

How do coaches and clients create and experience a critical thinking environment?

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Abstract

Inspired by my own personal experience and the limited literature regarding critical thinking environments in coaching, this constructivist grounded theory research study aims for the coach to facilitate clients to become critical in their coaching environment and consider what enables that to happen. Critical thinking has been described as a core competency and skill that is needed in today's leaders in organisations where there is constant and rapid change. A deficiency in critical thinking skills in coaches, in turn creates consequences for individuals as well as organisations themselves, as a deficiency of critical thinking skills transforms into a lack of ability to lead others. In answering this challenge both educators and employers are appealing for the development of critical thinking skills. To survive in the current age, people need to ask questions as well as challenge assumptions and find innovative ways to solve problems. Constructivist grounded theory methodology for this research offers a systematic and rigorous method for the data collection and analysis, allowing for the construction of a theory that is grounded in participants' views and experiences. Two sources of data were identified for this study, coaches and clients through a total of 40 interviews. The narratives of these experiences were used to develop a theoretical framework which conceptualised their experiences, and applied constructivist grounded theory coding cycles and strategies which identified, compared and connected different categories. The findings from this empirical research show a framework that is original and will guide coaches and business leaders to experience and create a critical thinking environment in coaching. The framework shows three elements that come together to create a critical thinking environment between the coach and client. Contracting – Establishing the relationship, Thinking space – Deepening the relationship and Physical environment – Situating the relationship. This framework can be used to raise awareness, deepen learning, and generate responsibility and building self-belief in the client by considering how to create a critical thinking environment in a coaching relationship.

Keywords: critical thinking, thinking environments, mental space, thinking space, physical environment, coaching, constructivist grounded theory

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the gap which exists between critical thinking and coaching. This involves a review of critical thinking, a term widely used to describe thinking effectiveness and which, to date, appears to be absent from the vocabulary of coaching. To explore this phenomenon, I investigate thinking environments, including Kline's (1999) thinking environment model. The research challenge is to use field research to explore the interdependence of the clients critical thinking in coaching, and to examine why this is important for the coaching profession and the corporate world, both of which seek the help of coaches.

Critical thinking appears in the coaching literature as an activity that should be part of a coach's toolkit and an element of their professional practice. The aim of coaching in this context is for the coach to facilitate clients to become critical thinkers in their coaching environment and consider what enables that to happen. Critical thinking consists of competencies and a set of skills that incorporate a person's capability to make decisions by analysing and exploring issues, evaluating the options that are available, identifying and understanding the existence of assumptions, and reaching a conclusion on the basis of evidence and reasoning (Walker & Diaz, 2003).

Critical thinking has been described as a required competency and needed skill by today's leaders in organisations, where rapid change is constant (Catchings, 2015). A deficiency in organisations not having critical thinking skills in employees, creates consequences for individuals and organisations (Catchings, 2015). Furthermore, Flores (2012) argues that a scarcity of critical thinking skills results in a lack of ability to lead others. In addition, the idea of slowing down to stop and think to produce better outcomes can often feel

counterintuitive, particularly where people are paid to produce results quickly and deadlines are the norm. It could be argued that the need for speed and results evolved as the result of the industrial age (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2003), with corporate language such as streamlining, centralising, outputs, and so on. Given the need to develop the skills required to be productive in a world that is rapidly changing, critical thinking has been described as a core competency needed on the part of today's leaders. In answering this challenge both educators and employers are demanding that critical thinking skills are developed (Davis & Botkin, 1995; Brookfield, 1987). These authors claimed that, to endure and survive in the current age, people need to ask questions as well as challenge assumptions and find ways to solve problems. That said, there seems to be too few arguments concerning the value and efficacy of specific interventions in critical thinking (McPeck, 2017), and thus the challenge appears to lie in the absence of agreement among researchers concerning what the concept of critical thinking actually is and the different terms used in this field of research.

By considering critical thinking and the conditions that create thinking environments in coaching, it is possible that coaches do create critical thinking environments, but these are not identified or named as such, apart from Kline's thinking environment model and the frequent reference to the importance of reflection in coaching texts. Kline's (1999) thinking environment approach has also been used for coaching supervision.

1.1 Motivation for the study

I have been coaching internal clients in the workplace for the past 17 years, where I have worked in financial and professional services. Through this experience, I started to understand the need to create the space for leaders to reflect and think for themselves in a

safe environment. I work in the human resources sector and have seen first-hand the dire consequences of poor decisions made by leaders in the workplace.

I first experienced the use of thinking environments during my master's in coaching at Henley Business School in 2013 and was struck by the power of the the approach developed by Kline (1999). I have since experienced a number of Kline's training sessions and remain fascinated by the 'thinking environment'. The first coaching session I experienced may be described as an 'aha!' moment (Napier, 2010) as I found that I could really think for myself in the moment, resulting in a feeling of clarity. This memory remains vivid today.

As a coach, my research interest is in the client's innate ability to think for themselves. This study examines the micro aspects of the thinking that takes place between the coach and client before, during, and after a coaching conversation. Alongside the elements of listening, questioning, clarifying, reflecting, and challenging, thinking is also one of the gaps that researchers argue has yet to be studied well (Fillery-Travis & Cox, 2014, p. 453). In addition, I selected constructivist grounded theory as the methodology for this research because it offers a systematic and rigorous approach for the collection of data and analysis. The constructivist epistemology chimes with my own perception of meaning making as constructed and interpreted. This methodology allows for the construction of a theory that is grounded in participants' views and experiences, which lends itself well to this research given that it focuses on the field of coaching for both coaches and clients.

As I complete my doctoral studies in coaching and mentoring, it is striking to note that critical thinking does not appear in the course design of any of the learning I have undertaken, and yet it is critical thinking that underpins the thinking rigour of good research (Wegerif et al., 2015).

Taking Kline's (1999) thinking environment work a stage further, this research examines the thinking environment through the lens of critical thinking; this approach allows this study to offer new insights to consumers of corporate coaching who seek to improve outcomes and business performance.

My intention is to conduct research that contributes to the practice of implementing a critical thinking environment and to improve outcomes for the professional practice of coaching to enhance thinking.

1.2 Aim and objectives

The aim of this research is to understand how coaches and clients create and experience a critical thinking environment in coaching. Within this thesis, I explore thinking environments in coaching and how these are experienced between coach and client. This study also offers the client's perspective, a view seldom considered in the existing literature (Bush, 2004).

Thinking in coaching has simply not been researched in any meaningful way (Fillery-Travis & Cox, 2014). As a practitioner in coaching, I appreciate and understand coaching is developing as both as a profession and an academic discipline (Bachkirova et al., 2014), I intend to produce empirical research that is original and will guide coaches as well as business leaders to really experience and create a critical thinking environment in coaching. Contributing to the literature that makes coaching effective for clients and closing the

identified research gap will not only help me as a coach but also, I hope, help coaches and clients improve their overall experience in coaching.

The overall objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To critically review literature on thinking environments, and review other frameworks and theories including Kline's model;
2. To examine associated research into thinking in coaching, critical thinking, critical reflection, and executive coaching environments, as well as studies that include the use of Kline's model;
3. To conduct empirical research that uncovers coaches' and clients' experiences and perceptions of how a thinking environment is created in coaching sessions;
4. To synthesise the learning into a new theory that can be used to suggest a framework that underpins professional practice of how coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment;
5. To contribute to the understanding and practice of implementing a thinking environment and improve the outcomes of the professional practice of coaching to enhance thinking.

1.3 Overview of literature

To understand what is meant by the creation of a thinking environment, it was important to research literature that helps us understand how coaches and clients experience and create environments in which they (coaches and clients) can think critically. The review reveals that limited empirical research has been conducted in thinking environments in coaching (Bassot & Reid, 2013), although there are some studies within business, healthcare, and education

(Hunter, 2018; Hall, 2013, Blackman, 2006; Anderson & Betz, 2001; Wasylshyn, 2003).

More research that examines thinking environments in coaching is necessary; without stronger theoretical foundations and empirical research to provide sufficient evidence to support thinking environments, it is possible that the concept of this may become nothing more than a passing trend (Feldman & Lankau, 2005).

For more than a century, research in critical thinking in education has attempted to evaluate the efficacy of specific interventions in critical thinking (McPeck, 2017). Despite these efforts, an absence remains of published studies remain on the role of critical thinking in coaching where other kinds of thinking associated with coaching, such as critical reflection, reflection on action and reflection in action are understood and accepted as methods of improving the ways in which people think.

1.3.1 Critical thinking and reflection

In the literature on critical thinking different terminologies are used to describe similar thinking processes. In addition, the literature also indicates that critical thinking, critical reflection, and transformational learning are all question-based models designed to nurture deeper thinking; these concepts are explored in detail in the literature review.

Multidisciplinary research into critical thinking outside of coaching has been substantial, with definitions stemming from educators in the early 1900s through to the present day. Dewey's (1933) early research noted the importance of developing critical thinking skills ('habits of mind') for unravelling problems. More recently, Jiang and Yang (2015) have contended that 'employees with strong critical thinking ability can identify problems from complicated situations, gather relevant information, and create alternative solutions' (p. 1228); their thinking is aligned with that of Walker and Diaz (2003), who argue that critical thinking

consists of a skill set which helps an individual to make decisions by evaluating all of their options and allowing them to recognise the existence of assumptions.

Various views have been adopted to describe critical thinking, including Brookfield's, (1987) reference to the ability to analyse events, understand and reason the origins of situations, where he states 'critical thinking is an activity that identifies and challenges assumptions as well as explores and imagines alternatives' (pp. 15, 229). Further, Price (2004) suggests, critical thinking involves considering the relationship between events themselves and their possible causes and effects. Ennis (1989, p. 152) identifies ideal dispositions for engaging in critical thinking, including being reflectively aware of one's own basic beliefs and being prepared to discover and listen to others' views and reasoning. Whilst Flores and Matkin, (2012) propose that critical thinking encompasses openness to alternative viewpoints as well as introspective reflection. Indeed, reflection is seen as critical to the thinking process (Grossman, 2009), and as Ntuen and Leedom (2007) describe, critical thinking is a structured process which involves reflective thinking on different ideas, perceptions, and beliefs. Similar to reflection, critical thinking involves considering and thinking about what has already happened and what could happen (Clark & Holt, 2001).

Grant (2005) argues that coaches need to have developed critical thinking skills, which give a coach the capability to analyse and construct rigorous and robust arguments and to engage in critical discussion. When coaches become critical thinkers in their coaching practices, they can develop an appreciation and understanding of the assumptions under which they and their clients may think and act (Cox, 2012).

In coaching, the term 'reflection' seems to be overused and thus may have lost its meaning. Perceptions and understandings of the application of reflection are varied, which means that coaches may engage in reflection in various ways (Cropley et al., 2012; Knowles et al., 2006).

Many terms are used to refer to the practice (e.g., reflection, reflective practice, reflective practitioner, and critical reflection); the meanings of these terms may differ and are dependent on the underlying assumptions as well as the context in which they are being used. Both Brookfield (1987) and Mezirow (2000) encourage reflection to enable learning. In coaching, reflection is where clients learn to understand their feelings, beliefs, and assumptions and learn from their mistakes, explore and understand their successes, and thus develop empathy and gain understanding and appreciation (Cox, 2012). Such development is key and is an essential practice for both the client and the coach (Cox, 2012).

Another difficulty in researching reflection in coaching is that it is challenging to separate and analyse the reflective component to test it (Jones, 2021). Few researchers have separated critical thinking from reflection; however, Price, (2004) and Cox, (2012) have both explored reflection as a way to renew contact with experience (Cox, 2012) as a precursor to critical thinking. Using a reflective process, such as content, process and premise reflection (Mezirow, 1991), a model of structured reflection (Johns, 2009), Dye's (2006) iterative 'SOAP' model or phenomenological reflecting (Husserl, 1920; Vermersch, 1999), a coach can work with a client to reflect on an event to gain a deep description and understanding of emotions, themes and structures. Vermersch, (1999) argued that using a reflective process, such as the phenomenological method, enables the client to produce more from the examined event than mere recollection. Thus, reflection provides the basis from which the coach and client go on to deconstruct and reason the origins of situations (Price, 2004). Cox, (2012) states there is a symbiotic relationship between phenomenological reflection and critical thinking. It could be argued from this perspective that reflection describes the issue, whilst thinking critically provides an opportunity to evaluate and redefine values, beliefs and assumptions.

In addition, reflection is not only between coach and client. It has been argued that before engaging in coaching, a coach should reflect on 'self' to surface their own existing values, beliefs and prejudices, so as to not confound the coaching content or direction (Kemp, 2011). Campone (2011) discusses how reflective practice is a critical skill for coaches. Greenfield and Jensen (2010) note that this process demands not only commitment but also ongoing self-reflection.

Unlike critical thinking, the objective of reflection in coaching is for the client to be able to accept the essence or meaning of an experience, as a result of which they can gain an insight. The client may require time to 'sit with' and attempt to 're-live' the experience in critical reflection so they are able to become comfortable with it and accept it as indicating something valuable (Van Manen, 1990). Johns (1994) maintains that reflection should always be coached to prevent meanings from being distorted or twisted out of context. Mezirow (2000) states that when knowledge is supported through dialogue with another it is possible to recognise, for example, patterns of similarity.

As can be seen from this introduction into critical thinking and reflection, through a coaching engagement, a coach can facilitate the client's development of critical skills by challenging the client's assumptions and experiences and providing opportunities for the client to consider a range of different perspectives. However, although reflection and critical thinking involve different levels of thinking, each is dependent on the other. For the coach and client to think critically, they must investigate alternative scenarios and realities (Price, 2004) and observe their values and beliefs, as well as any underlying assumptions (Cox, 2012). The term 'critical thinking' is defined in this research as a thinking process in which the client focuses and decides on what they need to believe or do.

1.3.2 Thinking environments

Researchers have developed various uses for thinking environments. These would include exploring hierarchies in organisations (Schwan, 1997), creating thinking environments in meetings (Havers, 2008), as well as the experience of leadership and power (Dangor, 1994).

The research suggests that people are affected not only by their interactions with other people but also by the environment in which an interaction takes place, whether this be in the office, in the workplace, or out in nature, for example. The term 'thinking environment' is referred to in different contexts, one being Kline's thinking environment model (1999), comprising 10 components, or principles, that the coach and client adhere to. It is now over 20 years since *Time to Think* (Kline, 1999) was published, and despite the popularity and appeal of Kline's model among practitioners, it can be argued that this approach is still not regarded as mainstream in the business world, especially in large organisations. Indeed, the research revealed that Kline's work is not referenced widely within academic literature; however, several electronic databases were reviewed, including Google Scholar, which indicated that 219 authors had cited Kline.

Since the 1970s, Kline claims to have guided many organisations in developing 'thinking environments' that foster thinking that is clear and deep and in turn enhances performance and results (Kline, 1999). Recently a change has transpired in the approach developed by Kline towards a coaching style that promotes bracketing out the coach (with the emphasis on the client) using a set of predetermined questions, this enhances the client's experience, thinking, and learning (Wallis, 2015).

Stout-Rostron (2009) states that there are two kinds of thinking environments: one that is provided by the coach and another that is provided internally, existing in the mind of the

client. Stout-Rostron (2009) agrees with Kline (1999) that both kinds of environments are indeed affected by limited assumptions individually and in society as a whole. Both Kline and Stout-Rostron argue that assumptions are fuelled by our own life experiences and that these assumptions need to be unblocked. These assumptions can be related to the individual, other people, or the systems in which a person works

Stout-Rostron (2019) argues that a coaching conversation results in the development and deepening of the coaching relationship itself. She asserts that this relationship creates a safe thinking environment and helps the client to initiate change. Kline (1999) argues that it is the coach who is keeping his or her attention all together in three different areas. The coach's focal point is on the client's narrative itself (in terms of content); the coach comes to be aware of what his or her are thinking in answer to their client's narrative; and his or her attention enables a thinking environment beneficial for the client.

The thinking environment places the onus on both the coach and the client to be aware of, and take responsibility for, the environment that is created. Although Kline makes no specific reference to critical thinking, her model of a set of questions with a clear sequence share some of the characteristics of critical thinking. It could follow that the thinking environment is a form of critical thinking.

In the literature, there is little emphasis on what transpires between the client and coach within the coaching process (Day et al., 2008), resulting in the coaching relationship only being from the view of the coaches perspective, not that of the client (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Wasylyshyn, 2003). From my own experience as a coach, I feel it is imperative to hear

the voice of the client, as this is just as important as the voice of the coach and hence is also part of this study.

Much of Kline's work has been developed for coaches; she developed the thinking environment model (Kline, 1999) in the mid-1980s. The model comprises 10 behaviours and is ordered around a number of questions, asked in sequence with pauses between each, allowing time for the client to respond. The idea is that the client (thinker) identifies limiting assumptions (beliefs) which, if removed or reframed by means of an incisive question (Kline, 1999), enable fresh thinking to emerge.

Kline has since founded an international coaching business and teaching school called 'Time to Think'. She has also authored several books. Her work has been used in healthcare and education, and she has written a number of reflective studies and papers which explore what is possible when we can create the conditions which encourage freedom of thought. In 2010, Kline proposed that the thinking environment, in terms of both the relevant theory and the actual process, will continue to be refined and explored (Kauffman & Tulpa, 2010). Kline now focuses on the Time to Think faculty and consultants who teach others.

Some coaches are trained and work exclusively using Kline's methods; others use it as part of an integrated approach to their wider practice. Hence, coaches adopt just some aspects of her approach. Furthermore, coaching models can help coaches provide structure to the interaction between the coach and client (Stout-Rostron, 2019). Stout-Rostron also states that models can be experienced as either prescriptive or rigid, a view that was acknowledged in the research results undertaken in terms of Kline's (1999) thinking environment model. The coaching conversation should be about the client, not the coach. If a coaching model is

excessively prescriptive, it may indicate that the coach has his or her own agenda (Stout-Rostron, Van Rensburg & Sampaio, 2009).

Coaching as a practice is growing, and my intention is to conduct research that contributes to the practice of implementing a thinking environment between coach and client and improve outcomes of the professional practice of coaching to enhance thinking.

Thinking environments can be created in a number of different contexts, each of which is defined by language which is unique to that field. At first glance, the models and terminology appear to be unconnected and complex; however, despite different definitions, there is some overlap between each approach in that they are all uniquely designed to nurture thinking – the hallmark of Kline’s work.

1.3.3 Thinking environments and coaching

Stout-Rostron (2009) discusses and outlines professionalisation in the coaching industry, how coaching conversations provide thinking environments, and how business professionals can develop and improve self-awareness and develop an in-depth understanding of who they are – embedding newly acquired skills, competences, and attitudes. These thinking environments are built between the coach and the client, and the true value in coaching is to create an environment where the client is given the freedom to think effectively, present ideas, and feel a sense of equality.

Although I found very little research concerning the physical environment and its impact in terms of where coaching takes place, coaches and clients are affected not only by their interaction but also by the environment in which that interaction takes place, whether in the office or place of work or at a venue outside of the workplace. The environment has an

impact on the people's ability to think, so careful consideration needs to be given to where coaching takes place. The impact our physical environment has on our capacity to create and experience a thinking environment is considered within the research results section of the thesis.

A thinking environment can be described as a system of human behaviours, principles, values, and assumptions that is created using a staged approach with a set questions (Bassot & Reid, 2013; Havers, 2008). An important aspect of this approach is the creation of an environment in coaching where the status of coach and client is equal and where limiting thoughts and beliefs are transformed through a depth of thinking in the coaching session.

In the area of coaching, there is a wealth of literature on the skills and models being used, although this seldom gives a clear and accurate picture of what occurs within the coaching environment itself. In addition, as Cox et al. (2014) outline, to date the research into coaching has mainly been practitioner-led, with the focus being on how coaching works in organisations or situations, not necessarily on the actual content of such sessions. An aim of this research is to provide an informative consideration of which aspects of coaching are the critical elements (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011).

Numerous models have been designed and developed to provide coaches with insight into their impact on the coaching environment. This study considers the conditions that need to be in place to create a thinking environment, as well as whether the rigidity of the models should be considered in this research

1.4 Definitions

1.4.1 Critical thinking

One of the main obstacles to determining how critical thinking is experienced and created in coaching is that there are numerous definitions of critical thinking that come from multiple disciplines. In different academic fields, critical thinking skills are also qualitatively different (Thonney et al., 2019).

The term 'critical thinking' is defined in this research as reflective thinking in which the client focuses and decides on what they need to believe or do (Ennis, 1989, p152).

Brookfield (1987) states that critical thinking is an activity that identifies and challenges assumptions which can be explored with alternative outcomes.

Critical thinking space, for brevity I will also use the term 'thinking space' throughout the thesis, but this will always assume a 'critical thinking space'. As outlined, the nature of Kline's questions in her thinking environment model suggests a critical thinking model, which features a set questions and clear sequencing, this shares characteristics with critical thinking where habitual ways of thinking and acting (limiting thoughts) are transformed through a depth of thinking and uncovering assumptions and then acting differently (Brookfield; 1987). I will throughout the thesis be using the term 'thinking environment' to mean 'critical thinking environment'.

1.4.2. Coaching

Coaching has developed from a multitude of disciplines, and there are many different definitions of the term 'coaching' (Wallis, 2015). Grant (2003) offers a generic coaching definition as a results-orientated, systematic process. The coach assists and enables the

development of life experience and the attainment of goals of the client in their lives.

Building on this, O'Broin and Palmer (2009) argue that coaching is a professional relationship that's collaborative (between the coach and client). In this study, the term 'coaching' is broadly defined as an individualised approach that is flexible to a person's development and accomplishment of goals (Bachkirova, Cox & Clutterbuck, 2010; Bachkirova, 2011).

Throughout this work, the term 'client' refers to the individual who has been coached in a critical thinking environment of some form.

The word 'coach' will refer to the individual that has coached the client and has trained in a thinking environment model of some form.

1.5 Methodology

The philosophy used to underpin this study is constructivist, while the focus is on the application of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2007). This approach seeks to explain why and how individuals behave in particular ways in both comparable and different contexts. In the case of this study, the context is a critical thinking environment.

Constructivist grounded theory gives a voice to participants, and Charmaz (2006) encourages grounded theory researchers to incorporate the many voices and views of participants' interpretations through their lived/living experiences. This is key to determining 'how' people experience and create a thinking environment during coaching. I aimed to identify a research approach that offered an epistemological and ontological fit with my constructivist position. Grounded theory also aims to develop theories from issues

that are relevant to people's everyday lives using comparable data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2007).

Grounded theory helps uncover emergent theory; rather than starting from a perspective based on existing theory and predefined ideas, the theory is realised from data collected in context. There is little theory to draw on in thinking environments, so I examine what is happening on the ground with practitioners and draw theory from their practice. New theoretical understandings can be gained through grounded theory and where a new theory is inadequate or unfinished (Walsh et al., 2015). Constructivist grounded theory was utilised in this research to develop a theoretical framework concerning how a critical thinking environment is created and experienced in a coaching context.

The research focuses on qualitative data collection from coaches and clients, or, as Kline calls them, 'thinking partners' (Kline, 1999), to help expand the academic understanding of how coaches and clients create a thinking environment.

In the initial phase, the participants were purposively sampled (Robson, 2011), with a mix of coaches and clients. The participants completed a number of phases within the study. The first phase of the study began with interviewing 10 coaches and 10 clients while, in phase two, a further 20 interviews were conducted with a further 10 (different) coach and client participants. Participants were selected using theoretical sampling following analysis from the first interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were a method used to gather data in qualitative research and is often used in grounded theory research (Birks & Mills, 2015). As Charmaz (2014) notes, this type of interviewing creates a flexible approach with open spaces where ideas can be created, and issues addressed accordingly.

Three distinct groups of participants were recruited: a) 'Kline disciples', b) 'Kline followers', and c) clients who had experienced a thinking environment in some form. Data was gathered from individuals experienced in the above fields. I noticed that many of the 'Time to Think' coaches (group a) whom I interviewed were self-employed and I felt they may be more loyal to this particular model due to repeat work, or they may not be open to other models. (This assumption on my part is discussed later in Chapter three, four and five). The third group (group c) consists of clients of coaches. They were selected for one of the following reasons: They were clients who had experience of the Kline thinking environment model as part of their coaching or had experience of other tools used to create a thinking environment in some form; either was sufficient for this research. The central aim was to gain rich insights into the coaches and clients' views and actions, as well as to build and develop an understanding of the impact that the physical environment had on the study. This understanding included the phenomena which arose out of the shared experience by what was expressed, felt, happened, and observed through the collection of detailed observations and interviews from the coaches and clients. The aim was to understand the way the coach and clients see the world.

All questions were open-ended to avoid prescribing answers. The interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes and conducted face-to-face where possible or via a video conferencing app (Zoom/Skype), but only the audio component was recorded. The face-to-face or video aspect of Zoom/Skype facilitated the development of rapport, thus encouraging the participants to share their thoughts and views on a thinking environment via personal interaction. Charmaz (2007) would class this approach as going beneath the surface of the conversation.

Initially, participants who could serve as sources of relevant rich data using grounded theory methods were chosen (Charmaz, 2007). Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight (2001) note that purposive sampling is used to select 'supposedly typical or interesting cases' (p. 79). I started the process with purposive sampling by selecting coaches and clients who could provide a relevant source of rich data on Kline's (1999) thinking environments. My theoretical sampling was completed at a later stage to avoid the analytical pitfalls identified by Charmaz (2014) because I was new to this research process.

I utilised Charmaz' coding method of analysis, which involves a staged process. The initial stage of the analysis of interviews is what Charmaz (2014) calls 'initial coding'. I chose the method of line-by-line coding, as recommended by Charmaz (2014) for people new to grounded research, as this allows in-depth, thorough analysis of the data and also reduces the risk of missing concepts and ideas.

I generated many codes on what I deemed the data suggested or implied. The initial and focused coding that was generated reflects the interactions with the participants and the interpretation of the actual data but is not exhaustive. Gathering focused data helps to sharpen and test the research ideas (Charmaz, 2006), which is characteristic of coding analysis in constructivist grounded theory. Throughout the process, there was a comparison of raw data with raw data and then data with codes. The determination of saturation did not depend on the amount of data collected and rather, saturation was determined as having been reached when no new insights emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006).

Using this approach, through this study, I have built and created a theory concerning the use of the thinking environment, thus creating a framework that may help advance the

professional practice of coaching to enhance thinking. This research should also add to the body of literature on thinking environments.

1.6 Structure of this thesis

The thesis presents my journey of addressing the research question and the objectives that were set. The aim of the study was to understand how coaching and clients experience a critical thinking environment in a coaching context. The thesis comprises seven chapters, including this first chapter.

Chapter 2 explores the literature relating to three key areas, critical thinking, thinking environments (particularly critiquing Kline's model), and coaching.

Chapter 3: Methodology. In this chapter I discuss the methodological issues in this study and also presents the process followed for gathering and analysing the data. This qualitative study focuses on how coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment using the constructivist lens, which provides the orientation for the work to be undertaken. The chapter outlines the research method, design, and data collection and analysis.

Chapters 4, 5, & 6: I present in this chapter the findings and analysis of results for: Contracting – Establishing the relationship, presented in Chapter 4. Thinking space – Deepening the relationship, presented in Chapter 5. Physical environment – situating the relationship, presented in Chapter 6.

Chapter 7: Discussion and conclusion. This chapter answers the research question by drawing on the entire thesis. This chapter also identifies the contributions of the research, any limitations, and considerations for further research in this area and my own personal reflections.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter aims to uncover research relating to the research question, namely 'How do coaches and clients create and experience a critical thinking environment'? The literature review focuses on three key areas: critical thinking, thinking environments (particularly critiquing Kline's model), and coaching.

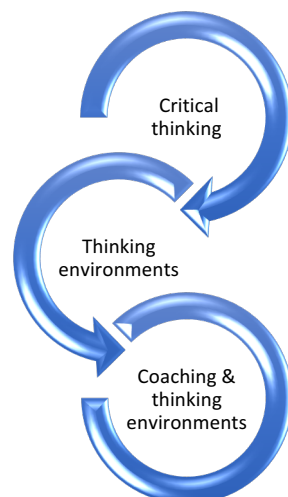
I used the following broad search terms for my research: thinking environment, critical thinking, coaching, executive coaching, coaching supervision, coaching in organisations, and a combination of these terms. In addition, I employed more targeted terms, such as Kline's thinking environment, incisive questions, and other components of Kline's model. The initial search revealed that critical thinking is widely referenced in the fields of adult education and nursing, wherein thinking environments are more established. One challenge that became clear was that the majority of research on thinking environments takes the form of practitioner papers. The literature searches in these areas produced valuable results concerning the role that thinking plays and how it is created and experienced between coach and client.

The research material was sourced from refereed journals, such as *Consulting Psychology Journal*, *International Journal of Learning, Development and Learning in Organisations: An International Journal*; theses and publications are written by researchers from reputable universities and coaching practitioner literature, wherein Kline's work is more widely known than in which other areas. Search engines were used such as PsychINFO, ProQuest, Google Scholar UK, and Radar to find articles in peer-reviewed journals and practitioners' theses and

books. I also consulted the websites of various accredited coaching bodies to retrieve their most recent articles.

At the time when the last review was conducted (August 2020), Google Scholar identified 397 authors who had cited Kline's *Time to Think*. A closer look at sources in which Kline had been cited revealed that such references were mostly fairly brief and usually occurred in books. However, those academic and practitioner papers that mention Kline's work do not present research but instead review the use of Kline's model of a thinking environment in the areas outlined in this chapter (e.g. career conversations (Bassot & Reid, 2013) or exploring hierarchies in organisations (Havers, 2008). The literature search identified a limited number of academic writers who cited her work in coaching (Cox, 2005; De Haan, 2008; 2011; Hall, 2013; Busby-Earle & Brown, 2014). Of the practitioner references, a recent online search showed individuals as well as organisations offering her model in the context of coaching, which is occasionally referred to as life coaching or career coaching. Figure 2.1 below illustrates the three key areas of research focus. These areas have been researched in detail.

Figure 2.1 Structure of the literature review



2.1 Critical thinking

The literature on critical thinking notes that different terminologies are used to describe similar thinking processes and reveals that critical thinking, critical reflection, and transformational learning are all question-based models designed to nurture deepen and develop thinking.

Ennis (2015) discusses how the term critical thinking came to the forefront during the 1970s and 1980s and notes that it is understood in both academic and everyday contexts as 'reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do' (p. 32). Ennis (1989) defines four key areas for critical thinking: reasonable thinking, focused thinking, reflective thinking and the ability to make decisions. While critical thinking may involve thinking about specific contexts and general skills do not imply the non-existence of context-specific knowledge, researchers such as Ennis (1989) consider critical thinking skills to be applicable across subject domains. Furthermore, Mulnix (2012) proposes that critical thinking is a skill that can be learned and taught – it is about how, rather than what, we think. She states that being able to evaluate both our own ideas as well as those of others without prejudice is a critical thinking skill. An alternative view, namely that critical thinking skills are domain-specific, is represented by McPeck (1981) and Willingham (2008). McPeck (1981) argues against general critical thinking, as he holds that thinking is always tied to a subject domain. Furthermore, he notes that knowledge of a subject is necessary for critical thinking and that critical thinking varies greatly from field to field (McPeck, 1981).

Yet another definition of critical thinking is offered by Paul and Elder (2014), who describe it as a way to analyse and evaluate thinking with a view to enhance it. Critical thinking has also been described as reflective thought which requires healthy scepticism, an open mind, and the suspension of judgement (Dewey, 1989). In his definition, Dewey (1989) notes that

critical thinking involves the deconstruction of deeply held assumptions, often using process models which seek to transform thinking and lead to a fundamental change in perspective. Walker and Diaz (2003) also state that critical thinking is a set of skills where an individual helps a person make a decision by considering and evaluating all of their options, as well as recognising the existence of assumptions. Later in this chapter, I go into more detail concerning how researchers consider different levels of assumptions and the role of coaches who use various coaching methods with clients to reveal assumptions through critical thinking.

Whilst there are many definitions of critical thinking from three disciplines – philosophy, psychology, and education (Mulnix, 2012) – there do not seem to be any disagreements about the value of this practice. However, there seems to be little agreement among researchers about what the concept of critical thinking actually is (Copp, 2016).

Criteria and tests used to determine whether critical thinking is taking place have been suggested by different educators, such as Brookfield (1987), Eraut (1994), and Etherington (2017). In his seminal work on the topic of critical thinking, Brookfield (1987) argues that people can only improve their thinking by surfacing, exploring, and validating assumptions; he asserts that people do so through considering how thinking should take place. According to Brookfield (1987), people can find it tough to self-distance and understand how their beliefs and deeply held values may steer them into distorted and hampered ways of standing and being in the world. He asserts that becoming critically reflective requires a new lens that enables clients to reflect a subjective picture of who they are and what they do as people. Brookfield (1995, p. 2) further explains that assumptions are ‘taken-for-granted beliefs about the world and our place within it that seem so obvious to us as not to

need stating explicitly'. Interestingly, Brookfield (1995) defines three levels of assumptions, with each level involving deeper critical thinking and thus more profound insight.

Cox (2013) builds on the work undertaken by Brookfield (1987). She discusses two paradigms in critical thinking: a validating paradigm and a transforming paradigm. The validating paradigm refers to the fact that experience can only be compared with existing knowledge. The transforming paradigm, in contrast, refers to challenging current values and perspectives through considering alternatives. (Cox, 2013).

Stacey (2003) has written academic papers and books about the concept of complexity and chaos in organisations and how organisations learn. He states that organisations are the patterning of peoples' interactions with each other. In addition, he argues that the increasing degree of interdependence between people in today's world means that it is imperative to understand the processes of human relating. Furthermore, he states that thinking can be viewed as a silent conversation or, as Ringer (2002) suggests, as a relationship with oneself. Whereas discussing the academic basis for this claim is not within the scope of this research, a core notion developed in Stacey's work is that 'thinking together' occurs between thinking partners in the context of a relationship with another; thus, it follows that the quality of the relationship can affect the quality of thinking a person engages in.

Burnard provides examples of how critical thinking skills in practice are common in nursing. The development of critical thinking skills on the part of nurses is a requirement in nursing education programmes in Westernised democracies (Burnard, 1989). Nurses' ability to analyse evidence or arguments, as well as being able to respond to them in a flexible

manner, is considered a prerequisite for a competent and reflective nursing practice (Burnard 1989, White et al. 1990).

Jiang and Yang (2015) investigated employees' critical thinking. Their empirical quantitative field study administered critical thinking questionnaires among 273 dyads of supervisors and their subordinates. Jiang and Yang argue that good critical thinking skills help employees identify problems, even if a situation is complicated, and allows them to develop and offer alternative solutions. The authors note that the respondents were not hesitant to express their own ideas or challenge authority for their respective organisations' benefit. As a result, employees motivated by learning have the confidence to express their opinions, which can in turn lead to organisational change (Jiang & Yang, 2015).

Critical thinking in crisis response is central to a conceptual research paper by van de Ven and Neef (2006). By evaluating how people make decisions and critiquing various sensemaking tools, the authors posit that there are limits to a person's capacity to assimilate new information and remain open to alternative explanations, citing confirmation bias. The hypothesis put forward is that by combining various technologies – a sensemaking tool, a semantic network search engine, and a distributed perception network – into a system the authors call the combined thinking environment, decision-makers will be stimulated to think critically about the information they receive. Interestingly, the authors describe sensemaking as a process of being able to go back to previously stored information to add newly learned information and to then move forward to work with new hypotheses.

2.1.2 Critical reflection and transformative learning

In contrast to the passive acceptance of the ideas of others, critical reflection is an active process (Fook 2012a; Brookfield, 1987). Fook and Gardner (2013) asserts that the strength of critical reflection lies in enabling the climate (the cultural and contexts in which we work) and the application of techniques. Fook and Gardner (2013) claims that it is flexibility which makes critical reflection so highly adaptable to situation, place, learner, and educator. Gould (1996) and Schon (1983) argue that there is no prescribed or formulaic way to undertake critical reflection due to the existence of various processes, techniques, and exercises. It is the diverse nature of critical reflection that has made it the subject of scrutiny and criticism (Ixer, 1999).

Transformative learning is conceptualised as a thinking process that involves a deep-seated change in frames of reference (unchanging assumptions and expectations), which transforms ideas, knowledge, or methods that have not yet been examined, thus making transformative learners more critically effective (Mezirow, 2000; 2006). For example, critical reflection is a process of assessing assumptions through challenging our thoughts and legitimacy of beliefs through dialogue that is reflective and discourse with other people that may have different attitudes to achieve an informed judgement (Mezirow, 1995). However, Illeris (2014) states that Mezirow's approach places more importance than is necessary on the cognitive process and does not pay sufficient attention to feelings, values, and learning. Limiting assumptions that are uncovered during coaching may not be rational and could be based on a client's past experiences, which may be based on their emotions. This may sound simple, yet, from birth, we spend a lifetime being told what to do, which limits our autonomy and replaces it with a learned model of thinking or being (Berne, 1970, 1968), which in turn reduces our ability to think well for ourselves.

Critical thinking summary

There are multiple definitions and descriptions of what critical thinking is and how it is taught (Ennis, 1987; Brookfield, 1987; McPeck, 1981). As noted previously, researchers such as Ennis (1989) view critical thinking as a skill applicable across subject domains, whereas McPeck (1981) argues that knowledge of a subject is necessary for critical thinking. With multiple definitions comes a lack of clarity. The result is misunderstanding or a lack of clarity on the part of individuals wishing to conduct research, as well as those attempting to put research into practice.

The literature reveals that different terminologies are used to describe similar thinking processes and that critical thinking, critical reflection, and transformational learning are all question-based models that lend themselves to coaching. With examples offered in coaching (Catchings, 2015), education (Brookfield, 1987), and nursing practice literature (Burnard, 1989), critical thinking can be achieved by identifying and challenging assumptions, as well as exploring alternatives from different perspectives. Similarly, transformative learning involves thinking critically by questioning the assumptions and expectations that shape and influence what a person thinks and does (Mezirow, 2008).

Critical thinking is a skill that can be used to discover and then question deep, possibly limiting assumptions. The question of how a coach or, indeed, a client knows when and how they are using critical thinking or have created an environment where they are able to access this thinking, consciously or unconsciously, became part of my research. I incorporated questions into my research design to determine how coaches and clients know whether critical thinking is taking place and the conditions required for this to occur.

2.2 Thinking environments

The notion that we need to think well in our wider lives and different aspects of work has inspired researchers to develop various uses of the thinking environment, ranging from exploring hierarchies in organisations (Schwan, 1997) to creating a thinking environment in meetings (Havers, 2008). Research on thinking environments has focused on business, healthcare, and education, including a number of studies on how effective coaching is for individuals (Blackman, 2006; Anderson & Betz, 2001; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007; Wasylyshyn, 2003). A more extensive review of studies on thinking environments and coaching is presented in a later section of this chapter.

The thinking environment theories explored focus on the encouragement of open-mindedness and awareness on the part of the client to stimulate, broaden, and deepen the ways in which they think, including the ability to challenge and overcome unhelpful beliefs which can limit one's freedom of choice. Interestingly, despite extensive attempts to link critical thinking and the thinking environment, only one paper – that by Ulsenheimer et al. (1997), which focused on a healthcare context – defines the use of critical thinking techniques within a thinking environment. The study, which was carried out by nurse educators and managers to gain understanding of the critical thinking processes of nursing staff, found that creating shared visions through the assumptions that the staff and organisation hold is important to improving outcomes. Later in this chapter, I discuss critical thinking and different levels of assumptions as a research interest.

Thinking environments have been researched and presented in different contexts and can be established by using critical thinking skills and providing space, whether temporal or physical, as well as by encouraging other behaviours. The next section compares and

contrasts Kline's codified model and behaviours with other models and research on creating a thinking environment.

2.2.1 Kline's thinking environment

Articulated over half a century ago, the philosophical roots of Kline's thinking environment can be traced to Rogers' (1961) person-centred concept of unconditional positive regard (Wildflower, 2013). There are similarities between the work of Kline (1999) and Rogers (1951). Rogers developed the person-centred approach, a well-known intervention in the West, not only adopted in coaching but also in counselling, mentoring and social care. The approach is grounded in a positive view of people or what he terms 'unconditional positive regard'. If the coach is able to provide an environment that is perceived to be safe, encouraging genuineness and shows empathy (Rogers, 1961) the client can develop positive self-regard, self-trust and the ability to view the world more accurately. Kline's (1999) model advocates that behind every positive action is quality thinking which involves the client accessing their feelings, somatic questions are asked to gain insight and the quality of attention that is given to the client create the right-thinking environment. The person-centred approach minimises directive techniques, such as interpretation, interruption, structured questioning and maximising active listening and reflection of feelings and clarification. Rogers (1951) also emphasises that the attitudes and personal characteristics of the psychologist/counsellor as well as the quality of the relationship is the prime determining factor of the outcomes.

Another similarity is the relationship orientated approach. Rogers (1961) posits the requirement for the psychologist/counsellor to listen to the client with acceptance, without interruption and judgement, if the client is going to be able to change. Similarly, Kline (1999) is clear that whilst the client is speaking there is no interruption from the coach however the

coach should show empathy by holding the client's attention and providing encouragement. Empathy and positive regard are aligned with the fourth component of Kline's (1999) thinking environment model. Both Rogers and Kline stress that people are innately self-resourceful. Kline developed the thinking environment in the mid-1980s and has since authored several books, including her most well-known title, *Time to Think* (1999). Through empirical observation, the thinking environment has evolved over four decades (Kline, 2016).

Kline's assertion is that the quality of everything a person does in life and at work depends upon the quality of thinking they engage in (1999). Interestingly, Kline's work does not make specific reference to critical thinking. This may be deliberate given her work is oriented towards practice and application rather than theory. This would also explain why her work has not been more widely referenced in academia, despite appeals from practitioners. Kline's extensive experience in human resources appears to be a limitation when attempting to apply the model in a research context (Bassot & Reid, 2013). A range of relevant published literature needs to be critiqued; the challenge with Kline's model is that there is a lack of published literature on and critiques of it, as it seems that no research to date has addressed her model (Bassot & Reid, 2013).

Kline's (1999) thinking environment is non-directive; its effectiveness lies in the creation of a climate conducive to the client's engagement in independent thinking, as opposed to being dependent upon a stream of external stimulus or experts. Kline originally created the approach to be used at 'any time, any place with anyone', but, more recently, the approach has developed into a coaching style using predetermined questions to focus on the client's experiential learning and thinking.

There would appear to be a conflict between Kline's claim that a thinking environment can be created at any time and at any place with any one argument and the established

principles of critical thinking. Holding knowledge of the subject domain is required on the part of all participants, meaning that the principles require this (particularly in adult education, where a critical thinking lens is customary) (McPeck, 1981; Willingham, 2008).

The characteristics of Kline’s approach share similarities to the clean language techniques first used in psychotherapy (Grove, 1998). These were subsequently developed into an effective 12-question technique now favoured by clean language coaches which encourages people to find a way forward for themselves (Sullivan & Rees, 2008). Kline also asserts that time and practice are necessary for people to think for themselves (Kline, 1999).

Kline’s model is a combination of 10 behaviours (or conditions) and a set of staged questions designed to create space to allow people to think for themselves (1999). Her work describes how these conditions – attention, equality, ease, appreciation, encouragement, feelings, information, diversity, incisive questions, and place – can be adopted in everyday conversation between people, in organisations, and wider society (see Figure 2.2.2).

Components	Kline’s thinking environment model
ATTENTION	Listening with palpable respect and without interruption
EQUALITY	Treating each other as thinking peers; Giving equal turns and attention; Keeping agreements and boundaries
EASE	Offering freedom from internal rush or urgency
APPRECIATION	Offering genuine acknowledgement of a person’s qualities; Practicing a 5:1 ratio of appreciation to criticism
ENCOURAGEMENT	Giving courage to go to the cutting edge of ideas by moving beyond internal competition
FEELINGS	Unexpressed feelings can inhibit good thinking

INFORMATION	Supplying the facts; Dismantling denial
DIVERSITY	Welcoming divergent thinking and diverse group identities
INCISIVE QUESTIONS	Removing assumptions that limit our ability to think for ourselves clearly and creatively
PLACE	Creating a physical environment that says back to people, "You matter"

Figure 2.2.2 Kline's (2009) 10 components of a thinking environment

To provide further context for the 10 behaviours and to critique the model, each area is now discussed individually. Kline (1999) acknowledges the need for solitude to think without distraction. She also acknowledges the benefits of having an attentive thinking partner to guide thinking, as our minds create distracting thoughts; however, she makes no reference to the types of environments in coaching which may help us to think. In contrast to common coaching techniques, Kline's model does not recommend reflecting the client's, or, in her terminology, the 'thinker's', words back at them. It is up to the client 'thinker' to do all of the thinking; the coach simply asks the questions.

In creating a thinking environment, clients 'must' think for themselves, despite some not wishing to do so (Kline, 2010). One approach to achieving a thinking environment requires reflection and action, which in turn results in a discipline that helps clients maintain a positive and centred approach to attention. Clients state that appreciation and attention are considered desirable coach related behaviours; both are elements of Kline's (1999) thinking environment.

Kline (1999) emphasises that ease is a felt presence and is an increasingly scarce state that is being bred out of our lives. Ease, an internal state free from urgency and rush, generates the most effective context for thinking. Ease invites reflection, a key skill that provides space for new learning (Kolb, 1984). If people are not at ease, a counterintuitive situation can occur in which independent learning, both individually and collectively, can impact important decisions (Senge, 2006). The world of business continues to be characterised by unrelenting urgency and a rapid pace, both of which are opposed to the creation of a thinking environment.

Kline (1999) supports encouraging dialogue to inspire the belief that 'I can' rather than 'I can't,' which may prove powerful for clients. More recently, Senge (2006) has discussed the difference between advocacy and inquiry, discussion and dialogue; when engaging in dialogue, a person should avoid judging others and allow thoughts to be free-flowing and emergent.

Kline (1999) believes that the suppression of feelings represses clear thinking. When a person is fearful, they suppress their ability to connect and communicate, which in turn affects their thinking environment (Kline, 1999). Stern (2004) explores this dilemma and ways of protecting the present moment from influences of the past.

Place is another distinct topic addressed by Kline (1999), which is a person's affective experience of their physical environment. Kline (1999) states that information is everything including physical, mental, and spoken knowledge particularly in the challenge of addressing what is not being faced. Kline's view is consistent with Lewin's (1930) theory that behaviour is a function of an individual in their environment, including both mental and physical environments. This suggests that people are not only affected by their interactions with

others but also the environment in which such interactions take place. Kline argues that it is the emotional space combined with other elements of behaviours that make it possible to allow participants in a thinking environment to feel that they matter.

Although there seems little research into the physical environment and coaching, considering that coaching takes place in organisations, research into organisational ecology seemed worthy of further investigation. The research concept of 'organisational ecology' was devised to capture the fact that organisations are complex ecological systems (Becker, 2007). Becker argues that the organisational ecology methodology conceptualises the workplace as a system in which physical design and environmental factors both shape and are shaped by work processes, the organisation's culture, workforce demographics, and information technologies. Evidence is accumulating that the physical environment in which people work affects both job performance and job satisfaction (Davis, 1984; Dolden & Ward, 1986; Vischer, 1989; Clements-Croome, 2000). In addition, researchers are increasingly finding links between employee wellbeing, health and aspects of the physical environment at work such as indoor air quality, furniture placement and lighting (Veitch & Newsham, 2000; Dilani, 2004; Zhong & House, 2012). The physical environment in organisations is a critical factor when considering employee performance (Jung & Lee, 2015) and job satisfaction (Vischer, 2007). If the physical environment is affecting people in the workplace, impacting employee performance, satisfaction and health then one could surmise that the physical environment could impact workplace activities such as coaching.

Expanding further into aspects of the physical environmental, in this case lighting and noise, the research into organisational lighting seemed to distinguish between the effects on building occupants of artificial lighting and that of natural daylight from windows. The

studies into natural daylight have linked increased comfort and productivity with window size and proximity, as well as with a view outside (Hedge, 2000; Mallory-Hill *et al.*, 2004; Ashkanasy *et al.*, 2014). Interestingly, studies into natural daylight and views from hospital rooms for example have been shown to positively affect medication requirements and recovery rates (Ulrich, 1984, 1991; Verderber & Reuman, 1988). The Ulrich (1984) study clearly demonstrated the relationship between the physical environment and people's wellbeing for instance. Ulrich proved that hospital patients who could view pleasant scenes such as trees and nature from their wards recovered faster. Evidence for the effects of the physical environment on wellbeing and health is clear (Wilson, 1984; Wilson, 2001; Mulville *et al.*, 2016). Results can also be found about the effect of the physical environment on creativity (McCoy & Evans, 2010; Davis *et al.*, 2019). Another noteworthy feature of the physical environment is its connection to social interaction and collaboration (Strauss, 1978; Irving *et al.*, 2019). This could affect the performance of both coach and client, and the satisfaction achieved from the coaching. In addition, numerous studies about people's interaction with the physical environment were conducted in environmental psychology; these generally explored people's associations and emotional construction of places, behavioural components of space, place dependence, and so forth (Gustafson, 2001; Auburn & Barnes, 2006). For example, the physical environment is recognised as a significant factor for knowledge creation and learning (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Senoo *et al.*, 2007;). Considering new ideas and research enhances the coaching practice and helps deliver client requirements, when looking for development as well as learning in a volatile and challenging corporate business world (Robins, 2017).

Another challenge to consider, is the physical noise in the environment. Studies in offices where employees worked in an open plan workspace, employees tended to judge noise to

be a primary source of discomfort, interruption, distraction and reduced productivity (Chu & Warnock, 2002; Kim & de Dear, 2013). Ayoko and Härtel (2003) found for example that privacy invasion could trigger conflict in people. They argue that employees are especially concerned about the level of distractions and lack of privacy in an open plan office. In addition, there are many studies that provide evidence that employees are uncomfortable in open plan configurations and prefer private enclosed workspace (Ornstein, 1999; Fried *et al.*, 2001; Brennan *et al.*, 2002). Further still, there is evidence that shows that aspects of psychological comfort and privacy are strongly affected by spatial layout: office size partitioning influences, and visual privacy is linked with territoriality and status (Wells, 2000; McCusker, 2002; Vischer *et al.*, 2003; Fischer *et al.*, 2004; Vischer, 2005). Privacy, confidentiality and lack of interruption is imperative for good coaching (Webb, 2020).

An important aspect of diversity is accepting and embracing people who are different from us, whether in terms of age, social class, gender, ethnicity, or race, which will result in the creation of a reciprocal and creative environment within an organisation (Hutchins, 2014). Where organisations develop hierarchies with a dominant group at the helm, the power structures (Sidanius *et al.*, 2012) that arise as a result will often serve to undermine any efforts to encourage diversity. Sameness and tokenism, Kline (1999) argues, are forms of denial and diminish the intelligence of groups, rendering some business environments un conducive to the creation of effective thinking environments (Kline, 1999).

Limiting assumptions and challenging them, is at the centre of Kline's model and can be described as the process of questioning the belief, the possibility, that something is a fact, making assumptions can mean that something has been taken for granted (Bassot & Reid, 2013). Assumptions can be created based on previous experience, which can impact people in many contexts. For example, negative assumptions limit what we believe we can do and

thus should be explored in coaching. Kline (1999) argues for the existence of three levels of limiting assumptions in her thinking environment, with each level of assumption being more deeply rooted than the previous: facts (which are on the surface), potential facts (which again may be on the surface but may be based on unfounded information), and bedrock assumptions. Bedrock assumptions are multi-layered and contain pre-conceived ideas concerning ourselves and where we may fit in the world (Bassot & Reid, 2013). It can be argued that bedrock assumptions are an important aspect of coaching, because they serve to limit clients' self-beliefs or the options available to them, such assumptions can potentially serve as barriers for clients as they attempt to move forward.

Interestingly, Brookfield (1995) also defines three progressively deeper levels of assumptions: paradigmatic, prescriptive, and causal. Brookfield describes paradigmatic assumptions as part of a person's thinking that may not be recognised and may only be questioned and critically examined after significant resistance. The process of uncovering these may be daunting, surprising, and even astonishing for the client, which suggests that the process may prove challenging for both clients and practitioners. Prescriptive assumptions reflect what a person may think should happen in a particular situation, whereas causal assumptions deal with 'if ... then' beliefs concerning how the world works and the situations under which such assumptions can be transformed. They are commonly stated in predictive terms and are based on our knowledge about what will happen should we take one path or another (Brookfield 1995, 2-3).

Similarities exist between Brookfield's (1995) paradigmatic and Kline's (1999) bedrock assumptions, as each plays a role in determining views of reality and structuring how a

client sees the world in which they live. In coaching, it could be argued that it is only through a critical examination of our assumptions and practices (i.e. our own view of the world) as coaches and clients that we can be positive and drive change (Denison & Avner, 2011). As discussed in the previous section, Brookfield (1995) and Cox (2013) make the connection between uncovering assumptions and critical thinking, which, curiously, Kline does not.

Appreciation is the final stage in the model, wherein the thinker (client) and listener (coach) actively appreciate something in the other (Kline, 1999). It is when one exhibits a tendency to find fault and criticise in the face of controversy and difficulty, that appreciation becomes crucial (Kline, 1999).

Kline's model is ordered around five questions, which are asked in sequence with pauses between each to allow time for the client to respond. The goal is that the client (thinker) identify limiting assumptions (beliefs) which, if removed or reframed by means of an incisive question (Kline, 1999), will enable fresh thinking to emerge. The sequence is as follows:

- 'What do you want to think about and what are your thoughts?'
- 'What more do you think, or feel, or want to say?'
- 'What more would you like achieve from this session?'
- 'What are you assuming is stopping you from achieving your goal?'
- 'If you were not to hold back in your life, what would you be doing?' (incisive question)

The incisive fifth question (Kline, 1999) is where the enrichment capacity of the coach can create an environment that facilitates effective interaction and reflection with others (Kauffman, 2008; Bachkirova, 2011). The outcomes of the incisive question can be likened to an 'aha' moment (Napier, 2010) or the critical moment in which 'the penny drops' (De Haan,

2008), causing a shift in the client's thinking, conscious or otherwise, which challenges their bedrock assumption (Kline, 1999). The incisive question shares characteristics with the 'miracle question' (De Shazer, 1985); however, De Shazer argues that the miracle question was never intended to be simple. Rather, it was designed to cause a shift in the conversation intended to reframe the client's problem (De Shazer, 2007).

To explore the use of incisive questions, Bassot and Reid (2013) employed Kline's thinking environment in career thinking sessions. In discussing how a career can relate to an individual's overall life satisfaction, the authors described how a client underwent a clear shift in thinking once they identified the incisive question. The significance of this finding is that the question the client posed to herself was distinctly different from the one that the coach would have otherwise asked (Bassot & Reid, 2013).

The Greek philosopher Socrates' style of questioning is commonly used in coaching and is the foundation upon which Kline based her thinking environment model. There is, however, discussion amongst practitioners and academics about the underlying philosophy and the extent to which Socratic questions can guide or direct a client's thinking (Padesky, 1993; Neenan, 2009; Cox, 2013). Goodman (2002) and Heron (1988) define the use of Socratic questions as a non-directive, open style of questioning which encourages the client to think for themselves and facilitates dialogue. While Neenan (2009) agrees that Socratic questions are helpful in coaching to promote awareness and reflection and to develop problem-solving thinking, he goes further to state that good Socratic questions provide a logic for sequencing questions to correct for overreliance on the intuition of experienced coaches and emphasises that asking good Socratic questions is imperative in coaching practice.

Socratic questioning is a fundamental part of the intensive coaching or psychotherapy technique known as cognitive behaviour therapy (Padesky & Greenberger, 1995), wherein

changing the way in which people think, either by changing their minds or guiding discovery, leads to emotional and behavioural change, enabling the development of more helpful perspectives in tackling assumptions. Padesky (1993) used her practice as a cognitive behavioural therapist to empirically research two factors of questions: firstly, where do good Socratic questions come from (for which she developed a list of useful questions), and secondly, how can Socratic questions be used to guide discovery rather than to change thinking on the part of the client? Guiding discovery is considered a preferable goal for therapists, as it develops the ability to determine how, rather than what, to think; for this purpose, Padesky (1993) developed a definition of Socratic questioning and proposes a set of stages for therapists to use.

Cox (2013), however, challenges the effectiveness and appropriateness of the use of Socratic questioning in coaching. She argues the Socratic method of questioning is founded on the philosophical notions of anamnesis (recollection, especially of a supposed previous existence) and elenchus (the Socratic method of extracting the truth by means of questions and answers, which is often used to refute arguments), which is at odds with a coaching ethos (Cox, 2013). In addition, Cox (2013) posits that the appeal of Socratic questions to coaches is that they challenge the assumptions held by clients so that the answers appear to come from the latter, a method which she suggests may not be appropriate for coaching.

Through an heuristic inquiry intended to offer insight into coaches' experience of generating questions in coaching, Wallis (2015) found that coaches' experiences impact their generation of questions in a number of conscious and unconscious ways. For example, the more absorbed by a topic a coach becomes during coaching, the less aware they will be of the construction or flow of their questions (Wallis, 2015, p.160). For a coach, this highlights the

importance of maintaining this balance of wanting to add value and yet remaining unattached to the client's outcomes.

A distinct difference exists between Wallis and Kline's approaches to the generation of questions. Wallis focuses on the influence of the dynamic relationship between the coach, the client and the wider system, emphasising a synthesis of 'all the things that help you' together with noticing, forming, and asking, which is in contrast to Kline's fixed sequential approach. Wallis appreciates that the more experienced the coach, the more readily questions come, as the coach will be less self-conscious and better able to focus on the client and their outcomes. The use of Kline's model means that regardless of the coaching experience an individual may have, they will be better able to focus on the client because they will not need to generate their own questions; rather, they will follow the set of questions provided in the model.

Brookfield (1987) argues that asking skilful critical questions is an effective way of externalising ingrained assumptions, which suggests that a synthesis between thinking and asking questions exists. However, the use of a combined method incorporating both the use of questions and other elements of the coaching process, including listening, clarifying, reflecting, and thinking, has yet to be researched (Fillery-Travis & Cox, 2014, p.453).

By allowing clients to ask themselves the right kind of questions, meaning those that encourage accountability and responsibility (Whitmore, 1992), one can encourage them to think for themselves.

Thinking environments summary

Researchers have developed various uses for thinking environments. In teaching and nursing, where thinking environments are more established, to exploring hierarchy in organisations, creating a thinking environment in meetings, and the experience of leadership and power.

Critiquing a range of relevant published literature is important. However, a challenge associated with Kline's model in this regard is a shortage of both literature that is published on and critiques of her model. It seems that the model has not yet been critiqued in any research. Kline's (1999) book is intended to guide practitioners in following her model; however, it does not include any reference to any theoretical underpinnings (Bassot & Reid, 2013). Her book seems to be based on her wide-ranging experience in the field of human resources, this is a limitation when attempting to apply her model in the context of research. While Kline's model was not specifically developed for coaching purposes, it has been adopted by coaches, and she seems to currently be focused on this application.

The literature reveals that assumptions is an area of interest for researchers, with a number of authors defining different levels of assumptions, including Kline's (1999) bedrock assumptions. Assumptions can be constructed based on previous experience, which could have an impact on people in many contexts; it may be necessary to explore such contexts in coaching. In Kline's model, an important aspect of coaching is addressing bedrock assumptions, as they can limit a client's self-belief or the potential options available to them, thus creating a barrier for them when attempting to move forward. Uncovering these may be surprising and even astonishing for the client concerned. As such, this can be a challenging process for practitioners as well as clients.

Critical reflection is required when challenging bedrock assumptions and can be a difficult practice from the client's perspective. Similarly, a coach may be required to challenge their own assumptions and should demonstrate reflexivity when doing so.

Coaching questions intended to help people think can take many forms and can be diverse in nature (i.e. they can be structured, meaning that they are fixed and asked in a particular sequence, or unstructured, meaning that they are variable and not asked in a particular sequence). Despite these apparent differences, the intent from a coaching perspective remains the same: to nurture thinking on the part of the client. There was no literature found that suggested that a particular style of questioning is more or less effective in determining a client's capacity to think.

This section has focused on creating an understanding of various aspects of a thinking environment, such as critical thinking, identifying limiting assumptions, and the importance of asking good questions. It has also illustrated Kline's model and presented some uses of the thinking environment in organisational contexts. The discussion in the following section considers specific aspects of coaching that can contribute to the creation of a thinking environment.

As the recent challenges of COVID 19 in 2020 have shown, overall, the pandemic has caused huge global socio-economic disruption, which directly or indirectly has affected the physical environment in which we operate (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020). The embracement of digital technology has kept people connected around the world. Digital 'savviness' will become a necessity (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020) for coaches and clients in order to operate effectively. Understanding the relationship between the physical environment and performance of employees is imperative. The same logical argument could be used when considering where coaching takes place. There are important elements of the physical environment that have

been outlined such as layout, daylight, noise, etc., that need to be considered when undertaking coaching. In summary, the research strengthens the link between the physical environment and the impact this can have on employees and in turn clients and coaches. The results of the research have implications for coaching practices and studies as they underline the importance of the physical environment. This research may reveal the impact of physical environmental factors in coaching. In practice, for instance, the findings may help coaches and clients to create coaching spaces that work for them. From a strategic perspective in coaching, the physical characteristics of the environment could be connected with the strategic goals of the client and what they want to achieve.

2.3 Coaching and thinking environments

Turner (2006) identifies five benefits of coaching: receiving one-to-one attention, increasing self-awareness, taking responsibility for self-development, experiencing just-in-time learning, and extending thoughtful dialogue with the third party. Furthermore, Klenke (2005) found that coaches have become aware that due to an increased reliance on technology, clients thinking for themselves needs to become an integral part of the coaching process. However, the idea of slowing down to stop, think, and produce better outcomes can often seem counterintuitive, particularly in business, where people are paid to produce results (Wheatley, 2006). The emphasis in business on getting more for less inadvertently reduces the opportunities for people to think. For example, the pressure of time is an unseen factor that can contribute to producing incorrect, impractical, inappropriate, or short-sighted decisions (Kandola, 2009). Dulewicz and Higgs (2003) argue that the emphasis on speed and not reflecting on our work are the results of the industrial age and the use of impersonal terminology such as streamlining, centralising, and outputs.

Laloux researched 'pioneering' organisations for his management book *Reinventing Organisations* (2014), in which he proposes a collective thought model which encourages the return of humanness to business, something he argues has been lost. Laloux found that organisations with self-managed teams and that emphasise the importance of intuitive reasoning and decentralised decision-making, which he describes as 'Teal', ignites the human mind and in doing so promotes freedom of thought and thus wholeness and self-management on the part of employees.

According to Myerson (2001) and McLean and Power (2007), the existence of a coaching culture in an organisation promotes motivation and encouragement on the part of employees, which can help to gradually change their behaviours. McDermott et al. (2007) note, however, that coaching outcomes depend on how the coaching process is supported and managed in organisations and whether coaching is seen as an integrated leadership development intervention rather than a remedial program; their views are thus in alignment with Kline's model of place and belief that people matter. Implicit in most of the definitions of a coaching culture is the belief that such a culture provides an environment in which employees feel valued, respected, and heard, which in turn creates a space in which a thinking environment can emerge.

Senge has been an influential voice in organisational development since the publication of his seminal book *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), in which he conceptualises a learning organisation as a dynamic system. Senge (2006) defines a learning organisation as a group of people working together to enhance their competence and expand their thinking to create results they truly care about. Senge (2006) states that in a learning organisation, conversations can take on a life of their own, move in directions that could not have been imagined or planned, and generate positive outcomes for the organisation. Senge (2006)

argues that the discipline of managing 'mental models' of organisations and their structures (Bion, 1961) involves a combination of surfacing, testing, and improving our internal pictures (information) of how the world and our environment work. If an organisation is a place where individuals can expand their thinking, then nurtured, collective thinking is possible, and people can learn to see the whole (reality) together (Senge 1992); Such learning can help to create a thinking environment in organisations.

A plethora of studies have used a number of research approaches to the topic of coaching to improve the performance of individuals, teams, and groups. However, applying these findings to improve the overall performance of an organisation can prove challenging. Organisations place value on their employees being able to think creatively; the ability to think critically is a necessary to enable this. For example, to investigate the effects of team coaching on supporting team reflection and learning for high-performing research and development teams, Mulec and Roth (2005) conducted a longitudinal study using a collaborative research approach involving a number of inquiry methods. The results suggest that coaching interventions had a positive impact on the performance of a team from an efficiency, creativity and climate standpoint. Reynolds (2011) also argues that coaching allows clients to be more creative in their thinking. His empirical research, which adopted a phenomenological approach, focused on conducting in-depth interviews with newly appointed senior leaders. He found that participants credited their coaching with helping them to overcome their vulnerabilities when dealing with challenges that are complex, developing new personal, social and cognitive capabilities, recognise new life purposes, and create motivation for and ownership of their roles. Participants also attributed value to the creation of a calm and reflective space between the coach and client.

In a study analysing group coaching in team settings using action research methodology, Fumoto (2016) suggests that when people have a turn to express themselves, measurable shifts in the thinking process can result. When everyone gets a turn to explore their individual thoughts on personal creativity, a thinking environment itself becomes an act of creation. Nabben (2015) draws on the work of Ramachandran, Kline, Goleman and Schwartz, in her book that was published on emotional intelligence and the field of neuroscience that is emerging, to explore how leaders can positively influence people by using their own emotions. Her study found that doing so can promote psychological safety and reduce the emotional triggers associated with poor morale, motivation, and commitment (Nabben, 2015).

Similarly, in his book intended for practitioners, Whittington (2012) proposes an approach involving systemic coaching and an emphasis on constellations as a method of placing groups or individuals within the systems to which they belong. Clients are invited to stand in their truth of 'what is' rather than developing goals independently or outside of those systems, which he argues is a powerful and enabling experience.

In contrast, Catchings (2015) developed a skill-building coaching model for critical thinking skills and leadership development covering the following concepts: listening, silence, questioning, and scaffolding. The model makes use of various theories, including collaborative learning, reflective judgment and learning, transformation learning, experiential adult and active learning, self-discovery, reconstruction, reflective observation and personal construct theory. She states that all of these are instrumental to the formation and operation of the model. The research supports questioning techniques and anticipates that critical thinking skills would improve over time. Catchings' (2015) results confirm that to improve critical thinking skills in leadership development, coaching can be used.

In addition to studies promoting the benefits of coaching, there are also those which present a critical view. An example of the latter is Fatien Diochon and Lovelace's (2015) review of literature that specifically explores the practice of executive coaching through the lens of power in organisations. Using an interpretive approach and an abductive method, the article presents studies confirming the view that coaching serves as a means of empowerment and improving organisational control. The literature in this area takes a critical view of coaching as a practice of control. For example, coaching employees to align their thinking and behaviour with their employer's values can be viewed as controlling them. Employees can become so rooted and entrenched in their companies' culture that they do not realise their entrapment in their organisational environment (Casey, 1995).

2.3.1 Coaching skills to create thinking environments

In her article about the professionalisation of the coaching industry, Stout-Rostron (2009) states that coaching conversations provide thinking environments wherein business professionals can develop both their own self-awareness and an in-depth understanding of who they are, thus embedding newly acquired skills, competences, and attitudes. Chowthee (2013) used a case study approach to determine the usefulness of coaching during an organisational transformation and states that coaching impacts the actions that managers subsequently take and results in them visibly demonstrating new behaviours.

It could be argued that a coaching relationship will provide a good thinking environment if the coach and client have a safe, secure, and responsive relationship. In his client-centred research, which represents a notable exception in coaching research, De Haan (2008) suggests that elements of the working alliance (the coaching relationship) influence the effectiveness of coaching. De Haan (2000) states that clients expect and appreciate qualities

such as listening, understanding, and encouragement on the part of a coach. Furthermore, he proposes that a relational coach should master a state of being as free as possible from their tensions and emotions through regular practice and supervision and is thus able to devote more attention and energy to the client's thinking and development. It is generally accepted that successful coaching outcomes are influenced by the skills, qualities, and characteristics of the coach (Jarvis, 2004; Bluckert, 2005; De Haan 2008). Hardingham (2004), O'Neill (2007), and De Haan (2008) assert that there is true value in the role of a coach as a thinking partner. Human society is founded and established on agreements or protocols concerning how we live in a relationship with each other (De Haan & Sills, 2012).

The behaviours that a coach demonstrates helps to build a client's trust in the coaching relationship, and also provides the basis for successful coaching outcomes (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Mayer et al, 1995; Schiemann et al, 2019). In a recent systemic literature review seven constructs were linked with successful coaching outcomes, these were identified as self-efficacy, coaching motivation, goal orientation, trust, interpersonal attraction, feedback intervention and supervisory support; with trust presented as the most prominent construct (Bozer & Jones, 2018. In discussing the construct of trust Bozer and Jones (2018) refer mainly to leadership research, particularly leader-follower research (Mayer et al, 1995) where a positive affective relationship between the parties is correlated to successful outcomes in mentoring and leader-follower relationships. However, they recognise a divergence in the leadership and coaching literature reviewed around the construct of trust. The authors conclude that leadership research suggests there is an affective correlation that followers attribute to the success of coaching; whereas the coaching research suggests the coaching client does not attribute an affective correlation to the success of the coaching relationship but that they must be able to trust the coach with their vulnerability and any

confidential information. Interestingly, Bozer and Jones (2018) provide an assessment of the quality for each of the seven theoretical coaching constructs. In addition, it is noted that whilst there is strong evidence that trust is important across the reviewed studies, the quality of the studies is considered moderate due to the reliance on reporting by coaches and the paucity of theoretical underpinning.

Mayer et al's (1995) study into trust in mentor relationships determined that there is a relationship between trust and risk taking in the relationship. They argue that trust alone does not determine the successful outcome of the coaching relationship but that the leader must demonstrate at least one of the three traits to develop trust, namely integrity, capability and benevolence and clients must go on to adopt a 'willingness to engage in behaviours that put them at risk' (p724), as an outcome of trust. Schiemann et al (2019) also argue that establishing trust strengthens the coaching relationship, when a client is more likely to be vulnerable, take risks as well as share wishes and dreams. Using Mayer et al's (1995) definition and construct of trust, Schiemann et al (2019) discuss how their sample groups of coaches across a number of studies use different approaches and emphasis to establish trust and how clients value trust. In conclusion, they posit, the most important element of trust is benevolence. Coaches who demonstrate benevolence, described as the extent to which a coach is believed to want to do good to the client (Mayer et al, 1995) to support clients in their autonomy need, which is defined as self-congruency, value-congruency and self-determination, are more likely to have successful coaching relationships and outcomes.

Gettman, Edinger and Wouters (2019) carried out a mixed methodology study to research the antecedents of contracting in relation to successful coaching relationships, which

includes trust. In their literature review, the authors highlight a list of constructs associated with contracting, such as setting direction and purpose, aligns coach and executive expectations, facilitates buy-in, clarifies roles, eases concern regarding confidentiality, as well as highlighting Kilburg's (1996) work that these activities are important in creating a successful coaching relationship. Their findings suggest three contracting behaviours affecting the coaching relationship: Expertise – simply by contracting the executive understands the coach has experience in coaching agreements; Agreement – around goals, parameters, objectives and how goals will be achieved; Bond as personal attachment and respect, and Trust which is constructed as sincerity, openness of the coach and the absence of motives for personal gain. Interestingly, their findings revealed a disconnect between the executive participants perception of contracting as a hygiene factor, as being important yet with no great outcomes, and the importance placed on contracting by coaches. Gettman, Edinger & Wouters (2019) state that despite the lack of direct recall around contracting per se, participants did offer data around contracting behaviours of a coach that contributed to the success of the coaching relationship with the antecedents of trust being a significant factor. They conclude that despite this 'lack of recognition it does not diminish the criticality of contracting' (p56) in contributing to the success of the coaching relationship.

According to Shohet (2008), when creating a thinking environment, one should strive for gentle, quiet, and unrushed conditions, with the focus of attention being on the client and allowing uncertainty to exist. Hawkins and Smith (2006) also note the benefits of a gentle pace and a reflective thinking environment for clients, coaches, and the profession itself.

In her qualitative study investigating the effects of coaching on leaders' resilience, Lawton-Smith (2015) found that coaching creates a safe and neutral space for clients to consider and think through their own problems and solve them. Dingman (2004), who surveyed 104

participants on the impact of executive coaching on their self-efficacy, proposes that listening and interpersonal skills, as well as the ability to hold the space to support the client, are desirable. Thornton (2010) compiled a book for practitioners based on her more than 20 years of experience of coaching teams and groups; she discusses the holding role of a coach, whose ability to create an effective environment encourages learning. Based on her experience, Thornton (2010) explains how coaching involves both dialogue and discussion and offers clients a space for deep reflection. In addition, no matter what kind of situation in which the coaching takes place, this needs to be a safe space and the coach/client relationship needs to be comfortable to support the client's freedom to disclose information and be authentic. Western (2012) associates what he refers to as 'space' with a specific type of coaching discourse, namely 'Soul Guide discourse' (2017: 43). He describes this as a discourse intended to create a reflective space wherein, beyond the conversation between coach and client, pauses and silences are also heard (Western, 2012).

Zanetti (2017) studied the meaning and value of pausing in relation to creating a thinking environment by undertaking 12 semi-structured interviews and adopting an interpretative phenomenology analysis methodology. Zanetti states that pausing, whether done privately, during one-to-one interactions, or in small groups, can have a significant and transformational impact not just on an individual level but also on participants' relationships in and outside of their work environment. She found that although participants reported substantial benefits as a result of pausing to reflect, gain clarity, and change pace to restore their physical, mental, and/or emotional balance and thus offer their best in a particular situation, they also reported a sense of guilt associated with finding space to pause amidst 'busyness'. Zanetti's (2017) suggestion is that coaching aids clients to find unique ways to create space to stop, pause, reflect, and restore equilibrium and to identify opportunities

and routines that may prove sustainable in their lives. Zanetti (2017) argues that creating space is another way of creating time, a condition which Kline (1999) believes is the by-product of a thinking environment (but not a condition required to create it).

An environmental study conducted by Gidlow *et al.* (2016) determined that walking in natural and pleasant urban environments induces cortisol changes in the brain, thus improving a person's mental state and reducing stress. The study also states that participants perceived their creativity as being greater due to the improved mood and diminished tension resulting from walking. This study suggests that the environment where coaching takes place can affect the thinking of the client. Walking, for example, is widely acknowledged to be a restorative activity which helps to break state and positively impacts our capacity to think (Anderson, 2004). There are various approaches to coaching, and it can be viewed as a static event which can take place in closed offices, workplace, or informal spaces. While there is little literature on the correlation between walking and coaching, I draw on Bachkirova (2014), Spinelli (2014) and Read (2016), who suggest that this approach can create a positive psychological state in which learning is emergent as a person discovers a way of existing in the moment and in their environment; such conditions make for effective coaching.

Winnicott (1974) emphasises the importance of creating a safe 'potential space' where learning can occur. Winnicott's (1974) theory of development describes how reflection creates a 'contained safe place' between a child and parent for learning and creativity. This creates the 'potential space' (Winnicott, 1974) where, within a secure relationship, the child begins to develop their own sense of self and eventually becomes independent of the parent. Lee (2015) builds further on Winnicott's description of this place of separateness,

the 'potential space', describing it as a place where healthy development should occur, where the child develops a greater tolerance of ambiguity, begins to develop their own sense of self and eventually becomes independent of the parent, and where they begin to live more 'wholeheartedly and authentically' (Lee 2015, p.5). A parallel of this safe environment could be a coaching space created for a client to facilitate their reflection and learning. Winnicott's (1974) concepts of potential space can be used as a critical framework for analysing the quality of attachments between workers and managers (Diamond 2017), coaches and their clients, and employees and their organisational cultures. Simply put, rather than considering outer and inner worlds, Winnicott (1974) was interested in the 'transition space' between these domains. Virtual worlds can be used for creative purposes. Dubouloy (2004) used Winnicott's model in a study focused on MBA students and coaching. In this work, the coach is described as the guarantor of the framework who holds and maintains a safe and reassuring atmosphere for the clients. The respondents' accounts indicated that, in a coaching context, a mental space is created between the client and coach, where the client can create, take risks, play around and be curious without encountering any of the consequences for doing so that would arise in the real world. Similarly, traits of Winnicott's (1974) 'potential space' and Kline's (1999) practice of giving 'exquisite attention' or deep listening can create a mindset of self-acceptance on the part of clients. Such an approach is consistent with Roger's (2004) client-centred approach, wherein showing unconditional positive regard empowers a client to develop the courage to understand themselves in a compassionate and non-judgemental way. Rogers (1980) developed ways of connecting and expressing a sixth sense using the 'body' as an instrument of knowing.

Whittington (2012) describes feelings or felt sense as another way of knowing beyond the five bodily sense, which he likens to a sixth sense. The coach and client create a joint space where deep transformation can occur through a new sense of awareness and responsibility (Whitmore, 2009) and where they can gain greater clarity and understanding in the moment (Whittington, 2012). Intriguingly, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) make a clear distinction between two different ways of knowing, which are 'knowing that' and 'knowing how'. 'Knowing that' can be referred to as truly understanding facts and rules. 'Knowing that' could, for example, be any piece of information that is acquired through education of some kind. In contrast, 'knowing how' is knowledge that is acquired through practice and experience, and it cannot be put into words as easily.

Bringing to the surface information that was previously outside of the client's awareness can result in profound shifts and insights and a sense of freedom to explore new thoughts and beliefs. It removes the need to have all the answers, encourages greater participation, leads to the generation of better ideas, and makes it possible to address and resolve challenging issues more rapidly (Havers, 2008).

It could be argued that creative insight is a type of problem-solving process, one in which a problem is reconfigured and resolved quickly (Metcalf & Wiebe, 1987; Sternberg & Davidson, 1995). Examples of such an understanding of creative insight can be found in the four-stage creativity model of preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification developed by Wallas (1926), through to more current research that has been undertaken on the psychology of insight and intuition (Sawyer, 2012). These studies conclude that the insight experience itself, is just as crucial as the time that leads up to a moment of clarity or insight. An insight or solution to a problem (e.g. when an individual knows that they are in a thinking environment) is generally associated with a positive feeling of something 'coming

together', 'making sense', or 'falling into place' by some means (Schooler et al., 1995, pp. 579–580). In other words, one obtains an insight through the use of intuition, which is an experience of knowing something without knowing how one knows it (Epstein, 2010).

In recent years, intuition has been a popular topic in relation to decision-making, and there are a number of eminent researchers in this area. Kahneman, Klein, and Sadler-Smith all argue that intuition is a flawed process for decision-making if founded on false assumptions. Writing in the *American Psychologist Journal*, two of the most well-known researchers on intuition, Kahneman and Klein (2009), presented thinking on intuition that has been cited in over 1,900 instances. Kahneman and Klein (2009) state that given that it arises from memory, expert intuition can be as wide of the mark as it can be accurate. Kahneman (2011) argues that evaluating an intuitive judgement necessitates assessing the predictability of an environment wherein the judgement was made and of a person's opportunities to become familiar with the consistencies of that environment. However, given that intuition is a cognitive function that can influence decisions and actions (Kahneman, 2011), it seems that intuitive thoughts and decisions could be based on prior learning experiences that are subconsciously processed (Sadler-Smith, 2008). Coaching literature uses terms such as 'insight' and 'knowing', as well as the concept of an 'aha' moment, all of which are linked to the creative thinking process in coaching. It is interesting to consider that intuition, while perhaps efficient, may also lead to biases. The use of critical thinking to expose assumptions has been researched (Brookfield, 1987; Cox, 2013); in particular, in Kline's model, uncovering bedrock assumptions and is central to creating a thinking environment. Therefore, coaching enables a change through facilitating the creation of a thinking environment. It could be argued that while they come from different sources, intuition and assumptions are closely related in terms of behaviour. Assumptions

are based on judgement, whether good or bad, whereas intuition is based on 'inner knowing', which may be based on previous experience or preference; hence, bias can creep in. A new situation may be considered on the basis of intuition on the assumption that the outcome will be the same. In either case, the situation is not subject to critical thinking; therefore, addressing assumptions in coaching can lead to change.

2.3.2 Coaching Models

Models may create a method within which a coach and client can work, although it could be argued that coaches may think that a coaching model may represent what should happen, or needs to take place, in their coaching practice, as Gyllensten and Palmer (2007) suggest. At times, a coach may be protective of boundaries in the coaching process, whereas the client may be more concerned with the coaching outcome. Such a situation may result in coaches not moving or thinking outside of the structure of the model being used and clients being maneuvered through a fixed process.

In her practitioner's handbook, Stout-Rostron (2018) states that coaching models offer a structure intended to assist coaches in their interaction with clients. However, she warns that models can be experienced as either prescriptive or rigid. If a coaching model is excessively prescriptive, it may mean that the coach has their own agenda (Stout-Rostron, Van Rensburg & Sampaio, 2009). The importance of models not being perceived as either 'prescriptive' or 'rigid' is a common theme in coaching research (Wall, 2017; Wall & Jarvis, 2015; Wilson, 2011).

Models have also been developed to provide coaches with insight into their impact on the coaching environment, thus enabling them to adopt a more agile approach to be able to serve the needs of their clients better. For example, the coaching signatures profiling tool (Stevens, 2010) uses the dimensions of empathy, logic, and control in a theoretical

framework which focuses on how a person regulates their attention and coordinates their corresponding responses (Walker, 2009). The tool is based on the use of a mental landscaping metaphor to imagine what is taking place in the client's world. A thinking environment is created during the feedback session with the coach because it serves as a catalyst for self-reflection on the coach-client relationship. The coach can adopt a more resourceful state for the client when necessary, creating conditions of appreciation, attention, and encouragement similar to those identified in Kline's model (1999).

Kline's non-directive approach is in contrast with earlier outcome-based models such as GROW (Whitmore 1992) but consistent with therapeutically informed coaching (Roberts & Jarrett, 2006), where the focus of the experience is on constructing understanding and sense-making rather than on identifying an answer or a solution. Kline's approach is more therapeutically informed, lying at the intersection between insight, the individual and models of coaching (Roberts & Jarrett, 2006).

Wilson (2011) argues that as a coach grows in experience, they tend to use skills learned and developed through their own coaching practice and that coaching models such as Kline's (1999) can be perceived as rigid to some coaches due to the fixed nature of the questions used and the associated conditions. Wilson (2011) claims that Kline's thinking environment does not need to be followed as rigidly as she recommends, as the same outcome can be achieved through a coach's intuition and experience. The conditions that need to be in place to create a thinking environment and whether less rigidity in following Kline's model can result in the same outcome form part of my research.

Coaching skills to create thinking environments summary

The literature shows that there are clear parallels between the coach-client relationship and some of the conditions which are a hallmark of Kline's thinking environment. The true value in coaching lies in creating an environment where the client is given the freedom to think effectively, present ideas, and feel a sense of equality. An additional requirement associated with a coaching role is shifting from being a coach or expert trainer to a thinking partner.

Research indicates that aspects such as space and time are involved in the creation of a thinking environment. As the literature states, reflection is achieved through a sense of ease, which is becoming increasingly scarce, particularly in the world of business; however, the importance of reflection should not be underestimated, as it provides space for new learning. From clients' perspective, research shows they cherish the challenge and the environment that coaching provides, and they tend to protect the thinking time it gives them (Smith, 2014; Boysen, 2018; Robins, 2014). In addition, research suggests not only that people are affected by their interactions with others but also that the physical environment has an impact on people's ability to think; thus, thought should be given to where coaching takes place, whether it be in the office, the workplace, or nature, for example.

As discussed in the literature, following Kline's model of a thinking environment, for example, might have the potential to change both the organisational culture of clients' workplaces and their personal lives (if only at the individual level).

As discussed in this section, there are many models that can be used in coaching, but models do not need to be rigidly followed to enable critical thinking. The research presented in this study attempts to identify whether Kline's model of the thinking

environment needs to be applied in as rigid a manner as she recommends or whether similar outcomes can be achieved by coaches who grow in their experience and develop their own skills through their own coaching practice (Wilson, 2011).

2.4 Summary

The review presented an overview of the limited amount of literature on thinking environments. A specific search focused on the concept of the thinking environment in coaching revealed that, despite appeals from coaching practitioners, there is little relevant research (Bassot & Reid, 2013). The analysis of the literature reveals that a thinking environment is a system of human behaviours, principles, values, and assumptions that is created using a somewhat staged approach with set questions; in addition, the analysis indicated that successful studies have been conducted in the fields of education, business, and coaching. Pivotal to this approach appears to be the creation of an environment where the status of coach and client are equal, where limiting thoughts and beliefs are transformed through a depth of thinking, and where a number of psychological states, including introspection, silence, and mutual appreciation, exist in parallel.

The review also revealed that thinking environments can be created in different contexts. Initially, the models and terminology of critical thinking, critical reflection, and transformational learning appear to be unconnected and rather complex; however, despite the diversity in terms of definitions, there is some overlap between each approach in that they are all designed to enable and nurture thinking. Each is defined by language which is unique to the field in which it is applied (Dewey, 1989; Flavell, 1979; Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 2008; Fook & Gardner, 2013).

It is curious that Kline does not refer to academic literature, yet some of her model seems to be founded on the work of academics. For example, Kline makes no specific reference to critical thinking; however, given that her model, which features set questions and clear sequencing, shares characteristics with critical thinking, it could follow that the thinking environment is a form of critical thinking. The literature on critical thinking shows a clear link between critical thinking and coaching: If coaching is considered a form of dialogue, then the findings of research on how critical thinking is used in coaching could also be applied to the use of coaching. It could be argued that coaching is accomplished by asking the client probing questions that allows the client to think and generate responses. Effective questioning is vital to the process of coaching and increases the client's awareness, thus allowing them to create their own actionable solutions (Grant, 2013). With that in mind, for this research, I opted for a set of questions that would invoke critical thinking, which would in turn create a thinking environment of some form during the interviews, and, in the analysis, I considered and explored indicators that critical thinking had taken place.

In coaching, posing a question or series of questions enables thinking and guides personal discovery, which can be defined not as a joint experience but as a coach-led one. Robins (2017) argues that insight, in contrast, is client-led. Where questions challenge a person's belief system through a process of reflection and expression, it follows that the experience of collaborating with a coach in a thinking environment serves as the trigger for challenging such beliefs. That said, there is no guarantee that any insight or personal discovery will subsequently produce behavioural change of any kind on the part of the client.

There are some fundamental differences in the kind of questions asked by coaches. These form a spectrum ranging from the predetermined questions adopted by Kline, clean

language coaches and some critical thinking models to the emergent questions posed in the moment using a synthesis of 'all the things that help you' (Wallis, 2015).

The review indicates that to create and experience a thinking environment, a therapeutically informed (Roberts & Jarrett, 2006) ask-not-tell approach (Whitmore, 2009) is required, which is counter to the pace and demands of business. When it comes to business, a thinking environment can play an educational role and assist in creating positive impacts on performance; the generation of better ideas, solutions, and decisions; allow people to feel valued and equal; and facilitate resolving issues quickly (Havers, 2008). According to Robins (2014), who conducted a doctoral study using a mixed methods approach involving 85 local government executive participants, providing space should be one of the aims of a thinking environment. Creating a secure space is key in addressing the challenges that coaching is intended to overcome, and executives protect the thinking time required to create such a space (Robins, 2014). A limited number of coaching scholars have now articulated and linked coaching and space, although I found little research focused on coaching and the physical environment. Throughout the literature, examined space is considered part of a coaching methodology rather than physical (confidential) space, which is overlooked in research. It can be argued that this is a practical consideration required in the coaching arena, whether that be for face to face, telephone, or online coaching. The impact our physical environment has on our capacity to create and experience a thinking environment is considered within the research design section of the thesis.

There appears to be a simplicity paradox between Kline's (1999) 'anyone, any time, any place' approach with the discipline refining the thinking environment over the past 30 years and the more formulaic views and requirement of subject knowledge proposed by the critical thinking community (Dewey, 1989). During the research interview stage, attention

was given to addressing the simplicity paradox; in addition, the physical environment, the perceived challenge of time, the question of whether there are elements of critical thinking either posed by the questions asked, and the resulting experience between coach and client were also considered.

Limited research has been conducted on the role of critical thinking environments in coaching. The present study is an investigation intended to fill the identified gap in previous research. The potential for positive outcomes as a result of leveraging the thinking environment in coach-client relationships (Kline, 1999) is a central theme of this research, which explores how coaches and clients create a critical thinking environment and considers models used in coaching and critical thinking, including Kline's work. The literature review explored and analysed Kline's six-step process and 10 behaviours to determine whether any of the elements thereof can be modified or even omitted while still creating the emotional and cognitive states required for the creation of a thinking environment.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological design used for this study, and outlines the process followed for data gathering and analysis. The design reflects the aims of the research, the research questions proposed and the epistemological understandings appropriate for this

study. The research focuses on coaches and their clients as 'thinking partners' (Kline, 1999) to understand how a critical thinking environment is created from the perspectives of coach and client.

The chapter begins by describing the research paradigm and research methodology adopted. A paradigm is a worldview or a set of propositions that explains how the world is perceived (Sarantakos, 1993); the research paradigm chosen for this study combines my ontological viewpoint with my epistemological standpoint, which holds a simple set of beliefs that then influences the method (Charmaz, 2007). My ontological view guided the choice of research. As part of this chapter, I address why I selected the constructivist grounded theory approach, which I discuss in relation to collecting and analysing the data. I define the selection criteria of the participants and the interview process and conclude with the evaluation criteria, as well as the ethical considerations relevant to this study.

3.1 Constructivist Paradigm

The choices that I made about the research paradigm were directed by my own ontological perspective, which incorporates the notion of multiple realities, in this case the multiple realities of the coaches and clients that have created and experienced a critical thinking environment in coaching. Seeking to understand their world, as participants have developed several and varied subjective meanings of their own experiences (Creswell, 2007). Guba and Lincoln (1989) argued that constructivism is a research paradigm that reflects an interest in aspects of the world that are not well accessed through objectivist methods and principles, maintaining that truths are social constructions created by the mind. According to Blumer (1969), when humans interact with each other, they become involved in an interpretive interaction, that is, they interpret each other's actions or remarks, and they react based on this interpretation. Mertons (2014) argues that knowledge is socially constructed. This

particular research is the result of the actual contact and interaction between me, as the researcher, and the participants, that my understanding is also constructed (as is the understanding of the participants).

The research paradigm fits with my own beliefs about the landscape and the nature of reality, and so supports a robust research design throughout. The assumptions of a constructivist paradigm incorporated into this research include the fact that the coach and client will inquire and explore about their perception of the world in which they live. They may expand meanings of their own experiences through interaction with other people; there are multiple meanings of the world, and reality is co-created by the participants as well as the researcher. It is acknowledged that the researcher is an equally significant ingredient of the study and the data amassed. As part of this research's epistemological bedrock, theories were yet to be discovered; they were constructed from the interactions that took place between the participants and researcher.

3.2 Research approach: constructivist grounded theory

The desire to find a research approach that offers an ontological and epistemological fit with my constructivist stance led me to investigate and discover various sources that articulate constructivist grounded theory and that come from multiple disciplines, such as education (Jones & Hill, 2003), psychology (Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000; Dodson & Dickert, 2004), occupational health and medicine (Vickers, 2016; Gustafsson, Dellve, Edlund & Hagberg, 2003) and nursing (Crossetti & De Goes, 2016; Annells, 1997c; McCann & Clark, 2003a; Norton, 1999). These researchers all draw on the work of Charmaz (2000, 2003) in helping to frame their reasons for a constructivist approach to their research. Charmaz (2000) has consistently argued since the early nineteen nineties that a constructivist

grounded theory approach is possible since "*data itself does not necessarily provide a window on reality. It is the 'discovered' reality that arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts*" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524). Constructivist grounded theory gives a voice to participants, and Charmaz (2006) encourages grounded theory researchers to incorporate the many voices and views of participants' interpretation through their lived/living experiences. This approach is key to finding out how people create and experience a critical thinking environment in coaching. Charmaz (2006) goes further in maintaining that it is not appropriate to retain a distant relationship with participants, where researchers then undertake the role of the 'authoritative expert.' In a coaching relationship, both the coach and the coached are perceived as being equal (Hardingham, 2004), and a unique, equally co-created, evolving relationship exists (O'Broin *et al.*, 2008). This aligns with Charmaz's principles on constructivist grounded theory chosen for this particular study.

Grounded theory is designed to develop theories from issues that are relevant to peoples' everyday lives by using comparable data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2007). It can be argued that the grounded theory approach is in itself an approach that leads the inquiry for the sole purpose of constructing theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Several, varied approaches have given rise to different interpretations of grounded theory, and Charmaz (2006) simply offers a constructivist alternative to classical grounded theory which will be covered in more detail. The constructivist approach presents an interpretive understanding in that it states the observer values priorities, positions and actions, as well as observations (Charmaz, 2009). In contrast, neutrality, passivity and the observer's authority describe an objectivist approach. Charmaz (2006) also argues that the constructivist method takes on board the instruments of grounded theory; however, it does

not support the objectivist and positivist assumptions of the more traditional approach (Charmaz, 2006).

The most commonly used method of grounded theory, formulated by Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998), is described as the traditional or classic perspective of grounded theory, and is depicted in the work of Glaser (1978) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). Their method recommends a step-by-step approach with established specific coding. They claim that, by abiding by the methodological procedures thoroughly, the researcher will be able to uncover the objective theory which is found in the data and that same theory shows itself through the person undertaking the analysis (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Willig (2013) describes this technique as potentially rigid and deductive. This version, according to Charmaz (2014), is situated in the post-positivism paradigm, considered as contradictive as well as conflicting with the principles of the constructivist paradigm and the qualitative research. The researcher needs to play an active part in working together with the data, and there is no single reality; constructivism only views the results of the actual analysis itself (Charmaz & Bryant, 2007).

Glaser and Strauss both progressed their grounded theory methodologies, giving rise to professional and methodological divergence. In the 1970's Glaser and in the 1980's Strauss wrote further expositions of grounded theory, publishing their books separately rather than collaboratively (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987). By 1990 Strauss had forged an academic partnership with Corbin and together they refined particular features of the original (Classic) grounded theory (Kenny & Fourie, 2014). The reformation of classical grounded theory did not cease with Strauss and Glaser, as Charmaz joined the academic debate and fashioned a third variation of grounded theory, thus Charmaz established a new chapter within the history of grounded theory.

Charmaz developed a distinctive introduction to grounded theory, which she learned personally from both Glaser and Strauss themselves (Charmaz, 2006). She argues that that she responded to Glaser and Strauss' challenge in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) to employ grounded theory flexibly in the researcher's own mould (Charmaz, 2006).

Charmaz took the original tenets of grounded theory and translated them into contemporary research paradigms (Kenny & Fourie, 2014), which has continued to evolve significantly since the conception of grounded theory four decades previously (Charmaz, 2006). She focused on interpreting grounded theory within a constructivist paradigm to forge a distinctly constructivist grounded theory approach. Thus, she produced a third variation of the grounded theory methodology. Charmaz's constructivist explanation of grounded theory reconfigured many of its instructions and assumptions (Charmaz, 2014). She rejected Glaser's underlying philosophy of discovering an implicit theory, arguing that 'neither the data nor the theories are discovered' and asserted that 'we construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). Charmaz also deviated from the 'methodological rules and requirements' of Strauss' highly systematic coding process perceiving it to be 'overly prescriptive' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 9). As an alternative, she proposed flexible 'guidelines' which would 'raise questions and outline strategies to indicate possible routes to take' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 11). Thus, she departed significantly from Classic grounded theory resisting both Glaser's underlined philosophy and Strauss' prescribed coding process.

Grounded theory is an emergent theory; rather than starting from a view of existing theory and predefined ideas, the theory itself is realised from the data and is a methodical

generation of theory from data which contains inductive thinking. There is little theory to draw on in thinking environments, so I wanted to examine what happens in practice with practitioners and draw theory from their practice. Another research approach I considered was heuristic (Moustakas, 1990). In the heuristic approach, the data includes the inner processes of everyone involved in the study, including the researcher, in contrast to grounded theory, where data are gathered from interviews and observations. In either approach, the role of the researcher reflects and contributes to the differing views of reality. Although I am passionate about creating a critical thinking environment in the coaching practice and to bring my own experience to the forefront in the thesis, the heuristic approach could have worked. However, I would have been looking solely at a small number of other coach's experiences of doing the same and reporting on experiences, rather than creating a tentative theory. Client's experiences would also not have been so prominent in the research.

Grounded theory was selected due to the fact it can be used to obtain new theoretical understandings where theory is inadequate or incomplete (Walsh et al., 2015). To maintain this method, all decisions made for the collection of data that constructed the theoretical framework are considered from a grounded perspective rather than a preconceived theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). 'Constructivist' grounded theory, which was developed in response to classical grounded theory by Charmaz (2000), posits the researcher as an essential part of the constructed reality of the research process, not an independent and objective observer (Clark, 2012). Constructivist grounded theory preserves the thoroughness of the traditional grounded theory method, but also requires reflexivity, thus helping to encourage a considered understanding of the participants' meanings, their actions, and their perception of their world; in this case, a thinking environment in some

form. Glaser (1992) believes that the researcher should avoid contaminating the data and allow for the emergence or discovery of theories. He argues in the favour of no reading on the topic of inquiry prior to the research itself. I, as a constructivist researcher, conclude that the researcher cannot be purified or separate from the actual data collection and analysis, although this can be approached with an open mind and no preconceived ideas. This would be a challenge when both are, in essence, created from shared experiences and relationships with the research participants, as well as from other sources of data. I chose to adopt Charmaz's approach to grounded theory, because there is no 'god's eye view' (Charmaz, 2006).

Constructivist grounded theory has been utilised in this research to develop a theoretical framework for how a critical thinking environment is created and experienced in a coaching context. I have gained extensive experience over the years in coaching and thinking environments, and groundedness would be achieved by the results of my commitment as a researcher to analyse what I observe in the interviews or in the data (Charmaz, 1990). Based on this notion, the researcher attempts to remain open to what is uncovered in the research while also remaining unattached, which allows freedom from preconceived and fixed ideas based on what could have been personal or professional interests or drawn from knowledge of pre-existing theoretical frameworks.

Strauss, Corbin and Glaser share the same view: that the theory discovered through grounded theory should be grounded in the data and not in the existing literature. Charmaz (2006) argues against this, asserting that researchers have been exposed already to the existing theories, hypotheses and concepts in their field of research. Charmaz (2006) has no issues with existing theories in the literature if the researcher is aware of them and does not start the research with them. Despite starting my literature review early to guide the

choices of the area to be researched and the method to be used in this research, I continued adding to the body of this methodology as new theories and concepts emerged.

The constructivist approach to grounded theory helps to explain *how* and *why* people behave in particular ways, in comparable and different contexts (Charmaz, 2006), in this case, a thinking environment in some form. Charmaz (2007) describes this as going beneath the surface of a conversation. Hogan (1994) argues that grounded theory as a research methodology can highlight common issues for individuals, which permits them to understand as well as connect with the theory, and in turn, individuals can use it within their own lives, by understanding how people understand their own experiences through emotion and meaning. I established this through the gathering of data, which in turn exposed opinions, facts, feelings, interpretations and actions, as well as various contexts.

3.3 Research Design

A constructivist approach to the research question, together with qualitative methods, was considered to be the most fitting approach to answer the research question. The strengths of the qualitative research method are that they can provide elaborate textual and recorded descriptions of how people experience a research subject, with realms of possibility for rich insights into the studied phenomenon. Patton (2002) explains that, 'the human element in qualitative research is both its strength and weakness'. The human element can be characterised as a strength because human insight and experience can be developed to allow for new understandings of the world; as an identified weakness, the issue hinges on the researcher's competence. The use of a qualitative approach is used in this study as it permits me, the researcher, to explore how people create and experience a thinking environment in a coaching context.

Charmaz (2007) describes constructivist grounded theory as '*a method of conducting qualitative research that focuses on creating conceptual frameworks or theories through building inductive analysis from the data*' (p. 187). Early coding in constructivist grounded theory enables the researcher to identify which direction to take when undertaking further data gathering. Theories can be constructed from inductive qualitative data; the data collection and analysis inform each other in an iterative process, and constant comparative analysis creates ever more abstract concepts and theories through an inductive process (Charmaz, 2007). The visual model (Figure 3.4) offers a representation of the stages that have been followed for this study. The grounded theory process merges the data gathering as well as the data analysis, in contrast to other qualitative research methods where a more linear sequence is followed. In the grounded theory method, the research needs to be able to develop without losing its main principles, refraining from having a pre-formulated hypothesis, simultaneous data collection, systematic coding, constant comparison, theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

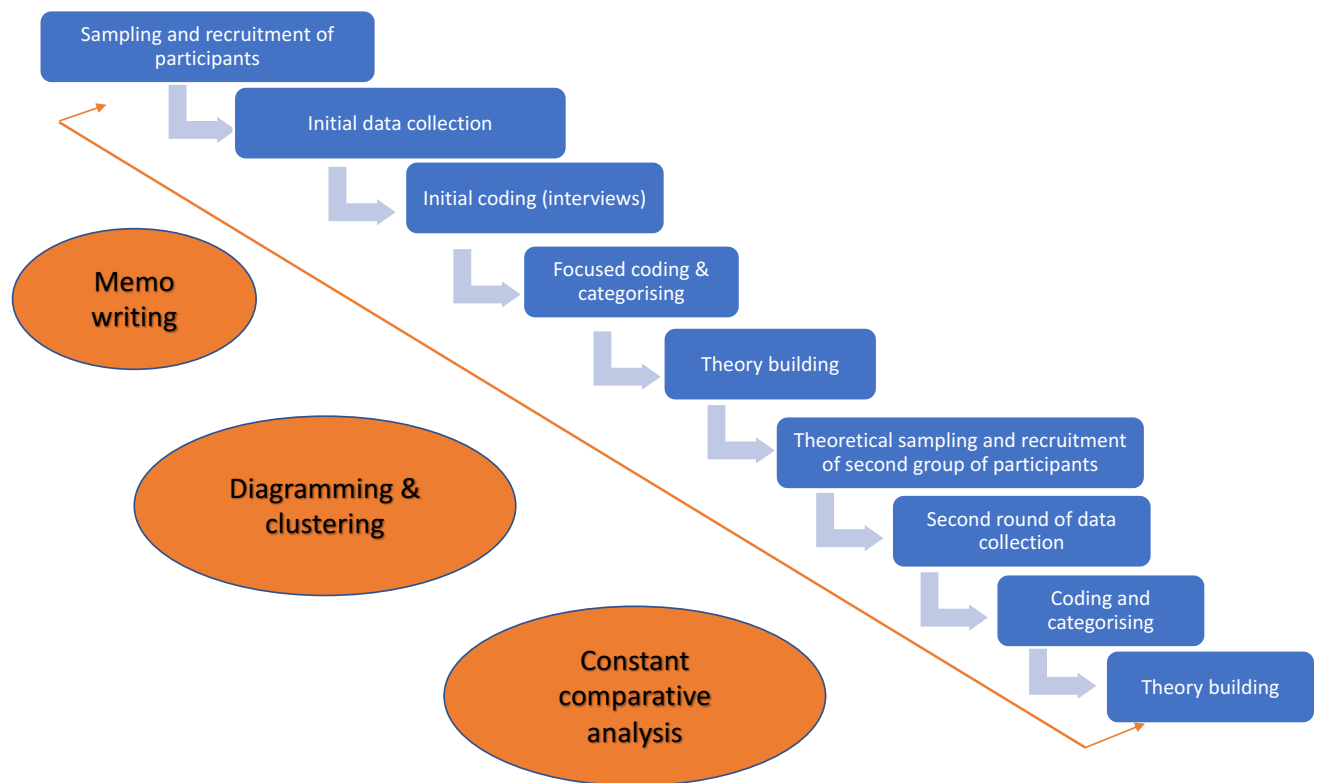


Figure 3.4 A visual representation of the data gathering, and analysis process followed (adapted from Charmaz, 2007).

The research was designed to examine how coaches and clients create and experience a critical thinking environment, hence how they construct meaning. I realised that, as the researcher, I needed to focus as closely as possible on the innermost part of the experience, while bearing in mind that it is not possible to truly imitate the exact conditions of what the participants experience (Charmaz, 2006). This approach required an exchange between me, as the researcher, with coaches and clients in the co-construction of meaning, while also considering any potential power differentials that arose through my position as researcher.

The grounded theory method allows for an iterative process of data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2007). From my own experience as an executive coach, I would argue that coaches require new knowledge and skills to address the challenges of their clients to

ensure a successful outcome of the coaching process. Constructivist grounded theory methodology can produce new coaching knowledge sprung from real life interactions with coaches and clients. This knowledge is assembled by developing a process to understand the experiences of the coaches and clients, interpreting and understanding how participants make sense of their observations, perceptions and actions (Charmaz, 2014). The analysis, iterative methods of data collection, the deep and intimate connection that I established with the research participants, the data and the theory that emerged, all make the development of grounded theory a co-constructed endeavour (Charmaz, 2014).

When making sense of grounded theory data, both induction and deduction are used. Charmaz (2014) suggests that researchers absorb themselves in a creative process of theory co-construction as well as using other analytic tools such as abduction. Abduction can be described as engaging in intuitive and creative ideas which may help the researcher to understand and explain any observations that are not answered or are unanticipated (Charmaz, 2014). According to Charmaz (2014), abductive reasoning deepens and develops theory construction by assisting in the re-examination of data, or encouraging the collection of even more data which may explain any observations that are not answered or were not expected. Abductive reasoning is informed by the experience of personal as well as the researcher's professional knowledge and experiences. Charmaz (2014) advocates for this type of knowledge from the researcher, she argues that an informed researcher enriches theory construction.

Data analysis and data collection need to happen simultaneously, one informing the other, where the primary focus of the research emerges as the analysis advances (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2005). Grounded theory expects that abstract ideas are

developed actions and words (Charmaz, 2005) about the coach and client's meanings.

Charmaz (2006) highlights the analytic aspects of grounded theory inquiry, while also recognising the solid foundation in the data. Rather than just describing the data, grounded theory requires that the researcher moves to 'conceptualising it in analytical frameworks' (Charmaz, 2006).

Charmaz (2012) argues that comparative methods need to be used throughout all the various stages of data analysis. She states that data analysis and thoughts and ideas that emerge all the way through the investigation empowers the researcher to assimilate as well as streamline the data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Furthermore, Glaser (2012) argues differently and is rather critical of Charmaz's approach of the constant comparative process. Glaser (2012) advises that this could impact the study through the bias of the researcher. He argues that grounded theory should be concepts and not accurate descriptions. His grounded theory conserves an objective standpoint where the researcher does not include their own understanding to the data. I disagree with Glaser's view as I don't see how the experiences of the role of coaching cannot be objectively analysed.

Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006) assert that the researcher needs to be reflective when using the constructivist paradigm, and transparent throughout the whole research process. Memo writing was used as one of the analytic tools that helped me to be reflective (as advocated by Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2007). Memo writing involved me writing down my thoughts, any feelings I had, and questions that arose from the analytic process.

3.5 Participants

The participants involved in this research project had a broad general knowledge of the topic researched and were from various cultures and organisations, including self-employed coaches, in order to provide a broad scope for this particular study. Constructivist grounded theory encourages the person undertaking the study to look for data where it can be found (Charmaz, 2014). Within this group, I needed to recruit coaches and clients who met the criteria for my study, as detailed in Table 3.6. These formed three groups: a) coaches who followed Nancy Kline's model fully, a target group I called 'Kline disciples'; b) coaches who followed Kline's model, but may have adapted it to suit their coaching practice, a target group I called 'Kline followers'; and c) clients who had experienced a thinking environment in some form. Seeking data from individuals experienced in these fields was essential in obtaining rich data. The aim was to interview 40 participants in total. The organisations identified ranged from finance, policing, to professional football.

Table 3. 6 Research participant group selection criteria and area of focus

Groups of Participants	Selection Criteria	Data Collection
Group A 10 participants	• Nancy Kline's 'Time to Think' coaches. • Possessed a post-graduate qualification and had more than five years' experience of coaching.	• Area of focus: coaches who used the Kline Thinking Environment Model as part of their coaching practice. • Participants were selected from all over the globe.

Group B 10 participants	• Used various coaching models to enable a thinking environment in some form. • Possessed a post-graduate qualification and had more than five years' experience of coaching.	• Area of focus: coaches who used various coaching models to create a thinking environment of some form. • A mix of employment status due to 'Time to Think' coaches being mainly self-employed. • Participants were selected from all over the globe.
Group C 20 participants	• Clients of coaches who have experienced a thinking environment in some form.	• Area of focus: Clients who had experienced the Kline Thinking Environment Model as part of their coaching, or clients who had experienced other coaching tools to enable a thinking environment in some form. • Participants were selected from all over the globe.

To recruit participants, starting in March 2019, I emailed Nancy Kline and asked if she was willing to share a poster that explained the research (See appendix 1). People who were associated with Kline and who showed an interest in taking part in the study emailed me directly. I also shared the poster on my LinkedIn profile, where I am part of various coaching networks. I received a good response to the research from people wanting to be interviewed.

After receiving an email from the interested participants, I had an email exchange or telephone call to check that they met the required criteria for the study. I also used this contact as an opportunity to outline the purpose of my research. Once an agreement was reached, all participants were invited via the same process: an invitation to participate, after which the consent form was sent to each participant via email, signed by hand, or

electronically, and returned to me via email. All groups were given a brief outlining the research objectives as well as the research study guidelines, a participant information form (coach and client - Appendix 2), consent form (Appendix 3), General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) notice (Appendix 4), based on the ethical research guidelines set out by Oxford Brookes.

3.6.1 Coaches

All of the coaches in Groups a) and b) in Table 3.7 were shortlisted either via Kline's contacts, or my existing professional network. The first ten coaches, Group a), are Nancy Kline 'Time to Think' coaches who coach using this method (Kline disciples). The second ten executive coaches, Group b) listed in the table, use various models in coaching to enable a thinking environment in some form. All coaches possessed a post-graduate qualification in coaching and had more than five years of experience of coaching. They were selected for the following reasons:

- they use the Kline thinking environment model as part of their coaching practice;
- they use the Kline model as a tool, or use other tools, to enable a thinking environment in some form;
- they were not restricted to Britain, to extend my research beyond the UK;
- they represented a mix of employment status. I noticed many of the 'Time to Think' coaches were self-employed and I felt this could make them more loyal to this particular model, because of repeated work, or they may not be open to other models (this assumption on my part is discussed later in Chapter four and five in the findings).

Table 3.7 Characteristics of participant coaches – (Groups A & B)

Codes	Sex	Position	Nationality	Industry /Environment
GROUP A - Kline Disciples				
KD001	Female	Self-employed	South African	Coaching/Kline
KD002	Male	Employed	British	Football/Kline
KD003	Female	Self-employed	South African	Coaching/Kline
KD004	Female	Self-employed	Indian	Coaching/Kline
KD005	Female	Self-employed	American	Coaching/Kline
KD006	Female	Self-employed	British	Coaching/Kline
KD007	Female	Self-employed	South African	Coaching/Kline
KD008	Female	Employed	British	Coaching/Kline
KD009	Female	Self-employed	Swiss	Coaching /Kline
KD010	Female	Self-employed	South African	Coaching /Kline
GROUP B - Kline Followers				
KF011	Female	Self-employed	Columbian	Coaching
KF012	Female	Employed	British	Health
KF013	Male	Employed	Irish	Police
KF014	Female	Employed	Polish	Communications
KF015	Female	Employed	American	Coaching
KF016	Female	Employed	British	Professional Services
KF017	Female	Self-employed	British	Recruitment
KF018	Female	Self-employed	British	Professional Services
KF019	Female	Employed	Australian	Marketing
KF020	Female	Self-employed	Dutch	Coach

3.7.1 Clients (coachees)

The third group (Group c) in Table 3.7) are clients of coaches. All these clients were shortlisted via my existing professional network or submitted to me via the coaches themselves. They were selected for one of the following reasons: they were clients who had experience of the Kline thinking environment model as part of their coaching or had experienced other tools to enable a thinking environment in some form; either was sufficient for this research.

Table 3.8 Characteristics of participants: clients Group C

Pseudonym	Sex	Position	Nationality	Industry /Environment
GROUP C				
P021	Female	Employed	British	Digital/Client
P023	Female	Employed	British	Digital/Client
P024	Male	Employed	Polish	Sales/Client
P025	Female	Employed	Irish	Human Resources/Client
P026	Female	Self-employed	Welsh	Recruitment/Client
P027	Male	Employed	Russian	Tobacco/Client
P028	Female	Employed	American	University/Client

P029	Female	Employed	American	Professional Services/Client
P030	Male	Employed	American	Banking /Client
P031	Female	Self-employed	Spanish	Marketing/Client
P032	Male	Employed	Indian	Author/Client
P034	Female	Employed	British	Banking/Client
P035	Female	Employed	Australian	Government/Client
P036	Male	Employed	Polish	Healthcare/Client
P037	Male	Employed	British	Police/Client
P038	Male	Employed	German	Insurance/Client
P039	Male	Employed	British	Corporate/Client
P040	Male	Employed	British	Police/Client

In total, 40 people participated in the study. Groups A & B were predominantly female, with only two males. Group C consisted of eleven females and nine males.

3.9 Data collection interviews

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, this is used as a method of gathering data in qualitative research and are regularly used in grounded theory research (Willig, 2013; Birks & Mills, 2015) because, as Charmaz (2014) outlines, this type of interviewing creates a flexible approach with open spaces where ideas can be created, and issues addressed accordingly. Semi-structured interviews was the method used to collect data for this research study. However, Patton (2002) warns that in semi-structured interviews, topics may be inadvertently missed. The structure of the interview could lead to diversions in the line of questioning (Newton, 2010) as different interviews will have different lines of wording, and hence comparability of the questions and answers will be compromised (Newton, 2010). The loss of the direct nature of the interview can, however, be seen in a favourable light, according to Patton (2002). Any emerging coherences of the interview can be analysed to provide a more contextual view of the research (Denscombe, 2007). Diversion from the main line of questions should, however, be controlled to avoid irrelevance (Patton, 2002). The full list of questions that were asked of the participants in this research is shown in appendix 5. The direction of the interview largely depends on the skills of the interviewer.

Denscombe (2007) shows that people respond differently in interviews, according to their perception of the interviewer. Aspects such as the interviewer's demographic characteristics regarding age, sex and ethnicity will affect the opinion of the interviewee and hence lead to bias when answering the questions (Silverman, 2005) and so, depending on the topic being discussed, the interviewee may choose to be dishonest or hold back information from the interviewer (Newton, 2010). To mitigate this effect, I, as the interviewer, made the intention of the conversation clear and allowed the interviewee to ask any questions about the

purpose of the interview (Newton, 2010). Another way I curbed this bias was by establishing any inconsistencies that existed in the interview during data analysis (Gomm, 2004). Any hesitations during the interview, such as behavioural changes, were noted down since such cues gave me (as the interviewer) a view of the bigger picture (Denscombe, 2007). Charmaz (2007) recommends in the constructivist grounded theory methodology that the interview processes be conversational, open-ended, as well as constructed mutually, which in turn, ensures that a deep and rich depth is obtained.

Grounded theorists argue about the advantages of recording interviews, although Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintain that notetaking itself is sufficient. Charmaz (2014) asserts that notetaking misses the situational details and also the construction of the interview. I agree with Charmaz's point, in that when the interviewer writes notes when coaching, he/she tends to lose connection with the client (Charmaz, 2014). Based on this argument and my own experience, I decided to audio record all the interviews.

As outlined, data were collected via semi-structured interviews, which allowed me, as the researcher, to engage actively with participants to explore a thinking environment with them. I was able to examine earlier events, opinions and feelings. Creating open-ended questions encourages participants to be open, and interesting stories start to emerge. Where it felt appropriate and I had a particular hunch about an issue, or I felt there was more to be uncovered, I shifted the conversation. In this research study, the participant interviews were open-ended; they were co-created and constructed and felt like a conversation. All questions were also open-ended so that they were not prescriptive of what the answer might be, thus allowing the participants to think for themselves.

Initially, I set up a pilot interview with a coach and client to test how the participants considered the interview questions, whether the questions needed modifying, and the pros

and cons of sharing the interview questions in advance of the interview. As a result of the test interviews, I decided to share the questions in advance, thus allowing both the coach and the clients to consider their responses and explore them further in the interview.

Prepared interview guides were arranged with the opening, central and closing questions with a total of no more than ten questions (see appendix 5), to ensure that the focus was on the data, which in turn, allowed the research to expand on critical components of the experiences (Charmaz, 2006).

With regard to developing the interview questions I took the advice of Charmaz (2014) and made sure that when I developed my interview questions, they explored the topic and would also expand and discover the participants' experiences in this field. I started with 3-4 very broad questions in the pilot interviews (see appendix 5 for the interview questions). I was clear with the participants I was interviewing that I was just beginning my research and that I mostly wanted to hear what they had to say. I took the examples of what Charmaz (2006) highlighted as good questions and adapted some of her language into my interview questions for my research topic. I wanted to capture the participants individual experiences, thoughts, feelings and actions. I found that I didn't always need all of the interview questions that I had scoped as stories and examples tumbled out from the questions that I had designed. When I developed the questions, I wanted to make sure that I were not forcing a particular answer from the participant.

From the insights that I gained from the pilot interview and my analysis, I developed further interview questions. By the time I had completed two interviews I had new ideas about both what questions to ask and who I should be talking to next. Following the guidance from Charmaz (2006) I began writing memos of my encounters from each interview - not just

about my preconceptions, but also about what I learned from that particular interview. I found that from memoing right from the start helped me focus on what interested me the most and I updated my interview questions accordingly.

A limitation of semi-structured interviews is the lack of certainty on the 'openness' of the answers given by the interviewee (Silverman, 2005). For example, the participant may not share their true views on a subject; they may give you an answer they feel you want to hear. This approach does not align with constructivist research where reality is co-constructed between participants (researcher and interviewee); however, I ensured that the different types of data were convincing and reliable (Silverman, 2005). Additionally, the onus is on the researcher to attach evidence to the collected data where possible; thus, I sought clarification where necessary to validate the interim findings of the study. Clarification included retractions of statements made during the interview (Newton, 2010).

Initially the interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes and conducted face to face where possible, otherwise via video Zoom (voice recorded only). This approach facilitated the development of rapport and thus enhanced the participants' confidence to share their thoughts and views on a thinking environment via personal interaction. The central aim was to gain rich insights into the views and actions of the coach and client, as well as understanding the impact that the physical environment had on the study. These insights included the phenomena which arose out of the shared experience through what was expressed, felt, happened and observed through the collection of detailed observations and interviews. The aim was to seek to understand the way the coach and clients see and experience the world.

At the start of each interview, I reminded participants about the intent of the study and checked to see if they had any questions from the information I had sent out. This exchange highlighted what was on the consent agreement and conditions; audio recording and the use of anonymised quotes were discussed and agreed on. I reminded participants that they could stop the interview or withdraw from the process at any time. All interviews conducted were recorded using a digital device, then downloaded and transcribed by me (the researcher). The median length of the interviews was 39 minutes.

Once I had asked all my questions, I asked each participant if they had any other observations, thoughts, or anything else they wished to add that had not already been covered in the interview. I invited them to contact me if they wanted to add anything at a later date, or if they wished to withdraw. I confirmed that participants were welcome to see my research once completed, or to view the transcript of the interview. Each participant was emailed after the interview to thank them for their participation (see appendix 6). Furthermore, I found the length of the interviews varied, although the more interviews I did, the better I became at containing the answers, for example, if the participant drifted off-topic.

Initially, participants who could provide a relevant source of rich data were chosen (Charmaz, 2007). Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2001) argue that purposive sampling is used to select 'supposedly typical or interesting cases' (p. 79). I started the outlined process with purposive sampling by selecting coaches and clients who could provide a relevant source of rich data around Kline's (1999) thinking environments. The inclusion criteria for the first 20 participants were that they knew Kline's model, used it within their coaching practice, and followed the model, or a client that had experienced the model in some form. I decided to complete my theoretical sampling at a later stage to avoid the analytical pitfalls identified by

Charmaz (2014), owing to my being new to this research process. Two of the pitfalls identified are making assumptions from the data rather than looking for evidence, and a need to get close to the data collection and analysis to avoid amassing volumes of unfocused data that would be overwhelming for the researcher. I identified some potential tentative categories by memoing and basing categories on the questions I had in the analysis; in this case, interviewing participants who did not fully follow Kline's thinking environment model, but who had experienced a thinking environment in another form. I found that selective sampling generated a vast volume of data, while open coding provided multiple emerging concepts and codes.

3.10 Coding and analysis

This section describes how I analysed my data following each interview, which led to constructing categories to inform a theoretical framework.

On completion, each interview was immediately transcribed to capture the interview while it was still fresh and clear in my mind. I went through the interview transcript, I checked it for accuracy against my recording. Next, I applied Charmaz's coding method of analysis which involves a staged process (see Figure 3.4). The first stage of the analysis of the interviews was what Charmaz (2014) calls 'initial coding'. I decided on the method of line-by-line coding, as recommended by Charmaz (2014) for people new to grounded research; this style of coding allows a complete and comprehensive analysis of the data and reduces running the risk of missing ideas and concepts (Charmaz, 2006). I selected a segment of data and started with line-by-line coding, which requires putting a name against each line of the written data (Glaser, 1978). Charmaz (2006) argues that this approach means the researcher stays close to the data.

I found that during coding, the faster I moved, the better the outcome was as I was not hampered by trying to make sense of each word or line. Where possible, I used the words and language of the participants to ensure I was immersed in the data and I was not using jargon or typical professional language. Line-by-line coding enabled me to familiarise myself with all of the data at a deeper level and gave me time to think as well as generate ideas, to challenge, and also question the data, for example, to keep asking myself what the participant was saying. By using line-by-line coding, I found that participants' stories took on many different meanings.

I generated many codes based on what I deemed the data suggested or implied, undertaking the task with an open mind where possible and without preconceived ideas. The initial and focused coding that was generated is not exhaustive. The codes are the reflections of the interactions with the participants and the interpretation of the actual data. The gathering of focused data helps to sharpen and test the research ideas (Charmaz, 2006), which is characteristic of coding analysis in constructivist grounded theory. I generated codes that were short and related to the data while trying to avoid concepts that seemed abstract. I moved quickly through the line-by-line process to enable my thinking to be free and clear and remained critical and analytical, as recommended by Charmaz (2014). When I found that a line did not generate a code, I made notes, carried on through the data, and at a later stage I returned to the line with a clearer mind. I was open to not restricting myself to having just one code per line and found that if there were multiple codes, I was open to the multiple messages. I renamed codes where this was deemed appropriate, which allowed me to work quickly with the data (Charmaz, 2014).

Following this, I looked at the codes I had created, for example, *'Equality of co-created space and presence'*, *'Pausing to imagine'* (Line-by-line coding, Figure 3.11), and then I went

through another level of analysis. When I went over the codes again, I began to see these as '*Client's desire for equality in coach relationship*' and '*Creating the right space for the client to think*' (Coding 2, Figure 3.11). Having completed these stages, I moved on to the final coding stage. By this point, I was seeking to raise the codes further from Stage Two to a more analytical level. For example, '*Client's desire for equality in coach relationship*', became '*Equal partnership*' (Coding 3, Figure 3.11).

Slice of data	Line-by-line coding	Coding 2	Coding 3
Presence.....I compare it to Buddhism. There's this concept of the fertile void, and I compare it to a space, I wrote a book called <i>Not Knowing</i> and this space of not knowing - I compare it to that which is described as almost like this space in between the known and the unknown, a joint space of equality in the relationship. I feel like when I go into that thinking space, it's almost creating a pause, creating a space of almost no thinking in order for something new to imagine.	Equality of co-created space and presence Pausing to imagine Space of encouragement for thinking	Client's desire for equality in coach relationship Creating the right space for client to think	Equal partnership Co-creating the thinking space
I think firstly to have the safety and encouragement to go to that space, so that means probably asking framing questions from experience as one way to go there, so the right type of questions. They're not technical questions, but they're questions that require living with the question a bit longer than going straight to the answer. Asking lots of questions to understand to think.	Coaching experience for right questions Exploring with questions to seek	Experienced coach asks the right questions	Questions from experience

Figure 3.11 Stages of coding

I sifted through the initial codes from each interview transcript, identified the ones that I deemed to be of higher analytic value and which appeared frequently, as well as those I saw as more significant to the question, I was researching than other codes (Charmaz, 2007). During the initial coding process, I found it imperative to ask, 'What are these data a study of? What do the data assume and what, collectively, do they represent'? (Charmaz, 2014, p. 187). I moved backwards and forwards in the data to examine the focused codes to create data sets that were the same as the other interviews, looking for patterns and themes. For each interview I had undertaken, I completed Initial and focused coding before moving on to the analysis of the next one. The focused codes I deemed greater conceptual value and were raised to categories. Concepts and categories were indicated by the data with every category having to earn its way into the analysis, that is, it had to be grounded in the data rather than being generated from my own hypotheses and preconceptions.

Once the four interviews were completed, I compared the data, looking for themes and patterns which surface when the researcher can find similar material in the data from different interviews. This step allows the researcher to look for comparisons. This is classed as a 'constant comparative method' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as outlined in the figure on grounded theory (Figure 3.4), which is necessary for the ongoing comparisons with the data, codes, and the categories (Charmaz & Tweed, 2012). As outlined in the example below (Figure 3.12), the method enabled me to make the connections between the interviews in this batch. I noticed several themes that all clients spoke about: equality in a coaching relationship, co-creating space, and the coaches' experience in asking the right questions of the client.

Interview 1: coding 3	Interview 2: coding 3	Interview 3: coding 3	Interview 4: coding 3
Equal partnership. Co-creating the thinking space.	Space for encouragement from equality. Create space together.	Respect encouragement in a coaching relationship equates to equality and space to think together.	Coaching relationship and trust create a thinking space or pause.

Figure 3.12: Themes in coding

All the interviews were processed in the same way. The line-by-line coding created a vast number of codes that were generated from the transcripts; for example, the initial line-by-line coding stage of a nine-page interview transcription generated 583 codes. While this made the analysis tougher because of the amount of data, I did not want to dismiss any data as they may have been central to the development of the categories.

At this stage in the process, I developed tentative categories by selecting the most significant codes in the analysis and ensuring that they were adequate for my emerging categories. The analysis of this batch showed that equality and creating space were similar, although described a little differently. The codes that emerged were: equal partnership, co-creating thinking space, trusting relationship creates thinking space, relationship based on respect and encouragement (Figure 3.12). Once saturation (no new information from further participant interviews) of these codes was reached, I constructed a category. This particular category was named Deepening the relationship (Figure 3.12). Saturation did not depend on the *amount* of data that had been collected and analysed, but on the point at which no significant new insights emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Charmaz (2006) defines saturation as the point at which the core categories that are identified during the analysis

are supported through relevant and thorough data, and so the variety of properties of the categories are established in detail.

Growing confidence with the data enabled me to develop the process more quickly. I discarded many unsaturated codes and used only saturated codes to inform my categories.

Three broad categories were constructed from the data, each with sub-themes, that are discussed in detail in Chapters 4–6. The categories form a framework for understanding the key aspects involved in how coaches and clients experience a critical thinking environment in coaching.

The three main categories are:

Category 1: Contracting Establishing the relationship, presented in Chapter 4.

Category 2: Thinking space – Deepening the relationship, presented in Chapter 5.

Category 3: Physical environment – Situating the relationship (where coaching takes place), presented in Chapter 6.

An additional comparison of data within the categories was carried out as there were three groups of participants. The terms ‘coach’ and ‘client’ are used to represent the two main participant groups, which are further identified in the three participant groups (KD – Kline’s disciple coaches; KF – coaches who use Kline’s and other models; CL – clients) with quotation identifiers prefixed with the corresponding participant group code and participant number. The categories that emerged during the analysis were formed by both coach and client experiences in coaching. To illustrate and discuss the categories the voices and perspectives of both the coaches and clients are drawn on.

An overall analysis of each category with a summary of the main points follows the presentation of the sub themes. Once the three categories were outlined, consideration was given to the interaction and relationship between the categories. I found that I was still refining the sub themes and order of categories throughout writing this thesis.

These categories and their relationships informed the theoretical findings.

3.14 Memoing

In all the stages, my assumptions and experiences were captured through reflective and analytical memos, which I wrote before and during the data gathering and analysis.

It was very helpful to complete memos after each participant interview. I listened to the audio recordings a few times, then I wrote memos reflecting my thoughts and interpretations based on what I heard the participant say. Memoing after each interview helped to capture my thoughts and any insights (Charmaz, 2006).

I continued to write memos which were integrated into the development of codes and categories. The example in Figure 3.15 was written during the early stages of analysis of the interviews above.

All of the clients interviewed stated that an equal relationship with the coach is key to driving a thinking environment or pauses within coaching. There are several references to co-creating or working together and encouragement has also been mentioned. Although, in some instances, trust was not always mentioned, it seemed to be a given that this was prevalent (assumption on my part?). This needs to be checked out in further interviews.

Figure 3.15 Memoing example

According to Charmaz (2010) (who regards reflection as a must), memo writing becomes more analytical as the research evolves. As the analysis progressed, the memos became more detailed and much more focused.

Interesting the amount of focus on equal partnership that enables trust. Does trust come through the encouragement of the client? Something to be checked on in the other interviews. Equality is interesting to me, is a thinking environment created by the coach not being an expert??? One to consider and check on while looking through the data.

Figure 3.16 Another memoing example

3.17 Theoretical sampling and pursuing theory

Theoretical sampling is one of the distinctive features of grounded theory which separates it from other qualitative approaches in that it gives the researcher the flexibility to gather further data whenever the analysis may require it to explore ideas that emerge from the analysis and answer questions.

Charmaz (2014) outlines that researchers can also use negative situations and tensions to recognise new considerations and identify another possibility from the theory that is developing. I found that when there were disagreements between respondents in the interviews, it was helpful in the way that it led me to ask the participants to explain further or in more depth about an issue, this was helpful when identifying any gaps in the development of the grounded theory.

3.18 Evaluation Criteria

I employed various methods to ensure quality throughout the whole process of the research study, based on Guba's (1981) advice. Guba (1981) posits that there are four main criteria that a researcher should look at to establish the trustworthiness of the research: transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility is the pursuit of the researcher to make sure that the research deals with the set objectives (Guba, 1981). In terms of these criteria, the researcher adapted well-established research methods and developed familiarity with the participants through studying documents and pre-interview chats (Shenton, 2004).

The next criterion is transferability. Unlike credibility (which deals with internal validity), transferability deals with external validity (Guba, 1981). Transferability is the relevance of the study in other contexts. Although different environments may not bear an exact resemblance to the situation and the population of those of the study, the research does provide a baseline understanding that will be applicable across other people (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability refers to the reliability of the study (Guba, 1981). The researcher must ensure that the study is conducted in the same environment in order to achieve the same results. The study, therefore, contains literature on the design, data gathering techniques and appraisal of the project to enable future research (Shenton, 2004). This aspect was considered when participants were identified for this study, and the criteria established: accredited executive coaches (men or women), or a coachee/client with experience of working with thinking environments in some form. A post-graduate qualification and more than five years' experience of coaching was required for participants who were coaches.

Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2013) state that the researcher should ensure as far as possible that the findings of the study are derived from the ideas of the population. Grounded theory entails the researcher developing analytic categories directly from the data, not from preconceived concepts or hypotheses. In addition, grounded theory processes compel the person undertaking the research to keep in mind what happens in the empirical world (Charmaz, 2007).

3.19 Reflexivity

Reflexivity enabled me to recognise my own biases throughout this study and to minimise these by really focusing on the participants' viewpoints and experiences (Finlay 2002). Many discussions in literature note how a grounded theory researcher needs to have an open mind during the research study (Glaser, 1998). The challenge for the researcher is how well this can be achieved? On the other hand, is the researcher able to see and generate theory by being open to the concepts in the data? I found that reflexivity through memoing helped me to consider my potential bias and raised my awareness about the relationship with the participants I interviewed during the research (Kolb, 2012). My extensive coaching experience enabled me to be aware of the influences that could have arisen from my assumptions.

The research question originated from my interest in and passion for the thinking environment and the observation that this approach is not used in the industries in which I have worked. I found that if I reflected on my potential bias, I could uncover some of my own assumptions which could have caused research risks.

3.20 Limitations of the research design

The broad research question helps to provide the scope for participants to contribute to the research as the phenomenon becomes more defined, which in turn provides new comprehensions grounded in the participants' world views (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). I have already mentioned Charmaz's pitfalls in unwieldy data collection in the analysis section. The limitation is the possibility of being overwhelmed by the amount of data that was collected. Charmaz (2007) emphasises the need for speed when scanning back and forth when looking at the data; although this technique helped, there was always a risk that 'something' may be missed, for example, data. Being close to the data, the stages of analysis, the memoing provided the required structure, and helped me to learn through the process, which in turn, made it easier as I became familiar with the process as well as the data.

Qualitative research was a challenging undertaking as it was very intensive when listening to participants and watching body language, followed by asking the questions, making sense of what was being said, and noting beliefs and assumptions. I chose grounded theory as it accommodated the research question and was consistent with my epistemology. As I am part of the research, not separate from it, despite my best efforts to be objective and open, there is still the lens (epistemology) that I bring to the research; given these variables, another researcher may bring their own beliefs and interpretations.

3.21 Ethical considerations

The research study was in accord with the Oxford Brookes University Code of Practice for the Ethical Standards of Research. I received permission to continue by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee, this was before any data collection commenced. Although I wanted to complete joint interviews with coaches and clients, the ethics

committee rejected this request owing to dependency issues between coach and client. Individual interviews were completed instead.

The following forms were used:

- Participant or Client (coaches) Information Form
- Consent Form
- GDPR notice

The following requirements were met:

- All participants were offered a copy of the interview transcript. No one asked to see this.
- Confidentiality was observed at all times.
- The identity of the participants was protected by codes.

3.22 Conclusion

I deem constructivist grounded theory the best fitting method to investigate this study and to understand how a thinking environment is experienced and created in the coaching context. The appeal of grounded theory is its wide range of disciplines owing to its explanatory ability (Charmaz, 2007). This explanatory ability helped me highlight the common issues in a way that allowed me to truly identify and connect with the theory and adopt it in my own life and work.

A conceptual framework developed in the grounded theory method can be regarded as an integral aspect of qualitative research, and provides a structured approach to enhance rigour, credibility and trustworthiness (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). As a researcher using the

constructivist grounded theory method and seeking to develop a conceptual framework, it was key that I acknowledged that this may not always be a linear process. In this study, the conceptual framework was developed incrementally, and emerged through a dynamic and iterative approach which evolved as the study progressed. The evolving nature of the conceptual framework is accepted as an approach which informs, and is informed by, the research process that is undertaken (Maxwell, 2012).

I positioned myself as the participants' partner in the research process, rather than as an objective analyst of subjects' experiences, which I considered to be imperative when developing a constructivist grounded theory design. Illuminating the place from where I started as a researcher triggered a need to reflect upon my own underlying assumptions which in turn amplified my own awareness of listening to participants' stories as openly as I was able. The language and writing style helped me provide a collective story of the participants into a practical account that has meaning for those in the coaching field. The aim of constructivist grounded theory is not to provide full individual accounts as evidence; instead, it seeks to move a theoretically delicate analysis of the participants' stories and accounts onto a higher level while still retaining a clear connection to the data from which it was derived. I found that by following Charmaz's model implicitly, although this felt complex, overtime I felt more comfortable and confident in this methodology and process.

The main consideration at the beginning of the research processes was selecting a methodological approach that (1) was appropriate to answering my research question; (2) resonated with my philosophical values for knowledge development within coaching; and (3) fit with my own personal beliefs, values, and aspirations. Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory draws on analytical frameworks of both Glaserian and Straussian traditions

(as outlined earlier in this chapter), but also respects the flexibility of researchers being able to co-construct theoretical rationalisations of phenomenon with participants. For me, this flexibility was important since vigorous interaction with participants was integral to understand how coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment in coaching, which can be accommodated using constructivist grounded theory. As reflexivity is core to practice in coaching, I saw this attribute of constructivist grounded theory as complementary to the nature of my disciplines in coaching. Overall, the philosophical underpinnings of constructivist grounded theory and the methodological processes described by Charmaz fit with my research question, disciplinary grounding, dissertation goals, and personal world views.

This following chapter (Chapter 4) presents contracting, the first of the three categories that have been outlined, from which findings were constructed.

Chapter 4: Contracting Establishing the relationship

This chapter presents contracting as the first of three categories from the analysis of the data. It is interesting to note that across all groups of participants contracting was mentioned as key to creating a critical thinking environment in the coaching relationship despite there being no specific questions regarding this topic. The analysis suggests contracting is pre-coaching or at least represents the start of the coaching relationship and informs the coaching process.

The chapter examines the extent to which participants believe that contracting may help to facilitate and establish a coaching relationship which enables a critical thinking environment. In addition, the chapter outlines how the data suggest that a relationship develops which allows both coach and client to have a clear understanding of their roles, expectations, and entitlements as part of their coaching relationship. Three subthemes emerged from the analysis of the contracting category and were coded as follows:

- **Establishing boundaries and outcomes**
- **Building rapport and connection**
- **Building commitment and empathy**

4.1 Establishing boundaries and outcomes

Within the context of setting boundaries, several themes surfaced. These include establishing confidentiality and a safe space; understanding and agreeing on processes, including the purpose, strategic direction and experience the client can expect; goals and outcomes; and securing buy-in.

Contracting offers clients the opportunity to discuss the focus and what is desired from the coaching sessions before coaching commences, as described by clients CL022 and CL021:

'In the set up, it allows people to have that focus and the insight at the start'. (CL022)

'You give whatever vision or let's say strategic direction, then you are pushed within certain boundaries; you feel comfortable'. (CL021)

As these clients note, the set-up session establishes the focus and strategic direction for the coaching sessions. It is interesting to note that clients mention that boundary setting offers a sense of comfort. Previous research indicates that clients reported various apprehensions before coaching begins or in the early stages of their coaching relationships, including scepticism, doubt, and anxiety concerning whether their issues are being taken seriously (Bluckert, 2005; Ianiro et al., 2013). By setting boundaries, clients feel a sense of comfort; however, other attributes emerged that contribute towards creating the impression of safety a client needs to fully appreciate what may arise during the coaching sessions. Based on the analysis of the data, these first interactions have been categorised as forming part of the coaching contract.

Contracting is about setting the scene at the start of the coaching process. As this coach and client discuss, the groundwork for a meaningful relationship is established:

'As a coach, you are often creating that environment at the beginning. You are teaching someone what it means, setting the boundaries early on'. (KD001).

'As a client, the coach is setting up the space [and] setting boundaries with me that are clear for both of us – what we want'. (CL027).

Boundaries form an important starting point for the coaching process, as they allow both the coach and client to gain clarity on the environment that will be created between them as well as what they wish to achieve through the process. To create the environment in the coaching relationship, time is spent establishing expectations, goals and an understanding of the process, as discussed by coaches KD002, KD003, and KD007:

'You know, right at the start, when you start working with a client, I spend time contracting and talking about the type of coaching and what the client can expect and experience'. (KD002)

'What I do in the coaching set up, I set it up, so they know what's coming. We talk about goals'. (KD003)

'To enable a thinking environment, the onus is on me and my contracting with them. What I need from them is to understand the process, boundary setting'. (KD007)

The findings indicate that to establish the coaching relationship, both the coach and client use the initial contact as an opportunity to contract with each other. The clarification of goals and expectations, as well as the client's understanding of the process or experience, that occurs at the outset of boundary setting contributes towards forming the contract. The participants also use their initial contact to set up the coaching environment or space, a topic which is covered in more detail in Chapter 6, as it emerged as an important factor worthy of its own discussion.

Contracting is normally done at the outset of a coaching engagement, although changes in terms of agreements and commitments may be made throughout the coaching process:

'During coaching, things can change, like goals, where you work. This needs to be taken into account, as this changes what you need'. (KD003)

'As a client, you change as you are being coached. This needs to be considered, as your outputs change as well'. (CL0037)

'A mutual agreement, it may start with, as a client I move and change as does my coach, that needs to be considered'. (CL025)

As can be seen from these responses, changes to the coaching contract are made to reflect changes in client circumstances and as the client develops their thinking and goals during the process. In the context of coaching, a contract should be considered a 'living document' (Hudson, 1999) and a 'dynamic process' (Kilburg, 2002), as the coaching relationship develops, goals evolve, and other changes impact the process.

Setting up a contract enables the coach to prepare a session for a client's specific needs. As described by this coach, such preparation involves considering certain practical aspects as well as emotional check-ins:

'When we are going to meet, setting of the interaction is important: what are the outcomes, check in how you are and how they check in with you'. (KD008).

As indicated by this quote, both the timing of and setting for the session are considered. In addition, preparations are made for the direction of the coaching, such as identifying desired outcomes and noting how both the coach and the client feel towards the session.

Setting expectations and identifying goals and achievements for both client and coach during contracting contribute to building the coaching relationship:

'You have a relationship at the start where you set up goals, set up what you are trying to achieve'. (KD010)

'When you have a coaching relationship, you talk about expectations and things like that. It's more effective by having some preamble that sets that up as expectation for both the coach and client'. (KF019)

Analysis of the comments suggests that the *preamble*, which involves setting up the contract, discussing *expectations*, and identifying desired achievements, contributes to developing the coaching relationship. Clients spoke about aspects of contracting at the early

stage of coaching that enable them to provide input concerning what they want from the coaching relationship, as indicated in the following quotes:

'Going into the coaching session knowing what you are going to get, knowing the success metrics, knowing what you need to think about'. (CL031).

'Session one, the contracting setting up, because it's my development, moving forward – points to the progress'. (CL028).

These statements show that contracting develops mutually between coach and client.

Interestingly, the mutuality of the coaching relationship, including setting up the contract, was evident throughout the findings. Although coaches may drive the setting up of the contracting process as part of their practice, clients also mentioned contracting as imperative in terms of letting them provide input:

'To enable a thinking environment, the onus is on me and my contracting with the coach'. (CL024)

This comment illustrates how clients consider their agency in contracting and in creating the critical thinking environment. Being in a reflective thinking space during the initial phase of the coaching relationship helps the client to consider how they wish to engage with their coach. A view expressed by Kline's disciples is that contracting is a requirement in coaching although not in the context of a thinking environment to start with. In contrast, Kline (1999) describes coaching contracting as a session in which the coach exhibits the 10 behaviours outlined in her model (see Chapter 2). Kline's notion is that the coach holds the attention of the client and asks the sequence of recommended questions. In addition, she states that the client is advised that the role of coach is to help the client to think for themselves; the coach is not there to do the thinking for the client. Furthermore, she advocates not taking notes during this session, as in a coaching session.

The data were clear in terms of how contracting was perceived, and this went beyond an ordinary thinking session. Participants spoke about setting goals and boundaries and establishing what might be achieved from coaching. Based on these findings, coaches and clients might be encouraged to discuss in detail boundaries, goals, and coaching success metrics, as well as expectations concerning the relationship on the part of both coach and client.

4.2 Building rapport and connection

The data indicated that rapport and connection were common themes despite no direct questions concerning these topics were asked during the interviews. From the analysis, it appears that rapport and connection were considered essential from the set-up of the coaching process; thus, they are presented as a subtheme of contracting. The interviewees indicated that a sense of connection and rapport were perceived as success factors of the coaching relationship.

The findings of this study reveal the importance of mutual connection, understanding, and rapport between coach and client. As described by coaches KD003 and KD007 and client CL024, rapport can be built in different ways, such as through humour or emotional and bodily awareness:

'You actually make that individual connection with each other. If you need to have a giggle, you have a giggle, but then get into the serious stuff; the rapport feels natural'. (KD003)

'It's about connecting at the start, with what my sense of them is, it might be an emotional tone or a bodily sense; we are in rapport'. (KD007)

'A sense of connection with the other person, almost a sense of physical connection'.
(CL024)

These coaches and clients describe rapport as a physical and emotional sensation. There is a sense of ease with each other. If the coach is unknown to the client and a relationship needs to be built from the outset, early rapport represents value to the client. As coach KF016 notes,

‘So, it’s a safe environment, definitely got a rapport with them, sometimes with a lightness to it. Having built the rapport, they know implicitly you have that value for them’. (KF016)

In this example, the coach describes rapport as *having been built*, which indicates that rapport is based on the coach and client having shared sensation(s) and a connection. The benefit of rapport in the coaching relationship lies in creating a *safe environment* where the client *implicitly* understands the value the coach has for them.

Concerning the implicit understanding aspect of rapport, coaches KD002 and KD009 and client CL030 further describe rapport as a dynamic relationship between coach and client where expressions and associations gain meaning, and understanding is created:

‘You have an almost symbiotic relationship with that client, understanding, expression of feeling, no matter what form. They don’t have to take long, funnily enough – when those things have been created, you have this rapport. It depends on how they respond as well [and] if they are listening really well’. (KD002)

‘Know what the expectations are on each side. Start some association and meanings, build rapport, start a good conversation. You want to be inclusive, the verbal and non-verbal science’. (KD009)

‘Working with a coach in that space, not filling the silence, I can feel that they are with me. Their focus is on me; there is that sort of emotional connection. It’s sort of a less tangible thing, understanding’. (CL030)

In these examples, rapport is described as a synergy between the coach and client. It goes beyond the verbal connection of making meaning and associations to being a *non-verbal science*, something *intangible* and an *emotional connection*. Furthermore, the coach enables the client to enter the thinking environment through the coach’s ability to listen well, express verbal and non-verbal engagement, and hold the space when the client is silent.

Coaches also described how they determine whether a connection has been established with the client based on the perception of a felt presence and through body language. This was mentioned by several coaches:

'It's from their presence, from their body language; it's from what they say. A connection builds between you'. (KF013)

'I can tell by the connection between us, which is pretty focused actually, it's not tangible, but it's clear in a coaching session'. (KD006)

These quotes support the notion that at the start of the coaching relationship, coaches consciously attempt to create a connection and rapport with their client to become trusted partners and to create a safe environment, which enables effective coaching relationships. As Feldman and Lankau (2005) note, establishing the coaching relationship is the first essential step in any coaching encounter as this is where the relationship starts. As the respondents outlined, if the coach provides support in the early stages of the coaching relationship, this helps the client to be more accepting of challenges that may come from their coach later in the relationship (as described and explored by respondents in chapter 4). Gyllensten and Palmer (2007) argue that rapport in a coaching relationship is essential to achieving effectiveness in coaching.

These client responses show an appreciation of the skills the coach presents in the relationship and how this supports their own sense of connection with the coach, as indicated by clients CL025 and CL028:

'Have the ability to go into and hold the space, develop a relationship. The coach needs to be attuned and present to everything, attuning to themselves, the client, and their relationship in between'. (CL025)

‘Quite sharp, have the ability to read me, be in a rapport with me, analyse the responses I am giving, and find the gaps between the reality of words, notice what is underneath what I am saying, notice my body language’. (CL028)

These quotes show that clients realise the benefits of having rapport with the coach and are able to articulate some of the conditions that rapport represents for them, such as the ability to *hold the space, be attuned and present, and notice what is underneath*. Although Kline (1999) does not explicitly mention rapport, the conditions mentioned above appear to align with Kline’s notion of ‘exquisite attention’. Kline goes so far as to state that the ‘quality of what you (the coach) are hearing is your impact on them (the client)’, which could also be said of rapport.

4.3 Building commitment and empathy

It could be argued that an established coaching contract serves to set commitment in terms of time and what is expected of both parties. Clients committing the time to undertake coaching is an obstacle that coaches may encounter (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). While committing time to coaching is essential (Kilburg, 1996), nothing will be achieved in a coaching relationship until the coach and client are fully committed to achieving the identified goals (Witherspoon, 2000). Rather than focusing on finding the time to undertake coaching, the participants in this research focused on commitment to the use and quality of time within a coaching session, as indicated by the following quotes:

‘I often work with timed thinking time, which I think helps people understand that there is a beginning and an end. Clients can feel uncomfortable at first; you need to stay committed and be empathic’. (KD001)

‘The best time, it’s focused’. (KF020)

‘The number one is time: time to think, creative, meaningful time’. (CL034.)

‘Giving time and space for what is needed’. (CL035)

These quotes describe the perceived quality of time created within coaching sessions, such as contained *thinking time, focused, space, and creative, meaningful time*. It is interesting to note that, within coaching sessions, time evidently has a qualitative meaning to both coaches and clients; that time is considered rather than fleeting. Considering that coaching sessions are usually bounded by time, it is perhaps not surprising that commitment to the quality of time is created.

Commitment reflects the dedication of both the coach and the client to the work that is going to be undertaken throughout the coaching relationship. As described by coaches KD005, KF019, and KF020, starting with the contracting:

‘Time – particularly when working with very busy people, focused time can help people settle down. It’s all about the client; you support them in a mentoring kind of way. You give them something, you show empathy and commitment, you understand’. (KD005)

‘Coaching is about helping people understand themselves and through understanding others [and] showing commitment at the start’. (KF020)

‘Looking for someone to help you be an accountability partner, committed to you’. (KF019)

From the perspective of the coaches, commitment is shown by their behaviour and focus on their clients. By showing understanding, demonstrating empathy, and serving as *an accountability partner*, the client feels supported to commit to the work they want to undertake. The findings show that commitment on the part of the coach is a conscious behaviour.

Clients also have a responsibility towards the coaching partnership and their actions, as a coach cannot create an effective coaching relationship on their own. Client CL028 notes the importance of setting the foundation, commitment and showing empathy.

‘Setting the foundation stone, commitment and showing empathy, because this relationship is going to be for six or 12 months’. (CL028)

Clients consider commitment and showing empathy to be part of the contract and a *foundation stone* of the coaching relationship. Building commitment to sustain the coaching process, which may last for several months, may encourage the client to engage in focused thinking.

Directly addressing the topic of commitment as part of the contracting agreement is intended to promote higher levels of enthusiasm and increased effort on the part of both coach and client, as noted by both coaches and clients:

‘We agreed at the beginning; we committed. I am not offering something outside of what we agreed at the beginning where we spend our agreed quality time. I invite them to try. I show empathy’. (KD007)

‘If I am not being judged, finally you are committed to me, building a relationship’. (CL031)

The data show that commitment reflects the dedication of both the coach and the client to the coaching relationship and their respective responsibilities, which include both tasks and behaviours. Time is referred to as *agreed quality time* between the coach and client.

Commitment has also been referred to by Gan and Chong (2015) as a mutual declaration to undertake responsibilities in the coaching relationship, including tasks and emotional behaviours. Kilburg (2001) and Gregory et al. (2008), argue that sustaining individual commitment is essential to coaching effectiveness by being certain that the challenging tasks and discussions take place. This involves a mutual responsibility between the coach and client; without this, the results may be difficult to develop, as the coach cannot

accomplish this alone. In addition, commitment involves a mutual agreement to fulfil the responsibilities in the coaching relationship.

It can be argued that contracting in coaching is personal (Frisch et al., 2012), as no two coaches work the same way and each client is different. As noted by coach KD004, contracting is a reflection of both the coach and client and their individual ways of working.

'I talk about contracting if you have set it up. You have to leave your ego at the door; they have to be committed enough. How do I show empathy? This is the balance; it's personal, it's a reflection of how we work '. (KD004)

The data indicates that, while they have different roles, the coach and client are equals in the coaching relationship. The comments by coach KD004 show that by leaving their *ego at the door*, the coach recognises that the contract is focused on benefitting the client; in turn, the client needs to be *sufficiently committed enough* to the work they set out to do. The role of empathy *is the balance* the coach demonstrates to enable the client to achieve this, and this is *personal* between the coach and client. A recurring theme in the research from both the coaches and clients' perspectives was the importance of the link between commitment and empathy in the contracting process

Empathy has been theorised in numerous ways, commonly theorising has adopted a cognitive as well as an emotional approach (Lamm et al., 2007). It can be argued that empathy in coaching is the ability of the coach being able to experience and relate to the thoughts, emotions, and experience of a client (Will et al.; 2016). Another definition of cognitive empathy in coaching is the ability to appreciate the perspective of the client to understand and comprehend their mental state. Coaches KD003, KD009, KF011, KF014 and client CL027 explain this:

'You are not feeling that you're being judged by anything you do or say; you have the freedom to explore. They have listened and understood, there is a rapport. It feels natural. It's about the person and their background, you know that they can empathise with you, [and that] they are committed'. (KD003)

'Creating and committing to an inclusive environment, free from judgement and bias. I think it's part of a journey'. (KD009)

'There is a commitment to that time, I am here. You feel empathy, you don't even need to think about it'. (KF011)

'You need the right amount of time. There is empathy; it just happens'. (KF014)

'Their focus is on me. I feel that you have that empathy, that there is no judgement. If the foundation is not there, it doesn't matter how good you are'. (CL027)

The data analysis showed a difference in thinking between Kline's disciples and followers regarding empathy. Kline's disciples stressed that the environment needs to be *inclusive* and *free from judgement*, where coaches empathise with their clients and understand them, and where clients can feel committed. Kline's followers, however, have a slightly different view, as they state that empathy does not need to be thought about; rather, it simply arises when there is sufficient time and commitment during sessions. The clients had similar insights, stating that they wanted their coach's focus to be on them. The analysis shows the importance of clients feeling that a coach is empathetic and non-judgmental as without this foundation there is the possibility the coaching relationship could be undermined.

Clients felt that having their words repeated back to them showed that the coach was listening and clarifying the latter's understanding – that is, showing empathy. With that in mind, it can be argued that coaches need to demonstrate empathy towards their clients to show that they understand their client's feelings. As outlined and explained by coaches KD003, KD006, KF019, and client CL037:

'Be able to play back and ask questions, show there is real insight. Do what comes naturally rather than just reading the notes. Talking the language that works for you by playing back in a way that works for you – critical friend, kind of mirror'. (KD003)

'I think repeating back can be valuable to you, a repeating back the words literally that the client has given to you'. (KD006)

'If I am listening to them, I am parroting back'. (KF019)

'I know the coach is listening when they repeat back what I have said'. (CL037)

The coaches (both Kline's disciples and followers) use playing back what has been heard or repeating the client's words to demonstrate insight and listening. There is also a recognition of the role that is played in how this is done, for example as a *critical friend* or a *mirror*, indicating that the coach makes a choice in terms of which of the client's words they repeat and how. Support for this view was provided by the clients, who noted that they felt listened to by their coaches should the coach repeat their words back to them.

Empathy can also be demonstrated towards to the client through paraphrasing, which can be classed as responding to the client emphatically (i.e. to the emotions of the client) by using words that attempt to replicate the essence of their message (Rogers, 1961). The findings show that empathic paraphrasing is used to communicate an interest as well as commitment in understanding the client's perspective, which implies the client's feelings are both valid and need to be heard by the coach. Clients CL027 and CL082 describe this way of showing empathy:

'Where there is a repeating back, an opportunity to reflect, if the coach themselves are reusing your words, rather than bringing their own words into it. The opportunity to reflect back and have articulated what you have said'. (CL027)

'Mirror reflection from the coach, does that make sense? Repeats your words back at you, words that show clarification and listening'. (CL028)

A common theme was coaches emphasising the importance of repeating clients' words back to them to support a client's sense of being listened to and to enable the coach to clarify their understanding of the client. There is also support from the clients for coaches reflecting on and rearticulating what clients have said. Curiously, however, despite repeating clients' words being considered an important demonstration of empathy and understanding by both coaches and clients in this research, Kline (1999) does not advocate this method.

With regards to repeating what a client has said, a further observation was how important it is to understand how a client feels. It can be argued that a coach shows an understanding of the client's perspective through cognitive empathy. The emotional aspect of empathy refers to a coach's affective response to a client's emotional state (Dziobek et al., 2008). From the analysis of the responses, showing empathy through paraphrasing the client's words may lead to a reduction in negative emotion and even encourage positive emotions on the part of the client; furthermore, the client feels listened to and receive the impression that what they are speaking about has been validated by the coach.

In the context of the coach-client relationship, empathy is not only shown by repeating the client's own words back to them or paraphrasing, as empathy can also be demonstrated through nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues are said to communicate emotions and uncover the quality of a relationship between two people interacting with each other (Schachner et al., 2005). De Haan (2008) argues that clients will achieve better results and have stronger coaching relationships with their coaches should clients feel that their coaches understand them and are attentive. With that in mind and considering nonverbal cues such as eye contact and facial expressions (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006), this might show the client that the

coach is in rapport with them and is being empathic. Interestingly, Burgoon et al. (2009) state that an estimated 65% of interpersonal communication occurs via nonverbal cues. The responses indicate that nonverbal cues form part of building a relationship between the coach and client at the contracting stage.

The coaches and clients shared many examples of how nonverbal cues contribute towards building rapport and thus relieving anxiety. Coach KF012 and client CL031 shared the following observations:

‘Sometimes it’s very visible. It’s like people relax, they smile, show all the physical signs that all the tension is relieved. We have a connection, a feeling of rapport’.
(KF012)

‘You can rely on basically just the body language, a person looking at you, nodding their head. Is this person asking the right questions? Are they in rapport with me? Is there a connection?’ (CL031)

Providing nonverbal cues was interpreted as the coach building rapport, demonstrating understanding, and listening to what the client is saying. The responses indicated that nonverbal cues are visible, with examples including smiling, body physically relaxing, and nodding of the head. Interestingly, Neuliep (2009) states that when an individual consciously communicates with another person, their brain is focused on decoding the conversation and the words that have been spoken; however, the subconscious is also busy reading body language for nonverbal cues. It may be the case in the coaching context that when a coach or client’s words do not reflect their body language, the brain of the other party may send a signal alerting them that something is wrong (Neuliep, 2009). Examples include the coach or the client not being congruent or honest or the client not being aware of their behaviours. With that in mind, a coach needs to have the ability to read both verbal and nonverbal cues to understand what is happening in the thinking space created between

the coach and client. During the analysis, the concept of the coach and client being able to notice and interpret each other's nonverbal cues implies the extent to which rapport is necessary to create a critical thinking environment.

The coaches and clients indicated that building rapport and showing empathy were important in addressing more challenging issues. In Kline's (1999) model, it is proposed that appreciation is the required behaviour. The thinking environment model that Kline developed recognises the ratio of appreciation to challenge as 5:1 for individuals and groups to think at their best. However, analysis of the coach and client responses shows they did not respond to appreciation in the way Kline suggests, as can be seen from the following comments made by coaches (both Kline's disciples and followers):

'I don't understand the appreciation element – if it wasn't there, would it make a difference? I am not sure of the impact'. (KD009)

'In the creation of the thinking environment, appreciation is not that important; it's not something that comes to the fore'. (KD002)

'Appreciation – it might feel quite awkward'. (KD007)

'I don't always look at appreciation, but I look if there is a possibility of putting it in'. (KF011)

A curious point concerning the findings of this research is that the coaches mentioned appreciation; however, they did not do so in the context that Kline (1999) mentions it in the thinking environment. Kline states that the brain requires appreciation to work well, as a person's thinking is often specious. In addition, she states that the way in which a coach offers challenge determines the way in which the client perceives them; therefore, it is imperative, for example, that challenge is not understood as a threat but rather as an interesting, affirming possibility (Kauffman & Tulpa, 2010). Furthermore, Kline argues that someone cannot be critical while showing appreciation. As can be seen throughout this chapter, the

participants frequently mentioned the importance of empathy, yet empathy is not an element of Kline's (1999) model. It could be argued that, while not mentioned specifically, empathy is covered in some of the elements of her model. Interestingly, Wasylshyn (2003) identified the most important personal characteristic of a coach as empathy, which also emerged as a key skill from the data used in this research.

4.4 Summary

In this chapter, it can be seen that many aspects contribute towards establishing a suitable starting point in the relationship between the coach and client, including empathy and rapport. The relationship needs to deepen and become a partnership where the coach is able to challenge the client's assumptions while remaining supportive and non-judgemental, as this approach allows a critical thinking environment to be created.

This chapter has established that contracting at the outset of the coaching relationship is mutually beneficial to both coach and client. Building rapport and creating a connection between the coach and client from the beginning of the coaching process are considered imperative in establishing a successful coaching relationship. It could also determine whether the client continues with the coaching relationship. In addition, this provides the grounding for developing the coaching relationship.

Referring to relevant literature on extant contracting concepts, it is interesting to compare and contrast what researchers have discussed. An example that particularly resonated with the findings in this study came from Barber (2015), who states there are three clear objectives in the contracting phase of coaching: 1) setting the direction and purpose; 2) providing a basis for the coaching relationship between coach and client; and 3) checking that expectations are aligned. Although Barber's themes were apparent in the data used for

this study, there were additional themes that participants considered important, such as rapport, empathy, focused time and commitment.

The data seem to show that a contracting session needs to set the focus and strategic direction, as well as what is required from the coaching and be mutually agreed (between both coach and client), along with success metrics, goals, and indicators of progress. It is clear that a sense of comfort is created by establishing boundaries between the coach and client. This sense of comfort can help to overcome any apprehensions a client may have had before the coaching commences and will address any anxiety that might be prevalent. At the start of a coaching relationship, time should be spent on establishing expectations, goals, and an understanding of the coaching process and what is to be expected. The contract that is mutually agreed upon between coach and client should be reviewed as the relationship develops, as the goals evolve, or following other changes that may impact the process. Kline (1999) does not discuss contracting as part of her thinking environment model, yet the participants in this research mentioned this often.

The findings in this study illustrate that establishing rapport was encouraged by both coaches and clients. It could be argued that unless rapport is established, the effectiveness of the coaching session may be diminished, or the session may not be as productive as it could be. Ianaro *et al.* (2013) found that as a relationship starts to grow and is nurtured by both the coach and client, a good relationship can be created from cool beginnings. Interestingly, the analysis did not uncover any examples where coaches and clients were unable to work together in the absence of a mutual contract; however, this may be a limitation of this research and should not be discounted as a consideration.

Building rapport involves creating a shared understanding between the coach and client. A connection between the client and coach allows the relationship to develop and trust to be established; the coach can strengthen this connection by expressing empathy. If the coach provides support, builds rapport, and shows empathy in the early stages of the coaching relationship, the client will be more likely to accept the challenges that may arise in the future. Clients appreciated being listened to and understood, shown empathy and a suspension of judgement from the coach. A frequent response from coaches and clients concerned the importance of expressing empathy in developing a good coaching relationship. Empathy is shown through the behaviours of the coach, such as repeating the client's own words back to them or paraphrasing. Coaches and clients indicated that a coach who repeats the client's own words back to them demonstrates understanding and listening. Empathy is also demonstrated through nonverbal cues which indicate that the coach is building rapport and a connection with their client and that the coach is understanding and willing to listen. The connection between the coach and client can be strengthened through the latter expressing empathy, which is a core component of a coaching session (Kilburg, 1997). Bluckert (2005) also argues that clients who trust their coaches will be more committed and that rapport can be built.

Establishing a coaching contract serves to identify commitments in terms of time and what is expected of both parties. This commitment reflects the dedication on the part of both the coach and client towards the work that is going to be undertaken throughout the coaching relationship. The quality of the coach/client relationship is recognised as the most important element in determining coaching effectiveness (which is outlined in detail in the next chapter). As observed from the responses considered in this research, this needs to start at the beginning of a coaching relationship. As the analysis presented in this research shows,

to create a critical thinking environment, a mutual and equal relationship needs to be built between the coach and client as a starting point, beginning with contracting. This finding is endorsed by O'Broin and Palmer (2010), who argue that a coaching relationship is defined as referring to a situation in which two people's thoughts, behaviours and feelings, are mutually dependent. In the contracting phase of the coaching relationship, the coach and client need to build a relationship. This seems to be easier if empathy and commitment are shown by the coach during the first coaching session and time is used wisely. In the absence of a workable coaching relationship at the start, the rest of the work may prove ineffective.

Based on the review of the coaching literature and models of coaching practice, and the research undertaken in this study, contracting to establish a critical thinking environment is essential. Contracting gives direction and purpose to the coaching engagement for both coach and client, aligns coach and client perceptions, creates buy-in, reduces ambiguity, builds rapport and connection and eases concerns regarding confidentiality and safety (Turner & Hawkins, 2016) that could impede the relationship and thus stop a critical thinking environment from being created. As Cox (2012) outlines, with the right ingredients coaching creates an environment that is conducive to reflection and critical thinking. If psychological safety (Kahn, 1990) is created through contracting this will allow the client to critically reflect on themselves and critically think, which in turn enables the client to develop a new perspective on their experiences.

The research highlights that coaches and clients that engage in contracting behaviours (e.g., discuss expectations, commitment, responsibilities) seem more likely to create a mutual understanding (partnership) and agreement on the goals and methods for development through these types of discussions. Lee (2013) maintains that contracting leads to a 'unity of process and purpose' (p. 43) and a greater sense of partnership between the client and the

coach. Indeed, a failure to discuss these issues may lead to a crack in the coach-client relationship (McKenna & Davis, 2009a). If these conditions are not met mutually then a 'crack' (McKenna & Davis, 2009a) may prevent the deepening of the relationship to the extent that creating and experiencing critical thinking is unlikely to occur.

The contracting process provides a mutual agreement on goals, roles, and expectations and thus seems to engender a shared purpose (connection), and the clear explication of parameters may increase trust in the coach and client motivations and intentions. Indeed, as this research and literature highlights by replacing ambiguity with clarity seems to build a connection, increase trust and commitment at the start of the coaching engagement. These findings lend support to the idea that what occurs early in a coaching engagement (when contracting normally occurs), and the impression a coach and client makes early on, may be especially impactful in the establishing and deepening of the coach-client relationship. Thus, contracting is especially crucial to create and experience a critical thinking environment in coaching.

The research found preliminary evidence that contracting in coaching was positively related to the establishment of the coach-client relationship, supporting the proposition that contracting is important in establishing the coaching relationship, without which critical thinking is less likely to happen. This chapter analysed the responses from the coach and client participants to identify the conditions that, in their opinion, should be established at the early stages of the relationship; these have been categorised as contracting. Coaches and clients discussed the need for contracting both at the outset and throughout the duration of the coaching relationship to incorporate changes in circumstances and goals that may occur. A further thought is that a breach of the agreement by either the coach or

client or both could fundamentally damage the trust in and integrity of the relationship.

Good coaching relationships are associated with factors such as trust and encouragement (De Haan et al., 2009; O'Broin & Palmer, 2010). These conditions were indicated to be essential in enabling a critical thinking environment and are discussed in the next chapter, which focuses on how a coaching relationship deepens and develops.

In chapter 4 of this research a step has been taken to empirically examine what a coach and client do that might have an impact establishing a coach-client relationship. This chapter shows both coach and client perspectives of contracting to establish the relationship so that a deepening of the relationship can start to occur. These findings provide a solid starting point for coaching practitioners interested in establishing a quality relationship with their clients to build towards creating a critical thinking environment.

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Chapter 5: Thinking space and deepening the relationship

This chapter presents findings related to how a coach and client deepen their relationship to create a critical thinking space. The previous chapter introduced the process of establishing the coaching relationship and discussed how a contract between coach and client sets the groundwork for what will occur in the coaching process. Building on the findings of the previous chapter, this chapter presents the factors that allow such a relationship to deepen and develop, which in turn facilitates the creation of a critical thinking environment that will enable the client to achieve the agreed-upon goals.

The coaches and clients interviewed spoke about equality (a balance of power) and trust as key elements in creating the desired thinking space in a coaching relationship. The interviewees also identified encouragement and respect as relationship characteristics which facilitate critical thinking in a coaching session and noted the role of questions in creating a feeling of ease, which helps to uncover assumptions and challenge. These elements have been grouped into four sub-themes that relate to the thinking space and deepening the established coach-client relationship:

- **Co-creating equality in the thinking space**
- **Relationship in the thinking space**
- **Behaviours in the thinking space**
- **Questions and challenge in the thinking space**

5.1 Co-creating equality in the thinking space

The analysis uncovered a common experience that underpins the coach-client relationship: equal partnership to co-create a thinking space. A particular insight from the analysis was

that participants stressed the importance of the coaching relationship and the thinking environment being established jointly or being co-created between coach and client in a symbiotic relationship. Both clients and coaches mentioned the notion of co-creating a *space* that enables thinking. As coach KD01 remarked,

'It's about having the space to think together, the space to think more deeply than you might normally'. (KD001)

The data show that the coaches indicate that *space* refers to a sense created within a coaching session. This notion of space in this context refers to the critical thinking environment that is created between the coach and client rather than a physical environment where coaching takes place. The findings confirm that this thinking space, or critical thinking environment, is co-created, which is an enabling and desired state in the coach-client relationship (the co-creation is enabled through a strong coach-client relationship). Many coaches discussed the need for the client to be willing to enter the thinking space. As coaches KD006 and KD007 note,

'The client is willing to go into a thinking environment, creating a tempo with the client'. (KD006)

'There needs to be a willingness to engage in a new way, a willingness to create the environment together, having a strong relationship'. (KD007)

What can be drawn from these comments is the need for the client to show a willingness to experience new ways of thinking. In addition, the coaches indicate that a thinking environment is created by the way in which the coach and client engage in this space.

This willingness of both the coach and the client to enter the thinking space is a requirement for deeper critical thinking to occur within a coaching relationship is noted by client CL025:

'The coach needs to have the ability to go into the thinking space themselves. If they cannot, then it's unlikely they can lead their client into that space. They need to make a difference with their presence; they have the ability to go into and hold that thinking space for themselves and for their client. I have chosen and made a conscious decision that I am going to be creating a thinking environment, and we have both agreed that is what we are doing. So, because of that there is equality, this is what the thinking environment looks like'. (CL025)

The client's response seems to confirm that the thinking space between the coach and client cannot be created by the coach alone. The coach, through their *presence* and behaviour, influences the quality of thinking space as they co-create the space with the client. As this client explains, by creating the thinking space together, equality is created. Furthermore, this client also notes that equality also means that the coach is willing to be influenced by their client. Additional responses regarding equality in the coach-client relationship indicated that neither the coach nor client is superior to the other.

The data also indicates that the relationship in the thinking space is of critical importance, as it allows a coach to determine whether and how to give space and when to interrupt or not.

The importance of the relationship was described by client CL027:

'In a thinking space, the relationship aspect is central because there needs to be an understanding of when to prompt and when not to, when to give space, and when not'. (CL027)

The importance of a relationship lies not only in creating a thinking space between coach and client but also in determining how this co-created space is used. For example, as coach KF013 observes, this may include how silence is used during sessions:

'Silence and reflection together create a thinking space'. (KF013)

In this example, the coach uses silence to enable the client to reflect, which generates a thinking space. A coach's ability to judge in the moment whether to interrupt or hold the

thinking space by using silence and reflection is determined by the quality of the relationship between the coach and client.

Beyond the fundamental premise of creating a thinking space, the participants discussed further attributes, such as equality between the coach and client as noted previously.

Equality was noted as an important part of the coach-client relationship by both the coaches and clients. An example of this is described coach KF014:

'It's about understanding the content of the session and people around you. Listening, being equal to, and having an active involvement'. (KF014)

In contrast, the absence of equality can have a negative impact on the client:

'If there is no equality, it's very hard to keep paying attention. We do things together'. (CL026)

Both coaches and clients stressed the importance of equality in the coaching relationship.

Interestingly, coaches and clients are aware of the dynamics of power in a relationship yet were only mentioned from the perspective of equality; the word power was not mentioned.

The data also confirm that a coach needs an understanding of the context of the coaching session, which includes listening to the client and being actively involved in the coaching thinking space.

The following statements by clients CL027, CL028, and CL038 affirm that equality is an important aspect of the relationship when co-creating a thinking space with a coach:

'Presence...I compare it to Buddhism. There's this concept of the fertile void, and I compare it to a space... I wrote a book called Not Knowing, and this space of not knowing – I compare it to that which is described as almost like this space in between the known and the unknown, a joint space of equality in the relationship. I feel like when I go into that thinking space, it's almost creating a pause, creating a space of almost no thinking in order for something new to emerge'. (CL027)

'Equality allows the space to emerge, in which to reflect, think about what I would say. Physically, it's like a feeling, a sensation of openness if you are in the thinking environment. Creating a space in which for me to be challenged, not confronted, but just challenged, treating me as equal'. (CL028)

'In my mind, it's like a crackling of energy. You don't hear it, but it is, as you are going into a thinking environment, especially when you have a really good relationship. You know you are both there in it'. (CL038)

It seems that another factor that enables equality between coach and client when creating a critical thinking space is the quality of the relationship that exists between them. It is interesting that the thinking space between the coach and client is described as being characterised by a '*sensation of openness*' and a '*crackling of energy*' as if it were a felt presence that goes beyond the words being spoken and a space where new thinking can emerge. These sensations may be what Kline (1999) argues are creating the space thoughtfully and compassionately. Furthermore, this happens when handling a conversation that offers a feeling of 'you matter' and this creates the right-thinking space for the coach and client to think. In addition, Frederickson (2003) writes about how emotions can affect our thinking processes, as well as our resilience and social connections with others. The findings indicate that a thinking space is created between the coach and client and subsequently enables a desired state in the coach-client relationship. Both coaches and clients need to demonstrate a willingness to create a thinking space together, and this creates equality. Silence is used in this space to enable the client to reflect. In contrast Dingman (2004), states that holding the space in a coaching relationship and supporting the client to achieve this are desirable outcomes. In addition, Lee (2015) notes that 'potential space' is the place where the development of a person takes place. In contrast in her 10 conditions, Kline (1999) states that equality is about treating each other (coach and client) as thinking peers, whereas attention is about listening with respect and without

interruption. In addition, in his doctoral thesis, Hamby (2013) argues that critical thinkers should possess and demonstrate the willingness to inquire; this means having the inner motivation to engage in the process of critical thinking. This is aligned to what has been found based in the research data considered in the present study, namely that there needs to be a willingness for the coach and client to enter this space.

5.2 Relationship in the thinking space

While coaches and clients may envisage the interpersonal relationship in coaching in different ways, both coaches and clients acknowledge the importance of trust and rapport. Trust is a topic that is frequently addressed in the literature, and the importance of trust was mentioned by both the interviewed coaches and clients when discussing the creation of a thinking space. The literature notes the importance of rapidly establishing trust between a coach and client. When trust is created and established, it helps to build rapport with the client and in turn develops the relationship between the coach and client. As coach KD002 remarks, trust is created by both the coach and the client:

‘Trust, honesty, willingness to push past challenges, and expression of feeling, no matter what it takes. When those things are created and built upon, and they don’t take long, funnily enough, when they have been created, you have this rapport. You have this symbiotic relationship; this makes it easier to create an environment to think’. (KD002)

KD009 and KD010 (coaches) and CL021 (client) mention that the greater the rapport between the coach and client, the more trust develops in the relationship. As trust is built, the coaching process should become more effective:

‘Trust shapes you, doesn’t it? As an individual. It helps you to step into a space that is completely purist with the client’. (KD009)

‘A capacity to allow awareness of feeling and connection with the other person, you know, with trust because they are experiencing a connection with their own feelings and emotions; they are embodying a thinking environment’. (KD010)

'So long as they (the coach) continue to connect with me, trust me, they are present and have eye contact, we are within a space where I can pause and speak, I am also thinking'. (CL021)

These comments indicate that when trust exists in a coaching relationship, it appears to help the coach to step into the critical thinking space with the client. As described by the participants, trust helps the coach to create a connection with the client, and it also allows the client to be able to explore and connect with their own feelings and emotions in the thinking space. While the coach *'connects'*, *'trusts'*, and is *'present'* for the client, they are also thinking with the client.

Both coaches and clients indicated that trust was created by both the coach and client. Trust was mentioned as important by both followers and disciples of Kline as well as by clients. Interestingly, Kline (1999) does not mention trust in her thinking environment model. In contrast, Bluckert (2005) argues that any discussion in a coaching relationship would not be complete without recognising the importance of trust. Trust enables the client to feel safe, and this allows them to be fully honest with both themselves and the coach (Bluckert; 2005; Goddard, 2011). Gyllensten and Palmer's (2007) study found that trust was critical in stress management coaching. These authors' views support what the participants indicated. It could be argued that this study suggests that trust is an essential requirement in other forms of coaching.

While the coaches made it clear that trust helps create the space necessary for the client to be able to enter the thinking space, both the coaches and clients mentioned trust expectations and how these manifest throughout the coaching relationship. It is interesting

to note that client CL021 reports feeling a sense of freedom and being able to take risks when trust in the relationship is established:

'Where I have got space, trust, where I have got freedom, where I can take risks. That environment where I can trust my coach, where I am going to be allowed to think'. (CL021)

Based on the responses, trust appears to offer clients the freedom to *'take risks'*, and this environment offers them somewhere they are *'allowed'* to think.

Client CL024 believes that the coach can help them and that the coach and client can do something together:

'I believe you can help me; I trust and understand we can do something; it gives me confidence'. (CL024)

As client CL025 notes, trust is particularly important when faced with challenges (even if this feels *complex* for the client):

'When something is a complex challenge, maybe that doesn't require a technical solution, when you want to support me for example, to find my own answer, trust – I think it's useful. I would say a willingness to trust, engage yourself, if it feels clunky to begin with'. (CL025)

These client responses indicate that trust in a coaching relationship creates mutual *confidence* which enables the client to be open and honest, as well as vulnerable. As the clients mentioned, if trust exists in a relationship, a client will feel that they can take risks and is likely to perceive the coach as non-judgmental. In such relationships, a client is empowered to face challenges; thus, the client and coach can collaborate together on solutions. Trust provides the mutual safety and security between both client and coach needed to manage expectations, establish boundaries, and to develop an open and honest dialogue. As Clients CL035 and CL37 explains, trust enables clients to take risks, creates intimacy and to think out loud:

‘Trust I think is the most important aspect of being a coachee. Having the client in a thinking environment – there has to be a massive element of trust; just being able to say what comes out of your mouth, it’s risky. It is the trust that enables you to sit back and allow the client to do the majority of the thinking’. (CL035)

‘Coaching provides opportunities, for example the coach getting to know and understand me as their client on a more intimate level. From experience, I know that Intimacy requires trust’. CL037

When trust is present in a coaching relationship, clients are more likely to share information that may be sensitive, and both the coach and client are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviours. Establishing trust is one of the foundations of a coaching relationship intended to create an environment where critical thinking can take place. The participants also note that trust is needed because one never knows where they are going to go in the coaching conversation; similarly, a coach may not know how a client may feel about or respond to a certain experience or attempt to resolve a particular issue. Clients proposed that coaching provides an opportunity for the coach to get to know the client on a more intimate level and Intimacy requires a significant amount of trust on the part of both coach and client. It could be argued that this is obvious for the client, as most of the coaching discussion revolves around them and their challenges. However, trust and intimacy also seem to be paramount for the coach for a conducive environment to be created. The data shows that trust involves allowing both the coach and client to take risks in the coaching relationship, in the critical thinking space that is developed between them.

It is critical that the coach and client create space in coaching to allow the client to develop their own solutions to issues. The mutual confidence in this relationship supports the client’s willingness to be open and honest; it also enables the coach to support their client. It is interesting to note that the clients perceive trust as relating not only to confidentiality and

what is shared but also to the skills of the coach in managing the content of a coaching conversation and the space in which this takes place. The data suggest that the conditions that enable critical thinking are relational – involving trust, equality, and ease, for example – rather than being procedural. Interestingly, the findings support previous research by De Haan and Niess (2012), who state that successful coaching is more dependent on a trusting relationship than the tools and techniques used by the coach.

The participants identified trust as a precondition for the creation of a thinking space between coach and client in their relationship. However, another reason why trust is deemed as necessary within the coaching relationship is that it enables a level of challenge.

From the client perspective, the interviewees mentioned the importance of trusting the coach, not feeling anxiety during silence, and establishing an appropriate atmosphere. In the absence of these elements, a client can feel unease, as described by CL027:

‘I trust the coach to be able to make space and not feel anxiety at the silence, which can be deeply uncomfortable’. (CL027)

Clients also discussed the importance of coach and client mutually creating a coaching space to allow the client to develop their own solutions to issues. As client CL031 explains,

‘I think it’s about creating an atmosphere of trust, building a relationship, and, again, I would fully expect the coach to give me time to explore the options to arrive at my own conclusions. I believe that coaching is the most powerful tool that basically helps me to think for myself’. (CL031)

The data reveal that clients prefer that coaches give them time to reach their own conclusions and that coaches establish trust in the relationship, which facilitates the client’s process of developing solutions. Most importantly, it could be argued that this space offers the client a critical thinking environment.

The data show that the use of silence is a good coaching skill and is part of a coach's ability to effectively listen to their client. However, it may also be a skill that can take time to master and feel comfortable with. Silence on the part of a coach may indicate that they have run out of questions or result in the client feeling uncomfortable (Wallis, 2016). None of the respondents indicated that they had encountered such difficulties, although this could be due to the fact that all of the coaches interviewed as part of this research were experienced.

5.3 Behaviours in the thinking space

The participants' comments confirm that encouragement in a coaching relationship helps the client to think and gives them permission to attempt something new or take risks. Although there are identifiable words as well as behaviours which are correlated with encouragement, it can also be manifested in the form of an attitude that is not verbally communicated. The coaches discussed how encouragement gives permission to form conversations in coaching. As coach KD001 observes,

'I think for the creation of a thinking environment, the one I would really pull out at this stage is encouragement. This gives the client permission to form any kind of normal conversation'. (KD001)

The coaches talked about going beyond words, holding the thinking space, and being available to clients. An example of this was mentioned by coach KD005:

'If they look like they are thinking, I would always allow more time. It's more about them, reassuring and the kind of, "yes you can keep going", that encouragement part. A look can be enough, and for them to come back to you and recognise you are still there then they go off and think again – they respect that'. (KD005)

When a coach encourages the client to stay focused on their thinking, *reassures* the client, the client will feel that they can continue to think for themselves in the thinking space, and they will likely respect the coach as a result. In Kline's discussion of her 10 components, she

defines encouragement as giving the client courage and inspiring the belief that they can rather than can't (Kline, 1999). In her work, this is described as a simple act on the part of the coach, such as a look or being present, that is sufficient to encourage the client to continue without verbally interjecting or interrupting the client's thinking.

The data indicate that coaches are aware of the use of body language as a form of encouragement. As coach KF016 explains,

'I encourage them through body language, not just words, perhaps in this sort of way, you know, nodding at them and stuff'. (KF016)

The respondents in this research indicate that encouragement is not only provided in the form of words that are spoken out loud but is also found in body language, in this case *nodding*. Other non-verbal cues of encouragement discussed by coaches were eye contact, facial expression, and head movements (e.g. nodding). This finding is supported by De Haan's (2008) research, which argues that non-verbal cues combined with coaching behaviours such as listening, understanding, and encouragement develop better quality coaching relationships. The notion that better-quality coaching can be achieved by a coach's skills in terms of knowing when and how to use verbal and non-verbal cues was apparent in the findings, particularly those concerning the theme of encouragement.

The interviewees described encouragement as *'a lightness in the atmosphere'* and *'gaining the confidence to explore'*. The coaches also mentioned how they use encouragement, whether expressed in words or through body language, to facilitate coaching conversations.

Coach KF015 provides a definition of encouragement and describes their approach:

'Confidence in the courage to explore their own mind, their own heart. So, I suppose I look for evidence that they have that. If they don't, then I know that I need to be more encouraging, and maybe give more information as a coach, either [through] speaking or body language'. (KF015)

In addition to coaches using non-verbal cues to provide encouragement, the respondents also noted that clients' body language could reflect a shift in thinking or a *new thought* that they had entered a thinking environment. Coach KF013 describes this phenomenon:

'When they get a new thought, that they experience something new, you see it through the body language; they nod and smile. They are experiencing a thinking environment. There is a lightness; encouragement comes into the relationship. It's hard to say what it does, but you feel it'. (KF013)

By using means of encouraging clients, coaches also recognise when clients feel encouraged.

This creates a symbiotic response, as the coach then feels encouraged to continue:

'Some people want you to be in that space because they want you to empathise with where they are, they want you to encourage them'. (KD009)

'As soon as you get an "aha" moment, it's wider, and there are unlimited possibilities in the relationship. There is no one direction; I feel encouraged to go on'. (KF018)

Encouraging the client helps them to access to the thinking environment – an *'aha' moment* or a feeling of *lightness* when the client accesses new thinking, for example, whereas, for others it was the body language of the client. Coaches also acknowledged that feeling encouraged enabled clients to access the thinking *'space'* or *'unlimited possibilities'* which indicate that one has entered a critical thinking environment:

'They are committed, not avoidant. They are committed to being there and wanting to think something through. You are soft touch facilitating; they respect that and find it encouraging. It's just creating that space and allowing them to go with that thinking'. (KF020)

'I want to have a person sitting in front of me, encouraging and respecting me. I don't want to have a manipulator'. (KF012)

Based on these coaches' responses, it appears that they are aware of the potential for *avoidant* behaviour. As Passmore (2010a,b) suggests, noticing what a client might avoid saying by observing non-verbal communications and body language is just as imperative as paying attention to what they say. Coach KF012 explains that a coach's skill lies in respecting a client and encouraging them to follow their thinking and to not act as a manipulator.

The findings show that a coach can influence the behaviours of a client, which in turn affect the coaching relationship and enable the thinking environment. As De Haan (2008) states, qualities such as understanding and encouragement on the part of a coach influence the relationship with the client and the effectiveness of coaching. Client CL021 speaks about encouragement and respect in a manner similar to that of the coaches, and CL021's observation is typical of that of the other clients:

'People give you the freedom to think; your efforts are encouraged. You have the right to fail because you are thinking. It's related to the entire environment; you create the environment which the person believes that's exactly what I want to be, I'm open to share ideas, they respect me'. (CL021)

As this client observes, it is important that the coach gives the client the *'freedom to think'* and *'fail'* and that the coach encourages the client's efforts to think for themselves and to be *'open to share ideas'*. The interviewed clients discussed the environment that is created by both the coach and client and how clients wish their coaches to respect the work that they are undertaking in that space.

Another client perspective shows that encouragement and respect go together to create the space needed in a coaching relationship. As client CL022 discusses, the coach needs to appreciate that the client has been brave and *'acknowledge it'*:

'I feel like I respect [that] this person has bravely gone somewhere. They have got some terrifying insights and reframed their activity. They have a moment, to respect that and acknowledge it'. (CL022)

Here, the client indicates that a coach and client taking a *moment* or pausing before moving on to consider their insights or emotional shifts represents respect for the change that they have achieved from the perspective of both the coach and the client. In her research, Van Woerkom (2010) found that clients attributed the effectiveness of coaching to their relationship with their coaches and that respect from coaches is not just a facilitative condition, as it was also stated to give the client freedom to change.

It is interesting to note the change of language from the perspective of the client. For example, client CL037 defines encouragement as follows:

'When I am allowed to express my opinions and even encouraged to express them, in a way, without fear of being judged. I think the relationship and building this is extremely important in coaching' (CL037)

Hence, for CL037, the ability to provide encouragement and show respect in a coaching environment is a key attribute of a good coach. To create a thinking environment in a relationship, it is important to promote mutual respect, regardless of goals or differences, to allow individuals to feel encouraged to contribute to the coaching session. Mutual respect in coaching is based on the recognition of both the coach and client's abilities and skills.

5.4 Questions and challenge in the thinking space

The way in which a coach asks questions appears to create ease in the coach-client relationship, which subsequently helps the client to uncover their assumptions and promotes a thinking space in which the coach can challenge the client. These findings were strongly evidenced in the data as a contributory factor to a critical thinking environment. As

described by coach KD001, by putting the client at ease, questions can be asked that may help to uncover assumptions held by the client:

‘Putting the client at ease – you listen for the things that might be holding somebody back or might be a challenge or might be something they can’t see for some reason. Incisive questions might be something I ask, examine their assumptions’. (KD001)

This coach discussed the importance of putting the client at ease and listening for cues about what may be holding the client back so that they could ask an incisive question to help the client uncover their assumptions and examine them.

Coaching questions are intended to allow the client to, explore, reflect upon, uncover and challenge their thought processes. Coaches and clients may unconsciously hold assumptions about themselves or others and the world in general. Coaching gives the opportunity to question these assumptions. As mentioned previously, asking probing questions helps the client uncover their assumptions and, under the right conditions, will also provide them with an opportunity to question the validity of these assumptions. A sense of ease gives the client ‘permission’ to go to places they may not normally explore (Kline, 1999). This was evidenced by coaches KD002 and KF011:

‘Initially, my questions would emerge from trying to remember which was going to be the right question. The questions now emerge from whatever is happening with the client at the time. Ease gives the client the biggest amount of permission from any normal kind of conversation’. (KD002)

‘It’s in their face, that expectant question, the client is flowing well, they are comfortable. My questions are aimed at the client to continue to think for themselves. If it’s not factual and knowledge-based, then it’s a limiting assumption; we can get past that’. (KF011)

The coaches discussed how initially some effort was needed for them to remember what questions to ask the client; however, over time, questions started to emerge based on what

was happening with the client in the moment. Emergent questions contribute towards creating ease for the client, and this sense of ease encourages the client to explore new thinking for themselves. Evidence from the interviews shows that both disciples and followers of Kline considered where questions emerge from. They consistently discussed the importance of a safe environment in which questions can develop (in which questions can emerge naturally), rather than an environment that may be perceived as excessively structured and rigid. The environment created is more important to both coach and client than adhering to a pre-defined set of questions or criteria. It should be considered that the coaches included in this research were all experienced, which may account for the sense of ease they have with the quality and flow of their questions. As Wallis (2015) notes, the more experienced the coach, the more readily questions to be put to the client come to them; hence, the coach is able to focus exclusively on the client and the outcomes. The findings indicate that questions emerge based on the attention that the coach pays to the client once a sense of ease has been established.

Another finding based on the comments made by the coaches in this study seems to support the argument made by Wilson (2011) that Kline's thinking environment model and questions do not need to be followed rigidly, as the same outcomes that would result from using predetermined questions can be achieved through asking questions based on intuition and experience. As outlined by Robins (2017), models may offer structure; however, it could be argued that this is not required in a coaching environment where open and honest conversations and a sense of ease often prove more effective.

The connection between the coach and client requires the coach to be cognisant of the client's agenda and outcomes, meaning that a coach should not allow their own agenda to influence the coaching process (Robins; 2017). As coach KD003 notes,

'It's something around quality of questioning and insights. I'd want someone who asked me some good deep probing questions on whatever is was that's going to challenge me. I want a safe environment where I feel safe and at ease'. (KD003)

It is interesting to note that coaches remarked on the efforts they made to create a sense of ease. They focus on creating adequate space in the coaching relationship, and some of the respondents noted the importance of a feeling of calm and serenity in terms of creating a sense of ease. Coach KD004 describes a relevant experience:

'I notice a feeling of both of us...just a feeling of great calm, almost serenity, accompanied by a tingle of excitement. Particularly in ease, and I have to work really hard on that. I have to give myself time to do that to get into that space'. (KD004)

The coach describes the sense of ease as a *'feeling of ... calm'* and *'serenity'*; however, this is *'accompanied by a tingle of excitement'*. Rather than the quiet, meditative state that calm and serenity might indicate, the coaching practice is ready to facilitate new thinking, hence the *'tingle of excitement'*. A coach requires certain skills to produce this combination of experiences and thus create a safe environment in which a thinking space can be created.

Once the client is in a safe environment, the coach can further inquire as to the client's goals and thoughts by asking relevant explorative questions. It is interesting to note that a good question seems to enable and empower the client to reconsider a problem being discussed in a coaching session. The findings suggest that good questions empower people to think for themselves, but only if ease exists in the relationship. Coaches also discussed putting clients at ease to check for assumptions. The coaches described how questions emerge; as coach KD009 explains, this depends on what is happening with the client:

‘For them to engage in that safe environment, to have that, they can explore whatever challenge or issue is forefront of their mind. It’s part of a journey. If you are paying attention, there is that insightful question that you ask once the person is at that particular point’. (KD009)

The above quotation draws attention to the usefulness of the questions asked in relation to the challenges faced by a client. The attentiveness of the coach enables them to ask insightful questions that are useful to the client, but only once the client feels they are in a safe environment. For the coaches, there seems to be a link between the questions being asked of the client and the ease created as a result of the coaching relationship and the willingness of the client to engage with their challenges.

In addition to the importance of ease, the connection between emotions and questions was discussed by both coaches and clients. Based on emotional cues exhibited by the client, the coach may be prompted to ask questions that enable deeper thinking, as described by clients CL023 and CL025:

‘Emotions are very much driven by what’s been shared with you. It could be anything from joy to pain. It’s those emotional cues that inform the questions, that doesn’t interrupt the train of thought. It encourages me to explore thinking more deeply’. (CL023)

‘Have a safe environment to go to that space, asking framing questions as one way to go there, so the right types of questions. They are questions that require living the question a bit longer than going straight to the answer’. (CL025)

As these comments illustrate, the emotions that are shared with the coach can allow them to ask an appropriate question, namely one that *does not interrupt the train of thought, that allows the client the opportunity to living the question rather than going straight to the answer’,* and enables the client to *explore thinking more deeply*. It can be argued that a coach needs to be attentive and attuned to the client in the thinking space so that questions

emerge in response to the client's emotional cues. In addition to asking the right questions at the right time, the coach also needs to allow the client *space* to consider their response to these contextual questions. This is an example of where the coach and client need to be comfortable with silence in the thinking space, as discussed previously.

Clients also expressed that they felt that a coach is investing in them when the coach asks questions based on what they have said. The coach does so by asking questions that *feel right* and *obvious* and help the client when they are *stumped*. The clients were open to being challenged by being asked the right questions at the right time, as shown in the following comments by clients CL034 and CL022:

'I think it's the questions they ask. I think the coach is listening when they can anchor the questions back to what they have heard. They are investing in me; rather than just having a coaching relationship, we have the dialogue. They ask questions when I am stumped'. (CL034)

'I think a pure questioning approach is fine upfront to a point. There are times when you don't know what you don't know. It's if it feels right, if it's obvious, it sparks a particular track to go down. We are on the same page or repeating my words back at me'. (CL022)

The connection between the role of questions provoked by an emotional cue is evident in this research. As discussed here, the types of questions asked, such as emerging (from emotional cues), framing, and anchoring, prompt clients to respond to the opportunity to *explore [their] thinking more deeply and living with the questions a bit longer rather than go straight to the answer*. These findings show that a coach's investment in the relationship is valued by the clients. Such investment offers a depth of interaction where the coach and client engage in *dialogue* rather than a question-and-answer coaching session, which opens new possibilities in the client's thinking to explore *a particular track* or gain understanding

when *you don't know what you don't know*. The connection between coach and client encourages critical thinking.

Coaching questions should aim to uncover, explore, reflect, and challenge the client's thought processes. Interestingly, the findings of this research indicate that if the coach asks the right questions and thus generates a feeling of ease, they support the creation of a thinking space. As discussed in the literature review, Brookfield (1987) argues that thinking can be improved by surfacing, exploring, and validating assumptions. The research findings show that asking skilful questions is an effective way of uncovering ingrained assumptions (Brookfield, 1987).

It is important to also consider the purpose of coaching as a method of observing and questioning not only thinking processes but also the action or task the client is working towards. As Cox (2013) argues, coaching questions are about helping the client explore, learn, and move closer towards their task.

5.5 Summary

This chapter explored how coaches and clients engage in new thinking through creating a thinking space together. The findings illustrated that both the coach and client need to be willing to enter the co-created space. In this chapter, space refers to the thinking environment that is created between the coach and client rather than the physical environment where coaching takes place.

As noted in Section 5.1, the coach, through their presence and behaviour, make the quality of the thinking space through co-creating it with the client and ensuring that equality exists,

in the coaching relationship. Both the coaches and the clients emphasised the importance of equality. The coach needs an understanding of the context of the coaching session, which includes listening to the client and being actively involved in the thinking space during coaching.

In particular, trust and rapport were identified, in Section 5.2, as being necessary requirements for the development of a coaching relationship. The importance of trust was repeatedly emphasised by both coaches and clients when discussing the creation of a thinking space. The respondents indicated the importance of establishing trust between the coach and client. When trust is created and established, this helps to build rapport with the client and in turn further develops the relationship with the client by enabling the coach to create a connection with the client. In addition, trust and rapport enables the client to explore and connect with their own feelings and emotions in the thinking space created. While the coach is able to connect with, trust in, and be present for the client, they are also able to think with the client, thus enabling the client to take risks and have the freedom to think in the space that has been created. Trust is considered to be necessary within the coaching relationship, as it allows the coach to challenge the client at a deeper level. When trust is present in the relationship, the coach is able to give the client time to arrive at their own conclusions; in addition, trust creates mutual confidence, which allows the client to be open, honest, and vulnerable. When mutual security and confidence is established between both client and coach, it enables expectations to be managed, boundaries established, and open and honest dialogue developed. Trust and critical thinking are interdependent (Kleinig, 2018), if critical thinking is to take place with the client, trust in the coach seems to be a necessary requirement.

Trust deepens and develops in the ongoing interactions between coach and client, enabling them both to take risks in the coaching relationship and the thinking space that is built between them. The data indicate that establishing trust is one of the foundations of a coaching relationship intended to create a critical thinking environment. Clients perceive trust not only in relation to confidentiality and what is shared but also in the skills of the coach in managing the content of the coaching conversation and the space in which this takes place. The respondents identified trust between the coach and client as being crucial in the creation of a coaching relationship intended to enable critical thinking.

An important finding that emerged from the research was the use of silence. The coach's ability to listen effectively to their client. Silence may be a skill that takes a coach some time to master and feel comfortable with. In addition, clients discussed the importance of not feeling anxious during silence and indicated that the right atmosphere needs to be established, otherwise unease can arise between the coach-client. A notable aspect of the coaching relationship is encouragement by the coach towards the client, reassuring the client that they may stay focused on their thinking and also giving them permission to think in a different way or even to take a risk. Encouragement allows independent thinking and more autonomous moral judgement, as well as surfacing independent opinions (Assor & Kaplan, 2001). The client will likely feel that they can continue to think for themselves and respect the coach for encouraging the created thinking space.

A notable aspect of the coaching relationship is offering encouragement, as this enables the client to think and also gives them permission to try something new or to take a risk. When a coach provides encouragement, it reassures the client that they may stay focused on their

thinking. The client will likely feel that they can continue to think for themselves in the created thinking space and respect the coach for encouraging this space.

Encouragement can also be conveyed non-verbally through body language. The use of body language by clients can also indicate a shift in thinking or a new thought being recognised. Body language can also help the coach notice avoidant behaviour. What a client may avoid saying is as vital as what they do say therefore, noticing tone of voice, body language, and other non-verbal communications is a vital skill on the part of a coach (Passmore, 2010a, b). It can be argued that the coaching relationship is what really matters, not the coaching tool, intervention, or models used (Hall, 2013). Encouragement and respect combined create the space needed in a coaching relationship and are key attributes of a good coach. The analysis of the data suggests that to create a critical thinking environment in a relationship, it is important to promote mutual respect, regardless of goals or differences, to encourage individuals to contribute to the coaching session. Mutual respect in coaching is established through recognition of the abilities and skills between the coach and client.

The manner in which coaches put questions to their clients appears to create ease in the coach-client relationship, which in turn helps the client to uncover their assumptions and promotes the creation of a thinking space by asking probing questions to help the client uncover their assumptions and, with the right conditions, will also provide them with an opportunity to question the validity of these assumptions. Ease gives the client permission to explore concepts that they might normally avoid or not consider. Paraphrasing and reflecting is useful as a starting point in coaching, however, for wider, fresher or new ideas that help the client gain a broader understanding of themselves and the world in which they

operate (Cox, 2012) existing assumptions need to be addressed and uncovered. Reflection in coaching describes the issue that the client has, whilst thinking critically provides an opportunity for the client to understand, evaluate and redefine their values, beliefs and assumptions (Vermersch, 1999). The skill of the coach is paramount when asking the right questions, reflecting, and showing the client that the coach is listening through paraphrasing and asking further clarifying questions, all of which should be done in the service of the client's critical thinking. The coaching relationship is implicitly linked to the questions a coach might ask a client (Stout-Rostron, 2006). It seems that underpinning this develops a respectful and trusting relationship between coach and client, thus allowing the coach to challenge the client in a constructive manner.

A potential difficulty that can arise when encouraging clients to think critically is evoking an emotive response. Asking critical questions about a clients previously accepted values, ideas and behaviours can be anxiety producing (Brookfield, 1987). Coaches need to not only be aware of but also be able to address these emotive responses accordingly. When following a model that involves structured questions, such as Kline's model, emotions could be overlooked which means that the right question might not be asked. As outlined in chapter two, questions can emerge during the coaching process after the coach has generated a possible 'hypothesis'; and may ask *reflexive* questions based on this. This reflexive process allows the client to reflect on and reframe their beliefs and thoughts (Cox, 2012). In addition, coaches need to have developed their own critical thinking skills, the ability to analyse and reason (Grant, 2005) and ask robust questions of their client.

As outlined in the literature review, models may create a process within which the coach and client work. It is imperative, however, that models are not experienced as either

‘prescriptive or rigid’ (Wall, 2017). If a coach is unable to move outside of a model, the client may feel that they are being manipulated through a process, which, as indicated by the respondents, is clearly not what clients want. Clients need to feel at ease and have an open, authentic coaching conversation, rather than being forced into following a particular model’s structure in the context of a critical thinking environment. As Robbins, (2017) notes, a coaching session needs to follow the agenda of the client, not the coach, which means that the coach’s agenda should neither consciously nor unconsciously be allowed to enter the co-created space.

The coaching relationship has been the subject of previous research, with De Haan *et al.* (2012) stating that the coaching relationship is important to both the coach and client from the outset of the coaching process. The consensus across the literature, and reflected in the findings presented in this chapter, concerning ease, equality, respect, and trust is that these qualities are essential in permitting coaches to establish and deepen their relationships with clients (Cox, 2012; Boyce et al., 2010). As Cox (2012) outlined, clients start to trust their coach enough to accept a challenge after an adequate amount of time, after contracting and the coach and client getting to know each other. The right to challenge someone needs to be earned (Brookfield, 1987). A central premise of coaching is facilitating clients to become more critical in their own thinking. This research highlights the importance of co-creating a safe environment where, if the right conditions (willingness, trust, ease, equality, and respect) are met, clients will be open to being challenged. Establishing and deepening the coaching relationship and the corresponding groundwork this provides, is a starting point for the coach to challenge the client to consider alternative approaches or revise their thinking. It simply is not sufficient to remain at a superficial level of challenge with the client.

Based on the data in this chapter, in the context of a coaching relationship, there appears to be a progression towards uncovering assumptions which would enable a client to free their thinking about an issue, thus creating a thinking space. Figure 5.1. illustrates that when the coach asks relevant questions, the client experiences a sense of ease. Once this state has been established between the coach and client, the coach is able to further challenge the client, which may reveal any assumptions that may be holding the client back.

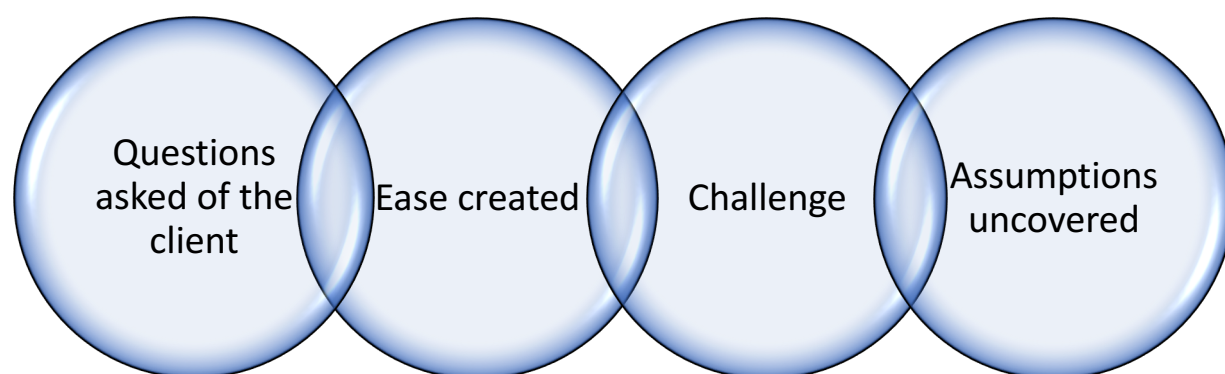


Figure 5.1. Thinking environment progression

Overall, the findings indicate that a combination of interrelated actions and emotions create an effective coaching relationship where critical thinking can be created and occur. Critical thinking involves questioning the client's assumptions which may underlie their accustomed and habitual ways of thinking and then being ready to think and act differently on the basis of the critical thinking (Brookfield, 1987) that has taken place. The data revealed that asking the right questions to access deeper critical thinking, responding to emotional cues, paraphrasing or repeating words back to the client, listening and noticing assumptions, creating a sense of ease to further challenge the client, and allowing the client to sit within the thinking space without interruption all play an important role in establishing the coach-client relationship. As outlined in chapter two, critical thinking is an iterative process: a

back-and-forth between experience, reflection and description of a lived experience, acceptance, and subsequent reflection and analysis of that lived experience. This process can be both challenging and emotional for both the coach and client. The building blocks in the coaching relationship discussed in this chapter were found to be key in establishing critical thinking in coaching.

As outlined in chapter four, the contracting phase of establishing the coaching relationship, the coach and client aim to build a mutual, equal relationship, and set clear boundaries and outcomes at the start of the coaching process. Contracting sets up the environment or thinking space. In this chapter, I explored how coaches and clients co-create meaning, realities and new narratives together in the coaching session; they infer a thinking environment that is created between them, reaching a desired state in the coach-client relationship. The relationship needs to deepen and become a partnership where the coach is able to challenge the client's assumptions, and yet remain supportive and non-judgemental of the client so that a critical thinking environment can be created (Browne, 2006). Both of these elements of the theoretical framework (as outlined in chapter seven) are to be viewed as if all the parts were built on top of each other. For example, the deepening of the relationship will not happen if the relationship is not established in the first place.

The next chapter shows how the physical environment in which coaching takes place builds the third element of the framework and how a critical thinking environment for both coaches and clients can take place.

Chapter 6: Physical environment and the impact on thinking

This chapter presents findings related to the physical environment in which coaching takes place to create a thinking environment. The discussion initially establishes whether and how the environment is a consideration for coaches and clients; and further whether there are conditions about the environment that impact the quality and effectiveness of the coaching experience.

There are three sub themes that were related to the physical environment to enable thinking, these are:

- **Necessary conditions for the thinking environment** - coaching away from the place of work
- **Natures impact on the thinking environment** - coaching in nature and walking
- **Interface preferences in the thinking environment** - coaching face to face or virtual

6.1 Necessary conditions for the thinking environment

One of the first themes identified from the findings is the necessary conditions (requirements) that coaches and clients should consider. The preference for both coaches and clients would be for a neutral environment and a quiet physical space; avoiding interruption and distraction.

What became clear from the analysis of the research is that utilising the physical environment where coaching takes place can impact coaching outcomes both positively and negatively. As discovered in the literature review, there was not much literature on what makes for a good physical coaching environment. A question was therefore incorporated

into the interviews to draw out the significance and definition of environment to the participants, as based on my own experience working in organisations, I found that the physical environment had quite an impact on a client's thinking. This has also been raised by clients whom I have coached. I also raised this with various other coaches, and my findings seemed to be confirmed by other coaches. Interestingly, there are some broad perspectives and some differences between what coaches and clients think of as important in creating the right environment.

The responses of both coach and clients showed that participants wanted to avoid interruption, as commented on by coach KD003:

'I want to be face to face, somewhere where we have a quiet space, even if it's a meeting room, somewhere, where you know you weren't going to get interrupted'. (KD003)

Clients talked about the need for a quiet physical space, where they were not going to be interrupted by others during the coaching session, as clients CL022 and CL033 illustrate, interruption during a coaching session is unsettling:

'Sometimes you will be doing coaching on site, and we have got those glass fronted offices. When you have got that, you are open to people flinging the door open. Finding a better environment if you like, where there isn't the necessary distraction of fellow colleagues'. (CL022)

'We need to be able to focus, to be on our own, even sitting in a meeting room with glass walls it's probably not going to work, we need to be comfortable. We need to not worry about someone walking in on us'. (CL031)

Clients discussed how they may have to undertake coaching at their workplace, and some mentioned the office configuration, such as glass fronted offices, leading to distraction. In

this example, the glass fronted offices meant that colleagues can be seen in meeting rooms which can lead to interruption and distraction during a coaching session.

Concentrating on the physical coaching space encourages the coach and client to converge in the psychological space, enabling the client to feel safe and be heard, as outlined in detail in chapter 5. It is vital for the coach to consider how the physical environment impacts each client. In addition, choosing the right venue and physical space are equally important to facilitate a successful coaching session, as well as freedom from disruptions. Contextualising this further with coaching in the workplace, coach KD004 and KD005, and client CL023 and CL028 clearly state that a workplace setting can negate part of the work that takes place in coaching.

'Place is vital, I refuse to coach in offices anymore, the persons office, I won't do it. I won't do it in offices, because it negates 50% of the work in my view. I think there is a physicality about where you are, and what that says about the person. You have to adapt the place to the person, they need to feel special, so choosing well is really important'. (KD004)

'There is something that happens in the external physical environment that has a significant impact on thinking'. (KD005)

'Physical space, I think, is really important. Do I matter? I think in a corporate space, you have some of those amazing buildings, we have got, they really make, you feel like you matter. Where I can, I get out of the corporate environment'. (CL023)

'In the workplace, that is where I want as a client some consistent uncontaminated support'. (CL028)

These comments illustrate different aspects of the importance of the physical space to both coaches and clients. From the responses, this ranges from a coach, as noted above in KD004's comment, who considers the workplace somewhat *negates* the effectiveness of the coaching to another coach who pointed out how the physical environment has a *significant impact on thinking*. Overall coaches consider that the clients' physical workplace could be a

hindrance. The clients also shared a preference if possible, to be coached away from their place of work or at least to be coached in a different physical environment. One client referred to how the physical environment reflects how they matter in that space, they spoke about the amazing buildings in which people work, and how this makes them feel like 'you matter'. In addition, another client wanted support in any location on the condition that it is not '*contaminated*' by the workplace. Client CL028 discussed that '*whether it's the pub, or in the workspace or at home, you can still think*' (CL028), however, sometimes the physical environment may actually contaminate a person's thinking, so a person may need to break away from that physical environment. This is supported by coach (KD05) who outlined that:

'Organisational culture has a significant impact on people, if we are meeting in an organisation, we are going around the same thinking again because we are part of that culture, and we are kind of perpetuating it in some ways'. (KD005)

The place where coaching takes place can impact clients being coached, as they are not free from the culture or contamination of what is taking place whilst in the workplace or their physical environment.

If coaching needs to take place in the physical place of work, this should be in a neutral place, a clear finding from both coaches and clients. As client CL036 describes:

'Coaching in your office, I'm always like, "get out of here" it's like the walls can suffocate you, in those places'. (CL036)

Coaching should not take place in a client's office, as this could make the client feel *suffocated* or closed in. The coach suggested coaching on a different floor, so the client is physically removed from their existing physical environment. Respondents discussed

coaching in a peaceful physical environment, as if the coaching is in a peaceful place then associations may be made with this peaceful physical environment:

'I prefer coaching offsite in a quiet space, a private room where the other person can cry if they need to without fear of being overlooked or anyone else judging them. If I have to coach in their office, I prefer to coach but do it on another floor to the floor that they are in. I always physically try to move them from their work environment. They make associations if you are in a peaceful environment'. (KF016)

In contrast, other coaches talked about how clients can be more vulnerable in a neutral space and that this helps them listen to themselves if they are away from their usual physical workplace when being coached:

'Physical environment is huge, it's huge. I think it has to be neutral, definitely neutral. You can go into the office of the person you are coaching, but they always have the badge on them. If you take them out of that, they are more open to be vulnerable, they are more open to really listen to themselves'. (KF013)

The findings show that the physical environment needs to be private, and neutral if the thinking a client does is going to be genuine, as supported by client CL034:

'It depends on how private it is. Just removing yourself physically brings a different perspective, you are in the home, you are in domestic mode; when you are in the office, you're in professional mode. I think neutral space engenders a genuine thinking environment. To move one step away from a professional environment can be useful'. (CL034)

The findings showed that there is a clear preference for coaching to be undertaken in a physical environment that is away from the client's usual physical environment or place of work. Coaches and clients may have different preferences when deciding upon and choosing the physical space where the coaching should take place. According to Kline's (1999), thinking environment model, the environment / location should convey that 'you matter'. In addition, she states that people think at their best when in a neutral environment, free from the outside influences such as work or home. The comments made by Kline disciples and Kline followers may have been influenced by the work of Kline in

relation to the physical environment. Kline discusses how thinking needs to take place somewhere that reflects the client's values, without affecting the client's state of mind. Secondly, she states that the first place of thinking is in the body. Kline does not state what the optimum physical environment looks or feels like. What is clear from the respondents in the research, is the impact our physical environment has on our capacity to create and experience a critical thinking environment. The research findings are building on Cury *et al* (2006) who state the physical environment may affect and influence the emotions that individuals experience, and that these emotions may subsequently impact goals and performance. If we consider this in a coaching context, if the physical environment is not satisfactory to the coach and client, this can affect the quality of the coaching that is undertaken, and also the goals attained.

Organisations are not just physical environments, they are places with psychological and social contexts where people work, live and relate to others (Bates & Thompson, 2007). For example, if the coaching session is held in a public space, the coach needs to consider the effect of the physical environment, such as ambient and noise (DuToit, 2014). Findings from this study confirm that putting distance between the client and their place of work can assist in creating a different perspective in coaching. Coaching at a client's workplace can lead to possible interruptions, distractions and disruption.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates the qualities of the physical environment where the coaching takes place. This needs to be away from interruption and distraction, and neutral so the client is free to think without impingement of role or organisational culture, and importantly, quiet for the most effective thinking environment. The physical

environment should be discussed, and a mutual agreement reached in order to achieve the best outcomes for both the coach and client.

There are various approaches to coaching, and coaching can often be viewed as a static event which takes place in closed offices, workplace or informal spaces such as pubs or cafes. There is some research on beneficial conditions, although outside of the coaching literature, such as larger rooms with natural light (Wilson, 2012). The next section discusses walking and coaching. Again, there was little literature on the correlation of walking and coaching, however this research draws particularly on Spinelli; (2014) and Read, (2016), who suggest that this approach can create a positive psychological effect, where learning is emergent as a person discovers a way of being in the moment and in the environment, conditions for effective coaching.

6.2 Nature's impact on the thinking environment

Both the coaches and the clients discussed the impact of walking and sitting in nature whilst undertaking coaching. Being in nature changes the quality of the thinking and provides a sense of freedom as outlined by coach KD001:

'I have met and gone walking with clients because it came out that they feel free and open in the outdoors'. (KD001)

Coach KD006 talked about how walking when coaching helps clients to think outside of the box and that impacts thinking in coaching:

'I have done walking coaching before, which can really help people think outside of the box. Looking at trees, just picture, can increase people's resilience. This is going to impact on the thinking'. (KD006)

Coaches talked about how their clients best thinking is in a *green environment* with *fresh air and walking*, and that enforcing a thinking environment in a quiet room does not always work, so an alternative physical environment can be helpful to enable a client's thinking.

'There are people who I coach, that do their best thinking when they are out in a green environment, and they are out in fresh air, walking. For me, it's where does that person do their best thinking. For me to enforce the thinking environment in a quiet room, where I am sitting face the person, it doesn't always work'. (KD009)

In contrast coaches discussed the link between movement and thinking, moving away from the client's desk, having natural daylight, with low or no noise can also enable a client's thinking as coach KF020 describes:

'Well, I believe walking can be good. I believe there is a link between movement and thinking. Get out into spaces. Somewhere different from the desk, ideally natural light, low noise, sometimes no noise'. (KF020)

Furthermore, as outlined by client CL026 the combination of movement, fresh air and not looking directly at the coach made a difference to the clients thinking:

'We do walking in pairs, we walk outside on the promenade near the sea, and we walk and think. It's amazing how the movement of fresh air, and not looking directly at the person, its different'. (CL026)

It is interesting how the client described walking next to the coach as being different. The findings show that walking and coaching in nature can produce better outcomes for both the coach and the client. The time spent walking in nature gave the client an additional way to think and provides more freedom.

There is little literature on the impact of nature and walking in coaching, as the Literature Review revealed. Despite this, previous research in learning illustrates that lower stress, motivation, enjoyment and engagement appear to be more positive in a natural setting

(Takayama et al., 2014). Both formal and informal learning when conducted in greener settings are linked with a greater sense of calmness (Nedovic & Morrissey, 2013; Chawla et al., 2014).

For many coaches and clients living and working in large cities being out in nature may not be an option. Alternative venues can be explored such as a quiet part of the building, break out area or a nearby cafe can act as a change of 'scene' as taking the client from their familiar surrounding can offer benefits. As coach KF012 states, just walking outside of the office building to break the scene can be helpful:

'I think if it's a coaching session within the workspace, I think it's great to break the scene, so we don't just sit in the office. Often, it's just a walk and talk outside of the building, get outside of where we normally sit'. (KF012)

Finding suitable space within a building is another option. As coaches KD001 and KD006 describe, having access to large spaces and natural daylight can positively influence a coaching session:

'Clients have chosen places with lots of glass, so they have the ability to look out and see daylight. Light, natural light makes a big difference'. (KD001)

'I don't know about the coachee, I personally, am deeply affected by the environment. Absolutely, it affects my ability to coach. I prefer to be in a room with windows, with plenty of space. Strong preference for larger airy space with a view'. (KD006)

The coaches expressed how clients have chosen places to be coached where there is lots of glass and the ability to look outside and see natural daylight, as well as having plenty of physical space. The responses show that having natural light and windows during coaching can have a positive effect, as long as the windows are not into the workplace where interruptions can happen. In contrast, while coaches stressed the benefits of coaching in

nature, clients talked about their preference for a virtual interface for coaching which is explored later in this chapter.

In summary, coaches showed a preference for changing the location of the coaching sessions and could articulate the benefits of walking, in nature or in the cityscape. Whilst clients also appreciated the benefits of being in nature, they also chose alternative places other than their work area with attributes such as light and space. There is some literature evidence in associated workplace studies, although not directly correlating nature and coaching, where certain conditions were found to produce positive affect. For example, being in nature produces a positive response thus reducing stress and anxiety which helps clients hold their attention for longer periods of time (Barnes, 1981; Heerwagen, 1986; Kaplan, 1995) a clear link between physical environmental conditions (surroundings) such as access to sunlight, views etc and productivity in the workplace (Mulville *et al.*, 2016) and the psychological aspect of daylight connecting the client with life in the outside world (Robbins, 1986). This would support what has been discovered in the findings from this research, that natural daylight as well as a psychological connection with the '*outside world*' can have an impact on the way in which we coach. In a coaching context, it could be argued that being out in nature, or outside in a city, could generate a positive response in both the coach and client, decreasing anxiety, conditions which go towards enabling the client to think and be more focused. The literature review shows there is little supporting academic research into the physical environment and coaching, however, this study highlighted the importance of these conditions. Interestingly, although coaches talked about the positive effects of being in nature, in this study, clients expressed a preference for the benefits of the virtual coaching environment, as discussed in the next section.

6.3 Interface preferences in the thinking environment

As indicated earlier in this chapter, clients showed a clear preference for a virtual coaching interface when asked about physical environmental factors. In contrast, many coaches preferred face to face contact, especially at the outset of the coaching relationship, as outlined by coaches KD003 and KF019.

‘After face to face I would be happy to then do virtual, but it would need to be further down the track. It needs to be quiet and light’. (KD003)

‘There is no substitute really for face to face. At least having an initial face to face, especially for the coachee. I feel there is a comfort level that it gives them. Then after the first initial session, they can be remote’. (KF019)

It is interesting that the coaches mention face to face coaching in the first instance, assuming this gives a comfort level to the client and the physical environment needs to be quiet and light. For coaches the importance of daylight was also highlighted a few times when coaching virtually. In contrast, this was not such a common finding with clients although lightly touched upon. Both coaches and clients talked about daylight and the visual aspect of this when coaching. An example of this is shown in the comments by coach KD008 and client CL029:

‘A physical environment, it is possible to create through technology, from the moment I see you on the screen, you have got a nice bright room, there is daylight. It is very quiet, there are no distractions. It is possible to re-create something like that’. (KD008)

‘Coaching online or through zoom, I do think is successful. With the visual presentation, really being able to sort of see the coach and see the person, you know, how they are empathising. I think visual element is definitely important’. (CL029)

The physical environment is as important when coaching virtually as face to face. The coaches using video technology talked about having natural light as well as no distractions. In comparison, clients talked about the visual interaction of being able to see the coach and how

they were displaying empathy. Clients classed the visual element of seeing the coach as important. Clients CL030 and CL035 outline how virtual coaching can be effective:

‘The funny thing is, I think coaching sessions are more effective on zoom, skype, phone or whatever than in sitting live. I don’t know why; this is my feeling. If you are in a cafeteria it’s hard to focus, even for the coach it’s hard to focus. On skype or zoom its more effective because it’s a bit harder for small talk and to be disturbed ‘. (CL030)

‘Given my coaching sessions are virtual, I don’t feel that a visual environment is as important. I think it’s much more about what you have got with people, that you have built that trust, and you have kind of established the ground rules. I think that is much more important than just sat in the physical environment’. (CL035)

Clients found that coaching sessions can be more effective when using video technology or the telephone than the face to face environment as they could be more focused, primarily due to reduced *small talk* and *disturbances*. Clients also showed a trend that the relationship with the coach was more important than whether the coaching was virtual or face to face. It was prevalent for clients, in particular, that virtual coaching was received positively. Academic literature acknowledges that virtual coaching (telephone coaching in this case) has been received positively, and as evidenced in empirical research produced by both McLaughlin, (2013) and Ghods, (2009). McLaughlin, (2013) argued that coaching over the telephone is as good as face to face coaching. When comparing face-to-face, telephone and video technology coaching, all seem to be equally as effective (Jones *et al.*, 2016). In addition, Berry’s (2005) study compared face to face coaching favourably with telephone coaching. The findings in Berry’s research is similar to the findings in my research (although more from the client’s perspective) in that coaches can have an equal preference for either telephone or face to face coaching. Both Berry and McLaughlin found that telephone coaching can enhance intimacy and disclosure from the client. McLaughlin’s study also found that coaching via the telephone added more depth to the coaching process and could be more powerful than face to face coaching.

In Ghods' (2009) quantitative study, coaching by telephone metrics show satisfaction in relationships, along with positive coaching outcomes being achieved. As intimated by the findings of Ghods' study, the coaching clients conveyed satisfaction beyond six months after completion of the coaching, as well as feeling at ease to divulge intimate information over the telephone and develop meaningful relationships with their coach. My review of the literature revealed that coaches and clients show positive attitudes towards virtual coaching (Berry, 2005; Frazee, 2008).

Chapter five discusses deepening and developing a good relationship between the coach and the client to be a critical factor for coaching to be successful. In this research the coaches show a preference in the first coaching session being face to face to establish a meaningful coaching relationship before moving onto virtual coaching. There does however seem to be a contradiction between the views of coaches, clients and research academics. Coaches say that in order to establish a meaningful coaching relationship, there is a strong preference for the first coaching session to be face to face before moving into virtual / remote coaching. Clients do not seem to be strongly influenced and are comfortable for the initial session to be either virtual or face to face. Research findings between academics indicate similar contradictions. Ghods' (2009) study found that coach and client relationships over the telephone can be developed and endure the distance. However, Charbonneau (2002) articulated that telephone coaching was recognised as being less valuable than face to face coaching especially when sharing sensitive issues. The emergence and prevalence of the use of video conferencing such as Skype and Zoom may account for this contradiction. There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest this from the clients interviewed.

Further still, Charbonneau's (2002) research found, as this study did, the first initial face to face contact was necessary to build a good coach client relationship. A study later conducted by Frazee (2008) reported challenges building a rapport over distance. However, the study outlined that technology offers enhanced accessibility, availability as well as frequency of communication.

The findings from this research are aligned to both studies by Charbonneau (2002) and Frazee (2008) that show that a good coaching relationship can be established virtually despite having the lack of visual cues and expressions. In time this can be overcome by explaining verbally to the client the process and by giving the client full attention, especially during the more subtle parts of a conversation (Frazee, 2008; Charbonneau, 2002).

6.4 Summary

The findings in this chapter show the physical environment where coaching takes place has an impact on coaching outcomes (as derived from the participant data). Despite little research to date on what makes for a good physical coaching environment, in this chapter the physical environment was seen as imperative to achieve a critical thinking environment between the coach and client. As outlined in chapter two, evidence is growing that the physical environment in which people work affects job performance and job satisfaction (Vischer, 1989; Clements-Croome, 2000). In addition, If the physical environment affects employees in the workplace, then one could assume that the physical environment may impact employee performance, satisfaction and these are impacted in workplace activities which may include coaching. Further still, coaches and clients emphasised that being taken away from their work environment was important to allow coaching to take place without

interruption, disruption and the influence of the organisational culture or their role. Three sub themes were established, and the following findings were concluded.

The first sub theme presented necessary conditions for the thinking environment. Coaches and clients may have different preferences when deciding and choosing on the physical space where coaching should take place, with that in mind, a recommendation could be that the place where coaching takes place, whether physical or virtual should become a part of the contracting session and should be reviewed on a regular basis throughout the coaching relationship. The physical environment can influence and affect the emotions that individuals experience, and emotions, subsequently, can impact goals and performance. If the physical environment is not satisfactory to the coach and client, this can affect the quality of the coaching that is undertaken, and the goals attained.

Another finding suggested that people react differently to qualities of the physical environment, psychologically, behaviourally as well as physically. It was highlighted that coaching should take place in a comfortable space, in a room that is private and free of interruptions. Evidence in chapter two supported the claim that employees found discomfort with interruption, this created a distraction and thus reduced productivity (Chu & Warnock, 2002; Kim & de Dear, 2013). Further still, Ayoko and Härtel (2003) stated that privacy invasion could trigger conflict in people. Evidence shows that aspects of psychological comfort and privacy have an effect on the spatial layout: office size partitioning influences, and visual privacy is linked with territoriality and status (McCusker, 2002; Vischer *et al.*, 2003; Fischer *et al.*, 2004; Vischer, 2005). Privacy, confidentiality and no interruption are all essential for good coaching (Webb, 2020). A finding from this research could be that the coach and client agree, as part of their initial contract, the physical environment where the coaching will take place to obtain the best outcome for both.

Coaching can take place in various physical environments. It may be seen as static (coaching in one place), although it can also be considered as moveable, coaching could take place in an office or workplace, or informal spaces, for example in a pub or cafe.

The second sub theme presented nature's impact on the thinking environment. Coaches and clients in this research discussed the benefits of undertaking coaching outside and in nature. Outdoor space or an outside view can generate a positive response in people and improve a person's thinking. Natural views have also been linked to improving a person's mood. In addition, walking helps the brain to deal with negative emotions, such as anxiety and stress and can help the brain function at an optimal level. Nature also appears to provide a calmer, quieter, safer context for coaching. The rejuvenating effect of nature on mentally fatigued people (Kuo, 2001) has been demonstrated in a large body of studies. Evidence of nature's beneficial impact on physical (Nieuwenhuijsen *et al.*, 2017), cognitive (Stevenson *et al.*, 2019) and emotional health (Thompson Coon, *et al.*, 2011; Tomasso *et al.*, 2021) is well substantiated in literature.

Organisations tend to be based in cities where there may be no natural views or nature to walk in. A further area of research could be to explore how organisations can look to adopt a green or secluded area, to stimulate positivity and openness.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that for a positive effect, the rooms where coaching takes place should be large, with natural light. Research into natural daylight has been associated with improving people's mood, increasing morale and lower fatigue and also focusing a person's thinking which would have a positive impact on coaching. The research in chapter two, showed evidence that natural daylight has been linked to increased comfort and

productivity as well as window size and proximity, and views outside (Hedge, 2000; Mallory-Hill *et al.*, 2004; Ashkanasy *et al.*, 2014). Another noteworthy feature of the physical environment that should be mentioned is its connection to social interaction and collaboration (Irving *et al.*, 2019). The reason being, that this may affect the performance of both coach and client, and the satisfaction that could be achieved from the coaching. The physical environment is recognised as a significant factor for knowledge creation and learning (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Senoo *et al.*, 2007), all of which may happen in the critical thinking environment of coaching.

The third sub theme presented the interface preferences in the thinking environment. Many of the clients showed a clear preference for wanting virtual rather than face to face coaching. In contrast, coaches showed a preference for face-to-face meetings, especially at the start of the coaching relationship. The need for natural daylight was also expressed in relation to coaching virtually, although this was not such a common finding with clients.

According to Robins' (2014) providing space should be one of the aims of a thinking environment, as confidential space is key for the challenge that coaching provides and is cherished by executives who protect this thinking time. A few coaching scholars have begun to articulate and link space and coaching, although I found very little research as outlined in the literature review on coaching and physical environment. Throughout the literature examined, space is considered as part of a coaching methodology rather than physical (confidential) space, an aspect which is overlooked in research. It can be argued that this is a practical consideration required in the coaching arena, whether that be for face to face, telephone or online coaching.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The original research question was ‘How do coaches and clients create and experience a critical thinking environment?’ The study revealed that critical thinking in the coaching context has been largely overlooked, therefore this study considers both critical thinking and the experiential context of thinking environments of coaches and clients. This conclusion covers the summary of the literature and methodology (7.1), the main findings, including a new framework for a critical thinking environment and includes the larger implications and impact the study may have on coaches, clients and the profession (7.2); Section 7.3 explains the limitations and areas for further research and 7.4 my personal reflections.

Within this thesis, I explored thinking environments in coaching and how these are created and experienced. Table 7.1 summarises the main objectives of this study, and how these were met. This demonstrates how existing research and new data were used to explore the research question:

To critically review literature on thinking environments, and review other frameworks and theories including Kline’s model;	Chapter two builds a case for the need to explore how coaches and clients create and experience a critical thinking environment. The review presented an overview of the literature in this area. The analysis of the literature reveals that a thinking environment is a system of human behaviours, principles, values, and assumptions that is created using a staged approach with set questions.
To examine associated research into thinking in coaching, critical thinking, critical reflection, and executive coaching environments, as well as studies that include the use of Kline’s model;	Kline’s model, which features set questions and clear sequencing, shares characteristics with critical thinking, her thinking environment model is a form of critical thinking. The literature supports the case that there is a strong link between coaching and critical thinking, if coaching is considered a form of dialogue, then the findings of research on how critical thinking is used in coaching can also be applied to the use of coaching.
To conduct empirical research that uncovers coaches’ and clients’ experiences and perceptions of	The research focuses on qualitative data collection from coaches and clients, to help expand the academic

how a thinking environment is created in coaching sessions;	understanding of how coaches and clients create a thinking environment. Forty interviews were conducted in total.
To synthesise the learning into a new theory that can be used to suggest a framework that underpins professional practice of how coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment.	Chapters four to six drew together the three elements (categories) that create a critical thinking environment between the coach and client. These are the most important elements to create the thinking environment, for both coaches and clients.
To contribute to the understanding and practice of implementing a thinking environment and improve the outcomes of the professional practice of coaching to enhance thinking.	Chapters seven presents the data analysis. The framework produced is specifically designed for coaching development and is intended to increase a coach's awareness of how to create a critical thinking environment.

Table 7.1: Research objectives and how these were met

7.1 Summary of the research process

The literature review focused on three main key areas: critical thinking, thinking environments (particularly critiquing Kline's model), and coaching. The literature review revealed a turning point in this study because two distinct ideas about thinking emerged. First, little academic literature referenced thinking environments (Kline 1999), whereas Kline's methodology and the 'thinking environment' are more widely referenced in practitioner literature, as well as being used within the executive coach community and in large corporates whose leaders have been trained in these methods. Second, the idea of critical thinking, as a method of thinking is understood and accepted by academia. I make the case (based on this study) that thinking environments bear the characteristics of critical thinking. In addition, I suggest that the coaching profession could benefit from adopting not only the term, but the design of study and training and practice about the benefits of thinking differently and thinking well.

The literature on critical thinking supports the case that a link exists between critical thinking and coaching; for example, if coaching is regarded as a dialogue, this corresponds well with the research on how critical thinking is used in coaching. As highlighted in the field study, a thinking environment in coaching is accomplished by contracting well, building a relationship, and considering the physical environment in which coaching takes place.

Critical thinking has been described as a core competency and skill, an essential requirement in leaders in organisations where change is rapid and constant (Catchings, 2015). Flores (2012) argue that an absence of critical thinking skills transforms into a lack of ability to lead others. Both educators and employers have been stating there is a need for the expansion and development of skills in critical thinking (Davis & Botkin, 1995B; Brookfield, 198). Brookfield; Davis and Botkin, argue that, in order to survive in the current age, people need to be able to ask questions, as well as challenge assumptions and find ways to solve problems. These authors observe that people with responsibility in organisations or education are constantly trying to perform as effectively as they can under increasingly testing conditions. As outlined in this research, the analysis of the data shows that, as a coach, work can be undertaken with clients to help them meet these challenges, and to think critically.

Findings in the literature review revealed that Kline's thinking environment model does not refer to academic literature, although some of her model seems to be founded in the work of academia. Nor does Kline make specific reference to critical thinking; however, her model is based on a set of questions and clear sequencing which share some of the characteristics of critical thinking. Kline's model evolved and developed from her own practice and experience.

As part of the thinking environment ethos, one of the aims of coaching is to facilitate clients to become more critical in their thinking. Brookfield (1987) states that thinking critically encompasses questioning the assumptions that underlie our typical ways of thinking as well as acting, and then being ready and open to think and act differently. Successfully challenging an assumption centres on developing an incisive question (Kline, 1998) in the co-created mental space. Asking critical questions can cause anxiety, and coaches need to be aware of what they evoke in the client and be able to address this accordingly. It may be that by following a structured model such as Kline's thinking environment with structured questions, this emotion could be missed, and the right question may not be asked of the client. Models can create a process within which the coach and client work, as outlined in the literature review, but it is imperative that coaching models are not experienced as either 'prescriptive or rigid' (Wall, 2017). The inability of a coach to move beyond a model gives the client an experience of being manipulated through a process, which is clearly not what the clients want.

Analysis of the literature and the research from the field study reveal the critical thinking environment in coaching as a system of human behaviours, principles, values and assumptions created by the coach and client. Pivotal to this approach is creating a thinking environment where the status of coach and client is equal in the relationship, and limiting thoughts and beliefs are transformed through a depth of thinking.

There is limited research on what makes for a good physical environment in coaching, although the physical environment is imperative in achieving a successful critical thinking environment between the coach and client. Both coaches and clients emphasised that being

away from their work environment was important to allow coaching to take place without interruptions or the influence of their job role. The change of environment freed the clients' thinking and allowed them the mental space to focus on the work to be done.

The thinking environment affects both the coach and the client. From my experience as a coach, I felt it imperative to capture the voice of the client, as theirs is as important as the voice of the coach, a view seldom represented in research literature (Bush, 2004). Using constructivist grounded theory, and a qualitative research methodology approach, it is my view that these methods enabled exploration of a critical thinking environment from the perspective of all groups of participants. I identified three groups of participants who were selected through purposive sampling. The first group were coaches who use Kline's Thinking Environment model, a group I call Kline Disciples. The second group were coaches who are familiar with Kline's model but may also use other coaching methods, a group called Kline Followers. Finally, I engaged with coaching clients who have experienced Kline's model and other models of coaching, a group called clients. I wanted to incorporate the multiple realities of the participants (their opinions and experiences) which underpinned my desire to explore the concept of a critical thinking environment in coaching.

The constructivist grounded theory methodology was also an appropriate framework to deal with the conceptual nature of the research question. This inductive, comparative, and iterative method of the investigation allowed me to explore the three groups of participants' experience as well as offering the appropriate technique to address my research task, focus, and understanding as well as revealing peoples' individual meanings attached to the concept of critical thinking environments in coaching. I successfully managed to establish a research approach that supported a good fit which linked together

the research paradigm, my own ontological perspective, and an appropriate research methodology.

7.2 Relevance and significance of findings

This study's main contribution is a framework developed from data for coaches and clients in coaching, which will help create a new theory and adds to the debates and literature on critical thinking in coaching, where research is limited. As depicted in figure 7.2, the critical thinking environment model can be explored to fill the gap in terms of empirically informed frameworks that can contribute to guidelines for how coaches and clients create and experience a critical thinking environment in coaching.

This original, empirical research will guide coaches as well as business leaders to experience and create a critical thinking environment in coaching. The study and evidence augment and contribute to mainstream coaching literature to help improve the coaching experience.

Numerous coaching models have been designed and developed in the past, but this study goes deeper and considers the conditions, as outlined, that need to be in place to create a critical thinking environment for both coach and client. The research findings highlighted three critical areas in creating such a thinking environment: 1. contracting; 2. deepening the relationship between coach and client; and 3. the physical environment (situating the relationship). All three categories should be considered together in order to achieve an optimum critical thinking environment in coaching. These are the most important elements in creating the thinking environment, and these features were common to both coaches and clients.

The findings described in Chapter four show that contracting takes place before coaching commences and deepening and maintaining a good relationship between coach and client is an essential factor for successful coaching. At the start of the coaching process, it is imperative that the coach forms a connection with the client and builds rapport, providing the grounding for establishing and developing the coaching relationship. In the contracting phase of the coaching relationship, the coach and client aim to build a mutual, equal relationship, and set clear boundaries and outcomes at the start of the coaching process. At the outset, boundary setting, clarifying goals and expectations as well as a clear understanding of the coaching process all form the basis of the contract. Contracting sets up the environment or thinking space. This is easier if commitment is shown by both coach and client in the first coaching session, and that time is used wisely. The study showed that emotional states such as empathy, rapport and chemistry contribute towards a suitable starting point in the relationship between the coach and client.

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emotional states such as empathy, rapport and chemistry contribute towards a suitable starting point in the relationship between the coach and client.

Evidence from this research suggests that contracting outlines success metrics and points of progress as a gauge or check point for looking at successes or issues that can be explored towards the client's goals. The mutuality of the contracting determines the success at the start of the coaching relationship. This research contributes to literature that already exists by developing an understanding and contrast to critical thinking in coaching. As coaches and clients co-create meaning, realities and new narratives together in the coaching session; they infer a thinking environment that is created between them, reaching a desired state in the coach-client relationship.

In the business environment, new knowledge and skills are increasingly needed to apply integrated ways of thinking in short timeframes. Furthermore, the coach/client relationship is vital to the success of the coaching intervention (Passmore, 2007). Although the study shows that aspects such as empathy and rapport contribute towards a suitable starting point in the relationship between the coach and client, the relationship needs to deepen and become a partnership where the coach is able to challenge the client's assumptions, and yet remain supportive and non-judgemental of the client so that a critical thinking environment can be created (Browne, 2006).

Chapter six shows how the physical environment in which coaching takes place creates a critical thinking environment for both coaches and clients. It is also key that the physical environmental impact should be considered, for example, where and how the coaching takes place (either virtual or face-to-face). This study showed that, in order to establish the

coaching relationship, clients preferred the first coaching session to be face-to-face before progressing to virtual coaching, indicating that the initial face-to-face contact had a positive impact on building a better coach and client relationship. It could be argued (as outlined in chapter 6) that coaches seem to have more of an issue with the virtual aspect of coaching being a success than clients do.

Figure 7.2 describes the link between the elements of the analysis which are shown as part of the theory building. The framework is developed from the data which will help create a possible theory. The framework produced (see Figure 7.2) is specifically designed for coaching development and is intended to increase coach awareness of how to create a critical thinking environment. Three broad categories were constructed from the data, each with sub-themes. As the findings developed, I decided to classify the categories as elements as there is an interdependency between them necessary to build the critical thinking environment in coaching. When considered together in the coaching context, the three elements have the potential for the coach and the client to create a critical thinking environment as reflected in the findings of this study.

The three elements (categories) that form the framework outlined are:

Category 1: Contracting – Establishing the relationship (Chapter 4)

Category 2: Thinking space – Deepening the relationship (Chapter 5)

Category 3: Physical environment – Situating the relationship (Chapter 6).

The aim of Figure 7.2 is to enable coaches and clients to use each element of the framework to establish a critical thinking environment in their coaching practice and for coach

development. Based on the data across all participants, coaches and clients should consider each element to achieve the optimum critical thinking environment.

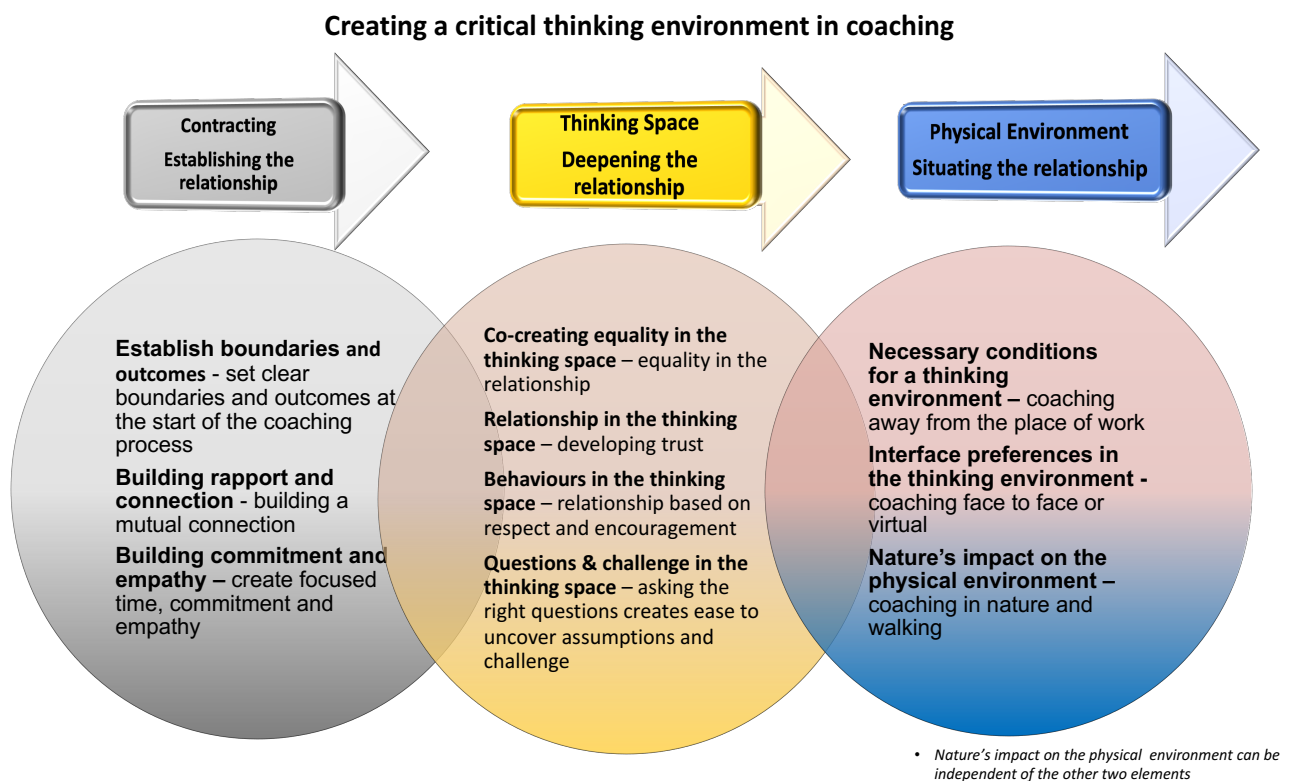


Figure 7.2 Creating a critical thinking environment

As outlined in Figure 7.2, each element of the critical thinking environment framework should be considered to create a critical thinking environment for the coach and client. The elements are interconnected, for example, if the contracting element of this model is missed out, then the basics for establishing the relationship with the client is missed; it will then be a challenge to create and experience a critical thinking environment. If the contracting and thinking space elements are met, but the coaching takes place in a physical environment that does not suit the client, the optimum critical thinking environment is inhibited. The exception is the element of the impact of nature on the physical

environment, which is not co-dependent on the other two elements of the environment ('Interface preferences in the thinking environment', and 'Necessary conditions for a thinking environment').

The following discussion focuses on the contribution to knowledge this study makes, specifically in connection with building a critical thinking environment for coaches and clients as illustrated in Figure 7.2.

As a requirement for deeper critical thinking to happen, the client and coach need to be willing to go into the co-created thinking space together. How the coach asks questions creates ease in the coach-client relationship, and subsequently helps the client to uncover their assumptions and promote a thinking space for the coach to challenge the client. This same approach could be applied to coaching supervision as well.

The power of questions should not be underestimated in coaching as this enables a 'thinking about our thinking' (Raelin, 2002, p. 66). The skill of the coach is paramount when asking the right questions, reflecting back and showing the client that the coach is listening through paraphrasing and possibly asking further clarifying questions; all this should be in the service of the client's critical thinking. The emergent quality of questions, together with the coach being able to ask questions pertinent in that moment, helps create ease for the client. The consequence of this sense of ease gives the client permission to explore and think for themselves. Underpinning all this is a respectful and trusting relationship between coach and client which provides a supportive challenge in uncovering assumptions. As outlined in chapter five, in the context of a coaching relationship, there appears to be a progression towards uncovering assumptions which would enable a client to free their

thinking about an issue, thus creating a critical thinking space. When the coach asks relevant questions, the client experiences a sense of ease. Once this state has been established between the coach and client, the coach is able to further challenge the client, which may reveal any assumptions that may be holding the client back. Overall, the findings indicate that a combination of interrelated actions and emotions create an effective coaching relationship where critical thinking can occur.

This study suggests the co-creation of space, willingness, trust, ease, equality and respect in coaching provides a safe environment where the client can be challenged, and thus assumptions uncovered. The data from the research showed that if the right conditions are met, clients are open to being challenged as they come to trust their coach. Trust needs to be established quickly between the coach and client, and once created and established, helps to build rapport with the client, and develops and deepens the relationship. When trust is evident in the coaching relationship, the coach is able to step into the thinking space with the client. This approach could be applied beyond the scope of coaching, for example, in one to one meetings between Line Managers and their direct reports when having development conversations, in education between lecturers and their students to help their pupils to reflect and learn around a particular issue.

The research showed that clients do not want or need an imposed model or structure in a critical thinking environment; they prefer to feel at ease and have an open, authentic coaching conversation. Coaches need to be aware of what a client may also avoid saying by their tone, body language and other non-verbal communications. The data showed that it is the coaching relationship that really matters, not the coaching tool, intervention, or models used.

7.2.1 Kline's thinking environment model

Kline's (1999) thinking environment model is aimed chiefly at practitioners and does not have the basis of academic research that other coaching models have achieved, as the literature review highlighted. Evidence also supports the view that the thinking environment model has never really gone 'mainstream' for coaches in organisations.

As outlined in the literature review, Kline's model (1999) uses a combination of ten behaviours (or conditions) and a set of staged questions designed to create space to allow people to think for themselves. Certain elements of her work emerged in the data from my study. Table 7.2 shows elements of Kline's model that appeared in the data from my study, and the areas that did not. As a result, I argue that not all of Kline's (1999) ten behaviours are required to achieve a thinking environment in coaching. Curiously an area that was prevalent in the data from my study, yet Kline does not include as part of her model is trust, which I argue, is a critical element when creating a thinking space between the coach and client and deepening the relationship.

The data also confirm that rigid questions in a model are not required. Skilfully asking the right question is more important and more effective. As outlined in the literature review and Chapter 5, the more experienced the coach, the more the coach becomes absorbed in the topic being discussed with the client, and the less aware the coach becomes of the construction or the flow of questions in the coaching session. This is different from Kline's fixed question approach to coaching, as outlined in Table 7.2.

Components	Kline's thinking environment model	Coach's thinking environment
ATTENTION	Listening with palpable respect and without interruption	Building commitment and empathy – creating focused time, commitment and empathy
EQUALITY	Treating each other as thinking peers; giving equal turns and attention; keeping agreements and boundaries	Co-creating equality in the thinking space – equality in the relationship
EASE	Offering freedom from internal rush or urgency	Ease enabled or used to uncover assumptions and (allow) challenge as outlined: Questions and challenge in the thinking space – asking the right questions creates ease to uncover assumptions and challenge
APPRECIATION	Offering genuine acknowledgement of a person's qualities; practising a 5:1 ratio of appreciation to criticism	Clients showed a preference for empathy and understanding Appreciation in Kline's model is perceived as awkward and not classed as important
ENCOURAGEMENT	Giving courage to go to the cutting edge of ideas by moving beyond internal competition	Behaviours in the thinking space – relationship based on respect and encouragement
FEELINGS	Unexpressed feelings can inhibit good thinking	Non-verbal and body language insights
INFORMATION	Supplying the facts; dismantling denial	Questions and challenge in the thinking space – asking the right questions creates ease to uncover assumptions and challenge
DIVERSITY	Welcoming divergent thinking and diverse group identities	Not mentioned in the study
INCISIVE QUESTIONS	Removing assumptions that limit our ability to think for ourselves clearly and creatively	Incisive questions would be part of Questions and challenge in the thinking space – asking the right questions creates ease to uncover assumptions and challenge Questions do not need to be in a sequence or set, these may emerge based on what the client raises with their coach

PLACE	Creating a physical environment that reflects to people, “You matter”	Necessary conditions for a thinking environment – coaching away from the place of work Nature’s impact on the physical environment – coaching in nature and walking Interface preferences in the thinking environment - coaching face-to-face or virtual
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Table 7.2 - Kline’s (1999) thinking environment compared with coach’s thinking environment

The research showed that the physical environment in which the coaching is situated has an impact on coaching outcomes, and on the relationship between coach and client. Coaches and clients have different preferences when choosing the physical space where coaching should take place, and a discussion about where coaching should be situated, whether physical or virtual, could become a part of the contracting session and might be reviewed on a regular basis throughout the coaching relationship. The physical environment where coaching takes place can also influence and affect people’s emotions, and emotions, can impact goals and performance. A physical environment that is not satisfactory to both the coach or the client can affect the quality of the coaching that is undertaken, and the goals attained.

This study showed that people react differently – psychologically, behaviourally, and physically – to qualities of the physical environment. Coaching should take place in a comfortable space, in a room that is private and free of interruptions from others. Coaches and clients in my research discussed undertaking coaching out in nature. Research outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2), shows that an outdoor space (or view) can generate

positive responses in people, reduce stress, decrease anxiety, so allowing both coach and client to hold their attention for longer periods of time. In addition, walking helps the brain to deal with negative emotions, such as stress and anxiety, and can help the brain function at an optimal level. An option could be walking in nature during a coaching session, to generate a positive attitude, decrease any prevalent anxiety, and help the client to think and be more focused during the coaching session.

Virtual and face to face coaching with available natural light was defined as important by all respondents in the research and this has been linked to improving a person's mood (Boubekri et al., 2014). If coaching is face to face then there was a preference for this to take place in larger rooms. Furthermore, client respondents in my research showed a clear preference for wanting virtual coaching rather than face-to-face. In contrast, coaches showed a preference for face-to-face, especially in the first instance of the coaching relationship. The data from this research showed that the initial face-to-face contact could have a positive impact for building a good coach and client relationship, but it appears that coaches are more doubtful about the success of virtual coaching than clients are.

This study goes further than just the theoretical contribution, as it also has implications for the coaching practice, and offers suggestions for practitioners, who can gain from this research. A theoretical framework for critical thinking environments in coaching can be used by coaches to enhance their coaching practice and may even be used beyond coaching.

The main beneficiaries of this research are coaches because based on empirical evidence it provides new knowledge, about the coaches' and clients' role and relationship in a critical thinking environment. The framework shows how a coach and client can co-create a

thinking environment between them. I recommend that coaches use this framework to understand their role in creating a critical thinking environment for their clients'. This framework could be provided by coaching professional bodies, coach training organisations, coaching providers, coach supervisors, human resources and learning and development practitioners to enable a critical thinking environment in coaching (and beyond coaching).

An implication of the study is that coaches could gain an understanding of what creates a thinking environment for both themselves and clients if they are more aware of the underlying mechanisms to achieve this. Coaches and clients can become active participants in creating the critical thinking environment rather than being passive recipients. My framework is specifically designed to increase the awareness of coaches and clients, and this study has synthesised the learning into a new framework that can be used to advance a theory that underpins professional practice. Professional bodies in coaching can understand the important role of critical thinking in coaching by using the framework outlined in this research. Alternatively, such bodies could develop further guidelines on how coaches, and possibly coach supervisors, can get the most from individual or group coaching to achieve a thinking environment in their coaching practice. Learning and development practitioners in organisations that provide coaching (and coaching supervision) services for their internal coaches could ensure that their internal coaches are able to use the critical thinking framework to achieve better coaching outcomes.

The critical thinking environment framework can help the coach and client in various ways: to contract with the client, to understand the dynamics of the coaching relationship and mental space created, and to consider the impact of the physical environment where coaching takes place. Introducing the idea of critical thinking as a thinking environment may

encourage coaches, clients and their organisations to integrate this into their environments to think about thinking as a new discipline, one that can be learned and refined so that thinking becomes more mainstream in terms of creating the right environment within the coaching session. As the development of coaches is established through continuous improvement and the increasingly effective integration of coaching knowledge, skills and understanding in their coaching practice, this framework can be used to raise awareness, deepen learning, generate responsibility and build self-belief in the client.

This study has not only helped me as a coach but will help coaches and clients improve their experience in coaching overall. The findings raise questions about how coaches interact with clients, how and if contracting is approached, how to establish a relationship between coach and client, and how the physical environment impacts a client's thinking.

7.3 Limitations and areas for further research

A limitation of this study is that all the coaches in this research were experienced and had at least five years' experience. Involving coaches with less experience may have created different findings. For example, coaches with less experience might feel more exposed if they are not following a particular coaching model. In this study, some of the clients I interviewed also had coaching experience; again, they may have been using their experience as a coach to consider some of the questions that I asked in the interview. Another limitation of this study is that it included both Kline disciples and Kline followers. It would be interesting to observe the outcome of having 'Kline deniers', or coaches who had never heard of Kline's model.

This design study is qualitative, and it sought to gain a deep understanding of how participants create and experience a thinking environment. The theoretical framework is

built on the analysis of experiences of 40 participants. All participants were recruited through advertisements placed through professional bodies and networks to ensure an interest in thinking environments. However, by answering this advertisement, the participants were also predisposed to thinking environments in some form, and this might have created a certain bias.

Another consideration is that my experience and background in this field (coaching and thinking environments) possibly assisted participants to be more open than they would normally be with other researchers. My considerate and caring style as well as my passion could, at times, have made it difficult to remain entirely neutral during the interviews. For example, I might have reacted a little more passionately at times to some of the participants responses, and in turn, encouraging the participants to elaborate more, and at other times, have acted in response a little less passionately to other responses and in turn missed potential data.

The framework established through the constructivist grounded theory method were shared with peers in the DCM group at Oxford Brookes University and twelve coaches at a coaching network event I am part of. Presenting this framework and asking for feedback was useful as I reflected on my influence on the interpretation of data, as a researcher (Remenyi, 2013). The coaches who attended perceived the framework as feasible to implement in practice.

Further research into the physical environment and coaching would be beneficial as this study only uncovered the start of some deep and meaningful research in this area into the impact of the physical environment, the implications of which affects both coaches and

clients. I would like to explore further the differences that were evidenced between coaches and clients in this area of my study: clients seemed much more open to virtual coaching than coaches are. I am eager to understand the 'value' the coach perceives they are creating for the client by meeting the client face-to-face rather than virtually. Is it because clients work more virtually today in their organisations, for example? These are questions that I would like to uncover.

7.4 Personal reflection

This doctoral research of Coaching and Mentoring (DCM) journey has been extremely worthwhile from an education perspective and in turn has provided me with various challenges. I have learned some useful lessons. When I started my research, I was looking for answers in academia, searching for a blueprint that I could apply to my DCM research. I found that masses of practitioner papers and academics had good advice, but I found, at the time and in certain instances, I could not always associate and relate to what was being said. Discovering constructivist grounded theory was key, as it offered clear tools and guidelines that provided the necessary structure. Constructivist grounded theory gave me the understanding I needed and helped me feel I could actually contribute and play a part to my field of study.

This study has helped me gain a new insight into the constructivist grounded theory methodology and some of the potential criticisms that inductive processes may encounter in academia. The intellectual and analytic process of moving from data to theory at times frustrated and challenged me as a novice to academic research; at times it felt overwhelming. After I completed a number of data collection cycles and analysing data in

rounds (as outlined in Chapter 3), I found that there were no more new understandings and insights to be discovered and I came to a decision that data saturation had been achieved.

Another challenge I was faced with was the manipulation of data. Charmaz suggests that researchers view grounded theory methods as flexible guidelines (Charmaz, 2006), yet I found all the approaches were required. To actually see all of the data was very challenging for me as the novice researcher. The process required me to analyse the data from the start of data collection, and to make systematic comparisons throughout the investigation so that I could integrate and streamline the data collection and analysis. As a novice researcher, a crucial challenge was the tension created in keeping flexibility within the process, especially when I found the process itself to be confusing at times.

The process of analysis required me to surrender to it, which was very tiring and time consuming. Immersing myself in the data was exasperating, chaotic and messy experience; although I can cope with mess and chaos, it was difficult, as the researcher, to navigate and manage the tension that exists between the need to find what direction I was going in and being able to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty. The constructivist grounded theory process asks a lot of the researcher, as they have to trust the constructivist grounded theory analytical process and surrender to it (Charmaz, 2006), right up to the point of writing and refining. At the same time, as a novice researcher, I also gained much in return as the whole experience of learning to deal with voluminous amounts of data, as well as uncertainty, allowed the journey through grounded theory to have an important and lasting change on me. I am grateful I experienced and managed this rigorous research that was academic in nature with its challenges and ambiguity; it increased my own knowledge and changed the way in which I work in my coaching practice.

I have also changed some of my views and coaching practice as a result of the study. As a coach, I now consider the contracting phase and go through the framework with the client; so far, with positive results. I am conscious that I see the relationship with the client as a partnership and not restraining myself in the process. This has contributed to much more open dialogue and deeper thinking, not only by the client, but also by me, as the coach.

Finally, I have learned how tough it is being a researcher. I have come to value research more and I appreciate the value that it contributes to the coaching profession. I have mostly enjoyed embarking on this study and I certainly feel encouraged and energised to carry out further research and facilitate more in the future.

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Appendix 1 - A poster that explained the research



How do coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment?

Research project to be submitted for the award of Doctor of Coaching & Mentoring (DCM) at Oxford Brookes University

Are you an experienced executive coach or coachee/client who *has* experienced the coaching session as a 'thinking environment'?

Before you decide whether or not to take part in this research, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information.

This research explores how coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment in the coaching context. A thinking environment is set of conditions that purport to help people to think well for themselves. Considering the application of a thinking environment in a meeting, as one example, the system, or 'environment', would comprise human behaviours, values and assumptions (Havers, 2008). The need to think critically, creatively and systematically in different aspects of work and our wider lives has inspired researchers to develop various uses of the thinking environment, from exploring hierarchy in organisations to creating a thinking environment in meetings and the experience of leadership and power. Nancy Kline, for example, developed a thinking environment model in the mid-eighties comprising ten behaviours (Kline, 1999). However, although it is twenty years since *Time to think* (1999) was written there is still a lack of research into thinking environments, especially in the context of coaching.

This study aims to build a theory around the use of thinking environments, constructing a framework that will advance the professional practice of coaching to enhance thinking and will add to the body of literature on thinking environments.

What I am looking for:

You are being invited as an accredited executive coach (men or women) or as a coachee/client in the UK with experience of working with thinking environments in some form. As a coach you will most likely possess a post-graduate qualification and have more than 5 years' experience of coaching. You may have used or adapted Nancy Kline's thinking environment model. Coachees/clients will have experienced a thinking environment within their sessions with a coach in some form.

Please note there is no pressure to participate. All individual contributions are welcome as part of this research study.

What it will involve:

Participation will involve a two-way, interview with me as the researcher. Together we shall explore how you have experienced the thinking environment in some form. Where possible as part of the research I would like to hear your construction and perceptions of your experiences of the thinking environment from your coaching sessions. The interviewing approach provides an opportunity to share how you perceive what creates a thinking environment in a coaching context.

The aim is to interview participants in total for 60 minutes either face to face or Skype. Prior to meeting you, I will arrange an introductory telephone/Skype call in order to introduce myself and answer any questions you may have. If you wish to proceed, I will send you a copy of the themes and questions we will discuss during the interview. During the interview I shall take notes and it will also be audio-recorded. All our conversations will be entirely confidential and all data will be anonymised before inclusion in the thesis or subsequent publications. You are free to withdraw at any time from this project, without giving a reason. If you are interested in participating, I will send you the Participant Information sheet which will provide more information.

When will this take place?

The interviews will take place between March and May 2019. My contact details are: Donna Johnston
Mobile: 0777 6250445
Email: 17002433@brookes.ac.uk.

Appendix 2 - Client participant information form

Client Participant Information Sheet:
From Donna Johnston, doctoral research student
Student Number: 17002433

Study title of my research:

How do coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment?

Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study to explore how coaches and clients work together to create and experience a thinking environment. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to explore how coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment in the coaching context. The thinking environment forms the basis of a teaching pedagogy and a coaching approach. The components are attention, appreciation, ease, encouragement, diversity, information, feelings, equality, place and incisive questions.

The need to think critically, creatively and systematically in different aspects of work and our wider lives has inspired researchers to develop various uses of the thinking environment, from exploring hierarchy in organisations to creating a thinking environment in meetings and the experience of leadership and power. Kline, for example, developed a thinking environment model in the mid-eighties comprising ten behaviours (Kline, 1999). Since then Kline has founded 'Time to Think' but although it is almost twenty years since *Time to think* (1999) was written there is still a lack of research into a thinking environment. This study aims to build a theory around the use of thinking environments, constructing a framework that will advance the professional practice of coaching to enhance thinking.

The research project forms part of my Doctorate in coaching and mentoring at the Oxford Brookes University where I am supervised by Dr. Elaine Cox & Dr. Peter Jackson.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate because you may have experienced a thinking environment in some form as a coachee. Participation will involve individual interviews. Where possible as part of the research, I would like to hear your own constructions and perceptions of your experiences of the thinking environment from your coaching sessions.

The aim is to interview participants for 60 minutes face to face or via Skype. Prior to meeting you, I will arrange an introductory telephone/Skype call in order to introduce myself and answer any questions you may have. If you wish to proceed, I will send you a copy of the themes and questions we will discuss during the interview in an interview guide. During the interview I shall take notes and it will also be audio-recorded. All our conversations will be entirely confidential and all data will be anonymised before inclusion in the thesis or subsequent publications. You are free to withdraw at any time from this project, without giving a reason.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not you wish to take part in this study. This invitation to take part in this research is from me, and it should not affect your relationship with your coach or your coaching programme if you decide not to take part. If you do decide you would like to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. All individual contributions are welcome as part of this research study.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The interviews will be face to face where possible, if this is not possible then skype (or other technology) would be the preferred option. These will be individual interviews on the topic outlined. Usually these qualitative interviews last approximately 60 minutes, although sometimes it may take longer. It will sound like two people having a discussion, as I ask questions of you based around the research area.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no anticipated risks in participating in this study. The main disadvantage is that you will be committing to approximately 60 minutes of your time to take part. You are invited to answer the questions based on your personal experience during the interview. However, you can refuse to answer any questions which you feel are uncomfortable and you can stop the interview at any time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The benefits of taking part in this study are that your experiences will add to the literature and contribute to the theory of thinking environments, and to the professional practice of coaching to enhance thinking. The study shall benefit participants through enhance understanding of coaching as well as providing the opportunity to reflect.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations) and confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material. Data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity. The data generated in the course of the research will be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you decide to take part in the study I can be contacted by email at the following email address 17002433@brookes.ac.uk or on mobile 0044 777 6250445. Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone or email.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will form part of the thesis for a Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring being undertaken at Oxford Brookes University. If requested you can be provided with a summary of the findings.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting the research as a student at Oxford Brookes University Business School.

Who has reviewed the study?

The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Contact for Further Information

Donna Johnston

Student Number:

Email: 17002433@brookes.ac.uk

Tel: 0044 777 6250445

My Director of Studies supervisor is: Elaine Cox - Senior Lecturer at the Oxford Brookes Business School, ecox@brookes.ac.uk>

My second supervisor is: Dr. Peter Jackson, Senior Lecturer at the Oxford Brookes Business School, peter.jackson@brookes.ac.uk

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 on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking part in the research project.

Draft Version Number

Version 6– 10th February 2019

Coach participant information form

Coach Participant Information Sheet:
From Donna Johnston, doctoral research student
Student Number: 17002433

Study title of my research:

How do coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment?

Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study to explore how coaches and clients work together to create and experience a thinking environment. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to explore how coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment in the coaching context. The thinking environment forms the basis of a teaching pedagogy and a coaching approach. The components are attention, appreciation, ease, encouragement, diversity, information, feelings, equality, place and incisive questions.

The need to think critically, creatively and systematically in different aspects of work and our wider lives has inspired researchers to develop various uses of the thinking environment, from exploring hierarchy in organisations to creating a thinking environment in meetings and the experience of leadership and power. Kline, for example, developed a thinking environment model in the mid-eighties comprising ten behaviours (Kline, 1999). Since then Kline has founded 'Time to Think' but although it is almost twenty years since *Time to think* (1999) was written there is still a lack of research into a thinking environment. This study aims to build a theory around the use of thinking environments, constructing a framework that will advance the professional practice of coaching to enhance thinking.

The research project forms part of my Doctorate in coaching and mentoring at the Oxford Brookes University where I am supervised by Dr. Elaine Cox & Dr. Peter Jackson.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate because you have established coaching relationships and may have used or adapted Nancy Kline's thinking environment model. Participation will involve individual interviews with you as a coach to explore how you have experienced the thinking environment in some form. Where possible as part of the research I would like to hear your individual construction and perceptions of your experiences of the thinking environment in your coaching sessions.

The aim is to interview about participants for 60 minutes either face to face or via Skype. Prior to meeting you, I will arrange an introductory telephone/Skype call in order to introduce myself and answer any questions you may have. If you wish to proceed, I will send you a copy of the themes and questions we will discuss during the interview. During the interview I shall take notes and the interview will also be audio-recorded. All our conversations will be entirely confidential and all data will be anonymised before inclusion in the thesis or subsequent publications. You are free to withdraw at any time from this project, without giving a reason, and any non-analysed data will be removed.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not you wish to take part in this study. If you do decide you would like to take part you will be given this information sheet and a privacy notice to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Please note there is no pressure to participate. All individual contributions are welcome as part of this research study.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The interviews will be face to face where possible, if this is not possible then skype (or other technology) would be the preferred option. There will be individual interviews on the topic outlined. Usually these qualitative

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no anticipated risks in participating in this study. The main disadvantage is that you will be committing to approximately 60 minutes of your time to take part. You are invited to answer the questions based on your personal experience during the interview. However, you can refuse to answer any questions which you feel are uncomfortable and you can stop the interview at any time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The benefits of taking part in this study are that your experiences will add to the literature and contribute to the theory of thinking environments, and to the professional practice of coaching to enhance thinking. The study shall benefit participants through enhance understanding of coaching as well as providing the opportunity to reflect.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations) and confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material. Data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity. The data generated in the course of the research will be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you decide to take part in the study I can be contacted by email at the following email address 17002433@brookes.ac.uk or on mobile 0044 777 6250445. Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone or email.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will form part of the thesis for a Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring being undertaken at Oxford Brookes University. If requested you can be provided with a summary of the findings.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting the research as a student at Oxford Brookes University Business School.

Who has reviewed the study?

The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Contact for Further Information

Donna Johnston
Student Number:
Email: 17002433@brookes.ac.uk
Tel: 0044 777 6250445

My Director of Studies supervisor is: Elaine Cox - Senior Lecturer at the Oxford Brookes Business School, ecox@brookes.ac.uk

My second supervisor is: Dr. Peter Jackson, Senior Lecturer at the Oxford Brookes Business School, peter.jackson@brookes.ac.uk

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 on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking part in the research project.

Draft Version Number

Version 6– 10th February 2019

Appendix 3 - Consent Form



Appendix 1: CONSENT FORM

Full title of Project:

To explore how coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment

Name, position and contact address of Researcher and Supervision Team

Donna Johnston, Doctoral Researcher, School of Business, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, OX3 0FL

Email: 17002433@brookes.ac.uk

Tel: 0044 777 6250445

Director of Studies: Dr Elaine Cox, Senior Lecturer, ecox@brookes.ac.uk>

Second Supervisor: Dr. Peter Jackson, Senior Lecturer peter.jackson@brookes.ac.uk

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

☐

I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded

☐

I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

Please tick box

Yes

No

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

☐☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 4 - General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) notice



Privacy Notice

Oxford Brookes University (OBU) will usually be 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 properly. The exception to this is joint research projects where you would be informed on the participant information sheet as to the other partner institution or institutions. This means that they will make the decisions on how your data is used and for what reasons. You can contact the University's Information Management Team on 01865 485420 or email info.sec@brookes.ac.uk.

Why do we need your data?

This is a research study designed to explore how coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment in the coaching context. To achieve this the research focuses on qualitative data collection with coaches and their clients to help expand understanding of how coaches and clients create a thinking environment.

OBU's legal basis for collecting this data is:

- You are consenting to providing it to us; and / or,
- Processing is necessary for the performance of a task in the public interest such as research

If the university asks you for sensitive data such as; racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade-union membership, data concerning health or sexual life, genetic/biometric data or criminal records OBU will use these data because:

- You have given OBU explicit consent to do so; and / or
- Processing is necessary for scientific or research in the public interest.

What type of data will Oxford Brookes University use?

Transcripts from the interviews will be used in the research proposed.

Who will OBU share your data with?

Data outputs will be shared with the supervisory team (Dr. Elaine Cox & Dr. Peter Jackson) as part of the ongoing challenge and development of the thesis. Transcripts and findings will be shared with you at each stage (if you wish) to check accuracy and understanding after each interview. External transcription software will be used to transcribe. All data, and any analysis and findings from the data, will be stored on Oxford Brookes University's Google Drive, for which the University has a security agreement in place. All files will be password protected and names anonymised.

Will OBU transfer my data outside of the UK?

No

What rights do I have regarding my data that OBU 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 the university using your data
- You have rights in relation to using your data automated decision making and profiling.

Where did OBU source my data from?

If you consent, interviews between myself and yourself will be audio-recorded and transcribed. This is the main source.

Are there any consequences of not providing the requested data?

There are no legal consequences of not providing data for this research. It is purely voluntary.

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 OBU 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 time in accordance with the research funder or University policy.

External transcription software will be used to transcribe your interviews from the recordings made. Data will be stored in confidential, password protected Google Drives, for which the University has security agreements in place. Analysis and findings from the data will be stored on Google Drive, password protected and in separate named files.

Who can I contact if I have concerns?

You can contact the Information Management team.

Postal Address: Information Management Team, IT Services, Room 2.12, Gibbs Building, Headington Campus, Gypsy Lane, Oxford, OX3 0BP

Email: info.sec@brookes.ac.uk

Tel: 01865 485420 in UK
+44 1865 485420 outside the UK.

Appendix 5 - Interview guide with participant questions

Interview Guide

Overall research question: How do coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment?

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I will be audio recording our discussions in order to have a record for my research. All data will be anonymised before inclusion. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time, without giving a reason.

Questions and themes for discussion

- Introduction: Let me tell you a little about my research project
- In a two way conversation I will ask the following questions with some possible following up questions.

Interview Questions:

Number	Coach (CO) or Client (CL)	Question
1	CO/CL	How do you know if you are in a thinking environment and its being created? What do you notice (think/feel)
2	CO CL	What are you looking for from a client to enable a thinking environment? As a client what are you looking for from a coach to create and enable a thinking environment?
3	CL CO	How do you really know you are thinking for yourself? How do you know as a coach that the client is actually really thinking?
4	CO CL	How do you know when your clients thinking has shifted? How did you know? What did you experience? How do you know when your thinking has shifted? Eg identified an assumption or aha moment?
5	CL CO	How do you know as a client that the coach is listening to you? As a coach how do you know the client is listening to you?
6	CO CL	How do you as a coach determine when to stop listening and start speaking? How do you determine that what you are about to say will be more valuable than what the client has to say? As a Client how do you know that the coach has intervened at the right time?
7	CO CL	Where do your questions emerge from as a coach and how do you know this is the right question to ask? How do you know this was the right question to ask?
8	CO/CL	Does the time and physical environment (place) effect the quality of the coaching session? If so how and what do you experience?

I am most appreciative of your time and efforts in my research. Please do feel free to contact me at any time with any questions you may have.

Donna Johnston
Mobile: 0777 6250445
Email: 17002433@brookes.ac.uk.

Appendix 6 - Thank you email to participants

Dear XXXX

Study title of my research:

How do coaches and clients create and experience a thinking environment?

Thank you again for your willingness and time to participate in my study. I have really valued your participation in this research study, your willingness and openness to share about your experience. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Again, thank you so very much for your time and effort that made this research study possible. I could not have done this without you.

Thank you

Donna Johnston

Mobile: 0777 6250445

Email: 17002433@brookes.ac.uk.