Peak moments: the experience of coaches

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‘*As it happens sometimes,*
a moment settled and hovered
and remained for much more than a moment.
And sound stopped and movement stopped for much,
much more than a moment’.
John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*

‘*Life offers up these moments of joy despite everything’.*
Sally Rooney, *Normal People*
Winner of the 2018 Costa Novel Award

‘*You never know where it’s gonna come from,*
and when it’s gonna come’.
Paul McCartney.
Idris Elba meets Paul McCartney,
BBC1, 19 December 2020

Abstract

Peak moments are considered by McInman and Grove (1991) to be a global panacea, and include peak experience (Maslow, 1964), peak performance (Privette, 1983) and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Peak moments are an under-researched phenomenon in coaching. They could, in principle, be important and motivating experiences, adding a unique and profound richness to the coaching experience. Extant studies focussing on 'aha', 'breakthrough' and 'critical moments' for coachees and coaches discuss the cognitive and not the phenomenological experience. This study aspires to address this gap in the coaching literature. Using a heuristic approach, ten UK coaches with a minimum of eight years' experience were interviewed about their encounters with peak moments and the interviews were analysed. The findings suggest that peak experience is a rarity in coaching, a transcendental and spontaneous moment of ineffable joy; peak performance validates the coach's confidence in their skills through feedback from coachees and third parties; and the concept of flow, much discussed in positive psychology, is regularly experienced in coaching, enabling rapport to be strengthened between coach and coachee. The coaches' feelings, both inside and outside the body, are explored, and findings suggest that the coach becomes a "conduit" in the sense that when coaches draw on their insights, intuition and tacit knowing, a peak moment is more likely to emerge. The analysis in Chapter Five revealed five core conditions which, when applied to coaching, increased the likelihood of the occurrence of a peak moment. In Chapter Six, these conditions are built upon and integrated with the findings from Chapter Four, the role of the coach's emotions in the coaching dyad. The implications of these findings relate to the joy and engagement of coaching as a vitalising, aesthetic experience, adding richness through the connectedness and collaborative engagement between coach and coachee.

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Chapter One – Introduction

I first experienced a peak moment during my fourth year at music college. I was playing the flute in an orchestral rehearsal, watching the conductor closely and following his lead, eyes locked during the timeless passage of the solo which seemed to go on forever, hang suspended in the air yet supported by the orchestra. It was as though I had been transported into another world, a world of transcendence and stillness. We finished playing the piece and the conductor put down his baton. The experience of that moment has never left me. It was a peak moment.

My second experience of a peak moment in music was playing the second movement of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, a unison solo with the first oboist. We played the solo and a quiet energy prevailed, an ethereal quality, time standing still yet connected to an energy that tingled. We looked at one another in total silence, somehow afraid to speak but then almost simultaneously said, 'what happened there?'. I can re-live that peak moment, retrieving and visualising the same feelings, thoughts and colours I experienced before.

Such extraordinary experiences have also happened in my life as a coach. I was working in a triad with two experienced coaches during a programme to study coaching with Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP). I acted as the coach and asked a question. I cannot recall what the question was, nor where it came from, but I do remember that it was not premeditated but seemed to emerge in the moment. The person acting as coachee paused, reflected, and a stillness of an intense magnitude was created while she appeared to consider the question. She answered after what seemed like an eternity, but in reality was probably only seconds. The phenomenon was experienced by all three of us, including the person acting as the observer. We looked at one another in disbelief and amazement. The coachee asked 'how did you do that?'. I remember her words distinctly, as it struck me as odd that she asked me how I had created the moment, rather than 'what happened there?'. Perhaps it was the first time she had experienced the phenomenon and therefore she attributed it to me, but it seemed to happen in the moment, when we three were able to 'go with the flow'. Something occurred which gave a sense of timelessness, silence and stillness similar to my experiences as a musician. Tindall, a renowned oboist, observes that 'anyone who has felt it knows it's as addictive as a drug' (2005, p. 180).

There are examples in popular cultures too. The Gallagher brothers, the creators of Oasis, describe their experience as one of connectivity and relatedness between themselves as artistic siblings, saying 'when he turns to me and I turn to him and there's only me and him who will ever get this, and that's what it's all about for us' (Oasis: Supersonic, 2017). These musicians describe further the magic and frisson that can be felt in music, contagion that connectedness can bring between two entities, observing 'there's a chemistry between the band and the audience, there's something magnetic drawing the two to each other' (Oasis: Supersonic, 2017).

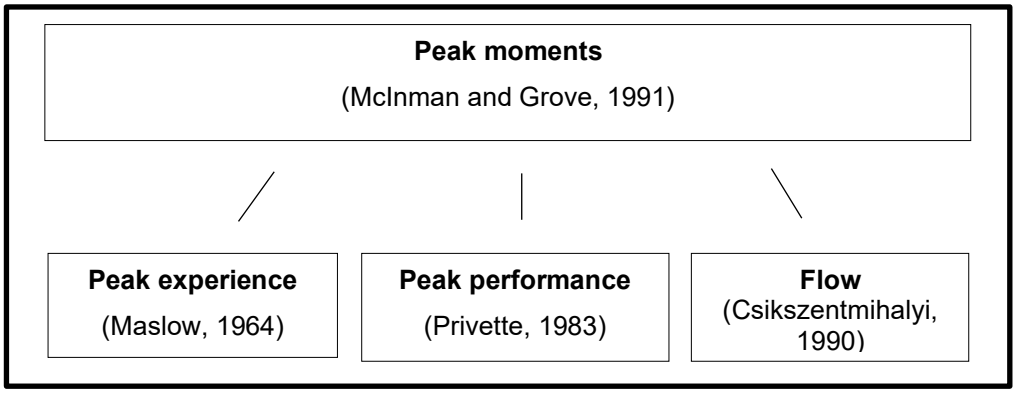
There are also contemporary examples in sport. Jonny Wilkinson, the British rugby player who scored the breath-taking drop goal in the 2003 Rugby World Cup, reveals:

> 'I actually got lost in that moment, I didn't know where I was […] it felt like a surreal, dream-like situation […] I want to keep it exactly as I remember it, which was one hell of an experience' (Wilkinson, 2003, quoted in Bech, 2013).

These quotes from a renowned classical musician, contemporary artists and a sporting hero highlight the prevalence of the phenomenon of peak moments. Such peak moments create a frisson, are almost magical, and provide a memory that never fades.

McInman and Grove (1991, p. 334) suggest 'the term *peak moments* as a panacea […] the term *peak moments* should be regarded as a global entity', adding that the states of peak experience (Maslow, 1964), peak performance (Privette, 1983) and flow (also called optimal functioning, Csikzentsmihalyi, 1990) are all categories of peak moments, illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1: The relationship between peak moments and the three states



My research into peak moments began with peak experience (Maslow, 1964). I soon discovered, however, that there was overlap with other peak encounters. This led me to widen the subject matter to include peak performance (Privette, 1983) and flow or optimal functioning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), under the collective term 'peak moments' (McInman and Grove, 1991). Peak moments share common qualities and display similar characteristics to one another (Privette, 1983) with reoccurring themes of stillness, happiness, enjoyment, fun, timelessness, self-awareness, focus, connection and human achievement. McInman and Grove (1991) argue, however, that the overlap of characteristics ought not to take precedence over the validity of each construct.

Peak experience is attributed to Maslow (1964), described by him as a moment of transcendence, a mystical experience or an altered state of consciousness. Privette (1983) alleges that it can be found in activities that seek excellence, including the creative arts, as espoused by Dewey (1958). Csikszentmihalyi (1990), the author of flow, suggests that individuals in the flow state are also in an altered state of consciousness and completely engaged in activities that are intrinsically rewarding. McInman and Grove (1991, p. 343) add that 'also characteristic of all three categories of peak moments is the feeling of performing or experiencing without consciousness'.

A search of the literature shows that there is little empirical research about peak moments in coaching, representing a gap in our understanding of how coaches experience the phenomenon. My experience as a coach left a deep impression on me, which led me to wonder if other coaches had experienced the phenomenon. There is no reason to assume that coaches do not already experience peak moments since Maslow (1961a, p. 10) suggests that peak experience is not limited to a particular type of person, and that they occur 'in practically everybody although without being recognized or accepted for what they are'. 'Practically everybody' may include coaches too; it could be that coaches are already experiencing the phenomenon without the coaching literature reporting how coaches experience the phenomenon. Bakker (2005) ascertains that there is emotional contagion between teacher and pupil, which can act as a catalyst for peak moments to emerge. There is no reason to suppose that such contagion does not exist between coach and coachee which could lead to a peak moment for the coach. An understanding of peak moments for coaches

could inform other coaches, offering their practice the benefit of a greater sense of the catalytic effect peak moments produce, as ascertained by Bakker (2005).

Such a benefit is highlighted by Schindehutte, Morris and Allen (2006). These authors acknowledge the existence of peak moments in business, stating 'the three phenomenological experiences may occur in isolation, such as when a crisis results in peak performance, but this is not accompanied by peak experience or flow' (2006, p. 353). Many coaches are entrepreneurs and business owners who could profit from an awareness of peak moments through the strong reciprocal relationship between peak performance and peak experience when associated with flow.

Extant coaching studies and papers (de Haan 2008a; 2008b; Kets de Vries, 2013; Moons, 2016) focus on the impact for the coachees and their responses, rather than the coach. Flaherty (2010) applies a theory drawn from phenomenology, stating that the coach must give good reason for their behaviour which accounts for outcomes and that 'a coach whose work does not affect outcomes will soon find himself unemployed' (2010, p. 7). As suggested by Flaherty (2010), the success of a coaching intervention rests on the skills ability and accountability of the coach. The coach's awareness of their competencies could additionally include an awareness of peak moments. Coaching is a growth industry and as such, needs to be mindful and vigilant of new developments, discoveries, and phenomena to broaden its knowledge base and resources. Nash and Collins (2006, p. 474) suggest that 'the old system where coaches succeed through luck' will continue unless coach education embraces all elements of coaching. Longhurst (2006) argues that the phenomenon of peak moments sits within the realms of insight psychology and therefore warrants exploration and research to see how coaches experience peak moments.

There are many studies on peak moments in fields such as music, sport, education, and nature and the wilderness, and these are reviewed in Chapter Two. The examination of these studies may reveal the nature and essence of peak moments, which, together with the subsequent empirical research, will add value and help to bridge this gap in the coaching literature on peak moments.

1.1 Research aim and objectives

The acknowledgement of peak moments (peak experience, peak performance and flow) in the aesthetics of coaching will potentially increase the richness of the practice, often described so functionally in the literature. The aim of this study is to explore how coaches experience peak moments. There are four objectives:

1. To critically review literature relating to peak experience, peak performance, and flow, in relation to the coach's phenomenological experience of such peak moments in coaching. This can be compared with peak moment experiences in other fields such as music and the performing arts, sport, business, education, and nature and the wilderness.

2. To undertake empirical research to uncover how coaches experience peak moments.

3. To analyse and construct meaning from the perspectives of coach participants to reveal, enhance and evaluate our understanding of how coaches experience peak moments.

4. To make an original contribution to the coaching profession where there has been little or no research on how the phenomenon of peak moments is experienced by coaches.

1.2 Methodology

Encouraged by Creswell (2003), I started this introduction with a personal statement, positioning myself as central to the research question. My experiences of peak moments as a musician and coach were central to the need to find a methodology which would reflect my subjective reality yet enable me to explore the phenomenon through other coaches' experiences too.

My experiences of peak moments were as shifting, multiple realities, created and interpreted by me, which informed me of my ontological position: interpretivism. Knowledge would be constructed through my interpretation of the subjective experience of peak moments by other coaches. Guided by Gray (2009), who suggests that interpretivism is closely linked to constructivism, I realised that my epistemology is grounded in constructivism.

When considering the choice of method, I had an implicit sense of knowing something in a visceral way, even before I was able to articulate what it was and how it had impacted on me. I have been influenced by Polanyi (1966) who states that such knowledge is part of the tacit dimension, suggesting that to curtail the tacit in research is to limit the possibilities of knowing. By dwelling on the knowing, the tacit becomes real. My tacit became real by keeping tuned into this knowing to understand its meaning which governed my choice of methodology, and arguably my whole research. Moustakas (1990, p.12) emphasises the positioning of the researcher in the methodology, acknowledging 'the involvement of the researcher, to the extent that the lived experience of the researcher becomes the main focus of the research'.

The heuristic approach is a branch of phenomenology (Hiles, 2002; Sultan, 2018) which facilitates a way of engaging in scientific research through self-inquiry and dialogue with others. The researcher is overtly positioned in the narrative and themes emerge through dialogue, whereby the researcher's role is to interview and interpret the essence of co-researchers' perspectives of peak moments 'that would 'retain the essence of the person in the experience' (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, p. 43). Sultan (2018) explains that heuristic researchers link and never separate the individual and the experience, internalising the question 'how do I experience this phenomenon?' (2018, p. 9). Gray (2009) informs that heuristic inquiry 'starts phenomenologically from the belief that the understanding grows out of direct human experience and can only be discovered initially through self-inquiry' (2009, p. 31). I settled upon this method, heuristic inquiry,

Nine co-researchers (so called in heuristic inquiry) were recruited through snowball sampling (Noy, 2008) and invited for a semi-structured, conversational interview. I was also interviewed, bringing the total number of co-researchers to ten. The analysis of the data followed the procedures proposed by Moustakas (1990). The heuristic approach, data collection and analysis procedures are reviewed in more detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

1.3 Definitions

The term 'peak moment' embraces a multitude of definitions. This definitional crisis is due to the interpretation of participants' experiences, which is dependent upon the way questions are asked, coupled with individuals' inability to articulate their experiences

(McInman and Grove, 1991). Murphy and White (1978, p. 21) allege (because sports people are only one of the relevant groups) that 'relatively few sports people have the language or philosophy to interpret altered states like these'.

It was Privette (1983) who named the three states (peak experience, peak performance and flow) 'constructs', defining them as positive, subjective experiences, phenomenological processes and 'significant, positive, human events' (Privette and Bundrick, 1991, p. 169). Peak moments lift the spirit, bestowing a feeling of absolute freedom where time has no relevance, 'the letting-be of the process and the graceful, integrated, Taoistic nature of the person in the event' (Privette, 1983, p. 1366). Among other beliefs, Taoist thought focuses on genuineness, longevity, health, immortality, vitality and transformation (Nations Online, 2015), which are believed to contribute to the state of eudaimonia. Seligman *et al.* (2005, p. 418) state that 'at least since the time of Aristotle, scholars, philosophers, and religious leaders have pondered the question 'how can we be become lastingly happier?'. Taoist individuals strive to live by the code of achieving their daimon or true self, a quest which gives meaning and direction in life. This philosophy resonates with Maslow's (1943) theory on self-actualisation, the essence of peak performance and the values of Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory on the experience of flow. Garland Evans (2016, p.19) concurs that 'the essential aspect of eudaimonia is similar to self-actualization: the expression of deeds that advance the highest potential of the individual'.

The definition of peak moments varies in the literature and there is terminological confusion. For example, Thornton, Privette and Bundrick (1999, p. 254) advise that attributes of peak experience are often associated with peak performance and that 'the interaction between these two optimal experiences is reciprocal and significant'. Significantly, these authors referred to peak experience and peak performance as optimal experience. Similarly, in their article on work-related flow, Ceja and Navarro (2012) define the experience of flow as a 'sudden and enjoyable merging of action and awareness that represents a peak experience in the daily lives of workers' (2012, p. 1101). Conflating these two constructs illustrates a need to be explicit about what is exactly meant by the individual constructs.

There is a diversity of terms to define experiences similar to peak moments. For example, Corlett (2012) defines being 'struck' as an instance of a cognitive experience

activated through 'the effect of recall in stimulating self-reflexivity and learning' (2012, p. 453). Another experience is termed an 'arresting moment' (Greig *et al.*, 2012), when people experience a jolt in their known certainty and suddenly see situations from a new perspective, suggesting a cognitive, post-reflective experience. Allen *et al.* (2008, p. 711) refer to 'extraordinary experiences' that comprise 'absorbing, flow, and peak experiences'.

From the research, the 'transcendent customer experience' (Schouten, McAlexander and Koenig, 2007) is an example of a phenomenological experience of a peak moment, which has aspects of both flow and peak experience. These authors propose that this experience seems to originate from outside individuals, taking them to heightened emotions whereby they feel intimately connected to some larger phenomenon such as nature, humankind or the infinite, which 'can generate lasting shifts in beliefs and attitudes including subjective self-transformation' (2007, p. 357).

In the following sections, I present definitions of the individual constructs that make up peak moments.

1.3.1 Peak experience

The term 'peak experience' can be traced back to Maslow (1971), according to Naor and Mayseless (2017, p. 3), although Maslow was writing about peak experiences from 1961, ten years earlier. Maslow (1971, p.176) defined peak experience as 'the great joy, the ecstasy, the visions of another world, or another level of living', adding that a peak experience is an emotional experience when time stands still, enabling moments of highest happiness and fulfilment. This can happen in a creative moment, when reading a book, listening to music, or enjoying moments in nature. There are several similarities between Maslow's (1971) and Marotto, Ros and Viktor's (2007, p .389) definitions of peak experience, which the latter describe as a 'brief and transient moment of bliss, rapture, ecstasy, great happiness, or joy as well as the temporary disorientation of time and space'.

1.3.2 Peak performance

While studying Maslow's (1943) theory of self–actualisation, Privette (1983) observed an experience which she later defined as 'peak performance', namely the upper limits of human functioning (Privette and Bundrick, 1991). Peak performance is essentially

defined by clear focus between two entities, the self and object, and the ensuing relationship that evolves (Privette, 1981). The object of clear focus, she explains, 'may be anything to which the person can be deeply committed or that truly fascinates' (1981, p. 64).

Equally important is the definition of 'exceptional accomplishment' by Thornton, Privette and Bundrick (1999, p. 254) who inform that 'peak performance, as a construct, is convenient for studying heightened human functioning that may provide insight for behavior enhancement and for personality development'. In as much as peak performance is oriented towards exceptional accomplishment and action, Marotto, Ros and Victor (2007) observed that peak performance 'builds upon and is intimately related to Maslow's (1968a) notion of peak experience' and that, by definition, 'all peak performances are peak experiences' (2007, p. 389-390).

1.3.3 Flow

Flow is attributed to Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p. 3-4) and defined as 'a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like'.

Bakker (2005, p. 27) condenses flow into three elements, 'absorption, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation', qualifying absorption as total immersion in an activity. Flow also induces a transcendent state (Rana, Tanveer and North, 2009). These authors define flow as a 'total use of one's abilities, focus of attention, effortless control and feelings of mastery and transcendence' (2009, p. 42). Additionally, Sinnamon, Moran and O'Connell (2012) agree that flow is characterised by complete absorption in a given task, which enhances skilled performance, adding that flow is 'a highly coveted yet elusive state of mind' (2012, p. 6).

Wilson's (2009, p. 32-33) definition of flow evokes the musical experience together with sport:

> 'The flow experience is also what Maslow meant by peak experience, but the word 'flow' is more evocative, suggesting the ongoing movement of music. Flow is the opposite of stagnation and boredom. William James speaks of a football player who plays the game *technically* perfectly; and then, one day, he is taken over by the excitement of play, and suddenly *the game is playing him.* This is

the essence of the flow experience. It is evolution in action; we can *feel* ourselves evolving'.

1.4 Literature

I started the research with a review of Maslow's (1964) work on peak experience and his theory on self-actualisation, which dates from 1943 to the early 1970s. Maslow took advantage of an opportunity (post-World War 2) to explore the psychology of well-being, commenting that participants reported 'having had something like mystic experiences, moments of great awe, moments of intense happiness or even rapture, ecstasy or bliss' (1962, p. 9). The more I researched, the more I became aware of other peaks. The study by McInman and Grove (1991) brought to light the concept of peak moments as a global panacea which now included peak performance and flow.

The mention of mystical experiences (Maslow, 1962) and James (1902) led me to investigate the early mystics such as St John of the Cross. Redfern (2020, p. 4-6) advises that:

> 'From ancient ascetics through to contemporary mystics […] the loss or dissolution of the individual self in the experience of union with God is a recurring motif throughout mystical literature […] these mystical experiences are not limited to any single cultural context but are a core aspect of human spirituality everywhere'.

The provenance of peak moments was explored through psychology, from positive psychology to sports psychology. There are early studies which reflect aspects of peak moments, reviewed in Chapter Two. Research of coaching literature revealed little reference to peak moments, either for the coach or coachee. It was again McInman and Grove (1991, p. 347) who brought my attention to Gallwey (1987), the sports coach who introduced his methodology into the executive coaching world. Much has been written concerning cognitive experiences for coachees, significant experiences called 'critical moments' (de Haan, 2008a; 2008b) 'aha' moments (Kets de Vries, 2013) and 'breakthrough moments' (Moons, 2016). These experiences contribute to meaningful life changes for coachees, as a result of coaching. This study will extend the work of these authors and shed light on the phenomenological experience of a peak moment for the coach, in an attempt to fill this gap in the coaching literature.

As I found scant literature about peak moments in coaching, I was driven by curiosity to broaden the scope to find out what other authors had written about peak moments. I also wanted to understand how peak moments had been described in other fields. This research proved to be fruitful, enabling me to use the experiences discussed in these fields as a comparison to the co-researchers' experiences in the analysis of the fieldwork.

Longhurst (2006) claims that she was unable to identify any body of literature relating to phenomenological accounts of 'aha' moments outside of cognitive studies of insight in problem-solving, suggesting that there is a theoretical gap in our understanding of peak moments for the coach. This research will focus on such phenomenological experience for coaches; experiences which feature so predominately in music.

1.5 Thesis chapters

The thesis comprises the following chapters:

Chapter Two: Literature review

The Chapter begins with a brief introduction of my approach to the Literature Review and the material researched. There follows a section on psychology, central to the background of peak moments, including positive psychology, sports psychology and a discussion on mysticism and religion. Due to the dearth of literature on peak moments in coaching, I explored the literature in other fields: music and the arts, sports, business, education and nature and the wilderness.

Chapter Three: Methodology

I identify my theoretical positions in relation to ontology and epistemology, which are aligned with the rationale behind the choice of heuristic inquiry as the method for this study. The engagement of co-researchers, data collection method and analysis are all discussed in detail. Heuristic inquiry has a predetermined set of processes and steps to uncover and understand individual experiences for the analysis which are clearly outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

In this chapter, I analyse the nature of peak moments with descriptions of the essences of peak moments. How coaches experience the three constructs is explored with an overview of the coach's feelings. The co-researchers' sensations, felt both inside and outside the body, are explored. This analysis enabled me to identify the core conditions which enabled a peak moment, discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis

This chapter consists of an understanding of the conditions that contribute towards enabling a peak moment to emerge, with analysis of the core conditions that coaches described to encourage a peak moment. These core conditions include connectedness, co-creativity, trust, the questions the coaches posed to enable a peak moment, and three coaching approaches. These approaches were integral to the coach experiencing a peak moment, and include the 'empty vessel' approach, the 'person-led' approach and the 'in' or 'out' coaching approach.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

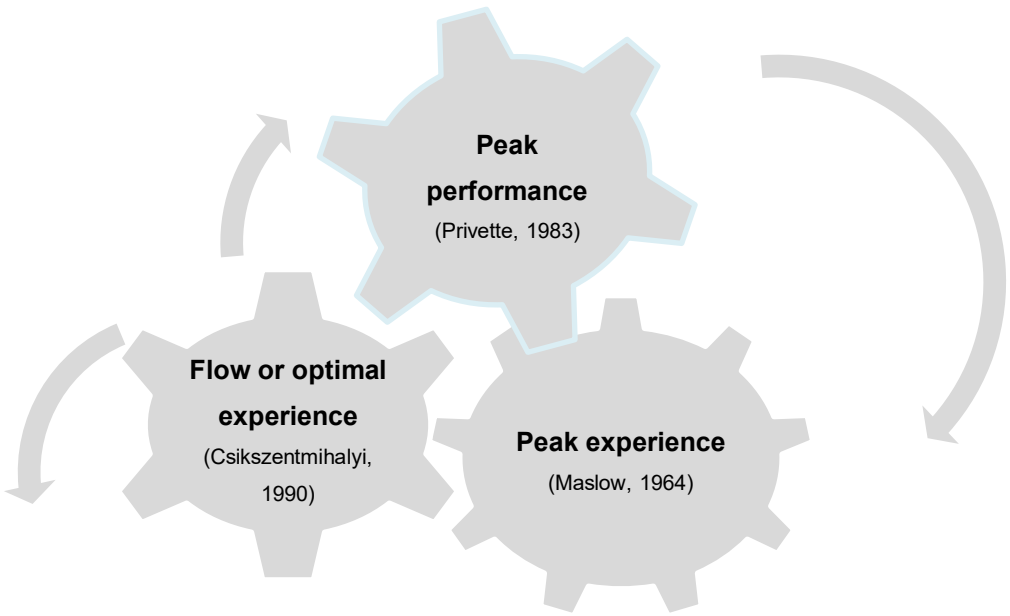
In this chapter, I interpret the findings from the analysis chapters to provide a deeper insight into the implications for coaching educators and coaches.

Chapter Two - Literature review

Introduction

In Chapter One, I explained the concept of peak moments, encompassing the phenomena of peak experience (Maslow, 1964), peak performance (Privette, 1983) and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The term 'constructs', so named by Privette (1983), is the collective term used throughout this study for these three phenomena. Figure 2 illustrates how the three constructs interface with one another, moving seamlessly from one phenomenon to another similar to the mellifluous movement of cogs on a wheel, or two soloists playing in unison.

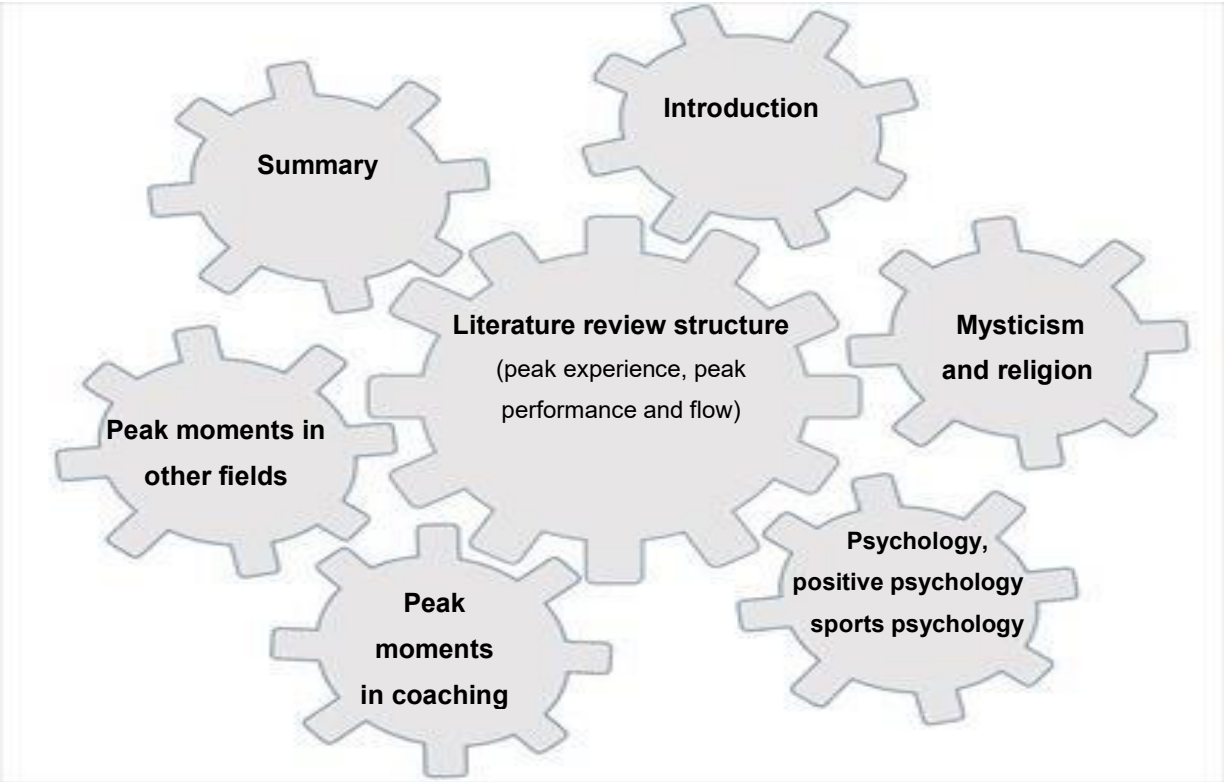
Figure 2: The three constructs of peak experience, peak performance and flow



In this chapter, I explore the provenance of peak moments, from the early mystics and researchers in psychology, such as William James (1902), Maslow (1943) and Rogers (1951), to positive psychology (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) and sports psychology (Privette, 1983). Extant literature on peak moments in coaching seems to focus on the coachee, and not the coach. Due to the paucity of literature on peak moments in coaching, the research territory was subsequently expanded to other fields. Studies

from music and the arts, sport, business, education, nature and the wilderness give a fuller sense of peak moments, from concept to experience, to provide insights into the phenomena and permit analysis into whether such insights can be applied to coaching. The structure of this chapter is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The structure of the literature review



I systematically carried out a search of the literature using the keywords peak moments, peak experience, peak performance and flow. I then broadened the search to include words which regularly surfaced: breakthrough, shift, self-actualisation, critical moments, aha moments, epiphanies, altered state of consciousness, creativity, transcendence, tacit knowing, insight, intuition and phenomenology. I focussed on the review on journal articles, and I found Google Scholar and Business Source Complete the most fruitful, but also used other EBSCOhost databases, ResearchGate, Taylor and Francis and Sage. The journals centred on psychology, coaching, mentoring, business, social sciences and peak moments, the key ones being the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, the

International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring and the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

2.1 Mysticism and religion

Through researching the provenance of peak moments, the experiences of others may contribute to describing such experiences and how these descriptions may be applied to coaching. Peak moments are not a new revelation; for example, Lowis (1998), reported that mankind has experienced anomalous, subjective experiences from the dawn of history, stating that 'reports of such have appeared in early texts such as those of both Eastern and Western religions dating back to about 1000BC' (1998, p. 203). The history of the experience of peak moments can be traced to religion, as proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p. 76):

> 'Flow and religion have been intimately connected from earliest times. Many of the optimal experiences of mankind have taken place in the context of religious rituals'.

The early mystics, for example St John of the Cross, equated their experience of peak 'oneness' with a closeness to God, as expressed by McGiffert (1907, p. 407): 'the word "mysticism" has been used in many and widely different senses, but it always implied some sort of immediacy of relation between the human and divine'. Referring to the early church, McGiffert suggested that the mystic experience involved a divine indwelling which:

> 'brings about an actual transformation of the nature of man […] Paul, John, Ignatius, and the Gnostics […] all mystics of a very profound type; mystics, not in the mere loose and general sense of the term, but in its strictest meaning'. For the congregation, however, the experience 'took the form rather of a divine influence, making itself felt now and again, and more or less controllingly in the life of the Christian' (1907, p. 414).

As early as 1902, William James was defining his mystical experiences as ineffable, unlike normal consciousness (Pathak, 2017). It was Maslow (1964), however, who recognised that people were experiencing what he called mystic experiences:

> ‘But it has recently begun to appear that these ‘revelations’ or mystical illuminations can be subsumed under the head of ‘peak experiences’ or ‘ecstasies’ or ‘transcendent’ experiences which are now being eagerly investigated by many psychologists’ (1964, p. 33).

In light of Maslow’s (1964) statement, an assumption can be made that peak experiences were no longer questions of faith but open to all mankind to experience, no longer eternal mysteries but in the world and within reach of human knowledge. The peak experience phenomenon was thus identified not as an extra-terrestrial or supernatural experience but rather ‘truly religious experiences in the best and most profound, most universal and most humanistic sense of that word’ (Maslow, 1961, p. 10). Maslow (1961) renounced the term ‘mystic’, keen to normalise the phenomenon, ‘this was a natural, not a supernatural experience; and I gave up the name ‘mystic’ experience and started calling them peak-experiences’ (1961, p. 10).

Mystical experiences were also explored by Greeley (1974), an American Roman Catholic priest who was influenced by Maslow (1964). Greeley recalled stories told by his clergy, encounters of individuals who experienced ‘an interlude of mystical ecstasy’ (1974, p. 1-2) which altered the consciousness of the people involved. One incident was of a man looking at the stars when an unspeakable sense of peace overcame him; another was the experience of a troubled young man whose mood was lifted when listening to Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy*; a third, a mother marvelling at her sleeping baby. When asked what he meant by mystical experience, Greeley (1974) answered ‘an interlude of mystical ecstasy…the ecstatic has discovered a new dimension of human consciousness that the rest of us can learn to develop and that will make the world a more peaceful and human place in the process’ (1974, p. 2-3).

Without mentioning the term ‘peak moment’, Frick (1990, p. 78) talked of the Symbolic Growth Experience (SGE) which provided ‘very strong support for the existence of a self-actualizing force in human personality’. This notion was akin to Maslow’s (1943) theory of self-actualisation. Frick (1990) believed that the SGE was a natural healing and growth-inducing experience to develop personality. A shift in consciousness happened when individuals heeded their insights, which led to a fusion of awareness and resultant personality change: a transcendence into a feeling of oneness and harmony with the environment.

Transcendent, life-changing moments were also described by Waldron (1998) in his qualitative, collective case study on the long-term life impact of such timeless experiences. Waldron's participants described an after-effect of the experience which often lasted for days and even weeks: 'it took Carole about a year to stabilize the immense impact of knowing that came through the experience' (1998, p. 113). One of the defining characteristics identified by participants was the noetic quality, which refers to the 'direct apprehension of knowledge and understanding accompanying the transcendent experience' (1998, p. 104). Waldron claimed that these experiences take the participants into unknown realms of understanding and knowledge about an entity that was hitherto unknown, 'one knows something that was until that moment unknown' (1998, p. 104). Compared to Maslow's (1971, p. 48) 'transient moments of self-actualization', Waldron's (1998) participants referred to long periods of time between experience and full impact. A challenge to the experience of Waldron's (1998) participants and Maslow's (1964) findings was the research by Ravizza (1977, p. 39) on peak experiences in sport, 'none of the athletes interviewed reported a life change from this experience'. Both Waldron's (1998) participants and Maslow's (1964) found the experience not only life-enriching, but also life-changing.

The loss of sense of time, consciousness and orientation during a peak moment was explained by Mainemelis (2001). Individuals experienced timelessness by becoming engrossed in work activities: 'an individual experiences timelessness during a focused state of consciousness' (2001, p. 548). Mainemelis suggested that timelessness is a constellation of four experiences: a feeling of immersion, recognition of time distortion, a sense of mastery and a sense of transcendence; 'timelessness is the experience of transcending time and one's self by becoming immersed in a captivating present-moment activity or event (2001, p. 548). Wilson (2009, p. 53), when writing about the quest for peak experiences, confirmed that 'the sense of time standing still often seems to occur in these mystical experiences'.

Peak and mystical experiences in intimate relationships was the focus of a study by Woodward, Findlay and Moore (2009). There was some evidence that peak experiences were associated with personal, spiritual and relationship well-being. 305 adults currently in intimate relationships participated in their study, and the results indicated that relationship peak experiences were associated with a deeper couple bond for some partners. Mystical peak experiences were also more prevalent among

older participants, and those identified as having mystical experiences had a more universal spiritual orientation. Woodward, Findlay and Moore (2009, p. 440-441) concluded that relationship peak experiences and mystical peak experiences were an 'exciting and potentially fruitful area of research that may help to explain why some couples' bonds remain strong'.

In this section, I examined the experiences of the early mystics who equated their experience of peak 'oneness' with a closeness to God, involving a divine indwelling which 'brings about an actual transformation of the nature of man' (McGiffert, 1907, p. 413). Maslow (1964) believed these experiences can be subsumed under the heading of 'peak experiences' or 'ecstasies'. Greeley (1974) endorsed this description, naming these moments an 'interlude of mystical ecstasy'. Waldron (1998) called them transcendent, life-changing moments which can have a long-term life impact. Contemporary mystical experiences were revealed too by Woodward, Findlay and Moore (2009).

The next section revealed the development of such mystical, transcendent experiences through psychology.

2.2 Psychology

American psychologist and philosopher William James (1902) believed that transcendent experiences such as peak moments could be life-altering, transformational and a primary source of energy that stimulated optimal functioning (Rathunde, 2001). According to Kets de Vries (2013, p. 6):

> 'Mystical experiences have been described since the dawn of psychology, most notably by William James (1902) […] according to James, mystical states of consciousness are central to religious experience'.

Central to understanding the phenomenon, James asked two questions: 'what were the limits of human energy' and 'how could this energy be stimulated and released so it could be put to optimal use?' (Rathunde, 2001, p. 142).

James's (1902) thoughts on the connection between mind and body influenced Maslow (1961b), who considered human behaviour to be determined by feelings and attitudes that comprised the whole person (Decarvalho, 1991). Maslow (1968a) made

studies of peak experiences by asking individuals and groups of people ‘what was the most ecstatic moment of your life?’ and ‘have you experienced transcendent ecstasy?’. These questions were not dissimilar to those posed by James (1902). Maslow (1968a) believed that life was moving towards a new understanding of the self with new expectations of ethical considerations and a way of being through self-actualisation and peak experience.

In 1959, Maslow acknowledged the Cognition of Being (B-Cognition), the state of mind of the self-actualised: motivated, ego-transcending and non-judgemental, with a deeper sense of perception. Within this B-Condition were the parental experience, the mystical, the experience of nature, aesthetic perception including music and the visual arts, and certain forms of athletic fulfilment, which Maslow (1959) called peak experiences. B-Cognition could also be perceived as an end rather than a means, carrying its own intrinsic reward when the individual experienced a disorientation of time and space but emerged from the experience, joyous and complete.

Maslow was influenced by Laski (1961), who traced links and triggers between nature, music, poetry, childbirth and ecstasy. These links between inspiration and ecstasy were later reconfirmed in Maslow’s (1968a) work on peak experience. Laski (1961) observed a similar phenomenon to peak experience which she termed ecstasy, ‘which appears to mean what other writers have called mysticism’ (Parrinder, 1962, p. 80). Laski’s (1961) study, a questionnaire, involved 26 males and 37 females (all acquaintances, middle-class, intellectual, mostly literary or artistic) who were asked, 'do you know a sensation of transcendent ecstasy?', a question not dissimilar to Maslow’s (1968a). Laski (1961) asked for descriptions of these experiences as well as the triggers that may have caused the experience to occur. According to Parrinder (1962, p. 81) ‘analysis showed a high frequency of ecstatic experiences, so that they can hardly be called 'abnormal’.

Rogers (1951) also began working towards a more holistic approach to psychology and, in his early career, spent time identifying what humans needed ‘to spontaneously grow and seek fulfilment’ (Moss, 2015, p. 15). Rogers (1951) wrestled with the notion of the experiential and the experimental, finally reconciling the two in the mid-1950s by proposing ‘a humanistic psychology that integrated the objective and subjective

modes of knowing, calling it intersubjective or phenomenological knowledge' (Krippner, 2015, p. 295).

In summary, it has been established that peak moments were already recognised by William James, as early as 1902. James wrote of transcendent experiences which were life-altering, transformational and a primary source of energy that stimulated optimal functioning. This mirrored Maslow's (1964) belief that life was moving towards a new way of being through self-actualisation and peak experience, enjoyed by way of experiences such as parenting, music and visual arts, mysticism and nature. These positive feelings are demonstrated in Landsman's Positive Experience and the Beautiful Person Model. Landsman (1968) polled 681 people from the age nine to ninety and asked them to write about three positive experiences. Landsman (1968, p. 16) concluded that the beautiful person 'must first and above all be self-accepting, self-liking, self-enjoying, self-expressive, self-understanding person'.

2.3 Positive psychology

According to Rathunde (2001), positive psychology is the science of well-being and optimal functioning. All three constructs (peak experience, peak performance and particularly flow) fitted with the well-being and optimal functioning remit of positive psychology. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) is not only the originator of the concept of flow (Wesson and Boniwell, 2007) but, together with Seligman (2002), is also one of the founders of the positive psychology movement.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) claimed that happiness is derived from three sources. The first is experiencing pleasure; the second having meaning in one's life; and the third experiencing flow while at work or play. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) cited individuals who felt truly alive, as though carried by an external force that is outside conscious awareness, free from worry about failure and released from self-consciousness whereby the doing becomes the reward with no other intended gain. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009, p. 90) set out the following conditions for flow to occur:

- a sense that one is engaging challenges at a level appropriate to one's capacities
- clear proximal goals
- immediate feedback about the progress that is being made

The intention of positive psychology, according to Seligman *et al.* (2005, p. 410-411), is to have a 'more complete and more scientific understanding of the human experience – the peaks, the valleys, and everything in between'. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) advised that when experiencing flow, at work or play, individuals found pleasure, happiness and meaning in life. Individuals lost themselves in their experience, reporting an altered state of consciousness whereby time became distorted. The experience of transcendence often occurred, and the outcome was intrinsically rewarding. Acknowledging flow at work could allow coaches bring a more complete experience to their coaching practice, as explained by Csikszentmihalyi (1990). Such an outcome could be fulfilling for the coach.

Continuing with the theme of psychology, the following section is concerned with the impact of sports psychology on peak moments.

2.4 Sports psychology

Privette (1981) is recognised as the psychologist who originated the term peak performance, originally described as transcendent functioning, when she stated 'the experience of superior functioning is termed peak performance' (1981, p. 58). Influenced by the pioneering work of Maslow (1962) and Rogers (1961), Privette (1981) focussed on three major approaches to positive aspects of life: personality, behaviour and experience. Privette's (1983) typologies defined peak experience as a high level of joy which is spontaneous, creating unity, fusion and playfulness. Peak performance was not playful but gave a strong sense of self, fulfilment, fascination and freedom. She defined flow as fusion with the world, fun, playfulness, enjoyment, perhaps even ecstasy. In early studies, Privette (2001, p. 165) included peak experience to clarify the features of peak performance, 'differentiating the two constructs'. Throughout subsequent studies, however, Privette (2001) discovered that the inner processes of peak performance were quite unlike processes at a normal level of parallel activities. Full, clear focus on object and the self were pivotal in all optimal performances, a focus which is prevalent in the coaching relationship between coach and coachee. Privette's (2001) descriptions of peak moments were expanded by McInman and Grove (1991, p. 343-345) into seven characteristics that appear in either two or all three of the constructs, each being a positive, subjective, phenomenological experience with overlapping characteristics that resonate with coaching:

i) *Absorption:* produced by intense concentration. Individuals experiencing a peak experience had a wide focus of attention, but not specifically mentioning sport. A characteristic common in coaching is for the coach to be totally absorbed in the coaching session, giving the coachee their full attention with clear focus.

ii) *Detachment*: the individual is detached not only from their surroundings but also from themselves and the results of the performance. This too is a characteristic of the coach, to be fully present, bringing their whole experience and self to the coaching session yet detached from their own agenda.

iii) *Emptiness*: explained as a sense of loss to self, a characteristic of the coach as the focus is on the coachee for the duration of the coaching session.

iv) *Ecstasy*: described as a feeling of euphoria. Successful coaching outcomes may gift the coach a feeling of ecstasy.

v) *Larger energies*: during a peak performance, athletes talk of feeling a higher sense of power which can be in the form of physical energy or communication and impact between team members. Coaches may feel a surge of energy in the coaching dyad.

vi) *Altered perception of time*: this is a common characteristic of all three constructs. If coaches are in flow, performing at their best they may experience this characteristic and also encounter a peak experience.

vii) *Sense of unity*: a sense of unity with oneself, the task, catalyst or surroundings is experienced in all three constructs. The coach develops a sense of unity with the coachee to foster trust in the relationship.

McInman and Grove (1991) maintained that much has been written about peak performance and flow in sport, yet little had been written about peak experience in sport. Ravizza (1977), however, published a study of peak experiences in sport. He interviewed sixteen men and four women to 'ascertain the personal experiences of athletes and secondly, to get a characterization of at least one subjective aspect in sport (1977, p. 35). Results from Ravizza's (1977) study showed similarities to Maslow's (1968a) description of peak experiences: temporary loss of ego, union with the experience and disorientation of time and space. There was however, one

difference with Maslow's (1968a) description. Maslow (1968a) said that attention during the experience may be wide, yet the athletes reported total focus with a narrow attention span. McInman and Grove (1991, p. 342) commented that there 'may have been a tendency to draw together commonalities more readily than should have been the case' as the sample was so small.

Research by Murphy and White (1978) into extraordinary events in sport resonated with descriptions of peak moments such as:

> 'the sense of *stillness,* however, is most often reported as occurring while the athlete is fully engaged' (1978, p. 13)
>
> 'the athlete's *self-awareness* in peak moments often differs radically from his or her sense of self' (1978, p.16)
>
> 'the experiences reported in this chapter all involve *transcendent feelings* commonly described by artists, mystics and lovers – and also by athletes' (1978, p. 11).

Some 35 years after Ravizza's (1977) study on peak experiences in sport, Harung (2012) integrated eastern and western insights over four studies. Participants (top performers in business, government, education sports and creative fields) described peak moments in terms of high intrinsic motivation, greatly expanded awareness, deep, inner relaxation amidst dynamic activity, effortless functioning, and inner joy. The performers reported that flow seems to be a broader concept, where skills match challenge with 'more frequent peak experiences' (Harung, 2012, p. 33). The fieldwork may provide insights for coaches who, when motivated, may consider themselves top performers.

The unique experience of eight swimmers of the English Channel, a test of mental toughness and self-confidence, was reported by Hollander and Acevedo (2000). All the swimmers set goals with a positive mind-set, had a way of measuring time and distance and an ability to relax in the open seas with a disassociated approach. Hollander and Acevedo (2000, p. 13) concluded that the swimmers' experiences include awareness of the total environment, loss of time perception and transcendence of the experience, which 'match Maslow's conception of peak experience'.

Hollander and Acevedo's (2000) words resonated also with Dodson's (1996) experience of mountain-biking, when she reported that 'it leads to feelings of joy and self-fulfillment, the transcendent sense of awe and achievement […] bounded in time rather than enduring over time' (1996, p. 317). Dodson (1996) explained that that there is a sense of freedom associated with mountain-biking which is liberating; freedom from the hassles and stress of everyday life, and comparable to experiences felt in river-rafting, skydiving and motorcycling, all of which 'inherently provide opportunities for riders to achieve peak experiences' (1996, p. 317).

In summary, although Privette (1983) studied peak experience alongside peak performance, there is an implication in her words that peak performance required a super-human effort, something above the average human capacity which took the individual to a higher level of performance. Dodson (1996, p. 317) echoed Privette's (1983) words on peak performance, when she admitted to 'exceptional performance, overcoming adversity'. Interestingly, Dodson's (1996) words also chimed with peak experience, which she expressed as 'simply riding surrounded by tremendous scenery and the natural environment', articulating a sense of liberation and freedom from the hassles and stresses of everyday life. Murphy and White (1978) used expressions such as a sense of stillness and transcendent feelings commonly described by athletes. Ravizza (1977) confirmed a temporary loss of ego, union with the experience and disorientation of time and space. The positive results from Harung's (2012, p. 41) study of top-class performers embraced not only peak performance but also flow which, in this study, 'deals with peak experience', linking the two constructs. It is the term 'clear focus' (Privette, 2001, p. 164) that isolated peak performance from peak experience and flow. These findings reflected a positive outlook for coaches and how they too may potentially experience peak moments as top-class performers.

2.5 Peak moments in coaching

Gallwey (1987), a sports coach, was influential in shaping coaching as we know it today. He introduced a simple formula that defined the Inner Game, a methodology for maximum performance in sport: 'P=p-I; performance is equal to potential minus interference' (Gallwey, 2000, p. 17). By 'interference' Gallwey (1987) recognised that the intrusion of conscious thought was a hindrance to success in sport. This concept of an unconscious state, leading more often to a successful outcome without the

interference of conscious thought, was operating in parallel to the flow experience identified by Csikszentmihalyi (1990). Gallwey's (1987) methodology was so successful that it was adopted in business and executive coaching. An assumption can therefore be made that coaches too would benefit from an awareness of conscious thought which may inhibit a peak moment.

There are studies which resemble peak moments in coaching. Such experiences are often called 'critical moments' (de Haan, 2008a; 2008b), 'aha' moments or 'tipping points' (Kets de Vries, 2013) and 'transformational shifts in the room' (Moons, 2016). Studies by these authors have identified the coachee's cognitive peak moment experience in the coaching process, yet little analytical attention has been paid to the coach's experience of peak moments, which this study addresses. Peak moments simply happen (Maslow, 1959). We can neither make nor command them, which infers something spontaneous and intuitive. Maslow (1961a, p. 17) pointed out that for a peak experience to happen there is a need to behave instinctively, trusting one's senses and intuition:

> 'All these involve an ability to let go, to let things happen. Will power only interferes. In this same sense, it begins to look as if the intrusion of willpower may inhibit peak-experiences'.

Despite addressing critical moments for coachees, de Haan (2008b, p. 124) advised that 'in short, coaching will remain a largely intuitive area of work until it can be demonstrated conclusively what works in what circumstances'. This philosophy concurred with the possibility of coaches experiencing a peak moment when they acknowledge and trust their intuition. Nash and Collins (2006, p. 486) recommended that when coaches operate instinctively, sometimes called 'gut feel', they are in fact taking advantage of their tacit knowledge 'which can be abstract and unarticulated'. For a peak moment to emerge, it could be that coaches may need to be guided by their intuition.

From the foregoing, de Haan (2008b) emphasised the importance of intuition in coaching. Intuition is preceded by tacit dimension (Moustakas, 1990), the sense of knowing something before it can be articulated (Polanyi, 1966). This is the kind of knowing that guides the brush of the painter, a largely unconscious tacit knowing that the coach can become aware of too. Moons (2016, p. 55) also explained how intuition

can lead to a transformational shift (albeit for the coachee) ‘developing and acting upon hunches, holding the silence […] all seem to be critical coaching interventions’. Moons (2016) pointed out that to make a transformational shift happen, coaches are not consciously applying any technique or approach to help clients come to their insights but simply using their intuition, which she called a sixth sense or third eye. Murray (2004), too, urged coaches to acknowledge and embrace intuition, which she sees as an opportunity to connect soul-to-soul with coachees. Ignoring our intuition, she advised, risks resulting in a tick-box, evidence-based approach to coaching, losing the rich connections that intuition brings.

There appears to be, however, a shift in the understanding of peak moments in the coaching context. For example, Moore *et al*. (2005, p. 3) developed a theoretical model called the intuitive dance; ‘at those peak moments the coach and the client are in a state we describe as relational flow’. They maintained that the use of relational flow will help to understand and promote mastery in the profession, emphasising the importance of the coaching relationship to promote flow states, growth, and change. Moore *et al*.’s (2005) model builds on Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) notion of ‘shared flow by emphasizing the relational genesis of flow’ (2005, p. 2).

Peak experiences are frequently described as ‘aha’ or ‘eureka’ moments for the coachee. Kets de Vries (2013, p. 155) made the analogy of a problem being solved or when, out of the blue, ‘a light bulb goes on in our head’. Such moments are related to insight and awareness for the coachee, eliciting positive feelings of happiness, similar to Maslow’s (1962) description of peak experience, ‘moments of highest happiness and fulfilment’ (1962, p. 69). Kets de Vries (2013) referred to these ‘tipping points’ as significant events that contributed to meaningful life changes for the coachee, and not the coach, which this study addresses.

Similarly, the study by Honsova and Jarasova (2018, p. 3) was aimed at the peak experience of coachees. These authors do, however, acknowledge the state of peak experience in coaching, simultaneously highlighting the gap in the coaching literature when they stated, ‘this experience seems not to have been researched in the field of coaching yet’ (2018, p. 3). One of the more interesting aspects of Honsova and Jarasova’s (2018, p. 3) study is their admission that ‘emotional experiencing seems little researched in the area of coaching’, which this study addresses.

This review on coaching has hitherto focussed on the coachee, but according to Flaherty (2010), the intimacy of coaching is dependent upon the coach's experience. Flaherty (2010) designed a five-step linear process; an overview of coaching which he names the 'flow of coaching'. His process started with establishing the relationship with the coachee, recognising openings, observing and assessing to enrol the client which leads to coaching conversations. Flaherty (2010) pointed out that this framework becomes less rigid with coaching experience and encourages the coach to work with this flow so that there is more cohesion between the stages. He also recognised that his process may be too structured for some coaches, inhibiting their natural spontaneity and slowing the flow of their natural intuitive responses. He added that knowledge of this structure gradually fades, enabling the coach to freely respond in the moment, an encouragement to enter the flow state. My interpretation of Flaherty's model is that if, as according to Harung's (2012) findings, flow deals with peak experience, then potentially a peak experience could happen if the flow state is encouraged.

McBride (2013) endorsed Flaherty's (2010) suggestion that the coach's competence is a prerequisite of experiencing flow. She proposed that one of the conditions of flow, an altered state of consciousness, sometimes streams into a coaching session when individuals fail to notice how long they have been coaching. This offers the possibility of a transcendent experience for coaches when their sense of time becomes distorted and it flies past unnoticed. McBride (2013, p. 3) acknowledged this experience retrospectively: 'I have only identified the flow state in my coaching in reflection on a coaching session'. Until her study was published, McBride (2013) claimed that no one had examined the coach's experience of flow, which embraces the value of peak experience and the behaviour of peak performance (Privette, 1983). McBride (2013) maintained that it is valuable to understand coaches' experience of flow, to learn what factors relate to the experience of flow for coaches, which this study addresses.

In summary, little has been written about peak moments from the coach's perspective. Flaherty (2010) talked of a process to encourage the flow in coaching, and McBride (2013) discussed how coaches experience the flow state. The extant coaching literature informed that studies on peak moments report on breakthroughs for the coachee, particularly when the coach is open to acknowledging their intuition. Maslow (1959), de Haan (2008b), Murray (2004) and Moons (2016) all endorsed the

importance of the coach's intuition to facilitate a creative environment. The sense of letting go to discover what emerges, in effect ignoring one's willpower but trusting one's intuition, is a discernible link between intuition and a peak moment. Willpower is an intrusion for the emergence of peak moments (Maslow, 1961a) suggesting that coaches would benefit from listening to their intuition to enable a peak moment.

Due to the lack of literature on peak moments in coaching, the research was broadened into other fields, as recommended by Mihalache (2019, p. 138):

> 'The heuristic design employs a plurality of voices in order to cover as many facets of the experience as possible – the voice of the researcher, those of participants […] and accounts found in literature, art and wisdom traditions'.

The first field to be explored is music and the arts.

2.6 Peak moments in music and the arts

Music is the most prolific and reported field of the arts when discussing peak moments including classical, orchestral and indie genres, and teaching. Maslow (1962, p. 9) reported that peak moments emanated from 'the great aesthetic moments (particularly of music), from the bursts of creativeness […] from great moments of insight and of discovery […] from mountains of fusion with nature'.

In a study of music and peak experiences, the prompts Lowis (1998) used to ask participants about their music listening experiences are similar to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) definitions of flow. Lowis (1998, p. 221) described the prompts as 'after Maslow and others', acknowledging the overlap of similar characteristics between peak experience and flow. The prompts included total absorption, oblivion of surroundings, being in another world, a flash of insight and a revelation or heightened sense of clarity. Lowis (1998, p. 221) maintained that 'if it is accepted that the participants were genuinely responding to the descriptions given in the instructions, then such reaction are by definition peak experiences'.

A study by Bakker (2005) answered two questions. Firstly, whether job resources (a combination of autonomy, performance feedback, social support from colleagues and supervisory coaching) are possible antecedents of flow experiences among music teachers; secondly, to what extent flow may cross over from teachers to their students.

Bakker (2005) pointed out that in all his previous analyses, flow was conceptualised as a phenomenon with three underlying dimensions: absorption, (work) enjoyment, and intrinsic (work) motivation. To answer both questions, flow at work was first defined as a short-term peak experience, characterized by the three dimensions. More specifically, the findings showed that job resources had a positive relationship with the balance between challenges and skills, and that this balance, in turn, had predictive value for the frequency of flow among music teachers (Bakker, 2005). This author's findings showed that the more flow experiences music teachers reported, the higher the frequency of comparable experiences among their students, suggesting that students inadvertently 'caught' the flow experience of their teachers. Conversely, Bakker (2005) suggested it is conceivable that teachers also experience more flow when their students have more of such peak experiences.

Researchers in Bakker's (2005) study recorded and analysed data from 178 music teachers and 605 music students, looking at the three iterations of flow: absorption, work absorption, and work enjoyment. The data overwhelmingly established that 'the contagion hypothesis was confirmed regarding flow' (Bakker, 2005, p. 40) and that there is a crossover of emotions from student to teacher, a precursor to a peak experience. The affirmation of these findings is encouraging for coaching. It alludes to the possibility of coaches experiencing a peak moment if they are capable of showing their feelings in the coach-coachee relationship. If the coach shows emotion and expresses his or her feelings, it is likely that the coachee will react to such feelings, which could result in a peak experience for the coach through contagion.

In contrast to peak moments in teaching, Green (2015) interviewed participants about peak experience in indie music and found that 'participants in the city's indie music scene cite peak music experiences as central to their biographical narratives of inspiration, influence, conversion and motivation' (2015, p. 333). Green (2015) described his peak music experiences as epiphanies, a term used by Maslow (1962, p. 13):

> 'Peaks come unexpectedly, suddenly they *happen* to us. You can't count on them. And, hunting them is a little like hunting happiness. It's best not done directly. It comes as a by-product – an epiphenomenon, for instance of doing a fine job at a worthy task you can identify with'.

Green (2015) agreed with Maslow that the concept of a peak experience is analogous in its distinction of an extremely meaningful experience that stands out as unique, different, influential, important and pivotal. As noted in the language used by Green's (2015) participants, and also ascertained in Bakker's (2005) findings, intrinsic work motivation was one of the three underlying dimensions of peak experience. Green's (2015) participants stated that motivation is part of their narrative in describing a peak experience. One of the key drivers for coachees to seek coaching is motivation to improve their thinking and/or behaviours. The role of the coach is to inspire motivation in the coachee, which brings together the possibility of peak moments in coaching through emotional contagion and motivation.

In their study of peak performance in an orchestra, Marotto, Ros and Victor (2007) reported that orchestral members were 'for a time transported by each other and to an experience variously labelled as flow, timeless-ness and aesthetic experience' (2007, p. 409). A peak experience is described by musicians as a 'brief and transient moment of bliss, rapture, ecstasy, great happiness or joy as well as the temporary disorientation with respect to time and place' (2007, p. 389). These authors explained that by transcending his or her normal level of performance, a musician experienced the joy and rapture associated with peak experience, and that at both the individual and group level, the dynamics of a peak experience 'encompass the values of the rational (scientific) and the emotional (artistic)' (2007, p. 408). In this study, peak experience happened without the flow state being present.

Regarding the performing arts, a study on the phenomenology of aesthetic peak experiences, Panzarella (1980) was acclaimed by both Rana, Tanveer and North (2009) and Harung (2012). Panzarella interviewed 103 respondents (who were generally well-educated in the aesthetic media) in art galleries and concert locations, concluding that 90% of the participants reported some lasting effects: vivid and continually stimulating memories. These findings concur with Maslow's (1961a, p. 14) assertion that 'some of the effects or after-effects may be permanent but the high moment itself is not'. Participants in Panzarella's (1980) study also experienced an enhanced appreciation involving more positive self-feelings, as well as improved relationships with others and a boost of optimism. When asked about what they were experiencing, participants reported an intense joyous experience when listening to music or looking at visual art. Additionally, in their study on subjective well-being,

Rana, Tanveer and North (2009) confirmed that peak experiences in music conformed to Panzarella's (1980) model, remarking that 'it would not be surprising if peak experiences of music were also associated with subjective well-being' (2009, p. 43).

Feeling and performance were the two dimensions tested in Panzarella's (1980) model, echoed in a letter Van Gogh wrote to his brother that 'emotions are sometimes so strong that one works without knowing that one works, and the strokes come with a sequence and coherence like that of words in a speech or letter' (Dewey, 1958, p. 75). Dewey (1958) also referred to Samuel Johnson. Johnson reported that actors were at their best when they lost themselves emotionally in their roles, implying absorption when in flow. Dewey (1958, p. 291) also wrote of art that 'the spontaneity of art is not one of opposition to anything but marks complete absorption in an orderly development'. The same descriptive language was used to describe both peak experience and flow, including words such as emotions, losing oneself, effortlessness and complete absorption. Dewey's (1958) observations were some thirty years before Csikszentmihalyi (1990) discovered during his doctoral research that artists were particularly prone to the experience of flow while painting. Artists experienced what many of them described as a zone of intense, pleasurable focus that they entered and remained within, intrinsically motivated to paint for their own pleasure and not for wealth and fame (Garland Evans, 2016).

In the field of creative writing, Fatemi (2004) reported on the characteristics of writing-triggered peak experience and explored three questions: can writing trigger peak or similar positive human experience?; how are these experiences described?; and what factors influence their occurrence? Of the 270 undergraduate students enrolled in writing classes, 44% reported experiencing at least one peak experience, or similar positive human experience, as a result of writing. Participants described their writing experiences as the flow of words, peak performance, clarity, disappearance of negative states of mind, an enhanced sense of power, and the process of writing as its own reward.

The dimensions of peak communication experiences were studied by Gordon (1985), revealing that empirical research exploring the phenomenon is surprisingly absent in this field. 'Peak communication experience' is the expression he used to ask 74 participants about their highest moments of mutual understanding, happiness and

fulfilment in communicating with other human beings, responding to a 19-item descriptive list on a five-point Likert scale. Women rated higher than men on loving acceptance and spontaneity in their peak communication experiences.

To summarise, the general consensus on peak moments in music and the arts consistently confirmed that flow is conceptualised as an all or nothing phenomenon, characterized by the three underlying dimensions of absorption, (work) enjoyment, and intrinsic (work) motivation (Bakker, 2005; Lowis, 1998), and often a precursor to a peak experience. Peak experience was defined as a short-term (Marotto, Ros and Victor, 2007), brief and transient moment of bliss, rapture, ecstasy, great happiness or joy, as well as temporary disorientation with respect to time and place. Green (2015) called the experiences meaningful and important epiphanies. Panzarella (1980) described feelings of exhilaration, being at one with the music, people, concert hall and environment generally; complete freedom with a loss of time and spatial orientation. Dewey (1958) suggested that the spontaneity of art is shown when actors lost themselves in their roles, and painter's strokes came with a sequence and coherence like that of words in a speech or letter as expressed by Fatemi (2004) and Gordon (1985). Peak performance is less discussed in this field but omnipresent in music which encapsulated all three constructs. Marotto, Ros and Victor (2007, p. 390) stated that by definition, all peak performances were peak experiences, yet 'the converse, however, does not hold true; not all peak experiences are peak performances'.

2.7 Peak moments in business

The global marketplace demanded that employees attained peak performance to maintain a competitive edge in business (Hallett and Hoffman, 2014). These authors supported the notion that 'peak performance in athletes […] provides coaches and consultants with a roadmap to conduct effective peak performance training in organizations' (2014, p. 212).

To investigate peak performance of business leaders, and specifically leaders who had integrated sustained accomplishment in their careers, Thornton, Privette and Bundrick (1999) asked 40 individuals to describe their personal experiences through interviews and the Privette experience questionnaire (1984). The results confirmed that, although influenced by demographic and other variables, the defining processes of peak performance were stable across samples, 'most notable were the peak

performance dyad – clear sharp focus of self and object – and aspects of peak experience – joy, fulfilment and significance' (Thornton, Privette and Bundrick, 1999, p. 262). Clear, sharp focus was Privette's (1983) mantra throughout her research, which differentiated peak performance from peak experience and flow.

The results from Bakker's (2005) study were also relevant in the business context. His research showed that employees were likely to experience flow when their job demands or challenges matched their professional skill. Findings showed that when flow was applied to the work situation, it can be defined as a short-term peak experience, characterized by absorption, enjoyment and intrinsic work motivation. Lyngdoh and Guda (2016) referred to Bakker (2005) in their flow theory perspective to understand salespeople's negative work-place states. In effect, these authors endorsed Bakker's (2005) perspective that when flow is applied to work, it can be defined as a short-term peak experience, again conflating peak experience with flow:

> 'We adapt Bakker's (2005) conceptualization and define flow among salespersons as a state of consciousness, or peak experience, that is characterized by absorption, work enjoyment and intrinsic motivation' (Lyngdoh and Guda, 2016, p. D-6.).

In the world of entrepreneurship, Schindehutte, Morris and Allen (2006, p. 350) proposed that 'peak experience promotes venture creation and growth as an aspect of self-actualization and optimal emotional functioning'. In effect, these authors were promoting Maslow's (1943) theory of the hierarchy of needs, adding that peak experience added to creativity and growth in business. Additionally, the authors also stated that that 'the three phenomenological constructs may occur in isolation, such as when a crisis results in peak performance, but this is not accompanied by peak experience or flow' (2006, p. 353). It appeared that entrepreneurial success can be empirically linked to peak experience, peak performance and flow, suggesting that being 'in the zone' (a term used by the authors and commonly applied to flow) enabled entrepreneurs to overcome obstacles and challenges that appeared insurmountable.

In summary, the most notable aspect of peak performance in business was clear, sharp focus, one of the results from Privette's Experience Questionnaire (1984). The observations made maintained that attributes of peak experience were often associated with peak performance and concluded that 'the interaction between these

two optimal experiences is reciprocal and significant' (Thornton, Privette and Bundrick, 1999, p. 254). The overlap between the three constructs was a constant theme running through this study. Bakker (2005) confirmed that a combination of autonomy, performance feedback, social support from colleagues and supervisory coaching were possible antecedents of flow experiences. Performance feedback linked peak performance to the outcome if applied to entrepreneurship, and peak experience promoted venture creation and growth as an aspect of self-actualization and optimal emotional functioning (Schindehutte, Morris and Allen, 2006).

2.8 Peak moments in education

Rogers (1951, p. 387-388) proposed that the goal of education was 'to assist students to become individuals', supporting individuals to work for themselves and not for the approval of others. Rogers's (1951) words chimed with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) who claimed that flow is an experience which is self-rewarding. By encouraging students to realise their potential, teachers fulfilled what Maslow (1971) called value education to ultimately self-actualise, which can lead to peak experiences.

Garland Evans (2016) recognised that teachers have intrinsic experiences in a partly conscious or unconscious way that can be described as peak experiences, inclusive of transpersonal experiences. He proposed that a study of peak experiences in teachers would cultivate a positive awareness of the phenomenon, to benefit a new generation of teachers who embody moral presence, manifested through self-actualisation. Such a new study may lead to knowledge of ways to invigorate, personalise, and create a sense of self-worth, 'thereby keeping idealistic teachers in their chosen vocation with obvious benefit to children and society' (Garland Evans, 2016, p. 3). He suggested that the best outcome of education is the emergence of moral individuals and teachers who model intrinsic moral presence, a suggestion underpinned by Maslow (1971), who advised that self-actualising individuals are known by their ethical, progressive action.

A study by Salanova, Bakker and Llorens (2006) of 258 secondary school teachers reported on the application of flow at work when referring to the field of education. There was a crossover with Bakker (2005) in their findings. Salanova, Bakker and Llorens (2006) confirmed that work quality can be improved over time by personal resources (such as social support, mutual cooperation and good relationships

between co-workers); innovation (suggestions from teachers to improve work quality, proposing new ideas for improvement); rules (teachers' workload and decisions about work processes made by the supervisors) and goals (defined objectives). These findings were almost a replica of Bakker's (2005) first question: whether job resources (a combination of autonomy, performance feedback, social support from colleagues and supervisory coaching) were possible antecedents of flow experiences.

A study of peak experiences, social interest and moral reasoning was undertaken by Christopher *et al*. (2002). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the hypothesis that peak experiences were related to ethical development. These authors concluded that 'facilitating peak experiences promotes the type of ethical orientations […] sorely needed in contemporary society' (2002, p. 49). They also recommended further research which 'would clarify whether there is a causal relationship between peak experiences and ethical development' (2002, p. 48).

In their study of learning as a shared peak experience in education, Raettig and Weger (2018) suggested that cooperation between students facilitates a state of shared interactive flow. By showing an interest in course content, participating in open discussion, acknowledging the competence of others and sharing the learning experience, students would communicate effortlessly and facilitate each other's thought processes. These authors said that fostering such an environment was crucial when looking to increase academic achievement, reduce drop-out rates and improve subjective well-being.

This theme in education appeared to revolve around morality and ethics, which can be developed through peak experience (Christopher *et al.*, 2002) although these authors suggested that further research is needed to relate peak experiences and ethical development. In like manner, Garland Evans (2016) proposed that further research is needed to benefit a new generation of teachers who embody moral presence. This author also confirmed that teachers have intrinsic experiences that can be described as peak experiences, inclusive of transpersonal experiences. Although Bakker's (2005) study researched music and flow, he concluded by saying that increasing the frequency of flow experiences and the subsequent crossover with student engagement would be an important contribution towards improving the educational system.

2.9 Peak moments in nature and the wilderness

Maslow's (1964) investigations into peak experience revealed that particular settings and activities acted as triggers: solitude, prayer, meditation, deep relaxation, physical accomplishment, and being in nature. Similarly, in their qualitative study on the nature of peak experiences in the wilderness, McDonald, Wearing and Ponting (2009, p. 371) expanded the notion of being in nature by including water, wild animals, sunsets, and mountains, and said 'it has yet to be determined in any satisfactory way what it is about nature, in this case wild nature or wilderness, that trigger peak moments'. The purpose of McDonald, Wearing and Ponting's (2009) inquiry was to extend our understanding of peak experiences by defining and identifying the distinctive elements of wilderness that contributed to triggering peak experiences. 39 participants who had visited wilderness areas in Australia were recruited for the study. The findings, written responses from participants, showed that the aesthetic qualities of the wilderness settings were key elements to their peak experiences. There was also a connection between peak experiences in the wilderness and spiritual expression, through the valuing of the natural environment and withdrawal from the 'human-made' world with all its pressures and distractions. Thorne (1963), a contemporary of Maslow (1964), described this spiritual connection in the sixth category of the (1963) model on peak experiences as climax experiences, meaning extreme fulfilment, especially of a spiritual nature.

Similarly, Vogler (2012) advised that, although a positive correlation has been illustrated between peak experiences in outdoor recreation and self-actualisation, there has been little to no research on the detailed components of peak experiences that might influence self-actualisation. Vogler (2012) conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 participants who had a history of outdoor recreation, finding several characteristics and triggers of peak experience including 'some form of discomfort, challenge, risk, physical exertion, flow, and natural beauty in a social group' (2012, p. ii). Through a boost of confidence influenced by a peak experience, the participants revealed a shift in their understanding of self-actualisation (category five of Thorne's 1963 model), self-actualisation. Supporting coachees to achieve their potential and wants is one of the precepts of coaching, a feature of self-actualisation.

Not only did Vogler's (2012) study reveal an enlightenment to self-actualisation, but the same finding was discovered in the study by Naor and Mayseless (2017). These authors focused specifically on the process of personal transformation taking place in the wilderness. The process involved recognising and understanding different parts of the self which were projected onto nature and experienced in a new, meaningful way. This gave light to new personal insights, leading to transformation. 15 participants aged between 28-70 years, who were familiar with a peak experience, were interviewed using a phenomenological approach. The participants claimed that their peak transformative experience in nature was perceived as a moment of profound insight, a step in the process of personal growth, similar to Thorne's (1963) fourth category.

It is not uncommon for coaches to walk with their clients in nature during a coaching session to benefit from the quiet and beauty nature has to offer, which reflects the insights from this section. The aesthetic qualities of the wilderness setting and being away from pressures, people, distractions and concerns of daily life were key elements of participants' peak experience. This freedom from the hassle and stress of everyday life reflected Dodson's (1996) feelings on peak experience.

2.10 Summary

Much of the research in this literature review revolved around peak moments in different fields as very little material exists on peak moments in coaching. The review started with the provenance of mystical and religious peak moments, followed by sections on psychology, positive psychology, and sports psychology. The main influences from each field are illustrated in Appendix 1.

In sport, the language of peak moments was distilled from athlete's experiences, including words such as stillness, self-awareness and transcendence. Peak performance was more prominent in the field of sport, although athletes reported being in flow and experiencing a peak experience through their peak performance. substantiated by Dodson (1996). She confirmed experiencing a transcendent sense of awe and achievement when mountain biking. Harung (2012) concluded that flow dealt with peak experience. Top performers described peak moments as highly motivational, imbuing the participants with expanded awareness, joy and inner relaxation.

The review of the coaching literature exposed how the peak moment experience, as represented in other fields, is notably absent. The extant literature focussed on the coachee's experiences. More than often than not, such breakthroughs were enlightening but not the phenomenological experience of a peak moment, as ascertained in literature in other fields, and as defined by Maslow (1964), Privette (1983) and Csikszentmihalyi (1990).

A search of literature in classical, indie and orchestral music revealed confusion over whether participants were engaged in peak experience or flow. In general, articles evidenced the sense of a loss of time and consciousness for both constructs, with peak experience reported as more of an epiphany and flow as absorption in the task in hand. The crossover of peak experience and flow between music teacher and student was found to be contagious.

For the visual arts, participants in Panzarella's (1980) model reported feelings of joy, a loss of time and experiences remembered as magical. In both music and the performing arts, flow was described as a short-term peak experience and a precursor to peak experience. Creative writing also embraced peak experiences, when the flow of words brought forth a sense of power in the writing process as its own reward, which chimed with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) description of the intrinsic reward from flow for its own sake, with no other regard.

In business, Bakker (2005) ascertained that employees are more likely to experience flow when job challenges and demands match their professional skill, defining flow at work as a short-term peak experience. Bakker (2005) said it is arguable that the peak experience of flow is an all or nothing phenomenon. Flow and peak experience were seemingly united.

In education, Christopher *et al.* (2002) voiced that research into education exposed a propensity for peak experience to be linked with moral reasoning and ethical considerations. Raettig and Weger (2018) believed that by fostering the well-being of students, shared experiences reduced drop-out rates and increased academic achievement. Such shared experience resonated with Bakker's (2005) study which straddled music and education, while also incorporating the workplace. When in flow, emotions between student and teacher became contagious, which resulted in a peak experience for the teacher and vice versa. Garland Evans (2016) maintained that

teachers, too, have encounters that can be described as peak experiences, or even transcendental experiences.

Peak moments were triggered in nature and the wilderness (McDonald, Wearing and Ponting, 2009). The aesthetic qualities of nature were found to be a key element for participants to engage with peak experiences, an experience which took participants out of the pressures of everyday life. Naor and Mayseless (2017) reported that their participants experienced insights about themselves, leading to transformation and a step into personal growth. This statement reflected the conative growth aspect of peak experience, as defined by Thorne (1963). Peak experience was the main construct under discussion for this field, with scarcely any mention of flow or peak performance.

The interest and experiences in other fields indicated that the gap in the coaching literature is important to expose and to fill. This study will therefore provide a new professional contribution to coaching knowledge, to understand how coaches experience peak moments, which may create insights into the experience of the phenomenon and add value to the coaching profession. The gap in the coaching literature on peak moments in coaching has largely ignored the possibility that peak moments could be experienced by many coaches during the course of their engagement with coachees, which this field work may identify.

A peak experience is described as spontaneous and joyful, a spiritual connection that promoted personal growth and a sense of being at one with the universe. Peak performance featured heavily in sport but less so in other fields, sometimes heralding a peak experienced through flow. Similar to peak experience, flow featured in all the fields and is frequently described as the peak experience of flow, coupled with motivation, absorption and enjoyment. Without the attributes of flow, a peak performance would not happen, nor would the individual be in a position to realise the spontaneity of a peak experience. Peak moments are unique and exceptional, taking us ‘beyond our ordinary perceptions and provide a moment of transcendence (Wildflower and Brennan, 2011, p. 7). Such an encounter is a potential benefit for all coaches.

Chapter Three - Methodology

In this chapter I report on the methodology adopted to explore how coaches experience peak moments. Starting with an examination of the research philosophy, I discuss how my ontological and epistemological perspectives are aligned with the research method. I then discuss the research design strategies that were considered before detailing the heuristic approach, followed by participant information, data collection methods and data analysis. The chapter closes with considerations on trustworthiness and validity, ethical considerations, reflexivity and limitations of the study, concluding with the chapter summary.

3.1 Ontology and epistemology

My ontological position was interwoven with my love of music. As a budding flautist, I bought recordings by different orchestras just to hear how each flautist played the solo in the same piece, for example *Daphnis and Chloe*. Each soloist presented a distinctive representation of Ravel's music, offering their reality of the passage by their individual interpretation of the same score. Collectively, the recordings presented multiple, changing realities of the same orchestration. The ontological position in the literature reflects this concept. Participants in the studies, drawn from divergent fields such as music and nature, offer their individual interpretation of their peak moment experiences.

According to Heidegger (2010, p. 203), 'as an ontological term, reality is related to innerwordly beings'. My innerwordly being was constructed out of respecting the individual interpretation and expertise over the instrument; the individual tone from each player, the sonority, timbre and technical expertise over the instrument, the phrasing, holding a note back to create anticipation, the rhythmical flow, the emphasis on certain notes in a passage, breath control and the solos with another instrument.

Parse (2001, p. 47) proposed that 'the researcher arrives at a phenomenon of interest while examining personal interests'. Drawing on Parse's (2001) proposal, my phenomenon of interest was peak moments, stimulated by artistic endeavours such as music. I experienced multiple realities, constructed and interpreted by me both as a performer and a listener. Creswell (2003) endorsed the existence of multiple realities, as did Sultan (2018, p. 55) who argues 'there is no single reality, but rather

multiple realities exist'. Every musical interpretation was different, offering numerous realities of the same work. Each recording delivered the same piece of music, be it a symphony or a concerto, yet multiple realities of the same opus were interpreted. There are as many different performances of symphonies interpreted by the conductor as there are individual musicians who comprise the entire orchestra, each giving their interpretation of their individual part. As espoused by Gray (2009, p. 18), 'hence multiple, contradictory but equally valid accounts of the world can exist'.

My belief in this self-created reality, interpreting my experiences and crafting my own sense of being, led me to interpretivism. This research paradigm aligned with my ontological perspective. According to Cohen (2000, p. 28), this paradigm 'strives to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors'. To reconcile the interpretivist paradigm, I am encouraged and inspired by Moustakas (1990, p. 53) who posed the question 'what stands out as one or two critical incidents in your life that create a puzzlement, curiosity and passion to know?'. My critical incidents are peak moment experiences, felt not only through music but later also as a coach. I am driven to discover how other coaches experience peak moments to interpret deeper levels of understanding. Sela-Smith (2002, p. 65) named these critical incidents a calling; 'from this intuitive place […] the place where the subjective scientist feels a call to discover some internal meaning'.

Epistemologically, I made meaning of my music experiences through my senses, feeling, visualising and hearing my reality of the experience. As expressed by Stelter (2007, p. 194), 'the felt sense is reformatted in a process of symbolisation into linguistic expression'. The phenomenon of a peak moment would need to be explored through language, metaphor and images, based on recall. Meaning would need to be made through my interpretation of experiences. As a musician I constructed meaning through my interpretation of the score. Similarly, meaning in this study would need to be made through immersion in my own experience, as advised by Moustakas (1990, p. 114), 'we arrive at knowledge through internal reflection'. Aside from my own experience, I would also invite participants to explore their encounters with peak moments, one of the objectives for this study.

Knowledge would be constructed through acknowledging and interpreting each participant's experience, an approach which concurs with Sultan (2018, p. 56) 'through

this intersubjective relationship, the co-creation of knowledge will occur'. Through interacting with participants, I would construct meaning. My epistemological position is thus constructivist. Gray (2009) confirmed that truth and meaning are created by the subject's interactions with the world, and that meaning is constructed, not discovered. Gray (2009, p. 18) advised that 'meaning is constructed in different ways through immersion and feelings even in relation to the same phenomenon'.

The relationship between me and the participants will be critical to the construction of meaning. The knowing, the meaning-making, would be dependent upon this participation, to create trust and rapport with the participants for them to feel safe when exposing their realities. Hiles (2002) emphasised the importance of knowing through participation. The participants' experience would bring forth a greater in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, revealed through an intense focus of inquiry on participants' thoughts and feelings to capture their experience of peak moments (Willig, 2013).

I contemplated at length the impact of my experiences and how relevant they would be in relation to participants' experiences. I was influenced at this stage by Sultan (2018, p. 57) who argues that 'it is challenging to imagine the possibility of imagining separating one's personal values from the process of inquiry'. Furthermore, Sela-Smith (2002, p. 64) endorses a need to 'discover an intense interest or passionate concern that calls out to the researcher and that holds important social meanings as well as personal compelling implications.' My interest and concern led me to the realisation that both my experiences and those of participants would be relevant to the construction of meaning for this study. This relevance was expressed by Sultan (2018, p. 55):

> 'Essential meaning is believed to emerge through process of deep introspection-or what Moustakas (1990) refers to as indwelling - stimulated by the dialogical and relational interaction between the researcher and co-researchers. In this manner, reality and meaning is co-created'.

Sultan (2018) highlighted how meaning is made. The interaction between me as main researcher and the participants would prompt the co-creation of meaning. Sultan (2018, p. 55) wrote of 'an individual's contextual and subjective meaning-making of personal and shared experience'. There are parallels between my experiences of peak

moments as a musician and as a coach. These contexts enlightened my meaning-making, concerning both personal and shared experiences, and drove the contribution of my thesis.

This study was designed to reveal an understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon of peak moments through the intersubjective relationship between me and the participants. Sultan (2018, p. 98) explained that without this co-creation, meaning does not exist: 'knowledge is co-constructed with an understanding that it does not exist independent of its co-creation by researcher and research partners'. This pairing of my own experiences and those of participants would be critical and influential in the choice of research design and strategy. Sela-Smith (2002, p. 65) used the phrase 'the smell of significance that draws any scientist into inquiry'. My smell of significance was my subjective encounter of a phenomenon constructed through my interpretation of the experience and those of participants. The research design therefore needed to integrate these two elements.

3.2 Research design

As well as drawing on Sultan (2018), the design of the study was influenced by McInman and Grove (1991), who advised that the rarity of a peak moment may be due to the way research questions have been asked. In light of this, I was swayed to consider conversational, semi-structured interviews and a phenomenological approach for this study, to capture the coaches' experience of peak moments.

With the interpretive/constructivist paradigm in mind, I sought an approach that would focus on my experiences and those of other coaches. Creswell (2003) emphasised the synergy between the first person, subjective approach and phenomenology, and accordingly, a phenomenological approach was taken for the research design. Drawing on the article by Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006, p. 108), the central goal of phenomenology is to 'approach and deal with any object of our attention in just such a way that it is allowed maximal opportunity to show itself 'as real''.

The choice of phenomenological approaches was between Husserl's (1931) descriptive, transcendental model and Heidegger's (2010) hermeneutic, interpretative model. The transcendental model encourages the researcher to adopt the noema and the noesis as described by Eddles-Hirsch (2015, p. 252); 'the noema represents the

objective experience of the object, whereas the noesis represents the subjective experience'. Husserl's (1931) model, referred to as a participant-oriented method (Hiles, 2001) sought to objectify experience, embracing the bracketing (epoche) or phenomenological reduction. Moustakas (1994, p. 180) described this model as 'setting aside prejudgements and opening the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence'.

This objective stance was reflective of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which I considered but rejected as an approach. According to Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006), the IPA researcher must have two aims in mind. The first aim is to produce a 'coherent, third-person, and psychologically informed description which tries to 'get as close' to the participant's view as possible' (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006, p. 104). This initial aim was similar to one of my objectives, but with a caveat. I wanted to 'get as close' as possible to the participants' experiences of peak moments from their personal subjective experience of the phenomenon, but not in an objective sense. IPA's second aim, according to Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006, p. 104) was to provide a 'critical and conceptual commentary upon the participant's personal sense-making activities'. My interest lay in how coaches experienced a peak moment and not how they made sense of the phenomenon, as conveyed by Eddles-Hirsch (2015, p. 251):

> 'Phenomenologists, therefore, are more concerned with first-hand descriptions of a phenomenon than they are in resolving why participants experience life the way they do'.

The other possible choice of phenomenological approach was Heidegger's (2010) hermeneutic approach. Heidegger (2010) disagreed with the premise of bracketing and considered that researcher and phenomenon had an equal voice; to separate the person and the world was considered false, as to be a person was to be in the world. Heidegger (2010) maintained that we cannot stand outside of our pre-understandings and our history of experience, defining phenomenology purely in terms of letting things be seen in the way they show themselves. Heidegger (2010) considered subjectivity as being-in-the-world, *dasein*, which Groenewald (2004, p. 4) described as 'the dialogue between a person and her world'. Laverty (2003, p. 7) used the more contemporary phrase 'mode of being human', explaining that meaning was found

through the lens of our background and understanding, whilst we simultaneously constructed the world from both background and experience.

My focus in the choice of research design was to stay as close as possible to my experiences of peak moments. I strived to avoid the objective stance (Eddles-Kirsch, 2015) as outlined by Bevan (2014, p. 136) who argued that phenomenological researcher 'is interested in describing a person's experience in the way he or she experiences it, and not from some theoretical standpoint'. Of equal importance, I sought a phenomenological research design that 'is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance, with quality, not quantity, with experience, not behavior' (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, p. 42). Correspondingly, the Heidegger (2010) philosophy of practical subjectivity was chosen, enabling me to remain close to the subjective account of the phenomenon. The focus on feeling responses of the researcher, instead of an outward-looking objective stance, was endorsed by Sela-Smith (2002), who reminds us that Moustakas (1990) legitimised this perspective with the term 'heuristic'. The researcher is directed to explore aspects of the self, drawing on tacit knowing or 'internal organizational systems not normally known in waking state-consciousness' (2002, p. 60). This internal place (Sela-Smith, 2002) was where experience, feeling and meaning joined together, both to conceptualise and to navigate the world; the tacit dimension of personal knowledge.

In the context of social science, heuristic inquiry is a strongly subjective approach (Gray, 2009). It is attributed to Moustakas (1990), yet other theorists, researchers and psychotherapists influenced its development: Husserl (1931), Rogers (1951; 1969), Polanyi (1966) and Maslow (1971). According to Douglass and Moustakas (1985), heuristic inquiry encourages the understanding of a phenomenon from multiple perspectives. These begin as a series of subjective musings, developing into a systematic and definitive clarification through interpretation and the construction of themes by noting hunches, ideas and essences as they emerge. Moustakas (1986) proposed three perspectives. The first, 'being in', is the dialogue between a person and their world, embracing the fullness of human capacity to be in the world; the second, 'being with', involves immersing oneself in another's world by listening deeply and attentively to enter into the other person's experience; the third, 'being for', supports bringing the full self to the other, through knowledge and experience. These

perspectives, together with Moustakas's (1990, p. 15) definition of heuristic inquiry, confirmed my choice of method:

> 'A way of engaging in a scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences'.

Described by Moustakas (1990; 1994) as a qualitative and phenomenologically aligned research model, heuristic inquiry sits between Husserl's (1931) transcendental and Heidegger's (2010) interpretive, hermeneutic approach to phenomenology. As informed by Moustakas (1994, p. 13) 'the aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it'. Sela-Smith (2002, p. 58) suggested that heuristic inquiry can be used in 'any research endeavor where the inquiry is on the cutting edge of new territory being explored'.

3.3 Process of heuristic inquiry

Groenewald (2004) claims that researchers using phenomenology are reluctant to prescribe techniques, yet Moustakas (1990) recommended six steps to prepare for data collection, seven concepts and processes for finding the research question and six phases of research for data analysis.

Six steps to prepare for data collection

I followed the steps as recommended by Moustakas (1990), considering not only my preparation as researcher, but also how to interface with and inform the participants.

1. The first step was to develop a set of instructions to inform potential participants of the nature of the research design (Appendix 2). This included its purpose, process and what was expected of them, such as their willingness to commit and cooperate, and their degree of involvement.

2. Locating and acquiring participants and developing a set of criteria for selection. I approached two professional networks who agreed to invite their members to support me in accessing participants. I sought nine experienced coaches, who identified as having experienced peak moments for semi-structured, conversational interviews, the

criteria being eight years' coaching experience My interview as the researcher brought the total number of participants to ten.

3. Developing a contract, including time commitments, place, confidentiality, informed consent, opportunities for feedback, permission to tape record and permission to use material in the thesis (Appendix 3).

4. Considering ways of creating an atmosphere or climate that will encourage trust, openness and self-disclosure. Although I prepared a process (Appendix 4) this was unnecessary as we were of a similar background, experience and proficiency as coaches, which enabled us to easily fall into rapport.

5. Using relaxation/meditation activities to facilitate a sense of comfort and relaxation (Appendix 4). Although recommended by Moustakas (1990), this process was unnecessary due to the above comment.

6. Constructing a way of apprising participants during the 'collection of data' phase of the importance of immersion and intervals of concentration and respite. This was effortless, as both parties were keen to connect with one another.

3.4 Participants as co-researchers

Participants in heuristic inquiry are called co-researchers and heuristics typically focuses on a relatively small, purposefully selected cohort. For phenomenological research, Gray (2009) suggested between five and 15, and Creswell (2003) recommended long interviews with up to ten people. Moustakas (1990, p. 47) claimed heuristics can be conducted with only one person, although he advises that a study will achieve 'richer, deeper, more profound and more varied meanings when it includes depictions of the experience of others – perhaps as many as ten to 15 co-researchers'. Consequently, for this study, ten experienced coaches (including me) were recruited. Their coaching approach was not as important as their experience of peak moments, and this, together with a minimum of eight years' coaching experience, were the two recruiting criteria. Coincidentally, de Haan and Neiss (2012) defined an experienced coach as one who has at least eight years' coaching practice. I also required coaches to be articulate, observing Clutterbuck and Megginson's (2010, p. 8) definition of mature coaches as those whose 'reflections lead them to an understanding of this interaction that goes far beyond textbook explanations of the coaching process'.

The two professional networks I approached for recruitment generated no interest. I turned to snowball-sampling, often referred to as chain sampling and arguably the most widely employed method of sampling 'where other avenues have dried up' (Noy, 2008, p. 329). Although Noy (2008) articulated that snowball-sampling relies on and shares in natural and organic social networks, I experienced both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that it provided me with participants who had experienced peak moments. The disadvantage is the recommendation of like-minded individuals with common values and beliefs resulted in the sampling of only one social network of coaches. They were all masterly, well informed, experienced and knowledgeable, giving rise to the assumption that they were all at self-actualisation which, according to Maslow (1964) leads to peak experience. Appendix 5 describes each co-researcher.

3.5 Seven core processes

The seven processes (Moustakas, 1990) are intrinsic to developing the exact wording for the research question to gain a deeper understanding of peak moments.

1. Identifying with the focus of the inquiry: The process starts with the researcher becoming at one with the question and engaging with it on a daily basis through self-directed searching. Kenny (2012) suggested that it is Moustakas's (1990) shared philosophy with Heidegger (2010) that the researcher must live with and embody the question, since 'an embodied question allows the inquiry to work on us and influence the quality of our thinking and exploration, which in turn guides the experience and understanding we achieve' (2012, p. 7).

My immersion into the topic became obsessive at both a conscious and tacit level. I seemed to be wrestling with the notion of something I could not yet articulate, yet images and memories appeared without consciously dwelling on them. I visualised and re-lived experiences which revealed layers of detail hitherto forgotten, 'pursuing intuitive clues or hunches and drawing from the mystery and sources of energy and knowledge drawing on tacit dimension' (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28).

2. Self-dialogue: The phenomenon starts to take a form and become a more recognisable entity, through self-inquiry, inner dialogue and openness to all facets of one's experience of the phenomenon. Rogers's (1969) influence on the development

of heuristic inquiry can be seen in his summary of the essential qualities of discovery (Moustakas, 1990, p. 17):

- openness to one's own experiences
- trust in one's self-awareness and understanding
- an internal locus of evaluation
- a willingness to enter into a process rooted in the self

It was almost as though self-dialogue was an unspoken witness to my tacit knowing, a voice muted (but not bracketed) by daily chores and duties yet present at all times, with suggestions and comprehensive sentences woven together from strands of thought: a silent companion. I had 'the recognition that if one is going to be able to discover the constituents and qualities that make up an experience, one must begin with oneself' (Moustakas, 1990, p. 16).

3. Tacit knowing: Drawing heavily on the ideas of Polanyi (1966, p. 4) that 'we can know more than we can tell', Moustakas (1990, p. 22) acknowledged that without the tacit in research, we limit the possibilities for knowing and understanding, stating that 'the tacit dimension underlies and precedes intuition and guides the researcher into untapped directions and sources of meaning'.

The tacit dimension for me was sensory; a compelling feeling that was utterly elusive, but a sense of something I had experienced in music and as a coach. Tacit is the implicit aspect of knowing, difficult to communicate in formal systematic language (Kenny, 2012). I experienced a frisson that was intangible yet something I felt passionate about, fundamental to the experience of the phenomenon as suggested by (Moustakas, 1990, p. 20), 'at the base of all heuristic discovery, is the power of revelation in tacit knowing'.

4. Intuition: lies between the explicit and the tacit, drawing on clues and observations which we verify by inference internally, leading towards the perception of something as a whole. Patterns start to take shape through the connection between the explicit and the implicit, as described by Moustakas (1990, p. 24), 'intuition guides the researcher in discovery of patterns and meanings that will lead to enhanced meanings, and deepened and extended knowledge'.

I found myself thinking about and reflecting upon the difference between intuition and tacit knowing. Hunches, thoughts and images were appearing at all times of the day and often at night, scenarios of past peak moments, reliving and indulging in the sensuality of each moment. This fusion of the tacit and intuition is best described by Djuraskovic and Arthur (2010, p. 1575): 'tacit knowledge represents all internally possessed achievable knowledge that we cannot describe or explain'. Sela-Smith (2002, p. 59) called this experience the surrender of the self to feelings which carry the researcher to 'unknown aspects of self and the internal organizational systems now normally known in waking-state consciousness'.

5. Indwelling: involves a willingness to turn unwavering attention and concentration on the phenomenon to find a deeper level of understanding. The process is conscious and deliberate whereby dwelling inside the clues and hunches brings forth expanded meanings and associations until insight in achieved 'through indwelling, the heuristic investigator finally turns the corner and moves toward the ultimate creative synthesis that portrays the essential qualities and meanings of an experience' (Moustakas, 1900, p. 25).

Indwelling was the process which came most easily to me and was captured through closing my eyes, indulging myself in visualising past peak moments and revelling in the moment of timeless immersion. The environment played a vital role in this process as I felt most at ease and able to 'indwell' when relaxed and at ease and switched off from my natural attitude. Curiously, this took place whilst in the bath, in the spa or relaxing on a yoga mat, holding a position or resting on a Pilates roller. It was as though indwelling and immersion interfaced continuously with one another, although Polanyi (1966) told us that a discovery does not happen through intentional searching.

6. Focusing: refers to an inner attention, staying with the sustained process of being with the central meanings of an experience. Moustakas (1990) argued that it is about creating an inner space to identify the qualities of an experience that have previously remained out of conscious reach. By focusing, (Gendlin, 1978) I found myself recollecting more instances of peak moments in different situations and with greater detail and clarity; 'focusing enables one to see something as it is and to make whatever shifts are necessary to remove clutter and make contact with necessary awareness and insights into one's experiences' (1990, p. 25).

Focusing for me was part of indwelling and immersion into my experiences and, because I am focussed in my way of being, was an element that took less effort. Within my focus, however, questions came to the surface as I started to recognise new aspects of themes which made me re-consider my beliefs, feelings, thoughts and judgements.

7. The internal frame of reference: Knowledge derived from heuristic inquiry must relate back to the experiencer's internal frame of reference to portray the experience, and not an external frame. I found myself thinking abstractedly of the phenomenon, without an awareness that something was shifting and growing, as expressed by (Moustakas, 1990, p. 26):

> 'To know and understand the nature, meanings, and essences of any human experience, one depends on the internal frame of reference of the person who has had, is having, or will have the experience'

By facing inwards and self-searching, immersing myself in the experience of peak moments, the research question gradually started to crystallise. It seemed as though I was living and breathing the experience, and through this internal frame of reference, I started to gain an understanding of the shape of the phenomenon, and how the research question could be framed. This was a long process, probably more than a year with several attempts at crystallising the question until the butterfly emerged from the chrysalis.

3.6 Data collection method

Interview is by far the most dominant method for data collection in phenomenological research (Bevan, 2014) and is the chosen method for this study. Conversational, semi-structured interviews were conducted, as recommended by Moustakas (1990, p. 47) because 'the conversational interview or dialogue is most clearly consistent with the rhythm and flow of heuristic exploration and search for meaning', cited too by Mihalache (2019) 'in interviews, Moustakas (1990) advised a conversational dialogue' (2019, p. 138).

As main researcher I was mindful of the need to monitor my biases around peak moment experiences when interviewing the participants. Co-researchers were encouraged to speak freely and tell their stories in a detailed first-person account of

their encounters to ‘retain the essence of the person in the experience’ (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, p. 3). Moustakas (1990) suggested that heuristic interviewing requires a Rogerian approach (Rogers, 1951): empathic listening and unconditional positive regard (being open to oneself and to the co-researcher) and ‘being skilful in creating a climate that encourages to respond comfortably, accurately, comprehensively and honestly in elucidating the phenomenon’ (Moustakas, 1990, p. 48).

My initial contact with co-researchers was by email, to invite them to consider supporting me in my research. I included the participant information sheet (Appendix 1) which briefly described what a peak moment represented for me. I tried to make this definition as general as possible, as I was conscious to avoid influencing their understanding and description of their experiences. I then telephoned them to introduce myself and arrange a date for the interview. The participant information sheet was then emailed to each participant.

3.6.1 The pilot interview

The first interview, the pilot, was with Felicity (pseudonym). I started the interview by asking her what she could tell me about her experience of the phenomenon. She immediately pulled me up, saying that she did not know what I required from her. Her response took me by surprise as I had sent the participant information sheet. She told me was that I had launched into the interview without framing the concept, telling me I had made an assumption that she was aware of peak moments. I back tracked, reframed the question and we continued, but I made a mental note to take nothing for granted in all subsequent interviews. My second observation from this pilot interview was how the interview terminated. At the close of the interview, Felicity asked me quite pointedly if I had any more questions and I realised that, having received the information I wanted, I was about to stop the interview without exploring further options. My behaviour reflects Frick’s (1990, p. 79) suggestion that at the base of all other attributes of heuristic research is the ‘freedom of exploration and inquiry, an assumption of integrity granted to the investigator’. Frick (1990) pointed out that although heuristics allows the researcher creative freedom, it could lead to irresponsibility from the researcher and undeveloped research (Djuraskovic and

Arthur, 2010). This gave me the insight to reframe both the start and close of each subsequent interview.

3.6.2 The main interviews

Having signed the consent form (Appendix 3), the co-researchers were asked to re-visit their experience of peak moments, staying as close as possible to their lived experience. Their reflections were encouraged by open questioning to elicit their thoughts feelings and behaviours about the phenomenon. During the interview, lasting between one and a half and two hours, I observed intonations, both verbal and visual, to understand the emotions and behaviours being expressed. I encouraged a close relationship, whereby the co-researchers would feel comfortable revealing as much as possible, creating a situation where they could be honest and authentic with me. As the interview progressed, the co-researchers were more and more actively engaged in revealing their experiences, which became a natural, unfolding dialogue 'most clearly consistent with the rhythm and flow of heuristic exploration and search for meaning' (Moustakas, 1990, p. 47).

During the interview process, the third perspective '*being for'* (Moustakas, 1986) came into play, particularly when common language and description of the experience was shared. I found myself inadvertently drifting in and out of epoche, which manifested itself as my own view and thoughts coming to my mind. It was as though I had an internal conversation with myself, reflecting upon what the co-researcher was saying and finding myself either agreeing or disagreeing with them. I had to bracket off my own thoughts and assumptions and focus on the co-researcher and their experience. I tried to balance the interview, bringing my experience and voice into the discussion when appropriate, through the phrasing of a question or responding to the dialogue.

Co-researchers almost always contextualised their experiences. They began by telling me the context of their experience, how it came about, and what it meant to them before detailing the actual experience itself. It was as though they were only able to retrieve the experience by setting the scene and visualising the experience once more before capturing the detail and description of each experience. I often found myself guiding the narrative back to clarifying the phenomenon, rather than the context; 'although the goal is to get participants to describe experience, one cannot control how people choose to express their experience' (Bevan, 2014, p. 140). Without realising

the synergy, I was unknowingly and unconsciously following Bevan's (2014) phenomenological interview method as a natural phenomenon and not a prescriptive format.

The interviews were audio recorded and I paid attention to language and how it was used, asking for an explanation when something was unclear. I transcribed the recordings myself, deliberately noting silences, pauses and demonstrative expressions in the dialogue including 'ums' and ahs' which signified a pause for reflection and thought. I realised these were indicative to produce a richer picture of the text, difficult to emulate in script yet important to record what was both overtly stated and the silences that ensued (Laverty, 2003). Transcribing is a long and often repetitive process, at least eight hours per transcript, but valuable insights were gained in the doing. I then sent the transcriptions to each to co-researchers for feedback and verification. Whilst transcribing each interview, I unintentionally began to muse over themes which were emerging, almost having an internal conversation with myself about how each them inter-related. I started to make a list. This complies with Moustakas's (1990) notion of constructing a way of appraising participants during the collection of data phase and the importance of immersion and intervals of concentration and respite.

Regarding my own interview as the tenth co-researcher, from the very outset of my interview, both I and the interviewer, Tom (pseudonym) realised we were not connecting on the subject matter. This realisation made the whole interview process very difficult for both of us. Tom admitted to not being adequately prepared and might have benefited from some preparation including reflecting on the participant information sheet in advance, for which he took full responsibility. On reflection, his disengagement revealed something about my conceptualisation of peak moments, which suggested that some people grasp it and others may not. Feedback from Tom made me think about what happens in the connection between two or more people which results in a peak experience. Tom also made me think about what the experience of a peak moment meant for coaches. In his struggle to clearly understand the differences in the three constructs, I also reflected on whether this was his lack of comprehension or something about the nebulousness and ambiguity of peak moments. These insights helped me to adopt a more discerning approach to my work.

3.6.3 The second interviews

A follow-up telephone conversation was conducted after two to three weeks as suggested by Moustakas (1990, p. 107) 'perhaps a follow-up interview'. The purpose was to ascertain if, on reflection, co-researchers had any further insights to offer. Very little additional information was forthcoming apart from the correction and deletion of a few names which I amended in the transcripts.

3.7 Data analysis

The inductive approach to this research began with a first reading of all transcripts. Having included all the pauses, 'ums' and 'ers' when typing the interviews, reading these pauses and stresses on the text helped me to re-live the interviews, gaining deeper insights into the co-researcher's experiences when hearing the voices anew. I intuitively began to recognise themes such as 'intuition', 'connectedness' and 'empathy', quotes highlighted with a marker pen in the text and named as a theme in the margin of the text on the second reading. By the third reading I was creating individual Microsoft Word files on each of the themes with extracted highlighted quotes from each co-researcher (my data is logged under my name, Kay). For example, where I wrote 'connectedness' in the margin, I copied the highlighted quote from the transcript into the connectedness file, following the directive prescribed by Moustakas (1990, p. 44) 'the heuristic researcher constructs methods that will explicate meanings and patterns of experience relevant to the question'.

21 themes emerged, which I wrote on post-it notes. I classified each theme under a cluster heading and arranged them on a flip chart (Appendix 6). For example, connectivity or connectedness (number five on Appendix 6**)** seemed to incorporate alignment, sharing and crying, and these were grouped as a cluster. The clusters changed several times as I familiarised myself with the content. Even the headings inter-changed as I continued to compare and reflect on each theme, deciding which cluster it belonged in, and how these clusters shaped the chapter contents, as guided by Sutherland (2012, p. 29):

> 'This was one means of constant comparison, a source for identifying category interrelation, and a point of constant reflection and validation of developing codes and categories'.

I eventually scoped three analysis chapters, challenging myself with what seemed to be the most important and relevant themes to satisfy the research question, and began writing up the analysis. The chapters changed three times in the analysis as I became entrenched in the meaning of each theme and how they inter-related and belonged together. I eventually settled on two analysis chapters. Chapter Four relates to understanding the descriptions of the essences of peak moments and Chapter Five focusses on an understanding of the conditions that comprise the emergence of a peak moment.

Although heuristic inquiry focusses on the researcher, I agree with Sela-Smith (2002) that the researcher, in interpreting the participants' experiences, could be accused of taking an objective stance on the depictions of their experiences. This stance was described by Sela-Smith (2002, p. 71) as 'a shift from experience and self-search to observation of experience of self and others', resonates with IPA. I found myself taking this stance to fully focus on the participants' dialogue. Sela-Smith (2002) distinguished between the experience of a phenomenon and experiencing the phenomenon. The difference lies in whether the focus is on yourself or another, in this case a co-researcher, and what is learnt from an observational perspective rather than from within the experience. As interviewer, I had to suspend my beliefs and experiences of peak moments to prevent influencing those of each participant. I found myself bracketing my experience to lay aside former beliefs and make way for new insights, which emerged through interpreting and constructing new meanings. Gray (2009) and Sultan (2018) maintain that by bracketing our subjective experiences and pre-acknowledged understandings of phenomena, we allow the phenomena to speak for themselves, unadulterated. Sultan (2018) suggested that bracketing of personal experience is highly regarded in qualitative research and helps researchers set aside the impact of some of their personal motives and values on the research process. I am aware that this transition to epoche when considering the experience of others could be regarded as a transgression from hermeneutics but Douglass and Moustakas (1985, p. 45) give permission to so do:

> 'it is appropriate to change methods or procedures in midstream, according to the requirements of explicating the levels of meaning connected with the investigation'.

Bevan (2014) instructed that the initial reflection in phenomenological research is offered by the co-researchers, and the second reflection of the phenomenon is contributed by the researcher. This presents the question of interpretation and how language is perceived and interpreted. Because of our similar demographics, I had to be careful not to interpret co-researchers' narratives in my language, making sure I stood outside of my language to accurately represent theirs. I was conscious of not manipulating the findings on their experiences of peak moments to corroborate my own theory or understanding of the phenomenon. My blind spots and assumptions were acknowledged and challenged, through critical reflection, from the beginning and throughout the investigation as part of the rich descriptions of the research.

3.7.1 The six phases of research for data analysis (Moustakas, 1990)

I tried to adhere to the heuristic approach but found myself shifting between the six phases and seven processes, assuming that I needed to complete each step before progressing to the next. I was assured by Hiles (2001), however, who suggested they complement one another, providing different perspectives on heuristic inquiry. I interpreted this as permission to move seamlessly between both the six phases and the seven processes.

1. Initial engagement

Moustakas (1990, p. 27) said that 'within each researcher exists a topic, theme, problem, or question that represents a critical interest and area of research'. During the phase of initial engagement I gathered the data from each co-researcher (the recording, transcript, my notes and feedback), internalising and processing the transcribed interviews, complying with Moustakas's (1990, p. 12) suggestion to get to the heart of heuristic inquiry with 'emphasis on the investigator's internal frame of reference, self-searching, intuition, and indwelling'.

2. Immersion in the topic and research question:

Predominant themes emerged when transcribing, bringing richness in hearing nuances in the co-researchers' dialogue between us. For me, this was the start of the process of timeless immersion in analysing the data, as upheld by Hiles (2001, p. 4*)*: 'virtually anything connected with the question becomes raw material for immersion'.

I entered a state which Moustakas (1990, p. 49) refers to as a task requiring timeless immersion inside the data 'with intervals of rest and return to the data until intimate knowledge is obtained'. This was precipitated and triggered for me by the main interview, when I found myself both present at the interview, totally associated yet disassociated. The disassociated state is the cognitive side of the brain seeking patterns, themes and links, whilst listening intently to the input until the data is understood. As explained by Moustakas (1990, p. 28), 'having crystallised the research question, the researcher grows in knowledge and understanding of it'.

3. Incubation:

I set the data aside to encourage an interval of rest, returning to it with a fresh perspective. I read the material again, made notes and identified themes from the data, allowing the inner workings of the knowledge to be processed on levels beyond immediate awareness. The benefit this brought was encapsulated by Moustakas (1990, p. 28): 'the period of incubation enables the inner tacit dimension to reach its full possibilities'.

4. Illumination:

I returned to the original data to ascertain if I had captured the qualities and themes essential to the experience, before moving onto the next co-researcher. Meaning was made through words almost 'jumping out' at me from the pages, words that became recurrent and repetitive with each transcript. This fourth phase of the process opens the door to a new awareness when the researcher is open to their tacit knowledge and intuition, as expressed by Moustakas (1990, p. 29): 'the process of illumination is one that occurs naturally when the researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition'.

5. Explication:

By now I had gathered together over 21 themes (Appendix 6). I again entered into a state of timeless immersion, with intervals of rest, until the universal themes and qualities were internalised and thoroughly understood. I attempted to compile depictions for each co-researcher to ultimately compile one representative depiction from up to three co-researchers as recommended by Moustakes (1990, p. 31), 'the

purpose of the explication phase is to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness'.

I found the whole concept of depictions both confusing and difficult to follow. I found no instructions in Moustakas (1990) to enable me to follow a process. I was confused as to what a depiction was, how to go about writing one, and its relevance. The only explanation and description I found was by Sultan (2018, p. 147) who proposed 18 questions to unravel potential themes, which was unbelievably helpful and reassuring. I copied out these questions and created three such depictions. I found the questions helped with structuring the themes for analysis and constructing each theme, but I found some of the questions irrelevant and started to scan over them. I also began to feel that the depictions were unreal, almost an identikit apparition of the co-researcher, totally devoid of heart and soul, which are the very essence of this study. I was spending at least two days on each depiction and the whole process became onerous and time consuming. The questions had, notwithstanding, served their purpose. I abandoned the effort.

6. The creative synthesis

Germane to heuristic inquiry is the creative synthesis. I carefully considered the transcribed interviews, thinking about how I could integrate my experiences in music and coaching in the culmination of the research (Frick, 1990). I painstakingly deliberated on how I could synthesise the themes which had emerged from the interviews, heeding Moustakas's (1990, p. 32) words:

> 'The researcher must move beyond any confined or restricted attention to the data itself and permit an inward life on the question to grow, in such a way that a comprehensive expression of the essences of the phenomenon investigated is realized'.

Eventually *sprech-gesang* sprang to mind, a vocal style between speech and singing (from the German *sprechen*, to speak, and *gesang*, song). It is without exact pitch and attributed to Schoenberg (Scholes, 1992). I am also inspired by the contemporary poet, rapper, musician and writer Kate Tempest (2018). I emailed the co-researchers to ask them if they would consider highlighting the responses on their transcripts which were most important to them, those which had impacted them the most, and return the

highlighted transcript back to me. I also gave them the opportunity to decline. Unfortunately, only two of the co-researchers responded. I compiled a prose of the two co-researchers' words to summarise how a peak moment emerges (Appendix 7). I then read this prose over pre-recorded background music, *Faure's Sicilienne, Opus 78*. I play the flute with a piano accompaniment on the recording, 'a representative synthesis of the essential nature of the phenomenon' (Sultan, 2018, p. 55). There is a link to the recording in Appendix 7.

3.8 Trustworthiness and validity

According to Moustakas (1990), the validity of the data is assessed through the paradigm of the study, in this case the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm. In heuristic inquiry, validity cannot be 'determined by correlations or statistics' (Moustakas,1990, p. 32). Themes and essences of experience come about through qualitative and not quantitative measures. The co-researchers in this study spoke freely from their subjective experiences of peak moments, which I interpreted and constructed under themes, as depicted by Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006, p. 10): 'the account is always constructed by participant and researcher'. The researcher's representation of the research question and the interpretation of the co-researcher's experience are constructed by constant referral to the original data.

Moustakas (1990, p. 32) advised that 'the question of validity is one of meaning'. He appeals to the researcher to reflect upon the whole process of heuristic inquiry, from the formulation of the question through phases of incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis 'not only with himself, or herself, but with each and every co-researcher' (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32). In truth, I complied with this process for myself, but doubt whether I truly applied the process with each and every co-researcher; some were more forthcoming than others in their descriptions of their understanding of peak moment experiences. For example, most of the co-researchers were familiar with the flow construct but not so familiar with peak experience. Peak performance left some of the co-researchers uncomfortable in the context of coaching.

Validation is established by giving oneself totally to the process, allowing it to unfold, noticing a deeper understanding of the self which is pushed into consciousness from tacit knowing. Regarding Moustakas's (1990) method, Sela-Smith (2002, p. 79) argued 'the feeling response, as experienced, is valid as it stands'. The feeling

response is exactly what I experienced in the case of the epoche, a concept which runs consistently throughout this study. Bevan (2014, p. 139) maintained that epoche is a fundamental level of validity 'to remain faithful to the descriptions of experience of the people interviewed'. The epoche was a critical position-taking attitude; one that I applied intuitively and that enabled me take nothing for granted when interviewing the co-researchers. The central principle of epoche is described as the first step of the phenomenological reduction process to enable researchers to reflect upon and then set aside their own views to focus upon the reports of the participants (Longhurst, 2006).

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical permission was sought and gained from the Oxford Brookes University ethics committee in December 2017. A copy of the consent form (Appendix 3), and participant information sheet (Appendix 2) were submitted and approved by the committee, ensuring that co-researchers were fully advised of what was expected from them and the fact that they could withdraw at any period during the study. Transcripts were sent securely to the co-researchers through the Oxford Brookes University secure Gmail system. Although interviews can potentially uncover sensitive moments, there was no need to terminate or stop one.

Confidentiality is critically important, as are other ethical behaviours such as keeping interview transcripts secure. All the co-researchers were anonymised by using pseudonyms, and company names used in the recordings were omitted from the transcripts. The follow-up telephone call, after despatch of the transcripts, gave co-researchers the opportunity to address personal details and facts that they felt would identify them and their clients. At their behest, genders and names of clients were changed, locations deleted to retain total anonymity, and spelling errors corrected.

I advised the co-researchers at the beginning of the interview that they could leave the process at any time without fear of reprisal. I was aware of the sensitivity of probing into their feelings when recalling peak moments, which may have led to an unforeseen emotional encounter. Although the co-researchers spoke intently and often passionately about the subject, none became emotional to the point that I felt I had to abandon the interview.

3.10 Reflexivity

Unique to the heuristic process is the fact that the question and method of the inquiry flow out of the researcher's own experience and inner awareness. Moustakas's (1990) model urges the researcher to set aside bias to reflect deeply on their own experience rather than bracketing their understandings of the phenomena. On the other hand, Gray (2009, p.22) emphasised that in phenomenology, current understandings have to be bracketed to the best of our ability to allow phenomena to 'speak for themselves', unadulterated by our preconceptions.

It is only in retrospect, following data collection and data analysis, in the context of 'being with' (Moustakas, 1986), that I realise apprising that I veered towards Husserl's (1931) approach. When interviewing, I looked for the reality of participants' experience of peak moments through their personal dialogue while using epoche to avoid bringing my own thinking and feeling into play. This was a natural occurrence for me, a move towards an attempt to hive off my experiences and judgements to be fully present yet impartial as the interviewer. I was consciously aware of not disclosing my own interests, background and biases as this might influence the interview. Moustakas (1994, p. 89) said that:

> 'The epoche process inclines me towards receptiveness. I am more readily able to meet something or someone and to listen and hear whatever is being presented, without coloring the other's communication with my own habits of thinking, feeling and seeing, removing the usual ways of labelling or judging, or comparing. I am ready to perceive and know a phenomenon from its appearance and presence'.

An explanation of how I adjusted my approach by veering towards epoche, without fully committing to phenomenological reduction, is made by Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006, p. 108):

> 'If the empathic treatment of our subject-matter is central to our approach, and we are prepared to adjust our ideas and assumptions in response to the promptings of that subject-matter, then we are on our way to developing a Heideggerian phenomenology'.

This explanation satisfies my need to understand why I oscillated between Husserl's (1931) and Heidegger's (2010) approaches to phenomenology. I adjusted my ideas and assumptions rather than fully applying epoche.

To be true and authentic to the heuristic process, Sela-Smith (2002, p. 78) suggested that for the heuristic process to be authentic 'it would seem necessary that the same guiding principles that apply to the researcher must apply to the co-participants'. I also question whether or not the participants should undergo the seven core processes of heuristic inquiry to give a richer explication of their experiences. Had this been the case, the pilot interview situation would have been avoided, and furthermore, co-researchers would have had time to contemplate on their experiences, perhaps able to differentiate with clarity the three constructs of peak experience, peak performance and flow.

From my own interview, I was challenged to think about the value of peak moments in coaching and the ambiguity of the related concepts of the three constructs; and also about how others who feel a strong connection with the experience conceptualise and value the coaching process and what peak moments could offer. In my interview, I was irrationally irritated in not being readily understood, which brought the interview to a close halfway through the prescribed time. It was only due to Tom's astute questioning that I later realised that there was learning available to me in the dialogue. For example, the awareness of peak moments may, at the very least, encourage coaches to be alert to the possibility of the phenomenon, enlightened by acquiring insights of a personal experience that they had hitherto maybe sensed through tacit knowing, but ignored.

3.10 Limitations:

One of the limitations of this study concerns my own interview. Tom (pseudonym) the interviewer was honest to tell me that the peak moment experience was totally unfamiliar to him. He found it hard to comprehend the phenomenon, although he recognised and acknowledged my passion for the subject. On reflection, perhaps in my interview I gave the impression that the phenomenon was an everyday occurrence, due to the fact that I felt so strongly. Tom asked me why I thought he had not experienced the phenomenon and I found myself interviewing him to attempt to access such an experience through past events in his life. Peak moments involve feelings and

emotions, and maybe Tom's emotions run at a different level, but his feedback to me was that he had a better grasp on peak moments after the interview. The limitation for me was that I ended up partially interviewing him. I admit to feeling slightly cheated that my whole experience of peak moments had not been fully explored. My experience demonstrates the importance of the researcher having experienced the phenomenon in order to work with the co-researchers.

A second limitation was in the context of social diversity. All the co-researchers were from the same race and background, gathered through snowball sampling (Noy, 2008). Future studies of peak moments for the coach would benefit from a more eclectic group of coaches, and even some who had not experienced a peak moment in their conscious awareness.

3.11 Summary

In this chapter I presented my ontological position as interpretivist, revealing how subjectivity and bias is treated. My epistemological stance is constructivist, concerning how meaning is made from the interaction with the co-researchers, which chimes with interpretivism.

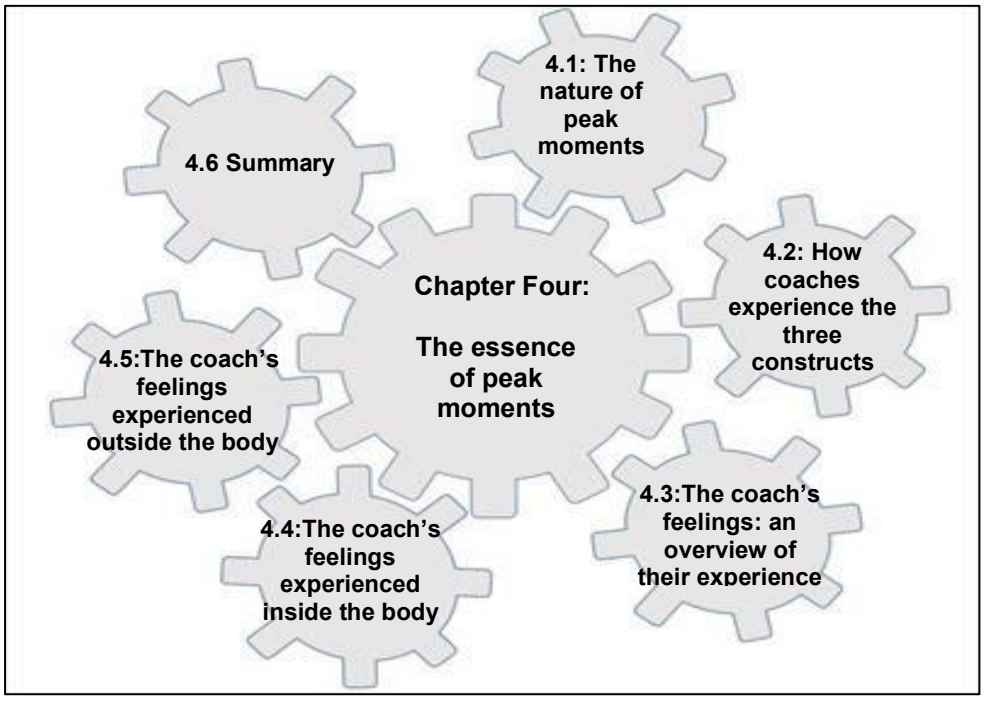
After consideration of other design possibilities, heuristic inquiry seemed the appropriate option to address the research question and satisfy the research objectives, as confirmed by Douglass and Moustakas (1985, p. 39): 'in its purest form, heuristics is a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life'.

Chapter Four – The essence of peak moments

The findings in this chapter comprise analysis of the recorded interviews and transcripts. I listened to the recordings and read and re-read the nine co-researchers' transcripts and my own, one at a time. My data is personalised under Kay, and direct quotations from the transcripts are shown in italics.

This chapter relates to the nature of peak moments and the essence of how the coaches experienced the phenomenon physiologically, emotionally and mentally. The chapter begins with insights into the definitional challenges, and the importance and rarity of peak moments, followed by an analysis of how each construct (peak experience, peak performance and flow) is individually experienced. The coach's feelings, from both inside and outside the body, which contribute to the possibility of a peak moment are then explored. The themes presented in this chapter are illustrated in Figure 4, below:

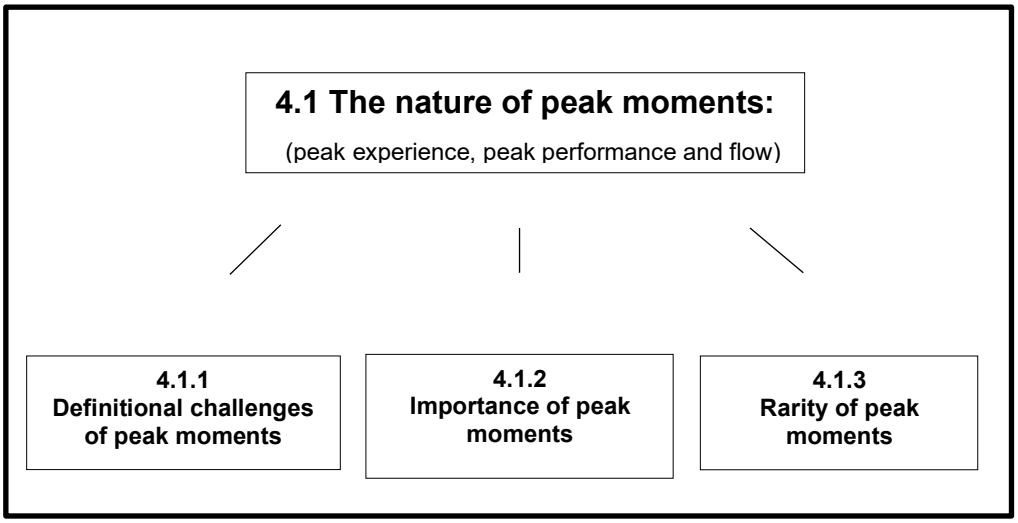
Figure 4: The essence of peak moments



4.1 The nature of peak moments

In this section I discuss three areas relating to the nature of peak moments: the definitional challenges in identifying which of the three constructs the coach is experiencing, the importance of peak moments for the coach and their rarity, illustrated in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: The nature of peak moments



4.1.1 The definitional challenges of peak moments

As ascertained in the literature, the confusion over words used to describe each individual construct was evidenced in the co-researchers' feedback. Some described a peak moment as a flow experience and others found difficulty in differentiating between the three constructs. Kay explains:

> *Was it because I was in flow and that I had a peak experience […] or did I have a peak experience because I was at a high performance level? They are so intertwined, there's so much overlap between them, even in the words people use in defining the experience (Kay).*

This description from Kay illustrates how the three constructs are linked together. There is confusion in her words. She is trying to fathom if her performance level

dictated that she was experiencing a peak performance, whilst in flow, that culminated in a peak experience.

Felicity differentiated between peak experience and flow:

> *I can think of one very good example of a peak experience […] it's a bit like flow but different. I think within a flow experience you can have a peak experience, and also within a peak experience you would probably be in flow. If you were in peak you would also have to be in flow but if you were in flow you wouldn't necessarily be in peak (Felicity).*

Felicity made some strong assertions, demonstrating her understanding of the conjoining of peak experience and flow. She explains how each of these constructs can be experienced individually or conjoined. The order of the experience is almost impossible to distinguish and possibly not worth distinguishing, as both are part of the peak moment experience.

In summary, the co-researchers had difficulty in differentiating between the three constructs, as stated by Josephine *'I do still struggle with the definitions […] I find it hard to make those distinctions when you told me about those categories'.* Co-researchers had difficulty articulating which of the constructs they experienced, differentiating between peak experience and flow. The challenge in making the distinctions is that they have similar characteristics (Bakker, 2005), such as spontaneity, timelessness and an altered state of consciousness. Mouton and Montijo (2017, p. 263) illustrated this confusion further by including peak and flow together as one experience, stating 'peak experiences (which can include flow or optimal experience)'.

4.1.2 The importance of peak moments

When analysing the nature of peak moments, the importance became apparent. Felicity confirmed this in one statement, *'I've never, ever forgotten it and this must be 15 years ago'.* For someone to remember an experience which happened fifteen years ago demonstrates its importance. Felicity's experience is a real event that is still vivid in her recall of the experience. It is so important to her that it is imprinted in her memory. She continues:

> *It's affected me so deeply that I remember it with clarity and years afterwards, which I think is a similar phenomenon to people's near-death experiences. Or when someone has a very spiritual experience, you remember it with absolute clarity. And it doesn't fade (Felicity).*

For an experience to not fade is an indication of its importance. Felicity's memory of her experiences is recalled with clarity and compared to other meaningful life experiences.

Peak moments are also important for Shirley:

> *My understanding of a peak moment is a moment where, as a coach, I feel something important is occurring (Shirley).*

Shirley shares her feelings that she senses something, a nebulous sensation of importance which is about to become apparent.

The importance of peak moments is illustrated too by Josephine:

> *But I don't think I would have carried on coaching if I had not had peak moments […] because it's what makes it worthwhile, that's what feeds me (Josephine).*

There is a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction in Josephine's statement, and a source of motivation to continue as a coach through being fed by peak moments. Motivation is a common quality to all of the three constructs (Privette, 1983).

Kay sheds light on a different understanding of the importance of a peak moment:

> *I think it's multi-faceted and I think it's very much integrated with who I am; it's very much tied in with who you are, what do you know, what's important to you, and how you live your life. And that's why for me it's important (Kay).*

This statement reveals that peak moments reflect who Kay is and give her a sense of valuing herself and how she lives her life.

To summarise, peak moments are important to the co-researchers. Green (2015) claimed that they are extremely meaningful experiences. Maslow (1959, p. 65) also wrote of the importance of peak moments 'he remembers the experience as a very important and desirable happening and seeks to repeat it'.

4.1.3 The rarity of peak moments

As an amateur violinist, Rex expresses his experience of the rarity of a peak moment through the metaphor of music:

> *Very like the feeling you might get when playing in a string quartet, one of the odd bars where we just get it spot on and everything works perfectly […] those feelings are few and far between and when they come they're absolutely amazing and it's a similar feeling to that (Rex).*

Rex compares his music experiences with coaching. The experience he feels when four musicians come together in harmony is reminiscent of how he feels in coaching when experiencing a peak moment, an amazing yet rare experience.

Felicity believes peak moments are rare too:

> *I mean it was a special experience, it was a peak experience, because it's very, very rare […] it's so rare, and it might not be so rare in aboriginal tribes you know, or in other cultures, but it's certainly rare in Western culture and it's certainly rare in coaching (Felicity).*

The rarity of a peak moment in coaching is expressed rigorously as a belief firmly held by Felicity. She questions whether it is rare in other cultures, an aspect not covered by this study, discussed as a limitation in Chapter Three and providing scope for further study.

Lizzie too speaks of the rarity of a peak moment, when she says, *'I literally go with the flow, and it's very rare'.* Lizzie not only concurs that the peak moment is rare in coaching, but she infers that she is in flow when the peak moments occurs.

The rarity of peak moments was challenged by Mouton and Montijo (2017, p. 274): 'the findings of this study call into question previous suggestions that peak experiences are rare'. My findings, however, dispute this statement, as several of the co-researchers confirmed the rarity of peak moments. Murphy and White (1978. p. 127) also confirmed that years can pass in between the experiences, and 'you will work very hard for years just to taste it again'.

4.2 How coaches experience the three constructs

One of the criteria for selecting participants for the study was that they had experienced a peak moment. The ways the co-researchers experienced peak moments were idiosyncratic. For example, Kay describes an experience that is:

> *Extraordinary, that takes me into another dimension and gives me a* 'raison d'être*', that is something that, having experienced, I want to find it again (Kay).*

Not only is Kay's peak moment extraordinary, but she experiences a phenomenon that she seeks to replicate. Her peak moment gives her a reason for being in this world and something to strive for in her desire to repeat the experience.

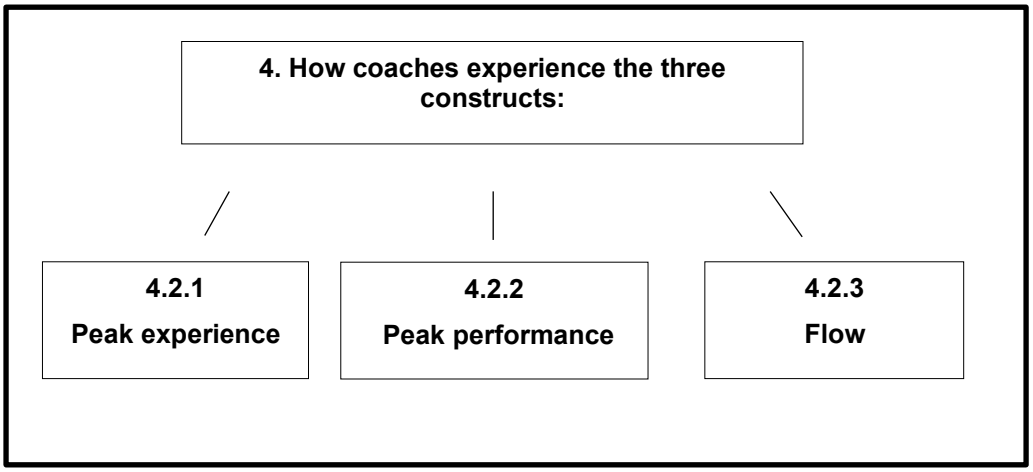
In contrast, Rex talked about a gentle feeling, which he calls a catharsis:

> *When I'm working with somebody, it's like a feeling of catharsis. It's sometimes quite a gentle feeling, a sort of resting down; it sounds almost precious to call it a gift but in a sense I feel privileged to get it (Rex).*

Rex's experience is his way of saying that he is rewarded by the privilege of observing his coachee in their work together, sensing that something has happened between them for which he feels gratitude.

This section continues with an analysis of how the coaches experience the three individual constructs of peak moments, shown in Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2: How coaches experience the three constructs of peak moments



4.2.1 How coaches experience peak experience

Almost half of the co-researchers expressed the experience of a peak moment as a transcendent peak experience, as expressed by Josephine:

> *It was JUST fabulous; it was a peak, it was definitely a peak moment because it transcended normal experience (Josephine).*

According to Privette (1983), transcendence is an experience outside time and space, which features in both peak experience and flow. Josephine's experience of a peak moment was transcendent, and therefore could have been either of the two constructs. The difference between them is that a peak experience is ephemeral, while flow has a much longer duration; yet paradoxically both are experienced as timeless.

Kay shares Josephine's sentiments about transcendence:

> *Well, for me a peak experience is something that is a little bit beyond the norm. A life experience that takes me into another world that is all consuming. It's magical […] it's not of daily life […] sort of transcendent almost (Kay).*

Both Josephine and Kay express feelings of transcendence and something out of the ordinary in the experience of a peak moment. Lizzie shares this sense of transcendence, '*and there being a sort of feeling, maybe a bit of trance'* by entering an extraordinary state. According to Maslow (1971, p. 279), transcendence refers to the 'very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness' and confirms that there are 'those who have private, personal, transcendent experiences' (Maslow, 1964, p. 41). Josephine and Lizzie fall into this category, as does Felicity.

The co-researchers who experienced a peak moment as a transcendental phenomenon experienced time as infinite, as Kay observed:

> *I don't know how long it lasted because time is obviously relevant but it's not relevant because it happened in what could have been ten seconds, it could have been five minutes or could have been a nanosecond, I don't know […] then things move on so it is a complete moment in time that seems timeless, that seems ethereal (Kay).*

Kay is faced with the challenge of knowing if she experienced a peak experience or flow. Transcendence and timelessness were conjoined as sensations for the co-researchers and difficult to differentiate, a further challenge being that flow and peak experience share these characteristics of timelessness and transcendence.

This loss of time when experiencing a peak moment was voiced by almost half of the co-researchers, including Susie who stated:

> *When I have felt completely at ease […] really about time passing so quickly because I'm so engrossed, I look at my watch and I think, where has that time gone? (Susie)*

Not only does Susie question where the time has gone, but also feels completely at ease during the experience.

Josephine also experiences time passing quickly:

> *Well it's timeless again. Even when I'm thinking about it now, I can say it probably lasted fifteen seconds, but it doesn't matter because it's still here. It's still inside me (Josephine).*

Josephine indicates that her experience is timeless which, as established, could be either the state of flow or peak experience. The experience was not, as with Susie, simply a matter of time passing without noticing how it has passed, but Josephine's recollection of the experience far outlasted the experience itself; a feeling stayed inside her. This is suggestive of a peak experience. It is difficult to analyse whether Josephine was in flow and had a peak experience, or if she had a peak experience and went into in flow. In the final analysis, both flow and peak experience are timeless, transcendent experiences, although as Felicity says, '*one doesn't preclude the other'.*

Josephine, Lizzie, Kay and Susie all reported an experience of timelessness whilst engrossed in the coaching process. An additional dimension was added by Felicity:

> *Well, I think if you have a peak experience you are already likely to be in flow, because flow is an altered state of consciousness […] where we experience time differently […] and I suspect that a peak experience is also an altered state of consciousness (Felicity).*

Felicity introduces the concept of an altered state of consciousness where we also experience time differently in both flow and peak experience:

> *So five minutes feels like forever and forever feels like five minutes. There's a difference; you experience time differently, I've certainly experienced that in coaching, in lots of coaching sessions, because you can be talking to somebody and it seems like five minutes and you find that an hour has passed (Felicity).*

Felicity's experience is timeless. She has no recollection of how long the experience lasted, which could have been anything from five minutes to an hour. She emphasises that the experience is not uncommon to her in coaching. In fact, she has had the experience many times in coaching. This pronouncement is contrary to her previous statements that peak moments are '*very, very rare […] it's certainly rare […] in coaching'.* My analysis is that in the rarity of the experience, Felicity is talking of a peak experience. In the instances of regular occurrence, Felicity is saying that flow is a timeless experience for her, but not necessarily a peak experience. When she says peak moments are rare, she is speaking of peak experience as an individual construct of peak moments. This is an important finding. The flow experience is frequent in coaching, but peak experience is rare; and both are timeless and transcendent in the experience.

The coach's state plays a part too in the peak experience phenomenon. When asking Lizzie how she remembers a peak experience, she answered:

> *All I have to do is put myself in the right state […] I think it was a peak experience because as soon as they got going, I thought, ah, great, this is absolutely fine […], it feels as if it's coming through me; not that I'm doing it, […] it's almost like I'm in a bubble, not a bubble, I mean, maybe bubble's wrong, somehow in the sunlight if you will, it's as if something's been revealed to me (Lizzie).*

Putting herself in the right state enables Lizzie to have a peak experience through seeing that the coachee has '*got going'.* I interpret '*got going'* as expressing that the coachee had some sort of revelation which gave Lizzie a peak experience. This only happens when she puts herself in the right state to facilitate the joyful experience she compares to sunlight.

In summary, peak experience appears to embody a sense of transcendence and timelessness, inducing an altered state of consciousness. Maslow (1959, p. 50) wrote that 'in all the common peak experiences […] there is a very characteristic disorientation in time and space'. Panzarella (1980) agreed. His study revealed that participants described feelings of exhilaration in their peak experience encounters, with a loss of time and spatial orientation.

Fatemi (2004) advised that 90% of respondents reported that their peak experiences had a permanent memorable affect, which reflects Josephine's encounter. Her peak moment experience remained within her, suggesting that was a peak experience (Fatemi, 2004) and not flow.

4.2.2 How coaches experience peak performance

There are aspects of peak performance that have been analysed and identified as relevant in coaching. Shirley conveys how she feels about her coaching prowess:

> *Where you might say 'WOW', you know, I ran the session to the best of my abilities […] and I used a new tool with audacity and precision (Shirley).*

Shirley is saying that a peak moment happened when she thought she had conducted a successful coaching session, felt confident that she had run the session to the best of her abilities, and in effect, she had performed well. The 'WOW' is the revelation of the peak moment when she felt, retrospectively, that she had achieved something special in the coaching session. Shirley's perception of this peak moment (which she refers to as 'WOW'), rooted in her reflection of the experience, is validation that she is doing a worthwhile job as a coach.

Richard calls his feedback validation:

> *Peak moment is also the validation for the coach for actually doing something right. When we're talking about performance, that's me describing me at my best (Richard).*

Richard believes that peak performance is an important factor in corroborating his skills and success as a coach and that it has a role in coaching. He interprets his own peak performance as a coach as a 'pat on the back', instilling belief in what he is doing and ratifying his competence as a coach.

Another example of peak performance in coaching is feedback from the coachee, for example that coaching had been of benefit to them and supported them in their career, as illustrated by Debbie:

> *It's like 'WOW'! So that coaching really made the difference. I think it reflected that she truly felt, she really saw the value in the coaching and how it had really supported her. I sometimes get clients, out of the blue, dropped me a note and said, "just want to tell you what happened". There's an element of just being so proud of how they found themselves and released their potential; and especially when it's led to them being happier as well'. Even if it's just an email that pings through and you think 'WOW' (Debbie).*

The individual Debbie mentioned refers to her career development, which she claimed would not have happened without Debbie's coaching skills. The compliments paid, acknowledging her ability as a coach, gave Debbie a peak performance feeling. The pleasure Debbie feels when receiving emails and notes from former coachees is evident and gives her a sense of self-worth, validating her performance as a coach.

Lizzie recalls her experience:

> *In fact, I saw this woman recently at a conference and she said 'thank you so much for what you did'. You know, that was a turning point for me. And, I mean, it was just extraordinary, so those sorts of moments are peak moments (Lizzie).*

The thanks the former coachee gave to Lizzie made her feel good about herself as a coach. This sign of appreciation came as a surprise for Lizzie and it signified what she had achieved in creating a turning point in the coachee's life.

Feedback also emanates from a third party, as cited by Shirley:

> *Things like that when they might make an observation on your performance as a coach. It's certainly possible where you're being observed by a third party, for example (Shirley).*

Shirley is referring to an occasion when she was observed as a coach, experiencing a peak moment as an expression of a job well done, when she feels valued.

The question of ego arose with several co-researchers. Debbie explains:

> *There are other types of peak that may be a little more related to ego, such as the client's manager saying "how amazing is this". I think you have to have a bit of ego about you as a coach, or you wouldn't be doing it if you didn't think you could. We don't talk about win, win, win very much, because we are afraid to expose our egos (Debbie).*

When someone compliments Debbie and says '*how amazing is this'* she says that she gets a stroke to the ego. She raises the point that as coaches, we don't talk about winning, as exposure of our ego creates a sense of being big-headed and over-confident. Debbie also admits:

> *I'm also driven by money, not money by itself, but as a sign of being successful (Debbie).*

Although not an end in itself, money is an important driver for Debbie, a sign of her success. Coaching is not only a calling but also a business. It is quite rational to expect financial reward for the effort that is being invested. Debbie's bank balance is a sign of her success and gives her a peak performance experience.

Lizzie agrees with Debbie:

> *I think the work that we do as coaches is, you have a bit of ego about it as you wouldn't be doing it if you didn't think you could do it so there has to be some ego. But I don't think it's the work I do, I think it's the work they do that they commit to doing that makes the difference (Lizzie).*

The tone in Lizzie's comment about ego sounds almost apologetic that the ego should be under discussion in coaching. She adopted this apologetic timbre in her voice by deflecting to the coachee, saying that they do the work. This corroborates Debbie's comment that as coaches, we do not acknowledge the 'win' in fear of exposing our egos. I believe this to be cultural. The British, as a national group, are renowned for their self-effacing attitude, corroborated by Wilson (2009, p. 6): 'a large part of the problem is the sheer *negativity* of our culture'.

Two of the co-researchers, however, felt strongly that the ego had no place in coaching. Shirley comments:

I always say you know, that if you have a big ego, don't come and learn coaching. It's not the job for people with a big ego (Shirley).

I believe the meaning Shirley intends is the arrogant aspect of the ego. Big ego implies an inflated sense of the self, as opposed to the feeling of self-worth.

Josephine's opinion is similar to Shirley's:

*I always find it hard to talk about ego, because I hear so many talks, people, coaches who talk about ego; you need to get your ego out of the way. With peak moments, I am very aware of my physical self as being solid, being there, but I'm not thinking aren't I wonderful. I am to-ta-lly (*exaggerated*) there for the client in that moment. Maybe later I think, where did that come from? I tend not to go away and think 'aren't I clever?' And if somebody says, that's clever, I'm actually appalled. That would be the worst feedback you could give me. Because cleverness comes from an intellectual place and I don't believe that came, these things come from an intellectual place (Josephine).*

There are several interesting points in Josephine's quote. She has actually overheard coaches talking about their ego and egotists, in the sense of boasting, and agrees with Shirley that, as a coach, you have to get your ego out of the way. Josephine's comments are self-effacing, emphasising that she is totally there for the client, and not for her ego to be flattered. Josephine also infers that peak moments are not cerebral. Peak experience and flow are transcendent phenomena, but peak performance can be interpreted as a cognitive response to the coaching performance.

Coaching engagement is another instance of peak performing in coaching, as described by Debbie:

At the start of the programme sometimes just having somebody engage when you weren't sure they were going to can be a bit of a peak moment […] You might not be certain that they're ready, willing and able to engage with the coaching and then suddenly something signals that they are so that's like 'WOW!'. It doesn't happen with everybody and it might be an accumulative build-up of smaller signals but suddenly, there's no doubt that they're in the room and ready to engage and work on the stuff (Debbie).

The peak performance moment for Debbie is when the coachee engages with the process. She points out that not all coachees arrive at this point, but small signals indicate their readiness which gives her the WOW factor.

Debbie then gave an indication why coachee engagement is lacking:

> *One occasion when that happened was when the relationship just did not work. She has been sent for coaching and didn't want to get into it. It was probably at the beginning of my coaching career and it felt as though it was forced, and at no point during that coaching did I feel that I was in flow. And then, I was having to think about absolutely everything (Debbie).*

There are two elements of resistance in Debbie's quote. The first is when coachees are 'sent' for coaching as part of corporate continuous professional development. Coachees may feel resentful of the process and disengaged as they had no choice in the process. The second element is Debbie's own inexperience as a novice coach. Debbie was adhering to a step-by-step coaching process, paying attention to the process rather than coachee, and in this conscious state, Debbie was unable to get into flow. Debbie's experience highlights the fact that only when the coach is able to enter flow are they likely to engage with a peak moment without paying attention to the coaching process. There is an inference here that only mature coaches experience peak moments. This study invited coaches with at least eight years' experience. A question remains if less experienced coaches have also experienced peak moments, which invites further research in this field.

Shirley agrees with Debbie about coachee engagement:

> S*o when I work in the corporate world sometimes I have instances, clients who are invited to be coached, you know, so they come into the coaching and they're not really ready so they're a bit distanced and not ready (Shirley).*

Shirley describes the attitude of people who are invited to coaching rather than seeking it themselves. She confirms that they are distant, and not ready to engage with coaching, in agreement with Debbie.

Another aspect of coaching engagement concerns contracting. The coach feels fulfilment when the contract is signed and ready to go, an acknowledgement of the

work invested. Debbie works hard at initiating a contract from the first interview, the so-called chemistry meeting, to involving the line managers, sponsors and sometimes human resources, and says:

> O*n the more commercial side of things, when it really looks like everything's going to work, or maybe at the evaluation of a programme with feedback from the third party around what they noted, that's possibly a peak moment. The contract ready to go; it can take quite a while to get to start coaching. One can often have invested a lot of time and energy in doing that (Debbie).*

Debbie admits that a peak moment could also be when everything is *in situ* for the coaching contract to commence, an acknowledgement that the work to get everything in place is recognised and rewarded. Credit is given for the effort that has been put into initiating the contract. Similarly, she feels that a peak moment is possible when the contract is being evaluated or when she gets feedback from a third party. Debbie also acknowledges that this peak moment is not as deep as a flow peak moment, but still gives her a sense of a 'WOW' moment, similar to Shirley's.

Rex has a similar view to Debbie:

> *It wasn't a 'bolt from the blue' but a kind of process that went on and on for ages really. And then in the last session, whilst we hadn't explicitly achieved any of the goals we'd written down at the beginning, he was in the right place to start achieving them. And that felt like, a sort of peak moment (Rex).*

Rex differentiates between his experience of a peak moment being a '*bolt from the blue'*, inferring an unexpected, transcendental experience, and what he now expresses as a peak moment: affirmation and validation of what he and the coachee achieved together, a readiness to engage with coaching.

Felicity, however, disagreed that peak performance warrants a place in coaching:

> *When we think about peak performance, we think about sporting performance and the coaching relationship is not a sporting experience, it is not a competition. Is a peak experience about being your best self and getting your best score? No. And that's what peak performance is about. It's about performing. And I think when you have a peak experience, there isn't an*

element of performance. Because you're not necessarily trying to be your best self, beat your best score or perform in a way that's better than anyone else, it just happens (Felicity).

Felicity belongs in the group of co-researchers who describe peak moments in the transcendent sense, adamant that peak performance has no place in coaching. She appears to be disagreeing with Maslow (1959) who argued that a peak experience happens through potentially being one's best self, self-actualisation, in stark contrast to Felicity's belief that *'you're not necessarily trying to be your best self'.* Felicity does not agree with Debbie, Shirley, Lizzie, Rex and Richard that peak performance is validation of the coach's abilities.

It seems that both peak experience and peak performance occur in coaching. Almost half the co-researchers described their peak moments using phenomenological language (suggesting a peak experience or flow) and the other half inclined towards verbalising their understanding of a peak moment in a more 'matter of fact' way. In a sense, all the experiences of peak moments have been gathered through the spoken word which results in a cognitive response, lacking the essence of a transcendental, timeless experience. Although Privette (1983) maintained that peak performance is also spontaneous, it has a different feeling compared to peak experience or flow. Kay's experience reflects these views.

They are knitted together, work concurrently and don't seem to work in isolation. Peak performance is when I get that feeling of completeness, seeing what the coachee has achieved through our discussion. It might be when the penny drops but it's not as magical as a peak experience (Kay).

Kay believes that she experiences a sense of the value in a peak performance through the coachee's insight. From her description, peak performance seems to be lacking in the visceral sensation and the magical feeling of a peak experience, appearing to be more of a cerebral experience; recognition of something which engages less with the ethereal.

In summary, it was suggested that a coaching peak performance moment is affirmation and validation that the coach is performing well, gaining confidence and a greater belief in themselves as coaches. Flaherty (2010, p. 11) emphasised that even coaches

need support and encouragement, a heart-felt approach: 'techniques cannot replace human heart and creativity in coaching'. There is a difference between egoism, development of the self which applies to coaching, and egotism, referring to an inflated sense of the self. Peak performance is shown to encompass the WOW factor, the coach performing at their best. This has been a long section. Peak performance and the WOW factor in coaching are new findings and the co-researchers had quite a lot to comment on this construct.

4.2.3 How coaches experience flow

The state of flow appears to facilitate deep rapport with the coachee, supporting the development of a greater sense of connectedness. Susie thinks this to be the case:

> *When I don't have that connection with someone, that sense of rapport isn't there, I'm thinking, now what am I going to do next? But when I'm in flow, hopefully they are too, and the time seems to fly by (Susie).*

Susie's words demonstrate that the flow experience enables her to get into rapport and connect with the coachee which then makes time fly past. The flow experience seems to put Susie into a state of not having to think about her every move and thought, hoping that flow is also being experienced by the coachee. The catalytic connection Susie experiences, and subsequent deep rapport with the coachee, is a timeless one, guided by flow. When coaches are not in flow, their conscious mind is active and rapport is not easily developed, rapport being an essential core condition to get into flow.

Susie confirms this deep sense of rapport with flow:

> *I mean, I suppose when I'm coaching, I'm totally in it, I'm totally getting into that other person's world. So, the questions I ask are based on their world, and this is where I think it's connected to the rapport I've got with people. So when I'm totally, totally with that person and listening to them, when I am in flow, I get a sense of that, something's happened (Susie).*

Susie's acute sense of listening allows her to enter the coachee's world. Rapport is co-created but, more specifically, enables Susie to get into flow; her senses are

heightened, allowing her to notice when something has happened between her and coachee which may be a precursor to a peak moment.

Debbie is of the same mind as Susie:

> *Because it's a moment of sort of being in flow by being connected, creating a safe space for her; it's a bit like a chrysalis that's fully emerged and shown her colours if you like, the peak moment is because it just sort of enables us to work together (Debbie).*

According to Debbie, too, there is an association between flow and connection with the coachee. Flow enables rapport and deepens the connection, enabling the coachee to feel safe. As a consequence, the coachee opened up and exposed her true self, the result of this peak moment.

Lizzie, a Neuro Linguistic Programme (NLP) trainer, uses state management, anchoring and modelling: three techniques which she thinks could be taught. There a risk in this suggestion, however, that the doctrine informs the rationalisation. Because Lizzie is pro-NLP, she talks effortlessly about these techniques:

> *I think you can probably teach people to put themselves in the right state, flow, but it might not be the same as the flow state for me or you. I think you can probably find that state, anchor it and model it. But I think the sensation would be slightly different to different people (Lizzie).*

Lizzie automatically identifies the 'right state' to be the state of flow and suggests that it would be possible to get people into that state to anchor a sensation in the body that can be retrieved by a trigger. When applied to coaching, the coach would be able to fire the trigger to get into the flow.

A different view is presented by Josephine:

> *It could also be counter-productive to try to teach it but it's something you can't guarantee creating […] you don't know when it's going to happen (Josephine).*

Josephine is saying that it would be possible to teach these techniques, but there is no guarantee that any of it will either stick with the trainee coach or produce the results they seek. When Josephine talks of not knowing when the peak moment is going to

happen, she is referring to a peak experience. Lizzie was referring to novice coaches when suggesting anchoring could be used for flow, not peak experience.

Jacob maintains that he is in a constant state of flow when he coaches, which means that he is probably in an altered state of consciousness all the time he is coaching:

> *This might sound a bit odd, but I kind of feel as though when I'm working, it's so in the moment and it's so in flow that yes, I'm in it all the time. It sounds a bit trite and I've always questioned it, because for me it's so simple - I cannot see the complexity (Jacob).*

This is an unusual concept to digest, despite the fact that Lizzie too maintains she in constantly in flow, '*I think whenever I'm working, I'm in that state' (Lizzie).* Felicity's citation that *'if you were in flow you wouldn't necessarily be in peak',* is a reasonable suggestion as to how Jacob and Lizzie maintain a state of flow throughout their coaching sessions. They are both in flow but not necessarily having a peak experience, a shorter time experience than flow.

The value of flow is indicated by Rex:

> *If I'm in flow, I think the goals, just as the tools in the toolkit are more or less irrelevant because I'm working with a person and we're gaining insight and I kind of think that's all we need to do (Rex).*

Rex demonstrates that flow enables him to simply be. He can forget about goals, tools and techniques and purely rely upon his insight and the connection he feels with the coachee to work together. Yet again, the importance of flow seems central to the way all participants describe their connectedness with the coachee, but in the case of Josephine there is something unique, in that she introduces play into coaching, saying:

> *Playfulness is another aspect of flow for me. It's still a total alignment in the moment to allow you to find the state that is needed with whoever it is. This is not a procedural process, it's riffing, it's playing, you don't know what's coming next. I'm VERY playful as a coach. You know, I often get people giggling when they surprise themselves when they giggle, and it's to do with the playfulness (Josephine).*

Play is normally associated with the theatre or children. In fact, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) studied during children whilst at play (McBride, 2013) to gain additional insights into flow. Josephine's playfulness results in a playful coachee and seems to form a deeper connection from an unexpected behaviour.

In summary, being in flow does not necessarily mean having a peak experience, but a peak experience can happen when in flow. Jacob's admission to being in a constant state of flow is reflected by Bakker (2005, p. 40) whose data overwhelmingly established that 'the contagion hypothesis was confirmed regarding flow'. The crossover of emotions from student to teacher, or in Jacob's case from coach to coachee, is a state which Jacob experiences throughout the coaching session. Despite the spontaneity of flow, such contagion may not happen without coach and coachee being fully connected, which requires skill, as confirmed by Csikzentmihalyi (1990, p. 54):

> 'although the flow experience seems to be effortless, it is far from being so. It often requires strenuous physical exertion, or highly disciplined mental activity. It does not happen without the application of skilled performance'.

When in flow, Rex is fortified to follow his intuition and insight to ask bold questions, which result in the co-creation of something between the two parties '*some boldness to say things that have been unsaid' (Rex).* Lizzie believes that she can change her state to enter flow, which (Wilson, 2009, p. 51) considered plausible: ''everyday consciousness' is only one of the many possible states, and that we become trapped in it by assuming that it is the only kind'. Josephine introduced the aspect of play in coaching, which is supported by Maslow (1968a, p. 91) when defining the state of the person in peak experience: 'it has a cosmic or a godlike, good-humored quality, certainly transcending hostility of any kind. It could easily be called happy joy, or gay exuberance or delight'. Csikszentmiyali, (1990, p. 74), too, confirmed the benefit play can bring, 'a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality […] and led to previously undreamed-of states of consciousness'. Not only is play a feature of flow, but peak experience too, as reported by Maslow (1968a, p. 91) that playfulness is 'fairly often reported in the peak-experiences'.

4.3 The coach's feelings: an overview of their experience

The co-researchers' feelings about peak moments are entangled between mind and body and sometimes difficult to distinguish. As a result, mind and body feelings are often inseparable in the experience of a peak moment, working in tandem, as expressed by Shirley: '*the peak moment is a feeling combined with thoughts and emotions and physical sensation'.*

Debbie, too, feels that mind and body feelings are working together:

> *It would be an embodied sense as well as an intellectual and an emotional sense; maybe it's more emotional than embodied. Maybe the intellect makes sense of it after the event by noticing what's happened. I'm not quite sure which way round it goes. But I think it's firing on all levels. (Debbie)*

Debbie is trying to work out if the body reacts before the mind, or whether it is the other way around. She concludes that they are simultaneous feelings, understood upon reflection after the experience. This is a recognition of the experience being brought into her conscious awareness from her preconscious (Damasio, 1999). Debbie is reflecting on the experience and trying to work out if it was initially a physiological response and simultaneously a cognitive awareness added to an emotional response. Notwithstanding, Debbie's experience chimes with Shirley that a peak moment is a sensed feeling.

Both Shirley and Debbie brought feelings and emotions into the conversation. Debbie has a strong belief that:

> We *generally don't make enough room for emotions in life, particularly in work. Emotions are there whether we are connected to them or not but when we do connect to them, the more effective we will all be. When I'm being sort of catalytic, challenging or pushing, I might not always know why intellectually, but there's a sense that I am doing it with an intention and without consciousness. It might just sometimes release the individual, maybe help them gain a new insight and shed an assumption that they might be holding (Debbie).*

Debbie's strong belief is that as coaches, we need to make room for feelings and emotions and connect with them. She explains why she needs to connect with her

emotions, and the result of connecting with them: taking note of a feeling enables her to react. She acknowledges that she is probably reacting without consciousness but feels confident to push the coachee into thinking about something intently that may be uncomfortable, until something 'lands'. This means that the coachee sees the presenting problem in a different way, gains an insight, or sheds an assumption. These outcomes are the result of Debbie acknowledging her emotions, a feeling she senses that enables her, as a catalyst, to push the coachee with a question that strikes a chord and leads to a resolution for the coachee.

Debbie's suggestion that being aware and dealing with our emotions can bring about change for the coachee '*and other peak moments'* equates to Kets de Vries's (2013) notion of an 'aha' moment for the coachee, as described by Shirley:

> *And so, now as I talk, I think really, when a client has an 'aha' moment, that for me I experience it as a peak moment. A peak moment occurs for me when an 'aha' moment occurs for the client (Shirley).*

Shirley clearly states that a peak moment happens for her when the coachee experiences an 'aha' moment. This notion extends Kets de Vries's (2013) work. Not only does being in flow develop connectedness and rapport with the coachee, which furthers the relationship, but also when the coach listens to their emotions, and works with them, the result could be a reaction from the coachee such as an 'aha' moment, when a revelation or insight is made apparent. As described by Shirley, this in turn creates a peak moment for the coach.

Debbie believes something similar:

> *Peak moments often come a result of being ready to do the work when individuals have breakthroughs which come more from the co-creation of that connection that I believe then will enable us to do the work. We're already doing the work to get to that level of connectedness (Debbie).*

Not only does Debbie believe that peak moments also come for her when the coachee has a breakthrough, but she feels the connection with the coachee is one of the building blocks for a peak moment to happen.

Josephine expresses her feelings about a peak moment:

I don't think I would have carried on coaching if I had not had peak moments; because it's what makes it worthwhile. If peak moments are the moment where the client has a breakthrough, if they have a breakthrough because of the connection you've created and what's happening between you, that's what feeds me (Josephine).

Saying that she would not have continued as a coach if she had not experienced peak moments is indicative of how strongly Josephine feels. She, too, emphasises the importance of the connection between coach and coachee. The result, Josephine maintains, is that if the coachee has a breakthrough due to their connection, this feeds her as a coach and gives her the motivation to continue coaching. Josephine's peak moment happens when the coachee has the breakthrough, a co-created encounter.

In summary, mind and body work together in the experience of a peak moment, as confirmed by Csikszentimihalyi (1990, p. 95): 'the body does not produce flow merely by its movement. The mind is always involved as well'. Damasio's (1999) theory of feelings and emotions confirms that there is a link between bodily experience and cognition: 'feelings are largely a reflection of body-state changes' (1999, p. 288). As summarised by Cox (2013, p. 12) 'experience includes bodily sensation, emotions and intuitions, and these are ways of knowing that inform our reflecting and thinking'. By listening to, and acting upon, their feelings and emotions, the coach is enabled to respond in a way that creates a breakthrough for the coachee, which in turn produces a peak moment for the coach.

4.4 Feelings experienced inside the body

The feelings the co-researchers sensed in their body from a peak moment emanate from increased energy. This energy was experienced as a powerful surge, sensations in the gut, a change in their breathing and intensity of feelings such as hairs standing up on the back of the neck. This intense, energetic feeling is captured by Debbie:

You can work with some clients where the energy is mutual, and it can feel quite explosive at times. I can often get that sort of flood of breakout energy in me. It's like the heart beats, it fastens, it quickens and there's a huge release of energy. I always feel so energised after a session. (Debbie)

Debbie describes in detail how energy affects her in the physical sense, making her heartbeat rise, but also points out that the energy is sometimes felt mutually. A third effect for her is that she feels a positive energy after the session. This huge release of energy gives a sense of motivation, a characteristic of peak moments.

Josephine, too, iterates how her peak moment experiences are linked to energy:

> *And it was one of the most luminous experiences I have ever had as a coach where you could feel all this energy just holding you. And the coaching was so powerful, it was a dance, it was a peak. I felt totally energised. It's light and the jubilation comes from its power, strength, anything is possible. I feel very still but everything's moving, alive, dancing; every cell is WHOOSH! (Josephine)*

The experience Josephine expresses is a powerful description of how she feels during a peak moment. As she says, it is a moving and powerful event, creating a sense of everything being alive and joyous. Every cell is her body is affected as a result of the power of coaching and the peak moment she experienced.

Kay also experiences a sense of energy:

> *It makes the cells in my body sizzle. It's like an energy force, plugging into something and a charge of something. I felt it whilst I've been talking about it; something in the air, an experience of wholeness. It's like breathing in something that makes you feel extraordinary, reliving that experience (Kay).*

Kay's experience was visceral. She experienced energy not only throughout her body but also as an energy force around her, an experience she can inhale and re-live.

For several of the co-researchers, one of the signs that a peak moment is either about to happen or is happening is located in the gut. For example, Debbie says:

> *I don't know where this is coming from, but I have this really strong sense in my gut and I'm feeling again tense and uncomfortable. So, it could be a warm feeling, or a sense of tension or something (Debbie).*

Debbie describes the physical response to the peak moment, in the middle of her body, but she also links these sensations to a phenomenon by saying '*I don't know where this is coming from'*. Maybe the tension she expresses is due to the uncertainty

of the source, which leaves her feeling uncomfortable. Debbie's feelings, described as tension in her gut, are, however, explained by Maslow (1968a, p. 92) as 'excitement and high tension'.

Richard too described feelings of tension:

> *There's a psychological effort to a peak moment that is really intense going on before, and I'll know that afterwards because I'll sit like I do now, and my head goes to the side and I'll be slightly forward and I'm really focussed and I'm really attuned and in. But afterwards my neck is bloody awful. I have to go for a massage every couple of weeks because it's just tight as tight. So I'm looking effortless, but I'm strung, not strung out but it's like, if you're a musical instrument you've got your strings at the right level and if they're too loose then it sounds useless and if it's too tight, they break (Richard).*

Richard confessed to regularly seeking a masseur to ease the strain and tension in his neck as he holds his body in tension before a peak moment. He likened the sense to that of an overstrung musical instrument and thinks he is looking effortless, which is no doubt his intention but perhaps difficult to pursue in practice. Richard experiences energy as a projection, linking him to the coachee:

> *First of all it's a projection of energy. I'm linking with them so I'm feeling it, seeing it, experiencing it. I also seem to be heightened in all of what's going on inside me. I often feel things around my gut and it's a sensation that if I'm feeling something it normally starts here. And that's my first indicator of trying to find out and make these links so I start there (Richard).*

Richard's description gives the sense of something about to happen rather than being in a peak moment, indicated by feelings telling him to look out for something; as he says, indicators that something is afoot. Richard indicated with his hands the area around his solar plexus where he feels the response to a peak about to happen '*it normally starts here'*. When he says he is *'trying to find out and make these links'*, he is noticing his physical responses seemingly working as an indicator that something is about to happen, almost like an alarm telling him to be alert.

A physical response was also described by Rex:

A peak experience makes the hair stand up on the back of my neck. As I'm talking to you now, I can feel that same 'hair standing up' feeling down my spine, sort of butterflies in my tummy and then this feeling of - I don't know if my hair is actually trying to stand on end but it feels as if it could well be (Rex).

This physical sensation is so intense for Rex that he re-experienced it again when thinking about it during our interview. Rex's description is visual, ethereal and a description of peak experience, neither peak performance nor flow.

Lizzie explains how her breathing is affected when experiencing a peak moment:

So, and I think I probably put myself into state by getting a little bit of adrenalin here, a little bit of breathing up here to start with. But I think probably habitually going into that space is that I learned how to use the adrenalin (Lizzie).

With her NLP skills, Lizzie puts herself in the right state to use adrenalin effectively. The definition of adrenalin is a 'substance which your body produces when you are angry, scared, or excited. It makes your heart beat faster and gives you more energy' (Collins Dictionary, 2020). Lizzie's ability to manage adrenalin means that she is not only able to use it to help control her breathing but also it energises her. She indicated the throat area when explaining her feelings, tapping on her chest and stroking the whole thorax showing how she goes 'a bit tingly' around the throat area.

In summary, the physiological responses described in the study by Longhurst (2010), concerning 'aha' moments, are not dissimilar to the feelings the co-researchers reported in the body for peak moments: feelings in the chest when breathing changes, the heart, the stomach, solar plexus and the gut, and a sudden rush of energy throughout the body. Although the descriptions are similar, an 'aha' moment occurs to the coachee when experiencing an insight. Peak moments can then occur for the coach when observing the 'aha' moment for the coachee, a finding for this section.

The cause of Richard's discomfort (which he considered to be a precursor to a peak moment) is revealed in two ways by Maslow (1961a, p. 17) who said 'I have run across at least one subject who gets tension headaches from peak experiences […] she reports stiffness tension'. Stiffness and tension are exactly what Richard describes in his experience of a peak moment. In fact, because of Maslow's affirmation it can be assumed that Richard's experience of a peak moment is therefore by definition a peak

experience, leading me to believe that tension is a sign of a peak experience. Additionally, time passed by without Richard noticing, a characteristic of flow and peak experience, resulting in tension in his neck. One of Maslow's revelations (1968a, p. 86) of peak experience is, however, that 'fully-functioning is effortless and ease of functioning when one is at one's best'. Richard's discomfort was probably caused by holding a physiological position for too long whilst in flow.

The co-researchers noted that these feelings in the body are indications of a peak moment which is about to happen or, on reflection, the responses to what happened during the peak. As articulated by Maslow (1971, p. 177), 'the discovery of identity comes via the impulse voices, via the ability to listen to your own guts, and to their reactions and to what is going on inside of you'.

4.5 Feelings experienced outside the body

Several of the co-researchers experienced peak moments as though they came from outside of the body. They described they felt they were being used as a channel, radar, antennae or conduit, transmitting a message or insight from outside themselves, as expressed by Lizzie:

> *I always feel it's coming through me, and it's as if I hear things in a different way. I seem to be able to hear what's really necessary to hear, and I don't know how I do it, it's just amazing, as if there's another force* (laughter) *is the way I'd describe it. It's as if there's something bigger that you're included in; not that I'm doing it; all I have to do is put myself* (laughs) *in the right state (Lizzie).*

Lizzie reveals that she is hearing and receiving something from another force, outside of herself, and that she is able to hear only what she needs to hear, interpreting and deciphering something phenomenological. During the interview she laughed while explaining this, a nervous giggle, as though she herself found it incredulous, even though it is how she has always felt.

This experience is also familiar to Josephine:

> *The words suddenly came out of my mouth before I even knew I was saying them; it didn't come from me, it was information that came from outside of me. I was just a conduit; so you're the interpreter, radar, antennae, I've used the*

> *word antennae earlier. A band of light is coming through from above me, right the way through the core of me and down into the ground (Josephine).*

Josephine uses multiple words - conduit, interpreter, radar and antennae - to describe phenomenological messages attributed to a sense of something being transmitted through her. Both Lizzie and Josephine refer to the experience coming from outside of themselves, but through the self. It sounds almost supernatural, especially when Josephine describes the sensation metaphorically as a band of light coming through her.

Debbie alluded to something similar when she said, *'I mean, you can't always explain why this is happening, but this is what I'm feeling at the moment'.* Debbie recognises something inexplicable, yet acknowledges that she is feeling a sensation, a sense of something supernatural, familiar for Rex too: *'some of them are real, almost bolts from the blue'.* Not only are Rex's experiences real to him, but *'bolts from the blue'* is an expression that reveals something happening without warning: unexpected, unplanned, spontaneous and coming from outside Rex. The concept of something being felt and revealed from the outside, rather than emanating from the inner world of the co-researcher, invites a cosmic dimension. This is evidenced in Josephine's experience:

> *You're listening for everything and you're tuned into the Universe. The connection was profound, not so much with her but being connected to everything and knowing all knowledge. That was the bit that came through; connection to the universe, connection to the self, connection to the other in that space and their system (Josephine).*

When Josephine states she is listening for everything, there is an assumption in her language that she is prepared for something unexpected, not yet recognised in her experience; she is anticipating something to be revealed from the Universe. The feelings Josephine experienced, feelings emanating from outside of herself, support the notion that there could be other undiscovered phenomena, resonating with Maslow's (1971, p. 277) description of a cosmic consciousness experience: 'this is a special phenomenological state in which the person somehow perceives the whole cosmos or at least the unity and integration of it and of everything in it, including his Self'. Research revealed that this concept of cosmic consciousness has already been

discussed by Longhurst (2006, p. 70) who described this concept as 'soul experiences' for those who highlight a feeling of connection with others and the universe.

This feeling of something coming through the coach is also supported by Felicity:

> *I felt that I had a kind of a message for her, that there were some things that I could say to her, in that time, in that moment, that would make her feel better. It wasn't about me, it was nothing to do with me. It came from outside of me as I was literally just the channel to give her, to pass the message through (Felicity).*

If the coach is acting as a channel to pass on a message to the coachee, I challenged Felicity on the viability of a peak moment experience for her:

Me:	*But, you call them, or refer to the as a peak experience.*
Felicity:	*Yes! Yes! absolutely, absolutely. Yes, yes!*
Me:	*But why would you call them a peak experience when it's not affected you, you've only been the conduit?*
Felicity:	*Because it has affected me so deeply that I remember it with clarity and years afterwards. I was literally just the channel to give her, to pass the message through; it was just sort of, I mean, it was a special experience, it was a peak experience.*

In this instance, Felicity authenticates that these experiences, when the coach feels they are being used as a channel, are categorically peak experiences. She was quite moved when I challenged her and took a deep inhalation of breath (audible on the transcript recording) when she expressed that it was a special experience, a peak experience, and of great significance. I discussed with her where such experiences emanate from, and asked how it was possible to receive such messages:

> *I'm not sure they come from the Universe. They come from what we know inside so that we can predict things, that's the scientific view and as a scientist, part of me believes that. But there's another part of me that wonders whether there is more that we don't know about, that cannot be scientifically explained. God,*

for example. So, receiving a message from somewhere else, nothing to do with me, but from outside of me, that would seem to be advanced intuition (Felicity).

As a scientist, Felicity was able to rationalise the experience into a scientific explanation of the individual knowing something inside of ourselves. This knowing could be both innate and spiritual, particularly since Felicity drew God into the discussion. Felicity also adds that there is also a question whether there are other phenomena as yet undiscovered, which infers a tension in her response between her rational and spiritual thinking. Similar to Felicity, Josephine supports the notion that there could be other undiscovered phenomena when she says, *'you're listening for everything and you're tuned into the Universe'.* This anticipation of other undiscovered phenomena raises the question whether the peak experience phenomenon is extra-terrestrial or supernatural. I refer again to Maslow (1961a, p. 10) who said of peak experience that 'this was a *natural,* not a *supernatural* experience; and I gave up the name '*mystic'* experience and started calling them peak-experiences'.

There is an explanation to be considered when addressing the phenomenon of messages received and interpreted by coaches as the radar or channel of transmission. As explained by Cox (2013. p. 76), Damasio's model suggests how 'pre-reflective experience and emotions shift to awareness in consciousness'. Damasio's (1999) theory states that the pre-conscious feeds into the consciousness, when neural messages create feelings which are felt as bodily messages creating the feeling of feelings. Consciousness is the feeling of knowing a feeling. Josephine is aware that a peak moment happens without any warning, and, as Rex says, it arrives as a '*bolt from the blue'*. The phenomenon can be explained as a message being transferred from the preconscious to consciousness without the coach being aware that this is happening, stimulating their experiences and knowledge that is lying dormant, waiting to be aroused. Josephine's experience starts at the preconscious level, '*I didn't think about it before I did it. I just did it, you can't force it'.* Josephine confirms that the peak moment experience happened, without any pre-conscious thinking.

In summary, several of the co-researchers experienced peak moments which came from feelings outside of the body. This perception of something outside of the self was expressed by several of the co-researchers. Such encounters were experienced as though the co-researchers were being used as a conduit, radar, antenna or channel,

as though they were being used as an interpreter. Such a perception was known to Maslow (1959, p. 52-53): 'peak experiences are […] also perceived and reacted to as if they were in themselves "out there" as if they were perceptions of a reality independent of man and persisting beyond his life'. This key finding gave rise to the metaphor of the coach as the conduit. As far as I am aware, the metaphor of the coach as a conduit has hitherto remained abstruse. This 'conduit metaphor' is an exciting finding as I am unaware that this contribution to the literature has hitherto been explored and researched as a metaphor relating to coaches.

Lizzie, Josephine, Debbie, Rex and Felicity all refer to receiving feelings and messages from outside of themselves, engaging more with a phenomenological experience, almost using the same words to describe their connectedness, such as a channel, radar, conduit or antennae for passing on messages. There is a feeling of a spiritual connection with cosmic consciousness, open to the suggestion of an energy or force greater than themselves, intuited from within themselves, whether tacit knowledge or another energy source, as expressed by Kay, '*it's almost like an out of this world experience'.* Wilson (2009, p. 57) provided another theory that 'perhaps, unwittingly, I tapped some universal source of knowledge', adding that 'there is one unidentified principle in the universe that draws like together, a kind of gravitational force concerning events' (2009, p. 143).

4.6 Summary

This chapter encompasses the essence of how the co-researchers experienced a peak moment, which resulted in eight key insights which may be applied to coaching.

1. The first insight is the definitional challenges articulated by the co-researchers, who experienced difficulty in differentiating whether a peak moment was a peak experience or a flow experience. Not all the co-researchers were able to define a peak experience, and often confused the encounter with flow. Several of the co-researchers also named the encounter a peak moment without distinguishing between peak experience and flow. Notwithstanding, peak moments were considered important and meaningful.

2. Both peak experience and flow were experienced as transcendental, inducing a temporary disorientation of time and place and an altered state of consciousness.

3. Peak experience was encountered as a rarity in coaching. Although time stands still, the experience was described as ephemeral.

4. Flow was regularly experienced in coaching. The co-researchers moved seamlessly in and out of flow which resulted in being focussed, connected and in deep rapport with the coachee. Time was experienced as infinite, as stated by Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p. 66) ‘time no longer seems to pass the way it ordinarily does […] often hours seem to pass by in minutes’.

5. The perspective of peak performance revealed here means that the coach is performing well, to the best of their abilities, which fills them with confidence and a greater understanding of themselves, developing egoism but not feeding the egotist; an affirmation and validation of one’s efforts, without a competitive element of pitching oneself as a coach against another coach-competitor. This section is longer compared to the sections on flow and peak experience. The detail I was able to construct from the transcripts was clearer, richer and more revealing in some of the co-researchers’ experience of peak performance.

6. The co-researchers’ feelings were analysed, body and mind working together when experiencing a peak moment. The co-researchers spoke freely of their feelings and emotions which engulfed their being. I distinctly remember being told on a coaching course that feelings were to be kept hidden, that it was not for the coach to show their feelings but to retain them. This situation was not the case for several of the co-researchers however, who expressed the importance of recognising and connecting with our feelings as coaches to enable a peak moment. If co-researchers were able to acknowledge their feelings and emotions and share them with coachees, peak moments could potentially be more frequent.

7. Several of the co-researchers described feelings inside the body when experiencing a peak moment: feelings in the chest, heart, gut and through their breathing, coupled with a powerful surge of energy.

8. Co-researchers were able to acknowledge feelings emanating from outside the body, gaining insights as though being used as a channel, radar, antenna or conduit, called ‘the conduit metaphor’ in this study. This perception of something outside of the self was known to Maslow (1959, p. 52-53):

> ‘Peak experiences are […] also perceived and reacted to as if they were in themselves “out there” as if they were perceptions of a reality independent of man and persisting beyond his life’.

When receiving information as a channel, Lizzie, Josephine and Felicity described their experiences as coming from outside of themselves rather than their internal selves. Wilson (2009, p. 138) corroborated this suggestion, saying ‘it would seem that, in some way, we exist *outside* of space and time’. Wilson explained further that ‘the mind possesses hidden powers that can influence the external world. This seems to happen by a process of ‘induction’, not unlike that involved in a simple electrical transformer’ (2009, p. 141). The result of this encounter was often a peak experience for the co-researchers. This ‘conduit metaphor’ is an exciting finding as I am unaware that this contribution to the literature has hitherto been explored and researched as a coaching metaphor and seems a vital outcome of this study.

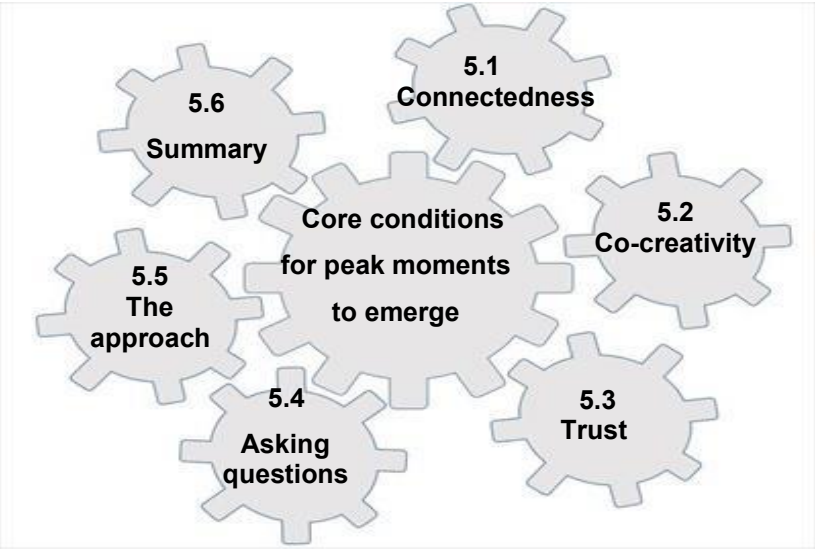
In the next chapter, I present the ‘core conditions’: elements of the emergence of a peak moment, analysed from the co-researchers’ experiences, which enable a peak moment to happen.

Chapter Five – Core conditions for peak moments to emerge

The data sources in this chapter comprise analysis of the recorded interviews and transcripts. Analysing the essence of peak moments in Chapter Four revealed that there are conditions which enable a peak moment to emerge. Shifting seamlessly between incubation, immersion and explication (Moustakas, 1990) I came to realise that there are five 'core conditions' which co-researchers considered important to enable a peak moment. These include connectedness with the coachee, trust between the two parties, the co-creation of a peak moment and the types of questions posed by co-researchers when coaching. The fifth core condition became apparent when I sensed that the co-researchers were all using elements of three coaching approaches, which often illuminated the path to a peak moment. The approaches comprise the 'person-centred' approach (to be of service for the coachee); the 'empty vessel' concept; and 'in' and 'out' behaviour, simultaneously observing and being in the coaching conversation.

The core conditions to consider for a peak moment to emerge (peak experience, peak performance and flow) are illustrated in Figure 5. These insights are potentially valuable for other coaches interested in seeking to experience peak moments.

Figure 5: Core conditions for peak moments to emerge



Csikszentmihalyi (1990) told us that conditions can be created to achieve flow, and similarly, core conditions can be developed to enable a peak moment, as suggested by Josephine: *'you can't make people do things but you can create the conditions for it to happen*'. There is no certainty, however, that a peak moment will happen by following these core conditions, as revealed by Wilson (2009, p. 51): 'sometimes they seem to happen of their own accord, out of the blue, as it were'.

5.1 Connectedness

Analysis of the data suggests that the coaching relationship does not happen without a connection.

Lizzie gives compelling evidence of being connected:

> *Being really, really, connected to the person […] that I worked with. So it was almost as if, how would I explain it? I feel as if, when I'm working with people, as if I'm absolutely there with them and there's no boundary between either of us (Lizzie).*

As can be seen from her words, being connected for Lizzie means being fully present for the coachee. She feels absolutely at one in the connection, with no boundaries between coach and coachee, a dyad. Kay believes too that connectivity is key:

> *I think it's connection. It's absolutely connection. Because when I experience it, it's not something I've been doing on my own. It's connection, connectivity […] something happened when I was working with this particular girl. I might have connected with her, or she might have said something, I don't know. I think it's something that happens. I think connectivity is the clue (Kay).*

The dyad is once more illustrated by Kay, who believes that the peak moment is achieved with another person. Kay also stated that it is something that happens, an indication of a phenomenological encounter. It was a peak experience.

Josephine, too, feels totally connected with her coachee:

> *You're ultra, uber connected, it's a peak something, that's connection, that's uber-connection if you like, exclusive to coaching, because by definition*

coaching is a relationship with somebody else […] when you are in that total hyper alert state you are totally connected to what's around you (Josephine).

There is a sense that, when experiencing a peak moment, not only does Josephine feel total connection with the coachee, she also feels a super connection between the dyad and everything else. The hyper-alert state described by Josephine is also experienced by Debbie:

I think for the whole of that session, we were probably both highly alert, emotionally and intellectually, to how we were working together […] the sensory receptors are heightened, alert, so you almost pick up every discernible movement or intuit. Well, I felt an intense connection and an intense support for her vulnerability (Debbie).

Similar to Josephine, Debbie says she experiences a state of heightened sensory acuity that intuits or precipitates a peak moment. Connectedness is about sensing too, as Debbie's sensory acuity is on high alert, enabling her to pick up information to guide the coaching process. Debbie goes further, to say that as a result of her connectedness with the coachee, using what she understood as her full sensory intuition, an intensity is created which disarms any masking of thought or gesture from the coachee. Debbie sensed this as vulnerability on the coachee's part.

Felicity questioned the level of connectedness she often feels with her coachees, stating:

If you connect with somebody at such a fundamental and a deep level, why wouldn't you be able to predict what they might think or might say? […] so if you've spent a bit of time with someone and you know how they think, and you know the kind of things they might say, if you know a little bit about them, perhaps it's advanced negotiation skills. I don't know, but when I have had that experience and have been able to share it with other people, they have all been shocked and surprised at that level of accuracy, level of intuition (Felicity).

Felicity struggled to name what connectedness was about. She seemed to be trying to rationalise her intuitive experience as a type of skill. The evidence of this connectedness seemed to be found in the astonishment coachees often experienced in being understood. The deep connection she attributes to her level of intuition or

advanced negotiation skills. This can be understood as offering the coachee a word or belief that is either shared or rejected. This process is repeated over time until each party is in a win-win situation, a deep level of connection has been made and the dialogue reciprocated. She is not surprised at being able to intuit what someone is thinking or about to say if the connection is deep and there is familiarity with the other person. If you know something about someone at a deep level, she believes it would not be surprising to be able to predict what coachees are either thinking or about to say.

Felicity added another dimension to connectedness:

> *When you have that kind of intuition, when you have that kind of insight, when you have that kind of connectedness, it stays with you […] it's for me absolutely about connectedness. You know, that connectedness with another person that somehow enables you to access information that you wouldn't be able to get in any other way, that level of connectedness, knowing (Felicity).*

Here, Felicity seems to experience connectedness as being at the heart of coaching and allowing deeper exploration with the client. The depth of the connection reveals that the coachee felt safe in the relationship and confident to express their feelings, giving forth information about themselves that would otherwise be inaccessible without that level of connection.

Another layer of connectedness, a oneness with the coachee, is identified by Felicity:

> *Maybe advanced intuition again, that advanced connectedness […] a oneness with the other person, actually; the boundaries between you, they're not blurred but they seem to have kind of faded away (Felicity).*

The oneness described by Felicity is similar to Lizzie's description '*there's no boundary between either of us'.* Felicity believes that her intuition can be deepened with a strong connection with the coachee and developed into oneness. The result is the diminishing of boundaries between coach and coachee, until they fade into oblivion, sealing the dyad.

Debbie also feels this oneness:

> *But equally I can think of times when, it's that sense of being so close in communion with the coachee, that there's almost a oneness in the work that we're doing. And a sort of real flow that is also dangerous because one could then be colluding or drawn into their system. It seems to create I think, just a unique space for the work that we're doing (Debbie).*

Debbie's experience of being at one with her client, coupled with her concern of collusion, is a double-edged sword. She acknowledges the uniqueness of the connection but, at the same time, is aware of being drawn into the coachee's world, encouraged by the flow state. The interpretation of the word communion is explained by Debbie:

> *'I'm not religious so when I say communion, I just mean that being, feeling connected, remarkably connected to that other person, they feel you understand them and there's a sense of safety and almost wonder and endless opportunity (Debbie).*

Although there is the inference, recognised by Debbie, that her experience of being and feeling connected with her coachee has religious connotations, she dismisses this parallel. Instead, she emphasises the opportunity that such a connection can bring. There is a paradox, however, between the coachee feeling safe and the coach feeling that they are colluding with the coachee. Collusion denotes a tension which is in conflict with the coachee feeling safe.

Debbie acknowledges what happens if the conditions of connectedness are not met:

> *We co-created the conditions in our connectedness although I wasn't sure that we're right to work together or that this coaching is going to work. I don't like to take money if I don't think everything's aligned (Debbie).*

Even though Debbie admits that the conditions had been co-created, there was something niggling in her awareness that stopped her from feeling totally connected with the coachee. Debbie was listening to her sensory acuity, picking up that something was not aligned. Debbie's intuition resonates with Rogers (1961, p. 202): 'I am aware of the fact that I do not know, cognitively, where this immediate relationship is leading'. Debbie is prepared to sacrifice working with a coachee if the core conditions have not been met to her satisfaction. Her approach is candid and honest.

Creating the conditions does not guarantee a peak moment but safeguards the coaching relationship that enables a peak moment. Debbie is not seeking a peak moment each time she coaches, and voices that the conditions also have to be in place for coaching to work, irrespective of a peak moment.

Kay revealed how she perceived connectedness to be an essential core condition to enabling a peak moment:

> *I wonder if I'm pre-programmed because I have experienced peak moments. Are the conditions set up physiologically within me to be able to anticipate a peak moment? I question if I'm not, I'm structured in a way to connect; perhaps I don't have to go through the process of the building blocks for me to be able to therefore see it or recognise (Kay).*

Kay considers the possibility of being pre-programmed into both anticipating and recognising a peak moment. She infers that the core conditions could already be in place for the experience to evolve, as though she is already prepared to connect with the emergence of a peak moment.

The way Lizzie, Kay, Josephine, Debbie and Felicity express their feelings of connectedness, to the coachee and everything around them, is similar to Panzarella's (1980) study on the phenomenology of aesthetic peak moments, which tested participants' reactions to feelings and performance. Panzarella's third category is emotional response, being at one with the aesthetic object and everything else around. This description chimes with the analysis of the coach's experience when deeply connected with the coachee. There are no boundaries in the dyad. The idea of being remarkably connected to that other person was discussed by Bohm (1994, p. 189): 'when people are really in communication, in some sense a oneness arises between them as much as inside the person'. Bohm expresses both what Debbie infers as collusion with the coachee, and what Felicity says about knowing someone so well that you can predict their thoughts, creating a oneness.

The sense of oneness in the connectedness is aptly described by Josephine:

> *Rather like putting your head against a beehive; you can feel all the vibration, of the whole entity that you've become, because in those peak moments you are at ONE with the other (*Josephine).

5.2 Co-creativity

The majority of the co-researchers emphasised the importance of connectedness in the relationship between coach and coachee, which gives rise, potentially, to the co-creation of a peak moment. While most spoke around the subject, I have only included comments from those co-researchers who specifically refer to 'co-creation'.

Shirley confirms co-creation is a requirement of creating a peak moment:

> *This peak moment in coaching is not a thing that I can produce by myself, like I can if I'm cycling or jogging. It is something that is co-created and something unique. It's more like an interaction that I'm having with my client and something happens in this interaction to cause this (Shirley).*

There are two important points in Shirley's statement. Firstly, the peak moment is a co-creation, generated by an interaction with the coachee. This means the connectedness has to be present, and there has to be a sense of cooperation between the two parties. Secondly, Shirley confirms that peak moments are unique. She continues:

> *There is a moment of extreme satisfaction and sharing between you and the client. So like something you've done together. There's complicity there, and something new was born, a new realisation, so that's why I can definitely say the peak moment in coaching has these characteristics and it's not like any other type of peak moment that we may have in life (Shirley).*

Shirley affirms the absolute uniqueness of a peak moment in the co-creation, unlike any other to be experienced in life. She calls it complicity, almost as though coach and coachee are colluding with one another, as implied by Debbie earlier. In Shirley's world, her experience compares with a new birth, something to celebrate. Shirley adds:

> *I'm moved in the same way as you, I'm on the same wavelength or the same frequency as you. I am completely together with you in an intellectual and an emotional proximity […] I think that's what happens when you're in resonance with a client. Everything else disappears and there is a moment of extreme satisfaction and sharing between you and the client (Shirley).*

Shirley's words express the intensity she feels in creating peak moments with her coachees, and she shares the pleasure it brings her. An openness to emotions and sensory acuity in coaching have been a consistent theme throughout this analysis. Shirley shows how unafraid she is of expressing her emotions and sharing them with her coachees. The way she conveys the proximity between herself and coachee is similar to the way Lizzie and Josephine expressed the fading of boundaries in the dyad.

With this sharing in mind, Rex proffers:

> *I talked before about the relationship. It feels as if something is happening in the space, in the middle. There's input from the client, something coming from me, some insight or intuition or even some boldness to say things that have been unsaid. And somehow that makes something happen in the middle (Rex).*

In this narrative, Rex talks of something happening in the middle between coach and coachee, forged by both parties. He maintains that this co-creation fortified him to ask bold questions, which he credits to his insight and intuition when he senses that the time is right for the co-creation to evolve.

Kay has a similar experience to Rex:

> *It's about the space in between. It's about the bit that you can't identify, it's the bit that you can't put your finger on (Kay).*

Yet again the importance of the co-creation seems central to the way Kay and Rex describe the sense of something happening between coach and coachee; something in the middle of the dyad that moves the relationship to allow a peak moment to emerge.

Another key point is raised by Debbie who expresses doubts about herself:

> *The peak moment, coming more from the co-creation of that connection that I believe will enable us to do the work together. I've been a co-creator; perhaps I've given that other person the opportunity to understand the word 'given'. Have I given the conditions whereby they can therefore be created? I don't know if I've done that. Have we created the conditions to do the work? It's very*

energising, and it's very humbling. I feel humble because there's something quite compassionate about it on both sides (Debbie).

Debbie emphasises that the peak moment comes from the co-creation of the connection between coach and coachee, for which she seems to feel responsible. Yet she queries whether she has given the coachee the correct understanding of how the conditions are created and feels humbled by the responsibility of being the creator of the coachee's willingness to engage. Although energised by the dyad, Debbie senses the coachee's vulnerability, asking herself if she succeeded in creating the conditions. The doubt Debbie recalled is analogous to the doubt coaches often feel about themselves, as quantified by De Haan (2008a, p. 90), 'doubts can also extend to the activity of coaching itself […] a different expression "am I doing it right?"'. To put it another way, Debbie is looking for affirmation and validation of her performance as discussed in Chapter Four.

In this section, the importance of the co-creation, of something between coach and coachee, is revealed. This occurrence happens through their connectedness, as stated by Stelter (2007, p. 191) 'new realities and new narratives are formed by the focus person together with the coach through their conversation and co-creation of meaning'. Rex and Kay tell of '*something'* happening in the middle between coach and coachee; input from the coachee's life experiences and insights from the coach, even boldness on the coach's part, which may conjoin and produce a peak moment. As shared by Desmond (2012, p. 72), 'the infinite is what emerges from the '*between'* so it can become known to both persons in the dialogical relationship'. One of the prompts Lowis (1998) included in his study on music and peak experiences is flash of insight, revelation or heightened sense of clarity, which resonates with Rex's recollection of co-creating a peak moment. As cited by de Haan and Sills (2012, p. 2) 'the coaching engagement involves an inter-play between two people's frames of reference, desires, beliefs, assumptions'.

5.3 Trust

Not only are the core conditions dependent on the connectedness and co-creation of the relationship, but also the trust that enables the coachee to feel safe.

Josephine explains how '*my goal was to gain her trust*':

Part of how you create the optimum conditions or making that happen, is the classic coaching stuff like using the language of the client, entering their world […] I've somehow entered his map, in an unconscious way so I could ask the question that he needed at that moment […] showing them you understand them. In his case, it was bringing some humour into a dark place, it was enabling him to trust me and feel safe (Josephine).

Trust is created through the connection Josephine made with the coachee. She cites two common coaching techniques to illustrate how trust is created. By reflecting the language of the client, the coach is developing rapport by making the coachee feel understood. Secondly, by entering their world, Josephine created the connectedness to develop trust, enabling her to ask pertinent questions to increase the chance of coaching success. When coachees feel trust with the coach, they feel safe and open to questions which would appear inappropriate and incongruous had trust not been established. Finally, having pursued these paths, Josephine throws in another option of using humour to lighten the situation and further the coachee's trust.

Trust is not only important for the coachee but for the coach also:

So part of my creating the conditions, is my own courage, being prepared to go into the unknown because doing something you've always done is not being courageous. Courage is facing the unknown. And so, stepping over the cliff, you know, over the precipice, you know, trust it! (Josephine).

Josephine believes that the coach has to be prepared to trust their own ability to do something different in a coaching session, and not feel the need to always do the same thing. Trust in herself she defines as courage; stepping into the unknown, without knowing the consequences, but potentially creating the conditions to encourage a peak moment. Josephine displays a certainty and trust in her coaching skills to risk going into the unknown to precipitate a peak moment. She feels courageous to behave in a way that would have been unthinkable without the trust that has been co-created.

Taking risks with coachees involves being pro-active too, as explained by Josephine:

Pro-active, well I've always felt free to do that in coaching anyway, depending what stage of the relationship we're at and where they are in the understanding of the context. So that jeopardy or risk or danger, whether people acknowledge

that's what it is, that moment of 'I could jump off the cliff or not' is part of what feeds that frisson, I think (Josephine).

Josephine explains that there is also a risk on the coach's part in venturing into the unknown. Her response indicates that when trust is present between both coach and coachee, the coach feels a sense of freedom to take a risk in what they ask, which feeds into the frisson of a peak moment when that happens. She mentions a sense of danger too, by stepping out of her own comfort zone, being pro-active, almost enticing a peak moment to happen.

Richard too has comments on the importance of trust:

There's a lot of energy going into creating the trust and creating the right atmosphere and, getting them into the right energy, helping them to be clear about what it is they're looking to work on (Richard).

Richard stresses the importance of creating the right atmosphere to enable trust to be gained, using his energies to energise the coachee to co-create the essence of the coaching session, and tease out the coachee's reasons for coaching.

Trust is vital in the relationship for Susie too:

It's the trust that's important. She (the coachee) said "why am I telling you all about this because I've never spoken about it?". The trust went very deep, as she's never spoken to anyone about these things before. But I know there had been that trust; yes, it's that trust that is important to me in the coaching (Susie).

Susie has worked out that the trust with her coachee is important to gain their confidence, so that they open-up and reveal issues that are personal to them. Her coachee felt that the trust was so deep that she could speak of issues hitherto never discussed.

In summary, trust is an essential core condition of the relationship between coach and coachee, as stated by O'Connor and Lages (2004, p. 162) 'at the heart of every coaching relationship is trust', which enables the emergence of a peak moment. Trust appears to mean that the coachee opens up to the coach, feeling safe to reveal their innermost aspirations, fears or wants. Not only does the coachee feel safe with the coach but also has trust in themselves, to engage with the coaching process. When

trust has been co-created, the coach senses a freedom to take risks, probing into the coachee's issues, even pushing their boundaries to accelerate the coaching process. De Haan (2008b, p. 129) advised that positive changes occur through coaching mainly when, among other factors, 'there is sufficient trust to allow intuition to do its work'.

5.4 Asking questions to facilitate a peak moment

In the last section, it was established that a peak moment is a co-creation between coach and coachee, encouraged through connectedness and trust between both parties. The co-researchers gave insights into the type of questions they posed to create the conditions for a peak moment to happen, as ratified by Shirley '*I asked questions that were insightful for the client'.*

This section begins with an analysis of '*out of the blue'* questions, those which are spontaneous and seem to appear from '*nowhere*'. Some of the co-researchers believe that the question that leads to a peak moment is often one that is random, as stated by Josephine:

> *God that was miraculous; where did that come from? Where would the question have come from? I've somehow entered his map, in an unconscious way so I could ask the question that he needed at that moment (Josephine).*

Throughout this study, Josephine's contributions have always veered towards the phenomenological approach, which she illustrated in this statement. She queried where the question she posed came from and talks of entering the coachee's map. By map, she means his thinking. Map is an NLP expression for someone else's understanding of their world, their mental territory. Josephine asks where the question came from, surprised that she was able to unconsciously enter the coachee's map and ask the question that was needed at the time. She believes this insight came from her experience and knowledge, the source of her knowing. Josephine has already created the core conditions to enable a trusting relationship with the coachee; both coach and coachee are in the right state, enabling them to co-create something that allows Josephine to tap into the coachee's thinking to unconsciously ask the question that could lead to a peak moment.

Josephine then brings alignment into the discussion:

I am totally aligned with that question and with that person. It's like a bubble, a light bubble […] well, I'm going to contradict myself because I've talked about THE question but what I meant was the question IN THAT MOMENT (Josephine).

Yet again, the importance of being connected with the coachee seems central to the way Josephine feels aligned to her coachee, and subsequently the question. Not just any question, but the one that was apposite for the coachee in that moment of the coaching session. She compared the feeling to one of lightness, a bubble, which gives the impression of something phenomenological, something ethereal, and not of this world.

Debbie explains what happens for her:

I can be quite intuitive so I usually use the 1, 2, 3 strike rule. If a question pops into my head, the 1st time, I might not use it if I'm not quite sure where it's coming from. If it pops in a 2nd time I'd be much likely to or if it's a feeling but if it comes up a 3rd I'll definitely say, I'm aware that I don't know where it's coming from but I've got this question in my head and it just keeps coming back; completely outrageous but here it is (Debbie).

Debbie has a basic trust in her tacit knowing and intuition. An '*out of the blue'* question pops into her head which she notices but ignores until it comes back for a third time. Debbie's unconscious mind is picking this up through her intuition. Applying her own '1, 2, 3 strike' rule, if the question returns, she acts on the information the third time around. There is a sense of targeting in Debbie's statement which reveals the absolute trust she has in her intuition and experience to deliver this question with precision and success.

Richard adds a bold statement:

Where the hell did that come from? […] because that's when it all clicks; and that's when I can get all of the bits of data coming in, and the right question comes out that unlocks something if I'm in flow or in that peak. It just comes, *trying to create the conditions so that the balance for me goes into flow (Richard).*

The question is evidently '*out of the blue*', surprising Richard, yet he can trace the source. He is in flow, at a peak, getting bits of data from his coachee which unlock something. This releases a feeling in Richard that just comes, when he feels he can ask the right question. He admits to trying to create the conditions for this to happen, balancing the conditions with flow.

Rex explains how he asks questions to enable a peak moment:

> *It feels like an instinct. It feels as if the relationship, that bit between me and the person, is telling me something. I don't instinctively know exactly what to ask, but I know sort of what the main thrust of the question needs to be and then I might spend quite a long time, 5 or 10 minutes maybe, kind of on autopilot. This is the thing that's going to generate the insight, BUT it's going to be a really challenging thing so how am I going to ask in a way that helps the person I'm working with hear it and respond rather than putting the shutters. So I've got a bit of me that's sitting there, as I say, on autopilot really, listening, using silence, skilfully, reflecting, all that basic stuff; but in my head, this is where I really need to get to. What if I were to ask that, it might not land and wouldn't be too great. Maybe I should do it this other way. What about if I start to talk about other people I've worked with, a more gentle way, would that help sort of? And so I've got all that going on, on the surface, kind of like a serene swan carrying on doing my job professionally but inside I'm thinking I know what I need to get to as a coach. Come up with that question that is very powerful, that helps the person you're working with to have some big insight or realisation (Rex).*

This quote from Rex is a particularly long contribution. Notwithstanding, I want to include it in full. It shows how deeply he is considering the question he needs to ask, the extent that he is reflecting, considering and summarising; the minute detail he goes into to try to find the right question to ask at the right time to encourage an insight from the coachee which, as already discussed, can lead to a peak moment for the coach. Rex says this process can take anything from between five and ten minutes. He is in deep conversation with himself, while another part of his mind is focusing on the coachee. As Rex says, he is trying to look serene and professional when underneath

the surface he is grappling with his thoughts. This entire transaction shows the real person at work; how he thinks and reflects as a coach in the pursuit of a peak moment.

A second type of question was introduced by Rex, which he named, the '*killer*' question. The concept of a '*killer*' question is well known in the coaching industry. For example, an internet search quickly comes up with companies advertising '*killer coaching questions'* to use during staff development sessions' (mtd, 2020). I asked him where the '*kille*r' question came from:

> *It's come from me seeing a big picture, asking all the questions, getting all the information. It's like I've got a jigsaw and someone's throwing pieces at you, randomly. Where/how do all these fit together? And all of a sudden, I can see the whole picture now. It's a beautiful butterfly! […] and to me it's a very, very intuitive big picture thing (Rex).*

By gathering all the information together from the coachee, Rex gets an updated picture of the progress in the coaching relationship, which he feels empowers him to ask the '*killer*' question. Rex explains how he recognises that moment:

> *I'm going to have those flashes of insight, that instinct that helps me to ask the killer question that may lead to peak experience. If they're ready, I want to be able to help them open their eyes; that question that is very powerful, that helps the person you're working with to have some big insight or realisation (Rex).*

The flashes of insight and instinct give Rex the go-ahead to ask the '*killer'* question. The timing to pose the all-important question, which releases something in the coachee, is felt intuitively. There is, however, something implicitly cognitive about the way Rex describes his approach to a peak experience in a calculated sort of way. It seems not to be a phenomenological experience but an experience he has thought about deeply; the timing of it, the delivery of it and the client's response. By asking the '*killer'* question, something in the dynamic of the coaching relationship moves the coachee towards a new insight, breakthrough or revelation. In response, this shift in the coachee then progresses into a peak moment for the coach.

In summary, the section on questions falls into two parts. The first part revolves around the *'bolt from the blue'* question that seems to appear to the coach for no reason. This can be attributed to the coach using their intuition and insight to know what is needed

for the coachee at that moment, dipping into their experience to help the coachee move forward. This *'bolt from the blue'* experience for Rex sounds more like the phenomenological peak experience described by Maslow (1962), which he can neither predict not manipulate. Josephine wonders where some questions come from, to which Wilson (2009, p. 60) responds 'here is a part of our mind which *knows* things that the ordinary conscious self does not know'.

The second part, the '*killer'* question, delivers a response from the coachee that can create a shift for the coaching outcome; something like a peak of understanding, a sort of revelation for the coach. Rex manages the delivery of the *'kille*r' question through listening to his internal dialogue, trying to work out when, and how to deliver the '*killer'* question. The difference between these two types of questions, both often resulting in a revelation for the coachee and potentially a peak moment for the coach, is as follows. The '*bolt from the blue'* question is spontaneous, while the delivery of the '*killer*' question seems to require affirmation that the timing is right for the question to be effective for a peak moment to happen.

Debbie notices thoughts and hunches which emerge from her intuition, experience and tacit knowing. She uses a three-strike rule. It seems that the coach can either ignore such thoughts or trust their instinct to put the hunch to use. Desmond (2012, p. 67-68) explains that as coaches, we can either ignore intuitive feelings and thoughts and hold onto them, or introduce such thoughts at the appropriate time, 'considering it as an aspect of the co-created relational field of our work […] rather than dismiss it, I chose to trust this as an aspect of our work together'. On the third strike, when the question keeps re-appearing in her conscious awareness, Debbie poses the question that will not go away.

5.5 Coaching approaches

From the analysis of the transcripts, there appear to be three approaches used by the co-researchers which enabled peak moments, as described by Felicity:

> *You start at the very basic level […] following a process because that gives a structure and a framework. But, the very best coaches, I think, are bit more client led, a bit more person-centred so the conversation flows wherever the coachee wants it to flow. And you can only do that with experience. And you*

can only do that if you let GO of the process. If you're hanging onto procedure you're not going to have a peak experience […] I don't think, I would be surprised if any process driven coach had a peak experience (Felicity).

Felicity explains that novice coaches need to follow a process until they feel confident, with experience, to abandon process and listen to their intuition to allow the conversation to flow according the coachee's needs. Felicity adds that coaching tools and processes are to be left behind, inferring that the coach is best placed to achieve a peak moment when they are in flow and not restricted to procedures and a processual way of coaching.

Felicity's words aptly lead to an analysis of the person-led coaching approach, one of three approaches that indicate how these co-researchers came within reach of, and moved towards, a peak moment.

5.5.1 The person-led approach: to be of service

In his approach, the coach is led by the coachee's needs, underpinned by Rogers's (1961) core conditions of congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard. Felicity adheres to this approach, saying:

I do person-centred coaching; they are the complete focus of my attention. I think it's about managing your own state, being open and not having an agenda. The very best coaches are more client-led, so the conversation flows wherever the coachee wants it to flow. And you can only do that with experience (Felicity).

There is an emphasis in Felicity's words on the coach's state, being open, without an agenda, and totally coachee-led. Felicity is fully present, focused on the coachee. Her experience allows the conversation to flow, which happens when the coach has gained trust from the coachee and trusts their own insights and intuition.

Shirley is of the same opinion:

I feel that I'm at the service of others doing this work. I forget everything else except from what I'm doing right there; I'm totally focused, letting go of everything other than my trade, my skills, observing and perceiving what is coming from that person. I think it's very important to be really serious and

rigorous, the knowledge underpinning coaching, but we shouldn't also lose that that indescribable, yes, the magic of it, sort of unexplainable (Shirley).

Similar to Felicity, Shirley's approach is to be of service to the coachee by totally focusing on them, noticing what is coming from them and applying rigour. She lets go of her skills, meaning she is not focused on her skills but on the coachee. She is fully present, noticing, simply sitting with them, just being. She adds that the indescribable magic of the peak moment must not be lost.

Josephine also believes in being of service:

I am at my best because I am not serving myself; I am serving the other at that moment. And that's part of the peaks for me. It's part of where the motive to coach can come from, to help others. It's part of what I am. It's not who I am (Josephine).

Josephine makes a point that what she does is different from who she is. As a coach, she is there to be of service, fully present for the coachee, but not to the detriment of who she is in her daily life. She retains her own identity.

The same approach is taken by Jacob:

It's the desire to allow someone to be themselves, to work out who they are, where they're going, what they want, what's important, what isn't; very much around encouraging somebody to do the coaching for themselves (Jacob).

Jacob emphasise the importance of giving the coachee the space to be able to think about what they want from coaching, and potentially take ownership of their own state and future. This means Jacob empowers the coachee to think for themselves and internalise their questions, ultimately answering their own queries when they have worked out what they want and where they want to be.

The approach analysed in this section concerns the coach's skill and ability to let go of their learned tools and techniques to focus on the coachee and be led by them. There is no tick-box process attached to this person-led approach. The coach depends on their learned coaching skills which they are able to put to one side to focus on the coachee, inviting their insight and intuition to surface. Murray (2004) recommends avoiding such a tick-box approach, as it risks losing the rich connections that intuition

brings. Although each coach has their own description of how they access this approach, they all maintained that their intent was to be of service for the coachee, to help them attain what they sought from coaching.

5.5.2 The empty vessel approach

Congruence and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1951) are integral to the concept of the empty vessel. In the coaching sense, congruence concerns personal alignment, which includes awareness, as explained by Josephine: '*it's about awareness of self'.*

Josephine thinks that by being self-aware, the coach is congruent about their personal concerns which have no place in the coaching relationship. The co-researchers reported that they find a way of ridding themselves of daily pressures by emptying themselves of such anxieties before engaging with the coachee. They approach the coaching room without prejudice and judgements, free of personal issues. They do, however, bring their full selves to the coaching session, their experience and expertise. The concept they used for this behaviour was '*leaving your stuff at the door'* or the '*empty vessel'*, which enables the coach to be in the right state, unbiased and fully available to the coachee, demonstrating unconditional positive regard. The purpose of the empty vessel concept is explained by Josephine:

> *You have to get rid of stuff to be able to deepen the connection, to enter the other's world which comes with practice. And that's part of the peaks for me, it partly comes simply from experience and practice (Josephine).*

To fully connect with the coachee, the coach has to empty themselves of their personal issues before the coaching session. This reference Josephine makes to connectedness is important. She is saying that to fully connect with the coachee, it is vital to get her own head '*stuff'*, an obstruction in the connectedness, out of the way, in case it prevents her from hearing what the coachee is revealing.

On the other hand, Josephine points out the problem that occurs when she is unable to shed her '*stuff*':

> *When I felt connected to a client, and my own stuff was not in the way, I would come away energised. I don't just mean adrenalin, we would have fed each*

other, that deep connection. When I didn't get that connection with somebody, I would come away knackered. You know? (Josephine).

Josephine emphasises the importance of ridding herself of her '*stuff*' to fully connect with the coachee. She feels energised and fed as a coach when her own '*stuff*' is out of the way, but deflated and exhausted after the coaching session if her issues interfere with the connectedness, creating an obstruction. The connection to engage with a peak moment only happens when Josephine is able to get her '*stuff*' out of the way, and she maintains that the coachee feels this connection too, both parties being mutually fed with the 'something' the connection brings.

Josephine also explains her experience as a coachee:

If you're a transactional coach, how can you have those moments? I've been coached in a transactional way and I feel as if I'm not really there. I'm being check-listed. I have met experienced coaches that don't get out of the way, and don't know that they haven't […] the longer you have that behaviour the harder it is to release it, but I'm not saying that I'm always out of the way. There are times when part of my struggle has been to get out of the way (Josephine).

The response Josephine gives indicates what happens when the coach does not get their '*stuff*' out of the way. She felt no connectedness with this coach and dis-engaged. Josephine recognises that to get '*stuff*' out of the way is not easy, neither for her nor coaches who may be entrenched in their way of coaching. She considers that it would be hard for coaches to change, speaking from experience as she too has struggled at times with the concept. Josephine also suggests that a fixed process of coaching, such as transactional coaching, limits the possibility of a peak moment happening, inferring that using intuition and insight to guide the coaching discussion is a more viable path towards a peak moment.

How coaches empty themselves is detailed by Josephine:

I've got a blank piece of paper. I'm going to listen, facilitate, guide back; it's not about me. I'm almost like an empty vessel, I'm literally the conduit for whatever they need to help them move forward. I am simply going very quiet inside myself and letting come up what comes up from me; that is my repository and my experience […] you will notice a stray thought, or you'll notice a feeling and

you'll think 'that's mine, not theirs'. Ok, hiya, off you go, I'll deal with you later (Josephine).

Josephine was explicit in detailing the steps she takes to become the empty vessel to acknowledge, '*what comes up'*. She again describes the concept of being a conduit for whatever the coachee needs, fuelled by her experience, to help the coachee move forward.

This concept of the empty vessel is endorsed by Shirley too:

You're bringing yourself, in all of your experience, your knowledge, your desire to be there for them. […] I think that's my job as a coach to, just to let that happen (Shirley).

Shirley confirms she brings her full self into the coaching room, confident to say '*just let that happen',* implying that the path to a peak moment is effortless when the core conditions are met.

Felicity explains why the empty vessel concept works:

I think the very best coaches empty themselves out so they don't transfer anything onto the coachee. They remain open to the experience and to this advanced intuition, what is beyond, so they can receive messages or make suggestions that might seem to come from outside of the dynamic, aside of the experience of the coach and the coachee; so that there's something more within the dynamic of that conversation […] Because I think for me, it's about state management.

The point that Felicity makes about not transferring anything onto the coachee is valid. She interprets that the essence of this concept is to be uncontaminated by one's own thoughts, personal issues and pressures to be rid of such concerns to enable the coach to become fully present for the coachee. Felicity refers to the concept as state management, a term used by NLP coaches. Felicity goes further. This state also enables Felicity to tune into her intuition, listening for insights from her tacit knowing or messages from outside of herself; as discussed in Chapter Four, the feelings coaches experience outside of their body. Felicity continues:

> *I don't think that ordinary coaches could do it. I think you have to be an extraordinary coach. You have to empty yourself. And if someone says "can you help me?" the answer is I don't know. What I do know is everything I am, I will bring to the table, my skills, knowledge, experience, to make some kind of positive contribution. I start, with an I'm OK, you're OK. And together we can work this out, and together we can pull something out of it (Felicity).*

The comments Felicity makes illustrate several of the factors discussed so far. She starts her coaching conversations with the balance of both coach and coachee being OK. Having emptied herself of her personal issues, she starts the coaching relationship with a 'blank sheet of paper', similar to the words used by Josephine, with no expectation of what is going to ensue. She simply brings her whole self, skills, knowledge and experience into the coaching conversation to be of service to the coachee to co-create something.

Lizzie subscribes to the concept of '*leaving stuff at the door'*:

> *I think I leave myself behind in terms of my prejudices and my baggage, but I think it's who I am, connecting with all my skills, and how they are with all their skills. That's what I honestly think, but I absolutely understand the notion of leaving it at the door, that metaphor (Lizzie).*

Although Lizzie agrees with the metaphor of leaving '*stuff at the door'*, she also emphasises the need to connect with all her skills and the coachee's skills too, indicating the importance of the connectedness already discussed in co-creation of something.

Susie also agrees with this concept:

> *I am bringing me and always feel congruent with myself, suspending any prejudices about that other person. And I can leave things at the door and then pick things up when I go back if I need to; my anxieties, my tiredness so I can perform at my peak in that session, because that session isn't just about me but it's about me being the very best I can be as a coach (Susie).*

Susie acknowledges the importance of suspending judgements. Bringing herself, devoid of judgements, to the coaching session means Susie is congruent. She uses

the term '*suspending'*, another way of saying that she is leaving her '*stuff'* at the door of the coaching room before entering. Not only is Susie able to '*leave things at the door'* before the coaching session, she is equally able to pick things up on her retreat if she needs to do so. She specifically refers to her '*stuff*' as '*things',* anxieties and tiredness. In leaving these behind, she is able to perform at her peak for the coachee.

Susie emphasises the need to be the very best she can be as a coach, a statement of the peak performance moment in coaching, congruent and free of prejudice.

In contrast, Rex disagrees that judgements are inevitable:

> *I'm finding this really difficult because I think it's impossible to be completely client focussed. I just think you can't do it because we're both people, and we've both got all our biases and prejudices and everything else.*

There is an honesty is what Rex says that is refreshing. I think we, as coaches, all like to think we hold no prejudices but sometimes it can be difficult to suspend them. I suspect he is missing the point, however, as the other co-researchers acknowledged they may have prejudices and biases but were able to suspend them for them for the duration of the coaching session.

Jacob brings another aspect into the discussion:

> *A better question might be 'what do I take through the door?' and I suppose I don't take anything through […] I don't know what the answer to that could be. What do I leave at the doorstep?* (*Jacob).*

It took some time before Jacob was able to voice these sentiments, a long pause of some one to two minutes while he internalised my question about leaving '*stuff'* at the door. He was bewildered by the concept and re-framed it by asking what he takes though the door rather than what he leaves behind. After I explained the concept to him, he responded by adding:

> *I think the concept's perfect. But I don't think it happens because I don't think any of these coaches have done any work on themselves. They've learnt it as a skill base. That's the problem. That's the difference between therapy and coaching for me. I always used to think, be told, that therapy was weaker than coaching and of course it isn't. In my book now, the therapeutic model is you*

have to do work on yourself to become a therapist and as a coach you don't. It's bonkers. It's dangerous (Jacob).

Jacob is reflecting on the work coaches need to do on themselves to engage with the core conditions; to be aware of noticing what they are sensing inside the body and signals from the mind. Jacob is inferring that coaching is not just skill-based; heart and soul are prerequisites to tap into the unknown and engage with the prospect of a phenomenological experience, a peak moment.

In summary, the co-researchers considered it important to empty themselves of personal issues and anxieties before the coaching sessions began. This meant getting their '*stuff*' out of the way to be fully present for the coachee, which leads the way to the possibility of a peak moment happening for the coach. In this approach, congruence and unconditional positive regard are important to enable a peak moment. In coaching, these Rogerian terms translate as self-awareness; a combination of letting '*stuff*' go and being fully present to feel totally connected with the coachee. The ability to do this encourages the flow state, when coaches feel energised after a coaching session rather than depleted. Josephine highlighted the impact of not being able to engage with the concept of the empty vessel, which she experienced whilst being coached. She added that the longer coaches have behaviours that are unhelpful for achieving a peak moment, the harder it is to release it, as enforced by Rogers (1961, p. 176) 'he has, often for years, been trying to change, but finds himself fixed in these behaviors which he dislikes'.

5.5.3 The 'in' or 'out' approach

This concept of *'in*' or '*out*' refers to the co-researchers' being able to both observe the coaching process and simultaneously run the process. There is an enchanting story Josephine recalled about an image in Sufism of two birds in the Blue Mosque, Istanbul, which represent the two aspects of the self. One bird represents the doing, the conscious mind, and the other represents observing, the unconscious mind. They are both present and relate to the concept of being *'in*' or '*out*' of the coaching process, which arose through the co-researchers' experience of a peak moment.

I asked Josephine if the conscious mind is aware of the unconscious mind and if they are working together:

YES, they're working in tandem but not thinking the same things. They're not noting the same things; my mouth was forming the sounds while the witness, the observer, was totally aware of what it was doing. It's not a controlling agent, it's an observer, sensing, noting, not doing, like a hidden camera. But it's more than that, it's all senses. I've used the word radar, antenna earlier (Josephine).

Josephine is aware of two parts of her thinking that are working together but noting different things in the coaching session. This is not to say that these two parts are definitively the conscious and unconscious mind, but the story of the two birds in Sufism provides an analogy for the coaching context. The two parts are separate yet working together. Josephine says it is her unconscious mind that is noting, sensing and observing, calling it the '*hidden camera'*. She says it is more than that, however. It is not a controlling agent over her conscious thinking self, but it is all senses, a radar or antenna. She refers to it as *'a band of light is coming through from above me, right the way through the core of me and down into the ground' (Josephine).*

The '*hidden camera'* is the radar or antenna, the unconscious. Josephine could not be clearer that in her experience of a peak moment there is an interaction between her conscious, the doer, and the unconscious, the observer. The relevance of this observing and sensing, for the coach, is as an *aide memoire* to look out for what is happening in the coaching session, to put them on alert for something which might present itself. As Josephine says, it is the '*hidden camera'* that is taking metaphorical pictures, images of dialogue that might be meaningful for the coach to raise with the coachee when appropriate. Josephine explains further:

This witness is ever present in the human brain. This capacity to both do and observe the doing is always there, and one of those aspects that I find wonderful about being human. You can both be in an experience and be an observer to an experience at the same time (Josephine).

Josephine's thinking that the concept of the '*hidden camera'* is part of the human self is grounding. It is not a '*supernatural*' experience but something that the human being has a capacity to undertake and possibly refine when aware of its potential. This is encouraging for coaches who are not yet aware of this concept of both doing and observing in coaching. Josephine says it is a perfectly normal human trait, which coaches could be already practising unconsciously; it could be a familiar way of being

that other coaches have not, as yet benefited from in coaching. This concept of being '*in' and 'out'* of the coaching conversation is a major finding, an approach which helps to create a peak moment.

Rex too is familiar with the 'noting' of something as the observer:

> *I think that when I pick up the emotion, I may not even do it consciously; they may not really be showing it but I think there's something in me that clocks it. It says 'hang on a minute, there's something going on', which allows me then to sort of frame the way I think about what's happening (Rex).*

Rex uses the expression *'there's something in me that clocks it'.* These words are not dissimilar to Josephine saying, '*it's sensing'.* Rex's *'clocking'* is fulfilling a similar role, noticing something and making the conscious mind aware of something going on, with the cautionary advice of '*hang on a minute'* to bring something to Rex's attention. Rex's observer makes him aware of an imminent '*something*' that is shifting in the coaching conversation, which Rex admits is brought to his attention by his senses.

Coincidentally, Lizzie uses 'clocking' too:

> *There might be a moment where somebody says something and I just clock it. It might be something to come back to later on but it's a very quick clocking. I might pick it up; but somebody might have said something when we're in the process of this, so I might bring it in right at the end (Lizzie).*

Lizzie explains how she notices or '*clocks*' something somebody says which she wants to unpick and holds onto it, like an image taken from the '*hidden camera'*, to explore later with the coachee. The immediate moment may not be right as she is fully present in the coaching session, but her '*hidden camera'* is able to store the image so that she can bring it into the conversation at a later stage when appropriate. Both she and Rex refer to the '*hidden camera'* as '*clocking'*, rather like taking a snapshot of something to hold onto until it is needed.

Shirley also subscribes to the concept of being '*in' and 'out':*

> *They* (referring to coachees) *shouldn't be seeing how the process is going along, whereas I am both in the story and also following the process so I can*

have a more external look at this peak moment, whereas the client is right in it (Shirley).

I am unsure in this quote if Shirley is experiencing a peak moment or if she is referring to the coachee experiencing something when she says, '*the client is right in it'*. Shirley is observing how the session is going by being both in the story and following the development of the session. In either case, Shirley is aware of the concept of being '*in' and 'out'* during the coaching conversation.

This concept of doer and observer is also experienced by Richard. His description, however, is slightly different:

And I'm trying to link it to the experience of the two 'me's. And thinking, what a bizarre concept. The two 'me's and I'm chatting to the two 'me's in the process of consciously trying to create the conditions so that the balance for me goes into flow (Richard).

Richard's description takes the form of two '*me's*, two voices in his head, one a gremlin in his conscious awareness, a critic. The second voice is his own, but a silent voice which guides him when in flow. When his thoughts are interrupted by the gremlin, he is brought back to the current moment and flow ceases. Richard's internal dialogue takes him out of flow, which is abruptly halted, bringing him back into conscious awareness with the coachee. Richard also uses the metaphor of being an observer on a balcony, watching people dance, yet also participating in the dance.

Susie's experience is similar to Richard's. She admitted to being able to split herself into watching what was happening in the coaching session and yet also being fully present, like the observer and the doer. She said, taking a deep breath*, 'I think it's probably the fact that it's unconscious - using the two sides of the brain' (Susie).* Using two sides of the brain is a different way of looking at the '*observing*' and '*doing*' in the coaching session. This theory suggests that the left side of the brain tends towards analytical and methodical thinking, and the right tends to be more creative or artistic (Sperry, 1961). This would explain the left-hand side of the brain, the conscious mind or doer, analysing and running the coaching session whilst the right-hand side of the brain, the unconscious or observer, is being creative and looking for artistry in coaching. This is the first of two possible explanations for the '*observing*' and '*doing';*

an interaction between the left and right sides of the brain, messages and insights that pass between the two sides. Maslow (1971, p. 173) said that 'unconsciousness carries in it also the roots of creativeness, of joy, of happiness, of goodness, of its own human ethics and values'; and if this is the case, the observer, the right-hand side of the brain, is contributing creativity and a feeling of joy to the coaching session.

Debbie too experiences this concept of being both observer and coach:

> *Especially if it's something outrageous that I can't work out where it's coming from […] that I might not fully articulate it openly, but maybe noticing something […] you sit there, and you're seeing what's happening (Debbie).*

Debbie is saying that she is noticing something, in a disassociated way, sitting and seeing what is happening as though from an observer's perspective. She is trying to see what is happening and work out what she is experiencing intuitively from a combination of the two parts of the brain working together; the right-hand side, noting something creative that is happening, and the left-hand side, methodically trying to work something out. Debbie extends the discussion to include insight:

> O*ften the insight comes from when you're a player in the dance or whatever it is; but maybe at that time you're not fully recognising the peak but it is maybe when you step out of it that you observe what just occurred (Debbie).*

Debbie clarifies that by stepping out of coaching (which she calls the dance) and by taking a look at what is happening, she is taking herself out of moment, creating a space to note what her insight is telling her. She is noting something that is being brought to her conscious awareness through her internal knowing, another example of being both '*in and 'out'* of the coaching session by using her '*hidden camera'.*

Josephine provides a second explanation for the '*noting*' and '*sensing*':

> W*hile I could say this wisdom comes from something outside myself, you could also be tuned in to what is inside. It all hinged on that moment when I had this sense of knowing inside me. I've been gathering data whilst the person's talking and I'm noticing, hearing and feeling; others would say it's experience but I don't know (Josephine).*

Josephine is giving clues as to the source of the '*something'* she receives as a channel, or the *'something*' that the observer notes and passes onto the doer. She talks of her inner knowing or tacit knowledge. Josephine is tuned into what is inside of herself, providing wisdom, drawing on her internal state of reference and her intuition to find an explanation for the wisdom '*inside me'* which aides in achieving a peak moment. It could also be her experience that is lying dormant in her sense of knowing, as she is gathering information about the coachee that resonates with previous experiences and knowledge. Cox (2013, p. 17) said that 'another common bubbling over of experience into consciousness is experienced as intuition'.

Felicity expands the notion of intuition:

> *Receiving a message from outside of me would seem to be advanced intuition, that you're channelling something from beyond yourself (Felicity).*

Intuition, as far as Felicity is concerned, is an advanced state which facilitates this assertion that the observer, providing insights to the doer, is intuition or experience drawing on tacit knowing. She is saying that her advanced intuition is channelling something beyond herself and not from her internal resources. Moustakas (1990, p. 112) explained that 'intuitions are hunches'. Felicity interprets these hunches or messages she receives to something we do not, as yet, know about ourselves.

In summary, I analysed the way the coaches can be both the doer and the observer, a coaching approach resulting in being both *'in' and 'out'* of the coaching procedure. The purpose seems to be to monitor the coaching development and look out for opportunities by the observer to initiate a peak moment. The observer warns or makes the doer aware of something that can be questioned or analysed in the coaching discussion to enable a peak moment. Wilson (2009, p. 57) advised 'this ability to experience thought on two quite distinct levels simultaneously is something I have never heard mentioned being possible' yet spoke of 'duo-consciousness, being in two places at once' (2009, p. 147). Wilson (2009, p. 56) made another observation pertaining to the 'in' or 'out' coaching approach: 'a small, every-day, observing part of my brain was standing apart, observing with astonishment what was going on in the rest of my thinking apparatus'.

Some of the co-researchers, Lizzie and Rex for example, use this approach by '*clocking'* something in the conversation to use immediately, or hold onto for a more apposite opportunity. Others work spontaneously, like Josephine, and react immediately to the observations made. Some coaches stated that this approach was down to insight and intuition, or as Felicity says, advanced intuition. Insight precedes intuition (Moustakas, 1990), and intuition draws on clues and observations to enable us 'to arrive at knowledge through internal reflection – knowing something without knowing how we know it' (Moustakas, 1990, p. 114). Out of the ten co-researchers, seven of them (Josephine, Rex, Lizzie, Shirley, Richard, Susie and Debbie) all subscribed to this notion of being both '*observer*' and '*doer'*.

5.6 Summary

This chapter is an analysis of the core conditions between coach and coachee to create the optimum conditions for a peak moment to emerge. Each of the cogs (which represent the core conditions in Figure 5) is pro-active. By keeping the cogs turning, the strength and momentum of the relationship is maintained so the peak moment is not lost. There are five insights into identifying and synthesising the core conditions:

1. The first insight is the importance of connectedness in the relationship between coach and coachee to enable a peak moment; a deep connection between coach and coachee enables the coachee to feel relaxed and reveal their inner feelings. The co-researchers expressed that a deep connectedness releases a sense of clarity in the relationship, with no boundaries, when they feel at one with the coachee. The sense of unity is one of the seven characteristics McInman and Grove (1991) listed as present in all three of the constructs. Wilson (2009, p. 54) said of connectedness, 'the vision transformed me. I stepped from it into a transfigured world; from agnosticism to gnosis. Everything connected'.

2. Co-creativity between coach and coachee enables a peak moment for the coach. Rex's co-creation manifests itself as something happening in the middle between coach and coachee; input from the coachee's life experiences and insights from the coach, even boldness on the coach's part, which co-creates something, synthesised in the middle, and progresses the coaching forward. What Rex calls 'something in the middle' was interpreted by Moore *et al.* (2005, p. 1) as the intuitive

dance, when coach and coachee enter a zone and are in a state these authors described as ‘relational flow’.

3. Trust is important, as explained by Terblanche and Heyns (2020, p. 2), ‘mutual trust allows a client to share and reflect more openly and creates a safe environment that permits the coachees to face their issues and take risks’. These authors contributed to the ‘underexplored field of trust in coaching’ (2020, p. 17), yet they concluded that there is no evidence that personality traits either directly or indirectly impact trust. The findings in this study illustrate that trust in coaching is co-created through rapport and empathy, resonating with Rogers’s (1961) core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence, which are ‘deemed essential components of a relationship of trust’ (2020, p. 3). The coach’s competence ‘by demonstrating ability’ (2020, p. 17) is also essential to create the core conditions to encourage a peak moment. The establishing of trust appears to mean that not only do coachees feel safe with the coach, but also trust in themselves to engage with the coaching process. The coach also trusts their insights and intuition.

4. Questions posed by the coach were found to be relevant in the enabling of a peak moment. The ‘*bolt from the blue’* question seems to occur when the coach is listening attentively to their intuition and a question presents itself which seems to appear from *‘nowhere’*. For this to happen, the coach is aware of being closely connected to the coachee, when trust is in place. The second type of question is the *‘killer’* question. Similar to the ‘*bolt from the blue’* question, connectedness and trust are *in situ*. By being tuned into the coachee and using their intuition, the coach delivers the *‘killer*’ question which provokes a response from the coachee, which, in turn, can result in a revelation for the coachee and a peak moment for the coach.

5. Three coaching approaches revealed that when coaches bring their full selves into the coaching relationship, including their skills and experience, a peak moment can evolve. Although there was a general agreement that a sound knowledge of coaching tools and techniques was mandatory, none of the co-researchers used a process-driven approach. The experienced coach consciously forgets about tools but draws on their skills and experience when needed. These approaches chime with Moons (2016, p. 52): ‘to actually make a transformational shift happen,

coaches are not consciously applying any technique or approach to help clients come to their insights'. In all three approaches, the focus is on the coachee.

The first of the three approaches is the 'person-centred' approach, underpinned by the Rogerian (1961) core conditions of congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard; to be of service to the coachee and led by whatever the coachee brings up in the coaching dialogue. When the environment of connectivity and trust has been co-created, the coachee feels safe to open up to the coach and take ownership of their issues. The coach is guided by their intuition and experience, focusing on the coachee, devoid of tools and a tick-box approach to coaching.

The second coaching approach, the concept of the 'empty vessel', is closely linked with the 'person-centred' approach. By emptying themselves of their personal issues and judgements before entering the coaching room, the coach can focus on the coachee, which initiates the conditions for a peak moment to emerge. As acknowledged by Stelter (2007, p. 191), 'it is important that the coach, through education and supervision, has been addressing his or her own weaknesses and possible problem areas'. Having emptied themselves of pre-conceptions and judgements, and by listening to their intuition, the co-researchers become the radar, antenna or conduit for the coachee, as discussed in Chapter Four. By emptying themselves of their own issues, the coach is demonstrating unconditional positive regard for the coachee and congruence in themselves (Rogers, 1961).

The 'in' or 'out' approach refers to the coach being able to both observe the coaching process and simultaneously guide the process. The unconscious mind acts as an observer to the coaching session, drawing on the coach's intuition, insight and tacit knowing for the conscious mind to respond and act upon these observations. As stated by McInman and Grove (1991, p. 347), 'characteristic of all three categories of peak moments, is the feeling of […] experiencing without consciousness'. Sela-Smith (2002) advises that human experience is deeply rooted in tacit knowledge and Moustakas (1990, p. 23) conveys that 'the tacit is pure mystery'.

The idea of being 'in' or 'out' is for the coach to notice clues and hunches, drawing on their insights, intuition and tacit knowing that might expedite a peak moment and bring them into the awareness of the conscious mind, the 'doer'. Josephine

used the metaphor of a *'hidden camera';* Lizzie and Rex called this *'clocking'*. In both instances, the co-researchers are noting something of interest to bring into the coaching conversation when appropriate.

Chapter 6, the conclusion, follows.

Chapter Six - Conclusion

The research began with my experience of peak moments. Much of this interest arose from an awareness of my experiences as a musician, experiences which usually happened in conjunction with another player. I then encountered the same experience as a coach with a coachee, which piqued my interest to explore the phenomenon further. The aim of this study was, therefore, to explore how coaches experience peak moments, with four objectives. The first was a review of the literature relating to peak moments in coaching; the second to undertake the research with coaches; and the third to analyse data. The fourth objective was to make an original contribution to knowledge about peak moments where there has been little or no research on how the phenomenon was experienced by coaches.

The review of the literature began with an exploration of the provenance of peak moments within mysticism and religion. A link to psychology in sports and positive psychology was revealed, followed by an exploration of peak moments in coaching. Gallwey's (1987) influence was the starting point, followed by breakthrough moments for coachees called 'critical' moments (de Haan, 2008a, 2008b), 'aha' moments (Kets de Vries, 2013) and 'transformational shifts' (Moons, 2016). Due to the paucity of literature on peak moments in coaching for the coach, the scope was broadened to include other fields such as music and the performing arts, creative writing, business, education and nature and the wilderness, which provided insights into how the phenomenon was experienced in these fields.

The nature of a peak moment is ethereal and timeless, a state which induces an altered state of consciousness, as cited by Wilson (2009, p. 53):

> 'The feeling was indescribable, but I have never experienced anything in the years that followed that can compare with that glorious moment; it was blissful, uplifting, I felt open-mouthed wonder […] I have had this wonderful experience which brought happiness beyond compare'.

The essence of this study was my own and others' subjective experience of peak moments. Interviews and interpretations were prerequisites to construct meaning from the coaches' personal encounters with peak moments, and the approach would therefore be of an interpretative nature. With this in mind, the interpretivist paradigm

aligned with how subjectivity and bias were treated. Garland Evans (2016, p. 280), however, posed the question, 'are we justified in seeing peak experiences as a kind of knowledge or are they just phantasms that cannot even be studied or verified?'. When re-living my own experiences, the memory was indeed verified, vivid and timeless, yet my reality was constructed out of my personal belief that peak moments enrich our lives and exist in multiple forms. To explore how other coaches experienced peak moments, my epistemological position was correspondingly constructivist, to make meaning from the co-researchers' encounters of their experiences of peak moments.

Having established that my ontological position was interpretivist and my epistemological position constructivist, the task was to optimise a research design which also incorporated my personal experiences. The choice of design was influenced by Moustakas (1990, p. 14), who advised that heuristic inquiry places importance on the subjective experience of the phenomenon in question: 'in heuristic research the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated'. Heuristic inquiry was consequently chosen for the research design. Heuristics assured me the freedom to explore my and others' experiences of peak moments at a deep level. Additionally, this study provided the vehicle to understand and develop the phenomenon's contribution to coaching.

The creative synthesis and final phase of heuristic inquiry is a personal undertaking by the researcher to synthesise all the elements of the study; music, art, story-telling and recordings are all proposed forms to express meaning (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas encouraged freedom of expression to create a platform to explicate the *what* and *how* of the phenomenon 'following the analysis of all the data sets and based on newly co-constructed understandings of it' (Sultan, 2018, p. 154). My choice of form is music, a recording on an audio file; there is a link to the recording in Appendix 7. I play the flute, *Faure's Sicilienne, Opus 78* (with piano accompaniment) as background music to prose, read by me. I compiled a *précis* to include my own and co-researchers' words from the study to summarise how a peak moment emerges.

The key findings from this research are summarised within the following two sub-sections: perceptions of peak moments; and the core conditions to enable a peak moment. A combination of elements of the core conditions contribute to establishing

and developing the coaching relationship. Three coaching approaches which succeeded in liberating a peak moment were also revealed. These findings are further contextualised to enhance understanding of the coaching relationship and may be of value in informing training for future coaches.

6.1 Perceptions of peak moments

The perception of a peak moment is many things. Once experienced, there is a desire to experience it again. The magical experience of a peak moment is seen as valuable, a coaching experience that is all consuming, apart from the norm and removed from daily life, adding richness to the human experience for the coach.

Coaches all described their experience using different terms, but common to all was a shared sense of important and meaningful life experiences; these memorable occurrences were not easily forgotten, whether a peak experience, a peak performance moment or flow, the three constructs of peak moments (McInman and Grove, 1991). The research illustrated that the confusion over terms led to conflation of a peak experience with flow and *vice versa*, indicative of the similarity between these two constructs of peak moments.

The sensation of a peak heralds that something is happening, a significant shift in the coaching conversation in that moment. Such a sensation fills the coach with joy, motivating them to continue in their chosen coaching career, a *raison d'être*, therefore adding value to the coaching profession. Without such experiences, continuation of coaching would appear to be meaningless for some coaches. Peak moments feed the coach to continue coaching and render the job worthwhile.

The perceptions of peak moments imply a level of spirituality in coaching, due to the transcendental nature of the phenomenon, as defined by Desmond (2012, p. 71):

> 'Spirituality is an aspect of our coaching relationships. Spirituality is part of the intersubjective relationship – the 'between' where both coach and client are open to what is emerging and what each is, in the mutuality of their dynamic encounter'.

The meaning of spirituality in the context of coaching is therefore not of a religious nature but part of cosmic consciousness, as described in section 4.5, feelings

experienced outside the body. Longhurst (2006) described these feelings as 'soul' experiences, feelings of connections with others and the universe.

In the literature, Maslow (1968a, p. 91) described an aspect of peak moments as 'playfulness, a cosmic or a god like, good-humoured quality transcending hostility […] fairly often reported in the peak experiences'. Playfulness is not prevalent in coaching, yet the benefit and value for both coach and coachee is a lightness that encourages a bond and progresses the relationship for a peak moment to occur. Additionally, Czikszentmihalyi's (1990) early musings on flow were centred around children at play, and how they became lost in time though playfulness.

The perceptions for each construct, identified in the current study, are presented below.

6.1.1 Peak experience

The research suggested that there are five aspects of peak experience: transcendence; spontaneity; rarity; timelessness; and an induced altered state of consciousness, as detailed below.

1. Peak experience induces a transcendental state. The value in transcendence is that the experience enables the person to embrace, as Maslow (1964, p. 41) said, 'the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness'.

2. The peak experience phenomenon is spontaneous. The findings reveal that a peak experience happens unexpectedly and cannot be engineered, and therein lies the beauty of the phenomenon. Core conditions can be observed to enable one, but there is no guarantee that a peak experience will emerge.

3. Peak experiences are also a rarity. Such rarity chimes with the literature in other fields, yet this is the first report in the field of coaching. It may be the case that this rarity is due to the cohort of participants, and that different results may emerge with an eclectic mix of participants from different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. A future study engaging with coaches of different ethnicities and cultures would be useful to ascertain if rarity is consistent.

4. A peak experience is timeless, and the sense of time is lost. The experience conveys the participant into a different understanding of how to be as a coach, transported by a transcendental wave which is experienced as temporal.

5. Participants are transported by an altered state of consciousness, inducing a temporary disorientation of time and place.

6.1.2 Peak performance

Peak performance generates the WOW factor in coaching, and there are five aspects which came to light through the findings: validation; feedback from third parties; fulfilment; pride in coachee engagement; and increased confidence and self-belief.

1. The findings disclose that peak performance is experienced through validation that the coach is performing at their best, associated with a job well done. This concept involves developing egoism, the philosophy which puts the self at the centre of its meaning, distinguished from egotism, the psychological overvaluation of self-importance. Validation is a sign of competence which makes coaches feel successful and valued in their work. The word 'performance' immediately gives a sense of competition, yet validation in coaching is exclusive of a competitive element or coaches benchmarking themselves against one another.

2. Feedback from third parties is a key aspect, such as when the coachee expresses the value they gained from coaching and how the outcome affected their career prospects and personal lives. Such feedback gives the coach a sense of achievement. The value for coaching lies in the motivation the coach feels to continue in their work. Equally, feedback from sponsors is motivating and encouraging, which breeds self-confidence and self-belief for the coach.

3. Another aspect reveals the fulfilment felt by the coach when the contract is signed and ready to start, a feeling of success and an acknowledgement of the work invested. This benefit is more applicable to executive coaching, whereby coaches are introduced to potential coachees in chemistry meetings to establish if there is mutual appeal to start the coaching contract.

4. The coaching relationship takes time to develop, through rapport, empathy and trust. The coachee does not always express a willingness to engage in coaching

but when this becomes evident, the coach feels an extraordinary sense of pride. These feelings alone help to bring the relationship between coach and coachee closer, forging the way for a successful partnership.

5. Peak performance in coaching fosters the coach's confidence and self-belief. Every coach has moments of self-doubt, even angst, about their performance, and until this research found the importance of peak performance, I can think of no other avenue for the coach to benchmark their prowess. There are, of course, professional coaching organisations who regulate the industry and offer accreditations and qualifications to recognise coaching levels of achievement. As far as I am aware, there is a paucity of research on the coach's internal state of performance, how they feel personally about themselves as a coach and not simply as a qualified professional. Further research on this construct would be enlightening and add value to the coaching profession, both for coaches and supervisors, to better understand internal dialogue and the doubts that we all experience.

6.1.3 Flow

The study revealed that there are five aspects of flow which benefit coaching. The first is that flow is regularly experienced; it is the most natural coaching phenomenon of the three constructs - transcendent, timeless and catalytic.

1. Flow state was experienced regularly in coaching. The result is focussed, deep rapport with coachees, enabling a greater sense of trust and connection in the relationship. Due to the increased rapport created between the two parties, a peak experience often ensues when in flow. The benefit for coaching is that flow appears to facilitate the co-researchers to get into deeper rapport with the coachee and develop a greater sense of connectedness.

2. Flow is experienced as a seemingly natural phenomenon in coaching, an experience which arises seamlessly in the coaching conversation when rapport is established and there is a connection between the two parties. Conditions can also be created to achieve flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) although in this study, flow happened without being engineered. Further research may show that flow can be engineered in coaching through NLP techniques such as anchoring.

3. Flow is a transcendent experience, inducing an altered state of consciousness. The coaches moved seamlessly in and out of flow and were totally unaware of this happening in the flow moment, only acknowledging it after the experience when the conscious mind kicked into awareness.

4. Time flies past when in flow. This timeless passage of time resulted in participants being freed from conscious thought, with two outcomes. The first is that flow appears to last a long time, and the second outcome is that deep rapport with the coachee is guided by flow. When writing about the crossover of emotions from student to teacher, Bakker's (2005, p. 40), data overwhelmingly established that 'the contagion hypothesis was confirmed regarding flow'. When the coach is in flow, it appears likely that rapport is strengthened due to contagion between coach and coachee. The benefit such contagion offers is the continual strengthening of the coaching relationship and the encouragement of depth in the connection within the dyad.

5. Flow in coaching seems to be catalytic. Flow was experienced as the enabler or precursor of a peak moment, a contributing factor to pave the way and guide the coaching conversation towards a peak moment. Flow is the means of getting to a state of peak performance and peak experience, all spontaneous encounters in coaching.

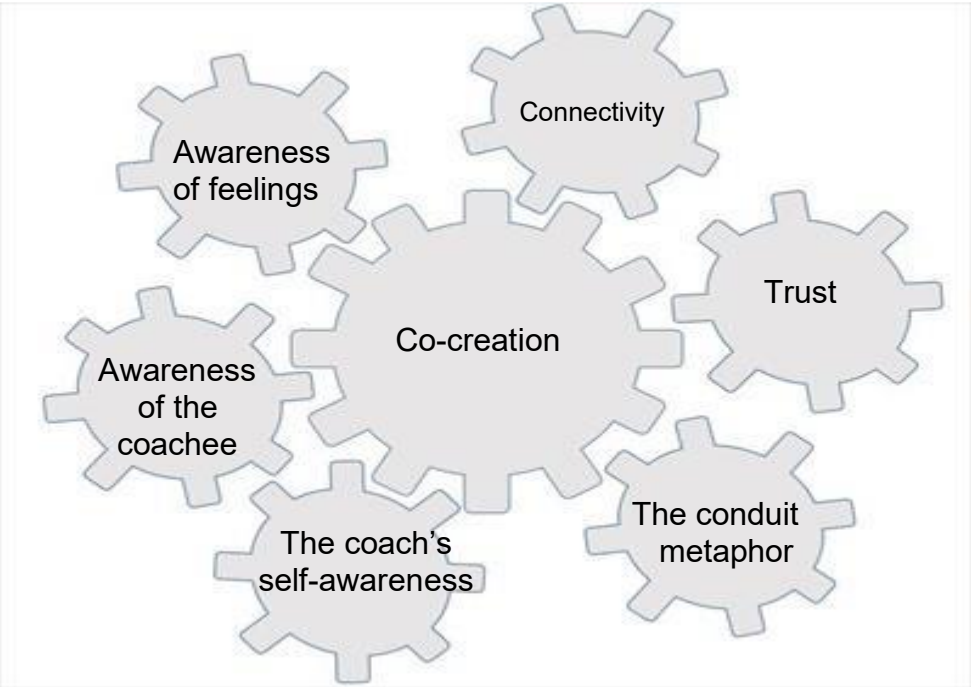
6.2 Building on the core conditions

A peak moment experience in coaching is reliant upon creating core conditions, which can be developed to encourage the emergence of a peak moment. An important finding from this research is that the peak moment is a co-created phenomenon between coach and coachee, supported by the core conditions. The coming together of the core conditions enables and often leads to a peak moment. The value for coaching is a greater sense of alignment and a deeper sense of empathy in the relationship between coach and coachee.

The findings in Chapter Five suggest that there are five core conditions which strengthen and develop the coaching relationship to enable a peak moment. These are: connectedness; co-creativity; trust; asking questions to facilitate a peak moment; and the coaching approach. Building on these core conditions to include the findings

of Chapter Four resulted in an amalgamation of the core conditions with the role of the coach's emotions in the coaching dyad, as shown in Figure 6 below. The revised core conditions are: connectivity; trust; the conduit metaphor, the coach's self-awareness; the coach's awareness of the coachee; and an awareness of feelings.

Figure 6: Building on the core conditions



Each revised core condition is discussed individually below.

6.2.1 Connectivity

Connectivity is one of the pre-conditions for a peak moment to happen. Being connected means being fully present for the coachee, at one in the connection, with no boundaries between coach and coachee.

The findings reveal that a peak moment does not occur without a deep connection in the relationship between coach and coachee, a oneness. According to Desmond (2012, p. 71) a 'sense of connectivity, a relationship' defines spirituality in coaching, adding that 'spirituality is perhaps the search for connectedness between the many parts of a person' (2012, p. 76). The coachee feels safe in the relationship and confident to express their feelings, giving forth information about themselves that would otherwise be inaccessible without that level of connection. When truly

connected, something transpires in the middle of the space in this relationship, forged by both parties, a magical moment of connectivity and unity, a shared experience. A peak moment happens between coach and coachee when something is co-created by the two parties in the space between them, as identified by Desmond (2012, p. 76):

> 'Interconnectedness, where clients' and coaches' inner and outer experiences are a source of creativity in the 'space' between; and a phenomenological method where the subjective experience is trusted'.

Connectedness is about sensing, too. The coach develops heightened sensory acuity that enables him or her to pick up information to guide the coaching process. As a result of a profound connectedness with the coachee, combined with the coach intuiting through the senses, an intensity is created in the connection which disarms any masking of thought or gesture by the coachee as honesty prevails.

The benefit and value to coaching is that a strengthened connection between coach and coachee enhances their relationship and a peak moment is, therefore, more likely to occur. A peak moment happens for the coach when the coachee has a breakthrough, arising from the connection the coach feels with the coachee. This a completely new contribution to knowledge, although Rock and Page (2009, p. 428) reported that, 'the connection between a coach and a client is often termed "rapport"'.

6.2.2 Trust

Mutual trust is co-created through the connectedness between coach and coachee. Not only does the coachee trust the coach, but the coach trusts in their own insights and intuition to monitor the coaching relationship and keep it safe. The trust the coach feels in their skillset means that they may dare to risk asking a certain question, such as a '*killer*' question or '*out of the blue'* question (discussed in section 5.4) which may provoke the coachee into a realisation that could precipitate a peak moment for the coach.

When the coachee feels trust with the coach, a safe space is created, giving the coachee permission to open up and answer questions which would appear inappropriate and incongruous had trust has not been established. Trust for the coachee also means trust in him or herself to engage with the coaching process. The findings illustrate that rapport is created through trust: the coaches' trust in themselves,

trust in the coachee and the trust the coachee feels towards the coach. Desmond (2012, p. 72) wrote of the 'space-between' and makes the point that 'it requires us to trust multiple ways of knowing'.

The drawing together of these conditions is what is new and important in this study. These core conditions may have been discussed previously and individually in the literature, but never brought together in this configuration. O'Connor and Lages (2004, p. 10) pointed out that 'trust is crucial in the coaching relationship […] trust comes from knowing yourself' which echoes the content of the following section on the coach's self-awareness.

6.2.3 The coach as conduit

This metaphor relates to the finding that when the coach is tuned into their intuition and tacit knowing, they perceive themselves as a conduit, radar, antenna or channel (discussed in section 4.5) to seek information that will be consequential for the coachee. This is an exciting finding as I am unaware that this contribution has hitherto been researched in the coaching literature. The metaphor of the conduit is a creative concept and also experienced in music by Carl Nielsen (2020), who says 'I often felt like a drainpipe through which music flowed'.

The information the coach accesses is often posed as a '*killer'* or *'out of the blue'* question for the coachee (discussed in section 5.4). The coach is often unable to identify the source from which this question arises. Desmond (2012), however, provides a rationale for this state: spirituality in coaching. The findings suggest something is created in the space between coach and coachee, where 'something' happens, which brings depth and richness to the coaching experience. It occurs in a space where both coach and coachee are open to the experience, as explained by Desmond (2012, p. 71):

> 'Spirituality is part of the inter-subjective relationship - the 'between', where both coach and client are open to what is emerging and what each is, in the mutuality of their dynamic encounter'.

The 'space-between' is a concept co-created between coach and coachee, due to their connectivity, mutual trust and engagement in the coaching relationship (discussed in section 5.2). The coach has listened to their tacit knowing and intuition,

and this results in being used as a conduit. Not all coachees, however, are prepared to fully engage with coaching. Coachee engagement is one of the conditions for a peak performance to happen, as discussed in the perception of peak moments in this chapter (6.1). Desmond (2012, p. 70) described some coachees' reluctance to engage, which may be a lack of awareness of their own capacity to share their emotions to fully engage with the coach:

> 'Many coaching clients arrive with a deeply internalised belief that 'knowing' is a cognitive process that occurs either within or outside of one's self – rarely emerging from relationship to others.'

Something 'happens' in the middle between coach and coachee, the 'space-between' (discussed in section 5.2). 'Something' emerges from the connectivity and trust in the dyad. This co-creation is frequently the gateway to exploring intuitive thoughts which the coach has from drawn from their tacit knowing, their skills and experience. Each of the cogs in these findings is inter-related and inter-dependent upon one another. They cannot be treated in isolation. Each is a part of the whole that constitutes the relationship in the dyad. Both connectivity and trust are implicit in this co-creation between coach and coachee.

The coach as the conduit metaphor is a major finding of this study. Certainly, it seems there is no research to date on this vital outcome, which is also an area for further research.

6.2.4 The coach's self-awareness

The research suggests that coaches engage in managing their state before entering the coaching room to be fully present in the coaching relationship, unbiased and devoid of their own issues and personal problems. With self-awareness, the coach recognises the necessity to empty themselves of all preconceptions and daily pressures before entering the coaching room. This management of the coach's state resulted in an approach which I called the 'empty vessel' approach (as discussed in 5.5). The coach puts aside acknowledged and recognised prejudices, judgements and personal issues to engage with the coachee. After putting themselves in the right state, as though a blank sheet of paper, leaving '*stuff*' at the door, the coaches became balanced, aligned and congruent. The coaching experience is enriched through the

coach's awareness of the self to prepare for the coaching intervention, and this maximises the opportunity for a peak moment to happen.

Coaches do bring, however, their full selves to the coaching session: their experience, expertise and understanding. This approach to coaching sometimes guides the path to peak moments. The essence of this concept is to be uncontaminated by one's own thoughts, personal issues and daily pressures, to avoid transferring anything onto the coachee. When rid of such concerns, coaches become fully present for the coachee, enabling them to tune into their intuition, listening for insights from their tacit knowing. Coaches feel energised when their own '*stuff*' is out of the way and they are focused on the coachee but deflated and exhausted after a coaching session if personal issues interfere with the connectedness. Interference from the coach's personal issues creates an obstruction which prevents the coach from hearing what the coachee is revealing. The coachee feels this connection too, both parties being mutually fed with the 'something' the connection brings. The connection to engage with a peak moment only happens when coaches are able to get their '*stuff*' out of the way,

6.2.5 Awareness of the other

The coach places the coachee at the centre of the coaching dialogue, engaging with Rogers's (1961) core conditions of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard. Increased awareness of the coachee leads to a deeper regard for the coachee and their needs. There is an emphasis on the coach's state, being fully present, open, without an agenda, and totally focused on the coachee. The coach's intention is to be of service to coachees, letting go of their skills, noticing what is coming up, simply sitting with them, listening and just being at one in the dyad.

The coach is skilled in being able to let go of their learned tools and techniques to focus on the coachee and be led by them. A sound knowledge of coaching tools and techniques is mandatory but not uppermost in the coach's mind; similar to the soloist who forgets about their technique under concert conditions, but focuses on the musical interpretation of the piece. Similarly, the coach focuses on the coachee with openness and curiosity through connectivity and trust, forgetting about their toolkit and learned techniques, preferring to depend upon their insight, intuition and experience.

Such an awareness of the coachee leads to the 'person-led' coaching approach, which also supports and contributes to the coaching relationship. Coach and coachee are tuned into one another for the co-creation of a peak moment, driven by mutual trust. The coaching conversation flows because the coach has gained trust from the coachee and equally trusts their own insights and intuition to allow the unknown to transpire. This person-led approach contrasts with a process-driven approach to coaching. When adopting the person-led approach, the coach consciously forgets about tools and processes but draws on their experience and understanding to fully focus on the coachee. Insight and intuition inform the coach to work with the needs of the coachee in the moment.

This approach is best described chimes by Moons (2016, p. 52) 'to actually make a transformational shift happen, coaches are not consciously applying any technique or approach to help clients come to their insights'. There is no tick-box process attached to this person-led approach. The coach depends on their understanding, their learned coaching skills which they are able to put to one side to focus on the coachee, inviting their insight and intuition to surface.

6.2.6 Awareness of feelings

An acknowledgement of feelings is another important finding and contribution to enabling a peak moment. Feelings from inside and outside the body are experienced and sensed when giving oneself permission to connect with and trust one's intuition and tacit knowing. Powerful sensations and visceral feelings such as a surge of energy throughout body herald an imminent peak moment.

When tuned into intuition and tacit knowing, a means of communication presents itself, similar to a sense of being used as a radar, antenna, conduit or channel. The coaching experience is enriched through the coach's recognition of their feelings. By taking note of emotions, coaches are enabled to react without consciousness, confident to ask uncomfortable, catalytic questions that often result in the coachee seeing the presented problem in a different way, gaining an insight, or shedding an assumption that has been holding them back.

The findings suggest that peak moments are also sensed though feelings which seemingly come from outside of the body when the coach is tuned into their intuition

and tacit knowledge. This occurrence appears to feel like an out-of-this-world encounter, akin to cosmic consciousness. There is a suggestion that messages are transmitted, probably from their unconscious mind, an insight from their external selves. There is a sense of something extraordinary, messages which appear as though '*bolts from the blue',* an expression that reveals something happening without warning, unexpected, unplanned and spontaneous.

When coaches were aware of their feelings and conscious and unconscious behaviours, a third coaching approach evolved, called the 'in' or 'out' approach. When entering a state to receive information from our tacit knowledge, intuition and understanding of the self through our experience, something 'speaks' to us. The result is that new questions are made available and intuitive messages are received. De Haan and Sills (2012, p. 39) suggests that working in this way 'requires the coach to have the capacity both to participate in the coaching relationship and to stand outside of it and reflect critically on what is taking place between them and the client'. The benefit and value for coaching is that by listening and acting upon feelings and emotions, the coach responds to the coachee in a way that creates a breakthrough for the coachee, which in turn produces a peak moment for the coach. Correspondingly, by acknowledging feelings and emotions, an opportunity is presented to work more intuitively with clients. Furthermore, feelings experienced from outside of the body are closely aligned to a peak experience as a transcendent encounter. Desmond (2012, p. 71) suggested that 'the transcendent may be what emerges from spiritual practices', citing meditation and reflection as suitable practices rather than dogmatic religious teachings. Without a process-driven coaching approach and free from personal agendas, coaches who listen to their intuition and draw on their tacit knowing can be of service to coachees, encouraging a peak moment to happen.

6.3 Contributions to coaching

There are seven contributions to coaching:

1. Peak moments offer a more profound, collaborative experience, contributing to the joy and engagement of coaching, rather than a functional, transactional process. Music feeds the soul, and so does a peak moment in coaching. It is aspirational, aesthetically rewarding, and beneficial to the relationship between coach and coachee.

2. The transcendental nature of a peak moment enables a deeper level of connectivity, through an acknowledgement of feelings. When the coach listens to their emotions, and works with them, the result could be a reaction from the coachee such as an 'aha' moment (Kets de Vries, 2013) when a revelation or insight becomes apparent; this, in turn, creates a peak moment for the coach. Peak moments provide extreme satisfaction as the result of the co-creation of something with coachees in the space created in the dyad: an aspect of sharing; the birth of something new; the sense of achievement when the coachee has an insight. The value to coaching lies in a better connection between coach and coachee.

3. The coaching industry seeks to improve and develop the sense of self in both coaches and coachees, and it could be that peak experience is a means of achieving higher levels of self-actualisation when coaches are aware of the phenomenon. Magic is brought to coaching relationship through the phenomenological nature of the experience. There is a feeling of exhilaration attached to a peak experience in coaching. Coaching is felt as a vitalising experience, taking the coach out of their normal everyday experiences into something meaningful. The value lies in how the experience makes the coach feel: joyous about the moment and richness of the experience, and eager for a repeat of the encounter.

4. The combination of the five core conditions is a new development in coaching. Individual elements have been presented in the coaching literature, but never hitherto as facilitators and precursors to a peak moment. All aspects of the core conditions shift seamlessly with one another, work together in harmony to encourage a peak moment.

5. The research revealed three coaching approaches which encourage the emergence of a peak moment: the empty vessel; the person-led approach; and the 'in' or 'out' approach. When supported by the core conditions, these approaches enable the coach to engage with a peak moment.

   The value and benefit of the empty vessel approach is an enhanced awareness of self, which enables the coach to be fully present for the coachee. Freed from any of their own preoccupations, which could contaminate the coaching

session, trust is fostered between coach and coachee, which leads to the connectedness necessary to co-create a peak moment. This approach is not dissimilar to the Gestalt approach to coaching. Bluckert (2010, p. 83) wrote that 'this emphasis on awareness as the change agent means that the Gestalt coach needs to learn to be an 'awareness expert'', which resonates with the empty vessel approach.

The second approach, the person-led approach to coaching, results in a deeper, more empathic relationship with the coachee. Empathy and rapport are developed through connectedness between coach and coachee which often results in a peak moment for the coach. This approach is already recognised in the coaching literature by Joseph (2010, p. 71) who wrote that in this approach, 'the coach is staying with the client's agenda'. The person-led approach in this study diverges, however, as this study incorporates the combination of the core conditions.

Through trust in their skills, experience and intuition, the coach experiences the 'in' or 'out' coaching approach. The coach is able to operate on two levels, seemingly at a conscious and unconscious level, hence the name for this 'in' or 'out' coaching approach. By tuning-in to their tacit knowing, coaches are able to tap into their skillset and experience to receive information as both the observer and the doer in coaching. By receiving such information, the coach becomes a conduit, radar, antenna or channel, which results in the conduit metaphor already discussed in this chapter. They can ask '*out of the blue*' or '*killer*' questions which give the coachee insights leading to a peak moment for the coach**.** Desmond (2012) wrote of spirituality in coaching, an aspect akin to the 'in' or 'out' coaching approach. Desmond (2012, p. 73) advised that 'we are open to the mystery of being and we are genuinely curious about any new awareness, creation or event that may emerge 'between one person and another', a statement that reflects the 'in' or 'out' approach.

6. Another contribution to coaching is the role and value of peak performance. The study shows that coaches can be proud and feel buoyant about their success as a coach without criticism and riposte of egotistical behaviour.

7. Finally, there is a contribution to coaching for supervision. This study reveals that the coach has a peak moment when the coachee has a breakthrough. In like manner, it could be that the supervisor has a peak moment when the coach gains a new understanding about themselves or their coach/coachee relationships when attending supervision. This may or may not be a current reality and is worthy of further research. Bakker's (2005) study revealed that contagion between student and teacher was amplified through a combination of autonomy, performance feedback, social support from colleagues and supervisory coaching, which endorses the role that supervision can play when anticipating a peak moment.

6.4 Limitations

In this study, I adhered to Eddles-Hirsch (2015, p. 254), who advised that the phenomenological tradition dictates that selected participants should have 'experienced the phenomenon being researched'. A second criterion for participation was that coaches had at least eight years' coaching experience. It is not unreasonable to think that coaches with less than eight years' experience could have experienced a peak moment without having an awareness of this phenomenon to recognise and name it. I was limited by the congruence of the cohort. I believe a deeper level of understanding of how coaches experience peak moments would have been achieved without this limitation. Progress could be made on the awareness of peak moments in coaching if random coaches were selected and interviewed about their phenomenological experiences as a coach. Maslow (1961a, p. 10) advised 'I now suspect they occur in practically everybody, although without being recognized or accepted for what they are'. As inferred by Maslow (1961a), coaches may have experienced a peak moment in coaching without realising this had occurred. Interviewing a random selection of coaches (and possibly more than the ten who participated for this study) could potentially tease out in the dialogue an experience which had not yet been identified and named as a peak moment.

Snowball-sampling (Noy, 2008) was successful in providing me with coaches who had experienced peak moments, but at the same time had its limitations as our experiences were consistently analogous. The demographics of the co-researchers were similar to mine. As like-minded individuals, we shared the same integrity, beliefs

and values. I sampled only one social network of coaches; we were all masterly, well informed, experienced and knowledgeable. This commonality made the interview process flow with ease as there were no linguistic misunderstandings and cultural misalignments.

Another limitation concerned heuristic process and the interviews. The co-researchers were not given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the research question. Rather than blindly send the participant information sheet (Appendix 1), the purpose of the first interview could be to discuss the research question and invite co-researchers to undertake the seven processes (Moustakas, 1990) that I, as the main researcher, undertook. This would give the participants an opportunity to really understand their experiences in depth. I subscribe to the argument made by Sela-Smith (2002), who believes that for the co-researchers to engage with heuristic theory, they should also undergo the seven core processes of research design (Moustakas, 1990).

The second interview would then take place a month or so later, when the conversation would be recorded, transcribed and transcripts sent to the participants. When analysing the data, I found myself internalising questions about the meaning of certain expressions such as ‘endless opportunities’ from one coach, which I failed to unpack at the time. There was also confusion about which construct was under discussion with the coaches, due to the lack of a thorough understanding of the meaning of each construct. These queries could have been resolved by a third interview, a month or so later, to discuss any questions which may have arisen from the data analysis. The richness of the research would have benefitted from three interviews. One long conversational interview and a short follow-up telephone interview was not enough to gain a deep level of insight into the coaches’ experiences.

Furthermore, I found the depictions challenging, as there was little instruction from Moustakas (1990) about how to go about creating one. The only reference I could find was from Sultan (2018). I followed his process but found it very time-consuming and ceased after creating three depictions. An attempt to create a group depiction I found equally challenging, which resulted in a composite of bits from each co-researcher which resembled no-one and felt lifeless and characterless. The essence of this study

was about feelings and phenomenology, and both depictions and group depictions felt alien.

Another reflection, learning and possible limitation concerns NLP. By default, and not intent, I realised when I started talking to participants that almost half, including me, were NLP-trained. Knowledge of various aspects of NLP such as rapport, congruence, sensory acuity and state management enable access to language and an awareness of the senses, which are usually quite hard to describe. A familiarity with and knowledge of NLP supported the participants in being able to develop connectedness in the coaching relationship, and possibly created the core conditions for a peak moment to occur with ease. By entering the coachee's map, participants quickly acquired a profound understanding of the coachee's world, enabled through NLP techniques. This realisation made me question whether my own experiences were imaginary or real, since visualisation, another NLP technique, comes easily to me. Also, on reflection, I am aware that the non-NLP trained participants were less articulate and forthcoming in the ability to express their experiences. Future research on non-NLP trained participants would be noteworthy to ascertain if some coaching training programmes are more likely to lead to peak moments than others.

From the foregoing, a case could be made for a future study of peak moments in these six areas: 1) a study to explore if coaches experience a peak moment without recognition of the phenomenon; 2) the number of cohorts; 3) a study with a random selection of coaches with different social and cultural backgrounds to build on the findings from this study; 4) a review of the number and purpose of interviews to augment Moustakas's (1990) process; 5) a review of the purpose and formulation of individual and composite depictions; and 6) the value NLP offers in coach training.

In relation to the study overall, the intervention of major surgery forced me to suspend studies for nine months. There was, however, a silver lining to this life event. The fallow thinking time gave me insights into how I could re-frame the literature review and make sense of the material researched (Appendix 8). Secondly, the first lockdown period due to Covid-19 enabled me to dedicate myself totally to writing and reviewing during an intense period of isolation. My final concern relating to the study overall is a niggling desire to start the study all over again as I now feel more competent in my

understanding of peak moments. I would incorporate all the limitations already expressed.

6.5 Personal reflections

One of my assumptions at the start of the study was that peak moments were spontaneous encounters and happened involuntarily. Trying to make one happen will only result in disappointment. A peak moment can be neither coerced nor forced. It can, however, be something to anticipate; something to look forward to and relish when, unexpected, it just happens. My assumption was confirmed by the findings.

I also believed a peak moment was created in conjunction with another being, an enabler or catalyst. I questioned if a peak moment was experienced as a co-coaching development, a dialogic experience, or whether it was a self-centred activity. From the findings, it has been shown that the coach-coachee relationship triggered the experience, dependent upon the core conditions: a co-creation of the phenomenon of a peak moment. The relationship was at the centre of this co-creation, supported by the three coaching approaches, when the coach was able to empty themselves of their personal concerns and issues, and trust their insights, intuition and tacit knowing. This learning was not dissimilar to what Bachkirova (2016) describes as the 'dialogic self': the coach who seeks to come across as more personal, homing in to meaning, desire, connection, dialogue and tuning-in. The other type of coach Bachkirova (2016) calls the 'competent self': the expert in the process of coaching. Such a process-driven coaching intervention can be mechanical, non-conducive to a peak moment, and tends to be about coaching *to* the coachee rather than *with* the coachee (Clutterbuck and Megginson, 2010). I have always been averse to processual coaching, but this learning affirms my belief that peak moments happen when working intuitively with coachees.

The focus of the study was my experience of the phenomenon, and heuristic inquiry gave me the freedom to explore my experiences of peak moments at a deep level. I wonder, however, if I am pre-programmed because I have experienced peak moments. Peak moments keep me motivated, give me joy and contribute to a fuller life and a more profound coaching experience. Similar to other human sensations, once experienced they are more easily recognised. If the conditions are set up physiologically within me to be able to appreciate and recognise peak moments, I

question whether or not I am structured in a way to connect with them; perhaps I am pre-programmed to recognise a peak moment in any of the three constructs, using visualisation and synaesthesia to recall the experience. The senses are primed, and the experience is felt, visualised and re-experienced. Correspondingly, a pre-condition to a peak moment is manifest.

One of my learnings is attached to the 'in or 'out' coaching approach. This concept is explained as a message from the preconscious to consciousness with an unawareness that it is happening, a message lying dormant yet waiting to be stimulated. Damasio's (1999) model proposed that 'pre-reflective experience and emotions shift to awareness in consciousness' (Cox, 2013, p. 76). I learnt through Damasio's (1999) theory that the pre-conscious feeds into consciousness, when neural messages create feelings which are felt as bodily messages, creating the feeling of feelings. Consciousness is the feeling of knowing a feeling, when the '*bolt from the blue'* messages become manifest.

The research suggests that with experience, coaches can afford to relax and enjoy the coaching experience by trusting their insight, intuition and tacit knowing. As a novice coach, everyone has to learn the basics, yet by observing and working on the core conditions to initiate a peak moment there is no reason to believe that this joyous experience cannot be made available to all coaches. This study engaged with mature, experienced coaches, but there is no reason to suggest that less experienced coaches could not experience peak moments. Novices may be inexperienced in coaching, but they nevertheless bring life experience. With this in mind, coach training could be skewed to make the core conditions available to trainees, with particular emphasis on the importance of listening to intuition and intuitive responses to encourage a peak moment.

In the peak experience moment, participants feel at one, joyous and creative, which aligns with the literature on peak experience as expressed by Maslow (1968a, p. 91): 'It could easily be called happy joy, or gay exuberance or delight. It has a quality of spilling over of richness'. Such richness is something I learned about the joy a peak experience brings, not yet highlighted in the literature about coaching.

In similar fashion, it became clear to me that the self-effacing British coaches were unprepared to talk about the performance of coaches. During the interviews I was

challenged to consider if money, success, validation and self-achievement were part of my coaching mindset. On reflection, however, I now better understand this viewpoint and construct, appreciating its merit as peak performance in coaching. There was an inference that ego should not be discussed in coaching, but I see no reason why coaches ought not to be proud of their achievements and talk about them. In my view, the professionalism of coaching *per se* would be enhanced if coaches were able to talk about their win-win conversations and inform others how to be successful. The significance of this contribution is to support the industry and coaches, in particular, to feel comfortable about peak performance. The findings indicated that peak performance has a role in coaching as validation of the coach's abilities, skills and success.

This study concerns the experience of peak moments for coaches. My experiences remain confusing, however. I am still unsure about defining a peak moment. I question whether I had a peak experience, as I was certainly in peak performance due to my advanced skill set, and possibly in flow during the entire duration of the encounter. In my coach training, I was advised to avoid emotional outbursts and keep my emotions under strict control, which I initially observed but later ignored, as this advice is non-conducive to attaining a peak moment. Cox (2013, p. 17) addresses this issue: 'this aversion should be seen as misplaced since feelings are the initial mechanism though which understanding is ultimately achieved'. Crying was also forbidden in my training, yet several of the coaches in this study observed that the tears from the coachee were often a precursor to something about to happen such as a breakthrough which may subsequently gift the coach a peak moment. The human feeling element is core to encouraging a peak moment, rather than a robotic approach to coaching.

Analysis revealed additional, unforeseen benefits for coaching if the cogs of the core conditions keep turning. The first is a benefit for the coachee. Through the co-creation of their relationship, the coachee sees something differently, often when the '*out of the blue*' or '*killer*' question is asked. The coachee is empowered and feels differently, and this enables a peak moment for the coach. Longhurst (2010) suggested this 'aha' moment, a shift in thinking for the coachee, is derived from intuitive, inner knowledge, perhaps inspired by the coach. Another interesting piece of research would be to ascertain if the coachee is aware of the coach's peak moment, and whether that peak

experience was the coachee's too, experienced in a different way but triggered mutually.

In conclusion, the benefit of creating the core conditions is twofold: a shift the coachee feels when something happens in the middle of the coaching conversation between the two parties; and, secondly, the peak moment the coach experiences in observing and revelling in the coachee's understanding of the shift. The peak moment experience is about feeling differently about coaching. A moving and powerful event, the peak moment experience creates a sense of everything being alive and joyous, connecting with every cell in the body. The coach and coachee potentially share a richer experience, through the power of coaching.

The relevance and significance of this study is about the joy and engagement of coaching, rather than seeing it functionally. It is a vitalising, aesthetic experience which is at the heart of my research, adding to the richness of human experience and collaborative engagement in coaching.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Influences of key literature

	Key authors	Methodologies	Themes and insights	Coaching related
Mysticism and religion	McGiffert (1907) Desmond (2012) Maslow (1961)		Synergy between peak moments and mysticism Mystical illuminations subsumed under peak experiences	Desmond talks of spirituality in coaching
Psychology	James (1902) Maslow (1961) Rogers (1951)		Rogers's core conditions	Peak moments could be life-altering
Positive psychology	Csikszentmihalyi (1990)	Interview	Flow is a construct of peak moments	Prevalent in coaching
Sports psychology	Privette (1983) McInman and Grove (1991)	Interview Questionnaire	Intense focus in the dyad (self and object) The 3 constructs Overlap in characteristics	Peak performance a new finding in coaching
Peak moments in coaching	Gallwey (1987) de Haan (2008a, 2008b) de Vries (2013) Moons (2016)	Interview	Critical Moments 'Aha' moments Breakthroughs	Applied to the coachee Impairment of conscious thought
Peak moments in music/arts	Marotto *et al.* (2007) Panzarella (1980)	Interview	Contagion between pupil and teacher	Transient moments of bliss
Peak moments in business	Thornton *et al.* (1984) Bakker (2005)	Interview Questionnaire	Flow described as a short-term peak experience	Absorption Motivation Joy in the task
Peak moments in education	Garland Evans (2016) Raettig and Weger (2018)	Interview Questionnaire	Promotes moral presence and ethical considerations	Contagion between coach and coachee
Peak moments in nature	McDonald *et al.* (2009) Naor and Mayseless (2017)			Personal growth Transformation

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Appendix 2: Participant information sheet

From Kay A M Weijers, doctoral research candidate
Student Number: 16007637

Study title: 'Exploring the coach's experience of peak moments'

January 2018

You are being invited to take part in a research study. 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 the study is to explore how coaches recognise and value the phenomena of peak moments in the coaching context which include the three states of peak experience, peak performance and optimal experience (flow). Peak experience is described as mystic, transpersonal, an intense and highly valued moment, peak performance as trans-active, an episode of superior human functioning and flow as fun, an intrinsically enjoyable experience.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You are being invited because you are an experienced coach with at least 8 years' coaching experience who may identify as having experienced peak moments that occur as a result of coaching sessions.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part but if you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be also asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw any unprocessed data at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you choose to take part, you will be invited to an interview and asked to talk about your experience of peak moments. Involvement in the research should be a pleasant experience, somewhat similar to that of an informal conversation.

There are three stages to the interview process as follows;

1. A brief introductory discussion by phone with me to arrange the main interview at a date, time and location convenient for you.

2. A main interview of up to two hours, when you will be asked to sign the consent form. You will be invited to re-visit your experience of peak moments, being as open and honest as possible, describing your thoughts, feelings and behaviours at that time. The format will be very similar to that of an informal conversation and may last up to 2 hours and you can stop the interview at any time. With your consent, the conversation will be an audio-recorded for a transcript to be made and used for the research; a transcript will also be sent to you.

3. A follow-up telephone conversation of up to half an hour, 2-3 weeks after the main interview for your feedback, to ascertain if you have anything else you would like to add since the main interview, if anything stood out in particular for you and if you have any further insights. This conversation will

not be audio recorded but if you would like to add additional information, this will be added to the study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The benefits of taking part are that your experiences will enrich the research and lead to a new professional contribution to coaching; to understand how coaches recognise and value peak moments that occur as a result of coaching sessions, which may create insights into the phenomenological experience. Furthermore, a theoretical contribution is anticipated to the literature on peak moments in coaching. The wider benefit of this research is that, just as the value of peak moments is known by artists, business leaders, sportsmen/women and musicians, so it may be valued by coaches as little is known about how peak moments are experienced by coaches.

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?

Contact me at the following address: 16007637@brookes.ac.uk

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, Faculty of Business.

Who has reviewed the study?

The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University Registration Number 171164

Contact for Further Information

Kay A M Weijers

Student Number **16007637**

Email: 16007637@brookes.ac.uk

Tel: 07790 038001

My supervisor is: Dr Elaine Cox, Director of Postgraduate Coaching and Mentoring Programmes, Oxford Brookes University, Faculty of Business, ecox@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 time to read the information sheet.

Date:

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Appendix 3: Participant consent form

Full title of Project:

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:

		Please initial box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.	☐
3.	I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

***Note for PI / Supervisory team*:**
The following statements should be included if appropriate.
If not, please ***delete*** *from the consent form*:

		Please initial box	
		Yes	No
4.	I agree to the interview / focus group / consultation being audio recorded	☐	☐
5.	I agree to the interview / focus group / consultation being video recorded	☐	☐
6.	I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications	☐	☐
7.	I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research.	☐	☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

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Appendix 4: Interview schedule and conversation guide

Full title of Project:

'Exploring the coach's experience of peak moments'

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:

Kay A M Weijers, Research Student; 16007637@brookes.ac.uk

Interview Schedule

- 8 – 10 participants
- The interviews are scheduled to take place between March and June 2018.

There are three stages to the interview process as follows;

1. A brief introductory discussion by phone with the researcher to arrange the main interview at a date, time and location convenient for participants.

2. A main interview of up to two hours, when participants will be asked to sign the consent form.

3. A follow-up telephone conversation of up to half an hour, 2-3 weeks after the main interview for feedback

Conversation Guide:

1. A brief introductory discussion by phone

2. Main interview: I shall introduce the co-participants to a 'guided reflection' to assist them to uncover their lived experience of peak moments (Maher, 2011). This is a guide to give them instructions to set the frame for the interview and to prepare them for their reflections:

- Select the space where you can be relaxed and uninterrupted
- Close your eyes and take long slow breaths and inhale slowly and deeply
- Recall an episode when you experienced a peak moment, attending to how your body feels, inhaling the sounds, smells, colours and sensations from that peak moment
- Try to capture the essence of the peak moment and re-live it, keeping your eyes closed
- Focus on a particular example of the experience which stands out for its vividness, or as if it were the first time
- And when you are ready to share your experience with me, open your eyes
- Describe the experience as you lived through it again, from the inside of your being, and capture the feelings, the mood, the emotions

Having set the frame for the interview, I shall listen. And when appropriate, paraphrase or repeat the same words and expressions the participant uses which will yield rich data. Thereafter I shall ask sensitive,

conversational questions depending upon what the participant divulges. My conversational style will not be interrogative but conducive to skilfully manage the conversation in a relaxed, informal and informative manner. I will use questions and phrases such as;

- *How do you remember the experience of your peak moment?*
- *Tell me more about…'*
- *Can you explain how that made you feel?*
- *What else did you experience?*
- *What were you thinking at the time?*
- *Was it an experience in the moment or a post experience reflection?*
- *Do you have anything to add?*
- *What else came to mind?*
- *Tell me more about…*
- *I'm noticing that…*

3. A follow-up telephone conversation after 2-3 weeks for feedback to ascertain if the participants have anything else they would like to add since the main interview, if anything stood out in particular for them and if they have any further insights.

Informal questions will be asked such as:

- *Do you have any feedback for me from our last conversation?*
- *Did anything stand out in particular for you?*
- *Is there anything else you would like to discuss?*
- *Do you have anything to add?*
- *Have you experienced any more insights?*
- *Has anything else emerged for you?*
- *On reflection, what was your strongest sense of the experience?*

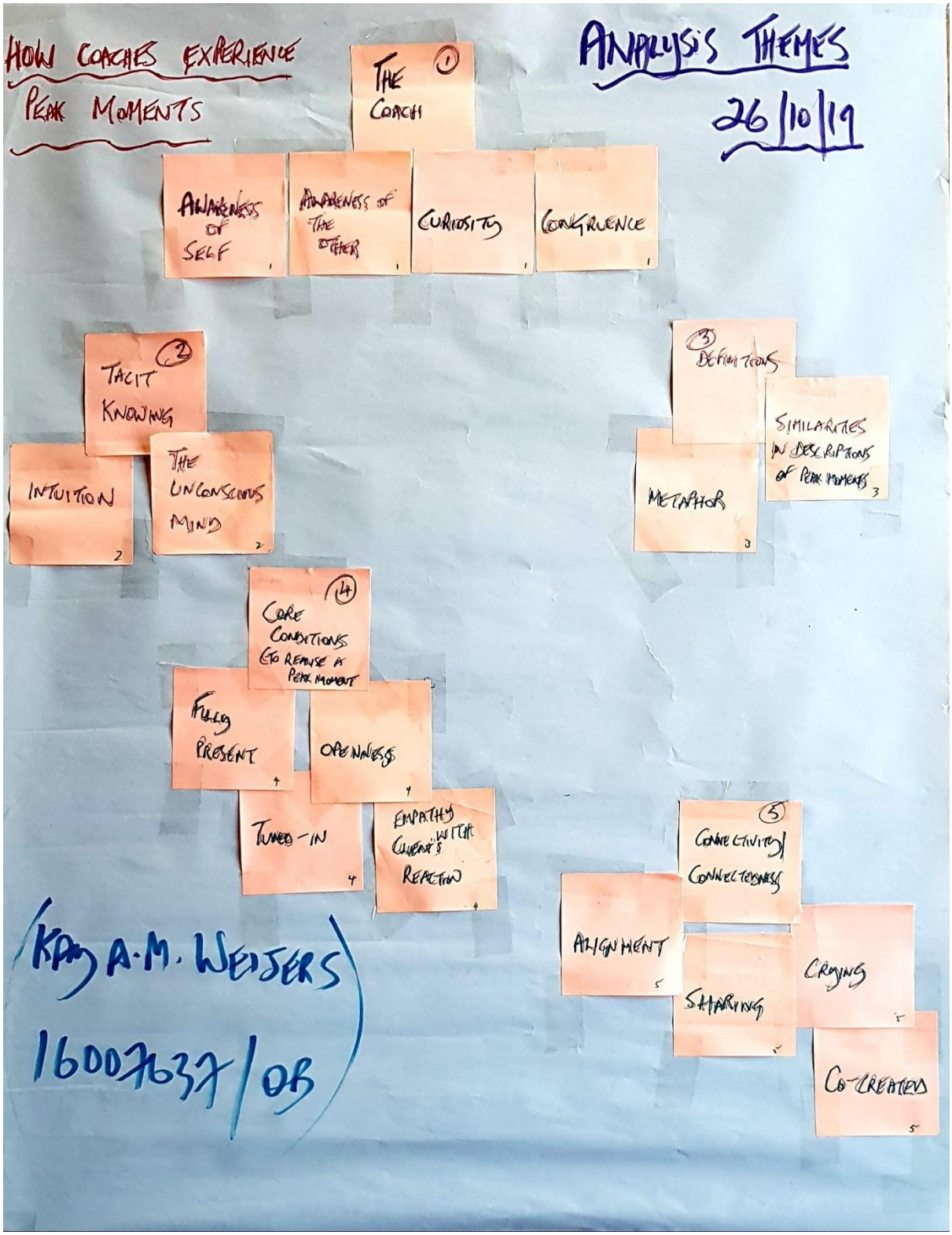
Reference:

Maher, A., Robertson, R., and Howie, L. (2011) 'The experience and development of awareness in gestalt therapy training groups: a phenomenological study', *Gestalt Journal of Australia and New Zealand*, 8 (1), pp. 36-56.

Appendix 5: Table of demographics of the co-researchers

COR	Pseudonym	Years' Experience	Type of Coaching
Co-Researcher 1	Felicity	31	Person-centred humanistic NLP trained
Co-Researcher 2	Josephine	42	A combination of individual and group coaching, life and corporate coaching NLP trained
Co-Researcher 3	Researcher	21	Cognitive-behavioural personal development for individuals NLP trained
Co-Researcher 4	Shirley	17	Executive and leadership coaching in companies 1:1 career coaching
Co-Researcher 5	Debbie	20	Organisationally sponsored developmental coaching of high potential leaders and senior executives facing transition
Co-Researcher 6	Rex	19	Executive coaching
Co-Researcher 7	Lizzie	33 12	Executive coach and mentor specialising in team and organisational coaching Wellness/health coach NLP trainer
Co-Researcher 8	Jacob	22	Professional and personal development
Co-Researcher 9	Richard	13 7	Executive leadership in corporate, 1:1 & team External coach
Co-Researcher 10	Susie	17	Life, executive, leadership, career, organisational and team coaching NLP trainer

Appendix 6: An example of analysis of the data



Appendix 7: The creative synthesis prose

The recording is available here: https://doi.org/10.24384/rscx-nk71

The coaching dance begins with the coach and coachee looking at one another. Do they feel a connectedness? Might they be able to fall into rapport and begin a conversation with ease? The coach has prepared for coaching by keeping an open mind, emptying themselves of their personal issues and judgements, forgetting about their tools and techniques yet bringing their full self to coaching, respectful of the coachee and mindful of whatever the coachee brings to coaching.

The coach begins by asking questions with empathy to establish mutual rapport with the coachee, creating a flow in the coaching conversation. The coaching relationship develops into a trusting and safe environment as the coachee begins to open up, like a chrysalis, expressing their inner needs and wants. The coach listens, staying present and focussed, honouring silences and pauses, trusting their insight, intuition and tacit knowledge, yet bringing their full self into the space and holding the space for the coachee. By observing and noticing their insights the coach becomes a conduit, antenna radar or channel for unexpected out of the blue, or killer questions to emerge, which generate new realisations and insights for the coachee. Both coach and coachee co- create '*something',* a '*something'* that happens in the middle of the dyad which invites a peak moment to occur.

This is how a peak moment emerges. Coaches trust their knowledge and experience, listen to their intuition and draw on their tacit knowing to bring forward whatever their intuition tells them might be helpful in the moment or beyond. It could be a question or a challenge that seems to come from nowhere when the coach responds to their insight. But the coach acknowledges hunches and feelings to encourage this often rare, memorable and joyful experience of a peak moment; a co-creation between coach and coachee.

Appendix 8: A re-frame of the literature

Authors' Contexts and what they wrote about Kay A M Weijers, February 13th 2010					
Name	**Dates**	**PE**	**PP**	**Flow**	**Gaps**
Psychology					
William James	1891				
Dewey	1934				
Maslow	1943				
Rogers	1951				
Privette	1983				
Positive Psychology (and Flow)					
Csikszentmihalyi	1990			X	Flow
Mouton, Montijo	2017				Love, passion and peak experience
Landsman's Positive Experiences Model	1969	X			3 category typology, the self, the external world and interpersonal
Yeagle Privette Dunham	1989				Highest happiness: an analysis of an artist's peeak exp
Mainemelis	2001				Timelessness
Rathunde	2001			X	Toward a psychology of optimal human functioning
Religion and Mysticism					
Greeley	1974	X			Ecstasy, a way of knowing
Maslow	1970	X			Religion, values and pe's
Primeux & Vega	2002	X			Operationaling Maslow: religious and flow as biz partners
Woodward, Findlay & Moore	2009	X			Peak & Mystical experiences in Intimate relatonships
Waldron	1998				The life impactof transcendent experiences
Sports Psychology					
Privette	1983	X	X	X	PE, PP, Flow: a comparative analysis
McInman & Grove	1991	X	X		Peak moments in sport
Gallwey	1987				In Coaching
Dodson	1996	X			PE in mountain biking
Ravizza	1977	X			PE in sport
Harung	2012	X	X		Pes during optimal performance in world class performers
Bundrick and Privette Study	1987		X		A Model of feeling and performance from misery to ecstasy
Music & The Arts					
Dewey	1934				Visual Arts
Panzarella, Robert	1980	X			The phenomenology of aesthetic peak experiences
Lowis	1998	X			Music and peak experiences
Tindall	2005	X			Mozart in the Jungle
Sinnamon,Moran, O'Connell	2012	X		X	Flow among musicians: measuring PE of student performers
Rana, Tanveer & North	2009	X			Peak experiences of music and SWB
Ben Green	2015	X			Peak music experiences as epiphanies
Pathak	2017	X		X	Effects of intense music experience
Marotto, Roos, Victor	2007	X			A study of peak experience in an orchestra
Bakker	2005			X	Flow among music terachers and their students
Maslow	1968	X			Music education and peak experience
Kirchner	2011			X	Incorporatiing flow into practice and performance
Business					
Salanova, Bakker & Llorens	2006			X	Flow at Work
Lyngdoh & Guda	2016			X	A flow theory perspective to understanding salesperson
Schindehutte, Morris & Allen	2006	X	X	X	Beyond achievement: Entrepreneurship
Hallett & Hoffman	2014		X	X	Performing under pressure
Ceja & Navarro	2012			X	Suddenly I get into the zone
Thornton Privette Bundrick	1990	X	X	X	Peak performance ot business leaders
Greig, Gilmore, Patrick, Beech	2012				Arresting moments in engaged mgmt research
Corlett	2012				Being 'struck' and the effects of recall
Allen, Massiah,Cascio,Johnson	2008	X	X	X	Triggers of extraordinary experiences
Schouten,Mc Alexander, Koenig	2007	X		X	Transcendent customer experience
Education					
William James	1891				Philosopher
Garland Evans	1948	X			Peak experience in educational encounters
Raettig & Weger	2018	X			Learning as a shared peak experience
Moons	2016				a Shift in the room
Chambers Christopher et al	2002	X			Peak experience, social interest, moral reasoning
Nature and the Wilderness					
McDonald, Wearing & Ponting	2009	X			The nature of peak experience
Naor & Mayseless	2017	X			How personal transformation occurs
Coaching					
Gallwey	1987				Coaching
McBride	2013			X	How coaches experience the flow state
Honsova, Jarasova	2018				Peak coaching xperiences
Longhurst	2006				The aha moment in co-actvie coaching
Flaherty	2010				Coaching
Moore,Drake,Tschannen-Moran, Campone	2005				Relational flow: a theoretical model for the intuitive dance
Prescott	2010				aha moments
Clutterbuck & Megginson	2010				Coach maturity
De Haan	2008				Creating tipping points, Critical moments
Kets de Vries	2013				aha moments
Thorne's Peak Experiences Model	1963	X			6 category classification of peak experiences

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