

**An empirical exploration into changes coaches
perceive associated with the experience of Flow in
coaching conversations**

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Abstract

The importance of the self of the coach and the coaching relationship is well researched. Flow as a subjective, optimal experience has been found to play a facilitating role in individual personal growth and development across many different contemporary work contexts and is receiving increased work-based research focus. Until recently, research efforts outside of the coaching context have been predominantly quantitative in nature, focussed on operationalising the Flow experience itself. However, little coaching-specific research has investigated either the relational experience of Flow or any understanding of its potential associated consequences. However, these approaches minimise opportunities to fully explore either the relational experience of Flow or the extent of possible associated consequences of Flow from the practioner perspective. There is only a small body of studies on the consequences of Flow in helping dyadic relationships in the contexts of nursing, teaching and therapy. However, to date little coaching-specific research has been conducted to investigate the experience of Flow from the coach perspective and none on understanding the breadth of any potential associated consequences on the self of the coach or the coaching relationship.

This study addresses this gap. Given the importance of the self of the coach and the coaching relationship, this study does not explore either the effectiveness of Flow or the client experience of Flow. Rather it focuses on the coaches subjective experiences and perceptions, exploring changes coaches perceive associated with the experience of Flow in coaching conversations. Two qualitative methodologies were used sequentially with ten experienced coaches over a ten-month period. First, Conceptual Encounter was used to extend our knowledge by establishing and mapping a common understanding of what coaches recognise as a Flow experience within the coaching relationship. Subsequently, the Heuristic Inquiry methodology was used to explore the experiences and meaning of any perceived changes coaches associated with Flow.

The findings indicate that an important connection is created in Flow between coach and client.

The Flow experience in coaching was seen by coaches as a catalyst for personal change after coaching. The Flow map developed in this study offers rich coaching-specific descriptions to enable other coaches to perceive and recognise Flow. The findings suggest Flow offers coaches a legitimate and purposeful way to agentially use and develop themselves as an instrument of Flow in their practice. Recognising coaches as instruments of Flow has important implications for coaching practice and coach development, the coaching professional bodies and academic research.

The study provides further ideas for enhancing coaches' reflection and developmental learning practice through dedicated training and supervision. First, the descriptive definition and map of Flow in the dyadic relationship of coaching helps coaches and supervisors recognise, understand and discuss this subjective experience. Second, reflecting on the difference Flow makes in coaching practice and the relationship acts as a catalyst for the agentic growth and development of the self as instrument of Flow in coaching. Finally, the 'Flow to self-efficacy to agency and more Flow' developmental spiral offers an additional pathway to support coaches' emergent journey of growth over time.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale for this study

As an executive coach, I have experienced occasions of Flow - when time seems to stand still, I am completely absorbed in what I am doing, and everything flows beautifully and effortlessly in the service of my client. I am left feeling fulfilled, knowing I was at my best and believing I made a difference. Unfortunately, I also recognise more negative occasions in coaching practice where, for instance, I have experienced sessions that make me anxious or bored. This was not new for me. I knew of Flow and had experienced those positive and negative emotions in my former corporate life before. Flow and Flow theory has long inspired me with hope, explaining that “poised between boredom and worry” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.35) lay this sweet spot of high-quality Flow I had experienced many times. The Flow channel model (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) fascinated me. It had enabled me to recognise my experiences as Flow. It had also given me some understanding that pitting my skills and experience against stretching challenges may increase opportunities for Flow. During my postgraduate coach development training, I began to explore Flow in the context of change inherent in the work of the coach. I again explored Flow in the context of my corporate leadership team during my Master’s, before becoming a full-time coach.

As I began coaching in earnest, feelings of anxiety accompanied me as I tried to develop into a good coach, recalling and applying all I had learnt. I relaxed as my experience grew, finding Flow and becoming more intuitive. However, I was also disappointed to find that I experienced occasions of boredom within this new chosen coaching career. ‘How could I be bored?’ I asked of myself, ‘doing work I had been drawn to, found so rewarding and had given up my successful leadership career for?’ I began to question myself, wondering what I was doing ‘wrong’ if I feel this way. Did other coaches experience this phenomenon too? If it was making me question myself, what effect was it having on my clients and my coaching? Recalling Flow

theory, I tried to understand the differences between sessions when I was in Flow and those in which I was anxious or bored, and felt that 'the' answer must lie somewhere in the balance between challenge and skill. I understood that slipping either side of the balance prompted negative emotions and I felt my coaching suffered as a consequence. I understood that I needed to increase the challenge for me to overcome feelings of boredom and experience Flow again. But I was confused about which challenge I should be focussing on - the client's coaching issue, my learning goal, the tool or competency or something else? I recognised that I thought I knew Flow theory 'in theory', but I didn't know what it meant or how it might be applied in coaching practice.

Further exploring the literature on Flow has shown that little is currently known about either the experience of Flow within the dyadic specific coaching context or any potential consequences associated with it. It became clear that investigating Flow in coaching from the coach's perspective is important when we recognise that the coaching relationship is a key influence on coaching effectiveness (De Haan and Gannon, 2017) and that the self of the coach impacts that relationship (Bachkirova, 2016). This required using field research to initially describe the experiences coaches recognise as Flow in coaching and then explore any changes they may perceive associated with those experiences.

The way we identify and balance our challenges with our skills to meet those challenges is, I believe, of great importance to all practising coaches and not just myself. Slipping either side of that balance had been shown to make a significant difference to people's well-being, contentment and fulfilment as well as their role performance (Ilies, Wagner, Wilson, Ceja, DeRue and Ilgen, 2017; Delle Fave, Massimini and Bassi, 2011; Salanova, Bakker and Llorens, 2006). Understanding, developing and potentially harnessing the benefits of Flow and its subjective balance could positively influence the quality of the coaching experience for both clients and coaches. I felt compelled to find a way to explore the difference being in or out of Flow could make to coaches and the coaching profession. In the process I hoped that I, too, would find answers in my personal journey of growth and discovery. This compulsion drew me

to the Oxford Brookes DCM programme and a journey of discovery. Four years later, the focus of this thesis is, therefore, to explore the subjective experience of Flow from the point of view of practising coaches and discover any changes they may perceive associated with this optimal experience.

Gaining a better understanding of any changes coaches perceive will, hopefully, help in three ways:

1. Add to the body of specific knowledge about Flow within the coaching and coach context

Whilst a great deal is known outside of coaching about the Flow experience and its antecedents, limited research exists about Flow within the field of coaching (Whateley, 2017; McBride, 2013; Wesson, 2010; Wesson and Boniwell, 2007). However, this body of research does appear to acknowledge the experience of Flow in coaching (Wesson, 2010; McBride, 2013) with indicators of how Flow may be encouraged (Wesson, 2010; Wesson and Boniwell, 2007) and its potential fit with existing coaching competencies (McBride, 2013). Existing literature does not, however, help to answer the research challenge and the “so what?” question of Flow within the dyadic coaching context.

This stands in contrast to the status of ‘presence’ in coaching, a concept closely associated with Flow. Unlike Flow, presence appears within accreditation body competency frameworks (ICF, 2017), has been specifically mapped in relation to the dyadic coaching context (Noon, 2017) and is considered an important underlying aspect of coaching success (Wasylyshyn and Kaiser, 2015; Stelter, 2014). Given my positive experiences of Flow and coaching, my awareness of the importance of Flow in other contexts (Bakker, 2008; Bakker *et al.*, 2011) and how instrumental Flow has been within the Positive Psychological movement (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), I have been both intrigued and mystified as to why so little exploration had been undertaken in coaching.

2. Contribute to the coaching profession

Arguably, the biggest challenge coaches and clients alike perceive to the future credibility and growth of the coaching profession is the continuing prevalence of untrained individuals who can call themselves coaches. Accreditation doubled over the last ten years (ICF, 2016) and once accredited, mastery is defined through competency parameters and time. There is an opportunity and, I believe a need, to extend coaching and coach development beyond the competencies emphasised within accreditation bodies.

Flow, as a potential development and growth vehicle (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2020), may help play a part in developing us as “instruments” of coaching (Bachkirova, 2016). The self of the coach is central to the coaching relationship and achievement of coaching outcomes (Bachkirova, 2016) and Flow has been shown to positively influence people’s personal resources such as well-being (Ilies *et al.*, 2017) and performance (Delle Fave, Massimini and Bassi, 2011). There is an opportunity to extend the benefits of Flow into the coaching context and broaden the coaching practice and development literature.

3. Grow to be the best coach I can be

Flow has long held an intellectual and practical fascination for me. Individuals in Flow are often performing at their best (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), something I aspired to for myself and the teams and businesses I led. Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p.6) argued that “A person who has achieved control over psychic energy (focus) and has invested it in consciously chosen goals cannot help but grow into a more complex being. By stretching skills, by reaching toward higher challenges, such a person becomes an increasingly extraordinary individual”. This made sense to me, guiding my developmental thinking and encouraging me to tackle increasingly complex challenges in my search to be the best I could be.

I enjoyed the challenge of deepening my intellectual understanding of Flow during my Master’s programme, whilst practically applying it for the benefit of the businesses I led. As I began

working as an executive coach, I recognised that my clients also described experiences of Flow, remarking how enjoyable and rewarding the experience had been and how fast the time had flown. As I outlined earlier, I had a deep and nagging need to go further and answer the “so what?” question. What effect might Flow have on people after they experience it, what difference might it make specific to my new relational context in coaching?

The more I am able to explore, understand and develop as a coach, the more I can help my clients think through and resolve their issues and unlock their best selves and performance. This research therefore allows me the opportunity to explore the “so what?” for myself, to discover and grow into my version of a more complex being and to discover what sort of ‘extraordinary individual’ I can become as a coach.

1.2 A challenge of definitions

One of the intriguing aspects of Flow experience is its individual subjectivity (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2020). However, one of its inherent limitations appears to be the inability of language to sufficiently communicate the depth and breadth of subjective experience (Dilts *et al.*, 1980; Moustakas, 1990). As the phenomenology of presence and Flow appear so closely associated, I firstly offer definitions of each. Beginning with the more widely known concept of presence in coaching, I draw a distinction between these linked but differentiated subjective experiences to be explored in more depth later in the thesis.

1.2.1 Presence

Biocca (1997, p.17) describes presence as a “basic state of consciousness” adding that it engenders the sense of realness, of “being in the real world”. Neurologist Damasio (1999) emphasised the necessity for an emotional connection through deep listening and sensing as a pre-requisite for ‘being there’, for example *feeling* that you are in a real world. Freeman, Lessiter and Ljsselseijn (2000) emphasise presence as an unchanging continuous state of immersion such that the physical environment disappears from awareness and the person is

in a “condition of complete sensorial immersion” (Freeman *et al.*, 2000, p.13).

A growing base of literature supports this state of presence as key in successful coaching, arguing that presence underpins the coaching process (Silsbee, 2008; Du Toit, 2014; Iliffe-Wood, 2014). Noon (2017, p.14) detailed a conceptual map of presence in coaching for the first time, arguing that “presence in executive coaching conversations is a way of being, experienced by client and coach personally and relationally, which is viewed as being desirable, beneficial and fundamental to the coaching process”. The International Coaching Federation (ICF, 2021) incorporates coaching presence into its competency framework, as being “fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident”. There may be room to clarify this further with a definition.

In summary, there is consensus that presence is a fully-focussed state of being in the moment, alive to what is; it is both perceived and stable, it doesn't change, such that people are fully conscious yet unaware of the outside world, sensorially immersed in a world connected through emotion, deep listening and sensing - ‘being there’.

1.2.2 Flow

The label ‘Flow’ originated from respondent language when researching the subjective phenomenology of intrinsically-motivated activity requiring playful effort and significant concentration (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Originally defined as “the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 36), Flow as an expression captured the essence of research respondents’ descriptions of the smooth process as like being carried along on a stream of water. Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p.4) evolved the definition to “a subjective state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it”, emphasising the intrinsic rationale. In their landmark paper, Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p.90) defined Flow as an “optimal experience in which an activity or experience seamlessly unfolds (flows) from moment to moment” such

that “the individual operates at full capacity”. Operating at full capacity when absorbed in mastering challenges during Flow positively influences perceived levels of skill and experience afterwards, meaning that the optimal experience of Flow helps foster growth and personal development (Nakamura *et al.*, 2020; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975).

1.2.3 Differences between the concepts of Presence and Flow

Whilst existing literature does connect the concepts of presence and Flow (Takatalo, 2002; Wesson, 2010; Du Toit, 2014; Noon, 2017), I see them as distinct and differentiated. Attention or focus is fully absorbed in both states; in presence it is an unchanging sensorial immersion in the moment (Freeman *et al.*, 2000), a sense of ‘being there’ (Biocca, 1997; Damasio, 1999), unaware of the outside world; whilst in Flow it is the complete involvement in a challenge or activity that is evolving such that nothing else seems to matter (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The two subjective states are recognisably very closely associated, both being subjective, emotionally positive and enjoyable. Whilst presence is stable, however, as a way of being, listening and sensing at a deep level (Freeman *et al.*, 2000), Flow is experienced as joyfully *doing an activity* that seamlessly unfolds from moment to moment in a dynamic way, acting effortlessly whilst performing at one’s best (Nakamura *et al.*, 2020). It is arguably the relationship to performance that captures the major differential between presence and Flow.

The ICF (2018) define coaching as partnering in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires clients to maximise their personal and professional potential. Presence in coaching has been defined and incorporated within accreditation competencies, is recognised as an important success factor in coaching and has been mapped for use. Flow in coaching research is at a much more nascent stage. Bakker (2005; 2008) defined Flow at work as a peak experience that is characterised by three main areas (intrinsic work motivation, total absorption in the task and work enjoyment) but this has yet to be translated extensively into the coaching context. I believe Flow is as much a necessary and natural fit with coaching as presence; indeed, Takatalo (2002) and Jin (2012) both argued that presence is a pre-requisite

for Flow. There is, therefore, a need to research Flow in greater depth within this dyadic specific context of coaching.

1.3 The coaching context and executive coaching

Whilst most coaches would probably agree that they are intrinsically motivated by their work and are focussed on inspiring their clients to maximise their personal and professional potential (McLean and Mallet, 2012), it is still work. The work of the coach occurs predominantly as a dialogue within a coaching relationship between coach and client. Coaching success is dependent on this (De Haan *et al.*, 2017; Du Toit, 2014). By exploring the specific context of executive coaching within which both my work and this research is necessarily situated, I intend to outline how it may impact this research.

My personal coaching style aligns with the non-directive stance John Whitmore (2009, p.10) extols, in that “Coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.” The ICF (2018) appears aligned with this, defining coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential”. It is the examination of maximising personal and professional potential as a working coach that is at the basis of this study.

Executive coaching is my principal work focus. It encompasses a wide range of specialties and services including coaching to enhance; business strategic planning and execution; leadership performance and behaviour change; and high-performance team development. I believe Kilburg’s (1996, p.138) definition of executive coaching encapsulates the breadth and depth of this. Executive coaching is:

“A helping relationship formed between a client who has the managerial authority and responsibility in an organisation and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified

set of goals to improve their professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organisation within a formally defined coaching agreement".

Perhaps one contextual differentiator that makes this exploration of Flow within the coaching context a pressing need is the critical importance of the "helping" coach-coachee relationship. Much of the positivist research on Flow relates to the individual's task focus without any reference to relationship, whereas coaching is by definition relationship-focussed and dependent on the quality of that relationship and the dialogue within it (Du Toit, 2014; Grant, 2017). There seems to be a pressing need to understand how coaches experience Flow and how that experience influences them and successful coaching relationships.

1.4 The research gap

Flow as an optimal experience has been found to play a facilitating role in personal growth and development across many different contexts (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Rathunde and Csikszentmihalyi, 2006) and the Flow concept is receiving increased work-based research focus, especially within modern organisations (Llorens and Salanova, 2017). Since Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) phenomenological study, research has been mainly quantitative, focussed on operationalising Flow utilising variations of tools based on Csikszentmihalyi's concept (Jackson, Martin and Eklund, 2008; Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1988) or Bakker's (2008) WO^{rk}-reLated Flow inventory (WOLF). Some empirical evidence about Flow consequences has emerged, indicating potential spirals of growth across three main areas: subjective well-being and positive affect (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2012); personal and organisational resources (Bakker, 2005); and performance (Bakker, 2008).

Choosing to operationalise Flow in this way means that researchers choose tools appropriate to proving the particular hypothesis under examination. For instance, using the WOLF tool to

prove linkage between Flow and self-efficacy (Salanova, Bakker and Llorens, 2006), or using a mixture of competency, autonomy, positive affect and other tools to measure Flow and well-being (Ilies *et al.*, 2017). This deductive drive to operationalise Flow may illicit encouraging relational results, but it does risk missing some of Flow's potential consequences (Llorens *et al.*, 2017). This has inevitably left a gap in knowledge about the breadth of influence Flow may have, leading to calls for more truly exploratory, in-depth, qualitative understanding of Flow within new work contexts (Hefferon *et al.*, 2017). The research in this thesis aims to help narrow this gap by exploring the breadth of any change coaches perceive associated with experiences of Flow.

The starting point for an investigation into any consequences of Flow is the Flow experience itself. As Flow is a subjective experience it is open to individual interpretation and understanding (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990); however, it is reportedly consistent across contexts and cultures (Nakamura *et al.*, 2020). Previous coaching researchers (McBride, 2012, Wesson, 2010) attempted to resolve this by sharing a standard definition of Flow with all participants to establish a common base of understanding for the research. However, most Flow research has occurred in mainly individual rather than dyadic, helping work contexts such as that of coaching. In order to discover the breadth of change coaches perceive associated with experiences of Flow, we must first identify the experiences coaches identify as Flow. It is from this common platform of understanding that any subsequent change can be perceived. To date, little research has been conducted to investigate the experience of Flow within the specific context of coaching and none on the associated consequences (Whateley, 2017; McBride, 2013; Wesson, 2010; Wesson and Boniwell, 2007).

Two important considerations therefore emerge which will inform the design of this research. First, in recognising the critical importance of the relationship in coaching (De Haan and Gannon, 2017), using an individually-focussed description of Flow that doesn't take this dyadic influence into account may be sub-optimal. Second, recognising the centrality of the self of the coach as the instrument of coaching within that relationship reinforces the opportunity to

investigate Flow in coaching from the coach's perspective.

1.5 Research aims and objectives

Having established a meaningful research gap, the research focus became “an exploration into any changes coaches perceive associated with the experience of Flow in coaching conversations”. Two sequential aims were established in order to achieve this. Aim 1 was: to establish a common basis of understanding of what experiences coaches identify as Flow within coaching. This understanding forms a platform from which aim 2 can be explored, namely: to understand the nature and meaning of any changes coaches perceive associated with experiencing Flow. These aims will be addressed through the following objectives:

1. To critically review the literature relevant to the concept of Flow and associated personal and professional changes within the workplace, focussing on coaching and helping relationships as a differentiator to other individual or work contexts.
2. To understand what experiences coaches identify as Flow within the coaching relationship and dialogue and how they map this phenomenon, using Conceptual Encounter methodology.
3. To explore the nature and meaning of the changes coaches perceive associated with experiencing Flow, using Heuristic Inquiry methodology.
4. To develop insights into the nature of Flow in the coaching conversation and coaches' perception of any associated change.
5. To develop recommendations for the further development of coaches based on an enhanced understanding of Flow.

1.6 Research design

In order to achieve the two primary research aims and explore the connection between these

concepts, a pragmatic social constructivist research approach was taken (Bachkirova *et al.*, 2017), incorporating mixed, sequential qualitative methodologies of Conceptual Encounter (CE) (De Rivera, 1981) to achieve aim 1 and Heuristic Inquiry (HI) (Moustakas, 1990) to achieve aim 2. This approach recognises that individual perceptions of experience can form multiple knowledges, all of which are not necessarily right or wrong (Willig, 2008) but are capable of collaboratively creating meaning together through dialogue (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). It acknowledges the ideal nature of a qualitative approach for under-researched areas of investigation (Willig, 2013), heeding the call for more in-depth, qualitative understanding within new work contexts for Flow (Hefferon *et al.*, 2017). Importantly, the approach regards the inclusion of both practitioner-researcher and co-researcher experiences as valid and important (Moustakas, 1990; De Rivera, 1981). A summary of the approach used is shown in Figure 1.

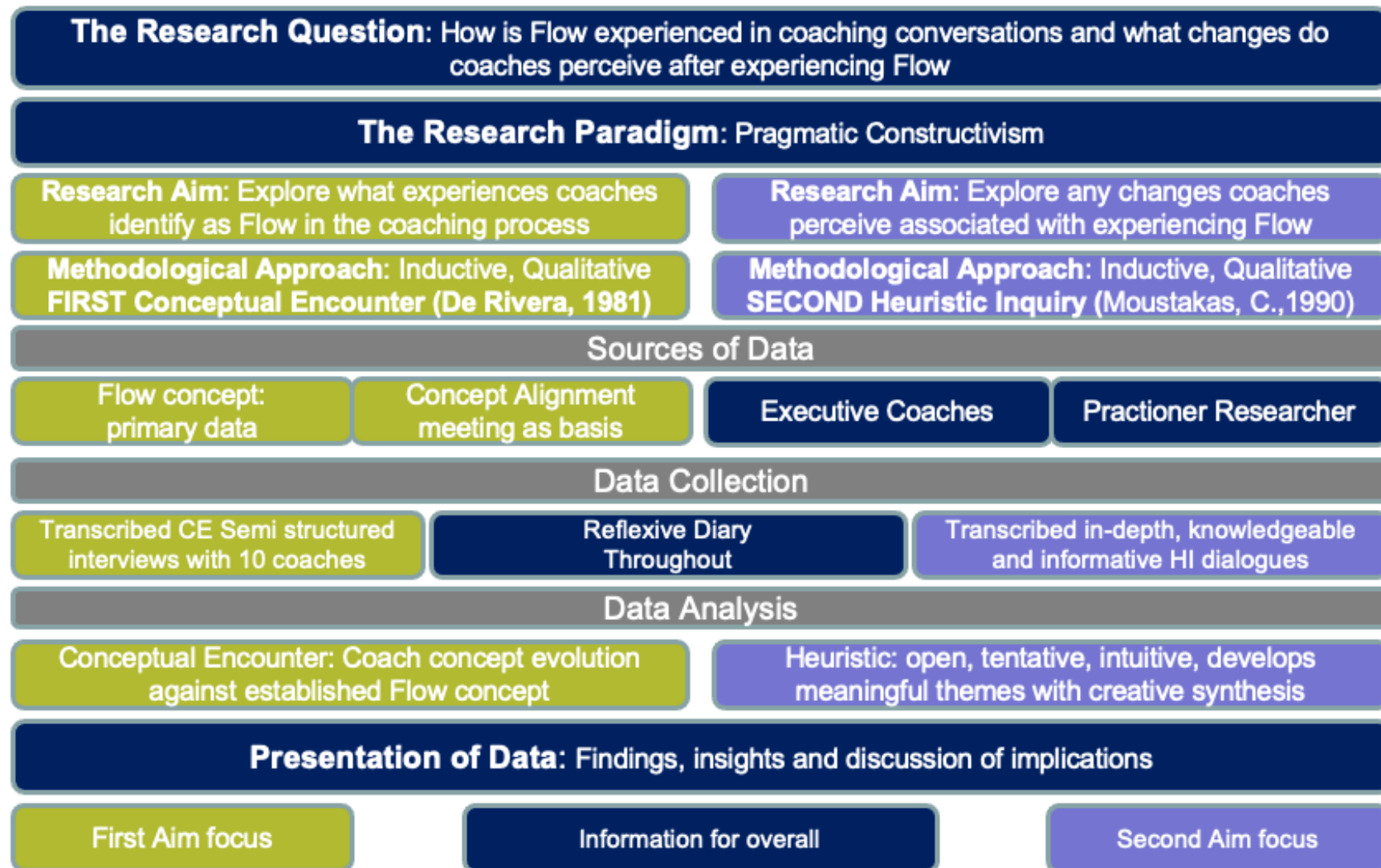


Figure 1: Summary of research design utilising sequential qualitative methodologies (De Rivera, 1981 and Moustakas, 1990)

In order to understand the changes coaches perceive associated with Flow (shown in purple above), it was imperative to first establish a platform of common understanding between myself and the coaches about what our shared reality of Flow was (shown in green above). Conceptual Encounter (De Rivera, 1981) was deemed ideal for this purpose. By taking each participant's view into consideration, in turn, the methodology encourages a collaborative conceptual evolution and understanding that culminates in a final shared map of the experience of Flow. This map of Flow became the shared starting point for aim 2, from which I and the co-researcher coaches could observe any perceived changes. Heuristic Inquiry methodology (Moustakas, 1990) was followed to honour, collect and analyse each participant's individual journey, in order to develop meaningful themes and represent the output through a creative synthesis. The methodological design of this research is presented in detail in Chapter 3.

1.7 Dissertation structure

In line with the pragmatic approach chosen, the structure of the thesis summarised below maintains a rigorous focus and prioritisation on the achievement of the research objectives. Chapters 1 and 8 introduce and conclude the research, with chapters 2 to 7 focussing on research objectives 1 to 5.

Chapter 1: Introduction. This chapter has outlined a broad statement of the problem set in the context of Flow, defined the knowledge gap and stated the research aims, objectives and approach constructed to fill that gap. The chapter defined key concepts in the research, explored the context of coaching and identified the importance of the dyadic relationship. It closed with a brief outline of the main literature and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review - research gap. The chapter explores and critically evaluates literature relating to Flow in coaching, expanding to cover similar helping relational work contexts: nursing, therapy and teaching. It concludes by evaluating existing knowledge against

the research aims and objectives to identify the research gap to be explored in this thesis.

Chapter 3: Literature Review - development of initial Flow map. The chapter examines the original Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1990) Flow research to explore and outline six identified phenomenological elements of Flow experience. In line with Conceptual Encounter methodology (De Rivera, 1981), an initial research conceptual map is prepared, amalgamating existing research findings with my experience as a coach practitioner-researcher.

Chapter 4: Methodology. In this chapter, the research strategy is presented. I outline the theoretical rationale for Pragmatic Constructivism as a research framework within the phenomenological tradition. I discuss the methodological issues of exploring two interdependent aims and the rationale for choosing Conceptual Encounter (De Rivera, 1981) and Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) as consecutive qualitative methodologies. The chapter outlines the process followed for co-researcher selection and the means of data capture and analysis for each methodology are described. Issues of quality, ethics and reflexivity are also discussed.

Chapters 5: Conceptual Encounter Findings. This chapter details and discusses the findings associated with the experiences coaches identify as Flow within coaching conversations, using Conceptual Encounter methodology. The chapter outlines the influence of the dyadic context, detailing the development of elements of Flow experience using coaches' descriptive language. The final phenomenological structure of Flow in coaching is mapped and discussed as a base for common understanding for use in the next stage of research.

Chapter 6: Heuristic Inquiry Findings. This chapter details the findings associated with exploring and understanding the nature and meaning of any change coaches perceive associated with experiencing Flow, using Heuristic Inquiry methodology. Findings outline the nature of change in coaches' individual frames of reference, detailing changes in thoughts and beliefs, feelings, behaviours and relational connections. The chapter concludes by describing

the meaning coaches ascribe to these changes.

Chapter 7: Discussion. This chapter discusses findings relating to the nature and meaning of change associated with experiences of Flow. Four themes are developed and discussed, including the development of a creative synthesis as the final element of Heuristic Inquiry. The chapter discusses each theme against the existing literature, identifying some of the potential implications that Flow in the dyadic context of coaching has for Flow theory, coaching theory and coach practice and development.

Chapter 8: Conclusion. This final chapter summarises how the research questions are answered and identifies the contributions this study makes to theory and coaching practice. Limitations and recommendations for future research are noted, and the chapter concludes with my own personal reflections.

Chapter 2: Literature Review Part 1 - The Research Gap

The literature review is split into two parts. Chapter 2 aims to address research objective 1 by exploring and critically evaluating the current body of knowledge relevant to the principal research question “What changes do coaches perceive associated with the experience of Flow in coaching conversations?” It is logical to suppose that before any changes associated with the experience of Flow may be discovered, there must first be alignment about what ‘Flow experience’ means. Therefore objective 1 also includes a review of the literature relevant to answering the presumptive initial question; “What experiences do coaches identify as Flow in coaching conversations?”. In Part 2 of the literature review (Chapter 3), I have chosen to capture the literature relevant to the development of an initial map of relational Flow specific to coaching conversations. This map will be used as the basis for the fieldwork within the chosen Conceptual Encounter methodology to address objective 2.

The research material reviewed was predominantly from peer-reviewed empirical research reports and reference books sourced via search engines such as Google Scholar UK, PsychINFO, ProQuest and Oxford Brookes LibrarySearch and RADAR, as well as the research sites of accreditation bodies such as the International Coaching Federation (ICF). Using broad initial search terms including ‘Flow in coaching conversations’, ‘Flow at work’ and ‘peak experience’ revealed that Flow research fell mainly into one of three sub-categories, namely: pre-conditions or antecedents of Flow; the experience or phenomenology of Flow; and the operational effects or consequences of Flow. My area of principal focus fell within the third area, the effect of Flow, but necessitated an exploration of the phenomenology in order to understand how Flow was described. This initial search also indicated some potential difficulties to this deeper understanding of Flow within the context of coaching. For example, beyond the sparse research in coaching (Wesson, 2007; Wesson and Boniwell, 2010; McBride, 2013), the majority of empirical research appears to focus on the operational aspects of Flow: the quantitative measurement and operational implications of Flow.

I have chosen an exploration strategy for this literature review consistent with the above. The configuration of the two parts is outlined in Figure 2 below, and it is through this framework that the literature review will be structured, explored and summarised.

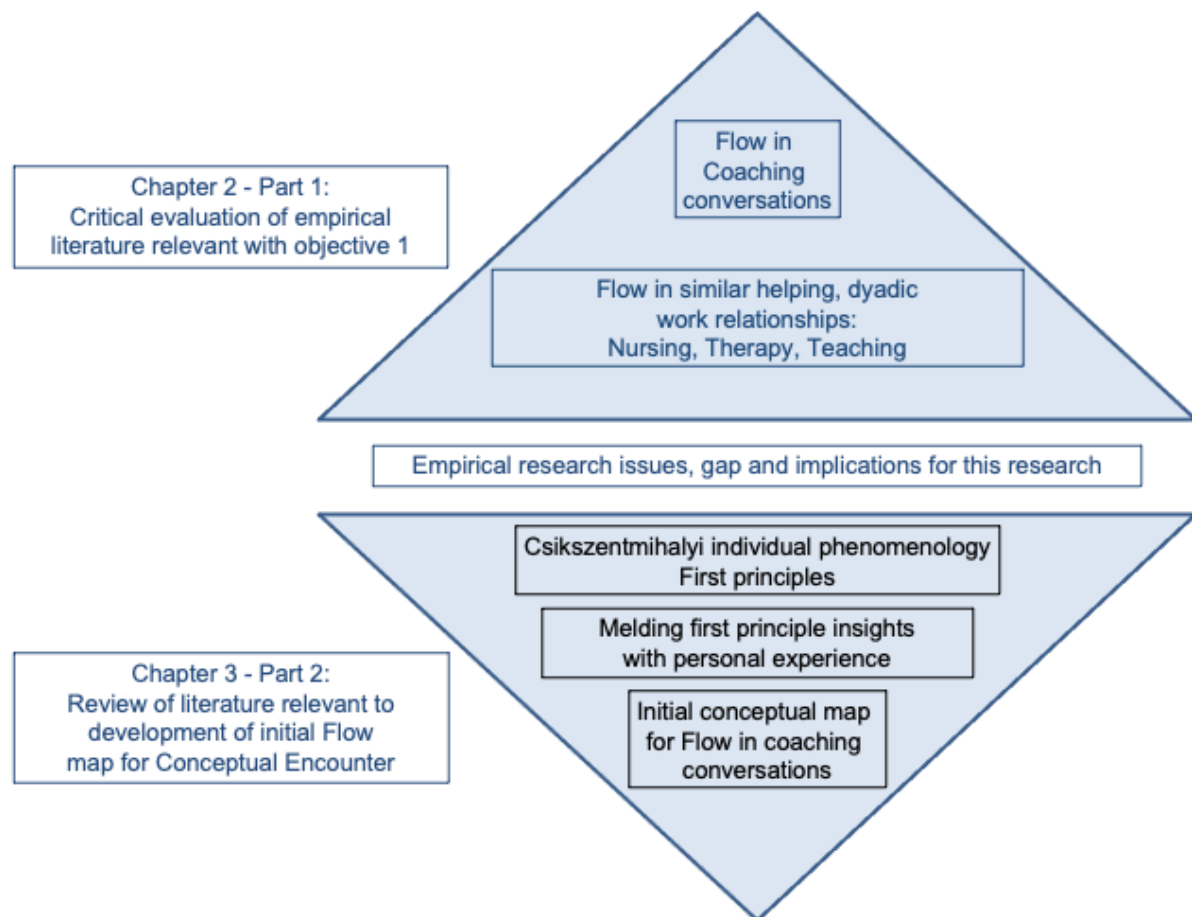


Figure 2: Two-part literature review strategy framework

2.1 Introduction: Critical evaluation of literature relevant to Flow in coaching conversations

Part 1 of the literature review consists of two main sections (Figure 2). The first section identifies the limited literature on Flow specifically relevant to the coaching context. As this section will show, there is insufficient knowledge to fully answer the research questions from within this body of literature. Given the importance of the special working relationship inherent in the coaching conversation and the fact that my research questions are bounded by the coaching conversation itself, I have restricted my review predominantly to Flow in work contexts that exhibit similar dyadic relational qualities. The second half of this chapter expands to examine Flow literature within the similar relational contexts of nursing, therapy and teaching (Renner, 2007). This chapter closes with a summary of the critically examined literature related to the research questions. This summary captures the main issues, identifies the consequential research gap, and explains how this gap may be addressed.

2.2 Flow in coaching conversations

Four published papers qualitatively explore Flow within the specific context of coaching. All four base their understanding of Flow on Csikszentmihalyi's body of work. Before evaluating the coaching-specific research, it may also be helpful to recognise that in addition to the holistic sensation people felt when acting with total involvement, Csikszentmihalyi (1975, p.36) also referenced Flow as an "optimal experience in which an activity or experience seamlessly unfolds (flows) from moment to moment" (1975, p.36) in which "the individual operates at full capacity" (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p.90). Two of the four coaching-specific papers focussed their Flow exploration predominantly on clients, one included both clients and coaches and the last considered coaches alone. Subjects range from a theoretical framework for Flow through to an empirical exploration of the antecedents of Flow and how coaching may help foster client Flow at work.

Wesson and Bonniwell (2007) linked a review of the literature on the antecedents of Flow with their work as coaches, to propose a theoretical framework for Flow in coaching. They argued for its potential application in practice by suggesting coaching tools that could help facilitate each of eight identified “Flow favouring conditions” (Wesson and Bonniwell, 2007, p.41). Whilst their research was primarily client-focussed, they surmised that coaches could “use Flow for the purpose it was intended for, that is (to enable clients) to interact as best they can with their environment and grow” (p.42) and it is this advantageous growth characteristic that they concluded had the greatest potential benefit. The credibility of their theoretical proposition was underpinned by references to relevant literature, namely: Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh and Nakamura’s (2005) antecedents research; Linley and Harrington’s (2006) strengths coaching approach; Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) Flow characteristics; and Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) strengths research.

Wesson and Bonniwell (2007, p.34) concluded that “when clients use their strengths, it is likely that their perception of their skills in relation to the perceived challenge will remain at a high level which would help facilitate Flow”. As a consequence, “they might (then) also be able to work with greater autonomy and be more mindful and appreciate issues involved in their strengths areas, so will apply themselves to a task with greater ease” (p.34). I am left with the supposition that if a state of Flow is so potentially beneficial for the client, arguably it may be so for coaches themselves. I am also left with the nagging suspicion that Flow for coaches is more nuanced than the application of coaches’ strengths alone.

Wesson (2010, p.53) extended her 2007 theoretical proposition by specifically exploring the “subjective experience of Flow during coaching conversations”. Her Grounded Theory research demonstrated both the existence of Flow in coaching amongst clients and their coaches and the identification of six factors deemed necessary to facilitate Flow. She used the lived experiences of coach participants as evidence for the existence of Flow by aligning them against “the classic characteristics” of Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990, p.57) phenomenology (Figure 3). Additionally, however, her research also pointed towards some extra and specific

coaching and relationship Flow characteristics which she felt important, such as mirroring, pace, engagement and building on each other's thoughts, which may potentially differentiate relational-based coaching from other individually based contexts. This extra finding seems to indicate the possibility that whilst Flow may share some common characteristics across contexts, Flow may also have some contextual and relationally-specific characteristics which may be important to understand in that context. This may be an important consideration for my research methodology indicating the need to stay as open as possible to explore the coaching context and avoid making assumptions about the generalisability of previous findings from other contexts.

Characteristics	Examples
• Intense and focussed concentration on the task at hand • Loss of reflective self-consciousness • Transformation of time	"I was absorbed deeply in listening to the coachee and their experience, hope, wishes and what they wanted to do next and how to do it...time disappeared and suddenly it was much later" Coach 20 "There was a sense of being 'at one' with the client, in terms of thought processes". Coach 7 "I felt as though I was totally engaged in the session without the usual distracting thoughts that sometimes invade my thinking and disrupt it" Coach 17
Merging of action and awareness	I was using skills and ideas from different places and synthesising them to create a new technique. Although I was aware of that, I wasn't 'in my head' analysing. Instead I was present with both head and intuition and it just seemed to work" Coach 26
Sense of control	"The discussion felt effortless; as though it was just happening naturally without too much thought or planning. It was working and I felt relaxed and really focused on the person I was with." Coach 17
Autotelic experience	"It was memorable and every time I think about it the good feelings flood back into my mind and give me a feeling of fulfilment and satisfaction." Coach 17

Figure 3: Adapted from Wesson (2010) as evidence for Csikszentmihalyi (1990) classic characteristics of Flow

Wesson (2010, p.61) concluded her findings by claiming that both client and coach perceived “an increased rather than decreased sense of self” after the Flow experience resulting in positive affect. She suggested that this increase in “sense of self” may have come whilst respondents grappled “with a new sense of reality, perhaps relating to an increased sense of competency, leaving them feeling more energised or more at peace” (p.61). This suggestion builds on her earlier assertion that this mutual challenging of capabilities during coaching relational Flow may allow both in that relationship to “interact as best they can with their environment and to grow” (2007, p.42). These findings, therefore, suggest growth in both skills and capabilities during and after Flow, but also a growth or development of oneself in terms of positive feelings of competency and confidence.

Assuming Flow to be a positive experience, McBride (2013) focussed on understanding how coaches experience Flow and aimed to use this to provide a new perspective on coach development and competencies. Additionally, McBride wanted to relate this new understanding to existing ICF coach competences and define a model for the Flow process in coaching. Having identified five themes from her interviews (pre-conditions for Flow, triggers of Flow, transcendental experience, extended positive affect and the role of coaching competencies), she arranged these into a coaching Flow model that she claims to be a “roadmap to mastery for all coaches” (McBride, 2013, p.74). Descriptions of the lived experience of coaches in Flow were used as evidence for each theme. From her research findings, McBride (2013, p.77) contended that coaches experienced Flow as “a multifaceted integration of cognition, heart, transcendence and competence that serves and is served by their experience, their competence and their dedication to the service of clients”. She asserted that coaches increased their reflective learning, reported more Flow and furthered their development journey whilst using her model to evaluate a coaching session from a Flow perspective. As a further consequence, she reported that participants experienced a “positive affect that lingered following coaching sessions that resulted in increased feelings of self-efficacy and affirmation of purpose” (2013, p.74).

Rather than directly reproduce the coach lived experiences that McBride (2013) used as evidence for her model, I have attempted to re-cluster them, as Wesson did, behind Csikszentmihalyi's (1975; 1990) classic Flow characteristics (Appendix a). Some characteristics, such as control, focus and autotelic experience, seemingly align with Wesson's, whilst McBride arguably highlighted additional relationally-specific characteristics such as confidence, relationship and transcendence.

These relational aspects of Flow in coaching began to emerge more clearly in McBride's findings. Based around a deepening of trust, McBride (2013) reported coaches recognising a deeper and richer closeness between themselves and their clients. Through this deepening of the relationship, a mutual, transparent, open and discovery-based mindset seems to facilitate a willingness to explore challenges together. Interestingly, for the first time in the coaching literature, McBride (2013) specifically linked coaches' descriptions of the relational experience of Flow with the transcendent nature of the Flow experience that Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1990) has sometimes highlighted between an individual and the task. This transcendence seems to describe an elevation of experience above the norm; for example, using spiritual analogies such as Church, Holy Spirit, divine and sacred, and energy references such as feeding off each other's energy, stillness and a merging of energies to become one (Appendix a). I explore later in this chapter how Csikszentmihalyi (1975) referred to this transcendence and oneness, with diverse examples including connections between climbers and the rocks they scale, surgeons and their teams and tools, and motorcyclists riding together.

Finally, McBride drew connections between coaches' descriptions of their entry into Flow, such as focus, absorption and deep listening with presence, claiming presence to be a "triggering process that propelled them (coaches) into the flow state" (McBride, 2013, p.52). McBride claimed this linkage between presence and Flow entry as a contribution to new knowledge. Noon (2017) later explored presence in more depth to specifically map the experience within the context of coaching and alluded to its close links with the experience of Flow.

The most recent coaching Flow research considered executives' individual experiences of Flow at work in the context of coaching as an intervention to help operationalise Flow (Whateley, 2017). The research concluded that executive coaching was a useful intervention to "support the executive in cultivating the individual, organisational and work conditions" (p.3) to operationalise Flow at work (Whateley, 2017). However, as data collection considered executives' individual experience of Flow at work rather than any specific exploration of Flow within the coaching conversation itself, it did not yield additional dyadic Flow experience insights relevant for this study's objectives.

2.2.1 Summary of Flow in coaching literature

All the coaching-specific Flow studies examined seem to focus on the identification and subsequent application of the conditions required to create and maintain Flow. I was initially encouraged to see findings reportedly validating both the existence of the positive state of Flow in coaching, and an alignment between respondents' lived experiences and the characteristics of Flow that Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1990) had identified. For instance, Wesson (2010) reporting some alignment with Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) characteristic of merged action and awareness and McBride (2013) aligned respondents' experiences with Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) sense of control and focus. Neither researcher has, however, provided a full, individual, coaching-specific description for each of the Flow characteristics Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1990) deemed necessary to experience the holistic state of Flow. Instead, descriptions appear to have been either clustered together to exemplify several of the characteristics at one time, such as those seen in Figure 3 (Wesson, 2010); or in McBride's case, re-clustered to justify either her model or some of the ICF capabilities.

Given that McBride's (2013) research purports to explore "How coaches experience the Flow State", it may have been helpful to record coaches' lived experiences of Flow against Csikszentmihalyi's characteristics. Rather than re-clustering them, seemingly to justify either her model or specific ICF capabilities, McBride could instead have used them as evidence to

directly answer her research question. Additional relationship-based specific characteristics were identified in both studies that are not specifically identified in Csikszentmihalyi's characteristics. For example, oneness with the other person, a transcendence of experience beyond the norm (McBride, 2013) and mirroring, pace and engagement (Wesson, 2010), pointed to potentially new insights that may have been missed in previous, more individually based Flow research. Finally, whilst neither research study seemed to be primarily focussed on exploring any changes that coaches may perceive after experiencing Flow, both Wesson and McBride did report some positive findings. For instance, both reported a lingering positive affect following Flow: Wesson (2010) indicated a growth in self-competence and McBride (2013) a similar increased sense of self-efficacy.

However, one potential methodological issue became apparent upon examining the data collection choices made by both Wesson and McBride which potentially raises questions about the full validity of the findings, with arguably important implications for my research. Before the data collection process began, both Wesson (2010) and McBride (2013) showed their participants a Csikszentmihalyi definition of Flow (Wesson used Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh and Nakamura, 2005; McBride used Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1988 – see Appendix b). Whilst McBride (2013) did not offer any rationale for this, Wesson (2010, p.54) explained that she did so “in order to improve the quality of (participant) responses” and overcome any potential confusion about Flow because “the term flow has different usages”. Utilising these Csikszentmihalyi definitions could help to comprehensively explain and describe what Flow is and how it may feel for participants. Following this approach could also help provide a swift, common basis for understanding amongst my participants from which to explore any potential effects after Flow inherent within aim 2 of my research. However, I believe that this methodological approach of providing pre-determined definitions of Flow to participants before the interviews may lay the findings open to two potential challenges and subsequent criticism. First, it raises potential questions as to the extent of the validity of the verbatim comments used earlier as evidence for Flow, for example, that the

early sharing of the Flow definition could lead the participants to be prejudiced in some way. I cannot see how that risk may be quantified, but it does open the findings up to that potential criticism. Second, the definitions used weren't relationally-specific descriptions of Flow in coaching relationships. I recognise that this would be difficult, given that the aims of both research projects were to explore this. However, I contend that had both researchers stayed truly open to explore and hear coaches' unprompted descriptions of Flow, they may have negated this risk. Therefore, an important implication for my Flow work is to stay open to their voices and experiences and ensure as far as possible that my participants are not unduly influenced or led in anyway before and during data collection.

As mentioned earlier, I restricted my focus predominantly to Flow in workplace contexts that require dyadic relationships, given both the importance of the special working relationship inherent in coaching conversations and the fact that my research questions have been necessarily bounded by the coaching conversation itself. The importance of that dyadic relationship in coaching is inherently recognised within the coaching definition itself. For instance, in my introduction chapter I stated that both the ICF (2018) and Kilberg (1996) start their definitions with the words "a partnering with clients..." or "a helping relationship formed between..." respectively. Importantly, this decision to focus on and be bounded by the coaching relationship also recognises that coaching is not only relationship based but has been found to be dependent, to great extent, on the quality of that relationship (Du Toit, 2014; Grant, 2017). Even given some of the reservations I highlighted earlier, both Wesson's (2010) and McBride's (2013) findings, highlighting additional relationship-specific characteristics found in Flow, seem to support this decision. Therefore, due to these methodological reservations and given that full and individual descriptions of each of Csikszentmihalyi's characteristics of Flow remain absent, I will next extend the review beyond coaching to explore those wider work contexts that arguably display similar work dyadic relational qualities, such as nursing, therapy and teaching.

2.3 Flow in similar helping dyadic relationships

Early Flow research work conducted by Delle Fave (2001) amongst relational-based helping professionals adds importance to this expansion. He found that the work contexts of helping professionals such as nurses and doctors include highly challenging activities alongside socially meaningful and creative tasks. Delle Fave (2001) concluded that the combination of these three work activities seemed to enable these helping professionals to report “the paradox of work” less frequently (Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre, 1989, p.815) whilst, conversely, also reporting Flow more frequently than managers. Building on LeFevre’s (1988) work, Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre (1989) highlighted this paradox when comparing their results on Flow in both work and leisure. They found “the paradoxical situation of people having many more positive feelings at work than in leisure yet saying that they “wish to be doing something else” when they are at work, not when they are in leisure” (1989, p.821). Later researchers (Hekter, Schmidt and Csikszentmihalyi, 2007; Delle Fave, Massimini, and Bassi, 2011; Bassi and Delle Fave, 2012; Engeser *et al.*, 2016; Delle Fave and Zager Kocjan, 2017) all align with Delle Fave’s findings in that this paradox is often mitigated in similar helping professions by those intrinsically-motivated work activities exhibiting the three characteristics reported in healthcare. This could arguably apply to coaching too, as Wesson (2010) and McBride (2013) described within their Flow research. Taking this understanding into account, and in order to further understand how people both describe Flow in their work helping others and highlight any changes they perceive after those experiences, this section now expands the review beyond coaching. The following sections explore the literature relevant to Flow experiences found within work contexts in three similar helping professions: nursing, counselling therapy and teaching. It may be argued that each of these rely on the importance of relationships in their work helping others.

2.3.1 Flow in nursing relationships

Interest in Flow research within healthcare and nursing contexts is extensive. Between 2011

and 2015, three research teams (Bringsen, Ejlertsson and Andersson, 2011; Colombo and Zito, 2014; Zito, Cortese and Colombo, 2015) specifically tried to identify how the positive experience of Flow may be created and used to help reduce or mitigate some of the negative context-specific demands experienced by nurses. They were ultimately concerned that the burnout and exhaustion reported by nurses was leading to their subsequent and premature loss to the healthcare system. Even though the nursing context was new for Flow research, each team chose to quantitatively measure and evaluate conditions relating to the antecedents for Flow and the Flow state itself, and to identify any subsequential effect of Flow on both nurses' levels of exhaustion and their perceived quality of life. Colombo and Zito (2014) and Zito, Cortese and Colombo (2015) identified that job and personal resources (such as supervisor support, competencies and self-efficacy) play a critical role in helping to mitigate some of the negative effects of job demands and fostering Flow in nurses. They reported that Flow (assumed to mean absorption, enjoyment and intrinsic motivation as in Bakker, 2005; 2008) directly reduced nurses' levels of exhaustion and recommended that building nurses' resources and reducing job demands at work were critical enablers for building Flow and protecting employee health.

The choice of quantitative evaluation of Flow and nurses' exhaustion, without previous exploratory understanding of any specific contextual work nuances, did, however, cause issues when comparing the results to the hypotheses. Whilst the researchers raised the contextual issue of "the constant balance between strain and stimulation in Nursing" (Bringsen *et al.*, 2011, p.1) and the subsequential exhaustion of nurses, the extent of that exhaustion and the work-related pressures and stresses causing it were not known. Extra in-depth contextual exploratory questioning was necessary for both Bringsen, Ejlertsson and Andersson (2011) and Colombo and Zito (2014) to make sense of lower-than-expected Flow quantitative data. For instance, Bringsen, Ejlertsson and Andersson (2011) were confused at first by the wide variation in Flow reported by nurses and nurse assistants, given the homogenous nature of the work across both cohorts, until subsequent qualitative follow-up

highlighted and explained the impact of significant work expectations and activity differences between the two. Similarly, Colombo and Zito (2014) were initially unaware of the extent and scope of the demands placed on nursing staff when investigating the relationships between job resources (such as competencies, autonomy and supervisor support), job demands (managing emotional patient experiences and workload) and Flow (measured as absorption, enjoyment and motivation). Nor were they aware of the subsequential impact those demands had, almost negating any positive effect that the resources may have played in helping nurses achieve Flow.

Once understood however, through extra in-depth exploratory questioning, recommendations pointed towards a need for managers to improve ways of working. As an example, having understood the critical importance of building resources to support nurses, Columbo and Zito (2014, p.262) recommended that HR work on increasing the trust between nursing supervisors and nurses such that “the employees feel free and autonomous, ensuring constructive feedback and organisational equity (that increases enjoyment)”. Indeed, in the exploration of the coaching literature earlier, both Wesson (2010) and McBride (2013) reference the importance of increasing the personal resources of coaches through increased self-efficacy and optimism as antecedents of Flow and buffers to exhaustion. Finally, having understood the critical effects of the demands, pressure and workload placed on nurses, Colombo and Zito (2014, p.262) concluded that managers should monitor nurses’ workload better “to limit or to distribute [work] more effectively...among the nursing staff”. Arguably, had either research team explored and understood these contextually specific areas and used this deeper contextual understanding to inform the research set-up and hypotheses, richer and more insightful findings may have emerged.

Implications for my research emanating from this small body of work are arguably limited, but these studies helped to inform my own research methodology. I contend that there was one main issue with the methodological choice of quantitative evaluation of Flow in the aforementioned studies that led to two key omissions. Quantitative methodology, by its nature,

tries to prove, hypothesise and measure cause and effect in order to generalise “beyond the confines of the particular context in which the research was conducted” (Bryman and Bell, 2015, p.174). As such, it only measures what it sets out to measure and that may be limited in its scope by a lack of previous knowledge. I therefore argue that this prior research missed two things. First, by measuring Flow’s effect on exhaustion, it missed important nursing contextual understanding to make sense of the results. To help ensure the same mistake is not made in the new relationship-based context of coaching, I align with Hefferon, Ashfield, Waters and Synard’s (2017) call for more in-depth qualitative exploratory research within new work contexts before conducting quantitative evaluations of Flow. Secondly, the predominant voice in this quantitative research was that of the researchers rather than the nurses, thereby blocking further insight into nurses’ experiences of Flow.

2.3.2 Flow in therapy and counselling relationships

Papers published about Flow in the context of therapy yielded seven results, with the first published in 1994. Those researchers recognised the positive nature of the Flow experience and were interested to understand its potential, primarily with the stated aim of helping clients. Yet only three empirical research papers have been published (Wilhelmsen, 2013; Grafanaki *et al.*, 2007; Jacobs, 1994), covering music therapy, counselling and psychotherapy, and occupational therapy respectively. The four remaining papers (Silverman and Baker, 2018; Dieser, Chritenson and Davis-Gage, 2015; Chilton, 2013; Parr, Montgomery and Bell, 1998) were all theoretical examinations of Flow and its potential application to therapeutic practice across music, mental health, art and school contexts respectively. All researchers referred to the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1990; 2014) for their theoretical underpinning of Flow, its antecedents and aspects of the phenomenological experience itself.

Therapists described their lived experiences of Flow positively and these descriptions were used as empirical evidence for Flow in therapy (Wilhelmsen, 2013; Grafanaki *et al.*, 2007; Jacobs, 1994). Recognising that the therapeutic areas of music, individual counselling and

occupational therapy are all different in nature, the descriptions reported as evidence nevertheless displayed many similarities. For example, in a qualitative exploration into Flow in music therapy (Wilhelmsen, 2013, p.61), Flow was described as “not being stuck, carried along, keeps me going, at ease and pleasurable”. During debriefing interviews after quantitative evaluation of the effects of Flow in occupational therapy, Jacobs (1994, p.11) reported therapists in Flow feeling “alert, happy, involved, confident, creative, excited, productive, proud, practice and challenged”. Furthermore, when qualitatively exploring Flow amongst counsellors and psychotherapists, Grafanaki *et al.* (2007) identified that Flow moments seemed to occur at “significant/good moments of therapy” (p.244) and reported that those moments appeared to therapists as “a catalyst...a turning point of therapy...where everything was flowing” (p.243). Comparing these turning points with the nine characteristics of Flow identified by Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009), Grafanaki *et al.* (2007, p.240) reported five themes relevant to counselling practice that they identified as “important in capturing the essence of flow during peak moments of therapy”. Four of these themes appear consistent with Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi’s (2009) findings and one, the last, is additional and refers to an aftereffect of Flow. They called these five significant moments “Flowing Moments” and Figure 4, below, outlines the themes alongside the individual verbatim descriptions they used as evidence for them.

Characteristics	Examples
Relational Bond / connectedness	"I feel very warm towards him. I have the sense of really having joined with him in the encounter. We are getting on and working. There is intensity about working together. It is more an intense warmth, rather than that sort of superficial engagement. I look forward to working with him ... That moment it was a "we-I" you know ... " (p.245)
Focus/ intense concentration	"I am really concentrating and I think I am communicating my concentration ... so it does flow. My head is thinking really hard collecting the jigsaw pieces. I was doing lots of thinking ... This is making sense, this is fitting in ... I am conscious with my words being very tentative in the meaning making, in the sense making." (p.247)
Ongoing / immediate feedback and reflexivity	"In his nonverbal communication he's got a very open face ... He is very expressive ... and there is something about suddenly he got heavy with the weight of his emotions ... and he is a big bloke ... But it's like he sort of becomes very still ... there is a shift in him, when he is talking about things...talk...talk...talk...and then.....talk...It is like it is touching him ... And it was not about pain, it was about realization of it. Revelation of it or whatever, it is like having your heart open if you like. This is a turning point of therapy. " (p.249)
Altered sense of time/ timelessness	"It's like a continuation ... In fact in a way it is hard to ... because I have found it hard to say this is when the main event started." (p.249)
Post effect on personal Growth	"This is a turning point of therapy ... This moment helped him to get rid of anger and blaming. It healed the biggest wound that he was not aware ... that it was raw and acute. He came as a 12-year-old boy, when his mum was dying of cancer and he left emotionally as an adult ... It is like he got in touch with some of his strength in that time ... " (p.251)

Figure 4: Five flowing moments from Grafanaki *et al.* (2007)

Whilst Grafanaki *et al.*'s (2007) last theme, shown in Figure 4 above, refers to the personal growth and development of a child and not of a counsellor, Wilhelmsen (2013) focussed his research specifically on therapists. His findings concluded that "experiencing Flow during music therapy improvisation seems to provide a sense of mastery, pleasure and motivation" (2013, p.61) amongst the therapists themselves. Therefore, it may be surmised that Flow could prompt a positive sense of growth and development in both child and therapist.

Jacobs (1994) highlighted issues relating to therapist retention similar to those identified in

nursing. Rather than quantitatively proving pre-determined hypotheses, as the nursing researchers did ten years later, Jacobs chose instead to quantitatively examine and measure therapists' optimal Flow experiences over a five-day period. Ultimately, he hoped that this knowledge would help to retain therapists by clarifying the causes of Flow and gaining insight into how activities in therapy may be transformed into positive Flow states (Jacobs, 1994). Echoing the methodological issues later raised (Bringsen *et al.*, 2011; Colombo *et al.*, 2014), Jacobs conducted quantitative research in a new work context without first understanding and being informed by any potential nuances particular to that context. His quantitative results reported that "subjects experienced flow a relatively small amount of time - an average of 5.24 times in a 5-day week, with a range of 1 to 12 experiences" and that "Flow was experienced most often (23.6%) when subjects were working with a client" (Jacobs, 1994, p.989). Beyond concluding that therapists were infrequently in Flow, Jacobs needed follow-up exploratory debriefing interviews in order to "reveal [a] variety of reasons" (1994, p.994) to make sense of the data before making his recommendations.

Conversely, both Grafanaki *et al.* (2007) and Wilhelmsen (2013) chose to explore Flow in dyadic relationships qualitatively. However, citing similar rationale for consistency as Wesson (2010), both also chose to share individually based descriptions of Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; 1988) with participants before fieldwork began. Whilst the desire for consistency is understandable, the action taken in sharing descriptions beforehand does, I argue, raise the potential challenge that therapists' views may have been prejudiced in some way, thereby undermining credibility.

In spite of these methodological concerns, three implications emerge from this review which align with the coaching research. Firstly, the research can be seen to emphasise the importance of the dyadic relationship and to hint at the depth or connectedness people feel with each other within that relationship (Wilhelmsen, 2013; Grafanaki *et al.*, 2007; Wesson, 2010; McBride, 2013) and at feelings of transcendence above the norm in that context. For instance, significant moments in therapy were described by Grafanaki *et al.* (2013) as

catalysts, turning points and flowing moments. Similarly, in coaching, almost spiritual language was used to describe 'light-bulb' moments when things clicked, changed and flowed (Wesson, 2010; McBride, 2013). The second implication centres around the fact that all the researchers referenced Csikszentmihalyi's work as the source for their understanding of both Flow antecedents and the phenomenology itself. It appears important, therefore, for both my understanding and for the credibility of my research to base and embed my work within the literature of Csikszentmihalyi. Finally, reports of a sense of personal growth (Grafanaki *et al.*, 2007) and development towards mastery (Wilhelmsen, 2013) in therapy after experiencing Flow appear similar to the sense of change and mastery both Wesson (2010) and McBride (2013) refer to in coaching. Even if there are potential methodological gaps in the coaching research, the similarity of findings across contexts adds some more credibility to the findings in coaching.

Therefore, whilst the voices of participants were more apparent within this therapy context, when describing what Flow may mean, more detailed descriptions appear to have been restricted to significant turning points in therapy rather than the overall Flow experience in dyadic relationships.

2.3.3 Flow in teaching relationships

Shernoff *et al.* (2014, p.211) stated that "fostering engagement and enjoyment in learning has become a dominant concern for educators, researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders". This intent has consequently yielded some key, even seminal, empirical research into Flow in schools. Excluding three unpublished Doctoral research dissertations exploring teachers' experiences of Flow (Gray, 2003; Di Bianca, 2000; Caouette, 1995), seven relevant Flow empirical research studies have been published. These seven papers focus mainly on operationalising Flow and establishing its cause and effect on teachers and pupils in the classroom. Therefore, whilst these papers have provided limited further insight into how teachers describe Flow, they have opened up a more significant understanding as to the cause

and potential effects of Flow in teaching relationships. This section summarises those insights and findings relevant to the description of Flow and the effects of Flow.

Studies which used quantitative tools to operationalise Flow in teaching research after 2005 relied on the three parameters determined by Bakker (2005) in his Work-reLated Flow inventory (WOLF) to describe Flow: absorption, enjoyment and intrinsic motivation. Three important empirical findings related to the effects of Flow on teachers emerged between 2003 and 2012. First, Flow across the relationship between teacher and pupil appeared contagious, such that one could create Flow in the other and *vice versa* (Bakker, 2005). Second, Flow experiences appeared to lead to personal growth, through helping teachers to develop their skills to tackle significant challenges (Delle Fave and Massimini, 2003; Bakker, 2005). Lastly, the experience of Flow amongst teachers seemed to result in “gain spirals” (Salanova, Bakker and Llorens, 2006, p.1) or “virtuous circles of growth” (Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.*, 2011, p.1) that were sustained and positively impacted teachers over time, building self-efficacy beliefs.

The idea that Flow was seemingly contagious between two people working together in a relationship was hotly debated by Di Bianca (2000) and Grey (2003) when they each reported contradictory findings. Bakker (2005) seemed to settle the debate and his research became a seminal piece of work, referenced extensively by future researchers. Bakker (2005) evidenced the Flow contagion claim above by using his WOLF inventory in a large-scale empirical study of 178 music teachers and 605 students. He concluded that “the more flow experiences music teachers reported, the higher the frequency of comparable experiences among their students” (p.38). This understanding could have positive implications for coaching practice. If Flow in coaches helps to create Flow in clients, it could demonstrate the use of the self of the coach as a true “instrument of coaching” (Bachkirova, 2016) and thereby support our clients’ growth and development.

The connection between Flow and teachers’ growth and development was first posited by Delle Fave and Massimini in 2003, but it was the operationalisation of Flow at Work by Bakker

(2005) in research using the WOLF inventory that became instrumental. Bakker (2005) defined Flow at Work as “a short-term peak experience that is characterised by absorption, work enjoyment, and intrinsic work motivation” (p.27) and the WOLF inventory tool mentioned earlier was designed to operationalise and measure these parameters. Bakker’s WOLF inventory, based on his definition for Flow, was one of two predominant tools used by researchers to measure Flow. The other tool was the Flow Short Scale (FSS), which Rheinberg, Vollmeyer and Engeser developed in 2003. Unlike Bakker’s WOLF, the FSS was based instead on Csikszentmihalyi’s Flow characteristics (1990). Utilising the WOLF tool in 2005, Bakker built on Delle Fave and Massimini’s (2003) earlier findings and established self-efficacy and self-esteem as key personal resources in the creation of Flow. He claimed that increasing self-efficacy influenced people’s perceptions of their skills and abilities to tackle challenges, and that this in turn increased the frequency of reported Flow experiences. This was an important development, as Delle Fave and Massimini (2003, p.338) had shown previously that “selective cultivation (of Flow activities) provides the individual with increasingly higher challenges and skill refinement, fostering personal growth and development”. This statement makes a strong link between Flow experiences and increased complexity (higher challenge and skill requirement) as a precursor for personal growth and development. They furthered understanding of the effects of Flow, arguing that the quality of these experiences “influences the outcomes, performances and long-term evolution of the activities themselves, their implementation and their level of complexity” (Delle Fave and Massimini, 2003, p.338). In other words, both Delle Fave and Massimini (2003) and Bakker (2005) showed that teachers affect both their own and students’ development. In coaching, this offers the potential for increased agency for coaches to be an instrument of coaching (Bachkirova, 2016). Through Flow, there appears the potential for coaches to grow and to build self-confidence, self-efficacy and a belief in their own abilities, and so tackle more and more complex coaching challenges, affecting coaching outcomes by the use of themselves as coaches alongside other tools.

Later with colleagues (Salanova, Bakker and Llorens, 2006) Bakker used his WOLF tool and

his findings about the impact of personal resources on Flow experiences to establish “whether Flow is facilitated over time by the presence of personal and organisational resources, and whether Flow has a positive influence on the availability of resources over time” (Salanova, Bakker and Llorens, 2006, p.14). Their work demonstrated the existence of a reverse causal relationship between resources and Flow. Specifically, Salanova, Bakker and Llorens (2006, p.16) reported that organisational and personal resources such as autonomy, coaching support and self-efficacy were “powerful resources to build positive experiences (Flow) at work...(that) feeling competent in the present seems to predict being in flow in the future.” Additionally, however, the reverse causal relationship was evident in that “experiences of flow at work at the present influenced the gain of organisational and personal resources in the future” (Salanova *et al.*, 2006, p.17). They argued that this finding about Flow and self-efficacy is consistent with Fredrickson’s (2002) Broaden and Build Theory, in that positive emotions (e.g., Flow) broaden people’s thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources and, importantly, “trigger upward spirals towards emotional well-being” (p.6). Indeed, it is in homage to this theory that Salanova *et al.* (2006) claimed evidence for Flow, inducing a gain spiral of personal and organisational resources such as self-efficacy. Closing the current round of Flow research amongst teachers, Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.* (2011) built on Salanova *et al.*’s (2006) work by establishing self-efficacy as an antecedent of Flow and arguing that it completes a virtuous “circle of Self-Efficacy and Flow in Teachers” (p. 427). For instance, they claimed that higher perceptions of self-efficacy led to a higher frequency of Flow experiences, and that teachers would take on more significant challenges as their perception of their abilities grew and strengthened. In turn, this appears to create more Flow, which then builds more self-efficacy and so on, in what then becomes a virtuous circle or spiral of growth over time.

Should any of these three findings from teaching be observed within the context of coaching relationships, it could arguably have positive implications for both coach and client practice and development. For instance, the spiral or circle of growth in self-efficacy and Flow over

time could arguably provide both coaches and supervisors with a new approach to their own development - and have real sense of agency in that growth. It seems important, therefore, to summarise the findings from this review of Flow in helping relationships against the research aims and discuss implications for my research.

2.4 Summary of coaching and relationship-based Flow

The aim of this review was to critically evaluate the literature relevant to the concept of Flow in dyadic helping relationships within the context of coaching conversations. In order to achieve this aim, part 1 had two specific focal areas: first, to understand what experiences practitioners recognised as Flow in helping dyadic relationships; and second, to understand the nature and meaning of any changes those practitioners may have perceived associated with experiencing Flow. The studies of Flow in relationships all seem to conclude that fostering Flow is a positive aim for practitioners and their clients in relational-based work contexts. The literature since 2000 provided only limited further insight into how Flow may be described in dyadic helping relationships, but it has opened up a more significant understanding of Flow's potential causes and effects. The review raised some methodological issues which, I argue, may risk the credibility of some of the descriptive findings for Flow within the first focal area of interest and may constrain and restrict the scope of our current knowledge in the second. I will summarise each in turn and identify the gap in knowledge that the present study aims to address, justified by the different context of the dyadic relationship of coaching.

The first aim of the review was to identify the experiences practitioners recognise as Flow in helping dyadic relationships. Whilst the details of the lived experiences are not reproduced again in this summary, Figure 5 below captures both the characteristics reported as consistent with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) findings (that most researchers used as a reference) plus additional dyadic relationship specific characteristics identified.

Characteristic	Reference	Descriptive example
Concentration on the task at hand	McBride (2013); Grafanaki, Brennan, Holmes, Tang & Alvarez, (2007); Caouette (1995)	"So we're both fully present. I don't think I can enter flow with a coaching client unless we are both fully present." McBride (2013)
Merging action and awareness	Wesson (2010)	"I was using skills and ideas from different places and synthesising them to create a new technique... I was present with both head and intuition and it just seemed to work" Wesson (2010)
Sense of Control	McBride (2013); Wesson (2010)	"you have to have the experience, and confidence is a piece of it, in knowing that if you ask the wrong question, it will be okay." Wesson (2010)
Loss of self-consciousness	(clustered alongside focus and loss of self-consciousness; Wesson (2010); McBride (2013)	"I knew I was in the flow state [in this session] because I ceased to exist. McBride (2013)
Transformation of time	Grafanaki, Brennan, Holmes, Tang & Alvarez, (2007); Caouette (1995);	"It's like a continuation ... In fact in a way it is hard to ... because I have found it hard to say this is when the main event started." Grafanaki et al. (2007)
The autotelic experience	McBride (2013); Wesson (2010)	"I knew I had experience flow from just the sheer enjoyment of the conversation. There was pleasure in even the bumpy parts of the conversation" McBride (2013)
Emergent Specific Relational Characteristics		
Depth of relation/ bond/ engagement/ Oneness/ connectedness	Wilhelmsen (2013); McBride (2013); Wesson (2010); Grafanaki, Brennan, Holmes, Tang & Alvarez, (2007)	"There was a sense of being 'at one' with the client, in terms of thought processes". Wesson (2010)
Transcendence beyond normal	McBride (2013); Wesson (2010); Caouette (1995)	"It's just fun and rewarding. It's just such an honor to stand in the presence of someone else going through discovery. It's inspiring and it's humbling. On some level it's a truly spiritual and divine experience." McBride (2013)
Mirroring, pace	Wesson (2010)	

Figure 5: A cumulative summary of references for Flow

Figure 5 references the voices of practitioners' lived experiences, obtained qualitatively and used as empirical evidence for both Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) characteristics of Flow and for additional identified relationship-specific characteristics. No additional descriptive empirical data emerged from the quantitative papers, as the researchers' voices were dominant, the definition of Flow assumed and the voices of participants unrequested. I argue that the main issue with the descriptive evidence emanated from the methodology used by McBride (2013),

Wilhelmsen (2013) and Wesson (2010). All three shared non-relation-based prescribed definitions for Flow with participants before fieldwork commenced, which may impair the validity of their descriptive findings. Whilst the exact impact on participants' descriptions cannot be established or assumed, neither can it be assumed that there was no impact. In other words, potentially influencing participants by sharing individually based Flow definitions beforehand cannot have helped establish true dyadic based descriptions for Flow, as participants may have been influenced by these definitions. Our knowledge is therefore limited about how coaches describe Flow within the dyadic relationship in coaching conversations. I argue that the voices of coaches need to be both heard and understood without influence if we wish to establish a true basis for that understanding. Figure 7, below, summarises this gap in our knowledge and highlights the need that this research can fulfil by establishing a descriptive map of the experiences coaches recognise as Flow in coaching conversations, using their voices and language.

The second aim of the review was to understand the nature and meaning of any changes those practitioners may perceive associated with experiencing Flow. So far, this literature review exploring the current empirical knowledge about Flow in relationship-based work contexts appears to highlight five very interesting and useful areas of potential impact. These effects are summarised in Figure 6 below as: an enduring positive affect; the contagion effect of Flow from one to another in a relationship; the importance of self-efficacy as an antecedent of Flow leading to increases in self-efficacy, motivation and performance in tackling ever increasing challenges; virtuous circles or spirals of increased personal resources, Flow and growth of the self as coach in the present and into the future.

Characteristic	Reference	Examples of changes associated with experiencing Flow
Lingering positive affect	McBride (2013); Wesson (2010)	"It was memorable and every time I think about it the good feelings flood back into my mind and give me a feeling of fulfilment and satisfaction." Wesson (2010, p.56)
Contagion of Flow	Bakker (2005)	"the more flow experiences music teachers reported, the higher the frequency of comparable experiences among their students" (p.38)
Increase in Self/ Self competence/ self-confidence/ self-efficacy	McBride (2013); Rodriguez-Sanchez, Salanova, Cifre & Schaufeli (2011); Wesson (2010); Grafanaki, Brennan, Holmes, Tang & Alvarez, (2007), Salanova, Baller & Llorens (2006); Bakker (2005); Delle-Fave and Massimini (2003)	autonomy, coaching support and self-efficacy were "powerful resources to build positive experiences (Flow) at work...(that) feeling competent in the present seems to predict being in flow in the future." Salanova et al. (2006, p.16)
Self-efficacy as an antecedent of Flow	Rodriguez-Sanchez, Salanova, Cifre & Schaufeli (2011)	self-efficacy as an antecedent of Flow and argue that it completes a virtuous "circle of Self-Efficacy and Flow in Teachers" (p. 427).
Virtuous spiral/ circle of Flow and Growth (Increase in personal and organisational resources now and in the future)	Rodriguez-Sanchez, Salanova, Cifre & Schaufeli (2011); Salanova, Bakker & Llorens (2006)	"experiences of flow at work at the present influenced the gain of organisational and personal resources in the future" (Salanova et al., 2006, p.17)
Growth	Wilhelmsen (2013); Wesson (2010); Grafanaki, Brennan, Holmes, Tang & Alvarez, (2007); Bakker (2005); Delle-Fave & Massimini (2003)	"selective cultivation (of Flow activities) provides the individual with increasingly higher challenges and skill refinement, fostering personal growth and development" (Delle Fave & Massimini, 2003, p.338)

Figure 6: Identified personal changes associated with experiencing Flow

In my introduction chapter, I highlighted the ICF (2018) definition of coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential. This emphasises both the importance and uniqueness of the coaching relationship in helping to foster growth and self-development in both coach and client, within a complex relational dynamic.

However, for this research the primary focus is on coaches in Flow and the subsequential changes that coaches may perceive. Notwithstanding the interesting and useful findings so far, two specific methodological issues have been highlighted that may influence this research and relate to new contexts. The first is the constraint imposed by the choice of quantitative evaluation in new contexts, and the second relates to the risks of not understanding and

exploring specific nuances inherent in new contexts. In Figure 7, below, I have summarised these issues, the gaps in our knowledge that they highlight, and the implications for this research.

	Description of Flow	Changes perceived after Flow
Methodological Issue 1:	Sharing a prescribed description of Flow that is not relationship based before qualitative research may have influenced participants. This risks undermining credibility of descriptive results.	Not exploring and understanding nuances of new contexts causes potential issues when explaining quantitative data.
Methodological Issue 2:	The voice of the participant is unheard during quantitative examination of Flow. Flow description is assumed/ prescribed and is not relationship based.	Quantitative research only measures what it sets out to measure, therefore Knowledge is constrained by it.
Gap Identified:	Need to hear and understand the voice of the coach when describing Flow in a dyadic relationship	The breadth of what possible changes may be perceived is not known in new contexts or relationships
Consequence for this research:	Need to create a descriptive map of the way coaches describe Flow in the coaching conversation – using their voice and language.	When the coaches recognise their description of Flow, they can observe it's influence for themselves and thereby connect those outcomes to Flow themselves.

Figure 7: Summaries of the issues, gaps in knowledge and implications for both aims of this research

By definition, positivist research is “preoccupied...by measurement, causality, generalisation and replication” (Bryman *et al.*, 2015, p.160), based upon hypotheses developed by the researcher that builds on previous research knowledge. The intention is then to generalise “beyond the confines of the particular context in which the research was conducted” (Bryman *et al.*, 2015, p.174). It could be argued that the researcher only finds out what they intended to find out, regardless of context. It might be reasonably contended that the extent of our new knowledge is necessarily constrained by the researcher’s intention and bias inherent within their hypotheses. Whilst the new knowledge about Flow in relationships is shown above in Figure 6, this constraint inevitably makes me wonder what else may not yet be known in new contexts simply because researchers haven’t openly asked for or listened to participants’

points of view. Additionally, the review has highlighted some difficulties researchers had with evaluating quantitatively obtained data without first understanding and exploring any specific nuances inherent to that new context. For instance, this review showed that the work of Bringsen *et al.* (2011), Zito *et al.* (2014) and Colombo *et al.* (2014) in nursing; Jacobs (1994) in therapy; and Bakker (2005) in teaching all depended upon further exploratory work for insight and clarification to make sense of the initial data. Indeed, Bakker (2005) recognised that Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) description of the Holistic Flow State included more nuanced and detailed aspects of the experience of Flow than absorption, enjoyment and intrinsic motivation alone. He concluded that "More research is needed to find out whether the three elements used in the current study sufficiently measure the experience of flow" (p.39). Therefore, in the context of coaching and the coaching relationship, I contend that the breadth of any possible personal changes coaches may perceive, associated with experiencing Flow, is currently unknown. Given this gap, I recognise a need to remain open to explore any possibilities emerging from the coaches' voices and perspectives, whilst acknowledging my own biases, hopes and assumptions.

Therefore, the contention is the inclusion of participants' own descriptions of Flow may enable other coaches to recognise this phenomenon in their own practice, in the relational context of the coaching conversation, and to observe its influence on them. Consistent with Dewey's (1908) and Morgan's (2014) pragmatic beliefs that reality is born of experience and inquiry, this research can honour coaches' journeys of discovery around Flow and help unearth the extent of any associated changes without undue influence beyond their own experience and perspectives.

Chapter 3: Literature Review Part 2 - Review of literature relevant to the development of an initial conceptual Flow map for Conceptual Encounter

This chapter reviews literature relevant to establishing an initial map of Flow for use within the fieldwork element of the Conceptual Encounter (CE) methodology (De Rivera, 1981). This map and the CE methodology will help to answer objective 2 and address the gap identified in our current knowledge about Flow in relational contexts. The conceptual map is intended for use as a starting point for dialogue in the second stage of the CE interview process where the map 'encounters' the co-researchers' experience. De Rivera (1981) recommended that the development of this concept melds together existing literature with personal experience. Therefore, I shall follow the process outlined in Figure 8 below, combining an understanding of the relevant literature, especially Csikszentmihalyi's (1975; 1990) participants' experiences of Flow, with any relevant relational insights unearthed from the first half of the literature review and my own experiences as a coach. I will first identify the six characteristics of the phenomenology of Flow from the original study by Csikszentmihalyi (1975). I will then examine each of the identified characteristics of Flow individually by exploring his participants' descriptions of that characteristic and melding that with my experience in turn. I will conclude the chapter by summarising my thoughts and introduce the initial conceptual map of Flow in coaching conversations that was used in the first stage of the CE fieldwork.

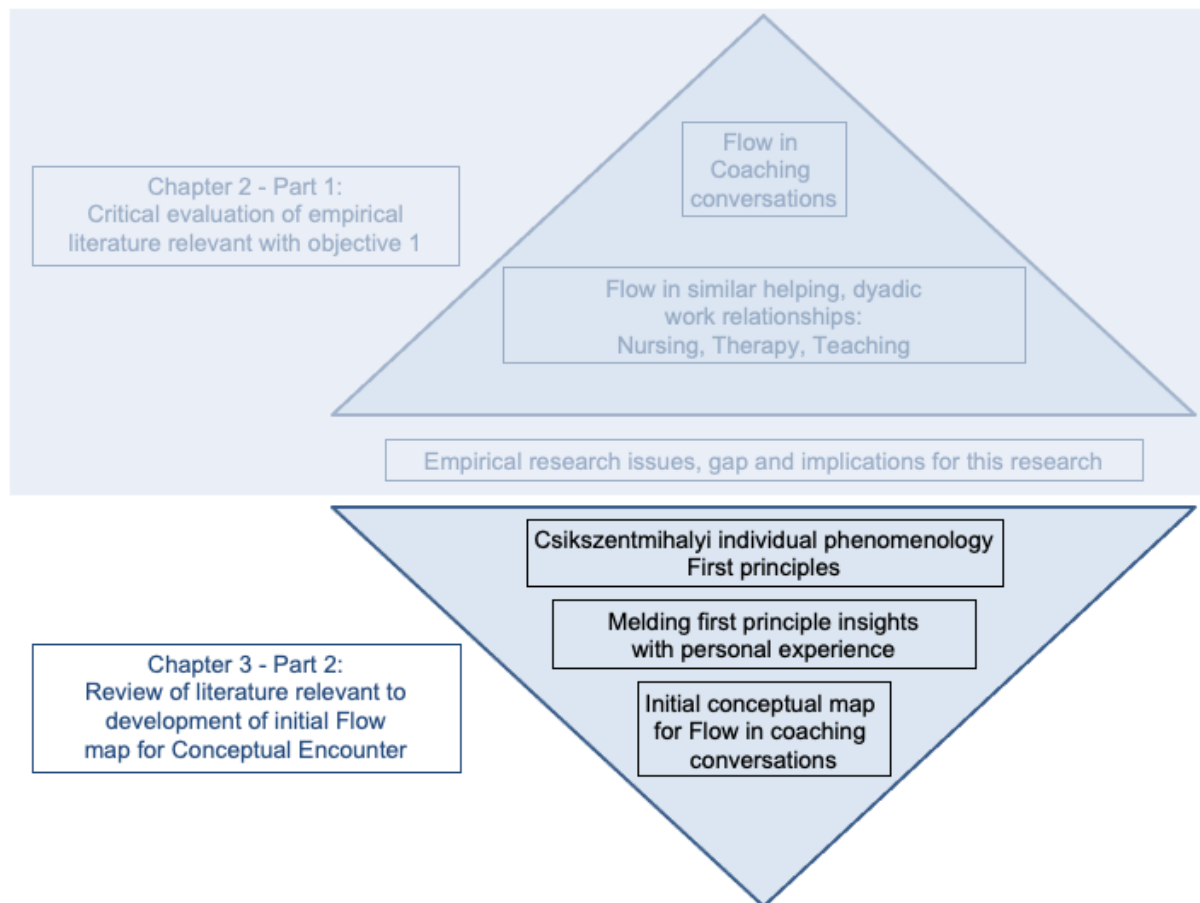


Figure 8: Part 2 literature review process to develop and initial concept map of Flow in coaching conversations

3.1 Csikszentmihalyi's individual phenomenology of Flow

3.1.1 First principles

Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) initial findings from his exploratory research into the phenomenology of intrinsically-motivated activity aimed to "begin exploring activities that appear to contain rewards within themselves" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.5). He was most interested in understanding the subjective experience itself, rather than the motivations behind the behaviour. He argued that through this understanding, he would gain new insights into the experience that would provide evidence with which to challenge and counter the existing behaviourist paradigm of stimulus-response (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Csikszentmihalyi

claimed that the word 'Flow' itself came directly from his research respondents, using it consistently as a helpful metaphor for their experience. For instance, a rock climber described "recognising that you are a flow. The purpose of the flow is to keep flowing, not looking for a peak or utopia but staying in the flow. It is not a moving up but a continuous flowing; you move up only to keep the flow going" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.47). As the experience of Flow is by definition subjective and holistic in nature, the task of clarifying what that metaphor actually means has proven as difficult today as it was in 1975 for Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; 2014; Fullagar and Kelloway, 2013). Csikszentmihalyi's early findings were challenged and criticised for being "very ethereal, bordering on the mystical", and for not being as objective as a pragmatic psychological concept 'should be' (Csikszentmihalyi *et al.*, 1988, p.11). However, I believe they provide the fundamental starting point for this research, born as they were from "pure research, motivated only by the desire to solve an intriguing puzzle" about intrinsically motivated activities (Csikszentmihalyi *et al.*, 1975, p.11) and remain one of the few truly exploratory research programmes on Flow conducted since. By exploring and understanding the lived experiences of Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) early respondents, I intend to help create some clarity of meaning behind each characteristic and establish an initial "simple and elegant" (De Rivera, 1981) conceptual map of Flow for use in this research amongst coaches. Listening to those respondents' voices again 46 years later will, I believe, help prepare the groundwork for understanding coaches' experiences of Flow today.

3.1.2 Csikszentmihalyi's overall holistic experience of Flow and its individual characteristics

Three principal findings emerge from the original work (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) which, he argues, have subsequently been found consistent across culture, class, gender and age (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; 2021). The first was that there are three reasons for choosing intrinsically motivated activities: they give people a sense of enjoyment; they allow them to use and develop their skills; and there is a structure or pattern to these activities. The second finding was that Flow had a "common set of structural characteristics...found to

distinguish those patterns of action that produced flow from the rest of everyday life” (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, p.8) that were experienced simultaneously and were found to be consistent across all the activities. Last, and again independent of the activity, respondents reported enjoying activities that simultaneously challenged and stretched them to grow and develop their skills. This study enabled Csikszentmihalyi to summarise, articulate and explain the logical sequence of Flow for the first time as:

“poised between boredom and worry, the autotelic experience is one of complete involvement of the actor with his activity. The activity presents constant challenges. There is no time to get bored or to worry about what may or may not happen. A person in such a situation can make full use of whatever skills are required and receives clear feedback to his actions; hence, he belongs to a rational cause and effect system in which, what he does has realistic and predictable consequences.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.35)

Verbatim reports describing the original research participants’ experiences of each of the characteristics in Csikszentmihalyi’s second finding are summarised in Figure 9 below. All verbatim descriptions were sourced from both *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (1975) and his later publication, *Flow* (1990, revised in 2002). At the time, however, he did not differentiate between the antecedents of Flow (the conditions that help cause Flow) and the phenomenology (experience) itself. Working with Nakamura in 2002, Csikszentmihalyi published an updated set of these characteristics which did differentiate between the two, separating the original list into three antecedents and six experiential descriptions of Flow (Figure 9). Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002; 2009; 2021) determined that the conditions for Flow, the antecedents, were separate from and not part of the phenomenology of the experience of Flow itself. For the purpose of clarity and consistent with a focus on the experience of Flow in the research question, I have elected to use this differentiated 2002 structure when examining Csikszentmihalyi’s original research and to focus on the six characteristics of the phenomenology of Flow.

Characteristic of Flow	Csikszentmihalyi explanation (1975, 1990)
3 Antecedents or conditions necessary for Flow:	
A challenging activity that requires skills to achieve it	"the activity must be feasible" (1975, p.39)
Clear goals: to focus against	"goals and the means are logically ordered" (1975, p.46) "coherent, noncontradictory demands for action" (1975, p.46)
Immediate feedback: about the progress being made	demands for action "provides clear, unambiguous feedback to a person's actions" (1975, p.46)
6 characteristics of the phenomenology of Flow:	
Focus	"a centring of attention on a limited stimulus field" (1975, p.40)
Merging of action and awareness : deep and effortless involvement	Flow "has no dualistic perspective: they are aware of their actions but not of the awareness itself" (1975, p.38) "consciousness works smoothly, action follows action seamlessly" such that "there is no need to reflect, because the action carries us forward as if by magic" (1990, p.54).
A sense of control over my actions .	"not necessarily the sense of being in control, but the sense of exercising control in difficult situations" (1990, p.61)
Concern for the self disappears	"What is usually lost in flow is not the awareness of one's body or of one's function, but only the self construct, the intermediary which one learns to interpose between stimulus and response." (1975, p.43)
Altered sense of time	"during the flow experience the sense of time bears little relation to the passage of time as measured by the absolute convention of the clock." (1990, p.66)
Positive emotions of enjoyment	"autotelic nature...it appears to need no goals or rewards to itself" (1975, p.47). "It is an end in itself." (1990, p.67)

Figure 9: Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) characteristics of Flow presented as three antecedents and six phenomenological characteristics (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2009)

Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) second finding about the holistic nature of the Flow experience contains one of many important paradoxes found in Flow research. In reporting this finding, Csikszentmihalyi (1975) stated that, whilst these characteristics could be identified retrospectively, respondents were unlikely to be aware of anything specific in the moment. Instead, he argued that respondents experienced them all both simultaneously and holistically. Csikszentmihalyi concluded, therefore, that in order for people to experience this holistic state, paradoxically all the characteristics needed to be present simultaneously as they were all

dependent on each other (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Engeser (2012) explained this paradox using the analogy of a doctor's holistic diagnosis of symptoms, to reinforce the finding that Flow cannot be represented by only one of the components; all are necessary for the experience of Flow or an accurate diagnosis. Perhaps the best way to exemplify this logic is by using Csikszentmihalyi's own words:

"The various elements of the Flow experience are linked together and dependent on each other. By limiting the stimulus field, a flow activity allows people to concentrate their actions and ignore distractions. As a result, they feel in potential control of the environment. Because the flow activity has clear and noncontradictory rules, people who perform in it can temporarily forget their identity and its problems. The result of all these conditions is that one finds the process intrinsically rewarding."
(Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.48)

Even though Csikszentmihalyi states that Flow is experienced simultaneously and holistically, he does not include any participants' verbatim descriptions of the overall experience. Instead, he captures descriptions for each separate characteristic to demonstrate their interdependence. The most complete description of how participants may experience Flow holistically is "as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which he is in control of his actions, and in which there is little distinction between the self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present and future" (1975, p.36) and that Flow experiences "give participants a sense of discovery, exploration, problem solving - in other words, a feeling of novelty and challenge" (1975, p.30) that "imply transcendence, a going beyond the known, a stretching of one's self toward a new dimension of skill and competence...by matching one's skills against a physical obstacle or against the boundaries of one's own competencies" (1975, p.33). It will be important to explore and understand more fully both the holistic nature of Flow and the individual characteristics experienced by coaches. Therefore, having identified the overall characteristics of Flow that are experienced holistically,

I will now explore each one individually. For each in turn, I will first outline Csikszentmihalyi's understanding of that characteristic, then detail the verbatim descriptions to add colour and comprehension and finally meld them together with any relevant coaching literature insights and my own personal experience.

3.2 The three antecedents for Flow

Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002; 2009) determined that the conditions for Flow, the antecedents, were separate from and not part of the phenomenology of the experience of Flow itself. Arguably therefore, they should not strictly play a part of this concept development review. However, as Csikszentmihalyi (1975) asserts that all the elements of Flow are necessarily interdependent, without their existence Flow will not be experienced. As such, I argue that a brief review is both helpful and necessary to understand their influence before exploring each individual element of the Flow experience. Figure 9 above identifies that an activity prompting Flow has three principal conditions (Nakamura *et al.*, 2009): being challenging in terms of skills required, having clear goals and involving immediate feedback. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) claimed that the first of these antecedents, a balance between a perceived challenge that stretches the person's perception of their skills and ability to meet that challenge, is the fundamental pre-requisite for Flow. A pictorial representation of this principal antecedent is shown in Figure 10 below. As fundamental as it may be, Csikszentmihalyi warns us that the balance between the states of boredom and anxiety is "intrinsically fragile" (Nakamura *et al.*, 2009, p.90) because "if challenges begin to exceed skills, one first becomes vigilant and then anxious; if skills begin to exceed challenges, one first relaxes and then becomes bored." Therefore, it would be logical to argue that the challenge must be perceived as achievable by the person as a fundamental starting point for Flow to happen (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). I can recognise having experienced these feelings in my coaching practice. I know that I have sometimes felt anxious before and during coaching, for instance when suffering a nasty case of imposter syndrome when meeting an important

new senior client from a work context that was new to me, like investment banking, and wondering if I will be good enough. Likewise, I must confess to occasional bouts of boredom and mind wandering in some sessions!

Importantly, Csikszentmihalyi (1975) identified that the second and third antecedents could help maintain this fragile balance. Goals, he attests, allow for “coherent, noncontradictory demands for action” (1975, p.46) against which shifts in this subjective state into anxiety or boredom “provide clear, unambiguous feedback” (1975, p.46) to help course correct and maintain the fragile balance of Flow. For instance, anxiety (as in my earlier example) will be experienced when people perceive the challenge to be greater than their ability to tackle it. For Flow to be regained, either their perception of the challenge will need to be reduced or their perception of their ability to meet the challenge will need to be increased. In my coaching example, for instance, clarifying that my goal was to help another person to think through and solve their own issues rather than solving anything for them helped to reduce my perception of the challenge. This simultaneously increased my perception of my ability to meet that challenge by recognising that I had the skills, experience and ability to do it well, and had done so before. By contrast, for anyone wanting to move out of feeling bored and back into Flow, the challenge and the way it is perceived may need to increase. Csikszentmihalyi believed that “achievement of a goal is important to mark one’s performance but is not in itself satisfying. What keeps one going is the experience of acting outside the parameters of worry and boredom: the experience of flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.38). From my coaching experience so far, neither anxiety nor boredom has helped my coaching effectiveness or made me feel satisfied; they have however provided the subjective train tracks to help me stay in Flow.

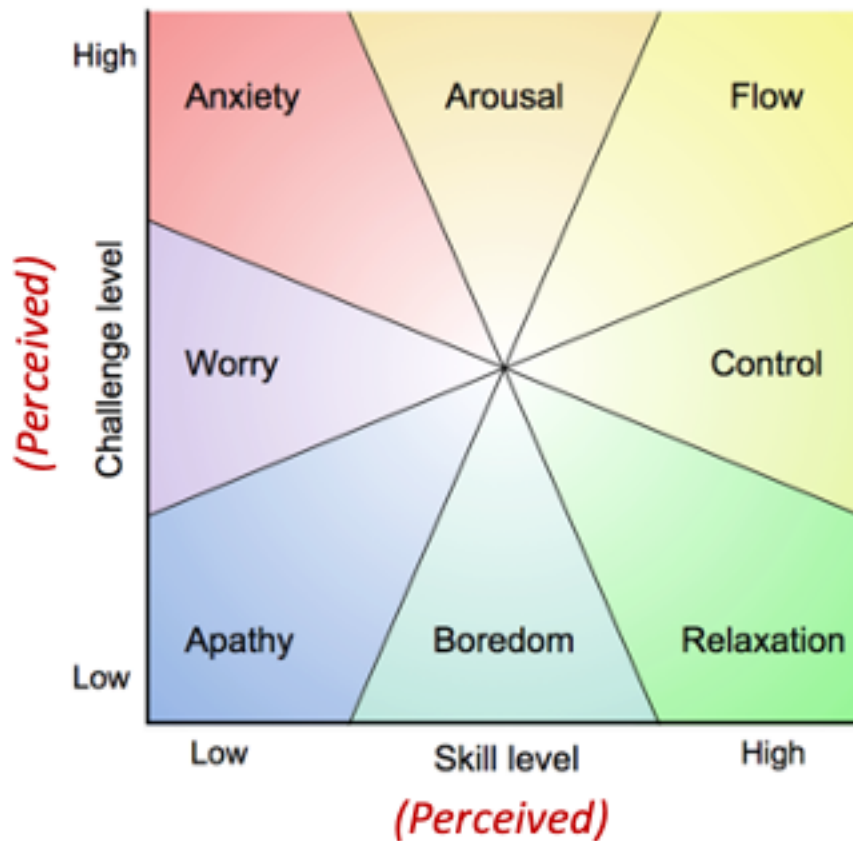


Figure 10: Adapted version of Challenge Skills Flow state (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2009) to include 'perceived'

As can be deduced from this example and Figure 10 above, Csikszentmihalyi understood that the balance inherent in Flow depends on individuals' perception of the challenge and of their relevant skills (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; 1990; Nakamura *et al.*, 2002; 2021) rather than objective evaluation and measurement. Arguably, one of the major hurdles for researchers when trying to operationalise or use the model is objectively evaluating and measuring subjective experiences (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Bakker, 2005; Kline, 2005).

One might argue that generalisation and measurement demands reliability and consistency,

and yet people are consistently inconsistent in how they subjectively perceive situations (Kline, 2005) and my experience shows that to be true, especially when under pressure. I would also argue that the frequent omission of the word 'perceived' in texts or models has not helped, therefore Figure 10 has been adjusted to include and emphasise 'perceived' on the axes. Nevertheless, most Flow models have been based on this antecedent (Moneta, 2012) and have used the balance of challenge and skill as a proxy for the existence of Flow. I believe that this reinforces the importance of this research to help understand both how coaches themselves perceive Flow and how they may perceive any changes in themselves and their coaching after experiencing Flow.

This antecedent also suggests that the role that self-efficacy can play in Flow and coaching is of critical importance. Both studies by Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.* (2011) and Salanova *et al.* (2006) demonstrated this importance in creating a virtuous circle of self-efficacy and Flow over time. In the coaching literature, McBride (2013) indicated the positive influence of self-efficacy on Flow and coaching practice. If we accept self-efficacy as a person's perceived ability to succeed in a task (Bandura, 1997), and that this perception of ability aligns with Csikszentmihalyi's balance needed for Flow between a person's perceived ability to meet a challenge and the challenge itself (1975), then it is clear why Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.* (2011) argue for self-efficacy to be seen as a fourth antecedent of Flow. I believe that including self-efficacy as a fourth antecedent would also reinforce the critical understanding of the role perception itself plays in Flow. Social Cognitive Theory has shown the importance of self-efficacy in behaviour change and its importance in successful coaching practice is well established (Malone, 2001; Bennet and Campone, 2017). I align with Bandura (2001, p.10) that self-efficacy beliefs are the "foundation of human agency" and therefore coaches' agency. Therefore, it is possible that self-efficacy can also have a major influence on us as coaches, in both our coaching practice and on our own perception of our ability to coach successfully at ever increasing levels of complexity and challenge.

3.3 Csikszentmihalyi's six phenomenological characteristics of Flow

3.3.1 Focus

'Focus' is the first of the six phenomenological characteristics of the experience of Flow (Figure 9). Csikszentmihalyi (1975, p.40) defined focus as "a centring of attention on a limited stimulus field." He explained that the purpose of focus is to help people concentrate on what they are doing without distraction (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). He argued that once someone is totally focussed on what they are doing and "all a person's relevant skills are needed to cope with the challenges" (1975, p.40), order is brought to our consciousness and there is no "excess psychic energy (attention) left over to process any information but what the activity offers. All attention is concentrated" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.53) and everything else is momentarily forgotten. Expressions such as "oblivious to my surroundings, leaving troubles at the door, nothing else but the activity on my mind, the world is cut off to me or that nothing else exists" (1975, pp. 40), shown in Figure 11 below, attest to respondents experiencing this focus and centring of attention to the exclusion of all else.

Characteristic of Flow	Participants lived experience
Focus – “a centring of attention on a limited stimulus field” (1975, p.40)	A basketball player: “Kids my age, they think a lot...but when you are playing basketball, that's all there is on your mind – just basketball...everything seems to follow right along” (1975, p.41)
	A dancer: “I get a feeling that I don't get anywhere else...I have more confidence in myself than at any other time. Maybe an effort to forget my problems. Dance is like therapy. If I am troubled about something, I leave it out the door as I go in (to the dance studio)” (1975, p.41)
	A music composer: “I am really quite oblivious to my surroundings after I really get going. I think that the phone could ring, and the doorbell could ring...or something like that...When I start working, I really shut out the world. Once I stop, I can let it back in again” (1975, p.41).
	A rock climber: “When I start on a climb, it is as if my memory input has been cut off. All I can remember is the last thirty seconds, and all I can think ahead is the next five minutes” (1975, p.40).
	A chess player: “ When the game is exciting, I don't seem to hear nothing – the world seems to be cut off from me and all there is to think about is my game” (1975, p.40).
	A rock-climber: “ One tends to get immersed in what is going on around him, in the rock, in the moves that are involved...search for handholds...proper position of body...” (1975, p.43)
	A basketball player: “Well, I have found myself at times when I have super concentration in a game whereby nothing else exists – nothing exists except the act of participating and swinging the ball. (The other player must) be there to play the game, but I'm not concerned with him. I'm not competing with him at that point. I'm attempting to place the ball in the perfect spot, and it has no bearing on winning or losing.” (1975, p.45)

Figure 11: Csikszentmihalyi (1975) Focus

It is likely that in coaching, Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) 'focus' is closely associated with the concept of presence and absorption. In the coaching research, McBride (2013, p.49) equated focus with the idea of presence such that “we're fully present.” Wesson (2010) described a deep absorption with listening to the client without the usual distractions to disrupt their thinking. The ICF (2017) explanation of presence draws on the need for the coach to be able to listen to the client with one's whole self and with all the senses which, I would argue, is closely associated with this aspect of focus in Flow. This linkage to presence was reinforced by Noon (2017, p.56), describing a coach present in the moment as “having absolute full, undivided attention” with the client, creating a stillness and openness without distraction. My coaching experience aligns with these findings. I recognise that when I lose focus, I become distracted and have to refocus intently on, as Kline (1999) said, being fascinated by what the client is about to say.

3.2.2 Merging of action and awareness

Once someone is fully focussed and absorbed in an activity, it allows what Csikszentmihalyi highlighted as “perhaps the clearest sign of Flow” (1975, p.38): when action and awareness merge. This is the second of the six identified characteristics of Flow. When action and awareness merge, respondents describe that their actions become “spontaneous, almost automatic” with a sense of “seemingly effortless movement” (1990, p.53). They are aware of the actions “but not of the awareness itself” (1975, p.38). In other words, there is no distinction between the action and the person doing the action, it just seems to happen effortlessly. Once they become aware of themselves in action, however, or they reflect on themselves doing the activity, Flow is lost. Csikszentmihalyi’s respondents described this seemingly effortless movement from the merging of action and awareness in Figure 12 below. Their experiences range from “energy flowing very smoothly to Zen feeling and an unthinking action that just seems to happen” (1975, p.39).

Characteristic of Flow	Participants lived experience
Merging of action and awareness : Flow “has no dualistic perspective: they are aware of their actions but not of the awareness itself” (1975, p.38)	A dancer: “Your concentration is very complete. Your mind isn't wandering, you are not thinking of something else; you are totally involved in what you are doing...Your energy is flowing very smoothly. You feel relaxed, comfortable, and energetic” (1975, p.39).
“sense of seemingly effortless movement” (1990, p.53)	A rock climber: “You are so involved in what you are doing [that] you aren't thinking of yourself as separate from the immediate activity...You don't see yourself as separate from what you are doing” (1975, p.39).
“consciousness works smoothly, action follows action seamlessly” such that “there is no need to reflect, because the action carries us forward as if by magic” (1990, p.54).	A rock climber: “It's a Zen feeling, like meditation or concentration. One thing you're after is the one-pointedness of mind. You can get your ego mixed up with climbing in all sorts of ways and it isn't necessarily enlightening. But when things become automatic, it's like an egoless thing, in a way. Somehow the right thing is done without you ever thinking about it or doing anything at all...It just happens. And yet you're more concentrated” (1990, p.63)
	Basketball player: “like I said, you don't think about it at all. If you step back and think about why you are so hot, all of a sudden you get creamed” (1975, p.40)
	Basketball player: “I really don't have to think. When I am playing, it just comes to me. It's a good feeling” (1975, p.39)

Figure 12: Csikszentmihalyi (1975) Merging of action and awareness

In some of my coaching conversations, I have experienced situations where things just seemed to come to me intuitively, seemingly without conscious thought and evaluation. Wesson (2010, p.56) found similar experiences with her research, describing “using skills and ideas from different places and synthesising them into a new technique...I was present with both head and intuition and it just seemed to work.” In discussion, more experienced coaches than myself have spoken almost mystically about trusting intuition in coaching to allow the right question to arise.

Whilst some coaching sessions felt somewhat effortless, I was left drained and exhausted by others. Csikszentmihalyi referred to this effortlessness as a perception rather than reality (1990). In reality, he argued, the effortlessness “does not happen without the application of skilled performance” (1990, p.54). It is this application of skilled performance that allows “consciousness (to) work smoothly, action follows action seamlessly” such that “there is no need to reflect, because the action carries us forward as if by magic” (1990, p.54). In other words, my experience aligns with Csikszentmihalyi in that it is hard work, but it just doesn’t feel like effortless magic.

3.3.3 A sense of control over my actions

When people fully apply their skills to stretching yet achievable challenges, they report experiencing the third of Csikszentmihalyi’s characteristics of Flow: having a sense of control over their actions. If they did not have this sense of control, Csikszentmihalyi argued, they would feel anxiety and stress as the challenge would be too great for them, resulting in an unpleasant feeling of being ‘out of control’. It is actually this absence of concern or worry about having of a lack of control that Csikszentmihalyi (1975) reported as ‘a sense of control over my actions’. He described this “Paradox of control” (1990, p.59) explaining that it is the possibility of control rather than the actuality of control that people report. For instance, the ballet dancer in Figure 13 below described having “no worries about failure” and “what a powerful and warm feeling it is!” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.44). Yet in reality, he argued, she

may fall, injure herself and never dance again; it is the possibility of perfection being attainable that she feels. Likewise, the rock-climber may fall, the chess player may lose; yet they reported a heightened sense of control whilst climbing or playing such that “I am in complete control of my world” (Chess player, 1975, p.45).

Characteristic of Flow	Participants lived experience
A sense of control over my actions . “not necessarily the sense of being in control, but the sense of exercising control in difficult situations” (1990, p.61)	Dancer: “If I have enough space, I am in control. I feel I can radiate an energy into the atmosphere. Its not always necessary that another human being is there to catch the energy. I can usually dance for the walls, I can dance for the floors...I don't know if its usually a control of the atmosphere. I become one with the atmosphere” (1975, p.44)
“A sense that one can control one's actions; that is, a sense that one can in principle deal with the situation because one knows how to respond to whatever happens next” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009, p. 90)	Dancer: “A strong relaxation and calmness comes over me. I have no worries of failure. What a powerful and warm feeling it is! I want to expand, hug the world. I feel enormous power to effect something of grace and beauty” (1975, p.44)
	Chess player: “I like getting lost in an external situation and forgetting about personal crap – I like being in control...Although I am not aware of specific things, I have a general feeling of well-being and that I am in complete control of my world” (1975, p.45)
	Basketball player: “I feel in control. Sure. I've practices and have a good feeling for the shots I can make...I don't feel in control of the other player – even if he's bad and I know I can beat him. It's me and not him that I am working on.” (1975, p.45)
	A dancer: “I get a feeling that I don't get anywhere else...I have more confidence in myself than at any other time.” (1975, p.41)
	A dancer: “If I have enough space, I am in control. I feel I can radiate an energy into the atmosphere. It's not always necessary that another human being be there to catch the energy. I can dance for walls, I can dance for floors...I don't know if it's usually a control of the atmosphere. I become one with the atmosphere.” (1975, p.45)

Figure 13: Csikszentmihalyi (1975) A sense of control over my actions

From my coaching experience, I believe that the notion of control may create a tension for coaches. Whilst neither the 2017 nor 2021 ICF Competencies mention the specific word ‘control’, their language is all about partnership and full autonomy for the client. Certainly, my training has always emphasised that the client ‘is always in control’ of the agenda and that I am in the service of them. The tension, therefore, lies in coaches seeking to feel control while

not exercising this control over the client or their agenda.

My understanding of Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) initial work is that he intended 'control' to mean 'self-control' rather than being controlling of another individual. For example, the basketball player in Figure 13 clarifies that he doesn't "feel in control of the other player" when playing basketball as "it's me not him I am working on" (1975, p.45). I have also not found any evidence for my concern within the coaching literature. Under the characteristic of control, Wesson (2010) only captured feelings of effortlessness, natural action and focus, whilst McBride's (2013, p.48) respondents linked experience, competence and confidence with "being okay with asking the wrong question" and "being able to let go of trying so hard", both arguably associated with the acceptance of not feeling in control. Yet I still have the intuition that this may be an issue in coaching practice. Therefore, I will retain Csikszentmihalyi's 'sense of control' in the initial concept but will be especially sensitive to coaches' language and experiences during the CE research interview process.

3.3.4 Loss of self-consciousness: concern for the self disappears

Here, I will begin with an exploration of the fourth characteristic of Flow: how respondents themselves describe a loss of self-consciousness (Figure 14) such that concern for the self seems to disappear. Some of them did report a loss of self-consciousness as "the conscious subject is diminished", or a respondent might "lose consciousness of his own identity". However, rather than describing the loss of self-consciousness itself, all respondents described instead the effect it seems to have on them, either as a transcendental expansion or a sense of 'oneness' with something separate from themselves. For example, a transcendental experience different from everyday life was described by respondents variously as "watching in awe and wonderment, a panther powering up a rock, it's supreme, I forget my problems, my hang-ups were obliterated, I can live outside my head and feelings of expansion and wanting to hug the world" (1975, p.43). The second effect described by respondents was a feeling of 'oneness'; a sense of being at one with something with no

separation, or as Csikszentmihalyi describes it, “a feeling of union with the environment” (1975, p.63).

Transcendental descriptive expressions akin to meditation and yoga were used, such as “our minds become one, being of one flesh or I melt into the rock” (1975, p.43). It is these experiences, Csikszentmihalyi claimed, that set Flow apart from normal life, in which, he argued, we spend so much time thinking about our own self. For clarity, Csikszentmihalyi (1975, p.43) stated that “what is usually lost in flow is not the awareness of one’s body or one’s function, but only the self-construct, the intermediary which one learns to interpose between stimulus and response.” For instance, the composer described “being in a state of awe and wonderment” as “my hand feels devoid of myself” and “it just flows out by itself” (1975, p.44), a violinist being “extremely aware of every movement of her fingers as well as the sound entering her ears...both analytically ...and holistically” or a chess player “retrieving from his memory, at will, previous positions, past combinations” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.64). Csikszentmihalyi argued that as we feel in control of our actions, focussing as we are on an achievable task, we have no need to feel threatened or at risk. Therefore, the psychic energy or attention in consciousness needed by the intermediary ‘self’ can be safely ‘let go’. In other words, it is the awareness of the concept of ‘self’ that is lost, not the ‘self’ itself (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975).

Csikszentmihalyi summarised the paradox inherent in this characteristic, by stating that whilst “concern for the self disappears, paradoxically the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience is over” (1990, p. 49). I will not enter into a deep discourse here about the ‘self’ - what it is, where it may be, singular or multiple - except to recognise that it is key to understanding consciousness and subjective experiences. Since 1975, a great deal of research has been conducted which has increased understanding of this area, yielding new insights in both neuroscience (e.g., Gazzaniga, 2012; Kuzban, 2010) and coaching (Bachkirova, 2011; 2016; 2020; Lawrence, 2018). The intent here is rather to explore what Csikszentmihalyi understood it to be and how his respondents described the experience.

Characteristic of Flow	Participants lived experience
Concern for the self disappears "What is usually lost in flow is not the awareness of one's body or of one's function, but only the self construct, the intermediary which one learns to interpose between stimulus and response." (1975, p.43)	Japanese motorcycle gang riding in a very large pack): "If the Run begins to go well, all of us, all of us feel for the others. How can I say this? When our minds become one. At such a time, it's a real pleasure...When all of us become one, I understand something...All of a sudden I realise, 'Oh, we're one' and think, 'If we speed as fast as we can, it will become a real Run.'...When we realise that we become one flesh, it's supreme. When we get high on speed. At such a moment, it's really super." (1990, p.63)
"Loss of reflective self-consciousness (i.e., loss of awareness of oneself as a social actor)" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009, p. 90)	A rock-climber: "The task at hand is so demanding and rich in its complexity and pull that the conscious subject is really diminished in intensity. Corollary of that is that all the hang-ups that people have or that I have as an individual person are momentarily obliterated...it's one of the few ways I have found to...live outside my head." (1975, p.43)
	A Composer: "You yourself are in an ecstatic state to such a point that you feel as though you almost done exist. I've experienced this time and time again. My hand seems devoid of myself, and I have nothing to do with what is happening. I just sit there watching in a state of awe and wonderment. And it just flows out by itself." (1975, p.44)
	A rock-climber: "You become a robot – no more like an animal. It's pleasant. There is a feeling of total involvement...You feel like a panther powering up the rock." (1975, p.43)
	A rock-climber: "One tends to get immersed in what is going on around him, in the rock...so involved he might lose the consciousness of his own identity and melt into the rock." (1975, p.43)
	A dancer: "I get a feeling that I don't get anywhere else...I have more confidence in myself than at any other time.. Maybe an effort to forget my problems. Dance is like therapy. If I am troubled about something, I leave it out the door as I go in (the dance studio)." (1975, p.41)
	A dancer: "A strong relaxation and calmness comes over me. I have no worries of failure. What a powerful and warm feeling it is! I want to expand, hug the world. I feel an enormous power to effect something of grace and beauty." (1975, p.44)

Figure 14: Csikszentmihalyi (1975) Loss of self-consciousness

I have also experienced many of these thoughts and feelings during Flow within my coaching practice. On reflection, whilst in Flow I don't seem to be aware of 'myself', rather I recognise having had experiences of 'we' as one with no separation from my client, a sense of awe or elevation like the composer when something special occurs or a breakthrough understanding is achieved in my coaching. Often, for me, it is at that moment of breakthrough that the

experience of Flow is often broken and the awareness of myself as separate from my client returns. In the coaching literature, both Wesson (2010) and McBride (2013) presented some evidence for this loss of the sense of self, oneness and transcendence (Figures 3 and 4) and especially the idea of not having the self-chatter about themselves, their performance and how they as coaches were doing. This aligns with the rock-climber describing how nice it was to “live outside my head” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.43). A deeper understanding of how coaches describe their experience of this characteristic of self will therefore be of great potential significance and importance.

3.3.5 Altered sense of time; a transformation of one’s sense of time passing

Csikszentmihalyi’s fifth characteristic, where people describe experiencing an altered sense of time, was seen as “one of the most common descriptions of optimal experience” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.66). Respondents in 1975 clearly described this experience as either speeding up, slowing down or just not being in their awareness; three examples are shown in Figure 15 below. I therefore fully expected to see a section about the transformation of time experienced during Flow in Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975) *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*; yet Csikszentmihalyi hardly mentions time and it is not included in any logic flow in his review. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and Nakamura *et al.* (2002; 2021) clearly distinguish the temporal distortion of time experienced during Flow within the characteristics of the phenomenology, yet it is again omitted in Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) exploration of Flow and creativity. I have decided to include altered time as a characteristic in the initial concept as it is featured in Nakamura *et al.* (2002), which this review is based on, reported in the 1975 transcripts, and claimed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as one of the most common descriptions; and, finally, because I have experienced this in my coaching practice on multiple occasions.

Characteristic of Flow	Participants lived experience
Altered sense of time	A long distance swimmer: "Every once in a while, just because of the long time (of the swim), your mind wanders. Like I'll wake up and say, 'Oh, I haven't been thinking about it for a while!'" (1975, p.40)
"during the flow experience the sense of time bears little relation to the passage of time as measured by the absolute convention of the clock." (1990, p.66)	A rock-climber: "When I start on a climb, it is as if my memory input has been cut off. All I can remember is the last thirty seconds, and all I can think ahead is the next five minutes." (1975, p.40)
"Although it seems likely that losing track of the clock is not one of the major elements of enjoyment, freedom from the tyranny of time does add to the exhilaration we feel when we act with total involvement." (1990, p.67)	A ballet dancer: "Two things happen. One is that it seems to pass really fast in one sense. After it's passed, it seems to have passed really fast. I see that it's 1:00 in the morning, and I say: 'Aha, just a few minutes ago it was 8:00.' But then while I'm dancing...it seems like it's been much longer than maybe it really was." (1990, p.66)

Figure 15: Csikszentmihalyi (1975) A transformation of one's perception of time passing

Time is another concept I believe to be sensitive in coaching. Our work is necessarily constrained by fixed, time-bounded sessions. Losing track of time may therefore create issues for working coaches. Whilst Wesson (2010) did give examples of coaches experiencing varying distortions in their sense of time during Flow, I am intrigued that McBride (2013) did not. After extensive discussion about time in the literature review of Flow and its inclusion in her definition of Flow shared with respondents, time was only mentioned briefly, either as an exit trigger for Flow, such that "the clock told us we had to stop" (2013, p.54), or in that the coaches were conscious of the time and a need to move on in their sessions.

I recognise in my early coaching experience that I was sometimes very conscious of and anxious about time as a challenge of the job, especially when I experienced time having disappeared after Flow. This was especially so when trying to successfully and neatly finish on time without appearing unprofessional or rushing 'as time ran away with me' or that 'I lost track of time.' I wonder whether, as I have gained experience, I have developed more of the skill of managing a sense of time; almost as if another part of my 'self' was watching and keeping track of it without disturbing my Flow. Csikszentmihalyi described a similar skill being

developed by those who also face time as an important challenge of the job, citing both surgeons and runners (1990). I believe that this relationship with time in coaching and Flow will be very important to include and explore in this research.

3.3.6 Flow's intrinsic reward: Positive emotions of enjoyment and satisfaction

The final and sixth characteristic of Flow describes the intrinsic reward of Flow as a deep sense of enjoyment and satisfaction coming directly from doing the activity itself; pitching skills against a stretching and meaningful challenge. Csikszentmihalyi's insight was that "achievement of a goal is important to mark one's performance but is not in itself satisfying. What keeps one going is the experience of acting outside the parameters of worry and boredom: the experience of flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.38). Flow, he argued, "appears to need no goals or rewards external to itself" (1975, p.47). Respondents reported that the deep sense of enjoyment and satisfaction they felt from the activity itself was "so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what they will get out of it, even when it is difficult or dangerous" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.71).

His findings indicated that this sense of deep enjoyment and satisfaction was also characterised by a forward movement, an increase in complexity from having gone beyond or having "accomplished something unexpected" (1990, p.46) or, I would argue, from discovery. He contended that this was the fundamental insight which would help him challenge the behavioural paradigm (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Csikszentmihalyi *et al.*, 1988). Unequivocally, verbatim reports from his respondents in 1975 agreed (Figure 16). Examples such as "the justification for climbing is climbing...the purpose of flow is to keep on flowing" exemplify this forward movement, whilst the response that "one does it, perhaps, for the satisfaction it gives" highlights the intrinsic reward. Just to reinforce the point, one composer concluded his advice to his students with "don't expect to make money...don't expect a damn thing. Do it because you love it" (1975, p.48).

Characteristic of Flow	Participants lived experience
Positive emotions of enjoyment "autotelic nature...it appears to need no goals or rewards to itself" (1975, p.47)	A composer: "One doesn't do it for the money. One does it for, perhaps, the satisfaction it gives. I think the great composers, all the great artists work for themselves, period. They don't give a damn for anybody else. They primarily satisfy themselves... If you get any fame out of it, it's when you are dead and buried, so what the hell's the good of it...This is what I tell my students. Don't expect to make money, don't expect a pat on the back, don't expect a damn thing. Do it because you love it" (1975, p.48).
"Experience of the activity as intrinsically re-warding, such that often the end goal is just an excuse for the process" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009, p. 90)	A rock-climber poet: "The mystique of rock climbing is climbing; you get to the top of a rock glad it's over but really wish it would go on forever. The justification of climbing is climbing, like the justification of poetry is writing; you don't conquer anything except things in yourself...The act of writing justifies poetry. Climbing is the same: recognizing that you are a flow. The purpose of the flow is to keep on flowing, not looking for a peak or utopia but staying in the flow. It is not a moving up but a continuous flowing; you move up to keep the flow going. There is no possible reason for climbing except the climbing itself; it is a self-communication." (1975, p.48)
	A chess player: "The most rewarding thing is the competition, the satisfaction of pitting your mental prowess against someone else...I've won...trophies and money...but considering expenses of entry fees, chess associations, etc., I'm usually on the losing side financially." (1975, p.48)

Figure 16: Csikszentmihalyi (1975): Flow's intrinsic reward: Positive emotions of enjoyment and satisfaction

One of my fascinations with Flow has always been the deep sense of enjoyment and satisfaction I have experienced from it. Indeed, my career change was motivated by the discovery that coaching not only gave me the satisfaction of helping others grow but that it also came with many enjoyable experiences of Flow. As with Csikszentmihalyi's respondents, the intrinsic satisfaction I get from coaching is deeply rewarding. Whilst I do considerable pro-bono coaching, the living I make as a paid professional coach is an important outcome from my work. I cannot therefore say that coaching is entirely intrinsically motivated, much as a surgeon may also be seen to be well compensated and recognised by society for this work. Yet, as in surgery - and in all work situations, Csikszentmihalyi argued - the conditions are available for myself and my clients to provide opportunities for Flow to occur and therefore to access the deep joy and fulfilment emanating from overcoming a challenge together. As one of the coaches in Wesson's (2010, p.56) research stated: "it was memorable and every time I think about it the good feelings flood back into my mind and give me a feeling of fulfilment and

satisfaction.” However, I believe that there is a lack of clarity about this characteristic from these and Csikszentmihalyi’s findings that could be problematic for this research.

Rather than one clear characteristic, I see two interconnected but arguably separate thoughts in the findings. On the one hand, I can see that Flow activities are ‘autotelic’; they are intrinsically rewarding in and of themselves, and have a forward motion, making people want to stay in Flow. As this is experienced in the moment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), I can align with the logic for its inclusion as an integral part of the phenomenological experience of Flow. It is the inclusion in the phenomenology that this intrinsic reward is experienced as deep enjoyment and satisfaction that I find more problematic. Even though the experience of Flow is rewarding, Csikszentmihalyi found that enjoyment as an emotion could not be felt during Flow itself but only experienced immediately afterwards (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; 1990). Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2021) later reported that people often expressed these positive emotions of enjoyment just as they emerge from Flow, or whenever the Flow experience was recalled. Whilst respondents describe feeling enjoyment, is this part of the phenomenology itself or is it an effect perceived only after the experience of Flow? I have decided, therefore, to include the word ‘enjoyment’ in the initial concept alongside expressions of ‘intrinsic motivation’ and ‘doing it for its own sake’, thereby stay open to coaches’ experiences.

3.4 Summary of the development of an initial conceptual map for Flow in coaching conversations

Having listened to and explored Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) research participants' voices describing their experiences of Flow, this section will now summarise my thoughts and conclude with the development of the initial conceptual map. Unlike previous coaching Flow research, where a concept was shown at the beginning of the interview process, this map is intended as a starting point for dialogue within the second stage of the CE interview process. It is at this second stage that the concept 'encounters' the co-researchers' experiences, after these experiences have been fully discussed, captured and understood.

In summary, I find that I can identify with each of Csikszentmihalyi's six phenomenological characteristics of Flow (Figure 9). I am able to recognise his participants' descriptions and align them with my lived experiences of my thoughts, feelings and actions as a coach in what I experience as Flow. However, whilst I can relate to their experiences, my own are set within the dyadic context of my coaching relationship. For instance, rather than being at one with a task, the rock, the music or even the scalpel, my experience is of being at one with my client in the moment. In deepening my understanding of each characteristic, questions that I had not previously considered important to my practice came into mind. For instance, Csikszentmihalyi's respondents described focussing on and being absorbed by the activity (e.g., climbing, basketball, dancing). When I reflect, what am I focussing on in coaching and what am I absorbed by? Is it the coaching aim, the business issue, the coaching process, the right question - or the client? In the last section I shared that I felt that when I focus on what my client is about to say, I centre on them, their words, their actions, their tone of voice; I am tuned into listening and feeling with everything I have. I am still absorbed and focussing; but what I am absorbed by is totally different to that which absorbed Csikszentmihalyi's respondents. How do other coaches experience this and how does the relationship affect the other characteristics?

3.4.1 Additional characteristics for this study

Bakker (2005) established that Flow was contagious between people, for example between coach and client. Therefore, as the relationship is so critical in coaching success and Flow may be experienced as contagious, it could be seen as a major differential between Csikszentmihalyi's work and my experience as a coach. I have therefore decided to add 'relationship' as an extra dimension to the other six characteristics to ensure focus and to explore more fully.

I have also decided to add 'intuition' to the list of characteristics to explore. The rationale for this is that intuition was reported in some of the coaching testimonies, was present in my training and is viewed as a positive skill by very experienced master coaches; yet this concept was not specifically mentioned in the Flow literature. I am unsure whether it is a distinct characteristic or whether it plays a role within the second characteristic (the merging of action and awareness) but its inclusion will allow a full exploration of it in Flow. I described my experience of merging action and awareness earlier as if the right thing sometimes came to me effortlessly, as if by magic. Again, for reasons of focus and exploration, I have separated the two parameters of action and awareness to stay open to a full exploration of it in Flow. The final characteristics for inclusion in the draft concept of Flow in coaching are shown below in Figure 17. Alongside each characteristic, I have highlighted potential areas of difference or questions that a coaching relationship may raise for exploration and understanding in dialogue with the co-researchers.

Characteristic of Flow for inclusion in CE fieldwork	Areas of potential differentiation for exploration
Intense Focus	Words from my experience: concentration, in the moment, on task and issue What are coaches focussing on? Issue, client, presence?
Merge action and awareness : deep and effortless involvement	Words from my experience: spontaneous, automatic, intuition How and where does intuition play?
A sense of control over my actions .	Words from my experience: can deal with anything, know how to respond, confidence and belief How do coaches react to 'control'? Control of actions or control of the client and agenda?
Concern for the self disappears	Words from my experience: self concern, reflective self What is lost? How is it experienced? Self consciousness, self concern, self reflection?
Altered sense of time	Words from my experience: perception, speed up and down How is time viewed? As an issue? Speed up, slow down or not be aware? How worried are coaches about letting time slip?
Positive emotions of enjoyment	Words from my experience: intrinsic, do for own sake, want to do again What is the intrinsic reward from coaching? How is it experienced? Enjoyment, fulfillment, happiness?
Relational	Words from my experience: reflective, contagion Depth, closeness, trust, openness?
Intuition	How is this experienced and where does it fit into coach's experience?

Figure 17: Initial characteristics of Flow for CE fieldwork based on Nakamura *et al.* (2009)

Having reconciled the list of initial characteristics, I identified three further principal concerns for discussion and resolution with my supervisory team. The first concern was to create a concept in the interview process that balanced sufficient information to enable discussion with the risk of leading or influencing co-researcher responses. Following the literature review process, I faced the risk of having too much knowledge. When mixed with my enthusiasm and desire to share the subject, there was a danger of overloading my co-researchers and deterring dialogue. My second concern was that the list in Figure 17 may have lost the essence of the interdependence of all the characteristics so critical for Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). My final concern was to ensure that at each stage of development the concept could remain simple enough for respondents to grasp and elegant enough to capture the essence of the

whole, as De Rivera's (1981) CE approach demands. After review and discussion, I chose to use mind-mapping as the basis for resolution, presentation and development. The initial mind-map representation I used to begin fieldwork is captured below in Figure 18.

Once in Flow, an activity or experience seamlessly unfolds (flows) from one moment to another and the individual enters into a subjective state:

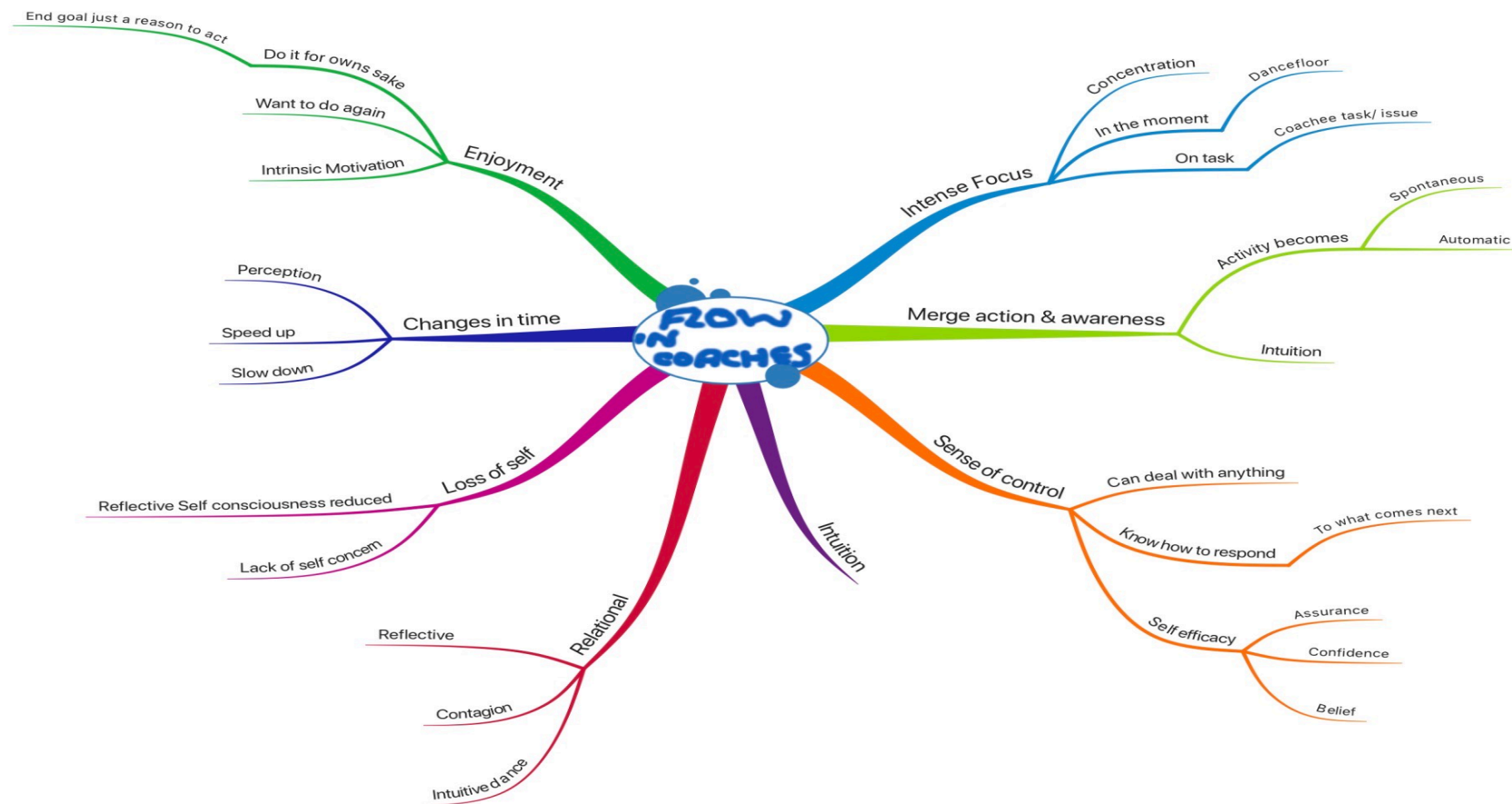


Figure 18: Initial Flow in Coaches concept used for fieldwork in the first Conceptual Encounter interview

I believe that creation of this mind-map helps to substantially alleviate the three concerns. First, I argue that the mind-map outline allowed enough information to be captured on the branches and sub-branches to prompt dialogue without overtly influencing co-researcher responses with detail, allowing the inductive nature of the process to take the lead and the voices of my co-researchers to be heard. Second, I believe the mind-map diagrammatically demonstrates the interconnectedness of the characteristics in Flow, with all characteristics emanating from a central Flow focus point. Lastly, using a mind-map allowed the whole concept to be viewed holistically, whilst also allowing each characteristic to be examined individually.

I argue that this mind-map forms the starting point of something simple and elegant enough to grasp and intuitively understand during its subsequent collective development. One of the aims of the CE exploration was to remain flexible and open to any new and unknown additional characteristics that the co-researchers could identify from their experience. I felt, therefore, that the use of the mind-map helped me achieve this aim, as its more free and flexible structure arguably encourages free expression, thought and new connections to be made. I argue, therefore, that this concept will support the research objective of clarifying the meaning and structure of Flow in coaching conversations, and so make a valuable contribution to theory and practice in executive coaching.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to detail the methodological choices I have made. I explain and justify those choices against the alternatives considered, outlining data collection methods and data analysis approaches, clarifying my biases, fears and beliefs and explaining how they may impact the choices in the research and its subsequent quality. I conclude by explaining how the research was conducted, taking ethical and legal considerations into account and clarifying any limitations in the design.

4.1 Theoretical framework for this research design

To achieve both the aims and answer research objectives 3 and 4, I have tried to be congruent in the methodological choices I have made. I base my work on an ontology Morgan (2014) best describes as pragmatic where reality is born of experience and inquiry. Morgan (2014) argues that in pragmatism, the primacy of focus is against the inquiry's aim and objectives with an epistemological understanding that knowledge consists of "warranted assertions" emanating from that inquiry. It is from taking action and experiencing that outcome, Morgan (2014) argues, that the warranted assertions create meaning from subjective experience. This is consistent with the phenomenological tradition from which this research approach is embedded, emphasising personal experience and people's capacity to create their own meaning from experience (Arnold and Randall, 2010; Spinelli, 1989). My attitude will be primarily pragmatic, in that I will "give up hope of finding anything absolutely permanent, true and complete" (Dewey, 1908, p.87) as we are researching humans and humans are fallible (Schiller, 1927). The epistemology chosen could therefore be best described as 'pragmatic' constructivism, leading to a theoretical perspective of interpretivism through the exploration of the phenomenology of Flow in coaching conversations. The research gap and inquiry referenced earlier require a deep exploration of the human lived experience of Flow. The subjective nature of the Flow experience emphasises my need to take a constructivist rather than positivist approach, acknowledging as it does the existence of multiple perspectives of

reality and that meaning is created between people together through dialogue (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Constructivism additionally embraces the view that people's experiences impact the perception of the constructs they hold as true. Finally, there is further validity in taking a constructivist approach to understanding Flow within this coaching context. Both De Haan (2008) and Grant (2017) recognised this approach to be fundamental when trying to understand the coaching process, the coach-coachee relationship and critical moments in coaching. Hefferon *et al.* (2017) also called for more in-depth, qualitative understanding of Flow within new work contexts. In terms of this research, I believe it is important to generate knowledge and understanding that is deemed useful by coaches within the coaching profession and it is on this basis that I contend that a pragmatic constructivist perspective using an inductive approach will best achieve this.

The challenge for myself as an active practitioner-researcher is to be sufficiently explicit about the inherent subjectivity of the research, whilst also being objective enough about that subjectivity. Given my previous experience and knowledge about Flow, I align with Morgan (2014) in that I believe that, as practitioner-researcher, the known and the knower are inseparable (Morgan, 2014). Therefore, I contend that I can make a valuable contribution to the research by playing an active and engaged role within it. This implies the need to find a methodological approach and methods that are aligned and consistent with this stance, whilst also ensuring that I stay open to and make explicit those new experiences that challenge my beliefs and subsequent actions.

4.2 Research design

Pragmatically, the purpose of the research is to answer the research question "How is Flow experienced in coaching conversations and what changes do coaches perceive after the experience of Flow?" I have tried to ensure that choices made were methodologically clear and philosophically aligned, yet pragmatic, and most importantly, answer the research question.

4.2.1 Initial approach

In order to explore any changes coaches perceive as a result of experiencing Flow, it was felt imperative that each coach needed to start from a common conceptual platform of what they understand Flow to be. Whilst the concept of Flow has validity across many work contexts (Nakamura *et al.*, 2002; Bakker, 2005; 2008) and has some popular awareness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), no common conceptual understanding yet existed within the context of coaching. Without this common base of understanding, each coach would begin their personal reflective journey of change from their own subjective standpoint, potentially undermining and risking the research quality and validity. The generation of a conceptual map of Flow therefore has two benefits: first, it satisfies the need in this research for a common base of understanding; and second, the shared concept and the rich descriptive language used to describe it help to fill an existing gap in our knowledge. Bryman *et al.*, (2015) endorse taking a qualitative strategic research approach to develop a rich and descriptive understanding of under-researched fields. I therefore argue that an inductive approach, consistent with the chosen pragmatic constructivist paradigm, is best suited to establish both a common understanding about Flow and explore any post-experience changes.

4.2.2 Evaluating options

Several potential qualitative methodologies were evaluated for their suitability to answer the research question. These included Grounded Theory (GT) (Charmaz, 2008), Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith and Osborn, 2003), Action Research (McNiff, 2017), Conceptual Encounter (CE) (De Rivera, 1981) and Heuristic Inquiry (HI) (Moustakas, 1990). Each qualitative approach examined is inductive and constructivist (Bryman *et al.*, 2015, 2015). Earlier I contended that my pragmatic constructivism paradigm choice enabled me to make a valuable contribution to the research by playing an active and engaged role within it. Of the qualitative methodologies evaluated, only Conceptual Encounter, Heuristic Inquiry and Action Research fully embrace the active engagement and embedding of the practitioner-

researcher as an integral and valued part of the research (De Rivera, 1981; Moustakas, 1990; McNiff, 2017).

In the first of these three, De Rivera (1981) explained that CE is a useful approach in both “the art of leading one’s personal life and the practice of helping others” (p.2) when “studying some aspect of human experience...which they are trying to fully understand” (p.3). In particular, considering the need for a common platform of understanding of Flow, developing a shared clear and elegant description of an experience “helps us recognise it” (p.2).

For the second, Sultan (2019, p.9) argued that HI researches human experience holistically, in that it “involves exploring the subjective experience of a particular phenomenon within a purposive sample of individuals.” She aligned with Moustakas (1990) when arguing that this HI approach helps to expose the essential nature and meaning of any relationship between an individual and that phenomenon, for all to understand (Sultan, 2019). HI’s humanistic roots drive it to embrace human lived experience, for example through questions such as “How do I/you experience this phenomenon?” (Sultan, 2019, p.9). In this research, therefore, that could allow for the exploration of how coaches experience any changes they perceive after occasions of Flow.

Lastly, McNiff (2017) advised that Action Research is useful when individuals are looking both to take action to improve their own current practice and to describe and explain why they are doing it, through the generation of new theory. My pragmatic approach necessitates that my research question remains paramount. Rather than aiming to improve my current practice through questioning and examination, my focus is on gaining insight about how coaches experience Flow and discovering any changes they perceive afterwards. For this reason, Action Research does not appear appropriate.

Instead of valuing, embracing and embedding my active engagement within the research, GT and IPA both seem to discourage it, to different extents (Smith and Osborn, 2003; Charmaz, 2008; Bryman *et al.*, 2015). For instance, in IPA the dual interpretation process (Smith and

Osborn, 2003) makes the separation of the role of researcher clear, stating that “the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (p.51). Therefore, whilst IPA may seem appropriate to investigate questions relating to the essence or meaning about people’s experience of a phenomenon, it restricts my value as practitioner-researcher to making sense of others’ experiences only.

In line with the pragmatic approach where the aims and objectives remain paramount (Morgan, 2014), a phenomenologically synergistic combination of Conceptual Encounter (De Rivera, 1981) and Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) methodologies were chosen to run sequentially, addressing each research aim respectively. I will now outline how the two methodologies flow sequentially together (Figure 19) to achieve the aims, introducing elements of data sources, data collection and analysis to demonstrate coherence between philosophy and design choices. Each methodological choice, data source, data collection method and analysis method will be presented sequentially in detail in the sections following this Research Design

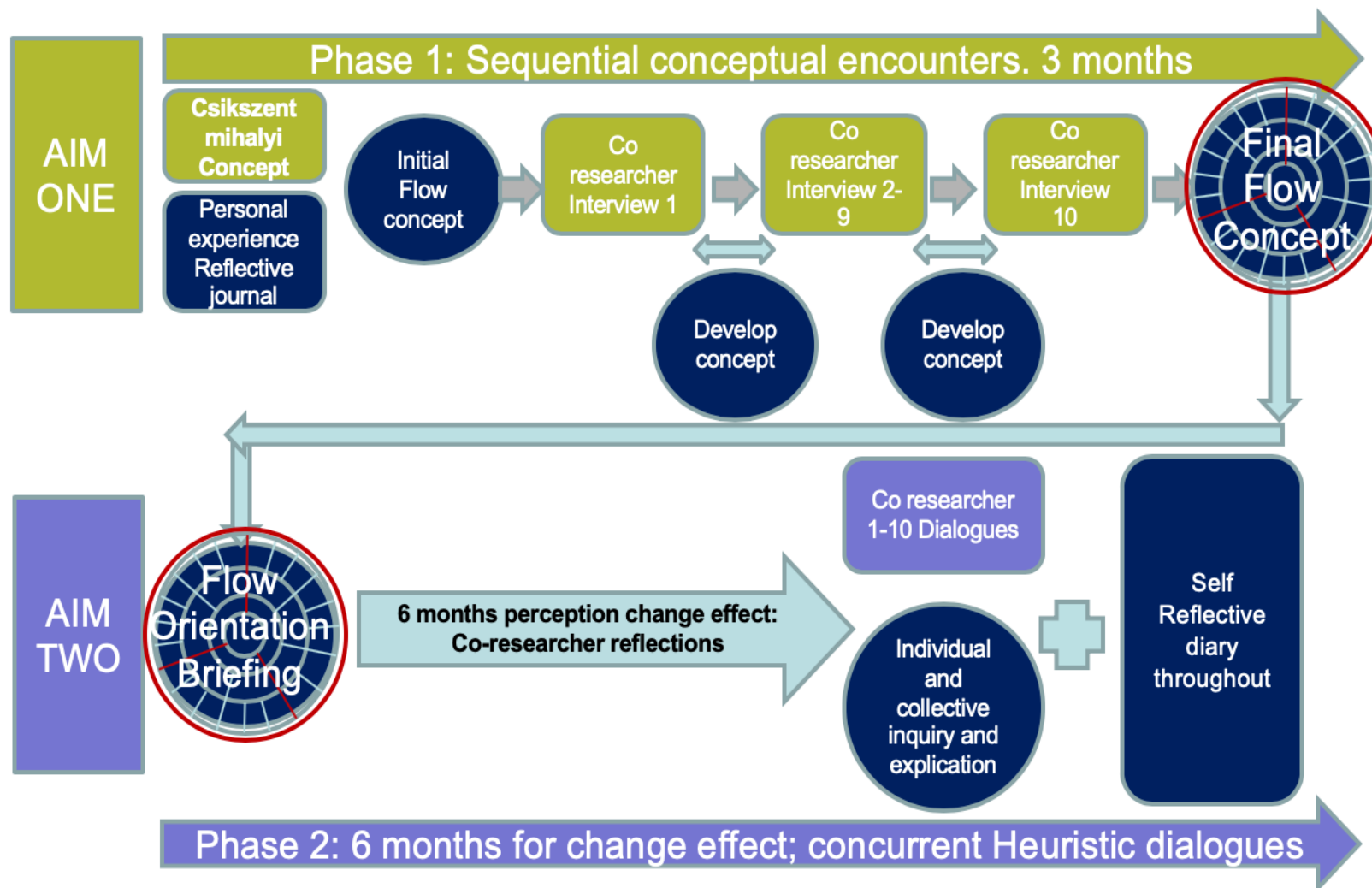


Figure 19: Overall research process flow for sequential application of CE and HI methodologies

4.2.3 Stage 1 methodology: Conceptual Encounter

Conceptual Encounter appears well-suited to jointly construct the concept of Flow in coaching conversations as a “map of our experience that enables us to share that experience with others” (De Rivera, 1981, p.1). This is important in two ways. First, it helps to raise our awareness of the structure of the experience and see the linkages between different aspects of the experience of which others may not have been conscious. This helps create what De Rivera called “looking rules” (p.2) that lead us to ask questions about other aspects of the experience. Secondly, “simply having a description helps us and others recognise the experience” (p.2). CE therefore is ideally placed to create a map of the as yet unknown concept of Flow in coaching, in a way that can be used by coaches to gain a shared understanding, from which they can observe any changes they may experience after Flow. Following the amalgamation of existing Flow knowledge in other contexts with that of my own lived experience in coaching, an initial concept is refined after each consecutive interview until a final concept emerges as an elegant and concise description. The finalised conceptual map of Flow was introduced to each coach at an alignment meeting at the conclusion of the CE process to ensure consistent and common clarity and understanding of Flow from which to begin the next stage.

4.2.4 Stage 2 methodology: Heuristic Inquiry

Following this platform of common understanding, Heuristic Inquiry appears well-suited to explore and understand any changes coaches may experience after Flow, whilst simultaneously allowing me to develop as a practitioner-researcher coach (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic Inquiry is a six-stage, organised and systematic method of inquiry devised initially by Moustakas (1961) to investigate the phenomenology of the subjective human experience of loneliness. He designed it as a way of “being informed, a way of knowing” (Moustakas, 1990, p.10) through the discovery of the lived experiences of both research partners and of the self. Heuristic methodology aims to recreate lived experiences, obtaining “full and complete

qualitative depictions of situations, events, conversations, relationships, feelings, thoughts, values and beliefs” (p.38) from the frame of reference of the experiencers. Self-understanding and self-discovery happen simultaneously in HI, and it is this aspect that makes it both a demanding process and a learning experience for me. Moustakas (1990, p.14) argued that HI demands “rigorous definition, careful collection of data and a thorough and disciplined analysis”, working both creatively and intuitively; all of which place significant responsibility on myself as practitioner-researcher. Embracing discipline and rigour will help safeguard against the potential challenge (Patton, 2014) my active involvement may pose to research integrity and validity. This unbounded exploration of lived experiences seems ideal to explore both the nature and meaning of any change coaches may perceive after Flow, providing valuable insights for use by other coaches.

4.2.5 Integration of research design

The research was designed to answer the research question most effectively within the context of the coaching conversation by taking a pragmatic constructivist approach. I have chosen two qualitative phenomenological consistent methodologies to be used sequentially to achieve this: Conceptual Encounter (De Rivera, 1981) to achieve the common conceptual platform of understanding Flow in coaching conversations, and Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) to explore the changes coaches perceive after Flow. Figure 20 summarises this overall Research Design in order to visually demonstrate the coherence between my philosophical assumptions and the chosen qualitative methodological approach.

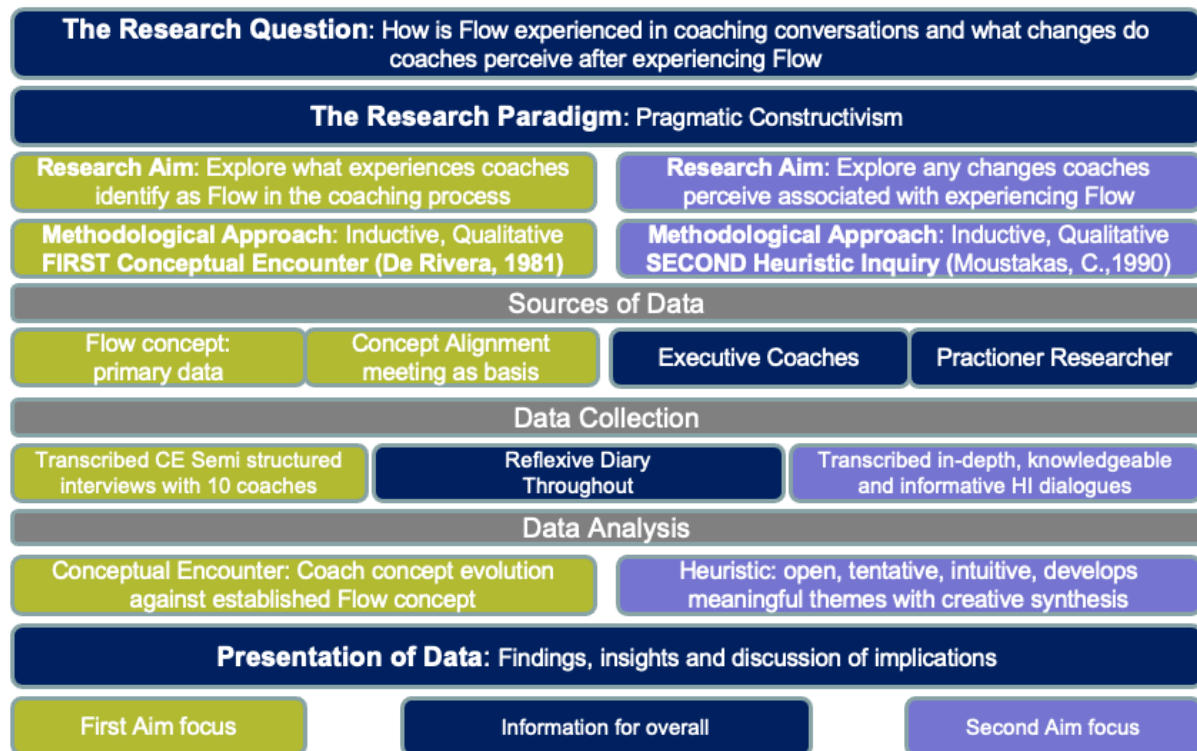


Figure 20: Summary of research design

These two methodologies are deemed an ideal fit for purpose for the following reasons. Both comply with Morgan's (2014) assertion that the known and knower are inseparable and with his conjecture that reality is born of experience and inquiry consistent with pragmatic constructivism. Both are phenomenological in nature, structured to help explore and understand human experience and emphasise the active role and partnership between researcher and research partner in the collaborative approach to the construction of meaning (De Rivera, 1981; Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019). However, the understanding that both CE and HI methodologies utilised defined thinking frameworks (De Rivera, 1981; Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019; detailed within the following sections) was one important extra benefit for me both personally and as research-practitioner. It might be acknowledged from the discussion earlier that, whilst both CE and HI methodologies are deemed fit for purpose, they are also arguably at the more intuitive and tentative exploratory end of the spectrum of qualitative options. My past leadership experience highlighted this as a potential personal

challenge for me, whereas utilising well used and well-defined process thinking frameworks reduced that challenge. These frameworks afforded me a structure within which I was able to feel free and maximise my creative strengths; yet simultaneously, focus that creativity constructively towards achieving a defined aim. Too much space and freedom risked unstructured personal creativity and contestable outcomes. Therefore, I consciously decided to follow De Rivera's (1981) CE and Moustakas's (1990) HI frameworks for both data capture and analysis as far as pragmatically feasible. This benefitted me and the research, allowing me to be fully engaged within both research methodologies whilst confidently maximising my creativity and intuition in the service of both understanding the research partners' experiences and achieving each research aim effectively.

4.3 Choice of co-researchers

Choice of co-researchers would usually follow from the needs of the chosen research methodology (Cresswell, 2013). My pragmatic approach ensured that my search for co-researchers was purposive in nature. Therefore, the needs of the research purpose, objectives and CE and HI methodologies (Palys, 2008) outlined within the research design remained paramount, and criteria for co-researchers were evaluated against the overall needs of this strategy. As with the research design, the choice of co-researchers was considered by beginning with the end in mind and working backwards. Fundamentally, this meant that the co-researchers had to have relevant and recent experience of Flow in coaching and have the self-awareness and ability to describe this experience (Moustakas, 1990; Cresswell, 2013). Additionally, I recognise that my personal knowledge and judgement of that group and their eligibility played an active part in this evaluation. As the research design required involvement of co-researchers over an extended period of time and with relatively deep introspection, I aligned with Moustakas (1990) when arguing for co-researchers who are also interested, cooperative, committed, willing and enthusiastic. Other demographic criteria (e.g., gender, ethnicity etc.) were not considered important for the scope of this research and the

achievement of its objectives.

Initial tentative scoping conversations were held with several of my known network of ICF/EMCC coaches to refine and shape the participant eligibility criteria, yielding significant participation interest. The choice of research partners was therefore evaluated for fit against the following criteria: currently working executive coaches reflecting the specific leadership and organisational context of executive coaching (Passmore, 2015) in which I have experience and wished to develop. Additionally, they are experienced, meaning that they will probably have at least 500 hours' coaching experience and be ICF or EMCC accredited executive coaches, motivated by their professional development, capable of reflexivity and sensitivity to explore and communicate psychological nuances in themselves and their development and willing to commit for the duration of the study. This criteria fit was deemed relevant for both methodologies. At this stage, consideration was given to two options, namely: the same cohort of co-researchers across both methodologies or two discrete groups, one for each methodology matching the criteria. All prospective participant coaches fitting these criteria were purposively sampled from personally known coaches and connections within the professional ICF and EMCC membership networks (Appendix c draft email). A subsequent snowball approach was utilised to ensure sufficient participants (Bryman *et al.*, 2015). Coaches were recruited on a first-come-first-served basis and brief details of all research participants are shown in Figure 21 below.

These initial scoping discussions with coaches to refine the criteria highlighted significant coach interest in both the research subject and their commitment to their own self growth and discovery. Additionally, these coaches expressed a desire and motivation to be involved across the entire project and both methodologies. The advantage of this meant that they would be sensitised to Flow and its characteristics before they began the heuristic discovery phase about changes they may perceive after the experience of Flow. The disadvantage of this, however, is that research findings could be open to challenge about the possible Hawthorne effect (McCambridge, Witton and Elbourne, 2014) or the need for sensitisation of coaches for

transferability of findings. The Hawthorne effect concerns the consequences of research participants being aware of the subject being researched beforehand and the possible subsequential impact on behaviour. The research question covered by HI explores specifically any “changes coaches perceive associated with the experience of flow in coaching conversations.” This presupposes that the coaches know what the experience of Flow, is in order to explore anything associated with it, and therefore may require some pre-existing awareness. After discussions with my supervisory group, we aligned on the fact that as the focus of the two research aims and methodologies is different, namely Flow in CE and any changes perceived after Flow in HI, it was felt that this would not pose a significant threat. I tried to minimise this further by carefully wording the communication, briefing notes and Participant Information Sheet (PIS) used, and to use a different PIS and consent form for each methodology and research aim, so as not to infer or lead in any way (Appendix d). This may have implications for further research, but we felt that this was not significant enough to counterbalance the advantages of having the same cohort. Possible transferability challenges poses are explored within the Findings and Discussion chapters.

Evaluating recent research studies (Munro, 2012; Bachkirova, 2015; Scott, 2017; Noon, 2017), it was proposed that a minimum of seven executive coaches would be sufficient. However, as the research aims were consecutive in nature and over an extended timeframe, the decision was made to choose ten participants rather than seven. This again helped further reduce any potential risk of coach participant dropout and its subsequent effect on the credibility of the research findings. Selection was stopped when ten coaches had been successfully recruited (Figure 21). No monetary reward was offered to participants for their research participation and all recognised the opportunity they had to gain insight into their own growth and development as coaches.

Co-researcher (pseudonym)	Coaching experience and Qualification	Coaching specialism	Previous Organisational Background
Chris	13 years Masters Executive Coaching	Leaders 1:1 / Teams HPT/ Leadership Dev/ Supervision	International FMCG General Management
Victoria	7 years PG Cert Executive Coaching	Commercial partner to business and investors/ Start ups	HR and Strategy Consulting
Laurence	6 years PG Cert Executive Coaching	Elite Individual and Team Performance	Elite Rugby, Angel Investor
Kate	12 years Chartered Psychologist	Public and Private; 1:1 Senior Executive	Leadership and OD Consulting
Zara	18 years MA Coaching	Pos Psych; Individual and Team coaching and training; OD Consulting	Public Sector training and OD Consulting
Kiara	19 years MA Coaching, ICF MCC	Coaching, Coach accreditation, Supervision, Author	Founder and CEO Coaching Ind. Leader
Julia (withdrew stage 2)	7 years PG Cert Executive Coaching	Finance; Executive 1:1, Board and Leadership Teams	Financial Sector Snr Leadership
Megan	5 years PG Cert Executive Coaching	Change Consultant, Business and Leadership	IT Change Management, Leadership and Consulting
Sarah	10 years Doctorate Coaching	Coaching Leaders in Complex Global Organisations	Global Pharma Snr Leadership and OD
Rory	15 years Doctorate Coaching	Global Banking Organisational Culture Change	Global Banking Change Leadership
Alistair (Practitioner-researcher)	12 Years Masters Executive Coaching Doctoral Candidate Coaching	CEO and Director 1:1 executive coaching, Global Board and International Country high-performing team coaching	Global FMCG Marketing and General Management

Figure 21: Choice of co-researchers

Following Ethics approval, formal discussions with no obligation were initiated with all participants to fully explore potential interest (note: this was not part of the data collection process). Subsequent to that discussion a PIS (Appendix d) containing all the study details, expectations and confidentiality requirements was forwarded with a consent form for the first stage CE methodology only, for review without obligation. Once coaches decided to explore further participation, they contacted me through the details provided on the PIS. A further exploratory discussion was offered, again with no obligation, in which the prospective participant was given the opportunity to ask any questions or raise any issues for discussion and clarity. A positive email affirmation and signed consent form from the coach participant at the beginning of the research interview initiated the engagement and storage of relevant data

in accordance with the stated guidelines. As outlined earlier, and with an emphasis on no obligation, a second PIS and consent form was used to instigate the start of the HI aim 2 research phase. One research participant did leave at this stage due to work and time constraints, meaning that nine participated in the full programme, somewhat validating the mitigation plan to increase from seven to ten co-researchers.

4.4 Conceptual Encounter methodology

Conceptual Encounter (CE) as a methodological approach has been extensively used to explore and map the lived human experiences (De Rivera, 1981) of anger, anxiety and panic, and laughter and elation. Within the coaching context, Bachkirova (2015) utilised the methodology to explore self-deception in coaches, Scott (2016) mixed the methodology with Action Research to explore coaching for and Gravitass and Noon (2017) mapped the concept of presence in coaching. This section outlines how CE was utilised within this research. It details the collection and analysis of the data to create the conceptual understanding and map how Flow is experienced in coaching conversations. Finally, it explains how this final concept was shared with the coach research participants to create a common platform of shared understanding about Flow in coaching.

4.4.1 CE research process

The process for CE in this research follows that understood by De Rivera (1981) and is summarised in Figure 22 below.

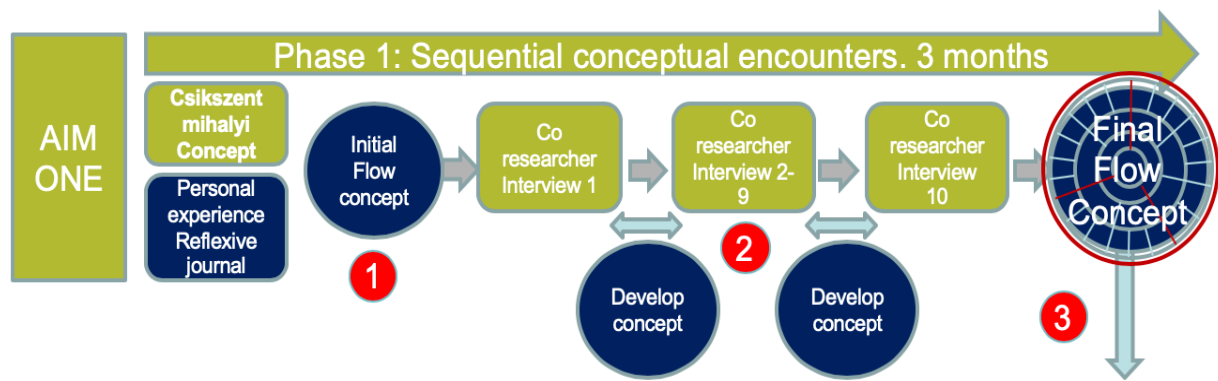


Figure 22: CE research process summary (De Rivera, 1981)

The CE process begins before interviews begin by establishing an initial conceptual understanding of Flow (Figure 22:1) in coaching (De Rivera, 1981). This initial starting point amalgamated Csikszentmihalyi's existing knowledge and understanding of Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh and Nakamura, 2005) with my own lived experience of Flow as a coach. Csikszentmihalyi's seminal description of Flow has been shown to be valid across a wide range of work and leisure contexts and I argue is the ideal platform from which to explore the similarities and differences within the specific context of coaching. I used my reflexive research diary throughout, enabling me to compare and contrast my experiences with Csikszentmihalyi's. This sensitised me to some of the use of language in the concept and likely tension areas in coaching. For instance, the element of 'control' experienced in Flow triggered a reaction in me as a coach, given the negative connotations associated with coach control and power in the coaching relationship.

Once the initial Flow concept was established, the CE process followed a series of sequential semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the research partners in turn (Figure 22:2). The encounter interview comprised two stages. In the first, the participant coach was asked to describe their experience of Flow in coaching as fully and deeply as possible. Secondly, the researcher's conceptualisation of Flow was introduced and 'met' that experience. After each encounter, data was analysed and interpreted, leading to a modified concept which was then

used in the next interview and so on until an overall concept of Flow in coaching emerged.

Deciding to consciously follow De Rivera's (1981) CE process as a thinking framework (as discussed earlier) had several benefits. First, as a practitioner-researcher I was initially required to be actively involved in the development of the starting concept. The up-front involvement allowed my experience to creatively shape the existing Csikszentmihalyi *et al.* (1975; 2002; 2021) conceptual knowledge, making it relevant for the coaching context. This recognised my desire for my experience to be validated and heard and it enabled me to release any remaining concerns about control and to be truly open and inquisitive about other coaches' experiences, perceptions and challenges that may be different from my own. Additionally, the collaborative nature and structure of the CE interview benefitted me by enabling my active involvement in the dialogue, creating meaning together with my research-partners (De Rivera, 1981). The two-stage process of the CE interview helped to manage that involvement and impact. In the first stage, my responsibility was to be open and actively engaged in listening to and honouring each research partner's experience, so establishing a clear and shared understanding of their experience with minimal personal impact. De Rivera (1981) outlined the need for more active engagement in the sharing and co-building of the concept through dialogue within the second stage of the interview. This collaboration process, he argued, is primarily inductive, due to the emergent nature of the meaning-making and the mutual construction of the concept through consecutive encounters.

The CE process, in summary, facilitated the exploration and emergence of a map of Flow in coaching (Figure 22:3) which needed to be, as De Rivera (1981, p.6) stated, "broad enough to capture the experiences..., elegant and simple enough without being cumbersome... and against which one can intuit and understand, not just rationalise", and aligned well with my pragmatic constructivist paradigm. Finally, the encounter process itself elegantly enabled the capture and reinforcement of our understanding that our experiences do indeed impact the perception of the constructs we hold to be true (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), yet created a platform of understanding shared by all research partners, critical for use later in the research.

4.4.2 CE data collection

Cresswell (2013) argued that social constructivist researchers adopt an inductive, emergent approach to the process of data collection, immersing themselves into the worlds of their research partners. Figure 23 outlines and numbers the elements of data collection during the CE process. Due to the experiential, subjective nature of Flow and the need to really understand the participants worlds, I followed De Rivera's (1981) and Sultan's (2019) advice that the primary data collection methods for both methodologies do not need to be restricted to interviews. Therefore, in addition to transcripts of the interviews, artefacts such as pictures and songs (Figure 23:2) and researcher self-reflective journaling (Figure 23:1) were captured as relevant data. All individual interviews were face-to- face, either physically or via Zoom video conferencing, and permission was sought to audio record each interview. The recordings were transcribed by an external, professional resource utilising anonymised abbreviation codes for each participant to preserve anonymity. Transcripts and findings were offered to each participant after each interview to check accuracy and understanding. All participant questions were open-ended with the intention to minimise overt researcher influence. All transcriptions were saved and stored on Oxford Brookes University's secure Google Drive in personal, password protected folders, in line with University data protection and UREC Ethics approved requirements. Reflective notetaking allowed for data capture throughout the research study.

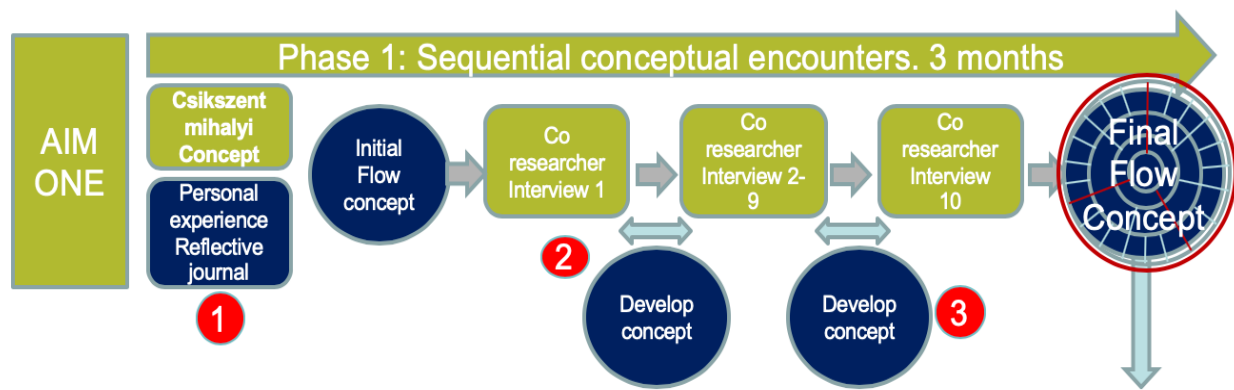


Figure 23: Data collection methods for Conceptual Encounter and Heuristic Inquiry

CE data collection commenced with the researcher interviewing each coach separately based on an initial concept (Figure 23:2). Prepared interview guides were provided. Sequential and iterative encounters utilising semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Appendix e) occurred with each coach in turn until all had been interviewed. The questions asked were open in nature, designed to allow the co-researcher to recall situations and examples of Flow in their coaching experience as fully as possible.

The encounter interview comprised two stages. In the first stage, the co-researcher was asked to describe their experience of Flow in coaching as fully and deeply as possible. To facilitate this exploration, I consciously tried to create as open and trusting an environment as possible, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality and emphasising how much I valued their experiences. My coaching experience certainly helped in this regard, focussing on being truly present and exploring only with the intent to understand. In the second stage of the interview, my conceptualisation of Flow was introduced and discussed with an intent to explore areas of alignment or misalignment between the concept and co-researchers' experiences. During this process, new insights emerged and joint understanding and meaning behind expressions were explored and created during dialogue. This meaningful dialogue allowed our existing experiences to be viewed through different eyes, refining and expanding our joint

understanding of the others' subjective experiences.

The largest challenge that we encountered throughout the interview processes was the difficulty we had in expressing the ephemeral subjective experiences of Flow using language. To aid in the exploration and data capture process, examples, stories, analogies, and occasionally music helped to express thoughts, feelings and behaviours in deeper and more meaningful ways. In this way, the co-researchers' concrete experiences "provided the data, facts or reality within which the evolving and new conceptualisation of Flow must fit" (De Rivera, 1981, p.5). I found that this two-part interview structure helped me to stay in a mindset of exploration and curiosity, being open to others' experience and jointly exploring and evolving the concept forwards, without the desire to control or direct. Each iteration of the concept (Figure 23:3) was captured after each interview on an evolving mind-map, each individual stage of which was captured and stored (Appendix f). This meant that after each interview, each stage of the mind-map became more sophisticated and nuanced in nature in answering the research question, describing and honouring the lived experiences of Flow in coaching conversations.

4.4.3 CE data analysis

Conceptual Encounter data analysis developed iteratively, as described before. Each interview was transcribed and imported into NVivo, a qualitative data software tool, to help with structuring and analysing it. Initial nodes were created, mirroring the arms of the initial conceptual mind-map (Figure 24 below).

Once in Flow, an activity or experience seamlessly unfolds (flows) from one moment to another and the individual enters into a subjective state:

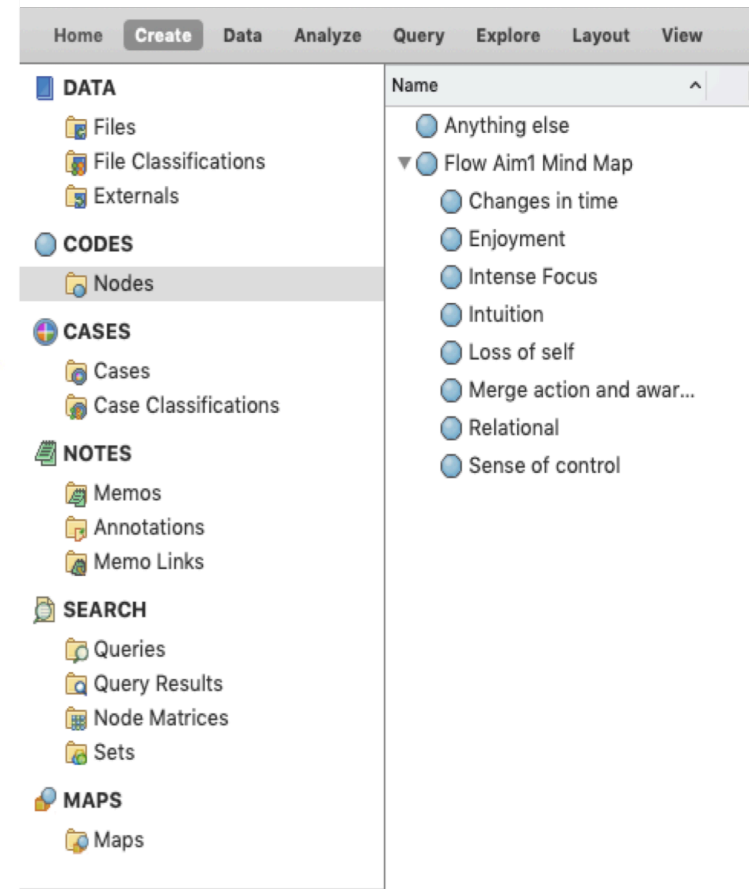


Figure 24: Example of mind-map nodes and transfer to NVivo nodes

The nodes from the initial concept (Figure 18) provided a structure against which data could be analysed using the De Rivera (1981) data analysis process shown in Figure 25 below. Each step of the analysis process was repeated sequentially for each subsequent co-researcher until a concise and elegant final map emerged. This section describes that process.

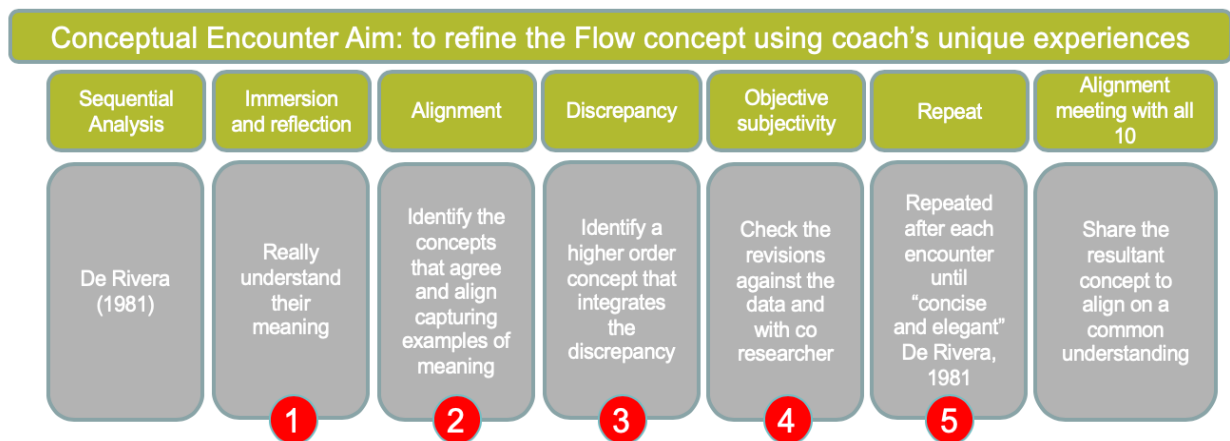


Figure 25: De Rivera CE Data Analysis (1981)

It may be argued that part of the first stage of joint analysis had already occurred during the data collection dialogue (Figure 25:1), in that the CE interviews necessitate not just a description of the experience by the co-researcher, but also a deep exploration and understanding of the meaning of the words used (De Rivera, 1981). Indeed, the second stage of the CE interview had expressly allowed for those meanings to be explored and understood further, examining through dialogue how examples of the examined experience and the language used either aligned with or challenged the concept. Following each CE interview, I first engaged with the mind-map and notes relating to that interview to re-immense myself within the dialogue (Figure 25:1). The mind-map proved a useful tool to check for this understanding during the dialogue, in that it allowed for dynamic exploration of both the overview and the detail, along with the language and concepts discussed. This had the

additional benefit of helping to minimise any personal bias. Re-examining the interview mind-map and notes afterwards afforded me a deeper reflective space in which a greater depth of understanding and shaping could occur, identifying both areas of alignment with the concept and discrepancies that challenged it (Figure 25:2/3). The understanding gained from these aligned themes and discrepancies was then checked against the transcript data to check that my thoughts and insights were indeed accurate (Figure 25:4). Finally, this reflective space and the new insights gained enabled the manifestation of a new higher order concept to emerge, captured as a new mind-map for use in the next interview (Figure 25:5).

Two further opportunities occurred to enrich and check this initial analysis, helping firstly to reduce any risk of bias and ensure new insights and nodes weren't missed, and secondly to ensure that the higher order concept both captured the lived experience of the co-researcher and made sense.

The first opportunity to reduce bias and identify any misunderstanding or missed new insights was to explore the transcript of the interview against the expanded mind-map, repeating De Rivera's (1981) steps 1-4 again (Figure 25). NVivo was very helpful in this process. The transcript was read again in full to immerse myself in that interview. It was then re-read against the identified nodes, capturing relevant passages that informed, enhanced and brought alive a deeper descriptive meaning between the node and co-researcher's lived experience. Nuances that began to emerge within each node were identified and developed into sub-nodes, again capturing relevant verbatim comments, examples and expressions against each. This process did involve elements of judgement as to what was appropriate to be included, which could be open to self-selection bias. However, I found the experience to be enabling, as the mindset of curiosity required to discover and honour the co-researchers' experiences created an openness to the transcript data and an identification of new nodes and nuances that I had missed. For instance, exploring and understanding the word 'control' in coaching conversations and the concerns it triggered in coaches helped refine and expand the concept in ways relevant to the context. This will be examined further in the Findings chapters later,

however, as an example: the wholeness of the Flow experience emerged as it was described as being within a bubble, leading to a circle device being used to surround the mind-map and a new node being identified that encompassed the experience as a whole.

The second opportunity to counter potential bias, ensuring the expanded concept accurately represented the co-researcher experience and made sense, came from involving the co-researchers again (Figure 25:4). In line with De Rivera's (1981) data collection process described earlier, each expanded and evolved concept mind-map was presented to the next co-researcher during the second stage of the following interview. This necessitated my clear explanation of the nodes, expressions and associated meanings from the expanded concept for co-researcher understanding and clarification and another round of challenge and reconstruction by that co-researcher. My experience was that this rigorous process demanded clarity backed by the data, leaving little room for bias and misunderstanding on my part as practitioner-researcher.

My final role as practitioner-researcher was to develop a concept that could achieve two clear aims. It must be both true to the experience, "broad enough to capture the essence of the phenomenon – to describe how the experience is organised – its structure", and "elegant yet simple enough to describe the different aspects of the phenomenon" (De Rivera, 1981, p.6). Addressing the tension between these two criteria during analysis allows the creation of a "map of our experience that enables us to share that experience with others" (De Rivera, 1981, p.1), which achieves the first research aim and provides a common platform of understanding from which to discover any changes effected by Flow. This challenge demanded of myself as practitioner-researcher the need to intuit a conceptual form from the mind-map data in a way that De Rivera (1981, p.6) enigmatically describes as "like Michelangelo sculpting, he or she must free the form that lies hidden in the rock."

In summary, following the De Rivera (1981) process afforded me a thinking framework in which I felt free to be curious, let go and creatively explore the lived experiences of all ten co-

researchers. Generating a conceptual map of Flow using the structure and descriptive language coaches recognise provided for both new knowledge and the common base from which any subsequent changes perceived by coaches after experiencing Flow could be explored. This final conceptual map of how coaches describe the experience of Flow in coaching conversations and the evolution of it will be detailed later in the Findings Chapter 5. Whilst establishing this new knowledge is interesting in its own right, given that no common conceptual understanding appeared to exist within the context of coaching; it is the creation of the common base of understanding that is critical for answering the second research question and the ultimate focus of the research. The following section therefore describes the methods that were followed in order to use this conceptual understanding to achieve this.

4.5 Heuristic Inquiry methodology

Heuristic Inquiry (HI) is a six-stage, organised and systematic method of inquiry devised by Moustakas (1990) to investigate the subjective human experience of loneliness. Within the coaching context, HI has been used to explore the coping strategies that experienced coaches use to manage their inner challenges (Kimblin, 2009), the Change Paradox (Munro, 2012) and, more recently, the potential of using poetry for the reflexive coaching practitioner (McCartney, 2018). This section outlines how HI was utilised within this research programme. It details the initial Flow Orientation briefing using the output of CE as the basis for the HI process of data collection and analysis, in order to, as Moustakas (1990, p.39) stated: “recreate the lived experience; full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person”. This helps answer aim 2 and objective 3: To explore the nature and meaning of changes coaches perceive associated with experiencing Flow.

4.5.1 HI research process

The overall process to answer this objective was structured in three stages summarised in Figure 26 below. Whilst the data capture and analysis process in stage 3 (Figure 26:3)

followed Moustakas's (1990) HI framework closely, stages 1 and 2 (alignment and reflective practice of change) did not and were additional methods. An overview of the process followed during these three stages is now presented, with the details of HI data capture and analysis captured in specific sections later in this paper.

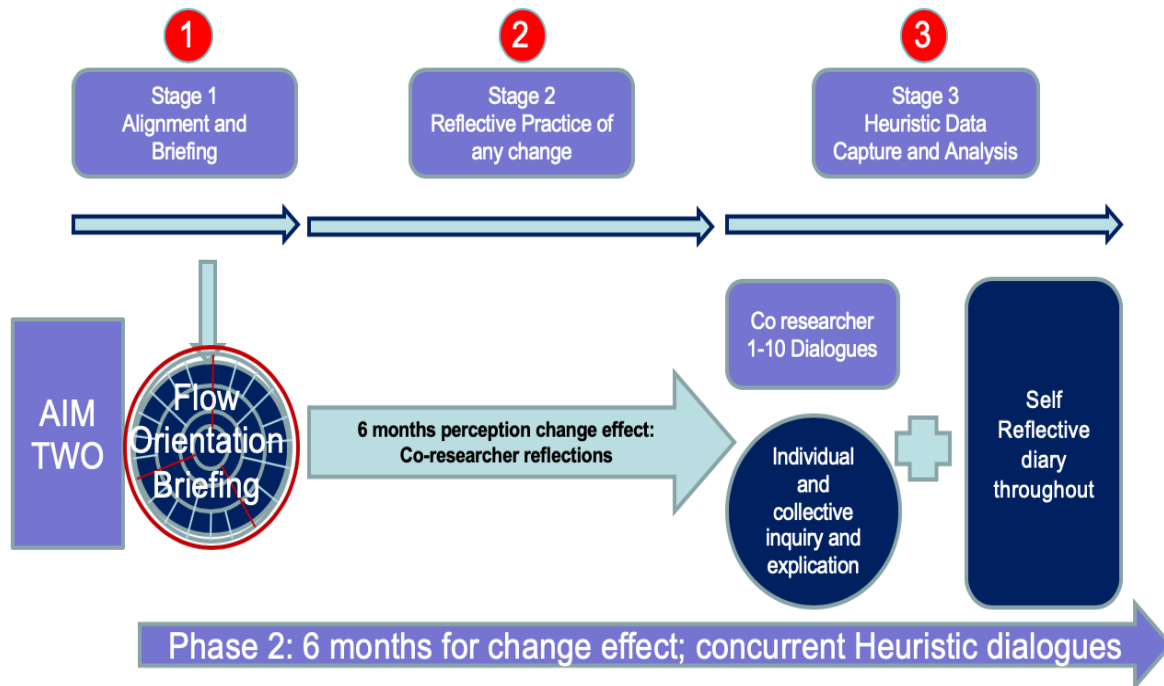


Figure 26: Three-stage research process summary covering alignment, reflective practice and HI data capture and analysis

4.5.1.1 HI Stage 1: Flow orientation meeting for common understanding by all coaches (Figure 26:1)

Having followed the CE methodology to complete a conceptual understanding of Flow as the output of aim 1, this section describes how the co-researchers were briefed (Figure 26:1) in preparation for the next stage of the research and the HI interviews at the end of it (Figure 26:3). This was not deemed part of the data collection process. A two-part alignment meeting was conducted with each individual co-researcher in order to, firstly, share the final concept and establish the base for common understanding and, secondly, to brief expectations and clarify the process for the next stage of the research to observe any changes after experiencing Flow. Before the meeting, a discussion guide, the finalised Flow concept and a new Stage 2 consent form was sent to each co-researcher (Appendix d). Nine of the original ten co-researcher participants consented to continue for the second stage of the research programme, one having dropped out for personal reasons.

This alignment meeting provided a further quality check, in that each co-researcher had another opportunity to explore the final emergent concept, see their own experience within it and gain a deeper understanding of how other co-researchers' experiences had shaped and widened it. This both expanded their own understanding of and sensitised them further to the collective experience of Flow, to which they could each refer over the following six months of research. Having established a common base of understanding, the next stage of the research was briefed using the guide detailed in Appendix g to cover the context, aims, expectations and timing. Over the following six months, co-researchers were expected to capture any changes they perceived or experienced after Flow within reflective notes. This timeframe placed a large expectation on co-researchers to stay committed and self-reflective, and therefore a new stage two consent form was used, emphasising the freedom to withdraw at any stage. Each co-researcher's experience of reflective note-taking and reflective learning practice was discussed to try and maximise existing good habits rather than to impose a standard procedure. This was appreciated and many requested some additional support from

me over the period. This support was tailored to each individual's expressed needs and varied from simple monthly email reminders to 30-minute monthly phone or Zoom reflective sessions designed to allow co-researchers space to reflect on and verbalise their experiences and insights.

From this base of understanding of Flow and clarity of expectations and support for the following six months, co-researchers embarked on the second stage of research.

4.5.1.2 HI Stage 2: Reflective practice of any change perceived (Figure 26:2)

In order to explore any change the co-researchers may perceive associated with experiencing Flow; it was felt that a suitable time period should be allowed for any of those changes to manifest themselves. The length of this timeframe was in itself a judgement and a compromise between maximising the time available for change to be perceived and fitting within the timing restrictions of the Doctoral Research study programme. Seemingly the most widely cited paper on Google Scholar and Wiley Online Library on habit formation (Lally *et al.*, 2009) indicated an average of 66 days for change to become habitual. The possible time range was wide: anywhere between four weeks and a year for change to become habitual. However, even this may not be a wholly reliable indicator, as the study only ran for 12 weeks, necessitating the longer time period of 12 months to be estimated. Therefore, I decided to pragmatically maximise the available time for any changes perceived to become apparent for the co-researchers. The Doctoral Programme timetable allowed eight to nine months for data collection, which included the three months for the CE first stage process. This left a maximum of six months for any changes to become apparent and data collection to occur, which in my judgement was a pragmatic and workable compromise.

As discussed earlier, co-researchers were asked to engage in reflective practice over the six months to aid them in becoming aware of any changes they may perceive after Flow. I considered using a form of Gibbs's (1988) reflective cycle around thoughts, feelings and behaviours as a structure for reflection. This may have helped me as practitioner-researcher

to ensure that I had the data I would search for during the HI interviews, but could also be seen as limiting or restrictive. Therefore, co-researchers were asked to follow their own favoured reflective practice approach, supplemented for some, at their request, by reflective sessions with myself during the research period. The reflective space offered them an opportunity to reflect on their experiences so far, unearthing and raising awareness of anything they wanted to discuss in the following period. As research aim 2 was focussed on discovering the changes coaches perceived after Flow, rather than the journey of change *per se*, the reflective sessions were not recorded or used as data collection. During these sessions I resolved to maintain a quiet, listening frame of mind to minimise my involvement and any potential influence whilst maximising the space for their self-reflection. At the end of the six months and before the HI phase of the research, each co-researcher was encouraged to reflect again on their journey and prepare for the HI dialogue, bringing along any artefacts they felt relevant and important to their journey of discovery.

4.5.1.3 HI Stage 3: Heuristic Inquiry data collection and data analysis process following Moustakas (1990) (Figure 26:3)

The intention of using HI as a process was to discover the nature and meaning of any changes coaches may have perceived after experiencing Flow in coaching conversations. Having had six months to allow any of those changes to manifest, the HI methodology (Moustakas, 1990) was followed to illuminate the changes from direct first-person accounts from the co-researchers who had experienced it. The focus of the methodology is on the re-creation of those lived experiences, using full and complete depictions of those changes from their frame of reference (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019).

Whilst acknowledging Douglass and Moustakas's (1985) assertion that "learning that proceeds heuristically has a path of its own...(and) without the restraining leash of formal hypothesis and free from external methodological structures that limit awareness or channel it, the one who searches heuristically may draw upon the perceptual powers afforded

by...direct experience” (p.44), I have attempted to follow the six phases (Figure 28) of heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990): initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. Additionally, he outlined seven processes, any or all of which are designed to help during each phase. These processes are identifying the focus of inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focussing and internal frame of reference. In the following sections I have attempted to explain each phase with accompanying reflexive notes, sharing my processes, thoughts and decisions openly to aid credibility, dependability and confirmability. Whilst I have separated data organisation and preparation, data collection and data analysis into sections for clarity and explanation, I learnt that, as HI is a creative process, data analysis could be said to begin when data capture starts (Sultan, 2019), thereby blurring the boundaries of all three (Finlay, 2011).



Figure 27: HI Data organisation, capture and analysis. (Amended from Sultan, 2019)

4.5.2 HI data collection

The intention of data gathering in HI is to construct methods that allow co-researchers to explore and describe their personal lived experience as fully as possible (Sultan, 2019). These

descriptions were gathered primarily during Stage 3 (Figure 26:3) through extended interviews which were subsequently transcribed for analysis (Moustakas, 1990). Data also included any experiential notes co-researchers gathered during Stage 2 (Figure 26:2) that they wished to share, plus my own reflective notes taken over the whole research period.

HI encourages researchers to conduct the interviews more as a dialogue than a series of questions and answers. Moustakas (1990, p 47) argued for dialogue as a preferred approach as it facilitates cooperation and sharing between researcher and co-researcher, “opening pathways to each other” and “encouraging expression, elucidation and disclosure of the experience being investigated” in an environment in which ideas, feelings and images can then flow naturally. Care was therefore taken to try and create an environment conducive to these points. This meant comfortable, warm surroundings without distraction or interruption, in which a trustful relationship can be built; much like environments I am used to creating within my coaching practice. However, unlike my coaching practice, in which I focus only on the client and their world with minimal, if any, personal sharing, I was aware that Douglas and Moustakas (1985, p.50) stressed the importance of self-disclosure during dialogue “as a way of facilitating disclosure from others - a response to the tacit dimension within oneself sparks a similar call from others”.

Unguided disclosure during the dialogue raised a potential dilemma for me as practitioner-researcher. Whilst my openness could spark openness in my co-researchers, I did not want any disclosure of my personal biases to steer or influence the co-researchers’ exploration unduly. My favoured solution to this dilemma was to prepare a small number of open questions to help prompt dialogue and then focus on presence and so move into a Flow state. The questions that formed the first part of my solution were designed to allow the co-researcher to recall situations and examples of any changes they had experienced and to describe and explore as fully as possible the nature and meaning of those changes. The questions followed the guide Moustakas (1990, p.48) detailed in Appendix h. Whilst not followed slavishly, his guide questions were shaped to fit the context of this research and used loosely to allow the

dialogue to flow naturally. Sultan (2019, p.123) described this well in that “While the interview should be structured and conducted formally, it should not ‘feel’ like a formal interview”. Answers to these questions often took the form of stories, examples, metaphors and analogies and the transcription of the dialogues formed the basis for analysis. Self-reflective notes taken after the interviews were included in the data, supplemented further with notes and observations from my reflexive diary.

As well as using a set of questions to foster guided disclosure, I used my experience of Flow as an additional way to facilitate meaningful dialogue. Being in Flow allowed me to lose self-awareness, co-joining naturally with my co-researcher in a mutual free-flowing exploration of discovery. I knew that the dialogue was being recorded and could therefore let go and “be open to the spontaneous shifts” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, p.44), engaging both tacit knowing and intuition in co-operative sharing. Sultan (2019, p.125) argued that “the quality of the data you collect will rely in large part on your ability to successfully facilitate the flow of relationship and conversation” in what she termed “embodied relational interviewing.” She described “embodied relational listening” as a critical element, incorporating a way of being that is “attentive and attuned to your own and your co-researcher’s experiences” (p.126), listening and being with mind, emotions and body. This arguably aligns with the deep absorption element detailed earlier in the Flow experience and with the definitions of presence included in the Introduction (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Nakamura *et al.*, 2021; Noon, 2017). I therefore found that allying my Flow experience with my coaching skills and experience to create the conditions for a relationship of trust, using the questions in Appendix h, allowed for dialogues that were very deep, meaningful, rich and rewarding for both myself and co-researcher. I contend that this deep experience is true to what Moustakas (1990) describes as the second phase of HI: immersion. The implication of this, however, was that the dialogue interviews were not strictly time-bound. They varied between 60 and 100 minutes, ruled instead by what Moustakas describes as “inner experiential time” (1990, p.46), concluding naturally when the co-researcher felt that they had had the opportunity to fully tell their story.

Once achieved, the data collection process was repeated for each co-researcher in turn.

4.5.3 HI data analysis

Once data collection was complete, I followed the six phases of HI data analysis (Moustakas, 1990). Figure 28 outlines the six phases of HI research and highlights the process of analysis under each phase. Whilst not strictly identified as a phase of HI, I have included a seventh as a critical element in the process, namely the validation of Heuristic Research (Moustakas, 1990). Validation or validity relates to meaning, in that meanings are individual and influenced by that person's particular frame of reference (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic research challenges the researcher to ask whether "the ultimate depiction of the experience...presents comprehensively, vividly and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?" (Moustakas, 1990, p.32). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued for credibility as the equal counterpoint to the construct of validity in qualitative research and contend that the co-researcher should be the judge of the credibility of any depiction of an experience. In heuristic research, however, Moustakas (1990) argued that instead of the co-researcher, this judgement is better made instead by myself as researcher, given the extent of my involvement in the evaluation of the data during analysis. Sultan (2019) offered a pragmatic alternative to this debate arguing that taking a more rigorous analytical approach to analysis will lead to a more trustworthy outcome for all parties and that using rigour and trustworthiness as expressions is more in-keeping with a constructivist approach. I believe the arguments are quite nuanced, as credibility, rigour and trustworthiness are all finely inter-related, however it appears clear that meaning and meaning-making is at the heart of heuristic data analysis (Sultan, 2019).

Therefore, to help build credibility, rigour and trustworthiness before data analysis began, I felt it important to recognise Sultan's (2019) point about focussing on meaning rather than frequency as a primary analysis criterion throughout, arguing for focus on "what is emerging within the dialogue versus how frequently it is emerging" (p.146). This was an important

mindset for me to maintain throughout the research, but especially so in the first immersion, incubation and illumination phases (Figure 28), reminding myself to understand the essential nature of the experience first and foremost and not to merely describe (Sultan, 2019). To achieve this, she recommends taking a more holistic view of the data and evaluating it throughout through two lenses: content and context (Sultan, 2019). The content filter helped me to focus on exploring the responses to the questions I asked and the words, phrases, analogies, images, etc. they evoked in response. The context filter helped with focus on the interrelationship dynamics I experienced during both the dialogue and the analysis - within myself; between myself and the co-researcher; and between myself and the environment. This guidance helped me stay grounded and focussed on unearthing meaning from within the data whilst following the analysis phases outlined by Moustakas (1990) below (Figure 28).

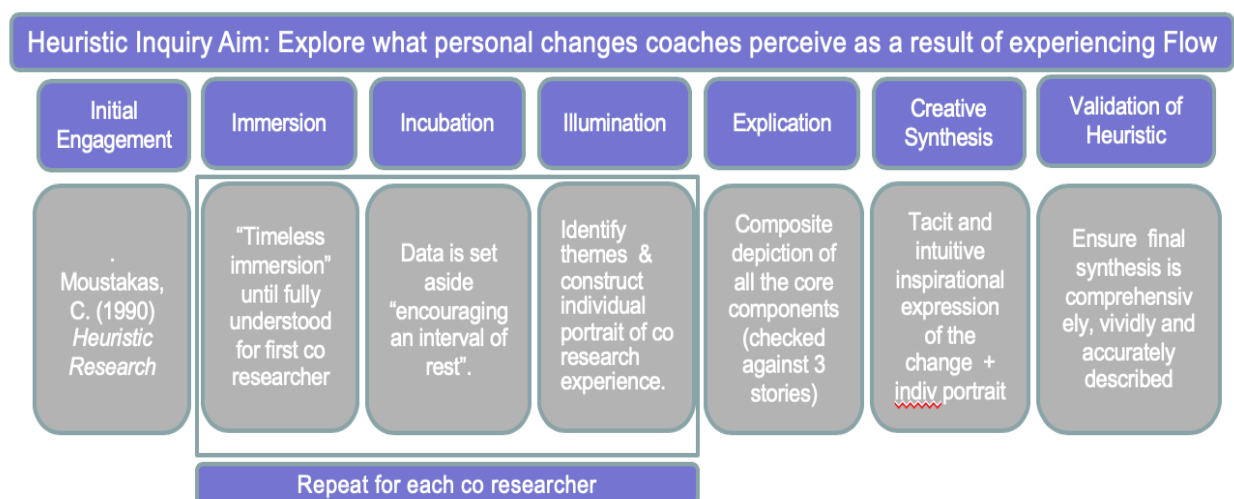


Figure 28: HI data analysis (Moustakas, 1990)

1. Data for each individual co-researcher (recordings, transcripts etc) was gathered together.
2. I **immersed** myself into the world of each co-researcher's data until it was understood clearly, remembering to take a holistic overview to search for meaning and understanding.

3. The data was then set aside allowing for a period of **incubation**, reconnecting afresh later. Mind-map notes were then made to reveal patterns and highlight the qualities, themes, nature and meaning of the co-researcher's experience against content and context. An individual depiction was constructed using their language and examples that brought alive and exemplified their experience (Sultan, 2019)

4. The data was again checked to ensure that each individual depiction truly **illuminated** and fitted the data. If it did, then I felt confident to move on to the next co-researcher. If it did not, however, I reshaped the individual depiction and revised until it truly illuminated the essential themes of their experience. Occasionally, when I judged it necessary, I heeded Lindlof and Taylor's (2002, p.242) advice to take "findings back to the field and determine whether the participants recognise them as true or accurate", in this case my co-researcher. Tracy (2010) argued that doing this is one way to aid the credibility of analysis.

5. Steps 1-4 were repeated for each co-researcher in turn, immersing myself in their world, incubating and illuminating each journey through individual depictions.

6. All the individual depictions were then gathered together as a group. I again immersed and incubated myself in their world, taking mind-map reflexive notes throughout until I was confidently able to illuminate the integrated experience in a group depiction (Sultan, 2019).

7. I again immersed myself into the raw data to try to identify two or three co-researchers who seemed to exemplify the whole, whilst also highlighting their individual uniqueness.

8. The **explication** phase that followed was designed to deeply explore, examine and understand the qualities and themes identified. It was especially in this phase that Moustakas's (1990) processes of focussing, indwelling, self-searching and self-disclosure allowed my tacit knowing, intuition and insight to be used to discover deeper patterns and meanings about the whole experience. I recognise that this was all from my personal frame of reference, whereby understanding my feelings, beliefs and judgements allowed me a deeper appreciation of

theirs.

9. A **creative synthesis** could then be imagined, bringing the findings of this deeper insight to life as an artistic representation.

10. The creative synthesis and individual portraits were then open to evaluation by co-researchers. The intent was that stakeholders evaluating the research would be better placed to validate the research and the experience for themselves. Engaging their senses beyond language in this creative way was designed to motivate and excite participants about the potential of Flow for their own journey of discovery.

Earlier in this section I outlined how important meaning and meaning-making were to the core purpose of HI methodology (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019). I explained why I felt it important to follow the approach to analysis Moustakas (1990) detailed, taking into account Sultan's (2019) holistic challenge to use content and context filters to build greater credibility, rigour and trustworthiness into the research, whether that be judged by myself as primary researcher or by my co-researchers. As a Doctoral level study however, how a wider set of stakeholders perceive the quality of this research will, in effect, determine how achievable this hope is. It is to this subject of overall quality beyond validity and credibility alone that we explore next.

4.6 Issues of quality

My approach to this Doctoral research was largely motivated by answering some of the "So what?" questions about Flow: what changes do coaches perceive after Flow? what difference in coaches' lives can Flow make? I want my findings to help make a difference. Personally, I would not be motivated to accept findings from research and change my approach unless I found it interesting, trustworthy and credible as a minimum, and why would others? Indeed, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.290) raised a very pertinent and very relevant question about this 35 years ago, when asking "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?", answering primarily that it must

be both trustworthy and authentic. I recognise that, in part, the credibility of this research sits with my skills and competence as practitioner-researcher (Angen, 2000). In Figure 29 I have assimilated the work of two sets of researchers, Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Tracy (2010), to help me to articulate my answers to this question and justify my approach to show this research to be both trustworthy and authentic. I use Lincoln and Guba's (1985) work, as they posed the initial question and argued for criteria more relevant to the constructivist paradigm inductive approaches I have chosen, whilst also juxtaposing them against the more positivist criteria behind most of the Flow research highlighted in the Literature Review. I also concur with the criteria Tracy (2010, p.839) "tentatively" identified as qualitatively universal in her "Big-Tent" paper for two reasons. First, they make pragmatic sense to me, being both more recent than Lincoln and Guba's and end-goal focussed (Tracy, 2010), important because much has been debated since 1985 about how quality is evaluated (Tracy, 2010). Second, I concur with her pragmatic intent to search for "a common language of qualitative best practice that can be recognised as integral by a variety of audiences" (2010, p.837), and being end-goal rather than process-oriented has the potential to encourage understanding and usage across paradigms. This is not just important to me for this Doctoral study but will also be pragmatically useful for sharing the findings among a wider audience of coaches who may represent a broad spectrum of beliefs.

Positivist construct (Winter, 2000)	Underlying issue	Interpretivist construct (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 recommendation)	"Tentative" Qualitative end goal criteria (Tracy, 2010)
	Compellingly interesting		Worthy Topic Relevant, Timely, Significant and Interesting
Reliability (Stability and Consistency)	Consistency	Dependability Accountability, reporting of changes, audit trail, accounting for context change	Rich Rigor/ Meaningful Coherence Theoretical constructs, Data collection and analysis, Sample
Internal Validity (cause and effect)	Truth value about findings making sense	Credibility Represent participants' construction of truth	Credibility Thick description, Crystallisation, Multivocality and Member reflections
Objectivity	Neutrality	Confirmability The degree to which results can be confirmed by others	Sincerity Self-reflexivity and Transparency
External validity (Generalisability)	Applicability	Transferability Reader to determine	Resonance Evocative representation, Naturalistic generalisations, Transferable findings
	Usefulness Answers "So What?"		Significant Contribution Conceptually/theoretically, Practically, Morally, Methodologically and Heuristically
	Rightness or wrongness of our actions		Ethical (detailed in Ethical and Legal considerations section later)

Figure 29: Research Quality assimilation of criteria for Quality Research. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010)

In the following section I examine each criterion in Figure 29 in turn, justifying my actions against them to build trustworthiness and quality into this research.

4.6.1 Worthy topic

Tracy (2010, p. 840) argued that research needs to be "relevant, timely, significant and interesting" in order for it to be a worthy topic of consideration. Within Chapter 1 of this paper, I summarised my motivation to explore Flow, articulated the coaching context, explored the gap I saw in our current knowledge, outlined the benefits I hoped for after that gap was closed and summarised the way I aimed to close it, as a way to achieve this.

4.6.2 Dependability through rich rigour and coherence rather than reliability

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings and how repeatable or replicable the research is for another researcher to conduct with confidence (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), building trustworthiness. My intention behind the research is to make a difference. Ensuring that the research is seen as trustworthy and dependable could motivate coaches to “intuitively transfer the research to their own action” (Tracy, 2010, p.845). Therefore, I have taken dependability beyond merely an audit trail (Bryman *et al.*, 2015) to a mindset of consistency and reliability throughout the research, assimilating two extra criteria that Tracy (2010) called ‘rich rigour’ and ‘meaningful coherence’ as key enablers. By ‘rich rigour’, Tracy (2010) meant richness in the descriptions and explanations about the rigour shown in decisions and choices taken, and in the “care and practice of data collection and analysis procedures” (p.841). Second, Tracy argued for meaningfully coherent studies that “eloquently interconnect their research design, data collection and analysis with their theoretical framework and situational goals” (p.848). Ensuring that there is a coherent line running through the research design, demonstrating a clear, logical and coherent linkage from the primacy of the research question and the aims through the data collection and analysis methods to the outcomes and claims made, is a key enabler of the dependability of the findings (Tuckett, 2005). Furthermore, I contend that the more transparent those rigorously made choices and decisions are (Tracy, 2010), with clear audit linkage between data and claims (Tuckett, 2005), arguably the more dependable the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Consequently, the choice of a pragmatic constructivist approach demanded three specific actions aiding consistency and reliability in the research. First, it must be seen as dependable; therefore, I have transparently recorded and accounted for choices made and the impact of any changes in the context on the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). There is a clear audit trail from recorded interviews, through external transcription uploaded onto NVivo, through interpretation, analysis and use of rich quotes as evidence. Whilst the processes within the chosen methodologies I followed are well documented and referenced in literature, I have tried

to be as explicit as possible about any intuitive steps taken in the analysis and understanding of the meanings behind the transcribed words. Second, it must be seen as rigorous, therefore rigour was built into the data collection and analysis processes (Tracy, 2010) by following the frameworks that De Rivera (1985) and Moustakas (1990) outlined. Last, everything should be seen as meaningfully coherent, philosophically aligned and consistent throughout in both design and execution (Tracy, 2010), in order to answer the objectives and make a worthwhile contribution.

4.6.3 Confirmability through sincerity rather than objectivity

Confirmability, the degree to which I can be shown to have acted in good faith (Bryman *et al.*, 2015) so that other researchers can confirm my results, builds trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Tracy (2010) argued that being transparent and self-reflexive during the research allows observers to see that researchers have acted with sincerity, which is also arguably equal to acting in good faith (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Whilst I previously stated that the processes for CE and HI were openly followed and well documented, complete objectivity in achieving these research objectives is neither feasible, desirable or achievable (Bryman *et al.*, 2015; Tracy, 2010). I recognised that as practitioner-researcher, the known and the knower were inseparable (Morgan, 2014) and therefore I wanted an active role within the research itself. As such, I ran the potential risk of allowing my personal values and biases and experience of Flow to unduly affect both the process and outcomes of the research and make the results difficult to confirm by others (Woolgar, 1996). Therefore, through extensive reflexivity, I have attempted to mitigate this risk by transparently recording and examining my own biases and beliefs throughout the research process and holding them up to the light of external challenge in writing this paper (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). By doing so, I trust that others see that I have been sincere and acted in good faith as a practitioner-researcher. Later in this chapter I will examine the specific subject of reflexivity in more detail.

4.6.4 Credibility rather than internal validity

Tracy (2010) defined credibility in terms of the trustworthiness and believability of the research findings. In order to establish that the research is true and believable, qualitative research can be seen through the eyes of the research partner (Tracy, 2010). That understanding and recognition by the participant of their truth helps to establish the credibility of the work as a true reflection of their reality (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). They are the true judge of its 'validity'. Both the research methodologies and my actions have helped to enhance that credibility. First, research transcripts were completed by an external and professional transcriber and offered to each participant after each interview for checks and amendments. Second, each successive CE interview encouraged the exploration and identification of both accurate understanding and alignment of our joint understanding of the Flow experience and the incorporation of challenges to that understanding (De Rivera, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The challenges were understood and the concept developed iteratively to incorporate each one. Third, the alignment process at the end of the CE process, built credibility by allowing another opportunity for each participant to see, understand and recognise the truth of their own experience of Flow within the whole (Tracy, 2010). Heuristic Inquiry honoured each participant's unique journey with transcripts and rich individual and group summaries, offered again for checks and amendments. Finally, the HI creative synthesis was in many ways a collaborative exercise in building shared credibility (Sultan, 2019). The inclusive and open nature of the research was consciously intended to build that credibility and truth. Therefore, by honouring the quality and reality of participants' experiences in thick descriptive language, when sharing the findings, my intent is that they may be acknowledged as trustworthy and believable new knowledge (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010).

4.6.5 Transferability through resonance rather than generalisability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described transferability as the extent to which research outputs can be transferred, or generalised, to other contexts and settings. The extent of applicability rests

with the person reading and evaluating how sensible it is for them to use it, or as Tracy (2010) argued, how the research empathises with and “meaningfully reverberates and affects the audience” (2010, p.844) who may have little experience of the concept. That way, Tracy (2010) argued, it can encourage the audience to do something with it. To aid them in their decision-making I have tried to be clear about my and the research literature’s understanding of Flow within other work-related contexts, highlighting the similarities and peculiarities associated with the coaching context for their evaluation. I have outlined the assumptions associated with the research for them to understand and recognise the applicability for their context and use, including a detailed description of the executive coaching context in which the coaches were chosen and the relationships inherent in that coaching work. Recognising the importance of empathy in resonance and transferability (Tracy, 2010), I consciously chose to write in the first person, to make it personal, and shared myself and my experiences openly throughout, so that readers may more easily recognise their own situation within it and “intuitively transfer the research to their own action” (Tracy, 2010, p.845).

4.6.6 Significant contribution

Tracy (1995, p.209) judged research to make a significant contribution when it can “bring clarity to confusion, make visible what is hidden or inappropriately ignored, and generate a sense of insight and deepened understanding.” I have captured the contribution that this research is designed to make in objectives 4 (to develop insights into the nature of Flow in the coaching conversation and coaches’ perception of any associated change) and 5 (to develop recommendations for the further development of coaches based on an enhanced understanding of Flow), detailing those within Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

4.6.7 Ethical

Tracy (2010) argued that ethics is a “universal end goal” (p.846) of quality in qualitative research, whichever paradigm is chosen. I have therefore considered the subject of ethics and how it influenced my choices specifically within the following section.

4.7 Ethical and legal considerations

Tracy's (2010) assertion about ethics as a universal end goal aligns with Lee's (2009) argument that all research should be underpinned by ethics and ethical practices. This section evaluates the main ethical principles involved and demonstrates that the decisions taken before, during and after this research were conducted in ways can be seen as "open, honest and [doing] no harm to the participants and others" (Lee, 2009, p.145). All research programmes at the University adhere to the Oxford Brookes Ethical Code of Practice for Researching Human Participants and are cleared for research by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). The University recognises that the "integrity of any research depends not only on its rigour but also on its ethical adequacy" (OBU Ethics, 2016, p.2). This is important for two main reasons: first, as Patton (2014) argued, professional ethical practice is a critical success factor in successful research; and second, choosing a pragmatic constructivist approach means that certainty is not possible and that reality is constructed between the participants (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). I also concur with Sultan (2019, p.211) when she stated that, when using such personally-oriented methodologies as CE and HI to co-create those realities, "it is not a matter of **if** ethical issues emerge but **when** they do". Therefore, the ethical standards of these relationship must be important to the credibility and quality of the research (Tracy, 2020). It is as much for these reasons as for compliance with University approval procedures that I share my planning and actions in the following section for evaluation. Whilst many disciplines and organisations have published standards of ethical conduct in research (Krathwohl, 2009), I have pragmatically taken each key element from the Oxford Brookes University code (OBU Ethics, 2016) that UREC used for this research clearance and explained how I planned for delivery against it.

"Research participants should take part voluntarily, free from any coercion or undue influence, and their rights, dignity and (when possible) autonomy should be respected and appropriately protected." The principle of informed consent relates to any prospective co-researcher having as much information "as might be needed" (Bryman *et al.*, 2015, p.139)

to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. Each co-researcher was therefore asked to voluntarily sign an informed consent form before any research or data capture commenced (Appendix d). This informed consent form outlined the purpose of the study and the specific actions that would be involved, including anonymity, confidentiality and the recording, storage and usage of any data. Each participant was reminded that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they were able to withdraw at any stage without explanation. As this programme of research was in two phases and over a long timeframe, two consent forms were used, one for each research question and methodology. This placed an additional emphasis on co-researchers' freedom to choose and consent at each stage.

“Research should be worthwhile and provide value that outweighs any risk or harm.”

In the previous section on quality, I touched on both Tracy's (2010) expectation that all high-quality research delivers a significant contribution and on my expectation of that significant contribution from this research. However, UREC additionally asks that we should evaluate these benefits against an examination of any potential harm that achieving them may have on the co-researcher. Indeed, it may be seen by many as unacceptable for any research to be likely to harm participants (Bryman *et al.*, 2015). That value equation makes up a key part of the UREC approval. Therefore, I have aimed to maximise the benefit of the research whilst identifying and minimising any potential risks of harm. For instance, whilst the prospect of any harm to the co-researchers was judged to be minimal (Bryman *et al.*, 2015), I did plan for research interviews to be stopped immediately and professional support to be offered if co-researchers felt overly emotional, concerned or wished it at any stage.

“Research staff and participants should be given appropriate information about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks and benefits, if any, are involved”. The principle underlying this statement is one of Honesty (OBU Ethics, 2016), a principal Tracy (2010) refers to several times in relation to transparency and consistency and which I try hard to live by. I mentioned earlier that in order to be able to make an informed participation choice, potential

co-researchers had to be given all the information they may need. A Participation Information Sheet (PIS) was therefore completed and used to brief each co-researcher honestly and transparently. A copy of the PIS used (Appendix d) details the study title, invitation, rationale for the research, why they are invited, issues of consent and an explanation of what may be involved in taking part including benefits, confidentiality, impartiality and contact details.

“Individual research participant and group preferences regarding anonymity should be respected and participant requirements concerning the confidential nature of information and personal data should be respected”. Maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of co-researchers and their organisations is assumed to be an integral part of ethical research practice (Bryman *et al.*, 2015). Codes or pseudonyms are often used as a way to de-identify participants (Bryman *et al.*, 2015) and mitigate the risk of harm to either co-researcher or their organisation associated with inadvertent disclosure of confidences (Sultan, 2019). Whilst I had initially decided to use codes to maintain confidentiality, I changed to use pseudonyms. I judged that this was both more consistent with the personal methodologies chosen, honouring the stories of real people, and would also make it easier for people reading the research to empathise with the human behind the name and the context in which they share their stories. The same pseudonym was then used in transcription, storage and identification of the co-researchers to ensure a clear audit trail of any claims of evidence (Tracy, 2010).

“Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure recognised standards of integrity are met, and quality and transparency are assured”. In addition to the actions I detailed within the section on quality, relating to integrity and transparency in the research process (Tracy, 2010), and following UREC approval, I maintained regular internal supervision sessions to ensure that any changes were openly discussed and reviewed. This allowed issues reflected in the reflexive journaling to be explored and highlighted for any potential biases or risks that could harm the research or its participants.

“The independence of research should be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality should be explicit”. Research funding from sources that have a vested interest in the outcome of the study has caused high-profile ethical controversy (Clark, 2000; Tyson, 2001). Therefore, by being “explicit and open about the resources that enabled their research” (Bryman *et al.*, 2015, p.149), researchers have to consciously think about how questions about their funding might undermine the credibility of their research. Consequently, I made it explicitly clear, both within the PIS and when using it to outline and discuss the research programme with potential participants, that the research was self-funded as part of my OBU Doctoral programme.

4.8 Reflexivity

I recognise Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) argument that taking a qualitative approach needs to acknowledge the researcher’s subjectivity. Indeed, it is only more recently (Richardson, 2000; Denzin, 2000) that researchers have accepted that the identification and exposition of a researcher’s “biases, motivations, interests or perspectives” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.290) helps to imbue the research with greater rigour and validity.

According to Dewey’s model of experience (Figure 30), all experiences involve a process of interpretation; our actions must be interpreted to create our beliefs and our beliefs must be interpreted to create our actions. As a practitioner I recognise that I have formed beliefs about Flow and coaching from my actions and experiences that I believe are valid, yet which remain subjective. This form of inquiry, like any experience, is then a continuous process of cycles of reflection between my beliefs and action taken before getting to any formal resolution. Given my integral role in the research process, I recognise that I am an instrument for data collection (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas described the importance of reflecting on both the way the research process impacts my thoughts, feelings and behaviours and conversely, how my thoughts, feelings and behaviours may impact the research itself (1990).

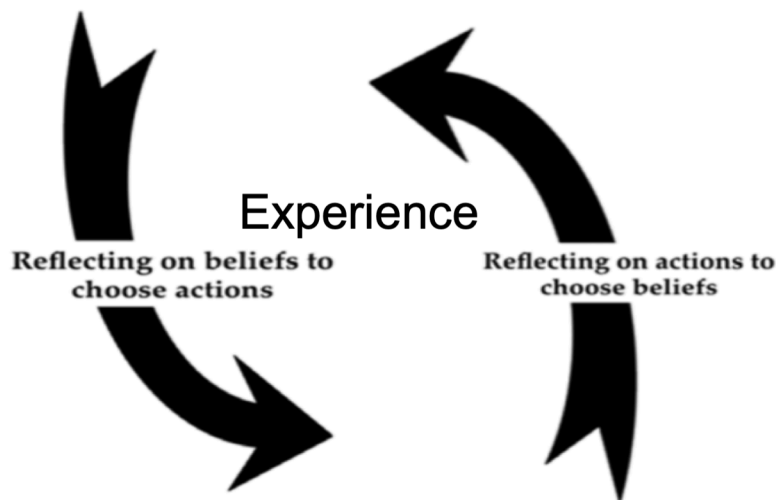


Figure 30: Amalgamating Morgan (2014) with Dewey’s model of experience (1908)

Reflexive practice, using a research diary both after each research interview and regularly during the research journey (Tracy, 2010), helped me to become aware of my underlying beliefs and biases and the potential impact they may have on the research process. I had used reflexive practice regularly as a self-development tool in my coaching practice with my supervisor and was therefore utilising existing habits. However, the depths of self-reflexivity demanded by both CE and HI (De Rivera, 1981; Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019) enabled much clearer and more honest self-evaluation and learning than had previously been afforded. As Tracy (2010) suggested, self-reflexivity and talking with others about the insights and experiences captured over the research process allowed those insights to be aired and challenged openly, grounding my learnings in reality and resulting in more conscious awareness around my actions.

Sultan (2019, p.165) asserted that the long-held idea in research was that “the researcher always has the upper hand”, which often led to the possibility of what Sandstrom, Martin and Fine (2006) described as an “asymmetrical relationship”; a relationship in which one person

tries to impose their thoughts or will over another. They advised that researchers should become consistently aware of their own power and its influence on relationship dynamics (Sandstrom, Martin and Fine, 2006). As I was so actively engaged throughout the research, I wanted to minimise the potential of any positional power and influence over my research partners. As a practicing executive coach, I am acutely aware of the potential impact of my 'self' as an influencing energy on others and the associated risks. I therefore focussed on adopting some of the same attitude and behaviours linked with good coaching practice, namely: maintaining an attitude of unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957), establishing trust, being present and listening beyond just the words being spoken (ICF, 2018), thereby creating an open and safe environment within which to explore and discover. Indeed, being fully present allowed the conditions and research to flow smoothly and easily.

Utilising existing habits of coaching practice allied with deeper reflexivity challenged and shaped my beliefs and actions, also satisfying many of my developmental motivations for commencing the Doctoral Programme. Csikszentmihalyi (1990; 2014) described Flow as a developmental experience, with each experience being an opportunity for growth. Recognising this as one of the consequences of Flow certainly influenced my initial interest to explore how the effects of Flow might shape my own growth as a coach. Surfacing this belief within my supervision sessions identified a reductionist risk, in that it had restricted the scope of the investigation to growth and development alone, whereas the opportunity afforded was to broaden and be truly open to discover any potential effects Flow may have on ourselves as coaches.

Such re-shaping, based on reflexivity and challenge (Sultan, 2019), helped to solidify my methodological choices towards true exploration and discovery. Starting with discovery as the end in mind, Heuristic Inquiry demands that the researcher "enter the research endeavour with openness and curiosity" (Sultan, 2019, p.50) and essentially facilitate a co-learning experience regarding the essential nature of the research topic (Moustakas, 1990). In this case that meant being "honestly and authentically" (Tracy, p.842) open to the widest possible changes coaches

may perceive after the experience of Flow, rather than simply following my interest in growth and development. To help me be “frank about my strengths and shortcomings” (p.842), both in my reflexive practice and towards my co-researchers, I discovered that maintaining this discovery mindset allowed me to be deeply curious and interested to understand both my own and my research partners’ subjective experiences, thoughts and behaviours (Moustakas, 1990).

This does, however, presuppose a common understanding of what we mean by the experience of Flow as a starting point. I recognised that my own beliefs about my Flow experiences were subjective yet risked influencing my ability to be open to and truly understand others’ experiences that may challenge my own. The collaborative meaning-making inherent in CE is broad enough to discover each participant’s individual subjective experience of Flow, and yet to create a shared understanding while allowing my own experiences to build, shape and challenge it constructively. This methodology helped me to let go of my need to control the outcome and to be truly open, and this proved both critical for the research and a major developmental learning point for myself as a coach.

Chapter 5: Findings - coaches' descriptions of Flow in coaching conversations

This chapter details the findings associated with understanding the experiences coaches identify as Flow within coaching conversations using Conceptual Encounter methodology. Findings focus on how coaches describe Flow, synthesising themes into an understandable map of Flow without losing the richness of the descriptive language. The chapter outlines the development of this descriptive map of Flow in coaching, building on the initial developmental mind-map outline of Flow detailed earlier in Chapter 3 (Figure 18). Evolutions of the mind-map following each CE interview are captured for reference in Appendix f.

Excerpts of co-researchers' voices detailing their lived experiences are used within the body of the text as evidence for each transition. To aid in establishing a common understanding of the elements of Flow for the coaches in Stage 2 of the research, I constructed a descriptive paragraph for each element based on the verbatim findings, adding texture and colour to the map. Each descriptive paragraph is underpinned by a table of more extensive verbatim comments, with the aim of highlighting key aspects. The chapter closes with an outline of the final mapped structure of Flow in coaching conversations, summarising the rich and descriptive language used by coaches. This framework map of Flow was shared with every co-researcher, forming the basis for a common understanding of Flow from which to notice any changes coaches may have perceived after experiencing Flow.

Once in Flow, an activity or experience seamlessly unfolds (flows) from one moment to another and the individual enters into a subjective state:

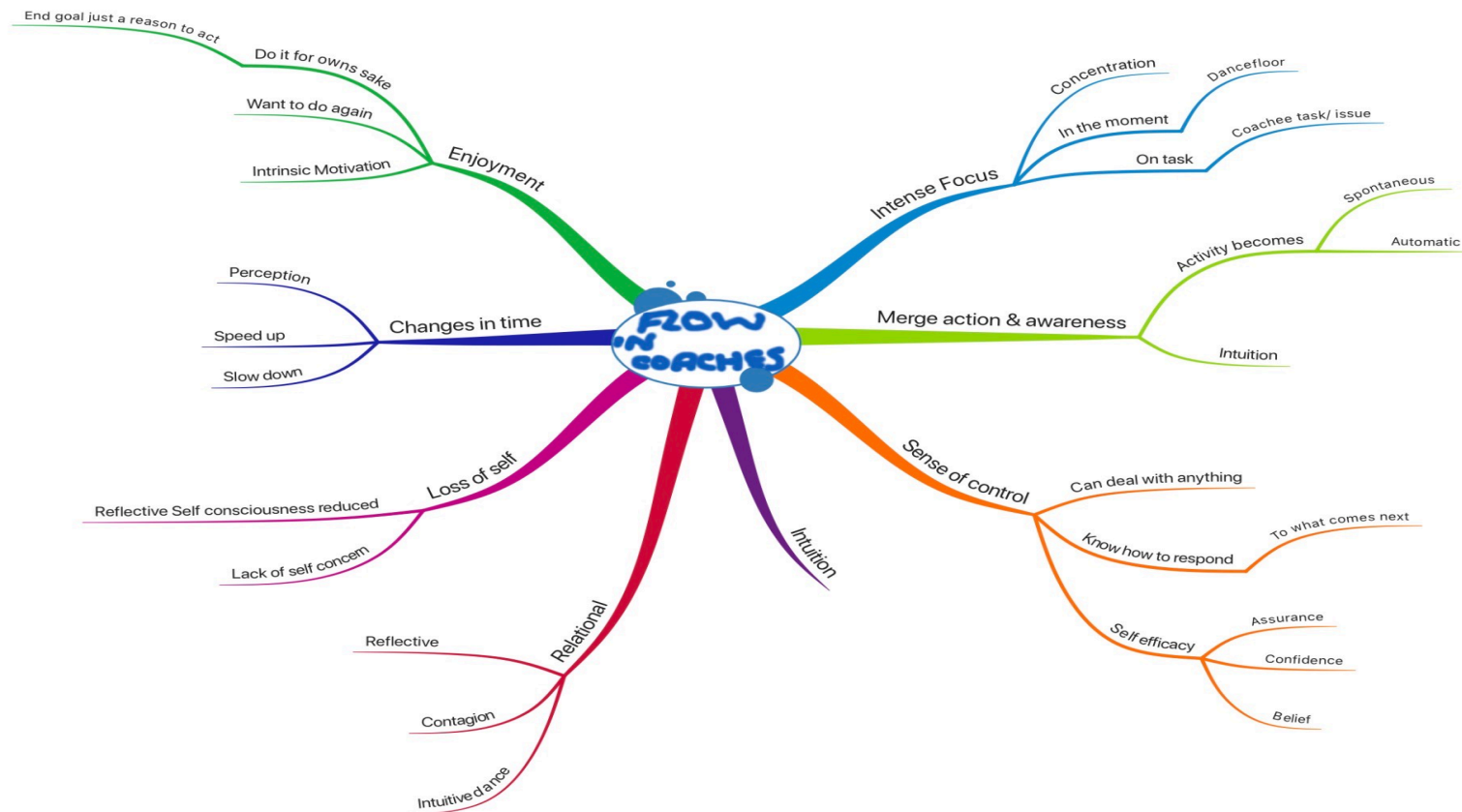


Figure 31: Initial CE fieldwork mind-map of Flow

I will now outline the analysis of each element within the map, summarising each with a descriptive paragraph.

5.1 Deep absorption

Csikszentmihalyi (1975, p.40) defined focus as “a centring of attention on a limited stimulus field.” He explained that the purpose of focus is to help people to concentrate on what they are doing so that distractions can be kept out of attention (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Coaches’ lived experiences of Flow challenged and clarified what coaches in Flow are intensely focussed on. Rather than an overt, moment-to-moment concentration on the coaching task at hand presented by the client, coaches in Flow instead report being deeply absorbed in being with the person.

As this research was necessarily bounded within the coaching dialogue, the coaching relationship significantly shaped this finding. Most importantly, it signified a shift in focus away from an inanimate task to be completed, towards a relationship and connection with a coaching client. This had two distinct implications for the research. First, it changed the language: *intense focus on* became a *deep absorption in*. Second, it suggested a shift in the coach’s moment-to-moment competency challenge of being *present to a human being* with their emotional and rational nuances rather than *present to a task*, no matter how complex. For instance, Laurence felt focus to be somewhat restrictive meaning “*you’re generally focussed in on a task...you are laser focussed*” whereas being absorbed in a person meant that “*you are open enough to be able to feel, to sense*” them such that “*stuff is hitting you and... I feel like I am picking stuff up from you*”. Sarah concurred, describing it in her coaching as “*when you’re totally absorbed in something and nothing else matters but that person, that moment; and being fully present, fully in the moment with coaching with that person*” such that “*the task becomes quite irrelevant*” (Zara).

Within absorption, coaches described three important characteristics in common: rather than

“just” concentrating, they listened at a very deep level; they were *“totally in the moment”* (Chris); and they were absorbed in the person, rather than the task. Kiara explained that listening goes beyond behaviour, as *“it’s not a behaviour really. It’s listening as a belief... the manifestation of a set of beliefs about somebody and their ability to think well”*. Chris described it as *“real, empathetic listening...to the words being said and listening to the words not being said”* and Zara mentioned *“listening to those instincts... at head, heart and gut level.”*

Original element	Final element	Co-researchers descriptive examples
Intense Focus	Deep absorption	“when you’re totally absorbed in something and nothing else matters but that person, that moment; and being fully present, fully in the moment with coaching with that person”. Sarah “Absorption. Focus to me is like you are almost just on one thing. You still need to be focussed but for me, focus means you’re generally focussed in on a task or a person or an attribute. You are laser focussed. Whereas absorption means you are open enough to be able to feel, to sense” Laurence
Concentration	Full sensory, listening beyond a behaviour	“its listening but not as a behaviour. Its not a behaviour really. Its listening as a really deep belief. The manifestation of a set of beliefs about somebody and their ability to think well.” Kiara “For me it is beyond listening, its sensing and an intuitive approach that almost doesn’t need care”. Kate “I was listening to those instincts. At head, heart and gut level. I felt completely calm”. Zara
In the moment	In the moment	“That Quaker quote ‘the urge to the next moment’, there is none of that at all. You’re just being and sensing, I guess.” Kate
On the task	In the person	“I find the word in-task quite jarring actually because the task becomes quite irrelevant. It’s the being, it’s a deep absorption of connectedness. And being whole, being immersed. You are seeing everything that is, a truth, a connected truth, and noticing everything that needs to be noticed.” Zara

Figure 32: Deep absorption in coaching conversations

These examples and the further verbatim descriptions (Figure 32) underpin the importance of Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975) centring of attention on a limited stimulus field, in this case the client. These findings appear consistent with Noon’s (2017, p.56) description of a coach present in the moment as “having absolute full, undivided attention”, creating a stillness and openness

without distraction with the client, and with the ICF (2021) definition of presence as being “fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident.” I personally find the latest ICF definition rather difficult to work with for two reasons. First, I understand being conscious *of* or aware *of* something in coaching; for instance, noticing changes in my clients’ state of being, but being ‘fully conscious’ is less easy to interpret, since its opposite would be to be ‘unconscious’ during coaching. Second, utilising the subject of the definition within the definition itself is problematic (using the term ‘present’ when explaining the definition of presence). However, I do appreciate the distinction being drawn between the state of ‘being’ in the moment in coaching rather than in doing particular activities. It might be surmised that this state of being present in coaching may be as necessary for Flow as Csikszentmihalyi’s apparently equivalent centring of attention on a task. Kiara recognised this similarity and the potential role presence may have in getting into Flow, but cautioned:

“In order for Flow to happen, the coach has to be very present, but I don’t think that being present means that you get into Flow. Presence is about the coach showing up in the right way. Showing up with interest and curiosity and unconditional positive regard and clear contract in a safe space and all of those things. And that is kind of a more superficial thing than Flow”.

It may be that these findings are highlighting a “*deep absorption of connectedness*” (Zara) in the person that goes beyond presence and is necessary to experience Flow. Focus on the client could be seen like the centring of attention or narrowing focus on the task in traditional Flow. However, these findings seem to indicate that Flow in coaching requires a more expansive or opening attention towards all three elements of client, coach and situation. This open focus is described best by coaches as deep absorption.

Using these co-researchers’ verbatim experiences as a basis, I constructed a descriptive paragraph in an attempt to capture the essence and meaning of the findings for deep absorption. This paragraph was reproduced within the final conceptual diagram later in this

chapter to add colour and texture and aid understanding of the subjective nature of the experience.

A **deep absorption** beyond focus; in the person and the coaching situation rather than the coaching task. If I were doing a jigsaw puzzle, the task I am absorbed in is doing the jigsaw. Whereas, in coaching, I am absorbed in the person and the coaching situation that I'm in. My behaviour is beyond listening, it's sensing at all levels opening my awareness to every nuance. I am present in every sense, absorbed in the moment and **being** in the moment, rather than doing.

5.2 Perception of time changes

Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p.66) claimed that experiencing an altered sense of time is reported as “one of the most common descriptions of optimal experience”. Coaches' lived experiences, captured within Figure 33 below, substantiate and align with this claim, with some using the analogy of the film *The Matrix* as a descriptive analogy for the fluidity of their experiences of the distortion of time. My own subjective experience seems to align with Chris's, Robert's and Megan's descriptions of an acceleration of time during Flow in coaching, and for me the very opposite occurs when Flow is sometimes hard to find. Additional changes in time perception were described as a sense of timelessness when time seems to stand still, or a sense that time just didn't seem to exist or matter to coaches in Flow. As Chris said, *“all the energy then is in the combined bubble. None of it is being wasted on external parameters or constraints. And time would be an external constraint I guess. So we put that to one side and we don't care if its 10 past 2 or 5 o'clock. We're in the moment and that's what's important.”*

Original element	Final element	Co-researchers descriptive examples
Changes in time	Perception of time changes	"your perception of time has changed...Its like the Matrix one. Its about gently moving things out of the way without any energy." Kate
Perception	Timelessness	"its just not in my thoughts. I don't know whether it speeds up or slows down, there is just an unawareness of it." Kiara "One of the obvious indicators of that is that timelessness feeling...So there's a sense on altering almost reality. So time is changing." Robert "I guess it sort of stands still actually. Because there is only that moment. And so that moment sort of gets elongated into the time that you are in that experience." Megan
Speed up, slow down	Fluid: speeds up and slows down	"What that says to me is that normally time is a straight line, and that's what it feels like. But this is much more in a give-and-take and its swirling round a bit more. And it becomes much less linear, much more fluid." Chris "You don't know you're in it... time flies a lot faster. The time when you're watch flies faster but the person in front of you slows down." Laurence "you are almost seeing what's coming next. Its almost like The Matrix. Everything slows down. That is what I believe flow is for me." Laurence "it has that effect of kind of slowing everything down for you, the nerves go a way and anything you want to say, you just say it." Megan
	Doesn't exist or doesn't matter	"If anything, time doesn't exist. Its not that it changes or anything. It just doesn't exist." Kate

Figure 33: Perception of time changes

Therefore, using these lived experiences, the descriptive text constructed to animate the element of a 'perception of time changes' within Flow in coaching conversations is:

My perception of **time changes**. Some say it speeds up, some say it slows down, some say it doesn't matter or exist at all. But it's very fluid.

5.3 Harmonious merging of action and awareness

This element focusses on the action in coaching and how the coach coaches. Csikszentmihalyi noted that when action and awareness merge, respondents described that their actions became “spontaneous, almost automatic”, with a sense of “seemingly effortless movement” (1990, p.53). They were aware of the actions “but not of the awareness itself” (1975, p.38). In other words, there is no distinction between two aspects of action: the action itself (*what* is done) and themselves doing the action (*how* it is done). These merged or happened harmoniously and effortlessly. Findings from this research in Figure 34 below appear consistent with both this spontaneous, almost automatic action, and the intuitive nature of the activity of coaching, expressed by Wesson (2010, p.56) as “using skills and ideas from different places and synthesising them into a new technique...I was present with both head and intuition and it just seemed to work.” The findings build on these two areas whilst reinforcing and emphasising the effortless nature of the action of coaching in Flow through the expression of ‘effortlessly merging action and awareness’. For example, early in the CE process Chris emphasised that “*when you’re in Flow... it’s effortless*”, reinforced later by Zara: “*Yes absolutely, the doing part...it just flowed.*”

Original element	Final element	Co-researchers descriptive examples
Merge action and awareness	Effortlessly merging of action and awareness	Yes absolutely, the doing part of it. It wasn't task, it wasn't process, it wasn't like let's do this, it didn't need explanation. It just flowed. Something else took over, almost like an out of body experience. You can feel yourself experiencing it. Zara
Activity	Effortlessly doing the right thing without thinking	I am not thinking I am now in flow; I am taking flow-like actions. It happens without me... I'm not consciously making that happen. Its not a conscious decision to take an action. This happens without that consciousness. Kate There 's no question about it...The right thing happening in the right place at the right time with the right person. Its all that sort of thing. Kate I think that things do unfold. And I think that things in the coaching conversation do emerge. Robert when you're in the flow...Its effortless. We are unconscious of our actions, because they are so in the moment. It becomes a completely natural process... of listening, asking questions, reacting, building, collaborating. Chris I can see stuff coming. In terms of a coaching session, you are not pre-empting stuff, but you almost know where they're going with it. And what is coming. Laurence
Intuition	Doing manifests intuitively	Its like that kind of almost ability to mind read, anticipate something or say exactly the right words, based on a really deep understanding of what the other person is going through. And you don't know how you know it, but you know it. Zara There's a sense of being lost in the other person, their world. Connected. Almost as one. Almost enmeshed. So deeply I am not in my own head but I'm in theirs. And with that come moments of intuition. Kiara its almost like that sixth sense. I'm a great believer in intuition as a sixth sense. maybe in the zone, we listen to ourselves better. We listen to that intuition better, both me as a coach and the client are able to go that bit further in their brain, in their thinking. And access stuff that... seems hidden away. Kate The flow... or the questions that emerge in flow moments aren't thought through or felt through, they're sensed...its not a challenge. Kate I think that I make those connections a lot more easily. Without thinking about them. it kind of goes into the processing plant and gets juggled around and out pops a question or a thought. Megan

Figure 34: Effortless merging of action and awareness

The lived experiences of coaches (Figure 34) further refine the action (*what* is done) through the expression 'effortlessly doing the right thing without thinking' and intuition (*how* it is done) as 'doing manifests intuitively'. Whilst co-researchers aligned with the conceptual experience of the effortless merging of the *what* and *how* of the action, they felt it important to distinguish

the two to aid recognition by other coaches at a later date. For instance, Kate felt it important to highlight that the action during coaching in Flow was doing “*the right thing happening in the right place at the right time with the right person*” and that “*taking [those] Flow-like actions...happens without me...I’m not consciously making it happen.*” Kate went on to describe *how* the doing manifested itself with an “*intuition as a sixth sense*” such that “*in the zone...we listen to that intuition better...and access stuff that...seems hidden away*”, therefore “*the questions that emerge in Flow...aren’t thought through [but rather] they’re sensed [and are] not a challenge.*”

To bring these distinctions alive and help other coaches intuit and recognise for themselves the element for a ‘harmonious merging of action and awareness’ I constructed a descriptive paragraph based on their experiences detailed in Figure 34 above.

An effortless merging of action and awareness, so that I am not thinking about what I’m doing. The activity itself is natural, spontaneous and intuitive, moving forward with a direction and a purpose. It’s unfolding from moment to moment, opening up to something worthwhile, exploring, connecting the conscious and the unconscious. Through stepping into their world, I’m intuitively making those connections. My response is intuitive and the questions are intuitive, informed as they are by my knowledge, experience and intention, and a deep curiosity about understanding both limiting beliefs and opportunity. Integrating, synthesising, connecting, unconsciously; it’s just happening. This synthesising releases the questions; like a sixth sense, beautiful yet effortless.

5.4 Self-efficacy

When people fully apply their skills against stretching yet achievable challenges during Flow, Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p.61) reported that they experienced a “sense of control over their actions.” In Chapter 2, when discussing the “paradox of control” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990,

p.59), I argued that in reality it was the *absence of concern or worry* about lacking control that Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) respondents had reported when 'having a sense of control'. Indeed, from the coaching research on Flow, only McBride reported anything aligning with Csikszentmihalyi's element of control other than respondents' apparent ease with "being okay with asking the wrong question" (2013, p.48). In Chapter 2, I shared some potential intuitive concerns about how coaches may interpret and misunderstand the term 'sense of control' within the context of coaching and committed to be especially sensitive to their language and experiences.

The findings in this research seemed to indicate that the term 'control' within the context of the coaching conversation was indeed an issue for coaches. For instance, in the very first CE interview Chris reacted against the term control, saying, "*you are not controlling, you are out of control of it.*" His interpretation and response was in reaction to the idea of controlling the client or the conversation. Kiara later agreed, stating that "*in the end, I'm not in control of whether they achieve it or not*", reinforcing instead that she felt "*committed to the person [whilst also being] detached from the outcome.*" Coaches during the process consistently wanted to avoid somehow being perceived as 'controlling' the client in coaching. Their initial view was to distinguish control of the client from control of themselves, with the idea of coaches having a 'sense of self-control' over both their own actions and their reactions to clients' emotions. For instance, Victoria explained her ability to feel what her client was feeling and yet to be "*distant enough to be aware of his feelings, understand them and perceive them...and empathise...without transference...no transference, that's it, sense of self-control...I was able to hold that.*"

Findings (Figure 35) evidence a desire to move beyond self-control to encompass a wider sense of 'self-efficacy.' Perceived self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute courses of action [including the motivational and cognitive resources] required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p.3) and is "rooted in the core belief, that one has the power to effect changes by one's actions" (Bandura, 2001, p.8). This concept

was well received by the coaches. They found that self-efficacy encapsulated not only their capacity for self-control but also their ability to: first, build a safe space; second, be grounded and self-assured enough to 'let go'; and third, believe in their own capacity and agency as coach to deal safely with anything that might happen within that space. They all found this idea to be both personally powerful and empowering of their perception of themselves as a coach.

Original element	Final element	Co-researchers descriptive examples
Sense of control	Self-efficacy	"I suppose you've just got to trust in your own ability. So you have that belief in yourself and what you're there for. So it goes back to being confident and comfortable in your own skin." Laurence
Can deal with anything	Can deal with anything	"I think that anything that comes, I am able to deal with." Megan "to really be in flow maybe, its our self awareness of ourselves that then means that we can let go of our beliefs, our values, our biases and remain in flow." Julia "I absolutely agree that when you are in that state you feel that you can absolutely deal with anything. You know how to respond instinctively. Self advocacy, assurance, confidence, belief." Chris
Know how to respond	Safe, harmonious space	"So a safe and also lovely space matters to me. A calm space, a clear agreement, a contract being met by both of us. And they talk a lot about the notion of safe container and the amount of time you need to spend creating that safe container for both of you. And when it really feels safe in every way; even in terms of location, the coach is present, the way you're going to work together, the way you understand each other, the limits of your expertise and expectations. That I think allows for an in-flow state to ensue. It allows for it. I don't think that an in-flow state can happen without that container being in place." Kiara "Showing up with interest and curiosity and unconditional positive regard and clear contact in a safe space and all of those things." Kiara
Self-efficacy	Grounded	"I felt very ready. I hadn't got any expectations on myself. It was very much I know that I can do good work. And by being utterly present, I know that I can do the best work that I can by trusting. And trusting whatever came up for me. And daring to take some risks. Being able to say this has just come up for me; I don't know if it's going to be useful." Sarah "it feels that you have to be centred and grounded in order to do the work. And then you have to let go of that and be open to anything." Sarah

Figure 35: Self-efficacy

The use of Csikszentmihalyi's term "sense of self-control" in individual Flow seemed to trigger either misunderstanding or resistance within the context of coaching. It neither expressed Csikszentmihalyi's absence of concern or worry around not having control, nor focussed on the coach's control; rather it triggered a negative reaction against controlling the client. Therefore, the following descriptive text of self-efficacy was constructed to enable coaches to recognise aspects of themselves as coaches and the boundaries of control they had within Flow in coaching conversations:

A sense of **self efficacy**. Grounded in an assurance, confidence and ease born of the deep belief that I can deal with anything that comes up, either from myself or the other. I can deal with any emotions that come up; I am aware of them, I understand them, I feel and empathise with them, but I don't get affected by them. I can hold myself and them in a safe space - I have enough, I am enough. I can let go of 'me'.

5.5 No consciousness of my-'self'

Despite Csikszentmihalyi (1975) naming his element 'Loss of self-consciousness', what was lost, he argued, was the awareness of self rather than the 'self' itself. He believed that when we feel in control of our actions and are focussed on an achievable task, we have no need to feel threatened or at risk. Therefore, the psychic energy or attention in consciousness needed by the intermediary 'self' "which one learns to interpose between stimulus and response" can be safely 'let go' and our awareness of our sense of 'self' is 'lost' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.43; 1990).

Co-researchers reported recognising these experiences during Flow in coaching. Kiara described *"a lack of self-consciousness, a lack of consciously accessing knowledge, a lack of care of myself and a disappearing of that boundary"*, whilst Chris challenged the loss of self by reporting that it's *"not a complete loss of self...it's a... a complete lack of focus on self. And it's not lack of self-awareness because you are aware of yourself, but you're completely*

unselfconscious". These comments, alongside more responses captured in Figure 36 below, seem to demonstrate that coaches need to modify Csikszentmihalyi's concept of loss of self, which emerges instead as the element described as 'no consciousness of self'. This emergent finding aligns more closely with Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi's later description of the element as 'Loss of reflective self-consciousness', helpfully describing this as "i.e., loss of awareness of oneself as a social actor" (2009, p.2).

Original element	Final element	Co-researchers descriptive examples
Loss of Self it is the awareness of the concept of 'self' that is lost, not the 'self' itself (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975).	No consciousness of 'self'	I want to say I was not thinking. A deep trust in the process and myself. And in a sense, safety I think for both of us. There is something about a lack of self consciousness, a lack of consciously accessing knowledge, a lack of care of myself and a disappearing of that boundary. Kiara I don't care about me. For me, I haven't lost myself but I'm not thinking I am looking good here or bad here, looking this here or that here. I'm not bothered on that level at all. So its not quite an acceptance of self but also not a complete loss of self. It's a... lack of focus on self, a complete lack of focus on self. And its not lack of self awareness because you are aware of your self, but you're completely unselfconscious. Chris
Reflective self-consciousness reduced	Trust and let go	When I trust the process I can let go of all sorts of concerns or worries that might get in the way of me being able to be with them and have that connection, very much connecting. Sarah so it's a fact that we can be confident and at ease, means that we can let go and go with the not knowing. Julia predominantly I do trust myself now... I'm able to let go and get out of my own way and be there for my clients. Sarah
Lack of self concern	Limiting parts of 'self' fall away	Because that internal chatter goes, and you're unfettered (back to my word), there is no question of whether or not you're confident or not. You're just doing it. Megan So I know that if I am in that state, in whatever I do, I perform better. Because I'm calm, I don't have any negative emotions, I don't have any negative chat. And it allows me to focus actually entirely on what I'm doing. And the contrast is massive. Megan Talking about the need to add value we have intrinsically to deliver something to the coachee, is taken away. There is no need. Any concerns that one has, or self-doubt that one, has is suspended at that moment. Victoria it just feels as though I'm accessing a different part of me and I'm accessing a different part of the client. So it feels like the communication is happening on a different level. And that level is I would say always more beneficial. Always more beneficial for the coaching in some way. So it's almost as though, because the ego, the sense of judgement and the egotistical stuff drops away, it feels as if I'm accessing a deeper part of who I am. Robert I would go deeper than that and say its an absolute freedom from fear. I think that the whole coaching experience and everything about it is about how we live a life that is meaningful and purposeful. And when you get into flow, its total. It releases you from any fears. Zara
	'Me' as guardian on the balcony ('me' on the balcony; keep an eye 'us')	it's the Ron Heifetz's balcony and dance thing...so you are on the balcony and in the dance at the same time. It's Martin Buber I-Thou as opposed to I-It. Sarah AB: Me means I am on the balcony looking at me. But I am on the dance floor and it's I. Sarah: Exactly. I don't know how I have a sense of time in coaching because it's not in my thoughts... So even though we're in flow, its sort of holding somewhere... For me it's a trust in that self who is still there, but keeping a very low profile. Trust, not as a controller but more like a protector. Kiara AB: A guardian? Absolutely, a lovely word. Kiara

Figure 36: No consciousness of my-'self'

Coaches saw three aspects inherent within the element of 'no consciousness of self'. First, they can identify with the idea of feeling safe and unthreatened enough to 'let go'. Unlike Csikszentmihalyi's task-focussed Flow, within coaching conversations this was understood to refer to both themselves and the coaching process. For instance, Sarah reported that when in Flow *"I wasn't in my head thinking 'what do I have to ask next?'...I had let go of all of that. I just thought whatever comes up, I just trust the process...I can let it go...and get out of my own way."* Julia concurred, using an expression I have often heard in coaching terminology, stating that in Flow *"meant that we can let go and go with the not knowing."*

Secondly, after letting go coaches also experienced Csikszentmihalyi's finding regarding lack of self-concern, rather describing it as if the limiting parts of the 'self' fall away. This falling away of limiting aspects of self they saw as a moment of suspense from their infernal internal chatter. For instance, Megan described that her *"internal chatter goes...I don't have any negative chat."* Victoria then found that, *"the need to add value was taken away. There is no need. Any...self-doubt that one has is suspended at that moment"* so that any fears they may have about what might happen or their ability to handle it drop away. Perhaps paradoxically, this seemed to allow for a deeper connection within the 'self'. Robert experienced that, for example, when *"the sense of judgement and the egotistical stuff drops away, it feels as if I'm accessing a deeper part of who I am."*

Finally, whilst recognising the loss of the sense of 'self' in Flow as *"getting myself out of the way"* (Sarah), coaches did also recognise an important role in coaching that their 'self' still played at the same time. Whilst they reported being lost in the action of the coaching, they also recognised themselves playing a supportive role as guardian, quietly watching and monitoring the process and dynamic of the coaching dialogue. Sarah recognised it being like *"a balcony and dance thing...so you are on the balcony [watching] and in the dance [of coaching dialogue] at the same time"*, also highlighting alignment with Martin Buber's (1971) relational concept of 'I and Thou' rather than 'I and It'; with 'I', myself, on the dance floor and in the coaching, whilst also recognising myself on the balcony looking at 'me'. Kiara strongly

aligned with the idea of the guardian on the balcony. She surmised the additional role of managing the sense of time, so crucial in coaching, reporting that *“even though we’re in Flow [and time not mattering], it’s sort of holding somewhere...for me it’s a trust in that self [as guardian] who is still there, but keeping a very low profile. Trust, not as a controller but more like a protector.”*

The purpose of this research was not just to understand how coaches described the experience of Flow, but also to establish a common platform of understanding from which to explore any subsequent changes. I surmised that the apparently paradoxical idea of multiple selves playing different roles whilst also concurrently being diminished in consciousness may be both relatively complex and nuanced and yet be easily understood by other people through a small phrase of words such as ‘no consciousness of self’. Therefore, the descriptive text for coaches’ experience of the element of a ‘no consciousness of self’ within Flow in coaching conversations was developed to capture the essence and meaning of the findings as follows:

No consciousness of my-‘self’. It’s a lot of lack of a lack of self-concern. A lack of concern that I will add too much value, I don’t waste energy on worrying about my ego, my critical voice or self-judgement, the chatter stops. This is the total trust that allows me to let go and go with the not knowing. Getting out of my own way. The limiting parts of my ‘self’ are put aside and fall away.

Yet there is a paradox here – getting myself out of my and the way yet knowing that I am still somehow ‘here’. As an analogy the ‘I’ in the coaching action ‘on the dance floor’ fades away, trusting totally in the process and in the ‘me’ as the guardian ‘on the balcony’, keeping a low profile, watching, assuring, protecting. Should I fall from Flow, ‘I’ become aware of my ‘self’ again and the chatter resumes.

5.6 Deep connection/ transcendence above the norm

As discussed previously in the Literature Review, because the research was bounded within

the context of the coaching conversation, the 'relational' element was explored specifically, covering aspects of reflective Flow, contagion of Flow and the relational intuitive dance.

The findings from coaches unearth a depth of human connection between coach and client during Flow that intuitively may have been known but was life-changing to some and may not have been consciously evaluated or reported previously. Rather than merely 'relational' as an element, coaches wanted to capture both the depth and the transcendent nature of the connection, naming it paradoxically 'deep connection/ transcendence above the norm.' For instance, Kiara described experiences of Flow when she and client went into "*a depth, a connection*", beyond the normal human relational connections, within which "*we had some really powerful, lovely experiences that actually ended up being quite life changing for him.*" As Figure 37 reveals, this experience was commonly shared by the coaches almost in energetic or mystical language which they intuitively felt but hadn't necessarily expressed so vividly or openly before. For instance, Chris felt that "*you don't have any higher connection than that...maybe people who are desperately religious do...it's the intense connection. It's an energy field... that's magic, it's a sacred space. Not often in life are you going to get that depth of connection with another person.*"

The deep connection/ transcendence above the norm fell into four areas communicated through energetic references. First, an alchemy of 'we' between people in coaching Flow, beyond chemistry, which Kate described "*You can't have chemistry, it has to be alchemy...humanity and depth.*" This alchemy then allowed a symbiotic, intuitive dance of oneness between two people at "*a very deep level of connection and understanding between us*" (Zara). The intuitive dance of oneness had an energy that was 'positively infectious' such that it "*literally flows into the other person and flows back again*" (Kiara). The energy experienced was "*transformative, out of body, other worldly*" (Zara) manifesting as insights, a-ha or light-bulb moments of clarity and revelation for the client.

Original element	Final element	Co-researchers descriptive examples
Relational	Deep connection / transcendence above the norm	I think that comment that I made earlier about a sense of oneness, I think is part of that deeper human being feeling. So the boundary between who I am and who you are disappears. There is a merging, a mutuality thing going on there. Robert And then we just kind of... go into a depth, a connection. And we had some really powerful, lovely experiences that actually ended up being quite life changing for him. Kiara There were very few words but it felt like a very deep level of connection and understanding between us. Communication of the whole body and resonance of connected energy that went beyond words. Zara
	Alchemy of 'We'	Its definitely a 'we'. We're in it together. You are almost joining. You've connected. Laurence So you mutually create the energy almost. Well its like that chemical reaction. But 'chemistry' for me is too technical a word. I like your 'alchemy'. You couldn't write down the chemical reaction that happens between us and our clients. There is an element of Merlin Magic in there. You can't have chemistry, it has to be alchemy. Humanity and depth, yes. Kate
Intuitive Dance	Intuitive dance of oneness	Its that energy, its that intuitive dance ... It's the real coming together in connection that I feel. Then you're together...that oneness is what I am picturing in my mind, its that whole dance bit. Its like you are just moving round connected, so its almost like a bit of a dance. Laurence It's that deep connection, about being seen. Seeing it, you are seeing it somehow. Congruence is a good word. Susan you're probably beginning to match and mirror what they're doing subconsciously more. Because that's kind of what happens naturally. So then they will feel that more. So I think that you just get into more of a state of rapport as you go into that state. Because you're instinctively starting matching and mirroring what they do. Megan
Reflective, Contagion	Positively infectious between us	I know that flow is coming all the way. The way I am talking about it is about the coach being in flow, but it literally flows into the other person and flows back again. And bouncing around, its something that is a relational thing that happens. Its about a connection and an ease, trust, deep understanding, a willingness by both to be open and vulnerable to whatever extent that moment requires. So it's a kind of interdependency of flow. And a relationship. It's a relational experience too. Kiara
	Insight from transcendent energy	it does feel that me and the other person are part of something bigger than ourselves. I feel more connected then I feel more than who I am. And not in an egotistical way. I've suddenly expanded beyond who I am and I've got this complete limitless reality, then the richness of the experience is so much greater. And the access to the things are so much greater. Robert there is something about 'spiritual' or 'higher plane'...It feels very sacred, which for a non-religious person seems a funny word to use. I was going to use the word special but its more than special. It's a magic, it's a sacred space. Not often in life are you going to get that depth of connection with another person. Very interesting. Chris I think that it can come with flashes of insight, moments. Zara I think the level of insight for clients is really high after those moments. Chris

Figure 37: Deep connection/ transcendence above the norm

As the extended verbatim examples included within Figure 37 demonstrate, descriptions for each of these four areas also reflect a language beyond the normal conversational or dialogic use in transactional coaching. Indeed, Zara mirrored other coaches' nervousness by rather apologetically summarising her use of energetic/ spiritual language as *"that hippy stuff again!"* Could this shared and real experience expressed so clearly by coaches perhaps reveal a potential reticence to share or use this language more openly within a more conservative 'business environment'? These findings and my experience during the CE dialogues intimate a desire and almost hunger to share the language of the experience with others and a relief in understanding that it was so commonly shared.

Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) research, being predominantly individually task-focussed, did not explore relationships in any great detail. However, he did note respondents experiencing a sense of transcendental expansion that was recognised as different to normal life when describing the element 'loss of self-consciousness'. There is nothing in the literature I have found to explain his decision-making criteria in not including this overtly within the experiential elements of Flow. However, the lived experiences of coaches in Flow recognise and describe a deep and transcendental connection with their clients during coaching that they see as above normal and very special. Therefore, I argue that this relational element demands a separate section to recognise the relational significance during coaching conversations versus Csikszentmihalyi's work. My descriptive text of coaches' experiences of 'deep connection/ transcendence above the norm' during Flow in coaching conversations attempts to capture the intent and meaning as follows:

A close and intense connection. Relatedness between myself as the coach and a significant other. There is an honesty and a depth to that connection; beyond chemistry, bordering on alchemy, where our wavelengths synchronise such that 'we' have replaced 'I' and 'they'. We flow together in an intuitive dance - congruent, aligned, mirroring each other's thoughts, feelings and actions. Our Flow is infectious, flowing from one to the other and back again, joining as one energy that transcends and elevates us above the ordinary

and everyday whilst simultaneously pulling our connection deeper still. A shared energy, buzz and aliveness that helps manifest revelation and rich, profound and sometimes even life-changing insight.

5.7 Fully alive with a deep, calm fulfilment

Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) argued that the intrinsic reward from pitching one's skills against a stretching and meaningful activity was experienced by his respondents as a deep sense of enjoyment and satisfaction. Csikszentmihalyi's insight was that "achievement of a goal is important to mark one's performance but is not in itself satisfying. What keeps one going is the experience of acting outside the parameters of worry and boredom: the experience of flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.38).

Coaches in Flow recognised the satisfaction inherent in their work but challenged the word 'enjoyment' for being *"a bit ephemeral...Fulfilment is something that we don't experience that often. Its more than just 'I really enjoyed that'. Its more than that."* (Chris). I had the sense that enjoyment was almost seen as somewhat selfish, as if in coaching it needs to be about the client, or at least alongside the client. Zara, for instance felt that *"it's not all about them and it's not all about me...It's just a deep and such a special...feeling of being fully actualised and fully alive. And that's what true living is"*. What coaches desired was to capture the description of simultaneously feeling both fully alive and with a deep, calm fulfilment. This simultaneously experienced feeling emanated from the special human connection in Flow, summed up by Julia and Robert. Julia felt that *"If you were to, say, describe your emotional state when you're in Flow I would say it's high energy, connected, kind of a buzz...I wouldn't put enjoyment."* Robert agreed whilst also emphasising a sense of humility and appreciation he felt for the deep human connection shared between coach and client. This he experienced as a *"feeling of wellbeing, happiness...and deep contentment...directed to the other person"*. The findings in Figure 38 stand as evidence of coaches lived experience that these two situations were not competing but experienced symbiotically. They were two sides of a positive, fulfilling and

gratifying experience of a shared and deep human connection with another being during Flow in coaching. The table captures these different aspects of feeling fully alive through a shared human intimacy from such *“profound and personal work”* (Sarah) that is intrinsically fulfilling as *“a privilege, a real privilege to work with people in that way”* (Sarah), revealing a calm and peaceful sense of excitement and satisfaction that is *“quiet, controlled but it’s definitely excitement”* (Kiara). Finally, Megan captures the paradox well by describing her positive feelings of *“immense peace actually...and at the same time somewhere between joy, elation and happiness. It’s my happy place.”*

Original element	Final element	Co-researchers descriptive examples
Enjoyment	Fully alive, yet deep, calm fulfilment	I think that, at the core...You're fully living in moment to moment. Zara I have a thrill; I think that is what that excitement is. I find it thrilling but in a relaxed way. Its about being absolutely in a state of excellence for someone else. And when they're gone, its also for me. I feel like wanting to high five someone. Wow, that was fantastic!... you don't even need to ask somebody how was that. There is no doubt in either of your minds that we connected. Kiara in the coaching room, there is a sense of kind of humility that comes with that human connection. An appreciation that this work is not just about me and me being a great coach. I am almost stepping back on an egotistical level. That feeling of wellbeing, happiness really and deep contentment I think comes when I look back on something. That sense is very much directed to the other person. There is a sense of love or connection, there is something quite below the conversational level; something has gone on, I think. Robert
	Shared human intimacy	So if you could take our skin and bones away, on this deeper level of being a human being, we are one human being...we still have our own independence and our separateness, but there's something else underneath, this invisible connection... there is this deeper human being connection. So it feels as though we're communicating as human beings on a deeper human being level. Robert It's intimate. it's an intimate connection in terms of knowing and being with someone else when they are doing some very profound and personal work. Sarah It can be gentle, but for me its more about real emotion, whatever that emotion is. Everyone works really... at a human level... no kind of pretence showing up. Kiara
Do it for it's own sake/ Intrinsic motivation/ want to do it again	Intrinsically fulfilling	And its fulfilling for me, so there is a part of it that comes from the fulfilment of knowing that you are really deeply helping this person to think or to create more awareness or become more self actualised. It's a purposeful, meaningful feeling. Kiara I am happy where I am now, in the sense that I am helping that person achieve those big goals and it does create a sense of growth because the more I as a coach I am able to be in 'flow', the better I am as a coach. Victoria
	Calm, peaceful satisfaction	If we had a magical session and we both came away fulfilled, we would have moved beyond task and issue really. We would have gone into insights beyond that. Enjoyment for me... its more than enjoyment, its calm, its satisfaction, its tranquillity, its peace. Chris There was just a deep gratitude when I walked away from the session, I just felt fantastic. It reminded me why its so humbling to work in this profession. When another human being lets you into their world its humbling. Zoe

Figure 38: Fully alive with a deep, calm fulfilment

Enjoyment in or from Flow in coaching is therefore recognised; however, unlike Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) task-based Flow, the feelings are influenced heavily by the human interplay inherent within the dyadic coaching relationship. Potential feelings of guilt associated

with gaining individual pleasure are acknowledged, and in practice the coaches sensed a much deeper emotional fulfilment than the word 'enjoyment' alone infers. This fulfilment emerges from the deep human intimacy and privilege that is felt within the depth of the relationship formed, the motivation to give back by helping another human and the satisfaction from helping them to achieve. It feels almost altruistic, in that it is experienced as nourishing and enriching at a deeply personal level. It is interesting to note these symbiotic feelings of excitement and being 'alive' and at the same time feeling a 'deep, calm fulfilment'.

Therefore, to try and capture the essence and meaning of this emotion demonstrated in Figure 38 above, I have constructed the following descriptive text:

Feeling fully alive whilst experiencing a peaceful, deep and calm fulfilment. It's an intrinsically fulfilling and satisfying experience to make a real difference. It's why I love coaching. I feel privileged to share in another human being's intimate and meaningful journey of insight and discovery of their best. It's when I feel at my best, alive and I look forward to doing it all again.

5.8 The overall holistic encapsulation of 'oneness'

Coaches' final descriptive element of Flow again alludes to the significance of the relational dynamic within coaching. When all the previous experiential elements were present, all the coaches repeatedly identified a state of 'oneness' between themselves and their client, beyond losing any consciousness of their 'self'. For instance, right from the first CE interview Chris identified the holistic significance of using a circle to demonstrate both the 'oneness' felt and the 'oneness' of the combination of all the elements. Chris succinctly explained that *"if we draw a circle all around these and had two or three things in it that pulls all of these together I think that oneness would be a theme probably across all of them, rather than being a subset of relational or whatever"*. Each subsequent coach identified with the significance of this oneness as something definitive, aligning with Chris's assertion that *"there is a oneness, isn't there?"*

That's where they get the Flow. There's a connection, an understanding, a chemistry, there's a respect, a fun, there's a lack of judgement. That is how I'd define it if I had to now."

The conceptual use of a circle of 'oneness' was not only found to help enclose the mind-map elements but also gave voice repeatedly to the use of a 'bubble' as a metaphor for the experience. For instance, Kate felt strongly that *"for me, my Flow, it's not me. It can't be me by myself. The bubble is our bubble. It's not a part bubble. We felt that we were the bubble."* She continued, reinforcing that *"we are the bubble. There's nothing inside the bubble, and there's no parts to the bubble. We're merged together in bubbleness!"*

Original element	Final element	Co-researchers descriptive examples
	Holistic	its all of these things cubed. This exercise is separating them for me, but then the magic goes, a little bit. All these things are accurate, but for me its them acting together to form this magic. Chris If I'm coaching with this sense of connection, it's not me that's coaching, and it's not you, because there's a oneness, then there's this bond that is allowing things to emerge. Robert So can I still be in flow if I don't feel the connection with somebody or I don't feel presence? I don't know that I could, because they all come together. Connection, presence, meaningful work... yes...for me, they do all need to be there. Sarah An idea of oneness, yes. A holistic experience, absolutely. Wanting flow, that little bit at the top. An activity or experience seems beyond flow, unfolds, absolutely. Yes, all that. Kate
	Oneness Bubble	If I'm coaching with this sense of connection, it's not me that's coaching, and it's not you, because there's a oneness, then there's this bond that is allowing things to emerge. And I've still got my intellect in there. I might still be directing in some ways, or listing or asking questions. So we're not separate on that. It's just on one level, we are connected... It's an overall wrapper or bubble that I'm sitting in Robert I think that oneness is what I am picturing in my mind, its that whole dance bit.. You actually feel like you're in that little bubble with them, which is what makes it so rewarding when you can get into flow. Laurence Its like you've got a whole bubble around you. Megan You know those bubbles that you blow with washing up liquid and they come out slightly wobbly. But they move at all sorts of angles. But it remains intact. And they are slightly iridescent and beautiful. For me, my flow, its not me. It can't be me by myself. The bubble is our bubble. Its not a part bubble. We felt that we were the bubble. But it moved in all sorts of different directions, very gently. Very gently through the air in a very soft way, a very kind way, in a very fluid way. There may have been a couple of questions that I asked but they were still in the integrity of the bubble. Kate

Figure 39: The overall holistic encapsulation of 'oneness'

Figure 39 demonstrates other examples of the significance of the holistic nature of Flow and the 'bubble of oneness' experienced consistently across the coaches. I would argue again that these lived experiences provide evidence for the significant impact that the relational context of the coaching dyad has on coaches' descriptions of Flow. In the Literature Review, I referenced Csikszentmihalyi's (1975; 1990) respondents understanding of both the holistic nature of Flow and the oneness of the experience, even in individual task-focussed activities.

As before, however, he has not highlighted in any text the conceptual use of a circle device to dramatise either the holistic nature of Flow or 'oneness' as a definitive descriptive element. This relationally-based Flow research finding would seem to challenge that omission. The use of the circle to demonstrate the holistic and symbiotic nature of the elements of Flow, and the bubble of 'oneness' analogy to highlight the safety and the depth of human connection created within it, have been fundamental in the coaches' experiences of Flow and in helping them establish a common understanding for the all-encompassing nature of Flow.

Therefore, the findings resulted in the use of the circle to surround and enclose the elements of Flow within a whole and to specifically note it in the descriptions in the conceptual map. Based on the coaches' experiences, I constructed a descriptive text for the overall holistic oneness encapsulating dyadic Flow in coaching conversations that was used to headline the whole conceptual map:

'Once in flow the coaching experience seamlessly unfolds from one moment to another. I am in a subjective state of oneness; connected as one inside a bubble of energy with the other person, the activity and the situation; connecting with something bigger than ourselves. Within the bubble all the separated strands described below synergise as one into a positive holistic experience of Flow; whilst outside, nothing else seems to matter. It goes beyond the idea of being. In Flow the process, the journey, the coaching unfolds effortlessly, flowing as one from one moment to the next.'

5.9 Summary of the diagrammatic development for the concept of Flow in coaching conversations

This section describes the diagrammatic development of the map of Flow. It demonstrates the move from the last CE interview mind-map output through to the final circumplex map with descriptive paragraphs shared with all co-researchers as the common basis of understanding for the next stage of research. The intent of the transition described here was to pragmatically retain as much of the richness and depth of the descriptive language as needed to enable co-

researchers to understand and ‘see themselves’ in the experience, whilst also being understandable as a coherent map of the holistic nature of Flow.

5.10.1 Last Conceptual Encounter interview mind-map output

The final mind-map emerging out of the CE interview process is shown in Figure 40. This map is designed to be a complete picture and a true representation of the co-researchers’ experiences, “broad enough to capture the essence of the phenomenon – to describe how the experience is organised – its structure” (De Rivera, 1981, p.6). However, it is open to challenge as not being “elegant yet simple enough to describe the different aspects of the phenomenon.” (De Rivera, 1981, p.6). My interpretation of this De Rivera challenge was to pragmatically prioritise enough understandability, identity and simplicity for coaches to use the map for its intended purpose in this research over conceptual elegance and simplicity at this stage.

The advantages of mind-maps include being able to capture detail but also demonstrate shape and linkages in a free-flowing diagram which can aid someone who is trying to interpret the phenomenon and apply it to their own experience. The disadvantage is that making sense of the detail demands that each branch element triggers a representative memory in the mind of the interpreter that makes an intuitive coherent sense (Buzan, 2018). As an involved researcher I may readily understand that intuitive coherent sense, but it may not be enough for a wider population to recognise and understand the different aspects of the phenomenon. This was the challenge justifiably presented to me by my supervisory team, and steps taken to address this are explained in the following section.

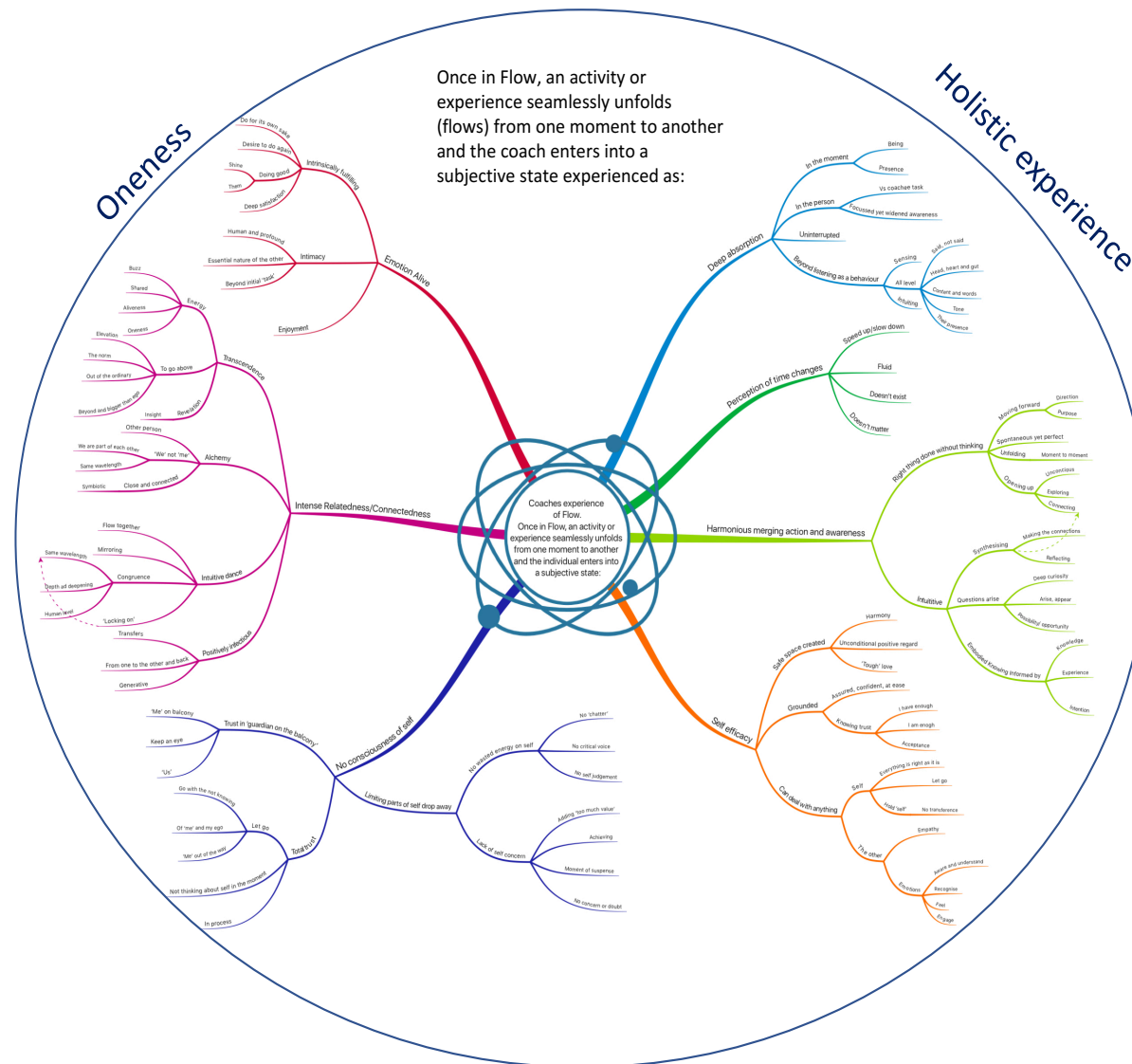


Figure 40: Mindmap outline of dyadic Flow in coaching conversations as an output from the last Conceptual Encounter interview

5.10.2 The intuitive and bumpy creation of a simple and elegant conceptualisation of Flow

Both Conceptual Encounter (De Rivera, 1981) and Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) encourage reflection and intuition to unearth insight and tacit knowing. I shared the challenge with one of the co-researchers, Kate. It was valuable to gain her perspective as one of the first co-researchers to be interviewed. A pattern or structure stood out to her that clustered the elements into three strands (Figure 41): behavioural - 'my being and doing' (time, space, action); cognitive - 'me as coach'; and the emotional relational aspect of 'we or us'. Whilst this insight did not fully solve the challenge, it did open my eyes to the potential that a coach's psychological frame of reference could add a further dimensional aspect to ordering the elements of Flow.

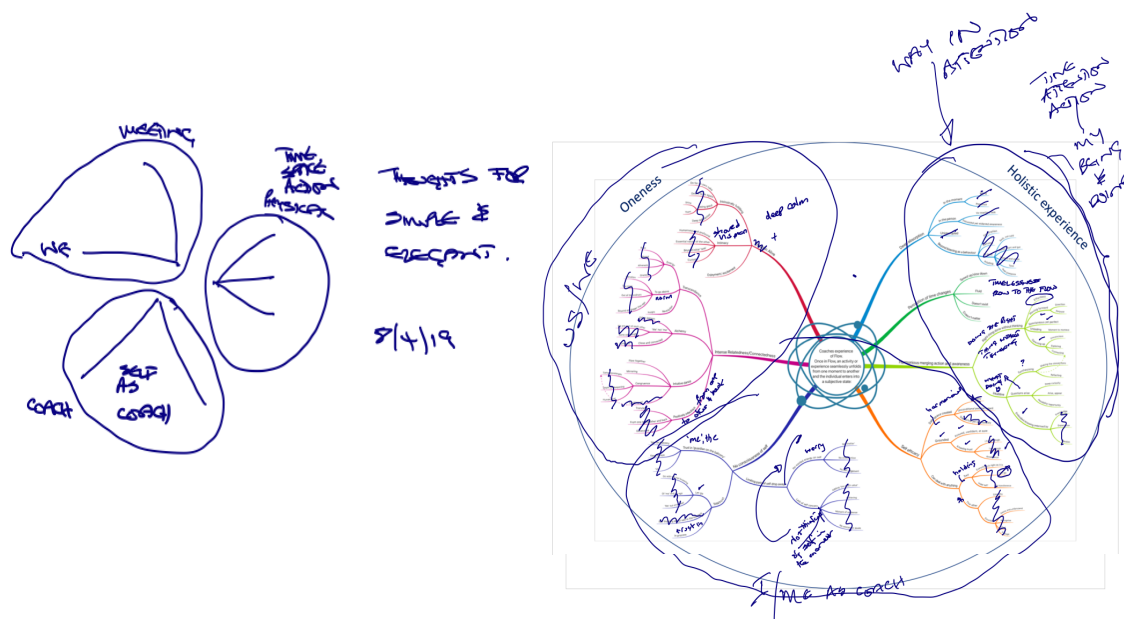


Figure 41: Extract from reflective diary capturing three possible strands of Flow

I grappled with the challenge presented by my supervisory team and by Kate, repeatedly and logically reviewing the maps and summary verbatim descriptions, exploring different ways to

present the information. Whilst reading a book on a bumpy flight to Ireland for a coaching session, a flash of clarity and inspiration came into my head and the rest of the flight disappeared as I tried to capture the idea. Figure 42 below demonstrates a (bumpy) visualisation of the concept, which struck me as simple in that it ordered and categorised the elements intuitively within a simple structure, but also elegant in that the circle device enclosed and captured the truth of wholistic oneness that characterised Flow. Flow in coaching was both described and characterised under each element; yet the diagram also demonstrated that Flow cannot be experienced without all elements being present - there is no break in the circle. This device had appeared and stayed from interview 1 until the end, but now elegantly contained all elements synergistically and was helped by the insight from Kate's higher-level structure.

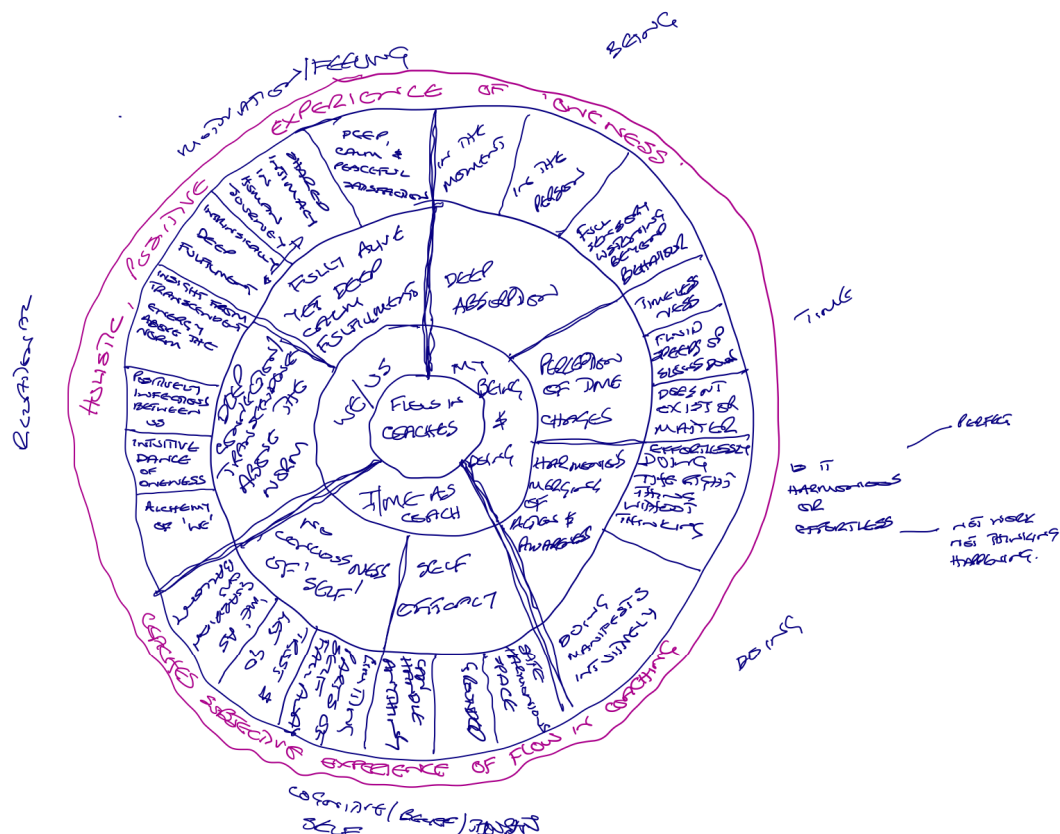


Figure 42: First intuitive conceptual diagram of dyadic Flow in coaching conversations

5.10.3 Final conceptualisation of coaches' description for dyadic Flow within coaching conversations

The final conceptualisation of Flow in a coaching conversation is constructed using five concentric circles to form the hub of the wheel from which all elements flow, creating a 'circumplex' housing all the elements of Flow in coaching. The central circle houses the central subject, coaches in Flow. Four further concentric circles emanate from the centre, detailing finer, more nuanced aspects of Flow within each circle as they move from the centre. Three spokes emanating from the central hub cut through each of the three following concentric circles out to the edge of the circumplex. These spokes divide the circumplex into the three psychological strands of a coach's frame of reference. These three strands of coaches in Flow (behavioural - 'my being and doing', cognitive – 'self as coach' and emotional – 'we/us') are captured within the second concentric circle. The two successive circles contain the elements of Flow identified within the CE analysis findings above.

The first behavioural strand, 'my being and doing' houses three behavioural elements of Flow relating to aspects of action in the coaching session: 'deep absorption', 'perception of time changing' and 'harmonious merging of action and awareness'. The perception of time changing was clustered within 'my being and doing' as it directly related to the paradox of time experienced whilst being and doing in the time-bound coaching session itself.

The second cognitive strand, 'I/me as coach', houses the two elements of how I experience my-self while coaching in Flow: 'self-efficacy' in my belief in my ability to successfully act; and 'no consciousness of self'. These two aspects, when clustered together, present another somewhat paradoxical experience of Flow in coaches. On one hand, I believe that I can handle anything and have created the safe space in which coaching can happen, whilst on the other, 'I' don't exist as I have trusted 'myself' to let go of limiting and self-critical parts of 'my-self'. At the same time, I believe that there is a part of 'me' that is watching everything and ensuring that events proceed well and within time boundaries.

The last strand of Flow in coaching ('we/us') houses the emotional aspects that are arguably unique to the relational dynamic of the duopoly in coaching: 'deep connection / transcendence above the norm'; and 'fully alive, yet deep, calm fulfilment'.

The final concentric circle surrounds the circumplex in an unbroken whole, like a tyre on a wheel. It metaphorically holds all the elements in place and represents the 'holistic positive experience of oneness'. This holistic oneness emerged very strongly in the first interview and changed very little throughout the process. It represents the idea that the experience of Flow cannot exist without the presence of all elements. It captures the unique experience that coaches in Flow recognise and value, best exemplified by Zara: *"what I am taking to the next ten years is...to feel alive and to feel connected and to be in Flow is fundamentally about respecting and loving who you are as a human being and the others around you. And that's what creates great coaching."*

The intent of the CE process has been to identify how coaches describe coaching in Flow so that it could pragmatically be used within the second stage of the research programme. By establishing a common platform for understanding Flow, the intent was to enable the co-researchers to observe any changes they may perceive after experiencing Flow. Flow, by definition, is a subjective experience. Therefore, establishing a common understanding by using the circumplex alone may not achieve its purpose, undermined by each individual's interpretation of the meaning of each of the words captured elegantly within it. For instance, 'doing manifests intuitively' may capture the essence but lays itself open to differences in how each person subjectively makes meaning from it for themselves. Recognising this risk, I included the descriptive paragraph for each element next to its respective element in the circumplex. This was validated within the alignment meeting with each co-researcher at the beginning of Stage 2, when each recognised their own experiences of Flow but could also know, sense and understand others' experiences by reading the descriptive paragraphs. Many later found this helpful during Stage 2 as it helped to heighten their awareness of nuances of Flow that they could subsequently recognise and name.

A conceptualisation of coaches' description of Flow in coaching conversations:

'**Once in flow** the coaching experience seamlessly unfolds from one moment to another. I am in a subjective state of oneness; connected as one inside a bubble of energy with the other person, the activity and the situation; connecting with something bigger than ourselves. Within the bubble all the separated strands described below synergise as one into a positive holistic experience of Flow; whilst outside, nothing else seems to matter. It goes beyond the idea of being; in flow the process, the journey, the coaching unfolds effortlessly, flowing as one from one moment to the next.

Being fully alive yet experiencing a peaceful, deep and calm fulfilment. It's an intrinsically fulfilling and satisfying experience to make a real difference. It's why I love coaching. I feel privileged to share in another human beings intimate and meaningful journey of insight and discovery of their best. It's when I feel at my best, alive and I look forward to doing it all again.

A close and intense connection. Relatedness between myself as the coach and a significant other. There is an honesty and a depth to that connection; beyond chemistry, bordering on alchemy, where our wavelengths synchronise such that 'we' have replaced 'I' and 'they'. We flow together in an intuitive dance - congruent, aligned, mirroring each others thoughts, feelings and actions. Our Flow is infectious, flowing from one to the other and back again, joining as one energy that transcends and elevates us above the ordinary and everyday whilst simultaneously pulling our connection deeper still. A shared energy, buzz and aliveness that helps manifest revelation and rich, profound and sometimes even life-changing insight.

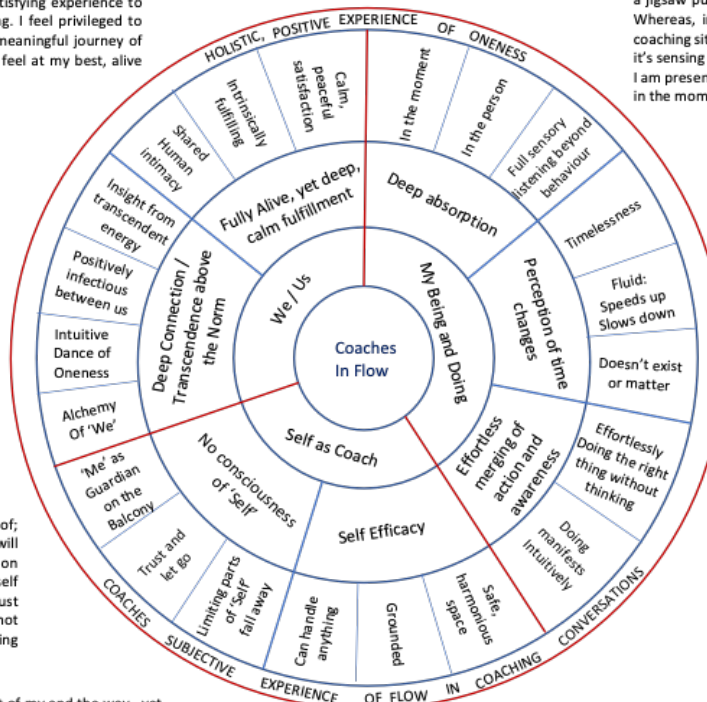
No consciousness of my 'self'. It's a lot of lack of; a lack of self concern. A lack of concern that I will add too much value, I don't waste energy on worrying about my ego, my critical voice or self judgement, the chatter stops. This is the total trust that allows me to let go and go with the not knowing. Getting out of my own way. The limiting parts of my 'self' are put aside and fall away.

Yet there is a paradox here – getting myself out of my and the way, yet knowing that I am still somehow 'here'. As an analogy the 'I' in the coaching action 'on the dance floor' fades away, trusting totally in the process and in the 'me' as the guardian 'on the balcony', keeping a low profile, watching, assuring, protecting. Should I fall from Flow 'I' become aware of my 'self' again and the chatter resumes.

A deep absorption beyond focus; in the person and the coaching situation rather than the coaching task. If I were doing a jigsaw puzzle, the task I am absorbed in is doing the jigsaw. Whereas, in coaching, I am absorbed in the person and the coaching situation that I'm in. My behaviour is beyond listening, it's sensing at all levels opening my awareness to every nuance. I am present in every sense, absorbed in the moment and **being** in the moment, rather than doing.

My perception of time changes. Some say it speeds up, some say it slows down, some say it doesn't matter or exist at all. But it's very fluid.

A synergistic mix or merging of action and awareness, so that I am not thinking about what I'm doing. The activity itself is natural, spontaneous and intuitive, moving forward with a direction and a purpose. It's unfolding from moment to moment, opening up to something worthwhile, exploring, connecting the conscious and the unconscious. Through stepping into their world, I'm intuitively making those connections. My response is intuitive and the questions are intuitive, informed as they are by my knowledge, experience and intention, and a deep curiosity about understanding both limiting beliefs and opportunity. Integrating, synthesising, connecting, unconsciously; it's just happening. This synthesising releases the questions; like a sixth sense, beautiful yet effortless.



A sense of self efficacy. Grounded in an assurance, confidence and ease born of the deep belief that I can deal with anything that comes up, either from myself or the other. I can deal with any emotions that come up; I am aware of them, I understand them, I feel and empathise with them, but I don't get affected by them. I can hold myself and them in a safe space - I have enough, I am enough. I can let go of 'me'.

Figure 43: Circumplex of dyadic Flow in coaching conversations

This chapter has detailed the findings associated with research objective 2: 'To understand what experiences coaches identify as Flow within coaching conversations and how they conceptualise this phenomenon', using Conceptual Encounter methodology. The chapter has outlined the development of each element of the concept building from the initial developmental concept of Flow (Figure 31) through to the final dyadic Flow circumplex (Figure 43). I present this map as my answer to research objective 2. In addition to its intended use as preparation and input for objective 3, I offer these findings as a further new and unique contribution to the development of the body of knowledge about both Flow and coaching.

I recognise that an external reader approaching this circumplex map for the first time may find it somewhat daunting and too complex to be understood easily. I will revisit this challenge again in the Discussion chapter to clarify and simplify this in a way that is appropriate for a new audience. However, at this stage, positive feedback from my co-researchers indicated that Figure 43 achieved my stated aim of being 'good enough' to be understandable and useful for them. All the co-researchers used the circumplex as a basis of common understanding of the Flow experience from which they could identify any changes they may perceive after it. It is to the findings concerning these perceived changes that I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Findings: changes coaches perceive after experiencing Flow

This chapter details the findings associated with research objective 3: To explore the nature and meaning of changes coaches perceive associated with experiencing Flow, using Heuristic Inquiry methodology. To paraphrase John Dewey (1913), as “we do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience”, the findings outlined in this chapter are about what has changed since coaches reflected on their experiences of Flow. As outlined in the Methodology chapter, a period of six months between briefing all co-researchers and data collection was chosen to allow any changes perceived by the coaches to become more manifest.

Guided by HI methodology (Moustakas, 1990), the findings outline both the nature of the changes that coaches perceived after Flow and the meanings they construed from those experiences. The lens of each individual's frame of reference was used to capture the five emergent themes: thoughts, feelings, behaviours, relational connection and meaning of change. Figure 44, below, summarises both the emergent themes and their respective sub-themes that will constitute the findings within this chapter. Consistent with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989), the nature of the changes that coaches perceived after Flow emerged through the five themes of coaches' thoughts, beliefs, motivations, feelings and actions. The final theme, meaning attributed to change, emerged from the data related to the meaning coaches made of the changes. The findings in this chapter raise important aspects of Flow and its positive impact on coaches' self-construct, in terms of self-efficacy beliefs, motivation and intent, self-confidence and self-esteem, and the agentic influence of the self as an instrument (Bachkirova, 2016) of Flow in coaching.

Thoughts	Feelings	Behaviours	Relationship Connections	Meaning of change
Positive change in self-efficacy	Lingering positive affect, increases in self...	The coach as agenic instrument of Flow in coaching	Individual efficacy to relational efficacy and collective agency	
Coaches perceive that they are at their best when coaching in Flow.	Positive changes in self-confidence	Understanding and taking care of myself as 'an instrument'	Connection as deep and powerful	Flow as a catalyst for my growth and development
Because coaches perceive that they are at their best in Flow, they became motivated to want to be in Flow more often.	Paradox of feeling both alive and brave whilst also calm and peaceful	Preparing <i>my-self</i> for coaching rather than preparing for coaching	Connection as real, human and intimate	Focussing my coaching through the lens of Flow
Because coaches desire to be in Flow more often, they report increased motivation to explore and capability to find ways to be in Flow more often, even when it's sometimes difficult.	Positive change in self-esteem	Focussing on presence and opening-up to the other person as a precursor for Flow during coaching	Flow changing nature and effectiveness of the connection – at the heart of transformation	Agency - It is in my hands/ I have a choice/ I can be the conduit of Flow
Coaches change in their self-efficacy means that they report being more confident and capable to handle whatever comes up during coaching.	Feelings help recognise the distinction of being in or out of Flow	Becoming braver and asking deep questions during coaching		Flow and excellence - I am at my best in Flow so orientate myself towards it
Coaches recognise that they have agency as 'catalysts' for Flow through the choices they have available and, in their control, to make		Self-reflecting after coaching through the lens of Flow		In Flow I am truly alive and connected to others

Figure 44: Summary of the nature and meaning of coaches perceived changes after Flow

Sub-themes for each thought, feeling, behaviour, connection and meaning will be elaborated using verbatim examples of co-researchers' lived experiences in two ways. Firstly, excerpts of coaches' voices are used within the main body of text as examples to support the emergent themes. Secondly, Appendix i includes tables of more complete examples of lived experiences for reference. My intent is to help practising coaches 'see themselves' vicariously in these examples and so bring the experience more fully alive for them (Bandura, 2011).

HI methodology recognises that my experience and involvement is both valid and important

to the whole discovery journey. Therefore, it is included in the development of the emergent themes. In this chapter, however, I intend to include only those personal reflections and experiences I believe either add new perspective to or challenge other coaches' reflections throughout. Where this is so, I have attempted to make my thinking clear, but have been guided as ever by the research question itself and my desire to underpin any findings by honouring and using co-researchers' voices as evidence.

Bandura (1989) asserted that, whilst we as individuals remain the agent of our thoughts, feelings and behaviours, they work interdependently, influencing each other to create meaning and action. The findings in Figure 44 should therefore not be evaluated as a logical, step-wise causal chain of influence. That would constitute "an abbreviated statement of convenience, rather than a conferral of agency" (Bandura, 1997, p.7). What the findings do represent, however, are the consistent emergent themes of thoughts, beliefs, feelings, behaviours and meaning attributed to the changes coaches perceive after Flow. Findings for each theme will now be explored, beginning with the first: changes in thoughts and beliefs after Flow.

6.1 Theme 1: Changes in thoughts and beliefs after Flow

Five sub-themes constitute the findings for theme 1: change in coaches' thoughts and beliefs. The five sub-themes, shown in Figure 45 below, are: 'at my best in Flow'; 'wanting more Flow'; 'intention to find ways into Flow'; 'capable to handle whatever comes up'; and 'being a catalyst for Flow in coaching'.

Thoughts	Feelings	Behaviours	Relationship Connections	Meaning of change
Positive change in self-efficacy	Lingering positive affect, increases in self...	The coach as agenic instrument of Flow in coaching	Individual efficacy to relational efficacy and collective agency	
Coaches perceive that they are at their best when coaching in Flow.	Positive changes in self-confidence	Understanding and taking care of myself as 'an instrument'	Connection as deep and powerful	Flow as a catalyst for my growth and development
Because coaches perceive that they are at their best in Flow, they became motivated to want to be in Flow more often.	Paradox of feeling both alive and brave whilst also calm and peaceful	Preparing <i>my-self</i> for coaching rather than preparing for coaching	Connection as real, human and intimate	Focussing my coaching through the lens of Flow
Because coaches desire to be in Flow more often, they report increased motivation to explore and capability to find ways to be in Flow more often, even when it's sometimes difficult.	Positive change in self-esteem	Focussing on presence and opening-up to the other person as a precursor for Flow during coaching	Flow changing nature and effectiveness of the connection – at the heart of transformation	Agency - It is in my hands/ I have a choice/ I can be the conduit of Flow
Coaches change in their self-efficacy means that they report being more confident and capable to handle whatever comes up during coaching.	Feelings help recognise the distinction of being in or out of Flow	Becoming braver and asking deep questions during coaching		Flow and excellence - I am at my best in Flow so orientate myself towards it
Coaches recognise that they have agency as 'catalysts' for Flow through the choices they have available and, in their control, to make		Self-reflecting after coaching through the lens of Flow		In Flow I am truly alive and connected to others

Figure 45: Summary of perceived changes in thoughts and beliefs after Flow

6.1.1 At my best in Flow

Flow theory suggests that in Flow “the individual operates at full capacity” (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p.90) and is at their best. The coaches’ lived experiences appear to provide consistent evidence of this in the context of coaching. For instance, Robert thought *“that one of the helpful things that this has done, as ever with focussed reflection...is shining a light on the experience in the coaching room. It shows me...that...I am at my best when I*

have this experience” and believed that Flow was “*a signifier of being at our best, for me bringing my full self into what I’m doing...I’m at my best and useful to my client.*” Victoria likewise explained that she could “*now see that being in Flow is me being the best I can be as a coach for myself and my coachee.*” Kiara, a very experienced Master Coach herself, described her experiences of Flow as “*like witnessing a masterpiece or something. There is something about excellence of a beautiful masterpiece...That is when I experience Flow and truly touch the excellence I crave...for a moment you have just touched what it is to create and be excellent*”. I find it difficult to find a better expression than Kiara’s for summarising the excitement and wonder when connecting with the excellence of being at one’s best.

6.1.2 Wanting more Flow

Once coaches had recognised that they appeared to be at their best in Flow, it seems logical to assume that they would want to be in that state more often. For instance, Kiara acknowledged that experiencing Flow led to the “*inevitable consequence of making me want to be in Flow more frequently.*” Robert agreed, believing “*then that is how I want to be most of the time, rather than a bit of the time*” and Victoria recognised that now “*I want to be more often in Flow.*” These lived experiences appear to show a change in motivation to be in Flow more often.

6.1.3 Intention to explore ways into Flow

This increased motivation appears to have led to changes in both the intention and persistence to explore ways into Flow and the willingness to persevere, even in the face of difficulties. For instance, Robert once again reinforced that “*it makes me want to develop the attitudes and the practice that allows that state to be felt more frequently and possibly for longer.*” Even when things did not go as planned, the motivation to persevere meant that Chris, felt that “*if I had a couple of sessions where I tried this and it didn’t really work terribly well, that’s fine. I’d just think ‘oh that’s interesting, what have I learned from that?’ Rather than ‘oh my God, I’m a*

terrible coach’.” Sarah similarly explained that *“it’s as if Flow and reflecting on it has helped everything come together. Increasing my self-awareness both as a person and as a coach in Flow has allowed me to become somewhat more sophisticated.”*

6.1.4 Capable to handle whatever comes up

Zara expressed many coaches’ beliefs about letting go of expectations, reporting *“self-efficacy in coming back to the grounded-ness and rootedness. The constraints, the ‘should’ constraints fall away when you do that process”*. Sarah concurred, emphasising how important this was for her self-image and her belief in her capability to be enough, whatever happens. She described:

“trusting myself, actually really letting go of any preconceived ideas of this is what we will do, or this is where I need to take this client or whatever... just trusting that being absolutely in the moment is going to be the right thing; it will be enough. And that’s what I have been doing. More and more...I have noticed is that I am more confident in my coaching capability. I am more confident that I can handle whatever comes up...I think I can handle anything.”

Indeed, Chris highlighted that *“You know that you’re moving now to quite a high level of coaching and so being confident enough that...if you’ve put all the conditions in place and you’re in the zone and it doesn’t happen and you don’t see the Northern Lights, that’s fine, I can live with that. It doesn’t make me a bad coach.”*

In addition to mastery experiences, Bandura (2011) considered any reduction in perceived emotional threat of rejection as a further source of increased self-efficacy. Perceived reduction in coaches’ inability to manage coaching issues, reported here, appear to align with this. These findings also appear consistent with the descriptive Flow theme reported earlier in Chapter 4.

6.1.5 Being a catalyst for Flow in coaching

Many of the coaches had the final understanding that they not only had choices but could make a conscious choice to pull the levers that would help create Flow and thereby help their coaching outcomes. This finding proved very empowering once they recognised that the levers were in their control. Sarah, for example recognised that *“I know and trust that the more present I am, the more Flow will happen”* and Victoria that *“it’s something I believe I can achieve in every session that I want it to”*. To Chris, it was a revelation that he not only had choice, but that it was very personal, focussing on his attitude. He revealed that:

“If I look at the system, the only thing in the system that had changed actually was my attitude. They hadn’t changed. They presented in the same way. But there was a mind-set for me that thought ‘right OK, you have a choice here... a conscious choice to say you can choose to be bored for the next hour and half or you can choose to be a bit more engaged. What are you going to choose?’”

These insights and their influence are perhaps best summed up by Laurence recognising that *“I am a conduit of that Flow and the realisation that it is achievable has completely changed how I now enter coaching sessions”*.

6.1.6 Summary of changes in coaches’ thoughts and beliefs

Bandura, (2011, p.9) argued that the biggest cause of growth in self-efficacy was “mastery experiences”, like Flow experiences. Perceived self-efficacy may be defined as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organise and execute courses of action [including the motivational and cognitive resources] required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p.3).

Evidence from coaches’ lived experiences above, supported by the extended examples shown in Appendix i, appear to indicate that coaches identify themselves at their best whilst in Flow. Flow theory suggests that in Flow “the individual operates at full capacity” (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p.90) and are at their best. Alongside this, the four additional findings

appear to combine to indicate positive change in coach self-efficacy beliefs after experiencing Flow consistent with “the core belief, that one has the power to effect changes by one’s actions” (Bandura, 2011, p.8). These findings also appear to align with existing knowledge from other helping relationship contexts such as teaching (Bakker, 2005; Salanova *et al.*, 2006; Rodriguez-Sanchez, 2011) that affirm the link between Flow and self-efficacy. As self-efficacy is context specific in nature (Bandura, 2011), emergent data within the findings in this report, building upon the earlier coaching literature (McBride, 2013; Wesson, 2010), seem to add evidence for an extension beyond teaching and into the new context of coaching.

6.2 Theme 2: Changes in feelings after Flow

When people judge their capabilities, they rely partly on bodily somatic information conveyed by emotional and affective states. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009) reported that “individuals often express positive affect at the end of a flow experience or when a flow experience is remembered.” Four sub-themes appear to affirm and build on this to indicate a lingering positive affect long after the experience of Flow. The four sub-themes constituting the findings for theme 2, changes in coaches’ feelings, are shown in Figure 46 below as: ‘self-confidence and assurance’; ‘feeling brave and fully alive whilst also calm and peaceful’; ‘self-esteem’; and, finally, ‘feelings helping to distinguish between being in and out of Flow’.

Thoughts	Feelings	Behaviours	Relationship Connections	Meaning of change
Positive change in self-efficacy	Lingering positive affect, increases in self...	The coach as agenic instrument of Flow in coaching	Individual efficacy to relational efficacy and collective agency	
Coaches perceive that they are at their best when coaching in Flow.	Positive changes in self-confidence	Understanding and taking care of myself as 'an instrument'	Connection as deep and powerful	Flow as a catalyst for my growth and development
Because coaches perceive that they are at their best in Flow, they became motivated to want to be in Flow more often.	Paradox of feeling both alive and brave whilst also calm and peaceful	Preparing <i>my-self</i> for coaching rather than preparing for coaching	Connection as real, human and intimate	Focussing my coaching through the lens of Flow
Because coaches desire to be in Flow more often, they report increased motivation to explore and capability to find ways to be in Flow more often, even when it's sometimes difficult.	Positive change in self-esteem	Focussing on presence and opening-up to the other person as a precursor for Flow during coaching	Flow changing nature and effectiveness of the connection – at the heart of transformation	Agency - It is in my hands/ I have a choice/ I can be the conduit of Flow
Coaches change in their self-efficacy means that they report being more confident and capable to handle whatever comes up during coaching.	Feelings help recognise the distinction of being in or out of Flow	Becoming braver and asking deep questions during coaching		Flow and excellence - I am at my best in Flow so orientate myself towards it
Coaches recognise that they have agency as 'catalysts' for Flow through the choices they have available and, in their control, to make		Self-reflecting after coaching through the lens of Flow		In Flow I am truly alive and connected to others

Figure 46: Summary of perceived changes in feelings after Flow

6.2.1 Positive changes in self-confidence and self-assurance

Coaches consistently reported a growth in their confidence in themselves and in their coaching. For instance, Kate described it as “*a quiet confidence*”, Megan noted “*it gives me confidence*” and Kiara that “*there is constant growth in confidence and acceptance of myself*”, demonstrating some alignment to the theme. To most, this confidence meant an increase in self-assurance. Kate felt that her confidence meant that “*I no longer needed to check myself as much...that critical voice on my shoulder that used to question me has changed to enabling and encouraging me*”. Megan’s confidence meant that she could “*throw away all the books now that pop into my head...I trust in the fact that what I’ve got is enough*.” Finally, Kiara felt

assured that she was indeed *“the person who is in the right place at the right time to be offering support...comfortable to go wherever it goes and I will go there as well, or if I can't go there I will say so”*.

6.2.2 Feeling both fully alive and brave whilst also calm and peaceful

Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p.3) argued that when we feel in control of our actions in Flow, we feel a sense of exhilaration and deep enjoyment. Coaches in these findings recognised that these feelings of exhilaration seemed to linger beyond Flow events during coaching conversations, but it was paradoxically also associated with a deep sense of peace and calm. For instance, Zara captured this paradox well, reporting that *“it's a sort of peace, a feeling of being fully alive and fully present...Flow is really what it feels like to be alive”*, whilst Kiara summarised it as a *“quiet power...sort of joyful. Satisfied. Powerful in the sense of having achieved something. It's a quiet power...with a sense of ease.”* These feelings for some combined to make some coaches feel braver, enabling them to take more chances or ask deeper and richer questions. Victoria, for instance, relayed that whilst *“I have more energy...more capacity...more clarity and more confidence...everything is a stretch...and I'm braver because of that.”* And Chris emphasised *“having the courage and confidence to try different things, different approaches and different questions...and learn and get better on that journey.”*

6.2.3 Positive changes in feelings of self-esteem

Coaches' reports of enhanced self-esteem included feelings of being centred, of trusting themselves and being their 'true me', and feelings of satisfaction. Megan talked of feeling *“calm and centred...of being very whole and complete, totally congruent and in the service of somebody else within the coaching context...feeling like I had been true to me...totally everything I could be, unfettered.”* Similarly, Chris noticed how he is now *“trusting I'm a good coach. It's very satisfying as a coach...and it's very exciting.”* Sarah concurred, noticing that

“it was so satisfying. I got that real inner satisfaction. And more pleasure and more contentment from the work that I do. And more gratitude I suppose”, which to her meant that she felt more comfortable and brave enough to work with a complete range of clients, including those with title or status that she had previously found daunting.

6.2.4 Feelings helping to distinguish being in and out of Flow

Feelings coaches use to recognise the differences between being in or out of Flow appear consistent with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) channel model of Flow. Whilst feelings associated with being in Flow are predominantly positive in nature, not being in Flow is more negatively characterised by feelings of anxiety or boredom. For instance, Megan recognised being in Flow as *“zero stress...that it does feel very...complete. It's a feeling for me, it just feels really good. It just feels really natural...there's just no effort”,* that to many, like Victoria, was *“a huge relief”*. Extended examples of coaches' lived experiences of the differences are included in Figure 47, below, to further highlight the distinction coaches were able to notice.

Positive feelings recognising being IN Flow	Negative feelings recognising being OUT of Flow
Chris: So being in the zone is driven by rapport with the person, meaningful and important things to talk about, full on collaborative discussion, not just a Q&A, high support and high challenge, liking the person, the person having done some thinking before the session and developing something useful during the session. Kiara: I'm a very kinaesthetic sort of person. So, hairs on the back of your neck standing up is probably the closest I can get. Kiara: Just a total sense of ease I would say. No performance anxiety, no sense of my-self at all. Just a knowing, a quiet knowing that I am here, doing my best and we will get somewhere. Yes, it's an absence of self-talk, and absence of almost conscious thought really. Apart from occasional conscious pauses where you go hang on a minute, maybe we could do this now. Everything is just available to me. Sarah: the good ones where you do have flow stand out... it was so satisfying. I got that real inner satisfaction. And more pleasure and more contentment from the work that I do. And the more gratitude I suppose. At the end it was like wow ... they went wow and I went wow Laurence: Whereas when you come out of a flow session, you are like 'Whoa, that was good!' You don't even need to ask because they feel like it was powerful, and you know it was powerful.	Chris: Not being in the zone is driven by being bored, being uninspired by the person or the issue, going round the track on the issue and thinking that we are stuck here just going round in circles and share of voice dominated by the client so no or lack of proper engagement by the client. Kiara: I've become very aware of how others determine my flow state. It's very dependent on the other person's reaction. Even at this point in my life and my career. Kiara: When you're not in flow it's felt really unfulfilling... And the impact of that on me is loss of confidence. Kiara: Then the stress response kicks in, your mind closes down, I couldn't think very well... that's the anxiety end ... yeah! I became a clumsier version of myself. And I felt really rubbish about myself by the time I left there. Kiara: I have been bored on occasions, yes ... Bored with the fact that I've been doing this so many times ... bored with the feeling that somebody else could do this better now. Phew! Some of them I hope that they will cancel. Kiara: So, it's felt really unfulfilling. And the impact of that on me is loss of confidence, doubting myself, self-talk saying, "oh maybe you are tired of this, maybe you've done it for too long, maybe you're losing your edge, read something else or study something else, find out more, you are going stale". Kiara: I am not in flow with that client because my own insecurities kick in there as well. And I start measuring myself against how good a coach I am or might be against somebody who is right up there in terms of their business profile. And that definitely...that's the anxiety end ... yeah! I became a clumsier version of myself. Sarah: I think its notable by the absence. When I didn't have flow moments with the client, the connection between us and the connection between the sessions was much weaker. And so that was the opposite of when I did have flow moments and I am conscious of those... the connection between flow moments is much stronger. Laurence: I am thinking of an example where I wasn't in flow, or it didn't feel like it. It was more transactional. I'm a nightmare anyway with being bored, but I was like 'God, we still have another ten minutes!' Laurence: If you're thinking I'm nervous or I hope that they're not judging me, then you feel a bit inadequate. And then you behave in a nervous way. Suddenly you realise, oh my God, this is clunky. It's not not going well, it's just not there.

Figure 47: Extended examples of coach's feelings associated with being in or out of Flow

It seemed that, for many of the coaches, being able to distinguish the difference and put it into words for the first time became a catalyst for further development. For example, Kiara felt that:

"it has really focussed my attention on what it feels like to be in Flow...it's a growing awareness [which has] made me uncomfortably aware of how often I'm not in Flow... And rather than thinking 'oh I must do something to get in Flow', I think that I must stop

doing the things that aren't singing to me...It was the dawning realisation about the effect my choices have on my sense of self-worth and excellence which was the key to enable me to finally unlock this in myself".

This somatic feedback was received and used in different ways by coaches both during Flow and for personal development. For Kiara, this realisation and insight associated with the feeling of being in or out of Flow was transformational for her self-development, *"even at this point in my life and career"* as a very experienced Master coach. For some coaches, like Megan, her desire to stay in Flow during coaching sessions prompted her to become stressed when not doing so. She criticised herself for not being in Flow as it meant that *"the coaching sessions would be clunky, and I felt frustrated to find it difficult to get into Flow."* It is interesting to note that, for Megan, this *"maybe was...the beginning of actually noticing,"* in turn helping her to refocus on what she had learnt to get back into Flow. Sarah, however, recognised a reduction in her self-criticism, noticing instead that *"I am not beating myself up about that... it's almost that sort of acceptance has increased"*. Others, however had turned the negative frustration into a positive, learning to use the disruption to Flow as interesting information for furthering their coaching practice. Robert, for instance recognised that:

"something might be said or happens...it might be an attitude, or something might come across from my client...that slightly disrupts that Flow state. That break in Flow is sometimes some extra intelligence that tells me there is something important to focus on with the client that I might not pick up whilst I am in Flow. And it's a fairly new experience actually, as it relates to Flow".

This new experience for Robert was a new learning for me. Before becoming aware of this finding, my feelings and experiences had aligned more with both Megan and Sarah. I enjoyed the positive feelings associated with both being in Flow during coaching and the lingering positive feelings afterwards. I would associate falling out of Flow with feelings of boredom and consequential self-criticism or blame, representing some sort of personal inadequacy.

Changing my mindset to one of curiosity about the inevitable disruptions in Flow during my coaching sessions enabled feelings of calmness and bravery, and I used these insights to either check the coaching contract, deepen the coaching relationship or take the insights into supervision for deeper exploration.

6.2.5 Summary of changes in coaches' feelings

These four findings appear to indicate a lingering positive affect, evidenced through increases in self-confidence, self-assurance and self-esteem. This seems to affirm McBride's (2013) and Wesson's (2010) findings and aligns with teacher's reports of increased competence and confidence (Salanova *et al*, 2006). The findings seem to suggest that, like teachers, coaches' self-efficacy was a "powerful resource to build positive experiences [Flow] at work... [and that] feeling competent in the present seems to predict being in flow in the future" (Salanova *et al*, 2006, p.16). Evidence also emerged that coaches could use the somatic experience of Flow to recognise and reflect on the differences they experience when in or out of Flow. This insight, and the intentional use some coaches made from this in their coaching, has not been found in other the helping relationship Flow literature and may indicate an additional new insight. The awareness of Flow and the difference it made seemed to be the catalyst coaches needed for change.

6.3 Theme 3: Changes in behaviour after Flow

Bachkirova (2016, p.143) coined a useful metaphor when exploring the use of the self of the coach beyond merely the application of knowledge, by referring to the agentic application of the self as "the main instrument of coaching." Bachkirova (2016) proposed three main ways to best use the self as the main instrument for coaching: first, to understand yourself as an instrument; second, to look after yourself as an instrument; and finally, to ensure that you fine-tune your instrument to help ensure its quality and sensitivity. I had those in mind when the five sub-themes constituting the findings for the theme of behaviour change emerged from the

data. As shown in Figure 48 below, these sub-themes are: 'understanding and taking care of myself as an instrument'; 'preparing my-self for coaching'; 'discovering ways into Flow during coaching'; 'bravery in asking the questions during coaching'; and 'self-reflecting through the lens of Flow after coaching'.

Thoughts	Feelings	Behaviours	Relationship Connections	Meaning of change
Positive change in self-efficacy	Lingering positive affect, increases in self...	The coach as agenic instrument of Flow in coaching	Individual efficacy to relational efficacy and collective agency	
Coaches perceive that they are at their best when coaching in Flow.	Positive changes in self-confidence	Understanding and taking care of myself as 'an instrument'	Connection as deep and powerful	Flow as a catalyst for my growth and development
Because coaches perceive that they are at their best in Flow, they became motivated to want to be in Flow more often.	Paradox of feeling both alive and brave whilst also calm and peaceful	Preparing <i>my-self</i> for coaching rather than preparing for coaching	Connection as real, human and intimate	Focussing my coaching through the lens of Flow
Because coaches desire to be in Flow more often, they report increased motivation to explore and capability to find ways to be in Flow more often, even when it's sometimes difficult.	Positive change in self-esteem	Focussing on presence and opening-up to the other person as a precursor for Flow during coaching	Flow changing nature and effectiveness of the connection – at the heart of transformation	Agency - It is in my hands/ I have a choice/ I can be the conduit of Flow
Coaches change in their self-efficacy means that they report being more confident and capable to handle whatever comes up during coaching.	Feelings help recognise the distinction of being in or out of Flow	Becoming braver and asking deep questions during coaching		Flow and excellence - I am at my best in Flow so orientate myself towards it
Coaches recognise that they have agency as 'catalysts' for Flow through the choices they have available and, in their control, to make		Self-reflecting after coaching through the lens of Flow		In Flow I am truly alive and connected to others

Figure 48: Summary of perceived changes in behaviour after Flow

6.3.1 Understanding and taking care of myself as an instrument

Once coaches became aware of Flow and the effect their choices were having on the quality of Flow and on themselves, they intentionally took action to look after themselves through the choices they made.

It is interesting to note that these examples appear to demonstrate Bachkirova's (2016) themes of understanding and care but individual coaches chose very different courses of action in response. For example, Zara observed *"more of a shift onto how we look after ourselves, how do we honour ourselves, how do we demonstrate love through our actions?"*. She understood the energy of Flow and how her body, mindset and feelings both influenced and were influenced by the energy of it. She chose to focus on self-care, to *"honour ourselves"*, as she said, in deep physical, mental, emotional and spiritually energetic ways, for example *"it's body hygiene in the sense of looking after the body physically and mental hygiene. Just calming the system down...if I am feeling anxious"*.

Alternatively, it was Kiara's *"dawning realisation"* about the negative impact some of her client choices were having on her mindset and feelings of self-worth that led to her *"finally [be able to] unlock this for myself...divesting myself of all but cherry-picked work...choosing more carefully, which I have started to do, who I am going to coach."* To honour herself she chose clients that she felt most likely to be in Flow with. This recognition that she had the power to take action in order to care for herself as an instrument altered her reality as a coach and this action was *"a big and important thing to do"*, something which she confessed she had grappled with for many years.

6.3.2 Preparing my-self for coaching

The motivation to be in Flow again and the difference it made seem to have prompted a change in the way coaches habitually prepare for coaching. As Chris noticed, *"it's that realisation that to be in Flow, you've got to be in a quiet mind, single focus mind, receptive."*

He recognised that he *“would plan slightly differently now for a session...15 minutes before a session I will shut the PC, reflect on my client notes, or just be quiet and get ready for the space. Because previously, I’d have been doing emails right up until he arrived.”* Similarly, Laurence felt that *“I prepare myself personally for the session rather than preparing for the session...as we are a conduit of that Flow [I spend] my fifteen minutes getting into Flow rather than reading the notes.”* Kate, however, would still look over her notes, but acknowledged that they *“are probably less now than I might have taken in the past. But then that’s the end of it. It’s a refresher, not a ‘so what might happen in this session?’.”*

What the coaches seem to be describing is a refocus away from preparing for the coaching session *per se* and onto preparing *them-selves* for coaching. This change recognised an intention to foster Flow, signifying a change in how they see themselves. Victoria saw herself going into *“a session and aiming to reach Flow state, using the techniques that I’ve worked on now”* and Chris’s intention was to *“go in with a higher expectation of being able to achieve Flow.”* Indeed, for Kate, her *“emergent confidence [about myself as coach] means that I see myself as a catalyst for Flow. Just the fact of you being you, having the capacity to create a space, a bubble, an environment or whatever, where Flow happens...that is...magical and...quite an empowering thing, I think”.*

The coaches seeing themselves as conduits or catalysts for Flow seems to suggest an influential agentic capacity, almost as if, using Bachkirova’s (2016) metaphor, they are preparing *themselves* as ‘instruments for Flow in coaching’.

6.3.3 Discovering ways into Flow during coaching

Having the intention to be in Flow as often as possible during coaching is, by definition, not the same as actually getting into Flow. Coaches discovered the conditions they felt necessary to encourage Flow through their reflections on their Flow experiences over time. They all appear to emphasise the key role that ‘presence’ plays. Robert, for example, believed that *“presence has been my fundamental focus for practice as Flow appears almost an effect of*

being present...I refocus on being present as I believe this gives me the best chance to return to Flow". Chris agreed, reporting that "I firmly believe that the probability of Flow occurring in my coaching is proportional to the quality of presence I have."

Whilst the term 'presence' occurred repeatedly in coaches' lived experiences, what it meant and what was needed to enter Flow varied by individual. For instance, Victoria appeared quite clear that *"the 'be' is very clear in my mind now... Be in the room, be present, be completely in sync, be in incredibly active listening mode, non-judgemental, unconditional positive regard, just be... That then allows Flow to flow"*. However, Chris felt that *"presence for me happens when I am brave enough to just let go and be. Truly trusting that I am enough...it's letting go and just trusting that that's what will happen."* Sarah aligned with the importance of presence and trusting herself as being enough for Flow, stating that:

"Just trusting that being fully present, being absolutely in the moment is going to be the right thing; it will be enough...trusting myself, really letting go of any preconceived ideas or outcome expectations of myself...that's what I have been doing more and more. It's led to more effective coaching and more instances of Flow."

Whilst presence appears to be key, the data from coaches' lived experiences above appears to indicate that this alone may not be enough for Flow. Megan encapsulated many of these feelings when sharing that:

"I think that the difference in Flow for me is that you're listening while being completely open in yourself. That's more than presence. It's about listening and being present and aware of your client... [but] for me to get into a Flow state, the extra step is me opening up".

It appears that coaches recognised the importance of presence with their client. However, the data also seems to indicate a 'fine tuning of the self as an instrument of Flow in coaching in order to enter Flow. Beyond presence alone, Flow also seems to require coaches to trust

themselves to 'let go' and 'open themselves up' to the moment and the client. As many of these elements also appeared within the first descriptive element of 'deep absorption' when describing Flow in chapter 4, there appear to be parallels between the two.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) identified that in order to enter Flow, the challenge in the task must be enough to fully absorb the person, such that they focus on it to the exclusion of all else. In coaching, it could be assumed that this is most likely to be the challenge presented by the client, but this can be questioned based on the findings presented here. It appears that to enter and use Flow the coach needs to re-focus on the challenge of being present with, and opening up to, the client to the exclusion of almost all else. I argue that this could align with the ICF (2017) explanation of presence at Master coach level to show that the "connection is to the whole of who client is, how the client learns, what the client has to teach the coach".

6.3.4 Bravery in asking the questions during coaching

Another aspect related to fine-tuning the quality and sensitivity of the coach as instrument emerged from the confident, positive feelings and self-efficacy beliefs reported earlier. As a consequence of reflecting on feeling fully alive and brave during Flow, coaches discovered that they became even more willing to ask the deeper, more penetrating and vulnerable human questions the next time around. As an example, Kate expressed that *"I'm probably braver at suggesting them because intuitively, it's the right thing to offer to the client. When I say I'm braver, I would have offered them before, but I probably would have offered them with an apology."* Likewise, Laurence proudly reported that he had *"asked one of the questions which I think was a result of Flow...I was pleased that I was quite brave to ask powerful questions but do it on a deeper level"*.

These were questions which could help to get below the surface of a client issue, but some coaches had previously felt daunted by the prospect of asking them. As Kiara beautifully stated *"It may start about the red shoes, but it's never really ends about the red shoes."* Or as Megan

shared *"I just go 'stop thinking, start listening, trust and go with it. However weird you think the thing is that you are about to say, just say it.' And just go with it."*

For some, this bravery enabled them, in their view, to become more challenging in their quest towards insight and, in Chris's case, away from boredom. Chris began to realise that his coaching *"was driven by being more challenging, by having a braver conversation with them. Interesting. So, it was me, it was me being prepared to say that 'I notice you've come to sessions without having done much preparation'. So being brave and a bit more challenging. And that has moved them. And made for much more interesting conversations as well."* He gained courage to ask *"the right and bigger questions."*

As well as asking the 'braver' questions, some coaches reported that feeling braver meant they felt more willing to take risks in their coaching. Here, for example, Sarah shared that she was *"putting myself in more as a coach. I am far more willing to take risks in team coaching ... being able to confront more, to be more assertive or more adventurous in the risks that I'll take."* Interestingly, she also shared that the more risks she took, the more able she felt to take them, and her fear of risk diminished, indicating a developmental aspect of change over time.

6.3.5 Self-reflecting through the lens of Flow after coaching

The last finding relates to reflective actions that followed coaching sessions. Dewey (1913) recognised that learning manifests through reflection on an experience rather than through the experience itself. As Laurence said, *"we don't do enough"* reflecting, as we move quickly from one client appointment to the next, scribbling a few notes down if we are lucky. All the coaches, to a greater or lesser extent, reported that reflecting on themselves and their coaching through the lens of Flow was both powerful and of real benefit in their development. Robert emphatically stated that for him *"the biggest impact is simply reflecting on Flow ... to have almost the privilege to reflect on Flow after the event has been great."* He went on to explain the change, sharing that:

“reviewing what has happened in a coaching session was a standard practice, looking for post-coaching insights as well. But to focus specifically on Flow and what’s been going on in the room is new. And that in itself is helpful...shining a light on the experience in the coaching room. It shows me...that...I am at my best when I have this experience. It helps me unpack what contributes to that experience.”

Zara built on this idea of unpacking Flow experiences, explaining that she reflects on:

“those trademark behaviours that we have as us at our best, what is it that we need to do moment-to-moment to have more of those kinds of peak experiences... and use that energy? So, it has formed me and my life, sort of day to day.”

If we accept Dewey’s (1913) assertion as having some substance, and we align it with Bachkirova’s (2016, p.145) call that “the focus on the self and reflexivity of the coach is the next step in coach development, enabling coaches to create their own unique style of practice and to be authentic in their role of a coach”; then this might logically lead us to conclude that being self-reflexive by looking at ourselves as instruments through the lens of the Flow experience has the potential to form this next step in development.

6.3.6 Summary of changes in coaches behaviour

These five findings about coaches’ behaviour change appear to indicate both an agentic aspect, with coaches able to intentionally influence Flow, and a developmental aspect, previously seen in coaching (Wesson, 2010) and in teaching (Wilhelmsen, 2013; Grafanaki *et al.*, 2007; Bakker, 2005; Delle Fave and Massimini, 2003).

First, examples above appear to show evidence for coaches seeing themselves as conduits or catalysts for Flow. As Bandura (2011, p.6) argued that self-agency involves the “power to originate one’s actions intentionally for a given purpose”, these examples do seem to indicate an agentic use of the self as coach. For instance, Chris recounted that after his Flow experiences he is now *“trying to put in place consciously the conditions for Flow. So, trying to*

stimulate it. Trying to lead them towards that position of Flow and that engagement which they need to get there." The data seems to align with self-agency and seems to have the potential to build on the metaphor of the coach as the 'instrument of coaching' (Bachkirova, 2016) to include the coach 'as the instrument for Flow in coaching'. Whilst Chris also recognised that *"it's not perfectly guaranteed all the time...it's not like a chemical reaction where you add this and that and the other and kaboom!"*, Bandura (2011) argued that it is the intentional action rather than the outcome that makes it agentic.

Secondly, the data supports Delle Fave and Massimini's (2003, p.338) assertion that "selective cultivation (of Flow activities) provides the individual with increasingly higher challenges and skill refinement, fostering personal growth and development." The examples of coach growth and development above seem to align with this, as coaches successively discovered, chose and applied different ways to look after, prepare, apply and reflect on themselves. As Sarah said *"It's as if Flow and reflecting on it has helped everything come together. Increasing my self-awareness both as a person and as a coach in Flow has allowed me to become somewhat more sophisticated."*

6.4 Theme 4: Changes in the relational connection between coach and client

Three sub-themes constitute the findings for theme 4: change in the relational connection between coach and client. The three sub-themes shown in Figure 49 below demonstrate: firstly, that coaches experienced a connection with their clients that had depth, honesty and humanity, and that this, secondly, fostered intimacy and trust that, lastly, many appeared to report as transformative for both participants. Whilst they may be seen as nuanced aspects of the same finding, coaches' lived experiences did appear to highlight and emphasise the different nuances of each element and these have therefore been included as separate entities.

Thoughts	Feelings	Behaviours	Relationship Connections	Meaning of change
Positive change in self-efficacy	Lingering positive affect, increases in self...	The coach as agenic instrument of Flow in coaching	Individual efficacy to relational efficacy and collective agency	
Coaches perceive that they are at their best when coaching in Flow.	Positive changes in self-confidence	Understanding and taking care of myself as 'an instrument'	Connection as deep and powerful	Flow as a catalyst for my growth and development
Because coaches perceive that they are at their best in Flow, they became motivated to want to be in Flow more often.	Paradox of feeling both alive and brave whilst also calm and peaceful	Preparing <i>my-self</i> for coaching rather than preparing for coaching	Connection as real, human and intimate	Focussing my coaching through the lens of Flow
Because coaches desire to be in Flow more often, they report increased motivation to explore and capability to find ways to be in Flow more often, even when it's sometimes difficult.	Positive change in self-esteem	Focussing on presence and opening-up to the other person as a precursor for Flow during coaching	Flow changing nature and effectiveness of the connection – at the heart of transformation	Agency - It is in my hands/ I have a choice/ I can be the conduit of Flow
Coaches change in their self-efficacy means that they report being more confident and capable to handle whatever comes up during coaching.	Feelings help recognise the distinction of being in or out of Flow	Becoming braver and asking deep questions during coaching		Flow and excellence - I am at my best in Flow so orientate myself towards it
Coaches recognise that they have agency as 'catalysts' for Flow through the choices they have available and, in their control, to make		Self-reflecting after coaching through the lens of Flow		In Flow I am truly alive and connected to others

Figure 49: Summary of perceived changes in relational connection after Flow

6.4.1 Deep connection

Coaches reported better connections between themselves and their clients, moved to a deeper and more powerful level through their experiences of Flow. Sarah reflected that “[In Flow moments] *it did really feel as though we easily and quickly connected... The more Flow moments I have, the better the connection across the whole assignment and the better connection overall.*” And Chris similarly shared that “*digging down a couple of levels...that is when I think you get into Flow, when you move away from the surface*”. Consistent with previous findings, coaches’ intentions towards developing Flow and deep connection were

similar. However, the ways they each ‘played their instrument’, to stretch the metaphor further, in the development of the connection were as different as the uniquely complex frames of reference of each coach and client.

Zara experienced the connection with her client energetically, consistent with her individual relationship with Flow, sharing that *“you experience the conversation within your body, and you can share that experience of the conversation and matter mirror each other to get a deeper understanding and a deeper connection between you and the other person.”* She went on to reference the connection as the real success in coaching whereas *“coaching is just a vehicle, isn’t it? The physicality of the experiences Flow and connectedness to human beings is absolutely fundamental...I think that those are the things that I have really learned...success is about being in Flow and being connected to other human beings. That is richness, that’s depth. That’s full experience. And that to me is success.”*

Whilst other coaches’ experiences may not have been as somatically energetic in nature, they all referenced a deepening or a going below the surface of the issue during Flow. Victoria for instance felt that whilst *“the choice is not just mine alone...I feel confident that when the trust is there and when they start to let go, when they go deeper, I can be at a higher Flow state. And they start to really flourish.”* This deepening they described went to a level which was perceived as powerful for both, with the difference dramatised more when Flow was absent. Sarah again explained this well, reporting that *“I think that connection piece is really important...when I have Flow moments, it helps that connection hugely. I notice that a lot more. I think its notable by the absence. When I didn’t have Flow moments with the client, the connection between us was much weaker.”*

It was interesting to me to notice the continuation of the metaphor of ‘the dance’ used within the CE findings. For instance, Zara shared that the connection *“was really powerful. It was the dance of the conversation”*, and Laurence used it to emphasise that *“If you can get that connection first, then it’s a lot easier to do the dance... You’re in that dance...you know you*

don't need to worry about it."

6.4.2 Connection as real, human and personal

For the coaches, depth seemed to be characterised by the humanity of the connection experienced when exploring personal and 'real' issues together in a trusting and safe environment. For instance, for Kiara *"it feels like really meaningful work. It's challenging work, it's fun work. We have great rapport but in addition to that there is this kind of achievement in it too... It's playing to my strengths. I'm in it, I'm lost in it, it matters to me. I think it's all that."*

Sarah emphasised the intimacy and trust in such a personal discussion referencing that there was *"Trust, so much trust there. It was very deep...it covered a lot of personal stuff but in a way that was productive"*. Kiara emphasis was more personal, explaining that the coaching state of Flow and connection *"tends to come about when there's a really deep either emotional or complex issue that's being presented...that then kind of triggers my Flow."*

6.4.3 Flow changing nature and effectiveness of the connection

Coaches reported both personal and relational ways in which changes in the connection may be perceived as transformational. On the personal level, Kate found a genuine and truthful authenticity in the connection that, with her self-assurance and confidence from the 'gift' of Flow in coaching, meant that she felt free of constraint and able to feel and be truly 'enough.' On the relational level, Chris underlined that *"the Flow experience was transforming the conversation...it became a real, expanded conversation"* for both coach and client.

Building on the relational level, Robert noticed that *"hooking into or being able to understand or be sensitive to the client's Flow state is important as well... you can sometimes notice when a client is in and out of Flow."* Robert used his ability to somatically notice these subtle changes in the connection for the benefit and effectiveness of his coaching, sharing his learning that those *"dissonances or interruptions to that Flow can be really useful information about myself, my client or our mutual coaching relationship that I can choose to use to help. I recognise that*

I may not have highlighted these insights had we still been in Flow.” This self-insight and use of him-self as an intentional instrument of coaching during the coaching conversation seems to indicate a significant level of sophistication and understanding. This seemed to allow Robert to pragmatically and “strategically act in different ways according to changing situations” (Bachkirova, 2021, p.7) for himself, his client and the coaching relationship.

6.4.4 Summary of changes in the relational connection between coach and client

The research was set within the context of the coaching dyadic relationship. As such, these findings further evidence and strengthen the importance that the relationship plays in coaching success (De Haan and Gannon, 2017) and add new knowledge about the positive influence Flow can have on that connection. As the connection between coach and client in Flow deepens the level of trust and humanity, allowing to clients feel safe enough to discuss really personal and meaningful issues, it follows that that they may consider these conversations as transformational at a human level.

This was found to be of profound importance for all the coaches. As Laurence asserted *“Nowadays, whatever anyone says, the human connection is one of the most important things in the world...when you are in Flow it comes... That’s more important than the tools.”* These experiences seem to resonate with the concept of moral agency (Bandura, 2001, p.9), using its proactive self-regulatory power to behave humanely, creating meaningful work through “stretching personal standards of merit...progressively as knowledge and competencies are expanded and challenges are met.” It also appears to have some consistency with the Flow channel model and the need for increased complexity in order to find Flow and meaning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Furthermore, the data seemed to suggest a change away from individual to more relational efficacy (Bandura, 2011), and an emergence of collective agency (Bandura, 2001) in the coaching conversation. Whilst this may appear to be consistent with social constructivism in joint coaching success, existing literature about collective agency within the coaching context

appears thin and this topic may be worthy of future exploration.

6.5 Theme 5: Meaning attributed to change

Finally, coaches reported five different expressions for the importance and meaning they attribute to their changes after Flow. These five sub-themes, shown in Figure 44, constitute the findings for the last theme, 'meaning of change'. They are: 'Flow signifies me at my best'; 'Flow as a focus'; 'agent for Flow'; 'Flow as a catalyst for growth and development'; and 'Flow as connection with others'. As these five findings represent different aspects of the coach's perceptions of importance and meaning, it should be noted that some were mentioned by each coach, some coaches mentioned more than one, whilst others, due to the high regard and significance they may have held for an earlier finding, repeated it again here. Heuristic Inquiry, using self-inquiry and dialogue with others, is a methodology designed to help find the underlying meaning of important human experiences (Sultan, 2019, p.14). It may therefore be acknowledged that these findings are in line with HI methodology (Moustakas, 1990).

Thoughts	Feelings	Behaviours	Relationship Connections	Meaning of change
Positive change in self-efficacy	Lingering positive affect, increases in self...	The coach as agenic instrument of Flow in coaching	Individual efficacy to relational efficacy and collective agency	
Coaches perceive that they are at their best when coaching in Flow.	Positive changes in self-confidence	Understanding and taking care of myself as 'an instrument'	Connection as deep and powerful	Flow as a catalyst for my growth and development
Because coaches perceive that they are at their best in Flow, they became motivated to want to be in Flow more often.	Paradox of feeling both alive and brave whilst also calm and peaceful	Preparing <i>my-self</i> for coaching rather than preparing for coaching	Connection as real, human and intimate	Focussing my coaching through the lens of Flow
Because coaches desire to be in Flow more often, they report increased motivation to explore and capability to find ways to be in Flow more often, even when it's sometimes difficult.	Positive change in self-esteem	Focussing on presence and opening-up to the other person as a precursor for Flow during coaching	Flow changing nature and effectiveness of the connection – at the heart of transformation	Agency - It is in my hands/ I have a choice/ I can be the conduit of Flow
Coaches change in their self-efficacy means that they report being more confident and capable to handle whatever comes up during coaching.	Feelings help recognise the distinction of being in or out of Flow	Becoming braver and asking deep questions during coaching		Flow and excellence - I am at my best in Flow so orientate myself towards it
Coaches recognise that they have agency as 'catalysts' for Flow through the choices they have available and, in their control, to make		Self-reflecting after coaching through the lens of Flow		In Flow I am truly alive and connected to others

Figure 50: Summary meaning of perceived changes after Flow

6.5.1 Flow signifies me at my best

Perceiving myself at my best in Flow is one example of a previous finding, from the theme of thoughts, that all coaches held in such high regard and importance that it was repeated here.

As Victoria shared, *“reaching Flow state is just being the best that you can be as a coach... I feel privileged to be aware of myself as a coach in Flow. Privileged to know that being in Flow is the biggest benefit I can offer my coachee to help them flourish.”* This recognition meant that many, like Robert, saw Flow itself as *“a signifier of being at our best.”* Indeed, the significance Robert placed on this finding is clear when he shared that he knew that *“I have*

aligned my life right – because I am experiencing Flow.”

The data suggests that once coaches recognise themselves at their best in Flow, these recognitions became a catalyst for both self-efficacy change and for many of the other changes that followed. Summating so many rich examples, like Kiara describing her-self at her best in Flow as having *“just touched what it is to create and be excellent”*, may help to explain why so many coaches took this as their ultimate meaning from their Flow experiences.

6.5.2 Flow as a focus

This finding builds on the behaviour change of reflecting through the lens of Flow, described earlier. Chris explained that he felt it worthy of repetition here because looking at his coaching through the lens of Flow was, for him, like taking *“the blinkers off myself as a coach”*. This reflects the significant difference that becoming aware of Flow and then reflecting on it made for Chris, which was supported by other coaches and recognised as different from their normal habitual reflection on the coaching session itself. For instance, for Kate it meant that *“awareness of Flow is actually a magical thing for me”*. Laurence felt that it had *“heightened my awareness of my interaction with others and the impact I am having on them. Being in Flow is way better, ten times better”* and Sarah underlined the importance of awareness, sharing that *“this has been a special experience once I became aware of it and could recognise it – both Flow itself and afterwards”*.

Coaches also highlighted the importance they placed on having a language to describe Flow. The language they refer to came from the Flow circumplex and its descriptive text reported earlier in Chapter 4. Sarah explained it well:

“recognising that the concept of Flow ... I wouldn’t have necessarily felt it or know what to call it. But by bringing it into focus and giving it a language, it’s been able to cement it for me as a wow!...Having the language to recognise and discuss Flow has been very helpful for me to reflect against... I am now able to recognise them, conceptualise

them and reflect on them more than I was doing without it. It resonates with me more now."

6.5.3 Agent for Flow

Earlier in this chapter, coaches highlighted changes in their beliefs about their capacity to influence or create the conditions for Flow. We also saw this feed through into coaches' behaviour change, in that they chose to put in place actions before, during and after coaching that could intentionally induce Flow. When coaches synergised these changes, they seemed to emerge with a strong sense of agency and self-determination in their coaching through Flow, seeing themselves as "*a conduit of that Flow*" (Laurence) or "*a catalyst for Flow*" (Kate). This seemed so powerful and important to some that it emerged again here as a finding. For instance, Chris felt that "*that's the discovery, I think...it's an appreciation that all those levers [for Flow]...that have made a difference...are in your control actually... My performance and growth is in my hands... I have a choice.*" Laurence agreed, enlightened to an extent by what he could bring as himself to the coaching, explaining that "*Sometimes we try and think that it's not about us, but I think it is. We bring 50% of that coaching.*"

Bandura (2011) posited that we are agentic operators in our life course and that our thought processes exert determinative influence over us and the choices we make, concluding that our efficacy beliefs are a major basis for our action and self-determination. The examples from these coaches appear to agree, as captured quite definitively by Victoria when she stated that now "*I actively want to seek a Flow state...it's something I believe I can achieve in every session that I want to.*" These lived experiences of coaches acting with a "full sense of volition and choice", seem to demonstrate both the agency and self-determination (Bandura, 2011; Deci and Ryan, 2008, p.14) recognised as important in achieving "efficacious outcomes in coaching" (Kemp, 2017, p.392).

6.5.4 Flow as a catalyst for growth and development

All the coaches recognised that their Flow experiences had, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced their growth and development over the six months. Victoria, for example, shared that her *“experiences of Flow in coaching has meant an acceleration of personal growth as a coach”* whilst Laurence described his journey of growth as *“the Flow experience, definitely... I am learning more. It is raising my awareness. And again, we are going up, and I am staying up.”*

Whilst all recognised the link between Flow and personal growth, the language and extent to which coaches described the strength of the link varied. Sarah, for instance, tentatively shared that *“whilst it is very hard to ascribe changes directly to Flow, I can see that in some ways it has been a validation and a consolidation of much of the personal development work I have been engaged in over the years”*. Alternatively, Chris felt that *“Flow has been the catalyst or lens through which I have been able to reflect and grow...if I look at my development as a coach over the last six months, it would be the highest it’s been since my first six months of learning to be a coach.”* Likewise, Laurence described his Flow experiences as *“like souped-up learning, development and performance for both myself and my coaching”*.

Regular Flow reflective practice seems to help enhance the awareness of the nuance of Flow and growth. For instance, Sarah did recognise at the end of the six months that *“It’s as if Flow and reflecting on it has helped everything come together... Flow is not only a positive coaching experience in itself but also is both a facilitator and synergiser that seems to open you up to wider growth and development beyond coaching alone.”* Kiara highlighted the importance of maintaining awareness: *“I think it’s stayed in my conscious awareness. How could it not? We’ve brought it into conscious awareness in having these conversations”*. Others who engaged in regular monthly Flow reflective practice described it as *“a synergistic feedback loop and a virtuous loop”* (Chris) or *“incremental systematic reflection on Flow”* (Victoria), and seemed even more nuanced in their use of Flow as a catalyst for growth. Chris for instance,

felt that he could now “*work at a different level. You know, I’m having to think about it much more, I’m having to use a greater percentage of my capability and skills and so on, but I can do this. So, it’s that, it’s a blossoming, blossoming*”. Victoria underlined this blossoming, adding that:

“By continuing to review my sessions [through Flow] I can recognise this and will need to re-challenge myself again about what I can improve to create presence and Flow – as I did at the beginning of the journey. It will be an ongoing journey of reflection and discovery through Flow and that is something that will help me stay at my best and move closer towards mastery...systematic reflection on Flow will hopefully mean that I don’t stagnate and will always be growing...[I am] excited to know that Flow will be a guide to challenge and stimulate me to refine and grow myself and my practice.”

These examples seem to demonstrate that experiencing Flow had an effect on coaches’ perceptions of their growth and development, whether they engaged in reflective practice over the six months or not. However, the data seems to suggest that those engaging in regular reflective practice using Flow as a lens on their coaching gained a more nuanced and clearer understanding of Flow and any consequential effects perceived after it.

6.5.5 Flow as connection with others

When episodes of Flow, in these cases coaching sessions, are over, Csikszentmihalyi (2014) claimed that people feel more ‘together’ than before Flow. Importantly for coaching relationships and the findings in this report, he explained that this ‘together’ is not just experienced internally but also by other people and shared with the wider world. The changes coaches experienced in their coaching relationships after Flow arguably show this ‘togetherness.’

However, whilst it was experienced by most as part of the nature of change, for Zara it meant much more. For her, ultimate success in coaching was in the connection itself. In the earlier

finding on connection, she passionately believed that *“the physicality of the Flow experiences and connectedness to human beings is absolutely fundamental.”* It was from this that all else made sense for her as a coach. For instance, Zara explained, *“the biggest take away for me is, if we are to advocate transformational working, transformational thinking and how we can all become better...then we need to change the nature of how we work together”*. The connection created in Flow allowed her-self and especially her clients *“to go deeper into their whole body thinking and provided a more playful and creative thinking space”* that transformed the dialogue and the way she worked. This went to the very heart of her-self, her work, identity and feelings of fulfilment and worth; so much so, that she finished with a wider explanation and a plea:

“what I am taking to the next ten years is...to feel alive, connected and in Flow is fundamentally about respecting and loving who you are as a human being and the others around you. And that’s what creates great coaching. If we change some of the indicators of what makes us human, what makes us happy, what builds efficacy and Flow within some of those measures, hopefully this study will bring it more to the fore in the field of coaching. Connection through Flow [would be] a success measure.”
(Zara)

These findings get to the heart of a question I sought to answer, the ‘so what?’ of Flow, and constitute new knowledge relating to the positive difference Flow experiences are perceived to make. I contend that this combination of meanings forms a motivating rationale for a wider discussion and debate about Flow in coaching and its inclusion in the wider vernacular and practice. As Kate said, *“It’s something else that actually can be a moment of magic...we would talk about Johari Window, we would talk about presence...So why not talk about Flow?”*

6.6 Summary of the nature and meaning of coaches' perceived changes after Flow

This chapter has detailed the findings associated with exploring the nature and meaning of changes coaches perceive associated with experiencing Flow, using Heuristic Inquiry methodology. The purpose of the chapter was discovery and as a pragmatist, to answer the 'so what?' of Flow: what difference might it make, especially for my work context as a practicing coach? Guided by HI methodology, the findings (Figure 44) outline both the nature of the changes coaches perceive after Flow and the meanings they construe from those experiences (Moustakas, 1990). Given the existing paucity of current empirical knowledge to help answer this objective, I offer these findings as a further new and unique contribution to the development of the body of knowledge about both Flow and coaching.

Consistent with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989), the nature of the change emerged through coaches' thoughts, beliefs, motivations, feelings and actions. Bandura (1989) asserted that whilst we, as individuals, remain the agent of our thoughts, feelings and behaviours, they work interdependently, influencing each other to create meaning and action. The findings in Figure 44 should therefore not be evaluated as a logical, step-wise causal chain of influence. That would constitute "an abbreviated statement of convenience, rather than a conferral of agency" (Bandura, 1997, p.7). What the findings do represent, however, are the consistent emergent themes of the changes coaches perceived in their thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behaviours after Flow.

Findings appear to indicate that coaches do indeed perceive positive change after Flow, and that these changes are experienced across their frames of reference. That was not a given and, I contend, is in itself significant. Csikszentmihalyi (1975, p. 36) referred to Flow as "the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement" which, according to the phenomenology of intrinsic motivation, is by definition enjoyed in and for itself rather for any gain or achievement. In other words, for a climber, getting to the top is the excuse for Flow

in the climb; in this research, coaching is just the vehicle and the excuse for the experience of Flow. The meaning of the changes appears, however, to underpin and enhance the ongoing personal fulfilment and purpose coaches gain from their coaching practice.

Whilst there does appear to be consistency with observations from other helping professions across many aspects of Flow, the relational context of the coaching relationship has unearthed new knowledge. Figure 51 below attempts to capture and summarise either the affirmation or extension of the body of knowledge relating to Flow, specifically within coaching.

Existing knowledge	Reference	Affirmed / Extended into coaching	New in coaching context
Self-efficacy as an antecedent of Flow	Rodriguez-Sanchez, Salanova, Cifre & Schaufeli (2011)	Increased self-efficacy beliefs extended to include coaching context	Flow signifies me at my best Wanting more Flow Intention to find ways into Flow Capability to handle anything Self as Catalyst/Conduit for Flow
Lingering positive affect	McBride (2013); Wesson (2010)	Affirmed in coaching long after experiencing Flow	
Increase in Self/ Self competence/ self-confidence/ self-efficacy	McBride (2013); Rodriguez-Sanchez, Salanova, Cifre & Schaufeli (2011); Wesson (2010); Grafanaki, Brennan, Holmes, Tang & Alvarez, (2007), Salanova, Baller & Llorens (2006); Bakker (2005); Delle-Fave and Massimini (2003)	Increases experienced in Self-confidence Self-assurance Self-esteem in coaching builds on McBride (2013) and Wesson (2010)	Feeling brave and fully alive whilst also calm and peaceful Feelings help to distinguish between being IN and OUT of Flow
Growth	Wilhelmsen (2013); Wesson (2010); Grafanaki, Brennan, Holmes, Tang & Alvarez, (2007); Bakker (2005); Delle-Fave & Massimini (2003)	Affirms Wesson (2010) initial supposition	Flow as a focus for reflection and learning (to understand self as instrument) Agency – my growth is in my hands Flow as catalyst for growth and development
Contagion of Flow	Bakker (2005)		I am an instrument for Flow in coaching Flow as deep, human and transformational connection of 'oneness' with client
Virtuous spiral/ circle of Flow and Growth (Increase in personal and organisational resources now and in the future)	Rodriguez-Sanchez, Salanova, Cifre & Schaufeli (2011); Salanova, Bakker & Llorens (2006)	Upward spiral of growth after Flow	Growth from Flow works through the interdependent influence of change in thoughts, feelings, behaviour
Coach as the instrument of coaching	Bachkirova (2016)	Coach as instrument of Flow in coaching	Agency – coach has a major influence in the relationship
			Selective cultivation of activities to get into Flow : understand, care for and fine-tune the instrument
			Flow as catalyst for growth

Figure 51: Summary of knowledge base as affirmation or extension after HI research findings

Finally, whilst affirming changes in aspects of self (increased efficacy, confidence, assurance and esteem), these findings help clarify what those expressions actually mean within this context. For instance, recognising myself at my best as a coach when in Flow was a major

influence on self-efficacy and confidence, and triggered many of the other changes in motivation and behaviour I have already observed or expect in the future. Bachkirova (2016, p.145) advocated that the “role of the self of the coach [as an instrument of coaching] is about expression of the coach’s self with all its complexity and uniqueness within a model of practice that is congruent with this self.”

For me, the findings seem to combine to indicate a significant agentic role for the coach in coaching which is newly apparent. The findings appear to highlight the significance of the coach as an instrument of Flow in coaching, for themselves and for their client, through the deep, human and transformative connection formed between them. These findings point to the agency of the coach to understand, look after and care for themselves as an instrument of Flow both before and during coaching and, finally, the importance of fine-tuning the quality and sensitivity of themselves as an instrument through regular self-reflective practice through the lens of Flow. These practices seem to synergise to promote growth and development for coaches, increasing their effectiveness and performance and deepening fulfilment for a coach making a real difference in the world.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings emerging from the changes coaches perceived in the context of existing knowledge. The principal aim of this study was to explore the ‘so what?’ of Flow. In order to create a common basis of understanding from which to evaluate the ‘so what?’ of Flow, the experience of Flow in coaching was first described and mapped. Having established a credible common platform for understanding and recognising Flow, coaches were able to share the changes they perceived after having the experience themselves. This knowledge is summarised below in Figure 52. Split into three columns, it highlights four core themes, including the creative synthesis, and forms the basis for this chapter’s structure and discussion. The first column demonstrates the existing knowledge base relating to the themes identified within the Literature Review. The second demonstrates how this research either affirms existing coaching knowledge or extends knowledge from other contexts into coaching. The third column highlights new knowledge in the coaching context, emphasising the specifics of the coaching relationship and Flow.

The first three themes are: ‘the deep, human and transformational connection between coach and client in Flow’; ‘Flow as a catalyst of change’; and ‘the agentic use of the self as an instrument of Flow in coaching’. In line with HI methodology, the final theme encompasses my creative synthesis of the changes perceived after Flow. Each theme will be discussed, highlighting how and where it fits into and extends the existing understanding of Flow and coaching knowledge.

Existing knowledge	Affirmed / Extended into coaching	New in coaching context
Deep, human and transformational connection between coach and client in Flow		
Contagion of Flow (Bakker, 2005; 2008)		Flow as deep, human and transformational connection of 'oneness' with client Self as Catalyst/Conduit for Flow
Bring self into relationship (Bachkirova, 2016) Presence (Noon, 2017)	Presence and opening up to client	Willingness to bring 'self' into the relationship – vulnerability, genuineness and trust
Flow as a catalyst of change		
Lingering positive affect (Fredrickson, 2004; McBride (2013); Wesson (2010)	Affirmed in coaching long after experiencing Flow	Feelings help to distinguish between being IN and OUT of Flow
Increase in Self/ Self competence/ self-confidence/ self-efficacy (McBride (2013); Rodriguez-Sanchez, Salanova, Cifre & Schaufeli (2011); Wesson (2010); Grafanaki, Brennan, Holmes, Tang & Alvarez, (2007), Salanova, Baller & Llorens (2006); Bakker (2005); Delle-Fave and Massimini (2003)	Increases experienced in Self-confidence Self-assurance Self-esteem in coaching builds on McBride (2013) and Wesson (2010)	Feeling brave and fully alive whilst also calm and peaceful Fulfilment beyond enjoyment
Self-efficacy as an antecedent of Flow (Rodriguez-Sanchez, Salanova, Cifre & Schaufeli, 2011)	Increased self-efficacy beliefs extended to include coaching context	Flow signifies me at my best Wanting more Flow Intention to find ways into Flow Capability to handle anything Self as Catalyst/Conduit for Flow
Virtuous spiral/ circle of Flow and Self-efficacy (Increase in personal and organisational resources now and in the future) (Rodriguez-Sanchez, Salanova, Cifre & Schaufeli (2011); Salanova, Bakker & Llorens (2006)	Upward spiral of self-efficacy and Flow	Upward spiral of self-efficacy, agency and Flow conducive with Growth. Growth after Flow works through the interdependent influence of change in thoughts, feelings, behaviour
Agentic use of the self as an instrument of Flow in coaching		
Coach as the instrument of coaching (Bachkirova (2016)	Coach as instrument of Flow in coaching	Agency – coach has a major influence in the relationship
Bandura agency		Selective cultivation of activities to get into Flow : understand, care for and fine-tune the instrument
Creative synthesis – Flow spiral of growth		
Growth (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, 2009; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Wilhelmsen (2013); Wesson (2010); Grafanaki, Brennan, Holmes, Tang & Alvarez, (2007); Bakker (2005); Delle-Fave & Massimini (2003)	Affirms Wesson (2010) initial supposition of growth	Flow as a focus for reflection and learning (to understand self as instrument) Agency – my growth is in my hands Upward spiral of self-efficacy, agency and Flow conducive with Growth. Growth after Flow works through the interdependent influence of change in thoughts, feelings, behaviour

Figure 52: Summary of findings extending current Flow and coaching knowledge

7.1 Deep, human and transformational relational connection formed in Flow

The importance of the coaching relationship is well established in coaching literature (Watts, Bor and Florence, 2021; De Haan and Gannon, 2017; Du Toit, 2014; De Haan *et al.*, 2013), as is the importance of the self of the coach (O'Broin and Palmer, 2010) as being instrumental in that relationship (Bachkirova, 2016). Flow literature also recognises how Flow positively influences individual self-esteem and self-efficacy (Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.*, 2011). Findings in this study indicate the formation of a deep, human and transformative connection between coach and client during Flow that subsequently deepens the ongoing coaching relationship. This important connection extends the current coaching and Flow knowledge, as coaches did not recognise it in their work outside of Flow. Flow is shown here to influence this relationship in three ways (the relational connection; trust and safety in the connection; and Flow's influence on the self in the connection), and sharing these findings contributes to the call to continue building coaching relational knowledge (De Haan *et al.*, 2017).

First, the relational connection findings emerged from both CE and HI methodologies and recognise the importance of the relationship and connection in coaching, both in the depth, humanity and transformation during Flow, and by acknowledging the deepening fulfilment and satisfaction experienced after Flow from that coaching connection. The relational connection finding is significant as coaches do not otherwise recognise or experience it when not in Flow. The depth of human connection experienced with Flow also appears aligned with the process of integration and connection 'of ideas and entities' with others, beyond ideas of the self (Csikszentmihalyi's, 1990, p.41). Additionally, the interdependent holistic nature of the feeling of 'oneness' experienced between coach and client in Flow aligns with Jowett, O'Broin and Palmer's (2010, p.20) relational definition of "two people's feelings, thoughts and behaviours being mutually and causally interdependent". As a further contribution to the coaching and relational Flow literature, the findings indicate that the quality of the connection in Flow meant that coaches consider it as one of the defining attributes not just of coaching success (Watts,

et al., 2021) but also of a sense of fulfilment, purpose and success for the coach themselves.

Second, findings suggest that the depth, trust and safety in this important human connection in Flow appear to have a positive influence on the coaching relationship. The importance and necessity of a human and personal level connection in coaching is well researched (e.g. Baron and Morin, 2009) in building coaching relationships of real trust in the eyes of the client (Bachkirova, 2021), an attribute widely recognised as a critical in the success of the coaching relationship (Cox, 2012, Watts *et al.*, 2021). Findings suggest that in Flow, coach and client felt at ease, able to engage in open, authentic coaching dialogue (Johnston, 2021). The atmosphere of 'oneness' found in Flow helped to foster a depth of intimacy and trust during the coaching session that enabled coaches to build a safe space. In this space clients felt able to lower their guard, open themselves to be vulnerable, and think and explore at a deeper and more personal level, seen as key for transformative and developmental change (Johnston, 2021; Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007). These findings extend the relational Flow and coaching literature, pointing to a positive role that Flow can play in the context of thinking environments and helping relationships such as coaching, therapy and supervision.

Last, the findings also recognise the impact of the self of the coach as being instrumental in the coaching relationship (Bachkirova, 2016). A personal connection involving high levels of trust in coaching relationships differentiates these from normal relationships by requiring more than an impersonal and distanced application of a coach's skills and knowledge (Bachkirova, 2016), requiring both the commitment of the client and the use of the self of the coach (O'Broin *et al.*, 2010). Findings indicate that coaches perceive themselves at their best during this connection in Flow. They experience an alignment and congruency within themselves, and their actions are perceived as genuine, authentic and effective, from which a sense of self-assurance, self-efficacy and agency emerges. Findings following Flow indicate coaches' increased trust in themselves and deepening trust between themselves and their clients. From this confident and emboldened position, coaches appear able to release previously held beliefs about holding themselves back and, as O'Broin *et al.* (2010) described, fully engage

themselves in the coaching relationship and dialogue.

Other examples of the importance of the self as instrument emerged. Existing coaching literature suggest that self-esteem issues often appear, negatively or positively influencing the coaching conversation. Maxwell and Bachkirova (2010), for instance, posited that high self-esteem strengthens the relationship by positively influencing personal resources such as confidence, willingness to challenge and take risks, optimism, creativity and coach self-efficacy. Findings in this study seem to support this, indicating Flow's positive influence on coach self-esteem, self-efficacy and the coaching relationship. For example, the improved self-esteem (i.e. confidence, authenticity and assurance) and self-efficacy (i.e. at their best in Flow with the belief that they can deal with any relational issue) seen after Flow enabled coaches to recognise themselves as active and equal partners in the relationship, gaining a sense of wonder and responsibility for the impact that their self can have on client and relationship alike. Likewise, the findings demonstrate that confident, self-assured coaches (self-esteem), perceiving themselves at their best and able to handle anything in Flow (self-efficacy), influence the relationship positively, with action following with ease and without conscious effort (agency). These findings reinforce the importance Maxwell and Bachkirova (2010) placed on coaches becoming aware of the impact of self-esteem on the coaching relationship.

This insight helps to extend the language around and understanding of the relational effect of Flow in the literature. It helps to extend existing coaching practice and development knowledge by asking coaches to become more aware of Flow and the impact on themselves when in or out of Flow. Becoming more self-aware of these differences and taking responsibility for their impact will reinforce the positive influence Flow can have on the self of the coach, coach impact and coach self-development.

7.2 Flow as a catalyst of change in coaching

This section discusses the emergence of Flow as a catalyst of change against the existing Flow and coaching knowledge (Figure 52), the starting point for which is the Flow experience itself. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2021) posited that after each experience of Flow people are changed in some way, whether small or large, due to the interaction of skills being stretched to meet a challenge. Flow as a catalyst of change begins first with being able to perceive and recognise the experience itself and the subsequential difference being in or out of Flow makes. Once Flow is recognised and experienced, coaches perceive themselves at their best during Flow. It is this motivating difference that appears to mobilise change. Findings of growth in coach positive affect, self-confidence, self-assurance and self-efficacy beliefs both during and after experiences of Flow underpin Flow as a catalyst of change, extending Flow knowledge into the context of coaching.

I believe that a relationally-specific description of Flow is important when trying to recognise Flow in coaching. I align with Hefferon *et al.*'s (2017) argument that researchers in new Flow contexts, such as coaching, need to listen to the voices of participants rather than following assumptions of generalisability seen in earlier research studies. These findings highlight three increasingly detailed descriptions to help coaches and researchers recognise and understand the dyadic Flow experience in coaching. First, a relationally-specific summary alongside the seven identified elements of dyadic Flow; second, a diagrammatic representation of the seven within a holistic circle of 'oneness' and, finally, a full and detailed descriptive map of dyadic Flow in coaching. These descriptions may be helpful for coaching practice and research in three ways: first, in recognising and appreciating that seven elements co-exist holistically, experienced as 'oneness' within dyadic Flow; second, in providing a lens to notice the differences being in and out of Flow makes in coaching practice; and last, in providing different windows for selective focussed choice during reflective practice and development.

Based on coaches' lived experiences, a relationally-specific introductory text and seven

identified elements of dyadic Flow are offered first to help augment Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) individualistic focus:

"Once in flow the coaching experience seamlessly unfolds from one moment to another. I am in a subjective state of oneness; connected as one inside a bubble of energy with the other person, the activity and the situation; connecting with something bigger than ourselves. It goes beyond the idea of being. Within the bubble the process, the journey and the coaching unfold effortlessly, synergising as one into a positive holistic experience of Flow flowing from one moment to the next; whilst outside, nothing else seems to matter."

Seven elements of Flow in coaching	Csikszentmihalyi (1990)
Deep absorption in the person	Intense focus on task
Perception of time changes	Altered sense of time
Effortless merging of action and awareness	Merging of action and awareness
Self-efficacy	A sense of control
No consciousness of self	Loss of self-consciousness
Deep transcendent connection above the norm	
Fully alive with a deep, calm fulfilment	Enjoyment

Figure 53: Comparison of relational elements of Flow in coaching vs Csikszentmihalyi (1990)

This coaching summary and the seven elements include those aspects identified in Csikszentmihalyi's (1990, Figure 53) more individualistic description, used in earlier coaching research (McBride, 2013, Wesson, 2010), but emphasise the dyadic coaching-specific

differences and language. For example, whilst subjective experience, moment-to-moment involvement, intense focus and involvement are included, the unfolding nature of the experience of 'oneness' between coach and client, rather than the activity itself, is reinforced. This effortless 'unfolding' found in the dyadic, deep, transcendent connection highlights the dynamic movement inherent during Flow in coaching, whilst extending Nakamura *et al.*'s (2002: 2020) other Flow elements into more coaching specific narrative.

The second description diagrammatically represents the seven elements but emphasises that all co-exist and are experienced simultaneously within a holistic circle of 'oneness' (Figure 54). Flow literature suggests that synchronisation of the elements increases the likelihood of Flow (Engeser and Baumann, 2016), during which all elements are experienced simultaneously (Fullager *et al.*, 2017). Whilst Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1990) recognised that all elements are linked and dependent upon each other, findings in this study suggest the holistic experience of 'oneness' shared between coach and client as a defining feature of dyadic Flow. These findings extend the importance of this connection into coaching literature. I believe that visually imbuing the seven elements with a sense of 'oneness' in a circle communicates a more accurate representation of the interdependent and simultaneous experience of each that is not conveyed by a list.

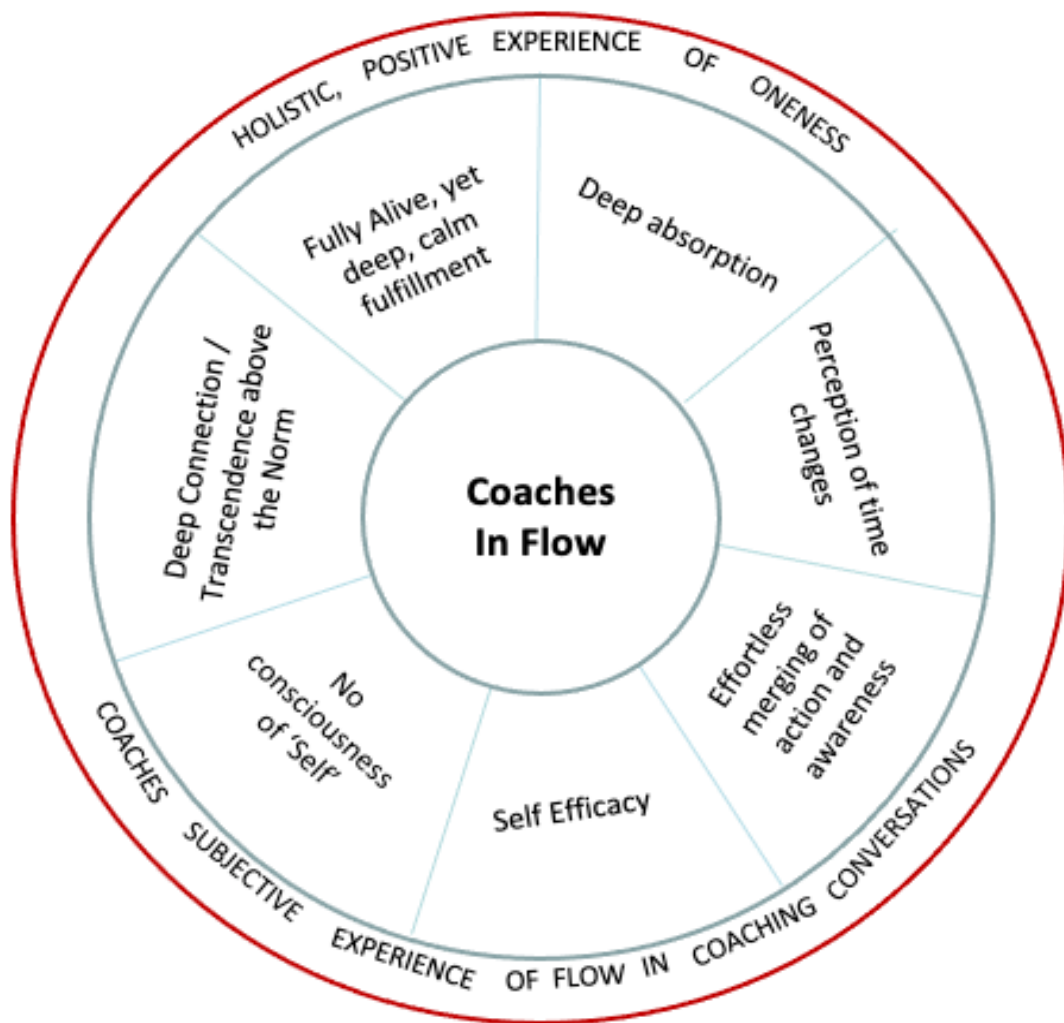


Figure 54: The holistic experience of 'oneness' in coaching in the moment of Flow

Finally, a complete descriptive dyadic map of Flow (Figure 55), including more elaborate and detailed descriptions of each element of dyadic Flow, may be helpful for more in-depth work. Flow being a subjective experience means individuals interpret and create meaning individually. Therefore, offering richer and more nuanced coaching-specific descriptions may help others to better understand and recognise the experience for themselves.

A conceptualisation of coaches' description of Flow in coaching conversations:

'Once in flow' the coaching experience seamlessly unfolds from one moment to another. I am in a subjective state of oneness; connected as one inside a bubble of energy with the other person, the activity and the situation; connecting with something bigger than ourselves. Within the bubble all the separated strands described below synergise as one into a positive holistic experience of Flow; whilst outside, nothing else seems to matter. It goes beyond the idea of being; in flow the process, the journey, the coaching unfolds effortlessly, flowing as one from one moment to the next.

Being fully alive yet experiencing a peaceful, deep and calm fulfilment. It's an intrinsically fulfilling and satisfying experience to make a real difference. It's why I love coaching. I feel privileged to share in another human beings intimate and meaningful journey of insight and discovery of their best. It's when I feel at my best, alive and I look forward to doing it all again.

A close and intense connection. Relatedness between myself as the coach and a significant other. There is an honesty and a depth to that connection; beyond chemistry, bordering on alchemy, where our wavelengths synchronise such that 'we' have replaced 'I' and 'they'. We flow together in an intuitive dance - congruent, aligned, mirroring each others thoughts, feelings and actions. Our Flow is infectious, flowing from one to the other and back again, joining as one energy that transcends and elevates us above the ordinary and everyday whilst simultaneously pulling our connection deeper still. A shared energy, buzz and aliveness that helps manifest revelation and rich, profound and sometimes even life-changing insight.

No consciousness of my 'self'. It's a lot of lack of; a lack of self concern. A lack of concern that I will add too much value, I don't waste energy on worrying about my ego, my critical voice or self judgement, the chatter stops. This is the total trust that allows me to let go and go with the not knowing. Getting out of my own way. The limiting parts of my 'self' are put aside and fall away.

Yet there is a paradox here – getting myself out of my and the way, yet knowing that I am still somehow 'here'. As an analogy the 'I' in the coaching action 'on the dance floor' fades away, trusting totally in the process and in the 'me' as the guardian 'on the balcony', keeping a low profile, watching, assuring, protecting. Should I fall from Flow 'I' become aware of my 'self' again and the chatter resumes.

A deep absorption beyond focus; in the person and the coaching situation rather than the coaching task. If I were doing a jigsaw puzzle, the task I am absorbed in is doing the jigsaw. Whereas, in coaching, I am absorbed in the person and the coaching situation that I'm in. My behaviour is beyond listening, it's sensing at all levels opening my awareness to every nuance. I am present in every sense, absorbed in the moment and **being** in the moment, rather than doing.

My perception of time changes. Some say it speeds up, some say it slows down, some say it doesn't matter or exist at all. But it's very fluid.

A synergistic mix or merging of action and awareness, so that I am not thinking about what I'm doing. The activity itself is natural, spontaneous and intuitive, moving forward with a direction and a purpose. It's unfolding from moment to moment, opening up to something worthwhile, exploring, connecting the conscious and the unconscious. Through stepping into their world, I'm intuitively making those connections. My response is intuitive and the questions are intuitive, informed as they are by my knowledge, experience and intention, and a deep curiosity about understanding both limiting beliefs and opportunity. Integrating, synthesising, connecting, unconsciously; it's just happening. This synthesising releases the questions; like a sixth sense, beautiful yet effortless.



A sense of **self efficacy**. Grounded in an assurance, confidence and ease born of the deep belief that I can deal with anything that comes up, either from myself or the other. I can deal with any emotions that come up; I am aware of them, I understand them, I feel and empathise with them, but I don't get affected by them. I can hold myself and them in a safe space - I have enough, I am enough. I can let go of 'me'.

Figure 55: Circumplex of dyadic Flow in coaching conversations

Coaching and Flow literature indicates positive affect experienced both during (McBride, 2013; Wesson, 2010) and lingering after Flow (Fredrickson, 2001). The Flow channel model (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) suggests that negative affect is experienced when not in Flow. Findings report similar experiences amongst coaches; for instance, coaches in Flow report enjoyment, fulfilment and calm, effortless and flowing action, whereas coaching out of Flow was 'clunky' and stressful. Findings also recognise a relational effect, emphasising the positive or negative influence a client can make. For instance, examples of negative anxiety or stress were experienced when coaches perceived a client or client challenge as being beyond their ability or experience. Conversely, negative feelings of boredom were felt when clients or challenges did not stretch them. The coaches 'felt' their way into these positive or negative differences in their experiences subjectively, rather than evaluating them objectively or rationally, recognising themselves at their best when in Flow. Having this awareness and ability to distinguish between these differences was important as a catalyst of change, motivating them to find ways to be in Flow more often.

Using emotions in this way aligns with Fredrickson's (2001; 2002) 'broaden and build' theory of positive affect. Broaden and build theory suggests that positive affect helps to broaden an individual's ability to focus and think (for instance, interest ignites exploration) and builds personal resources (such as self-confidence and self-efficacy), whilst negative emotions narrow mindsets. Positive affect was also found to trigger more upward spirals of positive emotion contributing to increased emotional well-being (Fredrickson *et al.*, 2002). Findings in this study appear to align with broaden and build theory. For instance, the findings demonstrate a broadening in coach thoughts and beliefs (such as increased interest and inquisitiveness about their client) and a building of personal resources (coach self-confidence, assurance and efficacy beliefs) after experiences of Flow in coaching. Findings further indicate coaches using positive and negative affect as nuanced feedback during their coaching practice, for instance recognising boredom as an indicator that they were no longer in Flow which triggered a mindset or behavioural change in their practice.

Increases in coaches' reported sense of self-confidence, assurance and efficacy found after Flow are important findings from this research but are also reported in existing coaching and Flow literature. Viera and Palmer (2012) began exploring the importance of self-efficacy in the dyad of coaching, capturing a definition which incorporated elements of self-belief, capacity to build trusting relationships and effective communication with others. In the current study, coaches reported positive influence in these areas when coaching during Flow. In Flow literature, self-efficacy beliefs have been found to be both an antecedent for and a subsequential outcome of Flow (Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.*, 2011; Salanova, *et al.*, 2006; Bandura, 1997). Within the context of teaching, for instance, Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.* (2011) found that the more self-efficacy is built, the more frequently Flow is experienced. The more Flow is then experienced, the more self-efficacy is gained, and so on, resulting in a 'circle of self-efficacy and Flow' (Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.*, 2011). As self-efficacy is context-specific (Salanova *et al.*, 2006), findings in this study extend the link between Flow and self-efficacy into coaching and the coaching relationship.

7.3 Agentic use of the self as instrument of Flow in coaching

The third theme, the agentic use of the self as an instrument of Flow in coaching, discusses an important role of the coach in agentially facilitating Flow as a catalyst for change. Findings suggesting an agentic aspect to the intentional use of the self of the coach before, during and after Flow in coaching can make a contribution to coach practice and development and extend knowledge on Flow.

Bandura (1997) asserted that self-efficacy constitutes the key factor in human agency: the power to act intentionally to achieve some specific purpose. Findings support the positive influence Flow has on coach self-efficacy beliefs, confidence and competence (personal resources). They also support a link to agency, as these changes motivated coaches to act intentionally to find ways back into Flow. By choosing to agentially 'pull the levers' conducive for Flow (preparation of mindset, presence and opening up, bravery to ask challenging

questions), coaches reported experiencing more Flow in their practice. By logical extension, the circle of Flow to increased self-efficacy (Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.*, 2011) led to agentic action (Bandura, 2011), resulting in more occasions of Flow. In this way, findings in the context of coaching indicate a widened 'circle of Flow to self-efficacy to self-agency and onto more Flow'. This widened circle extends existing Flow literature to include agency, whilst adding the circle to Flow in coaching literature.

The intentional agentic behaviours described in the findings appear consistent with Delle Fave and Massimini's (2003) discovery that selectively choosing activities in this way created situations of greater challenge and skill development. They concluded that this then facilitated more Flow and enabled personal growth and development. For instance, findings demonstrate that by searching for ways to re-enter Flow after recognising themselves coaching at their best in this state, coaches increased their exploration and discovery of new thoughts, feelings and behaviours consistent with building presence, opening up and finding Flow. Being present and opening up with the client in this way was found to be the *real* coach challenge. Aligning with the first dyadic Flow descriptive element ('deep absorption', detailed earlier), meeting the challenge required an ongoing refinement of focus, interest and intent in building a deep client connection. How coaches perceived that challenge was found to be subjective and influenced by each individual's frame of reference. Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) observed that people's subjective perception of challenge was more important than any objective evaluation. Consistent with Flow theory and aligning with the subjective challenge/skills Flow channel model (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), I posit that this journey of discovery is therefore one of increasing complexity and growth, demanding an ongoing fine-tuning of the quality and sensitivity of the 'self as an instrument of Flow' in order to enter Flow. It is this intentional action of choosing ways to re-enter or use Flow in their coaching that led to reports of change and growth in the self of the coach.

Some psychologists (e.g. Richardson, 2015) suggest that it is from some compilation of the coaches' thoughts, beliefs and feelings that actions themselves emerge. In discussing the

changes found in coaches' individual frames of reference that led to the extended Flow circle with the inclusion of agency, I take an emergent agentic perspective consistent with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989). This perspective recognises an interactional and reverse causation between coaches' thoughts, feelings and behaviours, working together to build personal resources over time. For example, the actions coaches chose in order to re-enter Flow did not seem to appear through some logical, rational problem-solving process. Rather, they emerged more from an experimental discovery approach to getting into Flow, developed as their thoughts, beliefs or feelings interacted and altered after successive successful experiences of Flow over time. The emergent link is important for the individual coach because self-efficacy beliefs affect coaches' levels of motivation, persistence, cognitive and affective states and importantly, the agency or actions that follow over time (Bandura, 1994; 2011).

Findings could therefore suggest an additional valid and pro-active role for coaches to intentionally use themselves and their actions to create or use Flow positively in their practice. The concept of self as the instrument of coaching (Bachkirova, 2016) can be applied to the phenomenon of Flow in coaching, exploring the developmental conditions Bachkirova (2016) suggested for best use of the self as that instrument. In this way, the agentic use of the coach as instrument for Flow implies an active role for the coach within the relationship. Indeed, findings indicate that in seeing themselves as valid instruments of Flow, coaches felt enabled to fully and genuinely engage in the coaching relationship dialogue. In using the analogy 'instrument of coaching', Bachkirova (2016) recognised both the importance of the coaching relationship (De Haan and Gannon, 2017; De Haan *et al.*, 2013) and of the self of the coach as instrumental in that relationship, but importantly not as a means of controlling or guaranteeing an outcome for the client. Findings indicated that coaches shared similar concerns, perceiving the term 'control' to imply a more passive than equal role for the client. Flow findings, however, open the door to a more nuanced and positive discussion about the word 'control' in coaching. Bandura (2001) argues that the agentic behaviour emerging from a strong sense of self-efficacy means that our intention, beliefs and actions have the potential

to create and shape the future to fit the particular purpose, but cannot guarantee it. As instruments of Flow, coaches demonstrated a refined 'self-control' in identifying and 'pulling the right levers' conducive with creating but not guaranteeing Flow. This self-control seems more consistent with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) intentional use of the word and raises a different, proactive and agentic perspective of control that could be both mutually beneficial and celebrated.

Bachkirova (2016) proposed three main conditions for good use of the self as the main instrument for coaching; first, to understand yourself as an instrument; second, to look after yourself as an instrument; and finally, to ensure that you 'check' your instrument for quality and sensitivity. The findings in this research demonstrate that coaches developed an increasingly sophisticated ability to recognise, reflect on and learn from the experience of Flow. In so doing, coaches demonstrated an increased ability to understand themselves as an instrument of Flow, for instance the positive or negative impact of their energy, health or clients on them-selves, in and out of Flow. Secondly, they increased their awareness of looking after themselves, for instance physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually. Finally, they utilised a sense of agency to fine-tune the quality and sensitivity of them-selves, for instance by noticing, evaluating and recognising when or how to use their emotions to selectively cultivate activities during coaching. By doing so, they perceived that they are in the best condition to use themselves as agentic instruments of Flow in coaching. These experiences offer additional, complementary development pathways for the self as an instrument of Flow. Exploring this agentic aspect to the intentional use of them-selves before, during and after Flow in coaching can make a contribution to coach practice and development.

7.4 Creative synthesis - Flow spiral of growth and development

The final stage of the Heuristic Inquiry presents a creative synthesis of my tacit understanding of Flow in coaching and the changes coaches perceive after it. Heuristic Inquiry, as part of the phenomenological tradition, focusses on people's subjective explanation of how they

experience the world around them (Sultan, 2019; Spinelli, 1989). The creative synthesis integrates my interpretation of the nature and meaning of the findings into a cohesive whole, using tacit knowing and intuition (Moustakas, 1990), and is offered as a contribution to coaching reflective practice and development.

I suggest that the emergent themes discussed so far (connection in Flow; Flow as catalyst of change; and agentic use of the self as instrument of Flow) logically align. Here, I will summarise my understanding of this logic. Findings indicate that an important deep, human and transformative connection formed during Flow that coaches did not otherwise recognise. One of the effects of Flow found in this connection was to raise coaches' awareness about the impact they could have on the relationship and prompt them to take responsibility for it. Findings indicated that recognising and perceiving themselves at their best during Flow positively influenced coaches' sense of self-confidence, assurance and efficacy beliefs, establishing Flow as a catalyst of change. Experiences of positive or negative affect were found to be used as feedback to recognise and adjust coaches' attitudes and behaviours in order to regain Flow. In this way, the agentic use of the self as an instrument of Flow in coaching introduced selective agency and a relationally-balanced agentic role for the coach into the relationship. Coaches, motivated to want to be in Flow, selectively sought to identify, develop and pull the levers consistent with Flow formation. Resultant growth in terms of self-sophistication and experience as instruments of Flow imbued coaches' work with meaning and fulfilment within a repeating circle of Flow in coaching.

Growth after Flow is a widely substantiated outcome in Flow literature (for example Nakamura *et al.*, 2020) and assumed in existing Flow in coaching literature (Wesson, 2010). The above logic suggests that growth emerged as coaches intentionally explored ways to discover and pull the levers to re-experience Flow, motivated by the perception of positive affect experienced during coaching in Flow. There may be an argument, however, that this growth and development emerged from experiences of Flow alone and may therefore have happened whether or not the coach was consciously intending to create the conditions for Flow. For

instance, it might be argued that as, by definition, Flow is only recognised on reflection afterwards rather than during it, when awareness of self stops, any positive affect (Fredrickson, 2004; Bandura, 1997) and gain in self-efficacy beliefs (Salanova *et al.*, 2006; Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.*, 2011) could occur purely as a consequence of Flow experience and time and not from self-conscious effort. It may also be argued that as Flow is at the heart of intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), intrinsically-motivated coaches would naturally selectively cultivate the actions and skills necessary to overcome the challenges inherent in the Flow channel model. This would infer that growth comes as a natural consequence of learning from experience.

However, within the phenomenological tradition, with its emphasis on subjective human experience, Morgan's pragmatic paradigm (2014) asserts that people's reality is born of experience and inquiry. Dewey (2008) described inquiry in this context as a self-conscious cycle of reflection about the interaction that beliefs and actions have on each other, thereby helping create meaning from the experience. Consequently, people may be said to learn by *reflecting* on experience rather than learning from experience itself. In other words, learning from subjective experience may depend on a continuing self-conscious cycle of bringing beliefs into awareness and a willingness to challenge those beliefs by the actions they decide to take, building new beliefs and so on. Coaches may be said to facilitate clients reflective experiential learning and meaning making in a similar way (Watts *et al.*, 2021). Whilst in a unique position to assist their clients, Watts *et al.*, (2021) also advocate for the development of similar self-reflective experiential learning capability as powerful and critical for coach continuing professional practice.

The need for a consciousness of the self in order to reflect and learn from experience is interesting in the context of Flow. Flow theory (Nakamura *et al.*, 2020), reinforced within coaching by these findings, posits that during Flow there is no attentional energy left to be aware of the self, there is no consciousness of the self. In other words, there is no awareness of being aware during Flow. Yet, becoming aware of being aware is an important indicator that

the self has re-imposed itself into the process and that Flow is lost (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Findings reinforce this, with awareness of Flow and the self forming an important and useful piece of feedback for use within the session or in reflective practice afterwards. Findings also indicate that conscious reflective practice to raise self-awareness aided coaches' ability to discover and self-consciously apply the levers for Flow, including the care and development of the sensitivity of themselves as instruments of Flow. Findings for growth in the self after Flow emerged as coaches intentionally explored and discovered the levers to agentically pull to re-experience Flow. For instance, becoming aware of themselves, of Flow, of differences and their impact, and of their thoughts, feelings and behaviours helped them to self-consciously choose the attitudes and behaviours needed for Flow. Therefore, being aware of being aware becomes critical in the development of reflective practice on the self and Flow in coaching as a facilitator for learning, practice development and growth.

As such, I believe it is useful to align the agentic cycle of coach 'Flow to self-efficacy to agency to Flow' with a process of coach reflective learning practice through the lens of Flow. Figures 56, 57 and 58 below show the creative synthesis development towards the final 'Flow in coaching agentic growth and development spiral'. This growth and development spiral of the self as an instrument of Flow in coaching may, I believe, be a helpful additional pathway alongside existing programmes of coach practice and development. Findings suggest that this additional pathway may help coaches gain an increasingly sophisticated understanding of themselves and the differences in themselves as instruments of coaching when in or out of Flow. This increased sophistication and reflection helped them to develop new capacities to look after and develop the sensitivity and quality of themselves and their personal resources. Ultimately, by doing so, coaches experience being at their best more often, by being in and using Flow more often in their practice.

The alignment of the circle of 'Flow to self-efficacy to agency to Flow' with reflective practice through the lens of Flow is shown as a flowing process in Figure 56 below. The agentic cycle evolves alphabetically, from Flow as the catalyst for change (A), to noticing positive affect after

Flow (B), recognising changing self-efficacy beliefs (C), choosing to prepare, care and reflect on the self to learn (D), intentionally 'pulling the levers' conducive for Flow (E), and so experiencing Flow again and restarting the cycle at A.



Figure 56: An evolution of Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.*'s (2011) 'circle of self-efficacy and Flow' as a cycle of Flow in coaches

In order to learn and grow from the experience of Flow, the process asks for conscious self-reflective practice through the lens of Flow over time. Diagrammatically, the cycle is represented as an open spiral as multiple cycles combine over time (Figure 57). This builds on Fredrickson's (2001; 2002) broaden and build 'upward spiral of positive affect', introducing agency into the development of coach personal resources as an instrument of Flow in coaching.

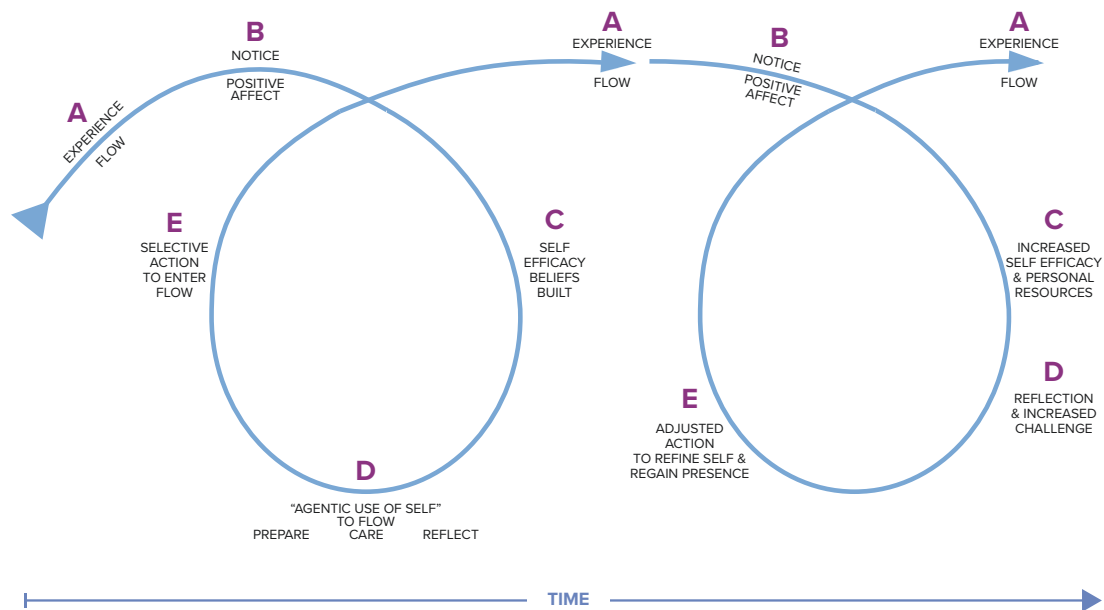


Figure 57: Spiral of Flow in coaches over time

However, I also see the spiral sitting visually within Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) Flow channel. Staying in Flow as personal resources grow over time demands an ever-increasing complexity in challenge (Nakamura *et al.*, 2020; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In this model, Flow fosters the motivation and belief to engage in finding more sophisticated 'selective cultivation of activities' as a way into Flow (Delle Fave *et al.*, 2003).

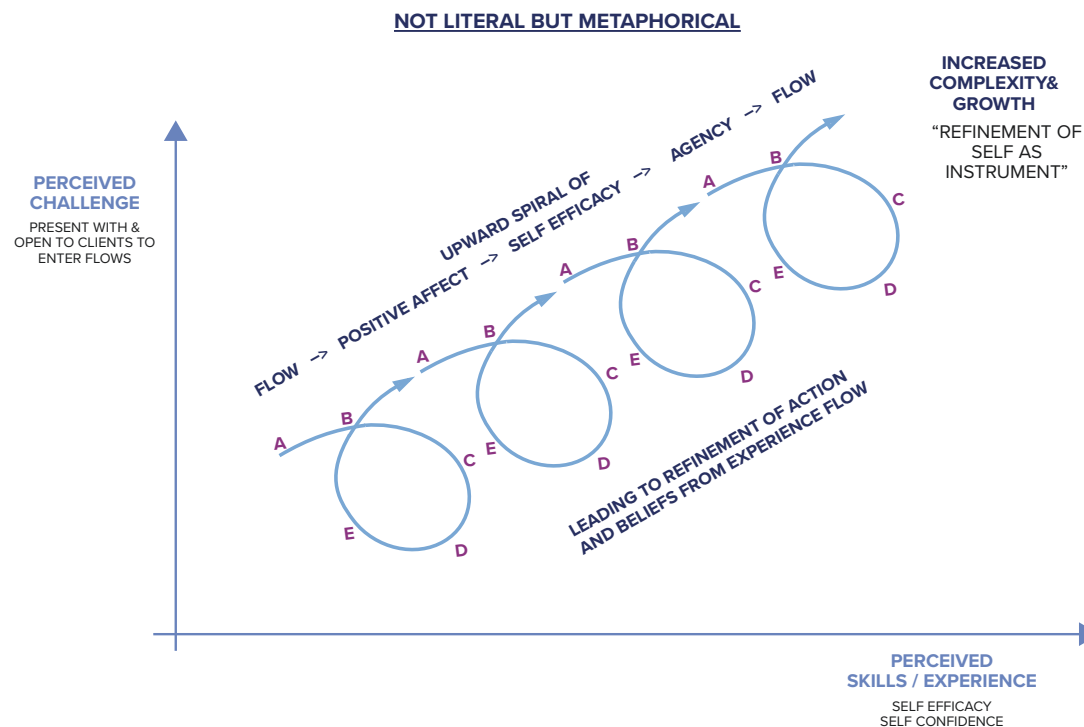


Figure 58: Spiral of Flow in coaches metaphorically within the challenge/skills model (based on Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)

I believe that situating the spiral visually within the challenge/skills balance helps depict the open process of refinement of the quality and sensitivity of the self as instrument of Flow in coaching (Bachkirova, 2016) and the subsequential increase in complexity and growth of the self of the coach (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Delle Fave *et al.*, 2003; Engeser *et al.*, 2012) as they search for ever more refinement to stay in or use Flow. The specific challenges and pathways to those challenges found through reflective practice will be as individual and complex as the self-construct of each coach (Watts *et al.*, 2021), mirroring the 'complexity and unpredictability of the coaching process' (Bachkirova, 2016).

In summary, therefore, the final 'Flow in coaching agentic growth and development spiral' (Figure 59) captures Flow as a catalyst for increasing complexity and growth in the self of the coach, as agentic instruments of Flow in coaching and, finally, as part of the circle of holistic

'oneness' experienced within the deep, human and transformational connection with their client that is the hallmark of great coaching. To a great extent, the achievement of growth and development is agentially within the hands of the coach, facilitated by reflective practice through the lens of Flow.

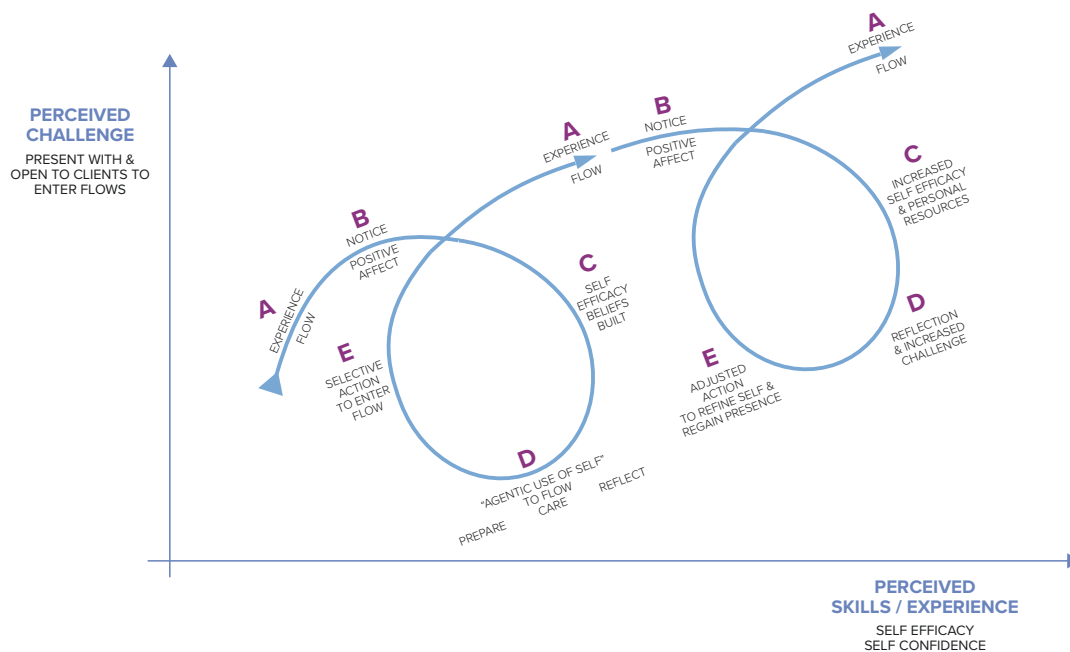


Figure 59: Flow in coaching agentic growth and development spiral

I therefore see a valid and important role for experiential reflection and learning from the experience of Flow. In this way, coaches' subjective reality could be understood, internalised and made useful for themselves and for coaching relationship practice. The 'Flow in coaching agentic growth and development spiral' and the self-consciously reflective knowledge behind it offer a motivating and additional self-determined pathway to achieve coaching fulfilment, growth and development that is within the hands of the coach.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This chapter summarises the contribution that the research has made, practically and theoretically, towards understanding the subjective nature of Flow and its consequences in coaching from the perspective of the coach. I review the main insights and evidential claims of the study and examine the potential implications of the insights on the self of the coach and the coaching relationship for the wider coaching profession. In doing so, I focus on how the findings can realistically and meaningfully help coaches become more finely attuned and developed as instruments of coaching. Finally, I elaborate on limitations and make recommendations for future research.

8.1 Addressing the research gap

Until recently, research has focussed mainly on the Flow experience itself and how it may be created and operationalised, rather than on exploration of possible associated consequences. In addition, since the original phenomenological work on Flow by Csikszentmihalyi (1975), research has been predominantly individually-focussed and quantitative in nature, with the researcher, by definition, looking to prove a hypothesis rather than being truly explorative. The consequent inherent risk in this approach, especially in new contexts (Llorens *et al.*, 2017), is that the full extent of any exploration may have been inadvertently curtailed. For instance, having the intention to prove a hypothesis, or assume the generalisability of individually-based Flow descriptions from other work contexts, may confer some bias or influence the outcome. Coaching literature highlights the criticality of the dyadic relationship to coaching effectiveness (Watts *et al.*, 2021; De Haan *et al.*, 2013) yet no relationally-based description of Flow exists to date in either Flow or coaching literature. By using and assuming generalisability of existing individual Flow descriptions, previous coaching researchers risked undermining the credibility of their findings. There remained a gap in our knowledge about how coaches describe Flow within the dyadic relationship in coaching conversations and any possible associated

consequences from it.

The research focus, therefore, became “an exploration into changes coaches perceive associated with the experience of Flow in coaching conversations”. Two sequential aims were established in order to achieve this. The first aim was to establish a common basis of understanding of what experiences coaches recognised as Flow within the coaching conversation. Establishing this common basis for understanding allowed the platform from which the second aim was explored: namely, to understand the nature and meaning of any change coaches perceive associated with experiencing Flow in the coaching context for the first time.

In order to achieve the two aims, a pragmatic social constructivist research approach was chosen, using mixed, sequential qualitative methodologies of Conceptual Encounter (De Rivera, 1981) to understand the experience of Flow, and Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) to understand the nature and meaning of any associated change. This approach recognised that individual perceptions of experience can form multiple knowledges, all of which are not necessarily right or wrong (Willig, 2008) but are capable of collaboratively creating meaning together through dialogue (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). It acknowledged the ideal nature of taking a qualitative approach for under-researched areas of investigation like Flow in coaching (Willig, 2013). Importantly, it allowed the inclusion of me as practitioner-researcher and recognised the ten coaches’ experiences as valid and important (Moustakas, 1990; De Rivera, 1981). Finally, taking this approach to the research heeded the call for more in-depth, qualitative understanding of Flow within new work contexts (Hefferon *et al.*, 2017).

Figure 60 summarises the main objectives of this study, and how these were met. This demonstrates how existing research and new data were used to explore the research question.

Research Objectives	Outcomes from the research objectives
To critically review the literature relevant to the concept of Flow and the associated personal changes within the workplace, specifically within the coaching conversations.	Chapter two builds a case for exploring Flow within the relational context of the coaching conversation. It highlights the potential to both describe Flow and any associated change with it in that context using the voices of coaches as evidence. Two past methodological issues and an initial map of Flow were identified, informing two phases of the research.
To understand what experiences coaches identify as Flow within coaching conversations and how they map this phenomenon, using Conceptual Encounter methodology.	A map of the relational description of Flow was developed in chapter 4 in the first phase. Building on Csikszentmihalyi's (1975; 1990) six elements of the phenomenology of Flow, seven were mapped, described and evidenced including an extra relational connection element using the taxonomy relevant to coach's and coaching. This map extends the knowledge base and provides a basis for use by coaches and the industry to identify Flow and any associated effects.
To explore the nature and meaning of personal changes coaches perceive associated with experiencing Flow, using Heuristic Inquiry methodology.	The research in chapter 5 found evidence for changes in coach's thoughts, feelings, behaviour, connection and meaning associated with Flow. These indicated increases in the perceptions and behaviour of the 'self' of the coach and expands the existing knowledge base into coaching. It affirms Flow and self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-agency in coach's and their impact in the coaching conversation.
To develop insights into the nature of Flow in the coaching conversation and coaches' perception of any associated personal changes.	Chapter six brought together three insights of Flow as a catalyst of change, the agentic use of the self of the coach as an instrument of Flow in coaching and the deep, human and transformational connection between coach and client as the alchemy of the coaching. These three were synthesized into a self-determined, virtuous and cumulative spiral of agentic coach growth and development. This spiral and its associated elements, extends existing knowledge and points to pragmatic application for coach and coach industry.
To develop recommendations for the further development of coaches based on an enhanced understanding of Flow.	Three main outcomes and recommendations are developed in chapter 7 from this enhanced understanding of Flow and its associated effects to conclude this research. The recommendations are intended to increase the awareness and agentic use of Flow in coaching for the benefit of coach, coaching relationship and coaching industry development.

Figure 60: Research objectives and how they were met

8.2 Contributions to literature, practice and understanding of Flow in coaching

This study contributes to both literature and practice. It contributes to the Flow literature by introducing an important relational aspect to Flow that extends our existing understanding. It contributes to coaching literature by deepening an understanding of Flow in coaching and its associated consequences, expanding on the little existing relationally-specific research on Flow in coaching. Finally, it contributes to practice by helping coaches, educators and supervisors understand and use Flow as an additional lens on their work.

8.2.1 Contributions to Flow literature

The relational focus of this study of Flow in coaching contributes to our existing understanding of Flow in three ways. First, it provides a rich relational description of Flow; second, a potential agentic development effect from Flow; and third, a greater understanding of the breadth of changes experienced after Flow. A rich and varied description of Flow in a relationship helps to augment the existing individual description in Flow literature. The relational map of Flow offers the opportunity to compare and contrast the different but interdependent elements of Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) individual Flow against this study's relational Flow. This could help others to clarify and distinguish the relational influences and differences between the two. For instance, it may be helpful to understand that in this research, participants in a helping relationship with their clients were absorbed by their client rather than focussed on a task, as would have been the case in Csikszentmihalyi's (1975; 1990) individual experiential description. As well as understanding the relational nuances influencing Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) six elements of Flow, it may also be important to recognise the additional relationally-specific seventh Flow element found in this study. Highlighting this additional relational connection could help others to understand and appreciate how research participants in Flow experienced it as deep, transformational and above 'normal' life.

This study also contributes to the understanding of Flow by building on the existing reciprocal reverse connection seen between Flow and self-efficacy (Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.*, 2011) and suggesting an additional agency in people intentionally acting to facilitate more Flow. Existing Flow literature seems to describe the Flow experience as something happening *to* individuals, without a sense of agency. However, this limited study offers elements of agency from those aware of Flow, evidencing participants intentionally discovering and creating the conditions conducive for getting back into Flow.

This study therefore builds on Rodriguez-Sanchez *et al.*'s (2011) work, offering an expansion of their 'Flow to self-efficacy to Flow' cycle to include agency as an additional link. The emergence of an expanded 'Flow to self-efficacy to agency back into Flow' cycle therefore suggests learning and developmental opportunities from this intentional search for Flow that can augment existing Flow developmental literature (Salanova *et al.*, 2006). Finally, by highlighting and describing the breadth of changes participants perceived after experiencing Flow, this study offers expanded opportunities for further research and development, whether exploratory or for operationalisation. This insight particularly contributes to answering the call for more in-depth, qualitative understanding of Flow within new work contexts (Hefferon *et al.*, 2017).

8.2.2 Contributions to coaching literature

This study contributes to coaching literature by developing a greater understanding of Flow in coaching and the effects it has on the coach and the coaching relationship in the following three areas. First, a coaching-specific definition of Flow is offered, with rich descriptions to enable other coaches to perceive and recognise Flow. Second, a new conceptual understanding of Flow in coaching positions it as a catalyst for change and a legitimate role for the coach. Third, purposeful agentic use of Flow is argued to be a source of development of coaches themselves as instruments of Flow.

Providing a coaching-specific Flow definition and a richly descriptive map of Flow in the dyadic relationship will help coaches to both understand and recognise Flow. Before coaches can gain any benefit or change after Flow, they must first be able to perceive and recognise it. Whilst this study may only be definitive for relatively experienced coaches, its co-construction reflects the language and lived experiences of coaches, meaning that more coaches may be able to perceive and recognise the experience more readily for themselves. In addition, and unlike past coaching research on Flow, the existence of a relational definition of Flow in coaching can act as useful basis for future research.

This study helps to establish a new conceptual understanding of the Flow experience in coaching and the coaching relationship. Through sharing how coaches' experiences differ when either in or out of Flow, coaches can importantly begin to perceive the differences for themselves. This is important for coaches to understand as, based on this study, differences in experiences seemed to unlock motivation and intention to use Flow as a catalyst for change in themselves and their coaching. Contributing a deeper understanding about these differences indicates an important connection created in Flow between coach and client. Adding this understanding to the limited literature on coaching relationships is important, given the critical role the relationship plays in coaching (De Haan *et al.*, 2017; Watts *et al.*, 2021).

Finally, this study offers a deeper understanding of the relationship between Flow and coaching, indicating a further possible route to personal and professional development for coaches. The findings suggest that Flow offers coaches a legitimate and purposeful agentic way to develop themselves as an instrument of Flow. This agentic use of self within the Flow reflective learning spiral offer coaches an additional pathway alongside established training and development routes to growth. The motivation coaches experience from reflectively seeing themselves develop and being at their best in Flow appears to manifest in commitment to ongoing personal and professional practice. This aligns with a growing body of evidence about the use of the self as the critical factor in the success of coaching (Watts *et al.*, 2021; Bachkirova, 2016; De Haan *et al.*, 2013; Wampold, 2001) and the core importance of reflective

practice in that future development (Watts et al., 2021). This additional engaging pathway to self-development appears to become available through the lens of Flow.

8.2.3 Contribution to practice

Finally, the study has important implications for coaches, educators and supervisors in providing further ideas for enhancing coaches' reflection and developmental learning practice through dedicated training and supervision.

8.2.3.1 Coach developmental practice through the lens of Flow

The implication of having a map of the Flow experience in coaching is that it may be a useful alternative lens through which to recognise, understand, reflect and discuss the differences prompted by being in Flow. Beginning with an overall summary understanding of the holistic experience itself before making use of the varying levels of rich descriptive text available in the map can support deeper and progressively more nuanced discussion, understanding and reflection on Flow in coaching. The rich descriptive text can help coaches to better understand the subjective experience vicariously, as seen through the eyes of others. This can then be used as a basis for recognition, interpretation and exploration of coaches' own frames of reference, helping them to create meaning cognitively and emotionally in their own way.

Once coaches understand the experience and know what to look for, they can begin to practice noticing and reflecting on the differences in themselves and their coaching when either in Flow or out of Flow. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) described Flow as being between anxiety and boredom, an encapsulation of the negative affect that people notice when they are not in Flow. This study found Flow to be a catalyst of change and development. Coaches perceiving themselves at their best in Flow began to explore and find ways to get themselves into Flow more frequently. The thoughts, feelings and actions coaches shared in this study can help other coaches to compare and contrast their own experiences. By cherishing and nourishing this experience and reflecting on their practice through the lens of Flow, coaches

can act with agency to find individually relevant and effective ways into Flow by recognising and developing their own frames of reference. The Flow developmental spiral offers stages of reflection, learning, practice and adjustment to guide and support the practitioner's emergent journey of growth over time.

8.2.3.2 Coach education through the lens of Flow

Helping coaches to become aware of the Flow experience and the potential to take agency in using it in practice offers educators an important opportunity to advance coach practice. It is increasingly recognised that a one-size-fits-all approach to coach education no longer makes sense and the uniqueness of the coach needs to be highly valued and developed (Bachkirova, *et al.*, 2017; 2015; Garvey, 2011). As such, educators are developing programmes that emphasise reflexivity and build critical appreciation of the body of knowledge which informs the coaching discipline (Jackson and Bachkirova, 2019). Findings in this study help to support educators in their development of the professionalisation of coaches by offering an additional route to the exploration of the individuality of the self as coach.

Including elements of Flow described in this study in their professional developmental programmes, educators could help coaches become aware of what Flow is and how to recognise it for themselves. By supporting them in their self-reflective education through the lens of Flow, they could potentially share and contrast their students' experiences against those in this study, helping students to grow themselves as instruments of Flow in their practice.

8.2.3.3 Supervision practice through the lens of Flow

Coaches recognise supervision as an important part of their development (Clutterbuck *et al.*, 2016) with reflective practice through dialogue and collaborative learning seen as a critical driver of that effectiveness (Jepson, 2016). Yet, many still express concerns that too few coaches regularly and actively engage in it (Haskins, 2013), arguing that some may see supervision as too narrow in focus. This suggests a need for supervision to play a broader,

more holistic and integrative role dealing with wider personal and professional development challenges (Jepson, 2016). Whilst this study is limited in scale and does not purport to be an answer to this call, it does indicate important opportunities for coach developmental support through dedicated and more deeply reflective supervisory dialogue that coaches could find to be motivating and fulfilling.

The varying levels of descriptions of Flow experience in this study can encourage and enable deeper supervisory dialogue and reflection on coach practice through the lens of Flow. By understanding the differences the participants perceive in their coaching, as explored in this study, supervisors may be more able to help their coaches make sense of their reflections and, importantly, contract and commit to a dedicated pathway of reflective practice. This reflection can help supervisors to explore changes in individual coaches' personal frames of reference, helping build self-efficacy beliefs for effective learning and development.

The Flow developmental spiral offers supervisors an additional staged series of opportunities for coach reflection, learning, practice and adjustment over time. Recognising and helping coaches grow and develop the agency to become more differentiated and discerning as high-quality instruments of Flow in their work can be as fulfilling for the supervisor as this study found it to be for coaches.

8.3 Limitations of the research

It is important to recognise that the decision I made to involve experienced coaches who were aware of Flow and were interested in their ongoing professional development may represent a limitation. Involving coaches with less experience may have yielded different findings. For example, coaches with more limited experience may have been more focussed on tools, techniques and process and may have identified different experiences, with different thoughts, feelings and behaviours. It is inevitable that involving coaches who had experienced Flow positively influenced the findings. It would be interesting to observe and understand the

experience of those who were aware of Flow but had not experienced it in coaching. Becoming aware of Flow is arguably a pre-requisite for identifying and perceiving differences between being in or out of Flow, allowing it to become a catalyst for change. Building on this limitation, making the decision to engage the same cohort of coaches in both phases of the research may also have influenced the findings as they were potentially sensitised to Flow through the Hawthorne effect (McCambridge, Witton and Melbourne, 2014). Engaging a new separate cohort for each phase could also yield different changes after Flow. Involving coaches not engaging regularly in their development or supervision may have identified other changes after experiencing Flow than those recognised in this study.

Another feature of the study that could be seen as a limitation was that the map of the dyadic experience of Flow in coaching was based on the data from ten coaches, a smaller sample size than either Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) original Flow work or other more definitive, large-scale Flow research projects (e.g. Bakker, 2008). Although a larger cohort and wider scope of coaches' experiences may have yielded different views and perceptions, this sample size was appropriate for the aim of gaining a deep understanding of the experiences and changes perceived afterwards, and comparable to others choosing similar methodologies (Bachkirova, 2015; Scott, 2017; Noon, 2017). This research unapologetically takes a pragmatically constructivist approach in exploring the subjective experience of Flow in a new relational context of coaching conversations. The two distinct methodologies, Conceptual Encounter and Heuristic Inquiry, were appropriately chosen and rigorously pursued.

The chosen research methodologies require the deep involvement of myself as research practitioner, with all my biases and inherent subjectivity. Maintaining objective subjectivity is an important characteristic of success (Ratner, 2002). In addition, both Conceptual Encounter and Heuristic Inquiry require the active engagement of myself as researcher within them. Therefore, the use of myself within the research could be perceived as a potential limitation of the methodology for several reasons. The nature of the questions and the manner in which they were asked will no doubt have influenced the content. For instance, whilst the questions

were open by design, they focussed the dialogue towards areas of my interest. I may therefore have been attuned to follow lines of investigation that triggered my interest and may have other topics that were relevant to my co-researchers. However, I have made considerable efforts to monitor my potential biases and to be particularly mindful in relation to any data that contradicted my expectations.

8.4 Recommendations for future research

This study represents a first attempt to map the coaches' experience of Flow in coaching and the changes they perceived after the experience. It is recommended that both the map of the experience and changes perceived in individual coaches' frames of reference experienced after Flow are explored further. For instance, using a larger sample and greater diversity of coaches, it may be possible to build on this study and explore how differences in coach experience or awareness may differ from and develop our understanding of the Flow descriptive map or any changes perceived after Flow.

Further studies could explore the influence that levels of coach experience may have. For instance, it would be helpful to establish how less-experienced or newly-trained coaches may experience and describe Flow and how that might develop the Flow in coaching definition or alter the elemental structure or descriptive text of the map of Flow. It would then be interesting to see how changes in coaches' individual frames of reference after Flow reflect differences in these levels of experience. For example, how would inexperienced coaches' self-efficacy beliefs after Flow compare to those in this study? How might any differences influence coaches' sense of agency in how they use and develop themselves as instruments of Flow? For instance, Flow entry through deep client absorption in this study differed from Csikszentmihalyi's (1975; 1990) task focus. How might inexperienced coaches' solutions differ, if at all, in tackling this Flow entry challenge?

Second, future research could explore how well this study's map of Flow establishes a common base of awareness and understanding amongst previously unaware research participants. How well does the Flow map enable unaware coaches to recognise and understand the experience enough to perceive any differences in their practice when in or out of Flow? Having become aware of Flow using the descriptive map, how might they experience and perceive changes in their frame of reference afterwards and how might that differ from findings in this study? These lines of inquiry would help to deepen and build our understanding of Flow in coaching across the wider representative coaching body, broadening opportunities for practice development through the lens of Flow.

This study has not examined the client's perspective of Flow in the coaching dyad. An important opportunity therefore exists to repeat the programme from the client's perspective, identifying and describing the experience of Flow in the coaching relationship and their perception of any subsequent changes in their frame of reference. This would help to establish a greater depth in understanding of how both coach and client experience the dyadic relationship in Flow. Insights from similarities or differences could have important implications for further understanding the coaching relationship and the influence of Flow on it.

Findings in this study have shown Flow to be a generally positive and mobilising influence in coaching. Flow as an optimal experience is, in essence, a form of focus and energy and, as such, is not itself either positive or negative. Occasional examples of coaches losing track of time in Flow, resulting in a consequential rush to close the sessions, were shared in this study. Csikszentmihalyi (1990), however, has reported occasions where the intrinsic nature of Flow experiences became addictive, and the consequential behaviour had negative effects. Future research could help to identify and explore the potential for any downside effects in coaching, for example an excessive desire to find and be in Flow may itself lead to a dependence and addiction to this experience, to the detriment of coach and client. Research exploring this would be of value in helping to identify and understand any boundaries and safeguarding needs.

8.5 Personal reflections

Reflecting afterwards on the dialogue and the transcripts from several of the data-gathering sessions, I recognised that I had been in Flow. In many ways, those sessions and transcripts often appeared to unearth the deepest and more profound insights about the coaches' journey in Flow.

Whilst the coaches' journey of developmental reflection through the lens of Flow changed their thoughts, feelings and behaviour, so too for me as both a novice researcher and as an experienced coach. Over the four years of this Doctoral research journey, my process of learning and research has reflected that of my co-researchers. It has been an ongoing, emergent and, at times, frustrating journey, building on incremental steps of awareness, understanding, trial, reflection, learning and adjustment. The journey began by establishing a base of knowledge, tools and approaches necessary for myself as a novice researcher. This stage challenged and deepened my fundamental beliefs about reality, knowledge and credible evidence. For example, discovering the works of Morgan (2014), Dewey (2008) and Fishman (1999) challenged and enabled me to recognise pragmatism as my paradigm view, through which I could make sense of my approach to research and life. Therefore, for this research programme, pragmatism allowed me to ground the research focus (exploring changes coaches perceived after Flow) as the primary driver for making appropriate methodological choices and so "transcend the Dialectic" (Fishman, 1999, p.102).

My ongoing researcher-practitioner developmental journey has been shaped by the choices I made. Reflecting on my experiences in applying two constructivist methodologies challenged and grew me in different ways. Conceptual Encounter required a co-creation of the map of Flow experience with my coach co-researchers. This contributed to a satisfying sense of coherence as coach experience challenged my understanding of Flow experience, demanding wider openness to others' views and an expanded conceptual understanding to incorporate them. Heuristic Inquiry required a depth of understanding of each individual's journey of

change after Flow. This contributed to an increased ability to suspend judgement and let go of a need to control or shape a desired outcome, demanding an ability to live in a state of flux and complexity of data and let meaning and sense emerge. This is a fundamental life skill that I have been challenged by throughout my working life and it is confronting it in this programme as a consequence of my choices that has developed me as researcher-practitioner, coach and person.

To conclude, this study has challenged and supported me intellectually, emotionally and on occasion, physically. It has fundamentally grounded me more deeply as a researcher-practitioner and as a practicing coach. Regardless of the relative perspectives of the coaches in this research, however, my reflection is that long-lasting insight and learning emerged through the interactions and dialogue between us on the journey. I recognise how fixed and firm my views were and how much easier and lighter I carry them today. I also recognise the depth of relationship and trust that has been built between myself and the other coaches in the study that I feel grateful for and believe will stay with us. I also recognise that their experiences, thoughts, feelings and meanings they shared in dialogue stayed with me over the analysis period and beyond, creating a lasting and deep imprint on me. The outcome of the research has been a deeper understanding of the experience of relational Flow in coaching and its consequential effects. I will continue to share this understanding in papers and at conferences in the future.

The personal experiences and learnings, however, have helped to change and enhance my coaching approach. A now firm belief in Flow's potential to help myself and others achieve has become my guide. Through Flow and this research study, I have found even greater enjoyment, purpose, fulfilment and development in my coaching.

As a summary capturing the thoughts and beliefs expressed by many in this study:

"I feel privileged and excited to be aware of myself as a coach in Flow. Privileged to know that being in Flow is the biggest benefit I can offer my coachees to help them

flourish, and excited to know that Flow will be a guide to challenge and stimulate me to refine and grow myself and my practice”.

My hope is that this work provides a lens of Flow through which more coaches may focus and so become their own instrument of Flow in their practice and development. I hope that I can continue to play a part as coach and researcher-practitioner in helping coaches to become aware of Flow and, through experience, notice it as a catalyst of growth and intentionally go on to develop themselves as instruments of Flow in their coaching practice.

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Appendices

Appendix a: Examples of coach lived experience of Flow (McBride, 2013)

Adapted from McBride (2013): Examples of coach lived experience of Flow in coaching re-clustered behind Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1990) characteristics.

Characteristics	Examples
Sense of control Sense of self (p.48)	"you have to have the experience, and confidence is a piece of it, in knowing that if you ask the wrong question, it will be okay." "I feel by now that I am competent enough as a coach that I can let go of trying so hard. . . I think that is key"
Confidence (p.48)	"You have to have confidence in your ability to succeed, in order to experience flow. You also need to have a strong sense of self-regard" "I think in the flow state you forget about what you're able to do. There's a "yes" quality to it. It's no longer "I think I can." It's "Yes!"
Focus / Presence (p.49)	"So we're both fully present. I don't think I can enter flow with a coaching client unless we are both fully present." "Getting the "I" out of the way and really being present to what is." "I would enter through the door of listening and that would be the thing that would allow me to really connect and get to that state." "It came out of my absorption, out of my concentration on her and letting go. And then, effortless emerged. It's just the being present, awareness and actions merge. Kind of objective and subjective at the same time. I'm not in there, but I'm clearly there. I'm not in her business, but I'm clearly in the situation. I'm merged with what's going on." (p.58)
Relationship (p.51, p.57)	"you trust the relationship and so you just go with it. And you're transparent and open" "I will meet them where they are. But, they need a willingness to venture out. They have to have a willingness to search, to look for the answers." "It always changes the relationship that I have with the client. We are closer after that all the time. We have an experience like you've kissed a girl when you're a kid. It's an event and you both know it and you are different. The relationship is totally different." "You trust the relationship and so you just go with it. And you're transparent and open. I knew I had experience flow from just the sheer enjoyment of the conversation. There was pleasure in even the bumpy parts of the conversation."
Transcendence (p.56)	"It's just fun and rewarding. It's just such an honour to stand in the presence of someone else going through discovery. It's inspiring and it's humbling. On some level it's a truly spiritual and divine experience." "There's really a merging with the client in a way, while not getting caught up in her story." "I knew I was in the flow state [in this session] because I ceased to exist. I didn't have to think about anything. The next question just came out of me. I didn't have to worry about how am I doing, how is the session going? It didn't matter at all. The conversation took care of itself. It was just effortless." "In that moment I'm not defined as a coach. Myself and the client have become one. And the information freely flows and the existence of time goes away. It's very conversational. It's not question, response, question, response. It's like energy feeding off of each other. You're all in one motion. There's a relaxation and we're moving forward." "If I was at church, it would be the Holy Spirit. There's almost another presence there. It's not another person. But, it is quiet and easy to think. And it's like a sacred place where it's easy to think, it's easy to talk, it's easy to communicate and there's a stillness in the air." "It's inspiring and it's humbling and it's awe provoking. And it makes your heart sing afterwards. And on some level it is truly a spiritual and divine experience."
Ease and Enjoyment (p.58)	"It's not work. I have a feeling of ease and grace" "It was just effortless. Exactly the right question was asked, and the next question" "I knew I had experience flow from just the sheer enjoyment of the conversation. There was pleasure in even the bumpy parts of the conversation"

Appendix b: Flow definitions

Flow definitions shared by Wesson (2007) and McBride (2013) before fieldwork.

Wesson (2007) provided the following definition for Flow for clarity from which respondents could form their responses:

"Flow is a subjective state that people report when they are completely involved in something to the point of forgetting time, fatigue, and everything else but the activity itself. It is what we feel when we read a well-crafted novel, or play a good game of squash, or take part in a stimulating conversation. The defining feature of flow is intense experiential involvement in moment-to-moment activity. Attention is fully invested in the task at hand, and the person functions at his or her fullest capacity". Csikszentmihalyi et al. (2005, p.600)

McBride (2013) Invitation Letter

Flow includes the following characteristics (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988) :

- 1.The activity has clear goals and objectives requiring response.
- 2.The activity provides immediate feedback.
- 3.The individual's perceived skills are suited to the challenge.
- 4.The individual feels completely absorbed in the effort -- a high level of concentration, minimal distractions.
- 5.The individual' s awareness and actions merge.
- 6.The activity feels effortless.
- 7.Intrinsic motivation is present -- the engagement is self-rewarding.
- 8.The individual experiences an altered sense of time.
- 9.The individual experiences a loss of ego-awareness or self-consciousness and has the sense of expanded consciousness and expanded strength.

Appendix c: Prospective co-researcher email



Introductory exploration email notice
From Alistair Bradley, doctoral research student
Student Number: 17022744

Study title
'Exploring the changes coaches perceive on their growth and development as a result of experiencing Flow'

Dear

Thank you so much for the brief conversation we had about my Doctoral research project. As we discussed, you asked for some more detail so that you could consider it carefully. To help you, I have attached the formal Participation Information sheet with full details about the project and the type of involvement it could need.

I want to reinforce that there is absolutely no obligation from my side to be involved in this programme, you must feel absolutely free to make an informed choice yourself. To reiterate, I fully appreciate that you have a full and busy agenda with your coaching and that your possible involvement in this research needs some reflection and consideration.

If you would like to discuss and explore your involvement further, or need any clarification, please do feel free to contact me; again with no obligation. Should you still be interested in taking part please do let me know. If you believe others might be interested in the research, please could you pass on my contact details so that they can get in touch with me. I'll then send an information sheet to them.

Thank you again for your interest and I look forward to talking again soon.

Regards

Alistair Bradley

17022744@brookes.ac.uk
07785 774478

Appendix d: Participant Information Sheet (PIS), Consent Form for Conceptual Encounter and Consent form for Heuristic Inquiry



Participant Information Sheet:
From Alistair Bradley, doctoral research student
Student Number: 17022744

Study title
'Exploring the changes coaches perceive on their growth and development as a result of experiencing Flow'

Invitation paragraph

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 intention of the study is to explore if flow experiences during coaching conversations may play a part in helping coaches grow and develop. Within the study we would explore how coaches recognise the experience of flow in the coaching context and the changes they perceive about their own growth and development afterwards. Flow is sometimes described as an intrinsically motivated experience where "people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 4)

Why have I been invited to participate?

You are being invited because you are working as an Executive Coach to senior business leaders in an organisational context. You are experienced, meaning that you will probably have at least 500 hours of executive coaching, and you are; International Coaching Federation (ICF) accredited, motivated by your professional development, capable of reflexivity and sensitivity to explore and communicate psychological nuances in yourself and your development and are willing to consider committing for the duration of the study.

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 participate in four research activities: an individual interview, a orientation focus group and then a period of recording your experiences and changes associated with flow followed by a final interview. The initial interview aims to explore your experiences of flow; the orientation focus group to develop a common understanding of flow and orientation for the next stage of the study. From this basis of collective understanding you will be asked to note and collect any subsequent changes in your growth and development you perceive over the next six months in a reflective log. At the end of this period a last individual interview will be held for you to share and discuss these perceived changes arising from flow. Involvement in the research should be an engaging and potentially developmental experience.

Before the first interview (up to two hours) you will be asked to sign a consent form. With your consent, the conversation will be audio-recorded for a transcript to be made and used in the research; a transcript will be sent to you to check for accuracy. A orientation focus group with all participants will last up to two hours and will be audio-recorded. From this point for six months, all participants will keep a reflective

log in order to individually note and collect your experiences of any changes you perceive in yourself and your work arising from flow. The time commitment for this should not be onerous, potentially up to 15 minutes a week as a reflective element after completing your normal coaching session notes. A final individual interview may last up to 2 hours and with your consent, will be audio-recorded and transcribed; and as with the first interview, this transcript will be sent to you to check for accuracy.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The benefits of taking part are that your experiences will add to a new professional contribution to coaching: understand how coaches recognise and value flow moments that occur in coaching sessions. This may help create and explore new understandings and insights into your growth and development. Furthermore, a theoretical contribution is anticipated to the literature on flow in coaching and its possible effect on coaches growth and development. The wider benefit of this research is that, just as the value of flow is known by artists, business leaders, sportsmen/women and musicians, so it may be valued by coaches and the coaching profession for its possible contribution to the ongoing development of coaches towards mastery.

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: 17022744@brookes.ac.uk or +447785 774478
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.

Contact for Further Information

Alistair Bradley
Student Number 17022744
Email: 17022744@brookes.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0)7785 774478

My Director of Studies supervisor is: Professor Tatiana Bachkirova Co-Director of the International Centre for Coaching and Mentoring Studies Oxford Brookes University, Faculty of Business, tbachkirova@brookes.ac.uk

My second supervisor is : Dr. Judie Gannon, Senior Lecturer at the Oxford Brookes Business School, jmgannon@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.



CONSENT FORM: Aim 1

Full title of Project:

An empirical exploration into the changes coaches perceive in the growth and development as a result of experiencing flow.]

AIM 1. Explore what experiences coaches recognise as flow within the coaching conversation.

Name, position and contact address of Researcher

Alistair Bradley

Student Number **17022744**

Email: 17022744@brookes.ac.uk

Tel: +44 (0)7785 774478

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.

☐☐☐

Please initial box

5. I agree to the individual interviews being audio-recorded
6. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

Yes

No

☐☐☐☐

7. I would like the option of being identified in any publication arising from the research.

☐☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature



CONSENT FORM: Aim 2

Full title of Project:

An empirical exploration into the changes coaches perceive in the growth and development as a result of experiencing flow.

Aim 2. Explore what personal changes coaches perceive associated with experiencing flow.

Name, position and contact address of Researcher

Alistair Bradley

Student Number 17022744

Email: 17022744@brookes.ac.uk

Tel: +44 (0)7785 774478

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.
4. I understand that the orientation focus group will be audio-recorded

☐☐☐☐

Please initial box

5. I agree to the individual interviews being audio-recorded
6. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications
7. I would like the option of being identified in any publication arising from the research.

Yes

No

☐☐☐☐☐☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix e: Conceptual encounter interview guide



Conceptual Encounter Interview guide

From Alistair Bradley, doctoral research student

Student Number: 17022744

Aim 1: Explore what experiences coaches recognise as flow within the coaching conversation

Context:

These questions are designed to provide a framework for a 90-minute conceptual encounter semi-structured interview exploring flow in coaching conversations. The aim of the interview is to first explore the research partner's specific and concrete experience of flow as fully and deeply as possible. The researcher then introduces and explores different aspects of the concept of flow for discussion and evaluation against the participant concrete experience.

Structure:

Introduce and explore experience of flow in coaching conversations: The aim is for the research participant to explore their idea and concrete experience of flow.

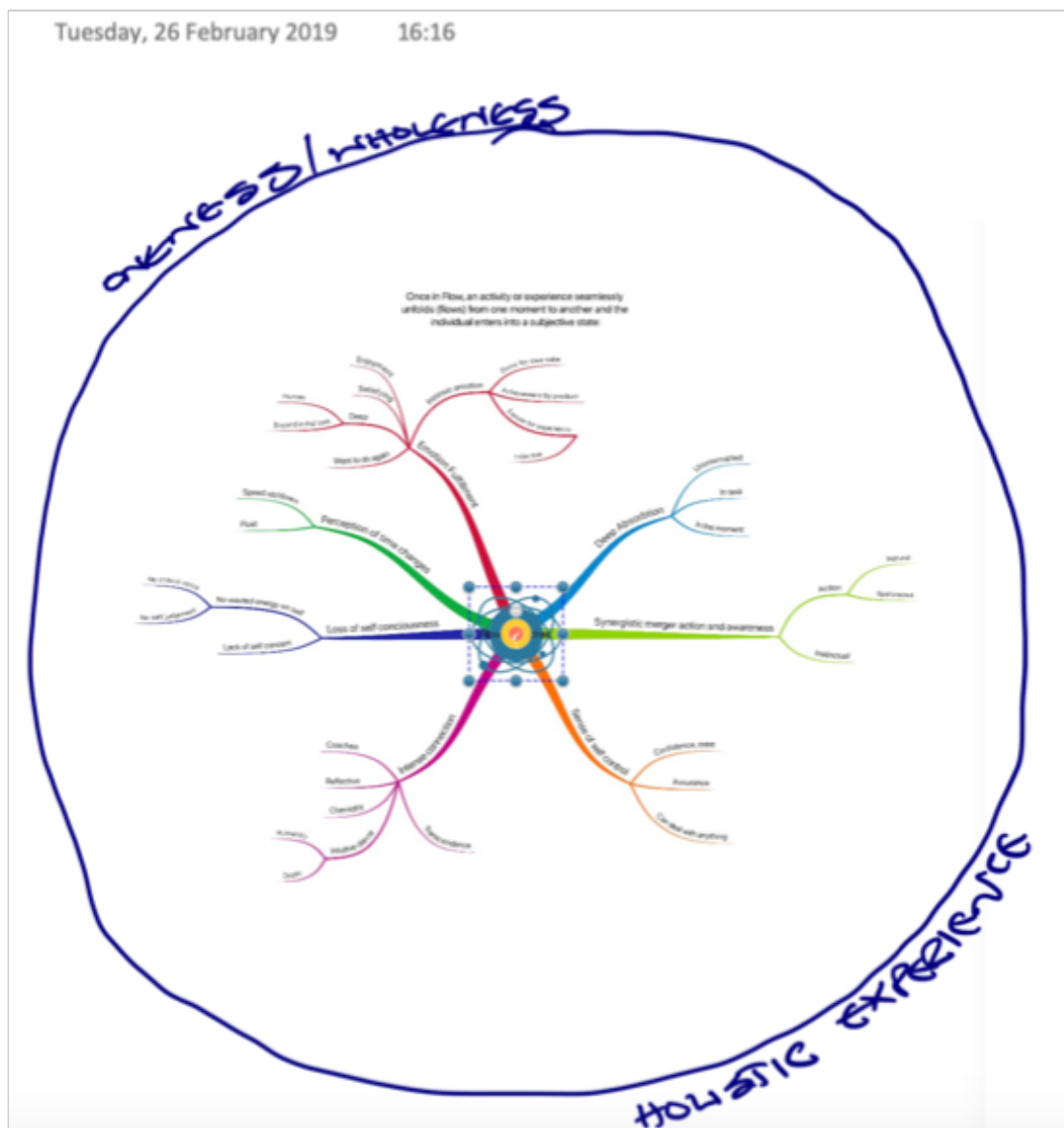
- What does flow mean to you?
- Could you describe to me recent experiences during your coaching conversations that you would identify as being in flow?
- What was it about the experience that you identify as being in flow?
- What kind of thoughts can you recall when experiencing this?
- How did this experience feel to you?
- What behaviours can you recall when you were experiencing this?
- What other experiences that you identify as flow would you like to share?
- Repeat above questions
- How did these experiences affect you and your coaching in any way during your coaching conversations?
- What specific experiences would bring this alive to help me understand more?
- What were the differences in your thoughts, feelings or behaviours you experienced during flow and after flow in your coaching conversations?
- What experiences can you recall about your coaching when flow was absent?
- What differences do you perceive when flow is present, if any?
- Could you tell me more about those differences?

Explore concept through encounter with experience: The aim is to introduce the researcher's concept and explore how it fits with the research partners' experience.

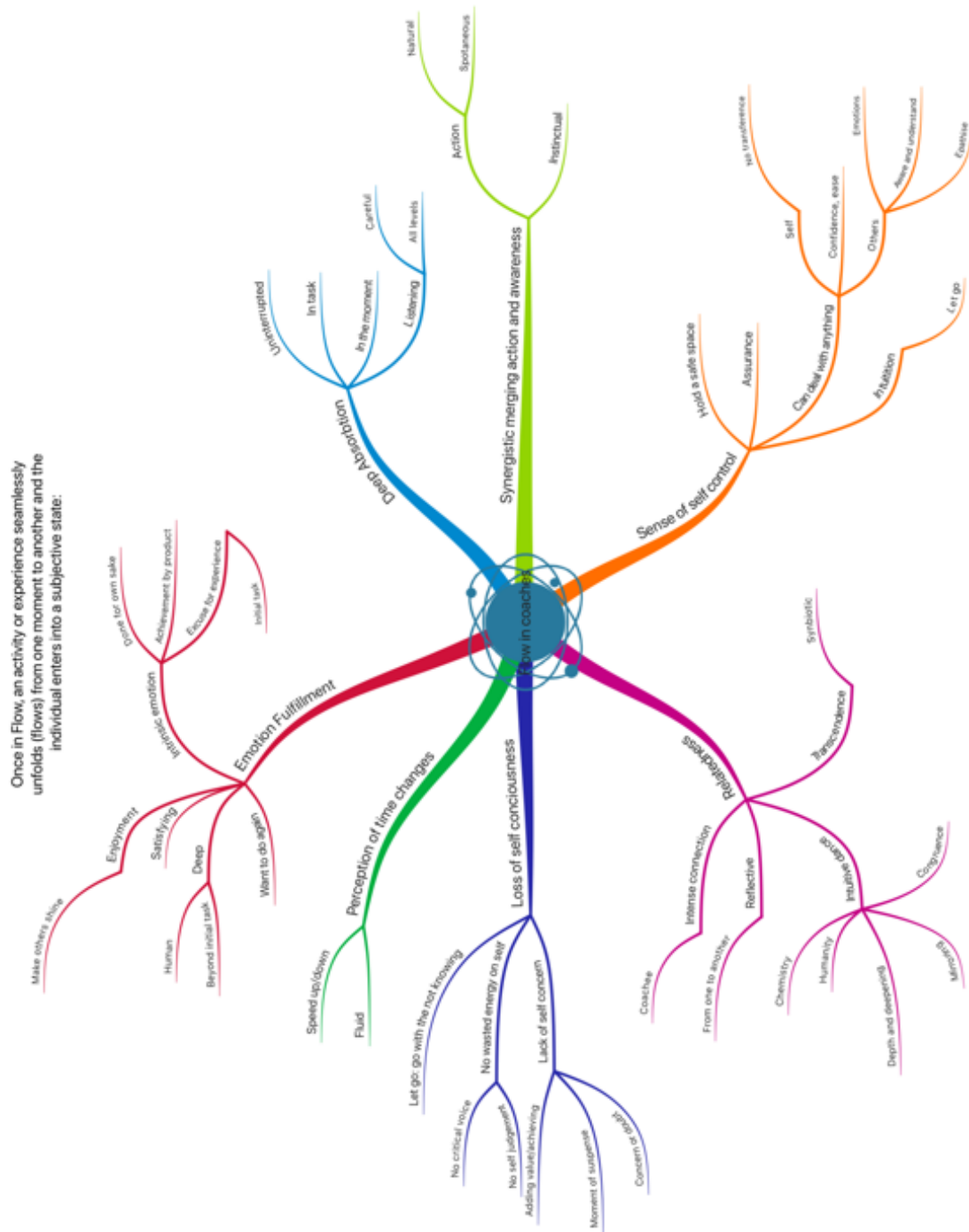
- (Researcher introduces an overall summary of the concept of flow "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.4)
- What does this mean to you?
- How well does this fit with your overall experience of flow?
- What works for you about this given your experience and our conversations so far??
- What doesn't work (if any) about this for you?
- How might this be changed or improved?
- (Researcher introduces an aspect of the concept of flow)
- What does this mean to you?
- How well does this fit with your experience of this aspect of flow?
- What works for you about this aspect of flow given your experience and our conversations so far?
- What doesn't work (if any) about this aspect for you?
- How might this be changed or improved?
- (Researcher introduces another aspect of flow and repeats above questions)
- Are there any other areas that you can think of that may be similar to flow? What makes them the same or different?
- Is there anything else that you feel is important to share about your experience of flow that we haven't covered so far?

Appendix f: Mind-map iteration of the CE interviews

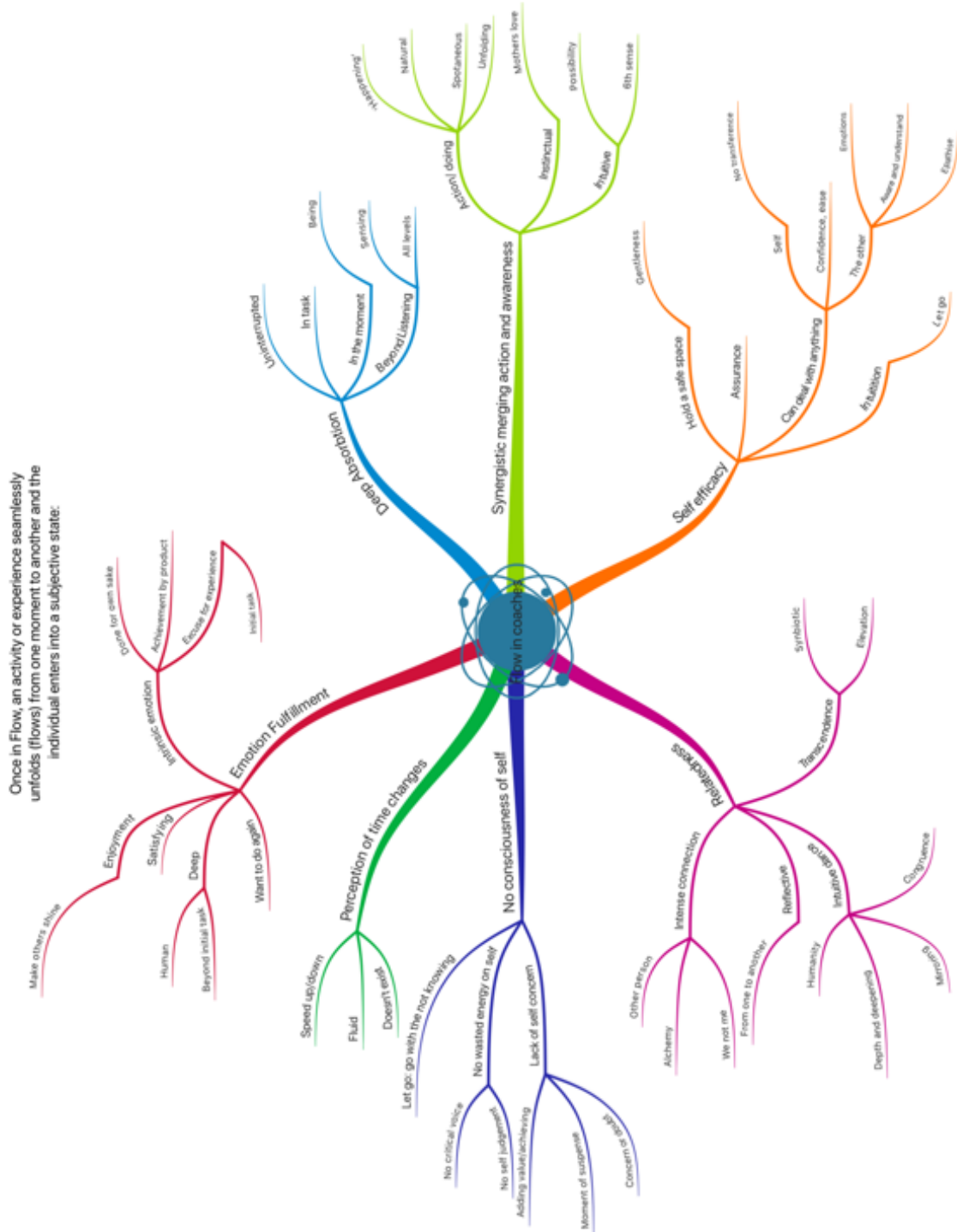
Interview 2



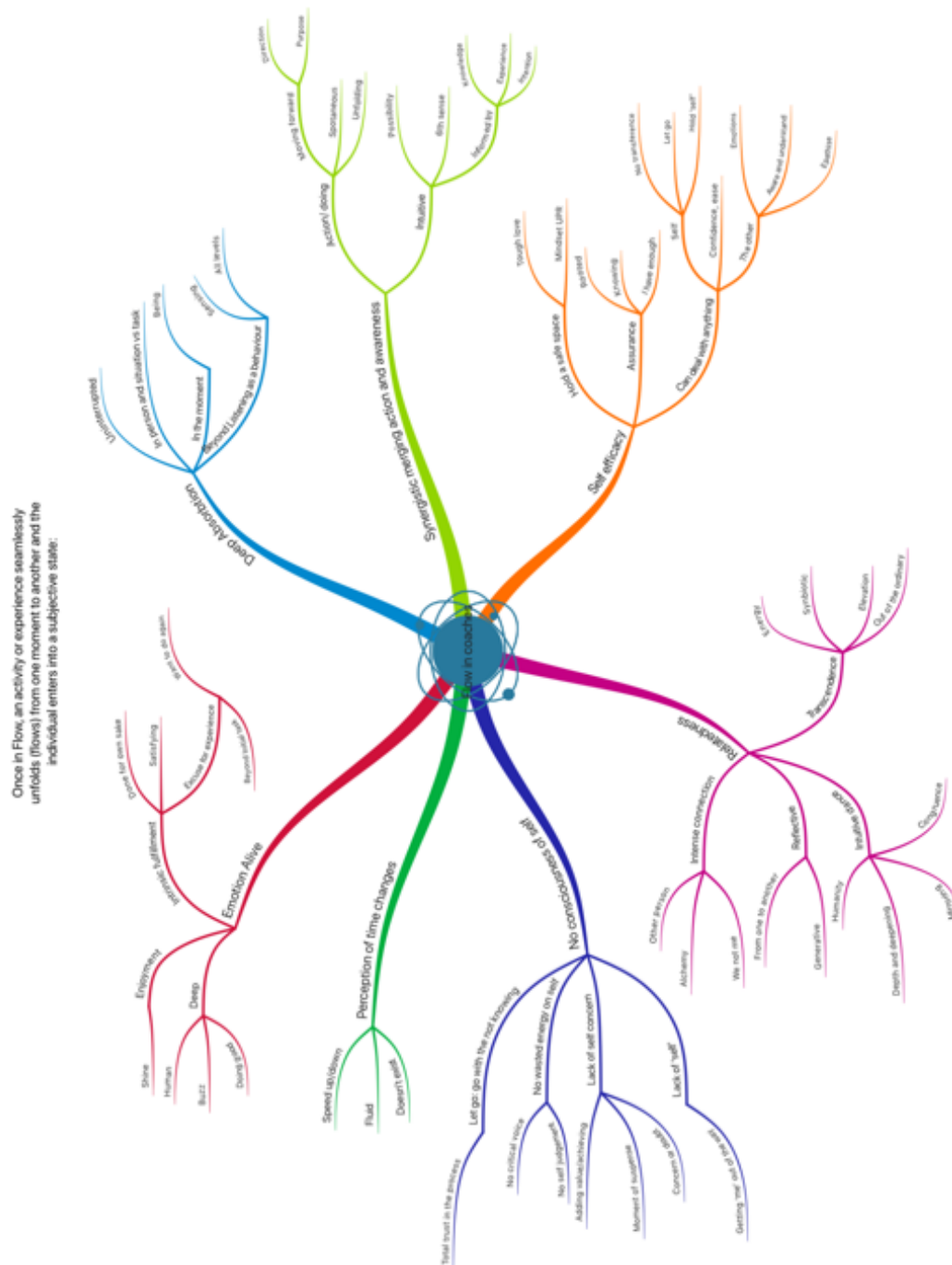
Interview 4



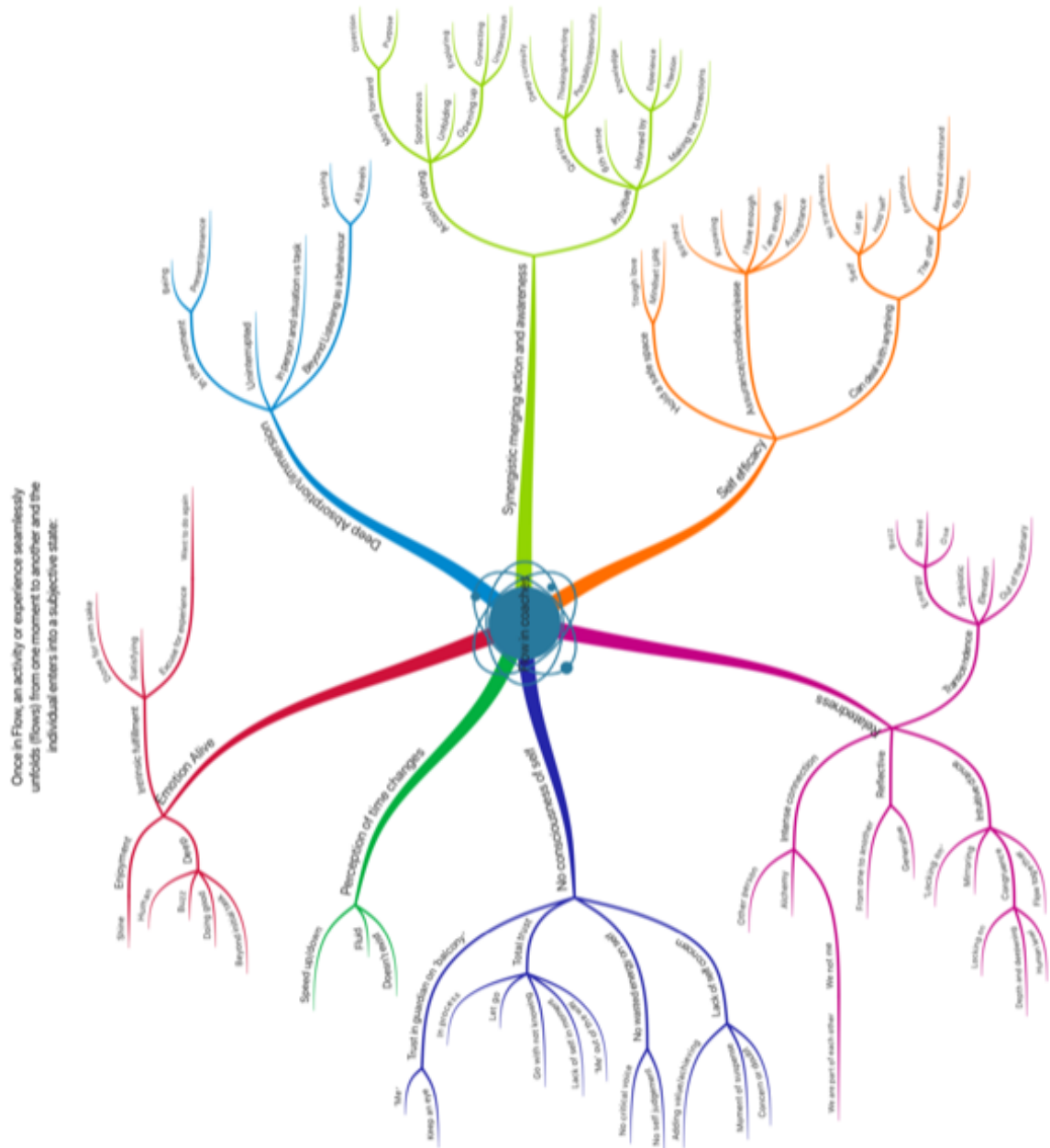
Interview 5



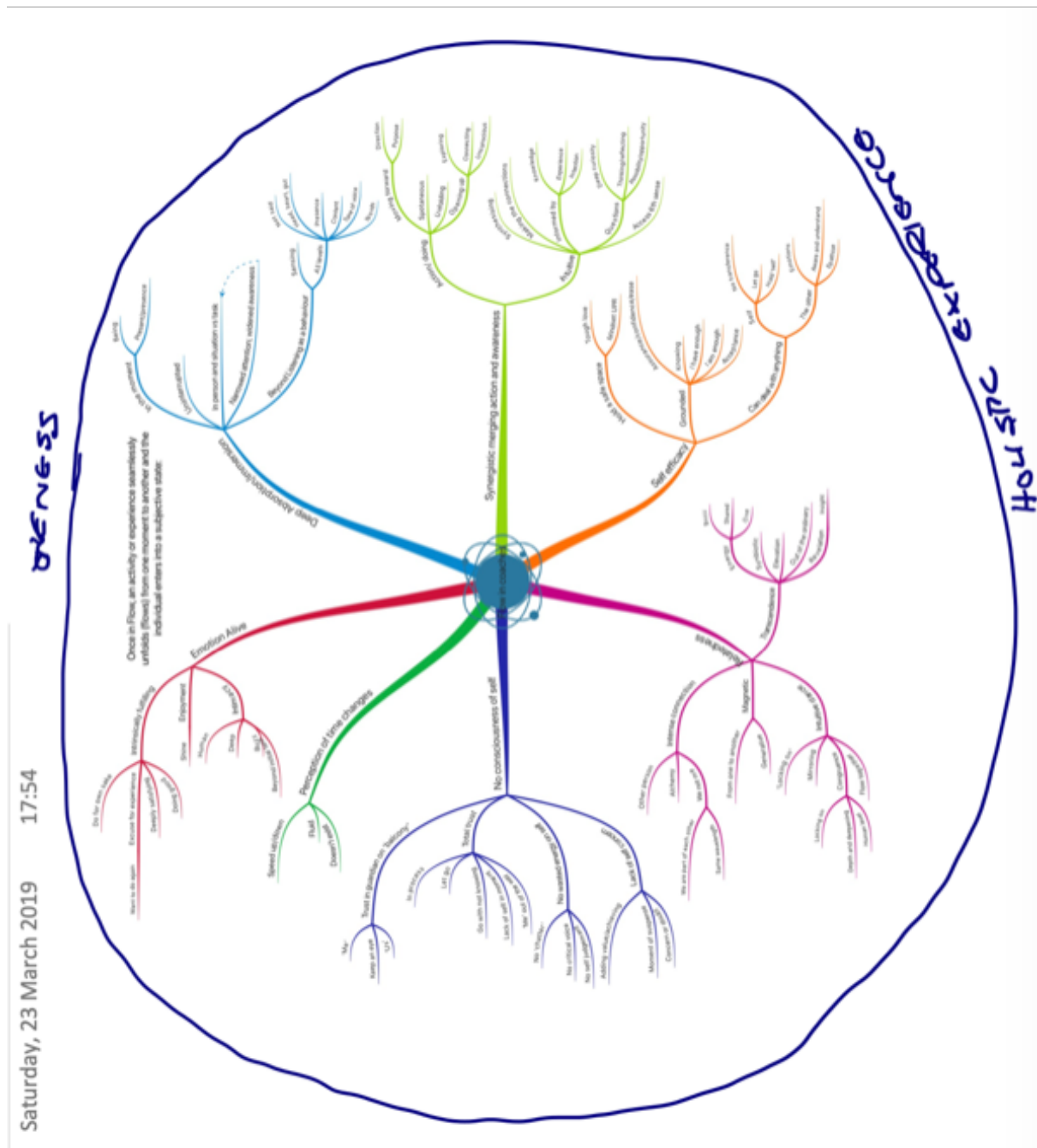
Interview 6



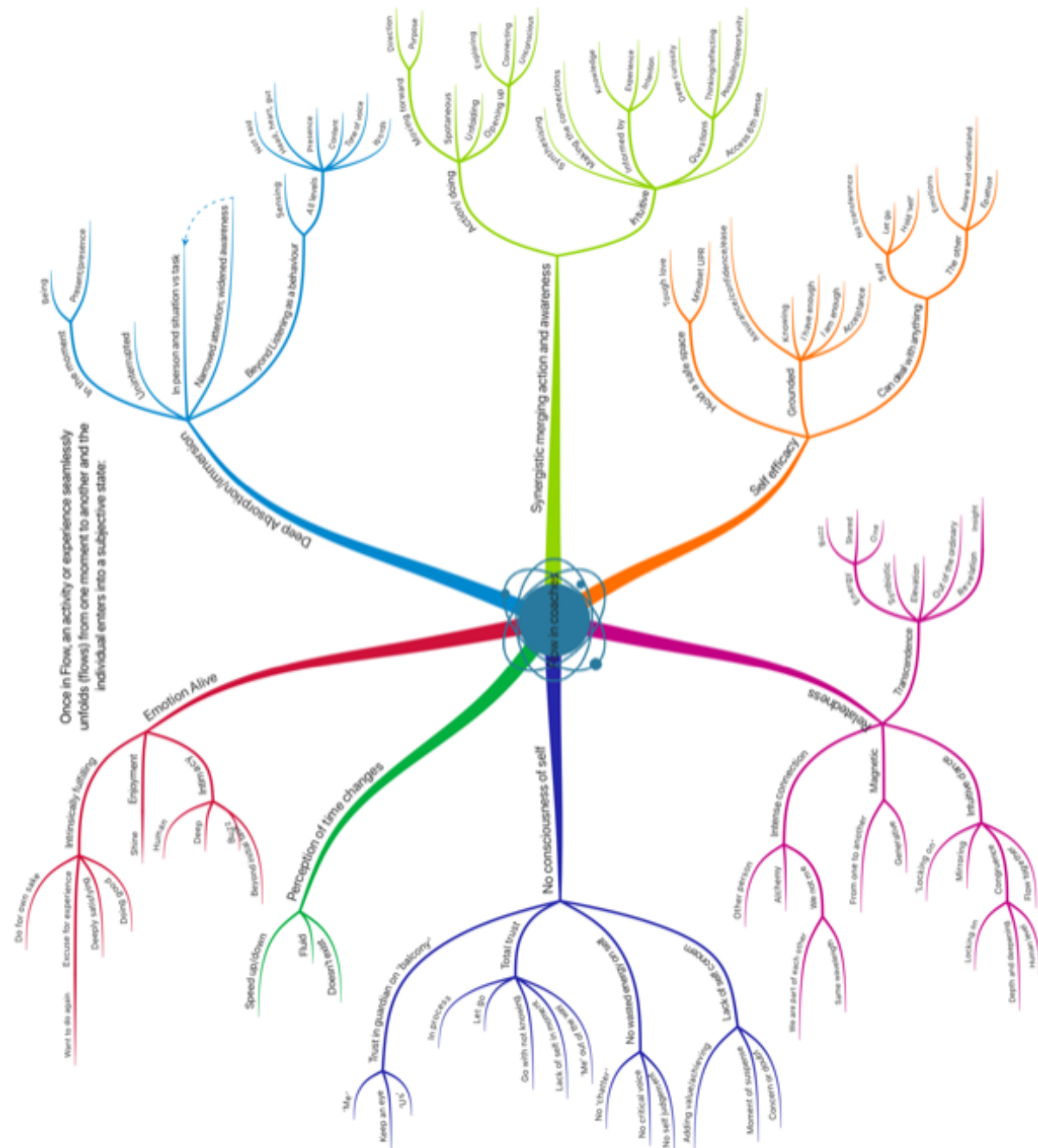
Interview 7



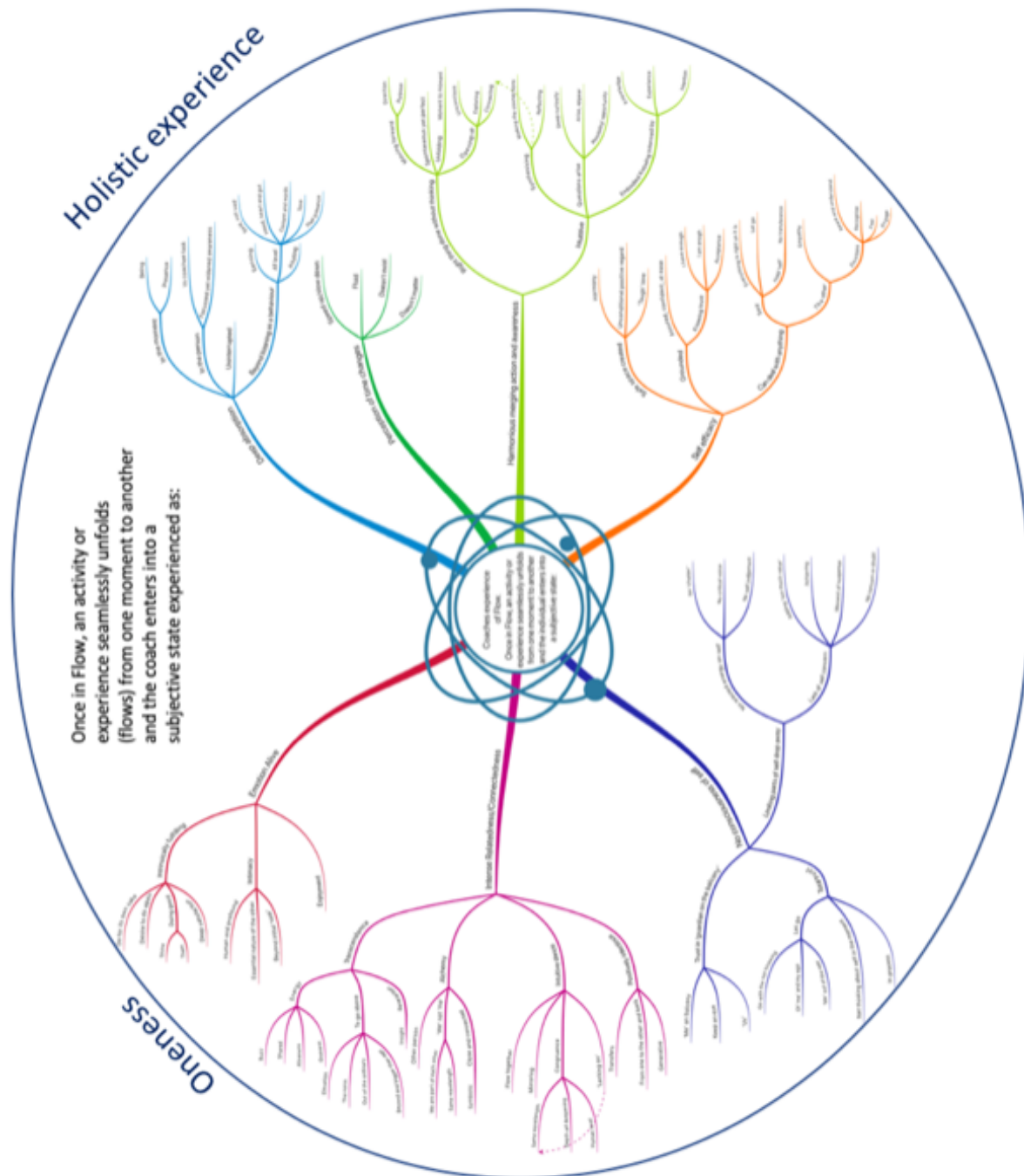
Interview 8



Interview 9



Interview 10



Appendix g: Alignment meeting



Alignment meeting
From Alistair Bradley, doctoral research student
Student Number: 17022744

Context:

The alignment meeting will provide the basis to allow a common understanding of the Final Flow concept from which they will be asked to observe and note any perceived change over the following 6 months. In the discussion participants will agree on the form and process of keeping a reflective log over that period.

Structure:

Introduce final flow concept and ensure common understanding:

(Researcher introduces the final overall flow concept)

Please take some time to read and understand this final concept

How well do you feel that you can understand this concept?

What does this mean to you?

What aspects do you like? What makes that stand out to you?

What aspects would you like to discuss for greater clarity and understanding?

How well do you feel that you could use this as a reference point for recognising flow in your coaching conversations?

Are there any areas of concern that you would like discussed and clarified?

Discuss and agree the expectations over the six months self-reflection

(Researcher outlines the aim of observing and noting any perceived change after flow over the following 6 months)

Discuss individual, normal habits of ongoing reflective practice that you may already do?

Discuss how often and how you feel it would be helpful to reflect on flow in your coaching practice and any changes you may perceive afterwards.

Summarise aligned and agreed actions, expectations and reflection log format for the following six months.

Appendix h: HI interview guide



Heuristic Inquiry Interviews

From Alistair Bradley, doctoral research student

Student Number: 17022744

Aim 2. Explore any changes coaches perceive after experiencing flow.

Context:

These questions are designed to provide a framework for a 90-minute heuristic inquiry dialogue exploring any changes coach participants perceive associated with the experience of flow. The aim is to have a more informal conversational interview or natural, unfolding dialogue between researcher and participant as this is felt to encourage a deeper, fuller and richer expression of their journey.

Structure:

- Reflecting on your journey over the last six months
- Describe some of the flow experiences you had? What stands out for you?
- What experiences stand out to you after experiencing flow?
- What qualities and dimensions of any changes you perceived after flow stand out for you?
- What events, situations and people are connected with those changes after flow?
- What feelings and thoughts are generated by that experience?
- What bodily states or shifts in bodily presence occur over that period?
- What changes in your behaviour have you noticed since?
- What meaning do you make of any changes after experiencing flow?
- Is there anything else that you feel you would like to share about your experience after flow that you feel is important to share?

Appendix i: Extended examples of changes co-researchers perceived after Flow

Thoughts

Sub-theme Attribute	Co-researcher lived experience
Self-efficacy From mastery experiences (Bandura, 1994)	Megan: I suppose I just think that I'm far more conscious of it now. The real shift that has happened is my desire to stay permanently in flow. I think that is probably how I think I've changed. Knowing that that's how I want to be when I'm coaching, and I can get there, makes me feel far more effective. I guess it means that I am being the best I can be as a coach. Megan: the nature of the change...understanding that when I do trust myself or I can trust myself, it's absolutely fine. That is when I am at my best. Megan: So, I think maybe there was a 'I think' before, I think that I am at my best, but now I know it with absolute certainty. Which is why I think that I can probably go 'I am a bloody good coach now' rather than think that I'm a good coach... I know I'm a bloody good coach when I'm in flow. Definitely. I am not actually sure that you can coach effectively unless you are in flow. So, I think that is my major reflection. Megan: noticing the difference being in flow makes, it means that you more quickly drop any idea that you have that you need to be a certain way or do a certain thing Kate: I think that what stands out for me is thinking about it. Sort of acknowledging that it's there ...Flow is for me a magical thing...it's the magic happening in my sessions. That happens. How amazing is that! I don't think that my life...or my coaching.. has been revolutionised by it, but I think there's no doubt that it has added value to me as a coach. Kate: It feels like a very un-sought-for endorsement of my skills as a coach, if I am honest...It's a gift that you give ... and receive ... by just being whatever your contribution to flow is. Kate: I know now that I'm confident enough that I have my big quiver of arrows of tools and techniques. I can access those if it feels right in the moment. So probably everything is a bit more 'in the moment' than it might have been. Kate: I'm a good coach. I add a lot of value to my clients in general. It's time to accept that. Don't be disingenuous about it, just yeah. You know, I'm lucky, I've got these gifts that I can share with people. By being me, I don't have to be anything but Kate the coach... Kate the coach is a particular persona, but my being her, it's enough in the room. Kiara: When my choice of client allows my needs to meet and match theirs to form meaningful and deep work together, wonderful things happen... They are kind of like me. And I am kind of like them... That is when I experience Flow and truly touch the excellence, I crave... for a moment you have just touched what it is to create and be excellent. Kiara: it's like witnessing a masterpiece or something. There is something about excellence of a beautiful masterpiece. Making me aware of flow has the inevitable consequence of making me want to be in flow more frequently. Kiara: And becoming more aware of it hasn't become a stick to beat myself with [when I'm not in Flow], it's become a really good thing. It's led me to more discernment Kiara: Having the confidence and the intuition to understand that ... I can pick and choose. I don't have to do it at all if I don't want to. So why don't I just work with the people with whom I feel really in-tune and for whom I think I can make a difference. And the confidence that comes with that.

Feelings

Sub-theme attribute	Co-researcher lived experience
Confidence/ Self-assurance I feel more confident	Megan: it just feels like more intuition, more authenticity, more confident. I suppose... It gives me the confidence to go, well, I'm just going to throw away all the books now that pop up in my head... I trust in the fact that what I've got is enough. Megan: The first words that come to mind are deeply satisfied, relaxing. And almost feeling like I had been true to me, that was a time that I was totally everything I could be, unfettered by anything. Kate: A quiet confidence. I no longer feel the need to check myself as much...I think it's that quiet confidence, that acceptance of intuition as a valid approach. Kate: It's that endorsement and joy that in my sessions, very regularly, flow happens. And that's a gift that you receive and a gift that you give. Kate: That critical voice on my shoulder that used to question me has changed to enabling and encouraging me. It's become an in the moment almost unconscious sounding board that's adding value. Kate: I think that there is that thing about flow... because I am quietly confident that it probably comes to me easier and quicker now, ... good things emerge, I am probably more relaxed... My coaching is calmer and more relaxed and more confident as a result. Chris: And increased my overall confidence and assurance as a coach... feeling reassured ... more natural as a coach... and being confident in that. You know, not being embarrassed sometimes, some anecdotes, some self disclosure, some advice. Just not worrying about the rules so much but just being there and being authentic. Chris: I think it's having the courage and the confidence to try different things, different approaches, different questions, different styles. And learn and get better and keep going on that journey. Chris: So rather than sitting there thinking and feeling very comfortable, I'm in the stretch zone again now... I feel more ambitious, more optimistic, more adventurous, more creative, more engaged, more excited. There you go, that's quite a good list. Victoria: It [Flow] makes my job even more pleasurable than it was before. I have more energy, I have more capacity, I have more clarity, I have more confidence. I am a much better coach. I feel I am a much better...and more mature coach. Victoria: So, it's a stretch, everything is a stretch... And I'm braver because of that. Kiara: there is constant growth in confidence and acceptance of myself as being a person who is in the right place at the right time to be offering support. Kiara: I suppose it's sort of joyful. Satisfied. Powerful in the sense of having achieved something. It's a quiet power, it's not a smugness or show-offy state. It's just a real honest acceptance of my own strengths and qualities, my contribution to that person. Kiara: It means feeling that I'm doing the work that I'm best at, that I enjoy most, and that makes me feel proud of myself and feeling that I have given really good value.

Behaviours

Sub-theme attribute	Co-researcher lived experience
I am an 'instrument' of Flow in coaching: Take care of myself	Zara: there was more of a shift onto how we look after ourselves, how do we honour ourselves, how do we demonstrate love through our actions. Zara: So, its body hygiene in the sense of looking after the body physically and mental hygiene. Just calming the system down... if I am feeling anxious. And taking that time out during the day as well. Zara: I'm more organised because I'm not rushing as much. I know what's important... so I build in time for the important stuff. That makes me more efficient because I feel better. I feel physically stronger. I feel calmer. I feel that I listen more. Kiara: it was the dawning realisation about the effect my choices have on my sense of self-worth and excellence which was the key to enable me to finally unlock this in myself. Kiara: And that has contributed to my divesting myself of all but cherry-picked work. Kiara: [making that choice] is a big and important thing to do, ... Choosing more carefully, which I have started to do, who I am going to coach...

Sub-theme attribute	Co-researcher lived experience
I am an 'instrument' of Flow in coaching: Prepare self rather than session	Robert: ... I need to have a certain attitude, I need to be listening, I need to be genuinely interested. It's just a state of mind you know. You can find curiosity in anything if you've got an attitude for finding that. Megan: The other difference ..was... that I used to worry about prepping for clients... now I probably...make just a couple of notes... If I'm in flow and I look at them, that's enough to bring the stuff back. So, I don't have to do loads of prep. Because if I go into flow, all that prep will just disappear. So, it's completely pointless! Megan: I had my list of my pre-session routine. Where I'd kind of just sit and breathe and you know, just do some good breathing, put myself in peripheral vision. Remind myself of how I want to structure the session and what I want to do and generally think about the client. And then stay in peripheral vision and go into the session. Kate: So, in terms of pre-coaching, there's a sense of being more relaxed about me as a coach. Not about coaching but about me as a coach. I'm more confident. Kate: I still do the prep, so I would look over my notes. My notes are probably less now than I might have taken in the past. But then that's the end of it. It's a refresher, not a hum, so what might happen in this session. Kate: This emergent confidence means that I see myself as a catalyst for flow. It feels a bit like... there's a super-power that you have. It's not like, a magician in terms of doing a trick. But just the fact of you being you, have the capacity to create a space, a bubble, an environment or whatever, where flow happens. And that is ... magical and ... quite an empowering thing, I think. Chris: I would plan slightly differently now for a session...15 minutes before a session I will shut the PC, reflect on my client notes, or just be quiet and get ready for the space. Because previously, I'd have been doing emails right up until he arrived. And then I would go umm right, where were we. And that's no way to start a session. Because you're busy, you're cluttered. Chris: it's that realisation that to be in flow, you've got to be quiet mind, single focus mind, receptive. Chris: I think going in with a higher expectation of being able to achieve flow. You can coach in black & white here and be a bit bored and look at your watch when you don't think he's looking and see if you can get out of here by 11am. Or you can approach it and think right, this is fascinating, this is curious, I am really going to use my skills to find out much more here to benefit the client obviously but also for my own interest and engagement as well. That's the only thing that changed. They didn't change. Victoria: I can go into a session and aim to reach flow state, using the techniques that I've worked on now. I get that... it's a stretch, everything is a stretch... I'm braver because of that. Laurence: It heightened my awareness of going into the sessions and how that can affect how the other person feels. Laurence: How I enter coaching sessions has been changed completely. I now treat it like a game day. Laurence: It means that I prepare myself personally for the session rather than preparing for the session... I can be more me at a deeper level rather than worrying about a process Laurence: I would spend my fifteen minutes getting into flow rather than reading the notes about before. I would be thinking right, I need to make sure that I'm personally ready for that coaching session. Just get myself in the right frame of mind: 'today is going to be awesome, I am going to have a great impact. I am going to come out of it energised, inspired. I go there to come out of there wanting to knock the ball out of the park.'

Sub-theme attribute	Co-researcher lived experience
Reflection through lens of Flow after coaching	Zara: [I reflect on] those trademark behaviours that we have as us at our best, what is it that we need to do moment to moment to have more of those kinds of peak experiences... and use that energy. So, it has formed me and my life, sort of day to day. Robert: I think that the understanding is that I'm probably better able to express how the flow experience changes and moves and contributes to coaching, through the reflections I've had afterwards. And flipping my mind...to reflections on flow. Robert: I think it's a real benefit and I think that the evolution if you like is that I notice flow more Robert: the biggest impact round the journey is simply the reflecting on flow as a result of these conversations... to have almost the privilege to reflect on flow after the event has been great Robert: I'm reviewing what has happened in a coaching session as a standard practice, looking for post coaching insights as well. But to focus specifically on flow and what's been going on in the room is new. And that in itself is helpful... shining a light on the experience in the coaching room. It shows me...that...I am at my best when I have this experience. It helps me unpack what contributes to that experience. Sarah: It's as if Flow and reflecting on it has helped everything come together. Increasing my self-awareness both as a person and as a coach in Flow has allowed me to become somewhat more sophisticated. Laurence: I think it's both the experience and reflecting on it. The flow <u>experience, definitely</u>. But even just reflecting on it, which is probably something that you don't do enough. Because you reflect on the session, but you don't necessarily reflect on the coaching... you reflect on the session and not on the performance. Now I say that it's a silly thing to do, because I have spent my life looking at the game and my performance. So that might be something that I need to change. Or I need to bring into my practice. So, it's how was the session, but also how was my performance in it. I think sometimes in coaching now it's about us as well. Sometimes we try and think that it's not about us, but I think it is. We bring 50% of that coaching. We are a conduit of that flow.

Sub-theme attribute	Co-researcher lived experience
I am an 'instrument' of Flow in coaching: Braver to ask questions during coaching	Robert: So as soon as I'm starting to try and work things out, I know that I'm not listening to client, I know I'm not present in the room. And that's absolutely what I don't want...What now do I now need to do to go back Robert: sometimes there has been a little distraction from the client. Something hasn't quite scanned. And that allows me, if I can unpack that in the moment, to come back with some sort of intuitive feedback to the client. To say, you know, 'When you just said that I felt really uncomfortable, what was going on for you there?' Megan: I just go 'stop thinking, start listening, trust and go with it. However weird you think the thing is that you are about to say, just say it.' And just go with it. Kate: I'm probably braver at suggesting them because intuitively, it's the right thing to offer to the client. When I say I'm braver, I would have offered them before, but I probably would have offered them with an apology. Or a... 'this is going to be slightly out of your comfort zone but have a go.' I won't even do that anymore. Chris: It's trying to put in place consciously the conditions for flow... trying to stimulate it. Chris: The insights and actionable ideas that came out from the client are higher ... from a flow experience, than from not. Chris: that was driven by being more challenging, by having a braver conversation with them. Interesting. So, it was me, it was me being prepared to say that I notice you've come to sessions without having done much preparation. So being brave and a bit more challenging. And that has moved them. And made for much more interesting conversations as well. Chris: for flow ... it's having the courage to ask that right and bigger question. What's the bigger picture, what's really going on here, what's your gut telling you here? Kiara: how does it affect my coaching? It probably becomes more creative and more fluid. I take more chances. Sarah: It's putting myself in more as a coach. I am far more willing to take risks in team coaching ... being able to confront more, to be more assertive or more adventurous in the risks that I'll take. The more risks I take, the more able you are to take risks. So, you lose the fear of it. So, you're able to take risks that previously I wouldn't have taken. Laurence: I asked one of the questions which I think was a result of flow...I was pleased that I was quite brave to ask powerful questions but do it on a deeper level.

Connection

Sub-theme attribute	Co-researcher lived experience
Connection as real, human and intimate (or vulnerable?)	Kiara: it feels like really meaningful work. It's challenging work, it's fun work. We have great rapport but in addition to that there is this kind of achievement in it too...It's playing to my strengths. I'm in it, I'm lost in it, it matters to me. I think it's all that. Sarah: Trust, so much trust there. It was very deep. So, it covered a lot of personal stuff but in a way that was productive. Laurence: Nowadays, whatever anyone says, the human connection is one of the most important things in the world...when you are in Flow it comes... That's more important than the tools Laurence: I actively now will make sure that I have the connection or the flow... because I've got deeper, quicker... and when you're in flow you do end up you do do a lot more personal stuff... You can actually have a real, good connection, a deep connection. And I think that's pretty powerful.

Sub-theme attribute	Co-researcher lived experience
Changing the nature and effectiveness At the heart of transformation	Robert: So, hooking into or being able to understand or be sensitive to the client's flow state is important as well... you can sometimes notice when a client is in and out of flow. And as they drop out of flow, you can use that as well Robert: Dissonances or interruptions to that Flow can be <u>really useful</u> information about myself, my client or our mutual coaching relationship that I can choose to use to help. I recognise that I may not have highlighted these insights had we still been in Flow. Kate: I come back to the Wild Things. Who's in the room is in the room. What is said is meant to be said. But I think what it is now is that the journey is about a quiet confidence, about what's meant to be said will be said, and I will say it. Kate: What will happen will happen. You know, who's in the room is in the room. Who leaves the room, leaves the room. Who talks, talks. Who doesn't talk, doesn't talk. And it will all be Ok. Because magic will happen anyway. But also, I'm... I'm going to sound arrogant, and I don't mean to... it's enough as coach to just allow it to happen without even being aware of my allowing it to happen. Kate: I just know that we came out [of Flow] with a great nugget of gold to build on at the end of it, or the client did. Or we both did, we both did it together, co-created. Chris: So, the flow experience was transforming the conversation ... it became a real, expanded conversation.

Sub-theme attribute	Co-researcher lived experience
Connection as deep and powerful	Zara: You know we get very transactional in our conversations, but if we stop and talk about things that are really affecting people and cut below the surface... the experiences of flow and connection to human beings. I think that those are the things that I have really learned... success is about being in flow and being connected to other human beings. That is richness, that's depth. That's full experience. And that to me is success. Zara: Coaching is just a vehicle, isn't it! The physicality of the experiences flow and connectedness to human beings is absolutely fundamental. Connecting to people who inspire you. Its people, its relationships ... It feels like a gift to be able to talk to someone and connect with them. Zara: you experience the conversation within your body, and you can share that experience of the conversation and matter mirror each other to get a deeper understanding and a deeper connection between you and the other person. Zara: You could feel the honesty, personal responsibility...they were really open to the conversation. So that was really powerful. It was the dance of the conversation AB: So, presence and therefore flow allows a richer, deeper, more real conversation or dialogue than non flow in a coaching conversation? Robert: Yes. I think so. That's what I believe. Chris: The probability of flow is proportional to the quality of presence of coach and coachee. You can't do it on your own. Chris: being in the zone is driven by rapport with the person, meaningful and important things to talk about, full on collaborative discussion ...digging down a couple of levels... that is when I think you get into Flow, when you move away from the surface. Chris: I think that you feel more satisfied afterwards, because hopefully you've had a broader, more engaged, more interesting conversation which the client has taken more from, more richness from. Victoria: the choice is not just mine alone... I feel confident that when the trust is there and when they start to let go, when they go deeper, I can be at a higher flow state. And they start to really flourish. Kiara: the coaching states of flow tend to come about for me when it's playing to my personal preferences. And there's a real deeply either emotional or complex issue that's being presented... that then kind of triggers my Flow. Sarah: I think that connection piece is really important ... when I have flow moments, it helps that connection hugely. I notice that a lot more. I think its notable by the absence. When I didn't have flow moments with the client, the connection between us was much weaker Sarah: The more flow moments I have, the better the connection across the whole assignment and the better connection overall. Sarah: [In Flow moments] it did really feel as though we easily and quickly connected... I felt very free and able to bring things in ... that are in tune and relevant, where the client was going and to be able to challenge in a way that is accepted, that did push the client out of where they would have been or out of their comfort zone but in a way that was productive, and we moved forward together... in tandem Laurence: let's use the dance analogy. If you can that connection first, then it's a lot easier to do the dance... You're in that dance... you know you don't need to worry about it. Laurence: When you're in flow coaching, it's like the Matrix [when] all the bullets are whizzing at you. Its being able to stop them and then pick the right bullets and pass them out of the way... you're able to see it all and just help them. Laurence: a bit like sport you know, just because you can pass with both hands, it doesn't mean that you can play the game to a higher level. You have to be able to read the game. And so that for me is what going deeper is.

Meaning

Meaning of change	Examples of co-researcher's lived experiences
Flow as a catalyst for my growth and development	"Flow has been the catalyst or lens through which I have been able to reflect and grow - I think it's just taken the blinkers off myself as a coach ... I'm having to think about it much more, I'm having to use a greater percentage of my capability and skills and so on, but I can do this. So, it's a blossoming, blossoming."
Focussing my coaching through the lens of Flow	"My personal journey suggests to me that there is value in using Flow as another lens through which to explore coaching practice."
Agency - It is in my hands/ I have a choice/ I can be the conduit of Flow	"Sometimes we try and think that it's not about us, but I think it is. We bring 50% of that coaching. We are a conduit of that flow."
Flow and excellence - I am at my best in Flow so orientate myself towards it	"Reaching flow state is just being the best that you can be as a coach. So, what are the triggers, what are the anchors that you use, it is something that you are in control of to get to."
I become a better Human Being, because in Flow I am truly alive and connected to others	"The biggest take away for me is if we are to advocate transformational working, transformational thinking and how we can all become better human beings, then we need to change the nature of how we work together."

Meaning of change	Co-researcher lived experience
Measure of success: I am at my best in Flow, so orientate myself to be there	Zara: The more you experience flow, the better a human being you can be Zara: To build in flow as a success measure. Zara: If we change kind of indicators of what makes us human, what makes us happy, what builds efficacy and flow within some of those measures, hopefully this study will bring it more to the fore in the field of coaching Robert: It is a signifier of being at our best, for me really bringing my full self into what I'm doing, then that is how I want to be most of the time, rather than a bit of the time. I have aligned my life right – because I am experiencing Flow Megan: I guess it means that I am being the best I can be as a coach. I know I'm a bloody good coach when I'm in flow. Definitely. It's not just as a coach, but for me as a human being and in my life right now, they mean... I will just be my best self. And calm. Megan: As a coach, knowing that that's how I want to be when I'm coaching, and I can get there, then I feel far more effective. Kate: It actually feels like a very un-sought-for endorsement of my skills as a coach, if I am really honest...It's a gift that you give by just being whatever your contribution to flow is. Victoria: reaching flow state is just being the best that you can be as a coach. So, what are the triggers, what are the anchors that you use, it is something that you are in control of to get to. Kiara: it's like witnessing a masterpiece .. for a moment you have just touched what it is to create and be excellent. Kiara: the experience of flow means lots of things but mostly it means excellence. It means excellent performance, excellent delivery, excellent rapport. Being completely congruent and authentic through to myself, my values without ego. Doing things for the right reason, listening, intuition. And whenever, whenever, I don't know how many more times I need to learn this but whenever I do...then wonderful things happen. Laurence: I feel like I am performing in my sessions at a high level more consistently. I feel like I am giving more and getting more in the coaching relationship. I feel like the impact that I am having is bigger. And I am also getting more enjoyment out of it too.

Meaning of change	Co-researcher lived experience
Agency: It is in my hands: I can be the conduit of Flow I have a choice	Kate: But also, the fact that me, I can speak only for myself, am a catalyst for flow. It's an extra gift that we have in the coaching conversation. Chris: So that's the discovery, I think... I think it's an appreciation of all those levers ... that have made a difference...are in my control actually. They are all building blocks for me achieving that sort of Flow, high performance and high engagement. My performance and growth is in my hands... I have a choice Victoria: I actively want to seek a flow state... it's something I believe I can achieve in every session that I want it to. Laurence: Sometimes we try and think that it's not about us, but I think it is. We bring 50% of that coaching. We are a conduit of that flow.

Meaning of change	Co-researcher lived experience
Flow as a catalyst for my growth and development	Robert: because I want to feel flow more, understanding and appreciating it as an experience and not just as a thought process is really helpful for me ... in my development as a coach. Kate: It's an extra gift that we have in the coaching conversation. Chris: If I look at my development as a coach over the last six months, it would be the highest it's been since my first six months of learning to be a coach I would say. Chris: Flow has been the catalyst or lens through which I have been able to reflect and grow - I think it's just taken the blinkers off myself as a coach ... this form of CPD which is nearly like having a supervisor in a way, is very conducive to me developing as a coach Chris: I think it's... recognising that you can work at a different level. You know, I'm having to think about it much more, I'm having to use a greater percentage of my capability and skills and so on, but I can do this. So, it's that, it's a blossoming, blossoming. Chris: I would use words like re-awakening, revitalising, lots of re words; re-energising, re-focussing. So, expanding, bigger picture, capability building. So, there are two ideas, a broadening idea and a re-boosting idea. That's how I would summarise it. I think that all the skills and approaches we learn are actually all leading to achieving Flow type situations with our clients and achieving transformational breakthroughs. Victoria: my experiences of Flow in coaching has meant an acceleration of personal growth as a coach. Victoria: I feel privileged and excited to be aware of myself as a coach in Flow. Privileged to know that being in Flow is the biggest benefit I can offer my coachee to help them flourish and excited to know that Flow will be a guide to challenge and stimulate me to refine and grow myself and my practice. Sarah: For me this has been a special experience once I became aware of it and could recognise it – both Flow itself and afterwards. Sarah: I now see Flow as not only a positive coaching experience in itself but also as both a facilitator and synergiser that seems to open you up to wider growth and development beyond coaching alone. Sarah: Whilst it is very hard to ascribe changes directly to Flow, I can see that in some ways it has been a validation and a consolidation of much of the personal development work I have been engaged in over the years. Laurence: It has been like suped-up learning, development and performance for both myself and my coaching. Laurence: I feel like I am performing in my sessions at a high level more consistently. I feel like I am giving more and getting more in the coaching relationship. I feel like the impact that I am having is bigger. And I am also getting more enjoyment out of it too Laurence: Being in flow is way better, ten times better.

Meaning of change	Co-researcher lived experience
Focussing my coaching through the lens of Flow	Robert: I've recognised that state as being a signifier of something good happening. And I've tried to have more of that sense of being in that state... [and] for the rest of my life, I will continue to do that. Robert: [therefore], because I want to feel flow more, understanding and appreciating it as an experience and not just as a thought process is really helpful for me ... in my development as a coach. Megan: I don't think it's just an experience thing... from doing more coaching. I think actually by being conscious of flow and doing coaching, somehow it feels like it's accelerating, Kate: I think that awareness of flow actually is for me a magical thing. I just like coming out of a session thinking oh, that was good! That happens. Chris: I think it's just taken the blinkers off myself as a coach... this form of CPD which is nearly like having a supervisor in a way, is very conducive to me developing as a coach Kiara: My personal journey suggests to me that there is value in using Flow as another lens through which to explore coaching practice. Sarah: In some ways it's been a validation. It's being able to recognise that actually it does make a difference. It makes a difference to me, and it makes a difference to my clients. And recognising that that concept of flow I wouldn't have necessarily felt it or know what to call it. But by bringing it into focus and giving it a language, it been able to cement it for me as a wow yes, a recognition, a validation of my growth, my journey and my value almost as reflected in the experience of the client. I think that's what it's helped do.

Appendix j: Examples of individual changes in Frame of Reference

Chris

Thought	Feelings	Behaviour	Relationship	Meaning
Chris: I think it's just taken the blinkers off myself as a coach. It's taking away limiting beliefs. The belief that a session with this client will never be interesting, this client is never going to go very far. On the other it's saying I am much more capable now of putting conditions in place to experience Flow and boost my performance much more consistently.	Chris: And increased my overall confidence and assurance as a coach... more natural as a coach... and being confident in that... Just not worrying about the rules so much but just being there and being authentic. Chris: I think it's having the courage and the confidence to try different things, different approaches, different questions, different styles. And learn and get better and keep going on that journey.	Chris: I would plan slightly differently now for a session...15 minutes before a session I will ... reflect on my client notes, or just be quiet and get ready for the space. Because previously, I'd have been doing emails right up until he arrived. And then I would go umm right, where were we. Chris: It's that realisation that to be in flow, you've got to be quiet mind, single focus mind, receptive.	Chris: The probability of flow is proportional to the quality of presence of coach and coachee. You can't do it on your own. Chris: being in the zone is driven by rapport with the person, meaningful and important things to talk about, full on collaborative discussion ...digging down about stuff... when you move away from the surface. Chris: I think that you feel more satisfied afterwards, because hopefully you've had a broader, more engaged, more interesting conversation which the client has taken more richness from.	Chris: If I look at my development as a coach over the last six months, it would be the highest it's been since my first six months of learning to be a coach I would say. Chris: Flow has been the catalyst or lens through which I have been able to reflect and grow - I think it's just taken the blinkers off myself as a coach ... this form of CPD which is nearly like having a supervisor in a way, is very conducive to me developing as a coach
Chris: Becoming more ambitious and more... responsible, perhaps as a coach... to say that I'm not going to live with mediocre results.	Chris: I'm in the stretch zone again now... I feel more ambitious, more optimistic, more adventurous, more creative, more engaged, more excited. There you go, that's quite a good list.	Chris: I think going in with a higher expectation of being able to achieve flow. You can coach in black & white here and be a bit bored and look at your watch when you don't think he's looking. Or you can think right, this is fascinating, this is curious, I am going to use my skills to find out more to benefit the client but also for my own interest and engagement as well. That's the only thing that changed. They didn't change.	Chris: So, the flow experience was transferring the conversation ... it became a real, expanded conversation.	Chris: I think it's... recognising that you can work at a different level. You know, I'm having to think about it much more, I'm having to use a greater percentage of my capability and skills and so on, but I can do this. So, it's that, it's a blossoming, blossoming.
Chris: If I look at the system, the only thing in the system that had changed actually was my attitude. They hadn't changed. They presented in the same way. But there was a mind-set for me that thought right Ok, you have a choice here.	Chris: So being in the zone is driven by rapport ... meaningful and important things to talk about, full on collaborative discussion, not just a Q&A, high support and high challenge, liking the person, ... and developing something useful during the session.	Chris: I firmly believe that the probability of Flow in my coaching is proportional to the quality of my presence. That ... happens when I am brave enough to let go and be. Truly trusting that I am enough, that I am confident that everything is now in place, and that whatever happens will be rewarding and enriching for us both.... it's letting go and just trusting that that's what will happen.		Chris: I would use words like re-awakening, revitalising, lots of re words; re-energising, re-focussing. So, expanding, bigger picture, capability building. So, there are two ideas, a broadening idea and a re-boosting idea. That's how I would summarise it. I think that all the skills and approaches we learn are actually all leading to achieving Flow type situations with our clients and achieving transformational breakthroughs.
Chris: It was a conscious choice to say you can choose to be bored for the next hour and half or you can choose to be a bit more engaged. What are you going to choose?		Chris: I'm trying to put in place consciously the conditions for flow... trying to stimulate it.		
Chris: You know that you're moving now to quite a high level of coaching and so being confident in that ... And being confident enough that ... if you've put all the conditions in place and you're in the zone and it doesn't happen and you don't see the Northern Lights, that's fine, I can live with that. It doesn't make me a bad coach	Chris: Not being in the zone is driven by being bored, being uninspired by the person or the issue ... stuck here just going round in circles and share of voice dominated by the client so no or lack of proper engagement by the client. Chris: It's trusting I'm a good coach. It's very satisfying as a coach. And it's very exciting as a coach. Chris: I think it's that sort of hope for abundance mentality. It's a development mentality. It's a potential mentality. It's a moving forward, moving ahead. It's an internal value system. So, I don't feel threatened by thinking you could do this much better. I feel very excited by that.	Chris: for flow ... it's having the courage to ask that right and bigger question. What's the bigger picture, what's really going on here, what's your gut telling you here?		Chris: So that's the discovery, I think... I think it's an appreciation of all those levers ... that have made a difference...are in my control actually. They are all building blocks for me achieving that sort of Flow, high performance and high engagement. My performance and growth is in my hands... I have a choice

Kiara

Thought	Feelings	Behaviour	Relationship	Meaning
Kiara: When my choice of client allows my needs to meet and match theirs to form meaningful and deep work together, wonderful things happen... They are kind of like me. And I am kind of like them... That is when I experience Flow and truly touch the excellence, I crave... for a moment you have just touched what it is to create and be excellent. Kiara: It's like witnessing a masterpiece or something. There is something about excellence of a beautiful masterpiece. Making me aware of flow has the inevitable consequence of making me want to be in flow more frequently. Kiara: And becoming more aware of it hasn't become a stick to beat myself with [when I'm not in Flow], it's become a really good thing. It's led me to more discernment Kiara: Having the confidence and the intuition to understand that ... I can pick and choose. I don't have to do it at all if I don't want to. So why don't I just work with the people with whom I feel really in-tune and for whom I think I can make a difference. And the confidence that comes with that.	Kiara: there is constant growth in confidence and acceptance of myself as being a person who is in the right place at the right time to be offering support. Kiara: I suppose it's sort of joyful. Satisfied. Powerful in the sense of having achieved something. It's a quiet power ... It's just a real honest acceptance of my own strengths and qualities, my contribution to that person. Kiara: It means feeling that I'm doing the work that I'm best at, that I enjoy most, and that makes me feel proud of myself and feeling that I have given really good value. Kiara: I've become very aware of how others determine my flow state. It's very dependent on the other person's reaction. Even at this point in my life and my career. Kiara: it has really focussed my attention on what it feels like to be in flow... It was the dawning realisation about the effect my choices have on my sense of self-worth and excellence which was the key to enable me to finally unlock this in myself. Kiara: It's made me uncomfortably aware of how often I'm not in flow... I think that I must stop doing the things that aren't singing to me. Kiara: When you're not in flow it's felt really unfulfilling... And the impact of that on me is loss of confidence. Kiara: I have been bored on occasions, yes ... Some of them I hope that they will cancel. Kiara: Just a total sense of ease I would say. No performance anxiety ... Everything is just available to me.	Kiara: it was the dawning realisation about the effect my choices have on my sense of self-worth and excellence which was the key to enable me to finally unlock this in myself. Kiara: And that has contributed to my divesting myself of all but really cherry-picked work Kiara: [making that choice] is a big and important thing to do, ... Choosing more carefully, which I have started to do, who I am going to coach... Kiara: how does it affect my coaching? It probably becomes more creative and more fluid. I take more chances.	Kiara: the coaching states of flow tend to come about for me when it's playing to my personal preferences. And there's a real deeply either emotional or complex issue that's being presented... that then kind of triggers my Flow. Kiara: it feels like really meaningful work. It's challenging work, it's fun work. We have great rapport but in addition to that there is this kind of achievement in it too...It's playing to my strengths. I'm in it, I'm lost in it, it matters to me. I think it's all that.	Kiara: it's like witnessing a masterpiece .. for a moment you have just touched what it is to create and be excellent. Kiara: the experience of flow means lots of things but mostly it means excellence. It means excellent performance, excellent delivery, excellent rapport. Being completely congruent and authentic through to myself, my values without ego. Doing things for the right reason, listening, intuition. And whenever, whenever, whenever, I don't know how many more times I need to learn this but whenever I do...then wonderful things happen. Kiara: My personal journey suggests to me that there is value in using Flow as another lens through which to explore coaching practice.

Zara

Thought	Feelings	Behaviour	Relationship	Meaning
Zara: letting go of things that I don't care about and don't frankly want to do. It's made me think about who I want to spend time with and where I want to put my energy. I don't want to waste energy ... One of my patterns before was people pleasing and you know, the comparison thing. I think that that has diminished, because I think it's just such wasted effort.	Zara: It's sort of a peace, a feeling of being fully alive and fully present...Flow is really what it feels like to be alive. Zara: It comes back to light really. Light energy and vibration. So, you get vibration through music. So, when you are transcended by a piece of music... thinking about YoYo Ma when he plays, I think its Beethoven	Zara: [I reflect on] those trademark behaviours that we have as us at our best, what is it that we need to do moment to moment to have more of those kinds of peak experiences... and use that energy. So, it has formed me and my life, sort of day to day. Zara: there was more of a shift onto how we look after ourselves, how do we honour ourselves, how do we demonstrate love through our actions.	Zara: You know we get very transactional in our conversations, but if we stop and talk about things that are really affecting people and cut below the surface... the experiences of flow and connection to human beings. I think that those are the things that I have really learned... success is about being in flow and being connected to other human beings. That is richness, that's depth. That's full experience. And that to me is success.	Zara: what I am taking to the next ten years is... to feel alive, connected and in flow is fundamentally about respecting and loving who you are as a human being and the others around you. And that's what creates great coaching.
Zara: Self-efficacy in coming back to the groundedness and rootedness. The constraints, the 'should' constraints fall away when you do that process.	Zara: sometimes you get into a moment where you think well actually everything is Ok. It kind of transcends our feelings of frailty and anxiety. Connection to other living beings. Yeah, flow does that, doesn't it? I feel better. I feel physically stronger. I feel calmer. I feel that I listen more. I know what's important	Zara: So, its body hygiene in the sense of looking after the body physically and mental hygiene. Just calming the system down... if I am feeling anxious. And taking that time out during the day as well.	Zara: Coaching is just a vehicle, isn't it! The physicality of the experiences flow and connectedness to human beings is absolutely fundamental. Connecting to people who inspire you. Its people, its relationships ... It feels like a gift to be able to talk to someone and connect with them.	Zara: The biggest take away for me is if we are to advocate transformational working, transformational thinking and how we can all become better human beings, then we need to change the nature of how we work together.
Zara: I think that is what flow gives you. If you're paying attention, you can notice when someone needs help...That's what flow is. That you really, really notice.		Zara: I'm more organised because I'm not rushing as much. I know what's important... so I build in time for the important stuff. That makes me more efficient because I feel better. I feel physically stronger. I feel calmer. I feel that I listen more. Zara: I'm more aware of when I'm not present, moment to moment to adjust it... and then any good stuff can come of that. Zara: ...making sure that you've got really good chemistry with your client. Because when you have that chemistry, that's when the magic happens.	Zara: you experience the conversation within your body, and you can share that experience of the conversation and matter mirror each other to get a deeper understanding and a deeper connection between you and the other person. Zara: You could feel the honesty, personal responsibility...they were really open to the conversation. So that was really powerful. It was the dance of the conversation	Zara: The more you experience flow, the better a human being you can be Zara: To build in flow as a success measure. Zara: If we change kind of indicators of what makes us human, what makes us happy, what builds efficacy and flow within some of those measures, hopefully this study will bring it more to the fore in the field of coaching