism right from the start, due to your experience and because you were going to organise the issue - and me - better than I was ever going to organise it; we'd been spinning round in circles for four months before you arrived. There was a huge difference in the breadth and depth of experience between us in terms of creating change on a large scale and knowing how the wider organisation works. I didn't have time to get into the detail, and that's not my thing anyway, but you're good at it. One of the great things about you was your being able to do things really quickly when

someone wanted something from us; then I'd think, 'Thank God someone can see a way forward'.

Me: I think initially what connected us was simply that we needed each other. I was able to give you some help that you thought you needed in order to get the initiative moving, and I needed some work that was challenging to motivate me. My skills and experience complemented yours and together we formed a team that was effective. With both our contributions harnessed, the project was able to increase its momentum.

There was more though. Mike and I liked each other, we hit it off, and we were both keen to do the project: it had meaning for us. We also sensed we could work well together; we recognised the benefit there was to each of us as individuals, and the value we could provide together as a team.

Mike: It didn't occur to me that you were a consultant because I had never worked with a consultant before; you were just a member of the team, and it turned out that you knew what you were doing. You weren't this wise expert who'd come in every so often; you were an expert who had his sleeves rolled up and was trying to pull the calf out of the cow's bum. You were getting immersed in it and having to do bits of it yourself, unlike the classic consultant who you see once every so often, talks a load of hyperbole and bollocks, asks to set up extra meetings so he can justify his existence, and then buggers off again.

Mike had a preconception of how consultants practice and he didn't recognise me as that archetype; so he was more inclined to work with me than he would be to work with what he thought a consultant was. I notice a strong congruence here between Mike's archetypal consultant and the consulting which I so dislike and which led me to begin this inquiry.

Me: You came across as a generous individual, one who was happy to take risks and suffer set-backs, as acknowledging these as necessary in order to get something worthwhile done. You were very inclusive, taking me with you when you went to meetings about our work and inviting me to the department's routine meetings and social occasions.

I have a strong sense of appreciating being accepted by Mike and I think this motivated me powerfully to work for him and with him. In some ways we are quite similar – we recognise like things in each other and they form a bond between us. In other ways we are dissimilar – these things create a tension between us but usually we recognise them and use them positively.

Me: When we started to work together, I saw that your style was to put down your ideas on a white-board and then to gather people around you to debate them. With some people this approach didn't get very far – maybe they had different aims in mind to us or were not responsible for the whole

thing in the way we were – so in the end we pushed on with what we felt was right and to some extent left them to catch up later, which they did.

Mike and I took a risk at that point and I think sharing the decision-making helped us to take it. I notice how already I have started to talk about Mike and I as ‘we’ and ‘us’, as though we were a single unit. And I had begun to distinguish between Mike and the other clients: he was not only my primary client, but with him I had an easy relationship in which I behaved more authentically, whereas other clients I treated as ‘real’ clients, thinking carefully about what I said to them. So I make choices about whom to try to build a special relationship with, and whom not. And perhaps I look for a buddy in a client organisation in order to find a way into it.

Me: As we came to understand more about the background to our work, I think we realised we were doing something that mattered. People’s lives, what the organisation delivered, its reputation and efficiency, all depended on what we were doing. The need was quite tangible: people were asking vital questions in the hope that we could answer them. So I think we realised that our project demanded to be done well. Our work could not be superficial, just going through the motions. It needed to be successful because the organisation depended on it.

Mike: What connected us together was that we both saw the point of the project.

I think it was more than that. I think we also believed that the project was achievable. Others in the client population, such as Nigel, agreed with the project’s objectives but were sceptical about whether those objectives could be achieved. Mike and I found meaning not just in the project’s aims, but also in that we could envisage it coming to fruition.

Responsibleness is the very essence of human existence. Man is responsible and must actualise the potential meaning in his life. Being human always points . . . to something, or someone, other than oneself – be it a meaning to fulfil or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself – by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love – the more human he is and the more he actualises himself (Frankl, 2004, pp. 106-115).

Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue. One must have a reason to be happy. Once an individual’s search for a meaning is successful, it not only renders him happy but also gives him the capability to cope with suffering (Frankl, 2004, pp. 140-141).

What an interesting word *responsible* is - it points to the *quality* of one’s responses; it is about holding oneself accountable to others for their reaction to our responses. This could sound like a play on words or being a bit preachy, but are we not ‘responsible for our responses to others?’ Can I work without that degree of meaning in my work? I don’t think I can – I think I have to be working towards some sort of useful outcome that benefits others; this is another aspect of my relational self.

[A person can have] *a world of relationships and psychological truths where an awareness of the connection between people gives rise to a recognition of responsibility for one another, a perception of a need for a response* (Gilligan, 1982, p. 30).

Mike: We co-owned the thing. Everything I wanted as the client is everything you wanted as the consultant. We shared the work. We were embedded together in it, joined at the hip. We quickly got into each other's pockets, into each other's thinking and understanding, even learning from the frustrations we had with each other.

This is a strong affirmation of how closely Mike and I came to work together and how strong was our awareness of each other.

Mike: Because we'd talked and chatted, we had a model which worked; in fact we spent an inordinate amount of time talking, going over the same things, working out what we were trying to achieve. And in the end, we came up with better solutions than were originally envisaged.

Me: I felt increasingly able to be open and relaxed with you. I think that having taken a joint stand with you on where we were taking the project, I felt a bond with you. I had the confidence to tell you what I thought, even when my ideas were unformed or contrary to yours. We started to debate ideas about the work between the two of us, tossing them to and fro many times and refining them in the process.

In such a dialogue . . . when the second person replies, the first person sees a difference between what he meant to say and what the other person understood.

And so it can go back and forth, with the continual emergence of new content that is common to both participants. Thus in a dialogue, the two people are creating . . . something new together (Bohm, 1996, p. 3).

I am struck here by how much Mike and I put ourselves in each other's hands: how much we came to trust each other. Our ability to have an effective dialogue depended on that. I also notice our sense of being a single unit, that our hopes and fears about what we were doing were vested in us as a team, not in each of us individually.

The basic movement of the life of dialogue is the turning towards the other . . . If you look at someone and address him you turn to him, of course with the body, but also in the requisite measure with the soul, in that you direct your attention to him (Buber, 1947, p. 25).

Me: Along with Roger we formed a cabal within the department who others recognised as the ones carrying the idea like a torch for everyone else. We got the first solid piece of implementation success and, with it, recognition from the rest of the department that we were onto something worthwhile. Then you went on two long trips abroad, leaving me to take things forward

alone in your absence. I missed us being able to work together as a team and it felt as though I was becoming the client as well as the consultant, but I couldn't see any alternative if I wanted the work to keep going, and I found that most - not all - of the wider client population were happy for me to take the lead while you were away.

I notice my sense of my own vulnerability when Mike and I could not work together. I was able to do better on my own than I thought I would, yet I clearly missed his involvement. I preferred to be in harness with him than working on my own. I feel more comfortable sharing work rather than doing it on my own, yet paradoxically I also want to have a sense of my own worth, my own contribution. I need both.

Women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then maintain affiliations and relationships . . . Men's only hope lies in affiliation, too, but for them it can seem an impediment, a loss, a danger, or at least second best (Miller, 1976, pp. 87-91).

Me: At about this time, I asked you what you thought of our relationship and whether you thought it flourished. You said it did, and that what that meant to you was that you trusted me and that we had become friends. You said you had learned a lot from me. I asked you what else you thought flourishing was about and you said 'respect'.

There I directly ask Mike about the flourishing of our relationship. He says he thinks that the relationship between us flourishes in that it is one of mutual trust, friendship and respect.

Satisfactory human relationship is the key motivational drive of human beings . . . Carl Rogers's core conditions of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard are now universally accepted interpersonal competences for any situation in which the development of the person is the goal (Nuttall, 2004, p. 16).

Mike: I trusted you because you are one of the most upright and open people I know. I had to trust you anyway because I was involved in other things which were very time-consuming. I trusted you that you would get right the things you were coming up with and the ideas and the proposals for the way forward and the movements in the model we were developing. I didn't give you instructions to go off and do things. When we were together at meetings, I always knew we would advance the same point of view, sometimes from different directions, but complementary. I never felt we needed to get together before we went to a meeting to discuss what we were going to say. We were at our best as a team when we had common adversaries or with difficult customers or when we adapted it on the hoof.

So *trust* raises its head again. When does trusting take place?

Trust depends on credibility. The four cores of credibility are integrity, intent, capabilities and results. Capabilities and results depend in turn on competence (Covey, 2006, pp. 54-55). Integrity is about congruence between intent and behaviour, plus humility and courage (p. 61).

Trust is like a bank account into which deposits, and from which withdrawals, are made (pp. 130-132).

Identification-based trust is based on identification with others' desires and intentions. Trust exists because the parties effectively understand and appreciate the other's wants; this mutual understanding is developed to the point that each can effectively act for the other. Identification-based trust develops as one both knows and predicts the other's needs, choices, and preferences as one's own . . . People may empathize strongly with the other (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996, pp. 122-123).

Identification-based trust is the third stage of an evolution which begins with Calculus-based trust and has Knowledge-based trust as its second stage (p. 124). Trust can be violated and can only then be painfully rebuilt (pp. 125-136).

That trust is part of the texture of flourishing relationships is one of my clearest findings. Covey reminds us above that trust cannot be taken for granted. However whereas with some clients I intentionally work at building up that trust, I did not consciously have to work at it with Mike. The bond between us was stronger. Basic trust was not an issue between us, not something we had to make a conscious effort to maintain. There were tensions between us aplenty but they did not seem to undermine the basic trust we had in each other. Our common values and purpose, our openness towards each other and the closeness that allowed us to be in each other's minds were what underpinned our trust, not that we forced ourselves to behave in a certain way towards each other in order to earn each other's trust.

And looking at the words of Covey, Lewicki and Bunker above, I notice also the hint that trust once established is not permanent. There are times when we may reassess the level of trust we hold in another. Covey makes this sound like quite a dynamic process, Lewicki and Bunker more sudden. I think I'm more with the latter. I don't regard trust as a currency that is traded, moving up and down with everyday events, but instead think of trust as something that runs deep. I take badly behaviour I interpret as a betrayal of trust. Trust seems for me to be both in the texture of flourishing relationships and a fundamental element of their structure. It enables us to treat each other's challenges as opportunities, rather than feeling threatened by them.

Me: When you came back from abroad our relationship felt different. I had done a lot on the project whilst you had been away and you wanted to probe and question what had been going on. As you resumed your old role I sometimes resented you taking decisions that I had been taking myself whilst you were away. I even felt that you shouldn't have gone away and that having done so you shouldn't expect to just pick things up where you had left off. Things came to a head a couple of times. On one occasion you

asked me to accompany you to a meeting with the Director. As we chatted outside the Director's office prior to his arrival, I realised that you wanted me to support you over a point we had not discussed and with which I didn't agree. To the consternation of the Director's office staff, we had a heated argument there and then. At the height of it, the Director arrived and we went in and put our views to him. It felt important to me to make our difference clear even though I sensed you were uneasy. On another occasion, you criticised the lack of progress on an aspect of the work for which I realised I was really responsible and I reacted over-defensively to your criticism. Looking back, I think that while you were away I did not feel that you any longer really jointly owned the project with me. I remember saying to you that I thought it was time for us to start writing down what our design was so that we and others could refer to something which recorded where the design had got to. I wrote the paper because you were away, and although you commented on it and I made some changes based on your comments, the document still felt more mine than ours.

I notice that I had high expectations of Mike's involvement, which he was unable to meet all the time, and that I had problems dealing with that. The sense of co-ownership diminished with him away and I got frustrated during his attempts to find his way back in when he returned.

Mike: When we disagreed, we weren't at our best - which could be because I didn't have time to devote to the issue - or when I was letting you down, when you were grumpy, when I wasn't listening, when I was winging it and looking good because you were. What kept us going through the hard times was that I needed you, had huge respect for you and liked you and thought I knew why you were grumpy and I know I'm not always the easiest person to work with. It never got that bad though.

Gaffney (2013) points out the importance of whether someone is in positive or negative *mood* to their susceptibility to positive and negative emotion, moods being emotional states which last typically several hours. Jordan (1991b) here speaks to the long view of emotion:

Crucial to a mature sense of mutuality is an appreciation of the wholeness of the other person, with a special awareness of the other's subjective experience. Thus the other person is not there merely to take care of one's needs, to become a vessel for one's projections or transferences, to be the object of discharge of instinctual impulses. Through empathy, and an active interest in the other as a different, complex person, one develops the capacity at first to allow the other's differentness and ultimately to value and encourage those qualities that make the person different and unique (Jordan J. V., 1991b, p. 82).

Me: After the disagreements we had when you returned, I reluctantly admitted to myself that you were making very sound judgements about the work and that I should not over-react to the odd difference of opinion. We asked

each other's opinions a lot. I found that if we appeared to disagree on something, that we could actually use that difference to our advantage if we gave ourselves the time to talk it through.

We worked hard together and spent a lot of time in each other's company. This caused some disquiet in both the customer and client teams: some people felt that there should be a clear separation between our roles, but the way we were working made more sense to us. But I think there was a cost because these other people felt excluded by us rather than included.

Mike: It's easier to talk about the difficult bits when I think of us as a team. I was worried that I was not empowering you or letting you do your thing. I didn't want to be seen to be stealing your ideas or using you to further my own aims. I was also worried that I was not in charge of the project. It crossed my mind that other people might think I was leaning on you too much. You had to tell me what to say at project meetings sometimes but I realised I had to put up with that; I didn't worry that you were taking over.

Just as I wrestle with my role as the consultant in the relationship, Mike is wrestling with his role as the client. He toys with it meaning he should be 'in charge' although he doesn't feel completely comfortable with that. There are also issues of inclusion and exclusion with others.

Me: I sensed a strong bond had been built up between you and me. We worked well together because we enjoyed working together. We could rely on each other. As we were very relaxed in each other's company, we enjoyed debating what we were doing. We looked forward to the work because it brought us together. We worked to please each other.

*It is not necessary for me to be friends with all my clients, and friendship is not my first priority . . . [yet]
My ideal client partnerships are friendships (Bellman, 2002, p. 71)*

Me: What's it been like having this conversation with me?

Mike: It wouldn't occur to me not to help you out by having this conversation. I can't stand an environment when people are trying to score points off each other, not team players. But more than that, we became friends. It was a good feeling. It felt natural; it felt like it should have felt like. We would work all day together and then go for a beer.

The process of relating is seen as having intrinsic value (Jordan, 1991b, p. 83).

Jordan's words sound a bit clinical compared to Mike's and mine. There was - and still is though we no longer work together - affection between Mike and me. I recently met up with him and some other friends for a weekend's walking and we regularly meet for a drink in Town. When we talk we share each other's hopes and fears for the future.

Me: As your departure date approached, I noticed I was nervous that you might not maintain your energy and commitment to the project, but you worked hard at it right up to the end and continued to take on new aspects as they emerged. I miss your comradeship though, someone to share everything with and to take on the world with. I don't feel as I can only work with friends but I think our friendship helped us work well together.

Mike: Our time working together feels both shorter and longer than it was: it was intense. Next time I work with a consultant, it's also got to be someone who is full time, someone who's got it, understands it and wants to make it a success as well, and someone who is mutually compatible with me. Next time I want what I've had now.

This was a relationship that flourished and an assignment that was successful. Several of the structural themes I have already noted are present in this conversation with Mike such as the themes of synergy and shared objectives that Mike has just mentioned. The two new structural themes that this conversation highlights for me are friendship and teamwork.

Mike and I became friends during this assignment. Inasmuch as mutual affection is a feature of friendship, this is something we've heard in the other conversations. When he talks about us being friends though, Mike also says that we enjoyed working closely together. I have a sense of us having been on a journey together, that the journey (the assignment) was both our shared work and provided a connection that we enjoyed having. We also looked out for each other in the way of friends.

It is only with friends that most people feel they can let their hair down and be themselves . . . It is in the company of friends that we can most clearly experience the freedom of the self and learn who we really are (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, pp. 185-190).

Mike and I also talk about us as a *team*. Teams possess many of the features of flourishing relationships: common goals, behavioural norms, synergised contributions and trust amongst them. What does Mike actually say about us being a team? I notice two particular phrases. He says that, 'It's easier to talk about the difficult bits when I think of us as a team' and that 'We were at our best as a team when we had common adversaries or with difficult customers or when we adapted it on the hoof'. By the 'difficult bits' I think he means the testing times in the assignment: he mentions difficult customers and common adversaries, but also difficult times between him and I; the difficult times between us seemed easier when we thought of ourselves as a team rather than as two individuals.

It isn't always easy though. I like to be in charge of the design myself, to feel in control, and to receive the affirmation that goes with being the architect of something seen as successful; but it's a trap. This week, Don and I have been doing a long workshop in which our design has evolved substantially. But it's felt a bit like a tug of war over it sometimes. I've wanted it to do what I want and Don has had different requirements.

We've needed to take times out to understand and accommodate each other's perspectives and when we've done that we've forged ahead again. I don't feel as though I've been giving something up. I know that Don has good reasons for saying what he says even if I don't at first grasp what they are. He gives me the chance to address his concerns about my ideas. In dialogue we agree each plank of our shared design and then we get on individually with making it happen. We both know now from experience that if we don't deal with each other's concerns then we will start trying to build different things and then have to go back a step again.

I think the inquiry participants feel that the sum of consultant and client's efforts counts for more than what each of them contributes. The idea of team points towards some form of fusion of individual selves, which echoes Buber's *I-Thou*. With both Mike, and later his successor Don, our relationship flourishes when we hold our work with each other 'in common', when we own it jointly. There is a dialogue between us about what we are building and because of that we trust each other to separately take the numerous actions there are to implement our design. We are a bit like a couple who take different roles in the care and nurture of their children, whilst retaining a shared responsibility for them overall.

My synthesis of the textures and structures of the participants' experience of flourishing consulting relationships ends here. I go on now to explain the structural themes I found. Then I further refine the synthesis into a summary description of the phenomenon.

Structural themes, summary description and model of the phenomenon

After the fifth conversation in the second round, I judged I had a clear picture of the structural ideas emerging, so I stopped collecting data and started to write up my findings. Following the phenomenological method, I am now going to go back and summarise the structural points I identified in the experience of the participants of flourishing consultant-client relationships in all nine conversations, before organising the synthesis.

How should we judge the validity of these findings? I wrote on page 70 about considerations of validity in the phenomenological process. Now I am reaching the end of that process and beginning to offer findings to a wider world as conceptual knowledge. Therefore additional considerations might come into play; I think John Heron (1996) has something useful to say about what these additional considerations could be:

Propositional findings are valid if they meet relevant criteria at their own autonomous level: these are linguistic criteria to do with grammatical usage and intelligibility, logical criteria to do with internal coherence of meaning, and contextual criteria to do with relations between findings and relevant propositions made by others in the same field of inquiry (Heron, 1996, p. 172).

I invite you, Reader, to judge my findings in this light.

Throughout the first round of fieldwork (Chapter 4), I started to identify elements of the structure of my research participants’ common experience of flourishing relationships between consultants and clients. The structures from the first round are summarised here, together with the textures that mediated them:

Textural themes	Structures
Engaging Finding common ground	Connection, Recognition, Reciprocation, Empathy, Liking
Peaks and troughs	Common outlook, values and experience
In a dialogue	Development, Growth, Energy, Generativity
Valuing each other	Belief in each other’s good intentions
Trust	Recognizing behavioural norms
Powerfully different	Sharing goals (what matters)
Sharing common ground	Interdependency
	Accommodating different objectives side by side
	Openness, Intimacy
	Sensitivity, Fairness
	Honesty
	Evidencing, Contextualising
	Power in balance

Table 1: Textural themes and structures identified in the first round of fieldwork

There are many inter-relationships between the items in this table and it should not be read as implying that the textures and structures are mutually exclusive or that any one structure is being discerned from only one textural theme.

In this chapter I asked directly about the space shared by consultants and clients in flourishing relationships and I identified the following additional structures in participants’ experience:

- Synergy, Integrity and Affection
- Acceptance, Love and Responsibility
- ‘Plot, script, improvisation’ and Meaning
- Joined at the hip (being a team)

Distinguishing between texture and structure is not required in the phenomenological method of *synthesis* and I sense that differentiating them has served its purpose – and served it well - in my inquiry. Some participants mentioned as texture what for others I perceived, from what they said, as structure. It seems to me to be a paradox of phenomenology that whilst it focuses first on raw experience rather than how that can be conceptualised, the focus is inevitably a concept in itself. So when I asked directly

about the ‘shared space’, some of what participants responded with was about structure they discerned as well as their raw experience.

In the transcendental methodology, my task now was to use my imagination to identify *structural themes* in flourishing consulting relationships. I discerned three themes. The first was that the relationships were both about the consultants and clients as individuals, and about what goes on in the space shared by them. This is reflected by both the shift in emphasis between the two rounds of fieldwork, and Buber’s attitudes of *I-It* and *I-Thou* respectively. The second pattern I noticed was that the relationships were both about how consultant and client are with each other, and about how they are together with others. I combined both these two structural themes into a framework in which my phenomenological description of the experience of the participants in flourishing relationships between consultants and clients addresses four perspectives:

	<i>Egocentrically, as individuals (I-It)</i>	<i>As partners, ‘in relation’ (I-Thou)</i>
<i>Internally to our relationship</i>	2) We engage with one another	3) We unite
<i>Externally, in the world</i>	1) We find common ground with another	4) We find a combined way forward

Figure 4: The progressive building up of a flourishing consulting relationship

The third structural theme I discerned was the sequence of development of relationships between consultants and clients into flourishing relationships. This pattern of development was the order in which the perspectives of flourishing consulting relationships in Figure 4 occur (shown as 1)–4)). I found that some basic agreement about how the world is, relevant to the assignment, is necessary for a relationship to get off the ground. Participants referred to this as finding ‘common ground’ and it provided a basis for them then to engage with each other fully. The real work of consulting then begins to be carried out in a transactional relationship, the giving and receiving of information and help. Trust between consultant and client builds if they deliver on the promises they make each other and their working relationship becomes increasingly less transactional and more mutual. Flourishing really begins when consultant and client start to surrender the boundary between them and begin to grow as a result of what they are learning together. As the consultant and client integrate together as a team, they then begin to synchronise their actions in the world in pursuit of mutual objectives in the assignment.

Taking each of the quadrants in the order in which they assume significance, my summary description of flourishing relationships between consultants and clients - using consultants' own words - becomes this:

1. We find substantial common ground with our clients in terms of our mind-sets, values, beliefs, interests and behaviours. We have a sense that each is coming from broadly the same direction, that we share similar views about the world, talk the same language and see eye-to-eye on issues. We feel passionate about what we are doing, that something is at stake that both value.

This is something like what Bellman (2002) calls *fit* in consulting:

Fit has to do with behaving in ways the organisation behaves; respecting similar values; working towards related, long-term goals (Bellman, 2002, p. 141).

2. We go through a process of emotionally engaging with the client at the start of flourishing relationships, letting each other in, reciprocating gestures and showing affirmation of each other's ideas. We come to like, respect and feel accepted by one another. We 'hang in there' with a strong sense of personal connection despite the peaks and troughs experienced thereafter. There is mutual affection. We enter into each other's mind, emotions and perspective and empathise with one another; even learning from the frustrations we have with each other. We come to trust each other. Neither feels superior or wants to be in charge. We become energised about what we are doing, enjoy working together and think more of giving than getting. We become relaxed about bringing up contentious matters and encourage challenge. We articulate what we honestly think about a proposal or idea and learn from each other.

3. Together we become a team. We co-own our project, embedded together in it, joined at the hip. What the client wants is what the consultant wants. We get into each other's pockets. We include each other in what we do and share the work. We feel a sense of responsibility, and want the best for, one another. Both are committed to the relationship. We take risks and suffer setbacks together. Consultant and client share a relationship in which we ask each other's opinions, value the other's experience, throw ideas around and try them out in an on-going dialogue, tossing them to and fro many times and refining them in the process. We use the differences between us to our advantage. Our skills and experience become complementary and are synergised.

Jordan (1991b) offers this description of 'mutual intersubjectivity' in any effective relationship:

A model of mutual intersubjectivity, then, suggests the following for each person in a relationship:

- *an interest in and cognitive-emotional awareness of and responsiveness to the subjectivity of the other person through empathy*

- *a willingness and ability to reveal one's own inner states to the other person, to make one's needs known, to share one's thoughts and feelings, giving the other access to one's subjective world (self-disclosure, 'opening' to the other)*
- *the capacity to acknowledge one's needs without consciously or unconsciously manipulating the other to gain gratification while overlooking the other's experience*
- *valuing the process of knowing, respecting, and enhancing the growth of the other;*
- *establishing an interacting pattern in which both people are open to change in the interaction (Jordan, 1991b, p. 83) .)*

4. Client and consultant conspire together and find an effective way forward in the same direction. We have a common purpose, aim, plot and script, within which we can both improvise.

I found a number of external relationships that influence the flourishing of consulting with clients, the most significant of which are summarised in the diagram at Figure 5 below. These additional interactions can support a flourishing consulting relationship or cause it to languish. For instance, a tension that is not being resolved between client and consultant might be played out between either, both, or the two as a team, with the wider client organisation, and *vice versa*.



Figure 5: Consultant and client in their worlds

However a dyadic unit has no agency of its own. As Mills (2005) puts it, it the interpersonal field does not become an autonomous agent:

There is no third subjectivity or agency, only experiential space punctuated by embodied, transactional temporal processes that belong to the unique

contingencies of the human beings participating in such interaction. But this is not to say that the intersubjective dyad does not introduce a new movement or generative element within the analytic milieu, what we may refer to as a “new presence”, the presence of affective and semiotic resonance echoed within an unconscious aftermath borne from the spontaneity of the lived phenomenal encounter (Mills, 2005, p. 171).

Finally, I combine the three structural frameworks and the summary description into a single model of flourishing consulting relationships, shown again at Figure 6. This model aims to show the sequence of development of flourishing consulting relationships in the words of my participants. The four stages are the four boxes of Figure 4 shown earlier in this section.



Figure 6: Flourishing consulting relationships, as they develop

In this section I have made a summary description of the flourishing consultant-client relationships I looked into, derived phenomenologically from the experience of the participants. These are the propositions I advance about that phenomenon as we have experienced it. You my reader can apply to them the validity criteria suggested by Heron that I cited at the beginning of this section:

- Linguistically, are they intelligible, and structured grammatically?
- Logically, is the meaning coherent internally between them?
- Contextually, is the relationship clear between my findings and relevant propositions made by others in the same field of inquiry?

Chapter 6 – Application of research findings to my practice

A phenomenological study stops at the point of achieving a synthesised description of the phenomenon. However, I also want to inquire by putting my findings into practice. My purpose in doing this doctoral inquiry has been to develop my craft as a consultant. So in this chapter I will look at how I now act as a consultant, in the knowledge of my findings about relational flourishing between consultants and clients, and what happens when I do. In this process, I want to see what further practical knowing I can develop about the phenomenon.

The first section of this chapter looks at how I link phenomenology and practice theoretically, creating a bridge from one into the other. The second section of the chapter considers practical knowledge from the standpoint of validity. In the third section I present a tool I developed with which to apply my findings. Then I apply my tool to a current consulting assignment and consider the result. I also apply my findings to a relationship outside consulting in the next section. Finally, I consider what applying my findings has yielded as practical knowledge and to what extent practice validated my findings.

Phenomenology and practice

John Heron (1999) offers a ‘pyramid of fourfold knowing’ that I have found helpful in understanding the processes of any inquiry:

Figure 7 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

Experiential knowing – imaging and feeling the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing – is the ground of presentational knowing. Presentational knowing – an intuitive grasp of the significance of patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical and verbal art-forms – is the ground of propositional knowing. And propositional knowing – expressed in statements that something is the case – is the ground of practical knowing – knowing how to exercise a skill.

Figure 7: Pyramid of fourfold knowing (Heron, 1999, p. 122).

In terms of Heron's learning pyramid, experiential knowing in phenomenology is what signifies the phenomenon; presentational knowing is the texture the phenomenon is reduced to; and propositional knowing is its imagined underlying structure. But the phenomenological method does not go on to support practical knowledge. This next diagram (Figure 8) illustrates how the knowing produced by phenomenological research can be related to practical knowing. It takes Heron's diagram (Figure 7), aligns to it the outputs of phenomenological methods, and shows the unfilled gap of practical knowing:

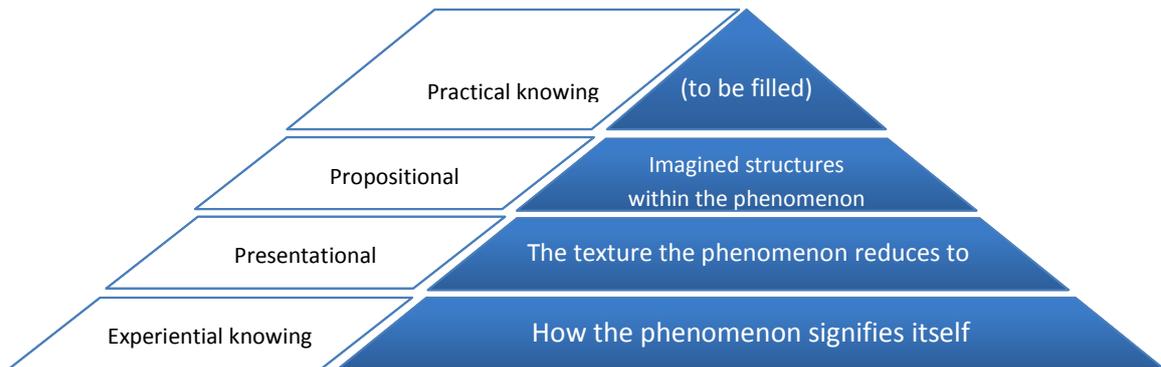


Figure 8: Heron's Pyramid of fourfold knowing mapped to phenomenological methods

What might this theoretical framework mean in the case of the phenomenon I have been researching: flourishing consulting relationships? This is a phenomenon that is itself about a practice – consulting - and specifically about the quality of that practice. For this reason, it seems to me that my practice has three possible roles it could play in my inquiry. Firstly, the presentational and propositional knowing I have developed might be used to guide my practice: they might provide clues as to how to find and develop flourishing consulting relationships, and to diagnose the possible issues in consulting relationships that are not flourishing. I develop a tool to guide practice in this way in the section on page 120. Secondly, I may be able to use the experience of practice to validate the theoretical model I have developed of flourishing consulting relationships. And lastly, by intentionally focusing on flourishing relationships as I practice consulting, I may be able to develop practical knowing to add to the knowledge of the phenomenon I have gained using phenomenological methods.

Validity considerations for practical knowing

I draw again on John Heron's (1996) writing about the validation of practical knowing to identify points to take into account as I put my findings into practice. In these quotations, Heron restates the relationship between practical and other forms of knowing described in the previous section, and adds his ideas on the quality of practical knowing:

The primacy of practical knowing lies in practice being the consummation of inquiry. However I cannot take intentional action in direct relation to something without having some conceptual information about it, without having some presentational data, and without meeting it.

It [practical knowing] transcends them [propositional, presentational and experiential knowing] with its own autonomous articulation . . . manifesting the value of human flourishing.

The grounding [of research] is epistemological, the consummation is axiological [concerning values].

Their [experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing] congruence is consummated in and through concerted and excellent practice, the apex of the pyramid, that fulfils them and shows them forth. This crowns their world with the value of human flourishing (Heron, 1996, pp. 165,166).

In this series of quotations, Heron emphasises the value of aspiring to human flourishing that is the possibility of practice. My motive in undertaking this inquiry was for practice to flourish more often, as I related in the section beginning on page 7, and in this dissertation I have explored at length what flourishing is. So in this way an element of validity is already built into the topic of my research. Human flourishing is not only how Heron suggests we validate practical knowing about anything, but also partly defines the phenomenon I have been researching.

A further quality of practical knowing suggested by Heron, which is also in a way already built into the definition of my research topic, is the relational aspect of human flourishing:

Practical knowing manifests excellence. What is important here [from a participative perspective] is the word 'concerted': people acting together and interacting through inter-subjective consensus. This is agreement in deed, in active use and in application of beliefs. Reality is necessarily that which is public and shared, it depends on a consensual account of its status and credentials (Heron, 1996, p. 166).

So what participation means for the development of practical knowing is 'agreement in deed' with others about knowledge being developed. Again this is consistent with my phenomenological findings about the practice of flourishing consulting relationships, as for instance in the description of the way relational, participative, dialogical knowledge is created (see page 79).

Another aspect of practical knowing is developing the knack of applying a concept.

Practice cannot be validated entirely by criteria formulated at the conceptual, propositional level. It has a criterion internal to the exercise of a skill, which is the knack of knowing how to perform it. This is a knowing of the excellence of the

doing that is within the doing. A knack is a self-validating account of an action at the heart of the knowing how that constitutes it. (Heron, 1996, p. 170).

I don't think it is possible to fully describe the knack of doing something. I have just been learning how to ride a motorcycle in order to undertake an assignment in a developing country. I found that one of the most difficult knacks to acquire was turning tight circles on the bike without falling off. It required a particular combination of the settings of the throttle and clutch, the degree of turn, adjusting the distribution my body weight on the bike and, I found, keeping my head up and looking round into the turn. Getting this combination right was a matter of trial and error. Over-conceptualising the task was not helpful. Practising building flourishing consulting relationships will be a matter of having a go at them, based on my findings about them as a phenomenon. As I do so, I hope to develop the knack of building flourishing relationships more reliably. I will probably be able to express some aspects of the knack but others will only become apparent from what happens.

The practical knowing I seek is how to foster flourishing relationships with clients as a consultant. In order to have some theory that is expressed in a way that I can act on, I decide to form questions to ask myself as I practise, based on my phenomenological findings . . .

Questions I can hold whilst practising

This is the tool I have developed with which to apply my findings. It is a set of questions to ask myself as I practise consulting. The tool takes account of each of the perspectives I have gained on flourishing relationships between consultants and clients, shown in Figure 4 in the section beginning on page 111 and reproduced here:

	<i>Egocentrically, as individuals (I-It)</i>	<i>As partners, 'in relation' (I-Thou)</i>
<i>Internally to our relationship</i>	2) We engage with one another	3) We unite
<i>Externally, in the world</i>	1) We find common ground with another	4) We find a combined way forward

Figure 4: The progressive building up of a flourishing consulting relationship

From the descriptors in each of the boxes in Figure 4, I evolve these questions:

First, do we have common ground to stand on?

- Is the meaning each of us finds in doing the work well matched?
- Are our values and beliefs congruent in the areas that the assignment is testing?
- Do we have access to the same information about the context of the work?
- Are we presenting each other with all the evidence we judge is relevant to the issue?

Second, are we engaged with each other?

- Are we aware of each other's emotional state, our ups and downs?
- Are we honest with each other?
- Do we empathise with each other's situation?
- Do we value and trust each other enough?
- Are we able to use our different experience and abilities to challenge each other, clearly yet fairly and sensitively?
- Are we able to balance power between us?

Third, do we operate together as a team?

- Do we co-own the project we are doing together?
- Do we take responsibility for our impact on the other? Do we care about each other?
- Do we build ideas together, dialogically?
- Do we use our talents to tightly complement each other's?
- Do we change each other? Do we grow, together?

Lastly, do we act in concert in what we do as a team in the wider client organisation?

- Do we have the same objectives?
- Have we a common plot (strategy)?
- Are the solutions we pursue the same?

Practical experience consulting with my questions in mind

In order to see how my findings work in practice, I am going to relate my experience of two of the relationships with primary clients I had during the consulting assignment I was undertaking as I wrote up this part of the dissertation. In both cases, I set out to see if I could to have a flourishing consulting relationship, as it is described in the summary description of the phenomenon in the section beginning on page 111, and to do this by holding the questions set in the previous section in mind as I practised.

To tell you my conclusions first, I found that one of the relationships, the one with Aisha, on the whole did flourish. In contrast, the other relationship with Bruce, despite a promising start, tended not to. (Pseudonyms have again been used.) The relationship with Bruce that chiefly did not

flourish possibly has more to offer in terms of validating my model of flourishing consulting relationships, whilst the relationship with Aisha, which did flourish, possibly has more to offer in terms of developing further practical knowing.

Working with Bruce

It was Bruce who I worked with most closely during the early weeks of the assignment, which was to set up a new function in a directorate of a large public service. I was brought in as a consultant from outside the organisation and Bruce had moved sideways from his previous role in the service. Bruce made me feel welcome and helped me find my feet in the organisation. He was keen to talk through the issues he was finding difficult in setting up the new function and to get my thoughts on the situations we were encountering. He encouraged me to be open about how I perceived the culture of the organisation and he asked me to help him understand how the Director worked, because Bruce knew that I had worked with the Director before.

A few weeks into the assignment a major task came up and Bruce put together a special team for this job. At his request, I agreed to help the team. The task appeared to go well for a week then Bruce got involved in other things and left the team to it. I wondered why Bruce was no longer personally leading the group. It then became apparent that there was not a unified view in the wider organisation about the task the group was doing, neither the scope of the work nor which directorate should be doing it. Eventually the task was successfully completed without Bruce, but not without a good deal of conflict with some parts of the wider organisation.

On another occasion, Bruce asked for my help with the assimilation of a supplier business into the organisation. He was very keen that when the integration took place, an insider be appointed in place of the existing manager. Although the issue was being discussed among others with an interest in who was appointed, Bruce was unwilling to talk about it, simply stating that only the insider option was possible, although others and I saw it having substantial drawbacks. Bruce hinted that I should recognise his authority over the matter and support him. The subject became the source of considerable tension between Bruce and the Director and eventually Bruce left to work elsewhere in the organisation.

Bruce moved to a connected part of the service and I still worked with him from time to time, but our relationship was no longer close. Sometimes he appeared willing to talk, even stepped in to help with a problem, but then, as though an invisible barrier appeared, he would not discuss things further or take any action, and would not explain why. I came to believe that Bruce sensed when I would not be 'on-side' and took steps to avoid me being involved in these situations, and that our difficulties related to differences in the beliefs and values we held about the organisation. I have become quite wary of Bruce's involvement in issues now and pay particular attention, when he is, to what his agenda is.

I'm going to analyse my relationship with Bruce now in terms of the questions about flourishing relationships I could hold whilst I practice, identified in the previous section. The key words from those questions are in bold to help you, the reader, keep your bearings.

Firstly, were Bruce and I standing on **common ground**?

- Was the meaning each of us found in doing the work well matched?
- Were our values and beliefs congruent in the areas that the assignment was testing?
- Did we have access to the same information about the context of the work?
- Did we present each other with all the evidence we judged was relevant to issues?

Bruce and I did talk about the **meaning** each of us found in the work we were doing and at a high level that meaning was well matched. We agreed that the public service our organisation was performing was important and that that meant a lot to us. Yet when it came to the meaning we found in what was happening closer to our individual work I think we differed. I was keen to see each team perform well and play its part in what the organisation was doing. I think Bruce found more meaning in trying to offer each individual in his team a sense of security during a turbulent period.

I can think of two key points tested by the assignment, where Bruce's and I's **values** or **beliefs** differed significantly. The first is that Bruce was reluctant to be involved in a dialogue with the organisation's suppliers or to work with them in a cohesive way. I advocated involving the suppliers in conversations about the changes being made, hearing their views and letting them hear ours. Bruce opposed that. I came to account for Bruce's position as an aspect of the prevailing public service culture he had worked in all his life: he was happy to talk freely to other public sector organisations but he felt that the private sector should be kept at arm's length. I was able to talk to Bruce about this on a few occasions. He said that the risks of involving contractors in strategic conversations outweigh the benefits. The main risk that concerned him was that colleagues in the public sector would see him as compromised by engaging with the private sector and no longer working impartially in the public interest. I start from a position that I always want to hear what anyone involved in something has to say because it could be to my benefit as well as to theirs, and in this case in the public interest as well.

The other **belief** over which I felt we differed was about accountability. If someone attempts to block or change an important course of action, then I believe that they should be invited to justify the consequences of their stance on the organisation as a whole. With Bruce I found that when he encountered colleagues blocking progress, he was unwilling to challenge them but would instead try to accommodate their decisions even when that threatened what he was trying to achieve. I discussed this behaviour

with Bruce and he said that it was a waste of time to try to discuss the issues with these people and that he just had to accept whatever position they took. He suggested that it is right to allow each colleague to take decisions without putting pressure on them. I believe that we all have to be accountable to each other for the positions we take. If someone thinks we need to take something into account then we should do so. That does not mean automatically accepting whatever they say but recognising that everyone's actions affect others; we are all interdependent.

I think Bruce and I did have the same access to information about the **context** of our work and we did present each other with all the **evidence** we judged was relevant to the issues we came up against.

Overall I think Bruce and I did recognise the edges of the **common ground** we stood on. Over some of our values and beliefs and some of the meaning our work gave us, I think we found that the ground was not common enough for us to flourish working together given the issues we were facing. I think if had been more flexible about these issues, I would have been inauthentic, and would no longer have believed in what I was saying or doing.

Going to the second perspective of flourishing consulting relationships in my model, did Bruce and I **engage with each other**?

- Were we aware of each other's emotional state, our ups and downs?
- Did we build ideas together, dialogically?
- Were we honest with each other?
- Did we value and trust each other enough?
- Were we able to use our different experience and abilities to challenge each other, clearly yet fairly and sensitively?
- Are we able to balance power between us?

I think Bruce and I were aware of each other's **emotions**: we showed what we felt to each other, good and bad. We were able to build ideas together, **dialogically**, except when our values or beliefs differed, and as I described in my response to the question on my first perspective of flourishing consulting relationships above, this lack of common ground caused great difficulties in our relationship, although I think we were **honest** with each other about where our beliefs and values were at odds.

My experience is that Bruce and I did **value** each other inasmuch as we recognised contributions from each other to the work we did together. On issues where we came to recognise that our beliefs and values were at odds, we were unable to value each other. So also, we **trusted** each other in some ways but not in others; we found there were limits to the trust we could place in each other; we trusted each other at a basic level to, for instance, do what we said we would do, but we distrusted each other in the areas where our values differ. For instance, after our dissimilar views became clear, both

Bruce and I would take opportunities to pursue our differing agendas without telling each other what we were doing and this caused some unpleasant surprises.

We were able to **challenge** each other, clearly, fairly and sensitively, as long as we thought it was worth it, but we gave up challenging each other in areas in which we had established we had incompatible beliefs. But on other issues we could still have a dialogue and did so. I think we balanced the **power** between us.

Overall, the fault lines exposed in our common ground showed up in the way we engaged. We connected well except when we realised we were not on common ground.

Thirdly then, did Bruce and I **operate together as a team**?

- Do we co-own the project we are doing together?
- Do we empathise with each other's situation?
- Do we take responsibility for our impact on the other? Do we care about each other?
- Do we use our talents to tightly complement each other's?
- Do we change each other? Do we grow, together?

Sometimes Bruce and I **co-owned** what we were doing but at other times we did not. Even when we failed to agree, I don't think Bruce or I tried to hide our **feelings** from each other. I think we **empathised** with each other well: for instance, when we disagreed about the values of people working in the public sector I could feel what this issue meant for Bruce, informed by my own long experience in the public sector. Bruce and I demonstrated to each other that we felt **responsible** for each other and cared about each other; several times we went the extra mile for each other. But the sense of responsibility we felt for each other was trumped when we thought there were important values at stake. We used our talents to **complement** each other except when there was a fundamental issue between us.

I don't think that Bruce and I have **changed** each other much or **grown**, but overall I don't think this was because we were unable to work as a team *per se*, but because we stopped ourselves receiving much substantial from each other. Maybe we did a little to start with but the edges of our common ground stopped that going further.

Lastly then, did we **act in concert** in what we did as a team in the wider client organisation?

- Did we have the same objectives?
- Had we a common plot (strategy)?
- Were the solutions we pursued the same?

I think we had common **objectives** for our work together but I don't think we had a common **strategy**. Our analysis of what needed doing - how to go about the work - was too different for that. So the **solutions** we pursued were different.

In summary, Bruce's and I's struggle to flourish together seemed to stem from our conflicting values and beliefs. In these matters, we were unable to trust, help or change each other and that showed up in our inability to face out to the rest of the organisation with common strategies and solutions. So although in many ways we were doing the right things to help our relationship to flourish, the influence of our different values and beliefs, as they applied to the work in hand, appeared fatal in this case and prevented our relationship from flourishing. We were pulling in different directions.

It is worth asking why I carried on with the assignment. But I had another primary client, Aisha, with whom I had a more successful relationship. I will describe and analyse this relationship next and contrast it with the relationship with Bruce.

Working with Aisha

I think Aisha and I were a bit unsure of each other to start with. We were both new to the organisation, outsiders, albeit from different backgrounds. We seemed to fence with each other for the first few weeks, sizing each other up, just as we were assessing the organisation we had entered into, and finding out what we could expect of each other. I think we started from a position of respect for one another; we had both moved from prestigious organisations and we both knew, and respected the judgement of, the person who had brought us in. Aisha and I offered each other our views and assistance and asked each other for help. Gradually our relationship flourished. Part of what bound us together was the resistance we faced from Bruce and other insiders in the organisation. In contrast, the organisation's commercial partners were natural allies inasmuch as Aisha and I came from cultures like theirs. Aisha and I were therefore able to make rapid progress in our work with the suppliers, which was central to the organisation's objectives. On the other hand we both experienced and shared our severe frustration with our new organisation's internal way of working; this we perceived as slow, bureaucratic, disorganised and risk-averse. Because I had more experience than Aisha of working in the public sector, I began to adopt a role of facing inwards towards the organisation, attempting to clear the path for our programme to succeed in terms of the administrative processes that threatened to throttle the life out of it. In this I received Aisha's encouragement and had some success.

There were still points of tension between Aisha and me. I sometimes found it frustrating that Aisha would not take my advice on tactical issues, but I could see that her own experience was telling her something different and the issues were not critical. Aisha was unable to support me in resolving an issue I requested her help with, but I accepted her stance on it because I knew that she had to be involved elsewhere at the time. Then also Aisha took a lot of time off in the summer and I found it difficult to keep

in connection with her, but when she came back we renewed our relationship successfully.

I'll analyse my relationship with Aisha now in terms of the questions about flourishing relationships I hold as I practice. I won't repeat all the questions, so please turn back to the part about Bruce and I if you wish to see them again.

Firstly, were Aisha and I standing on **common ground**?

I did not notice any clash between our **values** and **beliefs** to do with the assignment or the **meaning** each of us found in doing the work. Aisha and I have different backgrounds and we both shared **information** from them. We were happy to hear each other out when one had **evidence** to present.

Going to the second perspective, did Aisha and I **engage with each other**?

I would not say that Aisha and I were close; for one thing we did not usually see each other more than twice a week and it took a month or so for us to find a way of working that suited us. When we were together, Aisha and I were very **honest** and open with each other, sharing our **highs** and **lows**. We questioned each other and listened to each other's answers, **building up ideas together**. I had a clear sense of being **valued** by Aisha as a person and of valuing her. We demonstrated that value when we regularly asked for and received support. Aisha invited me into her lifeworld and responded when I invited her into mine. We always returned each other's phone calls straight away. We joked, we enjoyed working together and we **placed ourselves in each other's hands** frequently, without hesitation. We tested each other, but to get what we needed rather than suspecting that we might not trust each other. We did **challenge** each other, not necessarily **fairly** or **sensitively** because that did not seem to matter so much. We worked in a **balance of power**.

Thirdly then, did Aisha and I **operate together as a team**?

Aisha and I showed a similar degree of **ownership** of the project. We shared our **feelings** at work very openly with each other. I was able **to see the world through Aisha's eyes** and anticipate her needs and responses. I did feel **responsible** for Aisha; moreover I knew that I could help her and wanted to do so. I felt safe with Aisha; I had no concerns that she would not look out for me. We definitely **synergised** our talents, Aisha's knowledge of the market we worked in and my knowledge of project management and the public sector culture. Our relationship matured as we learned that we could trust each other in our interdependent roles. We **changed** towards each other and changed what each of us did in our work.

Lastly, did Aisha and I **act in concert** in what we did as a team in the wider client organisation?

Having worked together harmoniously on key documents whose purpose was to express the **objectives** of our project, I had a clear sense that Aisha and I shared them. Neither did we have any differences about our **strategy** inasmuch as there was one – I mean by that that our plot seemed simply to be to find a way through the bureaucratic maze of our organisation. The **solutions** we pursued were ones we derived in dialogue, and when an issue came up that affected the solution we made sure we consulted each other.

In summary, Aisha's and my consulting relationship flourished in time. It took longer for me to feel comfortable with Aisha than with Bruce, perhaps because Aisha did not privilege doing so as much as I, or Bruce, did. Even then, we were not engaged a lot of the time, but the quality of our connection was sufficient to support what we needed to share with one another. Thinking back to what my research participants Chris and Kim said in the fieldwork, establishing a rapport, getting to know each other, can be a helpful enabler to a flourishing relationship; but it is not where the real work gets done – where change occurs – which is in what we actively share. Nevertheless, it is on the surface where the relationship begins and it needs paying attention to if more is to follow.

So what did I learn from applying my findings in this assignment? Did applying my findings help me have flourishing consulting relationships with Bruce and Aisha? I think it significant that I was substantially more confident about how to pursue flourishing relationships with Bruce and Aisha compared to my previous assignment (with Mike, related on page 102). The action I took to support the flourishing of my relationships with Bruce and Aisha was more intentional, whereas before with Mike it had been largely instinctive. The relationship with Aisha did flourish. I can't say that it would not have before, but my willingness to stick at it in the early days particularly bore witness to my findings about the inevitability of emotional ups and downs in flourishing relationships and the necessity for challenge by both parties.

With Bruce, I learned that I am not always able to make consulting relationships flourish. Bruce and I's values and beliefs about the private and public sectors were too dissimilar for us to co-operate effectively; this in an assignment where nearly every step depended on having enough common ground to build on in terms of what we about believed and thought right about these two domains. One of the things we are doing when we are considering change is *prospection*, representing possible futures in order to assess the options open to us. We can think of ourselves doing this by generating "If X, then Y" conditionals and evaluating them (Seligman, Railton, Baumeister, & Sripada, 2013). I think with Aisha I was able to *prospect*, but not with Bruce. With Bruce, our assumptions and views about what was possible and right were too far apart.

What additional knowing did I gain in practice, what knacks to flourishing in consulting relationships? The knack I have the clearest sense of developing is that of *timing*. I often felt with Aisha that I knew what I wanted to say or how I wanted to act, but that it was important that I acted at a time when she was ready for it. In my research conversation with Robin (on page 95), Robin noted that clients often had higher priorities than talking

to their consultants. *Mood* was a factor noted by Gaffney (2013) that I used to analyse my research conversation with Mike (on page 102). I found in practice that I could tell from Aisha's manner, the nature of our conversation and what else was going on, whether or not she was receptive. If I ignored the signals that the time was not right, I might get a closed response which then came between us like a barrier for a while. If I waited for the right moment then we could share effectively.

Application beyond consulting relationships

At the same time as I was applying my findings in my current consulting assignment, I also found one aspect of them helpful to me in other close, one-to-one working relationships. Accepting that there are still difficulties in flourishing relationships and coming to realise that emotional ups and downs and challenge may be essential elements of all flourishing relationships, were a bit difficult for me to come to terms with as they emerged from my inquiry. They challenged the ideal with which I had approached my topic, determined to find a new and better way to practice consulting that would be free of the negativity that I had often experienced in the past. It was therefore particularly important that I was able to grapple in my practice with the role of negative emotion in flourishing relationships. To the extent that consultant-client relationships are like other relationships then I thought I might also be able to develop my findings on application further.

“Good conflict” is necessary for change and growth . . . We undergo our most profound change and grow most deeply when we encounter difference and work on conflict or differences in connection . . . Conflict is not defined by dominance, violence or aggression; rather, these modes of action are seen as manoeuvres to avoid conflict and change (Jordan J. V., 2009, pp. 4-5).

The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something worthwhile. Optimal experience is something we make happen (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 3).

Here then is my learning 'going deep' into some sensitive 1:1 work relationships I was having at the time I was working on this dissertation:

The deeper I go, the darker it gets. The things and people around me become less distinct and what's at a distance can no longer be seen. It's disorientating and scary. I feel drawn up to the surface again, where what I can see appears clearly and I can tell myself I know where I am. But I am drawn to see what lies deep down as well, and it can't be seen from the surface. It's down in the darkness.

Being on the surface can seem easy. I do not feel challenged all the time. Often, I can interpret the world in ways I already know how to deal with. I can have a ready answer for each question, like the management guides on airport bookstalls, with their neat

explanations and straightforward diagrams. I can feel confident of my position and in control of the situation. I persuade myself I have the answers and ignore signs that this may not be so. I can stay with the view I already have. But eventually, giving ready answers or avoiding issues doesn't wash.

You seem to have quite different views to mine and our relationships become strained. When we talk, our discomfort shows up. I may appear like I am not listening to you, or that I am suspicious, or angry or 'done to'. I certainly feel a sense of injustice. I might question where I am because I don't like it, or because you are telling me something I don't immediately understand or want to hear. And just as I may want to stay on the surface, I guess so may you; you can appear to me to be fixed in your view or offhand, as may I. You may be finding the issue difficult too; you may interpret my questioning as me wanting to ignore the inconvenient truths you are telling me. It may make you uneasy that you are not getting through to me. My questioning of you may make you feel criticised and put you on the defensive. It's like a fog comes in and one or both of us loses our reference points. We may both think of the other, 'They don't get it.'

But deep down is where we are finding new insights; if they were on the surface, they would be easy to find. By staying on the surface trying to dodge the hard stuff, I may be closing down issues that are vital, opportunities to discover things as yet unknown. The me on the surface may want to feel that I know what's going on, yet inside be unconvinced and want to know what's happening deeper down. And in some ways I feel enticed to go down there, as well as being frightened of doing so: there's a thrill of danger and the excitement of expecting to discover something new.

But if I surrender myself to the insecurity deep down, my hopes for a certain outcome are dashed; the course laid out in front of me disappears. Deep down there are fewer rules; I can't get by ticking boxes. The spirit of inquiry is what matters and prescribed action takes a back seat. The emotional turmoil of opening myself up can overwhelm my ability to see what there is. I can feel trapped. I no longer know what to do. My confidence takes a tumble.

Though I am reluctant to go there, I'm confident that I can find new understanding in this dark place; I recall that I always have done so in the past. I cannot flourish without experiencing difficulty; at least I never have done. What works for me down deep, is relaxing and paying as much attention as I can to the signals I am getting from you. I need to accept my vulnerability, to stay with each point and work it through, dwelling in the issue and imagining new options. When I wrestle too much for answers I feel myself pushing you away, sending you up towards the surface, or making us frustrated and angry.

If we both just stay on the surface, we may recognise that something is separating us but maintain our different positions and only politely fence with each other. Then, sooner or later we disagree on something important. It may be impossible for one or both of us to change without compromising a belief or value we have decided to hold on to. Or I may seek to get round you, or you round me, by influencing others to our own point of view. Or one of us may decide to break off contact.

Going deep, we can suspend our certainties and look for alternative explanations together. We can acknowledge and hold open our vulnerability to each other's ideas. We can point out each other's weaknesses without wounding too much. We can change. Yet one of us may not feel able to go deep. We may feel the need to maintain a certainty: to stick to a plan, maintain our authority or hold on to a position. If one stays up and the other goes down then communication is difficult. One is open but the other closed. One is vulnerable but the other has their guard up. One expresses certainties that the other doesn't feel. One can change but the other remains the same.

If one of us wants to go down, how does he or she encourage the other to come down as well? We have to want to do it. In consultant-client relationships, I try to tread a fine line between challenging the client more than they can take and challenging them so little that we stay the same; I can easily mistake where that line is. I need to be gentle as well as strident; to try not to let the other feel too threatened; to be graceful when they reach out to me; to be engaging and give them space, and time for us to come closer; I need to absorb some of their sensitivity. Then we can triangulate, look to others outside our immediate relationship for reference points. In cycles, we tend to get closer then push each other apart. We disturb each other, then find bridges to bring us back together. Or we give up and abandon the relationship because we cannot deal with the differences we have encountered. [Account ends here.]

Relational movement . . . is the process of moving through connections; through disconnections; and back into new, transformative, and enhanced connections with others. Being aware of how all relationships move through these different phases is . . . relational awareness (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons, & Salazar, 2008, p. 282).

Acute disconnections are ubiquitous and, when addressed, can actually lead to strengthened connection. Acute disconnections occur when people fail each other empathically, do not understand, or let each other down in a myriad of ways (Jordan J. V., 2001, p. 95).

Emotional highs and lows are greater beneath the surface. Pleasure may be superficial but fulfilment is about finding deeper meaning. Similarly, it may not be possible to deal with pain on the surface and we may need to go deep to resolve it. It is deep where change takes place, where new knowledge is found.

So what does this 'going deep' description of other relationships add to my description of flourishing relationships between consultants and clients? For a start, the surface-deep distinction I have made is something like the distinction, in the summary description of flourishing relationships at the end of Chapter 5, between how consultants and clients just *engage* with each other as individuals and how they *operate* as a team *in relation*. Buber holds that we alternate between being in *I-It* and *I-Thou* with another. But is the surface-deep distinction only about flourishing relationships? Exploitative relationships involving dominance and fear can also bind people together. Buber says this:

You speak of love as though it were the only relation between men . . . there is such a thing as hate.

Hate is by nature blind. Only part of a being can be hated. He who sees a whole being and is compelled to reject it is no longer in the kingdom of hate, but is in that of human restriction of the power to say Thou . . . This word consistently involves an affirmation of the being addressed. He is therefore compelled to reject either the other or himself (Buber, 1937, p. 16).

A converse of these statements would be to say that if a relationship is not affirmative, then one of the parties is rejecting the other, possibly because he (or she) cannot see the whole of the other or himself. On the other hand, if both can see the whole of the other and themselves and accept them, then they could enter a stable affirmative union.

I seek to flourish with clients using both attitudes - and altitudes - both on the surface and down deep. It's about how the two 'facing inwards' relationships work (see Figure 4 in the section beginning on page 120). Personally, I find that the active sharing down deep is the greater challenge. The temptation when the going gets hard is to eschew mutual responsibility, openness, empathy, synergy and change, and instead confront each other superficially and inconsequentially. If one can avoid reinforcing the vulnerability the other is feeling, and allow the pain to be productive, then perhaps the deep relationship can do its positive work.

People commonly demonstrate a paradox in the way they address relational issues in their lives. This paradox is enacted when, in the face of their yearning for connection, which inevitably produces a heightened sense of vulnerability, individuals use strategies that result in further disconnection and isolation (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons, & Salazar, 2008, p. 282).

But the prize is this:

The ability to participate in increasingly complex and diversified relational networks characterizes relational growth (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons, & Salazar, 2008, p. 280).

In summary, if consulting relationships are like other 1:1 working relationships, then the fulcrum of my model of flourishing consulting relationships may be in the often painful stage of moving *into relation*, allowing and being allowed by the other to change what we believe, operating together as a unit. This is the crux of whether growth occurs or not.

Summary of application

My practical experience of applying my findings to promote flourishing consulting relationships with clients draws in this chapter on my assignment with clients Bruce and Aisha. I first formulated a set of questions based on my model of flourishing consulting relationships (Figure 4), which I held open as I was consulting and regularly checked on.

Heron (1996) offers these *criteria for the validation of practice*:

Executive criteria – *can they do what they say they can do, elegantly with style and grace?*

Technical criteria – *does the practice have the effects claimed for it? Is it the most effective way of achieving the outcome sought?*

Psychosocial criteria – *is it free of pathology? Is it free from distortion by the norms and values of the social structure within which it is exercised?*

Intentionality criteria – *is the practice intentional rather than ad hoc or reactive? Do the inquirers give evidence of creatively sustaining congruence among the components of their practice – its motives, its guiding purpose and values, its strategy and norms, its actual behaviour, its context and its effects?*

Value criteria – *does the practice contribute to personal and social transformation according to the inquirers' view of an intrinsically worthwhile way of life for human beings?* (Heron, 1996, pp. 170,171)

I have tried to address all these criteria in my accounts of applying my findings. At a macro level, the experiences with Aisha and Bruce respectively showed that I could have flourishing consulting relationships, but that there is no guarantee that I will have them. At a micro level, what have emerged from applying my findings are important matters of emphasis and detail. In the relationship with Bruce neither of us was prepared to change some of the things we believed and held dear and this proved a fundamental constraint on our relationship flourishing. Aisha and I were not engaged a lot of the time, but the quality of our engagement grew and became sufficient to support what we had to share with each other. With Aisha, I developed some sort of knack for knowing when to speak and act with her and that sense of timing was important additional practical knowing.

I found my findings also helped other 1:1 working relationships flourish. The 'going deep' experience taught me to appreciate what depth I and the other party are at when the going gets tough, whether we are just engaging or also actively sharing. We both had to be deep in order to be able to change each other, but if one was up whilst the other was down deep then instead of change, the one on the surface could wound the one down deep badly; openness and empathy were out of balance.

Chapter 7 – Conclusions

In this final chapter, I will attempt to make a coherent whole of my inquiry and to look forwards from it to what could follow. After looking at some final validity considerations in the first section, in the second section of the chapter I identify the contribution I am claiming to scholarship. In the third section, I cover the limitations and further opportunities presented by my inquiry. Next I summarise the methodological developments I made in order to carry out my research. Finally, I talk about the effect the inquiry has had on me, the personal growth I have experienced during my research.

Final validity considerations

Lather (1986, p. 78) uses the term *catalytic validity* to describe the emergence of new behaviours, some documentation that the research process has led to insight and, ideally, activism on the part of the respondents. Bradbury and Reason (2001) offer the following as validity considerations applicable in general to Action Research:

- Explicit relational participation
- Guided by a concern for practical outcomes
- Theoretical integrity
- More than intellectual knowing
- Appropriate methods
- Significant
- New behaviours

The methodology of my research has been phenomenology rather than Action Research, but because I have applied my phenomenological findings in my practice and learned from that as well (Chapter 6), I think the all considerations offered by Lather, Bradbury and Reason are relevant to my inquiry. The evidence of my response to these considerations is my body of work and I will not repeat parts here, just ask you, Reader, to pause, think back over what you have read and decide for yourself to what extent my work is valid, and what your expectations supporting its validity are of the conclusions I will make in this chapter.

For my particular research topic, I think these additional validity criteria should also be applied, in order to check there is congruence between my findings and the research process I have followed:

- Has my inquiry promoted **flourishing**: flourishing work, flourishing relationships and the individual human flourishing of you, others and me?
- Can my findings make a difference to the practice, craft and profession of **consulting**? Are they of value to other consultants and clients?

- Can others **relate** to what I have found; particularly, are my findings *resonating* in fellow consultants and clients?

The quality of resonance I find a particularly helpful idea.

The manuscript stimulates resonance in readers/ reviewers, meaning that the material is presented in such a way that readers/ reviewers, taking all other guidelines into account, judge it to have represented accurately the subject matter or to have clarified or expanded their appreciation and understanding of it (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999).

My context and those of the participants is not the same as your setting, Reader. Therefore what I offer will not all be of value to you. What I hope is that some of my results, including the accounts of experience, will resonate with you. Resonance is also what occurs when a radio receiver is tuned into a station and picks up its signal. What I mean by 'resonate' here is that you feel a stirring within you, a recognition of something which corresponds with your own experience plus possibly something you can use, an idea that you think could apply helpfully in your own setting.

Contribution to scholarship

As a result of my research, what has our knowledge of flourishing relationships between consultants and clients *become* (Marshall & Reason, 2007)? The contribution to scholarship I offer is my portrayal of these bonds. This came in three forms:

- i. The synthesised description presented as a series of dialogues in Chapters 4 and 5.
- ii. The summary description in the section beginning on page 111.
- iii. The diagrammatic model (Figure 6) at the end of that section.

In addition to the considerations of validity summarised in the previous section, my depiction of flourishing consulting relationships is a contribution to scholarship just because there is no other representation of such relationships in the literature. As I argued in Chapter 2, the relevant research has up to now been dominated by investigating individual human flourishing, using quantitative methods. Scholarship has not yet provided a qualitative understanding of the processes of flourishing, nor explored the flourishing of relationships, in consulting or any other type of affiliation. This is the first reason I suggest my results are significant.

For practising consultants, I hope that the theoretical understanding I have presented will lead to you trying new ways of working in your craft. It already has for me, as I describe in the sections beginning on page 146 and 147. In the section beginning on page 120 I offered questions to hold whilst practising about whether a consulting relationship is flourishing in the ways described by the participants in my inquiry. An

assumption I stated at the beginning in Chapter 1 (p.15) was that consulting assignments can be more successful if attention is paid to whether consultant-client relationships are flourishing.

The higher prize I hope made more accessible by my inquiry is the individual flourishing of consultants and clients as they find their work more successful and their relationships more fulfilling. My group of participants was quite small and I have already said I expect they are to some extent similar people to me (p.62). So each consultant must decide for herself or himself whether my findings are relevant to them. For instance, I imagine some people will find that the idea of seeking relationships entailing a degree of closeness is uncomfortable. Some may feel that a flourishing association is unnecessary – that a more transactional form of consulting works well enough for them. Others may embrace relational flourishing but find my model too prescriptive – maybe they have not struggled as have I with relationships and are able to achieve them without conscious effort.

Further insights and opportunities for new research

In addition to my main research question, in Chapter 2 I identified a number of other ‘edges’ to the scholarship of my topic (see pages 35 and 54). The main issues were:

- (1) the role negative emotion plays in flourishing,
- (2) the role of relationships in individual flourishing, and
- (3) the extent of self-disclosure that is helpful in consulting

My findings also illuminate these questions to some extent. In this section I will say how, and what other opportunities I can see for further research into the areas around my topic.

What roles do negative emotions play in flourishing?

Positive Psychology is mainly silent about the positive role of negative emotions, for instance fear. Seligman (2003), a self-confessed pessimist, offers positive psychology as a positive alternative to a negative frame of mind. But on its own, this could be a somewhat superficial view of the role of the negative, less than fully honest about the extent to which we experience negative emotion, and to position it solely as disabling. Negative emotions clearly have some essential roles. Fear warns us when we notice a pattern of activity that may be going in a dangerous, unproductive direction in order that we can consider avoiding action. It makes us stop and think. The sense of vulnerability we experience in the face of something new and challenging, which we do not immediately know how to handle, is the seat of learning. Learning leads to growth and development, and development is essential in response to an environment that is constantly changing. I think that consultants and their clients are by definition in situations where the response to a situation is at least uncertain and sometimes quite frightening, for if the action needed was obvious the client might not have resorted to a consultant. And the consultant should be on the look out for the aspects of the client’s

situation that he or she has not seen before, and reflect on them rather than force-fitting them to a template. These situations involve consultant and client intentionally making themselves vulnerable to each other, in that they do not know what they will find or what they will bring to each other. Bellman (2002) offers this thought:

Positive, healthy change usually hurts. It hurts the way your muscles hurt when you ask them to do something they are not used to doing (Bellman, 2002, p. 179).

Writing of the therapeutic relationship, Jordan (2009) points to a potential dependency between vulnerability and another quality of relating, mutuality:

To express authentic feelings, one must enjoy sufficient safety to be vulnerable; this is directly related to how much mutuality exists in a relationship (Jordan J. V., 2009, p. 6).

I used Buber's (1937) *I-Thou* attitude to distinguish where processes of deep relating - that are essentially mutual - are in the structure of flourishing relating. I particularly offer my findings on these processes of mutual relating as a contribution to our understanding of how consultant-client relationships flourish. In these processes, negative emotion is used in a range of ways that have a positive effect. In the past, if I felt threatened by what a client was saying to me and did not know how to respond, I may have felt dislike for them. Buber (1937, p. 16) suggests that if one sees a whole person and yet rejects part of him or her, that one is not in a deep (*I-Thou*) relationship with them. If I feel dislike for a client, then it may be that I have chosen not to see - or may not be able to see - some part of them. And if this is so, I should recognise the possible limitation this imposes on the relationship - and work - and their potential for success. So when I feel negative towards someone at the beginning of a relationship, I need to consider whether I am seeing them as a whole, and seeing the world through his or her eyes. If the answer is 'No' then perhaps I need to choose whether I wish to see more of them or whether it would be better just not to work with them. To go on with the issue unresolved might be to risk a breakdown in the relationship in the future.

Chronic disconnections . . . result from repeatedly encountering nonempathic responses (Jordan J. V., 2009, p. 5).

But more often I encounter moments when I feel a clear, temporary negative sense of disconnection from a client, a bit like experiencing mild physical hurt. I have come to see this as part of the normal functioning of any relationship, and not just normal but essential to its flourishing. Jordan (2009) writes this of the therapy relationship:

Relational-cultural theory sees disconnections as normative in relationships . . . Acute disconnections occur frequently in all relationships. If they can be addressed and reworked they are not problematic; in fact they become places of enormous growth (Jordan J. V., 2009, p. 25).

My conclusion about negative emotion in consulting is that the differences between consultant and client - their 'differentness' - is essential to the consultant being able to

help the client, but that differentness is emotionally challenging. The consulting relationship was described by one of my research participants as a series of ‘peaks and troughs’. The unexpected perspectives offered by one person to the other in dialogue often cause feelings of vulnerability which need to be held and worked through.

How important are positive relationships to all flourishing?

Back in Chapter 2, I noted that Seligman (2011) posits that an individual’s wellbeing or flourishing has five measurable elements that count towards it, his ‘PERMA’ model:

- *Positive emotion* [of which happiness and life satisfaction are elements]
- *Engagement* [absorption in a task]
- *Positive Relationships*
- *Meaning*
- *Achievement* (Seligman M. E., 2011, pp. 16-20).

I also offered that I thought that relationships are for Seligman only one of five elements of flourishing. I do not get a sense from his writing that any of the five is essential and integrated with the others. He actually says that each element has this property:

It is defined and measured independently of the other elements (exclusivity)
 (Seligman M. E., 2011, p. 16).

However, Buber (1937), Bateson (1972) and others make the point that all life, all experience is relational, that it is lived in relation to other people, our environment and our gods.

	<i>Egocentrically, as individuals</i> <i>(I-It)</i>	<i>As partners, ‘in relation’</i> <i>(I-Thou)</i>
<i>Internally to our relationship</i>	PERMA model: Positive emotions My model: 2) Engaging (specifically emotional engagement)	PERMA model: Engagement (= absorption in task) My model: 3) Uniting
<i>Externally, in the world</i>	PERMA model: Meaning My model: 1) The common ground (including common meaning)	PERMA model: Achievement My model: 4) Finding a way forward (with the task)

Figure 9: Mapping of PERMA to descriptors of flourishing relationships

My findings included each of the four PERMA elements excluding positive Relationships – Positive emotions, Engagement, Meaning and Achievement - as integral features of

positive Relationships between consultants and clients. Comparing the four with the model I derived at the end of Chapter 5, then the correspondence shown in Figure 9 is apparent. Taking each box in turn:

Meaning about the world is shared between consultant and client when they are in a flourishing relationship. Our values, what we believe - and believe is right - stem from where we find meaning.

Sharing meaning requires enough of a similar view of the world (evidence and context) on which to base that meaning.

Positive (and negative) **Emotion** played important roles in relationships between consultants and clients and were part of the processes of *Engagement* in my model.

Engagement in the sense in which the term is used in Positive Psychology is absorption in a task, rather than what encompasses the interactions between two people as I use the term in my model. The absorption and loss of self-consciousness ('flow') that Positive Psychology ascribes to engagement is characteristic of how I found the deep mutual openness, empathy and synergy of being 'in relation'. Here in the situation of engagement deep down, was where I found that change is enabled.

Achievement is about what people accomplish in the world. In the consulting context, this is about what the consultant-client partnership achieves together. I found in my fieldwork that in flourishing relationships, consultant and client manage to form and pursue similar objectives, strategies and solutions for what they want to achieve together.

At the start of this inquiry, I made a connection between flourishing relationships with clients, successful work and the flourishing of consultants and clients as individuals. In effect, I assumed for the purposes of my inquiry that these three phenomena were closely connected. Whilst I think I have demonstrated that individual flourishing depends to some extent on the flourishing of the individual's relationships, in other ways my assumption would bear further research.

For example, let me relook briefly at the situation as it presented itself during the assignment with Bruce and Aisha I described in Chapter 6 on page 121. I felt that my relationship with Bruce had generally not developed positively, whereas the one with Aisha had thrived, so in terms of the relationships with principal clients the picture was mixed.

Some of the work I did with Bruce was successful but Bruce never gave me a sense that he thought it was important work. He didn't let me in to help him with other matters when it was apparent that we were not on common ground. In contrast, all the individual pieces of work I did with Aisha had a positive feel about their outcomes. I also had a sense with Aisha that we shared a realistic view of what could be achieved and we didn't take things on if we thought they were going to fail. Bruce and I were unable to do that. Overall, the work Bruce, Aisha and I were doing was frustrating; it survived rather than grew. Undoubtedly some progress was made but several major milestones were

missed. Along the way there were successes: new services launched, the approval of a major business case and the agreement of the vision for the future. But it was achieved much more slowly than planned and damage was done in the process: operational capability was lost and relationships were broken.

In terms of the individuals, overall I don't think Bruce, Aisha or I flourished during this assignment. Bruce moved to a different role and Aisha has decided to return to her previous organisation. My engagement was only a temporary one, but I had originally been offered a permanent appointment and in the end I was glad that I had not taken it. I think the situation the organisation was in, made it difficult for flourishing to take place. We were doing our best in very difficult circumstances, in fact the most challenging environment I have ever worked in. Aisha and I's relationship flourished in that we both recognised the reality of that environment and did not let it get in the way of a good working relationship.

I think there is scope for researching these connections further: for instance, a pattern I notice when considering the connection between the flourishing of relationships and of work above is that the more locally the assessment is made, the stronger the connection is. That's not surprising because there are many more people and more relationships to take into account in the wider organisation.

Mutuality

In the section beginning on page 46, I noted these questions arising from the literature:

*What do intimacy, empathy (both cognitive and affective) and mutuality look like in consulting relationships?
How far should a consultant go in living out a "radical" mutuality, with substantial focus on self and self-disclosure . . . and how the consultant manages the ethics and boundaries of a relationship that is mutual but not symmetrical?*

In my fieldwork I found colleagues readily addressing these questions. For instance Chris's experience in Chapter 5 includes the following answer to the first question:

Inside the space which consultant and client share, we could swap places . . . In the best relationships you forget who's the consultant and who's the client and you're just engaged with each other, you're just two people who are trying to solve a problem or reach a solution and you wrestle with it together . . . You are both, equally, emotionally engaged and committed. You enter into the mind, the emotions and the perspective of each other, and try genuinely, intuitively to empathise.

I found that flourishing consulting relationships are as much **mutual** relationships as the therapeutic relationships whence the question arose. The participants in my inquiry richly described how consultant and client reveal themselves to the other and are open to receive from the other. For instance, in a consulting relationship that is mutually balanced the consultant needs openly to acknowledge the client's take on everything. Writing of failures in therapeutic relationships, Jordan (2009) says:

If the therapist sends the message that she or he can receive and work on feedback about his or her limitations and fallibility, then chronic disconnection need not ensue. Unlike in past relationships, clients do not have to go into shame or protective inauthenticity but can stay with their own experience as the therapist stays with them (Jordan J. V., 2009, p. 42).

I refer now in **bold** back to the quote at the bottom of the previous page. I did not find mutuality detracting from the core agenda of the consulting client in flourishing consulting relationships: rather the essential **asymmetry** of the consulting contract was a reflection of the different experience and abilities the consultant brought to the relationship and that made him or her able to consult. Consultant and client have different roles in the consulting relationship.

I found consultants addressing the **ethics** of the relationship by embracing responsibility for their client and mutual responsibility for the outcome of the assignment. Robin made this point particularly clearly.

I found that the **boundaries** of flourishing consulting relationships were often simply described by participants as the boundaries of their assignments. The possibility of consultant and client becoming friends was an instance of crossing that boundary mentioned by several participants. My finding was that consulting relationships can become friendships and remain effective, but they need not do so for a flourishing consulting relationship to develop. Comparing the experience of participants Mike and Geoff, for instance, brings out this point.

However, in respect of coaching, as I noted in Chapter 2, de Haan and Sills suggest we should know if there are dangers involved in taking a relational approach. For instance, both my findings and the literature advocate consultants using their personal experience to enhance the mutuality of the consultant-client relationship. But how far should this go? As I showed in my relationship with Mike (page 102), not having much emotional distance between consultant and client can be enervating, even distressing. But writing of the educative relationship, Buber (1947) suggested:

The spirit's service of life can be truly carried out only in the system of a reliable counterpart – regulated by the laws of the different forms of relation – of giving and withholding of oneself, intimacy and distance, . . . Every form of relation in which the spirit's service of life is realized has its special objectivity, its structure of proportions and limits which in no way resists the fervour of personal comprehension and penetration, though it does resist any confusion with the person's own spheres (Buber, 1947, p. 113).

I wonder if it is possible to 'resist any confusion with the person's own spheres' when the person is a consultant and his client is in a type of organisation, for instance a small business or service outlet, where it is difficult to differentiate a person's own spheres from their vocational spheres. It might be particularly useful to consultants to research how to use the idea of a 'self-boundary' in their work.

Action Research into promoting and sustaining flourishing consulting relationships

I think there is more to be learned about acting intentionally to promote flourishing consulting relationships. The strength of the phenomenological approach is that it yields a rich portrayal of a phenomenon, but it does not directly address how this knowledge can be applied in practice. The findings of this dissertation about the nature of flourishing consulting relationships could however be used to suggest strategies to promote flourishing consulting relationships that could then be researched, perhaps using Action Research as the methodology. I started to do this in effect in Chapter 6 with my 'questions to hold while practising' on page 120.

A similar approach could be taken to addressing how a consultant and client could go about repairing ruptures in their relationship. This was another question that arose from my review of the existing literature in Chapter 2 that I felt my research had not addressed. For example, as I applied the results of my research with Bruce in Chapter 6 on page 121, one possible strategy for repairing the disconnection between us might have been to enlarge the ground common to us in a dialogue about the differing values and beliefs we held about the public and private sectors. The situation of this sort of disconnect could be another topic for an Action Research inquiry.

Researching processes of relating

As I noted in Chapter 2 (section beginning on page 46), Hosking (2011) uses the term *relational constructionism* for the concept of relational processes constructing relational realities. That notion infers that, in consulting, the consultant-client relationship itself produces useful knowledge. So in a mutually dependent relationship such as consulting that exists to generate ideas, relational constructionism provides a theoretical basis for promoting ideas that are shared. Bouwen *et al* tend to advance relational constructionism on the basis of its logic, and because of this it comes across as a somewhat cold, clinical theory. In the literature, I have not found any human stories that bring relational constructionism to life so as to draw people towards it. I sense though that phenomenological research could provide some compelling narratives. Taking a relational constructionist approach works well in my experience of consulting: no longer can I ever accept my own view of an issue or that of the client, but only a view constructed by us together, in relation.

The concept of relational constructionism helps me make sense of the way useful, effective ideas are formed when consultants and clients are working together. My practice has evolved pragmatically in the past into what I now identify as a relational constructionist approach. For example, in consulting assignments about business processes, it is normal in my experience initially to encounter dissimilar views about what processes exist, as well as various ways of identifying them and different means of collecting, analysing and presenting information about them. However, if the people in the organisation actively participate in the analysis and feel ownership of the process views being constructed together, then the processes become useful to the group as a whole.

In other processes of relating, my research did not address these questions from Chapter 2 and I think it would be interesting and useful to consultants to have more insights into these areas. So they are also opportunities for further research:

*What are the dangers of approaching consulting as processes of relating?
How can consultant and client go about avoiding or repairing ruptures in the relationship?
Is it useful to raise the client's awareness about the "here-and-now" relationship?*

Developing Appreciative Inquiry relationally

I said in Chapter 2 I thought Appreciative Inquiry was the nearest there is in current scholarship to a theory of flourishing consulting. Further back in Chapter 1, I introduced the notion of flourishing as 'mirror flourishing', citing leading AI thinkers. Those same thinkers have written this about flourishing and relating:

Mirror flourishing suggests an intimacy of relations between entities to the point where we can posit that there is no outside and inside, only the creative unfolding of an entire field of relations or connections. As Martin Buber (1937) once wrote, 'In the beginning is the relationship.' (Cooperrider & Fry, 2012A, p. 8)

So AI is beginning to embrace the relational dynamic in flourishing. But AI is applied on a large scale, at the level of an organisation and its stakeholders as a network. In contrast, the focus of my inquiry has been how 1:1 relationships work. One of AI's core tenets is that human systems are largely *heliotropic*, that is that they tend to evolve toward positive images (Cooperrider D. L., 2001). My consulting experience has been that using the heliotropic AI techniques of *appreciative questioning* and amplifying *positive deviancy* on a one-to-one basis with clients is also generative; these techniques contribute to the success of assignments and the flourishing of consultant-client relationships. I found in my research though that contemplating change also induces feelings of vulnerability, for instance in the section 'Peaks and Troughs' on page 78. AI focuses on *positive deviancy*, practices that are already successful in some places and could be used more widely. My evidence is that any new ideas, including positive ones, can easily induce a sense of being exposed, at least initially. Whilst positive images give people courage to approach change, every person's situation is unique and they have to make ideas their own if they are to prosecute them. Change challenges our sense of personal security by inviting a step into the less known – I described this as a personal experience 'going deep down' in the section beginning on page 129.

Relational courage . . . challenges the usual sense of courage as an internal trait, characteristic of individuals who undertake enormous risks alone . . . An RCT understanding of courage suggests that courage involves feeling the fear and finding support to deal with it. Thus RCT talks about the importance of encouraging other people, helping develop courage in one another (Jordan J. V., 2009, p. 32).

It is here, when the client faces the challenging prospect of becoming different, that I found in my research that the mutuality in the consultant-client relationship can support him or her in moving forward – see for instance Robin’s account of ‘accepting’ the client’s position on page 95. In AI though, the professional consultant will often not be the participant who helps pass on a positive idea; that would be the role of another participant and the professional AI consultant is instead normally in the role of process facilitator. So I wonder how AI consultants could stimulate more mutuality in their clients’ relationships with each other, help them to be more open with each other, empathise more with each other and change each other. I think it would be useful if this could be researched.

Appreciative Inquiry encourages us to dream, to extrapolate from what is experienced to what could be. I can imagine a world in which people pay as much attention to the quality of their relationships as they pay attention to people as individuals. Think of social media like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. All of them have profiles of individuals and the ability to register the individuals’ connections (relationships) with others. What would it be like if in addition to the profiles of the individuals, people could jointly (but privately) create profiles of their relationships? Drawing on my model of flourishing consulting relationships, these profiles might include their common ground, the way they engage with each other, the sort of partnership they form and what it does. If we attended to all our relationships in this way, they could perhaps be more successful.

The consultant-client dyad

As I showed in my review of consulting literature on page 46, consulting is perceived as about helping a client to achieve some improvement - in other words a positive change - and as Jordan (2009) puts it:

All change must be mutual and involves an enlarging circle of mutuality (Jordan J. V., 2009, p. 50).

Cooperrider and Sekerka (2003) offer another conceptual link between this ‘enlarging circle of mutuality’ and organisational flourishing. They posit a model of positive organisational change based on an assumption that organisations are ‘centres of human relatedness’. The model has the fusion of strength and activation of energy in the organisation growing, as ‘inquiry into the appreciable world’ and relatedness to others, also both increase in the organisation.

One of the angles arising from my inquiry in which I have been most interested, is that of the consultant-client dyad, both what it looks like from the outside and how the consultant-client pair jointly acts in the world. As my results show (see Figure 5 in the section beginning on page 111), this is often a feature of consulting assignments: the consultant develops a strong relationship with a primary client and, to others in the client’s organisation, the consultant and client come to be seen as a team with a common view and purpose with respect to the matter or project that is the subject of the assignment. The value of the dyadic perspective is that consultant and client can notice and work with how they relate to the wider client community in a unit, such as where parallel processes occur between their various relationships.

I suggest that the same areas of the relationship need attending to between the consultant-client dyad and the wider client organisation as they do between the consultant and client themselves inside the dyad. My experience is that it is particularly important for me as a consultant to pay attention to the principal relationships of my primary client with others in his or her client organisation and its stakeholders, what one of my consulting groups calls the 'HDMs' (Hidden Decision-Makers). I imagine that the idea of this dyad might be more generally useful in considering how 1:1 relationships affect and are affected by the relationships of the individuals and their dyad with all their worlds (Figure 10).

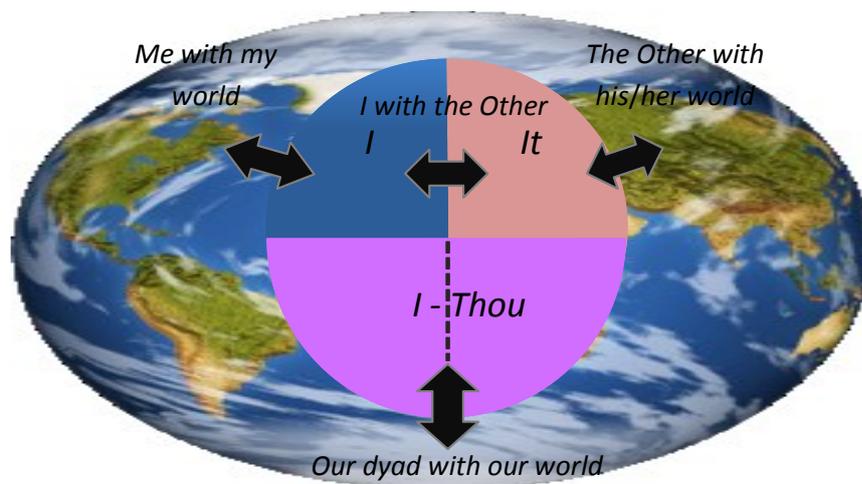


Figure 10: Us with each Other and our Worlds in both the I-It and I-Thou Attitudes

Expanding methodology

In undertaking my inquiry, I developed and used transcendental phenomenology in a way that I thought enhanced the insights phenomenology could provide to a relational topic. I did this by forming the synthesis of phenomenological descriptions as a series of dialogues created between the participants, scholars and me. The process I developed to form the synthesis was to sequence original data, literature and my sense-making within each identified theme so that a picture of it was gradually built up. Every speech ascribed to a participant in these dialogues was original data from my research conversations' dialogues – just as direct quotations were used for the literature. I found this helped me retain the sense of what was said with as much of its fullness preserved as possible as I worked with it and then represented it in a new form.

Phenomenology does not provide methods for applying knowledge, but as I described in Chapter 6 on page 117, phenomenology does advance propositional knowledge that can form the basis for practice. To support this, I developed my own method (page 120), a set of questions to hold whilst practising. These questions were in the form of a checklist for flourishing relationships with clients, which might help isolate features of

relationships that might be inhibiting them. I show how I applied these questions in two cases in Chapter 6 on page 121, and the insights they generated, which I found helpful. I believe the method I developed could be effective for other phenomena for which application is relevant.

Consulting today, in Cambodia

Today as I finish this dissertation, I am consulting as a volunteer to a Cambodian NGO working to reduce rural poverty. My main primary client is the Executive Director of the NGO, and other clients I consult to are the senior managers of the NGO. I live and work closely with them all in a town on the Mekong River.

So how does my inquiry affect how I practise my craft today, consulting in Cambodia? I try to look at the issues my clients ask for help with in all their complexity, both through their eyes as individuals and through the lens of each of our relationships. This is not an approach I see some other foreign advisors here taking and is not sometimes what my clients initially feel comfortable with: both foreigners and Cambodians often ascribe a particular culture to Cambodian people, and use this generalised concept to explain how issues have come about. It is as if the foreigners had not affected the situations and as if the Cambodians lacked individual perspective or agency. I do not find this formula profitable – it usually serves to obscure existential experience and provides both foreigners and Cambodians with an excuse not to address underlying problems.

Please look again at my model of flourishing consulting relationships on page 74 as I describe some of my work here.

I came to Cambodia in order to try to contribute to reducing poverty here but I also now feel a strong sense of being on common ground with my Cambodian colleagues over our values with respect to sustainability. Poverty reduction and environmental sustainability were already at the core of my NGO client's espoused vision and mission as an organisation, but the link between them felt theoretical rather than practical – to all of us. Two years on, we have a much better developed strategy as an organisation on sustainability. There is a consistent thread running through the design of our projects arising from evidence that poverty interventions must be sustainable, and that being in balance with the environment is the ultimate test of sustainability. The common ground I have with my clients has broadened as we have worked together on this issue.

My assumption now is that we have to 'get on' as consultant and client for me to be of any real help. I sense both parties - me now more consciously - checking that we are getting on well enough for us to carry on with what we are doing; I feel less conscious of this sense when we settle into a mature relationship and expect it to work well.

I am constantly evaluating why my clients are reacting the way they are to their situations and trying to meet them where they are, with something of value to put into

our relationship that means we mutually recognise progress. I don't think of what we decide to take forward as theirs or mine, but ours.

Often we will then work on parallel courses for a week or so without communicating, confident that our efforts are moving in the same direction. When the next obstacle or opportunity pops up, we get together and engage each other again in the issue.

This week, I had a long talk with my primary client about a longstanding issue - the lack of clarity about the formal relationships (ownership, reporting lines, and governance) between the NGO and a series of social enterprises the NGO has created. My primary client, and others involved in the issue, had asked me to assist them by proposing a structure that should work better. Having consulted those involved and researched practice elsewhere, I put forward a solution for discussion. We met for the primary client to hear my answer. His main response was that he would not have enough sufficient influence in the new structure over several senior managers who currently report directly to him. As he talked I found myself encouragingly relaxed about what he was saying. He challenged the model strongly and said he was doing so because he wanted to understand it as well as he could, not having any experience of such a structure himself. Having worked closely with him for two years, I had no sense of being attacked personally – I actually noticed that I didn't feel that as he was talking. Indeed, he did not suggest or imply that the model should be changed. Instead, his challenges pointed out to me aspects of the model that could be misunderstood, and where it needed elucidating for it to be better understood. For instance I undertook to expand on how shared internal services could be provided by one organisation to others and what day-to-day management meetings could be set up to ensure adequate coordination between the organisations. My client's lack of business experience is actually helping me to uncover features of the model that will be essential to the NGO working harmoniously with its enterprises. I feel as though I came away from the meeting with my client having given me something that will ultimately be of value to him.

In other cases, the boot is on the other foot. I might dispute with this same client quite vigorously about a proposal he puts forward and I sense him encouraging me to do so. If he is reluctant to change his mind, I understand that to mean that I can't see the whole of his picture or don't yet understand how he interprets it based on his experience; this provides work for me to do. When we have a way forward then we can go on.

The change in me

As I said in Chapter 1 (section beginning on page 7), my purpose in undertaking this inquiry was to develop my craft as a consultant. I expected that this inquiry would change me – indeed, as a practising consultant, it would be hard to argue that my findings could have no effect on my own way of working. Before carrying out my fieldwork on flourishing consulting relationships, I asked myself (see the sections beginning on page 15 and on page 58) what I was like in my consulting relationships and

whether I felt those relationships flourished. I found that I would privilege fixing problems, thinking rationally, respect and responsibility. I said I thought that none of these things were at odds with flourishing relationships yet they felt far from the whole story. The model I have now developed has given me a much richer understanding of what some flourishing consulting relationships are like. With this deeper understanding, I now feel more confident navigating the relationships I have with my clients and I have found that I am able to have flourishing consulting relationships, when the conditions are right. The dialogue with my client Mike on page 102 and the section above are evidence of this change for me.

The aspects of flourishing consulting relationships to which I pay most attention now are ones that in the past I used to avoid, telling myself that they were not necessarily rational things to concern myself with. I place my attention a lot of the time now on consciously empathising with my client. I expect the ideas we develop together in turn to enlarge my own perspective, in order that I can continue to contribute to refining the strategies we pursue. I think less about whether a solution is correct or incorrect according to some external benchmark and more about what could work for us. I try to see every issue the client organisation faces through the client's eyes, check with the client a lot and feel never more than temporary personal ownership of any matter. I notice times now when I make excuses to myself or give myself convenient answers when something does not work out the way I had thought it would - or just hoped it would. I spot myself going into defensive manoeuvres to avoid responsibility for reverses when from time to time they inevitably occur.

I am more humble and more able to share. I can even now imagine myself hiring a consultant - or coach or therapist, something I found difficult to envisage in the past: it seemed too threatening, too intrusive, demanding too great a surrender of my own perspective. I think differently now about the role of negative emotion. In the moment I am better at choosing whether to react to the messenger or the message, whether on the surface to reject a person because I dislike the view they are putting forward or deep down to trust their values and the meaning they are making of what they see. The part of the client that is missing for me may simply be what they can see that I can't. I try to see the part of the person that is missing for me and therefore understand why our disconnection is occurring. This doctoral inquiry has equipped me better to work with clients, contact with whom in the past would have often generated negative feelings in me.

The images I form of my world in general are increasingly about the relationships I have with others. The sense of respect and responsibility for others that is deeply ingrained in me has been harnessed in new and productive ways. And I have less difficulty now acknowledging my own needs in the consulting relationship.

We all want love, and our wants do not respect the boundaries of work . . . Yet many would deny it. But just watch them during their work day: What are they searching for, what do they respond to? Attention, recognition, care,

understanding, affection, glory, respect, appreciation, inclusion . . . They're looking for love in all the right places (Bellman, 2002, pp. 81,82).

Finally, I notice that the changes that have occurred in me do not make me simply happier. If anything they make me more sensitive, more vulnerable to being hurt than I was before. But I am finding more richness and meaning now in life.

Chapter 8 – Postlude: Transcending my inquiry

Introduction

This final chapter is written in response to my examiners' comments on the dissertation. The examiners asked me to reflectively critique my work in several areas and to ground it in my experience of personal attachment. Some of areas that they requested I review were methodological and others concerned how I had built on scholarship, particularly Buber's.

I have treated the examiners' feedback as an opportunity for further inquiry into my topic of *Flourishing Relationships with Consulting Clients*. What emerged as I did so was a theme of *transcendence*: transcending my experience as the inquirer and seeing my methodology and findings from a new perspective with a more spiritual element to it.

The chapter is structured so that the inquiry into my personal experience of attachment comes first and is followed by the critique. I intend you to be able to read the chapter on its own; it indicates where amendments have also been made to the preceding chapters.

Influences on me as the researcher

I acknowledged in the dissertation my personal inclination towards flourishing and intimate relationships. Maybe, however, I did not fully account for this predisposition or its implications. One possibility is that I have an unresolved need for flourishing and intimate relationships arising from my childhood. This could have subliminally prejudiced my research to reinforce my pre-existing view that flourishing relationships are important in consulting. An examination of my predisposition would therefore be worthwhile. Reason and Torbert (2001, p. 17) say that:

First-person inquiry takes us 'upstream' toward the source of our attention. This helps us clarify both 'where we are coming from' and the purposes of our inquiry.

Exploration of our biases contributes to what Reason has called 'critical subjectivity':

Critical subjectivity means that we do not suppress our primary subjective experience, that we accept our knowing is from a perspective; it also means that we are aware of that perspective, and of its bias, and we articulate it in our communications. Critical subjectivity involves a self-reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing (Reason, 1994, p. 327).

Reason does not say here that a personal bias can be eliminated or counteracted or that a researcher should attempt to do these things. Perhaps in the dissertation I overemphasised the facility in my methodology for an *epoche* to allow us to: "suspend or stand back from our ordinary ways of looking" (Ihde, 1977, p. 32). I wrote that *epoche*

was about avoiding “sully[ing] the process of evidence gathering” and “unencumbering us of the baggage of existing ideology” (p.58). *Epoche*, the first stage of Transcendental Phenomenological Research (Moustakas, 1994), is the surfacing of assumptions and preconceptions about the intentional object of an inquiry. The purpose of doing so is that these assumptions and preconceptions can be – as much as it is possible - laid aside, thereby less able to contaminate the openness with which the object is addressed anew phenomenologically. However, as Moustakas also states:

Some entities are simply not “bracketable”. There are life experiences that are so severe, intense, and telling, some things that are so ingrained, and some people that are so attached to or against each other and themselves that clear openness or pure consciousness is virtually an impossibility (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90).

My experience of personal attachment

I am therefore going to explore in more depth my attachments with *people around me*, the folk if you like with whom life has thrown me together both working as a consultant and earlier in life – family members, classmates, colleagues, neighbours and fellow members of extramural groups of various sorts. I am not going to look at personal attachments that developed into romance or deeper friendships, or the connection I feel to people in general (like fellow countrymen or the world’s poor). I will omit these sorts of attachments because I think they have different qualities¹. I will also exclude passing acquaintances that did not develop into significant relationships. I will begin with my family.

Just as my doctoral programme began I suffered the loss of my mother. The preceding masters course had encouraged digging into experience, and in the address I gave at her funeral I recalled family gatherings at my parents’ home in their retirement. I recollected my mother sitting by the fire surrounded by members of the family laughing with us: she giving us news about the goings on in the valley and we telling her about what was going on in our lives; the memory had and has a familiar, warm, happy glow to it. Even though I was one of four children, my mother was good at making me feel special – for example when I had a half-day at school she would meet me off the train home and take me out to lunch on our own. She would sometimes get cross with me but her wrath blew over quickly. I was comfortable and secure in her love for me as an individual and I have felt echoes of that love in subsequent relationships; personal attachments have given me many positive experiences.

My father was a doctor. During the school holidays he would take me to work with him at his hospital. I enjoyed this. He would take me on his ward rounds and explain to me

¹ This is to exclude three out of the ‘four loves’ identified by Lewis (1977); in his categorisation I am omitting consideration of *eros* (romance), *phileo* (friendship) and *agape* (unconditional love), and concentrating on *storge* (familiarity).

the tests he performed in his laboratory, teaching me what he was doing. I recall him helping me with homework and loyally supporting me at school events. He was patient with me when I got over-enthused about some idea or wanted to buck convention. I felt taken seriously and encouraged by him, and since then I have always valued such attention from others.

My sisters and brother were playmates, housemates and - all being younger - responsibilities. We had some bust-ups, but no break-ups, and rubbed along happily enough as a unit. Once I left home, I returned regularly on leave and each of them visited me wherever I was. As our parents neared the ends of their lives, my siblings and I co-operated amicably in caring for them and, when they died, we dealt with the practicalities without any difficulties arising between us. We still stay in touch and see each other regularly. Last week I e-mailed my brother to ask his advice about a piece of work and he called me back from a conference he was attending in the Middle East. I asked after his family – with me living overseas for a couple of years, I have not seen anything of them. I have at the back of my mind that something might happen that I might be unaware of and I care about them.

Nowadays, my wife and I have a grown up family of our own. Our daughter is currently in the protracted application process to start a new career. She is in touch every few days to report progress and she regularly asks my opinion. I want to help her and I want the best for her; and I am pleased to be able to support her. I share her joy in her successes and feel her pain when things go wrong. Our son has recently taken up a new interest - open water swimming. He is buying wet suits, doing training sessions and entering events. I can't give him any useful advice but I can show him I support him and I enjoy learning about his new interest from him. I am proud of him for trying to do something that is extending him, just as my father supported me.

At school, I got to know the other boys who travelled in on the same train and were in my classes. I enjoyed games and other organised activities, being with others, doing interesting things together, having a laugh, being part of a team - so I was disappointed if I ever did not get picked. I learned to value a sense of comradeship and wanted to be included rather than excluded.

In the Army, being in a group involved more rough and tumble. During one long residential course, one of us at a time was the victim of an elaborate practical joke staged by the others. In my case my colleagues conspired to turn my concern for them into a public spectacle ridiculing me; yet I joined in the humiliation of all the other members of the course when their turns came. On an operational tour in an isolated outpost, if one of us received a 'Dear John' from a girl he would put the letter on the platoon noticeboard for everyone to read. It was as though we accepted our vulnerability and made a virtue of it, an expression of our dependence on each other.

Nowadays, in the workplace a colleague might speak warmly about my contribution and I feel appreciated. If he is also open about difficulties he is facing, my trust in him increases and I want to help him if I can. Very occasionally, I fall out with someone I am working with and we become permanently *detached*: I can recall disagreeing with a

handful of people at different times over things that were important to us and us not succeeding in re-establishing much trust between us – I don't think there was enough common ground between us about things that mattered. Generally though I enjoy being with colleagues. I can't sit at a desk for long before getting up and going to talk to someone. I feel energised interacting with others: say delivering a presentation, in a workshop, writing a joint paper – these collaborative activities stimulate me. I hope I can give something useful to my co-workers, and of course *vice versa*, but it's more than transactional – I like the simple pleasure of being together, swapping stories and ideas, and going for a beer at the end of the day. I notice that others and I often prefer to do business with those we know, if we can. There is some sense that this could lead to a reciprocal advantage – “I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine” – but I find more often that we do business with each other because we are a 'known quantity', less of a risk, someone we are minded to trust because trust has existed between us at some point in the past.

Some of my acquaintanceships have petered out - or perhaps more accurately they became dormant and may be revived if our paths cross again. I enjoy renewing contact, hearing what people are doing and sharing my news. In the last few years I have been back in contact with someone who was a close colleague at the beginning of my career but whom I might never have been in touch with again had he not married the sister of a much more recent colleague. Social media makes this much easier.

Today when I meet someone new, I often have a sense of wanting to connect with him or her in a meaningful way. I am curious to know something about them, to find out what we have in common and to appreciate what makes them special. I want them to like me and I want them to be happy. I always feel a sense of anticipation at meeting new people. Indeed I enjoy all new experiences – not just meeting people. At the same time I might be a little apprehensive about going into the unknown. But when meeting people my sense of anticipation overcomes any apprehension. I tell myself that I should be able to get on with someone if other people can. And I have confidence in my ability to get on with others. So I consciously hold any anxiety in check and plunge in. I can't recall a time when I decided I did not want to meet someone I had the opportunity to meet. I don't mean I attempt to engage every stranger I meet in the street; I make choices. I have some sort of intention: a need to fulfil, whether mine or theirs, even asking or showing the way to somewhere. Often I make the first move to engage with someone I meet, whatever the context. I enjoy introducing myself to people – it energises me. I'm not fulsome though, speaking all the time: I often wait for others to express themselves to me.

I go down this week to the local sailing club with a view to joining if I like the look of it and arranging to take one of the club's boats out for a sail. I like sailing and my son wants to come sailing again with me when he is down with us. However I know no one in this club. The first person I meet though offers me a coffee, tells me about the club and introduces me to another member. I feel welcome. As we talk over the coffee, the three of us start to discover connections – jobs we've done, mutual acquaintances,

places we've sailed before. I start to feel comfortable and ask them for help to get me sailing again as I have not been out on the water for a long time.

I go to a networking event in the nearby city. People go to these events to meet potential business partners and identify how they could help each other. To spot these opportunities, we have to find out things about each other and our businesses. It's stimulating getting to know people, finding common perceptions and thinking of what we could do together. I also 'meet' new colleagues over e-mail about a piece of work we may do jointly. I'm keen to give them information about me that will make them think that I am a good person for them to work with – that I can 'bring something to the party', yet not too much information so that they consider me 'hard work'. At the same time, I am checking them out as well. I enjoy finding points of contact on which to build. I am encouraged to find that we are different– that we can complement each other's experience and therefore might be good as a team. I can't tell what they are feeling but I can see signs of acceptance and affirmation - or sometimes reluctance. I tread positively but carefully, judging whether to try to broaden the contact, usually hoping to, keen not to cause offence.

I particularly enjoy cross-cultural attachments and spent two years recently living and working in Asia. I spent some time with fellow expats, and enjoyed that, but I was happiest with my Cambodian colleagues and neighbours and their families. These relationships were riskier in that the people were more difficult to read and conventions were unclear, but getting close to people who are different and doing useful work with them gave me a greater sense of wellbeing.

From time to time, I reject an advance from someone else or vice versa. It could be that one person asks for something that the other does not want to give. In business, it might be that one of us is trying to sell something that the other does not want to buy. It could be that an idea is being pushed that one of us does not agree with. I might not trust them or *vice versa*. When I recall instances like these, I feel sorry that a connection wasn't made. It's rare though and opportunities for new connections keep coming.

Reflection

If I compare the experience I have just related with what I have already written in the dissertation, I notice this that I said before about childhood attachments:

*I think I formed a view early in life that relationships could **frequently** be more detached than I wished them to be. An eldest child, relations with my three younger siblings **often** felt distant – I think may have copied my parent's slightly strict attitude towards them, when they wanted a brother who was a friend. At my schools I did not make friends easily either. Not as extrovert as others, I would wait for gestures of amity from those around me rather than myself reach out to them. I thought and acted the loner more than others. Forming connexions was made harder because when I moved schools, to university and*

then Sandhurst, none of my previous social circle came with me, so I had to start again when others in these places already knew some of the crowd (p. 15).

These words convey more a sense of detachment rather than attachment, yet what I have now written (in the section above this) more often has a warm, connected feel about it. I want now to replace the words *frequently* in the first sentence and *often* in the second (which I have made bold above) - both with *sometimes*. The paragraph then feels more balanced and authentic. As I also said in the dissertation:

Many of my relationships have been happy and provided me with a rich sense of fulfilment . . . I feel deeply grateful for what I have had with these people (p.15).

So how do I account for the stronger sense of detachment in what I wrote previously? I reflect on two things. On the one hand, I might have been explaining my attachment to intimate and flourishing relationships by noticing the affect on me when there was want of them. That would be to agree that there is some longing for attachment derived from my early childhood. Transference could be taking place as a result of some specific incidents if not the generality of my attachments. Transference is:

That part or those parts of the person's highly individual, highly personal and largely unconscious loving impulses which is not being satisfied in her relationships (Freud 1912 cited in de Haan, 2011, p. 181).

And Ferenczi considered that:

Paranoic projection and the neurotic introjection are merely extreme cases of physical processes, the primary forms of which are to be demonstrated in every normal being (cited in de Board, 1978).

On the other hand, I might have been bringing out that - although I do often have good relationships - I have a sense of needing to 'work at them'. Before writing the new account of my experience in this piece, I carried out an *epoché* of personal attachment: this, if you like, is what I presupposed personal attachment to be:

*I expect to find that I seek human attachment and enjoy it. I think I may have to **work at** forming attachments - that connecting with others comes less naturally to me than for some. Perhaps this is because I don't notice the positive signs others offer me and because I am just less garrulous.*

By 'work at forming attachments', what do I mean? How does it typically happen?

When someone says or does something I am not expecting, or that I find challenging, my response can create distance between us. I may stop to consider the signals I am getting and during the pause I am silent and my demeanour expressionless. When this happens I think some people wonder whether I am with them, that perhaps I am bored or off somewhere else in my mind; or they may perceive me as not being willing to say what I think. My manner can even intimidate to them. At the end of this pause my next gesture can be more a cognitive than a felt response and, because I have been processing the

matter on my own, I may also have made several leaps of reasoning making my thought process difficult to follow. When I am in their place and others fail to respond quickly and positively to me, I know I can be roused because I feel unheard - when they may just be tired or uncertain like me. When I see others talking in a raw, unprocessed way, I can be disdainful that they are not thinking through what they are saying and spotting implications that to me seem obvious. I can be too fond of my own opinion. Sometimes I look in what others say for what I want to hear, selecting only the points that interest me or trying to find openings for me to express my beliefs, ignoring the rest of what they are saying. Or I take them too literally or attack what I assume their underlying suppositions to be. All this can be a bit off-putting!

I 'work at' these relationships by making the effort to say something when the right words don't come automatically, to show that I've heard and that I am taking what I have been given on board even if I don't respond immediately; I try to empathise with the other person and use the insights that provides; I try to show my feelings a bit more, but sensitively, so that the other gets a sense of what's going on in me without feeling threatened; I try to lower my defences and speak more naturally in the face of the urge to go back and tidy up what I've said. Nevertheless I can still be scared of what I might say, afraid of appearing politically incorrect, illogical, unvarnished, indecisive, offensive or overly emotional. Reflecting on this, I notice throughout that I am thinking quite a lot about myself: Buber's *I-It* attitude, feeling, thinking and responding as an individual. In addition my *working model* of the Other is quite fixed. So what about when I can get into the *I-Thou* attitude, 'in relation' with another person?

When the conditions are right and I allow myself to do so, I can talk and think at the same time in a natural way and I think someone else can find this more engaging, meaningful and easier to follow. I become less aware of myself – my own position – and more aware of where our conversation and relationship are going. It's like I think with the other person. So what drives me into *I-It* or *I-Thou*? In *I-Thou* I am open and therefore vulnerable so in *I-It* I feel I can protect myself and look after my own interests. For me to be in *I-Thou* I think I am looking for a mutual commitment, to know that I and the other can and want to transcend our individual positions and work together and that we will support not exploit each other in so doing. I think we also have to be close enough in our understanding of the situation we are in for us to be able to help each other. When the other person does not give me something I want or need, then I might revert to *I-It*.

Good attachments have generally happened for me, as I hope I have shown. But there could still be a deeper motivation subliminally influencing the outcomes I found. I wonder what else that might be. Reason and Marshall suggest that researchers should develop awareness of:

- (1) *The existential, life issues they bring to research, the opportunities and challenges offered to them by their gender, class, age, race, employment status, and so on;*
- (2) *The psychodynamic issues they carry, often the residue of unresolved*

*childhood grief, fear and anger which may colour the conduct of their inquiry:
and
(3) The archetypal patterns which manifest in their work (Reason & Marshall,
1987, pp. 113-117).*

I have been looking at the second of these, the psychodynamic issues I may be carrying, in particular the possibility of a longing for flourishing and intimate relationships taken from early childhood. But I also wrote in my *epoche* these words:

I believe that I want good for others and that I want to be of service to them and that this is part of why I seek attachment.

The idea of flourishing first came up during a conversation at Ashridge near the beginning of the doctoral programme. With the help of my supervision group I was exploring my motivation as a consultant and what I was trying to bring about in my work. Flourishing was the word I chose. The hope that I can contribute to human flourishing has sustained me through my long journey as a doctoral candidate. My attention is therefore drawn to the third area that Reason and Marshall suggest above we should develop awareness of: *archetypal patterns*. There is commonality between my attachment to flourishing and intimate relationships and the demands of my Christian faith. I think one possible archetype influencing my inquiry is:

The priest-healer – a vision of enquiry as an expression of the will to expand consciousness, to love, to heal (Reason & Marshall, 1987, p. 116)

In becoming an active Christian as a young man, one night I had a particular experience of feeling caught up in the wonderful and limitless love of God for me after a close friend invited me to pray with them. I can't put this mystical event fully into words but I was overwhelmed by what I felt at that moment and I have never forgotten it. It was a supernatural experience that deeply affected my soul. The experience changed how I acted: I felt I must to respond to God and I started straight away to try to understand how I should do so. I read in the Bible injunctions such as this:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: that someone lay down his life for his friends (John Ch. 15 v. 12-13).

Ever since my dawning of faith, I have felt an urge to more actively love - be charitable to - my fellow man and woman. By 'actively', I mean more than responding to them in ways that are pleasant, helpful or courteous. Rather, I started looking for ways in which I could be there for them in their lives. A classmate's relationship with his girlfriend deteriorated causing him distress - I sat with him for a long time listening to him and trying to comfort him. A difficult or unpopular job needed doing by my team - I would volunteer to take it on for the others. I tried to help others succeed and not let them down. I would offer assistance to newcomers, visit sick colleagues, and lend people things they needed. Acting out of love makes me vulnerable, open to criticism and being turned down, even ridiculed; maybe people take advantage of it to disregard their own

responsibilities. It has meant me turning down several career opportunities in order to follow a different star. It's certainly not without pain.

This motivation to actively love others is as strong in me today as ever. It was why I recently went to Cambodia consulting for two years as a volunteer. I respond to the love of God I feel by trying to improve things for others, helping them to realise their aspirations, pursuing their flourishing. Intimacy is a necessity for this in the sense that if I don't connect to another person at a deep, human level then I find I cannot perceive their wants and needs. That's to make a functional argument for love, but I find love fulfilling too.

I hope this account offers a richer background to my inquiry findings and my way of practising, sketching in what lies behind to make them more understandable and coherent. In undertaking this first person inquiry, I have tried to plumb my experience as authentically as I possibly can. I have wracked my memory for all the significant attachments I have formed with those around me in the workplace over the years, and the analogous relationships of earlier life at home and school, so that my account might be whole, not overlooking some vital experience that could still be affecting me today. I have read and reread the tale asking myself, "do I recognise my voice?" and "am I in anyway pretending or hiding anything?" When I have found a piece that does not ring true or when I don't know what I really meant, I've changed it to something I can offer as mine, wholly and meaningfully.

New possibilities

I set out to find in myself what may have influenced my inquiry that I had not fully acknowledged up to now. The importance of doing this is because my biases are integral to my findings and need to be fully appreciated if the findings are to be of value to others. I found that whilst I had some poor experiences of attachment that I had brought out in the dissertation, they sit in the light of a predominantly positive story that does not generally support the existence of an unresolved transference pull on me. However I did find that I tend to 'work at' relationships a bit more than some people and I have become more aware of this and how it happens. Indeed this tendency to 'work at' things may partly account for my choice of a fairly detailed methodology in the shape of Transcendental Phenomenological Research. As I will go on to explore in this chapter, *epoché* is quite an engineered solution to the issue of bias, and structure is texture taken through a cognitive analysis. My choice of phenomenology may have been driven by a determination to 'work at' the concept of flourishing, rather than undertake a less-structured inquiry that might have involved moving on from a notion that had grown dear to me.

Next I considered what other deeper motivations might have subliminally influenced the outcomes that I found in my dissertation's inquiry: those about the flourishing consulting relationships of I and the other participants in my inquiry, including consultant and client engaging with each other positively, affection, and a pronounced

sense of a responsibility to do the best for each other (p.114). I noticed that I had not given adequate weight in my dissertation to my inclination in my Christian faith towards responsibility and caring for others. This disposition may be expressed as an archetype, possibly that labelled by some the 'priest-healer'. This opens up new possibilities for a transcendental dimension to flourishing relationships. It may also have influenced the way I went about my inquiry in that my disposition towards relationships may have influenced my choice of second person inquiry. Being a 'priest-healer' also brings with it some traps I can see need to beware. For instance, much as my attachment to the flourishing of relationships might dispose me to do so, I should not ignore the irreducible *I-It* side of relationship in favour of the *I-Thou* side. And I should be authentic about when I still upset people or they offend me.

I am now going to see how this greater self-knowledge might inform particular aspects of the methodological approach I took and my use of scholarship.

Phenomenology as a methodology

I believed that by using phenomenology as my methodology I would be able to inquire into relationships very thoroughly. In the beginning the idea of a *flourishing* relationship was hazy and had a slippery feel about it. I recognised one intuitively in my *natural attitude* (Husserl, 1931) but not as a fully formed concept. The phenomenological idea of *flesh* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) was suggested to me as a useful theoretical notion informing relating and, with it, that phenomenology might be an appropriate methodology for finding out more about a relationship. With my understanding of flourishing relationships unclear, I wanted to get at their essence in a deliberate way and I was attracted to the formally prescribed methods of Transcendental Phenomenological Research (Moustakas, 1994). I thought as a former engineer that these methods had clear procedures, whereas some other methodologies, including Action Research, seemed to be more sets of principles or characteristics. On reflection, to some extent I was looking for a handrail to guide me through my work; I felt I lacked experience in qualitative research and I thought I saw a script to follow that could keep me on track.

Husserl originally expounded phenomenology as a philosophic system rooted in subjective openness (Moustakas, 1994): that to understand the essential nature of a phenomenon we can transcend our everyday thinking about it and perceive it afresh, as if for the first time. Husserl used the term *life-world*² to describe everyday thinking (Moustakas, 1994, p. 48), a canvas on which the phenomena in which we are interested can be identified but not where we can understand them properly – everyday thinking being too hectic and superficial for that. The alternative laboratory to the *life-world* that Husserl advocated was: “through reflection, instead of grasping simply the matter straight-out – the values, goals and instrumentalities – we grasp the corresponding subjective experiences in which we become ‘conscious’ of them” (Husserl, 1927, p. 23).

² Or *natural attitude* (Husserl, 1931)

Lévinas said that “phenomenology is the recall of these forgotten thoughts, of these intentions; full consciousness, return to the misunderstood, implied intentions of thought in the world” (Lévinas, 1985, p. 30).

My hope was that an understanding of the flourishing of relationships in consulting would be a contribution to knowledge of benefit to consultants and clients generally. Husserl wrote of phenomenology:

Its sole task and service is to clarify the meaning of this world, the precise sense in which everyone accepts it, and with the undeniable right, as really existing (Husserl, 1931, p. 21).

I was determined to hang onto the idea of flourishing of relationships in consulting because as a ‘priest/healer’ they are an important part of how I see the world. Maybe phenomenology gave me an opportunity to ‘work at’ my idea in the cognitive way I often prefer in such a way as to maximise my chances of putting some flesh on it.

However, Husserl’s underlying ontological stance is that there is an objective, real world and that the potential exists for all of us to understand things in that world in the same way. Phenomenological investigation was for him a project to understand the world better and a response to the limited degree he felt other philosophies had already done so. Yet each occurrence of a phenomenon is distinct in its situation: since some aspects of it may depend on the particular situation in which it is experienced - and it may not be possible to delineate aspects of the phenomenon from aspects of its circumstances - then it is not clear what can be objectified precisely as the phenomenon. The strength of the phenomenological method lies in its pursuit of the essence of a phenomenon; its potential weakness is in its lumping together of individual experience into an ‘objective’ synthesis which claims to apply to all participants equally; in practice we construct meanings about phenomena locally, socially and relationally from contexts that are not identical.

If we believe that other people influence the meaning we make of what we perceive in our consciousness, then what we know is what we know *with others*. Husserl recognised that:

It is within intersubjectivity . . . that the real world is constituted as “objective”, as being there for everyone (Husserl, 1931, p. 22).

Nevertheless his ontology is still essentially objective rather than relational; he merely makes room for intersubjectivity as an epistemological feature without recognising the uniqueness of each intersubjective situation. On reflection, I embraced Husserl’s phenomenological methods without acknowledging this root. Merleau-Ponty has also moved phenomenology on. He emphasized the *embodied* nature of our relationship with the world and described how that leads to the primacy of a situated perspective on the world. “The body is no longer conceived as an object in the world, but as our means of communication with it,” he said. “All my knowledge is gained from my own point of view.” Merleau-Ponty thus placed limits on phenomena meaning the same things to

different people. But like me he nevertheless entertained the potential for some common meaning:

“I perceive the grief or the anger of the other in his conduct, in his face or his hands, without recourse to any ‘inner’ experience of suffering or anger. But the grief and the anger of another have never quite the same significance for him as they have for me. For him these situations are lived through, for me they are displayed.” Thus, while we can observe and experience empathy for another, ultimately we can never share entirely the other’s experience, because their experience belongs to their own embodied position in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 cited in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p.19).

Transcendental Phenomenological Research is different from other qualitative methodologies in the epoche process and in its emphasis on induction, imagination and universal structures (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). One of the alternative methodologies I did not consider for my research was Narrative Inquiry, which takes personal narratives and retrospectively seeks meaning in them (Chase, 2005). It uses narrative analysis rather than the thematic analysis of phenomenological inquiry. Attention is paid, on the one hand, to the “narrative linkages” that a storyteller develops between the biographical particulars of his or her own life and, on the other hand, to the resources and constraints in his or her environment for self and reality construction (Chase, 2005, p. 663). Narrative Inquiry would have been less obtrusive and invasive; I would have invited research participants just to tell stories of their consulting, rather than illustrate flourishing consulting relationships with stories. I would then have attempted to do the work to understand the phenomenon afterwards by analysing their narratives. Potential participants may have wondered at what I was trying to find out if my inquiry had been this less specific, but I would not have influenced them with my preconception that there are flourishing consulting relationships and that they are worth studying.

Processes and Progress

Moustakas’s methodology provides processes (methods) through which phenomenology can be applied. I have also used this word *process* for my findings, but in two distinct ways:

- The on-going processes of relating I found in flourishing consulting relationships, particularly: dialogue, sustaining trust and influencing (using power) (identified from the lists of themes in the data on p.112).
- The processes of development I found in flourishing consulting relationship – finding common ground, engaging, uniting, and finding a way forward (Figure 4 on p.113).

My work has inquired into flourishing consulting relationships as an overall phenomenon, rather than as the phenomena presented by any of the on-going processes found within these relationships, such as trust, dialogue and influencing in the same detailed way; but what I hope I have done is to envisage how these processes fit

together within an overall phenomenon of a flourishing consulting relationship (for the relationships I investigated). Turning to the processes of development, my view became that flourishing is growth over the long term – a general *progress* rather than a repeating *process*. I found that my research participants and I referred to flourishing as a feature of the life of a consulting assignment or at least of a significant term of one. The link between the two types of process above was that consultant and client could intentionally build a flourishing relationship through a series of relational processes in which they got to know each other better and became more adept at working effectively as a team. (Of course this hypothesis fitted well with my predisposition to flourishing relationships.)

So when I wrote about relating and relationships I didn't mean the same thing. *Relationships* (noun) are the lives of connexions between people enacted as *relating* (verb) that goes on throughout the life of a relationship. I have paid attention not just to the moment-to-moment processes that go on as the participants interact but also their cumulative effect on the progress or growth of the relationship in which they take place. My interest in flourishing applies to the relationship, not the relating. And because I identify a single relationship between two people, that does not mean I see it fixed as either flourishing or not flourishing. Relationships change: the partners in the relationship influence and respond to changes in each other and in the environment in which their relationship exists. For example, in the dissertation Chris evidenced (p. 83) the effect of a third party to the relationship and Robin (p. 95) to other things going on in the client's life. Flourishing is more about the general direction of travel, the long-term evolution of the relationship being positive, in other words its *progress*.

Epoche

If I had accepted as authentic everything we participants might have said we experienced, then one of the main threats to the validity of the findings could be that something foreign had been introduced, something not *really* experienced but instead idly assumed, or a thought snuck in through the back door, because some part of our minds – conscious or unconscious – thought it had a place there. *Epoche* relies on the idea that we can bracket out these presuppositions and access what we really experience. As Husserl puts it:

We put out of action the general thesis which belongs to the essence of the natural standpoint (Husserl, 1931, p. 110).

However, it is a limitation of the notion of *epoche* that without retaining some pre-existing idea of the phenomenon under investigation then it cannot be recognised in experience. Therefore preconception must always be in play. On the other hand, utilising some of our awareness of the phenomenon under investigation may make it impossible to disable the rest of our presumptions about it - and to know whether this has been achieved. I wanted to be as open as possible to what I would find talking to practising consultants, reasoning that if I thought I knew what I was going to find then

that may be all I looked for. The existence of preconceptions is not in question, what is at issue is to what extent by acknowledging bias one can reduce it, become more open to what might otherwise not be perceived. A totally unbiased state is impossible. I was mindful of the existence of obstacles to knowing and attempting to surmount them. Another strategy I used was to draw on the perspectives of others – I talk about this below in the section ‘Participative Inquiry’.

Reflecting further, I notice how cognitive a solution *epoche* is to the cognitive ‘problem’ of bias, typical of my wanting to take an issue away and ‘work at’ it. Another approach to bias is not to try to reduce it but simply to acknowledge it as part of the authenticity of a subject’s narrative account – to let it reveal and substantiate the source. The authenticity of personal evidence, actually embracing its subjectivity, is surely what gives it its power to change thinking. Yet, as I have already said in the section above on phenomenology, Husserl’s purpose was rather objectivity. I think there can still be a role for *epoche* but its function is not eliminating bias. I would describe it instead as the preparatory process of digging through the layer of already known cognitions in order to access actual, authentic experience as fully as possible - yet never wholly as I might have implied on p.62 with the phrase “their raw experience”.

Texture and Structure

I don’t think I explained the texture/structure distinction as well as I could have in the dissertation. Texture and structure are revealed by what Husserl called the *noematic* and *noetic* dimensions of transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994, p. 31). Husserl saw the noema/noesis distinction as marked: “this cleavage. . . between two radically opposed and yet essentially interrelated regions of Being” (Husserl, 1931, p. 359). He said the noesis is what we make of an actual object, the meaning to us of its essential character; but that we are only immediately conscious of noemata [several noema] of it. The noemata are correlates of the noesis, “as such” the phenomenon is made known to us. Noemata find expression in our perception, memory, judgement, will and pleasure, and each noema has meaning immanent in it as well as in its noesis. To obtain a full description of a phenomenon, we should first experience the noemata, and then through reflection determine the noesis - first obtaining the texture, then the structure. The processes for doing so in Transcendental Phenomenological Research are respectively ‘Phenomenological Reduction’ and ‘Imaginative Variation’. I note that determining structure is a cognitive process that I might be predisposed to, whereas texture comes from directly perceived experience; so it is important that the methodology makes the texture of experience prominent.

My dissertation’s Appendix 2 ‘An example of a research conversation and its phenomenological analysis’ (now pp. 185 - 212) shows how I proceeded with Phenomenological Reduction and Imaginative Variation using the transcripts of my research conversations. For Phenomenological Reduction I started by highlighting the text that appeared to me to indicate texture. I took this to mean what the participant

actually experienced about the phenomenon of flourishing consulting relationships, as such they perceived it. For instance, one of the first indications of texture I found was the description of a flourishing consulting relationship as “friendly relationship but it’s a business relationship not a personal relationship” (p. 187). This did not indicate to me *friendship* - which could have been taken to be a structure of the relationship – but merely that consultant and client felt comfortable with each other. In general, I understood texture to be what was directly sensed about the phenomenon.

For the second phase of analysis, Imaginative Variation, the identification of structure, I started by looking for text that indicated reflection by the research participant pointing to conditions or circumstances, bearing in mind these assertions:

We find in fantasy the potential meaning of something that makes the invisible visible (Husserl, 1931, p. 40).

We imagine possible structures of time, space, materiality, causality, and relationship to self and others (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99).

For instance, the first text I took to indicate a structure was: “If ever I ring him up he’s happy to talk” (p. 187). This is a conditional statement: I thought it indicated that the speaker imagined - as a result of a series of individual contacts between them - that his client was open to engaging with him. The statement is not about how the subject felt, so not indicating texture.

Unfortunately in a quarter of the cases (nine out of thirty-six) in Appendix 2, I changed my mind about whether text indicated texture or structure when I was grouping it into themes. This must have been confusing to the reader because having changed my mind when I grouped the excerpts of text into themes (now pp. 204 - 208), I did not then go back and change the highlighting in the transcript so that it matched the thematic consolidation; I should have done so and I have done now. That I changed my mind might show that the distinction between texture and structure is not in practice easy to discern or perhaps instead that a few words can often indicate *both* texture and structure. For example, the first text I re-coded was:

if I was to try and define it [a flourishing consulting relationship], it would be continuing to work with a particular client as opposed to a client where you do one small piece of work and it doesn’t continue (p.186).

I initially coded this text as indicating structure: it makes the conditional point that if a relationship lasts then it may flourish but that if it doesn’t last then it can’t flourish. Later when I was identifying themes, I think I felt that this was too obvious a point to be worth highlighting on its own. Instead what I decided to pull out was that Bruce felt a *sense* – therefore texture - of the client wanting to go on with the relationship moment by moment.

Having re-examined my use of texture and structure, what have I learned? Although

Husserl makes a firm distinction between noema and noesis, I don't find in practice I can be certain which is which in every case. Moreover perhaps I fell into the trap of thinking that a text could indicate only one, not both. But it does still seem to me to be a useful to try to look both for the raw experience and for what we then make of it, and not confound these two. By looking specifically for each, my intuition is that I have more than if I had just said, "what is this person saying?"

Participative Inquiry

It seems appropriate that an inquiry into relationships should be carried out with others, and perhaps my disposition towards relationships also influenced my choice of *second person* inquiry. To strengthen the sense of my own participation in my second person inquiry I have exchanged *We/Us/Our* for *They/Them/Their* throughout the summary of findings on pages 114 – 115 and the diagrams linked to it (Figures 3, 4, 6 and 9).

Third and first person research were also options. Now having proposed a model for flourishing consulting relationships for the participants in my research, *third person* inquiries could be based on my findings to establish their broader applicability. *First person* inquiry's limitation is that it draws its data from one individual and so cannot claim that its findings apply to anyone else; however, great depth can be achieved by the researcher concentrating all his or her resources on just himself or herself.

My second person inquiry was limited in another way about which I am less easy. Reason & Torbert (2001, pp. 10-11) advance a "participatory imperative" in research, arguing that:

Since action is always interaction, the action turn in research emphasizes the participatory, relational nature of research. Fundamentally, if one accepts that human persons are agents who act in the world on the basis of their own sensemaking; and that human community involves mutual sensemaking and collective action, it is no longer possible to do research on persons.

'Mutual sense-making' is a powerful argument for second person inquiry. In my research it particularly exposes the one-sided nature of my evidence gathering into consulting relationships. Only one relationship I investigated involved both consultant (me) and client whereas for the six other participants I drew data only from the consultant. I am sure clients' participation would have been illuminating had I been able to obtain it. Consultants would have gained a better appreciation of their clients' experience, and clients would have been able to understand what their consultants were going through. New meaning could have been created from a dialogue between them. This would be something like Heron's *co-operative inquiry* (Heron, 1996), with inquiry groups formed each of a consultant and client together inquiring with a researcher.

Positivism, “I-It” thinking and relating

Positivism is not the paradigm I hoped to be speaking from in my dissertation. The ontology of positivism is naïve realism, a ‘real’ reality apprehensible as the same to many; its epistemology is objectivist and findings are held to be true, in the sense of generalizable (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). When I said on p.12 of the dissertation “In what I find to be in reality a complex world . . .” I did not mean that the world is ‘real’ in the philosophical sense that it exists independently of me or anyone else, simply that a complex world is present to me. Moreover, positivists might try to isolate and label one or two determinants whereas I have sought only to present what I have found in its complexity.

Nevertheless, I have accepted that Husserl took an objectivist stance. I believe that ‘flourishing consulting relationships’ are ‘real’ in the sense that the phrase expresses something that I and my research participants have recognised in common, but I don’t claim that everyone else in the world would accept this meaning as well. What I hope I have done for flourishing consulting relationships is to distil a description of what they are for my research participants.

I should be careful not to objectify relationships as either *flourishing* or *not flourishing* as was originally implied by the first words of the abstract (p. 2) and the section beginning on page 121. Not only do on-going relationships change but even past ones are capable of new interpretation and different viewpoints.

The *I-It* attitude may be taken to imply a positivist stance in the sense that *It* (for which Buber also meant *He* and *She*) speaks to the existence of an independent being. However, the *I-It* attitude is situated in particular relationships. Furthermore, Buber does not suggest - and nor do I - that we can stay in *I-Thou*. Instead his intriguing and illuminating idea is that we continually move between the attitudes of *I-Thou* and *I-It* (Buber, 1937, p. 17). *I-Thou* may be a better way of being with another but we can’t be in this mode the whole time. I experience something different and exciting bound up with another in *I-Thou*. Yet at other times I have to think of myself as an *I* with an *It*, a bounded person interacting with another individual. However close we get to someone, we still have separate lives to some extent. But that is not to ascribe to the ontological assumption in the Received View of Science (Woolgar cited in McNamee & Hosking, 2012) that objects [including individuals] can be said to exist independent of their connections or ways of relating.

I also see epistemological merit in both perspectives. If I were permanently to adopt an *I-Thou* attitude, I might need for instance to account for the agency, intellect and consciousness of a relationship; these are not impossible concepts, but are easier to understand for *I-It*. Since we are wont often to think of ourselves as individuals rather than members of relationships, then our thinking about relationships may be more accessible by providing a way in through *I-It* before proceeding to the more challenging idea of *I-Thou*. *I-Thou* is not an intersubjective construct as I originally stated in the dissertation on p.46 - the subject of *I-Thou* is the relationship between two people.

“‘Inter-subjectivity’ does not imply the *I-Thou* relationship, for many interpersonal, inter-subjective relations remain fundamentally *I-It*” (Friedman, 1947, p. xv). *I-Thou* is the sphere of the ‘between’ that Buber holds to be the ‘really real’. “‘All real living is meeting,’” says Buber in *I and Thou*, and *Between Man and Man* [Buber, 1947] again and again points to this seemingly evanescent sphere of the ‘between’ as ontological reality” (Friedman, 1947, p. xiv). The experience of individual people on its own is inevitably solipsistic (Moustakas, 1994, p. 37): thinking as a voiceless colloquy of the soul with itself (Plato cited in Buber, 1947, p. 30).

Is a relational constructionist perspective congruent with *I-It* or *I-Thou* or both? Hosking (2011) uses the term *relational constructionism* for the concept of relational processes constructing relational realities. She says relational constructionism gives ontology to construction processes. So do their relationships and relating define the individuals in them, or does something innate about individuals define the relationships and relating between them? I think both - inasmuch as we come to new relationships as individuals defined by previous relationships, then individuals are relational realities. And both *I-It* and *I-Thou* participate in construction processes defining relational realities: *I-It* between themselves, *I-Thou* between their dyad and other entities (this is what Figure 10 below attempts to show). Everything is in my view ‘relational’, sometimes obviously such as marriage or consulting; nevertheless although the relational dimension is always present and influential, a positivist with a primarily individualist stance might ignore it. In taking a ‘relational approach’, I try to come at a relational situation from the perspective of the relationship and its processes, rather than the individuals in it.

Given that I hold a relational approach to be important, is there some way in which I am compromising this stance by using phenomenology? Having the relationship with its relational processes as my unit of analysis is problematic in a methodological sense because a relationship does not have a consciousness that can be explored. The only experience available to us is from each individual. But that is not to say that the individual is not inherently relational and we can look for the relational evidence in individual consciousness – we can be relationally oriented to our experience. That is what I have tried to do. It’s another aspect of *participative knowing*, which I discussed above in the section ‘Participative Inquiry’. Participants can experience their relationships, sense what they are undergoing that is common to them as a team engaged in a shared endeavour.

2 dimensional diagrams

I recognise that a diagram - like any metaphor - is inevitably a simplification and therefore a distortion of what it seeks to represent; it may even infer that ideas have been confounded and reified. My wording of diagrams was also clumsy - specifically Figures 4 (pp.113 and 120) and 10 (p.145), which I have reworded and re-orientated in the dissertation and overleaf:

	<i>Egocentrically, as individuals (I-It)</i>	<i>As partners, 'in relation' (I-Thou)</i>
<i>Internally to our relationship</i>	2) We engage with one another	3) We unite
<i>Externally, in the world</i>	1) We find common ground with another	4) We find a combined way forward

Figure 4: The progressive building up of a flourishing consulting relationship

Recently a colleague drew my attention to the boundary between the *I-It* and *I-Thou* attitudes and asked me in what circumstances we transition between the two. My experience is that I transition from *I-It* to *I-Thou* when I sufficiently trust another to depend on them, because I make myself vulnerable in the process. I can transition back again to *I-It* if I feel that the other is abusing my trust. More often though, the relationship continues to flourish but goes into *I-It* over matters that we don't share. For instance, I would be circumspect with a colleague about non-work interests unless invited into that part of his or her life.

Another colleague asked what happens to the relationship at the end of the consulting assignment. I am in regular contact with two clients from the last few years and I would say that whilst we no longer work together – and therefore do not act together – we remain open to each other, offering each other our private thoughts, never doubting that we have each others best interests at heart.

Figure 10 tries to illustrate that in addition to the relationships we have with each other and our worlds in the *I-It* attitude, an *I-Thou* 'dyad' of consultant and client together may have relationships with its world – in our experience for instance others in the client organisation may think of us as one. In other close relationships as well people can think of and interact with a couple as a single entity.

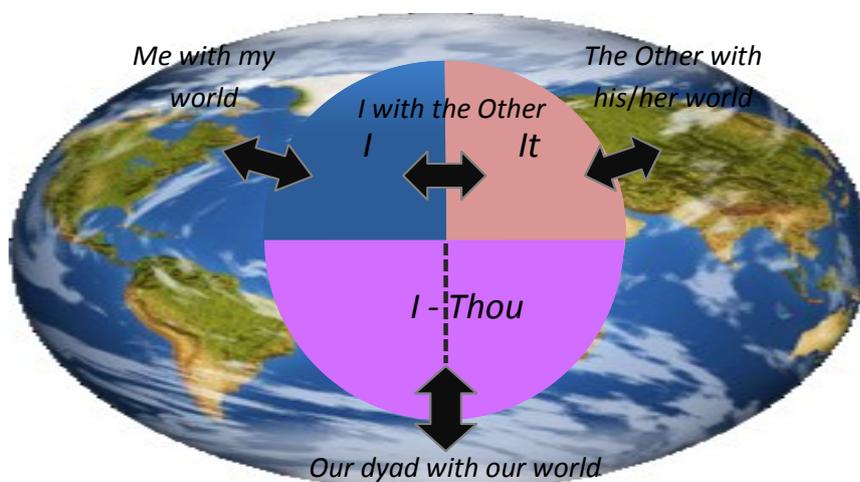


Figure 10: Us with each Other and our Worlds in both the *I-It* and *I-Thou* Attitudes

Buber and Dialogue

The participants in my research, including me, said their experience was that dialogue between consultant and client was a feature of our flourishing consulting relationships. I understood what we meant by 'dialogue' was that consultant and client listen to each other, respond directly to what each other says, and do so in a way that builds on each other's perspectives so that the outcome of the dialogue becomes a shared understanding between the participants. Bohm informed my preconception of dialogue when I was writing up my findings. He talks about dialogue being:

a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us. . . . out of which may emerge some new understanding. . . It's something creative. And this shared meaning is the "glue" or "cement" that holds people and societies together. Contrast this [dialogue] with the word "discussion", which has the same root as "percussion" and "concussion". It really means to break things up (Bohm, 1996, p. 7).

But what does Buber mean by dialogue? *I and Thou* presents a philosophy of dialogue, says Friedman in his introduction to *Between Man and Man* (1947, p. xi), the book Buber wrote after *I and Thou*. Dialogue is a *flourishing* of relation, says Buber, a feature of *I-Thou* distinct from the *monologues* that take place in *I-It* (1947, pp. 22-24). What is the essence of this distinction between dialogue and monologue that Buber makes? I think it lies in these words of his:

Genuine dialogue [is] where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them (Buber, 1947, p. 22).

So the 'intention of relation' is an end, not a means: the relationship is more important than what is transacted within it. In *I-Thou*, what we sense with the other party is an awareness of *our* shared self, and we then change together. Furthermore:

A man meets me about whom there is something, which I cannot grasp in any objective way at all, that "says something" to me, speaks something that enters my life (Buber, 1947, p. 11). What occurs to me addresses me (p. 13).

Buber seems to be saying that when we tune in and allow it to happen, we can use being 'in relation' to understand ourselves better as *I* and *It*, and that this is often more valuable to us than what we learn together about the world. Dialogue, Friedman says, "makes it possible to meet and know the other in his concrete uniqueness and not just as a content of one's own experience". *I-Thou* is an "act of "inclusion" (Friedman, 1947, p. xiii). I have a sense here of the way in which if I am not fully tuned into another person I discard what I don't want to hear or immediately understand. What 'lands with me' is only part of what they said.

Only when one really listens – when one becomes personally aware of the ‘signs of address’ that address one not only in the words of but in the very meeting with the other – does one attain to that sphere of the ‘between’ that Buber holds to be the ‘really real’ (Friedman, 1947, p. xvi).

And it's a two way process of benefit to both parties. I recently heard *I-Thou* described as a “relating of two people who [know that they] understand only part of themselves”. We learn about ourselves through our openness to another.

Dialogue is the response of one’s whole being to the otherness of the other, that otherness that is comprehended only when I open myself to him in the present and in the concrete situation and respond to his need even when he himself is not aware that he is addressing me (Friedman, 1947, p. xvi).

In comparison, “the basic movement of the life of monologue (*I-It*) is not turning away as opposed to turning toward; it is “reflexion” . . . when a man withdraws from accepting with his essential being another person in his particularity and lets the other exist only as his own experience, only as “a part of myself”.” (Buber, 1947, pp. 26-28). Monologue, however, can be “disguised as dialogue: in which two or more men, meeting in space, speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine they have escaped the torment of being thrown back on their own resources” (Buber, 1947, p. 22). “Monologue disguised as dialogue [is] absolutization of oneself and relativization of the other that makes so much of conversation between men into what Buber calls “speechifying”” (Friedman, 1947, pp. xiii-xiv). Alternatively, there is ‘technical dialogue’ “prompted solely by the need of objective understanding” (Buber, 1947, p. 22). But again in ‘technical dialogue’ “no experiencing of the *other side* [*I-Thou*] takes place, since here the concern is only with what is communicated and not with the partners in the dialogue themselves” (Friedman, 1947, p. xiii).

Within the *I-Thou/I-It* structure of my findings (pp. 114 - 116), I initially placed dialogue in *I-It* on the basis that dialogue takes place between individuals - I think then I understood dialogue as empathising with other people, taking their point of view into account and compromising. By empathising, “I give up my own ground for a purely aesthetic identification” with the other (Friedman, 1947, p. xiv), so empathy does take place in *I-It*. But the change possible in dialogue is more profound: I now associate it like Buber with *I-Thou*, which “goes hand in hand with remaining on one’s own side of the relationship” (Friedman, 1947, p. xiv) and there being transformed by others. I have amended the Abstract (p. 2), pages 114 – 116 and 121 accordingly.

Whilst Bohm and Buber’s views of dialogue certainly have different emphases, I do not see them as being at odds with each other. They agree that “the mark of contemporary man is that he does not really listen” (Friedman, 1947, p. xiv). Bohm sees dialogue as a practical device for solving problems: by suspending our assumptions and opinions and their pressure on us we have the opportunity to find new, shared meaning (Bohm, 1996, p. 9). Buber’s concern is more with what it means to be human and he views dialogue as fulfilling and authenticating the self (Friedman, 1947, p. xv). I am attached to both: practical consulting solutions generated in a living, mutual relation with my client.

The ineffable and transcendental

Husserl subtitled his treatise *Ideas*, “A Pure or Transcendental Phenomenology” (Husserl, 1931). The work encourages us to take a break from our everyday thinking about a phenomenon so that we can get to know it as it actually appears to us. By doing so, Husserl thought that the “essential features of an experience would transcend the particular circumstances of their appearance” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 12). In other words, transcending individual appearances of a phenomenon we can perceive the unique set of pointers to it and describe the kernel of the thing; like taking a ‘helicopter view’. This is also the sense in which Moustakas uses the word *transcendental* in ‘Transcendental Phenomenological Research’, the methodology on which my inquiry was based (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

‘Transcendental’ can also refer to the spiritual and/or religious, a realm transcending the everyday practicalities of life and focusing on our most deeply held beliefs and our most profound experiences. This is an area of human experience that is sometimes impossible to describe yet still knowable; in Christian hymns, God and His love for Man are described as ‘ineffable’. There was more of the ineffable about the way in which I and the other participants in my research referred to the aspects of our consulting relationships that I have ascribed to the *I-Thou* side of us. Some also reported an impact of their faith on their consulting relationships. When it comes to describing how we relate to each other when we are in a dyadic relationship then our normal individual-centred vocabulary works less well. Maybe in part we also operate in a less rational and more instinctive way. Buber said that *I-Thou* was epitomised by the relationship between Man and God, that God cannot be an *It*, experienced like another person; only our relating with God can be experienced, something like that which Christians know as the *Holy Spirit* or *Holy Ghost*.

Nuttall identifies a mode of relationship that is “spiritual and inexplicable . . . including the esoteric, mystical and archetypal experiences of relationship” and he calls this the *transpersonal* (Nuttall, 2004). He also talks about the transpersonal being greater than the sum of individual efforts. As I described in the first sections of this piece, the archetype of ‘priest-healer’ to which I am drawn may account for some of what I have experienced of intimate and flourishing relationships, in consulting and generally. I am struggling here to describe how I see myself: my love, concern and sense of responsibility for others and my ‘intention of relation’ with them - these possibly define how I hope to reach out to others. I think I believe that this transpersonal component is part of the make up of flourishing consulting relationships as I have experienced them. As I chose the other participants in my research, and we choose and are chosen by our clients, it may be no surprise that some of the others in this circle expressed similar sentiments. I have added the words “one in spirit” in the Abstract on page 2 to reflect this sense. The extent to which my findings are of value to others depend on whether they see themselves similarly or differently, as well as how much they are drawn to be relational beings and whether they believe that consulting can be useful without the

consulting relationship flourishing.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have uncovered more about me, the instrument of my research, *transcendently* in the sense of what type of person I am. Blessed with mainly warm relationships in childhood and profoundly changed by an experience of God as a young man, I am drawn to close relationships and I think of myself as an agent of practical love and fulfilment in many of my dealings with others - the 'priest-healer' archetype may express this idea: I have discerned a spiritual dimension to my research. This is not to say that relationships are always easy for me: indeed I find that I have to 'work at' them more than some to overcome my prickliness and rigidity. But transcending my attention to day-to-day interactions, I am aware of relationships and how they are developing, and most of the time I live in the hope of them flourishing.

In researching a relational topic I wanted to involve others so I asked a number of colleagues to help me by participating as co-subjects. This does not mean that I can make broader claims for my findings as Husserl's essentially realist phenomenological ontology might suggest. That would also be questionable given that my co-subjects are like me in valuing close relationships. Participation could, however, have been richer if I had been able to involve both client and consultant in each consulting relationship, seeing it through the eyes of both partners.

I was drawn to phenomenology in the first instance by Merleau-Ponty's idea of 'flesh', that which connects yet is invisible. It offered the enticing prospect of getting inside relationships and discovering something new about them. Transcendental Phenomenological Research then presented a means of doing so by standing back from what we ordinarily notice. This represented a considerable labour, perhaps reflecting my preference for 'working at' things. Epistemologically it involved accessing the detailed texture of our experience from our consciousness and visualising the structural patterns therein.

I hope I have shown how some of the pitfalls of the positivist lineage of phenomenological ideas and methods can be avoided. I have explored in this chapter how acknowledging the predispositions of researcher and research participants adds to rather than detracts from the validity of inquiry, making material more authentic and thus more likely to resonate with others and be useful to them. That is not in itself new. What I have done is to reframe the role of *epoche* in Transcendental Phenomenological Research from eliminating bias to making way for the uncovering of experience, preconceptions having been explicitly recognised.

I have drawn particularly on Buber. His *Thou* is a transcendent 'person', a relational other who could be either God or another human. This means that the *I-Thou* attitude has a spiritual dimension. Furthermore I sense myself to be in the 'priest-healer' archetype, seeking flourishing relationships with God and humans alike, which also plays

a part in the *I-Thous* I have. Yet Buber also points out that we live split lives, thinking of ourselves as individuals (*Its*) as well as united in relationships with *Thous*. I see a creative interplay here: relationships defining the individuals in them at the same time as individuals are defining the relationships between them. By getting this clearer for myself, I have been able to tighten how I have structured the research evidence using the *I-It/I-Thou* distinction. The value I have tried to mine in the case of *I-Thou* is accessing participants' experience from within their relationships, making use of an individual's capability to sense what he or she and a partner are experiencing that is common to them as a unit engaged in a shared endeavour.

By undertaking the inquiry, I have been able to transcend my own relating. If I 'work at' this idea in my imagination, I see myself sitting above the cusp between *I-It* and *I-Thou* for a particular relationship, looking down at the relating going on in each attitude at different times. It's like seeing a play alternating between two stages on both of which I and the other person are the actors. On one side each of us is limited by our egocentricity; on the other side where our attention is on the other person, we learn more about our selves, grow and flourish together spiritually in the process. I think the *Thous* I have known have even now helped me to understand myself somewhat better.

For us consultants, and our clients, I would draw attention to both the *I-It* and *I-Thou* sides of our consulting relationships. I hope the model I have described in the dissertation sharpens our ability to sense when we are operating egocentrically (*I-It*) and when 'relation-centrally' (*I-Thou*). Furthermore, I hope that my explicit acknowledgement of a spiritual or transpersonal component to the *I-Thou* attitude in consulting strengthens the model, recognising that the things that shape us most profoundly affect how well consultants and clients work together.

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Appendix 1 – Newspaper article on flourishing and relationships

Appendix 1 (The Telegraph, 2012) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

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Appendix 2 – An example of a research conversation and its phenomenological analysis

Conversation with Geoff, 5th October 2012

I have known Geoff (a pseudonym) for about four years since we both joined a regional network of small business consultants. Geoff has extensive experience in business and for a hobby is an expert on Georgian silver. He volunteered to help me with some research I did into the phenomenon of being a consultant in the service of clients at an earlier stage of my inquiry about three years ago. We had a research conversation that was useful to me then, so I contacted him again and he agreed to a further talk.

After I had been introduced to his wife and their cat, Geoff and I sat down in their house on the outskirts of a country town in Wiltshire. I asked him first what he had made of my letter explaining my inquiry. The letter had said this:

*The research model I am using is a qualitative one through which I am seeking comprehensive descriptions and depictions of your experience of relational flourishing. In this way I hope to illuminate or answer my research question, “**As consultants, how do we perceive and describe our experience of flourishing relationships with clients . . . and also what is our experience of those relationships which don’t flourish?**” Through your participation as a co-researcher, I hope to understand how you tell when you are in flourishing relationships with clients, and relationships which are not flourishing as well, and what the essences are of those experiences. When we get together, I would like to ask you to recall specific episodes, situation or events which shed light on these things for you. It’s your actual thoughts, feelings and behaviours that I am interested in, as well as the situations, events, places and people connected with your experience.*

My choice of research question was discussed on page 54. The letter also began the process of *epoche* (described in full in the section beginning on page 58), inviting the participant to focus on their existential experience of the phenomenon rather than their preconceptions and assumptions about it. The first few exchanges of the conversation with Geoff below also supported the *epoche*.

The transcription of our conversation follows. Parts have been highlighted, using four colours: these are the words that I picked out for subsequent analysis. In phenomenological terms, the words indicating the *texture* of the phenomenon are the *horizons* I can see for it, *bracketing* out all that is not relevant to the phenomenon. I describe how I use the both the indications of texture and the indications of structure in the sections of this appendix after the transcript.

An indication of the texture of a flourishing relationship
An indication of the texture of a relationship not flourishing
An indication of the structure of a flourishing relationship
An indication of the structure of a relationship not flourishing

- R Geoff, what did you make of my letter explaining my inquiry?
- G Yes, I struggled with it a bit. I couldn't quite figure out what to say about flourishing versus any other form of working with a client. I'm not quite sure how you'd define the concept of flourishing and I couldn't think of any particular examples or what have you about, but I'll do my best.
- R OK, thanks. Well, in a way that's a good thing because I'd rather come at it from an angle of you know, what we think rather than.... the way it comes to us rather than some pre-formed concept or theories about what it is. I mean, the reason I'm interested in it is following on from our earlier conversations, do you know what I mean? Two or three years ago now...
- G It's a long time isn't it?
- R Yes. My search has taken me in the direction of this concept of flourishing, whatever it is. It's become something that's really useful to me but I find that lots of people mean different things by it and yet, people find it a helpful sort of tag as well. So I'm just trying to find out more about what it does mean to people in the hope that it is something that's useful, beneficial, that they'll be able to help get to a more common understanding of what it is and when it takes place.
- G I mean I just, if I was to try and define it, would be continuing to work with a particular client as opposed to a client where you do one small piece of work and it doesn't continue.
- R Yes.
- G I mean, how would I define it any better than that?
- R Well, could I come at it from the angle of... can you think of it in terms of a relationship that you've had with a client that you... a real one, an actual one... rather than sort of a summary of all of them. A particular one. So you've got a person in mind that if I say to you "think of a flourishing relationship" your brain locks onto that particular client. What is it about that relationship that you've had with that client that you think you've tagged as being flourishing?

G Well, if I think of the client that I probably do the most work with and I've had for quite a long time and still do work with, its a guy called Simon. I guess it's a friendly relationship but it's a business relationship not a personal relationship. I don't know whether that's normal or not normal but I'm not sure that I would expect a business relationship to develop into a personal relationship. It might do, it might not, i.e. we don't go off to the pub together or anything like that and what have you. But it's friendly. If ever I ring him up he's happy to talk, he might ring me up occasionally to talk. Whenever I go in for a business reason we will often stop and chatter and natter about the state of the economy and the state of the world and things that are not related to the business reason of the meeting and I guess we probably do more of that than the actual business meeting. So, as an example I had a meeting arranged and we were going to go through all his personnel and do a salary review and what have you and he hadn't done the preparation for it and his PA who had the salary list and things had gone home. So, there was no point, we couldn't do the meeting but we sat and chatted for about an hour or an hour and a half. Bearing in mind that he's paying for my time I think you know, because the relationship works, you know, he finds that useful and comfortable and he's got somebody to talk to and he wouldn't talk about any of that sort of stuff with anybody else. How else would I define that relationship? It is particular as flourishing. There's no awkwardness in it so I don't feel any difficulty if you know, there's a piece of work I need to bill him for or anything like that... it doesn't get awkward or anything like that. We have the ability to disagree which I think is important so... and I can take the mickey out of him if I need to – which I do have to sometimes. He's comfortable but he accepts when I point out his failings – he knows what they are, I know what they are and when he sees himself doing it he, you know, he doesn't mind when I say... "well, look Simon, you know what you're like, you're not very good at this so..."

R This is great. Keep going...

G I mean and... so that's a relationship that's grown and I think it works quite well.

R If you called Simon to mind now what's the picture that you get?

G What's the picture? Him sat at his desk full of paperwork... too much paperwork and he's just messy with his paperwork and he prefers to divert the subject off business matters and I think it's important to allow him to do that. So if there's an important business issue to be discussed he'd rather – because he doesn't like to face conflict situations, and he knows he doesn't – he would rather divert the conversation off onto something else. So we might talk about his hobbies but more often than not he's likely to talk about the latest thing in the news and how many times... what do you think was going on in Europe with the Euro crisis and this sort of thing. I mean he wants to talk about these things so that's how I'd picture him sort of sitting at his desk, how are things, what's

going on and we might briefly talk about his business plan. He's trying to grow sales and he's got a lot of activity around growing sales and so I was in there earlier this week and the first thing he said was "oh, we've got a few orders coming in, it's going well". But immediately we started talking about something else so partly, he wants somebody to just talk about the weather to. And I'm comfortable with that because he pays me.

R Is there anybody else he can talk to right now?

G No. I think that's really, really important and I use it when I'm talking to clients on a more general basis is that they've got somebody that they can talk to about things that they can't talk to their members of staff or their husbands or wives or whatever and I think if you're going to allow the relationship to grow and develop, give people that ability.

R How does he do you think view you? Do you think he identifies as being... what he sort of gets from you, what you're there for?

G I think he genuinely values when I throw in advice on things and I would especially HR issues and staffing issues and so on.

R Hard stuff?

G Yeah. Hard stuff. I'm just thinking back to there was a sale meeting and he challenged his sales people and when you have a meeting, when a meeting... when you're working with people you've worked with for quite a long while... it can become quite open and quite animated rather than structured and formal and what have you. And when I'm throwing my ten penny worth in he stops and listens and you can tell that he's listening and actually taking note of it. So I think he values my experience probably in these things and I think particularly with people issues. But it's a small business, as I said before; he's not very good with conflict, especially with difficult people problems so he wants to hear how to deal with those things so I think he values that particularly.

R How close do you feel to him? You say it wasn't a personal relationship?

G No, I don't feel desperately close to him. He does a lot of talks. He plays the banjo in bands and does a lot of gigs and things like that and he's also one of these swimmers that swim in the sea, like channel crossing... I don't feel that I would go to any of his events or be invited to any of them.

R He's not interested in Georgian silver?

G No. So I don't think that we would connect other than at work and on work related, business related things.

- R But I mean the sense in which that connection is personal you know, it's business... how would you describe the connection that there is between you even if you, albeit limited to business matters and talking about the weather and the economy and newspapers and so on? Is it close on those matters?
- G Yes, I think it is. **We see reasonably closely eye-to-eye on issues.** Like our opinion of bankers and... but then I probably see eye-to-eye with most of the country on my opinions as to bankers. There isn't much that we don't see eye-to-eye on and I guess if the opinions had been very different, our views had been very different, it might not have flourished as well.
- R OK. Do you... are there occasions where you work together in front of others, maybe in front of staff or suppliers or customers....?
- G Yes is the answer to that.
- R I wonder if you could describe what happens then between the two of you?
- G How would you describe it? I mean, the example is this sales meeting and he and I had met beforehand to discuss what the problems were. He's got two sales people; why were they not performing, what needed to be done differently. We met beforehand to talk through how we wanted the meeting to go. I'm of the view that it's his business and it's his meeting and he should chair it and he should run it so he will run the meeting, always in my view, unless he asks me to chair a meeting or run it – he would do it. In that meeting we'd pre-agreed the things that we wanted to go through and what needed to be tackled in the meeting – in particular some of the difficult things. **When he started to drift off I would throw in say "well, actually shouldn't we be looking a bit closer at what's going on?"** Why it's happening? What do you think is going on Andy?" (one of the sales people) etc. And so pulling back into what we had agreed were the things that needed to happen. So **I would help him to get what he wanted in the meeting.**
- R And you said he listens on those occasions when you interject?
- G Yes.
- R And takes your view into account and...
- G Well he listens to the... I mean in that sort of situation I am steering the meeting. I mean he is a hopeless chairman of meetings, absolutely hopeless. He can't chair a meeting for love nor money. And so when there is a clear set of objectives that need to be got out of the meeting he will allow me to steer it

back onto the agenda if you like and so he's not just listening to my opinions he's allowing me to help him chair the meeting. Does that make sense?

R Yes, there's a sense there in which you sort of complement each other. You know, you allow your strengths to add to his or maybe make up for things he's not quite so good at.

G Yes, yes.

R I mean complement in the sense of sort of match up and add to rather than just telling him it's a good thing.

G Yeah, I think he probably wants me to help him to get the objective out of the meeting which would be why part of the meeting he's perfectly capable of running a sales meeting himself, he doesn't need me necessarily unless it's something that's a difficult meeting to be had and then he wants me to be part of that meeting to help him to get what's needed out of it.

R Are there other areas in which he's not so good at things that you're good at that you can particularly help him with?

G Well he's got some people issues. Unfortunately, I don't think I can help him as much as he'd like me to help him. He's got an individual who's very, very disruptive and has upset lots of people in the organisation. This individual needs to be taken to one side and given the message so to speak. He knows that but he's finding it very, very difficult to actually face up to doing that and so what we agreed would happen I do interviews with a whole bunch of staff and I think he was hoping that that would give this member of staff the clear steer that they need to sort themselves out. The problem is I can't do his disciplinary work for him. He doesn't do it because he avoids conflict and he finds it very difficult to sit down with somebody and let them know that they're not doing what they should be doing or they're causing trouble here etc, etc. and he'd dearly love me to do that for him but I can't because I don't have that authority and it's not something I can do for him anyway, he has to do it. So he sort of wanted me to by asking me to do all these staff interviews, I think he was sort of hoping that that might crack the problem for him but it hasn't. Do you see what I mean?

R Yes. It's an example of where he would have liked you to have helped him because he recognises that he can't do everything for himself. There's a sense of him wanting to work with you to overcome the problems that he's facing, issues that he's facing.

What do you think of the... well, I want to introduce the word 'power'. But I guess we've both been around a lot and it's not perhaps such a seminal concept for us but a lot of people feel that there is a power difference between one

person and another... between young people and old people or people who are very experienced and people who are less experienced and sometimes consultants feel that with clients, that there is a power imbalance – either with the consultant or with the client - that they somehow need to manage or at least notice.

G Um, I think you're right. I don't see it as an issue if you're thinking along those terms, if you're thinking is it a problem, I don't see it as a problem. I think it's real and it's there and it actually should be there and I suppose I behave in a way that makes it very clear that the power is his. The power rests with him. He makes the decisions. If we have a discussion about something and he says "right, well we're going to do this", fine. Whether I agree or not agree, he is in the position of authority. And I always underline that and support that in dealing with any of his staff or anything that's going on. So I make sure that everybody knows where the power is. What's curious, and I think I've probably only noticed this in the last three or six months or so, is I think his people probably think that I'm far more powerful in terms of influence than I am. I'm not saying they suck up to me but, I think they believe that I influence Simon and Simon owns and runs the company and that actually it's important that if I'm making suggestions or hints or what have you that they actually follow those up.

R Interesting.

G It is interesting and it's only something that's come about probably over about the last six months, since the staff interviews actually.

R Ah, OK. But do you feel at all, in your relationship with Simon, do you feel at all constrained?

G No. Not now. I think I probably certainly did in the early days but not now, I don't tread carefully anymore. But then that's partly me. I'm a little bit *laissez-faire* like that, what will be will be.

R Do you ever get the impression that Simon is uncomfortable with something that you're doing?

G Oh yeah. He's always uncomfortable with some of the things, not doing but saying, yes.

R Can you tell me a bit more about that?

G Ah, well, dealing with this particular staff member that I was saying about. I met with Simon... what I haven't mentioned is that one of the things he's done, is he's appointed a sort of 'number two' who is the general manager and it's part

of the process of him delegating more and you know not having to do it all himself, bringing someone on and I'm coaching this chap with him. What we've done over the last probably about nine months now, is he's got Alan, who's his general manager, more and more involved in things. So now when we have meetings it tends to be a three way meeting: Simon, Alan and myself. We were talking about this individual and both Simon and Alan were going "he's doing this, he's done that and he's done this wrong" and listing out what all the problems were and so my comment was "well you need to face up to it; you're going to need to sit the guy down and you're going to have to present all this back to him". I said "you need to list out all of which you just told me" – there was a great long list of all the things that are wrong – "you need to list all that out, get the evidence behind it and then sit down and go through it". He was very, very uncomfortable with that and I don't think happy at all that actually that needed to be done although he probably accepted that that's what had to be done. But he hasn't done it.

R Was he uncomfortable do you think because you'd put him on the spot a bit in front of Alan or...?

G No. It's because he, and I think he recognises this, that some of the things that I'm saying that he needs to do are things that he knows he needs to do but he doesn't want to or can't or finds hard to do. He's very set in his ways and I'm being ageist here, which I can be because I'm just as old as he is, so it doesn't matter – he's not comfortable with change, with modern technology and doing things new ways and so on. So when those things come up he resists them and doesn't want to do them. But he knows he needs to do them. And, he knows... it's really weird... he knows that I know, that he knows if you know what I mean, that when you're saying you need to do something along these lines and he's saying "yes, I know we do and we will do" and he knows that he won't and he knows that I know that he won't.

R So you've got some... you both recognise the limitations to what you can achieve together and you're sort of learned to live with those.

G Yeah.

R And yet in other areas you do alot together.

You mentioned that that relationship had grown over a number of years. You said you treaded softly a bit to start with, I don't know how many years but have you noticed it change in other ways or...?

G It's about three years that we've been working together. It's become more relaxed probably. I think we talk more now about the sort of general stuff. I guess I'm probably more relaxed about bringing up contentious things with him

where I might have been nervous about that in the early days, not wanting to turn this client off and get him to tell me to get lost and he's not going to pay me anymore. I think I'm probably more comfortable now with raising difficult issues with him, I think.

R So would you describe it as being a flourishing relationship right from the word go or one that you feel is now flourishing?

G Well, now that's the million dollar question isn't it? When is a relationship a flourishing relationship? I think we worked quite well right from the beginning. It was clear right from the beginning that he was comfortable with me, liked the way that we worked together and what he was getting from me and he signed up to use me for however long. But I think he's probably more comfortable now and when do you say it's a flourishing relationship?

R Well, it's what you think that I'm interested in.

G I don't know. I would have said... and I can't remember when I actually signed him up... but let's say I signed him up 36 months ago, I would have said that within three months I would have described that as a flourishing relationship because we worked well together, he was comfortable, I was comfortable, he was happy with what he was getting, it was a valuable service to him and so on. But the relationship grows as time goes on and it flourishes more and continues to grow. I mean, it might come to a point – I can't envisage it – where he says "well, so long and thanks for all the fish" you know. "It's been great, helpful, very useful but I don't think we need your services anymore". But I can't see that happening.

R Do you have any idea how it might end?

G I expect, I don't see it ending, but I expect that when it does it will just gradually get less and less involvement.

R What was it that you mentioned after about three months you thought you'd sort of got going, what was it that... do you have...?

G Nothing specific, Richard, I just think that we will have met in that time to started to get the relationship going.

R You got to know each other a bit, understood each other perhaps a bit?

G No, I think it's taken quite a long time for me to get to understand where he struggles...

R Yes?

G And the things that he has difficulty with. It's... I avoid challenging him too much. I mean, I could go in there and say "let's see, you've done nothing about this, you're useless at conflict..." but I avoid those subjects a little bit because he's uncomfortable with them, he knows he's not very good at them and he doesn't want to be keep reminding of where he's failing. He knows where he's failing, he knows the things that he should be doing but he's not doing very well and some of them he's slowly, slowly starting to deal with some of these things so I don't think it's right to just keep reminding him all the time of them.

R Yeah.

G But it takes a while to get to know the sort of person that you're dealing with and one of the things that are the good things and the bad things.

R So, what was the form of the connection that you established in those early days, before you understood his issues and his limitations and so on? **What was it that sort of bound you together early on do you think?**

G Oh, I think a lot of it was about similar views on things actually.

R Yeah, you said that before... in the business or in the rest of the world?

G Just generally..... in the rest of the world.

R OK.

G Let me give you an example that is totally outside of this but you'll see what I mean. We watched Bridget Jones last night, we watched the second video and she was at the Law Society meeting with this boyfriend of hers. Then they were all very rich and in striped suits and Lord this and Lord the other and **she made some sort of comment about well, I don't agree with all these stuck up conservative, bald headed fat old coots or something, and of course she's in this big Law Society meeting and the entire room goes absolutely silent because every single one of them is a stuck up conservative pinstripe... so she's obviously got a very different view of the world to this group of people that she's actually with and of course the story develops from there. In working with Simon, I don't have a very different view of the world to Simon and that was very quickly and easily identified I think.**

R What would you describe as the world view that you share?

G All sorts of things. I mentioned bankers and our view on bankers. Views on benefits and what people should be getting about benefits and how that operates and when news stories come up and we're talking about a particular

news story, our views are quite similar... I'm trying to give you examples but I can't with news stories.

R Are there sort of values that you share in common?

G Yes, I think so. I don't know actually what values would we share in common.

R Well, you've referred to some already I think in terms of... well, take the thing about benefits. Presumably that's about... is that about something to do with people need to make every effort to work for a living and....?

G Hmm, yes, yes. That sort of thing.

R With the bankers it's about people....

G Don't get me on the subject of bankers... and he's very similar. I mean I...

R Go on, I'm genuinely interested.

G I mean as far as the financial institutions are concerned I mean I think they virtually brought the world to its knees and every single one of them should be in prison for it.

R What is it that you both agree that they've done wrong though? How would you phrase it?

G How would you phrase it?

R Responsibility or something?

G It's responsibility, it's greed, it's don't give a monkeys about anybody apart from themselves and as long as they are making lots and lots of profit then to hell with the rest of you. You know, they won't lend money to businesses, they don't care about anybody or about businesses.

R I mustn't lead the witness but that all sounds quite moral. As if those are moral values that you're referring to.

G I think you're right actually.

R Rather than practical business stuff to do with the not lending people money or...

G I think you're probably right. It is about moral values and... I mean I have a sort of personal view that sometimes quite often in very big business people at the

very top are sharks and are only in there to get the absolute maximum for themselves and don't care about anybody or anything other than I must make as much profit as I possibly can and you know, if it means that 500 people are made redundant or 5,000 go on the streets and starve, I don't care, I'm making a good pile of money thank you very much. And **that set of values, we both think, I think, are wrong.** I also think it's quite common in small businesses that they don't have those values. Small businesses, in fact I was reading something yesterday or the day before, an email that came out, you know, small businesses work very, very hard. They do their absolute best and they're not in it to make themselves multi-millionaires. They care about the staff that they're working for and the business that they're working in. You hear businesses say, "well, I know I could sting these people for a bit more but I won't"... and Simon's like it, you know, he'll have customers who are not very good payers and he'll say well I know that they're struggling a bit at the moment so we'll let it go for a while 'cos I know this bloke and I've known him for years... and those attitudes are the right attitudes compared to the other attitudes.

R That's fascinating, thank you.

G I think **we both share those sorts of views.**

R You mean, you and me?

G No, no... **I mean Simon and I.**

R Could I just reverse the thing now? Tell me about a relationship which hasn't flourished? Again, think of a client, an assignment you know, a relationship there that didn't flourish. What... where do you go to? What's the situation?

G The only one I can think of that I thought was going to turn into something that it didn't was a piece of work that I did for a client, they were a building consultant, project management, architect type firm. I did a one off piece of work for him which looked at his business and what his goals and objectives were and all the things that he needed to do and all the rest of it. Drew up a management action plan for him and I had hoped and anticipated that we would work together to make it all happen and he seemed very grateful for, and liked what it was that I did, but then didn't want to take it any further. And I haven't the faintest idea why. I don't know what stopped it going forward.

R What did he say when you gave it to him?

G Well, I gave it all to him and I said well from here on the next step is shall we have a meeting to see how you're progressing with it and he said "well, let's see how I get on and I'll let you know", or something like that. He didn't specifically say "oh, no, I don't think we need to..." he didn't sort of say no. In fact we had a

meeting diarised and I sort of rung up a couple of days before and he said “oh, no I’ve got something else on” and it never actually happened. So it just died. I don’t know what it was. I thought in terms of what needed to be done in his business; I thought what had come out of that initial review was all good stuff. He seemed to think it was all good stuff, or I thought he did, so I don’t know whether it was what that was or whether he just didn’t want an adviser of whether he didn’t think he could work with me... I really don’t know.

R Is that the worst that’s happened?

G Well, it’s the only one I can think of that’s died a death like that.

R Does that mean that everything else has sort of gone much better or that you’ve been able to pick up the signs straight away that you weren’t going to work, that it wasn’t going to go anywhere or... I mean most people get quite a few kind of situations where they...

G I do get quite a lot of leads. There was one, it was a very small company, a packaging company in Bristol and I met with them and we had a superb discussion sat in their little office. There was father and son, the son was taking over the business from the father... what they needed to do, and they kept saying during the meeting and even afterwards “well, it was great, it was really helpful, that was really useful, that was superb. Thank you very much for all of that insight and help” and what have you but when it came to ok, well shall we come in and do this – ‘cos that was unpaid, the first meeting – they didn’t want to do anything going forward. I think that was a money thing. That was quite a small company and didn’t like the idea of having to pay £650 per day for my time going forward. I think that happens quite a lot but it seems people hear what it’s going to cost they switch off and don’t want to do it much as they might like the idea.

R Have there been instances where you’ve decided that a relationship that you’ve had with a client wasn’t flourishing and that you wanted to end it or...?

G Well, that’s a really interesting one because it only happened in the last two or three days, that’s really interesting. I got a lead come through and it was a company in Bath. He’s a one man band and he’s trying to set up his company and he wants some interim coaching and what have you to help him set his company up and all the rest of it. I had about a 20 or 30 minute conversation with him on the phone and he sent me his business plan and I had a look at it and I don’t think I really want to work with him and so I did it this morning: I emailed him back and, I mean I haven’t emailed him back and said I don’t want to take this any further, but I’ve emailed back and said I’ve had a look at the business plan, I’ve got some comments on that, I’m happy to have the one hour meeting to go through that with you free of charge and then I said something

like... but I understand that costs can be a constraint particularly when your first starting up in business and therefore I quite understand if you decide that you don't want to take this any further.

R But what was it that you didn't like about it?

G I don't know. I really don't know Richard. I did not click with him on the phone – it was only a phone conversation.

R So it wasn't a plan, it was the personal chemistry or something...?

G Yeah. I didn't click with him on the phone. I really don't think he's got much idea and I... I mean I think he probably wants something for nothing anyway and I'm not that hard up if you like, that I'm going to try and try and try. I'm not that desperate to... and I don't think the guy's got much hope really and I sort of doubt that he'll want to hear that either. He won't want to hear I don't think, my thoughts and views on... I mean his business plan wasn't wonderful and I don't think he'll want to hear that. I don't know, I just didn't warm to him over the phone.

R You could see a prospect of you being able to connect sufficiently to do something worthwhile together or...?

G No. That's right.

R Am I there or...?

G Yes. I mean he might come back and say... he might want a little bit of work out of me.

R What if he did, how would you react to that?

G Well that's the curious thing. I probably will but I won't work at the relationship. At the moment my view is that I won't try to develop it. I won't try to connect with him if you like, unless my first opinions are wrong and at our first meeting we get on a bit better and you know, if it is wrong then fine but I'll be more prepared if he wants me to do something I'll do it and then I won't be offering to do more stuff afterwards.

R So you want to get something back from him in a way?

G I suppose so. I'm not quite sure what though. Don't ask me what! I want to enjoy what I'm doing.

- R And what would you enjoy in this situation? What could he give you that you like?
- G I don't know. I don't know what it is. I can't think of anything. I don't know, how do you describe that you're getting on well in terms of a relationship in a business relationship and that you want to work together going forward versus a relationship where you don't particularly want to – sometimes you have to – you have to work with a particular individual and it's not a question of liking the individual so much – I work with people I don't necessarily like – but it's about respect perhaps, it's about... you said getting something from it... I don't know what I would get from it strictly.
- R What occurred to me was about the respect, it's something that he would be valuing your opinion. If he demonstrated in some way that he valued your opinion, that he was going to take your opinion, your professional opinion, on his position or his ideas into account, that that might...
- G No. I think yes it might help but I don't think that's – that's not the major thing at all. No. It's not that. It's... I don't know how you'd describe it... **it's about coming away from working with somebody feeling that you enjoyed it. I can't think of any other way to describe it than enjoyed. You know. Sometimes you come away from things and you think you've done something good, that you've helped them, that they're going to get some value out** of it because you've given them a bit of advice or whatever it is and you have a eureka moment or something, you say oh, yeah, right I'll do that – sometimes it's that – I'm not sure it's even that but it's with this chap. I don't know why it is, it's about clicking with people and I don't click with this bloke at all.
- R Thanks for having a go.
- G I can't come up with anything more on it!
- R Are there other relationships that you'd also describe as having flourished in the past maybe that are still going on? That might give a different dimension to...?
- G Well, one of the different dimensions is that sometimes relationships go up and down like that. **I have one client that I've been working on and off with over quite a long period of time and the off periods aren't because we're not getting on, it's because there's nothing particular that we need to do together.** And then, there will be an on period when he might ring me up and say oh, can we talk about... yeah, sure and I react and we meet and we discuss and we have a little on period for a little while. So I think you can have relationships that are on-off like that where, I guess, I'm seen as a sort of resource that's sitting in the background there that every now and then he'll pull on it and use it and I'm quite comfortable with that. I don't get paid as much but actually for him, that's

a valuable tool to have and that's the way he wants to do it, that's the way he wants to work. So, yeah, I have one client that I operate like that with.

R So there's something that once established is there whether you're in contact or not so the strength of the relationship doesn't just depend on how often you talk to each other. It's about when he needs you that you'll be able to be there and be there to help him.

G A good example with him; I guess I hadn't spoken to him probably for about three months and this was about a fortnight before the Olympics, when was that? Mid-August?

R Beginning of August.

G Beginning of August. And he rang me up and I hadn't spoken to him for about three months and he said "I've got a bit of a problem Geoff, can we have a chat, can we talk about it?" and I said "Yes, no problem David, when do you want to do it, I can be free..." And I saw him the next day. And I think that it's really important that I try and make myself as available as possible with clients who do that. So I saw him the next day and he went through all of his problem with me and he was completely over the moon with what came out of it... absolutely over the moon with it.

What it was is that he did a piece of work for a big... a customer who are a very big organisation. He'd done this piece of work about three years ago, installed this stuff then the maintenance contract had been let to another company and it all started to go wrong. The big company came back to him and said this stuff that you put in is no good and we want the money from you under warranty. And his response back was well, the warranty only works if you are operating it in the way that you're supposed to operate it and I'm not in control of how you operate it, I know for a fact that you haven't operated it the way you should have operated it, therefore there is no validity to the warranty. They are a very big company, he's a small company and he'd gone to a meeting with their manager and they wanted to claim £9,000 off of him as compensation for this kit not working properly. He was very unhappy and he felt he was being bullied by a big company and he'd had a meeting with them and well, originally it was £36,000 and they talked it down and agreed on £9,000, he was very unhappy with that and he arranged a meeting with a senior director up in London and I said, "well would you like me to come with you David? I'll come with you" and he said "yes, that will be great". It was a big relief for him. So we went through all the detail, preparing our case and all the rest of it. Went up to this meeting in London, he and I. We set off at 5.30 in the morning, went up in his car and tube... I spent all the morning with him and all the rest of it. The meeting lasted 35 minutes and out of the meeting they not only dropped the £9,000 that they wanted from him but they'd also commissioned a £5,000 piece of work from

him to fix it and also if he fixed it right then he could do it for the other 15 units which would be another £75,000 worth. So, we went into the meeting thinking he was being stung for £9,000 and came out of the meeting with a £5,000 order and a potential £75,000. I was satisfied, he was over the moon with it, absolutely over the moon and the really curious thing was, although neither of us mentioned it in the meeting, this senior director said at the end of the meeting he said "I'd just like you to know, we're not in the business of bullying people at all, bullying small companies. We want to support small companies". We hadn't even touched on that....So he got, and I felt great about it you know. Because he had his business advisor with him in his pinstripe suit and all the rest of it, I wasn't a lawyer – they threatened lawyers – I wasn't a lawyer, they didn't have lawyers there so it wasn't that kind of meeting – but he recognised suddenly additional value to having a business adviser working with him.

R Great.

G Oh, it was really satisfying that. It's an example where, I hadn't spoken to the guy for three months so he'd rung me up and we'd done this and he got a cracking result out of it and it made me feel good as well to be able to do that for him.

R And everyone's won 'cos his customer thinks more of him now as well.

G Yes, yes. It's... what a lot of small businesses are like actually Richard is that, him in particular but others as well, they are afraid of big companies and they allow themselves to be walked all over by big companies. But I've worked with big companies before and I don't have any fear of big companies, in fact, I have the reverse because I know how they work and so I think it's actually something that a business adviser can bring to small businesses that's not as easily defined but is a very valuable thing to have. And this one I've just explained is just one example of it but a link into big organisations.

R And equalising that power imbalance that we all feel.

G Absolutely, yes.

R OK, that's great, thanks. How are we for time? Is there anything else you're bursting to tell me about or...? I found that extremely useful, you're giving me what I needed.

G Good, I wasn't sure that I would be but...

R You have. Can I ask you lastly then, what's it been like talking to me?

G Oh, fine, yes.

- R Have you enjoyed it?
- G No, I don't find it enjoyable 'cos it's difficult. I find it quite difficult to be able to think of what it is that might help but it's nice to get the feedback that says, yes, that is what I wanted, so that's great. If it can be useful, what you're doing, then I'm happy if that makes sense.
- R Yes.
- G I mean I wouldn't want to feel that you've sort of gone away and you know, you've had an hour and you've listened to all of this and actually there's almost nothing in there that's relevant.
- R There's no chance of that.
- G No. I think it's important that what I've given you is going to be of help. I hope it is anyway.
- R Well that's brilliant thank you but I suppose I'm wondering what you've got out of it? Not that you've necessarily have got alot out of it but...
- G Well I wasn't expecting to get anything out of it no. No, I've come at it more giving rather than getting which is what I thought it was about. I guess I should probably start thinking a little bit about are the relationships flourishing and what I'm doing to help it flourish or not flourish. I don't know. No, what I'll get out of it will be a look at your papers and whatever it is you produce at the back of it and I'll be interested in that.
- R Do you remember anything about the last time we talked? When I popped up on your radar again, what did you remember about the last time we talked, if anything?
- G I remember I was called, in your paper you called me something... I think I was Jack and the other on Norman or something, I don't know...
- R You were Norman.
- G And I remember being able to recognise which one I was quite easily. I'll be honest, I can't remember what was in the paper too much, which is sort of a bit disappointing perhaps. I remember the meeting and I remember sitting in your kitchen or whatever it was and your tape recorder and getting that working...
- R Yes, I've got a better one now. Well, I hope that I've come a long way since then. I think I'm examining something that's alot more interesting and useful

now than I was before. I had this vague concept before of service and what that might mean but I think I've now found something that is much more meaningful to me about my work and I... so that's why I'm trying to see if it's as... what it means to other people as well and in the course of looking or talking to, it's going to be about eight people altogether in this round, I'll see what sort of kind or synergy or common ground there is between those people's views and my views about flourishing relationships with clients.

G I don't know, but I sort of suspect you'll get a lot of similarity actually between people in terms of how you build relationships to flourish going forward. I mean I might be completely wrong and I wouldn't dare to predefine what your results are going to be, but I would have thought that similar mindset thing, I think is going to be quite important and I would expect, I would assume, that you'll get a lot of that from people.

R Well, you will find out. You're only number two at the moment and even, I was working on number one's script on the train coming down here, and I've got a lot of work still to do, there's an enormous amount that you can pull out of this and I've been learning about how to do that in the last year or so. In order to identify the themes and so on and underpinning it all but I will pull it all together and my hope is that it's not just of value to me but to others as well. This is something which sounds as though it's really quite important and yet, there isn't much sort of written about it or trained about it. People tend to concentrate on how to write a business plan or some other concept...

G I don't know... I think we do it but we do it subconsciously to an extent and I think especially as you get older and greyer and more experienced at working with people and building relationships with people, especially business relationships. I think you do a lot of this stuff subconsciously and so it would be very interesting to see that subconscious stuff pulled out and – explicit is a good word – you know, defined as to what it is. So I think it will be really interesting.

R Great. Good. Thank you.

[End of conversation]

Phenomenological Reduction and Textural Description

In the process of phenomenological reduction, the phrases used by the participants about the phenomenon are all given equal weight: in other words repetition is not, on its own, taken to imply greater importance (this procedure is known as delimiting). Then themes are identified: phrases that are closely connected are grouped and given labels. This is a process of ideation, standing back a little way in order to see all of the data, reflecting on the meanings found, and being able to distil out their essence.

Here, shown in **green text**, are the themes I identify in the texture of Geoff's experience of flourishing relationships with clients, and, under each theme, the horizons (highlighted in the text of the transcript in **green** and **red** – red indicating converses of horizons).

Being in a flourishing relationship with his client, means to Geoff that their relationship grows (although they are not necessarily together regularly)

would be continuing to work with a particular client as opposed to a client where you do one small piece of work and it doesn't continue (p. 186)

a relationship that's grown and I think it works quite well (p. 187)

I think I probably certainly did [feel constrained] in the early days but not now, I don't tread carefully anymore (p. 191)

I think we talk more now about the sort of general stuff. I guess I'm probably more relaxed about bringing up contentious things with him where I might have been nervous about that in the early days, not wanting to turn this client off and get him to tell me to get lost and he's not going to pay me anymore (p. 192)

I would have said that within three months I would have described that as a flourishing relationship because we worked well together, he was comfortable, I was comfortable, he was happy with what he was getting, it was a valuable service to him and so on. But the relationship grows as time goes on and it flourishes more and continues to grow (p. 193)

I have one client that I've been working on and off with over quite a long period of time and the off periods aren't because we're not getting on, it's because there's nothing particular that we need to do together (p. 199)

Being in a flourishing relationship with his client, means to Geoff that he doesn't feel awkward with him

There's no awkwardness in it (p. 187)

if you know, there's a piece of work I need to bill him for or anything like that... it doesn't get awkward or anything like that (p. 187)

from the beginning that he was comfortable with me, liked the way that we worked together and what he was getting from me (p. 193)

a friendly relationship (p.187)

Being in a flourishing relationship with his client, means to Geoff that he enjoys working with him

it's about coming away from working with somebody feeling that you enjoyed it. I can't think of any other way to describe it than enjoyed (p. 199)

Being in a flourishing relationship with his client, means to Geoff that his client listens to him

when I'm throwing my ten penny worth in he stops and listens (p.188)

Being in a flourishing relationship with his client, means to Geoff that he can challenge him

We have the ability to disagree (p. 187)

I can take the mickey out of him (p. 187)

he accepts when I point out his failings (p. 187)

he doesn't mind when I say... "well, look Simon, you know what you're like, you're not very good at this (p. 187)

When he started to drift off I would throw in say "well, actually shouldn't we be looking a bit closer at what's going on? (p. 189)

He's always uncomfortable with some of the things [Geoff says] (p.191)

He was very, very uncomfortable with that and I don't think happy at all that actually that needed to be done although he probably accepted that that's what had to be done (p.192)

he recognises this, that some of the things that I'm saying that he needs to do are things that he knows he needs to do but he doesn't want to or can't or finds hard to do (p. 192)

Being in a flourishing relationship with his client, means to Geoff that he feels he is doing some good

you come away from things and you think you've done something good, that you've helped them, that they're going to get some value out of it (p. 199)

To produce the textural description, which is the product of Phenomenological Reduction, I used the thematic statements as the initial sentences of paragraphs,

followed by phrases (horizons) from the data to enrich the description of the theme identified.

Here is my description of the texture of the flourishing relationships Geoff has with clients:

“Being in a flourishing relationship with a client, means to Geoff that they have a friendly, though not necessarily close, relationship and that he doesn’t feel that there is awkwardness between them. Geoff enjoys working with such a client and feels that their relationship works well.

Being in a flourishing relationship with a client, means to Geoff that the relationship grows and lasts, even if they only work together infrequently. As their relationship grows, after a while he treads less carefully with the client and is more relaxed about bringing up contentious things with him where he might have felt constrained before. They also talk more about general business affairs and the news. They become generally comfortable with each other, and the client remains happy with what he is getting. And if relationship continues to grow as time goes on, it flourishes more.

Being in a flourishing relationship with his client, means to Geoff that his client stops and listens to him. Geoff feels able to make his client uncomfortable when he needs to challenge him, about things that he thinks the client knows he needs to do but he doesn’t want to do or finds hard to do. They both feel free to make it clear when they disagree. Geoff can ‘take the Mickey’ out of his client, and tell him when he drifts off the point; he can tell his client what he thinks are his client’s failings.

Being in a flourishing relationship with his client, means to Geoff that he feels he is doing some good, that he’s helped his client and that the client is getting some value out of their working together.”

Imaginative Variation and Structural Description

In the process of Imaginative Variation, the structural themes are identified.

Here, shown in **blue text**, are the themes I identify in the structure of Geoff’s experience of flourishing relationships with clients, and, under each theme, the points (highlighted in the text of the transcription in **light blue** and **yellow** – yellow indicating converses of points).

Flourishing relationships with clients take place when Geoff and his client share similar views about the world (p.196)

If ever I ring him up he’s happy to talk (p. 187)

Whenever I go in for a business reason we will often stop and chatter and natter about the state of the economy and the state of the world and things that are not related to the business reason of the meeting and I guess we probably do more of that than the actual business meeting (p. 187)

We see reasonably closely eye-to-eye on issues (p. 189)

she made some sort of comment about well, I don't agree with all these stuck up conservative, bald headed fat old coots or something, and of course she's in this big Law Society meeting and the entire room goes absolutely silent because every single one of them is a stuck up conservative pinstripe... so she's obviously got a very different view of the world to this group of people that she's actually with and of course the story develops from there. In working with Simon, I don't have a very different view of the world to Simon and that was very quickly and easily identified I think (p. 194)

I think a lot of it [what bound Geoff and his client together early on] was about similar views on things actually (p. 194)

Bearing in mind that he's paying for my time I think you know, because the relationship works, you know, he finds that useful and comfortable and he's got somebody to talk to and he wouldn't talk about any of that sort of stuff with anybody else (p. 187)

Flourishing relationships with clients take place when Geoff believes he is able to help them and he perceives that the clients do too (p. 202)

I would help him to get what he wanted in the meeting (p. 189)

As opposed to: I really don't think he's got much idea and I... I mean I think he probably wants something for nothing anyway (p.198)

I think he genuinely values when I throw in advice on things (p. 188)

So I think he values my experience probably in these things and I think particularly with people issues. But it's a small business, as I said before; he's not very good with conflict, especially with difficult people problems so he wants to hear how to deal with those things so I think he values that particularly (p. 188)

he went through all of his problem with me and he was completely over the moon with what came out of it... (p. 200)

he recognised suddenly additional value to having a business adviser working with him (p. 201)

Flourishing relationships with clients take place when the client feels able to talk openly to Geoff

he wants somebody to just talk about the weather to. And I'm comfortable with that because he pays me (p.188)

they can talk to about things that they can't talk to their members of staff or their husbands or wives or whatever and I think if you're going to allow the relationship to grow and develop, give people that ability (p.188)

Flourishing relationships with clients take place when they share the same business ethics

it means that 500 people are made redundant or 5,000 go on the streets and starve, I don't care, I'm making a good pile of money thank you very much. And that set of values, we both think I think, are wrong (p. 196)

To produce the structural description which is the product of Imaginative Variation, I used the thematic statements as the initial sentences of paragraphs, followed by phrases from the data to enrich the description of the theme identified.

Here is my description of the structure of the flourishing relationships Geoff has with clients:

"Flourishing relationships with clients take place when the client feels able to talk openly to Geoff about their businesses. Geoff thinks his clients find it useful and comfortable that they have got somebody to talk to and that they wouldn't talk about that sort of stuff with their colleagues or families.

In one flourishing relationship with a client, they spend a lot of time talking about the state of the economy and the world and things that are not related to the business reason of their meetings even though the client is paying for Geoff's time. If Geoff ever rings him up he's happy to talk then too. Geoff and his client share similar views about the world. *They see eye-to-eye on issues.*

Flourishing relationships with clients take place when Geoff believes he is helping them and when he perceives that the clients genuinely value his experience about how to deal with things and the advice he gives them. If Geoff doesn't think the client has got much idea about what he wants, or doesn't appear to value what Geoff is offering, then Geoff then their relationship does not flourish.

Flourishing relationships with clients take place when they share the same values. Both think it is wrong when businessmen make a good pile of money thank you very much if it means that 500 people are made redundant or 5,000 go on the streets and starve."

Synthesised Description

The final process of transcendental phenomenology is to synthesise textural and structural descriptions. Here is the first synthesised description I made of Geoff's experience of his flourishing relationships with clients.

"Being in a flourishing relationship with a client, means to Geoff that they have a friendly relationship. Though they aren't necessarily close, nevertheless he doesn't feel that there is any awkwardness between them. Geoff enjoys being in such a relationship with a client and feels that then they work well together.

Flourishing relationships with clients take place when the client feels able to talk openly to Geoff about his business. Geoff thinks his clients find it useful and comforting that they have got somebody to talk to; they wouldn't talk about that stuff with their colleagues or families.

Being in a flourishing relationship with a client, means to Geoff that the relationship grows and lasts, even if they only work together infrequently. As their relationship grows, after a while he treads less carefully with the client and is more relaxed about bringing up contentious matters with him where he might have felt constrained before. They also talk more about general business affairs and the news. They become generally comfortable with each other, and the client remains happy with what he is getting. And if relationship continues to grow as time goes on, it flourishes more. In one flourishing relationship with a client, they spend a lot of time talking about the state of the economy and the world and things that are not related to the business reason of their meetings even though the client his paying for Geoff's time. If Geoff ever rings him up he's happy to talk then too. Geoff and his client share similar views about the world. *They see eye-to-eye on issues.*

Being in a flourishing relationship with his client, means to Geoff that his client stops and listens to him. Geoff feels able to make his client uncomfortable when he needs to challenge him, about things that he thinks the client knows he needs to do but he doesn't want to do or finds hard to do. They both feel free to make it clear when they disagree. Geoff can 'take the Mickey' out of his client, and tell him when he drifts away from what they have agreed needs doing; he can tell his client what he thinks are his client's failings. Flourishing relationships with clients take place when Geoff believes he is helping them and when he perceives that the clients genuinely value his experience about how to deal with things in the advice he gives them. If Geoff doesn't think the client has got much idea about what he wants, or doesn't appear to value what Geoff is offering, then their relationship does not flourish.

Being in a flourishing relationship with his client, means to Geoff that he feels he is doing some good, that he's helping his client and that the client is getting some value out of their working together. Flourishing relationships with clients take place when they share the same values. Both think it is wrong when businessmen make a good pile of money

thank you very much if it means that 500 people are made redundant or 5,000 go on the streets and starve.

I ask Geoff what he made of our conversation and he said, 'I think it's important that what I've given you is going to be of help. I hope it is anyway.' I say, 'Well that's brilliant thank you but I suppose I'm wondering what you've got out of it?' Geoff responds, 'Well I wasn't expecting to get anything out of it no. No, I've come at it more giving rather than getting which is what I thought it was about.' This attitude of giving is potentially another clue to the way Geoff approaches relationships."

The initial synthesis of textural and structural descriptions above feels wooden: a bit lifeless. I therefore rewrote it in a relational form, as a dialogue using the actual words spoken by Geoff and I. I also added literature that I found spoke to the points we were making and were raising further ideas about the structure I was witnessing.

Geoff's flourishing consulting relationships

Geoff: If I think of the client that I probably do the most work with and I've had for quite a long time, it's a guy called Simon. I guess it's a friendly relationship but it's a business relationship not a personal relationship. We aren't necessarily close but there isn't any awkwardness between us. I enjoy being in a relationship with a client like that and I feel that we work well together then.

Human life and humanity come into being in genuine meetings. The most profound growth and change . . . can only occur in the context of this kind of "personal relation" (Buber, 1958). It requires mutual confrontation, and he calls it unfolding the "dialogical": that condition of genuine dialogue which involves bringing oneself fully into it, without reduction or shifting ground and without holding back relevant thoughts or withdrawing. (Ehrenberg, 1974, p. 423).

Me: Your clients find it useful and comforting that they have got somebody to talk openly to about their business; they wouldn't feel able to talk about the same stuff with their colleagues or families.

Geoff: A relationship grows as time goes on and it flourishes more and continues to grow, even if we only work together infrequently. We talk more about general business affairs and what's in the news. We become generally comfortable with each other: we share similar views about the world; we see eye-to-eye on issues. As the relationship grows, after a while I tread less carefully with the client and am more relaxed about bringing up contentious matters with him where I might have felt constrained before.

It is the capacity to maintain a sense of self that permits the therapist, while being deeply affectively connected, to make the complex clinical judgements that must be made. For example: what is the source of the patient's reactions? . . . Is this a point at which I should intervene and, if so, how? (Kaplan, 1991, p. 47).

Geoff: When he stops and listens and you can tell that he's taking note of what I say, I think he values my experience. I feel able to make the client uncomfortable when I need to challenge him about things that I think he knows he needs to do but he doesn't want to do or finds hard to do. We both feel free to make it clear when we disagree. I can 'take the Mickey' out of him and tell him when he drifts away from what we've agreed needs doing; I can tell him what I think his failings are.

Clients hire you for your contribution, expertise and perspective; they keep you for your authenticity and friendship (Bellman, 2002).

Me: Flourishing relationships with clients take place when Geoff believes he is helping them. If Geoff doesn't think the client has got much idea about what he wants, or doesn't appear to value what Geoff is offering, then their relationship does not flourish.

To be helpful to human systems involves choices that the helper has to make, and those choices rest on key assumptions that have to be examined continuously during the helping process. Those choices are primarily the on-line real time decisions on when to be in the role of expert, doctor, or process consultant (Schein E. , 1989, p. 2).

Geoff: Sometimes you come away from things and you think you've done something good, that you've helped them; that they're going to get some value. It is also about sharing moral values: I mean I have a personal view that sometimes in big business [Geoff works with small businesses], people at the very top are sharks and are only in there to get the absolute maximum for themselves and don't care about anybody or anything other than making as much profit as they possibly can even if it means that many people are made redundant and go on the streets to starve.

Me What have you made of our conversation?

Geoff: I think it's important that what I've given you is going to be of help. I hope it is anyway.

Me Well that's brilliant thank you but I suppose I'm wondering what you've got out of it?

Geoff: Well I wasn't expecting to get anything out of it. No, I've come at it more giving rather than getting, which is what I thought it was about.

In my dissertation you can see this dialogue arranged with those with other participants in themes as an overall synthesis of the phenomenon.