

Developing a group coaching model to cultivate creative confidence

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Abstract

This paper explores a new domain of coaching: group coaching for creativity. Despite increasing research on creativity literacy, rarely do we talk about the motivation to be creative. Many people don't believe in their creative potential and they lack the confidence to start exploring their creativity. Group coaching can cultivate creative confidence and build a solid motivation to nurture one's creativity. The research developed a group coaching model using an action research methodology. Five group coaching sessions were conducted in Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The results provide positive evidence of the model's viability.

Keywords: group coaching; coaching; creativity; creative confidence; facilitation

Introduction

As developed countries shift from a mass-production economy to a knowledge-based economy, there is an increasing demand for creative individuals across disciplines such as business, public administration and education (Sawyer, 2012; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). While creativity is often associated with art, problem solving or divergent thinking, it is also known to be an important factor of human wellbeing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Richards, 2007, 2010; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010, Sawyer, 2012).

The creativity training market is expanding and there are an exponentially increasing number of books on 'how to be creative' (Scott, Leritz & Mumford, 2004). However, rarely, do we discuss what could be the key motivation for individuals to initiate exploring their creativity. One needs to be, in the first place, aware of one's creative potential and have confidence in it (Richards, 2007, 2010; Kelly & Kelly, 2013). We also need to recognise our limiting beliefs about creativity that keep us from exploring it (Maslow, 1971; Richards, 2007, 2010; Sawyer, 2012). Creativity is a unique personal identity (Moran, 2010, Wirth, 2005). It cannot be taught or imposed but it can only be invited (Rogers, 1961; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010). Reflection, especially self-awareness, is, therefore, essential to be creative (Rogers, 1961). Coaching can provide the space and support required for such reflection (Cox, 2013; Griffiths, & Campbell, 2008).

I have chosen group coaching as a coaching format to cultivate creative confidence. The group coaching literature is slight but all the authors that I have studied agree that group dynamics enhance reflective quality (Hunter, Bailey & Taylor, 1994; Thornton, 2010). A theory should reflect both academic rigour and direct experience to make it practical (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Hence I have chosen to be an insider researcher and act as group coach to develop a group coaching model through action research. It is a great opportunity for practitioners and coaching scholars to contribute to the betterment of society, where creativity supports wellbeing, and individual wellbeing is the basis

of collective wellbeing (Moran, 2010). In the next sections, I will provide a summary of the literature review, the rationale for chosen methodologies and explore the findings. I will end this paper with discussions on the final model and research conclusions.

Literature review

There is virtually no literature on group coaching for creativity. However, psychologists, mainly in the field of humanistic psychology, have undertaken substantial studies of creativity. Considering the nature of the available scholarship, the literature review was conducted by focusing on the following topics:

- What is creativity?
- Creativity as an inherent and essential human quality.
- Everyday creativity and flow theory
- Growth mindset
- Group coaching

What is creativity?

If a child asked you this question, what would your answer be? You may feel relieved to learn that, despite more than sixty years of research, creativity experts have not yet agreed upon a single definition (Sawyer, 2012; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). Sawyer says: ‘defining creativity may be one of the most difficult tasks facing the social sciences’ (2012, p. 7). Feist (2010), on the other hand, argues that creativity researchers have been nearly unanimous in the concept that is, in Kaufman & Sternberg’s terminology (2010), ‘creative response is novel, good, and relevant’ (xiii).

Sawyer (2012), on the other hand, presents the definitions proposed by two major creativity research approaches as:

- Individual definition: Creativity is a new mental combination that is expressed in the world (p.7).
- Sociocultural definition: Creativity is the generation of a product that is judged to be novel and also to be appropriate, useful or valuable by a suitably knowledgeable social group (p.8).

These definitions beg the question: What exactly is ‘a new mental combination’? Should a creative product always require validation by an authority and not by the creator alone, even if he or she judges it to be novel, good and relevant? What is the exact criterion that could be unanimously agreed upon to describe ‘a suitably knowledgeable social group’? Does such an authority exist at all?

One could also argue that creativity is, in the first place, ability (Richards, Atkin, Cheatham, Crocker, Ockuly, Goslin-Jones, Jones, Kasian, Kenny & Smith, 2011; Pinker, 1997; Wirth, 2005). If creativity is conceptualized as a human ability, this could help us recognise it and develop it (Runco, 2007). Creativity is an expression of our potential as a complex being (Moran, 2010; Piffer, 2012; Wirth, 2005). In order to discuss creativity in my group coaching, I needed a common language to describe creativity, a more human centred concept that would allow us to grasp it as part of us. To this end, I offered the following definition: Creativity is the ability to engage the authentic self and to enjoy the process of becoming resourceful. In describing creativity in this way, I am respecting the work of creativity experts. Creativity allows us to be resourceful (Richards, 2007). We are engaged and enjoy ourselves in the process (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), which is valuable and what is produced is an expression of our authenticity, hence original.

From a coaching perspective, it is important to emphasise that creativity is closely linked to self-actualization as claimed by Maslow (1971) and Rogers (1961). Rogers (1961) considered that

creativity and self-actualization were inseparable twins. Hence, cultivating individuals' creative confidence could provide a solid starting point to achieving other coaching goals.

Creativity as inherent and essential human quality

Richards *et al.* (2011) claim that, 'We all have creativity—it actually keeps us alive, and it helps us thrive.' (p. 469). Sawyer argues that: 'Creativity is part of what makes us human' (2012, p. 3) and, furthermore, philosopher Steven Pinker (1997) declares that humans are all inherently creative. Runco (2007) confirms this by saying, 'Simply put, it is human nature to be creative' (p. 92). From an anthropological point of view, Wirth (2005) argues that a human naturally possesses creativity and it is essential for him to express his uniqueness through creativity. Creativity is an essential part of being a human being (Sawyer 2012; Richard 2007, 2010) and suppressing creativity could manifest as physical or mental disturbances in individuals and cause social issues (Hennessey & Amabile 2010; Pinker, 2001; Maslow, 1959, 1971). Pinker (2002) recognises that, 'the denial of human nature has not just corrupted the world of critics and intellectuals but has done harm to the lives of real people' (p. x). Csikszentmihalyi (1993) claims that we must foster creativity to strive today's unpredictable world.

Everyday creativity and flow theory

Creativity is not limited to art, but can also be applied to any activity in life (Richards, 2007, 2010; Sawyer, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Frank X. Barron, a creativity researcher in the 1960s and 1970s, defined the two criteria of everyday creativity as originality and meaningfulness (Richards, 2007). Everyday creativity provides clear and simple concept to recognise and practice one's creativity in daily life. However, its concept describes the end product rather than the process, and lacks guidance for practical applications of creativity. Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) flow theory can fill this gap as it offers a clear guidance for creating optimal experiences in which people are most creative. The key elements producing flow are defining a clear goal and using a feedback system to visualise the progress (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Csikszentmihalyi (1996) argues that the flow experience would transform everyday routines into enjoyable practices.

Growth mindset

Mindset is a simple belief about self (Dweck, 2006). Some people possess a fixed mindset that considers human attributes such as intelligence and creativity to be fixed at birth while others hold growth mindsets believing that these human traits are not fixed, but can be developed over time through work (Dweck, 2006). Dweck has undertaken substantial studies revealing the significant effect of mindsets on performance. Yeager and Dweck (2012) report that a growth mindset develops resilience and builds a solid motivation to take challenges and overcome difficulties. Karwowski (2014) reports a high correlation between having a growth mindset and a capacity for creative problem solving.

Group coaching

Group or team coaching is an emerging coaching field (Thornton, 2010; Clutterbuck, 2013; Britton, 2015) on which only a few studies have been conducted (Kets de Vries, 2014). Many researchers, including practitioners, use the terms 'group coaching' and 'team coaching' interchangeably (Hawkins, 2011; Thornton, 2010). Regardless of group coaching or team coaching, if the coach manages the session well, a collective synergy emerges (Britton, 2015; Thornton, 2010; Hawkins, 2011; Dolny, 2009). The group synergy can be at its best when a group is composed of diverse and aspirational participants willing to learn and develop their shared values (Sawyer, 2007, 2010, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Dolny, 2009). Britton (2015) describes the group coaching space as an 'intimate conversation space' (p. 117). It facilitates access to feelings and fosters self-awareness by thinking aloud about self and listening to others' stories (Thornton, 2010). Kemmis & McTaggart (2005) claim that collaboration offers the best space for reflection. In terms of creativity, Sawyer (2012) argues that: 'Groups play a central role in creativity' (p.407) as group dynamism enhances reflection and encourages ideas to emerge (Hallowell, 2010). One of the key tasks of the group coach

is harmonising the different dynamism of participants to develop synergy and maintain it throughout the session (Thornton, 2010; Hawkins, 2011; Dolny, 2009). Mackewn (2008) elegantly describes as this as a ‘choreography of energy’ (p. 624).

Methodology

Research Philosophy

A pragmatic research paradigm was adopted and action research was the chosen research methodology. Bearing in mind the research question (How do I cultivate creative confidence through group coaching?), my ontological assumption is that the world consists of both objective and subjective realities. The objective reality is that we humans inherently have specific characteristics as creativity regardless of our intentions. If these qualities are consciously recognised by an individual, they could become a subjective reality while, for example, his or her creative expression could be recognised as objective reality by the external world. In my view of the world, the boundary between an objective and a subjective reality is often not clearly defined but ambiguous and interconnected. I see ontology and epistemology in the same interactive cycle (Figure 1).

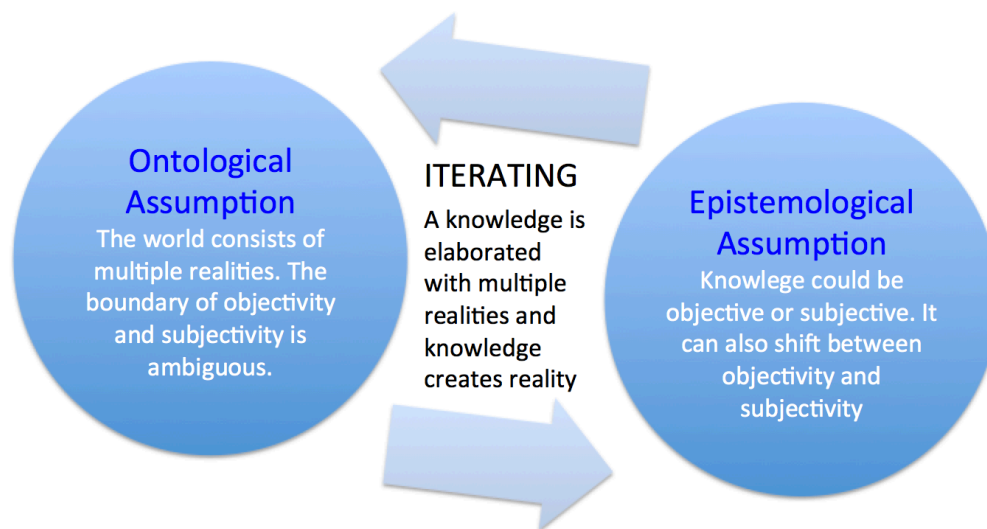


Figure 1: Interactive cycles of ontological and epistemological assumptions

They are interconnected and influencing each other as how we see the world and its reality in turn influences what we know and what we could possibly know. What I consider to be true knowledge could be an objective reality. Dewey (1910) defines true knowledge as the result of reflection that aims at belief which is firmly based upon the evidence or proof. It reflects the wisdom of the person or people who have acquired that knowledge by engaged reflection with ‘universal intent’ (Polanyi, 2012). The iterative cycle of ontological assumption and epistemological assumption, as a cohesive whole, generates evolving reality and true knowledge. Hence, my view of the world could not stand on the basis of dualistic concepts, such as notions of objectivity versus subjectivity. In studying group coaching for creativity, which is a novel and complex topic (see Literature Review), the ontological and epistemological perspectives that I feel are relevant are also complex with ambiguous boundaries between them, yet still make cohesive sense. This view of the world makes it difficult to choose any one of the traditional research paradigms, such as positivist or interpretivist as their dualism squeezes the resourceful gap to nothing. Rorty (1999) argues that the traditional dichotomy which is dominant in Western philosophy impairs social hopes as it weakens our sense of connectedness. The knowledge that I seek would arise in the human connection in group coaching and

the subtle interaction between objectivity and subjectivity. Dualism was, hence, a potential threat to this study since it does not permit a fruitful gap that allows dynamic interaction. I, therefore, needed to adopt multiple facets of different research paradigms as a set of continua (Niglas, 2010). For example, the positivist view of the world sees it as being governed by universal laws and considers what we see as reality and knowledge as also objective (Creswell, 2009). I agree with this perspective because we, humans, are part of the nature governed by universal laws and I would consider some of what we see or feel as objective reality. On the other hand, I also adapt the interpretivist view that existence and knowledge are constructed by subjectivity (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014). In my view, reality could be external, but also socially constructed with both modes of knowing influencing each other.

Both positivism and interpretivism advocate the objectivity of the researcher, working as an outsider (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Creswell, 2009). Considering my research question (How do I cultivate creative confidence through group coaching?), I didn't see how I could position myself as an external observer to evaluate my practice. Moreover, this study is value laden. I value creativity and group synergy and the research question is about the effectiveness of the combination of these two elements. Hence, the motivation of the study comes from a subjective source, but this does not prevent me from taking an objective stance.

Considering the above discussed points, it seemed that adopting a particular traditional research paradigm would be unrealistic and this led me choose pragmatism (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). I needed to be pragmatic to go beyond philosophical boundaries and adopt multiple approaches, so long as they are appropriate for the research question (Kelement & Rumens, 2008; Hakim, 2000). The aim of this study was to generate knowledge of how creative confidence can be cultivated through group coaching. A pragmatist epistemological position acknowledges that 'beliefs are true if they have practical utility – if believing them is useful, helpful and productive to people' (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014, p. 7). Pragmatism thus allowed me to maintain my view of the world and utilise the interactive gap discussed earlier that I consider essential for this study. Pragmatism also allowed me to directly be involved in the research (Rorty, 1999) and legitimises the sharing of my value, creativity, with collaborators because it is beneficial for individuals and society (Gray, 2004).

Pragmatism is criticised for not being able to assert the absolute truth (Rorty, 1999). I would argue that truth merits more complex label than just absolute. From the pragmatist point of view, what is more fundamental to the dichotomist argument is whether the truth, knowledge or belief has value to those who are concerned with its usage (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014). Rorty (1999), referring to Donald Davison and Dewey, writes: '... we should give up the idea that knowledge is an attempt to represent reality. Rather, we should view inquiry as a way of using reality'. (p.33) I am adopting this stance to seek the knowledge in exploring both objective and subjective realities and the subtle space between them. All these considerations made me choose with confidence action research as my methodology.

Action Research

Action research is a value laden pragmatic research approach that facilitates theory or solution development (Bradbury & Reason, 2003; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Herr & Anderson, 2015). In conducting group coaching under the framework of action research, I am creating a collective space for reflection to generate knowledge (Reason, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Action research is often criticised for its data validity and reliability due to the fact that the researcher is directly involved and also because of its flexible, emergent and iterative process (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Turnock & Gibson, 2001). Advocators of action research, however, argue that this issue can be resolved by making transparent the researcher's decision making processes (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Clark, 2000). They also argue that these characteristics of action research are exactly its unique advantages, facilitating immediate improvement to effectively reach the knowledge that the research is seeking (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

In action research, the initial plan can become obsolete based on learning from the actions taken (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Hughes (2008) warns that rigid application of any action research cycle model would undermine its emergent and flexible characteristics, the hallmarks of action research. These unique features are particularly valuable for research in an emergent area with little literature available, such as this study (Bradbury & Reason, 2003; Herr & Anderson, 2015). I also considered that my direct experience in the inquiry-knowledge generation process would be valuable to produce empirical evidence for practical use (Torbert, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Research design and group coaching model development

The study aimed to develop a group coaching model as a means to answer the research question. On starting the action research cycle, I created a model shell structure (Figure 2). It contains three components: contents, structure and coaching approach. Their common objective is to foster a group synergy to enhance reflection for cultivating creative confidence. The contents are the elements that construct group coaching sessions such as creativity theories, questions and topics that inspire reflection upon one's creative potential. The structure is about the context of the group coaching and the framework that makes the context effective, for example, type of activities, means of interaction and time allocation. The coaching approach stands here for the role and responsibility of the group coach. Facilitation is essential to manage the entire model function in collaboration with the group coaching participants.

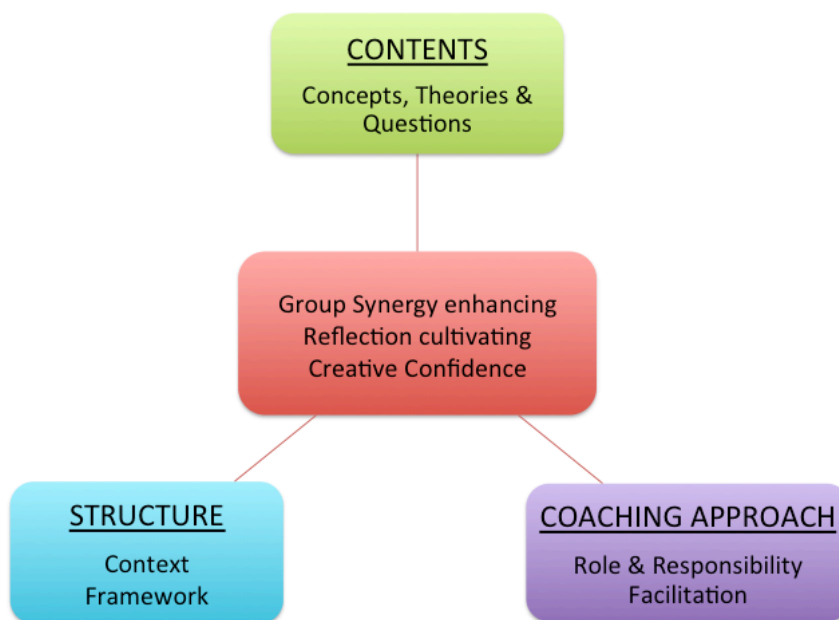


Figure 2: Group coaching model shell to cultivate creative confidence

The source of creativity can be found only if the person tunes in to their inner-self (Belsky, 2013). If a compassionate synergy is developed in the group coaching space, that would make participants feel safe to be able to reflect on their creativity (Thornton, 2010). In order to create such a space, I needed a framework to use in the group coaching. It should foster active listening and independent thinking. I chose Nancy Klein's Thinking Environment[®]. Woodley *et al.* (2010) report that the degree of collective intelligence correlates with the level of equality in the group, such as allowing everyone the same opportunities and time to talk. Thinking Environment[®] fosters equality (Klein, 2009) and allows people to focus on their own thinking (Wilson, 2014). It systematically

increases sensitivity in interaction and enhances the quality of thinking (Havers, 2008). It, thus, creates the climate of trust that creativity needs (Hefferman, 2015). Moreover, it also nurtures what Goleman (2008) calls *social intelligence* and enables listening with attention that generates new insights (Silverman, 2005; Goleman, 2013). Action research typically goes through several action-reflection cycles, and each cycle contains several steps to follow (Reason & Bradbury, 2008; O’Leary, 2009). For this study, five cycles were conducted as shown in Figure 3. The number of cycles was determined based upon the time constraints of the research.

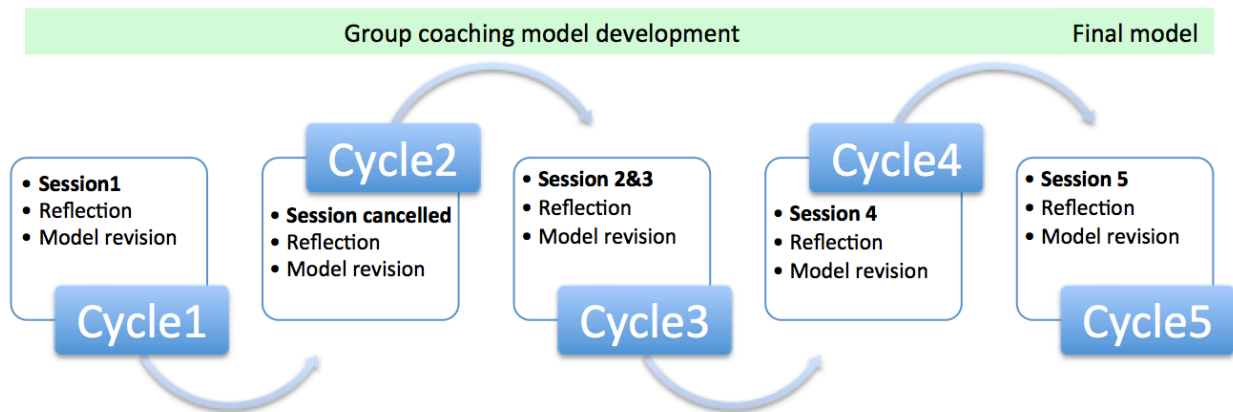


Figure 3: Action-reflection cycles

Table 1 shows an example of session agenda with suggested topics for reflection.

Time	Topics
15:00 – 15:10	Introduction <i>Group discussion:</i> “My idea of creativity ”
15:10 – 15:35	Everyday Creativity & Growth mindset <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Pairs thinking</i> followed by a <i>group discussion</i> on ‘My thinking about Everyday Creativity’
15:35 – 16:10	Engage to Enjoy to create Flow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Pairs thinking:</i> ‘I would enjoy house keeping if...?’ <i>Pairs thinking</i> ‘I could enjoy writing a difficult mail if...?’ <i>Pairs thinking</i> followed by a <i>group discussion on:</i> ‘What I like most about myself’, ‘What I really want to do in life’
16:10 – 16:15	Creative Habits
16:15 – 16:30	Group Discussion <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What do you now think about your own Creativity? How have the group helped you think about creativity?

Table 1: Session five agenda

Data collection

The pragmatism of my epistemological perspective encouraged me to use various data collection methods (Gray, 2004) as shown in the Table 2. I had five group coaching sessions with a different composition of participants each time.

Method	Objective and Description	Quantity
Questionnaire	<p>Part I: Likert-style rating (six categories) was used to collect quantitative opinion data (Saunders <i>et al.</i>, 2012) on the following two questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am motivated to explore my creativity. 2. I think I would enjoy more everyday activities by practicing my creativity. <p>The above data was used to evaluate the overall session effect to cultivate creative confidence.</p> <p>Part II: Following open questions were asked:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did you like most of the session? 2. What did you find difficult/didn't like of the session? <p>The above data was used to improve the group coaching model and to cross validate the effectiveness of the model with data from other sources as described below.</p>	38
Group discussion	<p>Wrap-up group discussion: each participant shared their thinking on the following elements (Recorded and transcribed verbatim. except for the first session):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Present perception about their own creativity. 2. Group coaching session quality, especially, how the group helped their thinking <p>The above data was used to evaluate the overall session effect to cultivate creative confidence.</p>	4
Observer	A peer coach was engaged as observer who attended three sessions out of five. We had a briefing after the sessions (notes were taken) and an hour-long interview following the last action reflection cycle. (Recorded and transcribed verbatim.)	2 briefings 1 interview
Reflection journal	A record of my reflexivity and reflections through out the study including methodological concerns, learning from literature review, group coaching model development, as well as session design and session material elaboration.	
Field notes	Observations and insights noted at each group coaching session.	

Table 2: Data collection methods

The participants (in total 38 people) were recruited through social media. The recruitment criterion was that participants be adults interested in creativity. Four sessions took place in Geneva, Switzerland and one in London, U.K. Apart from my observation and assessment, group coaching participants were provided with two means to express their evaluation of the session: a questionnaire and recorded group discussion. These were immediate and direct assessments from the participants' points of view. The other source of data was from an observer. I engaged a peer coach for this role and she attended three out of five sessions. We had a briefing after the sessions and an hour-long interview following the last action- reflection cycle. The interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. This served as validation meeting (Herr and Anderson, 2015). The collected data forms a data triangulation as shown in Figure 4. This was to mitigate bias and to ensure the data validity (Denzin, 1978; Silverman, 1993; Yin, 2013) by performing cross-validation (Jick, 1979). The overall data analysis included the quantitative data and qualitative data taking the advantage of mixed method (Yin, 2013).

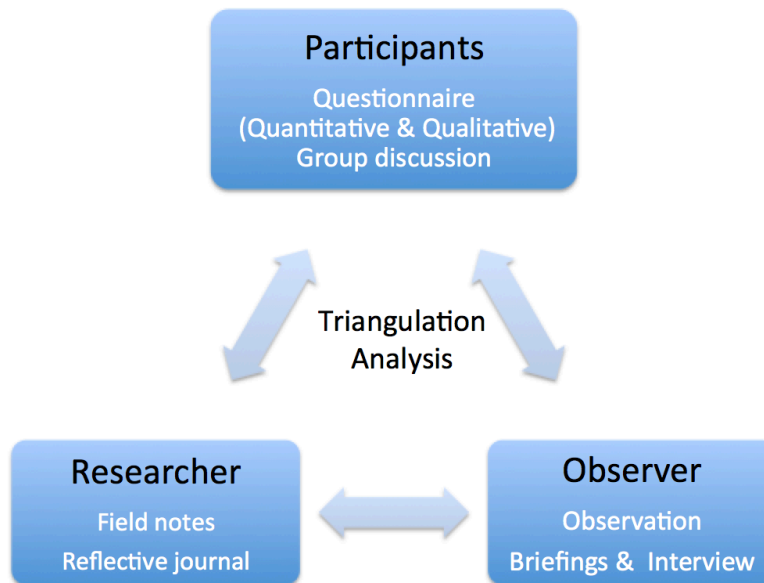


Figure 4: Data triangulation

Thematic analysis

Thematic coding is often associated with phenomenological research, but can be widely adapted for other research approaches (Robson, 2011). For this study, the thematic coding analysis was performed with the group discussion transcriptions. At the end of each session, I asked the participants two questions. The first was about their freshest perception of their own creativity and the other was about their evaluation of the group synergy. The identification of codes was both concept-driven and data-driven (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The concept driven codes were the ones linked to the research question and objectives, as well as the subjects of the literature review (Robson, 2011), such as creative confidence and group dynamism. The data-driven codes were the terms emerging from group discussions. These were the terms evaluating the effectiveness of the overall session, the quality of interaction, reflection or self-awareness on one’s creativity.

I will now explore the thematic categories and codes (Figure 5) with quotations from the transcriptions. Bold letters highlight the part of the quote considered relevant to the category.

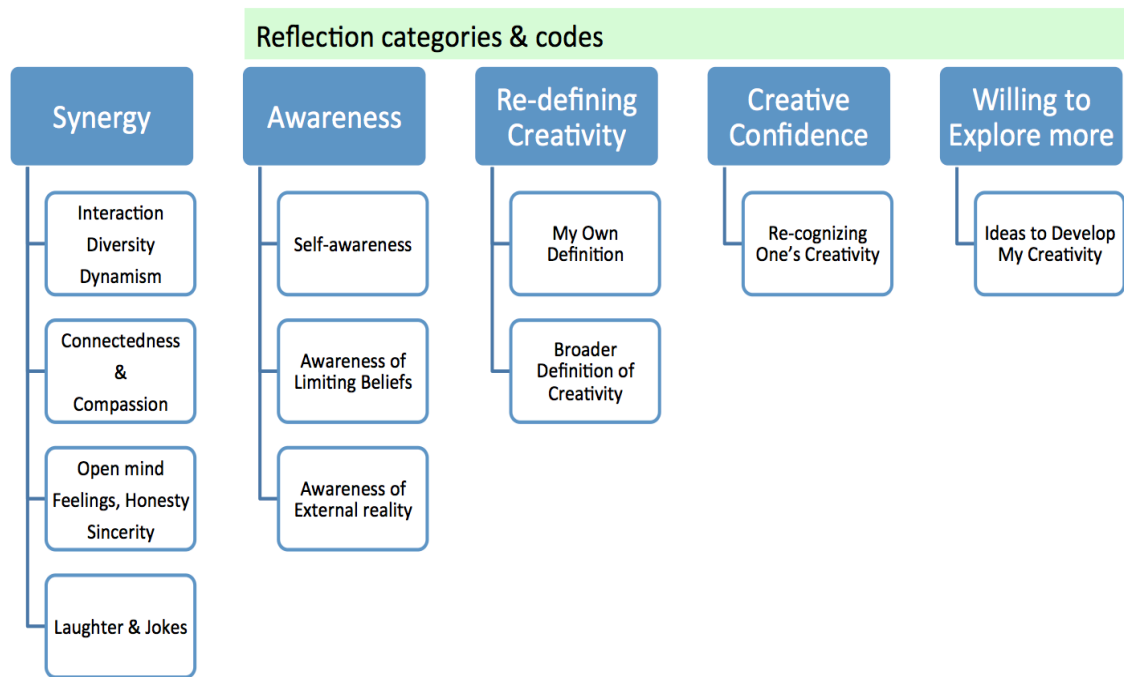


Figure 5: Thematic categories and codes

Synergy

Any words positively assessing group synergy such as ‘interaction’ and ‘connectedness’ were coded under the synergy category. I also counted the laughter and jokes, which demonstrated group dynamism contributing to synergy (Hunter et al., 1994).

*Today everybody **opened their minds** and welcoming to each other already, which I thought it only happens in the church. (Session 3)*

*For me, it's the diversity of thought purpose for the space, which has made **connections** and certainly has made and explored creativity. (Session 5)*

Awareness

This category included expressions of self-awareness, discovery of limiting beliefs, and new perspectives as the result of reflection.

***I discovered** that bad situations can be turned into good ones. That's the best teaching of the night, of the day. (Session 2)*

***Maybe I'm not as creative as I could be.** And why is that? I don't know, because maybe there's [sic] influences that prevent me from exploding in creativity. So, I think that's really something to be aware of. (Session 3)*

Redefining Creativity

When a participant described creativity with their own words, I coded it.

*Creativity, you don't have to search something out there; it's not the creativities, **it's just actually daily life.** (Session 3)*

For me creativity is about expressing why, about discovering oneself and expressing our deeper being involved and living it (Session 4).

Creative Confidence

When participants expressed that they recognised their creative self, it was coded.

*I discovered that **it's [creativity] all in me with things mostly I do.** And sometimes I just kind of forget that I can make it even better, enjoying it rather than just doing.' (Session 2)*

*For me, I think, it's trusting myself more in a sense that **I have the ability to be creative and I'm naturally creative'** (Session 5).*

Findings

The model evolved taking into consideration of the feedback from the participants, my reflection and the feedback from the observer. Hereafter is the summary of model evolution by cycle.

- Cycle 1: Creating a model shell (Figure 2), introducing the broader notion of creativity and reflection under the Thinking Environment[®]
- Cycle 2: Included everyday creativity and growth mindset concept, and more time was allocated for group interaction and reflection
- Cycle 3: Session time reduced from 150 minutes to 90 minutes to make it easier to participate. Added flow theory as guidance to practice everyday creativity.
- Cycle 4: Coaching approach much more focused on facilitation. Introduced the notion of creativity as human ability.
- Cycle 5: Confirming the effectiveness of the final model (Figure 6) and 'less is more' facilitation with minimum intervention.



Figure 6: Final Group Coaching Model to Cultivate Creative Confidence

The overall outcome of the thematic analysis is shown in Table 3. The quantitative data from the Questionnaire Part I was included in the table. In order to take advantage of the pragmatic mixed method, the thematic analysis was quantified to mutually illuminate the results with quantitative data (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). Session 1 data were not included as different topics were used for the group discussion which was not recorded. Additionally, different questions were used for the Questionnaire Part I.

	Quantitative data	Qualitative data quantified				
	Questionnaire Part I rating* average	Number of coding made/Number of participants				
		Synergy	Awareness	Redefining Creativity	Creative Confidence	Willing to Explore More
Session 2	Q1: 1.57 Q2: 1.71	37/7	7/7	2/7	2/7	2/7
Session 3	Q1: 1.60 Q2: 1.60	22/5	2/5	6/5	1/5	1/5
Session 4	Q1: 1.35 Q2: 1.42	N.A.**	0/14	10/14	3/14	0/14
Session 5	Q1: 1.37 Q2: 1.50	26/8	6/8	10/8	8/8	11/8

*Question1: I am motivated to explore my creativity.

Question 2: I think I would enjoy more everyday activity by practicing my creativity.

(Rate: 1. Strongly agree; 2. Agree; 3. Mostly agree; 4. Mostly disagree; 5. Disagree; 6. Strongly disagree)

** Due to the time limitation, the question on group synergy was not asked.

The numbers in blue indicate the best outcome in the category.

Table 3: Summary of session outcome

Key Findings

1. Participants were highly motivated to explore their creativity at the end of the session.
2. The final model (Session 5) yielded the best results in terms of overall creative confidence assessment (quantitative and qualitative) and the link synergy -> reflection effectiveness -> creative confidence was observed
3. A clear correlation was observed between Creative Confidence and Willing to Explore More.

In the following section, I will discuss how the three components of the model (Contents, Structure, and Coaching Approach) contributed to the positive outcome.

Content

Many of my group coaching participants had previously held a limited idea of creativity that was reserved only for art or special people. The new creative paradigm with a broader notion of creativity was widely appreciated. It helped the participants to redefine creativity and recognize their own creative potential. One participant expressed this in the following way:

...my thinking on creativity was very narrow, because I'm thinking of when I see someone, this art (a painting on the wall) for example, that's creative, and I couldn't do something like that. [...] I will actually look at things differently and perhaps be creative in how I look at them, and then achieve them. (Session 5)

The growth mindset concept played an important role in cultivating creative confidence. It supports the notion that creativity is inherent and can be developed if one works hard (Dweck, 2006). We see in the following quotation that a growth mindset is taking shape in the participant:

For me I think, it's trusting myself more in a sense that I have the ability to be creative and I'm naturally creative. And not focusing on the outcome but just going with the process more and to try resisting having to have some sort of an outcome, redefining any outcome; just going with the process. (Session 5)

Structure

In order to think about one's creativity, we need a safe and compassionate space to foster self-awareness (Heffernan, 2015; Woolley et al., 2010, Wilson, 2014). Participants generally appreciated the Thinking Environment[®] as expressed below in their answers to the question what they liked most about the session:

Feeling of being listened and free development of thoughts. (Session 3)

I like the active listening and compassionate listening + the opportunity to speak one-to-one with other participants. (Session 4)

The opportunity to speak to different people to listen and be listened to. (Session 5)

The observer described the group coaching space under the Thinking Environment[®] as 'magic':

I think certainly there is magic on top of the group coaching, on top of creating synergy ... I really appreciate your own groups. It's just a simple rule; people respect each other, sending love. (Interview: 10-07-15).

Appreciation is one of the Ten Components of the Thinking Environment[®] as appreciation is seen to develop social bonds (Adler & Fagley, 2005). We think more clearly and creatively when we know that we are appreciated (Fredrickson, 2009; Klein, 2009). Praise is a fundamental human need to perform one's best (Hallowell, 2010). Several times during the session, the participants had opportunities to appreciate the qualities of another participant. Some appreciations were striking:

You are great, I mean I feel that way I just never say it and actually wanted just to say it to you. (Session 3)

...I appreciate all of you guys... And sharing love with you. (Session 3)

Thank you for being who you are. (Session 4)

Despite the fact that it was a one-stop coaching session, lasting only about 90 minutes, the group coaching created a compassionate space connecting the participants. They felt safe to ponder their creative potential that allowed them access to their creative confidence (Rogers 1961).

Coaching approach

Flaherty (2010) says "coaching is a Jazz" (p. 32). This is very true, particularly for group coaching where the level of the unknown is higher than in individual and team coaching (Kets de Vries, 2014). Individual or team coaching generally sets up a clear goal and the coach usually has access to information on the client(s) (Thornton, 2010; Hawkins, 2011; Clutterbuck, 2013; Britton, 2013) while that is usually not the case for group coaching. The group coach, therefore, needs to improvise right tune (Thornton, 2010) and constantly adjust it to maintain the group synergy (Mackewn, 2008). This requires a high degree of facilitation skills and confidence to embrace the unknown (Thornton, 2010; Hawkins, 2011). It is also essential to unconditionally believe in the

participants' potential (Rogers, 1979). It goes without saying that the content and structure of the coaching should be thoughtfully constructed. However, when it comes to delivery, I found that confidence in human potential was the most effective quality for a successful session (Whitmore, 2009). When I could trust the participants and myself, I facilitated better and group synergy was naturally developed. Once synergy seemed to be taking shape, I left the entire group coaching space in the hands of participants. It may sound paradoxical, but I noticed that the less I intervened, the more quality reflection came out (Casey, 1993). It was in that space of minimum intervention that I heard more creative confidence statements starting with 'I'. Such self-awareness motivates the person to explore further their creative potential (Richards, 2007; Kelly & Kelly, 2013). Here is an example:

There are tools (for creativity). There are things you can do. But what reflected more is that I realized that I'm normally a very creative person, and I'm a very spontaneous person, I think I hadn't realized until we exchanged. So that for me is very important. It really touched me a lot. (Session 2)

I think I am creative, but I think what I want to change actually is reducing the fear around creativity. [...] Have a leap of faith in yourself and don't focus too much on the failure side of things. So yeah, I would like to work on that side of myself. (Session 5)

Conclusions

The study demonstrated that group coaching is a useful means to cultivate creative confidence. The developed model was effective, as most of the participants recognized their creative potential and were motivated to further explore it. The model is particularly effective when:

- Group coach intervention is kept to a minimum to maximize the group dynamic and independent thinking
- The group coach keeps faith in his or her capabilities, the model, and participants' potential

The study has demonstrated the schema of effect in which participants could reach their true knowledge of their creativity (Figure 7).

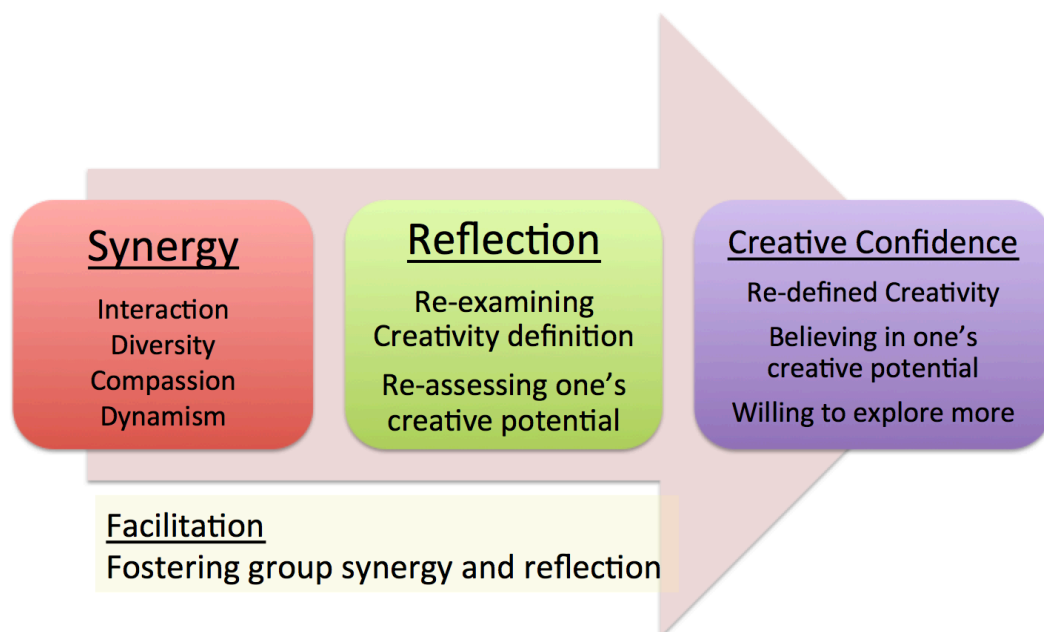


Figure 7: Effect of the model to cultivate creative confidence

In the group coaching space, it is not linear as shown in the above figure, but rather iterative. The three elements can form an iterative virtuous cycle positively affecting each other increasing the level of synergy, reflection and creative confidence. What develops the virtuous cycle very much depends on the group coach's facilitation, as he or she is the one who sets the tone of the session (Thornton, 2010).

Creativity is a pressing issue and it is a hope to resolve the social issues and make healthier society (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Richards, 2007). For us as coaches and coaching scholars, group coaching for creativity represents a great opportunity for social contribution. As described throughout this paper, group coaching enhancing synergy and reflection is a relevant means to cultivate creative confidence. Engaged and compassionate human interaction is one of the most fundamental desires of humanity (Hallowell, 2010) and perhaps, what is missing most today. I was very much encouraged by the following feedback from one of the participants:

*'I enjoyed the fact that in this group at least, there's a special space in which no one doubted that creativity is given 'cause in the outside world some people say, 'Well, I'm not creative.' And here at least we didn't start from that point, and it's very validating stuff and much more positive starting point. So I loved that, and from now on, I'm just going to remember, thanks to this group, that my starting point is we are creative and the challenge is to be open to that'.
(Session 5)*

Action research is a living process of knowing (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). I have provided, through the model, my answer to the research question, but it is one of many possible answers. Action research is an emancipatory inquiry (Boog & Tromp, 2003) and I hope this study inspires peer coaches to further develop the model. The model works best when it is tailored through the coaches' unique creativity. It is my experience that the model elaboration process allowed me to develop my own creative confidence. As the model became truly my own, I was more authentic and effective. It was such a joy to observe participants aspiring to explore their creativity.

Limitations of the study

My key concern in conducting this study was how many action-reflection cycles and group coaching sessions could be considered sufficient (Saunders *et al.*, 2012)). The number of action cycles for this study (five) was determined by the time limitations of the study, rather than criteria used to justify the data quantity and quality. I feel, however, that I had gathered enough evidence to make a claim of knowledge as to my original contribution. Nonetheless, the number of sessions (five) and participants (38) are relatively small and thus more cycles would have further confirmed the outcome.

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