The Evolution of Coaching; patterns, icons and freedom

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Abstract

Recent explosions in the range of 'people-development' disciplines are necessitating a *post hoc* task of classification. Whilst inductive and historical methods can be used to trace the distinctions between coaching, counselling, mentoring, therapy etc, they misrepresent crucial aspects of each. Here a conceptual model, 'personal ecology', is offered which accounts for this industry diversity in more fundamental patterns of human relating. The model looks at three core components of human relating, empathy, logic and control, and how these interact to give eight fundamental categories of 'people development'. This model suggests a more dynamic and fluid approach to inter-disciplinary relations, as well as a means by which practitioners can understand how and why they move from the approaches of discipline to another.

Key words:
Evolution, Taxonomy, Personal ecology, Mobility, Coaching signature

Introduction
A great deal of ink is being spilt on the differences between coaching, counselling, mentoring, therapy, supervision and consultancy. The issue is one of certain taxonomic importance, since any discipline needs to be able to define its unique characteristics in contrast to others. The entire 'people development' industry is going through a great evolutionary flowering, a rapid diversification of disciplines previously undifferentiated or even non-existent. Coaching itself has only been recognised within the last fifteen years; life coaching even more recently; counselling has the long history of all of twice that! This article concerns, primarily, the emerging distinctions between these disciplines.

Drawing on relevant literature, I will suggest three approaches we might take to the classification; one inductive, another historical and a third, conceptual. I will offer some evaluation of each; in particular I will outline the underlying model of the conceptual approach that is called 'personal ecology'. Using results from use with over 500 individuals between 2002-4, I will suggest that the Personal Ecology Profile (PEP) is a more promising model from a practitioner standpoint, as it fosters key coaching practices such as mobility and self-awareness.

Classifying the people development industry
'Kinds of people-development work' have not and would not emerge as neatly defined, classified and discreet disciplines. Rather, they fight their way out, struggling with proto-definitions, *ad hoc* descriptions and the general huff and puff of children attempting to mark out their ground in the playground; counselling from therapy, coaching from counselling, life-coaching from coaching etc…. There's plenty of hyperbole, plenty of territorialism and inevitable adolescent posturing. The older 'parent' species regard the new with suspicion and sometimes paternalism; the new

overstate their difference to bolster their insecurity. Professional pride and the raw pressures of market economics add 'edge' to the debate

The inductive approach

As with every taxonomic explosion, the classification of new species and genera is highly important and is always something of a 'catch-up' operation; it tends to proceed in one of three ways: inductively, historically or conceptually. The inductive approach is where the observable characteristics of the disciplines are carefully measured and then used to generate a schema to represent the relationships. Thus shared characteristics locate disciplines more closely to one another and unique characteristics locate them as discreet.

If we approach the emerging situation this way, we come up with a bifurcating diagram representing professional strands within the overall 'people development industry' (Diagram 1).

This scheme has both accuracies and inaccuracies. For example, it manages to express the similarity between mentoring and supervision; both involve 'another' (mentor or supervisor) bringing their experience and wider perspective as the core resource to the relationship; supervisor and mentor share *themselves*. However, it forces a false and over-rigid distinction between therapy and counselling; whilst broadly speaking therapy is focusing on the problem and counselling focusing on the person, both therapists and counsellors would acknowledge that the two are always highly intertwined. Likewise, the separation of coaching from counselling and consultancy does not accurately reflect that much coaching involves elements of all three, in differing degrees.

The bifurcating model reflects the iconic structure of evolving species according to a neo-Darwinian scheme[1]. Fanning out from a single originating trunk, the scheme has been used for over a century to illustrate how our entire biological diversity has evolved from a single-celled protozoan ancestor (Doolittle 1999) . This schema is however, ultimately an imposition upon our 'coaching taxonomy'. Unlike reptiles and mammals, the origins of the evolution of different kinds of people intervention cannot usually be traced to 'singular moments in history', or to a genetic switch, or along independent and discreet evolutionary lines. Consider the emergence of coaching, for example; the pioneers of coaching drew on their own insights from a range of professional disciplines- often their own backgrounds: psychotherapy, education, science, sports, business consultancy. The idea of 'coaching' *per se* as a discreet discipline was an emergent one in the early 1980s, as a common set of ideas began to slowly coalesce. The same could be said of counselling, emerging in the 1960s from the fields of therapy, pastoral care and broader healthcare practices. Therapy too, emerged through Freud from the older Victorian practice of neurology, which in itself was a diversification of medicine. The division of therapy from the medical profession remains to this day one that the British and American medical communities differ on, with American therapists requiring to be medically trained.

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[1] For an interesting web based introduction to biological taxonomy visit
http://tolweb.org/tree/phylogeny.html
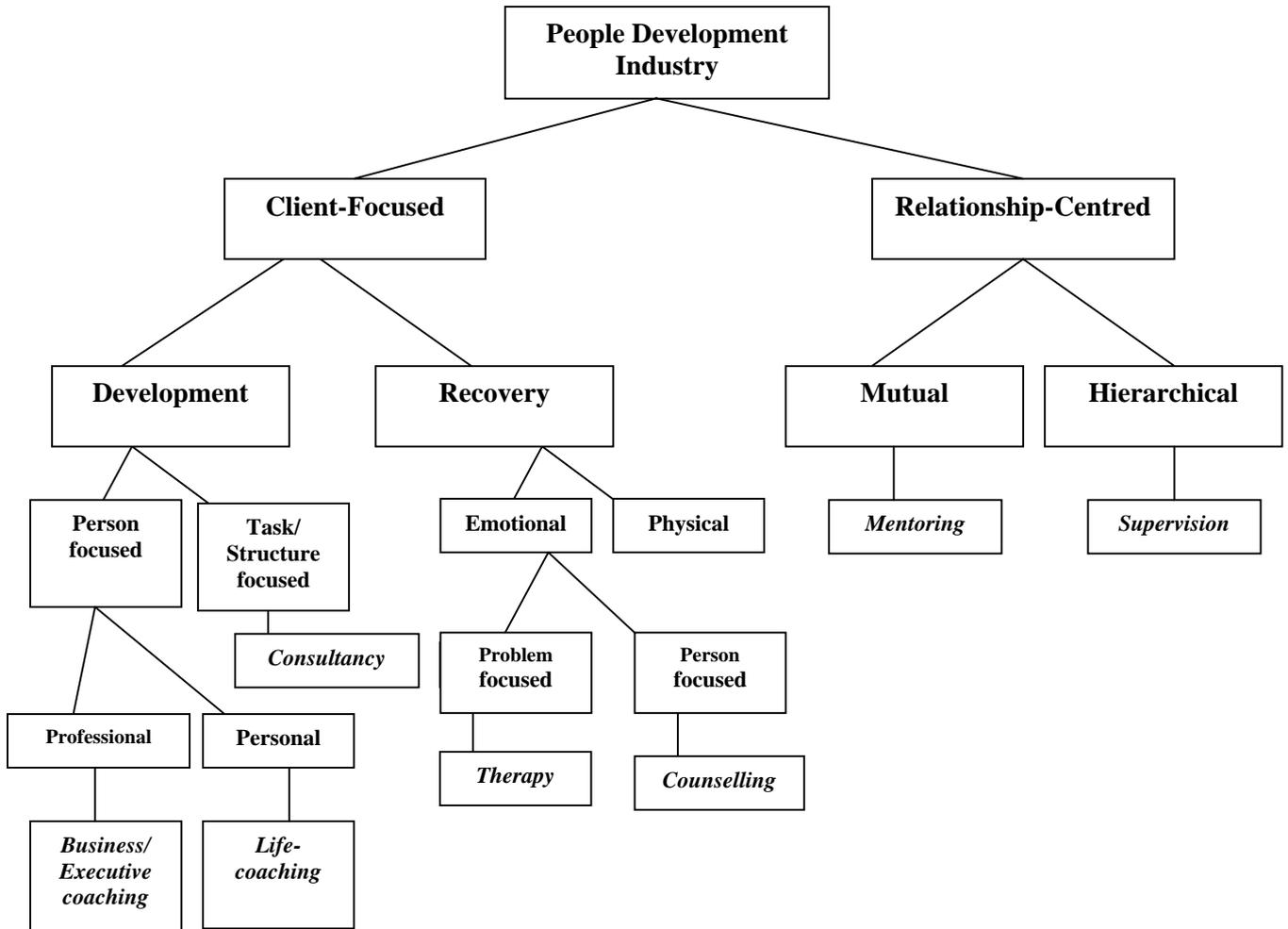
Diagram 1: Inductive classification of people development industry

The bifurcating scheme, whilst helpful in some respects misrepresents the fluid and dynamic emergence of people disciplines (or any discipline for that matter). It suggests that there is some fundamental, historical and inherent change at the moment of bifurcation, which in reality is often not the case. On the contrary patterns emerge which are recognised and labelled as discreet only later, *post hoc*, as a means of organising the new terrain.

One of the reasons that such an iconic 'Darwinian taxonomy' may appeal to people-practitioners is lack of confidence. It feels more secure to be able to formally define why you are different from another discipline in an almost genetic fashion. As biologists have learned, the ability to label differences in our genetic origins has made them the masters of the contemporary universe. Many of us who work in the messy world of people's lives and behaviours envy them their clarity of operation and consequent power of influence.

The historical approach

The second approach to the classification that we might take is to be historical. Historical precedent can be easily represented in a time line as shown below.

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                        Medicine, neurology
                              1850s

   Therapy c. 1900
                                          Management
                                          Consultancy c. 1930

           Counselling c.
               1960
                                                  Mentoring c.
                                                     1970
    Supervision

              Supervision      Coaching
               c. 1980s         c. 1980
                                                              Supervision

                                         2000    Life Coaching
                                                    c. 1990
                    Supervision

                                                   Supervision ?
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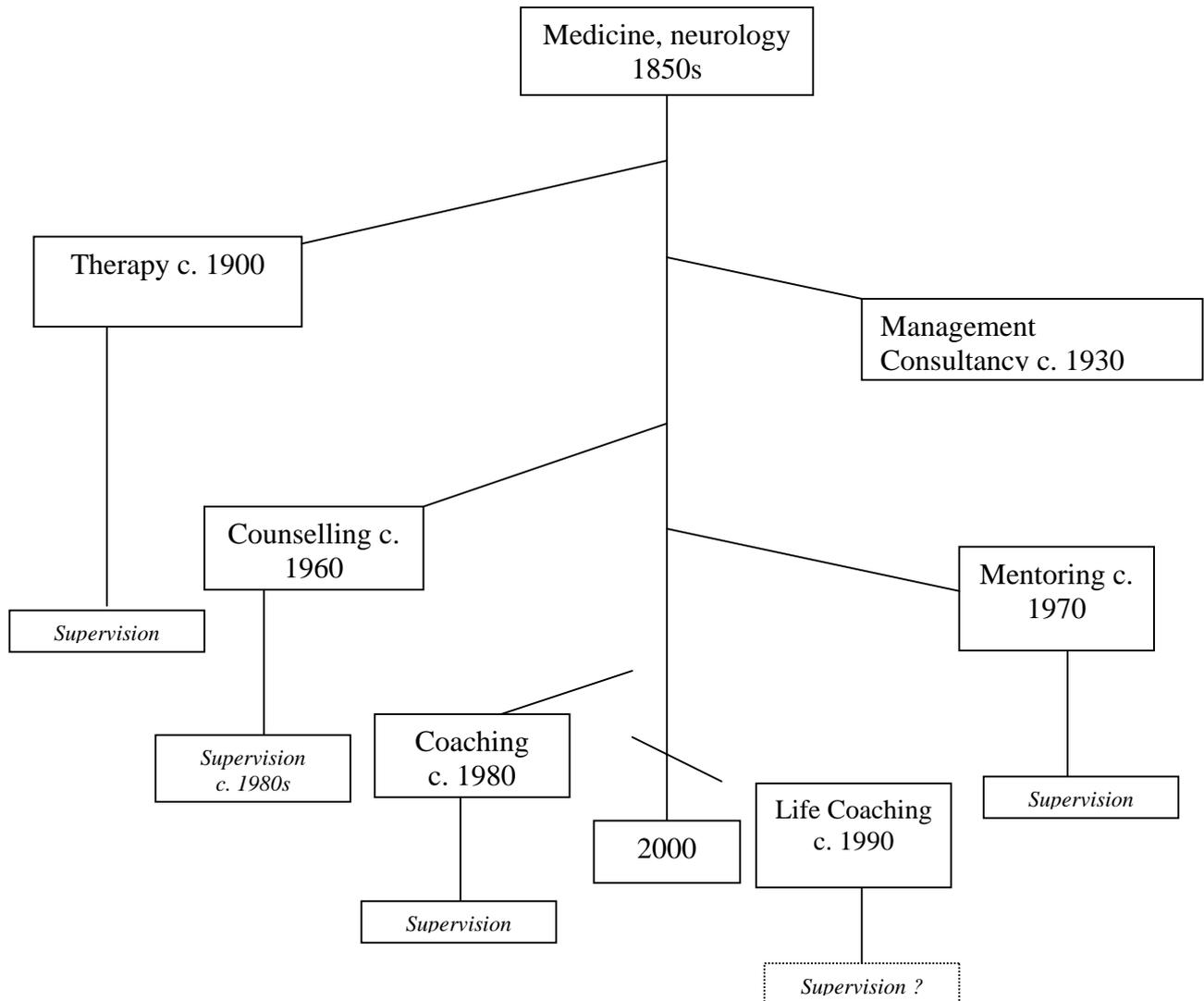
Diagram 2: An historical classification

Once again, this (highly simplified) scheme has both accuracies and inaccuracies. It helpfully highlights the priority of origin of the therapeutic field, lying as the grandfather behind all of the other, later disciplines. It also alludes to the fact that therapy itself is part of a much longer and older tradition of healthcare, traced back to Hippocrates but running throughout ancient times, medieval civilisation and the renaissance, which has only recently become atomised into the separate care of body, mind and soul as a consequence of the eighteenth century enlightenment.

Moreover, it helps to see in perspective some of the current issues surrounding the burgeoning coaching industry; the urgent need for supervision and accreditation, which the older disciplines have had in place for some years; and the even more

worrying unregulated spread of the life-coaching market which, interestingly, appears to be exhibit something of a return to much earlier primitive, pre-modern approaches to well-being - unregulated soothsayers, shamans, gurus and quacks. Regress rather than progress.

However, it fails to show what actually constitutes the difference between any of the fields. For instance, why is the therapeutic tradition distinct from the mentoring? What makes counselling different from coaching. As a bald statement of emergent historical reality, it is helpful. As a method for understanding the reality of industry structure it is somewhat limited.

A conceptual approach
Both the inductive and the historical classifications fail in their ability to offer an overarching model or construct within which to make sense of the divisions. The conceptual approach attempts to do just that. Rather than considering the origins historically or the patterns professionally, the conceptual approach seeks to take a more fundamental stance; what is at the root of the human interactions which has therefore driven the diversification into this pattern? This is a Popperian hypothetico-deductive approach (Popper 1959), which postulates a theory and then sets out to test it against the evidence. It makes predictions and tries to tear them down. In this case, the hypothesis is that the people development industry has evolved as *a representation of the expected range of human interactions.* In other words, using a general model, which accounts for the kind of human interactions that can be made, we can predict the range and type of people development interventions (and therefore, industry) that will emerge.

Personal Ecology
This conceptual approach is one that draws upon recent constructionist accounts of human formation and has been called by the author **'personal ecology'**. Unlike Bronfenbrenner's notion of ecological systems (1992), 'personal ecology' is less concerned about the outer environment of a person and more concerned about their inner psychological drivers. The model suggests that human behaviour is a consequence of the way we 'manage the space' between ourselves and others. In other words, rather than thinking of the person as bounded by their skin, this concept sees people as the unique set of relationships that they inhabit in the world; thus the air becomes 'thick', occupied by persons extending into the world.

Within this idea then, individuals are seen as managers of their 'personal ecology'- the dynamic, ever-fluctuating matrix of relationships they construct around themselves. We can predict therefore, that humans will both require and have developed suitable cognitive capabilities by which to manage the characteristics of their 'ecologies' effectively. There are seven such capabilities identified in the 'personal ecology' model as outlined in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Seven Capabilities of Personal Ecology

	Capability	Description
1.	*Impression Management*	The capability to both present and hide aspects of oneself, for the benefit of the (social) audience.
2.	*Self Expansion*	The capability to expand one's world and embrace change
3.	*Self definition*	The capability to distinguish and define oneself from others
4.	*Trust*	The capability to predict the trustworthiness of another
5.	*Empathy*	The capability to stand alongside another
6.	*Logic*	The capability to make sense of emotional and factual data
7.	*Control*	The capability to take responsibility for future circumstances

Whilst the model suggests that there are seven primary capabilities required for this managed ecological space, *three* of these appear to have a very direct bearing of the issues in hand – i.e. the diversification of kinds of people-development activity: *empathy, logic and control*. The reason for this is that the capabilities of empathy, logic and control are directly related to the cognitive and influencing character of people-development work.

Empathy:
Firstly, empathy, which within the model of personal ecology is closely related to proximity. Empathy is the distance an individual seeks to establish between themselves and another person. So, a highly empathic person is one who seeks highly proximate relationships- close attachments. This in turn leads to a high ability to 'see things from other people's perspective'; to stand in their shoes; along with an inevitable strongly personal involvement in any action or work they conduct. Low empathy (or high evaluation) on the other hand, indicates detachment, a desire to manage relationship from a distance. This results in a greater ability to stand apart from a situation, to see things more neutrally and an intentional desire to see things and people more as object than subject.

High empathy

A close proximity within one's personal ecology
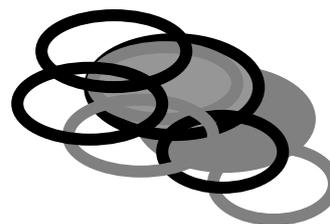
Low empathy

*A remote proximity within one's personal ecology*
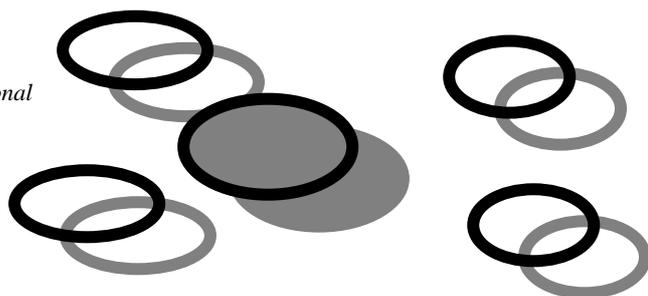
Diagram 3: Empathy

Forming (high connectivity)- *Seeing the connections between people/things*
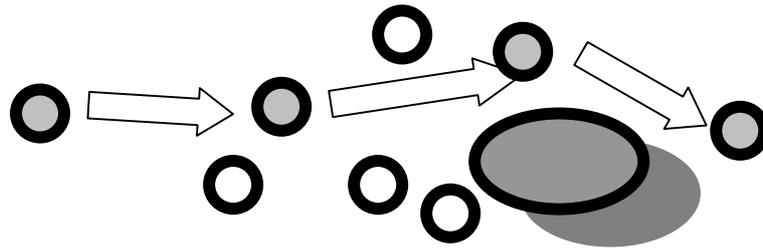
**Ordering (low connectivity)**- *Seeing the things themselves*
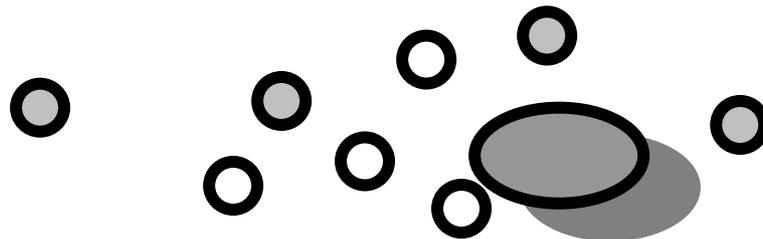
Diagram 4: Logic

Logic

Logic, within the model, is the ability to make sense out of the experiences we have. It is closely related to information processing. Primarily then, it is about pattern recognition - our ability to relate new experiences in the space around us to previous experiences and thereby make sense of them. High connectivity (or forming) indicates a tendency to scan the space in front of us in a generalist way, seeking overarching patterns and relationships but overlooking details. This leads to a tendency to form conclusions quickly, to pick up the meanings behind the experience and to 'see ahead of the game'. Low connectivity (or ordering) indicates an attention to the texture and detail of the experience around us. A more careful, linear and methodical approach to drawing conclusions.

Control

Control, within the model, is the need an individual has to manage the experiences that are occurring around them. It is strongly related to trust and responsibility. High control indicates a high desire to take responsibility for the space around one and low trust of others to do so. It leads to a desire to have things planned and within one's 'power' rather than leaving another to take responsibility for the outcome. Control can be thought of as a 'spatial grid', which therefore constrains the possible parameters of 'the other's' behaviour thereby making the future more predict able. Low control indicates a higher desire to trust the other person to take responsibility for the space; it is more responsive and process rather than outcome orientated.

Outcome (High control) *- Taking responsibility for the behaviour of others*
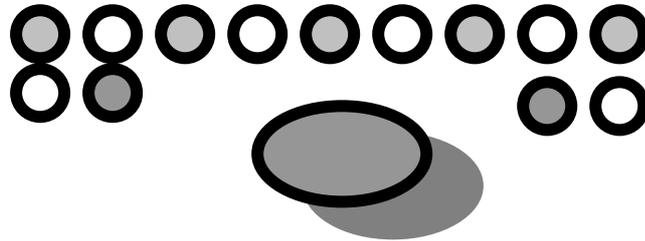
Process (Low control)*- Allowing others to take responsibility for themselves*
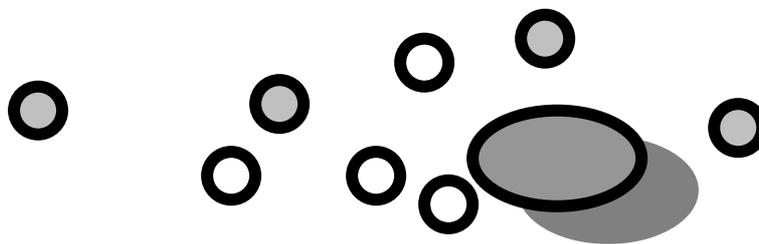
Diagram 5: Control

Empathy, logic and control, as linear scales within the personal ecology model, describe three important capabilities each one of us hone during life. However, those of us in the people-development industry will have, in particular, honed specific abilities relevant for our work. For example, a coach may have honed their ability to help others *take control* of their situation. A consultant may have honed their ability to understand the *logical processes* in a situation. A therapist may have honed their ability to tune into the *emotional texture* of their clients responses.

Diagram 6.   An interdisciplinary model of people development

Evaluating combined with *Outcome focus*

Empathising combined with *Outcome focus*

VFT
Performance coaching
Problem solving, systems and goals orientated, solutions focused. Goal orientated. Enjoys improving and changing existing structures or developing new ones. Drawn to performance coaching/ consultancy

MFT
Emotions Coaching
Positive, insightful and intuitive. Forward-looking and solutions orientated. Creates emotional bond, enjoys influence. Finds unresolved ambiguity difficult and likes stimulating ideas. Emotionally needy people drawn to them.

VOT
Systems consultancy
Practical, solutions focused. Usually task centred, seeks to improve level of control and delivery in system. Performance focus. Drawn to situations that need tighter solutions.

MOT
People Caring
Emotionally careful, practical and pastoral. Strongly people centred approach. Sees coaching as 'service'. Need to be emotionally in control. Responds to client need. Drawn to therapeutic or practical models.

MFPr
Therapy
Drawn to emotional complex situations, enjoys exploring inner issues. Focuses on texture of problem more than outcome. Critical of simplistic solutions but enjoys models and therapies.

MOPr
Caring / counselling
Emotionally understanding, patient, attentive, good listening ability. Focuses on person not task and focuses on current situation more than future goals; Drawn to painful situations. Happy to live with ambiguity and not draw conclusions.

VOPr
Analytical consultancy
Procedural, thorough, logical, pragmatic and objective. Problem-solving orientation. Sees things as systems to be looked after, refined and maintained. Drawn to consultancy or organisational design.

VFPr
Thought coaching
Ideas orientated, divergent, problem solving, original in approach. Enjoys exploring innovative possibilities; may be too divergent and unfocused. Weaker on solutions and delivery.

Empathising combined with *Process focus*

Evaluating combined with *Process focus*

Dimensions	*High*	*Low*
Empathy	M - eMpathy. Close proximity to other people	V- eVaulation. Remote proximity to other people
Logic	F- Forming. Sees the connections between people/things	O- Ordering. Sees the things in themselves.
Control	T- outcome. Seeks to manage parameters.	Pr- Process. Seeks to respond to parameters.

An interdisciplinary model:
If we now consider these three capabilities *in combination* we can generate a rich inter-disciplinary model of people development (see Diagram 6). There are eight categories in four quadrants; the eight categories are generated by the combinations of the three scales, *empathy, logic and control-* each bipolar.

Evidence for the existence of the 'personal ecology' concept
Between 2002 and 2004 the personal ecologies of over five hundred individuals in the UK were profiled using the Personal Ecology Profile, or PEP. The PEP is a web-based analysis system that involves a person creating a unique world 'in their mind'. They are prompted to do this by a series of web pages leading them through a set of fixed textual cues. The world they imagine is unique to them- a personal response to some open statements- a unique mental construct. This mental construct is then self-scored, along the seven capabilities already mentioned, including *control, logic and empathy* by a 68 statement questionnaire. The process takes about ten minutes per candidate; an analytical report can then be generated automatically by server-based software subsequently.

What this research has demonstrated is that the mental construct a person creates has close correlations with their actual behaviours. The process is a unique and specific version of the projective hypothesis (Frank 1939). Importantly, it is the only appropriate method by which to profile 'personal ecology'. A conventional test would fail to address the core reality of the model- that a person is best regarded not as an entity bounded by skin, but as a unique space occupied in the world. Research suggests that the only way to 'measure' the character of such a personal space is to 'give it room to express itself', literally, without the 'noise' of the actual world constraining it. The profile represents a pure image or projection of the person's psychological expression and the personal space they see themselves managing around them self.

From this research, people appear to have a stable 'home' in which they are most comfortable (a habitual set of attitudes and behaviours), but are capable of altering or developing this 'home' at different times. The model of personal ecology is best seen as a 'map' which describes the overall landscape of people-relationships and shows the routes needed to be taken in order to move from one area to another. The degree to which an individual is capable and willing to do so varies from person to person.

A few things are worth highlighting from this eight category model.

Firstly, classification: As a model for classifying the people development industry it suggests that the roots of the distinctives lie in the potential patterns of space between two people. People-development is a task that involves the management of encounter between (usually) two people. The model of 'personal ecology' suggests that this encounter has a unique character, which in itself will constitute the character and identity of that client-practitioner relationship.

Thus, for example, the difference between Performance Coaching (in the VFT category) and Therapy (in MFPr) is that the performance coach will remain detached from the person whilst the therapist will establish a more proximate relationship.

Moreover, the performance coach will focus on controlling the outcome of the agenda, whilst the therapist will work more in response to the emergent situation. This will lead to a unique encounter, the output of which will tend to be labelled (in this example) 'therapy' or 'performance coaching'. There are eight kinds of encounter that therefore lead to eight kinds of potential outcomes.

Secondly, coaching signature: The model *describes* possible kinds of intervention, it does not *prescribe* what any one single practitioner will do. So, for example, the performance coach is not fixed in perpetuity in the VFT category. Performance coaching may and perhaps will often involve the performance coach 'roaming' into other categories. Indeed, this is to be expected since people are not fixed entities but are constantly responding to the environment they encounter- managing the space around them. Thus, within the course of their contract, the performance coach may roam into MFT, 'emotions coach' territory at times, or VFPr,' thought coach' territory at others, depending on the needs of the client.

This raises the intriguing idea that a coach can be said to have a 'coaching signature'; *a unique pattern of moves which they are both competent and even habitual making in their coaching relationships.* A coaching signature will reflect the experience, expertise of the coach as well as the type of intervention they engage in. Self-awareness of one's coaching signature could also be thought to be an important aspect of good practice. In a group of ten coaches studied in 2003, each coach was happy to associate with one area of the map and recognise it as their own. However, most could also recognise that there were occasions in which they 'moved' and used other approaches with their clients.

This term itself is also given richness and dynamism by the model, because rather than defining it in static terms as a fixed description, the system allows a coach to monitor the emergence of their dynamic, evolving signature- a harmony played out over time, with each coachee as a new unique orchestral partner, rather than a single melody which gets thumped out repetitively. Such an image sits well with coaching's emphasis on responsive support and emergent learning.

Thirdly, roaming. The model would seem to have value in enabling an individual considering or indeed involved in people-development, to map the dynamic moves they make during a coaching relationship.

One case study of this involved a coach working with client X initially as a personal coach within a business context. Client X was seeking better management of their and other people's emotions. The coach was aware that they were coaching in MFT mode, facilitating the development of new behaviours. Client X was then faced with a pastoral tragedy in his company and looked to his coach to offer support. The coach moved from an MFT style to MOT style, which involved a greater listening, accepting, carrying dimension in this period. This more 'passive' pastoral style was appropriate given the situation, but as things got back to normal a stronger business agenda re-emerged. Client X needed help in strategy for the executive leadership of the company. In response to this, the coach adopted a more VFPr/VFT approach; a more detached, evaluative and conceptual style, enabling the coach to critique ideas and plans, to help the business move beyond its rut and explore strategy. Overall the

coach kept in mind the 'journey' they had made and variety of approaches he had used.

In this story, the coach has made three 'coaching moves' around the model, in response to client needs. They showed considerable mobility in doing so and 'matched' their client's issues as a consequence. Not all coaches would need or have this flexibility or self-awareness.

Fourthly, interdisciplinary relations. The model suggests that, whilst the classification of different disciplines in people-development is a real one, it is more complex and organic than either the inductive or historical schema suggest. It suggests that the different disciplines (coaching, consulting, therapy etc……) are best seen as emergent traditions, which reflect the diversity of human cognition and relating. These traditions become defined and self-reinforcing through processes of cultural definition, canonical formation, practitioner regulation and popular acceptance. The terms themselves, such as therapy or counselling, quickly establish via common usage familiar, embedded and oversimplified linguistic niches. However, the basic, underlying human encounters in which they trade are more closely related and perhaps flexible than might be thought.

In particular, this approach offers a new metaphor or 'icon' for coaching, consulting, therapy etc. Instead of seeing these disciplines as a taxonomic tree, they might be seen as a landscape with many different regions and areas. Indeed, some of the regions of the map may yet to have been fully explored or developed. The coach/counsellor etc, is then the 'guide' who leads their client over the landscape, understanding the overall terrain with their map. Coaches, mentors, counsellors etc inhabit different areas of the terrain, but are not locked in behind walls. Indeed, given their 'guiding' role they are required to be free, and able to bring freedom to their clients who may themselves be locked in a script or rut.

Given that language shapes behaviour, the concept of persons as landscape and coaches as guides, is perhaps an important linguistic metaphor. This may ensure that the overall terrain continues to develop and fragmentation and territoriality is avoided.

Conclusion
In this paper I have presented the three approaches to classifying the people-development industry. Both the inductive and the historical have limitations, not lease in inaccuracies and in encouraging division and fragmentation. A conceptual approach outlined here of Personal Ecology, offers a more integrated model which can represent the distinctions between practices whilst reflecting the mobility practitioners, will often, in reality, exhibit. I have argued indeed, that such mobility, as well as its associated linguistic metaphors, is a vital component of good coaching practice and the healthy development of the discipline as a whole.

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