How meaningful and useful is the concept of the life space in executive coaching?

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Abstract

Kurt Lewin argued that the life space is the totality of psychological and social facts of an individual in their environment at a certain moment. The life space determines behaviour.

This is the first study into how meaningful and useful the theory and concept of the life space are to executive coaching, and it explores the challenges of building coaching theory accordingly.

From a critical realist perspective, and by using a conceptual encounter and thematic analysis research methodology, the study explicates for the first time what the life space offers executive coaching, which until now has been largely overlooked in the coaching literature.

The life space is meaningful to coaches because it is experienced as a new, naturalistic, dynamic, heuristic, yet familiar concept. The life space is useful because it brings a new language and perspective that sensitises and orients coaches to important practical implications of perceiving the client, the coach and the coaching process as indivisible from the psychological context in which they are situated.

This study presents the first empirical and evidence-based conceptual map of the life space in executive coaching. This map invites coaches to coach with the life space in mind, to create a new, meaningful and useful understanding of the properties and characteristics of the phenomenon. The study then explores the complexities of the relationship between coaching theory and coaching practice.

The findings from this study extend the understanding of the contribution of Lewin, offer a new conceptualisation of the life space to be built on, and make recommendations for further research. The study argues that any understanding of the contribution of knowledge of the life space to coaching theory must accommodate the position that any suggested causal link to practice is hard to prove.

Keywords:
Lewin, life space, field theory, force-field, coaching, executive coaching, Gestalt, systems, constellation

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter sets out the research question and presents my interest in and my motivation for studying the concept of the life space in executive coaching. Reflections on my motivation for the research form a thread running through the whole of this study. This chapter provides a summary of the aims and objectives of the study and a summary of the findings and the contribution to coaching knowledge. The chapter positions the concept in the current and relevant research literature, highlighting a gap, and says why this research is important to coaching. It sets out why the chosen research philosophy of critical realism and the chosen method of conceptual encounter (de Rivera, 1981) are appropriate. To assist the reader, the chapter presents the definitions of executive coaching and the life space. The structure of the study is then summarised to further aid the reader in the navigation of the thesis.

1.1. My interest in Lewin and the life space

Executive coaching is in need of good research, and there are many aspects, concepts, questions and theories that might be studied. So why Kurt Lewin, and why choose to answer the research question of how meaningful and useful his concept of the life space is in executive coaching? There are four reasons for the choice.

Firstly, Lewin defined the life space as a function of the person and their environment, and he defined a person's behaviour as a function of their life space (Lewin, 1936; 1948; 1951; 1952). The life space was an important and life-long theme (Marrow, 1969) that was central to Lewin's field theory (1939; 1947a; 1951). Marrow (1969, p.ix) argued that Lewin's "*single purpose was to seek deeper explanations of why people behave as they do and to discover how they learn to behave better*". Whilst my purpose in executive coaching is not to determine or judge behaviour as better or worse, my purpose is to understand why the client behaves in the way that they do, and to find ways to support them to change aspects of their behaviour to maximise their impact as an executive. Lewin was interested in explaining a person's behaviour at a particular time in a specific situation

(Parlett, 1991) and this seems directly relevant to how executive coaches' work with clients – on their executive behaviour in their particular organisation in the specific context of a dyadic coaching session. Consequently, re-evaluating the contribution of the life space to contemporary coaching seemed important, it is a concept directly relevant to coaching, as a process that facilitates positive and sustainable behaviour change.

Secondly, as a coach trained in psychology, I was aware that Lewin is an important figure in this field. As Parlett (1991) argues, his contribution is said to rival that of Freud's in its long-term impact on twentieth century psychology. Similarly, Wheeler (2008, p.1638) states that "*for a brief period from the late 1930s until his death in 1947, Lewin was at the centre of the most creative and exciting work in experimental psychology*". In light of Lewin's position as a giant in the field, I was interested to explore what influence his concepts and theories have had, and continue to have, on the current theory and practice of coaching. Furthermore, the relevant and current literature suggests that rediscovering and re-evaluating Lewin's contribution to 21st century change theories has merit and potential benefits (Burnes et al., 2009; 2013; 2017; 2018). Burnes and Cooke (2013) argue that returning to Lewin's original field theory and engaging with the complexity of his experimental psychology can provide academics and practitioners with a valuable, much-needed theory and approach to managing change. As such, I engaged with the theory of Lewin's life space to explore the challenges and complexities of building coaching theory, to find out whether the concept can provide coaching academics and practitioners with a new and valuable approach to facilitating change. Lewin stated that it is possible to understand, predict and provide the basis for changing the behaviour of individuals and groups by constructing a life space comprising the psychological forces influencing the behaviour at a given moment in time (Back, 1992; Diamond, 1992). Therefore, exploring how meaningful and useful the theory of the life space is to executive coaching has the potential to make an important contribution to the executive coaching literature and practice.

Thirdly, as Marrow (1969, p.ix) argues, many of Lewin's ideas, concepts and theories "*have been so widely adopted that they figure as intrinsic to science itself and their origin*

is not remembered". Often enough, the ideas and techniques Lewin originated are discussed without reference to him and the theory of the life space is largely absent from most of the relevant literature, including the coaching literature. This supports the position of Markus (2005, p.180) that "*Lewin's idea that in seeking the sources of action we should include the person and his or her life space has not been a contagious one*". In light of this, I was interested to find out whether, by not acknowledging or by overlooking Lewin's concept of the life space, we were missing something that is important meaningful and useful to the theory and practice of our profession.

The final and foremost reason that I am fascinated by Lewin's concept of the life space in executive coaching is personal and speaks directly to my journey from practice-based sensitivity to my research question. During the course of my ten year career as a coach, I have continually noticed how a situation the client is in at work is a feature of their motivation for coaching and the topic or issue they wish to work on. Noticing this aspect of coaching triggered my interest in the notion of "coaching the situation" and what this might involve and require of the coach. This focus on "coaching the situation" borrows from the work of the Gestalt therapist Wollants (2012) on the "therapy of the situation" and it can be argued that this approach stands in some contrast to the current emphasis in the handbooks of coaching literature on the theories, frameworks and genres (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2018; English, Sabatine and Brownwell, 2019). Whilst these texts provide some consideration of the different contexts for coaching, a focus on the phenomenon of the client's situation and the implications of this for the coach and the coaching process is less well-developed. Consequently, this study investigates the notion of coaching the client in their situation by asking the question 'how meaningful and useful is Kurt Lewin's concept of the life space in executive coaching?' The life space is a concept that I recognise, personally connect with, and believe is important to executive life and executive coaching. It captures the phenomenological essence of some of my experiences as a senior executive and as an executive coach. For me, the life space is an understandable conceptualisation of each person's own unique, personal, momentary and complex psychological and social situation, and the effect this has on one's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. In the Gestalt organisational consulting work of Edwin and Sonia Nevis (1987; 1988; 2001), Nevis said:

> "*Lewin saw that people in the same situation exist in different life spaces. For instance, people who attend the same meeting are actually in varying psychological worlds. They will define their internal experience and their experience of the social and physical environment in unique ways*" (Nevis, 2001, p.12).

Nevis stated that Lewin was interested in the person-environment interaction as it existed at any given moment (Nevis, 2001, p.12). He also suggested that "*the consultant and the client in a system can occupy the same life space*" (Nevis, 2001, p.132), which, in the context of this study, applies to the executive coach and executive client.

In summary, this study argues that bringing the foundational concept of the life space from the historical hinterland, where it is overlooked or ignored, into the contemporary context to investigate how it might be meaningful and useful in executive coaching is an important endeavour, without which we will be missing important knowledge. This is because finding the answer to this research question extends existing Gestalt, Systems, Constellation and Adult Learning coaching theories by providing coaches with a new, contemporary, additional and empirically-based explication and conceptualisation of the structures, mechanisms and psychological forces that are present in the client's interaction with their situation. The study contends that the concept of the life space can be usefully applied in each and every coaching encounter and argues that too few models and definitions of executive coaching are justified by the level and depth of empirical research and conceptual analysis that characterise this research.

1.2. The research question, aim and objectives

The research question is: “How meaningful and useful is the concept of the life space in executive coaching?” The aim of the research is to answer this question from the perspective of experienced and psychologically minded practitioners.

To achieve this aim, a series of objectives were set for the study as follows:

- Develop a comprehensive critical analysis of the literature relating to the scope, currency and validity of the concept of the life space for executive coaching.

- Develop an initial conceptual map of the life space from my own experience and from the critical review of the research literature.

- Generate qualitative data by conducting interview-based research with executive coaches to explore their understanding of the life space.

- Explore the extent to which the initial map of the life space can be developed into a meaningful and useful framework to assist executive coaches in working effectively with the complexity and power of the phenomenon of the client, situated in and connected to their unique psychological and social environment at the time of and during coaching.

- Evaluate the extent and limit to which this framework is important to the process of executive coaching, and to which it offers new knowledge on coaching theory and practice and areas for future research.

- Evaluate the extent to which the philosophical and methodological choices made during the study contribute to new knowledge in this area.

1.3. Summary of findings and contribution to knowledge

For the first time, Kurt Lewin's concept of the life space (Lewin, 1936; 1948; 1951; 1952) has been studied and researched to find out if and how it is meaningful and useful to executive coaching. The study presents this little-known and rarely-used concept to executive coaches. This is a novel contribution to coaching theory. It makes a contribution by presenting the first contemporary and evidence-based map of the life space in executive coaching. This creates a new understanding of an existing concept and uses the work of Lewin in an original way.

The study answers the research question by showing that the life space is meaningful to executive coaching as a language, and as a lens that sensitises and orients the coach to the idea and implication that the client, the coach and the coaching process are indivisible from the ever-changing psychological and social context in which they are situated and that they are intimately connected to. The study invites the coach to adopt a new perspective of "coaching with the life space in mind". This perspective involves the coach consciously working with and in the phenomenon of the life space during each and every coaching session.

The study shows that the concept of the life space is useful to executive coaching because it is a naturalistic, dynamic, creative and heuristic phenomenon. These qualities provide the coach with a schema of ideas and conceptual tools which are easy to identify with, comfortable to work with, and likely to be accessible to their clients. This schema enhances the coach's awareness and understanding of the unique complexity of the client and of their needs and goals; the unique complexity of themselves as coach; the co-created and heuristic nature of the coaching process, and coaching as capacity building.

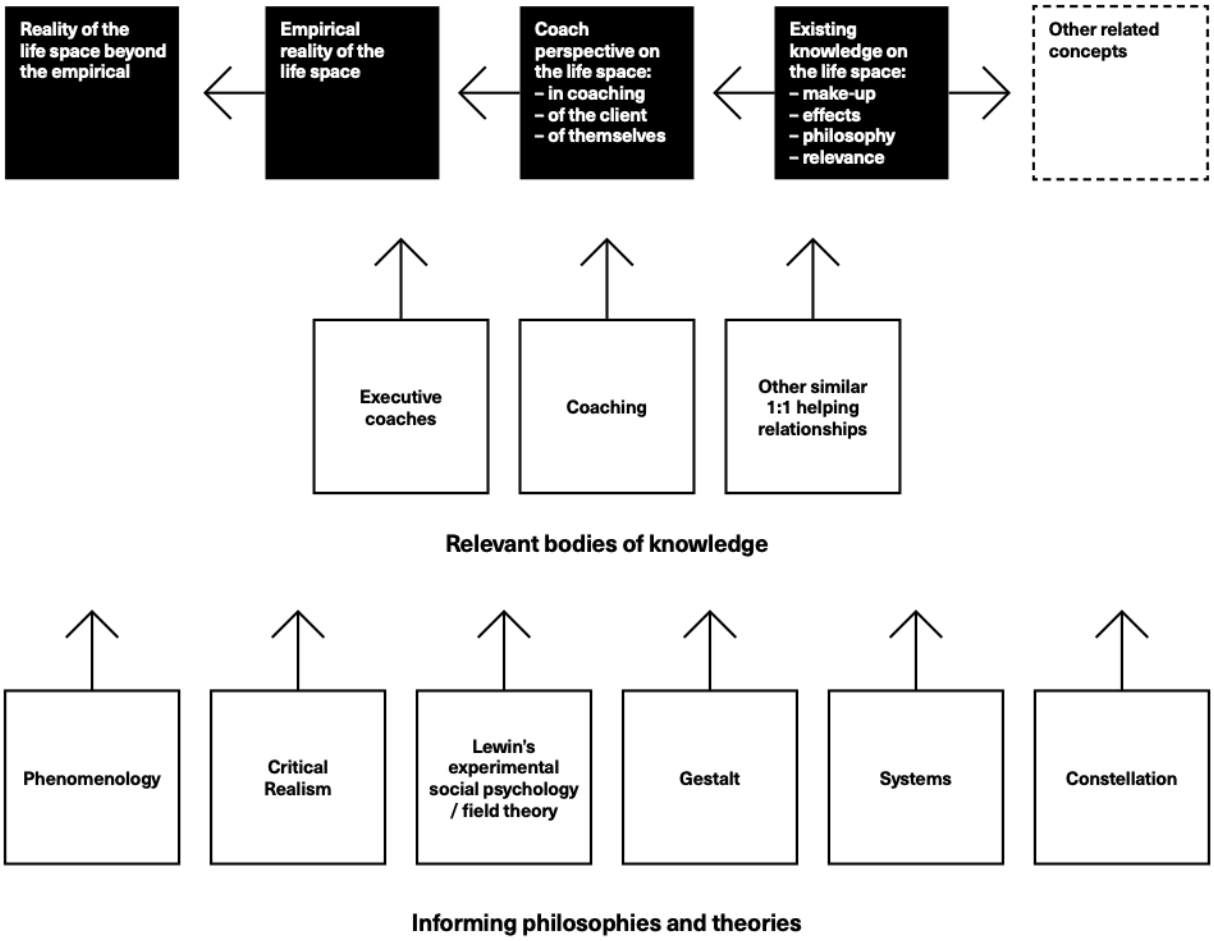
Whilst the study adds little that is new to coaching theory, it reveals for the first time how the life space influences executive coaching practice, which until now has largely been unacknowledged in the coaching literature. Unlike a lot of models or definitions of coaching, the proposition to apply the concept of the life space in executive coaching is

justified by empirical research and conceptual analysis, and is supported by other relevant coaching ideas, concepts and theories. By acknowledging the contribution of the life space to executive coaching, the study considers its potential relevance to coach supervision, training and regulation, and makes a contribution to the literature on the relationship between coaching theory and practice, and to the literature on the contribution of Lewin to 21st century theories of change.

1.4. Gap in the literature

An outline of the theoretical perspective on the life space is presented in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1
The theoretical perspective of the life space



The review of the literature reveals a gap in the development of models of coaching that are justified by empirical research and conceptual analysis, and are supported by other relevant coaching ideas, concepts and theories (Western, 2012; Cavanagh and Lane, 2012; Bachkirova, 2017). This study makes a contribution by providing the first evidence-based model of the life space in executive coaching as a conceptual map, and by demonstrating how the theory of the life space aligns with and extends existing coaching knowledge. Executive coaching is now one of the dominant methodologies for developing leaders (Sonesh et al., 2015), yet there continues to be a gap in the knowledge about how executive coaching works and what components of such coaching are effective (Grant et al., 2010). Bennet and Lemonie (2014) suggest that this gap is, in part, a function of the fact that the organisations where the executive coaching takes place are increasingly dynamic and complex environments. This suggests that research into the life space as a conceptualisation of the relationship between an executive and the increasingly dynamic and complex environment in which they are required to operate will make a contribution towards filling this gap.

A review of the literature on Lewin's concept of the life space revealed it to be a central concept in Lewin's experimental social psychology called field theory (Lewin, 1936; 1948; 1951), including his theory of force field analysis (Lewin, 1947a; 1951). Field theory is a central concept in the theories of Gestalt (Parlett, 1991; 1997). However, much of Lewin's work, including his conceptualisation of the life space, whilst influential, remains implicit and unacknowledged in the body of literature on psychology (Marrow, 1969; Markus, 2005; Burnes and Cooke, 2013). Because of this, Burnes (2004b, p.309-325), along with colleague researchers, went "*back to the future*" to rediscover and re-evaluate Lewin's experimental theories and concepts in the contemporary context of complexity theories, organisational change and organisational development. Whilst their studies cover a range of Lewin's ideas, such as field theory (Burnes and Cooke, 2013), his three-step model of change (Burnes, 2004a) and his topological psychology (Lewin, 1936; Endrejat and Burnes, 2024), unlike this study, they do not specifically review and re-evaluate the meaningfulness and usefulness of the concept of the life space.

Nor is the life space widely or deeply empirically researched in coaching. The review of the executive coaching literature and the more general coaching literature revealed only a limited number of references to the concept, and these are brief and in the context of wider research. McLaughlin and Cox (2016, p.42), in their study of coaching for brave leadership, make reference to the life space as a concept to assist the coach in "*understanding the strength of forces that are either hindering or helping the movement of the client towards a certain coaching goals*".

Pelham (2016, pp.74-75), in his synthetic study of the coaching relationship, makes a brief reference to the life space as *"a field that is co-created through the coming together of the life space of both parties, a unique constellation that is constantly changing*". Similarly, Bluckert (2021), in his research into Gestalt coaching, suggests that the client and the coach create and are created within the coaching situation as functions of the life space and are moved by the forces within it. However, in each of these studies, the concept of the life space is not central and is therefore not developed to any depth.

This gap in the research literature is also evident in the coaching theories that are implicitly associated with the life space because they position the client in the wider context of their environment. These coaching theories are Gestalt (Bluckert, 2006; 2015; 2019a; 2019b; 2021; Leary-Joyce, 2014), systems (Cavanagh, 2006; Lawrence, 2019; Starr, 2019) and constellations (Whittington, 2012). As a consequence of this gap, the scope of the literature reviewed was widened to embrace what is known about the life space as it is applied in other dyadic helping relationships similar to one-to-one executive coaching, such as counselling and education.

In summary, this study makes a contribution to the gap in the coaching literature by examining how meaningful and useful Lewin's little-known concept of the life space is in contemporary executive coaching. By so doing, the research demonstrates how this overlooked and forgotten concept, when re-evaluated, explicated and adapted to the

contemporary context of executive coaching, brings something new, important, meaningful and helpful to current and relevant coaching theory.

1.5. Why this research is important

There were three specific aspects of executive coaching for which a better understanding of the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space seemed potentially beneficial.

Firstly, I was interested to find out whether the concept might offer a fresh and different perspective on the psychological world of the executive, and on the challenges they face and often bring to coaching. I was interested to explore whether the life space might provide coaches with a new or enhanced awareness of how interaction works between the person and their psychological and social environment, and whether this can assist them in working differently with this phenomenon.

Secondly, the concept of the life space has been extended beyond Lewin's definition, to be a phenomenon between two or more people (Dembo 1964; 1975; 1977). I was interested in exploring if and how this conceptualisation might be meaningful and useful to the way in which the coach creates the dyadic coaching process with the client. Given Lewin's contention that behaviour is a function of the life space, I was curious to discover what this might reveal about influences on coaching interactions and practices. In this debate, the concept of the life space had not, to date, been considered in any depth (Cotterill and Passmore, 2019).

Thirdly, I was interested to explore the concept of the coach's own life space, and what the implications of this might be for coach practice and coach development. Could the concept of the life space offer new and important knowledge to the theories of the use of self and self-awareness in coaching, and could it have implications for coach training, supervision and regulation?

1.6. Research design

The life space is a little-known concept in coaching, and carries with it a high degree of complexity, not least in the way Lewin represented it in his own unique mathematical and topographical schema of psychology (Lewin, 1936; 1947; 2013). Consequently, I concluded that the most meaningful way to engage research participants in the study, and to generate rich data, was to create a map of the concept (a further conceptualisation) as it might look in executive coaching. In light of this, there was a strong, compelling and logical case to adopt the conceptual encounter research methodology (de Rivera 1981) that has this approach at its heart. A range of other phenomenological methods were considered, but conceptual encounter is the most natural fit as it is a proven and compelling method for inquiring into the research partners' experience of a psychological phenomenon such as the life space.

To assist the reader in navigating the thesis, it is useful to specify how the terms "concept" and "phenomenon" are consistently and clearly distinguished and used throughout. The term phenomenon is used to mean a fact or situation in the world that is experienced by the human senses as existing. In this research, the phenomenon under investigation is the interaction between the person and the psychological, social, cultural and physical situation or environment that they are in at a particular time interval and the effect this has on their behaviour. A concept is an articulation of an abstract description of the phenomenon under study that will illuminate and enrich our appreciation. In this research, the aforementioned phenomenon is conceptualised by Lewin as a life space. The fieldwork map and final map of the life space referred to throughout this study are further conceptualisations that aim to capture the essence of this phenomenon specifically in the context of executive coaching. As such, and for clarity, consistency and brevity, the concept "life space" is used to refer to and convey the essence of the phenomenon it describes. The distinction between the phenomenon and the concept and how they are applied in this study is wholly consistent with and a necessary requirement of the conceptual encounter methodology.

Conceptual encounter is a method in which the ontological and epistemological position, the foreknowledge and the critical reading of the researcher is present and used. It is not bracketed. This is foundational to the researcher creating an initial map as a concept of the phenomenon under investigation to be built upon, during the study and by future research. A purposive sample of ten executive coaches was selected for a program of semi-structured interviews, during which they each encountered the conceptual map and related their experiences of the life space in relation to their coaching practice. Through this dialogue and the fusion of experience with the abstract concept of the life space, the meaningfulness and usefulness of the phenomenon in executive coaching was developed into a final conceptual map.

The empirical data from the conceptual encounters were then evaluated using thematic analysis. This was chosen because Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that conceptual encounter methodology has a vagueness and lack of clarity around procedure, especially the data analysis. They also argue that a thematic method of data analysis is appropriate for the type of conceptual research question at the heart of this study, and that it is coherent with the broader philosophical and theoretical assumptions of critical realism that underpin my research (see Chapter 3). Accordingly, the data from the interviews was analysed, synthesised, themed and integrated into a parsimonious, contemporary, consolidated and evidence-based conceptual map. This map is designed to help coaches better understand the theory of the life space, how this influences aspects of their practice, and how they can use this concept to further enhance the quality and effectiveness of their practice.

Critical realism (Bhaskar, 2008a; Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020) was chosen because this philosophical perspective on reality and knowledge accommodated the likelihood that the majority of the research partners had not heard of the concept of the life space, and that the reality of the effect of the phenomenon can be out of awareness. Chapter 3 deals in detail with the justification for a critical realist approach to this study. Critical realism involved interpreting the data retroductively at the level of the actual and real domains of reality (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020, pp.29-31). This deeper analysis was provided so

as to ensure that the study arrived at the most comprehensive and reliable understanding of how the life space is meaningful and useful in executive coaching, and is not limited to its meaning and use as reported and ascribed by a sample of ten research partners. It is a framework through which to discuss the complex questions at the interface between the theory of the reality and knowledge of the life space and its impact on coaching practice and, more generally, the interface between coaching knowledge, theory and practice.

1.7. Glossary

This chapter provides a summary definition of executive coaching. It also presents Lewin's definition of the life space. These definitions are provided to assist the reader in navigating the complex, theoretical and conceptual nature of this thesis. Further reference is made in Appendix 1 to the component parts of the life space (Lewin, 1936; 2013, pp.332-346) and to where the concept is positioned in Lewin's field theory (Lewin, 1951; 1952).

Executive Coaching

This study is focused on and limited to the genre of executive coaching. The literature is in agreement in defining executive coaching as a one-to-one activity between the coach and the executive, as distinct from group or team coaching. It is an organisationally sponsored engagement, wherein the coach is required to align themselves and the client, the client and the sponsors, and themselves and the sponsors (Robinson, 2019, p.429). Coaching embraces the executive's organisational context and requirements as important to the process and outcomes of the coaching (Mura, 2003; Stokes and Jolly, 2018; Robinson, 2019). This is the definition of executive coaching used in this study.

The Life Space

Introducing and explaining Lewin's complex and complicated conceptualisation and representation of the life space is a challenge for myself as the researcher, for the research partners and for the reader of this thesis (Burnes, Hughes and Rune, 2018). The

extent of this challenge is reflected in Lewin's work on topological psychology (1936, 2013, pp.332-346) which provides a dense glossary, covering 103 definitions across methodological, mathematical, psychological and dynamic conceptualisations, including the life space. This challenge and its implications for this research are reflected upon throughout the thesis, and led me to provide a succinct and relatively straight forward definition of the life space, which is presented below.

Lewin defined the life space as a function of the person and their environment. He defined a person's behaviour as a function of their life space. Lewin expressed this in a mathematical formula as the interaction of the person (P) and the environment (E) producing the life space (LS). In symbolic expression, $LS = f(P, E)$ (Deutsch, 1954) and behaviour (B) is expressed as a function of the life space: $B = f(LS)$.

In narrative expression, this definition of the life space is the conceptualisation of the person and their environment, and the resulting totality of facts and possible events which determine the behaviour of an individual at a certain moment. Lewin (2013, p.16) referred to the "*psychological life space*", and Parlett (1991), in his reflections on Lewin's field theory, referred to the life space as the person's personal reality, their actuality in the moment**.**

1.8. Thesis overview

Chapter 2 systematically reviews the literature on the concept of the life space. It presents the major themes, ideas and gaps in the literature and the implications for our understanding of how meaningful and useful the life space is in executive coaching. The knowledge gathered from the review forms the basis of the map of the life space used in the fieldwork to collect the data.

Chapter 3 considers the philosophical position adopted in the research, the associated resulting choice of research strategy and methodology, and the justification for it. The

chapter presents the method by which the fieldwork map of the life space used in the data collection phase was developed. Consideration is also given to how this research relates to quality criteria in qualitative research, including the quality of the final map of the life space, and to the limitations of the study and issues of ethics and reflexivity.

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the data and the themes from the research which resulted from the methods employed. This chapter is in two parts. Part one shows that the concept of the life space in executive coaching was limited in what it revealed that was new to the research partners. It also reveals evidence that the life space has meaning and utility in executive coaching. Part two of this chapter shows how the map of the life space was developed into its final conceptual form.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings from the research in the context of the current and relevant theory. It presents how the life space aligns with and extends existing coaching theory, and discusses the implications of this from a critical realist perspective for coach theory and practice, and the relationship between the two.

Chapter 6 reminds the reader of the purpose of this study and presents the conceptual conclusions and recommendations. The chapter presents the answers to the research question, the warranted contribution the study makes to the theoretical gap in the coaching research literature, the contribution the study makes to the practice of executive coaching and to research methodology. The chapter presents the limitations of the research and the potential areas of further research. It concludes with my reflections on the methodological and the personal learning from the study.

Chapter 2: Critical Review of Current and Relevant Literature

2.1. Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to reveal and evaluate the current state of knowledge on how meaningful and useful Lewin's concept of the life space is to executive coaching. The design is a systematic literature review (SLR) (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart, 2003). This design is consistent with the research strategy, as it compares the findings from the literature, primarily phenomenological studies, to develop an interpretative translation (Beck, 2003) and identify themes. The aim is to broaden and deepen an understanding of a particular phenomenon (Jensen and Allen, 1999) such as the life space, so as to clarify and evaluate the claims and critiques about what it is, what it does, and how it has been represented and studied. This serves to broaden the understanding of the ontology and epistemology of the life space, its underlying structures and mechanisms, and the effect of these in coaching. The SLR reviews the literature surrounding the life space, including Lewin's original theory, and presents the ideas and the debates and controversies surrounding it.

The relationship between the life space and coaching will be drawn out from the literature, and its relevance to the research question will be answered. Whilst very little direct empirical evidence exists in the coaching field, the literature that connects the life space to coaching is considered. Because the life space is central to Lewin's rejection of considering the person in isolation from their environment (Lewin, 1936), the primary fields of coaching literature considered are those where this perspective is most influential. These are the theories of Gestalt, systems and constellations. The review then extends to include constructs of the life space in other helping professions that have a similar dyadic, relational quality. These include counselling and teaching. Exploring the life space as a phenomenon in these related contexts enables learning from a wider body of knowledge that has relevance to executive coaching (Noon, 2018; Bachkirova, Rose and Noon, 2020).

In conducting the review of the current and relevant literature, Oxford Brookes Discover search engine was used to review the library catalogue and external journal articles and conference papers. Google Scholar was also used to identify sources of literature. All relevant peer-reviewed journals, seminal texts and academic sources were reviewed. Primary search terms were: life space, Lewin, field theory, force-field, coaching, executive coaching, Gestalt, systems and constellation.

In summary, the review evaluates the current knowledge, major themes, ideas, debates and controversies surrounding the life space in four parts:

- The make-up of the life space.
- The effects of the life space
- The philosophy of the life space
- The relevance of the life space to executive coaching and other similar dyadic helping professions.

Figure 2.1 provides a summary of the schema and key sources of the SLR. These four parts have been identified as the focus of the SLR because of their direct relevance to the objectives of the study as specified in Chapter 1. The literature on how the life space is constituted, the effect it has, the foundational theory and philosophy behind the phenomenon, and its relationship to coaching and other related professions, reveals the current state of knowledge on how meaningful and useful the life space is to executive coaching.

Figure 2.1
Summary of schema and key sources of the S.L.R

Foundational theories (Lewin)

1917, 1936, 1938, 1939, 1943a, 1944, 1947, 1947a, 1948, 1951, 1952, 1996

Relationship to Coaching and other Related Professions

EXECUTIVE COACHING
Mura 2003
Bennett and Lemoine, 2014
Sonesh et al, 2015
Stokes and Jolly, 2018
Robinson, 2013

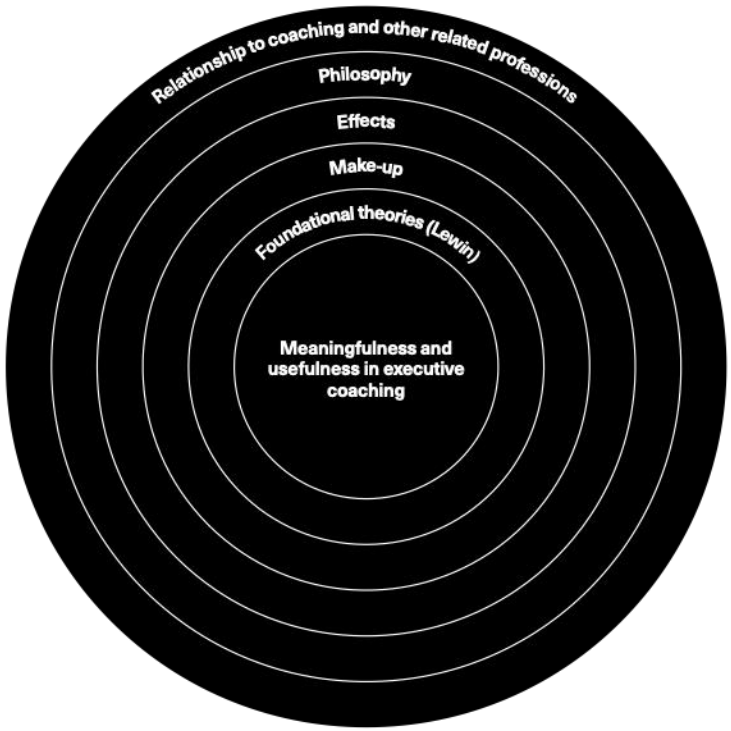
GESTALT
Leary-Joyce, 2016
Bluckert, 2015, 2021

SYSTEMS/CONSTELLATIONS
Cavanagh, 2006
Clutterbuck, 2012
Whittington, 2012
Lawrence, 2019
Starr, 2019

RELATIONAL/FIELD
Chidiac, 2012
Denham-Vaughan and Chidiac, 2013

TEACHING
Lewin, Lippitt and Escalona, 1940
Gould, 1955
Redl, 1959-1966
Brant-James, 2008
Adams, Korpach, O'Keefe, Soetaert, 2022
Ilyasov, 2021

COUNSELLING/THERAPY
Peavy, 1996, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2008a, 2008b,
Rodgers 2010
Brown and Reavey, 2018



"Lewin's idea that in seeking the sources of action we should include the person and his or her life space has not been a contagious one".

Markus (2005, p. 180).

"Often enough ideas and techniques Lewin originated are discussed without reference to him".

Marrow (1969, p. 18).

"There is nothing so practical as a good theory"

Lewin (1951, cited in Landauer, 2011, p. 184)

Make-up of Life Space

Allport, 1945, 1948
Tolman, 1948
Dembo et al, 1964, 1975, 1977
Koestler, 1967, 1978
Marrow, 1969
Nevis, 1987, 1998, 2001
Parlett, 1991, 1997
De Rivera, 1995
Robine, 2008
Francesetti and Roubai, 2020
Pelham, 2016
Brown and Reavey, 2018
Bluckert, 2015, 2021

Effects of Life Space

Zeigarnick, 1927
Bhaskar, 1978
Nevis, 1987, 1998, 2001
Parlett, 1991
Kegan, 1994
Wheeler, 2008
McLaughlin and Cox, 2016
Soff, 2018
Lindorfer, 2021

Philosophy of Life Space

Cassier, 1910
Leeper, 1940
Lippitt, 1939
Marrow, 1969
Bronfrenbrenner, 1997
Gold, 1999
Burnes, 2009
Burries and Cooke, 2013
Bartunek and Woodman, 2015
Cummings et al, 2016
Francesetti, 2019a, 2019b
Burnes, Hughes and Rune, 2018
Endrejat and Burnes, 2022

2.2. Make-up of the life space

Kurt Lewin's concept of the Life Space (1917; 1936; 1951) is a central part of his topological psychology (Lewin, 1936; 2013) and his Gestalt field theory (Lewin, 1951; 1996). His friend and biographer, Alfred. J. Marrow, asserts that Lewin's first preliminary statement of the concept was as early as 1917, and that "*the concept of the life space was to become one of Lewin's lifelong themes*" (Marrow, 1969, p.11).
The literature reveals four major debates about the make-up of the life space. These debates are about:

- A holistic view of a person extending to include the environment, making the person indivisible from their surroundings
- The life space, reality and time
- The life space extending beyond the individual
- The transposition of the life space as a closed system.

A review and evaluation of the key literature relating to each debate is presented in turn below.

2.2.1. Indivisibility of person and environment

As can be seen from the mathematical formulae and the description of the life space in Chapter 1, a foundational principle is the indivisibility of the person and their environment. Lewin made a scientific claim not to be satisfied with general laws about generalised people, but to develop a theory and terminology that allows the explanation of a single case and to answer the question of why, in a particular case, a given individual behaves in a given way and not otherwise (Lewin 1936, p.11). Hence, the focus of Lewin's theory and investigations was the person-in-a-situation, which is called the life space. In field theory, Lewin's "*aim was to discover the determining conditions of human events*" (Marrow, 1969, p.xiv) and a foundational principle of his approach was the philosophical rejection of the idea of viewing the person without considering their environment.

The literature suggests that this position can be seen as counter to the orthodoxy prevailing at the time of Lewin. It challenged the more dominant theories of behaviourism and environmental conditioning (Pavlov, 1957; Thorndike, 1911; Watson and Rayner, 1920; Skinner, 1938; 1956), and the psychodynamic focus on the individual alone (Freud, 1899; Jung, 1946; Adler, 2010). In general terms, these theories maintained human beings as the sum of their parts, and that the individual parts, such as the unconscious mind or the environment, can be separately identified and the causes of behaviour related to individual external stimuli (Deutsch 1954; Lewin 1939). Indeed, the prevailing view among a significant number of Lewin's contemporaries was that subjective experience, like perception, played no part in behaviour and was an "*improper subject for scientific inquiry*" (Rock and Palmer, 1990, p.91). In contrast, Lewin asserted that a shift was required "... *from a view centered on the individual, to a view centered on the interactions in the between*" (Francesetti and Roubal, 2020, p.113-136). To represent the phenomenon of the space "*in between*" the person and their environment, Lewin (1936) created the psychological conceptualisation of the life space.

2.2.2. Time, reality and the life space

Another foundational principle of the concept of the life space and the field theoretical approach is that one cannot avoid taking into account aspects of the individual's past and future and their degree of psychological reality in the present. This theoretical conceptual scheme for the age-related development of the perception of time as a temporal dimension of the life space is explored through quantitative analysis by Eson and Greenfield (1962). By developing a quantitative instrument to measure the emphasis on divisions of time, they analysed the influence of age and sex as factors in the structure and content of time perspectives. Their findings reference the concepts of distant and near past and distant and near future as manifest in the present moment of the life space (Eson and Greenfield, 1962, p.114) as part of the individual's sense of fantasy and reality. Lewin described this as a person's degree of psychological reality (Lewin, 1959, p.345). Lewin drew a distinction between what he called reality, a property of psychological facts, and irreality

or fantasy, and he asserted that the "*degree to which the life space is structured in the dimension of reality-irreality depends upon the person and their momentary situation*" (Lewin, 1959, p.345). The fantasy is the individual's own ideal goals and values, compared to those realities which must be taken into account for a realistic structuring of expectation, at a particular moment in a given situation.

The life space is a conceptualisation of Lewin's basic tenet that causation is a contemporary process because the life space is of a specific time and consists of the horizon of all that can be seen at that time (Robine, 2008). Within this horizon, time exists as the distant and near past, the present, and the near and distant future. Lewin (1951) argues it is the present moment that determines any behaviour change "*since neither the past or the future exists at the present moment it cannot have an effect on the present*" (Lewin, 1936, p.35). This position is supported by Stevenson (2018) who suggests that if we move out of the here and now of the life space, we tend to project our past and anticipate our future and, since this is not the present or present-centred, it is an illusion that ensnares us in its recurrence. For Lewin, each here-and-now moment is singular and unique, even though it contains influences from the past, present and future and degrees of psychological reality. The "psychological past" is included contemporaneously in the life space as part of the person's present-time perspective.

Lewin specifically defined his principle of contemporaneity and singularity (Parlett, 1991), the past existing in the person's unique present time perspective, in opposition to psychoanalytical explanations of a person's life history. As Marrow says:

> "*Lewin recognized that this theory varied widely from the historic belief of some psychologists that a future goal drives present behavior and from the claim of classic associationists that the past influences present behavior*" (Marrow, 1969, p.350).

Consequently, his notion of contemporaneity is subject to the challenge that he did not pay enough attention to the effects of the past on present behaviour, particularly, past traumas. The types of childhood memories that Lewin, on occasion, listed as examples of the unimportance of the past in a person's present life space can be read as primarily pleasant or neutral memories. Traumatic memories are formed in a very different way from normal memories, have a different effect on personality, and can represent a chaotic invasion of the present by the past (Arnold-de Simine, 2018) that does not easily fit Lewin's notion of the psychological past as relevant to the present life space.

Notwithstanding these challenges, Lewin's notion of the past existing within and affecting the present, consciously and unconsciously as part of the life space, has a well-established history and a currency. Dembo, Barker and Stoddard (1977), in their research on anger, showed how behaviour may be understood in terms of the current situation rather than the past. In Gestalt psychology and Gestalt coaching, the client's behaviour depends neither on the past nor the future, but on the present field in the "*here and now*" (Bluckert, 2021, p.30).

This is echoed by Pelham when contends that:

> "*We have to attend to the total situation, the life space … including past histories and future plans, goals and ambitions. But these past and future aspects are not to be considered as separate, distinct realms (e.g., history explaining current behavior) but rather as aspects of the present here-and-now field*" (Pelham, 2016, pp.74-75).

The relevance of the contemporaneous nature of the life space to executive coaching is supported by Stokes and Jolly (2018, p.256) in their work on the psychodynamic approach. They invite the coach to attend to both the dynamics of the organisational system in executive coaching and the personal psychology of the executive - their history as manifest in the here-and-now of the coaching encounter.

2.2.3. The life space beyond the individual

The literature concerning the notion of the life space as a phenomenon beyond the individual and something that exists between two people is a theme taken up by one of Lewin's students, Tamara Dembo (1964; 1975; 1977). Dembo (1975), in her research into socio-emotional relationships, particularly the helper-helped relationship, conceived of the actor not as a person but as a life space. De Rivera asserts that Dembo:

> "*was interested in capturing the essence of these dyadic relationships, struggling to reach beyond our understanding of the life space as a person in an environment toward an understanding of the life space between persons in a situation*" (de Rivera, 1995, pp.24-25).

Similarly, de Rivera (1981, pp.24-25) conceives "*of the person as a subject who creates the life space as well as being an objective part of it*".

Stevenson (2018, pp.161-188), in his study of Gestalt consulting, describes this notion of being subject and object to a phenomenon, with reference to the concept of holism and the holon (Koestler, 1967; 1978). A holon is described as an entity that is itself a whole and, simultaneously, part of some other whole. It is Janus-faced, with an integrative self-transcending tendency to function as part of a larger whole, and a self-assertive tendency to presume its individual authority. Holism is a type of hierarchical growth from simple to more complex wholes, the dynamic interplay between container and contained. The Gestalt coaching literature suggests that the life space can be conceived of as a holon – the life space is a person in a situation and can be, at the same time, a person in a situation with another (Nevis, 2001, p.132). Describing the life space in this way aligns with the work of Bluckert (2021) and Pelham (2016). Bluckert describes the life space from the Gestalt perspective as co-created between the coach and client in the moment. He suggests that the client and the coach emerge in the here and now of all that they

currently bring to the one-to-one encounter; they create and are created within the situation as functions of the life space, and are moved by the forces in the life space (Bluckert, 2021).

Pelham (2016, pp.74-75) echoes Bluckert in his phenomenological work on widening the field of the coaching relationship, "*The coaching relationship is understood as a field that is co-created through the coming together of the life space of both parties, a unique constellation that is constantly changing*". Pelham invites the coach to attend to his or her life space, the life space of the client, and the interaction between – the co-constructed life space of the here-and-now dyadic coaching interaction. Bluckert (2015, p.80) perceives the co-creation of the life space of the coaching interaction as a meaning-making process, a process of integration, whereby the coach and the client can each create a shared sense of personal coherence.

These studies, however, take us only so far. There is no research to describe or explain in detail the component structures and mechanisms of the life space as a co-creation between two people, yet this conceptualisation is of importance to our understanding of the dyadic coaching process. Furthermore, the client-coach process is an area in which there is limited research (Cotterill and Passmore, 2019). This study seeks to contribute to filling this gap in knowledge by explicating what, if anything, about the life space makes it meaningful and useful in executive coaching, including how it might conceptualise the creation of the coaching process between the coach and the client, and characterise the optimum conditions for successful coaching.

2.2.4. The life space as a closed system

For Lewin, the life space is a bounded and organised system, a complete discrete unit of experimental analysis (Lewin, 1952) with the capacity to be transposed, unaltered, into a different context. Being able to discern accurately which psychological and social facts are within the boundary of the life space, both the phenotypic and observable facts and the psychological and genotypic facts, and how they are patterned and mutually

interdependent, is central to Lewin's experimental method. For Lewin, it is critical how the life space is intentionally organised in the moment (Parlett, 1991; 1997) into a field by the person (Nevis, 2001). This momentary pattern or organisation is generally more important than the size of any particular field (Lewin, 1936; 2013).

Furthermore, because the life space exists outside the individual, the phenomenon can range in complexity and size from individual to dyad, team, organisation, community and beyond. For Lewin, the capability to represent the bounded and defined momentary life space, and to distinguish between the primacy of the pattern and the size, had important methodological implications for his experimental psychology – a psychology in which it became possible to study the fundamental constellations of the phenomena of a life space experimentally, by transposing it into an appropriate size for research. This enabled the creation of experimental social climates which allowed Lewin to study and affect the direction and strength of the forces within the field, specifically those acting as a counter-valence to goal achievement, so as to intentionally and predictably change behaviour. As Burnes and Cooke (2013, p.420) put it in their re-evaluation of Lewin's theories, "*in order to bring about change, one has to establish which forces to modify in the life space, and to judge what effect this would have*". For Lewin, the life space was a finite bounded psychological entity, capable of being studied to a laboratory standard.

This notion of the life space as a closed system has attracted criticism. Tolman (1948) challenged Lewin's treatment of the physical and physiological fields of the life space as being ostensibly psychological in nature. Tolman argued that Lewin does not account for the ways in which the outside world produces changes in a person's life space, or the ways in which the life space changes the outside world. He considered Lewin's concept to pay inadequate attention to objective reality and to be an artificially closed system, with its boundary confined to psychological phenomena only. Similarly, Allport (1945; 1948) argued that Lewin's theory confuses physical realities (the outside world) and psychological realities (the life space) because Lewin used his terms ambiguously. The central point of Allport's critique is that Lewin's theory tempts the psychologist to mix and confuse external physical factors and internal psychological factors within the same field.

Allport maintained that the researcher must separate the two sets of factors conceptually, in order to uncover the laws that govern their interactions and influence social behaviour. Marrow (1969, pp.36) questions the life space as an artificially closed system because of Lewin's "*notion of non-psychological physical or social facts being outside of the reality of the life space*". More recently, Brown and Reavey (2018) echo this criticism of the life space by suggesting that the life space is already part of a broader psycho-social plane which is inherent in the life space but not reducible to it.

Lewin's assertion that the life space of a person can be transposed unaltered into a different setting, and is capable of being studied, is of interest to executive coaching. If one accepts this assertion, it is conceivable to think of the coaching interaction as an experimental setting for the coach to work with the transposed life space of the client. In other words, coaching is a process in which to study and affect the direction and strength of the forces within the life space, specifically those acting as a counter-valence to the client's goal achievement, so as to facilitate a change in his or her behaviour. This captures the essence of my coaching approach and that of many colleagues, which may be expressed as "what goes on in the coaching encounter goes on outside of it". This is a central principle to the Gestalt coaching notion of *"working in the here-and-now, right here, right now*", as Bluckert (2015) described it – or re-creating and experimenting with real issues in real time.

How meaningful and useful the concept of the life space is in this context is not sufficiently researched. This study makes a contribution in this area by exploring the life space as existing at an individual level, whilst being transposed into the greater and different life space of the coaching process.

2.2.5. Gap in the literature

The main body of the literature relating to the make-up of the life space is, in general, dated, mostly published between 1917 and the mid 1990's. More contemporary research has come from Burnes (2004a; 2004b; 2015; 2020), Burnes and Cooke (2013) and Burnes

and Bargal (2017), amongst others. The work of Burnes is primarily based on a critical evaluation and comparative analysis of the relevant literature and the conceptual roots of field theory (Parlett, 1991), and focuses on the make-up and relevance of Lewin's change management theories to complexity theories and organisational development. My study differs, making a new contribution to the literature by focusing specifically on the make-up of the under-researched concept of the life space, and evaluating its relevance in the field of executive coaching. Unlike the work of Burnes (2004a; 2004b), my research uses a critical realist philosophy (Bhaskar, 2008a; Fleetwood, 2014), and a conceptual analysis methodology (de Rivera, 1981) to explicate the characteristics, relevance and contribution of the life space to contemporary executive coaching.

Although the work of Pelham (2016) and Bluckert (2015; 2021) has considered the concept of the co-created life space in coaching, their work has been part of a wider study within which the life space is not a central focus. As such, there is little in-depth research to describe and explain the component structures and mechanisms of the life space as a co-creation between two people, yet this conceptualisation is of importance to our understanding of the dyadic coaching process. Furthermore, the client-coach interaction is an area in which there is limited research (Cotterill and Passmore, 2019). How meaningful and useful Lewin's concept of the life space is, as a phenomenon that can be transposed unaltered into another setting such as the executive coaching session for experimentation, is not sufficiently researched. This study makes a contribution in this area by exploring the life space as existing at an individual level, whilst being transposed unaltered into the greater and different life space of the coaching process.

This research seeks to contribute to filling these gaps in knowledge by using conceptual analysis and empirical evidence to explicate what, if anything, about the make-up of the life space makes it meaningful and useful in executive coaching.

2.3. Effects of the life space

There is a series of claims made by Lewin throughout the course of his experimental research (Lewin, 1939; 1944; 1946; 1947a; 1947b; 1948; 1951; 1952; 1996), and in Gestalt literature (Parlett, 1991; 1997) about the effect of the phenomenon of the life space on human behaviour. These works state that the life space is real because it determines behaviour; behaviour is goal-driven and is a result of the resolution of tension systems in the life space; and change in the life space is a conceptualisation of human growth and development. The theory and issues surrounding each of these claims is presented below.

2.3.1. Reality of the life space

For Lewin, the life space is actually an empirical space which is as real as a physical one (Lewin, 1939). The nature of the reality of the life space for Lewin is that it has a causal effect on behaviour (Lewin, 1939, pp.868-896). Lewin's position was that the life space can be a perceivable phenomenon, akin to a magnetic energy field, in which the actor is portrayed not as a person but as a life space - a person in, affecting and affected by a situation. However, knowledge of the life space can be fallible: "*the life space is the total psychological environment which the person experiences subjectively, although not necessarily consciously*" (Wheeler, 2008, p.1640). This philosophical position on the ontology and epistemology of the life space is consistent with the philosophy of critical realism (Bhaskar, 2008a; 2011), which is the conceptual framework for this study. This synchronicity has methodological implications, as detailed in Chapter 3 on the overall research strategy. In brief, from a critical realist perspective, the life space is real because it has a causal effect on behaviour, and this reality is not dependent on the presence of empirical experience or knowledge. In other words, the life space will be present and will have an effect without awareness, and the reality of the life space is the presence of structures and mechanisms that make this actuality. As Myers (2020) put it, "*in this sense the LS is akin to the water in which a fish swims*" – the life space is ubiquitous, even if outside our awareness.

From this philosophical position, Lewin insists that the first task of a field-theorist approach is the determination of which situations and behaviours are empirically possible and which are not, as determined by all the properties of the person's life space as a whole, and the associated constellation of the regions and forces (Lewin, 1936). In the life space, "behaviour" is never solely caused by the person, nor solely determined by factors in the surrounding environment. For Lewin, the person's behaviour is an interaction with individual factors in the immediacy of the surrounding environment. He states that each of us, and all of us together, live in life spaces (Lewin, 1936) governed by forces induced by the situation we are in and the people we are with (Lewin, 1944). People in the same situation exist in different life spaces with similar and different forces. For instance, people who attend the same meeting are actually in varying psychological worlds (life spaces), in which they will define their internal experience of the social and physical environment in unique ways (Nevis, 2001), and will behave accordingly.

From the Gestalt perspective (Parlett, 1991, pp.68-9), the life space is a personal process in which certain parts of one's total experience become figural, as a need, with a motivation towards the goal of meeting the need, and other parts of the life space are organised around them as ground. The life space is the person interacting with their environment, and is a way of describing an ongoing, evolving and transforming process in which the person continually engages with and configures the experiential field, choosing their own reality and appropriate action. Lewin posited that an understanding of the interaction between the person and their perception of their socio-psychological environment, their life space, will permit the understanding and the prediction of the person's behaviour, and suggest how it might be intentionally changed (Lewin, 1946; 1951).

More recently, Lindorfer (2021, p.29-46), in her study of the relationship between field theory and personality theory in Gestalt psychotherapy, explicated the processes by which the life space influences behaviour. She described the facts in the life space (objects, persons, activities) as related to each other, and the person and the environment as being

mutually interdependent. If and how an object, person or event is experienced is, therefore, a result of a dynamic process of organisation, in which the Gestalt properties of the object or event and the total configuration in the person's perceptual field play a substantial role. The perceptual field is not isolated, but in close communication with the overall "inner" situation, especially the person's prevailing goals, intentions and needs (Soff, 2018). The structure of the regions and the meaning of the life space is intentionally organised by the person's motivation to achieve a goal or goals that meet the need the person is most aware of. The life space thereby moves to a state of unity and equilibrium. Therefore, there is a direct relationship between the momentary state of the individual and the structure of his/her psychological environment. This momentary relationship is a unique constellation of the structure of the regions and the meaning of the life space.

2.3.2. Life space as a tension system

According to Lewin, as has been mentioned, the life space has a causal effect on behaviour, because it is a field organised, directed and influenced by the person's intentions to meet their momentary and pressing needs. Once an intention develops, it creates a tension system (Zeigarnick, 1927) and there is energy to move towards a desired goal and thereby reorganise the life space to a state of balance or equilibrium, thus allowing the emergence of other need–tension systems to be satisfied through a continuous cycle of experience (Nevis, 2001). The tension system energises perception of the phenotypic and genotypic facts in the environment of the person's life space associated with the need, and behaviour is directed towards a release of tension, a satisfaction of need through achieving the goal. For Lewin, tension systems represent a locus of energy for work and change. They give dynamic functional existence to the life space in the form of contradictory valences that positively enable or negatively restrain goal achievement. Lewin contends that the constellation of these forces at a moment in time determine what behaviours are possible and not possible in the moment.

Gould (1955, pp.305-312) considered the applicability of Lewin's system of psychology, including the life space, to the classroom. In so doing, he described Lewin's process of

energy, motivation and need-satisfaction in the life space as a change in cognitive structure. A need or quasi-need communicates with a region in the life space and "*throws it into a state of tension. Tension endows some environmental region with dynamic characteristics "valence" which gives the region active functional existence in the life space*".

2.3.3. Life space as human growth and development

Lewin perceived the role of psychologists as one of working with a client's unstable, disorganised or maladjusted life space, or region of the life space. An instability in the life space can lead to the instability of the person (Lewin, 1939), and unless this is attended to, the person is vulnerable to what he termed regression – a reversion to a less complex, more disorganised life space, which impedes growth. Lewin defines the development of the individual as a process of extending, differentiating and restructuring the boundaries and regions of the life space, to move from a state of tension and instability where goals do not meet needs, to a state of stability and equilibrium in the life space, where needs are satisfied (Lewin, 1946).

From a Gestalt perspective, Nevis (2001) suggested that human development is manifest in capacities for attaining goals becoming more specialised, skills becoming more finely honed, and life spaces becoming more highly differentiated toward a perspective to see, hold and handle greater complexity. As such, one of the symptoms of the expansion and increasing differentiation of the life space during human development is an increasing variety of behaviour that satisfies the individual's needs and maintains a sense of equilibrium when confronted with increasingly complex challenges. Kegan (1994) draws on this process of extending, differentiating and restructuring the phenomenon of human perception and perspective in his study on the evolution of consciousness, as it relates to the ever-increasing demands of our environment and culture. In order to cope with rapid growth in the mental demands of modern life, the professional helper has to know how to build the capacity for the individual to reconcile and integrate competing influences, and to handle more complexity.

Rather than attempt to identify all possible influences and objects within a person's life space, Lewin (1946) would select a portion of the field which was relevant to the particular issue or topic under investigation. As Parlett put it:

> "*... the openness to anything in the field is not a call for exhaustive inclusion in which each and every contributory influence within the person's or group's reality has to be accommodated ... The field is organised and what is most relevant or pressing is readily discoverable in the present. Instead of exhaustively documenting what is in the field, there is attention to what is momentarily or persistently relevant or interesting*" (Parlett, 1991, pp.68-9).

In a contemporary coaching context, this has echoes of topic and goal setting and reality testing, as conceptualised in the TGROW (Topic, Goal, Reality, Options, Wrap-up) model of performance coaching (Whitmore, 2009). It also aligns with the more recent theory of coaching for vertical development in leaders (Sharma, 2019, pp.247-260; Sharma and Cook-Greuter, 2010; Bluckert, 2019a; 2019b) and the theory of coaching for an increasingly complex world (Berger and Fitzgerald, 2019, pp.293-304).

2.3.4. Gap in the literature

The majority of the studies on the reality of the life space originate in the Gestalt tradition of therapy (Nevis, 2001; Parlett, 1991; 1997; Lindorfer, 2021). Unlike these studies, this research considers the reality of the life space outside of the therapeutic context and in the context of executive coaching. This research builds on the foundational concepts of Lewin and what is known about the life space in the therapeutic context, but it is primarily focused on what this research tells us about the transferability of this knowledge to dyadic coaching, to establish the extent to which the life space is a meaningful and useful reality in this context. The extent to which the life space, and the concept of the tension system therein, is meaningful and useful to executive coaching in relation to the topic, goal and

issues under investigation has not been researched to any depth. McLaughlin and Cox (2016) make a brief reference to the life space in the context of goal-setting and coaching to develop braver leadership. However, the research into the notion of the client's coaching needs and goals as a tension system is underdeveloped, and is therefore a central aspect of this study.

Unlike this study, none of the previous studies offer any conceptual analysis of the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space as a conceptualisation of adult growth and development, and the extent to which this might align with, refute, or extend the modalities of performance coaching and coaching for vertical development. The literature reveals that for Lewin "*what has effects is real*" (Lewin, 1936, p.19) and the life space is causal and real. The question of if and how such an effect from the life space is meaningful and useful when applied to coaching remains important but unanswered. The emerging theories of coaching for vertical development and for an increasingly complex world align with the notion of a change in the life space being a change in cognition and a growth in consciousness, but these theories make no reference to the life space as a conceptualisation of adult development.

2.4. Lewin's philosophy of science

This section of the SLR evaluates the literature on Lewin's philosophy of science, as reflected in his claims about the effect of the life space and how this phenomenon is represented in his topological psychology (Lewin, 1936; 2013). Lewin believed that psychology needed to follow physics to be regarded as a respectable science, and therefore applied physics and mathematical concepts to his research into social psychology. Lewin defined the life space in his Principles of Topological Psychology (1936; 2013, p. 340) as one of 103 definitions (Lewin, 1936, pp.332-46) across methodological, mathematical, psychological and dynamic conceptualisations. For Lewin, the person and their perception of and interaction with their life space has a direct causal and predictable effect on their behaviour, because he considered properties such as

personality, will and emotion as subject to static laws and capable of being studied experimentally, including mathematically (Lewin, 1946; 1947a).

Lewin stated that the life space was useful only for constructing and representing causality between the person, their perception of their momentary environment, and behaviour. This is because Lewin conceived of the life space as having structures, mechanisms and forces which directly determine behaviours. This reflects Lewin's first and foremost interest in trying to develop a language, a topology, for the representation of psychological phenomena, central to which was his conceptualisation of the life space. Lewin's Principles of Topological Psychology asserts that people do not perceive separate objects directly but rather impose an organisational pattern on them in their mind, both consciously and unconsciously, to intentionally organise the field into their momentary life space, and thereby make meaning.

Lewin's philosophy requires science to be able to handle everything in a person's life that is psychologically important to him or her at a moment in time, and to organise all those elements (goals, needs, behaviour, tensions, etc.) into a single system of description, representation and explanation, namely the life space. In this goal, Lewin was strongly influenced by Cassirer (1910), and he adapted his field theory concept from physics to show how the psychological forces surrounding an individual or group could influence their behaviour (Lewin, 1936; 1948). Lewin understood reality as an ensemble of relations and, in so doing, was "*redefining psychology as the study of behavior in the psychological field*" (Bronfrenbrenner, 1977, p.203).

In order to express the properties of the life space, Lewin created "dynamic constructs" based on his theory of dynamic interdependence - a fact's effect on other facts and it being affected by these others. For Lewin, issues such as this are to be attended to, not merely theoretically, but in a practical manner sufficiently specific to attack the concrete tasks of the laboratory or clinic (Marrow, 1969). This was central to his quest for scientific respectability, and led him to use topology and vectors, sub-disciplines of mathematics, which study relations amongst regions in a space, as the foundation of his field theory,

which was hence called topological psychology and vector psychology. Topological and vector psychology explain social behaviour by representing the structure of the total situation and the resulting events (Lewin, 1939).

> "*In general one may say that topological tools allow us to determine which events are possible in a given life space and which are not possible. Vector concepts are necessary to determine which of the possible events will actually occur in a given case*" (Lewin, 1936, p.85).

In essence, Lewin thought it essential to discern, represent and understand the psychological forces, and their strength and direction in the life space, that emerge from the person's perception of, and motivation to meet, their needs in a momentary total situation. Lewin suggested that only by mapping these life space forces by his topological and vector psychology, is it possible to understand what behaviour is possible and not possible. Lewin's idea and use of his own topography and mathematics to illustrate his theories, including the life space, have been the subject of challenge. Leeper (1940, pp.285–287) notes that Lewin's methods have been criticised for giving very little indication as to why such topological and vector representation of a life space might be fruitful to psychology. He defended Lewin's topological psychology as a means of indicating how psychological situations could be represented, and as a means of permitting the development of careful, explicit definitions of directions of behaviour tendencies and of relationships of direction in the life space. Leeper (1940) agrees with Lewin that such definitions are significant because they permit the careful statement of the conditions for the measurement of the driving and restraining psychological force of a person's motivation to achieve a goal to meet a need (Lewin, 1938, p.247).

However, Burnes and Cooke (2013, p.418) suggest that "*at best, just focusing on a few obvious driving and restraining forces, ignoring the complex psychological conditions that*

make up the entire life space, will only provide a very partial understanding of the situation, if not a misleading one".

They assert that Lewin's complicated topological and vector psychology was blamed by his colleagues for the fact that his work, including his concept of the life space, was underestimated and underrepresented during his lifetime and beyond, a position supported by Marrow (1969). Only a few scholars (e.g. Herbst, 1952) use Lewin's topological approach in their work because of the complicated descriptions, partly written in a self-created mathematical language (Burnes and Cooke, 2013). Endrejat and Burnes (2024) assert that this complicated language sounds alien to current ways of describing social phenomena. Even Lewin's friend and biographer, Alfred Marrow (1969, p.116), commented that Lewin's writings on topology were "*difficult reading*" and that "*few psychologists were willing to devote the time to the careful study of his complex system of concepts*".

Burnes, Hughes and Rune conclude that Lewin has fallen out of favour as:

> "*In his quest for scientific respectability, he attempted to adopt physics with its mathematical rigor as the underpinning "paradigm science" for his Field Theory, making it over-complicated and somewhat impenetrable to both scholars and practitioners"* (Burnes, Hughes and Rune, 2018, pp.408-425).

Burnes and Cooke (2013) suggest that Lewin used a complicated Jordan curve, or egg-shaped diagram, to represent the life space as all the factors in the environment as perceived by the individual that affects the individual at a given moment. They suggest that this form of representation can be viewed as a distraction that leads the focus away from the merits and usefulness of Lewin's theories and onto his mathematical representations of them. Furthermore, this method of representing the life space does not readily add any new insights to the behaviour it supposedly explains, and it cannot be used to predict a person's behaviour before it occurs. Rather, Lewin's diagrams are after-the-fact representations of his data. Burnes, Hughes and Rune (2018, p.45) describe

Lewin's topology as the "*Achilles heel of his Field Theory and suggest that these tools should be applied only when and where they help and do not hinder progress"*. Burnes and Cooke (2013) suggest Lewin's use of his own topology has significantly limited the amount of published, peer-reviewed research literature that can be drawn on. Although Lewin's ideas are frequently cited (e.g. the three-step model of change and action research), Bartunek and Woodman (2015), Burnes (2015; 2020) and Cummings et al. (2016; 2017) assert that this does not necessarily mean that the authors have read or understand Lewin's work. Indeed, the esoteric nature of Lewin's topology, including his description of the life space and its effects, provides a challenge to this study. It is a challenge to express the complexity and nuance of the life space, and any relevance it might have to coaching, in a way that retains integrity with his conceptualisation but is accessible and understandable to the research participants and the readers of this thesis. Notwithstanding these challenges, Burnes and Cooke (2013, p.415) say that "*when stripping away Lewin's maths from his theories, and revealing the Gestalt underpinnings, a clear, useful and integrated approach to change emerges".* Burnes (2009), Lippitt (1939) and Marrow (1969) conclude that, whilst Lewin's topology might be suspect, his Gestalt-based field theory, and the use of conventional topography to generate life space diagrams, are in themselves quite robust and useable.

Gold (1999), in his anthology of the works of Lewin, suggests that Lewin's goal of predicting behaviour reflects the empirical methods by which his scientific assertions should be tested and considered to be real. Gold (1999) offers a nuanced interpretation, suggesting that Lewin ought to be considered as a psychologist who formulated the phenomenon of the life space as something that is perceived and socially constructed through the interaction of the person with their environment, often unconsciously and out of awareness. This is a phenomenological position from which Lewin sees the life space as a real, moving thing, something that can be perceived as an emerging constructed phenomenon (Francesetti, 2019a; 2019b). By contrast, Gold (1999) asserts that Lewin's deterministic and positivist position relates to how the life space should be scientifically tested for a direct causal relationship with behaviour, a relationship that makes the life

space real. Easton (2010, p.118) puts it thus, "*the world is socially constructed, but not entirely so, the "real" world breaks through to limit which social behavior is possible".*

Endrejat and Burnes (2024), in their paper explaining and updating Lewin's concept of topological psychology, give a comprehensive critique of his methods and how they can be adjusted to improve how we think about planned organisational change. They suggest that plain language should be used to explain the concepts employed, drawings should be used to illustrate and explain the change situation, and there should be a focus on the exceptions to the rules to generate a better understanding of organisational life.

2.4.1. Gap in the literature

The literature on Lewin's philosophy of science and his own topological and vector psychology suggest that there are significant challenges to this study of the phenomenon of the life space. However, they also represent some of the reasons for this research. An investigation to understand and describe in detail the life space, so as to reveal what, if any, meaning and use it has in coaching, has not been undertaken before. In getting beyond the difficulties with Lewin's philosophy of science and his topological language and mathematics, we are able to discover what will be lost if this key idea of Lewin is misunderstood or neglected. Currently, there is no literature on the merits or otherwise of representing the life space as part of a coaching process, nor on how meaningful or useful this might be. The literature confirms that the research question remains unanswered. The literature suggests that by investigating the make-up, effects and the philosophical challenges of the relevance of the life space to executive coaching, this study will enhance the coach's awareness and understanding of how they can work with the psychological forces and the power of the executive's psychological and social environment.

2.5. The life space and coaching

This part of the SLR evaluates the literature on the distinct characteristics of executive coaching, to reveal an alignment with the concept of the life space and how it is meaningful and useful in this context. The SLR then considers the extent to which the

coaching literatures on Gestalt, systems and constellation coaching and the relational field reveal knowledge about the meaning and use of the concept of the life space in executive coaching. Finally, the literature on the life space in other helping professions which have a similar dyadic, relational quality is considered. These include counselling and teaching. Exploring the life space as a concept in this wider body of literature adds to what is known about the meaning and use of the phenomenon in executive coaching.

2.5.1. Executive coaching

An evaluation of the literature on executive coaching reveals that my research to establish if and how the life space is meaningful and useful is significant in two respects.

Firstly, the life space is a conceptualisation of the person as intimately connected to and situated in a complex social and psychological world (Lewin, 1951). This conceptualisation aligns with the literature that defines executive coaching as working with the individual's personal psychological reality whilst embracing the executive's organisational context and requirements (Mura, 2003). One of the aims of the executive coach is to help the client to increase alignment between their individual and organisational needs, with all the stakeholder needs involved in the coaching process (Mura, 2003; Stokes and Jolly, 2018; Robinson, 2019). This distinctive requirement to align the needs of multiple stakeholders suggests that multiple stakeholders are "present" and influential in the immediacy of the client's psychological environment during coaching.

> "*The dynamics of the psychosocial system of which the executive is part need to be understood during coaching if that individual is to take up his or her role effectively in the organization*" (Stokes and Jolly, 2018, p.256).

The life space offers the coach a new means of conceptualising and working with this psychosocial system and the complexity that it brings for the executive.

Secondly, executive coaching is now one of the dominant methodologies for developing leaders (Sonesh et al., 2015), yet there continues to be a gap in the knowledge about how executive coaching works and what the effective components of such coaching are (Grant et al., 2010). Bennet and Lemonie (2014) suggest that this gap is, in part, a function of the fact that the organisations where the executive coaching takes place are increasingly dynamic and complex environments. This, in turn, suggests that research into the life space as a conceptualisation of the relationship between an executive and the increasingly dynamic and complex environment in which they are required to operate will make a contribution to filling this gap.

2.5.2. Gestalt coaching

> "*Many of [Lewin's] concepts have been so widely adopted that they figure as intrinsic to science itself and their origin is not remembered. Often enough ideas and techniques Lewin originated are discussed without reference to him"* (Marrow, 1969, p.ix).

This is the case with a substantive body of the coaching literature that considers the person in their environment, situation or context, particularly the genres of Gestalt, systems and constellation coaching. This literature has resonance with the life space, although the concept is rarely explicitly or directly referenced. This means that, to a large extent, any claim that this literature offers anything other than relatively superficial knowledge on the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space is speculative. That said, the position adopted in this study is that there is merit in considering this literature, in order to establish what it says, if anything, about the research question, albeit implicitly.

The literature on Gestalt coaching, and its focus on field theory and the person in relation to their environment, or total situation, suggests that the life space is meaningful and useful. Leary-Joyce (2014, p.171) speaks of the coach needing "*environmental awareness*", and suggests that Lewin's Force Field Analysis (Lewin, 1951) is meaningful

and useful when the coach works with the client's deep internal resistance to any proposed change. He describes issues brought to coaching by a client because they are feeling stuck, and explains that these are often held in balance by the interaction of opposing sets of forces – those that seek to promote change (driving forces) and those attempting to maintain the status quo (restraining forces). Whilst this has strong echoes of Lewin's conceptualisation of the life space as containing enabling and restraining valences in relation to goal-driven behaviour, Leary-Joyce makes no direct explicit reference to the life space. Bluckert (2015, pp.17-18) talks of the coach having a "*field mentality*" as "*an outlook and a way of thinking about the interconnectedness between events and the settings or situations in which they take place. It invites you to look at the total situation*". The field perspective invites us to consider that *"our existential states vary and change according to the total situation – or "life space", as Lewin called it – which we are currently experiencing"* (Bluckert, 2021, p.18).

Whilst the Gestalt coaching literature makes occasional explicit reference to the concept of the life space, it does not consider in any depth how meaningful and useful it is, beyond being one of a number of conceptualisations specific to the theoretical perspective. The literature suggests that the life space is influential in Gestalt coaching, but the underlying structures and mechanisms are insufficiently developed and explicated, leaving the research question unanswered.

2.5.3. Systems and constellation coaching

The literature on systems coaching (Lawrence, 2019; Cavanagh, 2006) and systemic and constellation coaching (Whittington, 2012; Starr (2019) make no direct or substantial reference to the concept of the life space. However, these modalities often position the client as indivisible from their situation or system. Cavanagh, in his work on coaching as a complex adaptive conversation, notes that the behaviour of a person is the behaviour of the system, called forth by the complex web of relations in which the person finds themselves:

> "… *coaching from a complex adaptive system perspective does not draw a dichotomy between the individual and the… wider organization*" (Cavanagh, 2006, p.327).

By building on the work of Lewin's son (Lewin, R, 1994, pp.16-17) and the notion of complexity and chaos, Cavanagh invites coaches to understand the complexity of the human person, the human systems, and the complex adaptive system that is the coaching engagement:

> "… *to have the courage to approach human tensions that disturb us, yet paradoxically help us to grow more fully present and responsive human beings*" (Cavanagh, 2006, p.352).

Lawrence (2019) invites the coach to look beyond the immediacy of the one-to-one coaching relationship to the wider systems, as a "*linear pathway toward a more sophisticated and desirable practice model … to offer a simple framework and language to enable practitioners to talk about different aspects of systemic practice*". Starr (2019, p.212), in her work on coaching and seeing systems, suggests that clients increase their effectiveness and choice when they can see their deep internal systems, the forces acting upon them from the larger systems of which they are a part. Whittington (2012), in his work on constellations coaching, acknowledges hidden and organising forces in the system which create invisible fields of influence over everything in their path, similar to the magnetic field of Lewin (1951). He contends that coaching the client must inevitably involve coaching the system towards a form of balance and equilibrium. Whittington (2012, p.63; p.73) invites the coach and client to "*map their own system*" and then move from mapping to constellating towards "*living maps*" of the relational system.

Clutterbuck states:

> "*I do not think it is possible to be a truly effective coach without supporting the client to become more aware of the systems in which they belong; coaching the client must inevitably involve coaching the system*" (Clutterbuck, 2012, p. viii).

None of the literature referenced above makes any direct or substantial reference to the life space, primarily because the roots of the concept lie in the Gestalt tradition. Accordingly, there is little to no direct, explicit and empirical evidence in these coaching literatures that the life space is meaningful and useful. However, it is clear from the review of these literatures that these modalities primarily position the client as indivisible from their situation or system and influenced by it. The extent to which these theories explicate how the client is influenced by and yet influences the system or systems they are in is less clear. This would suggest that research into the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space as a new method of discerning and representing the resulting constellation of forces at dynamic play between the client and their environment has the potential to extend this literature. The life space positions the client as indivisible from, but not subservient to, their environment. The life space and its phenomenological qualities suggest that the concept is implicit and influential in the foundations of systems and constellation theories of coaching. Answering the question about how meaningful and useful the life space is to executive coaching makes the implicit explicit, it explicates and rediscovers the concept of the life space to establish the nature and full extent of its meaning and use to executive coaching and the range of associated theories.

2.5.4. Relational field coaching

Chidiac (2013, pp.11-13), in her study on creating an organisational coaching culture, seeks to capture both the dyadic relational and field sensitive nature of coaching – the interplay between the individual and the wider field. She contends that the context in which coaching takes place can be as impactful as the coaching relationship itself, and she created the paradigm of relational field coaching to reflect this. To this end, Chidiac suggests that relational field coaching is well captured by the three-pronged approach of

“self-other-situation”, or SOS, highlighting that all three dimensions need to be attended to (Denham-Vaughan and Chidiac, 2013). In a sense, and notwithstanding that no reference to the life space is made by Chidiac, this SOS model integrates Lewin’s concept of the life space as the phenomenon of a person in an environment with Dembo’s conceptualisation of the life space as a phenomenon between two people – a person, the other, in a situation (Dembo, 1964; 1975). Unlike my research into the life space and its effect on the individual client, the coach and the coaching process, Chidiac focuses on the organisational coaching culture. Whilst she seeks to capture both the dyadic relational and field sensitive nature of coaching, the emphasis is not on the dyadic interaction, as it is in my study, but on the organisational field.

2.5.5. Gap in the literature

The literature on executive, Gestalt, systems and constellation coaching and relational field coaching reveals that the knowledge about the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space to executive coaching is limited. Whilst this literature can be interpreted as making an implicit use of the concept, the life space is not substantively acknowledged or considered, either theoretically or empirically, in the coaching literature. The same can be said for the emerging genre of coaching for vertical development in leaders.

Overall, there is little or no tradition of the development of the life space traceable to the theory and practice of executive coaching. No substantive research on the development of the concept from abstract theory into professional practice exists. Whilst there are a small number of coaching studies that make reference to the life space, primarily studies in Gestalt coaching and studies of the coaching relationship, none of these studies consider or evaluate in any depth the life space in one-to-one executive coaching, the life space of the coach, or, most significantly, the notion of the life space as co-constructed by the client and the coach through the coaching interaction. There are no studies on how meaningful and useful the concept of the life space is from the perspective of coaches. As such, the current and relevant coaching literature confirms that the research question at

the centre of this study, how meaningful and useful is the life space to executive coaching, remains unanswered and constitutes a gap in the knowledge base.

2.5.6. Life space in other similar helping professions

The knowledge of the life space in current and relevant coaching theories is limited, therefore, the literature on other relevant studies is considered. These literatures embrace teaching, counselling and therapy as helping professions that have a similar dyadic, relational quality to coaching. This literature is reviewed to establish what it reveals about the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space when applied in practice, and what this might reveal towards answering the research question about its meaning and use to executive coaching.

2.5.7. Life space and teaching

Brant-James (2008, p.4) coined the term "*Life Space Pioneers*" to describe the work of Lewin and his concept of the life space as a way of emphasising "*that individual behavior must be understood in its social ecology*". Redl (1959, pp.1-18) applied this concept in his technique of the "*life space interview*", by moving therapy from the office to front-line conflicts in the ecology of troubled children and youth (Long, Wood and Fecser, 2002). Redl (1966) was a founder member of milieu therapy, which applied the concept of the life space to create healing environments for children who heretofore had struggled with adults. Between 1941 and 1968, Redl and his team ran "*life space milieu*" days (Brant-James, 2008, p.6) at the University of Michigan outdoor camp for troubled children and young people. Redl (1966, p.718) provides an account of a life space interview. It is characterised by adopting an open and inquiring stance, in contrast to the didactic stance of a lot of teachers. It advocates not standing in judgement over the child's behaviour, but seeking to understand the behaviour from their perspective and to demonstrate this understanding to the child. It invites using the word "*why*" sparingly, saying "*it is very difficult to explore reasons*". The life space interview strongly recommends that the interviewer gets a description of what happened and to listen to what the child says. It advises against "*wishful thinking*", whereby the interviewer projects onto the child what

they as adults wish to hear and believe. Redl describes characteristics of the life space interview that are not unlike some of the foundational characteristics of established coaching techniques found in introductory texts such as TGROW (Whitmore, 2009) and in basic concepts of coaching (Hill, 2004). These include an open and inquiring stance characterised by questions, not answers; being non-judgmental; displaying empathy and unconditional positive regard; trying to establish the reality of the situation, and avoiding inviting justification of behaviour by the use of the word “why”.

Similarly, Adams et al. (2022, pp. 184-188) applied the life space in their inquiry into how the theoretical frameworks guide Child and Youth Worker students in their efforts to form meaningful connections with children, youth and families. They conclude that, for some participants, the greatest impact of the theoretical frameworks that they were taught lay in “*increasing their sensitivity to one’s life space*”. For example, one participant commented on how the concept of the life space had allowed him to “*gain perspective on the social, cultural and historical factors that may affect an individual”.* Another participant noted how “*an approach that focuses on life space work and meeting the child where they are at physically, mentally and emotionally can help form deeper connections with children and youth*”. The study concluded that life space work is largely based on the assumption that children and youth often learn best in the moment, and a life space intervention is about meeting them where they are developmentally.

Gould (1955, pp.305-312) studied the applicability of Lewin’s “*system of psychology*”, including the life space, to the classroom and an actual teaching situation, to establish how this might work and to what effect. He applied Lewin’s concept of behaviour in the classroom as a function of the child and his/her environment (Barker, Dembo and Lewin, 1941). This required the teacher to understand the psychological world in which the child lives. The study explored how the life space properties of the psychological past, present and future and the levels of reality and irreality in the child could be changed by teaching to create learning through a change in cognition. Gould confirmed Lewin’s contention that

learning simply results in a more highly differentiated life space, "*more sub-regions connected with defined paths*" (Lewin, Lippitt and Escalona, 1940).

Similarly, and more recently, Ilyasov et al. (2021) studied how the training of teachers prevented the impact of destructive online communities on adolescent behaviour. The study concluded that teachers can master techniques to develop critical thinking in school children, strategies to help them manage negative emotions, and ways to expand the life space of adolescents. In essence, the study concluded that adolescents are influenced by the online social environment due to their uncritical thinking and unstable worldview or life space. Developing critical thinking, being able to more highly differentiate reality from irreality, enables an expanded and more stable life space.

The literature on the application of the life space in teaching and working with children and young people reveals the meaningfulness and usefulness of the concept in this context. The literature positions the life space as a form of interview, a form of "milieu therapy", a framework to make connection, and a conceptualisation of the phenomenon of human learning and growth. This literature is suggestive of the fact that the life space might have some similar meaning and utility in executive coaching. However, the generalisability of the applicability of the concept life space from one milieu to another similar milieu; from teaching to coaching, is untested. Furthermore, teaching is often a group process, unlike the dyadic nature of executive coaching. That said, the evaluation of the literature on the life space in teaching suggests that exploring its meaning and use in executive coaching has the potential to integrate learning from one discipline to another.

2.5.8. Life space and counselling and therapy

Brown and Reavey (2016), in their work with patients on medium-secure forensic psychiatric units, investigated where the limit of the life space of a patient can be found in material terms and relational terms. They concluded that in relational terms, the life space can be expanded far beyond the physical limits of any environment, and they cite the effect of music as evoking this expansion. Using relational-material approach to

autobiographical remembering (Brown and Reavey, 2016, pp.200-22), they discuss the analytic framework provided by the life space. They consider the relationship between the personal, psychological world of the life space and the impersonal, non-psychological world of the socio-material environment, and the formulation of the memory, as an expansion of the life space. They consider the connection to past persons, objects or places as part of the current life space "*whereby the mobilization of the past intertwines within contemporaneous relations*".

Rodgers (2010), drawing on the work of Peavy (1996; 1997; 1999a; 1999b; 2000; 2001; 2004; 2008a; 2008b), developed the practice of life space mapping as a visual means of investigating the outcomes of counselling and psychotherapy from the client's frame of reference. Drawing on the five principles of Lewin's field theory (Lewin, 1951; Parlett, 1991; 1997), Rodgers (2010) conceptualises therapeutic outcomes in terms of changes in the life space through differentiation and restructuring, particularly changes in time perspective and in reality/irreality levels. In essence, Rodgers applies the life space to shift perception of problems from being of a person in isolation, to being between the person and their psychological view of their environment. In terms of looking at outcomes of counselling and psychotherapy, Rodgers suggests that this requires a subtle shift in focus, such that the person is no longer seen as primarily responsible for, or the root cause of, their problems and issues. Rather, problems and issues arise between the person and their environment. From this life space perspective, Rodgers asserts that the statement "I have felt tense, anxious or nervous" becomes "There has been tension, anxiety or nervousness between myself and significant things in my life". Rodgers suggests that this life space perspective is useful as it not only places the responsibility "between" the person and the environment, it brings a primary focus on the dynamic of the tension, anxiety or nervousness.

Peavy (1997; 2000) drew extensively on Lewin's concept of the life space to describe the semantic network in which people are embedded (Peavy, 1997; 2000). He defined the life space through a socio-dynamic perspective, to be an aggregate of the meaning of all the

people, experiences, objects, relationships, events and so on that a person has accrued in life. For Peavy:

> "*A life space is like a hotel in which many voices take up residence. Depending upon the occasion and the orientation of the individual, different residents may give voice. Together, the counsellor and help-seeker investigate the help-seeker's life space and narrated selves which reside the*re" (Peavy, 2001, p.9).

Peavy (2008b) developed life space mapping as a therapeutic tool, facilitating the explication of what a person considers to be the important and personally meaningful aspects of the life space with regard to their current concern, and to place different factors in association with each other. Peavy (2008b) considered the life space map not just a representation of a person's world, but a tool help people actively construct the meaning of their reality. Peavy (1997) saw the mapping process as a joint venture between the counsellor and client. The counsellor begins the process by inviting the client to populate a blank sheet of paper to map out experiences, events, people, relationships, needs, voices, obstacles, possibilities, and other information, as a map of the present life space. The counsellor and client work together during the mapping so the counsellor can get an inside view of the life space of the client. Rodgers (2010) suggests that this approach enables the clarification and simplification of complex issues and situations, and can introduce structure to counteract disorganisation. Connections can be drawn between previously unrelated elements, patterns of influence can emerge in the act of creating the map, and problems and concerns become contextualised within a wider view (Peavy, 2004).

The literature on the life space in therapy and counselling reveals its meaning and use as a conceptualisation of therapeutic outcomes and as a therapeutic intervention of mapping between the counsellor and the client. As with the literature on the application of the life space in teaching, this literature cannot directly answer the research question about its

meaningfulness and usefulness in executive coaching. Nonetheless, it provides some of the foundations upon which an initial conceptualisation can be built, and signals the potential importance of exploring whether or not the life space has a similar meaning and utility in executive coaching and the reasons for this.

2.6. Summary of the life space in the literature

The aim of this literature review was to evaluate the big ideas, debates, issues and controversies about the concept of the life space, to reveal the current state of knowledge on how meaningful and useful it is to one-to-one executive coaching. The review considered what the literature reveals about the make-up of the life space, its effects and Lewin's philosophy of science, including his own topographical representation of the phenomenon. The review presented the debates and issues surrounding the life space and explored what the literature says about its relevance to coaching and what can be learnt from its application in similar dyadic helping relationships.

Overall, the literature positions the meaning of the life space as a central concept in field theory and in the study of behaviour in the psychological field. The life space represents the philosophical view of seeing and treating the person and their behaviour as indivisible from their environment, intimately connected to and situated in a complex and ever-changing psychological and social world. The phenomenon of the life space is a function of the person in a particular setting at a specific time, where the direction and strength of the associated social and psychological forces determine what behaviour is and is not possible. Behaviour is explained by understanding the structure of the total situation. The definition from the literature means that the life space can and does exist beyond the individual and as a phenomenon created between two or more people through interaction. It is a phenomenon that can be transposed into and represented in another setting such as the dyadic coaching encounter for experimentation and study.

The literature suggests that the usefulness of the life space in executive coaching is as a conceptualisation of a phenomenon that directly affects behaviour. For Lewin "*what has*

effects is real" (Lewin, 1936, p.19) and the life space is causal and real. The problems and issues a client brings to coaching are conceptualised as "between" the client and their environment, bringing a focus on the tension that is present in the "between". If a person's life space changes, so does their cognition and their behaviour. The literature also positions the life space as a conceptualisation of human growth and development, as it is concerned with expanding the individual's consciousness and perspective through which they experience and understand the world around them and their relationship to that world. This is primarily because it is a phenomenon based on perception, in which all actions are the result of the ever-changing resolution of need-tension systems towards equilibrium in the life space. By opening up and differentiating new and unknown regions of the life space, introducing structure to counteract disorganisation, and clarifying and simplifying complex situations to contextualise concerns in a wider view, the person increases their capacity to see and do more. The expansion and increased differentiation of the life space conceptualises the notion of awareness equalling choice, the life space as a heuristic, a form of human development manifest in the increasing variety of behaviour that satisfies needs and maintains equilibrium when the client is confronted with the ever-increasing complex challenges of executive life.

The literature on using the life space in working with children and young people in education positions the life space as a form of interview, a form of "milieu therapy", a framework to make connection, and a conceptualisation of teaching and learning. The literature on the life space in therapy and counselling reveals it to be a conceptualisation of therapeutic outcomes and a therapeutic intervention between the counsellor and the client involving the mapping of the life space. The life space in this context is an aggregate of the meaning of all the people, experiences, objects, relationships, events, and so on, that the person has accrued so far, including the dilemmas and tensions. The mapping of the life space can be seen as a heuristic construction of the meaning of the client's current reality; facilitating the explication of important and meaningful aspects of the life space with regard to the person's current concern. This is done through a process of drawing connections between previously unrelated elements so that patterns of influence emerge into the client's awareness.

The theory of the life space is largely absent from most of the relevant literature. This reflects the position of Markus (2005, p.180) that "*Lewin's idea that in seeking the sources of action we should include the person and his or her life space has not been a contagious one*". Accordingly, the coaching literature reveals that the knowledge about the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space to executive coaching is limited. The literature on Gestalt, systems, constellation and relational and field coaching suggest the life space is implicitly influential in theory and practice. However, the concept is not substantively acknowledged and considered either theoretically or empirically. There is little or no tradition of the development of this concept traceable to the theory and practice of executive coaching. No substantive research on the development of the concept from abstract theory into professional practice exists. Whilst there are a small number of coaching studies that make reference to the life space, primarily studies in Gestalt coaching, none of these studies consider or evaluate in any depth the life space in one-to-one executive coaching, the life space of the coach, and the notion of the life space as co-constructed by the client and the coach through the coaching interaction and the coaching process. There are no studies on how meaningful and useful the concept of the life space is from the perspective of coaches. The current coaching literature does not directly answer the research question. Although the literature on Lewin's philosophy of science and his topological and vector psychology highlight the challenges in revealing and understanding life space in the present context of executive coaching, not to do so runs the risk of missing important structures, mechanisms and nuances and thereby failing to realise the potential benefits of coaching with a clear understanding of the life space in mind.

The overall evaluation of the literature and the gaps in knowledge that are related to the focus of this research provide the platform for the significance and importance of this study. For the first time, the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space has been studied and researched at depth in executive coaching from the perspective of the coach. This approach relies on utilising existing knowledge, however limited, and uses the earlier

concept of the life space in an original way to offer a new and contemporary understanding. This is a novel contribution to the literature. This new theoretical conceptualisation brings to light, for the first time, the depth and specificity of what the life phenomenon brings to executive coaching.

The critical review of the literature argues that Lewin's offer has largely been unacknowledged, if not overlooked. Unlike the literature on some other models of coaching, coaching with the life space in mind is justified by empirical research and conceptual analysis (Jackson, 2004) and supported by relevant coaching theories, ideas and concepts.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p.183) refer to research designs as the “net” of ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs and assumptions that a researcher relies on to generate knowledge. Accordingly, this chapter outlines the paradigm of philosophy within which this question is situated. This includes the ontological and epistemological perspectives used. It sets out the research approach to answering the research question, and it explains the justification for the choice of research methodology. Data collection and analysis methods are presented, and issues of presentation, quality, reflexivity, ethics, and the assumptions and limitations of the research are addressed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the strategy and rationale for the research design.

3.2. Philosophical paradigm

This section clarifies how my assumptions about what is real, and how what is real is known, have informed my worldview and influenced the decisions I have made in choosing a particular approach and methodology for this research (Creswell, 2013). The philosophical position that is most congruent with my research is critical realism (Bhaskar, 2008a; 2011; Fleetwood, 2014; Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020). Critical realism is “*a meta-theory rooted in ontology – the study of the way the world is”* (Fleetwood, 2014, p.183). It represents a stance that accepts a realistic ontology, but questions the possibility of an objective experience of it, positioning our knowledge of the world as fallible. Fallibilism suggests that propositions concerning empirical knowledge can be accepted even though they cannot be proved with certainty, and that some knowledge is more certain than other knowledge, meaning that not all knowledge claims are equally fallible (Danermark et al., 2019). Accordingly, the philosophical frame of this research rejects the necessity of an inexorable link between ontology and epistemology. It is ontologically realist and epistemologically relativist/subjectivist, with a strong orientation towards an interpretivist focus. In other words, the life space exists and takes effect both

inside and outside awareness. Reducing a statement about the existence and nature of the life space to a question of what is known about it is an epistemic fallacy; to believe our knowledge of the life space is a direct representation of what it is really like is an ontic fallacy. The empirical evidence is not the full story or the entirety of explanations. In order to answer the research question, the research strategy has to accommodate epistemological relativism. This philosophical position draws a clear distinction between Lewin's experimental psychology and the phenomenon of the life space as something that exists beyond empirical observation and experience with underlying causal conditions of human behaviour, and Husserl's concept of the lifeworld as the lived experience of us as conscious beings (Husserl, 1983).

This critical realist position is a good fit with my research, as it aligned to Lewin's philosophy of the life space as described by Gold (1999). Lewin's position was that how people behave at a given moment in a given situation is a direct function of the life space (Lewin, 1951) and that the life space is a causal phenomenon and thereby "real". From this perspective, the quality of the real is not considered to be substance but causality (Tsoukas, 1989; Morgan, 2007; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2018). Viewing the life space from a critical realist perspective requires me, as the researcher, to distinguish between three levels of reality as described by Buch-Hansen and Nielsen (2020, p.29-31). Firstly, the empirical realism domain of people's experiences and observations of the life space; secondly, the actual realism domain of people's experiences and observations of the life space plus the events that can exist without them being experienced and observed; and thirdly, the deep domain of realism of the life space's structures and mechanisms not directly observable which can, under certain circumstances, sustain and cause events in the actual realism domain. This is the route to a fuller story of how the life space is meaningful and useful in executive coaching. It requires a "retroductive" mode of inference in the research, requiring the researcher to move beyond the empirical to the deeper levels of reality to identify causative mechanisms (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020, p.35). It is an approach that rejects the positivist notion of generalisability of findings in favour of the research output's applicability to or accommodation of real-life coaching scenarios (Johnson, et al, 2006), where the "real" includes what happens in coaching that is out of

awareness. The critical realist philosophy allows for the ontologically “real” life space to arise in different ways.

As a critical realist, I see my own and the research partners’ experience of the life space as an interpretation of the reality of this phenomenon, as opposed to seeing the reality of the life space as an interpretation. From this position, I accept the existence of alternative conceptual schemes that allow for different perceptions and interpretations of the same reality of the life space. Accordingly, as the investigator, I take responsibility for the final definitive interpretation of the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching and the justification for it. Three strategies were applied in operationalising this interpretive process: an ongoing reflexive process of examining my political and philosophical stance, my assumptions, responses and analytical choices; the offer of re-engagement with the research partners (through the sharing of transcripts and the offer of an opportunity to comment on them); and a clear statement of my own interpretive lenses (Jackson, 2016). Whilst gathering the data I accepted that mine and other researchers’ knowledge of the life space was interpretive and fallible and, as such, it was necessary to present the limitations of my findings and signal areas that will be worthy of further research.

In summary, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of critical realism suggest that this was a well thought through and coherent perspective on the world and the generation of knowledge. It is a perspective that accords with my own experience of the life space, and provides the appropriate philosophical frame for my research design.

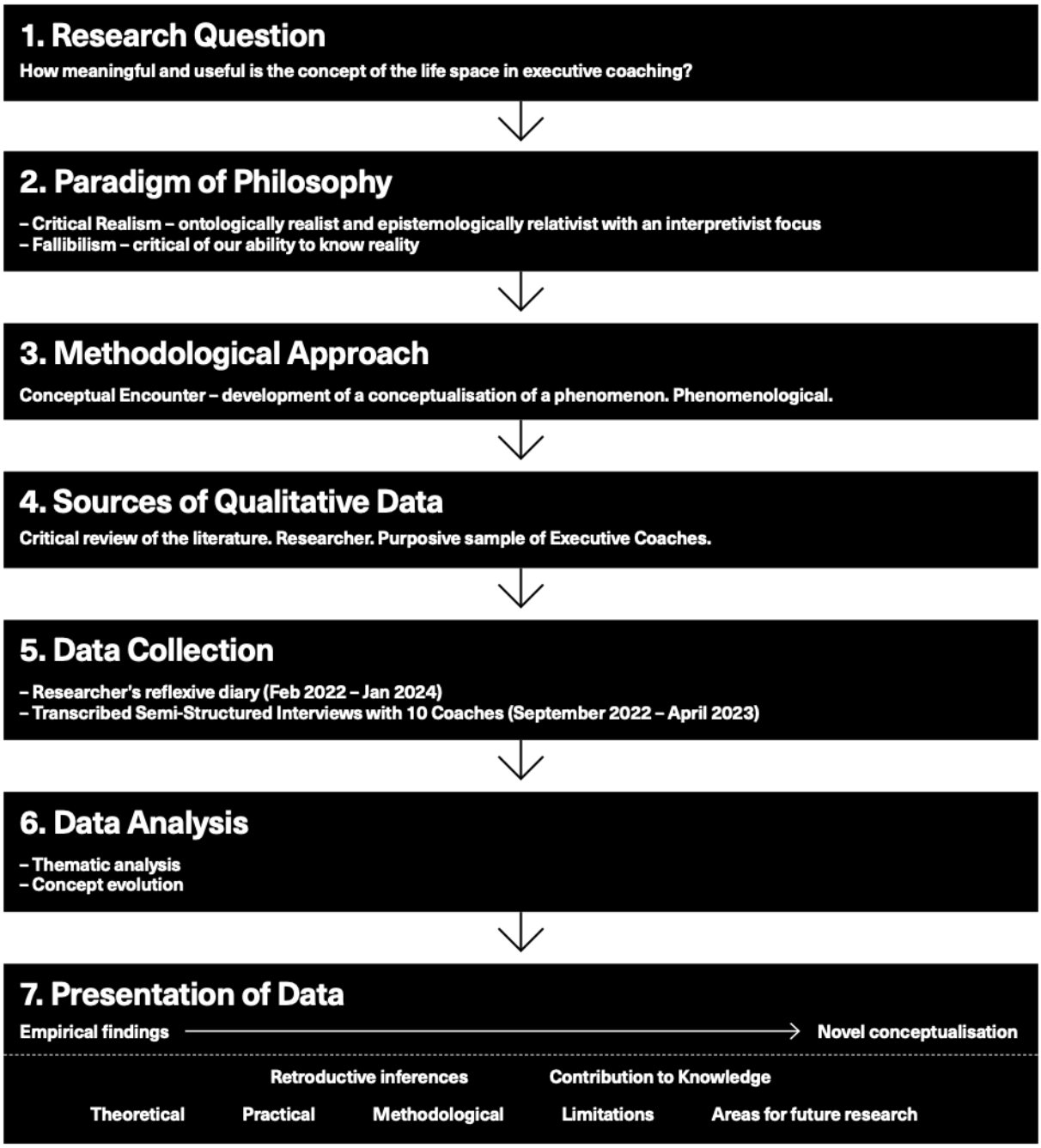
3.3. Choice of methodology

As stated by Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006, p.2), “*researchers must select an investigative worldview that’s compatible with their convictions around the nature of reality*”. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010, p.4) argue the same when they say that, ‘*Ontological and epistemological positions invariably inform methodological and methods choices*’. While critical realism is a relatively new orientation, Easton (2010, p.119) cites

its use in many disciplines to establish its provenance and coherence as a credible theoretical framework for this type of phenomenological research. Accordingly, the research design shown in summary form in Figure 3.1 was created to arrive at a methodological approach best suited to answer my research question in accordance with this ontological and epistemological philosophy.

The research question (item 1 in the research design) is investigated from a critical realist stance (item 2). This supports a methodological approach of conceptual encounter (item 3). Item 4 covers the sources of qualitative data, and item 5, the data collection process. The data analysis (item 6) is thematic analysis, and the presentation of the empirical data (item 7) is captured and conveyed in a novel conceptualisation of the phenomenon. The data is also presented as a contribution to theoretical and practical coaching knowledge at the empirical level and at the deeper levels of reality, to identify causal mechanisms in the phenomenon. The research design concludes with an evaluation of the limitations of the study and the implications for future research.

Figure 3.1
Summary of Research Design



Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) suggest that the focus of qualitative research is to investigate an under-researched area and to generate a rich description. The life space in executive coaching is under-researched. The overall aim of the study is to generate a novel, rich and descriptive conceptual map of the life space, derived from a thematic analysis and interpretation of how it was experienced by the coach research participants and how it operates outside awareness and to what effect. Cox (2020, p.44) suggests there are four methodologies that are specifically suited to create a conceptualisation of a phenomenon, namely: conceptual encounter (CE) (de Rivera, 1981), grounded theory (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Apramian et al., 2017), discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and hermeneutic (Shotter and Gregory, 1976). With this in mind, there are five reasons why conceptual encounter (de Rivera, 1981) was the natural, most logical and obvious choice of research methodology for this study.

Firstly, the specific nature of my study is the development of the concept of the life space from the analysis and interpretation of the executive coaches' experience of the phenomenon, and the meaning it holds for them as research partners. This fits nicely with conceptual encounter, and much less so with other methodologies. Conceptual encounter is well-suited to answer questions concerning how we can describe the meaning of an experience, the organisation of a person's experience in a given moment, a person's way of being-in-the-world, and the various choices that confront them as a creative participant in experience (de Rivera, 1981). Conceptual encounter asserts that human experience has an internal unity awaiting discovery, and this phenomenon can be precisely explicated into a concept or model or map. The critical evaluation of the literature reveals that the current map of the life space in executive coaching is seen as limited, incomplete and partial. The landscape is not well navigated toward new discoveries about the influence of the life space on the way coaches are during coaching, the choices they have and make, and how the coaching encounter might be enriched. Conceptual encounter will enable the development of a new, more sophisticated conceptualisation of the life space in executive coaching than currently exists, and will contribute new and important knowledge.

The second reason why conceptual encounter was chosen is because, unlike the other research methodologies, it has a clear and direct synchronicity with critical realism:

> *"[Critical realism] mirrors the language and procedures we routinely adopt and the explanations we create.but only if the process involves thoughtful in-depth research with the objective of understanding why things are as they are*" (Easton, 2010, p.119).

Similarly, the conceptual encounter methodology is, to a large extent, predicated on the language, procedures and explanations routinely adopted for the phenomenon under study. That phenomenon, in this case, the life space, is then subjected to in-depth empirical research grounded in people's experiences of it (Crotty, 1998, p.24), here, to enable an understanding of the different meanings and uses the life space in executive coaching has for different coaches. It is then subject to a retroductive analysis, to discover the underlying structures and order beyond the empirical level of realism that gives rise to this meaning, and it also explains those aspects of the reality of the life space that are not observed or observable. In this way, the critical realist philosophy and the conceptual encounter methodology integrate to establish a rich, multi-layered understanding of why and how the life space is meaningful and useful in executive coaching.

The third reason for choosing conceptual encounter is the synchronicity between the philosophical positions of the architect of the methodology, de Rivera, and the architect of the life space and focus of the study, Kurt Lewin. De Rivera says that:

> "… *conceptual encounter is closely related to Kurt Lewin's experimental methodology. Lewin emphasized the tension between the concrete details of the individual's experience and behavior and the investigator's abstract conceptualization of a dynamic genotypic field, the "life space", which was conceived*

to underlie the phenotypic details of behavior and experience"

(de Rivera, 1981, pp.24-25).

For a complete discussion on this, see de Rivera (1976, pp.15-20, cited in Foote Rhyne, 2003). While the conceptual encounter method differs from Lewin's, in conceiving of the person as a subject who creates the life space as well as being an objective part of it, it shares his desire to construct a consistent body of abstract conceptualisation that is responsive to the specifics of lived experience.

A fourth reason for choosing conceptual encounter is that it speaks to a significant and valid critique of phenomenological research, namely that it is concentrated on the use of language in naming the phenomenon of interest (Bachkirova et al., 2020, p.80). Willig (2006, p.89) highlights this when she contends that the use of language "*precedes and therefore shapes experience and in some way prescribes what we think and feel*". She amplifies the point when she says that "*the researcher's choice of label for the phenomenon of interest is not merely a descriptive but constructive one*" (Willig, 2007 p.216). This research study has to answer that challenge, as the life space is a pre-existing label. Conceptual encounter attends to this critique. It recognises a reliance on narrative words on the basis that experiences are hidden until articulated, but it is designed to access the reality that lies behind the words, the experience on which the narrative is based, and the person's encounter with this experience. It is the experience and not the narrative that is being investigated, and as Kemp (2021, p.52) says in his inquiry into the phenomenon of emotional labour in coaching, "*The use of a visual map in Conceptual Encounter adds an element which is not so heavily reliant on language and may access routes to the concept other than purely linguistic ones*".

The final reason for the choice of conceptual encounter is that is increasingly becoming established as an effective, distinctive and valid research methodology within the field of coaching and beyond. It has been used to research human experiences as diverse as emotion (de Rivera and Kaya, 2005; Lindsay-Hartz et al., 1995) and false memory (de

Rivera, 1997). In the specific context of coaching, Maxwell (2009) investigated the boundary between coaching and therapy/counselling using conceptual encounter, and Bachkirova (2015) adopted it to investigate self-deception in coaches. More recently, Noon (2018) used conceptual encounter to investigate the phenomenon of presence in executive coaching conversations, Snape (2020) to explore women's identity work in career choices and transitions, and Kemp (2021) to consider the phenomenon of emotional labour for coaches. This body of research provides a firm foundation for the use of conceptual encounter in this research.

3.4. Position of the literature and researcher

Conceptual encounter permits the investigator to build on a prior conceptualisation and to eventually offer a developed conceptualisation to be built upon through further research (de Rivera, 1981). In this study, the prior conceptualisation is Lewin's life space and the conceptualisation to be built on is the final map fully evolved through this research. In accordance with this, there must be a starting map or concept from which to work. This particular methodology enables this to be created from the researcher's own experiences and foreknowledge, and from a critique of the extant literature (de Rivera, 1981). Therefore, with conceptual encounter, the foreknowledge and presence of the investigator is included in the process of data collection, data analysis, and the development of the concept.

3.5. Implementation of conceptual encounter approach

This section describes clearly how the conceptual encounter approach was implemented in this study. It discusses the overall approach, the method by which the map of the life space was developed up to the point of data collection, the selection of research partners, and how the overlapping data collection and data analysis activities were selected and performed.

Figure 3.2
Summary of the Conceptual Encounter Procedure

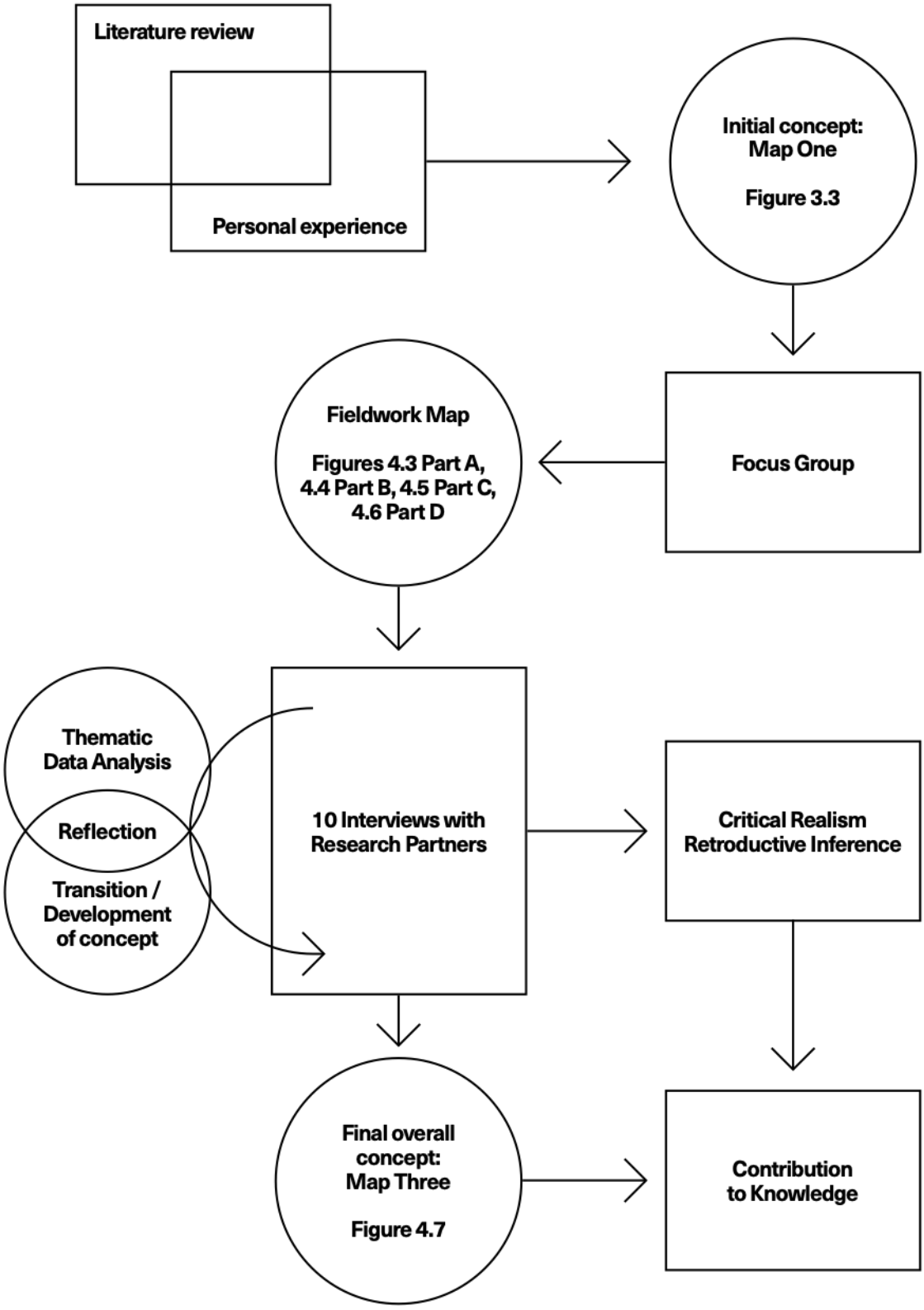


Figure 3.2 provides a summary of the conceptual encounter procedure implemented in this study. It summarises the process by which the fieldwork map of the life space that was used in the ten interviews was constructed from the literature, from my own experiences and from feedback from a small focus group. Figure 3.2 presents how the data from each interview was analysed and synthesised, including the process of retroductive analysis, to arrive at the final and fully developed conceptual map of the life space. Finally, it illustrates how this map and the critical realist paradigm came together to make a contribution to knowledge.

3.5.1. Overall approach

Conceptual encounter is distinct from other phenomenological approaches in that the researcher develops an initial concept or map of the phenomenon in question to encounter the recalled experience of the research partners. Through the process of dialogue and the map “encountering” and becoming fused with, and solidly grounded in, the concrete experience of the coaches, the map of the life space is systematically developed. Care has been taken to establish whether there was an “enlightening fit” between the abstract map and the experienced reality, or whether something was wrong, and if so, why. The impact of this experiencing on the map invited myself as the researcher to create a new or amended map, and the power of the conceptualisation occasionally led a research partner to a new or different comprehension of their experience of the life space in coaching.

3.5.2. Development of the map used in fieldwork.

Providing a transparent account of how and why the map of the life space in executive coaching was developed to its final form is a key aspect of demonstrating the credibility of the findings when using a conceptual encounter methodology (Bachkirova, Rose and Noon, 2020). The initial conceptual map of the life space in executive coaching, drawn from the review of the literature and my reflections on my own experiences of the life space, is included as Appendix 2. This map was not used in the fieldwork interviews. This was because I noticed that it contained a lot of detail and was advanced in articulating

complexity. This reflected a fairly natural tendency of the researcher after a long period immersed in research into the life space. However, overly complex, didactic and abstract starting models are not helpful for allowing partners into the research process and prompting them to do the thinking, sense-making and exploration required. I was reminded of Kemp's experience in using conceptual encounter to investigate emotional labour in executive coaching. He found that he had done too much of the meaning-making for his research participants and chose to move towards a more spacious and inviting conceptualisation (Kemp, 2021).

In light of the reflections and conclusions about the initial map, a decision was taken to pilot the map with a small focus group prior to engaging in the fieldwork interviews. The feedback from the focus group expressed a collective sense of not being invited into the conceptual encounter process as equal partners. A vignette of the findings from the focus group is included as Appendix 3. I concluded that my initial attempt at conceptualising the life space in executive coaching did not meet the standards and requirements laid out in the conceptual encounter methodology, and ran a significant risk of invalidating the findings from the research. It is important that the phenomenon and the associated concept under investigation is experienced by the research partners as being co-constructed as equals in a joint research venture. This is one of the fundamental requirements of the conceptual encounter methodology. That sense of co-construction was not the experience of the focus group. Conceptual encounter requires a lot from the investigator in terms of analytical expertise, experience, reflexivity and integrity, and it can test one's ability to retain a phenomenological stance and to embrace the challenge of the data from the personal concrete experience not fitting the current conceptualisation. Furthermore, de Rivera (2006, p.6) demands that any conceptualisation "*must be elegant".* That is, it must be relatively simple, rather than cumbersome. With these challenges in mind I was convinced that the initial map was too prescriptive and complicated, and a new, more suitable iteration would require a fundamental and radical rethink and reimagining.

The fieldwork map introduced to the ten research partners is presented in Chapter 4, in four parts, as Figures 4.3 (part A), 4.4 (part B), 4.5 (part C) and 4.6 (part D). It is included

in Chapter 4 to aid the reader in navigating and understanding the narrative around the analysis and findings from the research participants' encounter with this map. The four parts of the map (A-D) were introduced one after the other at phase two of each interview. I decided to organise the map into four separate but interrelated parts, so as not to overwhelm the research participants with too much information at once, and to structure each interview over the four sections to try to capture the full extent of their experience of the encounter. Each part of the map was designed to provide sufficient detail to generate specific responses, and to leave sufficient space to allow for the research partners' own meaning-making. Striking this balance was a constant challenge throughout the course of the research, and formed a major part of my ongoing reflections throughout the collection and analysis of the data. Extracts from my reflexive diary are included as Appendix 4. At the heart of the fieldwork map was the requirement for my investigation to enable collaboration, and for subsequent iterations to be solidly grounded in the concrete experience of actual coaching events in the life of the coaches. The concrete experience of the research partners' individual cases provides the raw data of the investigation – the "facts" which the investigator's conceptualisation must fit (de Rivera, 2006, p.5).

The fieldwork map represents several key areas for exploration with the research partners. Firstly, in Figure 4.3, it focuses on the executive being indivisible from their psychological and social environment. Secondly, in Figure 4.4, it focuses on the executive's coaching needs and their goal as a function of the life space; a tension system existing between the client and their environment. Thirdly, in Figure 4.5, it focuses on the context of the coaching process as a co-creation between the life spaces of the coach and the executive, and becoming a life space in itself. Finally, in Figure 4.6, the map was designed to signify that there are implications for how the coach might practice during the coaching session. A narrative account of each part of the map is presented in Chapter 4 to assist the reader in understanding how I developed the conceptualisation of the life space in executive coaching at the point of the fieldwork, and to navigate the analysis and findings.

3.5.3. An adapted approach

The conceptual encounter methodology is traditionally characterised by a cumulative and iterative process, whereby the map is amended during the course of the encounters to reflect the experiences of the research partners. This continues until it reaches a point of development at which it is fully evolved, so that further interviews and encounters will add nothing new. This study adapted the traditional approach, whilst remaining true to the spirit of the conceptual encounter method. The same map in four parts was introduced to all ten research partners and was not amended during the course of the program of interviews. This is illustrated in Figure 3.2. Although the same map was used in all the interviews, the analysis of the data constituted an ongoing iterative process of concept development as presented in Chapter 4. Notes were kept about how the data was impacting the development of the concept, and throughout this process the map evolved to its final form as presented in Figure 4.7 in Chapter 4.

The methodological decision to adapt the conceptual encounter process in this way was made for three interrelated reasons which were peculiar to my research. Firstly, introducing the concept of the life space presented some challenges that had to be accommodated in the methodology. The sample of research participants for the focus group and for the ten interviews was compiled purposively to ensure that they were sufficiently informed about the contextual issue of the phenomenon (Bachkirova, 2015), specifically, the notion of working with an executive client in relation to their psychological and social environment. Although this was the case, the significant majority of the research partners had not heard of the concept of the life space. This made my research unusual, as conceptual encounter is generally predicated on investigating and developing a psychological phenomenon for which all research partners have a common name. This situation meant that in most of the interviews, I was introducing a new and essentially abstract concept, which aligned with and justified my critical realist perspective that decoupled the ontological reality of the phenomenon from the epistemology of knowledge of it. The abstraction was amplified by the complex nature of the properties of the life

space, as discussed in Chapter 2. Consequently, it was important that I arrived at a relatively straightforward and logically sequential map of the life space, and it was essential that I used this consistently in order to facilitate as much discussion, meaning-making and rich data from the research partners as possible. To do otherwise would, in my view, have unduly complicated the processes of data collection and analysis. It would also have run the risk of introducing too much of my own subjective interpretation, with the risk of my being insufficiently objective and receptive to the meaning made by the research partners.

Secondly, the map that was introduced to the ten research participants had already evolved through a transition point involving testing with a small focus group. Arriving at this map through the earlier iteration before the ten fieldwork interviews ensured that I had *"something suitable on which collaborative work could begi*n" (Kemp, 2021, p.83).

The third reason for adapting the methodology was that it did not inhibit or compromise my ability to meet the quality standards set out in the conceptual encounter methodology and presented in section 3.12 of this chapter. Furthermore, the five reasons why conceptual encounter was the natural and right choice for my research, as presented earlier in section 3.3, were not adversely affected by this adjustment.

3.6. Selection of research partners

The research participants are referred to as research partners in this study. This reflects the methodology of conceptual encounter, which positions the final map of the phenomenon under study as a joint venture, co-created from the partnership between the researcher and research participant (de Rivera, 1981).

Non-probability sampling was used to select the research partners. Non-probability purposive sampling is defined as the process of selecting research participants based on specific purposes, with the goal of answering the study's research question (Creswell and

Poth, 2018; Crotty, 1998). This procedure was adopted in this research because if a coaching researcher is *"planning a phenomenological inquiry they would be advised to make sure that it is about an experience which is recognizable to participants even if it can be experienced in one or another way."* (Willig 2007, p.16). In this study, I sought participants who were sufficiently informed about the contextual issue, if not the name, of the life space. Because of this, I limited my research to the experiences of the life space from the coach's perspective. Establishing a sample of clients who could both experience the life space as a recognisable phenomenon and be able to answer the research question was too challenging within the timeframe available for the study. The demographic details of the research partners selected for the focus group (to pilot the initial map) and for the fieldwork is presented in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3
Details of research partners

Research partner	Focus Group (FG) Fieldwork Group (W)	Gender	Position	Qualification	Currently practicing (years)	Prior knowledge of Lewin	Prior knowledge of life space
Coach A	FG	F	Executive Coach	Post-graduate	15	Yes	No
Coach B	FG	F	Executive Coach	Post-graduate	15	Yes	No
Coach C	FG	F	Executive Coach	Post-graduate	13	Yes	No
Coach D	FG	M	Executive Coach	Post-graduate	10	Yes	No
Coach 1	W	F	Executive Coach	Degree	13	No	No
Coach 2	W	F	Executive Coach	Degree	12	Yes	No
Coach 3	W	F	Executive Coach	Post-graduate	20	Yes	No
Coach 4	W	M	Business/Executive Coach	PhD	15	Yes	Yes
Coach 5	W	F	Business/Executive Coach	Degree	20	Yes	No
Coach 6	W	F	Executive/Development Coach	Post-graduate	15	Yes	No
Coach 7	W	M	Executive/Development Coach	Post-graduate	30	Yes	Yes
Coach 8	W	F	Executive Coach	Post-graduate	30	Yes	No
Coach 9	W	F	Executive/Development Coach	Post-graduate	20	Yes	No
Coach 10	W	M	Executive Coach	Post-graduate	35	Yes	No

In assembling the research partners, I was mindful that the meaning and the appropriateness of the term purposive sampling in qualitative research is contested, and that the language of purposeful sampling strategies is fraught with ambiguity and used inconsistently (Gentles et al., 2015). Purposive sampling is judgmental and subjective, and thereby reliant on the researcher's own judgment when choosing research participants. The choice of participants was guided by finding the most appropriate sources of in-depth, rich and detailed information about the phenomenon under question. As such, a criterion-based sampling selection approach was adopted with clear eligibility criteria. The research partners were required to be current executive coach practitioners, hold a graduate or postgraduate coaching-related qualification or equivalent, and have a minimum of five years' experience. These criteria were based on the assumptions that, as experienced, graduate and current practitioners, their memory of their experiences in coaching would be fresh and that their academic and practical coaching experience would enable rich insights from the coach's perspective. In other words, I was sufficiently satisfied that the participants were competent to "*interpret the substance of the construction*" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.111), if not the name, of the life space. Furthermore, the ability of the partners to engage with the concept through psychological mindedness as a core competency (Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck, 1999; Kilburg, 1996; 2001) was important, in order for the development of the concept to be well-informed and sophisticated.

When considering how many research partners to recruit, I was mindful that conceptual encounter methodology places value on evidence obtained from detailed analysis of single cases. It does not attempt to generalise, but rather to build on prior information to accumulate data that can offer a significant depth of information on the phenomenon. For sampling in phenomenology with an interpretive methodology, a relatively small number of research participants is appropriate (Cohen et al., 2000). I chose four research partners to form the focus group to pilot and "road-test" my earlier map, and ten for the fieldwork sample. A total of fourteen participants is a relatively large number in conceptual

encounter research. This number was chosen because I limited the research to the experiences of coaches and not clients, and I used the same map for all semi-structured interviews. I needed to be as assured as I could that I had sufficient numbers, to make it likely that the research would arrive at a point where the final few interviews were adding little to the concept development, thus suggesting that it had evolved to the point of full development.

3.6.1. Focus Group

In conceptual encounter, data collection through semi-structured, one-to-one interviews can be supplemented by a focus group, so as to leverage the creativity of group dynamics, collective experience and recall, and to generate interaction data (Lambert and Loiselle, 2008). Furthermore, the focus groups are more than a sum of their parts, in a way that individual interviewing is not (Krueger and Casey, 2015), and using these widens the pool of participants with unique insights into coaches' experiences. Utilising a focus group to test the suitability of the initial map of the life space had the benefit of distancing myself as the researcher from my own views, by including other interactive voices. This was particularly important because I was testing the fitness for purpose of a map I had worked hard to create, and I was aware that I might find difficult to let go of it if required to. The focus group was selected purposively in accordance with the criteria set for the selection of the ten individual research participants. These participants were sourced from my cohort of doctoral students. The focus group met in person for just under one hour, to test out three things: the extent of prior knowledge of the concept of the life space; the collective experience of the phenomenon through encountering the map; and, the nature and degree of the data generated.

3.6.2. Research partners for semi-structured interviews

A sample size of up to ten research partners was within the recommended range for phenomenological inquiries (Gray, 2013; Fischer, 2011) and comparable to recent studies in coaching that have used conceptual encounter methodology (Bachkirova, 2015;

Maxwell, 2009; Noon, 2018; Kemp, 2021). In accordance with the chosen methodology, the involvement of new participants beyond the baseline of ten and the subsequent data analysis stopped when no new themes were emerging from the consequent interviews and the model became clear and “elegant” (de Rivera, 1981).

The criterion used, and the relatively small number of research participants needed, suggested that there was only a limited number of data sources that could contribute to the study. Consequently, I used my own professional networks to secure the purposive sample. Ten research participants were drawn from two coaching organisations that engaged associates, including myself, who I knew were likely to meet the sampling criteria. Written permissions were sought and granted from the directors of each company, all three of whom were practicing coaches. These three coaches, along with seven others across both organisations, were invited and they all agreed to take part. A participant information sheet, consent form and privacy notice were sent to each participant, to ensure that their consent to take part was informed and voluntary. Examples of these are included as Appendices 5, 6 and 7.

3.7. Methods of data collection

The structure of the data collection process was based on de Rivera’s conceptual encounter process (de Rivera, 1981), in which data collection occurs through semi-structured one-to-one interviews. Conceptual encounter allows for the use of other complimentary methods of inquiry and data collection, in order to access and evoke the experience of research partners that may be beyond the scope of words, such as participant observation. However, in this study, the combination of a focus group and ten semi-structured interviews provided sufficient high-quality data.

By using conceptual encounter methodology, I was largely dealing with narrative data, on the basis that words help us clarify our own experience and words are the major, though not the only, avenue to understand the experience of others. This promoted a degree of

heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1994), as concrete experience itself is an abstraction. Therefore, as the researcher, it was always important for me to question the validity of the experience itself and be open to the possibility of its manifestation in ways that are not immediately experienced and may be a little different from the description. Potter and Hepburn (2005) have drawn attention to the fact that much qualitative analysis of interview-generated data does not pay attention to the many contextual features of the interview, and instead takes such data at “face value”. Therefore, throughout the fieldwork, it was important for me to reflect on the unique meaning and experience of the interview for both myself as the interviewer and for the interviewee, and to take care not to assume that the interviewee’s words were simple and direct reflections of their thoughts and feelings. Epistemological reflections on this process, including my critical realist perspective and the notion that the interview itself is a co-created life space, are presented in Chapter 6 in the conclusions and recommendations.

In designing and conducting the series of interviews, I was mindful of the general characteristics of semi-structured interviewing that make it fit for the purpose of qualitative research. These include the design of the interview agenda, the selection and evolution of questions from the literature review and my own experience, and the need for the interviewer “*to find the right balance between maintaining control of the interview and where it is going, and allowing the interviewee the space to redefine the topic under investigation and thus to generate novel insights for the researcher*” (Willig, 2013, p.29). To meet these standards, care was taken in the development of the fieldwork map, and a loose framework of pre-determined, open-ended questions was created (see Appendix 8) for the semi-structured interviews. This framework was designed to provide a consistent yet flexible approach, and to enable the research partner to ask any questions about the research and the interview, to feel comfortable, and to explore their recollections of their experiences.

Each interview was up to 90 minutes in length and was conducted using the Zoom virtual platform. I was aware of the requirement in conceptual encounter to ensure that each

research partner is “invited in” to the research, and I considered the costs and benefits of conducting the interviews face-to-face. I decided against this and used the Zoom platform for two reasons. Firstly, the research partners are geographically located in various parts of the country. It was not appropriate to ask them to travel, and the costs of my travelling, in terms of money and time, were prohibitive. Secondly, my experience of one-to-one coaching online was extensive and overall highly satisfactory, with clients not reporting any detriment to intimacy or other relational qualities. Each interview was audio recorded, and a full contemporaneous, verbatim, hand-written transcript was compiled. An extract of a transcript from one interview is included as Appendix 9. Each research participant was offered the opportunity to receive a copy of the transcript, and to check and amend it as they required. None of the research partners took up this offer, but it was an important part of my aim to engage research partners in all the aspects of my collection, analysis and interpretation of their data.

Each interview was held in two stages. Stage one was an invitation to explore the extent and nature of each research partner’s knowledge and their concrete experiences of the life space in executive coaching. Stage two involved the introduction of the fieldwork map of the life space (Figures 4.3-4.6) in this context. This was to facilitate the map’s encounter with these concrete experiences, or for the map to stimulate experiences, including experiences that challenged the conceptualisation of the life space. Throughout both stages of each interview, every effort was made to maintain the phenomenological principle and stance that is central to phenomenological approaches such as conceptual encounter (Bachkirova, Rose and Noon, 2020). The formulation of a good conceptualisation of the life space was a continual interpretative meaning-making process. Accordingly, as the investigator I moved back and forth between interviews, observations, literature and reflection, collecting data, developing transitional concepts, and gradually becoming more alert to the nuances and patterns of the phenomenon in executive coaching. During each and every interview, the research partners’ descriptions of their experiences of the life space were considered as a means of reaching a wider meaning, bringing to light what is not obvious about the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in their work. Each interview sought to create a fusion between the fieldwork map

of the life space and the research partners' recalled experiences, in order that the analysis of the data could move from the content of the dialogue to the underlying structure of their experiences to the conditions that bring them about (Willig,2007). The maintenance of the phenomenological principle was supported by the keeping of a contemporaneous reflexive diary to enhance sense-making and counter any preconceived subjectivity. This process requires the investigator to be alert to and receptive of the inherent dialectical creative tension between concrete experiences and systematic conceptualisation. During the course of this study, this creative tension was manifest in differences and a lack of fit within the experience of the encounter. This provided rich data and allowed for three key outputs.

Firstly, the modification and evolution of the conceptualisation of the life space by myself as the investigator. The encounter at times "breached" my own reality of the life space and consequently challenged and ultimately broadened and developed my own experience of the phenomenon.

Secondly, the conceptualisation of the life space facilitated a change to how the research partner conceived of his/her experience of working with this phenomenon and this enabled the emergence of data about how these findings could be translated into a useful and practical map to enhance practice.

Thirdly, and after patient study of numerous instances of the phenomenon, the collection and analysis of the data led to the co-creation of an interesting, non-trivial conceptualisation of the life space, which accurately fits experience and reveals a hitherto unexpected order both pertinent and particular to the theory and practice of dyadic executive coaching.

3.8. Data Analysis

Conceptual encounter methodology has a vagueness and lack of clarity around procedure, especially the data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), so it is important that the

theoretical position of the data analysis process for this study is made clear. In order to be clear about the theoretical position of the data analysis, I supplemented the primary methodology of conceptual encounter with a secondary simple process of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Willig, 2013). This was primarily deductive, combined with elements of inductive thematic analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) in which an *a priori*, theoretically informed coding frame, in the form of a fieldwork map of the life space, was used to organise the data to begin with, and where novel themes were allowed to emerge.

Verbatim, hand-written transcripts were taken from each semi-structured interview. Line by line analysis of each transcript was undertaken in order to identify the most important and salient patterns of meaning contained within the organised data and the novel themes. I then integrated this data to construct my interpretation of a thematic and empirically-based description of the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching, in order to inform the development of the final concept to answer the research question. These themes and the sub-themes they were constructed from are presented in Chapter 4.

Figure 3.4 illustrates the process, wherein an initial coding frame was designed to capture the data from each research partner's experience of their encounter with each of the four parts of the fieldwork map (Figures 4.3-4.6). There were eight codes for each of the four parts of the map, leading to 32 data "boxes" or units. My coding was ostensibly theory-driven from the literature review and my own experiences of the life space, and was designed to capture the similar and different experiences that each research partner had when encountering the fieldwork map of the life space.

Figure 3.4
Coding framework

Map	Coding frame	Resonant	Not resonant	Missing	In need of greater emphasis	In need of greater clarity	Unhelpful	Unique	Anything else
Part A 4.3		Code 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Part B 4.4		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Part C 4.5		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Part D 4.6		25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32

Figure 3.5 illustrates how themes were constructed from the coded data. This was a process in which each of the 32 data boxes was analysed to identify what I interpreted to be the most important and salient constellations of meaning from the data. The criteria for determining these was informed by my research question, and the patterns and connections between the codes were used to construct themes about the research partners' experiences of the life space in coaching, their experiences of encountering the fieldwork map and how this might be developed to enhance the extent of its meaningfulness and usefulness in executive coaching. Appendix 10 presents a photograph of some of the wall charts used to organise and synthesise the data into themes, which began to tell the story about what was going on in my data. These were synthesised individually and collectively into ten sub-themes. Each of these sub-themes was then synthesised into two main themes, to capture the important aspects of the data set in relation to my research question about how the life space is meaningful and useful in executive coaching.

Figure 3.5
Construction of themes

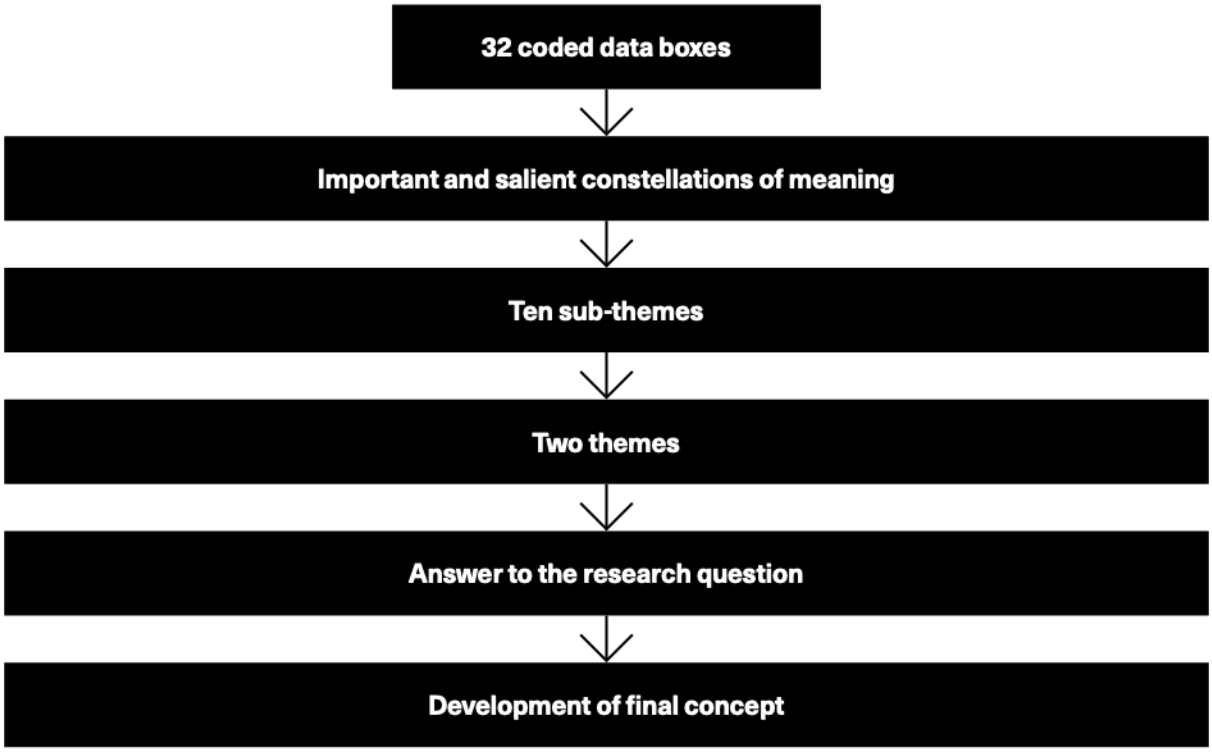


Figure 3.6 shows the practical phases of the thematic analysis undertaken. This is accepted as a robust method, it was very useful for bringing structure to the data analysis stage of the study (Braun and Clarke, 2006), and it helped in applying the characteristics of a good qualitative approach, as noted by Castleberry and Nolen (2018). These are given as: compiling, disassembling, reassembling and interpreting the data (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018).

Figure 3.6
Phases of thematic analysis

Phase		Description of process
1	Familiarizing yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2	Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3	Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4	Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5	Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6	Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

No data set is without contradiction. A satisfactory thematic map or overall conceptualisation of the data patterns and the relationships between them should attend to the data that depart from the dominant story in the analysis and need to be included in the coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.88). When there was a discrepancy between the participants' positions, I looked for a higher order concept that would integrate these different positions. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis can be characterised by theories such as critical realism, which acknowledges the ways in which individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of reality. Therefore, thematic analysis can be a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality.

As the theoretical framework of my study shows, my critical realist ontological and subjectivist epistemological position rejects any link between the reality of the life space and knowledge of it; knowledge of the life space can be fallible and subject to

interpretation because the life space and its effects can operate outside of awareness. Whilst the analysis of the empirical data is thematic and leads to empirically justified findings, the discussion of the findings is essentially retroductive (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020). Retroductive inferences allow for aspects of the life space and explanations for them that are outside the empirical. This study therefore draws a distinction between the findings from the research at the empirical level as presented in Chapter 4, and the implications of a critical realist analysis for the formulation of knowledge, as discussed in Chapter 5.

3.9. Limitations of research methodology

Notwithstanding the fit and congruence of the overall research design, there are challenges and potential limitations with the use of conceptual encounter and thematic analysis as a research methodology. It is important to acknowledge the exploratory nature of the investigation and, therefore, the provisional nature of the findings that emerge.

Firstly, the investigator deals largely with words and narrative, on the basis that experiences are hidden until articulated. This is, itself, a limitation. It necessarily precludes experiences of the life space as expressed in different ways, such as art or drama, and uses English as the language of communication, thus limiting the sample pool.

Secondly, the conclusions and the contribution to knowledge from this study are synthesised from the findings and reported as a novel, spare and elegant model or “map” of the life space, which makes important discriminations and reveals important relationships in the way that the life space enhances coaching practice. However, it is a “map” and hardly the same as going somewhere, though it can be useful in helping us to get there. Consequently, these aspects are discussed in Chapter 5 of this study, and highlight areas for future research.

3.10. Reporting the findings

The findings from this study are primarily reported in the form of a new conceptual map. This map explicates what has previously been implicit in the phenomenon called the life space and its relationship to executive coaching. The conceptualisation offers an elegant and parsimonious phenomenological representation, using metaphor when beneficial, to capture the essence of the phenomenon in executive coaching in an economical and effective form. This map connects to related conceptualisations of phenomena. These related conceptualisations are the phenomena of context, tension and energy; the co-created liminal life space of the dyadic coaching process; the concepts of the phenomena of perception, perspective and behaviour in relation to adult learning and building executive capacity through coaching; and the concepts of the phenomena of self-awareness and the use of self as a coach. The findings from this study have been reported to all participating research partners. These findings are discussed in the context of their potential meaning and usefulness for those surrounding coaching, such as coach-trainers, supervisors and regulators. Finally, the findings and the newly developed conceptualisation are underpinned by a discussion about the limits of empirical findings in answering the research question and the implications of a critical realist philosophy when building coaching theory to influence practice.

3.11. Issues of Quality

Phenomenological research, including conceptual encounter, deals with the intangible and ambiguous, and requires no theoretical proof (Bachkirova, Rose and Noon, 2020). This, in a sense, licenses the researcher to freely interpret what is before them. The reality is that these apparent freedoms are precisely what makes these methods far from easy. They demand of the phenomenological researcher that they exert both self- and methodological disciplines to a very high degree if the outcome is to be a rigorous, credible and persuasive research project. The audit trail of the care taken to ensure that the final map of the life space was evolved to the rigorous standards of the methodology speaks to the credible, persuasive nature of this study. In this respect, the extent to which this final map

of the life space is indeed the final map depends on how well it meets the standards of validity as specified by de Rivera (1981).

The conceptual encounter methodology has three quality criteria, and I will deal with each in turn. I will also make reference to Tracy (2010) who addressed the need to judge qualitative research in a language consistent with such research, rather than a poor transition from positivistic paradigms.

Firstly, de Rivera suggests that the final conceptualisation must be successful in developing the implications of what has previously been implicit in the phenomenon under study. Evidence that this criterion is met is that the evolution of the final conceptualisation of the life space was constructed from the explicit and empirical data, but also from the implicit, tacit data where the phenomena was operating in the actual and deep domains of reality in the background of the coaches' recalled and recounted experiences, and was often out of awareness and therefore not directly spoken about. Furthermore, some of the research partners perceived the phenomenon in a new light during the interview process and reported a better understanding and appreciation of the life space, its complexity and depth, and its meaningfulness and usefulness to them. The final map usefully and succinctly captured essential aspects of the work they do with the client and why, where previously these had been understood differently, unnamed, and at a limited level of awareness or even out of awareness. Examples of this include the concept and definition of what is meant by the client in their context; the need- tension system as the motivation and energy for change; the coaching process as a liminal co-constructed life space with depth and breadth; the growth and development of the executive as a change in the life space; and the life space as a conceptual tool to enhance the use of self and self-development in the coach. In this sense, I suggest that this research meets the quality criteria set by Tracy (2010) to define it as a worthy topic. It is relevant, timely, significant and interesting, due to the contribution it makes to the gap in the coaching literature on the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space to executive coaching. It also contributes to the gap in the research literature on the development of coaching as an

academic discipline, including the gap in knowledge about the aspects of the coaching process and interaction that determine what is and is not possible in a coaching session and to influence outcomes in coaching (Grant, 2014). Furthermore, this research provides a critical realist framework to consider the complex questions at the interface between coaching theory and knowledge and coaching practice.

De Rivera's second quality criterion is that the final conceptualisation of the life space "*mus*t *be broad enough to include all the instances of the phenomenon yet narrow enough to exclude related phenomena"* (de Rivera, 1981, p.6). The final map must fit all the different experiences that the research partners relate or, at least, further encounters must no longer add anything new and no longer challenge the investigation. During the course of the interviews and the thematic analysis of the data, I was rigorous in ensuring that this was the case. The way in which I adapted the map after the focus group and the ten interviews, to reflect all the feedback and thoughts which participants were sharing, adds to the credibility of this work, as does the fact that the final map bears little resemblance to the map encountered by the research partners. Furthermore, the data analysis (Chapter 4) is congruent with all the themes that have arisen, and the map, as adapted, is a faithful and comprehensive representation, fitting all the different experiences that different research partners related.

As I entered into the final phases of the systematic six-stage thematic analysis, it transpired that my conceptualisation of the life space appeared to be fully "saturated" and immersed in the data to the point of full evolution. This showed the final map to be broad enough to capture all the instances of the life space in executive coaching from the perspective of the research partners, but narrow enough to exclude the related phenomena of the experiences of the executive client and similar interactions in other related coaching fields. In this sense, the research meets a number of the quality criteria set by Tracy (2010). It is rich in rigor, with sufficient, abundant, appropriate and complex theoretical constructs derived from the literature review, supplemented by over six months in the field, and comprising in-depth, comprehensive data collection and rigorous analysis

processes. The research demonstrates sincerity, as it is characterised by my self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases and inclinations, with full transparency about the challenges encountered and how these were attended to. For example, the challenge of carefully designing the map through a transition point and a focus group to ensure its suitability for fieldwork and the challenge of capturing the multi-vocality of the research partners' reflections. The research has sufficient depth and resonance to potentially influence coaching and academic audiences through what is the first novel and evocative representation of the life space in executive coaching. It provides a meaningful coherence by achieving the specified aim and objectives established at the outset of the study, by using theories, methods and procedures that connect the research question, the stated goals, the philosophical paradigm, the literature, the findings and interpretations, and the contribution to coaching knowledge.

De Rivera's third and final quality criterion is that the conceptualisation of the life space is elegant and parsimonious. The final map of the life space meets these standards, as it adapts the powerful concepts of Lewin in a precise way to capture the essence of the research partners' experience of the life space in executive coaching. Chapter 4 provides a transparent account of the analytical process through which the findings were synthesised into the novel, elegant and parsimonious maps in Figure 4.7. In turn, this final map relates directly to other investigators into the life space, such as Pelham (2016) and Bluckert (2021) in coaching, Peavy (2001) and Rodgers (2010) in counselling, and Burnes and Bargal (2017) in relation to the currency of Lewin and his concepts in the 21st century. The study thereby becomes part of a wider sphere of inquiry, signaling areas for future research. The study meets the final quality criterion set by Tracy (2010), as it constitutes a significant contribution to coaching knowledge, conceptually, practically, methodologically and ethically. There is procedural and situational integrity around the research question and the associated strengths and limitations of the findings.

3.12. Ethics

As Noon states in his conceptual encounter study of presence in coaching:

> "*Ensuring honesty, openness, and respect for competing world views is fundamental to good research practice and safeguards must mitigate against risks of collusion and any attempt to use data to support a personal agenda*" (Noon, 2018, p.66).

This ethical challenge was pronounced for me in this research study. Using a conceptual encounter research methodology embeds my foreknowledge and ontological and epistemological presence as a critical realist researcher in the process of data collection and analysis. This was consciously bracketed in, and presupposed a thorough process of reflexivity and a thorough review of the extant research literature prior to the commencement of the gathering and analysis of the data. This created a number of challenges.

Firstly, this approach required a lot from the research participants. The purposive sample of coaches are integrated as a research partners in the research enterprise, and the concept of the life space in coaching is co-constructed with them as equals in a joint research venture. The investigator and research partners are, by definition, inside the field of the research and these individual, collective and co-creative experiences are part of any conceptualisation. Conceptual encounter research is heavily dependent on personal qualities and the quality of the relational encounters, including the issues of power and trust. Therefore, ethical issues are an important consideration. The research partner may be likely to say what they think the investigator wants to hear, and the investigator may be likely to hear only what they want to hear. As such, it was important to establish the conditions of inquiry to promote faithful rather than distorted accounts; I had to strive to balance partnership with research objectivity, to be fully involved but detached. This

required me to be deeply reflexive and to build a transparent audit trail of data collection and analysis throughout the research process. The care taken to introduce the right type of map of the life space to research partners and the keeping of a reflexive diary throughout the study were two important dimensions in working hard to ensure an ethical piece of research.

Secondly, this methodology required a lot from me as the investigator in terms of analytical expertise, experience, reflexivity and integrity. The investigator has differing roles as a collaborative investigator of the lived experience of others, whilst being knowledgeable in the subject area and responsible for iterating a map of the phenomenon. This dialectical tension is a test of one's ability to retain a phenomenological stance, and to embrace the challenge of the data from the personal concrete experience not fitting the current and emerging abstraction. In this sense, the approach resembled ethno-methodology (Moustakas, 1994), as the "encounter" of my abstract concept with the concrete experience of the coaches had the potential to breach my reality of the life space and thereby broaden my experience. Nonetheless, there was the risk of being perceived as arrogant in claiming to believe in and know the reality of something that my research partners did not, and perhaps a risk of my having a disposition against any alternative view of the life space. Indeed, any sense of any such disposition or bias on my part could have compromised the integrity of the research. However, first and foremost I was interested in evaluating the reality of the life space in the real-life practice of executive coaching, and not advocating for its meaningfulness or usefulness. Everything is something, and I was committed to mining the richest seams of knowledge, including the tacit and the contradictory, as I built my conceptualisation.

In light of these ethical challenges, a formal university ethics review process was performed prior to the approval of my research proposal, and clear and consistent guidelines were followed to ensure that the research partners gave informed consent and were assured of adequate data security. Furthermore, before any of the research participants were interviewed, they were provided with a participant information sheet (see

Appendix 5). This information advised them of their rights to confidentiality and data protection, explained the aims of the study in clear terms, allowing them to make an informed decision as to whether they wanted to participate, and highlighted any potential risks from taking part. Prior to the start of each interview, written consent was obtained and evidenced via a consent pro-forma (see Appendix 6) and it was made clear to all research partners that they were participating voluntarily and could withdraw their consent at any point during the research, up until the point that the data had been fully analysed. To ensure confidentiality and the anonymity of each coach, their client and/or the relevant organisation, all Zoom interview recordings were held on a secure laptop and individual names were coded. Similarly, any quotations and vignettes used to illustrate the conceptualisation were also anonymised. In summary, this research adheres to the Oxford Brookes ethical code of practice for research involving human participants (Oxford Brookes website, 2022).

3.13. Reflexivity

For me, the most helpful definition of reflexivity in research comes from Willig (2013), who says that the role of the researcher needs to be acknowledged in the documentation of the research, because the research process inevitably shapes the object of inquiry. This challenge is reinforced by Jackson and Cox (Spinelli, 1989; Vagle, 2018; Willig, 2006) when they say:

> "*Even when trying to bracket their presuppositions and avoid inherent biases, researchers recognize the fallibility of acquired knowledge and engage in critical examination of their customary ways of relating to the world through the process of reflexivity*" (Bachkirova, Rose and Noon, 2020, p.80).

Far from bracketing out the foreknowledge of the researcher, conceptual encounter positions it as central to the approach. This has required me to be very self-aware throughout the research, about what I bring to the research from my own perspective,

values, assumptions, interests, experiences and beliefs, often tacitly known, about the world and about knowledge. I am a former Executive Officer of over 20 years' experience with over nine years' experience as an executive coach working in the public and private sector in the UK, who has been trained in particular psychological and humanistic approaches. As such, I come to this research with a series of experiences and some formed views, not least about the reality and the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space. However, this is research because it seeks the views and experiences of others. Consequently, for the research to be valid, it requires a good helping of epistemological reflexivity (Fleetwood, 2014) about my position as a researcher and its effect on my interpretivist lenses on the world, the formulation of concepts, and the claims made about it. This is, of course, easier said than done. As Kemp (2021, p.77) points out, whilst the disclosure of these challenges helps the reader of research work gain some insight and understanding into what impact the presence of the researcher's epistemological position has made upon the work, *"there is an obvious and plain issue with reflexivity itself; that what is not known by the researcher, is not known by the researcher"* (Roulston and Shelton, 2015).

This study has undoubtedly tested my ability to retain a phenomenological stance. I was, and am, fascinated by and enthusiastic about the life space in coaching, and I had to guard against any sense of wanting to prove something or be proved right. These are all important ethical considerations that warrant detailed attention and considerable reflexivity on my part, both at the outset of the research project and throughout. I had to be continuously aware of the impact of my epistemic relativism – my dual role as insider and outsider, participant and researcher. Here, the reflexive turn of my qualitative research was essential (Altheide and Johnsen, 1994). Appendix Four provides an extract from my reflexive diary as evidence of the reflexive nature and rigor of the research. Issues such as pre-understanding and openness, closeness and distance, the co-construction and situation of knowledge, trustworthiness and integrity, power relations, and ethical dilemmas were all subject to reflexivity by me, alone and in supervision. I was acutely aware of the synchronicity between the topic of the research, the life space, and the presence of this very phenomenon in the research. Throughout the research I have been

thinking about the presence of my life space as a researcher, the life spaces of the research partners' and the life spaces co-created between us when we came together for the interviews and the focus group. I have been reflecting on the impact this has had on what has been possible and not possible in this study, and how I tried to guard against any sense that this has introduced bias and subjectivity that bring into question the integrity of the project. Supervision and the use of my reflexive diary have been essential tools in this goal. My reflections on these specific issues are presented in chapter six with reference to the limitations of this study and the limitations of the claims to new knowledge.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the ten conceptual encounter interviews conducted in accordance with the research methodology. Part one of this chapter presents how the wealth of evidence from the ten conceptual encounter interviews was analysed and synthesised into two main themes, which answer the research question by telling the overall narrative story about the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching. Each of these themes is presented in turn. Theme one is the life space as a new yet familiar concept to the research partners that they found easy to connect with and comfortable to work with. This theme is constructed from the evidence from the research partners' encounter with the whole of the map. Theme two is the life space as a lens that sensitised and oriented the research partners to a greater awareness and understanding of important practice implications of viewing every executive coaching session as indivisible from the psychological and social context in which the client, the coach and the coaching are situated and intimately connected to. The lens of the life space gave the research partners a greater awareness and understanding of the complexity of each client and the unit of work in coaching, and the coach's own complexity in the coach role, both of which relate primarily to the research partners' responses to encountering parts A and B of the fieldwork map; the heuristic of the co-created coaching process, which primarily relates to their feedback on part C of the fieldwork map; and the aim and objectives of executive coaching to build capacity, which primarily relates to the research partners' experience of encountering part D of the fieldwork map

For each of the two themes, the evidence produced from the research partners' encounter with the fieldwork map of the life space is presented. Each theme is synthesised from a range of sub-themes that were constructed from the data from each interview. Each theme and sub-theme is supported by exemplar quotes from the research partners, which support the selection and synthesis of the evidence into the constellations of meaning that are

important to the research question of how meaningful and useful the life space is in executive coaching.

Part two of the chapter builds on the findings in part one, and presents how the two themes have been developed into the final conceptual map of the life space in executive coaching, to capture and convey a new understanding of the phenomenon.

Figure 4.1 provides a summary of the structure of this chapter to assist the reader in navigating the narrative. Reading from the bottom up, this table shows how part one of the chapter is organised to provide an account of the process by which the evidence from the research partners' responses during the ten interviews to their encounter with the fieldwork map of the life space was analysed and synthesised into 10 sub-themes and two main themes and constructed into the final map. The table then illustrates how part two of the chapter is organised to show how the final map was evolved into a conceptualisation representing the answer to the research question about the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching.

Figure 4.1

Summary of structure of chapter 4

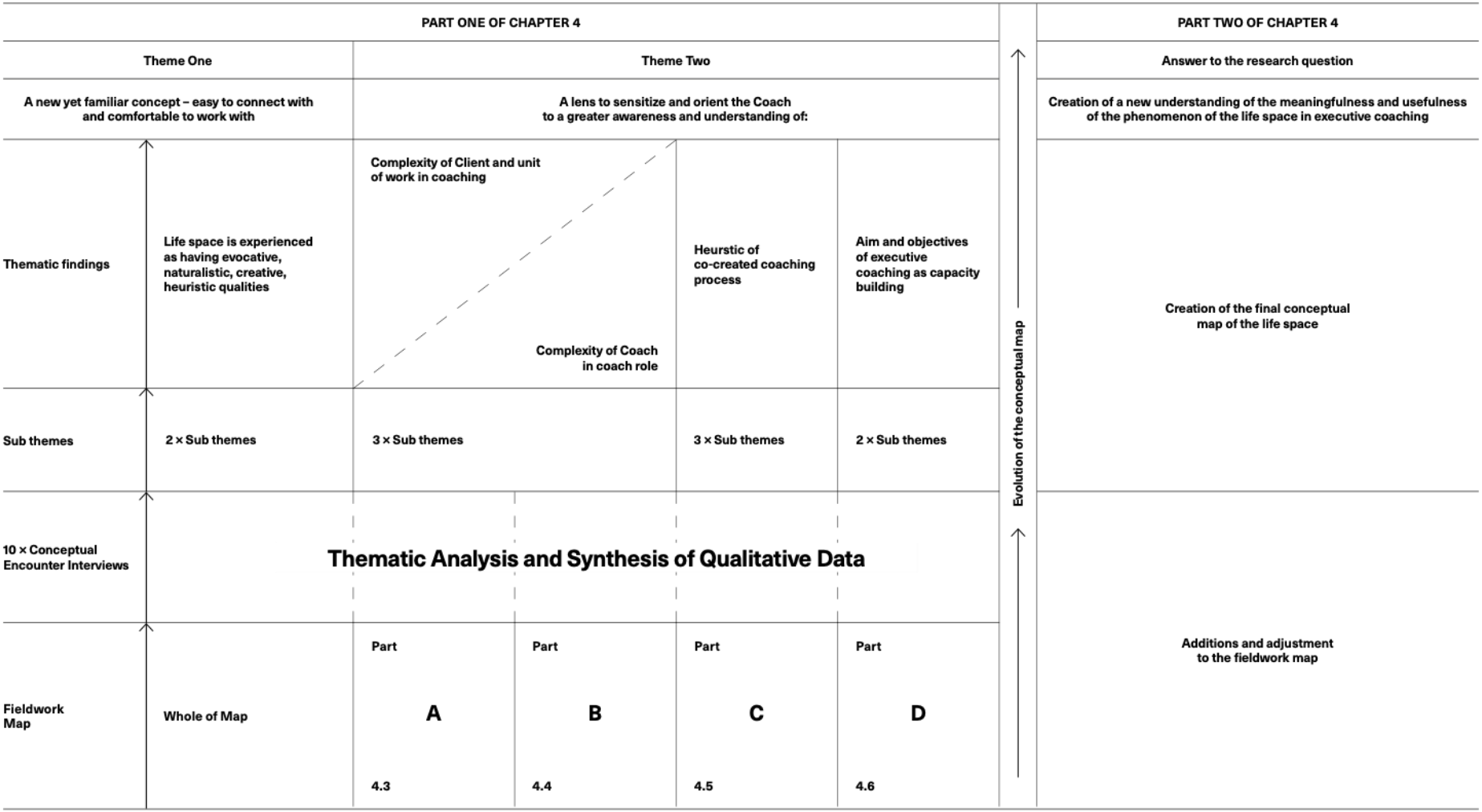


Figure 4.2 presents a conceptual framework to summarise the evidence from the conceptual encounter interviews and the process of developing the final conceptual map and the thematic findings. Reading from the top down, it summarises the key evidence from the ten interviews relating to the whole of the map and its four parts. The framework then highlights the changes made to develop the final conceptual map in light of the evidence. It then presents a summary of sub-themes that were constructed from the fusion of the fieldwork map of the life space with the research partners' accounts of their experience. Finally, Figure 4.2 presents the two main themes that resulted from the analysis and synthesis of the sub themes. Figure 4.2 is designed to assist the reader in following the process of conceptual encounter interviews and thematic analysis by which the findings were determined.

Figure 4.2

Development of final map and thematic findings

		Whole of fieldwork map	Part A Fig 4.3	Part B Fig 4.4	Part C Fig 4.5	Part D Fig 4.6
Fieldwork Map						
Evidence from interviews of meaning and usefulness	Resonant	– Fresh lens and language that can be used and is potentially meaningful to clients – humanistic – Integrating quality – succinct capture of important aspects of coaching – Resonant of modalities / working with psychosocial forces – Resonant of role and function of coach	– Context – unique, multi-layered, interconnected – Being in the world (BITW) a stimulating concept – Past + future in present – Coach awareness of self in the moment	– Holistic and human language – Tension system/pulled out of shape – Metaphor of voices in hotel of work – Life space of Coach / reflexivity	– Universally resonant – Unique to each dyad – Strong resonance with metaphors: alchemy, zoom lens, magnetic energy, guided journey – Resonance of process as a heuristic – Determines what is/is not possible in each session	– Stages 6, 7, 8 resonant – Spatial dimension of route map into unfamiliar territory of L.S as resonant – Heuristic
	Less Resonant	– Too organized / prescriptive – Insufficient capture of dynamic qualities – Too many parts X 4 – disaggregated	– Onion ring unclear/unhelpful – 'BITW' lacks clarity	– Over-complicated – Static – Lacks interest – Esoteric	None	– Too much – Too organized/prescriptive – Too much like force-field analysis – Overly-deterministic
Changes to develop final conceptual map		– Abandon 4 maps; create one integrated map – Incorporate research partners' own words and metaphors – Build on familiarity with L.S and frame as a lens / mind's eye to coach with L.S in mind – Capture and convey clear sense of what coach becomes aware of and does through L.S	– Integrate part A + B into one map – Replace onion-ring with grid to incorporate client and coach in context – Include metaphor of 'hotel of work' with competing voices as a tension/ energy for change – Emphasise phenomena of tension/disequilibrium – Include phenomenon of 'BITW' as related to needs and goals in coaching – Invite coach to reflexive turn on their L.S and use of self before, during, and after coaching session		– Integrate into one overall map – Incorporate metaphors to express unique quality of L.S of Coaching and process as a guided Journey into unknown territory of L.S	– Remove 10 stage process – Integrate into one map – Conveyed a more iterative and emergent bespoke process – Incorporate new language/lens of expanding differentiating L.S as change in perspective / capacity building
Sub-themes		L.S is experienced as: – Old wine in a new bottle – A shorthand integrating current modalities and practices L.S is experienced as: – Fresh lens and language – Having evocative qualities of naturalism, dynamism, creativity, and heurism	L.S is experienced as: – Client and coach as indivisible from their context – Context as a unique aggregation of meaning – Coaching goal as a function of context		L.S is experienced as: – A co-created whole greater and different from sum of parts – Liminal space for coaching – Coaching is about changing meaningful parts of L.S	Coaching is experienced as: – Stabilizing client in their L.S – Co-creating a new route map for client to navigate unfamiliar territory of L.S
Main themes / findings		Theme one: L.S is a new yet familiar concept that is easy to connect with and comfortable to work with Theme two: L.S is a lens that sensitized and oriented coaches to a greater awareness and understanding of...	Complexity of the client and the unit of work in coaching, as related to their needs and goals	Coach's own complexity in the coach role	Heuristic of the co-created coaching process	Aim and objectives of executive coaching as building capacity

Figures 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6 present the four parts of the fieldwork map of the life space, introduced to the ten research partners as the topic for each semi-structured interview. These numbers correspond to parts A, B, C and D of the map, and throughout the analysis and findings, reference is made to each of these letters for ease of reference.

Part A of the map (Figure 4.3) represents a working definition of the client's life space in executive coaching. It proposes that people exist in in different psychological worlds of their own personal reality, their actuality in the moment. They will define their internal experience of their psychological and social environment in unique ways and behave accordingly. The life space is the totality of the different parts of the executive client's psychological and social environment at the time of and during the coaching session. The map tries to capture these different and identifiable generic parts of an executive client's life space in an "onion ring" diagram of eight concentric circles moving outwards from the centre of the life space. These circles are not separate from each other, they interact dynamically and are likely to be in different configurations for different executives, and for the same executive at different times. The number and names of the circles is not exhaustive, and there may be more, fewer or different ones for each executive. The map concludes with an outer circle to represent the coaching process as containing and being part of the executive client's life space. The lines representing the concentric circles of the life space are broken, to illustrate that the boundaries between the different parts of the life space maybe solid, permeable or non-existent, depending on how merged or separate they are in the client's experience at the time of and during the coaching session.

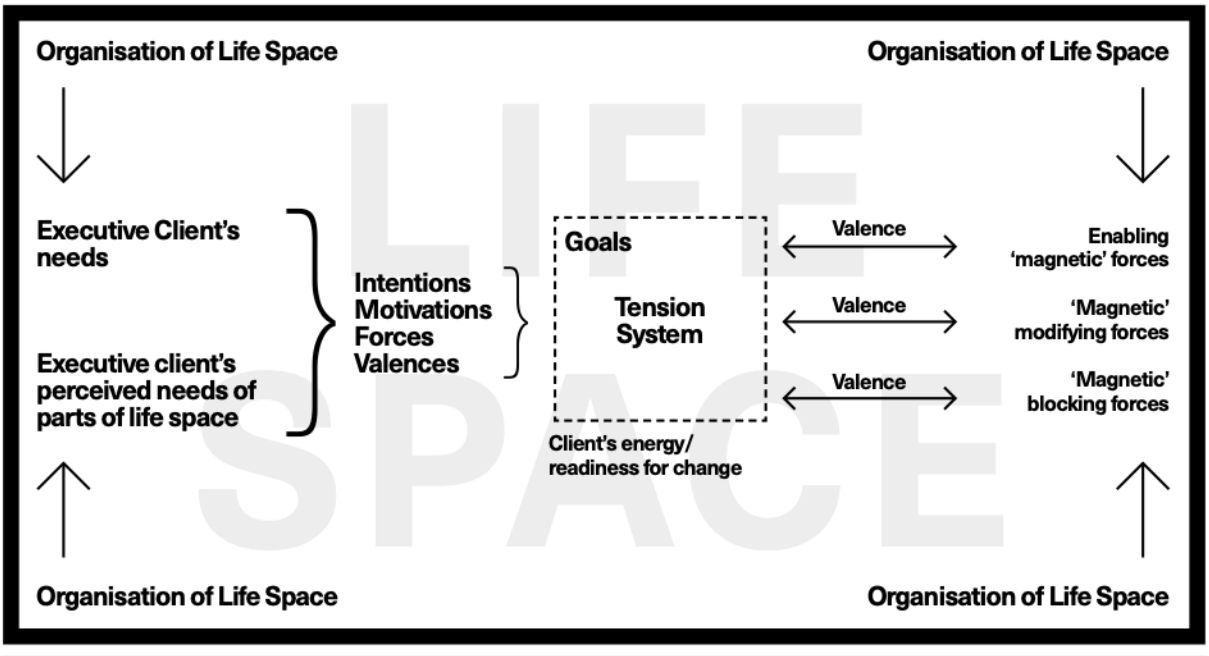
Figure 4.3 **Part A**

Fieldwork concept map: client's life space

Part B of the fieldwork map (Figure 4.4) represents a proposition about the causal effect of the life space on the executive's behaviour, and its relationship to the issue they bring to coaching. This part of the map proposes that the life space contains psychological and social forces that determine the executive's experience and behaviour in a specific situation at a moment in time. It proposes that the executive's behaviour is goal-driven, and the goals emanate from their life space, either from their own needs and intentions or from the psychological and social forces in the wider life space as represented in part one of the map. How the different parts of the life space are structured, separated or connected (by the solid or permeable boundaries represented in part one of map two) will determine the strength and direction of the psychological and social forces at play. Figure 4.4 represents these forces as "magnetic" and as valences with strength and direction, either driving and enabling or restraining the executive in moving toward or away from goal achievement. Wherever the executive's goal originates from in the life space, it is manifest in the coaching session as a tension system for the executive. The tension system creates energy and readiness for change emanating from the executive's motivation, wish, need, purpose or intention, and is positioned as the topic or goal for the coaching session.

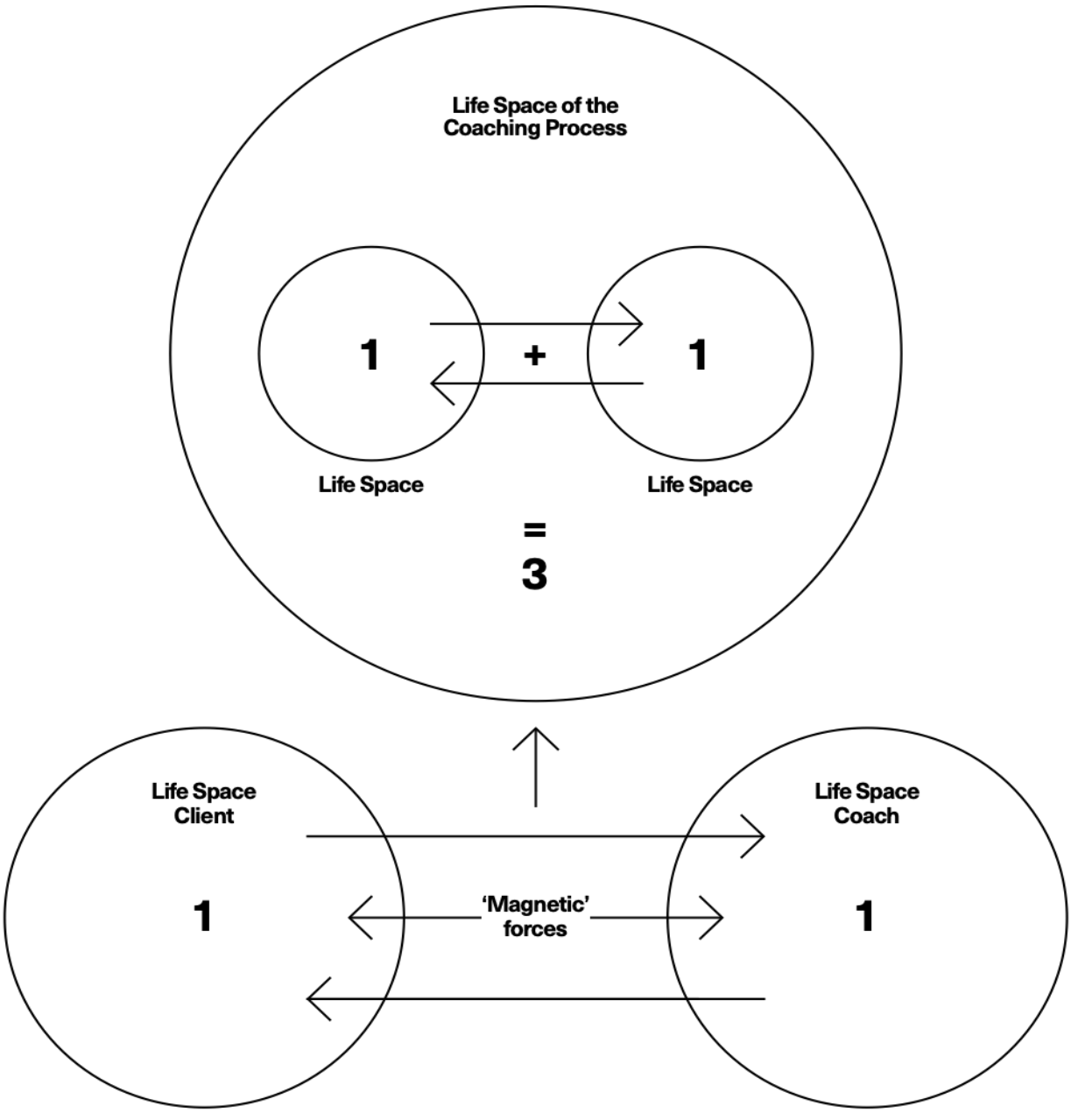
Figure 4.4 Part B

Fieldwork concept map: client's goals for coaching



Part C of the map (Figure 4.5) builds on part one, and defines and represents the coaching process as the respective life spaces of the client and the coach coming together, to co-create a unique life space of coaching that is different from and greater than the sum of the individual life spaces. This is represented by the illustration that one plus one equals three. The map positions the life spaces of the coach and the executive client as interacting “magnetic” forces in the co-creation of the coaching process.

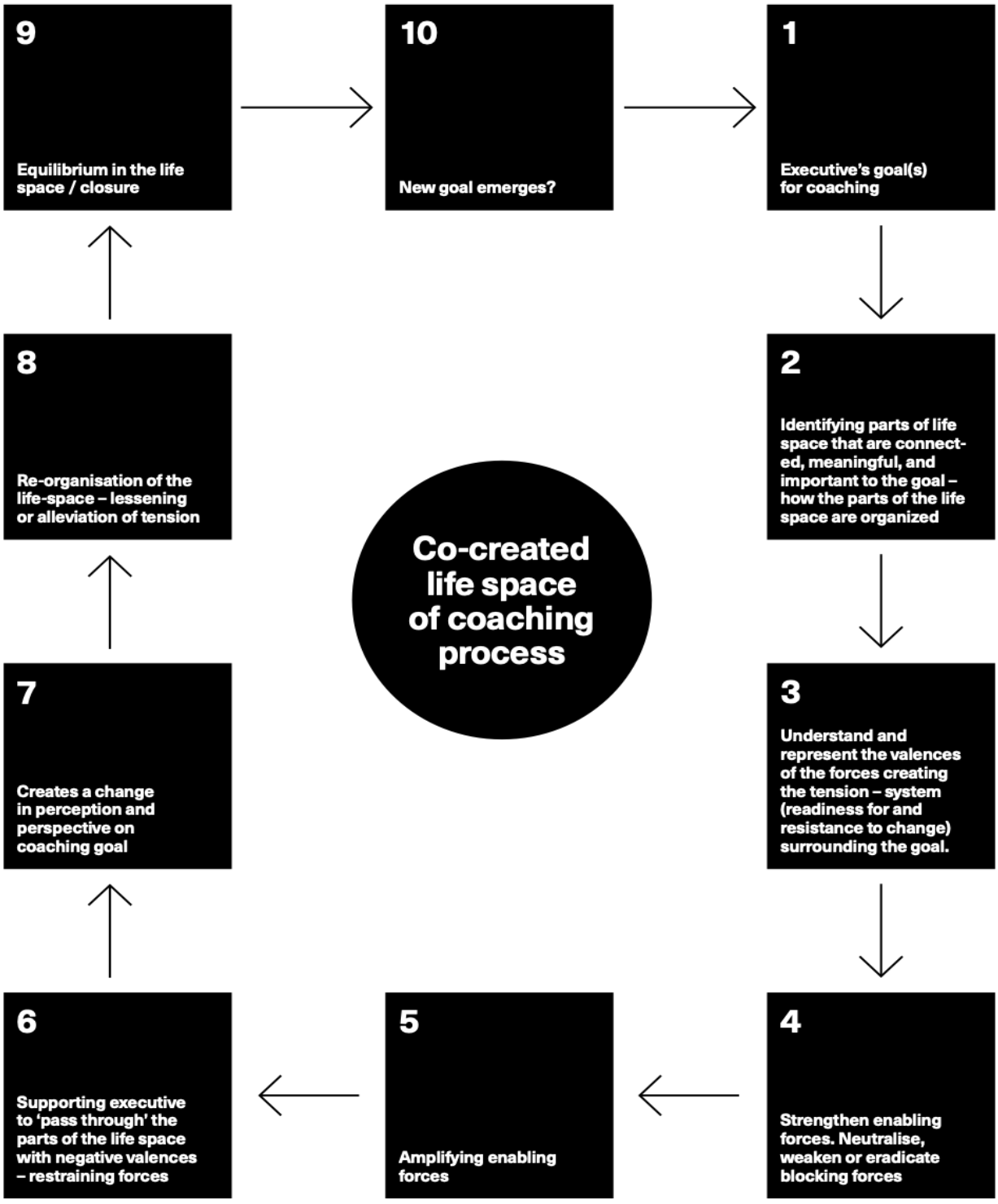
Figure 4.5 Part C
Fieldwork concept map: life space of the coaching process



Part D, the final part of the fieldwork map (Figure 4.6), depicts the executive coach as having the concept of the life space in mind when coaching. It represents this approach as a ten-stage coaching process. Overall, this invites the coach to work with the executive in their life space to change the make-up of their life space and, thereby, change their behaviour.

Figure 4.6 **Part D**

Fieldwork concept map: coaching with the life space in mind



The map represents the task of the coach as identifying with the executive those parts of their life space that are connected, meaningful and important to the executive's goal – how these parts of the life space are organised. Having identified the part or parts of the life space under investigation and how they are organised, the task of the coach is to work with the executive to understand and represent the surrounding psychological and social forces and their associated valences. These are represented as the forces in the executive's tension system – the energy and readiness for change and the resistance to change. The next coaching task is to work with the executive to strengthen the enabling forces and to neutralise, weaken or eradicate the restraining forces. To achieve their goal, the coach supports the executive to amplify their existing strengths as enabling valences and, often, supports them to pass through a part or parts of the life space with restraining or negative valences. This process changes the executive's perception of the aspects of their life space under investigation. It changes how the life space is organised. In changing the life space, it changes their perspective, motivation and intention, with the potential for new and different action. The executive's tension system is then lessened or alleviated, and the executive experiences a sense of closure and a greater sense of equilibrium, until another need and goal emerges. The map represents the aim of the coach in expanding, differentiating and reorganising the executive's life space to reduce the executive's tension system toward equilibrium/closure, from which a new goal emerges.

4.2. Part one – theme one: A new yet familiar concept

In summary, theme one shows that the whole of the map of the life space in executive coaching (parts A-D) was experienced by the significant majority of the research partners as a new, yet familiar concept that they found easy to connect with and comfortable to work with. In this sense, the life space was limited in what it revealed that was new to the research partners. The concept did not significantly change many of the ways in which the research partners understand and approach their work. The concept had a meaningful and familiar feel.

These findings relate primarily to the research partners' encounter with the whole of the fieldwork map, and particularly part D (Figure 4.6), representing a ten-stage process for a coaching session built around the characteristics of the life space. The research partners' feedback suggested that the fieldwork map captured important and familiar aspects of their experience of their coaching practice. The different parts of the life space of the client (the life space as an onion ring in part A); the client's goal, as situated in and emerging from the constellation of forces and the tension system in their life space (part B); and the coaching process as a co-created life space (Part C) involving different stages (Part D) were universally experienced as a broad representation of their experience of important aspects of the way they work with a client in their psychological and social world. The research partners described the map as having meaningfulness and usefulness that was familiar to the way that they coach, although the concept of the life space and the way this meaning and use was conveyed through the figures and words was mostly new.

In this sense, the fieldwork map was experienced as a new, yet familiar, concept. To support this finding, I highlight the two most important and salient sub-themes constructed from the data: the partners' experience of the fieldwork map of the life space as "*old wine in a new bottle*" (Coach 10), and their experience of it as a form of "*shorthand*" (Coach 2) for why and how they currently practice.

- Old wine in a new bottle

The "old wine in a new bottle" sub-theme was constructed from the majority of the research partners' experience of the life space as a new way to encompass aspects of a lot of the different modalities they apply in their practice, and some key aspects within these modalities. Coach 10's experience of coaching using force field analysis captured the essence of the feedback from the research partners; he characterised the life space as:

> "*… how and why I practice as I do. I haven't heard of the life space but as I see it here it seems to be recognisable to me*

although I am not sure what it gives me that is new other than a nice short expression that captures a lot" (Coach 10).

Similarly, Coach 3 described the map as a new representation of "*how I already work with the Gestalt ideas of figure and ground, the ground being the life space from which figures emerge".*

Whatever the different aspects of each research partners' coaching model or dynamic, the overall sense was that they experienced the life space as resonant of how and why they practice. More specifically, the idea of "coaching with the life space in mind", as represented in part D of the map, was experienced as a new and meaningful expression of coaching. This made sense to the research partners, particularly in respect of the ways in which they worked with the psychosocial forces of the client in their psychological and social world, but again the map brought nothing that was specifically new. As an example, Coach 6's experience of the map and coaching with the life space in mind was expressed as follows:

"*Whilst the map uses some language I might not be familiar with, it speaks to how I work with the client now, in the here-and-now of the coaching session to build a shared picture of the influences impacting their coaching issue, raising awareness of any hidden connections, to really connect them to their assets, and support them in the session in experimenting with living the change they want to make. This can shift their perception of their situation and alter their perspective on the issue and what, if anything, they might do differently as a result*" (Coach 6).

Coach 6 was able to integrate the new concept of the life space into how she currently coaches. She experienced it as "*a fresh expression of ways in which I work which can be useful, the life space is an easy term that I think a client can relate to, but it does not significantly change or challenge what I do and why I do it*". The experience of the life

space as an easy term that client's might relate to is a theme running through the evidence.

Coach 10 best summed up the general experience of the research partners when he described his encounter with the map as "*drinking old wine from a new bottle*", to express his sense of the life space as a new, yet familiar concept that presented in a new and fresh way, similar to the way in which he already practices.

- Shorthand

One of the common experiences relayed was the way in which the life space succinctly captured and conveyed something of how the research partners experience the essential nature of their role as coach working with a client, and the fact each client is situated in their own unique environment. Parts A and B of the map, and some aspects of C and D, were experienced as a fresh, short and relatively simple expression of familiar and important aspects of executive coaching.

Coach 2 captured the essence of this experience when she related that the life space had:

> "… *the quality of a shorthand, abbreviating and symbolising in a relatively short and simple way my role as an awareness-raising partner for the client, holding up a mirror to him or her in relation to their context and the psychological forces that influence their behaviour, which is often out of awareness*" (Coach 2).

Coach 6 painted a similar picture in relating her encounter with the life space as another "*tool in the tool kit*, *but one in which the two short and simple words of life space can hold an awful lot of meaning once you are familiar with it*".

Coach 8 conveyed a similar sense when she related her experience of the life space as something "*new but familiar to me if this makes sense*". She thought of it as a "u*seful summary of important aspects of psychological coaching, particularly for new or trainee coaches".* Coach 8 experienced the map as an accessible representation of a lot of complexity, sufficiently rooted in theory to have integrity, and "*simplifying and translating theory into some practical steps*" for running one or a number of coaching sessions.

Overall, the words "life space" landed with the research partners because they were experienced as having something of an "*integrating quality*", as Coach 10 expressed it.

Coach 4 painted the same picture in a different way when he described his new affinity with the notion of:

> "… *coaching with the life space in mind because it speaks to me in a short and simple way about a lot of what I do as an executive coach. How I work with the person in their system or field. It is a term and a concept I can see myself using*" (Coach 4).

- Summary of theme one

In summary, the findings reflect an overall sense of the research partners experiencing resonance between their practice and the map of the life space –a new, meaningful, recognisable and succinct representation of important aspects of how they coach which, while useful, brought little that was new to their current practice. The life space is experienced as a new yet familiar concept.

4.3. Part one – theme two: A sensitising and orienting language and lens

Whilst theme one presents the fieldwork map of the life space as a reasonable, succinct, and fairly familiar portrayal of aspects of how the research partners understand and practice executive coaching, theme two of the findings shows that it is more than this.

Theme two presents the concept as meaningful and useful in executive coaching, as a lens that sensitises and orients coaches to important implications of the presence and effect of the psychological and social context surrounding each and every executive coaching encounter. This is because the whole of the map of the life space was experienced as having naturalistic, dynamic, creative and heuristic qualities, which evoked in the research partners an enhanced awareness and understanding of important aspects of executive coaching, wherein they view each and every coaching session as indivisible from the psychological and social context in which the client, the coach and the coaching are situated in and intimately connected to. These aspects are the complexity of each client and the unit of work in coaching and the coach's own complexity in the coach role; the heuristic of the co-created coaching process; and the aim and objectives of executive coaching as building capacity. Overall, this new lens of coaching with the life space in mind was experienced by the research partners as a way of highlighting how the coach is working both with and in the concept and phenomenon of the life space during each and every coaching session.

The language of "life" and "space" and some of the schema of words and terms used in the four parts of the fieldwork map were experienced as having evocative, naturalistic, dynamic, creative and heuristic qualities for the research partners, which were meaningful and useful to them in their work. The combination of these qualities was experienced as unique to the life space and as a beneficial sensitising and orienting prism – meaningful and useful as a fresh language and lens on coaching the client in their psychological and social situation. Coach 4 conveyed the essence of this experience when he said that the concept of the life space:

> "*Enables us to capture something about the situation and the person in it from their perspective in a naturalistic, real-life way. The life space has a messy, dynamic and ever-changing feel, somebody else in the same situation will have a different experience, a different life space. The boundaries in the onion ring of the map* (Part A) *will be distributed in different ways for each person and at different times*" (Coach 4).

Coach 9 echoed this experience by using the metaphor of Parlett (1991, p.5) when she related:

> "*The life space to me is like a river, and you cannot walk in the same river twice. It's constantly changing, flowing and moving as we respond to our sense of our surroundings in work and in coaching. This applies to me as coach, the client and what is happening between us*" (Coach 9).

Coach 1 experienced the creative quality of the life space as:

> "… *the coaching space where the client meets their context and makes sense of it and we as the coach are part of creating this context, us theirs and them ours and this is unique to us at this time in this situation*" (Coach 1).

Coach 2 expressed her affinity for the concept as something that resonated with a heuristic quality for both the client and herself:

> "*It's like a mirror, a reflection of the client or me in our moment in our world, and I can see that it might enable the client or me to learn or discover for myself how the situation I am in is impacting me. Mapping the life space around an issue, which*

parts of the context are meaningful here can, of itself, really bring about a new awareness and choice" (Coach 2).

Similarly, Coach 4 expressed his experience of the life space as uniquely combining and capturing these qualities in a way that other related coaching terms do not:

> *"The map leads me to think about how I might attend to what life is like for this person in a way that is more immediate than field or system, or force field. Actually as we speak using the term life space strikes me as a lovely, different and intimate way of bringing in the notion of system or field, it's a personal gateway into their experience, their life, the space we are sharing, that invites them to connect with their experience"* (Coach 4).

Overall, the research partners relayed how the new concept of the life space was meaningful and useful to them as a fresh language and phenomenological lens on aspects of their practice. It was experienced as bringing a heightened awareness of four important aspects of seeing and working with the complexities of the client in the context of their momentary psychological and social world. The first of these aspects is the complexity of each client and their needs and goals for coaching. The second aspect is the complexity of the coach in the coach role. These two findings are primarily based on the evidence of the research partners' encounter with parts A and B.

4.3.1 Complexity of each client, their needs and goals

This finding reveals that the life space captures and enhances the research partners' awareness and understanding of their experiences of the complexity of each client and their needs and goals for coaching. The evidence for this finding is primarily constructed from three sub-themes. Each is presented in turn.

- Client as indivisible from their ever-changing psychological and social context

This sub-theme was constructed from the data relating to the research partners' experiences of the life space as a naturalistic and dynamic phenomenon which raised their awareness and understanding of the client being situated in and intimately connected to a unique, multi-layered, interconnected psychological and social context. The word context was important to the research partners. They experienced Part A of the fieldwork map of the life space of the client in a context that included the client "being in their world", of which work is but one part. Part A's representation of the life space of the client as an "onion ring" had a mild resonance with all the research partners. It was universally experienced as capturing something of the complexities of each of the clients they work with, and how this complexity affects their client in their work and role. However, the concentric circles in this part of the map suggested to the research partners that adding the word "context" to the map would further enhance how it captured and conveyed something of their experiences. They experienced the phenomenon of context as central to how they see the client and how they coach.

Coach 3 experienced the map as a:

> "… *helpful reminder of the complexity of what we mean when we say we work with the client in their context. For me the map represents the client in their context. Each client is unique, people can be in the same context, the same meeting, but experience very different things and therefore have very different needs"* (Coach 3).

Similarly, Coach 5 said that the map:

> "… *emphasised the complexity of what we do and the real complexity of our clients and their role, responsibilities, their wider context and how this affects them differently at different*

times and how their experience is unique to them and what they might bring to coaching" (Coach 5).

Coach 6 described how working with context is central to her coaching process:

"… *for me working with the person in their context and working* to *change the context is changing the person, this is a big part of what my coaching is all about. Is it a context that elevates them, makes them feel powerful, or subjugates them, makes them feel small?"* (Coach 6).

This theme of the map "helpfully reminding" coaches of their experiences of working with the client's individual and unique perspective on their context was emphasised by Coach 2, who experienced the map as conveying a sense of the client "*bringing all of who they are to what they do, their multi-layered world".* It captured how she experienced the client in a coaching session as a whole, occupying many roles simultaneously, and how their "life" and "world" has a multi-layered complexity.

There was a consistent theme amongst all the research partners about how the map captured something of their experience of their clients as indivisible from their context, and how executive coaching practice has to work with each client situated in and intimately connected to their own psychological and social context. More specifically, the life space as the executive client "being in their world" (the sixth ring in the onion at Part A) generated curiosity and was not universally experienced as a helpful part of the map, because it meant different things to different people, or in some cases, nothing at all. Coach 4 said "*unlike the other circles this does not seem to point to anything*". However, the use of this term in the map stimulated lively discussions about what is meant by the client "being in their world" and for all the research partners, it captured a sense of the client in their work context, this context being only one part of a wider interconnected context of life outside of work. Throughout each discussion, there was commonality in the research partners' experiences of executive coaching taking a "*holistic view of the client*

in their wider world, whilst focusing on what all of this means in the context of their work, role, organisation and the associated issues they bring to coaching" as Coach 3 put it. The notion of the life space capturing something of the client being both in their organisational role and "being in their world" was experienced as a meaningful and helpful conceptualisation of the complexity of working with a client as situated and connected to their unique context.

For some research partners, the client "being in their world" evoked a sense of the "*person as a spiritual being, connected to coaching the soul in the context of a wider cosmos*", as Coach 8 said. Coach 7 said it evoked in him a sense of the client being "*alive to the* world" and suggested that, not dissimilar to Coach 8, it might convey more "existential questions" about a the client's meaning or calling in the world. This part of the life space held meaning for Coach 6, as they felt working with some clients on their "*values and vision for their life*" allowed them to really connect with a stronger sense of purpose. For some of the research partners, the life space as capturing something of the client "being in their world" had a more pragmatic meaning. This was the notion that the executive in their role in their organisation is now much more situated in and intimately connected to global events. The essence of the research partners' experience of this was captured by Coach 5 when she said:

> "*For me, the client being part of a wider world is probably about the interconnectedness of things these days, the world is a smaller place and this is now part of what the executive has to deal with"* (Coach 5).

Coach 5 recounted her experience of executive clients bringing to coaching challenging topics like climate change and their organisation's policy, targets and regulatory requirements, in relation to this. Other research partners linked this part of the map to executives grappling with the complexities of technological advances such as cybersecurity. Not surprisingly, some of the research partners made reference to coaching executives during the pandemic and supporting them through the enormous

challenges this brought at so many levels, both organisational and deeply personal. Coach 7 suggested that the concept of “being in their world” presented executive coaching as an approach not just to developing leaders, but developing increasingly conscious and transformational leaders who are increasingly aware of the interdependency of things. Coach 7 experienced the life space as a way of thinking about coaching:

> *“To develop wisdom and maturity in leaders, to coach for vertical growth and development and to encourage a third generation of coaches that signifies a greater understanding and appreciation of systems to shift the discipline from “I” and performance-solution focused coaching to the “we” of the person in systems such as their organization, to the “bigger we” of a macro-consciousness in terms of climate emergency, technological development and societal change, the life space of which we are all part of and bound to”* (Coach 7).

These findings suggest that the executive “being in their world” was a vague but provocative and deeply resonant concept for the majority of the research partners, and related directly to aspects of their different experiences of how they coach with the client’s context in mind. The client “being in their world” of their life space reflects executive coaching for some coaches as concerned with the personal and more intangible aspects of context such as the client’s soul, their calling, with a sense of their personal value and vision in life in and outside work, positioning the client as the executor of how they lead their life, not only their life in work. For other research partners, this part of the life space evoked a sense of the executive’s organisational context as an increasingly open system in which the executive is functioning in a greater, more complex, interconnected and global whole, of which the workplace is but one area. In this sense, the map captured something of the coach’s awareness and understanding of the client’s context as a complex, unique and dynamic phenomenon that is central to how and why they coach.

- Context as an aggregate of meaning the client has accrued so far in relation to their work

All the research partners experienced resonance with, and found meaning in, Part A's definition of the client's psychological and social environment as "*the aggregate of the meaning of all the interconnected people, experiences, objects, relationships, events and so on that they have accrued so far in relation to their role and work*". Coach 1 expressed the essence of all the research partners' experiences when she said that this part of the map captured and conveyed a "*clear sense of what we mean when we talk of the client's context in coaching*". Coach 2 said that this part of the map:

> "*provided a really helpful definition of context as it is present, powerful and manifest in the complexities about the work issues they bring to coaching and how these issues are connected to and touch so many other aspects of their lives"* (Coach 2).

Part A of the fieldwork map presents the phenomenon of the client's past and sense of future as part of the client's life space. Coach 6 experienced a strong resonance with it:

> "… *because it captures the client's past and future as present in their current life space and in the coaching session, and how the coach must work with all the different aspects of a person, including their history and how they see their future*" (Coach 6).

For Coach 5, the map captured how the coach is:

> *"… working with all of who the client is, their life as it is, their past, there hopes and anxieties for the future, what bits of all of this they bring to their role as an executive and what they bring of*

themselves, other roles they inhabit at the same time, into coaching" (Coach 5).

In this sense, the life space was experienced by the research partners as including aspects of the client's past and their feelings about their future that are present for them during the here-and-now of the coaching session. Working in the here-and-now with the phenomenon of temporality, the past and the future in the present, was a highly meaningful part of the map. It was universally experienced by the research partners as important for the coach to be fully attuned to the idea of the client and their goals for coaching as indivisible from their psychological context, and highly aware of the complexity this brings to the coaching encounter.

- Coaching goal as a function of the client's context

This sub-theme is constructed from the data from the research partners' experiences of part B of the fieldwork map. Part B represents the life space containing a pattern of enabling, modifying and blocking psychological and social forces and valences, as a tension system that determines the client's experience and goal-driven behavior in a specific situation at a moment in time. In encountering part B of the map, the research partners connected with their own experiences of the simultaneous and multiple demands placed on the client that exist alongside the client's own needs, and how this creates a tension system which can pull or push the client into a sense of disequilibrium. The conceptualisation of the coaching goal as a function of the life space was meaningful and useful in this respect. The research partners highlighted parts of part B that were very meaningful whilst suggesting some amendments and additions to the map, which, from their experiences, had the potential to enhance the coach's awareness and understanding of the relationship between the life space and the goal or goals the client brings to coaching. These relate to the concepts of the phenomena of tension system, multiple stakeholders, and disequilibrium.

All the research partners related experiences of behaviour as oriented to meet needs, and how they work with psychosocial forces to assist the client in identifying and achieving goals. For some, the notion of a "tension system" was not altogether new, although it was associated with the modalities and terminologies of Gestalt, constellation and force field coaching, and not associated with the concept of the life space. Examples of alternative but similar conceptualisations used by the research partners included "*fixed gestalts", "enduring themes", "creative adjustments*" and "*force field analysis*". In this sense, the life space brought nothing new. Coaches generally accepted that needs and goals arise from the client, not in isolation, but in relation to their psychosocial environment. However, the notion of the life space as a "tension system" was experienced by the research partners as helpful in enhancing their understanding and awareness of how needs and goals are located within, and emerge from, the client's unique experience of their situation, and how this is a dynamic, ever-changing process. It also resonated with the research partners' experiences of tension remaining until it is lessened or alleviated by the executive achieving their goal and meeting their need.

Part B of the map of the life space was consistently experienced as helpful, because it brought a phenomenological and naturalistic quality to how the coach might understand the needs and goals from the unique perspective of the client. The concept of the client experiencing a tension system in their life space was experienced as an enhancement of the research partners' understanding and awareness of the psychological and often hidden nature of the coaching agenda.

Coach 4 said that the concept of the life space with a tension system "*enables us to capture something about the client's issues in their situation from their perspective in a real-life way".* Coach 4 described his experience of working with the client's goals as not being particularly bound by any model, such as GROW or Solution-Focused coaching, but:

> "… *looking for how the goal is connected to how the client is making sense of the situation they are in, or the coach waiting for*

the goal to emerge, noticing what the client is holding that feels unresolved, a tension" (Coach 4).

He described his experience in terms of the goal or topic for coaching originating from the client's relationship with particular aspects of their psychological context that are out of balance at that moment in time. Similarly, Coach 2 relayed how the concept of being with the client's life space and tension might now help her in this process:

> *"I can see myself keeping the life space and tension system in mind as it brings a real-life quality to the work that words like aim, goal, system and field and context don't have"* (Coach 2).

Coach 10 related his experience of the life space as "*contextualising*" force field analysis, by positioning the forces as located in and emanating from "*tensions the client experiences*" in discernible and interrelated areas of their environment at the time of coaching. His reflections were characterised by the life space giving him a sense of a more holistic and "*human*" view of the client and one that he "*could play back*", suggesting connections or patterns "*in the life space*" that are influencing the topic or goal that might previously have been hidden.

Coach 10 suggested that integrating force field analysis with the concept of the life space and using the terms life space and tension system:

> "… *conveyed a qualitatively different and more bespoke texture than constellations, force fields*, *topic or goal, It is a fairly simple thing to get hold of, hold on to and convey to the client*" (Coach 10).

Coach 3 had not come across the concepts of either the life space nor tension system before encountering the map. Nonetheless, her experience was similar to that of Coaches

2 and 10, and captured something of the essence of the experiences of other research partners. For her:

> *"Seeing what the client is bringing to coaching as a tension in their life, a sense of them being burdened, bent out of shape, carrying a heavy heart as well as a full head and how they need to leave the session less burdened, less heavy is a new and useful way of thinking … often clients report feeling lighter after a coaching session and this idea of alleviating or reducing a tension system sort of speaks to this"* (Coach 3).

Coach 3 related how she can see herself using the notion of a life space "*in tension*" with clients and using this language because it "*has and conveys naturalistic and human qualities of their life, their space, what this space is full of and what tensions they have and need to work on*".

Framing the client's coaching goal as a tension system in their life space was a meaningful and useful concept for the research partners. However, they thought that part A of the fieldwork map at the fourth onion ring from the center (organisational environment) lacked an important detail about the major source of this tension. Coach 1 said that this part of the life space needed to capture and convey the presence of multiple stakeholders with multiple and often competing needs:

> "*For me, the map lacks detail about the range of multiple stakeholders the executive has to deal with, from within their organisation and outside of it with key partners, and the complexity and challenges this brings to them and their role*" (Coach 1).

She thought that including and emphasising this in the life space map would be a helpful prompt for some executive coaches, "*particularly those who themselves have not had direct experience at an executive level*".

Coach 2 made the same point but in a slightly different way, when she related her experience of the life space, and said it resonated with her as "*an important part of the executive's everyday situation*":

> *"… how they manage the often-contradictory demands of many people and the frequency with which they bring issues around this to coaching, particularly when they are trying to manage many competing demands that might compromise what they think is needed or what they want and need at that time"* (Coach 2).

Coach 5 connected strongly with the notion of the organisational environment in the life space containing multiple stakeholders, because it brought to mind for her a metaphor of "*the many voices* [the executives] *carry in their head*" and "*which ones are the loudest or in opposition to each other*".

Throughout the interviews, there was a theme of the research partners experiencing the different parts of the client's life space as less of an onion ring and more akin to Peavy's metaphorical "hotel of executive work", in which many voices take up residence (Peavy, 2001, p.9). For Coach 9, the image of the executive "*hearing many voices at the same time*" brought into sharper focus how the executive has to think about an issue or a challenge from lots of different perspectives at the same time and how they are likely to feel that "*The client cannot please all of the people all of the time and how things are just not as straightforward as you might initially think*". These experiences suggest that the life space was experienced by the research partners as missing a specific and universal part of the client's organisational context - the simultaneous presence of multiple important

people to the executive, and the demands, often contradictory or competing, that this places on them in their organisational role.

Part A of the map, showing permeable boundaries (broken lines of the concentric circles) between the parts of a client's life space, resonated with the research partners. This was because it emphasised the "real-life" dynamic, ever-changing nature of a client in their situation, and how this dynamic complexity is often an aspect of the client's needs and goals at the time of and during coaching. Coach 10 said that the life space represented how the executive's role and their needs in work are "*often indivisible from the wider context of what's going on in their lives".* Coach 1 said that "*some boundaries will be firmer or more fluid for some people than others and these boundaries can often be constantly changing, in a state of flux".* She talked of coaching executives who, at times, seem to be working "*twenty-four seven with work permeating all other boundaries*" and at other times, less so. These findings suggest that the life space seemed meaningful and useful to the coaches as a way of helping them to connect the complexity to their experiences of their clients bringing a common theme to coaching. This was expressed variously as "*work-life balance, or the spaces between the part of the life space of work and the other parts of the life space"* (Coach 2), "*healthy-self regulation*" (Coaches 6 and 8) and "*sustainability*" (Coach 9). These comments captured the experiences of the research partners that the boundaries in the life space, however uniquely configured, feature regularly as a phenomenon that the executive brings to coaching to work on.

The research partners experienced Parts A and B of the map as a representation of the "*unique experiences of the executives and how they cope with the demands placed on them, the directions they are pulled or pushed in and the choices they make"* (Coach 6), and how the relationships in the spaces between the different parts of the life space are "*personal and individual, with one person's balance not the same as another person's balance"* (Coach 4). These findings capture and convey something of the research partners' experiences of the clients coming to coaching feeling ""*pulled out of shape in different directions*" by the demands placed upon them or "*out of balance, a sense of disequilibrium*". Coach 8 related her experience of a client coming to coaching wanting to

experience their work as less invasive of their life outside of work and how, despite their best efforts, this was proving virtually impossible. She related how the client had worked in the past with a coach to list which tasks could and could not be de-prioritised or delegated, and how this had brought about no discernible change. The notion of a life space with permeable boundaries being "*in disequilibrium and out of balance"* for the client encompassed her experiences of coaching being less about the nature and frequency of the client's behaviours (failing to re-prioritise and delegate) and more about investigating the underlying psychological and social dynamics influencing their behavior; the way in which the different parts of their life space were currently configured, and the tension this created in relation to competing needs and goals.

- Summary of the life space as the complexity of each client and their needs and goals for coaching

The findings reveal that parts A and B of the map of the life space captured and enhanced the research partners' awareness and understanding of their experiences of the complexity of each client. The concept captures and amplifies something of their experience of working with the client as indivisible from their ever-changing psychological and social context. The context is the aggregate of meaning that the client has accrued so far in relation to their work. This context includes their past, their sense of future, and their own needs and goals from being in the world, alongside the often-competing voices of multiple stakeholders. These parts of the map encompassed something of the coaches' experiences of the client as not in isolation, but situated in and intimately connected to a complex, momentary, ever-changing and interconnected psychological and social world, with the need to resolve underlying tensions and dynamics that determine their behavior at a moment in time. This is a world that not only influences the nature of their needs and goals in coaching, but also influences how the coach might understand and establish the coaching goal.

4.3.2 Complexity of the coach

This finding presents the life space as a conceptualisation of important aspects of the coaches' experiences and understanding of themselves as coach. Parts A and B of the fieldwork map enhanced the coach's awareness of themselves as being in their life space – situated in and intimately connected to the environment of their own psychological world in the here-and-now of the coaching session. This enhanced awareness invited them to a heuristic reflexive turn towards the influence of their life space on their coaching practice and their use of self. It is constructed from two sub-themes.

- Coach in their context

During the interviews, part A of the map invited a general and pronounced appreciation of the research partners' own complexity as a factor in the coaching process. There was a strong sense of the life space "*as a meaningful representation of the client's psychological world*" and therefore *"equally meaningful as a representation of the coach's world*" (Coach 5). Coach 6 related that she experienced her life space as an understanding and awareness of how the very human emotions of anger, loss, weariness, frustration, excitement and joy associated with life outside of work, the other interconnected parts of the life space, can be "*with her in a coaching session".* Coach 4 conveyed something similar, in experiencing the life space as bringing an immediate, real and human quality to thinking about the psychological reality of the coach at the time of and during coaching. He referred specifically to his needs as a professional when he recalled a coaching session in which he was "*very mindful of how important a client this organisation was for me and how I was with wanting to feel as though I had worked hard and done well to feel assured more work would follow*". He said he felt an occasional "*tension*" between meeting his own needs and his professionalism in working to meet the needs of the client, and that this was in the "field" of the coaching process.

Coach 10 related his experiences of the life space as tool for personal preparation for a coaching session, "… *a scan or inventory of what thoughts, feelings, motivations the*

*coach might be aware of in the moments prior to coaching, during coaching and after coachin*g". He went on to discuss how an awareness of one's life space and any tension systems within it might enhance the coaching process. There was a sense that he experienced the life space as a self-awareness raising concept, and that having a heightened awareness would enable him to more consciously be in service of the client.

Similarly, Coach 7 experienced the life space as an expression of the "*work on self that enables the use of self as the highest order coaching skill*". He talked passionately of there being a significant absence of this self-work amongst a lot of coaches. He conveyed a strong sense of coaches coaching with their "*own life space in mind*" because the life space captures "*an awareness of how you are in each and every moment*" and how "*the presence and energy of the coach changes, often outside of the coach's awareness*". Coach 7's experiences were characterised by an appreciation of the life space as a representation of how the context of both the coach and the client impacts the coaching process.

All the research partners conveyed a sense of "self-awareness" and described experiences of the deliberate and intentional "use of self" in their coaching. They all displayed the emotional intelligence associated with self-management and relational management. In this sense, the life space might well be another tool on the shelf of personal development concepts and frameworks. However, its conceptualisation of an awareness of self "*in the moment*" was a theme that ran through the research partners' experiences; a sense that it was meaningful and useful as a concept that might be used just prior to coaching, maybe during coaching and maybe as a reflection point afterwards. As Coach 7 suggested:

> "*Maybe it can be developed as a scanning tool, both a physical mapping, but maybe a psychological scan of where my tension system is right now and how it's changing*" (Coach 7).

Coach 1 described her experiences in terms of knowing one's own life space and which parts of it are important to the coaching process as a sense of "*grounding myself*, *ready to coach*". For Coach 4, there was a sense of the life space enabling the coach to "*tune into themselve*s, *what am I with, am I with a tension system and what does this tell me is needed here, now?"*

The life space was experienced as an enhanced sense of the coach's self in the moment of coaching; drawing on their awareness of their own psychological world to bring forth the right presence in the moment for the client. Coach 8 experienced this as "*knowing how to use the self in service of others*", and described an awareness of:

> "*knowing how my needs, my need for affirmation as a good coach, might override the what the client needs from me and being aware and able to manage this because I know myself in the situation in this moment*" (Coach 8).

These findings suggest the life space as a heuristic for the coach, a mirror or invitation to a reflexive turn to enhance and enrich self-awareness and the use of self in the coaching process.

- Unique complexity of the coach in role

Part A of the fieldwork map as the onion ring of the client's life space, and the notion of the client simultaneously having multiple stakeholders conveying multiple and often competing needs, resonated with the research partners' self-experiences as coaches.

Coach 1 explained:

> *"It's not just me and the client, it's me meeting the needs of the stakeholder, often the client's boss who commissioned the work,*

as well as meeting the client's needs and the needs of the wider organisation. Often these are aligned, sometimes not" (Coach 1).

Coach 5 painted a similar picture in relating her experiences of *"managing the whole coaching process"* and *"including the client's needs but also those of the organisation and particularly the needs identified by the person, rarely the client themselves, who is sponsoring the coaching".*

Similarly, Coach 3 described his experience in terms of:

"... the tension that sometimes exist for the coach in trying to meet the needs of the client whilst meeting the specified needs of the organisation or the person sponsoring the coaching" (Coach 3).

The sense from these findings was that the research partners experienced the life space as an authentic conceptualisation of their psychological world in a coaching session, capturing something of the "tensions" that they are aware of and manage in their key role of "holding the whole of the coaching project", including the needs and expectations of all the stakeholders. There was no sense that this routine and regular aspect of executive coaching would have been overlooked had it not being for the introduction of the concept of the life space. The life space added nothing new, but it did enhance the coach's awareness that managing the expectations of multiple stakeholders has a complexity that is an important part of their psychological world as a coach, and that it can create a life space tension system. As Coach 9 related, "*We too have our hotel of work where often many competing and conflicting voices reside***".**

- Summary of the life space as the complexity of the coach

These findings present the life space as an easily recognisable conceptualisation of important aspects of the coaches' experiences and their understanding of themselves in relation to their psychological context at the time of and during coaching. It is experienced in ways that are similar to the life space of the client, being in their world, whilst capturing something of the unique role of the executive coach, often holding and managing the competing needs of stakeholders in the coaching project. In this sense, the life space is comfortable to work with for the research partners, a new, yet familiar concept with a heuristic quality. It is experienced as an invitation towards a reflexive turn – a concept that sensitises and orients coaches to the phenomenological complexity of their self, their practice, and the relationship between the two. There was a consistent and universal sense from the research partners that the concept of the life space encompassed their experience of themselves as indivisible from, situated in and intimately connected to their own unique and momentary psychological context. The research partners related their experience of the client's individual complexity and their own complexity, and how both were present in the liminal space where the two people meet and make sense of their contexts, and how this awareness of self is important to their own development and to the integrity of their coaching.

4.3.3 Heuristic of the co-created coaching process

This finding is constructed from the data about how the research partners related their experiences of the whole of the fieldwork map, and particularly part C. This part of the fieldwork map presented the coaching process as a life space co-created by the interaction of the individual life spaces of the client and the coach. This co-creation was represented through the metaphorical equation "one plus one equals three", and as a phenomenon of magnetic forces that the coach is part of and working within. The framing of the life space as enhancing the coach's awareness and understanding of the dyadic coaching process as a co-created and heuristic phenomenon was constructed primarily from three sub-themes drawn from the data, as follows.

- A whole greater and different than the sum of its parts

This sub-theme is constructed from data about three important and salient experiences of part C of the map, as reported by the research partners. These are the alchemy of the life space; the magnetic energy and meaning created in the life space; and how it determines what is and is not possible in each and every coaching session.

Part C of the fieldwork map represents the life space of the coaching process in the metaphorical equation of one plus one equals three. Coach 9's experience of this was characterised by her "*using this metaphor when describing to a client how two people interacting creates something different and bigger than the sum of the two people, it's a dynamic process*". Coach 1 painted a similar picture when she related "*how something comes from a conversation between the coach and client that couldn't have come from either separately*". Similarly, Coach 4 talked of "*something coming into existence, a life space that neither the client or the coach create on their own, a shape opens up, unpredictable, a fertile void*". Coach 3 expressed her experience of this when she related her encounter with the life space as capturing and conveying a sort of "*magical sense of two chemicals interacting to create a new chemical, something much more than the combination of the two*".

The life space represented in this way seemed to evoke something of the research partners' experiences of how the co-created life space can have the quality of being alchemical, i.e. the whole being greater and different than the sum of the coach and client as they exist as individuals in their own psychological worlds. For Coach 2, the life space evoked something of the unique naturalistic phenomenological and dynamic quality of the coaching process, something that is "*unique to what is happening between this coach and this client at this time and at each moment throughout their coaching session. It is a living entity, breathing and dynamic".* She expressed how the term life space evoked and captured something of these naturalistic qualities: "*I like the liveliness of the term life space, and its spaciousness. It's sort of invitational. What life are we creating between ourselves in this space?"*

The findings from Coach 9 painted a similar picture. She experienced the term life space as something she would consider using in future coaching to enhance the quality of the coaching process. For her, it was a phrase that had a little bit of curiosity and exploration of the unknown about it:

> "*I enjoy it. It's validating. Lively. Natural. I wonder what the person's life space is. It's an interesting term that I might find myself using in some form or context. What is the space of work in your life really like for you? Is it crowded, claustrophobic? What's in it? Where does this come from? How does what's in it make you feel? It is a phrase of intimacy and feelings. Yes, it's a new, nice phrase for me to use with my clients*" (Coach 9).

Similarly, Coach 4 related his experience of the coaching process as a life space having a unique quality of capturing something of both the situation, and the person in that situation, from their perspective in a naturalistic way. He characterised this as:

> "*Thinking about how I might attend to what life is like for this person in a way that is more immediate than field or system, or force field. Using the term life space strikes me as a lovely, different and intimate way of bringing in the notion of system or field, it's a personal gateway into their experience, their life, the space we are sharing, that invites them to connect with their experience"* (Coach 4).

Coach 4 went on to recount how he experienced the life space as different and distinct from systems theory. Systems coaching for Coach 4 seemed to have a much more deterministic feel to it compared to the life space:

> "*You are placed in a system and as the system changes how you are changed is something to do with system dynamics. In contrast, the life space has a unique naturalistic quality of phenomenological experience. It is evocative of the individual, their unique experiences of their situation at this moment and how this might naturally change and why they feel and behave the way that they do. Introducing the life space as a way of talking about all of this can really help us as coaches to access what's really going on for them in an authentic way"* (Coach 4).

Coach 7 suggested that "*coaching with the life space in mind is to invite the coach to be aware of the power of their own life space in their presence in coaching*", and to invite the coach to "*engage with the everyday words life and space in the coaching process, instead of our more usual words of context, environment, situation or system".*

Overall, the research partners related a strong sense of the language and phenomenon of the life space of the coaching process as having a naturalistic, phenomenological and alchemical quality. This quality captured and enhanced their awareness and appreciation that the client and coach are naturally co-creating a coaching process which is greater than, and different from, the sum of the individual life spaces of the client and the coach. The concept of the co-creation of a unique life space was experienced by the research partners as a naturalistic gateway into a unique and shared meaning of the client's psychological world at the time of coaching.

The life space was also experienced by the research partners as having the quality to illuminate something of their experience of the nature and importance of this alchemy; why for the coach each encounter was unique and often brought different experiences. This was because parts C and D of the fieldwork map of the life space encompassed their experiences of working with the "*energy in the room*", as Coach 2 expressed it. The client's energy, the coach's energy and the alchemical combination of the two determine what is and is not possible in any coaching session. Being alert to the client's levels of

energy, and the readiness for change emanating from their intention around any self-declared coaching topic or goal, was felt to be routine practice for the research partners. The research partners related a range of examples wherein they viewed the life space as capturing their experience of being aware of and working with a sense of "*where the energy is for what*" in each encounter, as expressed by Coach 3. However, the life space map at Part C conceptualised this energy as having a "magnetic" quality and this resonated strongly with all the research partners. This concept represents the phenomenon of a co-creation of the life space of the coaching process as the interaction between the magnetic energies emanating from the respective life spaces of the client and coach. In part D, stages 3 and 4 of the map portray the client's energy as a tension system that signals to the coach a readiness or resistance to change, and ultimately determines what the coaching process can and cannot achieve. This aspect of the life space was experienced as particularly meaningful and useful for the research partners.

Coach 3 related her experience of these qualities of the life space:

> "*Because my one plus the one of the client equals three, then I need to be very mindful of my "one" and the "one" of the client and what sort of "three" it is creating … the client can* sense *from my presence, from myself and my energy, as I can from them, some signals, maybe at times unknown to me, about what I'm up for and not up for today*" (Coach 3).

Coach 9 explained, "*the client can sense from how I show up as coach what's available and impossible today from the extent to which I bring myself, my energy, to the encounter*", whilst Coach 1 described a similar experience:

> "*As much I sense from the client if they really have energy around the issue they are bringing, they can sense this from me. Am I really, genuinely interested and alongside them, or going*

through the motions? They will know and we will know together at some level of what is on the table today and what is not" (Coach 1).

Coach 9 related how the concept of the life space of the coaching process as a unique, dynamic and momentary magnetic field captured something of her experiences:

"*... being with the same client at different times and being with different clients in similar coaching sessions and how each and every encounter was different. It invites the question of what is possible or not between us now"* (Coach 9).

Overall, the research partners experienced the life space of the co-created coaching process as the individual life spaces of the client and themselves interacting to create a phenomenon that is greater and different from the sum of the two as they exist in their own individual psychological contexts. The life space was experienced as an enhancement to the research partners' awareness of the coaching process as a unique, forever-changing constellation of magnetic energy around goal achievement, which enables, blocks or modifies behaviour and thereby what is possible and not possible in each coaching session.

- A liminal space where the client meets context

This sub-theme is constructed from data regarding two important experiences of part C and D of the map. These are the notion that "mapping" the life space of the client with the client is a phenomenon that is unaltered into the here-and-now of the co-created coaching process; and that the life space is a metaphorical zoom lens to enable the coach to work with breadth and at depth with the client, as a heuristic for self-learning. The research partners related their experiences of "*mapping*" or *"facilitating*" an explication of the important and meaningful "*bits of the onion ring*" (Part A) with regard to the client's current concern. Coach 5's experiences of the life space were characterised by "*zooming out"*

from the coaching topic and goal to "*the bigger picture of the life space, to draw connections between previously unrelated elements*" so that patterns of influence emerge. Coach 3 painted a similar picture of the life space as a "*zoom lens*", enabling the coach to see the wider and influential context surrounding the coaching issue, and using the concept as an "*awareness raising and self-learning*" tool with the client. This included Coach 3 describing her experience of thinking about the life space as a way of representing and getting a full understanding of why the client has brought a particular issue to coaching, and how and why it is important and influencing their behaviour. Similarly, Coach 9 related her experience of the life space as "*mapping the voices in the client's life space of work".*

> "M*apping the life space around the coaching topic is language I can hear myself using in the future with confidence it will resonate as meaningful to the client"* (Coach 3).

In this sense, the life space was seen to invite the focus of the coach to be broad enough to capture the patterns of connection between the tension, or "voice", and its relationship to the wider context of the life space and how it is currently configured by the client. It enhanced the research partner's awareness and understanding that the client's problems and concerns become contextual in a wider view, enabling them to look for and work with the interrelated and interconnected parts of the client's life space that are important and meaningful to their topic and goal for coaching.

The research partners' experiences of the life space and the phenomenon of the tension system was often characterised as enriching their understanding of working at depth as well as breadth. Coach 5 related that "*seeing the onion ring and seeing the tension system brought to mind the notion of a microscope*". She described her experience of the life space as a zoom lens, and she described slightly adjusting her frame on coaching to more consciously imagine herself "*zooming out, and then zooming in to put the client and his needs under the microscope*". For Coach 5, the life space was a useful lens with which to enhance her ability to discern forces in play that are not readily visible and often lie out of

awareness. Findings from Coach 7 painted a similar picture. He described his experience of the life space as being able to "*hone in*" on what he described as "*the unit of work*" for a coaching session. He felt that it offered a breadth of perspective, as suggested in the onion ring diagram, whilst also inviting a narrower focus on those parts of the life space that are important and meaningful to the client in relation to their issue – *"what are the key influences, connections with the specific tension system?"* In this sense, the life space enhanced the research partners' understanding of their work as being less about the observable behaviour of the client, and more about being able to focus clearly on the underlying, often hidden, psychological and social dynamics influencing this behaviour.

Furthermore, throughout the interviews, the research partners conveyed a strong sense of the life space as an awareness raising tool, a heuristic to engage the client in self-learning. Coach 8 described this as:

> "*… using the life space as a lens for the client, inviting them to look at the breadth of hidden connections to their issue and inviting them to work at depth with how they think, feel, their attitude and perspective*" (Coach 8).

Overall, the research partners' experiences of the map of the life space as a phenomenon to be mapped and looked at, with breadth and depth, with the client to facilitate self - learning suggest that the concept captured something meaningful and useful from the coach's experiences of coaching occurring in the liminal space where the client meets and makes sense of their context, of their own life space.

- Changing relationships between parts of the context

This sub-theme relates to how the map of the life space was described as enhancing the research partners' awareness and understanding of how coaching the client in their context involves changing their relationship with this context, as part of the client's self-learning. The map of the life space evoked a strong sense that, for them to facilitate self-

learning for the client during the coaching process, they have to be highly aware and understanding of the nature of their role. Coaching with the life space in mind was reported as is meaningful and useful in this respect, because it offered a new schema of resonant metaphors and words to describe their role.

Part D of the map positioned the coach as "supporting the executive to pass through the parts of the life space with magnetic negative valences*"*, areas which would restrain goal achievement and impede the easement of tension. Overall, this part was experienced by the research partners as a quality of the life space that seemed to capture something of their experiences of themselves as a "*trusted guide to the client*", as Coach 1 related. This dimension involved the research partners experiencing the life space of the coaching process as a useful metaphorical allusion, with the coach "*inviting the client on a guided journey*" (Coach 5). This involves the coach and the client engaging in stage 3 of part D of the map, to co-create in the coaching session "*the social climate or territory*" (Coach 8) of the parts of the client's life space that are in tension, as a way of the client being supported in journeying into the more challenging and potentially risky terrain of their reality. Coach 1 said that this metaphor of the client's life space was a powerful image for her. She said it connected her to a sense of "*being invited into and stepping on very personal and potentially delicate territory*" and described a sense of "*needing to step carefully*".

For Coach 9, this captured something of a humanising quality and evoked a "*joint venture*". The notion of the client and coach being on a journey together, into a challenging part of the client's life space, enhanced her awareness of the personal, co-created, extraordinary and intimate nature of their coaching process. Furthermore, this guided journey into parts of the client's life space was experienced by the research partners as a metaphor for how they can facilitate a change in the client's relationship with those parts of their psychological context that are meaningful to their goal. As Coach 3 put it:

> "*The life space sharpens how I think about how I draw*
> *connections between previously unrelated elements of the parts*

of the client's context and their impact on what we are working on in the session" (Coach 3).

In so doing, the coach can experience a greater awareness and understanding of how they can raise awareness in the client, and thus reveal hitherto hidden patterns of influence and barriers to the achievement of their coaching goals.

- Summary of the life space as a co-created heuristic coaching process

The co-created coaching process is experienced as a life space that the coach is in, and part of, with the client. It is a phenomenon that is different from and greater than the sum of its constituent parts, and it enhances the coach's awareness of working in a life space during coaching. It enhanced the research partners' awareness and understanding of the magnetic nature of the dyadic coaching interaction as a unique and forever changing constellation of meaning, and how this determines what is possible and not possible in each session. It amplified their sense that the client's goals are situated in, intimately connected to and emerging from the totality of their psychological world at the time of and during coaching. The research partners also experienced the life space as the liminal coaching space where the client meets and makes sense of their psychological and social context, and where a zoom lens enhances the coach's sense of working with breadth and depth. This amplified their experience and understanding of coaching as being less about the observable behaviour of the client, and more about being able to focus clearly on the underlying psychological and social dynamics which influence this behaviour.

The coaching process as a life space was experienced as a heuristic for the client – a joint-venture through which the coach and client can identify the constellations of psychosocial valences that are important and meaningful to the client in relation to their tension system, and which act as barriers to goal achievement. This heuristic draws connections between previously unrelated and unchartered elements of the parts of the client's life space that are important and meaningful to the coaching topic. The coach

raises the client's awareness of these to reveal hitherto hidden patterns of influence and thereby change the perceived relationship between parts of their life space.

4.3.4 Executive coaching as capacity building

This finding is constructed from the data about how the research partners related their experiences of the whole of the fieldwork map, and particularly part D, which represented a staged process for coaching, aimed at building the capacity of the client, with the life space in mind. This is presented at stages 7, 8 and 9, working to change the client's perception of and perspective on their coaching goal, to reorganise the structure of the client's life space, and thus to lessen or alleviate their tension system toward an increased sense of structure, stability and equilibrium. Stages 7, 8 and 9 of part D of the life space map were accessible, comfortable and meaningful for the research partners, as a lens that framed the aim of the executive coaching encounter as to stabilise the client in their context and as a process of co-creating with the client a new route map to navigate a solution to otherwise unresolvable problems.

- Stabilising the client in their life space

Coaching to build capacity was central to how all the research partners experienced their role and aim. Central to this was coaching to broaden, deepen and change the client's perspective so as build their capacity to "*see, hold and do more*", as Coach 8 expressed it, and to "*develop the client by expanding, deepening and broadening perspective"* (Coach 8*)*. Coach 7 connected this part of the map to "*coaching for maturity, wisdom and vertical learning*" as a necessary modality to help leaders lead in times of increasing complexity. In this sense the concept of the life space brought nothing that the research partners were not aware of and already doing. However, for some of the research partners, conceptualising a change in the client's perspective as a "reorganisation of their life space" and conceptualising the aim of coaching as stabilising the client in their life space, was a meaningful and helpful new lens and new language. This was because the life

space seemed to enhance the coaches' awareness and understanding of the importance of working with a psychological spatial dimension.

Coach 6 talked of her experiences of thinking about coaching with the life space in mind as "*creating new space for the client*, a *more spacious mind, an increased consciousness to see and do more*". Similarly, Coach 4 thought it was an area of the map that for him created a different "*mind's eye view of the aim of coaching, a shift in the position of the client in relation to their issue, creating a different space and vantage point to see and experience things differently".* During further discussions, he related his experience of the life space as a constantly changing phenomenon, a momentary spatial configuration of the client's perception of and interaction with their situation. For him, the idea of coaching to disrupt, reorganise, differentiate and change the configuration of the client's life space was:

> "*A natural and plausible narrative for what we mean when we talk of coaching to change perspective, it captures something of the phenomenon of the situation the client is in from their perspective and how we might together sort of try to discern, to represent this as a space to raise awareness, to support and challenge, reveal and invite the possibility of a different space, a new perspective"* (Coach 4).

- Towards a new route map for unfamiliar psychological territory

In accordance with this spatial dimension of the life space, some of the research partners related experiences of inviting the client to metaphorically "*stand back*" from their coaching issue, to "*reframe or reorganise*" their view of their tension system. Coach 5 related examples of some of her clients feeling as though they had a metaphorical "*insurmountable wall*" in front of them. When they were invited in coaching to stand back, "*put some distance between you and the problem*", she related how, from this new vantage

point, they could see a way "*around the wall, as opposed to climbing over it. A different route"*.

Coach 5 related a particular example of a senior social services officer being "*presented with"* the task of reducing the number of children in the care of the council due to the burden of costs. The client believed this was something beyond her control, as well as being "*morally questionable*". The concept of the life space enabled Coach 5 to experience the client in a psychological space that was configured into a tension system that felt unresolvable, configured in such a way that she could not "*navigate her way to a solution and felt stuck and worried*". For Coach 5, the life space gave her the new language and lens of the client as being in "*unchartered territory without a map*". She framed her way of working with the client as providing a new route map:

> "*I can see how the territory, how the life space needed to be configured in a way that looked more familiar to the client. In our coaching session this required the client to see the issue from the boss's perspective and the perspective of his boss*" (Coach 5).

From this position, Coach 5 related how the client reframed their issue as not about reducing the numbers of children in care, but about reducing costs. The "*insurmountable wall"* of reducing numbers was replaced by rebalancing over time the range of placements away from high-cost residential care to lower-cost foster care placement. Coach 5 explained that "*the territory of the life space surrounding this problem was now looking different, more familiar, and the client had a new route map*", and therefore the client felt empowered and able to exercise agency. Coach 7 painted a similar picture when he related his experiences of coaching to vertically develop leaders as an "*unfolding of new life spaces*." He related his experience of a reorganisation of a life space in this way as a sort of "*expansion, an opening of a bigger canvas*", a shift in perspective that sees a change in the life space more as a "*change in the client's operating system rather than a change in the software*". He described his experience as "*the territory being reconfigured,*

as opposed to the client using their existing maps that would not offer a helpful route". This captured something of his experience of what the concept of the life space might bring to the existing narrative around "*transformational, third-generation coaching*".

In a similar way, but with a different emphasis, Coach 10 explained:

> *"Working with how people make sense of their lives and the spaces they have in them and this notion of working with the make-up of their life space, opening a space, creating a different space, makes this personal and real, much more than working with the words of perspective or field or constellations. It has a warm and real quality about it, that we are involved in changing lives"* (Coach 10).

This sense of the life space bringing a vivid and human quality to the coaching process was nicely summarised by Coach 7, when he said that this notion of working to change a life space reminded him that "*coaching can change peoples' lives, conversation by conversation*".

Overall, the new language and lens on building leadership capacity as a restructured life space offered the research partners a new and enhanced awareness and understanding of the aim of the coaching process – changing the relationships between the interconnected parts of the life space that are important and meaningful to the client's topic and goal so as to broaden and deepen their perspective.

- Summary of life space coaching as capacity building

There was a resonance amongst some research partners that a change in the life space is a change in the client, and this change occurs by opening, deepening and expanding perspective to be able to see and do things differently, to hold and manage more complexity. The metaphor of a problem being a life space of unfamiliar territory, and the

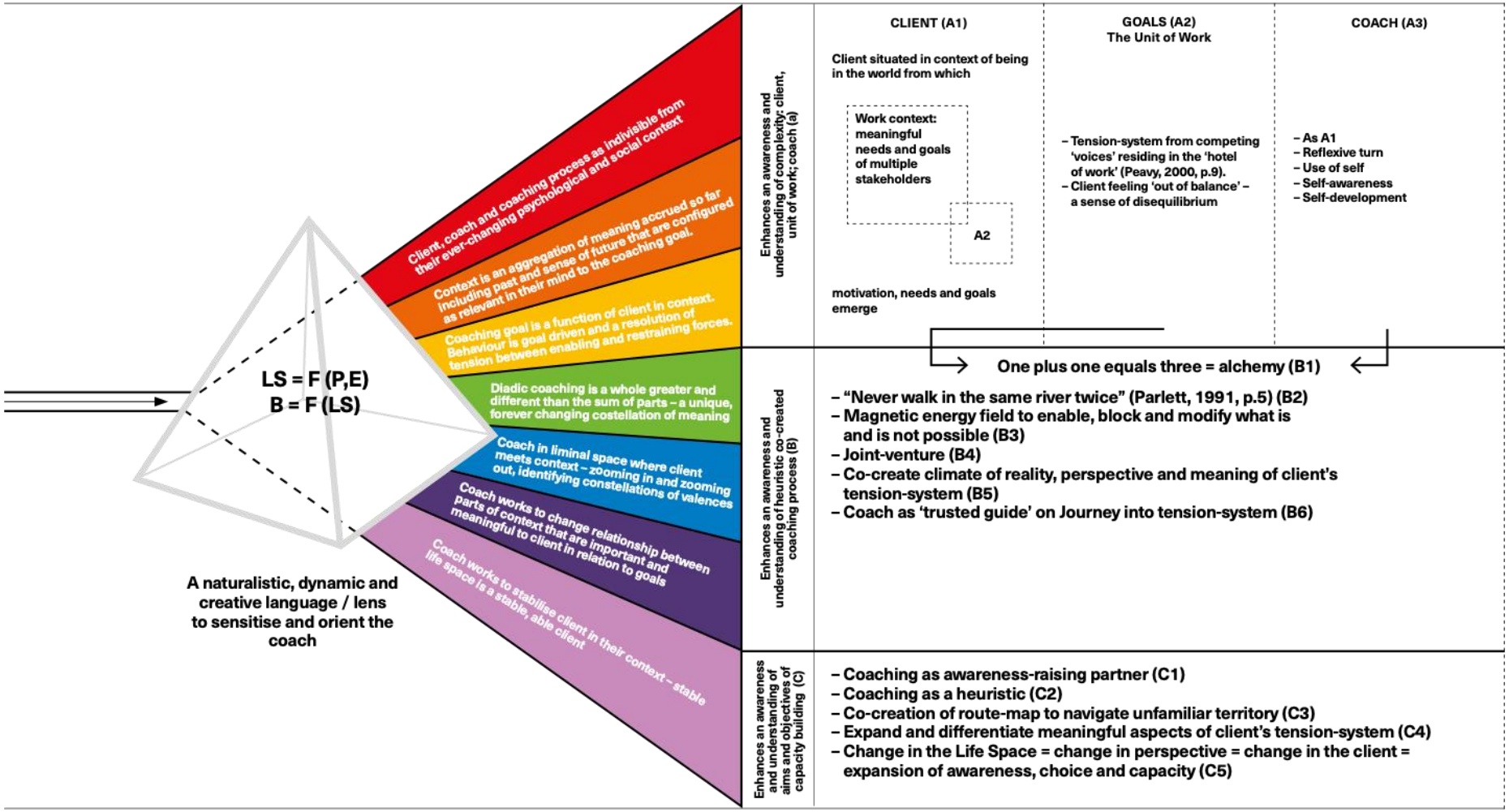
solution being a reconfiguration of the territory to something familiar, captured something of the complexity that they experience in executive coaching, and was meaningful. It was also useful, experiencing the concept of the life space in this way enhanced and enriched some of the coaches' understanding and awareness of what they seek to achieve in any executive coaching session. It seemed to offer a particular way of "unpacking" and explicating what is meant by coaching to change perspective.

4.4. Summary of part one findings

This summary of the findings maps directly onto the final conceptualisation of the life space in executive coaching, as represented in Figure 4.7 below. To assist the reader to navigate the relationship between the main findings and the final map, the seven main sub-themes in the summary are cross-referenced to Figure 4.7, to emphasise their centrality to the final map. These seven sub-themes are represented in the final map as seven beams of light emerging from the naturalistic lens of the life space, to sensitise and orient the coach to a heightened awareness and understanding of important aspects of executive coaching.

Figure 4.7

Final concept map – coaching with the life space in mind



Part one of the findings presents two findings. Firstly, the life space was experienced by the research partners as a new, yet strangely familiar concept that they found easy to connect with and comfortable to work with. This finding shows that the concept of the life space in executive coaching was limited in what it revealed as new to the research partners. The concept did not significantly change many of the ways in which the research partners understand and approach their work. It had a meaningful and familiar feel of “old wine in a new bottle” and as a “shorthand” for current coaching practices despite it being a new concept for the significant majority of the research partners. It provided a synthesis that captured something of their experiences of coaching the client, not in isolation but as situated in and intimately connected to their ever-changing psychological world.

The second finding shows that, whilst the life space was experienced as limited in what it revealed as new to the research partners, it was experienced as having dynamic, creative, naturalistic and heuristic qualities, often reflected in the use of metaphor for important aspects of coaching. These qualities made it meaningful and useful in executive coaching as a fresh language, and as a lens that sensitises and orients coaches to the idea and implication that the client, the coach and the coaching process are indivisible from the ever-changing psychological and social context in which they are situated and intimately connected to (the first light beam in the final map). It was experienced as a language and a prism through which the implicit implications of working with a client in their context were made explicit, enhancing the coach’s awareness and understanding of important themes in executive coaching.

In relation to the complexity of the client and their coaching needs and goals, coaching through the lens of the life space was experienced as enhancing the coach’s awareness and understanding of the client’s experience of their context. Without this understanding of the life space, the coach can neither adequately understand nor facilitate a change in the behaviour of the client. In this sense, coaching with the life space in mind was experienced as useful to the coach in working to achieve the agreed outcomes of the

coaching plan. The life space captures the coaches' experiences of the client's context as an aggregation of the meaning of all the interconnected people, objects, relationships, events, et cetera, that the client has accrued so far in their world of work, including their past and sense of future, that are configured as relevant in their mind to the coaching goal (the second beam of light in the final map).

The coaching issue is seen as located in the context of the client's needs and goals of being in the world, which is an increasingly open system in which the client is functioning in a greater, more complex, interconnected and global whole, and of which the workplace is but one area. In this sense, the issues the client brings to coaching and the subsequent process of topic and goal setting are experienced by the coaches as a function of the tension in the client's relationship with their context (the third beam of light in the final map).

The concept of the life space enhanced the coaches' awareness and understanding of the behaviour of the client as goal-oriented to meet needs. The everyday challenges of executive leadership and management that confront and are meaningful to the client can be framed as unmet needs. The life space frames this unmet need as a form of disequilibrium in the client, made up of metaphorical contradictory and competing "voices" or valences that enable, block or modify goal-achievement. This creates a tension system in which the client's actions are a result of their resolution of tensions towards a sense of equilibrium, which was resonant for the coaches. This tension system in the life space was experienced as a system of energy and readiness or resistance to change, which enables the coach to access the client's reality as the unit of work. Coaching with the life space in mind frames the problems and issues the client brings to coaching as between the client and their environment, and brings a primary focus on the dynamic of the "in between", the liminal space of the tension system. With the life space in mind, coaching becomes less about the nature and frequency of the client's behaviours, and more about investigating the underlying psychological and social dynamics influencing their behaviour – the way in which the different parts of their life space are currently configured.

In relation to the coach's own complexity in the coach role, the make-up of the life space of the client was experienced as applicable to the coach. It was also experienced by the coaches as an invitation to a reflexive turn, before, during and after a coaching session, to examine how their own life space impacts their use of self, self-awareness and self-development.

In relation to the co-created heurism of the coaching process, the life space was experienced as inviting the coach to see their dyadic interaction with the client as a unique life space of the coaching process; a space that is different from and greater than the sum of the coming together of themselves and the client as they exist as individuals in their own psychological worlds (the fourth beam of light in the final map). The coaches identified with the notion of the alchemy of "one plus one equals three" as the co-created coaching process, a unique and forever-changing constellation or field of "magnetic" energy around goal-achievement that enhances, modifies and blocks behaviour and thereby determines what is possible and nor possible in each and every coaching session. The life space of the coaching process was experienced as "never walking in the same river twice"' and the coach as a metaphorical "trusted guide" accompanying the client on a "journey into unfamiliar territory" to co-create a "new route map"'.

The coaching process was experienced as existing in the liminal life space where the client meets and makes sense and meaning of their context, transposed into the here-and-now of the coaching process (the fifth beam of light in the final map). In this space, the coach zooms out from the unit of work to look for and work with the interrelated and interconnected parts of the client's life space that are important and meaningful to their topic and goal for coaching, so they become contextual in a wider view. The coach zooms in to see their work as being less about the observable behaviour of the client and more about the underlying, often hidden, psychological and social dynamics influencing behaviour. This is experienced as the coach working with the client to enable a change in the relationship between the valences in the parts of their context that are important and meaningful to them in relation to their tension system (the sixth beam of light in the final map). Through a process of establishing with the client which valences to modify and the

effect this will have on their perception of and perspective on the tension system, the life space is re-organised.

In relation to executive coaching building leadership, the aim of executive coaching was experienced as a heuristic process. This heuristic is a new lens on coaching, directed towards expanding and increasing the differentiation of the client's life space to facilitate a sense of structure, stability, familiarity and equilibrium when the client encounters the tension systems arising from the increasingly complex challenges they face (the seventh and final beam of light in the final map). The notion of coaching for a change in the client's life space was experienced as enhancing the research partners' awareness that such a change is a change in perspective, and thereby a potential change in the client's behaviour.

The expansion and differentiation of the client's life space during human development is the increasing variety of behaviour that satisfies their needs and maintains their equilibrium when confronted with the increasingly complex challenges of executive life. The framing of the objective of executive coaching was experienced as a process through which the coach and client can draw and change the connections between previously unrelated elements of the client's life space that are important and meaningful to the tension system, so as raise awareness in the client and reveal hitherto hidden patterns of influence that act as barriers to goal achievement. In this sense, the life space is not just a representation of the client's world.

4.5. Part two: Development of the map

This part of the chapter provides a line of sight between the map used in the fieldwork (Figures 4.3 to 4.6, parts A-D) and the final map of the life space in executive coaching, by presenting reflections on the data analysis alongside a discussion of some of the main points of development. The map of the life space in its final form is presented in Figure 4.7 below. The map has the seven colours of the rainbow to express the main implications of

coaching through the lens of the life space, as presented in the summary of the findings. The map has references A, A1, A2, and A3; B, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5 and B6; and C, C1, C2, C3, C4 and C5, as the practice themes and practice points illuminated by the lens. These references are included to assist the reader in navigating the final concept. Chapter 3 on the methodology of the research provides an explanation of the development of the map. Throughout the interviews, there was an iterative process to the evolution of the concept. Alongside the parts of the fieldwork map that resonated as meaningful and useful, the research partners were invited to relate their experiences of what in the map was unhelpful, missing or needed greater emphasis or greater clarity, so that the map could encompass all the experiences they related.

In general, all the research partners were able to relate to the four separate parts of the fieldwork map and the whole of the final map, despite the life space being a new concept for the majority of them. For the most part, the fieldwork map was immediately recognisable, attractive, understandable, meaningful and comfortable to work with. This is reflected in part one of the findings. This finding also reflects the research participants' experiences of the fieldwork map as a useful framework that had recognisable, naturalistic, dynamic, creative and heuristic qualities, which enhanced their awareness and understanding of important aspects of executive coaching - theme two in part one of the findings. For some of the research partners, however, some of the images and language in the fieldwork map did not resonate as strongly, and therefore diluted the extent to which they experienced the life space as a meaningful and useful concept. When this data was analysed, the majority of issues formed a common theme relating to ways in which the whole of the fieldwork map could be further developed. There was a small minority of issues concerned with specific aspects of the different parts of the fieldwork map.

4.5.1 The whole of the fieldwork map

Overall, the written narrative describing the life space in executive coaching and the conversations it triggered were experienced as more accessible and meaningful than the

figural images portrayed in parts A, B, C and D of the fieldwork map. There were moments of recognition in both the narrative and figural representations. However, whilst the overall finding was that the images in the map did have qualities that evoked a sensitising and orienting experience to important aspects of coaching, these qualities could be further emphasised and clarified. Coach 2 captured the essence of this experience by relating that the fieldwork map was "*organised in too organised a way*". Coach 4 painted a similar picture, by stating that the map *"captured, yet also missed some of the naturalistic, dynamic and complex quality*" of the life space. The method of organisation was clearly too delineated to fully encompass the research partners' experiences of the quality of the life space as a naturally occurring and ever-changing phenomenon. Coach 9 echoed the metaphor of Parlett (1991, p.5) when she said "*the life space to me it is like a river, and you cannot walk in the same river twice*".

Furthermore, it became apparent that for some of the research partners, the fieldwork map could be thought of as too complex, insufficiently simple and not properly integrated into a meaningful whole. There was a sense during the interviews that some of the research partners fairly quickly arrived at what Coach 8 described as "*saturation point*". Four parts of a map of just one phenomenon were described as a lot to take in, and contributed to some of the research partners challenging the fieldwork map as "*too bitty*" (Coach 4) and a "*bit too prescriptive*" (Coach 5). The overall experience of the research partners was encompassed by the experience of Coach 10, who related that the map "*needs more life and more space*" and how, for him, its value might lie in it "*being something of a simpler provocation to think about how I see aspects of coaching and how I might see them slightly differently than I do now*".

- Development point 1

These findings are reflective of the critique of the literature that suggests that the life space is a dynamic phenomenon that is difficult to conceptualise visually as a model or a map in an easily understandable and recognisable way (Burnes, 2004). I reflected on this throughout the research, and particularly when I was considering how best to develop the

map in to a final form to encompass all the related experiences of the research partners and to provide a conceptualisation that would be helpful to coaches in their practice. There is interactive media other than the static diagrammatic form, such as video, that might have the potential to represent and capture the dynamism of the life space. This is a potential area for future research. However, for the purpose of this research, these findings led me to reflect on and thus conclude three ways to develop the final map to enhance the qualities that the life space brings as a sensitising and orienting framework for coaches.

Firstly, less is more, and the essence of the life space in executive coaching should be captured and conveyed in one map. Secondly, the life space evoked the use of metaphor in the way some of the research partners related their experiences, and it seemed to me that using their own words as much as possible to convey practice points was likely to enhance the meaningfulness of any map. Furthermore, the option of “coaching with the life space in mind” generated resonance, enthusiasm and energy. It seemed sensible to build from this platform and to use the metaphor of the life space as a “minds’ eye”, lens or prism on practice that brings to the fore at the earliest point these naturalistic, dynamic and creative qualities to make explicit the implications of working with a phenomenon that, in turn, illuminates aspects of practice.

4.5.2. The Four parts of the fieldwork map

The feedback on the research partners’ experiences of the four different parts of the fieldwork map (parts A-D) are reflected primarily in the final part on the right-hand side of the final map (Figure 4.7). This final part of the final map is a framework of words and metaphors related to each of the four themes presented in this chapter and discussed in Chapter five. This part of the final map seeks to capture and convey a clear sense of what the coach might see and do if they were to coach through the lens of the life space.

The finding about the complexity of each client and their coaching goal(s) is represented as A, A1 and A2. The finding about the complexity of the coach in the coaching role is

represented as A3. The finding about the heuristic of the co-created coaching process is represented as B and B1 to B6. The finding about the aim and objectives of coaching as capacity building is represented as C and C1 to C5. The feedback that led to the development of the fieldwork map into this final map is summarised below.

· Part A of the fieldwork map: the life space of the client

In relation to the research partners' feedback on part A of the fieldwork map, there were four aspects. Coach 7 captured the essence of the first aspect when he related his experience of how "*the unique and dynamic nature of any life space does not easily lend itself to an onion ring of circles or lines of any configuration on a map"*. Coach 9 thought that "*concentric circles suggest an order which does not exist as the order is fluid and unique to each person at a particular moment"*. Coach 4 thought that trying to represent this complexity in a map seemed "*almost inevitably reductive and over-simplified*". The concentric circles of the onion ring representing the life space did not resonate in the same way for all the research partners. For some, they were thought of as suggestive of a diminishing order of importance as they move out from the centre, and as insufficiently dynamic, too static to encompass the bespoke and personal nature of the unique psychological world of each client at the time of and during coaching.

The second aspect was that some of the research partners challenged part A of the fieldwork map as missing an important aspect of the executive client's world, and as lacking clarity and being unhelpfully vague. The phenomenon of multiple stakeholders and all that this brings into the executive's life space at the time of and during coaching was experienced as important and missing from the map. Capturing and conveying this through the metaphor of the client hearing "*multiple voices with multiple and often competing needs*" (Coach1) resonated with the research partners.

The third aspect of feedback was concerned with how life space as a conceptualisation of the executive "being in their world" was deeply resonant for the majority of the research partners and related directly to their different experiences of aspects of coaching.

However, the map was experienced as vague and incomplete in this respect. For some research partners, this part of the map reflected executive coaching being concerned with the personal and unique complexities of intangible phenomena such as the client's soul, their calling, and their personal values and vision, in life in and outside of work. For others, this part of the map evoked a sense of the executive's organisational context as an increasingly open system in which the executive is functioning in a greater, more complex, interconnected and global whole, of which the workplace is but one area.

The final, striking aspect of the research partners' experiences of part one of the map was how it was immediately understandable, meaningful and comfortable to work with, encompassing their experiences of their own complexity in the coach role. There was a strong sense that the concept of the life space in executive coaching was equally meaningful as a representation of the phenomena of the client and the coach, in relation to the actuality of their personal psychological world at the time of and during coaching. The phenomenological qualities of the life space were experienced as the same, and no distinction was drawn between the two by the research partners.

- Development point 2

In light of these four comments, the onion ring format for part one of the fieldwork map was replaced in the final map at A1, A2 and A3, by a simple grid of the essential complexities of the client, their goals, and the coach, in relation to their psychological and social context at the time of and during a coaching session. This part of the final map seeks to do no more than reflect the feedback on the importance of the map capturing and conveying the client and their needs as a function of them being a person in their world, experiencing a sense of being pulled or pushed out of balance or equilibrium by their context (A2). It represents their context as ostensibly made up of the multiple needs of stakeholders that have meaning for the client in relation to their executive role, and their own needs and goals in this role and in relation to themselves, as situated and connected to their unique wider world (A1).

The client's goal and the unit of work for coaching is represented at A2 in the final map as a tension system in their life space that is a function of the "hotel of work" (referencing the work of Peavy, 2001, p.9) in which the client experiences often contradictory and competing voices of need that require reconciliation with their own needs and goals at that moment in time. Finally, this part of the final map at A3 invites the client to a reflexive turn by thinking of their own life space before, during and after each coaching session, and how this might enhance self-awareness, the use of self in the moment and self-development.

- Part B of the fieldwork map: the coaching goal as tension system

Part B of the fieldwork map of the life space had qualities that were experienced as enhancing important aspects of the research partners' experiences of the complexity involved in understanding and working with the client's energy and readiness for change during a coaching session. However, it also became apparent that some research partners experienced this part of the map as limited in the extent to which these qualities were fully captured and conveyed. The map was challenged as being complicated, too organised, static, esoteric and consequently lacking in interest. It was experienced as the least attractive of the four parts of the fieldwork map, and the least comfortable to work with.

> "*The map is not providing a sufficiently rich, vivid, vibrant picture of how and why the issues the client brings to coaching are a function of their life and life space. The map intimates this but it needs to be clarified and emphasised more*" (Coach 2).

Coach 9 said that they "*agree with what the map is trying to convey, how needs and goals emerge from the client's experience of their situation at a particular time",* but said that, by its nature, this phenomenon *"does not lend itself to straight lines".* Coach 4 captured the overall sense from most of the research partners, in thinking that the map was resonant of force field analysis, more so than the life space, because it emphasised the valence of forces and their point of application on a person and their goals. For Coach 4, "*a blank*

sheet of paper" and an invitation to the client to "*draw the life space around what you are bringing to coaching and how it affects it*" was a more meaningful expression of working with the liveliness and personal nature of the phenomenon. For him, this approach could capture much more of the personal, unique, messy and naturalistic nature of the life space than the map in its present form.

- Development point 3

These findings led me to connect with and reflect on the high degree of attachment I had for this part of the fieldwork map. Part B was the part of the map that had exercised me the most due to the challenges of trying to encompass and convey the origin of the client's needs, as a consequence of the way in which the psychosocial forces in the life space were organised at any moment in time, and manifest as a tension. Consequently, I experienced a strong sense of investment in the map, yet, when I stepped back and reflected on the experiences of the research partners, it became apparent that it could easily be thought of as too complicated, less a proposition and more of an esoteric set of assertions. In short, an image that did not capture the imagination of coaches.

I was aware that the phenomenon of the client's coaching goal as located within the life space as a tension system resonated with the research partners. Their experience was that it encompassed something phenomenological and naturalistic of how they work with the enduring themes, or dilemmas and paradoxes that are experienced as intrinsic to executive life and are often present in coaching as the issue the client wants to explore. This experience was accompanied by a strong resonance amongst the research partners, with the life space encompassing how they work with the phenomenon of the client's energy for, and resistance to, change, and how they sense what is going to be possible or not in the coaching session. I decided to build this part of the final map of the life space around these resonant themes, and to integrate it into the whole of the final map at parts A2 and B3. In so doing, the intention was to frame the goal/tension system as a function of the client, in relation to their context and the associated "competing voices", and to make the map more attracting of the coaches' interest in discerning and representing the climate

of the client's reality of and perspective on the tension system (B5). The intention was also to segue into Part D of the final map, representing the heuristic of how a change in perspective might be represented as a change in the life space (C, C1, C2, C3, C4 and C5).

- Part C of the fieldwork map: the life space of the coaching process

This was the most resonant part of the fieldwork map for the research partners, it represented the coaching process as a naturalistic, alchemical, magnetic and bespoke life space. The metaphorical equation of one plus one equals three encompassed and conveyed their experience of the co-creative, momentary and dynamic quality of dyadic executive coaching. It made explicit the often implicit ways in which the interaction between the client and coach can create a whole of a coaching process, which is different and greater than the sum of the individual client and coach, and determines what is possible and not possible in any coaching session. Nothing was reported as being unhelpful, missing or requiring greater emphasis or clarification in respect of this part of the map.

- Development point 4

The only amendment to Figure 4.5 of the fieldwork map was to capture and convey its meaning in part B of the final map, in accordance with the need for it to be integrated into one concept. Hence, it is represented in three metaphorical forms. Firstly, at B1, is the equation, that one and one equals three, reflecting the alchemy of each uniquely co-created life space of coaching. Secondly, borrowing from Parlett (1991, p.5) at B2, by representing the ever-changing dynamic coaching process as a "river that cannot be walked in twice", suggestive of an underlying structure with dynamic, flowing and creative qualities. Thirdly, at B3, where the co-created coaching process is represented as a magnetic energy field of psychosocial valences that enable, block and modify what is and is not possible in any coaching session. At B4, B5 and B6, the coaching process is represented as a heuristic in which the coach and client are in a joint venture (B4), to co-

create the reality of the “climate” of the client’s perspective and the meaning ascribed to their tension system (B5), with the coach as a trusted guide (B6), accompanying the client on a metaphorical journey into the region of the tension system, with negative valences that restrain their goal-achievement.

- Part D of the fieldwork map: coaching with the life space in mind

This part of the fieldwork map encompassed some important aspects of how the research partners experience the stages and characteristics of their own coaching process in a coaching session. However, some of the research partners described a more fluid, more iterative, less full, less organised and less pre-determined approach. Coach 8 suggested that “*there is probably too much in this map if it is representing what goes on in one coaching session*”. Coach 4 related that the map contained some language he would not use, such as strengthening enabling forces and weakening restraining forces. He preferred what was, for him, a language “*less associated with force field analysis and more resonant of the life space*”. He suggested that the coach “*looks for what emerges in the moment around the coaching issue”* in order to *“see connections between parts of the life space that are important but have remained hidden to the client, out of their awareness*”. For him, this more iterative approach captured much more of the personal, unique, messy and naturalistic nature of the life space than the map in its present form.

Coach 6 painted a similar picture. She related her experience of “*looking for patterns of association in the here-and-now of the coaching session”* and thought the map needed to capture and convey a more iterative and emergent process than simply stating a sequence of actions for the coach. Coach 10 thought the map “*a little ordinary, failing to capture the extraordinary and unique nature of each client*”. She thought the value of the map as was in its ability to represent the deeply personal “*bespoke and creative nature*” of working with the phenomenon of the life space, and that the map needed to clarify and emphasise this in order to bring something more meaningful and useful to coaching. Once again, there was a theme of the fieldwork map failing to capture the phenomenological nature of the life space.

- Development point 5

Overall, I was left with a sense of Figure 4.6 of the fieldwork map being far too prescriptive and detailed for some of the research partners. Again, I was given the impression that "less is more". These reflections focused on stages 6, 7 and 8 of part four of the map, stages that portrayed coaching with the life space in mind as the coach being a "trusted guide" to the client, and working to change the organisation of the parts of the life space that are important to the client and their goal, thereby changing the client's perspective and potentially their behaviour. Accordingly, I decided to abandon the ten-stage coaching cycle and simply integrate these aspects into the final map at part C.

Part C and parts C1 to C5 frame the aim of the coaching session (C4) as a change in the client's life space, representing a change in perspective as a change in the client toward awareness, choice and increased capacity. C1 positions the coach as an awareness-raising partner to the client. C2 frames working with the phenomenon of the client's life space as a heuristic. This heuristic is represented at C3 as the coach and the client co-creating a metaphorical route-map for the journey at B6 into unfamiliar and challenging psychological territory. The coach, as the "trusted guide", aims to expand and differentiate the meaningful aspects and the psychosocial valences of the tension system (C4) as the route to an expansion of awareness, choice and capacity in the client (C5).

4.5.3 The final map

The final map of the life space in executive coaching (Figure 4.7) is presented as an invitation to the executive coach to coach with the concept and phenomenon of the life space in mind. The mind's eye view of the life space is represented by a prism, within which sit the essence of Lewin's foundational characteristics of the life space, their relationship to behaviour and their implications for coaching. The prism is presented as a lens that has qualities to sensitise and orient the coach to a naturalistic and phenomenological view of the client and the coach, situated in their psychological and

social context, at the time of coaching and from their perspective. It is a lens on the client's perspective on their own complex and ever-changing internal experience of their psychological and social context.

The qualities of the lens of the life space are represented as seven rainbow-coloured shafts of light. Each of these seven qualities is summarised in narrative form and each is presented as a fresh light to illuminate important aspects of the executive coaches' experiences as they were related in response to encountering the fieldwork map of the life space. This light represents how it is that coaching with the life space in mind enhances the coach's awareness and understanding of three things.

Firstly, and represented as A and A1-A3, the unique complexity of the client and their needs and goals, and the unique complexity of themselves as coach.

Secondly, and represented as B and B1-B6, the co-created heuristic nature of the coaching process.

Thirdly, as represented as C and C1-C5, the aims and objectives of executive coaching as a heuristic for the client for building leadership capacity.

The final part of the final map explicates what this enhanced awareness and understanding might mean for the coach in relation to how they view and put in to practice important aspects of coaching. The map seeks to build on some of the language used by the research partners, capture the sense of the map as a "shorthand" for their experiences, and to make explicit the often-implicit dimensions to coaching the executive in the context of their complex psychological and social world.

In concluding this chapter, it is helpful to return to de Rivera's purpose for adopting the conceptual encounter methodology, which is to *"articulate an abstract description of the general phenomenon that will illuminate our specific experiences and enrich our appreciation of life'* (de Rivera, 1981, p.3). In line with de Rivera's three criteria for

assessing completeness, the final concept of the life space has made explicit some aspects of the phenomenon that were previously only implicit; it has encompassed all of the different experiences that different research partners have related, and used their words where appropriate; and, as the first contemporary evidence-based map of the phenomenon in executive coaching, it has achieved a sense of maturity that did not otherwise exist.

4.6. Part three: Conclusion

The answer to the research question is that the concept of the life space is experienced by coaches as familiar, easy to connect with, and meaningful and useful, as a lens that has heuristic qualities. These are qualities of naturalism, dynamism and creativity, that capture in a succinct way many of the complexities the coaches encounter in their work, and represented in the seven rainbow colours in the map. The lens of the life space sensitises coaches to these complexities and thereby enhances their awareness and understanding of four important aspects of coaching the client as situated and intimately connected to their personal context; the complexity of the client and the unit of work in coaching; the complexity of the coach role; the heuristic co-created coaching process; and the aims and objectives of executive coaching as capacity building.

Beyond having heuristic qualities for the client and the coach, the life space brings little that is new to coaching practice and theory. This was a surprising finding. The review of the literature strengthened the argument to revisit and re-evaluate the life space and its contemporary value, because this has proved beneficial in other areas (Burnes, 2004a; Burnes, 2004b; Burnes and Bargal, 2017). Consequently, and for the reasons stated in Chapter 1, I anticipated that this study of the life space might bring some important, albeit modest, new knowledge. However, the contribution the concept makes is that of enhancing an awareness of what is already known to experienced and psychologically-minded coaches, but not known as working with the concept of the life space. The concept encompassed many of the ways the research partners practice, and this endowed it with resonance and meaning, despite the fact that the significant majority of the research

partners had not heard of the concept prior to the research. In this sense, the life space was a new yet strangely familiar concept to them, with characteristics that were present and influential in their executive coaching practice. Whilst this was meaningful, it limited the extent of the usefulness of the concept. This is reflected in the conclusion that the life space enhanced the research partners' awareness and understanding of the benefits of coaching with the life space in mind, but brought nothing new that they would not have already known or considered. Nonetheless, the research creates a new and important understanding of an existing concept that has largely been overlooked, and uses the work of Kurt Lewin in an original way by providing the first ever contemporary, evidence-based map of the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

The study has explored the following research question: “How meaningful and useful is the concept of the life space in executive coaching?” Previous chapters have set out the context and aims of the research, explored the relevant literature, explained the methodology, and presented the data analysis and findings, including the final conceptualisation of the life space in executive coaching. In light of the findings presented in Chapter 4, this chapter discusses three things.

Part one discusses the empirical findings and conceptual analysis underpinning the claim that coaching with the life space in mind is meaningful and useful, and makes a new contribution to knowledge. This claim is discussed in the context of the ideas and concepts from relevant fields of coaching theory and how the findings challenge and extend these theories and reframe our thinking about executive coaching.

Part two discusses the challenges of critical realism in proving the actual and deep levels of reality beyond the empirical. The chapter goes on to discuss the implications of these challenges for building theory in coaching, and the complexity of the relationship between theory and practice.

Part three provides a discussion of how the study of the life space makes a contribution to extending the existing knowledge about the work of Lewin and his contribution to 21st century theories of change.

Part four offers concluding remarks.

5.2. Part one: Empirical findings

It is important to discuss the empirical research, analysis and findings about the life space in executive coaching in the context of existing ideas, theory and concepts for two reasons.

Firstly, it fits with the requirement of the conceptual encounter methodology (de Rivera, 1981). This methodology tests the extent to which the final map of the newly developed concept of the life space is sufficiently resonant, current and powerful, by looking for evidence that it can be part of a wider sphere of inquiry, including a wider body of knowledge and literature. A good conceptualisation must not only fit the phenomenon with which it immediately deals, but must relate to other conceptualisations in other fields of research and literature (de Rivera, 1981). It must offer a conceptualisation to be built on.

Secondly, there is a gap in the extent to which models or definitions of coaching are supported by empirical research or justified by conceptual analysis (Jackson, 2004, cited in Bachkirova and Borrington, 2019, p.338). My study argues that coaches can benefit from coaching with the life space in mind. For this to be a warranted contribution to theory and practice, this chapter must discuss the extent to which this claim meets these requirements and is supported by relevant ideas and concepts from other relevant coaching theory (Western, 2012; Cavanagh and Lane, 2012; Bachkirova, 2017). For these reasons, this part of this chapter discusses how the findings are aligned with and fill gaps in executive coaching theory, theories of Gestalt, systems and constellation coaching and coaching for vertical development. Figure 5.1 presents the major links between the different coaching theories and the research findings, so as to demonstrate why these coaching theories and frameworks have been discussed and not others. The discussion is organised in this way to reveal the boundaries between the findings and other related

concepts, and how they challenge and extend these theories and reframe our thinking about executive coaching. Throughout the discussion, reference is made to the literature reviewed in chapter two, and to additional theories where it is illuminating.

Figure 5.1
Major links between relevant coaching theories and empirical findings

Findings / Theory	Executive Coaching	Gestalt	Systems/ constellation	Vertical Development
A new yet familiar concept – a form of shorthand		✓	✓	
Complexity of client and coaching goal(s)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Complexity of coach	✓	✓	✓	
Co-created coaching process	✓	✓		
Coaching as capacity building	✓	✓		✓

5.2.1 Executive coaching theory

Executive coaching is now one of the dominant methodologies for developing leaders (Sonesh et al., 2015). Research into executive coaching has been increasing over the last two decades, and there is now a developing evidence base for the subject (Fillery-Travis and Cox, 2018). However, Robinson (2019, p.439) says that "*We need more good research and writing on executive coaching"*. No one would want to return to the uncertainty of nearly two decades ago, when it was referred to in a *Harvard Business Review* article as "*The Wild West of Executive Coaching"* (Sherman and Freas, 2004). However, there continues to be a gap in the knowledge about how executive coaching works, and what the effective components of such coaching are (Grant et al., 2010). Bennet and Lemonie (2014) suggest that this gap is, in part, a function of the fact that the organisations in which the executive coaching takes place are increasingly dynamic and complex environments.

This study provides "*more good research and writing*" on executive coaching, through rediscovering and empirically researching Lewin's early but central theme of the life space in the context of contemporary coaching theory. The findings show that by establishing the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching, and by developing a new map of this phenomenon for coaches, this study extends our understanding of executive coaching in two main ways: by explicating what the literature on executive coaching theory means when it refers to the psychosocial system of which the executive is part; and when it refers to the coach's task as helping the client to hold and bear the tensions between forces pulling in one direction or another.

Firstly, the newly developed model of the life space is a lens through which the coach sees the executive as intimately connected to and situated in a complex psychological and social world. This is represented as the red and orange beams of light emanating from the prism of the life space in the final map in Figure 4.7. This perspective aligns with the psychodynamic approach to executive coaching (Sandler, 2011) which combines insights from psychoanalysis about the nature of psychological forces with the systems perspective on organisations (Miller, 1993; Hoffman, 1994). The life space conceptualises "t*he dynamics of the psychosocial system of which the executive is part" (*Stokes and Jolly, 2018, p.256) and which need to be understood by the coach during coaching if the executive is to take up his or her role effectively in the organisation. Understanding the executive's life space at the time of coaching is to understand the psychosocial context of which the executive is a part, and how their perception of and interaction with the forces it contains influences behaviour and what is possible and not possible in the coaching session.

The yellow, third beam of light in the map enhances the coaches' awareness of the above, by inviting them to think about the executive's behaviour as a function of the life space (Lewin, 1936), and to think about the underlying psychological and social dynamics of the executive's system and the array of influences and valences on the executive's behaviour (Lewin, 1936). This is the coach appreciating the unique and dynamic complexity of each

client, and it is a perspective that Frisch et al. (2012) suggest is essential in executive coaching. It enhances the coach's awareness and understanding of the importance of investigating the "actuality" of the specific dynamics of a phenomenon of human behaviour, or the unique singularity as it is called in field theory (Lewin, 1951; 1996).

Secondly, this research extends our understanding of executive coaching by providing coaches with a new, meaningful and useful conceptualisation of the topic and goal of the coaching session as a tension system in the life space (A2 in Figure 4.7). Framing the issue the client brings to coaching in this way is aligned to the research of Stokes and Jolly (2018, p.254) who defined the coach's task as helping the leader to hold and bear the tensions between forces pulling in one direction or another. The final map of the life space in A1 explicates this definition of the coach's task by enhancing the coach's awareness and understanding of the client's coaching issue or goal as function of their executive role; a role that locates them in multiple systems at once, with multiple stakeholders with multiple needs and goals, often competing and contradictory.

A2 of the map represents this as the client's metaphorical "*hotel of work in which competing and contradictory voices take up residence*" (Peavy, 2001, p.9). Here, the map and the associated metaphor aligns with the literature that defines executive coaching as embracing the executive's organisational context and requirements (Mura, 2003) and helping the executive increase alignment with the goals of all the stakeholders involved (Stokes and Jolly, 2018; Robinson, 2019). McClaughlin and Cox (2016), in their study of coaching for brave leadership, make reference to life space as helpful to coaches in getting a better understanding of the factors affecting the goal-achievement of leaders but, unlike this study, it is touched upon only briefly. This study extends this understanding by inviting the coach to not only focus on the organisational context and goals, but to locate these goals alongside those of the client in the totality of their psychological and social context, situated in and connected to the wider context of their being in a wider world outside of work (A1 in Figure 4.7), and the client's inner psychological landscape.

Furthermore, the map of the life space enhanced the coach's awareness of how they might discern and represent the totality of the client's reality in a situation (B5 of the map) in a given moment, so as to better understand the underlying psychological forces and see the hidden patterns of influence that act as a barrier to goal achievement (as represented in the blue shaft of light in Figure 4.7). This is the coach working heuristically with the client to map the hotel of work, to identify the particular tension system (A2), to co-construct the meaning of their psychological and social reality (B5), and to work with their energy and readiness for change (B3). The life space map is not just a representation of the client's world, but a heuristic tool to help them actually construct the meaning of their reality (Peavy, 2008b). Here, the map is aligned to the field theory principal of changing process (Parlett, 1991, p.5); it frames the client's motivation, needs and goals for coaching as a function of the executive's ever-changing relationship to their specific psychological environment at the time of and during the coaching session (Rodgers, 2010).

5.2.2 Gestalt, systems and constellation coaching theories

The life space is ostensibly a Gestalt concept (Lewin, 1936; Parlett, 1991) that expresses the integration of coaching at an individual psychological level with the environment or the system of the individual. It is, in essence, an expression of coaching the individual with their system in mind, including the system of coaching, and working with the inner landscape of the executive's psychological reality as they perceive and interact with the totality of their psychological and social environment or system. However, as the review of the literature (Chapter 2) shows, the concept of the life space is overlooked and rarely acknowledged, even in the current and relevant Gestalt coaching theory of Leary-Joyce (2014) and Allan and Whybrow (2007).

Conversely, Bluckert (2015, p.18), in his synthesis of Gestalt coaching theory, argues that the Gestalt coach must have a field mentality, a perspective that invites the coach to be aware that *"our existential states vary and change according to the total situation – or "life space", as Lewin called it – which we are currently experiencing"*. However, Bluckert does

not develop this argument with reference to any empirical research or to any level of detail. By contrast, in this empirical study, the final map of the life space in Figure 4.7 aims to explicate how the phenomenon of the life space affects both the client and the coach as they currently experience each and every coaching session. The map provides a fresh empirically-based language, lens and framework to extend the depth and breadth of our thinking when we consider how and why our existential states vary and change according to the total situation we are in at a moment in time, including each and every coaching session.

In a similar way to Gestalt, no reference is made to the concept of the life space throughout the emergence of systems and constellations theories in the mid-20th century. In her study of systems in coaching, Starr (2019, p.212) references the foundational "*work of Weiner, Forrester, von Bettalanffy and others*" and the application of these theories to coaching (Cavanagh, 2006; Lawrence, 2019; Whittington, 2012), but there is no reference to the life space. Furthermore, the coaching literature reveals there are no instances of empirical research using the concept. It can be argued that this gap is reflective of an emphasis in systems coaching on the system above the individual. Cavanagh (2006, p.327), in his work on coaching as a complex adaptive conversation, notes that the behaviour of a person is the behaviour of the system. Starr (2019, p.212), in her work on coaching and seeing systems, suggests that clients increase their effectiveness and choice only when they can see their systems, the forces acting upon them from the larger systems of which they are a part.

Whittington (2012) argues that coaching the client must inevitably involve coaching the system. Similarly, Clutterbuck states:

> "*I do not think it is possible to be a truly effective coach without supporting the client to become more aware of the systems in which they belong; coaching the client must inevitably involve coaching the system*" (Clutterbuck, 2012, p.viii).

Unlike the coaching theories of systems and constellations, the final conceptualisation of the life space in executive coaching as represented in Figure 4.7 argues that it is meaningful and useful because it conceives of the client and their behaviour as indivisible from their ever-changing psychological and social context, not subservient to it. It does not privilege the system above the individual, but integrates the two into one conceptualisation. This study, therefore, extends the existing Gestalt and systems literature. It shifts our thinking by introducing the life space as an intra-theoretical concept of both theoretical traditions; a concept that integrates the notion of the person in a system as a life space, and the person as indivisible from their ever-changing psychological and social context and living and behaving in the actuality of their organised field (Parlett, 1991).

The life space as an intra-theoretical concept is meaningful and useful when coaches work with what Stokes (2018, p.256) refers to as the two central questions of psychodynamic executive coaching: to what extent the executive's personality influences the behaviour of the organisation, and how much the dynamics of the organisational system determine the executive's feelings and behaviours. This study argues that the life space is an important and influential concept in this context. This study and the final map of the phenomenon takes it from relative obscurity, with only occasional and brief mentions in the Gestalt coaching theory, and no references in systems and constellation coaching, and puts it towards the front-and-centre of executive coaching theory.

The final area of discussion concerning the relationship between the findings from this research and the Gestalt theories of coaching is in relation to A3 in the final map at Figure 4.7. A3 captures and conveys something of the coaches' experiences of the concept of the life space, as an invitation towards a reflexive turn. It was experienced as capturing something of the complexity of each coach, a metaphorical "mirror" of the unique and ever-changing relationship with their unique psychological and social context at the time of and during a coaching session. The naturalistic, dynamic and heuristic qualities of the life space were found to have the potential to enhance the coach's awareness of and use of self before, during and after each coaching session. This finding aligns with the work of

Argyris and Schon (1974) on the theory and practice of increasing personal and professional effectiveness.

From the Gestalt perspective, Bluckert (2006, p.84) regards the use of self as the "*highest order coaching skill*". For him, it can be the difference between good and great coaching. This approach requires the coach to focus on his/her own subjective experience and share this appropriately as part of an authentic dialogue with the client. Bluckert (2015, p.68) calls this sharing of the coach's interior and exterior world in the service of the client "*the use of self*". This study aligns with his research, as it conceptualises the life space of the coach as a tool for increasing their self-awareness, a means of connecting them to their self-experience – the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that arise in the coach in relation to the client in the coaching session – their interior psychological landscape. Far from denying these experiences and suggesting that they have no place in coaching, the life space invites the coach to look "inwards", rather than outwards towards the client, so as "*to begin to attend to themselves and notice what is there*" (Pelham, 2016, p.65). This research extends this literature by using empirical evidence to explicate the notion of "what is there". What is there is the phenomenon of the coach's life space at the time of coaching; the interior, or psychological landscape of the life space as genotypic fact; the normative social, cultural, moral and ethical psychological actuality in a given situation (Lewin, 1936; 2013). Arriving at a new understanding of how the life space is meaningful and useful in executive coaching invites the coach to think about the make-up and effect of their own life space as part of themselves in coaching (Bachkirova, 2016). It is the life space of the coach from which they co-create and influence the coaching process, and determine with the client what is and is not possible in each coaching encounter.

5.2.3 Adult Learning and Development

Part C of the new concept of the life space in executive coaching encourages the coach to grow the capacity of the executive through expanding their perspective, and to see this as core executive coaching territory. The concept of the life space positions the coach as a

heuristic awareness-raising partner to the client (C1), and frames a change of perception as a change in the life space, a journey towards an expanded and more differentiated life space which leads to a change in behaviour (C2, C3, C4, C5 in the map). This conceptualisation aligns with Lewin's concept of the life space as a process of learning through "locomotion" (Lewin, 1936, pp.300-331; 2013, p.340). Rather than attempt to identify all the possible influences within a person's life space, Lewin would select a portion of the field or zone which was relevant to the particular issue or topic under investigation. He would then establish which forces in the life space needed to be modified to judge what effect this would have on a change in their cognition (Lewin, 1951). For Lewin, a locomotion, or a movement, in the organisation of the relevant and meaningful regions of the life space is a change in perception; a change in cognition; a change in behaviour. It positions the coach as interacting with the inner psychological reality of the executive's life space, their genotypic level of perception of their social, cultural and interpersonal experiences, as Lewin called it (Gold, 1999, p.64), as a key source of cognitive development. In this sense, I argue that the concept of the regions or zones of the life space as a phenomenon of perception and human development align with and build on the work of a scientific contemporary of Lewin, Vygotsky, and particularly his sociocultural theory and zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). By determining which regions or zones of the life space are proximal to the coaching topic and goal and exploring these with the client, different levels of development are investigated through the co-created coaching process of the client and the coach, leading to the development of perception and a progression in the client towards a greater capacity and consciousness. Whilst Vygotsky called this process internalisation and Lewin called it locomotion, I suggest that there is alignment between the two theories. My study extends these theories through empirical research and by applying them to the modern-day context and process of coaching that is co-created between the coach and the client. This theoretical alignment and extension is reflected in the final map at C3 and C4, which refer to the coach inviting the client into a region of their life space proximal to their coaching issue to co-create a route map to navigate unfamiliar territory or a less familiar zone of the life space – in Lewin's words, to experience locomotion, a process that can assist the client to take a fresh look at a difficult problem or dilemma and internalise a changed

perception. C4 refers to the coach working with the client to expand and differentiate meaningful aspects of their tension system. This is the coach working to shift the executive's perception of the issue being worked on in coaching, by exploring its position on a continuum between "*fantasy and irreality*", as Lewin called it (1936, p.345; 2013), and pragmatic reality. This is to reorder and bring organisation and stability where there was disorganisation and instability, so as to expand their life space into a bigger whole. An instability in the life space can lead to an instability in the person (Lewin, 1939).

This notion of the life space as a heuristic (C2 of the map), enhancing the coach's awareness and understanding of how to work with the phenomenon of the client's perception and perspective, aligns with the current and relevant theories of coaching for adult learning. Berglas (2002) and Peltier (2009) have identified an understanding of how to promote the adult learning process as an area of technical competence that might reasonably be expected of an executive coach. This study extends adult learning theory in executive coaching by introducing the life space as a new conceptualisation of adult development for coaches to consider and apply in their work. It offers a new frame for executive development that is aligned to and extends the theory of vertical development in leaders, or maturity coaching, as Sharma (2019, pp.247-260) refers to it. Vertical development theory gained prominence in the 1990's through the work of Kegan (1994), and through new ways of thinking about the evolution of consciousness and how we see ourselves in relation to the ever-increasing demands of our environment. In this sense, the life space, as a conceptualisation of growing human capacity to handle greater complexity, sits within the literature highlighting adult development as a necessity for dealing with the mental demands of post-modern life (Kegan, 1994, p.307-335). The expansion and differentiation of the executive client's life space as human development during coaching is manifest in the increasing variety of behaviour that satisfies their needs and maintains their equilibrium (as represented in the final indigo beam of light in Figure 4.7) (Nevis, 2001) when they are confronted with the increasingly complex challenges of executive life.

This research makes a contribution to this literature by connecting the life space to this field of literature. The world is only going to get more complex, so leaders have to be

supported, to increase their own capacity to lead in such demanding circumstances (Kegan, 1994). This study adds to the emerging literature linking theories of adult development and the life space with coaching theory. This study builds on the work of Bluckert (2021, pp.119-123) in his synthetic study of the distinctive features of Gestalt coaching, which connects the challenges of increasing complexity to Gestalt-based adult vertical leadership development programs (Bluckert, 2019a; 2019b). Sharma and Cook-Greuter (2010) and Sharma (2019, pp.247-260) similarly make a case for maturity coaching as a means of enabling vertical development in leaders. These theories expound a range of developmental frameworks and lines of development for adult learning, as summarised by Bluckert in his guides on vertical development (2019a, pp.15- 36) and vertical development in the workplace (2019b). At C4 and C5, the map introduces the concept of a change in the life of the client as a change in their perspective, and as a change in their awareness and choice of action. This is a new conceptualisation that integrates the aim and objectives of executive coaching into to adult learning theory and executive leadership development.

5.2.4 Summary

Part one of this chapter discusses the contribution the empirical findings make to the extant knowledge about coaching theory and practice. This claim to knowledge is based on a theory that a fully evolved map of the life space is useful in executive coaching because it provides a fresh language and lens, and new knowledge that impacts coaches' practice. In other words, it has qualities that sensitise and orient the coach to a greater awareness of the idea and implication that the client, the coach and the coaching process are indivisible from their psychological and social context at the time of and during coaching. This enhances the coaches' understanding and awareness of key aspects of coaching, and this heightened awareness impacts their practice in a way that would not have been the case without this new knowledge and awareness of the life space. This finding is based on empirical research and conceptual analysis, it is supported by extant coaching theory and makes a warranted case to suggest that there is a direct causal

relationship between the map of the life space as new knowledge and what happens in practice. This is a plausible and defendable position, suggestive of a closed-system of cause and effect, reflective of an inductive or deductive finding.

5.3. Part two: A deeper analysis of the findings

Whilst part one of the findings are defendable for the reasons mentioned, Hanson et al. (1958, cited in Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2018, p.8) rejects any such inductive or deductive conclusions as unsatisfactory. Induction is unsatisfactory since new knowledge does not merely constitute simple summaries, or condensations, of data "*but gives an explanation of data"*. He argues that deduction also gives a faulty picture of the research process, since it presupposes that scientific discoveries happen "*through airy speculation, which remains to be tested through empirical analysis*". Instead, Hanson argues that at a certain point when working with empirical material a pattern emerges. He calls this pattern-finding retroduction.

My research found that when the coaches were introduced to and became aware of the concept of the life space, a pattern became evident. This pattern was the theme that they experienced it as a new, yet strangely familiar, concept (theme one). They experienced the life space as a new concept, but also as "old wine in a new bottle", and as a form of recognisable "shorthand" that they could easily connect to how they were practicing as coaches prior to becoming aware of the concept. There were instances where the coaches retrofitted their new awareness of, and use of, the phenomenon and the concept into their practice. In this sense, an interpretation of part one of the findings can be that the phenomenon of the life space was present and influential in the research partners' coaching practice, without the large majority of them having any prior knowledge of the concept. This pattern suggests that any claim of a closed, linear and causal relationship between the coaches' knowledge of the life space and the impact of this knowledge on their coaching practice is questionable, or at least worthy of discussion. This position introduces us to the complexities and challenges of proving a theory. It suggests that the

phenomenon of the life space and its reality is not dependent upon knowledge of its existence, but is reflective of it having a constitution of deeper causal structures and mechanisms that, in certain conditions, impact coaching practice outside any empirical observable evidence of the coach's awareness. This implies that the life space has a deeper level of reality, and it is this deeper reality that operates unseen in the background, affecting coaching practice, not a new knowledge of the espoused theory of the life space as suggested in part one of the findings. This position suggests that a retroductive analytical approach is required to move beyond the summary or condensation of empirical data (Zachariadis et al. (2013) to consider and explain not whether but how the life space was present and causal in the way the coaches' practise, regardless of their new knowledge and awareness. This is a position that suggests that it is the existence of the phenomenon of the life space, and not a knowledge of its theory, that is influential on executive coaching practice. This position needs to be discussed in order for this study to be satisfied that the research has arrived at as comprehensive and deep an understanding as possible of the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching.

To discuss this position, part two of this chapter considers the challenges of critical realism (Bhaskar, 2008a; Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020) in proving the different levels of reality in building coaching theory and the complexity of the relationship between such theory, knowledge of theory and practice. It discusses the stratified ontology of critical realism and the concepts and boundaries of ontological and epistemological fallibility, the differences between coaching models and theories, the transitive and intransitive dimensions of the phenomenon and the concepts of Fetishism and Hegemony as applied to the relationship between coaching theory and practice. This chapter then discusses a critical realist account of the complex questions at the interface between the theory and knowledge of the life space and coaching practice and the more general interface between theory, knowledge and practice. The chapter discusses the life space as a causal and open system and the implications of this position for the findings of this study.

5.3.1 Stratified Ontology

Critical realism has a stratified ontology (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020, p.36) that draws a distinction between the empirically known “observable” world of the life space in coaching and the “real” world that cannot be observed and therefore exists independently from human perceptions, theories and constructions. Critical realism provided a framework for this study to approach the complex questions at the interfaces between the theory of the reality of life space and our knowledge of it and its impact on coaching practice, and, more generally, the interface between coaching theory and coaching practice. Proving that the life space exists beyond the level of empiricism introduces ontological and epistemological complexities. To handle these complexities in any meaningful discussion it is necessary to clarify some related concepts and the boundaries between them. These concepts are: a model or map such as the one produced in the findings from this research (Figure 4.7); a theory, such as the theory that a map of the life space having a direct causal impact on coaching practice does not reveal the full extent of its meaningfulness and usefulness in executive coaching; and the concepts of the transitive and intransitive dimensions of a phenomenon such as the life space. A model such as the map of the life space in executive coaching is, according to Gass (1999), an abstract description of the real world. It is a simple representation of more complex forms, processes and functions of physical phenomena and ideas. The map in this research aims to represent and describe in simple but comprehensive terms the real world of executive coaching, and the idea in this research is that the phenomenon of the life space is meaningful and useful in this real world.

A theory is more established and multi-dimensional than a model. According to Tashakkor and Creswell (2007), a theory is a set of interrelated constructs (variables), definitions and propositions that presents a systematic view of a phenomena by specifying relations amongst variables, with the purpose of explaining natural phenomena. In this research, the theory underpinning the empirical findings in part one is that the variable of the knowledge of the life space has a specific and direct causal relationship with the variable

of coaching practice, and that this relationship explains the meaningfulness and usefulness of the natural phenomenon of the life space in executive coaching.

The critical realist theoretical perspective however introduces two more constructs in to the discussion about the theory of the life space and its impact on coaching practice. These constructs fundamentally challenge the existence of any closed, linear and causal link between the reality of the life space, what is known about it, and how and why people coach as they do. Critical realism holds that any phenomenon has transitive and intransitive dimensions (Bhaskar, 2008a, 20011a). The transitive dimension of the life space is our knowledge of the phenomenon in executive coaching at this point in time. An empirical finding of this research is the transitive dimension of the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching. This new knowledge has been built on a review of the knowledge already produced, as presented in Chapter 2 during the evaluation of the extant literature. This new knowledge also provides knowledge at a moment in time upon which new knowledge can be built. In conceptual encounter terms, the final map of the life space is a conceptualisation to be built on by future research to build further knowledge (de Rivera, 1981).

The intransitive dimension (Bhaskar, 2011a) of the phenomenon is that it exists independently of our knowledge of it, and does not change because our knowledge of it changes. The phenomenon exists and changes without our knowledge of it. The intransitive stance argues that the empirical findings from this research (that the significant majority of the research partners had no prior knowledge of the concept of the life space but once introduced to it experienced it as a meaningful and useful) has no bearing on the existence and nature of the phenomenon in executive coaching. To suggest otherwise is what Buch-Hansen and Nielsen (2020, p.29) refer to as an ontic fallacy – that what is known about the phenomenon of the life space in executive coaching from this research is what is real about the life space in executive coaching. Furthermore, it follows that the research partners' new knowledge and awareness of the life space has no linear cause and effect on the reality of the life space, including how it impacts coaching practice. Independently of any new state of consciousness of the phenomenon of the life

space in coaches brought about by this research, the life space was present and causal in their coaching. To suggest otherwise is what Buch-Hansen and Nielsen (2020, p.29) refer to an epistemic fallacy – that what is real about the life space is what we know from this research. By adopting a critical realist philosophy this study guards against the epistemic fallacy of reducing a statement of the life space's existence to a question of what is known, and the ontic fallacy of positioning our knowledge of the life space as a direct representation of what it is really like. To consider the entirety of the life space's meaning and use to be as experienced and reported by the research participants, and to consider this knowledge to be all of what the life space is in executive coaching is, from a critical realist perspective, fallacious. This fallacy would be reflected in the stance that the findings presented in part one would provide the only answer to the research question; that answer being that the map introduced to the research partners has now been amended exclusively from the third person perspective of the coaches to reflect the findings about their experiences of its meaning and use. The critical realist research philosophy of this study means that this is a partial answer only. Because the concept of the life space is unknown to the majority of coaches, and because a lot of what the phenomenon is and does sits outside of awareness, it follows that empirical evidence alone will not tell the whole story about the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching. To rely on the empirical findings alone to answer the research question is to fall into the trap of the ontic and epistemic fallacies.

Furthermore, the critical realist lens suggests that such a position is Fetishism (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020, p.31). Fetishism refers to the ways in which human beings and social relations come to be perceived as natural, closed and immutable when in reality they are geo-historical, open and changeable. This position of Fetishism contends that the appearance of a direct causal link between a coach's knowledge of the life space and its impact on executive coaching practice may be deceiving in a systematic manner. Fetishism suggests that this is due to the overall configurations and hegemonic discourses on building coaching theory to inform practice. The imperative for coaching to be accepted as an academic profession, underpinned by academic theory, and with a value placed on scholarly practice, can be framed as a form of this hegemony. This can be seen in the

studies of coaching research which broadly argue that such research has now reached a level of maturity where it has something meaningful to say to practitioners in relation to what constitutes effective and ethical practice. As Fillery-Travis and Cox (2014, p. 519) argue: "*Maintaining the dialogue between practice and research is critical to producing a robust body of evidence*". A range of coaching journals such as the *International Journal of Evidence Based Practice, Coaching: An International Journal of Theory,* and *Research and Practice*, all publish practitioner-based research and are excellent sources of evidence-based practice. This hegemony of maturing coaching research to inform practice is largely predicated on there being a direct causal relationship between the development of coaching theory through research and an impact and influence on practice towards professional and regulatory standards. It is plausible that what influences how coaches' coach might be the linear relationship between theory and practice. A critical realist philosophy of fallibility (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020) willingly concedes that propositions concerning empirical knowledge can be accepted, particularly if, like the findings presented in part one of this research, they are justified by empirical research and conceptual analysis, and supported by other relevant coaching ideas, concepts and theories (Danermark et al., 2019). However, from a critical realist perspective, and from the standpoint of this research, such propositions cannot be proved with certainty.

5.3.2 Coaching as a life space

In contrast to the discussion in part one about the empirical findings of this research, this part of the chapter offers a different account of the complex questions at the interface between the theory and knowledge of the life space, and coaching practice and the more general interface between theory and knowledge, and practice. This account centers on part B of the final map in Figure 4.7, finding that the coaching process is itself a life space co-created by the interaction of the life spaces of the client and coach (Dembo, 1964; Dembo et al., 1975; Dembo et al., 1977). This research contends that coaching with the life space in mind embraces the phenomenon of the coaches coaching "*in the phenomenon of a life space*", not just coaching with an enhanced awareness of the concept. It is this notion of coaching in a life space that throws a new light on why some

things are possible and some things are not possible in an executive coaching session (B3 of the final map). As Parlett argues, "*We help create each other's realities*" and "*We are not only in contexts, we are part of them. Moreover, we act as contexts for others – we help make up their world"* (Parlett, 2015, cited in Bluckert, 2021, p.33). Bluckert (2021) argues that the client and the coach emerge in the here and now of all that they currently bring to the one-to-one encounter – they create and are created within the situation as functions of the life space, and are moved by the forces in the life space. This positions the life space as a causal phenomenon that, in certain conditions, has mechanisms and structures that trigger, modify or block events, regardless of one's knowledge or awareness of them.

In this sense, the life space is essentially a phenomenon in the deep domain of reality (Bhaskar, 2008a, p.47; Fleetwood, 2002, p.67). Lewin (1951) was interested in uncovering the causal conditions of human behaviour where the individual is seen as an intrinsic part of the objective systems of mechanisms in the world such as the life space. Whilst phenomenological psychology aims to reveal the taken-for-granted, implicit and socially constructed meanings by which our experience is constituted (Brookes, 2015), Lewin's experimental psychology was interested in answering the question of why people behave as they do at a given moment in a given situation (Marrow, 1969, p.xv). His answer was his life-long theme of the life space. As an intrinsic part of the life space, the individual's behaviour is a direct function of the life space (Lewin, 1951). For Lewin the life space is a causal phenomenon and thereby "real". Lewin argues that the life space is an abstract conceptualisation of a dynamic genotypic field, which was conceived to underlie the phenotypic details of behaviour and experience (Lewin, 1951). In other words, the life space conceptualises the psychological details of behaviour and experience that are often outside the individual's awareness, the genotypic facts, that determine the observable details of behaviour and experience, the phenotypic facts (Lewin, 1951).

This position contends that aspects of how the life space operates in the background and to what effect, are, by definition, often missing from empirical evidence, and some aspects of the life space are likely to be present and supported by explanations that are different

than empirical accounts. The stratified ontology of critical realism requires a discussion about the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching at the real and deep domain of reality. It requires a consideration of the structures and mechanisms of the life space that are actually and really shaping events whilst operating in the background and outside of the awareness of the coaches. It requires a consideration of the explanations these structures and mechanisms offer that converge with or diverge from the empirical findings, to enhance and deepen our understanding of how the life space is meaningful and useful to executive coaching. As stated earlier, any such consideration is retroductive, in that it constitutes a "*mode of inference that moves between the empirical and the deeper levels of the reality of the life space to identify the hidden causal mechanisms*" (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020, p.35). Retroduction involves taking some manifest phenomenon or outcome of interest as a starting point - the conclusion - and then considering what mechanisms "*must exist in all likelihood*" for the phenomenon/outcome to be what it is (Buch-Hansen, 2020, p.68).

My research involves taking the conclusion that the life space is meaningful, useful and influential in executive coaching, regardless of a coach's knowledge of the concept and then postulating what mechanisms are part of its phenomenological existence. Lewin conceived of the life space as structures, mechanisms and forces which directly determine behaviours. To a large extent these mechanisms are essentially his Field Theory Principles (Lewin, 1952; Parlett, 1991) that are manifest as his foundational position that behaviour is a function of the life space, which is a function of the present moment, the here-and-now. .

5.3.3 The life space as determining what can happen

Evidence of the critical realist view in Lewin's psychology is that his purpose behind the concept of the life space was the "*aim to discover the determining conditions of human events*" (Marrow, 1969, p.xiv). A foundational principle of his approach was the philosophical rejection of the idea of viewing the person without considering their

environment. For Lewin, the theory of the life space was only useful if, in practice, it was a tool to construct and represent the causality between the person and their perception of their momentary environment and behaviour. In the life space, “behaviour” is never solely caused by the person or determined by factors in the surrounding environment. For Lewin, the person’s behaviour is an interaction with individual factors in the immediacy of the surrounding environment. This mechanism “*must exist in all likelihood*” for the phenomenon of the life space to be what it is (Buch-Hansen, 2020, p.68). Each of us, and all of us together, live in life spaces (Lewin, 1936), governed by forces induced by the situation we are in and the people we are with (Lewin, 1944).

Lewin’s metaphor for the causal structures, mechanisms and forces of the life space which directly determine behaviours, is that of the magnetic force field (Lewin, 1947a). This is represented in B3 of the final map (Figure 4.7) as the co-created life space of the coaching process having forces that enable, block and modify certain events; this is referred to in the map as the energies of the client and coach determining what is and is not possible during the coaching encounter. In coaching terms, this force field is a conceptualisation of the mechanism of the client and coach’s intrinsic need to engage in a joint venture (B4 in the map) to intentionally organise the coaching life space to co-create the climate of the meaningful reality of the client’s situation under investigation in coaching (B5).

For Lewin, what is critical is how the life space is intentionally organised in the moment (Parlett, 1991; 1997) into a field by the person (Nevis, 2001). This is his Principle of Organization, which argues that everything has meaning, even apparent “randomness” when considered in context because “*the meaning of a single fact depends upon its position in the field”* (Lewin, 1952, p.150). The map at B3 suggests that the way in which the life space is intentionally organised in the moment, as a tension system of magnetic forces, is the coaching task for the coach and the client. For Lewin (1947), being able to discern accurately which socio-psychological facts are within the life space, both phenotypic and genotypic, and how they are patterned and mutually interdependent, was central to his experimental method. His topological and vector psychology were conceived

and developed to explain social behaviour by representing the structure of the total situation and the resulting events (Lewin, 1939).

In essence, Lewin would have thought it essential for the executive coach to discern, represent and understand the strength and direction of the psychological forces that are a result of the client's perception, and the motivation to meet their needs in the momentary situation of the coaching encounter. This is the essence of the new conceptualisation of the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching at Figure 4.7. If Lewin were alive to apply his experimental psychology to executive coaching, it is arguable that he would maintain that it is only by the coach and the client co-creating the climate of the reality of these life space forces (B5) that is it possible to understand what behaviour is empirically possible and not possible in any coaching encounter. Lewin insists that the first task of a field-theorist approach is the determination of which situations and behaviours are empirically possible and which are not, as determined by all the properties of the person's life space as a whole and the associated constellation of the regions and forces (Lewin, 1936; p.45). From the critical realist perspective, these life space forces exist, as they are causative of what can and cannot occur in each and every coaching session; they will determine what the coach can and cannot do, regardless of the espoused coaching theories he or she brings into the coaching encounter. Where coaching theory will have some influence is the extent to which applying it is central to the coach's needs and goals during the coaching session (A3 of the map). For Lewin, any such motivation and intention on behalf of the coach is part of the topological and vector psychological landscape co-created by the interactions of their life space with that of the client at the time of coaching.

5.3.4 Coaching in the here and now

The other key causal mechanism in Lewin's concept of the life space is the Principle of Contemporaneity (Parlett, 1991; 1997), which points to a constellation of influences in the present field explaining present behaviour. "*The psychological past and the psychological future are simultaneous parts of the psychological field at a given time*" (Lewin, 1952,

p.54). In other words, it is not the actual events, past or future, which are of concern in a coaching session, because the actual field conditions at other times are not present now (Robine, 2008). Lewin (1951) argued that it is the present moment that determines any behaviour, "*since neither the past nor the future exists at the present moment it cannot have an effect on the present*" (Lewin, 1936, p.35). Furthermore, for Lewin, his Principle of Singularity (Parlett, 1991; 1997) means that each life space is unique. Each and every executive coaching session is unique, even though it inevitably contains influences from the client and the coach's past, present and future. Part of the coach's past is his or her experience, training and affinity for particular coaching theories and modalities. Part of his or her immediate future might be what needs and goals they themselves hope to meet and achieve by the end of the session.

However, the underlying mechanisms of contemporaneity and singularity in the life space mean that what will determine how the coach coaches are the actual conditions of the organisation of the forces in the coaching life space in the here-and-now of the encounter. This is, of course, not to say that the coach's hopes, ambitions, theories and modalities have no bearing on the coaching interaction. They do. This is Lewin's Principle of Possible Relevance (Parlett, 1991; 1997), whereby everything means something. However, Lewin's Principle of Changing Process (Parlett, 1991; 1997) insists that the coach's knowledge and experience of coaching theory from the past exists in a coaching life space that is undergoing continuous change. This means that the coach and client's experience of such things is merely provisional, depending on the momentary dynamic field, rather than permanent. Nothing is fixed and static in an absolute way (Lewin, 1952), including the effect of coaching theories such as the life space and their impact on coaching practice.

5.3.5 Implications for coaching theory and practice

The critical realist position adopted in this study is essentially philosophical. It is a position that argues that one's view on the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching is dependent upon one's acceptance or otherwise of the stratified tenets of critical realism, in making sense of the reality of executive coaching, and one's

knowledge of that reality. As has been stated earlier, the empirical findings in part one of this chapter are plausible and defendable, and make the case for the newly created map of the life space as a modest contribution to knowledge that impacts coaching practice.

However, a critical realist position offers a newly illuminated and explicated account of the relationship between coaching theory and coach practice. It is a position that argues that this is the route to a fuller story of how the life space is meaningful and useful in executive coaching. It is an approach that rejects the positivist notion of the generalisability of findings, such as the linear cause-and-effect between theory and practice, in favour of how a research output is applicable to and can accommodate the real-life coaching scenarios (Johnson et al., 2006). In this study, the reality of the life space in executive coaching includes what happens in each and every coaching session that is both in and out of the awareness of the client and the coach. As Searle (1995; 165) puts it: "*The fact that alternative conceptual schemes allow for different interpretations of the same reality … has no bearing whatsoever on the truth of realism*". In this sense, the theoretical position adopted in my research is one of realism rather than idealism. Realism tends towards discovering pre-existing structures of experience. Idealism tends towards structures not being there until they are discovered. As a critical realist I see my own and the research partners' experience of the life space and its effect on coaching practice as an interpretation of the reality of this phenomenon, as opposed to seeing the reality of the life space and its effect on coaching as an interpretation. From this position, I accept the existence of alternative conceptual schemes, such as a direct relationship between theory and practice that allow for different perceptions and interpretations of the same reality of the life space. However, this study argues that the life space and its effects exist beyond empirical proof, and are therefore hard to prove. This is a challenge to what one might argue is the positivistic hegemony of the current understanding of the linear cause-and-effect relationship between theory and practice. The chapter suggests that the relationship between the development of coaching theory and its influence on coach practice is much more complex than this. It is an area for future research.

5.4. Part three: Contribution of Lewin

The third part of this discussion argues that this study extends the existing knowledge on rediscovering and re-evaluating the contribution of Lewin to modern-day change theories. Burnes (2004a; 2004b; 2020), Burnes and Bargal (2017), Burnes, Hughes and Rune (2018), Burnes et al. (2011), and Burnes and Cooke (2013), amongst others, have in some form "*gone back to the future*" to rediscover and reappraise the theories and concepts of Lewin in the context of 21st century theories of organisational change and organisational development. As suggested by Marrow (1969), Burnes and Cooke (2013) and Burnes et al. (2018), the concepts of Lewin are often implicitly influential in organisational change theory, and are worthy of research to explicate their relevance in the 21st century. As recently as 2022, Endrejat and Burnes (2024) applied the topological psychology that was central to Lewin's scientific philosophy and his representation of the life space, in the context of a planned change. In so doing, their findings align with this research, that the change of forces in the life space changes what events are possible or impossible in a given situation at a given time. Endrejat and Burnes assert that plain language should be used to capture and explain Lewin's concepts, to make them more accessible and visible to 21st century researchers and practitioners. The findings from my study broadly align with this finding, and this is shown in the metaphors and small number of concepts used in the parsimonious final map of the life space in executive coaching (Figure 4.7), as presented in part two of the findings in Chapter four.

In addition, however, this study further extends the literature on Lewin. Firstly by explicating the phenomenon of Lewin's concept of the life space in the context of executive coaching – a context that is outside and different from the existing focus in the literature on Lewin and theories of organisational change and development. Endrejat and Burnes (2024) argued that Lewin, whilst considered to be "*one of the most influential psychologists*", is little and rarely understood, and whilst "*there has been an accelerating focus on research within the coaching domain over the last 25 year*s" (Cotterill and Passmore, 2019, p.55) there is little research into its foundational roots and concepts (Bluckert, 2022). Unsurprisingly, in this context there has been very little research with

reference to Lewin, and even less research with reference to the life space. As Markus (2005, p.180) argued, "*Lewin's idea that in seeking the sources of action we should include the person and his or her life space has not been a contagious one*". As long ago as 1969, Marrow made the point that Lewin's theories are often influential in contemporary applied psychological theories but rarely acknowledged (Marrow, 1969, p.ix). By rediscovering and reappraising the influence, meaningfulness and usefulness of the earlier concept of the life space, this study makes an original contribution to acknowledging the significance of the work of Lewin to the development of coaching theory and practice. The study draws on and re-imagines one of the most central and powerful concepts of Lewin to provide a novel, evidence-based and contemporary iteration, which is of significance to coaching practitioners and academics. It is worthy of note, however, that research is a fiercely contested field. This is particularly so around research into the effectiveness of different approaches, leading to the evidence-based practice movement which began primarily in health-care (Rowland and Goss, 2000).

The primary focus of this study is less about if coaching works and more about how it works. This study makes no claim that coaching with the life space in mind is necessarily any more effective than the range of other coaching theories, frameworks and genres. Rather, this is essentially a study in the coaching process. The coaching process is defined by Myers (2017, p.590) as "*the interaction between the coach and the client within a single session of the coaching and/or a series of coaching sessions*". This study investigated the process of working with the concept and phenomenon of the life space in executive coaching, and as the final map of this process shows, the study has a primary focus on the single coaching session. Nonetheless, this is a study ostensibly describing a coaching approach to explore its meaningfulness and usefulness in the specific context of one-to-one executive coaching. It is, as de Rivera (1981) suggests, a conceptualisation to be built on by future research.

The second way in which this research extends the literature on Lewin is by showing the synchronicity between the experimental psychology of Lewin from the early to mid-nineteen hundreds, and the more recently developed critical realist philosophical paradigm

of this research. As the discussion has shown, there is a warranted case to argue that Lewin and his genotypic and causal concept of the life space is a phenomenon that, at an intransitive and deep level, can be considered, in more contemporary terms, as a form of critical realism. This knowledge extends our thinking about the relationship between the theory and knowledge of the life space and how it impacts coaching practice. It suggests that any contemporary understanding of the contribution that Lewin and the life space makes to coaching knowledge has to accommodate the argument that any suggested causative link, as proposed in part one of the findings, is complex, hard to prove and at risk of ontic and epistemic fallibility.

5.5. Part four: Concluding remarks

As Kemp (2021) acknowledged in his conceptual encounter study of emotional labor in coaching, there are several areas on which a focus *might* be placed, given the abundance of findings in this research. However, in my view, the areas discussed are the most prominent. This is a matter of judgement, and it is possible, if not probable, that a different researcher would make different choices. The choices I have made are in the context of my interest in building coaching theory from my knowledge of the life space in executive coaching, and in the context of my philosophical and methodological research choices. These choices are methodologically justifiable due my central role in the research. The primary process by which I arrived at these discussion areas is intuitive. This was a process of empirical and thematic analysis, retroductive inference, thinking and reflection, trial and error, reviewing my thoughts in study supervision and refining this chapter through a number of iterations. As de Rivera (1991) reminds us, in the final analysis, the findings are the responsibility of the researcher. Accordingly, chapter five has presented a faithful representation of what has emerged for me from the findings in the context of current and relevant coaching theories.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

In this chapter, the conceptual conclusions from the study are presented to demonstrate the case for a contribution to knowledge that is reasonable and can be defended (Trafford and Lesham, 2008). The aim and objectives of the study and how these were met are presented. The main findings are summarised, as are the new contributions to coaching theory and practice. The limitations of the study and areas for further research are highlighted. The chapter concludes with my personal reflections on my academic journey and how this experience has impacted and changed me.

6.1. Meeting research aims and objectives

The aim of research was to establish the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching from the perspectives and experiences of experienced and psychologically minded practitioners. The first objective of the study was to develop a comprehensive critical analysis of the literature relating to the scope, currency and validity of the concept of the life space for executive coaching. In Chapter 2, I have shown that the contribution the concept of the life space can make to executive coaching has to a large extent been unacknowledged, if not overlooked, in the literature. The research on the application of the life space in helping professions that does exist is primarily limited to education and counselling and therapy. The literature relating to the scope, currency and validity of the concept of the life space for executive coaching is limited and has not been researched with any depth.

The second objective of the study was to develop an initial conceptual map of the life space from my own experience and from the critical review of the research literature. This conceptual map is presented as four interrelated parts in Figures 4.3 – 4.7, parts A-D in Chapter 4. In Chapter 3, I have shown how this map was developed in accordance with the chosen conceptual encounter research methodology, to ensure that it was of the required standard and quality to be used in the fieldwork.

I have shown in Chapters 3 and 4 how the fieldwork met the third objective of this study – to generate qualitative data through interview-based research with executive coaches to explore their understanding of the life space. Figure 3.2 in Chapter 3 summarises how the conceptual encounter procedure was supplemented by thematic analysis and retroductive inference, in order to meet the fourth aim of this study – to explore the extent to which the initial map of the life space could be developed into a meaningful and useful framework to assist executive coaches in their work. Chapter 4 and Figures 4.2 and 4.7 show how the data from the research was analysed and synthesised into evidence-based themes and developed into the final conceptual map of the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching.

The fourth objective of this study was to evaluate the extent to which this map of the life space is important to the process of executive coaching, and contributes new knowledge on coaching theory and practice, on areas for future research and on the philosophical and methodological choices made during the study.

The rest of this chapter brings together the answer to the research question, how this study adds to, modifies, refutes and contributes to filling the gap in the extant theoretical, practical and methodological knowledge, the limitations of the study and the suggested areas for future research.

6.2. Answer to the research question

The study answers the research question by showing that the life space is meaningful to executive coaches as a new, yet familiar concept that is easy to connect with and comfortable to work with. The life space is meaningful and useful as a fresh language and as a lens that sensitises and orients the coach to a greater awareness and understanding of the idea and implication of the client, the coach and the coaching process as indivisible from the ever-changing psychological and social context in which they are situated and

intimately connected to. The study invites the coach to adopt a new perspective of "coaching with the life space in mind". Whilst the study adds little that is new to coaching theory, it makes a novel contribution by inviting the coach to adopt a perspective that involves consciously working with, and in, the phenomenon of the life space during each and every coaching session.

The study shows that the concept of the life space is useful to executive coaching because it has naturalistic, phenomenological, dynamic, creative and heuristic qualities. These qualities provide the coach with a language and schema of ideas and conceptual tools that they experience as easy to identify with, user-friendly and likely to be accessible to their clients. This schema enhances the coach's awareness and understanding of the unique complexity of the client and their needs and goals; the unique complexity of themselves in the coach role; the co-created heuristic nature of the dyadic coaching process; and coaching as capacity building.

This study shows how this research has led to the creation of a new understanding of the existing and early concept and phenomenon of the life space, in the context of executive coaching. The study uses the foundational work of Lewin and the life space in an original way to explicate its meaning and use in executive coaching and to explore some of the complex questions at the interface between coaching theory, knowledge and practice.

6.3. Gap in the literature

For the first time, the meaningfulness and usefulness of Kurt Lewin's concept of the life space has been studied and researched in executive coaching from the perspective of the coach. This is a novel contribution to the literature. This study presents a new theoretical conceptualisation in the form of a map (Figure 4.7) that brings to light for the first time the depth and specificity of what the life space brings to executive coaching, which has, until now, been largely unacknowledged, if not overlooked, in the coaching literature.

The map of the life space proposes a model of “coaching with the life space in mind” that can bring benefits to the coach. Jackson (2004, cited in Bachkirova and Borrington, 2019, p.338) argues that too few models and definitions of coaching are justified by empirical research and conceptual analysis. This study shows how the invitation to coach from the perspective of the life space requires the coach to work in and with this phenomenon in each and every coaching session, and how this proposition is supported by empirical and conceptual analysis and by relevant ideas and concepts from other relevant coaching theories (Western, 2012; Cavanagh and Lane, 2012; Bachkirova, 2017). This study of the life space aligns with and extends the theory of executive coaching, specifically Gestalt, systems and constellation theories. It does this by introducing and explicating how the life space is meaningful as a sensitising and orienting framework and useful in enhancing the coach’s awareness and understanding of the complexities of seeing the client, the coach and the coaching process as indivisible from the momentary and ever-changing psychological and social context in which they are situated.

The notion of the life space as a heuristic, enhancing the coach’s awareness and understanding of how to work with the phenomenon of the client’s perception and perspective, aligns the research to the current and relevant theories of coaching for adult learning and development. Furthermore, by explicating the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space, this study makes a contribution to filling the gap in the literature about how executive coaching works and the component parts that make it effective (Grant et al., 2010), including the coach-client interaction, which is an area of coaching that is under-researched (Cotterill and Passmore, 2019).

This study has shown how the literature on critical realism (Bhaskar, 2008a, 2001a) can be extended to the challenges in proving the different levels of reality in building coaching theory, and the complexity of the relationship between theory, knowledge and coaching practice. The study argues that the empirical findings in part one of this chapter are plausible and defendable, as they are built on empirical evidence and conceptual analysis, and demonstrate a full engagement with relevant theory. At the same time, this study argues that a critical realist position offers a newly illuminated and explicated account of

the complex relationship between coaching theory and coach practice. The critical realist paradigm of this research argues that only by exploring the intransitive domains of the reality and knowledge of the life space can we access a fuller story of how the phenomenon is meaningful and useful in executive coaching.

The final contribution this study makes to extending theoretical knowledge is the addition it makes to our understanding and appreciation of the contribution of Lewin to twenty-first century theories of change. Firstly, this study explicates the central concept of the phenomenon Lewin called the life space in the context of executive coaching – a context that is outside, and different from, the existing focus in the literature on Lewin and theories of organisational change and development. This is an original contribution to the literature. Secondly, the study shows the synchronicity between the experimental psychology of Lewin from the early- to mid-nineteen hundreds, and the more recently developed philosophical paradigm of critical realism. It argues that any contemporary understanding of the contribution that Lewin and the life space make to coaching theory has to accommodate the argument that any suggested causative link to impacting practice, as proposed in part one of the findings, is complex and hard to prove.

6.4. Contribution to practice

This research aligns with and builds on the argument from Lewin himself that "*there is nothing as practical as a good theory*" (Lewin, 1943, pp.333–345; Landauer, 2011). The study makes a new contribution to practice by making the little-known concept of the life space known to executive coaches. The concept is evocative and stimulating for coaches, generating a rich range of good quality discussions. This, in itself, brings benefits to the profession by stimulating fertile debates and ideas for future practice about how to work with the coaching client as situated in and intimately connected to their ever-changing psychological and social context at the time of and during coaching. More specifically, the final conceptual map (Figure 4.7) introduces to coaches what is likely to be the new concept of the life space. This concept offers a naturalistic, dynamic, creative and

heuristic language and lens on executive coaching. It sensitises and orients the coach to a heightened awareness and understanding of the benefits of coaching with the life space in mind, i.e. to coach through the lens of the concept of the life space; to work in and with the phenomenon. In so doing, the final conceptual map makes a new contribution to practice by inviting the coach to engage with the seven implications of coaching the executive in their environment, including the co-created environment of the coaching process. These seven implications illuminate the findings highlighted in theme two of this research in Chapter 4. They heighten the coach's awareness and understanding of working with the complexity of each client and their needs and goals (A, A1 and A2 in the map), the coach's own complexity in the coach role (A3 in the map), the co-created heuristic coaching process (B in the map), and coaching as capacity building (C in the map).

Adopting the life space perspective involves the coach working not just with the theory of the life space, but being part of and working within the co-created phenomenon of the life space that is unique to each and every coaching session - working with the actuality of the life space (Parlett, 1991). The fieldwork map (Figures 4.3 – 4.6) was consistently experienced by the research partners as an invitation to discuss how and why they work in the liminal space where the executive client meets the totality of their psychological and social environment. This study builds on this empirical evidence, and the following table in Figure 6.1 lists those for whom this work could have significance, the nature of the significance, the actions they might take in response to it, and provides a cross-reference to Figure 4.7 of the final map of the life space in executive coaching.

Figure 6.1

Significance and potential actions for coaches and others

Significance	Potential Actions in Response	Map	Coaches	Supervisors	Trainers
life space is all but absent in coaching language and practice	Consider the concept and its' qualities and implications in relation to practice.	1–7	✓	✓	✓
Complexity of each client as indivisible from their environment	Recognise the client as existing in an open, interconnected system of 'being in the world' of which work is but one part	A1	✓		
	Recognise 'the world' as a multitude of often competing stakeholder needs existing simultaneously alongside the needs of the client	A1	✓		
	Recognise the issue/topic/goal under discussion as a tension system in the client's relationship with their 'world'.	A2 B5 B6	✓		
Complexity of each coach as indivisible from their environment	Consider the life space in relation to reflexivity before, during and after each coaching session	A3	✓	✓	✓
	Explore the life space in a supervisory context	A3	✓	✓	
	Consider the life space in relation to the use of self and self development	A3	✓	✓	✓
Coaching process as a co-created life space and heuristic	Understand the coaching process as a unique, co-created, ever-changing phenomenon	B1 B2	✓	✓	✓
	Understand the coaching process as a magnetic field of the client and coach's energy field, enabling, blocking, modifying what is and is not possible	B3	✓	✓	✓
	Understand the coaching process as a joint venture, the coach as 'trusted guide' co-creating client's reality and journeying into the tension-system	B4 B5 B6	✓	✓	✓
Capacity building as a change and expansion of the life space	Consider the aim of coaching as changing the client's perception of and perspective on their relationship with their tension-system	C1	✓		✓
	Consider the objectives of coaching as expanding and differentiating meaningful aspects of the client's tension-system; and as co-creating a new metaphorical route-map to navigate unfamiliar territory in the tension-system	C2 C3 C4	✓		✓
	Consider a change in the client as a change in their life space	C5	✓		✓

What is clear from this table are the potential implications of this research for coaching practice and related activities across a range of interested parties. Whilst the individual actions of those within each group identified need much further thought and consideration, awareness is the first step. The table deliberately distinguishes between actions of recognition, understanding and consideration. These distinctions reflect the range of invitations to coaches, supervisors and trainers. A call to “recognise” actions reflects the position that these aspects of the life space are beyond reasonable dispute, whilst they are likely to be known as other concepts in coaching theory and practice. This relates to the complexity of the individual as indivisible from their environment. The call to “understand” is a similar invitation, predicated on the notion of the coaching relationship as a co-created, dynamic and ever-changing process which determines what is possible and is not possible in each and every coaching session. Again, the coach and client coming together as the joint architects of a coaching experience is a well-established phenomenon in coaching theory (Pelham, 2016). The call to “consider” the life space and the resulting potential actions is an invitation to engage with the concept as potentially beneficial, whilst recognising that it is one of a range of concepts that inform different modalities of coaching, often implicitly.

6.4.1 Coaching practice

The contribution of this study to coaching practice is represented in Figure 4.7 of the final concept map of the life space, and in Figure 6.1. Coaching with the life space in mind in this liminal space, where the client meets and makes sense of and meaning from their context, invites the coach to make a shift in perspective and emphasis. This shift is captured and conveyed in Figure 4.7 by the seven beams of light. It is a shift away from perceiving the client in isolation, and toward seeing them as intimately connected to and situated in an aggregate of all the meaning they have accrued so far, relating to the everyday dilemmas, tensions and worries that might be brought to coaching. This research argues that such a shift is essential in executive coaching practice. Without identifying with the client the implications of the meaning of important aspects of their life space with

regard to the issue under investigation in coaching, the coach can neither adequately understand nor facilitate a change in the behaviour of the executive. The needs the client brings to coaching and the subsequent process of topic and goal-setting for each coaching session are a seen as a function of their life space, their momentary and ever-changing relationship to their socio-psychological environment. The client's motivation for and their needs in coaching, although presented as being about work, are located in the needs and goals of the totality of their wider life; a totality in which the boundaries between work and other elements of their life are frequently permeable and, at times, non-existent. The agenda for coaching is therefore less about the properties and regularity of the client's behaviour, and more about investigating the underlying dynamics of the totality of psychological and social issues affecting that behaviour.

Behaviour is framed as goal-driven and as a function of the client's life space. As such, all the client's actions are the result of the ever-changing resolution of tensions, anxieties and worries towards goal-achievement and a sense of stability in themselves in their world. Coaching with the life space in mind also invites the coach to adopt a particular perspective on changing the behaviour of the client, and how to facilitate this change (part C of the map). Behaviour is a function of the life space, so changing the life space changes behaviour (C5). The life space perspective invites coaches to think about changing the executive's perception of the coaching need by co-creating the client's reality with them in the here-and-now of the coaching session (B5) – mapping the "hotel "of contradictory and competing "voices" (A2). This is process of identifying the psychological and social forces that are blocking or modifying the client's goal-achievement, and drawing connections between previously unrelated elements so that patterns of influence emerge (B5). Raising the client's awareness of these psychological forces, hidden connections and patterns of influence is a heuristic to shift their perspective. It changes the relationship between the interconnected and interrelated elements of the client's concern, so that the problem becomes contextual in a wider field. Coaching with the life space in mind enables the coach to design with the client a new-route map for the issue under investigation (C3), and to create some stability where there was instability, so that complex and seemingly intractable problems seem clearer and simpler. In this sense,

coaching with the life space in mind invites coaches to think about this change of perception as a change in the executive's life space and an expansion of, and an increase in, the differentiation of the life space (C4), which leads to a change in perception, cognition and the opening up of an increasing variety of changed behaviour. A change in the life space is a change in the client.

6.4.2. Coach supervision and training

The phenomenon of the life space as presented in this critical realist study is metaphorically the water in which a fish swims, with both transitive and intransitive realities. Accordingly, the findings from this research have a universal applicability beyond the micro level of the coach. At the meso level, from the perspective of the coach supervisor or trainer, the life space has the potential to enhance their awareness and understanding of the unique complexity of the coach or trainee coach and their needs and goals; the unique complexity of themselves as supervisor and trainer; the co-created nature of the supervisory or training process; and supervision and training as a heuristic for building coaching capacity in the coach and trainee coach. However, the extent to which the life space has any, similar or different meaning and utility in the context of coach supervision and training as it does in coach practice is beyond the scope of this research, as are any implications for the development of executive coaching through the regulatory bodies.

6.5. Methodology

The final of the six objectives for this study was to evaluate the extent to which the methodological choices made contribute to new knowledge in this area. Any such contribution is in the form of reflections on some of the challenges I encountered. At the outset of the study, it became apparent that the conceptual encounter method is designed to develop conceptualisations of phenomena for which the research partners very often have a common name. Throughout this study, there is evidence of how I have adapted the methodology to accommodate the fact that, for the majority of the research partners, the

term life space was new. Whilst the research partners had sufficient contextual knowledge of the phenomenon, their lack of knowledge about the specific concept created some challenges. It might be that the learning from these challenges is of significance for future phenomenological qualitative research, particularly the application of a conceptual encounter method.

Chapter three presents the justification for the methodological choices made during the study. Conceptual encounter methodology has a vagueness and lack of clarity around procedure, especially the data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, I supplemented the primary methodology of conceptual encounter with a relatively simple and primarily deductive secondary process of thematic analysis. Combining and integrating the two approaches was useful, but it challenged my ability to clearly and precisely capture and convey the process by which the coded date was constructed into important and salient units of meaning, and then constructed into sub-themes as the building blocks for the two main thematic findings. This challenge potentially weakened the extent to which this study is able to demonstrate in a transparent fashion that the findings are fully warranted through empirical evidence. Exploring the nature of the vagueness and lack of clarity around procedure, especially the data analysis, in conceptual encounter, and the ways to address this, might be an area for future research.

Critical realism was the logical philosophical research strategy to accommodate my ontological objectivism (the life space is real) with epistemological relativism (the reality of the life space necessitates no knowledge of it). Combining a critical realist paradigm with a conceptual encounter method and a thematic and retroductive analysis led me to limit the scope of the study to a purposive sample of experienced and psychologically-minded coaches, to work hard to ensure the map they were introduced to was methodologically fit for purpose, and to develop the final map iteratively and in a more linear way by purposefully sticking with the same map in all ten interviews. This approach may be unorthodox and, for some readers, questionable, and it is certainly less than methodologically “pure”. However, my justification is that it was an adapted approach that did not compromise the validity and integrity of my findings, whilst giving me the best

chance to develop as full, rich and deep a picture as possible to answer the research question about how meaningful and useful the life space is in executive coaching.

6.6. Limitations

Chapter 5 has presented the discussion about the findings from this research and highlighted the fallibility of knowledge and the limitations of this research, in the context of the critical realism and the epistemic and ontic fallacies (Bhaskar, 2008a, 2011a; Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020). This section discusses the concept of epistemological relativism in relation to the current and relevant theory on knowledge generation, and the limitations of such knowledge. It considers the limitations to the claims to new knowledge from this study with reference to behaviour resulting from knowledge being a function of the life space (Lewin, 1936; 2013).

As has been highlighted throughout this thesis, a critical realist research strategy is a commitment to ontological realism and epistemological relativism. This commitment involves recognising that knowledge is always socially produced and fallible (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020, p.40). As well as this commitment to the fallibility of knowledge, there is an equal commitment to one's own fallibility. The knowledge about the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space in executive coaching is socially constructed through the phenomenon of myself interacting with the research partners in interviews and a focus group – it is a fusion of horizons through dialogue (Gadamer, 1967) that creates a new understanding of the phenomenon of the life space. This study frames these interactions as life spaces, co-constructed from the individual life spaces of myself and the research participant, in the same way that the coaching process is a co-creation (as shown in Figure 4.5 in Chapter 4 and in part B of the final map in Figure 4.7). In this sense, the knowledge of the phenomenon and how it is generated is the phenomenon itself, the transitive dimension (Bhaskar, 2008a, pp.11-14; pp.51-52). This transitive dimension encompasses the theories, paradigms, models, concepts and descriptions of the life space that exist at a given point in time, the point of the focus group or each interview. It also encompasses the more intransitive phenomena of the needs and goals of myself and the

research participants, and the psychological forces and valences enabling or restraining the meeting and achievement of these needs and goals. In other words, the extent and nature of any knowledge created is a function of this intransitive life space – a phenomenon that determines what is possible and what is not possible in a specific situation at a given time. How people behave at a given moment in a given situation is a function of the life space (Lewin, 1951).

A different life space of an interview or a focus group, at a different time, with different people or with the same people but with a different mood and energy, is likely to have created different outcomes and created different findings, and thereby, a different knowledge. Consequently, the knowledge produced from this study is context specific, of a time, of a place and of the people involved. It captures the essence of human experience and translates this into empirically supported knowledge, but such knowledge speaks only to the context in which it is generated, namely, dyadic executive coaching involving experienced and psychologically-minded coaches. It is neither generalisable nor transferrable beyond this context without further research. This accords with Lewin's field theoretical principle of singularity which means any generalisations are suspect (Parlett, 1991). Consequently, the ideas that coach supervisors, coach trainers and coaching regulators might benefit from coaching with the life space in mind requires additional and focused research. Equally, the knowledge generated in this study is created solely from the related accounts of the experiences of a purposive sample of coaches and myself. Any claim to what these findings might mean about the meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space for the clients of executive coaching requires new and specific research. In this sense, and in keeping with the conceptual encounter methodology, the knowledge of the life space offered in this study is a concept to be built on by further research.

Philosophical and methodological choices bring opportunities, implications and limitations. Choosing a conceptual encounter methodology places my own knowledge and experience at the heart of this study. My presence and my biases, despite my best efforts to mitigate their presence, will have impacted every stage. Limiting the data to interactions with purposively selected coaches, working with the fallibility of memories, analysing and

interpreting data through the lens of critical realism, and choosing which themes and findings are paramount are only some of the significant field conditions of the life space of this study. These conditions directly determine, and thereby limit, the nature of the findings and knowledge created. Furthermore, each of the data gathering points in the study encompasses the theories, paradigms, models, concepts and descriptions of the life space that exist at a given point in time – at the time of the focus group or interview. Each data gathering point is predicated on knowledge already produced, which is an indispensable means to producing new knowledge. The production of new knowledge dynamically builds upon and transforms existing knowledge, and thereby becomes existing knowledge to be built on by future research (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020, p.28). Today's knowledge of the life space builds upon previous knowledge, just as tomorrow's knowledge will draw on and transform what we know now. As such, the knowledge from this study has a temporal quality – it is of the here and now and is limited to such.

The final limitation of this research relates to the characteristics of modesty and relativity. In the broad sense, the research adds little that is new to coaching theory. It builds on and expands existing coaching knowledge by explicating the phenomenon of the life space, whilst recognising that the phenomenon is experienced as a new, yet familiar concept to the research participants. This research makes the concept known, and in so doing, highlights the contribution it currently makes to coaching theory and practice, and proposes that the awareness of the concept and its qualities can bring benefits in practice. Such claims are supported by conceptual analysis, empirical research and relevant coaching theories, ideas and concepts. This research argues with confidence that executive coaching with the life space in mind is a warranted theory, and it is plausible that this theory has a beneficial effect on coaching practice. This claim, however, co-exists alongside the research providing a critical realist framework to approach the complex questions at the interface between the theory of the reality of the life space, our knowledge of it and coaching practice, and, more generally, the difficulties in building and proving coaching theory. The fact that both positions are held and not presented as mutually exclusive can be seen as both a limitation and strength in this study, not least as a foundation for further research.

6.7. Areas for further research

I hope that more research follows in coaching with the life space as the focus. This study provides a foundation, a first map for the further exploration of the concept in wider contexts than executive coaching. The meaningfulness and usefulness of the life space to other genres of coaching, including team coaching, coaching that is internal to an organisation, and to less experienced and psychologically-minded coaches, would extend the knowledge of the concept and the benefits and dis-benefits it might bring. Similarly, using the map to explore what the life space means to coaching clients, and if and how it might enhance their coaching experience, is likely to be an interesting and potentially useful companion to this study.

Figure 4.7 in Chapter 4 and Figure 6.1 in this chapter present the framework for coaching with the life space in mind, which is targeted primarily at executive coach practitioners. One can extrapolate from this framework ideas about how the findings from this study might contribute to coach supervision, training and regulation. The life space is a meaningful and useful heuristic, encouraging coaches to a reflexive turn towards the use of self. The concept acts as a gateway into an awareness of what the coach brings of themselves, how they show up, the presence of their own needs and how all of this is a major determinant of what can and cannot be done in a coaching session. Introducing the life space and the findings from this research to coach trainers and regulators might assist them in educating and developing trainee coaches to practice beyond their existing modalities. However, coach supervision, training and regulation were not the focus of this study. The benefits or dis-benefits of supervising or providing training and regulation “with the life space in mind” are potential areas for future research.

Finally, a theme constructed from the feedback from the research partners was the extent to which any map of the life space was limited in capturing and conveying its uniquely naturalistic, dynamic, creative and phenomenological qualities. Figure 4.7 makes a

genuine effort, but undoubtedly falls short. Representing the life space was a challenge for Lewin himself and for those that followed (Burnes, Hughes and Rune, 2018; Endrejat and Burnes, 2024). With the advent of Artificial Intelligence, virtual reality and other technological media developments, this might be a rich and fertile area for future research. Figure 4.7 offers a first conceptualisation to be built upon.

6.8. Personal reflections

Philosophical, ontological, epistemological and personal reflections on my experience of this study, including the notion that the interview itself is a co-created life space, is a theme that runs through this thesis. The experience has undoubtedly challenged, stretched and developed me in many ways, not least as a nascent academic researcher and an experienced executive coach.

The experience of studying for a professional doctorate in my seventh decade has changed me. It has been unfinished business since I turned down the opportunity to take a PhD in my early thirties. The fact that it has taken 30 years to return to it is a surprise. This opportunity is also meaningful due to legacy issues I have carried from my mid-fifties following a serious illness. This illness impaired my cognitive and executive functioning to the extent that the coordination of sequencing simple tasks was often beyond me. Thus, this experience has provided a feeling of challenge and closure, and I will always be grateful to those who facilitated and supported me throughout this opportunity. It is a gift that will keep on giving, not least as a new-found critical faculty with which to engage with ideas, concepts, theories and further scholarly research.

In some ways, my unbounded respect and enthusiasm for Lewin the man, his work and his concept of the life space has not been matched by my enthusiasm for the findings and the modesty of the contribution to coaching theory and practice. Nonetheless, coaching with the concept of the life space in mind is a meaningful and useful proposition that can be built upon by future research. Lewin was ahead of his time, and using his concept in an original way to create a new and contemporary understanding has been a privilege.

Finally, I have made hard work of what is, by definition, hard work. I have found the task of simplifying complex concepts for the reader to be challenging. I underestimated aspects of the rigorous requirements of doctoral research and I have learned from this. The lessons are too long to go into here, other than highlighting the lesson of fully exploring and understanding the philosophical and methodological choices made and the implications for the rigor of data collection and analysis. I will always be grateful to my supervisory team for their wisdom, patience, encouragement and, above all else, for their forbearance.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Lewin's field theory and the life space

Lewin's field theory

Parlett (1991, p.68-91) summarises Lewin's field theory from a Gestalt perspective as a holistic view of a person extending to include the environment, making the person indivisible from their surroundings. Lewin's field theory provides a conceptual language for this approach, looking at the total situation rather than viewing it piecemeal, and instead of reducing complex interactive phenomena to separate component parts, the overall picture, the total situation, is appreciated as a whole. In field theory, Lewin established five principles. These are described in summary, as they signal Lewin's big ideas and have a direct relevance to his concept of the life space.

Firstly, the Principle of Organization, which argues that everything has meaning, even apparent "randomness" when considered in context, because "*the meaning of a single fact depends upon its position in the field"* (Lewin, 1952, p.150).

Secondly, The Principle of Contemporaneity, which points to a constellation of influences in the present field explaining present behaviour. "*The psychological past and the psychological future are simultaneous parts of the psychological field at a given time*" (Lewin, 1952, p.54). In other words, it is not the actual events, past or future, which are of concern, because the actual field conditions at other times are not present now.

Thirdly, the Principle of Singularity, meaning each person-situation, each life space, is unique. Meanings will be individually constructed and conclusions drawn will not be identical, making generalisations suspect.

Fourthly, the Principle of Changing Process, which refers to the field undergoing continuous change, "*one never steps in the same river twice*" (Parlett, 1991, p.5). Experience is provisional, depending on the momentary dynamic field, rather than permanent. Nothing is fixed and static in an absolute way (Lewin, 1952).

Finally, The Principle of Possible Relevance, meaning everything in the field is part of the total situation and is potentially meaningful (Lewin, 1952).

Components of the life space

These five principles reflect Lewin's perspective that a shift was required in psychological theory and analysis, from a focus on the individual to a focus on the individual in relation to their environment – their life space. Lewin proposed that the life space consists of the environment, the person, regions, boundaries and psychological forces of valence, which determine how people behave at a particular time in a given situation.

In the life space, the "environment" depends not only on the objective situation, but also on the characteristics of the person (Deutsch, 1954). Both these phenomena together form the totality of the facts in the life space. It is necessary to consider all aspects of a person's conscious and unconscious environment in order to discern the person's life space (Burnes and Cooke, 2013). Lewin holds that each life space will have phenotypic facts, such as the physical setting and the characteristics of members making up the field. It will also have psychological or genotypic facts, including social characteristics that affect and are affected by each other. These genotypic psychological facts are made up of social facts such as values and ideology, cultural facts such as style of living and thinking, and sociological facts such as group norms and temporal facts of time. These genotypic facts of the life space are often not directly observable.

In the life space, the "person" is conceptualised as the behaving self which is seen as "*the individual's perception of his relations to the environment he perceives*" (Lewin, 1939, pp.868-896). The totality of facts exist in "regions" of the life space, which are qualitatively different from each other and are separated by "boundaries", which are more or less

permeable. A person's experience and behaviour is determined by the way in which, and to what degree, these regions are connected or separated (Lewin, 1936, p.45). The life space constitutes a singular, dynamic, unique whole which is both greater and different than the sum of its parts, and within which the relationship between the regions of the life space is constantly changing into different, momentarily unique patterns from which meaning is made.

Each person in a system, a team, a group or a dyad lives in their own life space at any given time, where different psychological forces determine their behaviour in that situation. Behaviour is goal-driven and is a function of, and a change in, the life space (Lewin, 1959, p.338). Psychological forces with strength, direction and a point of application cause change. These enabling or restraining/blocking forces are generated when a region of the life space is in tension, relative to surrounding regions, regarding the meeting of a goal. These forces tend to produce changes in the life space and thereby changes in behaviour, such that differences of tension are reduced by goals being met and need being satisfied (Lewin, 1959, p.346).

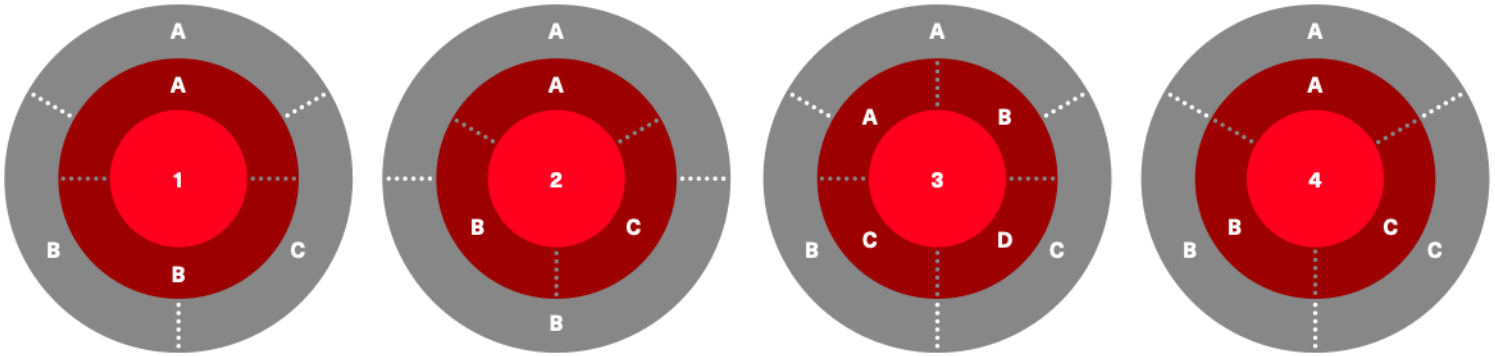
Appendix 2: Unused initial draft map of the life space

This map (seen on the following page) represented the life space as a series of four stages in a single executive coaching encounter.

The coding key to the map is as follows:

- **1-4:** the stages of the coaching session
- **A-D:** conceptual propositions
- **A-C:** invitations from me to the coach to a way of practising

Appendix 2
Initial unused map of the life space



- Stage of coaching session
- Conceptual propositions
- Invitations to practice

Framing the topic and goals for coaching

A The executive as intimately connected to and situated in a complex psychological and social world
B Executive's motivation, needs, topic and goals for coaching as indivisible from and a function of their momentary and ever-changing relationship to their specific psychological environment at the start of and during coaching
A Support and challenge the executive to align and integrate their own needs with those of the wider stakeholders
B Enabling the executive to be increasingly effective in their role through advancing the business objectives of the organisation
C Shift from identifying the individual problems or regularity of the executives behaviour as the coaching agenda, to investigating the underlying psychological and social issues in the totality of all that is in their immediate psychological environment that are influencing behaviour

Mapping the coaching territory/agenda

A The executive's reality is the aggregation of the meaning of all the people, experiences, objects, relationships, events and so on that the executive has accrued so far in their world that are relevant in their mind to the coaching agenda
B These include tensions and dilemmas intrinsic to executive life – Tension-systems.
C Dilemmas and tensions are barriers to goal achievement and endowed the executive with energy and readiness for change
A Coaching territory is the tensions and dilemmas the client brings
B Tensions and dilemmas such as work-life balance, collaboration versus competition, self v role/organisation, system needs v organisational needs, v departmental/team needs, v individual needs, leadership v management, enabling v directive, tensions in relationship with boss

Mapping the strength and direction of the forces within tensions/dilemmas under investigation

A The liminal space where the executive meets their psychological environment
B All actions are a function of the resolution of tensions towards goals achievement
C Forces are enabling, restraining or neutral towards goal achievement and are of varying strengths
D Elements in the tension system have boundaries that are open, closed, permeable, impermeable
A Establish openness or closed nature of boundaries between elements in the tension-system – permeability, impermeability
B Draw connections between previously unrelated elements to reveal patterns of influence
C Shift executive's perspective on the coaching issue to enable different view(s) and choice(s) of action

Framing developmental outcomes

A The developmental outcome from coaching is a change in the executive's life space by way of an expansion of their perspective on their world, their place in it, and what they are capable of doing
B An opening up, expansion and increased differentiation of elements/tensions of the life space
C Re-ordering psychological past and future and degree of psychological reality in relation to goal and need
A Bring distant past to the near past or near future
B Differentiate fantasy and reality to expand degree of psychological reality
C An increase in the sub-division/differentiation of regions/elements of the life space

Appendix 3: Vignette of focus group

Four research partners: face to face for 50 minutes. Responses to being presented with Appendix 2, the first draft map of the life space in executive coaching (not used in the fieldwork/ data gathering).

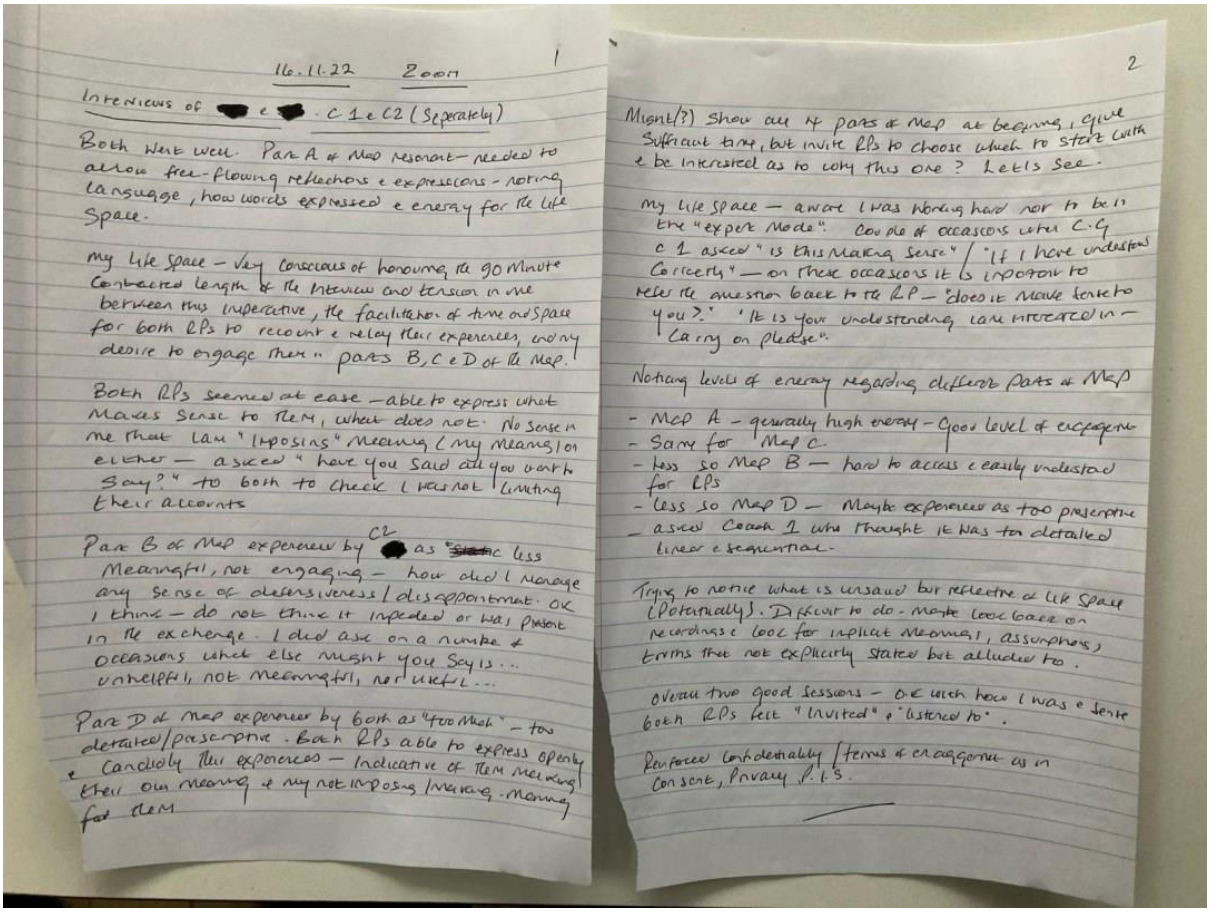
All the research partners were aware of Lewin and his work, primarily in connection with OD and change management. None of the research partners had prior knowledge of the concept of the life space.

There was a general response of “wow, this is a detailed and extensive map with a lot to take in” – too much, in fact. Parts 1-4 of the coaching process were recognisable and resonant of coaching with the phenomena of psycho-social forces. The conceptual propositions were generally experienced as assumptions which gave the map a prescriptive feel. The research partners unanimously relayed that they felt as though too much work and too much of the thinking had been done and that the map left little space for their meaning making.

As an instrument for the conceptual encounter methodology, the map seemed not yet sufficiently fit for purpose. The research partners experienced a sense of being presented with the answer and not invited into an open and candid discussion. This experience was particularly noticeable with regard to the conceptual propositions and the invitations to practise. Whilst some of these were recognisable, the combination of them all together in one dense map did not lend itself to a sense of a genuine and equal partnership between them and myself as the researcher. The research partners also relayed a general and unanimous view that the map contained too much detailed information to be properly processed in the time allowed by this group interview or in any future one-to-one interview.

In summary, the feedback from the research partners was to recognise the amount of effort, research and thinking that had gone into creating this map whilst inviting me to let go of a lot of what had been included and to re-design and re-imagine the map as considerably more engaging and invitational; a different map in which most of the work about what the life space might mean and how it might or might not be useful in executive coaching was yet to be done.

Appendix 4: Extract from reflexive diary



16.11.22 Zoom 1

Interviews of [redacted] e [redacted] - C1 e C2 (Seperately)

Both Went well. Part A of MAP resonant - needed to allow free-flowing reflections e expressions - noting language, how words expressed e energy for the life Space.

My life Space - Very conscious of honouring the 90 Minute Contracted length of the Interview and tension in me between this imperative, the facilitation of time and Space for both RPs to recount e relay their experiences, and my desire to engage them re parts B, C e D of the MAP.

Both RPs seemed at ease - able to express what Makes Sense to them, what does not. No sense in me that I am "Imposing" Meaning (My Meaning) on either - asked "have you said all you want Say?" to both to check I was not limiting their accounts

Part B of MAP experienced by C2 as "Static less Meaningful, not engaging - how did I Manage any Sense of defensiveness / disappointment. OK I think - do not think it impeded or was present in the exchange. I did ask on a number of occasions what else might you Say is... unhelpful, not Meaningful, not useful...

Part D of MAP experienced by both as "too Much" - too detailed/prescriptive. Both RPs able to express openly e Candidly their experiences - Indicative of them Meaning their own meaning & my not Imposing / Meaning - Meaning for them

2

Might(?) Show all 4 parts of MAP at beginning, give Sufficient time, but invite RPs to choose which to start with & be interested as to why this one? Let's See.

My life Space - aware I was working hard not to be in the "expert Mode". Couple of occasions when C.g C1 asked "is this Making Sense" / "If I have understood Correctly" - on these occasions it is important to refer the question back to the RP - "does it Make Sense to you?" "It is your understanding I am interested in - Carry on please".

Noticing levels of energy regarding different parts of MAP

- MAP A - generally high energy - Good level of engagement
- Same for MAP C.
- less so MAP B - hard to access e easily understood for RPs
- less so MAP D - Maybe experienced as too prescriptive
- asked Coach 1 who thought it was too detailed linear e sequential.

Trying to notice what is unsaid but reflective of life Space (Potentially). Difficult to do - Maybe look back on recordings e look for implicit Meanings, assumptions, Terms that not explicitly stated but alluded to.

Overall two good Sessions - OK with how I was e Sense both RPs felt "Invited" e "listened to".

Reinforced Confidentiality / terms of engagement as in Consent, Privacy P.I.S.

Appendix 5: Participant information sheet

Researcher: Mike Livingstone

Contact email: mikeliv@btopenworld.com

Title and aim of the research study

How meaningful and useful is the concept of the life space in executive coaching?

The aim of the study is to explore the meaningfulness and usefulness of Kurt Lewin's concept of the *life space* for executive coaches, in order to develop a practical framework to help coaches in their one-to-one executive coaching sessions.

Invitation to participate

I am an executive coach studying for a professional doctorate at the International Centre for Coaching and Mentoring Studies at Oxford Brookes University Business School. I am looking for executive coaches to take part in my research and I would like to invite you to consider taking part in the study. Before you decide, it is important for you to have information about why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information.

The purpose of the study

The *life space* is a concept created by the psychologist Kurt Lewin to describe how a person perceives and interacts with the social and psychological influences acting on them at any given moment. For Kurt Lewin, the life space is like a force field that affects an individual's behaviours, including their leadership, and is something that needs to be understood and taken into account when working at a psychological level with people.

You are invited to consider taking part in an investigation into the notion of the life space in one-to-one executive coaching. The research is designed to find out how meaningful and useful this is to you as an executive coach, if at all, and to explore if you work with the life space or not, and how you might work with it if you wanted to. The research is focused

on one-to-one coaching sessions, so team or group coaching sessions will not be discussed. To date, there is little research on this topic.

In this research, it does not matter if you do or do not accept the existence of the life space or whether you recognise the concept. What counts is your experience and knowledge of one-to-one executive coaching and what this involves for you.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You are invited to participate in the study as you hold a coaching qualification that is recognised by one of the accrediting coaching bodies; you have been working as an executive coach for five years or more; and you are in receipt of regular coaching supervision. Furthermore, your coaching practice involves working at a psychological level with your clients, and this might be relevant and helpful in exploring the notion of the life space.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a consent form to sign and a privacy notice that will explain how your data will be collected, used and stored securely. If you sign the consent form to take part in this study, you are free to withdraw at any time and without having to give a reason. After the interview, you will be sent a copy of the transcript so you can check that it is accurate. You can amend or edit the transcript if you wish, so that you are happy that it is a full and accurate account. If, after the interview, you decide you do not want your data to be part of the study, your data can be withdrawn by you up until the point it is to be analysed. In these circumstances, contact me by email and the recording and any transcript of your interview will be permanently deleted and not included in the study.

What will happen if I take part?

Participation in the study will require you to be involved in an interview for no more than 90 minutes at a mutually agreed and convenient time and location, or through an on-line

platform. The interviews will be audio-recorded. The first part of the interview, about ten minutes (or as long as is helpful), will be made available to answer any questions you might have about the research. At the start of each interview, a map of the life space, that I have developed from the relevant literature and from my own personal experience, will be introduced. You will be asked to comment on the map and to respond to questions prepared in advance and asked on the day, as well as questions which will arise from our discussion.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The main issue is your commitment to give up your time and share your knowledge.

Every effort will be made to make the interview an interesting, useful and good experience.

However, discussions about coaching can raise personal issues and, understandably, some people might experience some level of stress or anxiety. If this is the case, you can suspend or terminate the interview at any point.

Furthermore, if you need independent support you can contact MIND at http://mind.org.uk, the National Counselling Society at http://nationalcounsellingsociety.org, or any other support service you know of. Also, as you are in receipt of coaching supervision, there is the option of seeking support from your coach supervisors.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The benefit of taking part in the research is that you will contribute to the investigation into how meaningful and useful, if at all, the notion of the life space is when working in one-to-one executive coaching sessions. This is intended to further develop the theory and practice of the executive coaching profession and contribute to how coaches might be trained and developed. Furthermore, by reflecting on your work in this context, you might also gain insights into your own coaching practice and how this might be enhanced.

The final map of the life space in executive coaching and a summary of the findings will be

shared with you on completion of the research, which is estimated to be around February 2024.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

Whilst the interview will involve discussing the work you do with your clients, you will not be asked to reveal their identity or the specific organisation in which they are working. Any quotes used and published will be anonymised and only broad descriptions will be used in reference to the types of organisations and sectors covered in the study.

Each of the research participants will be given access to the summary findings from the research, and the final report will be in the public domain and in any relevant research articles. No data from your interviews will be shared with any of the coaching organisations of which you are an employee or associate, other than the thematic analysis informing the summary findings that will be in the public domain. Any publication arising from the research will use only anonymised quotes (subject to your acceptance of the same in the consent form).

All the information collected will be kept strictly confidential and in accordance with legal requirements and limitations. Confidentiality and privacy will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of the research data by anonymising your identity. The audio recordings of each interview will be stored securely for verbatim transcription. Once the recording has been transcribed, it will be deleted as soon as possible, and it is likely that this will occur within six months of the date of the interview. The verbatim hard copy transcripts will be kept securely until the research thesis is completed, which is likely to be up to three years from the date of the interview. At this point they will be permanently destroyed. The records of the analysis of the data will be archived securely in accordance with the university's policy on Academic Integrity, for a period of ten years.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you would like to participate in the research, please send an email to my address at mikeliv@btopenworld.com, including your name and contact details. You will then be contacted to arrange a convenient time for the interview. In advance of the agreed date, you will be sent a copy of the consent form to consider, sign, and return, and a copy of the privacy notice.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

As the themes and findings of the research emerge from the interviews, these will be captured in a textual and diagrammatic form such as a framework or map. This map, and a summary of the findings from the research, will be shared with you at the completion of the research program (estimated to be February or March 2024).

The results of the study will form the research element of my doctoral thesis for the award of Doctor of Coaching and Mentoring. This is a professional doctorate and the thesis will be stored and widely accessible at the University library and in any relevant research articles once it is approved and published. A summary of the findings will be shared with the doctorate supervising community, other coaching researchers, and those with an interest in coaching development and practice.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting the research as a part time student at the Business School at Oxford Brookes University. The research is self-funded and is supervised by Dr Adrian Myers, Senior Lecturer, and Dr Ioanna Iordanou, Reader in Human Resource Management (Coaching and Mentoring). See below for their contact details.

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Who has reviewed the study?

The research was approved by the University Research Ethics Committee on 7th March 2022. The Oxford Brookes University number is 2161016.

Contact for further information

For further information, you may contact me on the aforementioned email address.

You can also contact the members of the academic supervisory team. These are Doctor Adrian Myers and Doctor Ioanna Iordanou. They are contactable by email as follows:

amyers@brookes.ac.uk

ioanna.iordanou@brookes.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the way the study has been conducted, you should contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee at ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to read this information and for your interest in this research project.

Mike Livingstone

March 2022

Appendix 6: Consent form

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

Full title of Project: How meaningful and useful is the concept of the life space in Executive Coaching?

Name, position and contact details of Researcher: Mike Livingstone, Doctoral Student at the International Centre for Coaching and Mentoring Studies

	Please initial box	
	Yes	No
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.	☐	☐
3. I agree to take part in the above study.	☐	☐

	Please initial box	
	Yes	No
4. I understand that the interview / focus group / consultation being audio recorded and I agree to this	☐	☐
5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications	☐	☐
6. I agree that an anonymised data set, gathered for this study may be stored in a specialist data centre/repository relevant to this subject area for future research	☐	☐

[redacted]	8 November 2022	[redacted]
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Mike Livingstone		M. Livingstone
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 7: Privacy notice for research participants

Researcher: Mike Livingstone

This Privacy Notice provides information on how Oxford Brookes University (Oxford Brookes) collects and uses participant's personal information when you take part in one of our research projects. Please refer to the research Participant Information Sheet for further details about the study and what information will be collected about you and how it will be used.

Oxford Brookes is the Data Controller of any data that you supply for this research. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it lawfully. We will make the decisions on how your data is used and for what reasons.

Why do we need your data?

The data is needed to explore the meaningfulness and practical utility of Kurt Lewin's concept of the *life space* in order to develop a framework to assist coaches in one to one executive coaching.

Oxford Brookes' legal basis for collecting this data is:

The research and collection of the data has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee on 15th December 2021, Oxford Brookes University number 2161016.

Your consent is an ethical requirement.

Oxford Brookes University's legal basis for processing your Personal Data (or information) is as set out in Art 6 UK GDPR.

What type of personal data will Oxford Brookes use?

No personal or identifying data will be collected or stored. Participants are however informed that the confidentiality of the information they provide can only be protected within the limitations of the law -i.e. it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

Who will Oxford Brookes share your data with?

The results of the study will form the research part of a doctoral thesis for the award of Doctor of Coaching and Mentoring. This is a professional doctorate and the thesis will be stored and accessible to you at the University Library once it is approved and published. The summary of research findings will be shared with participants, the doctorate supervising community, other coaching researchers, and those with an interest in coaching development and practice.

The data generated by the research in all forms, written and electronically recorded, will be securely stored for ten years after the conclusion of the research project in accordance with the University policy on academic integrity. The data that is stored electronically will be either securely encrypted or stored securely in Arkivum, for which the University has a security agreement. The audio recordings of the interviews will be permanently deleted within six months of transcription.

Will Oxford Brookes transfer my data outside of the UK?

No.

What rights do I have regarding my data that Oxford Brookes holds?

• You have the right to be informed about what data will be collected and how this will be used

• You have the right of access to your data

• You have the right to correct data if it is wrong

• You have the right to ask for your data to be deleted

• You have the right to restrict use of the data we hold about you

• You have the right to data portability

• You have the right to object to Oxford Brookes using your data

• You have rights in relation to using your data in automated decision making and profiling.

Your rights will depend on the legal ground used to process your data.

Where did Oxford Brookes source my data from?

The data is coming from research participants who have volunteered to take part in the research and they have given informed written consent for the data to be used and stored in accordance with the terms of this privacy notice.

Are there any consequences of not providing the requested data?

There are no consequences of not providing data for this research. It is purely voluntary. If you like to withdraw part way through the research, the Participant Information Sheet includes this information. It may be that some of the data that you have provided has already been used in the research. If you would like more information about this, you should feel free to contact the research team.

Will there be any automated decision making using my data?

There will be no use of automated decision making in scope of UK Data Protection and Privacy legislation.

How long will Oxford Brookes keep your data?

In line with Oxford Brookes policies data generated in the course of research must be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years in accordance with the research funder or University policy.

Who can I contact if I have concerns?

In the event of any questions about the research study, please contact the research team in the first instance. Their contact details are listed on the Participant Information Sheet. If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee at ethics@brookes.ac.uk. For further details about information use contact the Information Security Management team on info.sec@brookes.ac.uk or the Data Protection Officer at brookesdpo@brookes.ac.uk. You can also contact the Information Commissioner's Office via their website ico.org.uk.

Appendix 8: Interview guide and questions

November 2021

Introductory Remarks

Thank you for taking part in the interview.

As outlined in the PIS the information you provide is confidential. All the information will be anonymised so you, your clients and the organisations they work for cannot be identified.

The PIS details how the information will be stored and for how long, as well as providing information on the aim and purpose of the research, why you have been invited to take part, and what this involves. Do you have any questions or concerns?

Stage One: Beginning Questions

Could you tell me about your coaching practice and how you describe the way you work in one to one executive coaching sessions?

How would you describe the paradigm or coaching dynamic you work from in these sessions?

What do you make of the idea of the client in relation to their environment at the time of and during coaching being important to what happens in your coaching?

Lewin argued that the life space is a function of the person in their momentary environment and that the life space determines why people behave as they do at a particular time in a particular situation.

What do you make of this? Can you think of any examples where this phenomenon or something similar has been present in your coaching?

Stage Two: Fieldwork Map Figures 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6

Each figure discussed individually and sequentially

What is your response to this map?

What, if anything, does it mean for you and how you coach?

Which parts of the map resonated and why? What was unhelpful, missing, in need of greater emphasis or greater clarity and why? How would you change or develop the map?

Is there anything you would add to the model?

Is there anything you would adjust in the model?

Is there anything you would remove from the model?

The Fieldwork Map as a Whole

In thinking about paradigms for one to one executive coaching practice what are your thoughts and feelings about the model of the life space as represented in these figures?

Have we covered all you wanted to say about the topic? If not, what else would you like to cover?

Ending Questions/Feedback in the interview

How did you find the experience of discussing the life space?

What aspects did you like, feel ambivalent about or dislike?

Do you have any suggestions about how the interview might be improved?

The zoom interview has been audio recorded and will be transcribed. The zoom recording will then be erased/deleted.

Would you like a handwritten copy of the transcript so you can check it is an accurate record of our interview?

Finally, do you have any questions or concerns?

Thank You.

Appendix 9: Extract from interview transcript

Coach 4

13 February 2023

Zoom

Stage One

Could you tell me about your coaching practice and how you describe the way you work in one to one executive coaching sessions?

I am a business and executive coach, so I work one-to-one with senior people in the public and private sector. I see my role to support and challenge and to connect the client to their own capacity to find solutions, so I am a coach who raises self-awareness to connect folk with their efficacy, their latent power. I work with what might be getting in the way of this, maybe how the client gets in the way of themselves. Is that enough? I can go on.

No, that's great thanks. So, in light of what you have said, how would you describe the, your coaching dynamic about how you work from in these sessions?

Well, I see myself as an existential coach. By this I mean working with people around the big questions of meaning, calling, some of the big issues about being alive in the world. As you know I am a fan of Heidegger and how people make their own sense of their world, their place in it and what they can and cannot do. From a psychological point of view I am probably Gestalt, raising awareness, looking for patterns of beliefs and patterns in behaviour, reflecting these back, noticing what I see, looking for fixed-gestalts, blockers, inhibitors, working very much in the present. Pretty person-centered but very aware of the power of people's context and its impact. I have worked with people in great organisational cultures and toxic cultures so you can see the huge effect these have.

So this takes me on to my next question, which you have started to answer, or maybe answered already, what do you make of the idea of the client in relation to their environment at the time of and during coaching being and how and why for you is this important to what happens in your coaching? As I know you know, Lewin argued that the life space is a function of the person in their momentary environment and that the life space will determine why people behave as they do at a particular time in a particular situation. So, what do you make of this?

So I think the life space is really important, it invites me to consider the whole of the person's life, all the circumstances of somebody's life, the wider environment if you like, and I thinks it's err kind of easy with psychological mindedness to focus just on the individual, their inner world, and lose the significance of the surroundings if you like. So I think it's a really key notion and it's really easy to let it become the ground rather than figural, so to speak. I think it's vital. I like the phrase "*coaching with the life space in mind"* because it speaks to me in a short and simple way about a lot of what I do as an executive coach. How I work with the person in their system or field. It is a term and a concept I can see myself using.

Can you think of any examples where this phenomenon or something similar has been present in your coaching?

I have thought and written about the life space of the coaching relationship as you know. It's how the coaching relationship is a life space of itself created by the coach and client – something new emerging that could not have been created without the interaction. I have always thought about coaching with the system in mind or the field but never about coaching with the life space in mind although this has an attraction. It's simple nice language and captures something nice about being alert to the relationship between the client and what is going on for them in relation to their context, what sense they are making of this. I think we will go on to discuss more of this. Is that enough for now?

Yes, it's a nice link to me introducing the four parts of the map, each in turn. Just hang on while I get Part A on the screen.

Stage Two

Figure 4.3 – Onion Ring

So looking at this part, part A. Have a read and let me have your reaction about what it means, if anything, to you.

It's an onion ring. I get it and assume it's a sort of straw man – it will be different for different clients. I suppose I have always thought of the life space as a term that enables us to capture something about the situation and the person in it from their perspective in a naturalistic, real-life way. The life space has a messy, dynamic and ever-changing feel for me, somebody else in the same situation will have a different experience, a different life space. The boundaries in the onion ring of the map will be distributed in different ways for each person and at different times. It's personal *and* individual with one persons' balance not the same as another persons' balance in their life.

You introduce this notion of balance, can you say more?

Yes, well for me coaching is about balance – is the client healthy in their life, their work life. As the onion ring says, you cannot and should not separate out these aspects. For me whatever the right balance is in a person, in their life space, is personal to them. I coach people whose onion ring of work is massive compared to other aspects and this might be ok for them now, it might not. That's why, in a way, I suppose any diagram of this slightly illusive phenomena is inevitably reductive and over-simplified. I get what it's trying to say about how I work with all of these dimensions of the client. Where it is meaningful and useful is that the map leads me to think about how I might attend to what life is like for this person in away that is more immediate than field or system, or force field. Actually as we speak using the term life space strikes me as a lovely, different and intimate way of bringing in the notion of system or field, it's a personal gateway into their

experience, their life, the space we are sharing, that invites them to connect with their experience.

This onion ring captures but misses some of the naturalistic, sort of dynamic, ever-changing and complex quality but it brings to mind an awareness of the complex nature of coaching when you take into account not just the inner-game of the client but their context and how they are responding to it, interacting with it, all of which is very particular to them, not really generalisable.

This discussion and this map speaks to this for me and as I say, I like it much more than "what's in the field" or "what is the system doing here" both of which don't feel as lively, life-like or, for that matter spacious. These terms mean nothing to most clients whereas as introducing the idea of their life space sounds much more immediate, connecting and personal. What's this ring "being in their world" about?

What if anything does it mean to you?

Not sure. Unlike the other rings it doesn't really point at or to anything. You have it there for a reason I am sure. I take it to mean the client as connected to and part of the wider phenomenon of being alive maybe. I don't know – is it as big as our relationship and co-dependency with nature, technology, geo-politics, economics or climate-change? It's vague, it needs to be there but maybe needs greater clarity to enhance its meaning. For me, work, family, friends are not the entire nature of what we as coaches work with. There is this more nebulous phenomenon of the world, global events, particularly for executives with the interconnected world-wide web but also as a species, as parents worrying about climate change, pandemics. They are all part of the life space less or more prominent at different times. This is the same for the coach as well as the client. I am in my world and this conversation about the life space, my life space, has a sort of immediate, real and human quality to thinking about the psychological reality of the coach at the time of and during coaching. On a less serious but real note I know my needs at the time of coaching, my life space, affects my coaching. It's not about climate change or the pandemic, it's smaller but what comes to mind is a recent coaching session where I was very mindful of

how important a client this organisation was for me and how I was with wanting to feel as though I had worked hard and done well to feel assured more work would follow. I have a mortgage, kids and am self-employed. OI suppose there was a bit of a tension for me between meeting these personal needs and my professionalism to work to meet the needs of the client and that this was in the “field”, the life space of the coaching process. Maybe working with the life space in mind helps me tune into myself, what am I with, am I with a tension and what does this tell me is needed here, now? Anyway, I have gone off at a tangent, where were we?

No not at all, I am interested in your idea of the life space of the coach and, if I have understood you correctly, it’s presence and possible impact on the coaching session.

Please say more if you want.

Appendix 10: Wall chart – the synthesis of data

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