

A multiple perspective analysis of a coaching session

Adrian Myers (2014)

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A Multiple Perspective Analysis of a Coaching Session

A.C. Myers

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Adrian

Abstract

Although there has been considerable growth in coaching as a field of practice, there is much concern about a lack of research and theory on which coaches base their practice. The key question of what coaching *is* remains an area of much debate. In the absence of any in-depth understanding of the coaching *process*, sponsors and clients of coaching have little clarity about what services they are contracting. Coaches themselves, are compelled to choose an approach that is advocated by a particular coaching school in which they are trained, or to base their practice on their own assumptions. In order to address this need to understand the coaching process, the research described in this thesis sets out to provide an in-depth exploration of the moment-by-moment interactions, between coach and client.

This research design involved the multifaceted analysis of six coaching sessions with six professional coaches and clients. The sessions were video-recorded. The focus of the coaching sessions was on work-related topics. At the end of the sessions, coaches and clients were interviewed and asked to recall what stood out for them in the sessions. Later, each video-recording was shown to one of six groups of typically, six professional coaches, who were asked to comment on their observations. The spoken accounts of all participants were analysed thematically and discursively. The Inquiry also involved the use of Q-methodology, which required all participants to rank-order a series of written items, describing a coaching session.

The findings suggest that for the client, the coaching process is primarily an experience in which the client's interpersonal needs are met and which gives space and structure for the client to change perspectives. For the coach, the coaching process is a form of expert intervention in which she draws on a varied range of habitual ways of processing her experience of the client and makes in-the-moment decisions. At the level of the dyad, coach and client create a sense of meaning together that is difficult for observers to appreciate. In general, participants tended to notice the same events but evaluated them differently.

1.0 Chapter 1 Introduction

There is considerable growth in coaching as a professional practice and academic discipline (Cavanagh and Palmer, 2006; Passmore, 2007; Sperry, 2013; Auerbach, 2012; Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Stern, 2004). This expansion seems to be driven at least in part by faith in the assumed potential of coaching. For example, executive coaching is described as a “must” (Institute of Directors, 2014). The potential of coaching seems even to extend to helping executives become more culturally aware in an increasingly global world (Abbott, 2009; Hilary, 2009).

However, in spite of the popularity and promise of coaching, there is still much debate about what coaching is and how it might or should be considered different to neighbouring practices. There is discussion for example in relation to how coaching might differ from counselling (Bachkirova and Cox, 2004; Spinelli, 2008) or consulting (Allan et al., 2010). Some commentators argue that counselling practices should be included in coaching (Simons, 2006). Others suggest that coaching should be firmly rooted in the coach’s knowledge of contemporary management and political issues (Levinson, 2009). These examples serve to highlight the breadth of opinions that circulate in the literature on what coaching is and how it should be practised.

Edited volumes on coaching practices serve to highlight the diversity in views about coaching as a practice and theoretical discipline. Palmer and Whybrow (2007) for example outline a range of popular approaches that are as varied in their theoretical approaches as solutions focused coaching, Gestalt coaching and motivational interviewing. Similarly, Cox et al (2010) highlight a breadth of diverse approaches that include ontological coaching, psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioural coaching. They outline a range of different coaching genres that include developmental coaching, leadership coaching and skills and performance coaching. They also include chapters that consider different contexts in which coaching takes place (e.g. peer coaching, life coaching).

While on the one hand, alternative coaching traditions, genres and contexts point to the breadth and diversity of ways of practising coaching, they also express different philosophical orientations. For example, Gestalt coaching is rooted in phenomenological psychology (Gillie, 2009); behavioural based coaching (Peel, 2005), adopts a more realist ontology; narrative based approaches adopt more social constructionist ontology (Stelter, 2014). Alternative coaching approaches suggest competing ontological assumptions about the nature of coaching.

One of the difficulties in defining the boundaries of coaching is that coaching has emerged from a range of diverse traditions including for example developmental psychology, education and organizational practices. A survey carried out by Whybrow and Palmer (2006) identified tremendous diversity in the practice of coaching (background of coach, type of coaching practised) across the membership of the Coaching Psychology Forum, the precursor to the Special Group in Coaching Psychology. Similar findings had been reported earlier in the literature (Judge and Cowell, 1997, Kilburg, 1996). In contrast, it has been argued that there may be relatively few differences between varying schools of coaching in spite of the way they are described theoretically (Roberts and Jarrett, 2006). There is therefore uncertainty about whether coaching is as a professional practice different in spite of the diversity of backgrounds and approaches described theoretically. It is also possible that in spite of the different theoretical descriptions of coaching, there may be conceptual commonalities across these traditions, genres and contexts.

In spite of the growth in the practice and promise of coaching, many commentators have expressed concern about the lack of research and established theory on which coaches base their practice (Harakas, 2013; Feldman, 2005; Lowman, 2011; Kilburg, 2004; Joo, 2005; Stewart et al., 2008). There is in particular, a lack of empirical research on coaching process; that is on the analysis of the moment by moment interactions between coach and client. Much extant research seems to focus on the experiences of the client (de Haan et al., 2010).

In a sense, this literature does say *something* about the *process* if what we mean by *process* is at an experiential level of analysis; experiences can also give an insight into what is perceived as the key events taking place within a session of coaching (the recollections of the coach can also highlight key moments from the coach's perspective; (e.g. de Haan and Nieß, 2012). However, most studies that consider the experience of the client (and/or of the coach) say little about the moment by moment in-session experiences or moment by moment occurrences taking place over the course of the interaction. Research on client (and/or coach) experiences tends to focus on a small number of salient moments occurring within the session rather than the whole session.

There is very little research on the perspective of the external observer. Greif et al (2010) have carried out a micro-analytical analysis of the coaching process although this is primarily at a behavioural level and their research focus is mainly on what the coach does rather than on what the client does or on what the coach and client do together. Their research is also firmly grounded in a particular model of coaching (results based coaching), derived from (in the main) student populations and the perspective of a detached, expert observer. In principle, there seems no clear reason for giving more or less importance to the perspective of the coach (what she/he attends to and how he/she arrives at decisions to act during the interaction), to the client (his/her experience of the in-session interactions) or to the external observer (noticing behaviours and perhaps making inferences or evaluations about intentions or other non-visible psychological processes occurring during the interaction). Process can therefore be conceptualised experientially, psychologically or behaviourally. If one considers also social and cultural assumptions expressed in the accounts of participants, then process can also be understood in a normative sense; that is as a cultural discourse (e.g. how a coach *should* behave).

An absence of literature on the coaching process coupled with such a breadth of descriptions of diverse practices identified in coaching practice calls into question the identity of coaching

as a clearly identifiable practice and as a distinct academic discipline. In the absence of a deeper understanding of coaching, it is unclear what coaching might provide over and above neighbouring practices or for that matter, what constitute the active ingredients of coaching (Bono et al., 2009). Nieminen et al. (2013) has questioned what coaching contributes that facilitated multisource feedback cannot provide. In the absence of research and in the absence of the likelihood of large scale funding, researchers and practitioners are making assumptions that research findings in psychotherapy might best be considered readily applicable to practices in coaching (de Haan et al., 2013). Much can still be learned from psychotherapy research. However, one must be mindful about its relevance in coaching. Empirical research is warranted and should be carried out as much as is practicable in order to evaluate similarities and differences between psychotherapy and coaching. This does not necessarily mean conducting comparative research; it could simply mean evaluating if findings in psychotherapy (identified in the literature) are also relevant in coaching. Given the prohibitive costs of large scale quantitative research, more in-depth qualitative approaches in coaching may constitute a more pragmatic approach than large scale quantitative approaches.

It is against this backcloth of a lack of and need for coaching process research that this study originates. In particular, this need is to explore in depth the moment by moment interactions between coach and client and at the level of a whole session. At the same time, it seems important to be mindful of the breadth of views and practices existing within the coaching community. This means that in investigating the coaching process, it would be important to involve a variety of coaches from a range of different traditions in the research process. Given the range of competing philosophical orientations underpinning coaching as well as epistemological possibilities of interpreting the coaching process at different levels of analysis (e.g. at experiential, psychological, social constructionist or cultural levels of analysis), it would seem to be beneficial to explore the coaching process at all these levels rather than for

example to assume that one level only (e.g. as a behavioural interaction) represents the coaching process.

1.1 Research Objectives

This thesis therefore sets out to answer the question: **“What can be learned about the coaching process by analysing a coaching session from multiple perspectives?”** This open-ended question was intended to allow an in-depth and rich exploration of the coaching process. The question would provide scope for an investigation that could in principle consider different physical perspectives; for example the perspective of the coach, client and observers (experienced in different coaching traditions, genres and contexts). It could also provide scope for considering different ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of the coaching process; for example by exploring the coaching process from behavioural, phenomenological, psychological, social constructionist/ cultural perspectives. From a behavioural perspective, the coaching *process* could include the observable interactions between coach and client taking place in a coaching session. From a phenomenological perspective, *process* could be explored in terms of the experience of the client. From a psychological level of analysis, *process* could mean the moment by moment cognitive, affective and somatic processing of the coach facilitating the session. From a social constructionist perspective, the coaching *process* could be understood in terms of the way coach and client, make sense of their interaction and/or in relation to broader social and cultural values/discourses.

In order to address the research question, three broad-ranging objectives were established:

1. Carry out a critical literature review on the literature on process research in psychotherapy and coaching in order to identify how the process between practitioner and client has been conceptualised and what has been learned about the interactive process; establish what can be learned from psychotherapy process research that could be relevant for understanding the nature of coaching process

2. Undertake empirical work in order to gain an understanding of the coaching process; this would mean exploring how clients recount their participation in a coaching session; how coaches manage the interaction (e.g. what they attend to and what decisions they make in the moment by moment interactions) and how coaches acting as observers make sense of the interaction (what they notice and choose to comment on)

3. Make a significant contribution to knowledge by rendering explicit the underlying assumptions coaches make about how coaching sessions should be or could be facilitated and by understanding the client's experience of the moment by moment interactions of an actual coaching session

The first objective would consider the therapeutic literature for the decisions discussed earlier (breadth and depth of research that could potentially be of relevance in understanding coaching process) in addition to the much more limited literature on coaching process. The second objective would provide scope for understanding the process of coaching in a range of different ways and would also provide an insight into what coaches and clients identify or consider particularly important in the practice of coaching. The third objective is derived from the first two objectives and constitutes the knowledge that would be gained as an outcome of the investigation. As a result of the Inquiry, the outcomes would be a clearer understanding of the coaching process at various levels of analysis and an understanding of what is considered important from a range of involved stakeholder perspectives. The study would therefore contribute to understanding what coaching is, how it is practised and how it should be practised (normative perspective) and would help address the gap in the literature in relation to a lack of empirical literature on coaching and specifically in relation to the coaching process taking place in whole actual sessions of coaching.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the data collection process would involve collecting and analysing the perspectives of a diverse range of coaches, clients and coaches acting as observers (referred to as coach-observers in the Inquiry). In brief, 6 actual one-to-one coaching sessions were video recorded (professional coaches with existing clients or with volunteer clients taking part in a one-off session lasting typically for around 60 minutes each). There were two main data collection methods: interviews and card sorting (Q methodology) making the research design mixed methods.

Coaches and clients were asked to describe the coaching sessions by rank -ordering 84 playing style cards (Q-items) upon which descriptors of the coaching session were written. These items represented a *Q-Set* and are integral to Q-methodology. The Q-set (Coaching Process Q-Set, CPQS) had been developed as a research tool in an earlier study (Bachkirova et al., 2012). The way the items are ranked can be compared and contrasted across perspectives (coach, client and observer) using qualitative and quantitative analyses which are integral to Q methodology. The second principle data collection method involved asking coaches and clients to provide their “accounts” of the session immediately after the session in unstructured interviews/ via interpersonal process recall.

At a later stage, groups of coaches were asked to observe the recordings of the coaching sessions (one per group of coaches; typically 6 coaches in an observer group). The observers were asked to rank order the Q-sets and then to participate in an open discussion about their observations/ evaluations of the session.

1.2 Structure of Thesis

This report is structured into a series of Chapters. Chapter 2 presents a literature review. The literature review considers research in both coaching and psychotherapy. There is such a broad and extensive literature in process research in psychotherapy that I have tried to identify and review some of the core areas of study. Pragmatically, I have also reviewed studies that have provided summaries of process research (e.g. reviews, meta-analyses) in

psychotherapy. Similarly, I have identified some studies that are illustrative of the breadth and depth of literature in psychotherapy process research. The literature identified in coaching process is much more limited which highlights the lack of research generally in coaching process.

Chapter 3 is on Research Methodology. This is structured into two parts. Part 1 considers the social constructionist epistemology in this thesis and the hermeneutical approach adopted in the thesis. The second part considers in detail the research methods used. The epistemological assumptions adopted in this thesis provided an important framework for the whole thesis. While I set out to explore the coaching process with an openness to conceptualise the coaching process at various levels of analysis, the assumption that the same phenomena can be viewed very differently is consistent with social constructionist epistemology (Burr, 2003). This means that as a researcher, phenomena in the world are always open to multiple interpretations. In one moment, the coaching process can be constructed as an experience; in a second moment as behaviour; in a third as a psychological attitude; in a fourth as a cultural practice; etc. Phenomena only take the form that they do because we can draw on linguistic resources and cultural frameworks to make sense of whatever we choose to focus our attention upon. This social constructionist epistemology will form a backcloth for the thesis as a whole; it goes beyond simply being included as a section in a research methods chapter. It informs the research question, the nature of the research methods used, how the data is interpreted and the way that the findings are constructed and conclusions drawn. The composition of the thesis itself is in a sense, a process of construction rather than an objective analysis of phenomena.

The research methods were broad ranging. They included Q Methodology (Stephenson, 1935; Watts and Stenner, 2005a; Brown, 1980), interpersonal process recall (Kagan, 1984), unstructured interviews (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2006), observer groups, thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and broader discursive techniques. The breadth of methods used was intended to allow a breadth and depth of data collection and analysis consistent with the

overall multiple-perspective framework. Had only a limited scope of research methods been used, it would not have been possible to explore the coaching process at multiple levels of analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings of a thematic analysis of the client's experience of the coaching session. This led to the identification of 11 main themes and a smaller number of overarching themes. This enabled an understanding of the coaching process from the client's experience of the session and is summarised in a conceptual model of the coaching process (how coaching can be considered to impact the client) from a client's perspective at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the coach and presents in the main a *psychological framework* for understanding what might be constructed as the *internal processes* of the coach (what the coach attended to and how decisions were made). This Chapter considers each of the six coaches describing their sessions in turn. This is different to the previous chapter which identified how the sessions were considered generally. For example in chapter 4, for each theme identified, examples are provided from each and any of the 6 sessions. In the case of Chapter 5, how each coach described their sessions varied and by providing a review of each session in turn in the chapter, this variety is highlighted. In the case of Chapter 4, there appeared to be more similarities across the accounts and it did not therefore seem warranted to consider each client perspective individually.

Chapter 6 presents the findings from the observer groups. As in the case of the accounts of the coaches, there seemed to be more merit in considering each session in turn largely because the context of each session was so very different (e.g. different types of coaches commenting on different types of sessions). This chapter gradually identifies a range of issues presented across different observer groups (summarised in a table at the end of the review of each session in the Chapter) and leads to the presentation of a table that summarises the breadth and depth of issues raised by the coaches. These issues represent key debates about the practice of coaching (what coaches think coaches should or

should not do when they conduct coaching sessions). The perspectives of the observers drew on both thematic analysis and broader discursive techniques.

Chapter 7 presents the findings from the Q Methodological analysis. This is a very detailed Chapter which provides an in-depth analysis of some of the coaching sessions; compares and contrasts individual sessions and compares and contrasts perspectives (coach, client and coach-observers) generally across accounts. It includes a detailed analysis of two of the sessions analysed in the Inquiry and includes a comparison across the perspectives of the coach, client and observers. This Chapter unlike the previous findings Chapters includes a large amount of statistical data and analysis.

Chapter 9 is the discussion chapter and brings together some of the major issues raised across all physical perspectives (coach, client and coach-observers) and from the findings of the analyses of the spoken accounts and from the analysis of the Q-sorting process of all participants. It also considers broader epistemological assumptions. This chapter relates the findings to broader conceptual frameworks as well as to some of the literature considered in Chapter 2. This includes a discussion in relation to common factors and the Rashomon experience (Mintz et al., 1973) which are fully discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 10 provides the overall conclusions to the Inquiry, including limitations, ethical and professional issues in addition to personal reflections at the end of the Inquiry.

1.3 Terms of Reference

In this thesis, I have chosen deliberately to use the first person frequently. I want to give expression to my own interpretative approach in the research process. This is consistent with a social constructionist paradigm that acknowledges the role of construction in the research process (rather than phenomena existing independently of sense-making processes).

In order to be as succinct as possible in this thesis, I have generally referred to the research investigation conducted as the "Inquiry". The term "[spoken] accounts" is also widely used in

the thesis in order to give emphasis to the expressions of the coaches as expressions of shared linguistic resources; social phenomena. This is to avoid referring to (private and essentialist) “thoughts” of the research participants which would not be consistent with a social constructionist paradigm. The choice of terminology is discussed in chapter 3. At various points, I also refer to the “perspective” or “viewpoint” of the various research participants. These terms are again intended simply to convey that something can appear differently from a particular vantage point; there is no intention to claim that a perspective or viewpoint presupposes a uniquely private/ essentialist domain of understanding. Viewpoints/ perspectives can be considered to express cultural beliefs even when expressed by an individual or by a small number of individuals. They can therefore be understood as social/discursive phenomena.

2.0. Chapter 2 Literature Review

Given the broad scope of the research question, there were many bodies of academic and practitioner literature that could have been considered relevant in providing a contextual backdrop to the Inquiry. The literature on 'perspectivism' seemed immediately relevant. This could have related to the writing of a diverse range of scholars from a broad range of academic fields including philosophy, metaphysics and epistemology, ethics, sociology, psychology and often interdisciplinary knowledge such as the sociology of knowledge. Early drafts of the literature review did explore these literatures. My particular interest in the Inquiry was however primarily to explore the interaction between coach and client and these broader bodies of academic knowledge seemed distant from the coaching session as my unit of analysis. On the other hand, an attempt to focus more on the specifics of the interaction between coach and client in a coaching session seemed to highlight an equally diverse range of potentially relevant literature. For example, the backdrop to the interaction could be explored in relation to academic and practitioner literature on behaviourism, social learning, psychodynamics, symbolic interactionism, personal construct theory and sense-making. Given the multi-disciplinary nature of coaching, there seemed to be a breadth of conceptual frameworks that would seem to be of relevance including theories of learning for example.

Initial drafts of the literature review explored many of these areas of literature. Wilber's (2007) integral map suggests that any phenomenon can also be studied at different levels of analysis including phenomenological, behavioural and sociological and systems level perspectives. Perhaps the realization that many diverse areas of literature can be considered relevant in this Inquiry highlights how any researcher will always adopt a particular perspective on a research topic. In this sense, a researcher is always constructing a body of knowledge through his/her framing of the topic of inquiry rather than uncovering a single "truth" about the way phenomena actually exist independently of our own constructions.

Rather than begin the literature review from a theoretical perspective (i.e. from the viewpoint of symbolic interactionism, psychodynamic theory, etc.), the decision was made to focus initially on the literature on the interactive process between coach and client. This is often referred to as “process research.” One challenge in reviewing process research in coaching is that there is a general lack of research. Conversely, there is a wealth of literature in psychotherapy process research that seemed to be of immediate relevance. However, I was also aware that for many practising coaches and academics, coaching can be considered in many respects, fundamentally different to psychotherapy (Cox, 2013). Perhaps, the literature exploring the interactions between teacher and learner, healthcare worker and patient, sales person/ consultant and client, career counsellor and client or any other context of interpersonal interaction would also be just as legitimate in providing a conceptual backdrop to my Inquiry. On the other hand, the literature also seemed sparse in some of these areas. Heppner and Heppner (2003) for example highlight the lack of process research in career counselling.

Another conceptual challenge related to understanding what could be the focus of a literature review in relation to the concept of ‘interaction.’ As will be highlighted in the process literature reviewed in this chapter, much of this literature explores how client change comes about. While this might seem commonsensical, this raises the question if the purpose of the interaction (between psychotherapist and client and/or coach and client) is to achieve some form of change. Perhaps, the purpose of the interaction is simply to gain a new perspective or to derive some sort of personal/ psychological satisfaction from the social interaction. Perhaps the interaction only has cultural meaning as some sort of rite; that is a practice in which people take part because it is part of wider organizational discourse in which participants believe it is worthwhile to take part. In other words if the unit of analysis when studying a coaching session is broken down into a study of the interpersonal dynamics, one might reflect on what is meant by ‘interpersonal process’ and must question whether the way it is commonly defined in existing literature is absolute. There also seemed

to be boundary issues. For example, should the relationship be considered as something separate to process? Or, is the building of the relationship a process issue? If the way of being of the practitioner (traits or states) impacts on the process, should this be considered part of the process or something which might influence the process? The existing literature already defines the boundaries of what is constructed as “process” and that it is important to be mindful of this when reviewing the literature.

Yet another challenge related to circumscribing the literature even after deciding to focus on interpersonal interaction. Initial reviews of the literature suggested that there were relatively discrete areas of literature that seemed important to review including for example literature relating to the influence of non-specific, change processes in coaching (common factors).

There is also a literature that considers the perspective of different witnesses to the change process (the perspectives of the practitioner, client and observer). Each one of these areas seemed so rich in breadth and depth of findings that they could all have merited an in-depth review in their own right; they all seemed to make a contribution in understanding “process”.

Mindful of the choices available, I made the decision to review in particular, the mainstream literature in what is referred to generally in coaching and psychotherapy as “process research,” in addition to available literature which seemed to provide some conceptualisation or empirical study of the interaction between practitioner and client in psychotherapy and coaching. The lack of literature on coaching seemed to suggest the need to provide a theoretical backdrop and psychotherapy research (including counselling) seemed to provide rich pickings for a researcher interested in process. Other coaching writers draw on process research in psychotherapy which seemed to legitimize a rationale for exploring this literature. Moreover, many coaching traditions have been inspired by theoretical literatures which have developed in the context of psychotherapy; many of these are considered in Palmer and Whybrow (2007).

This Chapter will therefore outline primarily the literature in coaching and psychotherapy. The literature review is separated into a number of sections for clarity of communication. Part 1 will consider how the psychotherapy process has been defined and identifies the goals of psychotherapy process research. This will be followed by a discussion of the main findings from some of the most salient texts and articles on psychotherapy process research. This section will consider in particular what has been considered as the *events paradigm/ sub-outcome* perspective in process research through which a number of researchers have developed sophisticated qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyse what is understood as client change processes at a micro-analytical level. This section will end with a discussion of a more pluralistic perspective to psychotherapy process research including a post-modern perspective which will lead into a dedicated section on this perspective. This will be followed by a discussion of the common factors perspective, which argues that therapeutic change comes about as a result of general factors common to all therapies rather than specific orientations or techniques. A section will consider the contribution of psychotherapy research that considers multiple-perspectives (client, therapist and external observers).

In light of these introductory comments, the purpose of the literature review is to understand how psychotherapy process has been conceptualised, what has been learned as a result of investigating psychotherapy process, what the literature on common factors has informed about psychotherapy process and in particular what has been learned by adopting different perspectives on the therapeutic process. A final section in Part 1 will consider what can be learned from this review for understanding and researching coaching process. The second part of the literature review will consider the literature specifically on coaching research. The rationale for beginning with process research in psychotherapy is because of the volume of psychotherapy literature which seems to set the context for exploring coaching process research. In fact many coaching process researchers seem to be adopting frameworks and

approaches from within psychotherapy which seems to justify the relevance of beginning with the literature in psychotherapy.

The breadth of literature covered in the literature review did not come about by searching exclusively on key words such as “process research”. Searching with these keywords provided a helpful start point. However, the research process then developed on the basis of how one article led to the identification of other key articles or terms. For example, the literature on “common factors” was not readily identified with the use of key terms such as “process research” but was identified by adopting a very exploratory approach. In a sense the research process seemed to parallel that of “snowballing” in participant sampling whereby one contact (with the literature rather than a research participant) led to another. The databases used included all those readily available with Oxford Brookes University, including EBSCO, Sage and Emerald. Psych-info was also available via personal membership of the British Psychological Society and the American Psychological Association.

2.01 Defining Process/ Process Research in Psychotherapy and Identifying Goals of Process Research

It is important to be as clear as possible at the outset what the focus of the literature review might be when considering the interactions between practitioner and client. *Process* seems to be a relevant term for beginning to frame a focus of study. Many references to process in the literature on psychotherapy refer to *process research* rather than to *process* as a separate construct. It seems that *process* only becomes a topic of interest when it is a focus of research. Rice and Greenberg (1984) refer to *process research* as “in situation performances” and “interactions of therapy” (p8). Their interest in process research is framed from within a methodological perspective: “The approach we are suggesting...involves the intense scrutiny of recurrent change episodes in psychotherapy, making fine-grained descriptions of these moments of change together with the patterns of

client-therapist interactions that form their context” (p.13). Siegfried (1995) adopts a similar micro-analytical perspective on *process research* as “the branch of psychotherapeutic process research dealing with ‘small chunks’...Researchers hope to eventually discover the relevant mechanisms of a process of therapeutic change...and to understand what causes a person to change his or her behaviour” (p.6). Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) describe psychotherapy *process* as “the content of psychological therapy sessions and the mechanisms through which client change is achieved, both in single sessions and across time” (p.2) while Elliott (2010) alludes to Greenberg’s (1986) description of psychotherapy *process research* as “identifying, describing, explaining and predicting the effects of the processes that bring about therapeutic change” (Greenberg, 1986, p.4).

Greenberg (1986), argues that psychotherapy process research can be analysed at 4 different hierarchical levels: 1) content (what is talked about in a session); 2) speech acts (the different functions served by different linguistic constructions such as informing, advising, promising, etc.); 3) episode (meaningful units of therapeutic interaction intended to achieve particular in-session objectives; e.g. setting the agenda for the session or challenging a particular irrational belief) and; 4) relationship (the overall characteristics of the interaction). Content and Speech acts are at the lowest level and form part of episodes which in turn are nested within the overall context of the relationship. Greenberg stresses the significance of context and how the interpretation of any observable event in a session must be understood both within this hierarchical context and within the specific contextual meaning of what is being discussed.

In summary, *process research* seems to have been generally described in the psychotherapy literature at a micro-analytical level. Researchers have generally defined process research in terms of the detailed interactions between client and therapist and how these interactions bring about client change (e.g. Rice and Greenberg, 1984; Elliott, 2010, Siegfried, 1995). The micro-analytic perspective identified in this section provides a useful point of departure for reviewing what might be understood as psychotherapeutic process.

However, as will be illustrated later in this literature review, some researchers have adopted varying conceptualisations of process; for example in relation to the importance of language, extra-linguistic interactions, behaviour, meaning-making and whether the focus should be on change processes within the client or between the therapist and the client.

2.02 Scoping the Literature: Edited Editions of Psychotherapy Research, Summary Reviews and Journal Articles

A number of edited volumes have attempted to provide overviews of current research practice and findings in process research that have been published over the past 30 years. Edited volumes include Rice and Greenberg, 1984; Toukmanian and Rennie, 1992; Greenberg, 1986; Siegfried, 1995; Greenberg and Pinsof, 1986; Bergin and Garfield, 1994 and Weiss and Sampson, 1986. These editions tend to bring together a range of either conceptual and/or empirical investigations into the psychotherapeutic process; some adopting a more pluralistic perspective than others. For example, Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) considers postmodern as well as positivistic perspectives while Rice and Greenberg tend to focus on what Kaye (1992) describes as the *re-constructionist* approach (which is discussed later). Some of these edited volumes adopt a particular theoretical lens (e.g. Weiss and Sampson, 1986) which provides a psychodynamic perspective of the psychotherapeutic process).

There are so many edited volumes of contributions on psychotherapy process in addition to those mentioned above that it becomes difficult to decide what to include in any review of the literature on psychotherapy process. Erskine (2010) provides an edited volume of contributions that provide clinical case studies from the perspective of transactional analysis while Cain and Seeman (2001) provide a broad ranging handbook of humanistic psychotherapies that includes research contributions on psychotherapy from a humanistic perspective. Lock and Strong (2012) provide an edited volume that outlines post-modern and discursive perspectives in psychotherapy; this edited volume highlights relevant

research, conceptual frameworks and case examples. McNamee and Gergen (1992) provide a review of social constructionist approaches in psychotherapy with case examples. Many of these texts set out to outline the change process rather than find evidence of how change works. Nevertheless, they highlight the breadth and competing ways of understanding how changes in worldview can take place for the client in interaction with the practitioner.

The very different approaches taken tend to suggest that there isn't one single understanding of psychotherapy process; it is always from a perspective be that humanistic, social constructionist, psychodynamic or any other ontological viewpoint. As already highlighted, the particular lens adopted frames *what* is investigated and *how* the subject matter is researched. Rice & Greenberg (1984) for example tend to emphasise more how the therapist brings about change within the *psyche* of the client, while Lock & Strong (2012) believe that the core of psychotherapy process resides in the *interactive communicative process* between client and therapist.

There are many seminal texts that seem to provide a particular contribution to understanding psychotherapy process beyond those that set out to explicitly research psychotherapy process. Wampold (2001) provides a comprehensive review of meta-analyses in psychotherapy efficacy studies/ outcome studies which provides insights into effective mechanisms of change in psychotherapy (i.e. the influence of 'common factors'). Rogers (1951a) presents a seminal text on person-centred therapy whose theories of change processes developed in part through the analysis of audio recordings of therapy sessions. Jones (2000) also discusses lessons from both, empirical research and theory. There is so much that has been written on psychotherapy process and so many past and present theorist-practitioners each giving vignettes of actual practice that it seems that any overview will always be partial and selective.

Researchers who have attempted to provide short summaries of process research in peer reviewed journals tend to acknowledge the enormity of the task (e.g. Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001) or adopt a particular focus (Elliott, 2010 and Greenberg, 1986 who both focus on summarising findings in relation to what has already been referred to in this Chapter as the *re-constructionist* approach). Given the scale of the task, researchers seem to shy away from providing pluralistic qualitative summaries in journal articles. They tend to compile edited volumes of qualitative reviews, limit their findings to case study based investigations or they conduct meta-analytic reviews of effectiveness which abound in the literature (e.g. Barker et al., 1988; Bowers and Clum, 1988; Clum et al., 1993; Clum et al., 1993). Some studies consider the perspectives of therapist, client and observer or address a specific aspect of the interaction (e.g. the relationship). Meta-analyses in psychotherapy research either consider, specific aspects of process that are considered to be relevant in effectuating change or consider the overall effectiveness of psychotherapy. These studies often show little difference or no difference across therapies which allow researchers to draw conclusions about the (lack of) relative efficacy of different approaches. There is also a plethora of papers in psychotherapy that describe or show the application of an arsenal of process instruments that are both used to understand and research psychotherapy process. Timulak (2008) illustrates many of the diverse instruments in use.

2.03 Review of Edited Volumes of Psychotherapy Process Research

The thrust of Rice & Greenberg (1984) and other researchers (e.g. Elliott, 2010; Llewelyn, 1988; Grawe, 1997; Flückiger et al, 2009) working in the same paradigm, amply illustrated in the volume, is to understand the process of client change considered to take place in identifiable discrete *episodes* within the therapy session in interaction with the therapist. Rice & Greenberg (1984) argue that essential to their approach is to understand how change takes place *within* the client rather than to conceptualise the therapy process as something which is *done to* the client by the therapist. In this sense, the authors claim to adopt a client-

centric approach. They suggest that process research should set out to understand changes within the client at three levels:

“The first level which we shall refer to as client process, concerns the manifest client performance in the session. The second level, which we designate as client operations, concerns the client’s internal mental operations. The elementary information-processing operations of cognitive psychology constitute the third level.”

The authors suggest that the second level is where most attention needs to be directed (e.g. the client’s focusing on his inner dialogue, recognising negative self-statements, stopping these statements...) as once a sequence of operations has been identified, practitioners can gain an understanding about what they need to achieve in therapy. The authors suggest that the development of theoretical models of change process can lead to two different forms of eclecticism. One is where therapists from different orientations can incorporate lessons learned from process research, and can apply particular methods demonstrated through research to be effective as and when their main approaches fail to be achieving the necessary results (*technical eclecticism*). A second form of eclecticism would be a new approach to therapy driven by evidence based research (subsequently described in the literature as the *integrationist* approach; more recently adopted by researchers such as Grawe, 1997 and Flückiger et al, 2009). It could therefore be argued that Rice and Greenberg (1984) propose a political agenda for therapeutic process.

The authors suggest that the identification of change mechanisms can make a number of important contributions to knowledge (and practice identified above). First, at a descriptive level it becomes possible to detail the operations that take place in a change episode (level 2) and to construct theoretical models of cognitive-affective information-processing mechanisms that underline the phenomena (level 3). Second, an identified in-session change process can be evaluated in relation to post-session client outcomes.

Rice & Greenberg (1984) illustrate a range of approaches to qualitative research although the longest of 4 sections in their text is dedicated to research drawing on the method of *task analysis*. Rice and Saperia (1984) in the same edition describe task analysis as consisting of a series of steps (: selection and description of the task and task environment; rational analysis; detailed moment-by-moment descriptions of client performances; comparison with an idealized model leading to revisions of model). Other research methods included in the edited volume are chapters on what is described as *Interpersonal Process Recall* (IPR) and *Comprehensive Process Analysis*. These methods are broadly similar in terms of how they involve observers, therapist and client; how they apply a battery of research instruments and how they set out to provide detailed analysis of patterns of change.

In evaluating Rice and Greenberg (1984), it is difficult not to be impressed by the rigour, breadth and depth of the research illustrated. There does seem to be some merit from a psychological perspective in understanding client change. An analysis that might otherwise be limited to analysing the behavioural interactions would not provide any insight into possible cognitive-affective processes. There is also a sense of optimism that through a qualitative methodology of micro-analysis, key change mechanisms can be identified and ultimately be managed therapeutically. This is perhaps characteristic of the positivist progressive agenda. It is also apparent that the researchers have at their disposal a large number of existing process measures to facilitate their analysis as well as a well-resourced research team and willing and readily available research participants.

From a more critical perspective however, their analysis seems to suggest that problems are located *inside* the client. In this sense, irrespective of the way the research seems to focus on the client, the client is still positioned as an object of study and whose thoughts and feelings can be acted upon technically, provided mechanisms of change can be identified and understood. A more general criticism relates to the overall methodology. Some therapist-researchers argue against the “application of natural scientific methods to [understand] ...meaningful complexities of human experience” (Walsh and McElwain, 2002).

This viewpoint suggests that even if micro-analytic research methods do provide insights that appear helpful in psychotherapy, they risk being ignored by those therapists wedded to different philosophical frames of reference. Rice & Greenberg (1984) and their associates are in effect proponents of the rational-empiricist tradition:

“The central strategy of the new paradigm can perhaps best be labelled as “rational-empirical” approach...The basis rationalist supposition...is that for a person of a given type, there exist invariances in the organization of his or her inner processes which apply across situations to generate the person’s performance. The rational-empirical approach takes seriously across situations of internal processing characteristics, but also stresses the importance of the performance demands of the class of situations...It is from these invariances in a specific class of situations that processing characteristics that hold across situations can be inferred for a person of a particular type” (p.20).

A final criticism is that the methodological rigour of the reconstructivist approach seems to be very demanding and resource intensive and it is difficult to imagine that researchers traditionally orientated to a more summative process-outcome quantitative methodology will adopt an in-depth microanalytic qualitative methodology. In summary, politics and tradition are in practice perhaps as important if not more influential than scientific discourse alone in researching and in using research findings.

Greenberg (1986) provides a summary of process research. She suggests that extant research has not taken sufficient account of context (i.e. how different actions can have different impacts according to client personality characteristics, the issue being discussed, the phase in therapy, etc.). She also recommends that researchers focus on understanding *patterns* of interaction rather than engage predominantly in quantitative research. Picking up on the same theme covered in Rice and Greenberg (1984), she also expresses concern that too much research has taken place at levels of description that are either too high (e.g. at the level of the relationship) or too low (at the level of specific behaviours). She also

emphasises the importance of adopting “a multilevel, multidimensional, and multi-perspective (observer and participant) approach” (p.6). Her recommendations are useful in attempting to identify an appropriate level of analysis. Her comments in relation to the complexity of interactions and breadth of contextual variables seem to highlight the challenge in researching and understanding coaching process but also of the need for in-depth research that acknowledges the relevance of context and complexity.

Greenberg (1986) usefully summarises two different types of process research: *task analysis* and *sequential analysis*. Task analysis has already been described. Sequential analysis is described by Greenberg as consisting of the analysis of sequential patterns occurring across the therapy session (or series of sessions); for example analysing the type of client response that might follow from a particular type of therapist intervention. Greenberg (1986) highlights these two methods in order to illustrate a material distinction between two types of orientation in process research; task analysis which is focused on a more in-depth qualitative and inductive approach and sequential analysis which generally starts with a limited range of identified patterns of interaction and attempts to monitor, through statistical analysis the impact of these methods on changes in the client. Greenberg (1986) is critical of some of the challenges in this latter type of quantitative research, including the difficulty in identifying lagged effects and the need to establish a priori coding systems in order to monitor antecedents and consequents. However, she still sees merit in this approach and suggests that more sophisticated designs can help address the identification of lagged effects.

Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) produced another volume of qualitatively oriented process research which the authors preface as the “new paradigm” (vii). In the preface to their edition they reference Rice and Greenberg (1986) and in doing so, seem to suggest a conceptual alignment with these authors. Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) preface their volume by challenging the Rogerian (1951) view that it is the attitude of the therapist that is

central to the process of change. Psychotherapeutic change is conceptualised more as a process in which change occurs as the effective negotiation of key events in therapy: “In this initiative, the Rogerian view that there is a global relationship between the therapist attitudes and the client is replaced with the view that therapeutic change is localized in change “episodes” or “events” involving particular performances by the client in response to particular performances by the therapist. Types of change episode are discovered inductively and then modelled through a logico-empirical approach to theory construction.”

These are bold assertions that are explicit about the psychotherapeutic process; in effect as a technology that might require an active client but one that responds to the active technical expertise of the therapist. They also make clear that a rigorous analysis of these interactions is possible and will lead to an identification and understanding of key psychotherapeutic change processes. Their outline is therefore consistent with Rice & Greenberg (1984) and Greenberg (1986). The language of “performance” used by Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) suggests that therapy is a skill to be performed, perhaps like a learned repertoire of a stage performer; in the case of the client, the metaphor suggests that essentially cognitive change processes are played out within the client. Toukmanian and Rennie’s (1992) edited volume provides dedicated chapters outlining methods and examples of detailed studies of “significant events” in therapy (one of an increasing number of technical terms used to describe the focus on episodes or events in therapy and that contributes to the construction of process research as the negotiation of critical events). Their edition includes a broader range of qualitative approaches than those outlined in Rice and Greenberg (1984) and rhetorically, creates the impression of an expanding field of research process. The authors also include conceptual papers presenting models of how change might occur and how these models can be investigated further through micro-analytic qualitative research methods.

Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) published a qualitative review of psychotherapy process research. The authors begin by outlining the sheer scale of process research. Rather than

attempt to provide a comprehensive review, the authors set out to provide an overall organizing framework and provide illustrative examples of different types of process research. They classify existing research studies within 3 broad categories:

- 1) Descriptive studies
- 2) Hypothesis testing
- 3) Change theory linked process research.

They categorise descriptive studies as those that set out to describe the detailed aspects of therapist/client interaction (behaviours, language, thoughts and feelings of both participants). They include within this category, the discovery oriented approaches (advocated by Rice & Greenberg, 1984; Greenberg, 1986 and Toukmanian and Rennie, 1992). They also include comparative studies which compare the perspectives of therapist, client and observers and which have tended to suggest differences in perspectives in relation to the same session. They argue that descriptive studies point to the complexity of interactions occurring within therapy process. They also suggest that there is a relative scarcity of comparative studies. This suggests that there could be some benefit in researching practitioner, client and observer perspectives.

Hypothesis testing (2) relates to studies which attempt to quantify the efficacy of psychotherapy (if therapy works) or effectiveness (what works) of psychotherapy. Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) categorise hypothesis testing studies in turn into 5 sub-categories:

- 1) Those that quantify the impact of techniques within specific types of therapy
- 2) Those which consider patient characteristics and how they impact on process and outcome
- 3) As 2 but for therapist characteristics
- 4) Those which consider timing and context as influencing variables;

5) Studies which consider process factors when outcomes are poor. This analysis highlights perhaps the range of research relevant to understanding psychotherapy process and again points to the relevance of context (2, 3 and 4).

Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) try to provide a balanced account of these studies. Within the first sub-category (impact of techniques), while acknowledging that many studies have done little more than identify factors that are common across therapies (e.g. the quality of the working alliance, therapist encouragement, reassurance, time, explanation and catharsis), they also identify a limited range of studies that highlight the contribution of specific factors (i.e. characteristics of a particular type of therapeutic intervention that have been found to have a differential effect on one or more outcome measures). This is perhaps an important claim because it leaves open the possibility of specific techniques giving rise to specific changes. However, it also provides perhaps an illusory vision of process research ever finding specific change mechanisms or at least that will stand to challenge the relevance of non-specific factors.

With respect to the second subcategory (patient characteristics), Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) while acknowledging that much of this research fails to show superiority of any one form of therapeutic orientation, cite research that suggests that one of the reasons for accounting for a lack of differential impact across studies could relate to client differences and in particular, the differential capacity of some clients for self-healing. They also cite studies that suggest that the therapeutic alliance and outcome can be predicted on the basis of the original level of interpersonal functioning of the client. Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) also suggest that the impact of technique (differential impact of different therapeutic approaches) could be concealed in studies that fail to take account of individual differences. The authors tend not to dwell on the 3rd category of hypothesis testing (therapist characteristics); they do so enough merely to highlight some of the complexities in making predictions on outcome based on variable therapist characteristics. In the 4th sub-category (timing and context), Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) emphasise the relevance of timing and context impacting on

outcome. They give examples of how different interventions might for example only be appropriate or have a particular relevance for the client at particular points in the therapeutic process. In relation to the fifth and final category (retrospective studies when outcomes are poor), the authors review a range of studies which suggest possible factors giving rise to ruptures in the therapeutic relationship.

Their overall conclusion from the study of hypothesis testing (outcome) studies is that demonstrating clear links between process and outcome is extremely difficult owing to myriad variables impacting on outcomes. However, with a degree of optimism, they suggest that provided sufficient attention is given to client and contextual variables, it may be possible to identify antecedents of effective outcomes. In other words, their analysis sets out to suggest that methodological difficulties might have confounded findings in extant research rather than conclude that the failure of a large volume of studies to show differential effects is based on there being no differential effect of any one type of therapy. Their progressivism remains intact.

In relation to the third broad area of process related studies (change theory linked process research) the authors refer to studies which have put forward theories for explaining mechanisms of change. They cite in particular the assimilation model proposed by Stiles et al (1990), an 8 step sequential model of problem resolution and which involves the client “incorporating and integrating a problematic experience into the self” (Stiles et al., 1990, p.189) and separately, therapist responsiveness as well as noting that each school of therapy has its own theoretical assumptions about what is important in therapy and why. In reviewing their third categorisation of process studies, they point to findings that suggest that one reason for researchers failing to identify active ingredients of effective therapeutic interventions is that particular interventions are contextually dependent; that is, more of an active ingredient is not necessary good for you! The authors also suggest that interventions might have a lagged effect beyond the immediate in-session occurrence. They point out that the assimilation model of Stiles et al (1990) takes account of client, problem and person

specific factors. They also cite literature that suggests another reason for failing to identify links between process and outcome could relate to differences in therapist responsiveness and how responsiveness could in turn relate to strength of the alliance. Llewelyn & Hardy (2001) highlight the potential relevance of bodies of conceptual knowledge such as social influence processes and general change processes for further developing theoretical understanding of client change. They also reference studies that suggest that change processes are interactional in the sense that both the actions of therapist and client impact on each other rather than in terms of a one way linear chain of events instigated by the therapist. This example serves to illustrate some of the complexities of understanding change processes.

In their overall evaluation of the literature on psychotherapy process, Llewelyn & Hardy (2001) emphasise a plethora of limitations of the various process research methods (: the challenge of making across study comparisons when a diverse range of methods have been used and different units of analysis have been employed; use of tools without sufficiently rigorous content validity; competing theoretical assumptions; small and unrepresentative samples; different definitions of the same construct; correlation data not demonstrating causality; a failure to take account of competing explanatory models of change; a lack of ecological validity and insufficient attention to interpersonal context). Llewelyn & Hardy (2001, p.15) suggest that a future research programme needs to consider therapy as a “dynamic interactive process” and that a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods will be required to make sense of the complexity of the therapeutic process. They suggest that bodies of knowledge in social psychology and interpersonal influence theory are likely to be important in understanding the interactive process which is set to complement research that has already drawn on theory from within cognitive psychology and psychodynamic theory. Finally, they point to some of the challenges in conducting process research in the future including the necessity and difficulty of acquiring funding to support the research.

The paper by Llewelyn & Hardy (2001) is particularly useful in providing ways to organize and structure process research. It also highlights the breadth and scale of research. Their review serves to question whether a general lack of research demonstrating the relevance of specific factors (e.g. therapy specific techniques) is due to a need for more rigorous research design or whether all therapeutic interventions are equivalent in effect.

The next study that will be considered at some depth in this section is Elliott's (2010) review of the psychotherapy process literature. His paper is relevant in that it provides a more contemporary view. Elliott (2010) like all the other researchers already outlined emphasises the significance of understanding process to understand change. Elliott (2010) argues that all process research needs to demonstrate a range of scientific criteria; part of which includes offering a plausible explanation for hypothesized causal relationships. Elliott (2010) categorizes what he describes as Change Process Research (CPR) in terms of:

- 1) Quantitative Process-Outcome Research (these are studies that Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) identified as *hypothesis testing* and Greenberg (1986) as *efficacy* studies)
- 2) Qualitative Helpful Factors Design (these are studies that ask the client what seemed useful to them in therapy which is carried out either by qualitative interviewing and qualitative analytic methods or by giving clients questionnaires to complete; data collection can be at the end of a session or mid-way through a programme of sessions)
- 3) Micro-analytic Sequential Process Design (which is consistent with Greenberg's (1986) description that was summarised earlier in this section);
- 4) The Significant Events Approach (this incorporates task analysis and other approaches as described by Greenberg, 1986). Elliott's (2010) categorization of the process research literature is primarily methodologically oriented. He briefly describes the competing approaches outlining the appeal and limitation of these categorised approaches.

Similar to the approach taken by Llewelyn and Hardy (2001), he cites literature that has identified several thousand process-outcome studies and suggests that relational variables (e.g. the therapeutic alliance) are characteristic of this body of research that has been demonstrated to have the most significant impact on client outcomes. He outlines how this research typically considers natural variations in one or more *predictor variables* (e.g. quantity of therapist interpretations) and how differences impact on a series of *effect variables*. He suggests that the attraction of this approach is that it is very much aligned with current research practice and has strong intuitive appeal.

However he highlights two principal methodological limitations in outcome related studies:

1) *Measurement problems* which in turn relate to unreliability, basement and ceiling effects and other sampling errors; he also refers to ethical issues if researchers attempt to manipulate variables experimentally

2) *Internal validity problems* which relate to third party and reverse variable causation. He also cites research carried out by some process researchers (e.g. Stiles, 1980) which suggests that mechanistic assumptions of more or less of an intervention, fails to take account of client characteristics and therapist responsiveness.

Elliott (2010) suggests that despite of numerous outcome studies which have been conducted; these studies have generally produced “disappointing results.” He argues that only a relatively small percentage of the variance in client outcome is typically explained by process-outcome studies. In order to illustrate this point, he refers to those studies that have measured therapist empathy as being one of the more robust findings in process outcome studies and suggests that the effect size for therapist empathy is between .2 and .4 which explains a relative small percentage of the overall variance (this would equate to between 4% and 16% of the total variance).

In reviewing studies of the Qualitative Helpful Factors Design, Elliott (2010) refers to the potential of this form of research in generating rich data and developing theories, the ethical

importance of client involvement and ease of data collection. Elliott (2010) concedes relatively little space for this type of research and chooses to highlight a handful of promising studies in this area. He also refers to the gradual increase in studies using this design. This assertion suggests that relatively few studies using this design have actually been carried out (even though studies of this type are becoming more prevalent). The limitations he identifies relate to the possibility of errors of attribution on the part of the clients as they “follow cultural scripts about the effects and nature of therapy or simply mistakenly attributing to therapy changes that are actually independent of therapy, life events, psychobiological processes...or even the effects of research” (p.127).

In relation to *micro-analytic sequential process design*, Elliot (2010) highlights this method's potential for meeting established scientific criteria:

- 1) Identifying causal relationships (co-variation) between process variables; that is the therapist's actions and the client's response (e.g. exploratory questions and client insight)
- 2) A temporal/sequential relationship between therapist action and client response
- 3) A plausible explanation for the causal relationship
- 4) Ecological validity (based in actual practice).

The limitations Elliott describes include:

- 1) The challenge of linking in-session causes and effects with outcomes beyond the session
- 2) Reverse causation (the client's actions causing the therapist's responses)
- 3) Third party causation including the overarching influences such as the therapeutic alliance; similarly lag variables that are not measured could be influencing the client's responses (that is other aspects of the session that might have had an earlier impact than the immediate sequencing of measured therapist actions)

4) The time consuming nature of the research and the skills needed to carry it out which Elliott (2010) suggests is the major challenge of making use of this research method. Elliott (2010) refers to the need to train third party observers (who need to rate sessions), time spent in identifying and preparing detailed transcriptions and finally make use of specialist statistical techniques.

5) The overwhelming volume of potentially independent variables

In summarising studies which apply sequential analysis, Elliott (2010) points out that this research method “has never really caught on” mainly because of the methodological challenges involved.

In considering each of the three methods (Quantitative Process-Outcome Research, Qualitative Helpful Factors Design and Micro-analytic Sequential Process Design), Elliott (2010) highlights exemplary studies and/or points to promising studies that have developed particularly sophisticated research designs and statistical techniques. He also refers to the potential for qualitative methods such as conversational analysis for analysing patterns of language use. However, the last method he outlines (significant events) is presented as the potentially most fruitful and which he argues has addressed many of the shortcomings of the other process research methods. Within significant events, Elliott (2010) includes task analysis and comprehensive process analysis (both of which were outlined earlier).

He suggests that all methods based on the significant events paradigm focus on important moments in therapy. These include moments of insight, empowerment, resolution of therapeutic tasks, ruptures in the relationship and misunderstandings. Elliott (2010) argues that significant events studies incorporate the key principles and techniques of helpful factors designs by involving the client in identifying significant events. He argues that they incorporate some form of sequential analysis of actions and events (although covering more influencing factors than is typical in more traditional forms of sequential process analysis thus permitting more theory building). Finally, the in-session findings are often further

investigated by the relationship of the key findings with post session and longer-term outcomes. In summary, the significant events approach attempts to draw upon all three methods he previously describes. Elliott (2010) suggests that significant event studies are: 1) highly flexible and can be widely applied across different types of therapy; 2) close to practice (ecological validity); 3) a means of drawing upon therapist implicit knowledge; 4) capture something of the richness of the therapy process.

According to Elliott (2010), a major limitation of the significant events paradigm is that it is technically demanding and time consuming. He also suggests that it presents a model of therapy which is task rather than relationship focused. Finally, Elliott (2010) acknowledges that this form of research has not as yet been widely used. However, Elliott (2010), like Greenberg some twenty-six years earlier calls for “systematic methodological pluralism” (echoing Greenberg’s, 1986 call for “multilevel, multidimensional and multiple-perspective approach,” p.6).

Overall, Elliott’s (2010) summary seems very much aligned with those of Rice & Greenberg (1984), Greenberg (1986); Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) and Llewelyn & Hardy (2001). Across all of these reviews, there is a sense of continued optimism that a close investigation of process will allow researchers to identify change mechanisms which will in turn enable a practice of psychotherapy more based in an informed research approach. There is an underlying rational-empirical thesis based in a scientific and evidence based methodology. There is also a sense of the formidable challenges involved in conducting process research yet all express hope that improved research design together with concerted effort will generate productive results. Rhetorically, all use the same strategy of illustrating exemplary studies that seem to have demonstrated, through effective and sophisticated design, the potential for this type of research.

It is difficult not to be sceptical of the real potential for making progress in this arena. If some twenty-six years after Rice & Greenberg’s (1984) initial call for a discovery-oriented

approach is summarised by Elliott (2010) as “disappointing,” it is difficult not to question whether a more sophisticated research design and a more concerted effort will really bring to light change mechanisms considered to be occurring *within* the client.

Perhaps the challenge in undertaking process research is that what is being investigated is the full spectrum of human experience and processes of social interaction. Clients bring to the session their most personal thoughts, present themselves in particular ways, choose what they wish and don't wish to disclose, express a range of emotions and contradictory thoughts. Perhaps this is what many of the researchers are stating when they refer to client variables. Therapists too, take to the session their own understanding of the therapeutic process, make assessments of the client and respond interactively with their clients; they are human too. Perhaps what is at the heart of much process research is a medical model which assumes that particular types of intervention can lead to particular types of outcome. In practice, there may be so much that is unique about human experience and behaviour that different interventions might influence different clients at different times in different ways. What might be needed in coaching process research (that is lessons drawn from psychotherapy process research) is to adopt an orientation which takes account of the different meanings client and coach might take to the interaction.

Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) published an edited volume of research in psychotherapy process. This is an interesting volume of process research because it includes less orthodox approaches to process research as well as the more conventional discovery oriented approaches. In the introductory comments to this edited volume, Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) outline how “despite the massive research in psychotherapy process effective psychotherapeutic variables are still largely unknown” (p.1). This comment points to the continual challenge of identifying specific mechanisms of change. Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) suggest that one of the reasons for a lack of progress is that process variables have been too broadly defined. Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) criticise researchers working in the reconstructive approach for superimposing a technical language over and above

everyday ways of understanding interpersonal processes. Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) suggest that a new language simply creates a new layer of processes to be explained:

“Thus, the working with metaconstructs and metalanguages, i.e. constructs and languages reconstructed above the imprecise commonsense language, necessarily leads to a principally infinite number of explanations of the phenomena under investigation” (p.2).

He suggests that the reconstructive approach risks circular reasoning:

“Even the best psychotherapeutic study on a particular construct...can only prove the occurrence and changes of these process variables by means of operationalizing them in a way to increase the likelihood of detecting the assumed process variables and their changes in the empirical data” (p.3).

He highlights how these approaches have “liberally invented hundreds of “theories” [author’s italics] and explanations of psychotherapeutic changes, processes and outcomes” (p.3).

In order to avoid these challenges, Siegfried (1992) refers to an emerging literature in a range of disciplines which has adopted a “realist bottom-up theory of science or a nominalist bottom-up theory of science” (p.3). He argues that this literature suggests that process researchers should “take ordinary language use as a commonsensically accepted basis of social sciences more seriously” (p.3). The task of psychotherapy becomes one of an explanation of common sense (that is an approach which works from bottom to top). Such an approach “is not an expression of an attempt to explain the “true” or necessary ingredients of a therapeutic process, but a mere specification of socially defined facilitation factors ultimately leading to successful outcome in therapy” (p.4). He suggests that this avenue of research will lead researchers to consider how “ordinary attempts of change and developments differ from therapeutic effects of change and development” (p.5).

Siegfried (1992) then elaborates his argument further by suggesting that a contribution from a broad range of disciplines is needed to understand change processes in therapy: “The

multitude of linguistic descriptors of change alone makes it highly unlikely that one discipline alone could account for all these outcome in psychotherapy” (p.5). He calls for “methodological pluralism” in researching coaching process and claims that his volume of micro-process research is a “first attempt to integrate research of other disciplines on therapeutic processes” (p.5).

Many chapters in the volume adopt the post-modernist critique of traditional rationalist-empirical research exemplified by Rice & Greenberg (1984), (1986) and Elliott (2010). Siegfried (1992) suggests however that many of the post-modernist critiques tend to adopt general critiques rather than focus on the specific interactions of therapy. He concedes that this observation undermines the potential contribution of post-modern contributions. Nevertheless, Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) is useful in at least challenging some of the principles of the modernist approach. This is done particularly well by the chapter provided by Kaye (1992) which can be considered as illustrative of the post-modern critique.

Kaye (1992) contextualised the post-modernist critique of psychotherapy process as follows:

“...the foundationalist mode of inquiry privileged in Western discourse as scientific imposes a particular construction of psychotherapy for research purposes. It is a construction predicated on modernist assumptions and fashioned according to the dictates of logico-empiricism methodology” (p.30).

He is very critical of this approach arguing that “the research based on this version has been misguided, futile and unilluminating” (p.54).

He does concede (if perhaps with some irony) that this approach has achieved two main contributions to knowledge:

- 1) It has demonstrated that psychotherapy is more effective than no therapy
- 2) It has shown that there is no difference in effect between the competing approaches

Given the scale of the psychotherapy research outlined by Llewellyn and Hardy (2001) among others, these comments call into question the whole research enterprise built on the rational-empirical research tradition.

Kaye (1992) suggest that a major problem with psychotherapy generally which is reflected in process research is that psychotherapy assumes that there is an underlying cause or basis for pathology; that this cause is contained within the client or his/her relationships and that specific problems can be diagnosed. For Kaye (1992) these assumptions are socially constructed and promote the assumption that techniques can resolve identifiable problems:

“These beliefs serve to maintain a particular social constructed idea of psychotherapy, viz, as a body of techniques applied by a trained professional with the purpose of ameliorating or “curing” psychological problems. Implicit in this notion is a “medical” analogy modelled on an organic metaphor that psychological problems have their foundation in an underlying specific and identifiable cause that can be diagnosed and treated by intervening with appropriate, purpose-built technique.”

These underlying assumptions impact on the identity and role of practitioners and the power accorded to them in this identity or role:

“...most psychotherapies spell out performative prescriptions: they specify roles for activities whereby change can be induced in another by the specially trained and accredited. This in turn perpetuates the concept of the therapist as having certified and privileged knowledge. He or she is a member of an “esoteric order”...a socially sanctioned expert.”

Kaye (1992) argues that underlying assumptions about the nature of psychotherapy has set a positivistic research agenda:

“Within this frame, it would appear sensible to set out to examine what is done in therapy, by whom, to whom and under what conditions. Accordingly (and given the reductionism and atomism endemic to scientific methodology), the investigation of psychotherapy has been

marked by attempts (a) to isolate its effective ingredients, (b) to unearth a putative underlying mechanism, and (c) to separately examine client, therapist, and technical components” (p.37).

Kaye’s (1992) concern is that research approaches that attempt to identify universal causal laws cannot possibly capture the complexity of the interaction:

“Not only is this ideal-type design unrealistic in proposing that real-life practices conform to artificial quasilaboratory conditions, but it does not fit with the complexity and unpredictability of communication in the therapeutic encounter. It asks us essentially to base our research on an image of a group of identically cloned therapists mechanistically using the same words in the same manner in the same sequence to a group of identical clients who manifest...exactly the same problem”.

He suggests that nonspecific variables will always confound the results of research studies because psychotherapy is a holistic and integrated process. He cites comments made by Tomm et al. (1983) in the context of family therapy in order to illustrate how a reductionist approach renders the research so devoid of context and distant from actual practice that practitioners often fail to find research useful:

“The holistic patterns which may have first attracted the interest of the scientist are obliterated as soon as they are broken down for study...Perhaps this is why clinicians so frequently complain that the findings of family researchers are trivial and useless in practice (Tomm, 1983, p.39 cited in Kaye, 1992, p.46)”

Kaye (1992) echoing Siegfried’s (1992) comments (above) argues that the questions posed by the researcher construct the nature of the phenomena being investigated and that has led to a transformation of psychotherapy process:

“The thrust of my argument is that research questions posed from within the parameters delimited by the canons of scientific research tend to be disconnected from psychotherapy

and indeed transform it into something else. For not only are the questions we bring to therapy theory-laden, but our theories construct the phenomena they are designed to explain” (p.38).

Kaye (1992) aligns his position alongside those of well-known post-modernist therapists including Kenneth Gergen, Harold Goolishian and Harelene Anderson:

“..it has become customary among therapists of a postfoundational persuasion to construct people as living narratives negotiated in the social arena, actively constructed in discourse with others, drawing on culturally provided constructs and utilizing the genres, canons and rules of the culture for the negotiation of meaning. These psychotherapists have accordingly begun to evolve a framework for both theory and practice derived from the hermeneutic tradition, social constructionism and narrative theory. Within this framework, people’s narratives are likened to texts, which are amenable to restorying. In this way, the metaphor of the therapist as co-author of a new, less problematic narrative has been born...From this position, therapy is construed as the activity of generating meanings which might potentially transform experience through collaborative dialogue. It is an activity that takes its meanings from the meanings that emerge from the dialogic interaction.”

This viewpoint is echoed in many social constructionist perspectives of psychotherapy beyond and more recent than those cited by the research (e.g. Wong, 2006; Orange et al., 1997; Lock & Strong, 2012). According to Kaye (1992), from this conceptualisation of therapy, a different research methodology is needed. He proposes that process research should primarily be interpretive and hermeneutic:

“Where what is sought is knowledge-through-understanding of a process in which constructions of reality are being explored deconstructed and reconstructed in the context of dialogue- a process dependent on intersubjective understanding and the sharing of meaning – an interpretive approach is called for” (p.49).

Kaye (1992) points to the potential of discourse analytic methods. These could serve to question current assumptions about psychotherapy and create new ways of understanding psychotherapy. This approach could include a deconstructive reading of the therapeutic discourse used by the participants (e.g. to understand what version of events is being constructed). He suggests that discourse analytic methods could also be used a) to explore the metaphors and constructs the participants draw upon (e.g. hypothesising, reframing); b) to evaluate the impact of words used (e.g. how particular words might lead to exploration); c) to explore the co-creation of meaning. More specifically, he suggests that inquiry within a discourse analytic framework could take one of three forms:

- 1) *Reconstitutive inquiry* which “seeks to provide an account which restores or reveals the meaning of the text in its own terms by uncovering the hidden themes which constitute it” (p.51).
- 2) *Elucidatory inquiry* which seeks to understand the broader social and cultural influences that inform psychotherapeutic discourse
- 3) *Generative inquiry* which “construes research as productive rather than reproductive...it seeks to produce a new understanding of a given field of inquiry...Such a form of inquiry involves the reinterpretation of resymbolisation of discourse via dialogic exchange in a novel context or from a novel perspective (p.52)”. Kaye (1992) summarises the potential for a more interpretive approach as follows:

“In sum, interpretive approaches to knowledge point two ways – toward the illumination of the meanings that organize our knowing and to the creation of meanings which might extend our understanding” (p.53).

In summary, this section has given a lot of space to some of the prominent names in psychotherapy research. Those researchers who have tried to provide insight into psychotherapy process from within the rational-empirical tradition appear to have struggled to identify the active ingredients of therapy. Whereas post-modernist commentators such as Kaye (1992) highlight the need for a new approach based on understanding the construction of meaning in the therapeutic process (both within therapy and in relation to understanding therapy as a discourse), those more bound to the rational-empirical tradition seem to remain firm to the belief that more sophisticated designs will enable identification and understanding of the process of change as a manageable technology.

2.04 More Recent Contributions to the Postmodern Perspective

Almost twenty years later and many more discursive approaches have appeared in the literature including Spong (2010) and an edited volume of discursive perspectives (Lock & Strong, 2012). Spong (2010) outlines the challenge of broaching the topic of discourse analysis in psychotherapy as there isn't a consensus about what the term means or should include:

“Discourse analysis means different things to different writers, and this is in part because the term discourse is itself used in multiple, and sometimes contradictory ways...Discourse can refer to spoken language only, or to spoken and written language...Others see discourse as wider than just the ways in which language is used, and include in a discourse a range of social practices...which are involved in making meaning” (p.2).

She suggests that a broad definition of discourse analysis can inform therapy in five different ways:

- 1) By examining language use in therapy
- 2) By helping clients understand how they are positioned with respect to dominant discourses and to invite them to adopt new subject positions

- 3) By understanding and working with how client groups are constructed or construct themselves
- 4) By identifying underpinning discourses associated with particular models of therapy
- 5) By providing an analysis of broader social structures, meanings and power relations and their impact in constructing particular discourses relevant for psychotherapy as an institution

Some of the approaches outlined by Spong (2010) appear to be of direct relevance to understanding the moment by moment interactions in therapy; others appear to have a more postmodern and broader sociological orientation.

Lock and Strong (2012) provide a range of chapters by varying research oriented practitioners which attempt to explicate social constructionist/ discursive approaches to therapy. These are orienting texts which outline the social constructionist agenda rather than concise summaries of social constructionist or discursive approaches. The agenda setting thrust of this work seems to suggest that the momentum is growing for a new direction in understanding psychotherapy process research, at least from some quarters. What does seem to be shared among the contributors to this volume is a view of the psychotherapeutic process as *collaborative interaction* and some key principles that underline this paradigmatic stance. Levin and Bava (2012) outline some of these principles which can be summarised as follows: 1) a position of not-knowing, of the therapist as being curious and open to how the client constructs his or her realities (their truths rather than one discoverable truth); 2) of establishing and maintaining a sense of connection with the client which includes avoiding recurring to professional discourses when threatened and that might serve to establish unequal power relations between client and therapist; 3) being highly reflective throughout the whole engagement with the client and while not discarding professional knowledge, being tentative in making suggestions and always seeking to prioritise how the client makes sense of his/her realities; 4) through a strong sense of connectedness and joint endeavour, new meanings can be created that allow the client to

achieve a greater sense of wellbeing and ability to cope; 5) therapy is understood as a performance rather than a series of behaviours:

“The therapist is a person who is situated in social, cultural, political and historical contexts. These social locations intersect with each other...making unique performances. Similarly, the client brings into play his or her unique performance. The intersection of these two performances is where the client-therapist relationship plays out. This relationship gets improvised within each conversational space and turn. This we are enacting situated practices” (p.132).

The social constructionist’s account of the psychotherapeutic process is very different to that which is associated with the more positivistic approaches described earlier. Both camps refer to “performance” but in one tradition, this term refers to the execution of automatic process within the client or skilled repertoires on the part of the therapist; in the discursive tradition, it is more about improvisation and the collaborative negotiation of meaning against a socio-cultural backdrop.

2.05 The Psychotherapy Process Q Set

There are so many different ways by which psychotherapy process has been researched that it is difficult to present a simple summary that does justice to the breadth and depth of the type of investigation conducted. An attempt to do this was carried out earlier in this chapter by reviewing in particular reviews of psychotherapy process research. This was intended to illustrate how a more social constructionist interpretation of the psychotherapeutic process appears to be gaining popularity. One particular area of psychotherapy research was however overlooked yet is still usefully reviewed. This relates to the *psychotherapy process Q-set* and is relevant for two reasons. First, it presents a different method for analysing psychotherapy sessions. Second, it is based on Q methodology which will constitute one of the main research methods used in this Inquiry. This section will briefly review this tool and how it has been used in psychotherapy research.

The psychotherapy process Q-set (PQS) has been developed and used in research by Enrico Jones and his associates in the USA since the mid-1980. Rather than analysing significant events or behavioural sequences in therapy sessions, Jones and his associates have analysed whole psychotherapy sessions using the psychotherapy process Q Set (PQS). The PQS consists of 100 short statements (e.g. 10-15 words) typically presented on playing sized cards. The statements or *items* are intended to capture the most significant process elements of a range of common psychotherapies, including therapist technique and patient affect. The items are expressed in non-technical language in order to enable application of the tool across a wide range of psychotherapies. Process is expressed in terms of what the patient and therapist do as well as what happens between them (dyad).

The instrument was developed in consultation with subject matter experts (experienced psychotherapists). It is typically used by trained researchers and subject matter experts to identify the defining characteristics of psychotherapy sessions. The instrument requires judges to sort the items into a normal distribution consisting of a typical nine categories, with -1 to -4 representing least characteristic of the therapeutic hour; 0, neutral or irrelevant; and +1 to +4 most characteristic of the session; the technique is ipsative so that items are rated relative to one another in their salience in describing a therapeutic hour (Jones et al., 1988). The tool is used from within a realist epistemology and makes use of a range of statistical techniques.

A number of studies have been carried out by Jones and associates using the PQS; including for example, Price and Jones (1998); Ablon and Jones (1998); Ablon and Jones (1999); Coombs et al., (2002); Ablon et al., 2006); Pole et al., (2002); Ablon and Jones, (2002). These studies often set out to identify an idealised prototype of a given psychotherapy. This is typically achieved by asking experts to rank order Q-items as highly characteristic/ uncharacteristic of a chosen psychotherapy; the list of ranked items then becomes a template for describing the psychotherapy. The prototypes can then be used to compare idealised sessions against actual practice, to compare the efficacy of one form of

therapy against another and to identify factors associated with client change (when used for example alongside outcome measures). For example, Jones and Pulos (1993) found that trained practitioners could use the tool reliably to distinguish between different types of psychotherapy. Having established the reliability of the instrument, they were able to proceed to a second investigation in which they found that patient improvement generally was related to psychodynamic technique irrespective of the intervention type that the client had actually received. In other words, if clients received cognitive behavioural therapy; provided that process elements characteristic of psychodynamic technique were present; then patient improvement would be more likely. In a separate study, Ablon and Jones (2002) identified that how therapists conduct therapy in practice is different to the form of psychotherapy to which a therapist might claim allegiance.

The PQS presents an alternative way of researching psychotherapy process and one that seems to compete against other forms of micro-analytic research methods. It does not seem easy to ascertain the relative effectiveness of one method against another. This is because most studies using particular methods which attempt to identify mechanisms of change seem to point to the need for more research yet are always offering the promise of interesting possibilities. It isn't even clear if it is meaningful to ask if one method is likely to be more useful than another. This is because what really might count in therapy is the general meaning making process rather than the identification of specific ingredients. The next section will consider how many researchers have called into question whether the search for specific ingredients will always prove illusory; given that what often seems to be important in therapy are not specific activities or processes but more general factors common to all psychotherapies.

2.06 Common Factors

One of the key findings in psychotherapy process research is the finding that positive client outcomes are associated with factors common across therapeutic interventions (common

factors) rather than as a result of specific types of interventions or techniques applied within interventions (specific factors). There are some claims for the role of specific factors for some diagnosable conditions (Reisner, 2005). The findings in relation to common factors are interesting in many ways, not least because they have often been identified as a by-product of much research that has been carried out in order to identify relative differences in effectiveness between different types of therapeutic approach. They are also interesting in that they call into question the whole premise of psychotherapy as a technology (a set of tools and techniques that can be applied by an informed expert) rather than as a collaborative relationship in which what seems to count in therapy is in the main, working with a therapist who is empathic and provides an opportunity for the client to resolve his or her own difficulties in open and flexible dialogue with the therapist. In short, common factors undermine the medical model of psychotherapy and present a serious challenge to those researchers highlighted earlier in this Chapter who seek to identify specific mechanisms of client change.

A useful starting point for reviewing the literature on common factors is the research of Grencavage and Norcross (1990). Like many articles on common factors, the authors pay homage to Rosenzweig (1936) for his much cited adage, "Everybody has won and all must have prizes" (the famous Dodo Bird verdict in *Alice in Wonderland*) by which the best part of a century ago, the relevance of non-specific aspects of the interaction bringing about positive changes in the client such as client catharsis, the therapist's personality and interpretative process (plausible interpretations not necessarily correct ones) were suggested as being more important than the specific influence of therapy specific interventions. In other words, all therapeutic interventions were in principle, equivalent and what counted was the existence and impact of underlying common factors. Grencavage and Norcross (1990) outline how some support was gained for this view from a range of therapists, notably Carl Rogers (1951b).

Over time a number of papers have been published which have suggested a range of identifiable common factors impacting on the therapeutic process. Grencavage and Norcross (1990) in a review of the literature, identified 89 different commonalities; 41% of which related to change processes, 21% to therapist qualities; 15% to the therapeutic relationship; 6% relating to client characteristics; and 17% to treatment structure. Change processes were defined as “transtheoretical means by which change occurs in psychotherapy” (p.374) and included catharsis, the practice of new behaviours, fostering insight and the client’s acceptance of a convincing rationale for the treatment. Therapist qualities included general positive descriptions of the therapist, their capacity to cultivate hope and positive expectations, their warmth and positive regard, their empathy and their acceptance of the client; having some authority as an expert (“socially sanctioned healer”) was also considered significant. The therapeutic relationship relates to what is created between the client and therapist (e.g. an experience of intimacy, engagement). Client characteristics were identified primarily as attitudinal, whereby a client has positive expectations about the potential for change and actively seeks help. Finally, treatment structure seems to be the most related to what might seem at face value to be specific factors (e.g. use of techniques, adherence to a theory). However, Grencavage and Norcross (1990) consider these effects as primarily ritualistic; that is it is they have an effect primarily because of their symbolic significance. Another influence the authors categorised under treatment structure was the exploration of the inner world of the client.

In another analysis of the data but within the same study, Grencavage and Norcross (1990) identified the most common elements across categories appearing in the literature they reviewed. The most consensual common elements were the development of a therapeutic alliance (56%), the opportunity for catharsis (38%), the acquisition and practice of new behaviours (32%), the client’s positive expectancies (26%), beneficial therapist qualities (24%) and a provision of a rationale as a change process (24%).

In a separate review of the literature, Assay and Lambert (1999) concluded that the therapeutic alliance had a major impact on client improvement, accounting for 30% of the overall improvement. His review included an assessment of the impact of extra-therapeutic effects which he estimated to account for 40% of client improvement. He suggested that a further 15% of client improvement was due to a placebo effect and only 15% to specific techniques. By extra-therapeutic effects, Assay and Lambert (1999) refer to two main factors; first client variables (e.g. how motivated the client is to change and to engage in a therapeutic relationship, the nature of their difficulties and personality characteristics); second, the resources that clients have at their disposition (e.g. family and friends and access to support groups and the self-help literature).

Wampold's (2001) text on "The Great Psychotherapy Debate" provided very strong grounds for accepting the relevance of common factors. Wampold (2001) conducted a comprehensive review of psychotherapy outcomes including several meta-analyses of meta-analyses. Given the comprehensiveness of the study, it is difficult to do justice to the statistical and analytical rigour as well as the scope of the study in a short summary. The following comments are intended merely to highlight some of the key findings.

Wampold (2001) outlines two competing models for understanding psychotherapy; one founded on the medical model in which it is assumed ingredients characteristic of a theoretical approach govern the effectiveness of psychotherapy; a second "contextual model" emphasises a holistic approach and is based on the assumption that common factors govern the effectiveness of psychotherapy. Wampold (2001) argues that a distinction needs to be made between a "common factors model" and a "contextual model". A common factors model assumes that there are a set of factors, each of which make an important contribution to outcome. In a contextual model, the meaning given to the psychotherapeutic process by therapist and client are critical contextual phenomena (e.g. that it is a helpful process and worthy of engagement). Wampold (2001) argues that a contextual model should be considered as a meta-model because:

- 1) Common factors are shared across therapies and do not therefore represent a specific type of therapy
- 2) Contextual characteristics are integral to the specific traditions rather than components that can be isolated and researched separately
- 3) That which counts is the meaning participants give to the particular approach in which participants are engaged.

He warns against making simplistic assumptions; for example against the assumption that person-centred approaches (given their emphasis on the therapeutic relationship which is highlighted as important in the common factors literature) be considered as a contextual model; he argues that client-centred therapies are examples of approaches based on a medical model which goes beyond empathic understanding. Moreover, he argues that any psychotherapeutic approach could in principle create effective relationships that could promote change.

Wampold's (2001) study involved the meta-analysis of meta-analyses carried out in psychotherapy prior to 2001. These studies included 68 separate meta-analyses carried out by Grissom (1996). Wampold (2001) concluded that the average effect size for psychotherapy is 0.81 which would be considered large in social science research (i.e. meaning that 79 out of every 100 clients receiving therapy would be better off than clients not receiving therapy and would account for 14% of the outcome variance): "Simply stated, psychotherapy is remarkably efficacious" (p 71). Wampold (2001) reviewed meta-analyses in order to identify if some psychotherapies were more efficacious than others (relative efficacy unlike the earlier review which had considered absolute efficacy); his review included meta-analytic studies conducted in the 1990's that he argued had been conducted with methodological rigour. He concludes that with the exception of some studies for the treatment of depression and anxiety, there are very little or zero differences across

therapies. This leads him to argue that the medical model, based on the assumption that specific ingredients are responsible for client outcomes, does not hold true.

Wampold (2001) reviewed studies that had considered specifically the importance of the working alliance. His review suggested an overall outcome correlation of $r = .22$ (this is equivalent to $d = .45$ or 5% of the variability in outcome effectiveness). This demonstrated a moderately strong relationship between the alliance and outcome. Wampold (2001) also considered the importance of allegiance and adherence to particular models of therapy. This review suggested that adherence to a particular model was not associated with beneficial outcomes in comparison with those studies that allowed therapists to adopt a more eclectic approach. Wampold (2001) also considered the impact of the therapist. These studies indicated that therapists within a given treatment account for a large proportion of the variance in outcomes. Wampold (2001) cites a study conducted by Crits-Christoph et al (1991) which estimated 9% of the variability to be due to therapist effect, thus further supporting the contextual over the medical model: in brief, it is the therapist that counts not the intervention.

As a final coup de grace in his deconstruction of the medical model, Wampold (2001) revisits Asay and Lambert's (1999) descriptive statistics (based on content analysis) with the findings from his statistical analysis and argues that if only 13% of client outcome can be attributed to psychotherapy and if therapists represents 9% of outcome effectiveness, then $9/13\%$ of the overall variability of psychotherapy is due to the effectiveness of the therapist (a proxy measure for common factors) = 70%. If specific effects at most explain 1% of client outcome variance, then this equates to $0.01/0.13\%$ of total variance in psychotherapeutic outcome = 8%. In summary, 8% of the variance in client outcomes relates to specific effects, 70% to common factors and 22% is unexplained variance. Wampold (2001) suggests that this in the main relates to differences in clients.

Overall, in evaluating the findings and recommendations of Wampold (2001), it is difficult not to be convinced of the key arguments in light of the volume of statistical support provided based on a thorough review and analysis of existing literature. It has also unsurprisingly generated strong opposition (e.g. Chwalisz, 2001a). It tends to leave the practitioner somewhat deflated given that the message appears to be that any form of intervention can work provided both the practitioner and client commit to it. He undermines the foundations of psychotherapy selecting psychotherapy as a target for criticism:

“...psychotherapy is indeed a myth, created by Freud and maintained by people’s belief in the endeavour” (p.2310).

Wampold (2001) asks therapists not to be despondent and to relish in the understanding that “it is the healing context and the meaning that the client gives to the experience that are important” (p.219) but it really does seem that this statement suggests “that anything goes” provided it seems credible for both therapist and client.

Since Wampold (2001), a number of articles have been published providing further support for common factors. Most of these studies appear to provide further support for the supremacy of common over specific factors (e.g. Luyten and Van Houdenhove, 2013; Mones and Schwartz, 2007; Castonguay et al., 1996; Harris Jr et al., 2006). However, the literature is not without its critics although some of these critics (e.g. Chwalisz, 2001b), appears to be more concerned about the political implications of the significance of common factors rather than on the validity of data that supports their existence. Some researchers in psychotherapy also continue to focus on research which suggests that specific mechanisms of change can still be identified. Honos-Webb et al (2003) continue to propose the relevance of the assimilation model of change and don’t even mention the relevance of common factors in their investigation. The perspective of Chwalisz (2001) perhaps reminds us of the institutional power of psychotherapy as much as reminds us not to discard the possibility of the identification of specific mechanisms of change occurring within the client.

2.07 Comparing Perspectives: *the Rashomon Experience*

In this section, I will briefly summarise what has become known as the *Rashomon Experience* in psychotherapy and its relevance in coaching practice. I will begin by setting the context for understanding the *Rashomon Experience*. This will involve referring initially, briefly to Mintz et al (1973) where the term seems to have been first used in psychotherapy. I will then outline the implications of the *Rashomon Experience* for practitioners in psychotherapy and coaching. I will refer to the wider social science literature on *Rashomon* (but only briefly) as this helps to contextualise its relevance in understanding the metaphor. This will be followed by a review of the literature on *Rashomon* in psychotherapy and coaching. Overall, I will argue that the *Rashomon Experience* has important implications both from an academic perspective (ontologically and epistemologically) and in relation to coaching practice. I will argue however that focused research in psychotherapy on the *Rashomon Experience* is under-researched. I will also argue that the concept of the *Rashomon Experience* needs more clarification. Overall, this approach will reflect a broad range of perspectives on the *Rashomon Experience*.

The coining of the Rashomon Experience in Psychotherapy

In psychotherapy process research, Mintz et al (1973) found that clients, therapists and independent expert-observers tended to disagree about when a therapist was demonstrating *good therapy* (even though there was broad agreement about what *good therapy* should consist of and there was a good level of agreement in describing the client's in-session emotions). Mintz et al (1973) also found that there was no more agreement between any view-pair (i.e. between client and therapist, client and observer, therapist and observer and observer and observer) either in descriptions or evaluations of the session. It seemed that the process of observing or of experiencing a session led to different interpretations of the interaction. The authors alluded to this finding as the *Rashomon experience*, based on Akira

Kurosawa's classic (1950) film in which different witnesses present different and inconsistent accounts of the *same* event.

Implications of the Rashomon Experience

Overall, the *Rashomon experience* is very important both in psychotherapy and as a backdrop to coaching process research because it could be interpreted to suggest that the evaluation of actual sessions in a helping context is essentially, a subjective process. From an academic perspective, the *Rashomon experience* raises the question whether there is an "objective reality" in a helping relationship or whether there are only subjective impressions and interpretations of interactions between practitioner and client.

From the perspective of coaching practice (and other helping relationships), the *Rashomon experience* (or *effect*) is problematic. For example, in relation to the assessment of coaches, we might ask if any one position is in some sense privileged in really understanding what is *good* or *bad* practice. Similarly, in the context of the supervision of coaching, it is unclear if the supervisor can gain an objective insight into what is happening in the coaching interaction. It would seem that the supervisor might simply be making yet another interpretation of the interpretation of the coach but without really being able to "see through" the account of the supervisee into the "reality" of the experience. Moreover, it isn't clear that even if the supervisor can gain a sense of what is happening or whether the supervisor's judgement should be given an authoritative voice in deciding what is good or bad practice. This is important in relation to the normative function of supervision (Inskipp and Proctor, 1995) whereby the supervisor intends to monitor, evaluate and standardise good coaching practice.

While the above comments imply a constructionist or relativist perspective (e.g. Gergen, 1999) on the implications of *Rashomon*, even if we assume that an "objective reality" does exist in a helping relationship, Mintz et al's (1973) study would still seem to suggest that the coach and client seem to value different aspects of the helping relationship. The study also

highlights the objective difficulty in making common evaluations of effective practice across perspectives. Therefore, even from a positivist perspective, it isn't clear what supervisors or trainers need to focus on in order to help coaches evaluate what they need to do to manage the helping relationship effectively. For example, should supervisors and trainers/educators focus on ensuring that the client's expectations are met (i.e. to respond to what clients might appear to value) or should they focus more on ensuring that the practitioner facilitates the process in a way that is considered appropriate theoretically? Also, given the difficulties in evaluating sessions, how do they also arrive at a clear judgement about whether practice is actually carried out effectively?

Rashomon in Social Science Research

The metaphoric use of the *Rashomon* film appears to have gained some ground in social science research. A search on Google Scholar, using *Rashomon* as a key word in the *title of the article* identified 345 citations; 204 of which refer to publications since 1996. Some of these articles focus on the challenges of reconciling perceptions of events including for example, issues relating the Israeli-Palestine conflict (e.g. Kacowicz, 2005) which seems to highlight the broader challenges in reconciling differing perspectives. Other papers are used to explore differences in perspectives in traumatic events such as for example the research of Roth and Mehta (2002) which explores differences in viewpoints on lethal school killings. This latter study aims to elucidate broader epistemological and ontological issues in relation to perspective-taking but also illustrates how perspectives can be routed in shared communal understandings. The notion of *Rashomon* appears therefore to have found some use in social science research to help elucidate differences in perspectives in different social groups. These differences seem to relate to differences in local meanings (Gergen, 1993). The use of the *Rashomon* metaphor seems relevant when considering its relevance in psychotherapy and coaching because it demonstrates how the concept can be used to help understand differences in perspectives across broad topics of interest.

Rashomon in Psychotherapy

A number of academic papers written between the mid-1950s and the early 1990s set out to explore differences in perspectives between therapists and clients and/or therapists, clients and observers. These studies were evaluated in Weiss et al's (1996) review of a total of 41 papers written during this time period. Weiss et al (1996) do not refer specifically to the *Rashomon experience* but do conclude that "there is great variability in the extent to which clients and therapists agree in evaluating various dimensions of therapy" (p.493). The 41 studies reviewed seem very broad ranging in focus. For example, twenty-three of the studies focus on perceptions of the results of therapy; 10 studies deal with competing descriptions of the client's problems and 3 studies consider the quality of the therapeutic relationship. Weiss et al (1996) highlight how many of the earlier studies (up until the mid-70's) focused primarily on the perspective of the therapist which seems to suggest that up until this point in time, few studies had taken into account the perspectives of observers or clients.

Only 6 of the 41 studies (including Mintz et al, 1973) reviewed by Weiss et al 1996, compare differences in perspective between therapist and client in relation to a specific session. The review includes Stiles and Snow (1984) which suggests that clients tend to value sessions that are *smooth* (reflecting comfort and relaxation) while therapists tend to value sessions that are perceived as *deep* ("powerful" and "valuable"; p. 63). Two of the other 4 studies highlighted (Dill-Standiford et al, 1988; Schwartz and Bernard, 1981) are reported to align with the findings of Stiles and Snow (1984). A fifth study considers the degree of therapist experience and client agreement while the sixth study (Marziale, 1984) considers therapist and client perceptions of behaviours that were identified to contribute to the therapeutic relationship.

The review of Weiss et al (1996) is important in highlighting the scope of studies that have considered differences in perspectives. In particular, the research evaluating differences in

perspectives for whole sessions seems quite limited up until the time of writing, beyond a small number of studies identified by Weiss et al (1996). It would seem that while *Rashomon* appears a powerful metaphor in social science and as quoted by Mintz et al (1973), it has not constituted a mainstream area of research in psychotherapy. This is paradoxical given the apparent grounds for assuming its relevance in a helping context.

The Rashomon Experience in Coaching

The possible relevance of the *Rashomon experience* in understanding the perspectives of different participants in coaching process has been taken up by the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (de Haan and Nieß, 2012). Early research by this team of researchers (e.g. De Haan, 2008a; De Haan, 2008b and De Haan et al, 2008) seemed to indicate the existence of the *Rashomon experience* in coaching when the research team began to explore the descriptions of critical moments of clients and coaches experienced in coaching sessions. However, in later studies (e.g. De Haan et, 2010, De Haan and Nieß, 2012), the authors collected data which led them to re-evaluate their earlier findings and which led them to conclude that the *Rashomon experience* might be less relevant in coaching than in psychotherapy (these differences are explored further in section 2.15 of this Chapter; starting p. 99). This conclusion was based on their finding considerable agreement in their later investigations between coaches and clients who often identified the same critical moments in coaching sessions. Agreement was found “both in their recall/selection and in their emphasis/interpretation” (p. 125). Only two examples of shared critical moments are provided however in de Haan et al (2010) although many individual incidents of critical moments are provided. It is not therefore possible to review the original data showing similarities independently.

In the case of the examples of critical moments provided in de Haan and Nieß (2012), the authors conclude that there were differences in how the same events were interpreted by

client and coach (this study provides a detailed case study description of critical moments identified by both coach and client over a period of time):

“...the coach and the client referred to the same moments as being critical in the coaching sessions... the coach mostly described moments of self-doubt as being critical...[while] the client focused on moments of new learning and a positive change in the coaching relationship” (p.198).

However, the high degree of similarity in the identification of critical moments suggested that there was still considerable “similarity in experience of both persons...which disconfirms the “Rashomon conjecture”” (p.209).

It is not therefore clear whether the Rashomon experience is or is not relevant in coaching. Much seems to depend on the weighting one might wish to give to the relative importance on the one hand, of similarities in evaluation/interpretation and on the other, identification. There is also a need for more transparency in the reporting of shared interpretations of critical incidents.

There may be a benefit in the Ashridge Critical Moment Study Group (de Haan and Neiß, 2012) providing more data of shared interpretations/ evaluations of the same critical incident or more studies which explore this. It would seem however that clients and coaches do, at the least, identify similar moments.

Recent Studies of Perspective Taking in Psychotherapy

Since the paper of Weiss et al (1996), there seems to have been a lack of literature comparing perspectives of sessions of psychotherapy. A search on PsycNET (APA) using the search term *Rashomon (any field)* narrowed within *psychotherapeutic processes*

identified only 3 studies, all of which predated Weiss et al (1996). A search on PsychSource also using “Rashmon” as a key term only identified one article preceding this date. Given the pre-eminence of the Session Evaluation Questionnaire (SEQ) in Mintz et al (1973), which was used as a tool for exploring perspectives in that study, a further search was carried out in PsycNET (APA) using the term *session evaluation questionnaire* narrowed by *psychotherapeutic processes*. This search only identified 13 studies written in or after 1996, the date of Weiss et al (1996) publication. None of the abstracts of these studies suggests an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of therapist and client and/or that of the observer. A search on PsychSource also using *session evaluation questionnaire* only identified 1 study published post 1996. This study (Hafkenscheid, 2010) focuses on the factor analytic structure of the SEQ. While these searches do not represent an exhaustive search of available databases, they do include a significant number of contemporary journals on psychotherapy process. As a final search in the literature exploring perspective taking specifically, a search was performed in *Psychotherapy Research* as a mainstream journal publishing articles on coaching process and using the terms *client rating* and *therapist rating* and separately *patient rating* and *therapist rating (any field)* in both cases); the former listed 9 studies and the latter, 8. In the case of the former search, 5 of the studies focused on perspectives of the therapeutic relationship. One of the other 4 studies related to differing evaluations of outcomes; another on the use of immediacy in therapy; one on the perception of risk and one reviewing P technique. These results suggest that there has been little or no interest in exploring further, competing perspectives on whole sessions of therapy. It is also interesting to note that de Haan et al (2010) while the authors do highlight the lack of evidence for *Rashomon*, the authors also tend to identify broadly, the same literature as that I have identified. This again seems to suggest a lack of focused and more recent literature on *Rashomon* since Weiss et al, 1996. (The authors also make a specific reference to another early study: Yalom and Elkin, 1974. This is not included in the Weiss et al study, 1996).

Research Exploring the Therapeutic Relationship

There does however seem to have been considerable interest in exploring differences in perspectives between therapist and client in relation to the therapeutic relationship.

Differences in perspectives on the client-practitioner relationship are particularly important as the relationship (e.g. agreement on tasks, goals and a sense of relationship; Bordin, 1979) is considered an important common factor (Wampold, 2001).

It seems possible that most resources for research comparing differences in perspective have adopted this orientation. The most recent meta-analysis readily identifiable in the literature on perspectives of the *therapeutic relationship* (and similar terms including for example, the *working alliance*) is that of Tryon et al, 2007. This study, reviewing 53 studies in refereed journals (1985-2006), reported a moderately positive correlation (0.36) between the views of therapists and clients with clients tending to evaluate the relationship more positively than their therapists ($d = 0.63$). A moderately positive correlation does not justify refuting the suggestion of a *Rashomon experience* however in therapist-client evaluations of the working alliance. It would seem that both practitioner and client recognise the typical intimacy of the relationship (and as reported by Tryon et al (2007), including breakdowns in the relationship) but clients generally have a stronger sense of intimacy than their therapists. Tryon et al (2007) make no references to *Rashomon* but do cite other studies outside of psychotherapy that have found divergence in assessments of parent-child and teacher-child evaluations (Reynolds and Kamphaus, 1992) and father and mother evaluations of adolescents (Christensen et al, 1992). References to these studies are intended to highlight research which has found diverging perspectives in relationship evaluations. The authors suggest that differences between clients and therapists in alliance ratings may be due to the different experiences of the participants, with clients for example comparing their experience of the therapist relationship against a backdrop of less collaborative medical practitioner-

client and other day to day exchanges. Therapists on the other hand have a wider client base against which to make evaluations of the strength/ characteristics of the relationship. Tryon et al (2008) conducted a review of the literature on the therapeutic relationship using a larger data set of 63 studies. The authors found that therapists tend only to use the top 30% of rating points on relationship measures while clients tend only to use the top 20%. The authors suggest that this might reflect:

“... the possibility that clients and therapists do not differentiate among lower rating points on the scales, tend to rate the alliance according to a social desirability or dissonance-reducing response set, or provide ratings that accurately reflect the alliance” (p. 546”).

This is an important finding as it suggests that, while not ruling out the possibility of “accuracy”, general similarities in evaluations of the working alliance could be an artefact of rating measures rather than a reflection of what might be considered actual differences in subjective evaluations. As in their previous study, the authors do not refer to the *Rashomon experience* but the implication is that any lessons taken from studies of the therapeutic relationship which suggest similarity in perspectives may not be considered reliable.

Research Exploring “Helpful Events”

In addition to the research on the therapeutic alliance which seems of relevance in understanding the Rashomon experience in psychotherapy, there seems to have been some interest since Weiss et al (1996) in evaluating *helpful events*. A search on PsycNET (APA) identified 8 entries narrowed within *psychotherapeutic processes* for *helpful events* search item: *title*). A search on *Helpful Aspects of Therapy Questionnaire* however, (search item: *any field*) identified 54 results, although this reduced to only 7 when the search was narrowed to *psychotherapeutic processes*. Only one of these latter studies considered the perspective of both therapist and client.

Holowaty and Paivio (2012), (identified in searching in databases for studies in “helpful events”) cite some articles that do take into account the client’s perspective (specifically, Castonguay et al., 2010; Elliott, Slatick, & Urman, 2001; Gallegos, 2005; Gershefski, Arnkoff, Glass, & Elkin, 1996; Grafanaki & McLeod, 1999; Klein & Elliott, 2006), but also point out the general lack of literature that considers the client’s perspective. Similarly, Denhag et al (2012), (also identified in databases), refer to a lack of client involvement when conducting “clinical trials” (p.720). While this review of the literature is not comprehensive, these sources which were identified seem to suggest that the client perspective has not been extensively researched in psychotherapy. This is also confirmed by Llewelyn and Hardy (2001).

It may be that there is more literature on helpful events that a more in-depth review of terms associated with *helpful events* might be able to identify. De Haan et al (2010) for example identify a range of literature on helpful events that seem to have taken account of the client’s perspective. Their references include Yalom (1970) and Bloch et al (1979). De Haan et al (2010) also cite Llewelyn (1988) who compared the descriptions of clients and therapists of helpful events. Llewelyn (1988) found that:

“...during therapy the types of event most frequently reported by clients were reassurance/relief and problem solution events, whereas therapists reported the clients’ gaining of cognitive and affective insight” (p. 223).

This comment seems to provide confirmation of the Rashomon experience in psychotherapy. Llewelyn (1988) does not use the metaphor of Rashomon to support her own findings but does allude to the Mintz (1973) study. De Haan et al (2010) cite a range of other literature on helpful events (mainly pre 1988) but the authors do not highlight any differences in perspectives identified in this literature.

Other Process Literature in Psychotherapy

Some articles identified in the literature, which do compare perspectives of therapist and client, seem very specific and versed in particular theoretical assumptions. This means that they only provide partial insights into how therapists, clients and/or observers evaluate therapeutic sessions overall. Gumz et al (2012) for example set out to explore patterns of “destabilisation” between therapist and client and this literature seems to align more appropriately with the broader field of ruptures (e.g. Safran, Muran, & Proskurov (2009) and to which the authors refer). Other studies take account of multiple perspectives but the context of the research is very specific. For example, Martino et al (2009) compare the perspectives of supervisors, independent observers and therapists (but not clients) in evaluating adherence and competence of therapists in the use of Motivational Enhancement Therapy. It is still interesting to note however that in this study, “there was poor agreement [between independent raters and supervisors] regarding the extent to which the specific interventions occurred within sessions” (189). Denhag et al (2012) include a review Martino et al (2009) alongside a limited number of other studies in their preamble to their own study which compares the perspectives of supervisors and independent judges. They refer to a lack of research which systematically compares these perspectives. They only identify 2 studies (Borders and Fong, 1992; Chevron and Rounsaville, 1983) in addition to Marino et al (2009), neither of which found agreement between the two types of rater. In their own study, Denhag et al (2012) confirmed “this relative lack of agreement” (p.727), when comparing the perspectives of independent raters and supervisors in evaluating adherence and competence of therapists in their application of a range of psychotherapies. Supervisors tended to rate adherence and competence more highly. Denhag et al’s (2012) review focuses on reasons for these differences which include difficulties in identifying particular techniques and possible problems in using measuring scales.

Research building on Grawe's integrationist framework

Recently, there appears to have been some renewed interest in considering the perspective of clients and therapists as part of the overall goal of understanding change mechanisms. Mander et al, 2012 reports some publications in German which have developed a new tool for evaluating the in-session experiencing of therapist and client. The tool the authors refer to is the Bernese Post Session Report; BPSR (Fluckiger et al, 2009) which is grounded on Grawe's (1997) integrationist framework of mechanisms of change across psychotherapies. As summarised in Mander et al (2012), Grawe's framework consists of *resource activation, problem actuation, mastery, clarification of meaning* and the *therapeutic alliance*). The BPSR "measures Grawe's mechanisms of change" (p.105) and "other relevant aspects" (p.107). It is useful to note that in their discussion of the literature on multiple-perspective taking as a preamble to the development of the BPSR, McCarthy and Barber (2009) refer to lack of multiple-perspective taking in psychotherapy process literature. They refer to how survey instruments have been developed either for use by external observers or by therapists and with little intended involvement of the client. This further suggests that the literature on multiple-perspectives is under-explored. Referring to existing literature, the authors highlight how the therapist and external observers' perspectives have been seen as more "objective" and "informed" (p. 97) and which has led to a neglect of the client perspective.

Mander et al, 2012 report on the development of a new instrument based in part on this original tool (:Scale for the Multiperspective Assessment of General Change Mechanisms in Psychotherapy; SACiP) which as the name suggests takes account of therapist and client perspectives. The SACiP also draws on the WAI (Mader et al, 2012) and comprises 5 scales (*emotional bond; problem actuation; resource activation; clarification of meaning; agreement on collaboration* and *mastery*). The authors report on the initial application of the tool which:

“...found that the patient ratings were consistently higher than the therapist ratings on five of the six mechanisms of change. Further, although significant, patient and therapist ratings of change mechanisms were only lowly correlated ($r=.2$).” (p. 112).

The authors conclude that:

“...the findings of the present study show for the first time ever that differences between patient and therapist ratings are not restricted to alliance ratings but also apply to the other mechanisms of change. As suggested by Tryon et al. (2007), patients and therapists generally may consider different anchor points as crucial when they evaluate therapeutic processes. Unfortunately, to this day there are no studies that have examined the reasoning behind those patient and therapist ratings” (p. 112).

Mander et al (2012) do not make any explicit references to Rashomon, largely because the spirit of their work is more about understanding change mechanisms rather than exploring differences in perspectives. However, making an allusion to Rashomon would not be inappropriate. The authors highlighting of a lack of studies exploring the reasoning of differences in perspective would seem to call for renewed interest in the Rashomon experience.

Rashomon and Post Modernism

Before concluding this review, it seems pertinent to highlight that differences in perspectives would be expected in a post-modern construction of the helping relationship. This perspective is eloquently summarised by Anderson (1997):

“Understanding in any conversation is always circumscribed by the context of the conversation and is necessarily always unique to its context (Garfinkel, 1967; Shotter, 1993a). It must be known within the development of the conversation itself, and can only be known by those involved in it (Garfinkel, 1967), not by an observer. Likewise, as David Hoy (1986), referring to hermeneutic understanding suggests, “there is no privileged standpoint for understanding” (p. 399). For instance, therapists (or supervisors or consultants or team members) often talk of a “metaposition,” referring to a privileged position above or outside an event (for example, behind a one-way mirror). We cannot be meta to an event or to a therapy conversation. We simply participate in it; that is, observe it, hear it, or converse in it from different positions, from different angles, from different preunderstandings. Each position is one of many possible ones. Each person in a conversation participates from a unique perspective and experience; for various reasons, these may be quite different from those of other participants. This is part of the reason that the experiences of a therapist in a therapy room and the observers behind the one-way mirror often differ. It is one explanation of why a child welfare worker’s, a parent’s, and a therapist’s experience of the same interview can be so different or a mother’s report of dinner with her daughter’s boyfriend can vary so from the daughter’s or the boyfriend’s recollection.” (pp. 114-5)

It may be therefore that what is required in understanding differences in the accounts provided by different witnesses to the helping relationship reviewed in this review is less a question of explaining differences in identifying *objective realities* and more a question of viewing the interaction from a different philosophical paradigm.

Conclusion on literature on Alternative Perspectives/ Rashomon Experience

This review does not claim to be a complete review of the literature on *Rashomon*. As with much of the literature in psychotherapy, the pursuit of a broad topic of knowledge seems to emanate from within and across a broad spectrum of more or less varied sets of distinct sets

of literature (e.g. research on the *Relationship/ Working alliance*; research on *helpful events/events paradigm*). This makes a focused review on identifying differences in perspectives problematic.

A key conclusion from this review is that the literature generally tends to suggest a divergence of views between the perspectives of practitioner, observer and client and that most of these studies preceded Weiss et al (1996). The articles which would most strongly support this assertion in addition to Mintz et al (1973) would include Stiles and Snow (1984), Llewelyn (1988) and Weiss et al (1996). More recent studies would include Mandler (2012). Other articles have also been highlighted in this review but I would argue that these are the most authoritative articles that would support the existence of the *Rashomon Experience*.

Overall, the literature therefore supports the existence of Rashomon (Mintz et al, 1973) when there are different witnesses to the helping relationship in therapy. Moreover, differences relate primarily to differences in evaluation rather than in differences in the observation of agreed events. This conclusion for the psychotherapy literature is also supported by de Haan et al (2010).

The recent assertions from the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan and Nieß, 2012), cautions us not to make early conclusions about the existence of the *Rashomon experience* in coaching. However at the same time, studies conducted by this Group (Day et al, 2010 and Day and Nieß, 2012) still do not provide sufficient transparency at this stage to conclude that Rashomon is not relevant in coaching in terms of interpretation/evaluation of different aspects of a session. The authors support this conclusion by making reference to their limited data set (de Haan et al, 2010, p.125).

It is also important to decide on what basis we might conclude more dissimilarity than similarity when deciding whether a Rashomon experience should be considered a valid

description in either psychotherapy or coaching. Should a correlation of 0.36 (Tyron et al, 2007) for example be considered to show similarity in perspectives or dissimilarity? More clarification is needed in order to understand on what basis we might conclude that perspectives may or may not be considered essentially similar or dissimilar.

2.08 Coaching provided by professional coaches in an Organizational Context

It is becoming somewhat of a cliché to state that there is a lack of research in coaching in organizations even if there are signs that it is increasing. Grant (2011) estimated that 634 articles on coaching had been published between 2000 and January 2011 of which 231 were empirical investigations. His summary suggested that over the 10 year period, there had been a gradual increase in empirical research (45% articles published in 2010). Grant (2011) only considered articles published in two databases (*Psych-Info* and *Business Source Premier*) so the study is not exhaustive but does give an indication of the scale and scope of coaching research. Passmore (2010) notes a “*plethora*” of articles have been published since 2006. However he argues that most of these are atheoretical, offering case studies or new coaching models devised by coaching practitioners. He suggests that two questions should predominate: “*Firstly, does coaching have an effect and what effect does it have on the coachee? Secondly, what does the coach do which contributes to change in the coachee?*”. The first area of research refers largely to post-session outcome research. The second area relates more specifically to process. These two areas of research directly parallel research in psychotherapy.

2.09 Empirical Studies on Coaching Sessions

Very few studies could be identified in a wide ranging literature review that had analysed actual coaching sessions. Greif et al (2010) refer to “recent observation studies of coaching behaviour” but their paper refers only briefly to two empirical studies (Behrendt, 2006 and Schmidt and Thamm, 2008), the former related to line managers as coaches and the latter involved trained graduate students coaching other students. Greif et al (2010) outline a model of coaching which is based in the literature but in the literature on psychotherapy and primarily that conducted by Grawe (2000). The coaching “process model” derived from Grawe (2000) offers an integrated approach to coaching based on 7 “general success factors” (p99). These are: *Esteem and emotional support; problem reflection; self-reflection; affect reflection and calibration; clarification of goals; resource activation; support of transfer into practice*. Greif et al (2010) stress the importance of resource activation in relation to achieving successful outcomes. The model seems intuitively to have some commonsensical components such as reflection and clear goals which are coaches generally are encouraged to employ (e.g. ICF competencies). The components also appear to be generally similar to common factors in psychotherapy; for example, Grencavage and Norcross’s (1990) references to the importance of reflection on the client’s inner world and the importance of the client acquiring and practicing new behaviours. However Greif et al’s (2010) model is theoretically driven seeking primarily to activate self-mobilizing processes with the client. Greif et al (2010) refer to the similarity of the model with a solutions focused approach. It is not therefore clear in what way the model is not just another conceptualisation/ model of coaching derived from psychotherapy rather than one derived specifically for coaching and from an empirical evidence base. The authors acknowledge a need to adapt the approach to the specific needs of a client, including the client’s personality. Therefore, the model seems to adopt a broadly flexible and constructivist approach to coaching.

Greif et al (2010) refer to the reader to an on-going publication of the “Coaching Success Factors Observation Manual” (now Version 4, 2010) that summarises much of the process research conducted to inform and validate the model. More details are provided in the manual on the two studies already summarised above; also (Geißler, 2009), (English translation not available) which identified a range of behaviours shown by the coach (*shows attention, asks, mirrors, questions/confronts/criticizes, explains, gives feedback and prompts the client to act*) and client reactions initiated by the coach (*focuses cognitively on a subject; describes concretely or reflects on the process, the causes or the meaning, evaluates and develops action intentions*). Content analysis identified *asking questions* to be the most frequent observed communicative behaviour (26-61% of verbal communications) and client reactions were the most frequent type of response (24-52% of responses). This pattern was uncharacteristic for the one session that appeared problematic, justifying the importance of patterns in the 9/10 sessions that appeared to achieve beneficial outcomes.

Greif et al et al (2010) refer the readers to a study in which they had validated the model by interviewing coaches about their practice (Greif et al, 2008). They also cite other literature that tends to support their general approach (e.g. Mäthner et al., 2005). The methods outlined are described in the manual. The methods are very rigorous and involve the training of observers, the detailed scrutiny of video-recordings and detailed application of statistical techniques. Their observation instrument is also described in detail (*Cubus Analyse*; Grawe et al., 1994) and which is derived from psychotherapy. This methodology allows the authors to relate outcomes to process variables. Greif et al et al (2010) refer to the study of Schmidt and Thamm (2008) which showed significant correlations between some coach behaviours and outcomes (*facilitation of self-reflection* and a reduction in *helplessness; resource activation* and *goal satisfaction; verbal empathy* and *behaviour* and *goal reflection; support of transfer* and self-ratings of *time management* and *information management; non-verbal reinforcement* and *emotional insight*). Contrary to expectations they found that *non-verbal reflections* correlated with *negative affect* and *self-reflection*

correlates with *de-motivation* (Schmidt and Thamm, 2008 cited in Greif et al et al, 2010, p6-7).

The observation manual provides details regarding the specific behaviours coaches need to show in order to enact the seven success factors; for example “Esteem and Emotional Support” is sub-divided into three broad behaviours which in turn are broken down into a series of even more specific behaviours. Trained coders evaluating the behaviours of the coach follow specific guidelines for rating the behaviours of the coach.

Greif et al (2010) make some interesting evaluations in relation to coaching. For example, they distinguish coaching from therapy in terms of coaching’s specific tendency to enable self-developmental processes in the client; also in its focus on the achievement of results through self-reflection: “The facilitation of intensive results oriented self-reflection is one of the core competencies and functions of coaching. It distinguishes coaching from types of counselling that are less evasive” (p.101). However this comment is immediately qualified: “In this respect coaching can be compared to psychotherapy” (p.101). Thus, we are left a little uncertain about how coaching might be different to counselling but similar to psychotherapy. Greif et al’s (2010) distinction relates to the degree of challenge so the distinction seems to be quantitative rather than qualitative.

Overall, Greif et al (2010) present an interesting methodology for studying coaching. Unlike much of the literature in coaching, they present empirical findings. Their research also appears to be gaining some momentum with the researchers highlighting future programmes of empirical research. They also amply demonstrate how in-depth quantitative process research can be conducted in coaching and produce some potentially useful findings. The most salient limitation is probably that their research so far has been conducted with students and line managers rather than with actual coaches. There is also a danger that they will only find in their research what the design of their research investigation will allow

them to find; one is perhaps reminded of the early Wittgenstein (1929) who argued that our knowledge is limited by the language that we have to describe the world (Martland, 1975). The approach of Greif et al (2010) also seem to be very much focused on what the coach does rather than on what the coach and client do together and this undermines a collaborative conceptualization of the coaching process.

2.10 Critical Moments

This section of the thesis presents a summary (rather than a critique) of the literature on *critical moments* in coaching and focuses on six principal papers identified in this review and published by the various members of the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan and Nieß, 2012). Given the author's constructionist epistemological position, this summary will inevitably include a degree of interpretation although an attempt will generally be made to summarise the literature (i.e. outline the main concepts, methodology and findings) with only occasional references beyond what the authors actually state in order to help contextualise their research.

Eric de Haan is the lead, single or contributing author of the 6 principle papers identified in the literature (de Haan, 2008a; de Haan, 2008b; Day, de Haan, Sills, Bertie and Blass, 2008; de Haan, Bertie, Day and Sills, 2010a; de Haan, Bertie, Day and Sills, 2010b; de Haan and Nieß, 2012). Similar, work-in-progress and/or Dutch versions of these papers appear in a range of other publications including de Haan and Blass (2007), de Haan (2008c), de Haan, Sills, Day and Bertie (2006) and de Haan (2006a, 2006b). Through these articles, the coaching interaction is presented as a series of moment by moment interactions in which some of these interactions take on a particular significance for coach, client or both. The papers present the authors empirical findings based on questionnaires and/or interviews with coachees and coaches. The context of the coaching upon which the research is based relates mainly to work-related, (but not exclusively) one to one coaching (e.g. executive coaching). The authors' research adopts a methodological approach informed by an

established tradition in psychotherapy process research which over the past 40 years has led to the publication of a range of studies within what is described in the literature as the *events paradigm* (Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001). The authors cite many studies in psychotherapy research in setting the context for their own investigations (e.g. Elliott, 1985 cited in Day et al, 2008, p. 620). The authors also situate their research methodologically in the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954 cited in de Haan et al, 2010, p. 127).

This summary will include an overview of the main findings from the 6 principle papers in chronological order. It will also include a summary of an initial exploratory study (De Haan et al, 2006) as this is particularly useful in setting the context for the studies which follow. The other papers tend to follow a logical and chronological account of the collection and analysis of data. In brief, De Haan (2008a) presents an analysis of the recollections of critical moments of 49 novice coaches collected through written assignments produced as part of an on-going coaching module at Ashridge Management College. De Haan (2008b) presents descriptions of critical moments for experienced coaches (e-mail responses collected from 47 coaches reporting 8 or more years of coaching experience). Day, de Haan, Sills, Bertie and Blass (2008) present an analysis of critical moments following in-depth interviews with 30 experienced coaches. De Haan, Bertie, Day and Sills (2010a) present an analysis of critical moments of clients gathered through a survey and some interview material. De Haan, Bertie, Day and Sills (2010b) compare and contrast clients and coaches accounts of critical moments taken immediately after events. Finally, de Haan and NieB (2012) present a detailed case study of an interaction between coach and client. De Haan et al (2010) report a full data set at the time of writing of 352 critical moments.

De Haan et al (2006)

De Haan et al (2006) present an initial overview of their on-going research in *critical moments* in coaching. This relates to previous work reported for example in De Haan 2006a and De Haan 2006b. The authors set the context for their research. It is inspired by similar

research in psychotherapy; the authors cite for example Rice and Greenberg (1984) who have sought for a number of years to understand how change occurs in a helping context and have contributed to the development of methods which allow a rich exploration of the helping relationship. The authors suggest the probable relevance of common factors and of the importance of the relationship as a common factor (the authors cite Wampold, 2001 who proposed that change occurs in psychotherapy through a range of factors common to all therapies). They describe their approach as “narrative and qualitative in nature” and their interest in “meaning, in an inductive manner” (p. 5). The context of the research is also set in the context of the needs and scope of supervision:

“We wanted to explore which of these tasks [of supervision] and types [of supervision] are common in the world of coaching...”(p. 7).

This context setting is relevant because it highlights the focus on the authors research programme. There will be an assumption that the relationship is important in the coaching encounter and that material is likely to provide some lessons for supervision.

The authors do not provide at the outset an explicit definition of a *critical moment* but contextualise its occurrence and implications:

“Tense, exciting and difficult moments may occur, and the coach is alone while responding to them. Executive coaches recognise that these challenging moments can be real opportunities for growth for both coachee and coach – but they can also be blocks or obstacles to the coaching process if not recognised or addressed well. They can hinder or undermine the ‘working alliance’ between coachee and coach, as much as they can deepen the relationship and open up new avenues for growth” (p. 4).

A critical moment is thereby contextualised as emotionally challenging; functionally, it is presented as a point of transition in the coaching process which can be either generative or destructive of the coaching process and/or the coaching relationship. There is an assumption that these points of transition can be successfully managed.

From a methodological perspective, De Haan et al's (2006) conceptualisation of a *critical moment* informed the research design (i.e. its emotional impact and existence as a challenge/dilemma). For example, the instructions given to research participants were as follows:

“Describe briefly one critical moment (an exciting, tense or significant moment) – or, in the later research, also a challenge, or a dilemma – with one of your coaches. Think about what was critical in the coaching journey, or a moment when you did not know quite what to do” (p. 8).

The authors report that participants were able to identify “moments of dilemma, challenge and indecision for the coach” (p. 9).

De Haan et al (2006) describe the types of dilemma, challenge and moments of indecision, identified in the research, in some detail. In summary, for inexperienced coaches, these moments were reported to be associated with the coach's own insecurities and doubts; for example in relation to their “own suitability for the role of coach” (p. 21). Based on these findings, the researchers elaborate on their understanding of a *key* or *critical* moment that they had presented earlier in the paper and which I referenced earlier in this summary:

“...a critical moment is a difficult, awkward moment that hinders the coach and puts him/her off balance, while on the other hand it is precisely in and as a result of such moments that the coach can learn something about him or herself, about the coaching relationship and ultimately about the coachee”(p. 12).

If these moments are successfully managed, they have the potential for becoming “breakthrough moments” or if they are not; they represent “missed opportunities” (12).

The authors state that their research identified fewer reports of doubt on the part of experienced coaches. Rather than provide descriptive details of the critical moments of experienced coaches (saving this for subsequent publications), the authors highlight how the

critical moments of experienced coaches led to change provided the coach was open to, and made use of, their experience in the coaching session (e.g. following intuition, reflecting back their observations, etc.) and provided the coach was able to manage his/her own internal tensions (intrapersonal skills). In the concluding comments in the article, the authors highlight the importance of critical moments in promoting client change. Critical moments are therefore conceptualised as generally instrumental in the coaching process; they are moments when the coach can draw on his/her intrapersonal awareness to bring about client change:

“Overwhelmingly, the examples of critical incidents and challenges offered by and discussed with the experienced coaches, related to their paying attention to their own responses in the moment...and finding a way of using the response in service of raising the client’s awareness of some aspects of themselves or the situation. This very often seemed to be a moment of change and progression for the client...” (p. 21).

The authors make several references to the literature on coaching and psychotherapy that either appear to have informed or support the research findings. A key text that the authors cite is O’Neill (2000) to which De Haan and al (2006) reference their findings in relation to the coach needing to reconcile “Strength, daring and containment” (backbone)...and acceptance, readiness and warmth”(heart)” (p. 13).

De Haan, 2008a

De Haan (2008a) presents a detailed description of the critical moments described by the inexperienced coaches in De Haan et al (2007). A random sample of 42 of 56 critical moments collected from 49 novice coaches is classified into 19 different types of critical moment. De Haan points out that these moments “could have been classified differently” but “fall naturally under the headings” (p. 92). The classifications are broad ranging; for example, “Building a Relationship,” “Am I good enough,” “Deferring your opinion,” “Breakthroughs”, “Directing the conversation,” “Team coaching” (pp.92-97). De Haan

(2008a) proceeds to analyse all 56 critical moments as 4 types of doubt: “Doubts About Every Coaching Conversation and Every Moment in a Coaching Conversation,” “Doubts About the Coaching Relationship,” “Doubts about Guiding the Coaching Conversations” and “Doubts About the Boundaries of Coaching Conversations (pp. 99-102).” The author then provides a “Synthesis” (p.102) in which coaches are advised about how they might “better handle these tensions and doubts”(p.102). Four broad suggestions are proposed: *understanding* that “The Critical Moment Says Something About the Coach and About the Coaching”; that “Critical Moments Are Breakthrough Moments”; that “The More Critical Moments, the Better the Coaching”; that “Coaches Can Only Continue to Learn Thanks to Their Critical Moments” (pp.102-3). In his overall conclusions, de Haan (2008a) argues that “the effectiveness of coaches seems determined primarily by their ability to doubt, not to know what is coming next, and to greet what comes next with questions” (p.105). The centrality of doubting is also explained in relation to the title of the article (“I doubt therefore I coach”, p. 91):

“Like Descartes...the coach experiences a significant turning point when he shifts his own attention away from the many doubts and uncertainties...and toward the activity of doubting itself”(p.105).

De Haan, 2008b

De Haan (2008b) presents the findings of critical moments of the experienced coaches reported in De Haan et al (2006). The presentation of the data follows a similar format to that presented for inexperienced coaches in 2008a (initial description of critical moments, analysis and synthesis). In his initial presentation, De Haan (2008b) categorises critical moments into 18 sub-categories which in turn are categorised at a super-ordinate level into three broad themes (: “Managing Key Conditions,” “Deepening the coaching conversation and the coaching relationship” and “Handling what happens in the coaching conversation and the coaching relationship”: 109-121). As in his previous article (de Haan, 2008a), de

Haan points out that “many critical moments can be categorized under a number of different headings” (p.109) indicating, as in his earlier analysis (2008a), epistemologically, an interpretative analysis. The 18 sub-categories present a broad range of reported critical moments. For example one coach reported a critical moment as the coach making a suggestion to go for a walk which led to a “useful conversation” (p.109). Another example is a coach reporting an instance of disclosing one of his/her own experiences to the client: “talking about an experience of my own” (p.114).

In his “analysis” (p.122), de Haan (2008b) categorises the critical moments provided by experienced coaches as 8 different types of anxiety (e.g. “Anxiety About the Boundaries of Coaching,” “Anxiety Due to the Specific Behaviour of the Coachee,” “Anxiety stepping Mainly From the Coach”; pp. 122-7). In a process of “Synthesis” (p.127), De Haan (2008b) makes some suggestions about how the coach might address these challenges. De Haan (2008b) refers to these challenges as “struggles,” because, “they are recurring challenges that experienced coaches cannot avoid but need to handle as well as possible” (p.127). The struggles (4 types) are “The Struggle to Stay “Fresh and Receptive””; “The Struggle to Retain and Increase the Coach’s Ability to Put Things Into Perspective”; “The Struggle to Contribute “Containment” to the Relationship” and “The Struggle to Contribute the Coach’s Own Observations” (pp.127-9).

In his conclusions, De Haan (2008b) cites psychotherapy research by Carlberg (1997) which suggests that *turning points* (moments of change) occur in therapy; these moments are characterised by unpredictability and an increased sense of inter-subjectivity between practitioner and client (“emotional meeting”; p. 130). De Haan (2008b) suggests that many (but not all) of the *critical moments* in his data set (77%) suggest these occurrences. He then draws his article to a conclusion by arguing that the “quality of coaches is determined primarily by their ability to tolerate tension and to tackle the ongoing struggle with new tensions and uncertainties” (p.131). This comment represents another movement in his reflections and suggests that client change is brought about through the coach’s skill in

exploiting the tensions he/she inevitably experiences. Coaching is therefore constructed as the coach's capacity to manage tension and uncertainty and in part, informs the title of the article ("I Struggle and Emerge").

Day et al, 2008

Day, de Haan, Stills, Bertie and Blass, 2008 provide a detailed analysis of the interview data reported briefly in 2008a. This consisted of an analysis of 51 critical moments collected from 28 experienced coaches identifying critical moments over their past 12 months of coaching. The authors continue to develop their understanding of critical moments:

"... critical moments are unforeseen and characterised by intense emotions and anxiety within the coaching relationship. These moments were most often seen to be turning points in the work...[These moments] resulted in either insight for their clients or a distancing, or even breakdown, in the coaching relationship. Their accounts indicate that the outcome of these moments is influenced by the coach's containment of both their and their client's emotions. This process of containment involved coaches being aware of their own emotions and the reactions of their client, making a link with what was taking place in the coaching relationship and reflecting on their experience with their client in a manner that led to heightened awareness for the client. In situations where a distancing occurred between coach and client, this was associated with either an aggressive response or an avoidant response by one or both parties... These findings demonstrate the importance to the coaching process of personal insight on the part of the coach, reflexivity in the coaching relationship and emotional containment by both the coach and the coaching supervisor" (p. 207)."

This summary highlights the authors understanding of the significance and existence of critical moments; in particular, that critical moments are *turning points* characterised by

intense emotions and anxiety that can lead to client insight and/or an improvement or deterioration/breakdown in the coaching relationship. The more the coach seems able to remain calm and reflective, the greater the likelihood of a successful outcome. The authors also draw on a range of concepts from psychotherapy and learning generally to support their arguments including Bion's (1963) notion of containment in psychotherapy. The authors emphasise the importance of supervision in helping the clients to manage these situations. The centrality of the relationship is highlighted by the authors in that the critical incidents present a potential threat to the relationship and/or a moment in the relationship when something occurs which has a particular impact on the progress of coaching/ client insight. Overall, their findings seem to suggest that effective coaching is about the coach and client working reflexively and with uncertainty. At some point, an occasion will arise, which if handled reflexively will be instrumental in the client's progress or will lead to a deterioration/breakdown in the relationship.

The analysis provided by the authors is broadly in line with that provided in De Haan (2008b). Examples are given which provide what might be taken as evidence for the experiencing of intense client and coach emotions, tensions in the relationship; tensions relating to the boundaries of coaching and changes in the relationship. The authors refer to critical moments arising unexpectedly. The authors identify a range of forms of anxiety and doubt experienced by the coach which accompany critical moments. The identification of anxieties is consistent with and is supportive of De Haan's (2008b) identification of the significance of coach anxiety. However, there is a greater emphasis on the notion of managing ruptures in the relationship. The authors provide evidence of the sequential nature of interactions that supports their claim of the importance of containment (citing Bion, 1963) on the part of the coach. The backdrop of conceptual frameworks provided in the psychotherapeutic literature provides additional plausibility and credibility to their findings. The importance of the therapist managing the client's expression of negative feelings or hostility is for example also widely highlighted in the psychotherapy literature (e.g. Bachelor

and Horvarth, 1999). Day et al, 2008 emphasise additionally, the importance of *shared* reflection in addition to remaining calm. The authors do not discuss however whether the importance of shared reflection is relevant in the psychotherapy literature. The importance of shared reflection seems to be quite similar and provides support for the relevance of *immediacy* in coaching advocated by O'Neill (2000).

De Haan et al, 2010

Having discussed the accounts of critical moments provided by clients and by coaches in previous studies (principally and chronologically; De Haan et al, 2008a, 2008b; Day et al, 2008), the authors now consider the accounts of clients and coaches in relation to the same moments. Eighty-Six critical moment descriptions were reported immediately at the end of coaching sessions; 43 from coaches and 43 from clients. The data was collected from 14 coaches (with their clients) and related to 21 coaching sessions. Unlike in previous studies, the reporting of the critical moments tended to focus more on “new realisations and insights as most critical” (p.109). The authors relate their findings to their previous research which had given more emphasis to moments of doubt and anxiety including ruptures. They argue that everyday coaching is associated with moments of insight whereas if coaches are prompted to reflect on their careers, they will tend to focus more on key moments of tension. The authors report finding in their new study reported in De Haan et al (2010) “substantial agreement about the specific moments that were critical in the sessions and why” (p. 109). The authors argue that this agreement calls into question the so called Rashomon effect in psychotherapy as well as their previous research which has suggested that practitioner and client often place a different emphasis on events occurring in the helping relationship. Implicit in the notion of Rashomon is the individual’s construction of the coaching interaction (i.e. in which the process is given subjective meaning and significance by the participants). De Haan et al (2010) however present a somewhat realist account of events in coaching

sessions as objective realities actually occurring in coaching sessions with both coach and client attending to the same “reality’ of the conversation” (p.124).

It is perhaps interesting to point out how the more recent research on critical moments conducted by the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan and Nieß, 2012) reports a higher level of agreement about the identification of significant events than in psychotherapy. Cummings, Hallberg, et al. (1992) for example found that clients and counsellors recalled the same important event 34% of the time, whereas Cummings, Martin, et al. (1992) found that they recalled it 39% of the time. Similarly, Martin and Stelmaczonek (1988) found that counsellors and clients recalled the same event as most important in a session 33% of the time. De Haan et al (2010) do not discuss these differences in detail but do suggest that one of the reasons for a high level of agreement between coaches and clients could be related to their shared background: “...coach and client are essentially similar being both 21st century professionals with an interest in leadership and development” (de Haan et al, 2010, p.124).

De Haan and Biess, 2012

In their most recent published study identified on critical moments, De Haan and Nieß (2012) present a case study involving the content analysis of the reported critical moments described by coach and client taking part in a programme of coaching (10 X 90 minute sessions over a 7 month period). As in de Haan et al, 2010, the authors found a high level of concordance in the coach and client identification of critical moments (approximately 50% of the descriptions) although the coach tended to focus mainly on moments of self-doubt and the client on moments of new learning and positive change in the relationship (the coding of coach and client anti-correlated; p.205). The study also found that the number of client insights (typical critical moments for clients) decreased over time while the coaching

relationship appeared to strengthen. These findings point to the possibility of regularities in patterns over time in coaching.

The authors still conclude however that the identification of critical moments refutes the existence of the Rashomon effect; the authors, thereby giving more emphasis to the process of identification than that of interpretation:

“...For us, the most encouraging finding was the similarity of experience of both persons in the room...which disconfirms the “Rashomon conjecture” of entirely different recollections in helping relationships” (p.209).

Conclusion (Critical Moments)

The research on critical moments demonstrates a rigorous and generally transparent approach in coaching process research. The analyses throughout the studies demonstrate a high level of methodological sophistication and involve multiple researchers adding to the validity and reliability of their findings. The methodological approaches are clearly outlined and draw on both qualitative and statistical techniques. The details of the critical moments are often presented in full which allows one to critique the categorisation of types of critical moments as well as the nature and consequences of a critical moment.

Overall, the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan and Nieß, 2012) provides a body of literature which gives an insight into the coaching process and which had hitherto and still remains largely under-researched. In many ways, the described experiences of novice coaches in earlier studies highlight a broad range of professional, ethical and boundary issues that coaches need help to negotiate early in their careers. The experiences of more experienced coaches in some of the subsequent studies highlight a broad range of the continued challenges that coaches face and for which they need support through supervision and continued professional development. The earlier studies on the descriptions of critical moments by experienced coaches provide an insight into the on-going process of managing one's own and one's client's emotions at tense moments as well as the relevance

of working with immediacy (O'Neil, 200). The experiences of clients highlight the importance for the client in gaining new insights. The coding and categorisation of critical events also provides taxonomy for understanding critical events considered to occur in the coaching process and which can be used or critiqued by other researchers. Collectively, these findings constitute a substantial contribution both to the academic literature and to practice.

2.11 Coaching Typologies

A number of studies have been carried out that have adopted an inductive analysis of the behaviours of coach. Stein (2009) analysed actual coaching sessions and interviewed coaches about how they had conducted their sessions. Stein identified 16 conversational identities employed by a coaches (e.g. *agenda facilitator*, *narrative listener*, *challenger*, etc.), which could be classified within three major frames (*process frame*, *content frame* and *relationship frame*; frames being defined by the task). The notion of a conversational identity is demonstrated in the content of the language used by the coach (for example if the coach encourages the client to come back to his original agenda, the coach will be acting as *agenda facilitator*). Stein (2009) suggests that the typology could be useful as a basic vocabulary and tool for self-reflection on the part of the coach and as a mechanism for evaluating if there is a difference between what coaches say they do and actually do. Stein (2009) presents an interesting descriptive study derived from actual coaching sessions. Her findings suggest that coaches can adapt different approaches in different contexts although she highlights how some coaches might have a particular preference for a particular approach. Her findings also seem to point to the diversity of coaching practices.

One challenge in understanding the framework is perhaps to consider what might determine the boundaries of a conversational identity. In conversational analysis for example, boundaries can be identified in relation to a *turn construction unit*, (Ten Have, 1999).

Similarly in speech act theory, there are specific semantic definitions for specific syntactic constructions (Searle et al., 1980). Stein's typology could also be criticised for its focus on the coach rather than at the dyadic level (actions and impacts). Finally, because the typology focuses on the semantic use of language, it overlooks possible unconscious processes and/or non-verbal interactions (Mehrabian, 1977). However, overall, the study very usefully begins to provide a conceptual framework for understanding aspects of the coaching process.

In a similar multiple typologies oriented approach to Stein (2009), Jackson (2005) produced a five- dimensional typology reflecting attitudinal and conceptual differences in the way coaches said they practiced coaching. The five dimensions are as follows:

1. Systematic methodology – Flexible Personal Methodology
2. Explicit Foundations of Practice – Less Explicit Foundations of Practice
3. Pragmatic Competency Coaching – Facilitative Open Scope Coaching
4. Personal Presence Achieves Outcomes – Procedure Achieves Outcomes
5. Concrete - Philosophical

This multi-dimensional typology for defining the practice of coaching highlights the potential for generating frameworks for understanding the breadth and scope of practice beyond single dimensional typologies (*cognitive behavioural coaching, Gestalt coaching, etc.*) but as Jackson acknowledges, his exploratory study was based on interviews with only five coaches, is based on his interpretation of the data (using a range of mixed methods) and should not be generalised. The dimensions also seem to overlap in the descriptions Jackson provides; for example the first dimension is evidenced “by reference to doctrinal authority” while the fourth dimension takes account of “adherence to doctrine” Nonetheless, the study has its merits; for example in highlighting a range of methodologies that could be usefully applied to make sense of what coaches do (in this case, grounded theory, repertory grid technique, clustering; non-parametric statistical analysis and linkage analysis). It also

highlights some potential differentiators between practicing coaches. Finally, while focused on the coach, the analysis goes beyond behaviours, generating higher order constructs (typologies) that incorporate behaviours and other aspects of the practices of coaches.

2.12 Parallel Process Research

There is some literature on coaching which attempts to make sense of coaching process at a less conscious/ non behavioural level. Day (2010) for example discusses the relevance of the “parallel process” in coaching. This refers to how unconscious relational dynamics in one context or system can be replicated in another system (p. 868). He provides a detailed case example of working with the parallel process.

Day (2010) contextualises this research within broader debates in psychoanalysis relating to what has been described as the “relational turn”. He argues that this represents an emerging paradigm change within psychoanalysis representing “a movement from “one person” psychology to a “two person” psychology which privileges inter-subjectivity over understanding individuals as separate independent entities that can be studied objectively” (p.865). He contrasts the “relational turn” with a more traditional psychoanalytic paradigm which “has tended to see the therapist and client as independent actors in unconscious interactions, with the client’s contribution being known as “transference” and the therapist’s response to the client being known as “counter-transference” (p.866).

2.13 Conclusions to Literature Chapter

This chapter set out to provide a review of the literature on process research in both psychotherapy and coaching. In this conclusion, I will present a summary of the main findings and key arguments presented. I will then consider the lessons coaching process

researchers can take from the body of literature on psychotherapy process which has been given particular consideration in this chapter.

The key theme presented in this chapter has been the emergence of a social constructionist interpretation of the psychotherapy process (e.g. Kaye, 1992; McNamee and Gergen, 1992; Spong, 2010; Anderson, 1997; Wong, 2006; Orange et al, 1997, Gergen, 1999, Goolishian, 1987; Lock and Strong, 2012; Levin and Brava, 2012). This understanding of psychotherapy process adopts a holistic approach to understanding the interaction between practitioner and client, as a meaning-making process. This understanding contrasts with that of more positivist and mainstream, qualitatively-oriented psychotherapy process researchers (e.g. Rice and Greenberg, 1984; Greenberg, 1986; Elliott, 1986, Llewelyn, 1988; Grawe, 1997 and Flückiger et al, 2009).

Some researchers within this latter tradition have focused on specific types of qualitative approaches such as the “events paradigm” (Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001). Other process researchers in psychotherapy have adopted a positivist-oriented approach but have used more quantitative based techniques (e.g. as summarised in Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001; Elliott, 2010 and Greenberg, 1986). There is also a breadth of literature that has investigated specific aspects of the psychotherapy process, including the Working Alliance (e.g. Tryon, 2007); ruptures in the relationship (e.g. Safran et al, 2009), immediacy (e.g. Kasper et al, 2008) and therapist responsiveness (e.g. Stiles et al, 1990).

Overall, the leading proponents of qualitative oriented approaches (Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001; Elliott, 2010; Greenberg) tend to agree that the way in which therapeutic change is achieved still needs much more research and improved research designs. All of these proponents however, agree that in principle, it will prove possible to identify a set of specific mechanisms that are associated with change in therapy. Some psychotherapy process authors have also called for more involvement of the client’s perspective on the psychotherapeutic process (e.g. *Holowaty and Paivio*, 2012). A relative lack of the

perspective of the client particularly in light of the findings in relation to the *Rashomon conjecture* (i.e. that perspectives seem to differ according to the stakeholder perspective taken in psychotherapy) seems to point to a useful area of future research in psychotherapy. Greenberg's (1996) call for "methodological pluralism" (p.6) also seems particularly relevant given the breadth of understanding that different methods and perspectives on the psychotherapeutic process appear to provide.

A number of reviews of the literature on psychotherapy outcomes (Grencavage and Norcross, 1990; Assay and Lambert, Wampold, 2001) have led to the argument that *common* rather than *specific* factors are associated with client improvement in therapy; that is, general factors common to all psychotherapies (including for example, the therapeutic relationship, the opportunity for catharsis, etc.). Wampold (2001) has argued that the existence of these general factors undermines the notion of psychotherapy as a *medical model* which involves the application of specific therapeutic interventions. Wampold (2001) advocates instead, a *contextual* model of change, which as the term implies, takes into consideration, broader contextual, non-specific factors associated with the change process. While Wampold (2001) does not reject the possibility therefore of developing a body of knowledge that can identify general causal factors associated with change across a wide range of psychotherapies, it could be argued that his notion of a contextual model, can be reconciled with a social constructionist interpretation of change as a meaning-making process.

This summary sets the context for highlighting some of the lessons that coaching process researchers might take from the psychotherapy process literature:

Psychotherapy is effective (Wampold, 2001). Given the similarity of psychotherapy and coaching as *helping conversations*, and given the lack of available resources (unlike in psychotherapy), there seems to be an argument for not investing these limited resources

into researching the effectiveness of coaching. This argument has been made convincingly by de Haan (2008c)

1. Coaching process can draw on a well-resourced arsenal of process methods, methodologies and tools for exploring process including for example, interpersonal process recall (Kagan and Kagan, 1991) and Q-sort methodologies (e.g. Ablon and Jones, 1993). Q-sorting has been used in particular by Bachkirova et al (2012) and in this current thesis. Coaching researchers can also learn to apply statistical methods used in psychotherapy process; for example, the use of Cohen's Kappa (1960) has been used extensively in studies comparing the perspective of different participants/observers when evaluating therapy sessions or aspects of therapy (Weiss et al, 1996); this technique has been used by the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan et al, 2010) for establishing levels of agreement between researchers evaluating data collected on *critical moments* in coaching sessions.
2. The lesson from psychotherapy for coaching process researchers, more generally, is to avoid rediscovering what is already available and/or to consider the possibility of developing measures derived from psychotherapy where this might lead to resource savings
3. Conversely, coaching researchers can identify content areas and methodological approaches in psychotherapy process research which have been under-addressed and tailor coaching process research in a way that might be considered consistent with the values of the emerging discipline of coaching; for example, the client's perspective has been largely neglected in psychotherapy process research (Holowaty and Paivio, 2012) yet the coaching literature is arguably very client-centric (e.g. Whitworth, 2011).

4. Coaching researchers can use or adapt definitions of process provided within psychotherapy as a benchmark and orienteering framework for investigating coaching process; this will also be useful longer-term in understanding similarities and differences between psychotherapy and coaching via empirical research. The research carried out by the Ashridge Critical Moment Study Group (de Haan and Neiß, 2012) has already for example been able to contextualise findings from coaching in relation to findings in psychotherapy (i.e. that the Rashomon experience may be of lesser significance in the coaching process; e.g. de Haan et al, 2010)

5. Coaching researchers can use or adapt the organizing frameworks provided within psychotherapy; for example Llewelyn and Hardy's (2001) categorisation of *exploratory studies, hypothesis testing and theory development* and within this particular sub-groups such as studies within the "events paradigm" (Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001). These are useful organizing and orienteering frameworks and will also enable the transfer of learning from psychotherapy. It is interesting to note that the "events paradigm" approach has already been adopted by the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan and Nieß, 2012). This group has also compared and contrasted differences between experienced and novice practitioners (reviewed by Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001), further demonstrating the transposition of organizing research frameworks from psychotherapy (e.g. de Haan et al, 2010) into coaching research.

6. Coaching process researchers can begin their analysis of coaching with a basic language and set of concepts for understanding aspects of the psychotherapeutic interaction that could be relevant for understanding aspects of the coaching interaction including immediacy (e.g. Kasper et al, 2008); therapist responsiveness

(Stiles et al, 1990); the Working Alliance (e.g. Tryon, 2007); and ruptures in the relationship (e.g. Safran et al, 2009).

7. There appear to be a number of topical issues in psychotherapy process research in which there has been a great deal of research interest: e.g. common factors and in particular, the relevance of the therapeutic relationship (Wampold, 2001). Coaching process researchers can build on these findings; for example to explore broader contextual factors associated with change common to all forms of coaching. The more recent literature associated with the integrationist approach (e.g. Grawe, 1997 and Flückiger et al, 2009) is already being adapted by process researchers in coaching (e.g. Greif et al, 2010)
8. The interest in more discursive approaches in psychotherapy (e.g. Spong et al, 2012; McNamee and Gergen, 1992, Anderson, 1997) suggests that coaching researchers might productively explore coaching process more holistically as a process of meaning-making; also that multiple-perspectives might be considered (including the client's perspective) and without recourse to the construction of a new theoretical language (Toukmanian and Rennie (1992)
9. More generally, the breadth of psychotherapy process research alerts us to be tolerant of a breadth of different research approaches and paradigms in order to increase our understanding of coaching; also to appreciate that our understanding of process in a helping relationship is always from a particular perspective; be this from a witness to the interaction (practitioner, client and/or observer for example) or from a particular theoretical orientation.
10. Finally, "coaching" process researchers might try to contextualise both psychotherapy process and coaching process as complementary strands of research within the broader context of research in "helping relationships"; this would help avoid

unwittingly stigmatising many people who might otherwise be considered pathological and in need of medical (therapeutic) treatment

Risks for Coaching Process Researchers

There are some risks that coaching researchers need to take into account however when drawing on the literature in psychotherapy; for example:

1. While assuming in the literature discussed in this chapter that there are fundamental similarities between psychotherapy and coaching, some authors emphasise what they consider to be important differences between psychotherapy and coaching (e.g. Favorite, 1995; Jatska and Ratey, 2004). Cox (2012) has also argued that the two fields of practice are different and highlights how coaching draws on a range of particular traditions in addition to psychotherapy, including adult learning development, business practice and organizational change. There is therefore a need to consider carefully the relevance of methods, techniques, classifications and concepts used in psychotherapy
2. If coaching researchers draw on methodologies, research techniques, organizing frameworks, taxonomies and prior findings from psychotherapy, there is the risk that coaching research simply repeat lessons without the creation of any new knowledge; a need to develop a unique and distinct body of academic knowledge and practice has been highlighted in the literature (e.g. Hamlin et al, 2008).
3. There is also a risk that a process which might arguably be conceptualised as a meaning-making interaction and one readily understood through the use of everyday concepts becomes reconstituted in a veil of theoretical language derived from

psychotherapy process; we are reminded of Kaye's (1992) warning not to privilege scientific discourse

3.0 Chapter 3 Research Philosophy and Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research philosophy underpinning the research undertaken in this Inquiry. It is also to outline the research methods used. Part 1 of this chapter will focus on the social constructionist approach adopted. It will include a discussion of the importance of discourse and meaning making in the social constructionist perspective. It will situate the research in relation to alternative ontological and epistemological assumptions which I will argue can still be incorporated within a social constructionist understanding providing alternative frameworks are considered as perspectives rather than epistemologically privileged and authoritative ways to access what might be conceptualised as *truth*. In Part 2, I will begin by outlining the methods used in the Inquiry (Q Methodology, Interpersonal Process Recall (Elliott, 1986), Unstructured Interviews and Observer Groups). I will then explain how I used the Coaching Process Q-Set (Bachkirova et al, 2012) in the Inquiry and provide brief details of what this tool is and how it was used. I will then focus on the specifics of the research design including decisions in relation to sampling and involvement of research participants. After discussing the details of the design, I will outline the data collection and analysis methods. Towards the end of Part 2, I will discuss quality and ethical issues. Throughout this chapter I have tried to identify my own voice in the Inquiry. What I mean by this is I have made an attempt to apply my own sense-making of existing paradigms and research methods and apply them to address the research questions I posed at the outset. In doing so, I have used a very broad set of research methods and this has necessitated some flexibility and innovation in applying them. However, I argue that a flexible use of methods allows a researcher to gain a breadth and depth of understanding of phenomena, and in the case of the Inquiry, of a coaching session and what can be understood by analysing a coaching session. Moreover, I argue that the research process is always a subjective engagement with a topic of personal interest and what counts is to make explicit one's assumptions and to be mindful of possible limitations. This is part of the

process of finding one's own voice but also one that acknowledges the need to be transparent about what that voice is claiming and on what grounds.

3.1.0 PART 1:

The first part of this chapter will outline the ontological and epistemological assumptions which provide a backcloth to this thesis. I will begin by outlining my general philosophical position. I will then consider this position in the context of understanding a coaching session. This will lead to a discussion on the importance of perspective taking when designing research, the importance of discourse in this thesis and the relevance of social constructionism in therapy. This later consideration is important because it sets the scene for considering the relevance of social constructionism in coaching. I will provide an overall summary of the first part of the chapter before proceeding to the second part which will look at methods more specifically.

3.1.1 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

The philosophical orientation in this thesis has taken its point of departure from the literature on social constructionism. This is a very broad church and one that is made all the more difficult to demarcate owing to the usage of similar philosophical orientations, research methodologies and concepts described variously as social constructivism, constructivism, interpretivism, relativism or post-modernism. The aim in this section is simply to make clear my own philosophical position rather than offer a treatise on conceptual differences. My choice of social *constructionism* in preference to the similar notion of social *constructivism* is based largely on my own reading in this field which tends to favour the term social constructionism (Gergen, 1999; Gergen, 1998; Burr, 2003; Parker, 1998; Shotter, 1993; Edley, 2001b).

There are no authoritative definitions of social constructionism. Definitions are situated in a realist philosophical framework and are attempts to capture what would be argued from a social constructionist perspective as ineffable features of the world that would be considered

to exist independently of the transitory, historical and culturally relevant meanings that we use to make sense of experience. Many writers who tend to adopt what might be considered a social constructionist orientation (see the list provided at the bottom of the previous page) adopt different ways of conceptualising and approaching their subject matter. However, these writers tend to share broad similarities in their ontological and epistemological assumptions.

One shared understanding is that there is nothing in the world that exists independently of the way we might make sense of whatever we wish to focus our attention upon. Tables are only tables because in most world dominant cultures we have an understanding of what a table is and what purpose it stands for. Likewise, constructs such as *beliefs*, *emotions*, *sensations*, *cognitions*, *values* and even *shared understandings* only *exist* in the ways that we understand them because language provides us with a vocabulary for giving meaning to aspects of experience (Burr, 2003). The very words on this page are derived from a shared cultural understanding. From a social constructionist perspective, it can be argued that *concepts* are taken to be social constructions, ways of making sense of our experience and for communicating with others. *Concepts* do not accurately reflect reality because there is no reality that exists independently of how we choose to make sense of it.

Social constructionism is often criticised for suggesting that there is no real world beyond language; that a *tree* as much as a *belief* is nothing other than a linguistic construction. From this critique, social constructionism becomes tarred with the typical anti-relativist and post-modernist critique that there is only *perspective*. I would argue that this is a misunderstanding of the spirit of social constructionism. It is only possible to have a perspective because there is something in the material world about which we can have a perspective. However any object of our attention is always open to multiple interpretations; even the boundaries of the object upon which we focus our attention are always open to change. For example, when we look at the open countryside, we can look at a tree as something existing separately within the landscape or as an indistinguishable part of the

landscape. A tree can be conceptualised from multiple frames of reference; for example as an object of art, as a fuel source or as a biological entity. A tree will take on different meanings for anyone looking at a tree; for some people it will be associated perhaps with happy childhood memories; for some cultures, the association will be with ancestral spirits.

These points may seem obvious and compatible with a realist framework. One might argue that *real* objects in the world can always be understood from different frames of reference but that each perspective helps build an overall understanding of a given phenomenon; for example, it is only by looking at a building from 360 degrees that the overall features of a building can be known. However, from a social constructionist perspective, objects in the world take on particular meanings always derived from cultural, social and historical frames of reference available in language. Rather than gaining a more comprehensive understanding of phenomena, different perspectives present alternative constructions for understanding phenomena. Different perspectives contribute perhaps to a richer or more sophisticated understanding of the world we experience around us.

Whether one talks of trees or emotions, from a social constructionist perspective, these concepts are always open to multiple understandings and any attempt to provide a single, universal and time-immemorial definition is illusory. However, this does not mean that “objects” don’t exist in a materialist sense; just that we can understand them differently and our frames of reference for understanding them will inform how we will act towards them.

These points are made by Gergen, 1990:

“This does not mean that there is nothing outside language, nothing beyond what we make it out to be. However, it does argue that because our conjoint formulations of what is the case are typically embedded within our patterns of action, our formulations are enormously important in constructing our future” (p.5).

Social constructionism does sensitize us to be wary of concepts which might only *appear* to exist as entities independently of our own sense-making processes. For example, in

everyday language we assume that a range of *mental* concepts such as *attitudes, beliefs, values, memories* and *personality* exist just as much as we assume that concepts such as *tree, pain* or *Manchester* exist. Objects in the material world do differ. Pain is commonly described as a felt sensation or as an experience and Manchester is somewhere we might travel to. There are therefore boundaries to objects in the material world and the scope of possibilities for how we might engage with them or experience them. These boundaries are however much more blurred from within a social constructionist framework than from within a realist framework. It becomes very difficult, for example, to draw boundaries between what in language seem similar constructs such as *beliefs, attitudes, values* or *emotions*. It also seems unclear how one might draw a clear boundary between *pain* and *pleasure*. Ask any sadomasochist! It might also be difficult to distinguish when a particular design of a *chair* might better be understood as a *table* or when a *prophetic vision* becomes *madness*, or be better understood as a *neurological condition* or simply as a *worldview*. How we make sense of phenomena will always be influenced by cultural understandings.

It is only when we try to make clear demarcations across phenomena that we acknowledge the difficulty in circumscribing phenomena. Phenomena only become clearly demarcated to the extent that we have concepts expressed in language that allow us to make claims of clear demarcations. However as our constructs will always be subject to change as societies and cultures change over time, and even as we might contest differences in any point in time, there will always be alternative concepts for making sense of the phenomena we experience.

The outline presented so far in this section of social constructionism is relevant in this thesis because the whole Inquiry is focused on different ways of making sense of a *coaching session*. By outlining the social constructionist paradigm, and my own position in the context of this house with many rooms, my own philosophical position becomes clearer. The next section will briefly outline the subject of my Inquiry from a social constructionist framework.

3.1.2 Describing the Research Focus from a social constructionist perspective: a coaching session

A coaching session, first of all, is understood to *exist* in the sense that it is understood as a practice that can be readily distinguishable from other activities such as going shopping or climbing a tree. However, when one tries to provide sharper definitions around coaching that might differentiate it from what might be considered neighbouring disciplines such as consultancy, psychotherapy, counselling and career counselling, the task can appear challenging. It is, of course, possible to try to make demarcations around these neighbouring disciplines (e.g. Cox, 2013) but one always risks constructing artificial and simplistic distinctions such as ‘counselling is about dealing with one’s past’ or ‘dealing with emotional problems’ and ‘consultancy is about giving advice’ particularly when there are so many different genres, traditions and contexts in which coaching takes place and so many coaches who are trained and experienced in counselling and who reflect these experiences in their practice. Of course, there may be differences in emphasis or typicality and attempts to draw distinctions and boundaries will no doubt continue to be made. However, an effort to make differentiations seems to suggest the complexity in arriving at clearly demarcated boundaries. My argument is that this is because of the futility of the challenge of attempts to define *actual* boundaries across phenomena rather than any lack of clarity about what coaching is, as opposed to many other professional practices. Other practices only gain authority and the appearance of definitional boundaries because they are regulated; that is they are institutionalised and this gives them an appearance of uniqueness and universality. Coaching has not been institutionalised in the same way for example as *psychotherapy* or *legal advocacy*. It is for this reason that attempts to define coaching can appear to be complicated.

In this Inquiry, definitional problems were prominent from the outset. It was unclear, for example, whether the sessions I recorded could legitimately be described as *coaching sessions* rather than some other form of intervention; also whether the sessions might best

be categorised as “developmental,” “skills” or “performance coaching”; or whether the sessions investigated might best be classified as “executive” or “leadership” coaching sessions for example. I was often asked to clarify what I had actually recorded at seminars and conferences. Definitional issues were particularly blurred in that four of the six sessions that I studied were *one-off* engagements to which I invited people I identified as *coaches* and separately, others I identified as *clients* to take part in what I referred to as a *coaching session*. Neither clients nor coaches questioned what I meant by a coaching session as they either worked as coaches or had some shared understanding of what that term meant. In this context, the terms themselves situate coaching in a business discourse of commercial transactions between practitioners and clients.

The engagements I organized were considered *coaching sessions* within the scope of the study because this was what the coaches and clients were asked to participate in and this is what the participants understood they were doing. They were defined by a common understanding. The content of two of the sessions recorded in the Inquiry related in part to career decisions (although not as the sole focus of the conversations). This suggested that what happened in the sessions might also be understood from a career counselling perspective. The clients varied in their seniority but all spoke of work related concerns. However, in the sessions, broader life issues were sometimes discussed; this suggested some similarities with life-coaching. In one session, the focus of the conversation seemed to relate to learning networking skills and public speaking; in another session, the focus was much more on the person’s values. The sessions did therefore seem to express overlaps with the many extant definitions in the literature that have attempted to demarcate different contexts and genres of coaching associated with organizations (e.g. leadership coaching, performance coaching, executive coaching, etc.).

It was not really that clear if the sessions could clearly be demarcated from therapy in that one of the coaches was particularly concerned about her client’s sense of wellbeing (how his current work situation was so out of line with his values that it was making him unhappy). An

observer highlighted a cathartic therapeutic dimension to this session, which seemed to indicate a least some possible therapeutic element. The focus of the session was however about the client's career choices so the focus was arguably more on work decisions than emotions or values in and of themselves. From a social constructionist perspective, and as should be clear from the earlier discussion, difficulties in distinguishing boundaries is to be expected and perhaps made all the more pronounced when an element of stage-management in constructing coaching sessions is applied (i.e. organizing one-off sessions outside of a specific organizational context or outside an on-going contracted programme of coaching). I have therefore tried to use a very simple description for circumscribing the subject of the Inquiry by referring to the engagements recorded as "coaching sessions" as this was readily understood to be the case by all participants and neither coach nor client in any way, described them as being anything other than coaching sessions. However, I am also trying to make the point that the difference seems to be as much about how one makes sense of what one is doing (coaching as something which is socially constructed) rather than necessarily any clear boundaries existing in an objective sense that clearly differentiates one practice from another.

3.1.3 Perspective Taking as a Research Design

The social constructionist perspective is relevant in this thesis because it is based on the assumption that whenever one considers any topic of interest, it will always be from a particular perspective; be this the perspective of the coach, client or a group of observers be this from the perspective of different research methods or be this from the perspective of different epistemological assumptions. In the latter case for example, I argue from a social constructionist perspective that it is possible to make sense of the world through the lens of phenomenology, through the lens of realism or from the perspective of any other ontological and epistemological framework. However, from a social constructionist perspective, any alternative ontological or epistemological framework is just a perspective or a lens for making sense of the world we experience. If a phenomenological study claims to reveal

something about subjective reality or if a realist perspective claims to clearly identify a particular phenomenon and its causal relationships with other phenomena, then rather than assuming that these studies have identified *the truth* about phenomena; they would be understood as providing *a way* (and only a way) of making sense of the world around us. However, this would not mean that these perspectives do not have any value. I suggest that a social constructionist perspective is able to tolerate other epistemologies because they can be constructed as ways of make sense of the world around us; not as ineffable truths but as frameworks for meaning-making.

3.1.4 Discourse

The concept of *Discourse* is central to social constructionism and is particularly relevant in the context of this Inquiry. Burr (2003) describes a discourse as follows:

“...a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event, person or class of persons, a particular way of representing it in a certain light” (p.64).

This description suggests that *discourse* refers to persuasive and constructed accounts of reality; about *what is* and *what is not*. There is also an implicit sense of morality (normalising values) and a sense of the way things are understood and presented to be in Burr’s (2003) description. In order to illustrate this sense of a discourse, Burr (2003) gives the example of discourses on fox hunting; one that promotes foxhunting as pest control and another as an immoral sport. Advocates of both positions construct a picture of what is right and wrong. From a social constructionist perspective, discourses are important conceptually because they present alternative constructions of reality which are based in socially shared understandings.

Foucault (1972, p49) focuses on the relevance of action in discourses. He refers to discourses as “practices which form the objects of which they speak” by which he

emphasised how all activities including declarative statements construct the way the world is understood to be and this process has practical consequences. Butler (1999) who has been greatly influenced by the writing of Foucault gives the example of how when a baby is born, the midwife might typically raise the baby and declare that “this is a girl” (p.15). This very act is a way of proclaiming gender constructions from the first moments of life. We are born into a world of discourse that shapes the way we make sense of the world and the world makes sense of us. Through our actions we give expression to existing discourses and help shape new discourses. Foucault (1978) argues, however, that there will always be resistance to dominant discourses which is how new discourses emerge over time.

The above descriptions of discourse suggest that when, as researchers we interview participants, what we tend to hear are the *expressions of discourse* rather than *individual thoughts* expressed by individual research participants. We hear how existing discourses *speak through* individuals rather than how individuals express their own *individual views* about a topic of interest (Burr, 2003). In interviewing coaches in this study, either as observers or as facilitators of coaching sessions, the assumption made was therefore that they were reflecting discourses about what coaching is and how it should be practised. Disagreements with dominant perspectives represent resistance to existing typical constructions or what we might refer to as *local discourses* (i.e. existing within a wider community of coaches and may relate to specific practices such as the role of advice-giving) rather than reflecting broader social discourses (e.g. such as a discourse of liberty, freedom or gender). However broader social discourses (e.g. humanism, managerialism, individualism, etc.) are also likely to be expressed in the accounts of coaches as we are all subject to wider social discourses. Clients also speak from the position of clients contracting coaching; they too are exposed to discourses of coaching through their participation in organizational life where they may be familiar with the practice of coaching as part of leadership and personal development.

The long-established philosophical tradition beginning with Descartes's positioning of thought preceding language, is directly challenged by the notion of discourse. Rather than treating spoken communication (e.g. the accounts of research participants) as reflecting the private thoughts of individuals, discourse reflects pre-existing socially constructed ways of making sense of the world; spoken language becomes a social rather than an individual construct.

There is a diverse breadth and depth of writing in discourse analysis and the intention in this section is not to attempt to map the landscape of this challenging field; only to make clear my position in using my construction of discourse. I also acknowledge that rather than describing the way coaches express discourses about coaching in any spoken account provided, one could simply argue that coaches are expressing dominant views and beliefs about coaching. Any challenge to these dominant views can simply be described as *debates* in coaching. These terms are more consistent with a realist paradigm. The terms *discourse* and *debate* and separately, *discourse* and *viewpoint* are both describing the same objects of our attention (phenomena) but express different epistemological and ontological assumptions. If we use the words *views* or *beliefs*, then epistemologically, we assume that we are finding out what is going on in the *mind* of the individual. If we use the word *debate*, we are assuming that different individual views are to a greater or lesser extent shared or contested. If by contrast, we use the words *discourse*, the emphasis moves from the private to the social realm. This is what is meant by discourses *speaking through* individuals. We are of course conscious that we are voicing what we might describe as views and beliefs. However, epistemologically, there is a much stronger sense of identifying social rather than individual phenomena when we use the term *discourse*.

Some social constructionist writers might use discursive research methods that focus at a micro-analytical level of analysis; others tend to focus on wider social discourses and underpinning ideologies that seem far removed from everyday interactions. Burr (2003) refers to these approaches respectively as *Micro* and *Macro* social constructionism. A key distinction between the two approaches is that micro social constructionism assumes that

individuals can make use of linguistic resources to present a particular version of events; this is a process that is done consciously. This is a relevant concept in the Inquiry as the assumption is being made, consistent with what Burr (2003) describes as micro-constructionism, that individuals are not just puppets of broader social and local discourses. There is a sense that individuals can use linguistic resources rather than simply being determined by them.

One prominent writer working at a level of micro-social constructionism is Edley (2001a) who for example has described how men when speaking about sex will consciously position themselves in relation to a wide range of local discourses about sex (*local* in the sense that the topic is relatively circumscribed in relating to men and how men talk about sex). Similarly, Wetherell and Potter (1988) focus on how speakers will position themselves with respect to different discourses on race depending upon the situational context in which they find themselves. Both Edley (2001b) and Wetherell and Potter (1988) contextualise their research within the research framework of *discursive psychology* which acknowledges the role of the individual as a conscious user of discourses. They refer to the variety of local discourses as *interpretative repertoires*, by which they draw an analogy with how for example a person can draw on a range of ways of talking about a particular topic, just as a ballerina might draw on a range of different patterns of movement.

The spirit of social constructionism will be prevalent in the Inquiry rather than a rigid adherence to terms such as “interpretative repertoires,” “micro” or “macro” social constructionism. This Inquiry is intended to be broad ranging, to provide a broad exploration of the coaching process and the use of specific terminology can tend to constrain what can and cannot be addressed in an investigation. In keeping with the standpoint of a tolerance of multiple perspectives in social constructionism, all terms used can be considered simply as ways of making sense of our experience. What I consider to be important in this Inquiry is to try to convey a sense of what is related in the accounts of all research participants which are always open to multiple interpretations; these interpretations include considering

something as a *discourse* (social constructionist epistemology) or as a *debate* (realist epistemology).

I will also typically use the terms “account,” “perspective” or “viewpoint” intermittently and frequently in this thesis as opposed to the “interview” or the “thoughts” of the research participants. This is because these words tend not presuppose any private language on the part of the participant or to reflect any actual representation of how something might *be*. A perspective or viewpoint, for example, can simply represent how something appears from a particular vantage point; not necessarily how something *is*. Similarly, an account suggests that a version of an event can be something constructed (by the individual and through wider social discourses) whereas the “thoughts” of an individual suggest that there is no active process of construction.

3.1.5 Social Constructionism in Therapy

In keeping with the assumption in this Inquiry that a great deal can be learned from the literature on psychotherapy about the nature and practice of coaching, this section will briefly consider the relevance of the social constructionist approach in therapy. The relevance of social constructionism in therapy was considered in the previous chapter. The intention in this chapter section is to indicate how the principles of social constructionism applied in therapy can be applied methodologically in this Inquiry.

One writer who amply illustrates what I would describe as the spirit of social constructionism in therapy is Anderson (1997) who outlines six philosophical assumptions underpinning her approach:

1. “Human systems are language and meaning-generating systems
2. Constructions of reality are forms of social action rather than independent individual mental processes
3. An individual mind is a social composition, and self, therefore, becomes a social, relational composition

4. The reality and meaning that we attribute to ourselves and others and to the experiences and events of our lives are interactional phenomena created and experienced by individuals in conversation and action (through language) with one another and themselves
5. Language is generative, gives order and meaning to our lives and our world, and functions as a form of social participation
6. Knowledge is relational and is embodied and generated in language and our everyday practices” (p.3)

Anderson outlines the meaning behind these principles over the course of almost three hundred pages, so it is difficult to do justice to the spirit of her approach. These principles are implicit in most of the points already highlighted in this chapter: that meaning making and language lie at the heart of social constructionism; that reality is socially constructed; that our sense of self is the product of our inter-relations with others and our cultural heritage; that language and action are closely related and that language is a form of action; that meaning resides between individuals rather than within the individual and that therapy is a collaborative process. Other social constructionist therapists include Kenneth and Mary Gergen and Tom Anderson. These writers among others were considered in the literature review. They all share in emphasising the relevance of meaning-making which will be a key feature of the methodological approach. This means that in the Inquiry, I will in particular be interested in how the research participants make sense of what they describe and that meaning-making between client and coach will be of particular importance.

3.1.6 Summary of Part 1

In the first part of this Chapter, I have outlined my allegiance to social constructionism and outlined my particular position with respect to this overall paradigm and how it will apply to the research approach adopted in this Inquiry. Specifically, the assumptions made are as follows:

- That when coaches as research participants respond in interviews, they are expressing local and broader social discourses; local discourses refer to how the practice of coaching is constructed; discourses may be specific to a particular group of coaches from a particular coaching tradition or more generally shared across many different coaches; challenges to existing discourses are understood as expressions of resistance which have the capacity to become assimilated into existing discourses or to challenge and replace them; new discourses represent new ways of constructing coaching practice
- That from a realist perspective, discourses are understood as opinions, beliefs, assumptions and similar terminology that give more emphasis to the individual in holding their own individual views; aggregations of individual views reflect collective opinions, beliefs and assumptions; wherever dominant opinions, beliefs and assumptions are challenged, there is scope for new debates to take place which may lead to a more effective way of practising coaching
- That given that it has been argued that a realist perspective can be understood from within a social constructionist framework; that is as an interpretive perspective rather than as a reflection of how the world is; the Inquiry will be tolerant of considering a realist framework while making clear that realism is just a perspective rather than a reflection of reality

- That not only do discourses speak through individuals but also that individuals are users of discourse and can adopt particular positions with respect to discourses
- That meaning is central to social constructionism; rather than focusing on understanding causal mechanisms that impact on other phenomena either in a linear or systemic way; central to any social constructionist research Inquiry is to discover how research participants work with meaning; that is how they construct the social realities they experience

Having outlined the epistemological and ontological assumptions in this Chapter and having broadly outlined what the reader is likely to find over the course of reading the findings from this Inquiry, I will in the next section discuss the research methods used.

3.2.0 Part 2: Research Design

The second part of this chapter will consider in depth the research design employed in this Inquiry. I will begin by outlining the principles of the research design and the options that were considered possible. I will then consider the data collection methods and then the data analysis methods. The section on data collection methods will consider the use of interpersonal process recall, interviews and observer groups. The early sections will explain these methods. I will also outline how these approaches were integrated in an overall coherent approach. I will then outline in some detail Q-methodology as a key method of data collection. I will then return to some of these methods but in order to explain how they were administered. I will also consider the relevance of conducting a pilot study and ethical issues. I will then consider data analysis.

3.2.1. Principles of Research Design

The purpose of the Inquiry was to consider what could be learned about the coaching process by analysing a coaching session from multiple-perspectives. This was purposively a very broad focus. It seemed that very many different research methods would be able to

contribute to addressing the research topic. For example, it would be possible from a realist perspective to design a research instrument that might be able to identify and quantify particular types of behavioural interactions including types of verbal expressions. There were also in existence already established assessment tools and methodological approaches that had been identified in the literature review. There was scope to build on the emerging literature on critical moments in coaching sessions using the critical incident technique. There were grounds for conducting a phenomenological analysis of how the coaching process had been experienced by coach and client. There was also the possibility of understanding the coaching session in relation to the practice of coaching as a socially constructed phenomenon. Foucault (1988) for example has considered therapy as an institutional practice and Cushman (1996) has also provided an extensive review of how psychotherapy has emerged over time in America. This Inquiry could attempt to parallel those studies but with respect to coaching rather than therapy/psychotherapy. Wilber's (2007) conceptualisation of methodological pluralism seemed to suggest scope for multiple ways of constructing and researching any phenomenon and could readily (and did initially) provide a conceptual framework for addressing the Inquiry. The alternative ways of investigating a coaching session seems to be endless.

Reflections on methodology led me to choose an approach that would allow for a very broad range of perspectives in making sense of the coaching process. This is consistent with the original research question. This would be based on the following principles:

1. Adopting different experiential perspectives (e.g. that of the client, the coach and observers); there was also precedent for this approach in psychotherapy
2. Adopting different epistemological assumptions (e.g. considering how a session might look from a behavioural perspective, a phenomenological perspective or a discursive perspective); this process would also include analysing the session at different levels of analysis (more micro and macro levels of analysis)

3. Adopting different research methods (e.g. considering what might be learned about a coaching session by using a range of qualitative and quantitative techniques: in this case the assumption being made is that the methods used construct what is found)

In following these broad principles, it is possible to provide a very rich and broad exploration of the coaching process. In the following sections, I will outline the specific data collection methods used. This section will focus on the types of data collection methods and techniques used as well as the rationale for their selection.

3.2.2.0 Data Collection Methods

At the design stage, Q methodology seemed to offer a timely and pragmatic research design choice. The detail of Q methodology will be described in more depth shortly. My intention initially is to provide an overview of the data collection methods and too much description of this method will detract from this purpose. In brief, Q methodology typically involves asking research participants to rank-order a series of statements describing a topic of interest and then in the analysis phase interpreting how participants ranked those items drawing on patterns of statistical correlation (i.e. comparing how participants rank-ordered items relative to others). At the time of preparing my research proposal, I had been participating in the development of a tool (: the Coaching Process Q-Set, Bachkirova et al., 2012) designed to analyse a coaching session using Q methodology. The initial research project set out to develop and test the tool. The tool provides eighty written descriptors of typical coaching sessions. These descriptors had been validated as representing a comprehensive range of typical characteristics of coaching sessions in the development and testing of the tool (coaches were asked to use the descriptors to rate an imagined session that they would typically conduct; also to comment on any notable absences in descriptors). This initial study suggested that the tool held some value for analysing coaching sessions. The next step in the process would be to use the tool to investigate actual coaching sessions. A Q methodological approach would also seem to offer both the possibility of interpreting

coaching sessions at micro and broader levels of analysis, meeting the need to evaluate the coaching session at different levels of analysis and from different epistemological perspectives. That is coach, client and observers could be asked to rate a coaching session by sorting the eighty descriptors in relation to their experience/ observation of the session (i.e. in principle, the sorting process could be used to identify something about their phenomenological experience of being coached, coaching or observing a coaching session). At the same time, the sorting process, in principle, could be used to try to identify actual differences in how coach, client and observers rated the session (i.e. to identify in a more realist/objective sense what the coach and client did/ didn't do (and created between them such as the atmosphere in the session) by comparing ratings across the participants (this would be a more behavioural level of analysis). The same process could also in principle provide some scope for analysing the sorting of the items from a more interpretive perspective; that is to make inferences about what meanings or values were being expressed in the patterns of sorting expressed by the participants.

This latter perspective would go beyond trying to understand and describe the experience of being coached, coaching or observing a coaching session in two different ways. First, the sorting of the items could be used as a basis for understanding the meaning-making process occurring between coach and client. For example, if the coach was perceived by the client to be very argumentative, then the client might use the descriptors to capture this sense of the coach being argumentative. This latter perspective is more overtly social constructionist in the emphasis it gives to the meaning making process. Secondly, the sorting of the items could also, in principle, reveal something about the dominant discourses (also a social constructionist perspective) and debates (realist perspective) prevailing within the coaching community. These possibilities are described in the Table 3.1 below, together with their potential for making both an academic contribution to knowledge and a contribution to practice.

Table 3.1: Research Design Possibilities: Epistemological Assumptions, Contribution to Knowledge and Practice

	Behavioural/Realist Perspective (Micro level)	Phenomenological Perspective	Social Constructionist Perspective (Micro level)	Social Constructionist Perspective (Macro level)	Realist Perspective (Macro level)
Epistemological Assumptions	The sorting patterns express observed events actually occurring in the coaching session	The sorting patterns express the experience of being coached (client perspective), coaching (coach perspective) or observing a coaching session (observer perspective)	The sorting patterns express the meaning making process occurring between coach and client (how one person interprets the interventions of the other and makes sense of their own interventions or interprets their ways of being in the session); this can be perceived. Interpretations of the interactions can be made by coach, client and observers	The sorting patterns express broader discourses existing within the coaching community and society about how coaching should be practised.	The sorting patterns express debates about how coaching should be practised
Contribution to academic Knowledge	Understanding what can be considered to happen in a coaching session	Understanding what it feels like to be coached, coach or observe a coaching session	Understanding the importance of meaning-making in the coaching process	Understanding how broader discourses influence the practice of coaching	Understanding what issues need to be addressed to improve the practice of coaching
Contribution to Practice	Helping coaches understand what they might need to do differently (e.g. feedback)	Coaches can understand their own impact more clearly and what they might need to do to respond to this experience. Providing insight into the experience of coaches so that coach trainers can help them manage any tensions and issues experienced	Coaches can use the meaning making process as a resource to help the client progress the issues brought to coaching	Coaches and educators can challenge existing norms in order to improve the overall client experience of being coached	Development of answers to further the effectiveness of coaching (e.g. through further research)

3.2.2.1 Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR)

Consistent with the research objectives and in accordance with principle 2 (above), I did not want to be constrained to only one research instrument and approach. I therefore decided to include in the research design Interpersonal process recall. Interpersonal Process Recall

(IPR) is a qualitative research technique which attempts to gather the recollections of participants in relation to an event as soon after the event as possible. The technique was developed by Bloom and Heyns (1956) for exploring student thought processes but it was first used in psychotherapy research by Kagan (1984) and has been used since extensively in psychotherapy process research and in particular by Elliott and associates (: Elliott, 1983; Elliott et al., 1994; Elliott, 1986; Elliott and Shapiro, 1988; Elliott and James, 1989a; Rhodes et al., 1994) Typically, integral to the application of the technique is the use of video material. For example, at the end of a session of psychotherapy, a therapist and client are asked to view sections of a video-recording and asked to describe what was happening during the moments of the recording.

In my own research, I was less interested in identifying specific events in a session as my unit of analysis was a whole coaching session. I also did not want to impose the frame of reference onto the participants that a coaching session might be about identifying significant events. I therefore decided to ask participants (coaches observing sessions as well as the coach and client) to freely recall what they remembered about the coaching session with particular reference to “what stood out for them about the session”. This was intended to give the participants the opportunity to construct the session as a series of specific events or more holistically.

3.2.2.2 Interviews

One problem with IPR however, as a research technique, is that I did not expect the free recall of the session to last for very long. IPR alone would restrict the quantity of potentially useful data that could be collected in the form of spoken accounts. For the coach and client (each interviewed separately), I therefore decided to conduct an unstructured interview after an initial unprompted recall of what appeared salient in the session. The interviews would be unstructured in order to allow participants autonomy in continuing with their own frames of reference about what had stood out for them in the session. In practice, this would mean

adopting a non-directive coaching style of interviewing, asking research participants to elaborate on the points they made and keeping my own interventions to a minimum. If another researcher were to try to replicate the process, it would mean asking open questions such as “What do you mean by that?” “Could you say a little more about that...anything else?” “What else stood out for you?”

By keeping the interviews separate for coach and client, neither would impact directly on the other’s account. In this way, the data collected would be more subjective (individual viewpoints rather than a shared coach-client viewpoint co-constructed in a shared interview). This would have provided an interesting perspective but given the findings in the literature review in relation to the supposed Rashomon experience (e.g. Mintz et al., 1973; Elliott and James, 1989b; Stiles and Snow, 1984), it was considered useful to keep these apart.

3.2.2.3 Observer Groups

In order to obtain the observer perspective, I decided to invite professional coaches to observe video recordings of the coaching sessions, the accounts of which had already been provided by coach and client. All coaches and clients had agreed to provide recorded sessions for this purpose. The decision to collect data from observer groups rather than via individual interviews was considered to represent a pragmatic way of identifying dominant views and opinions within groups of coaches. In a group discussion, it was assumed that participants would tend towards common areas of consensus and disagreement in relation to what was commonly understood to be the key aspects of a session worth talking about. The observer group process was also intended to allow space for participants to challenge each other on what was observed and not observed and would likely create debates that would not arise in the absence of challenge in individual interviews. In this way, the group discussion would, in principle, allow the identification of the most salient and contentious issues.

The format of conducting the observer groups was intended to parallel the interviewing of coaches and clients. As in the case of the interviews with coaches and clients, the sessions therefore began with an open question of what stood out as salient: “What stood out for you?” This was then followed by asking exploratory questions in the same manner as in the case of the individual interviews.

The process for conducting the observer groups was more structured than for the individual interviews given the dynamics of groups rather than being able to check understanding on a one to one basis when explaining the process individually. The session began with a formal overview of the process. In order to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to contribute, each participant was asked to provide their own accounts of the session in turn before broadening the discussion to allow anyone to speak at any time. As a researcher and experienced group facilitator, I felt able to pick up on any behavioural indicators of a wish for any participant to express or challenge a particular viewpoint.

3.2.2.4 Coherence in Data Collection Methods

There was, however, what could be considered as an overall coherence in the data collection methods used. Q methodology aims primarily to understand what is considered *salient* from a research participant’s perspective. Participants sort items (e.g. the eighty items in the CPQS) *self-referentially*; that is they rank order items according to what is salient to them, from their own personal perspective. The principle of personal saliency/ subjectivity was therefore a key element of all the data collection techniques. Participants would highlight what was salient to them when freely recalling the session they had observed or had experienced. Similarly, the unstructured interviews would allow participants as much as possible to work from their own frames of reference rather than my own as the researcher. In this way, while a multiple range of data collection methods were used, the overall coherence of the data was achieved by focusing on collecting subjective data (views, opinions, observations, feelings, etc.) primarily at an individual level (coach and client

interviews and sorting of the descriptors) but also at a collective level (in the observer groups but with ample opportunity for individual to voice their own particular viewpoints).

This section has focused primarily on the principles underpinning the research methods and techniques used. In the next section, I will elaborate in some depth on Q methodology as it is less common than interview or group methods for collecting data and needs therefore some elaboration. In a later section, I will provide more detail on the specifics of how the data collection process of Q Methodology, IPA and the unstructured interview process were conducted together. It is not possible to do this without first understanding more about the process of data collection in Q Methodology. I will also provide details on the research participants in a later section.

3.2.2.5. Q-Methodology

Q methodology was developed from the 1930's by William Stephenson, (Stephenson, 1935; Stephenson, 1953; Stephenson, 1936; Stephenson, 1980; Stephenson, 1952) who wanted to develop a methodology for researching subjective viewpoints. Stenner and Stainton Rogers (2004) have argued that Q Methodology is best described as a "qualiquantilogical" approach rather than qualitative or quantitative as it attempts to work with subjectivity rather than objectivity, involves ample interpretation on the part of the researcher and at the same time makes use on statistical techniques.

In Q-methodological studies, research participants (*P Sample*) are typically provided with a set of *stimuli* (Q Set) which they are asked to rank order (*Q Sort*) according to a *specific condition of instruction* (e.g. according to how much they agree/ disagree, like/dislike or consider the stimuli to be characteristic/uncharacteristic of a particular topic, concept or other topic of interest). Typically, the Q-set takes the form of playing sized cards upon which are written 5-10 word statements in relation to a topic of interest. For example, in the CPQS, the following 3 items are written on separate playing style cards:

Q73: Coach Shares her knowledge about topic

Q71: Coach suggests possible solutions

Q51: The session appears highly structured

In using the CPQS, research participants (in principle, coach, client or observers of an actual or imagined coaching session) are asked to Q-sort Q-items according to “what seemed most characteristic to them in describing the session”. They are asked to decide if the coach appeared to be *suggesting possible solutions* more than the coach seemed to be *sharing her knowledge* about a topic. Similarly, each research participant is asked to decide if the session appeared more or less *highly structured* than it seemed that the coach was *suggesting possible solutions* or *sharing her knowledge* about the topic. Given that there are eighty items in the CPQS, a research participant has to make relative judgement calls with respect to all of these eighty items. Those items that stand out the most are considered to represent what the participants consider to be most *characteristic* of the session.

Typically in the Q-sorting process, participants are asked to rate items according to how characteristic the items are in a negative sense as well as in a positive sense. For example, an item such as Q71 might stand out (i.e. be considered *highly characteristic* of a session) because from a participant’s perspective, the coach didn’t *suggest possible solutions*. Some items might not seem from the participant’s perspective to be particular relevant or interesting when describing a coaching session. For example, Q71 might, for whatever reason simply not stand out in a positive or negative sense for the research participant. This would mean that this item would typically be placed in a mid-position in the ranking process as being neither *characteristic nor uncharacteristic*.

Given that some items are likely to stand out as *highly characteristic* of the coaching session, others as *highly uncharacteristic* and yet others as *neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic* of the session, the sorting process broadly categories items in these 3 ways:

- Highly characteristic (most salient in a positive sense)
- Neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic (not salient in any way)
- Highly uncharacteristic (most salient in a negative sense)

In order to simplify the data collection process, particularly when using eighty items, sorting items initially into three piles according to these categories is a relatively easy way of completing an initial sorting of the items. The research participants can then go back and make relative distinctions between twenty-five to thirty items within each of these three broad categories.

This process is further facilitated by asking participants to sort the items into columns with each column representing either more or less salience than an adjacent column. Figure 3.1 provides the actual distribution used in the analysis.

The distribution shows how items can be sorted into eleven columns. In column ele11, a research participant would place the items he/she considers to be the most characteristic of the session; in column 1, he/she would place the items he/she would consider to be the most uncharacteristic of the session. In column 7, the participant would place those items that seemed to say the least about the session. All items that a participant placed in the columns in-between columns 11, 1 and 7 would be more or less characteristic/ uncharacteristic of the session. For example items placed in column 8 would still be considered to be relatively insignificant in relation to how the research participant had made sense of the session but more characteristic than items in column 7. Similarly, items placed in column 2 would stand out in a negative sense as being highly uncharacteristic of the session but a little less so than those items placed in column 1.

By asking research participants to place items into a forced distribution, the subsequent statistical analysis of the data can be simplified. There are fewer items towards the beginning and last columns in order to accentuate perceptual differences between items. This is based on the assumption that fewer items are placed at the ends of a statistical

distribution (Block, 1961). In order to enable a subsequent statistical analysis in the data analysis process, the items are given a numerical rating.

Figure 3.1: Example of a Completed Q-sort

Completed Q-Sort

-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
82	53	47	13	6	9	1	10	5	2	4	41	81
19	54	58	43	8	16	3	17	7	27	30	63	37
	75	64	45	18	83	12	24	11	84	36	80	
(2)	72	70	46	21	29	14	25	15	39	79	77	(2)
		76	59	28	42	20	26	31	40	62		
	(4)	69	60	32	48	22	34	35	75	55	(4)	
			67	44	49	23	65	38	74			
		(6)		51	56	33	66	57		(6)		
			(7)		61	50	68		(7)			
				(8)		52		(8)				
					(9)	78	(9)					
						71						
						(12)						
-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

A research participant is asked to rate q-items relative to one another (statements on playing style cards; each card is given a number 1-84). Those items considered “characteristic” of a session are given the rating of 1, 2,3,4,5 or 6 with 6 representing those items considered to be *most characteristic* of the session. Those items rated as *uncharacteristic* of the session are ranked -1, -2, -3, -4, and -5 with -6 representing those q-items considered most “uncharacteristic” of a session. In the Inquiry, an early version of the CPQS was used which had more items than the final version. The full set of items in in Appendix 8. The pyramid shape is the result of limiting the number of items that can be ranked in the different columns and therefore compels the participants to make subtle discriminations between items. Later in this Chapter, I will refer to a “factor array” which is a factor representation of the viewpoint of a group of research participants (e.g. all coaches, all clients; all coach-observers, etc.). The factor array illustrates the relative positioning of items (ordinal ranking of z scores resulting from the weighted averaging of scores within the data set) and allows a researcher to interpret the overall pattern of sorting expressed by a particular group.

In order to ensure that the participants understood the task, all observers were given a short presentation ahead of completing the Q-sort. Participants appeared to welcome this approach. The same information was provided but verbally to coaches and clients with ample opportunity to provide clarification. The attached presentation used to explain the process is included in Appendix 4.

Highly characteristic was defined in 4 different ways:

1. The extent to which a particular item seemed to characterise the session overall (i.e. an item seemed to encapsulate a/the central overall feature(s) of the session based on frequency or in terms of appearing to provide a dominating backdrop to the session), (***Happened and Characterised the Session***)
2. The extent to which an item stood out because its manifestation seemed very important in the broader context of the session (that is its manifestation seemed to ensure the effectiveness of the coaching process including the development of the coaching relationship), (***Happened and it was important that it did***)
3. The extent to which an item stood out but should not have been expressed or was expressed but inappropriately (i.e. it led to an unsatisfactory coaching process; it impacted negatively on the relationship, etc.). (***Happened but should not have happened or happened in the wrong way***)
4. The extent to which an item stood out because it seemed otherwise salient; for example if an item seemed unusual, interesting or different to what a coach observing a session might normally do and these aspects of the element made the item salient, (***Happened and seemed unusual/unexpected***)

Highly Uncharacteristic was defined inversely to the ways outlined above:

1. The extent to which a particular item seemed to be very **uncharacteristic** of the session (i.e. an item seemed definitely not to encapsulate a/the central overall feature(s) of the session; that is it was infrequent or did not happen in the session or was not a dominating backdrop to the session), (***Didn't happen and did not characterise the session/ characterised the session by its absence***)
2. The extent to which an item stood out because a particular item did not feature in the session but should have featured (that is for example; that it did not occur seemed to ensure the effectiveness of the coaching process including the maintenance of the coaching relationship), (***Did not happen but should not have happened***)
3. The extent to which an item did not happen and should not have happened (***Did not happen and rightly should not have happened***)
4. The extent to which an item stood out because its absence seemed otherwise salient; for example it did not happen but an observer might have expected it to have happened (***Did not happen and it seemed unusual that it didn't***)

Neither Characteristic nor uncharacteristic was defined in terms of being neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic in any of the ways described above.

In order not to overwhelm the participants, they were informed that the key principle was to sort items according to what seemed salient to them in sorting the items. Some items would seem more salient than other items for many reasons; these were the items that they should place as highly characteristic. Some items would also stand out as highly uncharacteristic because they did not happen. Some examples were given to encourage understanding. I

explained that the ways I had suggested that items might differ were only examples and did not have to be followed normatively. Most participants appeared to understand the main principles of the task, if not the specifics of the varying ways in which they might have sorted the items. The physical sorting was done manually on large desks and in the case of the observer groups, spaced out in the rooms used. For the observer groups, I also circulated to help explain the task on an individual basis when asked or when participants seemed to be seeking clarification.

This section has outlined in some depth Q methodology (but only in relation to Q methodology as a data collection technique). I have now outlined the principles of all data collection methods used. In the sections which follow, I will describe how the various data collection methods were co-ordinated, provide details on the research participants and provide details on the coaching sessions used.

3.2.2.6 Selection of Research Participants

The decision was made to analyse six actual coaching sessions. In this way, the data collected would be true to practice rather than derived in a contrived way. The choice of six sessions was a pragmatic decision based on what could reasonably be studied within the scope of a PhD thesis. However, it was also thought that interviews with six coaches and separately six clients would enable the possibility of conducting a meaningful thematic and separately meaningful thematic analysis from within each perspective studied; that is be able to identify shared experiences and meanings that could apply to a wider population. The intention would not be to generalize the findings but it would be to identify shared experiences that could be of relevance in general in coaching and that could be explored further.

I also wanted to analyse more than one session in order to capture something of variety in the individual ways coaches might conduct coaching sessions and differences in coaching practices generally. There were many conceptual possibilities about what sort of coaching

sessions to analyse including stage of coaching (e.g. first, mid-engagement, end session), type of coaching tradition (e.g. psychodynamic, behavioural) employed by the coach and type of coaching genre (performance coaching, developmental coaching, etc.). In practice, I would be reliant on my own network of contacts and on overcoming what seemed like considerable resistance to take part. Possible contributors I identified claimed it would be too invasive and compromise confidentiality. (This was an interesting finding in itself as it suggested something about a discourse of coaching as a private practice). In practice, I therefore identified two coaches who were willing to provide a video-recording of their sessions with actual clients. In the case of four other sessions, I secured the cooperation of four coaches on the condition that I would find four clients who would take part in a one-off session. All participants were identified through personal networks. The coaches were given pseudonyms (henceforth in this thesis: Tristan, Marjorie, Joanne, Alice, Alison and Drew) to protect confidentiality although one coach had only two years of full-time experience; this was Drew who was working as an internal coach. All other coaches had several years of experience and held a range of relevant qualifications. Three of the six coaches had or were working towards doctoral level qualifications in coaching; two of the coaches were qualified to work with clients at a psychotherapeutic level. Most had other relevant professional qualifications (e.g. two coaches as chartered psychologists) and two of the coaches were involved in the assessment and training of coaches. The clients were all keen to be coached and to bring a real issue to the session. All clients were either very familiar or broadly familiar with coaching with the exception of Marjorie's client who had no real awareness of coaching as a practice.

An attempt was made to identify as broad a spectrum as possible of coaches to observe a coaching session. This was intended to capture something of the diversity of practices of coaching. Coaches were chosen because I wanted to understand what aspects of the coaching process the coaches would pick up on and whether there would be similarities or differences in their observations. Their perspective would be one from within the community

of practising coaches. They would be able to make informed comments on their observations and sorting of the descriptors. Other perspectives would have been of interest but qualitatively different (e.g. an academic's perspective, a purchaser's perspective, etc.).

Details of the sessions are provided in Table 3.2. There was no intentional matching of observers to coaches. There were generally practical restrictions on who would be able to participate when. An assumption was made that a group of six coaches (minimum of four and maximum of six) would be appropriate for a useful discussion. Only one session was viewed twice. This was because only two coaches attended the first viewing and more coaches were needed to capture a range of views on the session.

Table 3.2: Participant Details: Coaches and Clients

Session	Coach	Approach	Client	Session Type & duration	Main Content	Observers
1	Tristan	Humanistic / eclectic	Self-employed consultant/marketing professional	Final Session of a series of 6 (90 mins)	Assertiveness, career planning and learning/outcomes of coaching	6 NLP qualified FT internal coaches (large UK organization)
2	Joanne	Humanistic / eclectic	Experienced HR Manager, Services	One-off session (60 mins)	How values might influence career choice	4 highly experienced FT coaches (eclectic)
3	Alison	Gestalt	Experienced HR Manager, manufacturing sector	One-off session (60 mins)	Managing a transition to a new job, new organization	4 experienced coach/consultants qualified in the application of transactional analysis in organizations and in one to one coaching (main session)
4	Marjorie	Humanistic / eclectic	Experienced Lawyer	One-off session (90 mins)	How values might inform career choice	6 experienced coaches (range of backgrounds)
5	Alice	Behavioural	Private sector hospital manager	One-off session (60 mins)	How to network and present more effectively and with confidence	8 experienced coaches (range of backgrounds)
6	Drew (FT Internal coach)	Person-centred	Board Member, large UK publishing company	Mid-engagement	Review of current projects and planning next steps	4 coaches studying for an Masters in coaching (varying levels of experience) and 1 professional development consultant with experience of coaching

3.2.2.7. Data Collection Process

Different types of data were collected: 1) the coaching session (as material for showing to the observer groups); 2) Q Sorts and Interviews (from the clients, coaches and observers). In this section, I will also discuss the process for collecting Q data, the relevance of a pilot study and ethical considerations.

The coaches who would be facilitating the sessions with clients identified by me were given minimal background to the clients. I did not want to introduce preconceptions. Fortunately, they did not request details other than to know that they would be coaching a volunteer. For those coaches and clients meeting for the first time, they were asked to spend a few minutes alone together ahead of the session. This was an ethical decision on my part based on the assumption that coaches and clients would be able to discuss any private contracting issues. I also wanted both participants to be at ease with each other ahead of the process; another ethical and professional consideration.

The coaches were introduced to the room in which they would be coaching ahead of meeting the client. The rooms chosen were as comfortable as possible and typical of many coaching environments. In some cases, professional rooms used for coaching were hired. The coaches were encouraged to set up the room however they wished beforehand and this usually consisted of an arrangement of two chairs about half a metre apart. This process was also intended to mitigate any anxiety on the part of the volunteer coaches.

A professional recording of the session was arranged whereby a cam-recorder (audio and video) was set up and running at the start of the sessions. However, no one was present during the recording other than the coach and client. When the clients came out of the room, the recordings were switched off. Both coaches and clients were asked to conduct their sessions as *actual* rather than as role plays and to run the sessions for an hour or for however long they considered appropriate. This duration was intended to represent actual practice as much as possible. The camera was positioned equidistant to the participants,

approximately 3 metres away from the participants for 5/6 sessions. In the case of one session, two cameras were positioned; one on the client and the other on the coach. This was intended to experiment with the actual recording process and provide more detail of the participants. The recording could then be transferred to juxtapose two images; that is a split-screen effect. The impact of this was to take away the space immediately between the two participants and perhaps therefore some of the interchanging body movements but provided more detail of facial expressions.

The data collection process had to be conducted to meet the time constraints of the participants. In three cases (sessions 2, 3 & 4), the clients and the coaches were interviewed within 48 hours of the coaching session. In two cases (session 5 & 6), the client was interviewed and completed a Q sort while the coach waited; in another case (session 1), the coach completed a Q-sort while the client was interviewed and then the client completed the Q sort from home the following day and was given written details about how to complete the task.

All coaches and clients typically completed the Q sorting after the interview. While the interview process would likely impact on how the Q-items would be sorted, this was an inevitable part of the process conducted by a single researcher. However, given that there were a substantial number of q-items to sort, the reflective interview process was likely to help prompt the sorting process; it would arguably be more considered.

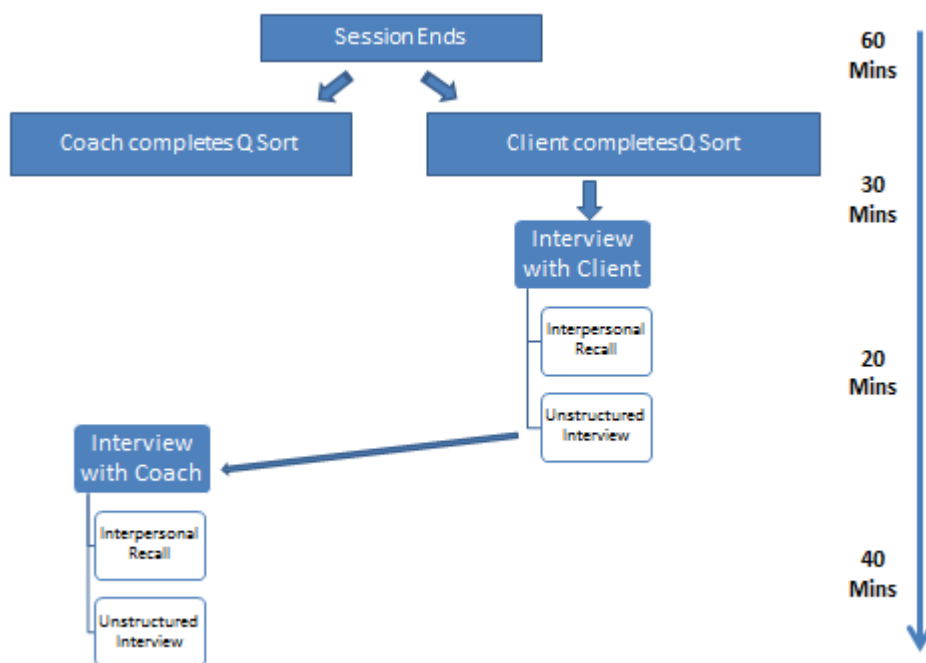
The interviews with the coaches (including the initial IPR/free recall of the session) lasted typically around 60 minutes; the interviews with clients lasted around 10 – 45 minutes depending on how much time the clients were able to give and that seemed to produce a freely flowing conversation. All interviews were recorded using a digital auditory recorder.

In the case of the observer groups, all coach-observers were asked to complete Q Sorts immediately after viewing a recording of the session and before taking part in open discussions. This was intended to maximise the expression of individual viewpoints in the Q

Sorts which would otherwise have likely been unduly influenced by the group discussion. Having completed the sorting process, the open discussions typically lasted for an hour although almost two hours in the case of session 4.

The typical data collection process for the coaches and clients is illustrated in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3: Data Collection Process: Coaches and Clients



In the observer groups, the videos of the recording sessions were shown in full in order to ensure that all participants would be able to identify and talk about the same content.

However, in the case of session 1, 15 minutes of the first session was edited out between 10 and 25 minutes of the actual session which had lasted 90 minutes as the participants did not have time to view the whole recording. This part of the tape was taken out on my judgement call that this part of the session involved the client doing most of the talking with minimal intervention on the part of the coach in the session. It relates to Tristan's session and this issue will be discussed when discussing his session in depth in later chapters. In the case of one session, there was a problem with the audio-visual equipment (part of the challenge of using so many different rooms) in spite of seeking the help of a technician. This meant that

the sound of the conversation was not as loud as it would have been under ideal conditions. The sound was still loud enough however to hear the spoken exchanges but might have impacted for example on the perception of energy in the session for example. All video recordings were projected on standard classroom type large screens. In most cases, a classroom type environment was used but laid out to try to encourage open discussion (cabaret style).

The observer groups were also conducted more formally than were the individual interviews. It involved a phased approach. The format included an initial presentation to contextualise the research. This was followed by a viewing of the recording, a formal presentation to outline the Q-sorting process and then the interview process. The process typically started by asking each participant in turn to provide an overview of what had stood out for them in the session (stage 1). This was followed by a more general open discussion (stage 2). In a third stage, the observers were asked to explain how they had each sorted the Q-items which in turn led to a more general discussion prompted by how each observer had sorted the Q-items. All discussions were audio-recorded. The process took approximately 3 - 4 hours per observer group; this included up to 90 minutes to view the sessions; 45 minutes to complete the sorting process and one hour to discuss the sessions and a short break for refreshments. Up to 30 minutes was also given to explaining the sorting process and introducing the CPQS/ background to the research. A similar time commitment was needed for coaches and clients although part of this was intentionally of immediate benefit for the clients and less time was given to formal explanation.

Each participant was asked to sort the cards in columns on a large table. The photograph in Appendix 7 illustrates a completed Q-sort. Each participant was asked to put the cards into the envelopes placed above each column. I monitored the process to ensure that the right number of items was placed into the right number of columns and into the correct envelopes.

3.2.2.8 Pilot Studies

Given the challenge of setting up a pilot study in addition to 6 actual coaching sessions and in order to give recognition to a substantial number of participants, the decision was made not to conduct a formal pilot study. However, lessons from the earlier sessions were incorporated into the later sessions. Some of the lessons from the first session included the introduction of the phased approach (outlined above) to ensure that the views of all observers would be expressed; inclusion of a formal presentation to explain how to sort the items and to contextualise the research.

3.2.2.9 Ethical and Legal Considerations

The study was approved by the University Ethics Committee. Legal issues were also considered by relevant personnel within the University in relation to the publication of reports and use of video-recordings. Tailored participant Information Sheets (PIS) were provided for coaches, clients, observers and for sponsors, if requested. An example of the PIS for the observers is provided in Appendix 2. Assurances were given to all participants in relation to the management of confidentiality. The interviews with the clients were kept relatively short depending upon how well I knew the interviewee and in order to minimise any potential discomfort with the reflective process. In the case of the observer groups, the sessions were kept within agreed time commitments or were renegotiated mid-session in the case of one session only. In the case of some coach interviews and some observer groups, the coaches appeared to be valuing the reflective process and in order not to curtail their reflections, the interviews/ discussions were extended above that originally planned. In retrospect, more detailed planning of timings would have been helpful ethically. This would have helped to ensure time commitments were clearly agreed and appropriate for the reflective process.

3.2.3.0 Data Analysis:

Having considered in some depth the data collection process, this section will consider the approach taken to data analysis.

3.2.3.1 Q Methodology

There is a clearly defined process for conducting Q mode factor analysis; the approach draws largely on that described by Watts and Stenner (2012). However, there is a wealth of writing on Q methodology which has arisen in the wake of Stephenson and this also informed the analysis (Brown, 1980; Block, 2008; McKeown and Thomas, 2013; Dziopa and Ahern, 2011; Watts and Stenner, 2005a). Having collected rank ordered data, it is possible to make statistical comparisons in relation to how one person has sorted items compared to another. The first step in the process is therefore to obtain a correlation matrix of the participants' Q-Sorts. This produces a single figure (correlation co-efficient) indicating the extent to which the overall pattern of sorting of one participant correlates with the overall pattern of sorting of each other participant. This means that for a hypothetical study in which there were 11 participants, there would be 10 correlations coefficients for each participant and 100 correlations coefficients shown on a grid altogether although half of these would be repeated (i.e. the correlation of participant 1 with participant 2 would be the same as the correlation co-efficient for participant 2 with participant 1).

Q Factor analysis is then carried out to group together participants (by-person factor analysis; Watts & Stenner, 2005) in order to identify common patterns of sorting. For example, if participants 1, 3, 7 and 9 tended to sort the items in a similar manner (tending to rate the same Q-items as highly characteristic and the same Q-items as highly uncharacteristic), the factor analytic process will identify these common sorting patterns and a factor can be extracted from the data representing this shared sorting pattern. Similarly, participants 2, 5 and 8 might also show similar patterns of sorting and finally, participants 10 and 11 might tend to sort in a similar manner. In this hypothetical case, 3 factors might be

extracted in the by-person factor analysis. For a factor to be extracted, only two participants need to show a similarity in their scoring patterns. The convention to consider a factor as significant is when the eigenvalue exceeds 1.00. Typically, centroid or principal components analyses are utilized to extract factors. Varimax or judgemental (hand) rotations are used to maximise statistical differences (Watts and Stenner, 2012).

Having extracted and rotated the factors, factor loadings can be calculated based on the total number of items in the Q-Set (Watts and Stenner, 2012). Q-sorts that load onto more than one factor are considered to be confounded and are discarded. This ensures that viewpoints captured in the factors are clearly differentiated.

The next step in the process is to produce a factor array which is intended to represent a best-fit for those participants loading onto the factor. A factor array is the normalized weighted average z score for each Q item derived from all of those participants in the P sample (research participants) loading onto (i.e. defining) the factor (Dziopa et al, 2011, p. 41). Visually, the factor array produces an idealised Q-sort which can be displayed as a Q-sort with the Q-item with the highest weighted average positive z score being given the highest ranking and the highest weighted average negative z score being given the lowest ranking. All other scores occupy mid ranking positions. In other words, the factor array has the appearance of an actual Q-sort and shows the relative ranked positions for all Q-items. To go back to our hypothetical example, if participants, 1, 3, 9 and 7 tended to rate "Coach interrupts client" at +4, +5, +6 and +2, overall that item might occupy the position of +6 in the factor array.

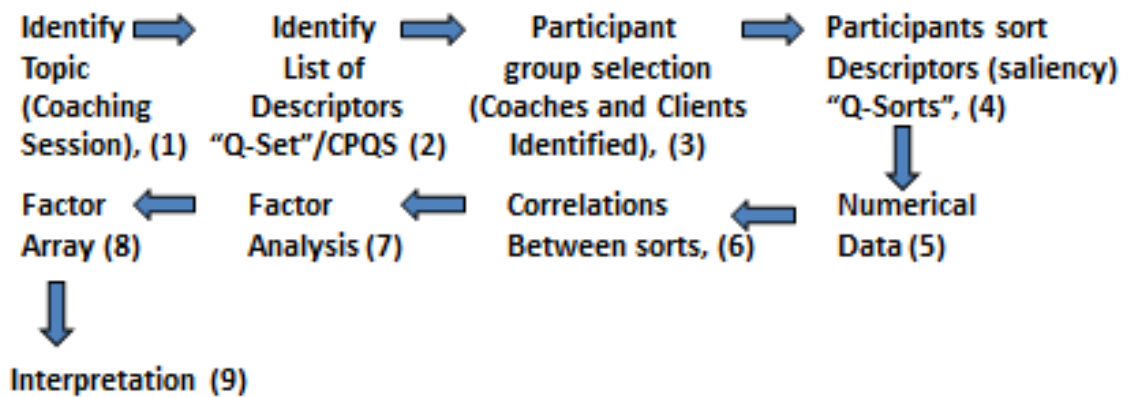
In most Q-methodological studies, the purpose of the Inquiry is to identify the range of opinions a group of people might hold with respect to a topic of interest. One factor analysis is conducted for a group of perhaps 20 or more participants and typically a Q-set will contain between 40 and 60 Q-items. Typically 3-6 factors might be extracted. Watts and Stenner (2005b) for example, wanted to establish different viewpoints on the meaning of love and

each factor identified in their study was intended to represent different viewpoints. In the literature on Q-methodology, it isn't always clear what is meant by a viewpoint. On the one hand, it can be considered spatially in that factor loadings can be displayed graphically in two or three dimensions showing where each participant loads in relation to any 2 or 3 factors displayed in two or three dimensions at any one time. Each factor on a graphical display represents a particular viewpoint. With rotation, the views of particular groups of participants can be maximised. An analogy described by Watts (2010) is when theatre-goers might view the same stage performance but what will be seen on stage will vary depending on whether one is viewing the stage from the stalls, the circle or upper circle and where one is positioned (on the left hand side, right hand side or middle). In other words, the factor analytic process allows for the same event to be perceived differently by different participants based upon the particular perspective they might take with respect to a topic of interest. Stainton-Rogers (1996) has suggested that different viewpoints (factors) can be considered to represent broader social discourses; that is to reflect the varying ways a topic of interest is talked about and understood in a particular social, historical and cultural context. Q methodology has also been used however in psychotherapy research to identify specific behavioural and other characteristics of therapeutic sessions demonstrating different epistemological assumptions about what can be identified through Q-methodology.

This Chapter has covered Q Methodology in some detail. A summary of the Q Methodological Process is provided in Figure 3.3 below.

Figure 3.4: Q Methodology: Overall Process

Q-Methodology (Process Steps)



3.2.3.2 Hermeneutic Approach and Thematic Analysis

At the outset of the research, I had been very open-minded with respect to what data the IPR/ unstructured interviews might provide. Depending upon the research interest or orientation of the researcher the same data could for example be interpreted as phenomenological data, discursive data or in a more objectivist sense, reports of actual processes occurring in the session. From a social constructionist perspective, all data is open to the way a researcher might wish to construct whatever he or she finds.

In keeping with the original objective to focus on saliency, I tried to identify what seemed salient in the spoken accounts. "Saliency analysis" has recently been considered a key element of thematic analysis (Buetow, 2010). Buetow (2010, p.123) highlights how saliency

analysis “identifies and keeps visible what stands out from qualitative data. It highlights which units of meaning are salient at the data surface (primary salience) while also exposing the salience of latent messages (secondary salience). It thereby aims to facilitate clarity and the production of salient conclusions.”

In this context, saliency was constructed as what stood out to me as a researcher based on what the participants said and how whatever was said was expressed. I was reminded of McLeod’s (2003) emphasis on hermeneutics in relation to *letting the text* speak to the researcher. At first, this approach seemed unconventional. I felt that competent researchers needed to be very clear about what they wanted to identify and what specific methods they would apply to identify whatever it was that they wished to identify. However, the more I thought about this, the more I thought that methods are at least in some degree, rhetorical devices for convincing the researcher and his/her would-be audience in the ‘truth’ of the findings. Take away the methods and one is left with the researcher and the text; there is an encounter and what is required is the skill of the researcher to make sense of the data in the context in which it is generated.

The principle of the hermeneutic cycle (McLeod, 2003; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009) seemed very important. I found that by listening repeatedly to small fragments of one interview and then listening to the whole interview and then listening to the another fragment of another interview and then a whole interview and so on repeatedly, patterns within the data took on a particular shape. From my philosophical perspective, there is always a process of construction, of sense-making on the part of the researcher. This is different to what one might readily understand as interpretation in a more objectivist sense. From an objectivist perspective, interpretation implies finding out what the data means, as if there were some inherent meaning to the text. The influence of existing frameworks of understanding is implicit in social constructionist and interpretive approaches. A process of construction emphasises more the way a researcher shapes the data. This is not to say that there are no inherent patterns in the data but it is to acknowledge that meaning arises

through the projection of the researcher's own assumptions, frameworks and exposure to local and broader social discourses as well as the influences of the methods used. This principle is aligned with Gadamer's (2008) hermeneutic *fusion of horizons*. A richer understanding of the data emerges as a researcher applies his/her own fore-understanding to understand the data: the data speaks to the researcher and the researcher speaks to the data, out of which a new understanding emerges.

The recordings of the interviews were not fully transcribed. As a researcher, I was not convinced that methodological rigour can lead to the identification of truth; in this sense the importance of rigour in methodology is a discursive construction. This is not the same however as being generally methodical, analytical and transparent in one's assumptions. I also found that by listening to the accounts, I recreated more of a sense of the original interviews and discussions. I could also gain a sense of recollection of what I noticed as salient at the time of the interviews. When particular aspects of the recordings seemed salient, I wrote comments down so that I could reflect on the detail of the text, again from a hermeneutic framework, cycling to and from the original recordings and the written transcriptions.

The first repeats of listening to the accounts (first the clients' accounts, then the coaches' accounts and then the coach-observer accounts) were intended to allow me to gain an overall sense of the focus and sentiment of the discussions. This wasn't done with any particular explicit framework; it was an attempt to allow the data to appeal to my tacit frames of reference.

Given the large data sets based on the spoken accounts and the fact that typically in Q methodology, only one data set is analysed. Pragmatically, I therefore applied a more abbreviated form of thematic analysis than some traditional thematic analyses described in the research methods literatures. I also suggest that conceptually, there are no assurances that a meticulously detailed 'bottom-up' line by line analysis of the data or a systematic

coding of the data would necessarily lead to a more trustworthy interpretation of the data than a messier hermeneutic cycling whereby I as a researcher could cycle between the detail of comments made, the overall sense of a client's account and the overall sense of the clients' accounts. It also seemed helpful to make sense of the clients' accounts by taking account simultaneously of the accounts of the coach and observers. In fact, it was not possible to do otherwise as I collected data first from the clients and coaches and then from the observer groups so I always took my initial understanding of the data from the interviews to the discussion groups. It was never possible just to collect data as I was conscious that an informal process of interpretation began (and could not be avoided) the moment I started to collect data.

In order to illustrate the principle of analysis, I will illustrate the general approach in this paragraph. I began by listening to the accounts of the client from the first session. I got a sense that the experience had been extremely positive for him. This same sense of positivity was conveyed by the coach. There were particular characteristics of the client and coaches accounts that just seemed to stand out for me as personally salient; for example how the client and coach shared the same language (e.g. metaphors relating to coaching as a maritime exploration). I then showed the recording to a group of observers who practised from a neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) school of coaching (all were trained practitioners or master practitioners) who seemed extremely critical of the coach and session. I was quite taken aback by their reactions. This same pattern was repeated for all other discussions. This led me to explore what had made the session so productive for the coach and client and yet so unacceptable from the perspective of the observers. In an initial analysis, several disparate shared experiences seemed to emerge from within the clients' accounts (e.g. the coaches always showing empathy; all clients having positive expectations, etc.). The analysis of the accounts of the observers seemed to suggest a range of common criticisms (coach not exploring enough; coach not getting at the real issue, etc.). The accounts of the coaches seemed to sit in the middle with the coaches simply explaining what they did in a

relatively unperturbed manner. It was only by cycling between the three sets of accounts with curiosity and with a drawing on my own tacit frames of reference and recent and continued wider reading of relevant literature that a higher level meaning of the accounts emerged.

This meaning was both energised and enacted by an analysis of more detailed comments made by individuals. There were particular moments in all of the accounts that seemed to hold an especial significance for the speakers. These moments captured my curiosity; for example, in the case of one client who really paused and mulled over the experience of being listened to. This had been very impactful for him. It was only by contextualising the description of that experience in the light of the analysis of the clients' accounts overall as well as those of the coach and observers that the meaning of what the client said became clearer. Similarly, it was often only by comparing accounts with respect to particular events that the meaning of particular events became clearer within the overall reflective process. The findings from the Q methodological analysis were also used to help inform the analysis of the thematic analysis and vice versa to inform the Q methodological analysis.

The analysis of the data also continued through the write-up phase. As I tried to structure the findings and the interpretations of the findings in the discussion chapter of this thesis, new patterns of understanding continued to emerge resulting in changes in the ways I had categorised the themes. The actual writing process was a way of engaging with the text but yet from another angle as a form of reflective writing, leading to several redrafts of the findings. Working visually and kinaesthetically on the computer seemed to help the pattern construction process and contributed to a sense of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). The continued engagement with the literature as part of the write-up continued to energise the reflective process.

3.2.3.3 Discursive Analyses

Given the exploratory nature of the research and the formulation of the research question on applying multiple-perspectives there seemed to be scope for including discursive perspectives in the analysis. This was the most challenging part of the analysis as there seemed to be a multiplicity of ways of analysing the data discursively. At one level, many of the coaches had used vivid metaphors which seemed to express something about how they had constructed the coaching process. There seemed to be ample scope for including the use of metaphors to help inform the overall thematic analysis (that is to interpret the meaning of how language was used to describe the coaching process). From another discursive perspective, there seemed to be a careful positioning of how the speakers wanted to be perceived; in particular how the coaches wanted to be perceived to future observers. These apparent attempts to present a particular identity seemed to indicate something about the coaching process; that is coaching as an enactment of professional identity.

At one level, I would suggest that analysing discourses can be considered relatively simple methodologically. For example, shared opinions can be considered as discourses. It then becomes a matter of identifying shared patterns of talking about coaching and naming these as discourses (e.g. whether coaches should give advice, whether a coach should be empathic, etc.). This approach to discourse is described in the literature as *interpretative repertoires* and was discussed earlier in this chapter.

At a level of aggregation, some of the shared ways of talking about discourses begin to show a degree of similarity with broader social discourses. Naming discourses at this higher level goes beyond the immediacy of the coaching community of which the research participants could be considered to represent some of its members. In much of the literature on discourse analysis and from a critical perspective, there is a sense of shared views about prevailing discourses in society such as a discourse of managerialism (e.g. Newman and Clark, 1994; Clegg et al, 2005), a discourse of humanism (Wolfe et al, 2005; Ellerman, 1998),

a discourse of individualism (Jensen, 1995; Evans 1990) and other broad discourses. Academics of a discourse analytical persuasion seem to match their findings to their awareness of these broader understandings of dominant social discourses, already described in academic literature. There isn't a ready-made manual of "discourses" that a researcher can use for comparative purposes however. This would run counter to the principle of discourses as somewhat difficult to circumscribe and reify as objective entities.

In the Inquiry, some attempt has been made to first of all identify the ways the participants spoke about coaching. These shared patterns of talking were simply identified in the Inquiry as discourses in order not to over-complicate the analysis. The shared patterns of talking were identified as an integral part of the thematic analysis described in the section above. At higher levels of analysis, I have tried to relate them to broader social discourses with which I was generally familiar as suggested is a typical process in the discursive literature. In order not to be dogmatic however, I have also considered the possibility of shared ways of talking about events as opinions, debates, views, beliefs and assumptions. The reader is encouraged to adopt a position of epistemological openness and to reflect on how the data might be interpreted.

3.2.3.4 Q Analysis

The technical procedures for collecting Q data were described earlier in this Chapter. The Q-sorts generated by the client and coach show the way client and coach sorted the 84 items in the Coaching Process Q-set (CPQS) into 13 columns (-6 *Highly Uncharacteristic* of the session through to 0 *Neither Uncharacteristic nor Characteristic* of the session to +6 *Highly Characteristic* of the session).

In order to compare the Q-sorts of the coach and client with the viewpoint of the observers for any given session, a factor array can be created to express a shared viewpoint within the group of observers. The observer factor array represents the weighted average loading of those Q-sorts loading onto any factor (shared statistical correlations among Q-sorts) that can

be extracted from a set of observer Q-sorts. The observer factor array is therefore a representation of the factor and for purpose of comparison, displayed as a Q-sort with rankings of -6 (highly uncharacteristic of the session) to 0 (neither uncharacteristic nor characteristic) to +6 (highly characteristic) as in the case of the Q-sort of the coach and of the client. In this way, an observer perspective can be compared directly against the Q-sort of the coach and the Q-sort of the client for any given session.

Factors can also be extracted more generally in the data, for example for all clients, all coaches, all observers and all viewpoints when all Q-sorts are analysed together. One or more factors might be extracted depending on the number of shared viewpoints expressed. In Q methodology, every factor that can be extracted from a group of Q-sorts represents a shared viewpoint, a similarity in how the Q-items are rank-ordered. Each factor can be expressed by creating a factor array.

A key aspect of Q Methodology is to interpret the overall configuration of items expressed in the factor array and/or individual Q-sort; that is to consider what viewpoint is being expressed by placing or tending to place (expressed in a factor array) some items at -6, others at 0 and others at +6. Items placed at the extremities are particularly interesting because they are considered to identify those items that are particularly salient for any given individual (individual Q-sort) or in any overall viewpoint (factor array). Typically in Q Methodology, the researcher will limit the analysis to a description of overall viewpoints (one overall statistical analysis for a particular group of people). When analysing coaching sessions however, there is scope to provide a rich interpretation of competing viewpoints; that is to consider the viewpoints of distinct participant groups (e.g. clients, coaches and observers) and for one session or generally across all sessions. Given that the research question is to explore multiple-perspectives, this is an important feature of the research but does add a great deal of complexity and additional analyses over and above that typically carried out in a Q methodological investigation.

Interpretation in Q methodology generally is difficult and particularly so for interpreting Q-sorts/ factor arrays for coaching sessions in the present Inquiry because participants were given ample scope to rate items in ways that were personally meaningful for them. For example, an observer might rank the item *Q29 Coach shows empathy as highly uncharacteristic* of the session. One interpretation could be that the coach did not show what perhaps most coaches would understand as empathy; another could be that the coach was considered to show hostility and a negative placing of Q29 might have been intended to capture this understanding. Another interpretation could be that for most observers, the coach did show empathy but for the particular observer who may be particularly skilled in showing empathy, the coach did not show empathy when compared to his/her own standards. Alternatively, the observer might want to capture in his/her Q-sort that the coach did generally show empathy but at one critical moment in the session, failed to show empathy. Yet another possibility is that the observer mistakenly placed an item as *highly characteristic* when he/she meant to place the item as *highly uncharacteristic* (measurement error). Making sense of items rated as *highly uncharacteristic* seems particularly difficult because a participant completing a Q-sort is making a statement about something being salient owing to some sort of perceived absence. These challenges are highlighted in these opening comments in an attempt to provide transparency in the analysis. The reader is asked to reflect on the interpretations made in order to consider if they can be considered credible in light of the data. However, while interpretation is difficult; it is also possible to make sense of the sorting patterns by reflecting on the accounts of participants provided in the interviews. The reader is also invited to take account of these comments which are used in this Chapter to support the interpretations made.

A series of different analyses were carried out as follows:

1. An analysis of individual coaching sessions (6)
2. An analysis of the clients' viewpoints overall (1)
3. An analysis of the coaches' viewpoints overall (1)

4. An analysis of the observers' viewpoints overall (1)
5. An analysis of all viewpoints analysed together (1)

In each analysis (1-5), factors were extracted from the data and used to create factor arrays representing shared viewpoints. For example, in 1 (above), factors were extracted to create factor arrays to express shared viewpoints within the groups of observers for any one session and compared against the Q-sorts of coach and client. In 2 (above), factors were extracted and factor arrays created to represent shared viewpoints for all clients and only clients, analysed separately from all other Q-sorts. In 5 (above), factors were extracted and factor arrays created for all Q-sorts analysed together irrespective of whether the Q-sorts of observers from one session load onto the same factor as a Q-sort from participants associated with different sessions. The overall aim of these analyses was to identify and interpret viewpoints. In other words, the aim is to identify and interpret shared perceptions of what is constructed to be happening when considering a coaching session or coaching sessions generally from the viewpoints of coaches, clients and observers.

The Q-sorts of the client and coach show the way client and coach sorted 84 items in the Coaching Process Q-set (CPQS) into 13 columns (-6 *Highly Uncharacteristic* of the session through to 0 *Neither Uncharacteristic nor Characteristic* of the session to +6 *Highly Characteristic* of the session).

3.2.4. Summary

The research methodology described in this Inquiry is ambitious and complex. The breadth of research methods and techniques were considered necessary to understand the complexity of coaching sessions. The data collection process obtains data from 3 different types of participant and uses a range of methods/techniques (Q technique, interpersonal process recall, unstructured interviews and observer groups). The data analysis draws on Q methodology, thematic analysis and a range of discursive approaches. The Q methodological approach alone is extremely ambitious in the way a series of analyses were

carried out within a single study and that the level of analysis has been at a micro-analytic level (82 descriptors) as well as at a more interpretive level of analysis.

Epistemologically, I have argued that the approach is social constructionist in its openness to be accepting of alternative epistemological approaches but alternative epistemologies, consistent with a social constructionist ontology assumes that all epistemologies are just constructions; they are perspectives on the phenomena we experience. I have also argued that the meaning making process is at the core of all constructions of the world we experience which is a core concept in a social constructionist approach.

The overall coherence in the approach is based on the overarching hermeneutical methodology which tries to make sense of the data by comparing the detail to the whole and vice-versa. This means identifying individual comments, use of metaphor, moments of personal saliency, rank ordering of items at an individual participant level and relating these observations at a broader categorical level (within or across categories). It means comparing the findings from a Q analysis to the findings from a thematic analysis to the findings from a more discursive analysis of the language used in the way participants describe coaching. Collectively, these alternative ways of making sense of the same focus of attention (a coaching session) allows for what is intended to be a rich and sophisticated understanding of the coaching process.

4.0 Chapter 4 Introduction to Findings and the Client Perspective

Different ways of presenting the findings were considered, including the presentation of findings on a session by session basis. One advantage of presenting the findings session by session is that it would have made very clear who the coach, client and observers were for each session. It would have also made clear how the session came about (i.e. whether I had identified the coach or if the session was a mid-engagement session, what the content of the session had been, etc.). By way of contrast, in presenting the accounts of the sessions for the client, the coach and the coach-observers separately and in sequence, the reader would risk losing some of the contextual information for each session. Initially, the sessions were written up as whole sessions (i.e. as separate individual cases) but this presentation of the findings led to a loss of sense of similarities and/or differences in the way, the sessions were described by the various clients, coaches and coach-observers participating in the research. One other possibility was simply to choose one session and write it up as a detailed case study and argue that this case illustrated the way coaches, clients and coach-observers typically evaluated the session. However, this approach seemed to lose a great deal of transparency and much of the collected data would simply be omitted.

There was the added complication that I had carried out two different types of analysis of the spoken accounts; first of all, a thematic analysis and then a discursive analysis as outlined in the previous chapter. There was also the challenge of writing up the statistical analyses as they had been very detailed and had been used to analyse each session as well as the sorting patterns of the clients, the coaches and the coach-observers separately. The analysis had also taken into account an overall statistical analysis of all the perspectives considered together. These patterns were all interesting in their own right and could be compared systematically alongside the perspectives of the spoken accounts. However, comparing and contrasting such a large data set seemed very complicated. In some ways, the thesis could be considered to consist of 3 separate analyses:

1. A thematic analysis of the spoken accounts of a range of witnesses to the coaching interaction (clients, coaches and coach-observers)
2. A discursive analysis of the same
3. A statistical (Q-methodological) analysis of a range of coaching sessions

These considerations and early drafts of the thesis led to two major decisions in relation to writing the thesis. First, I would write up the thesis into separate chapters. The First 3 chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) would address the findings from 1 and 2 above. A fourth chapter (Chapter 7) would address the third analysis (above) separately.

In writing up the first 3 chapters, there seemed to be some logic in presenting the findings first of all in terms of the descriptions of the clients, then of the coaches and then finally of the coach-observers. The logic was based on beginning with what might be considered the output of coaching; that is the actual experience of the client. This would be followed by an account of the coach as it was through the coach's facilitation of the session that the coach's experience would be influenced. Finally, presenting the accounts of the coach-observers would imply some distance from the immediacy of the session. The accounts of the coach-observers would present an overall evaluation of what the client and coach had done together.

With respect to Chapter 7, the Q-methodological analysis, the decision was made to structure these findings in a particular sequence. First of all, given that statistical analysis is essentially a technique for reducing data and for making overall comparisons between data sets (Field, 2013), it seemed logical to begin by presenting an overall analysis of the sessions. This was also considered a useful starting point for writing up the statistical analysis as the reader may be looking for an overall sense of what the sessions are indicating overall, having considered a bottom up analysis of first the client's, the coach's and then the coach-observers' perspective (Chapters 4-6). Having started with an overview of the sessions, it seemed logical to follow this by analysing a couple of sessions in depth.

Given that Q methodology has not been used to analyse coaching sessions before, to my best knowledge, I decided to illustrate how a Q methodological analysis could be written up in two different ways (presenting the data systematically in tables and then in a more narrative format). The write-up for the first session would also present a modified Johari window (Luft and Ingham, 1955) in order to facilitate understanding of the different perspectives considered for a single session. This would then be followed by a separate analysis of the clients' perspective (all clients' Q-sorts for all sessions considered together); the coach's perspective (all Q-sorts of coaches considered together) and then all Q-sorts for the coach-observers. Finally, an overall analysis would be provided, as would be traditional in a conventional Q-methodological study (Dziopa et al, 2011) in an attempt to make sense of all the statistical data already presented in some detail.

This is a formidable set of data for the reader to progress her or his way through. Ultimately, there did not seem an easier or more meaningful way of presenting the findings that would demonstrate transparency. In order to help the reader follow the threads of the findings, the Chapters are presented in a logical sequence and as already indicated in the preceding paragraphs:

Chapter 4: The Perspective of the Clients (thematic and discursive analysis)

Chapter 5: The Perspective of the Coach (thematic and discursive analysis)

Chapter 6: The Perspective of the Coach-Observers (thematic and discursive analysis)

Chapter 7: Q Methodological Analysis

Some simple graphics are presented in order to help the reader follow the exposition and threads of the findings. In Chapter 4, it should already be possible to readily identify the main themes that are been discussed as the themes are presented early in the chapter and then are considered one by one. A higher level of analysis is suggested towards the end of the Chapter and a diagram is presented which summarises the client's experience.

In Chapter 5, it should be possible to follow which coach is being discussed since I have added icons to show the progression of one coach's account to another. In Chapter 6, it should be clear what session is being discussed because similar icons have been provided. In Chapter 7, additional icons are intended to help orient the reader through the chapter. At the end of Chapter 5, a table is provided in order to help pull the findings for that Chapter together; this table shows differences in the approaches of coaches. In Chapter 6, a table also summarises the issues raised across the sessions by the coach-observers. Finally, summaries are provided at the end of each chapter to help the reader quickly recap the main points argued and a list of key points is intended to help the reader gain a sense of the emerging arguments which will be picked up in the discussion chapter of this thesis (Chapter 8).

In order to orient the reader at the outset, an overview of the sessions analysed followed by details of each session are presented below. The reader can therefore refer back to this section when reading the Chapters which follow.

4.1 Context to Coaching Sessions: Participant and Session Details

It was not considered ethical to obtain all the background demographic details of the coaches and clients participating in the study. All participants were already making a significant commitment to take part (giving up their time, travelling to a venue, reading documentation before attending, etc.). When some of the participants had been identified through a third party (e.g. one coach had contacted another to ask if they would be willing to take part in the study), ethically, I did not think I could ask them for too much background to their practice. This seemed too intrusive. I therefore obtained whatever data I was able to identify over the course of the study as and when it arose naturally in conversation. It was particularly difficult to obtain details of the coach-observers as the composition of each Observer-Group kept changing owing to problems coordinating diaries. The participation of

some coaches also became dependent upon other contacts I had already established; some commitments were only made just ahead of the sessions.

I am also hesitant to provide too many details of the participants for reasons of confidentiality. For example, if I were to state that a coach is well known to Brookes with a doctoral qualification and adopts a cognitive-behavioural orientation, already, some readers of the thesis may be able to identify that person. Some details are therefore deliberately withheld. Coaches were also recruited from a range of locations with varying loyalties to different institutions in order to further protect confidentiality.

The difficulty in obtaining and presenting personal details highlights a challenge in conducting in-depth, qualitative research with professional coaches and their clients.

4.02 Overview of Coaching Sessions: Participant Details and Overall Context

In total, 6 coaching sessions were recorded. Four of these sessions were “one-off” sessions in that I identified a coach and a client who were willing to hold a single coaching session with no agreed follow up. All four clients were asked to come to the coaching session with a clear issue they would like to address. The coaches and clients did not know each other beforehand. All coaches were asked to facilitate each session as a real coaching conversation and requested to conduct the session in the way they would do normally. The sessions took place in the most appropriate coaching environment possible (i.e. quiet rooms with comfortable chairs) given the constraints of the research. This was intended to make the context as close to a natural coaching context as possible. No fees were charged for the sessions. Two other sessions were mid-engagement sessions in which the coaches and their respective clients agreed to take part in the research. One of these sessions involved an internal coach with their client. The other session was a private arrangement between a coach and their existing client. Four sessions lasted approximately one hour; two other sessions lasted 80 and 90 minutes respectively. The content of the sessions varied from life and career goals (3 sessions), starting a new role (1 session), developing presence at work

(networking and giving presentations; 1 session) and managing current business projects (1).

Coaches were recruited through personal and University networks. All coaches were very experienced. Three coaches are experienced in assessing coaches; two are experienced coach supervisors. All coaches had coaching specific qualifications. Two coaches, at the time of the field research, were working towards doctoral qualifications and two were qualified at doctoral levels. All coaches had extensive experience of executive coaching at director level in organizations. Some coaches had other backgrounds in addition to coaching (e.g. therapy and/or organizational development).

All 4 clients participating in the one-off sessions were known to me through professional networks. Two of the clients that I recruited had backgrounds in Human Resources and Organizational Development. Another was identified through another contact and was a manager of a private hospital. The fourth coach was a legal professional. All coach-observers were recruited through personal networks and social media. The coach-observers varied in their experience. Some were known to me and had extensive coaching experience. Other coaches were asked to come to the sessions if they would consider themselves to be “experienced”. During conversations and e-mail correspondence, some of the coaches provided additional information which suggested considerable experience as coaches. For one group, the coach-observers were largely students on a post graduate course in Coaching but all had experience of paid coaching. Some coach-observers may have been relatively less experienced but this would not have been the norm and it became too intrusive to establish their backgrounds. Some of the coach-observers had published in coaching or had other practitioner credentials (e.g. were coaching-supervisors or were involved in the development and certification of coaches).

The sessions were viewed some weeks after the recording of the sessions. Each session was shown once to a different group of coach-observers. However, in the case of one

session, two viewings were arranged owing to low numbers of coach-observers for the first viewing. Each session was viewed generally in accordance with the chronological order in which they were recorded. However, some video-recordings were held back for particular Observer Groups. For example, knowing that the composition of two observer groups would be TA and the CBC coaches, I thought it would be interesting to show them a recording of a contrasting style (Gestalt coach).

Neither coach nor client was present in the observer-groups. The details of the sessions are provided below. In describing the sessions, I have largely made reference to some of the summative descriptions provided by the coach and/or observers. In some cases, I have highlighted some critical moments (De Haan et al, 2010) which became at some point a focus of all discussions for that session.

Tristan's Session

This was the first session that was recorded and the first which was shown to an Observer-Group. Tristan has several years of coaching experiencing. He is also a qualified therapist. He described his approach as broadly humanistic, including Gestalt based influences. His client was at the time between careers and had held managerial positions in an international organization. The client himself had a background in consultancy projects and had had some experience of coaching others. The session was a final session of 6 that had taken place over several months. According to the coach, the sessions had focused on career goals and assertiveness. According to the coach, the focus of the session was primarily that of the client reflecting on his learning from the coaching over the previous months. The coach would help the client make connections between different issues as they arose.

The session lasted 90 minutes and was shown almost in its entirety (excluding 10 minutes between 10 and 20 minutes of the actual recording in order to work within the time constraints of the audience) to a group of 6 observers working as full-time coaches in the public sector. All participants were delivering coaching at a senior level within the public

sector as well as delivering coach-training programmes for managers. All coaches had qualifications in NLP including some at Master- Practitioner level although some coaches also had broader qualifications in coaching. Their expressed preference was to apply an NLP informed approach. According to the coach-observers, the session was observed to be one in which the coach gave ample reflective space to the client. Core content issues included the client's expressed desire to be more assertive. The client was observed to spend most of the session reviewing the progress he felt he had made; this included family, work and personal impacts. The coach was observed to ask the client to repeat statements, using "I" (The coach explained that this was intended to help the client to take ownership of the issues he raised) and to show a range of established questioning and listening skills.

Joanne's Session

Joanne described her approach as humanistic and gestalt based. She said that she drew on what we agreed could be described as "intuition," although this term did not fully capture what she did in a session (words seemed evasive). Her session involved a contact identified by myself to be coached. The client was an experienced HR professional invited to take part in a one-off session. The client had been coached before but by someone who had adopted what she described as a more business-like, task-focused, behaviourally oriented type of approach (this description was given by way of contrasting her experience of Joanne).

The session lasted for one hour and was shown in its entirety to 4 highly experienced coaches used to operating at senior levels. The coach-observers came from varied backgrounds; three having worked at senior levels in industry (at least two at director levels); one coach was working as a coach-supervisor. All coaches had post-graduate coaching qualifications or equivalent; one at a doctorate level.

The content of the session initially focused on the client discussing with the help of the coach, whether she should take a new job she had just been offered and if so, on what terms. The session then seemed to take a broader life-goal focus with the client being

asked to take part in a time-line/ visualization exercise in which she was asked to think where she would like to be at some future point. The client referred to a metaphor of a 'Pot of Gold' on a beach. The metaphor would become a key point of discussion in the interviews. The client would argue that she thought that the coach knew the real meaning of the 'Pot of Gold' (i.e. that it was not about money); the coach said she did not know nor that she did not need to know; the observers thought that the coach needed to know.

Alison's Session

Alison described her approach as Gestalt based. The session lasted for one hour and was shown in its entirety first, to 2 coaches from a cognitive-behavioural school of coaching; one of whom had a professional doctorate in coaching; the second was also highly experienced; both coaches working at senior levels in executive coaching. Given the low numbers of observers, a second session was organized in which involved 5 observers from a transactional analysis background. All 5 observers delivered one to one coaching in addition to other OD based interventions.

The client was about to start a new job with a new organization at a more senior level. She was apprehensive about the role change and the focus of the session was on helping her to make a good impression when she started. The client and coach talked about the different ways she could be or appear to others. During the course of the session, coach invited the client to take part in the Empty Chair technique (e.g. as outlined in Rogers, 2008) to explore these differences.

Marjorie's Session

Marjorie explained that many of her client engagements often tended to be people seeking in-depth exploration of self and values. She said that she was often recruited through her personal networks to help more challenging clients. She has a doctoral qualification in clinical psychology although hasn't worked as a clinical psychologist for many years. She provided me with an outline of her approach which appeared to emphasise a client centred

approach; however, she outlined a broad knowledge base of psychometrics and psychological models of development which she also appeared to draw upon in her coaching practice. At the time of writing, she had over 20 years of coaching experience. Her client was a contact identified by myself. He is a highly experienced legal professional. He had no experience of coaching or of personal development generally, having worked mostly in small professional organizations.

The session lasted for 90 minutes and was shown in its entirety to a group of 6 coaches from a mix of backgrounds. One coach had an NLP background, another a professional doctorate in coaching, another said she adopted a solutions focused approach, one other coach had a background in coaching in Education at senior levels; another was using coaching in a social work context; the sixth coach referred to extensive coaching engagements in which she had participated but did not declare her coaching practice.

The content of the session was based around the client's negative conception of his profession and his immediate working environment. The focus of the session moved towards an exploration of how the client might be able to work in an environment more aligned with his own personal values. The coach explained that she tried to encourage the client to reflect as much as possible but having found this difficult and in the context of a one-off session, she decided to give advice and make suggestions. A critical moment (e.g. De Haan et al, 2010) in the session according to the coach was when the client looked outside and noticed that not all branches are necessarily bad which was his interpretation of what the coach had been telling him. There was, according to the coach, another critical moment in the session when the coach put down her pad and said that she tried to get the client to focus on what she was saying. Some observers saw this as a moment in the session when the coach tried to close the coaching session, which had not been the expressed intention of the coach.

Alice

Alice is another highly experienced coach with a professional doctorate in coaching. She described her approach as tending to focus on the issues of the client and as described by the client rather than on trying to read too much behind what the client was saying. This suggested what I would construct as a non-developmentally oriented model of coaching. She said that coaching should be conversational and that making suggestions is an important aspect of her model of coaching. She agreed to coach a client in a one-off session and whom I had identified. The coach was the General Manager of a large private sector hospital. She had been coached before and was favourable to coaching having learned about coaching through a senior level business course. The session was shown to a group of 8 coaches of varying coaching traditions. Some of the coaches said that they favoured a person-centred approach, others a general humanistic orientation, one coach a solutions-focused informed approach and one coach was a highly experienced senior manager with formal coaching qualifications and also experienced at coaching at senior levels; one other had doctoral level qualifications and was highly experienced in coaching. One of the coaches had already participated in the research as the coach of one of the sessions (and made this known in the Observer-Group). The focus of the session was on the client's apprehension in relation to giving presentations and networking at board level.

Drew

Drew had been working as an internal coach in a large organization for the past two years. She was completing a professional doctorate in coaching. The session involved a board member of the organization who said that in her distant past she had experienced developmental coaching. The session was the fifth in a series of 6 contracted sessions. The session was shown in its entirety (60 minutes) to a selection of students completing a Masters Degree in Coaching and one coach-consultant; all had coaching experience.

Quite a lot of time was spent at the beginning of the session in relation to a general catch-up on events. The session then focused on two main business projects in which the client had been involved. The coach described the projects and the coach mainly listened asking a few questions from time to time in relation to her progress on the projects. At points in the session, both coach and client would write down action points for the client to address beyond the session; they included some points for reflection.

The following table summarises the details of the sessions, provided as a point of immediate reference for reading this chapter.

TABLE 4.0: Summary of Coaching Sessions

Coach	Observer Group Viewing Order	Coach Background	Client	Observer Group	Session Type	Duration (Mins)	Session Scope
Tristan	1 st	Humanistic	Coach's Existing Client	6 NLP Coaches working as internal coaches in the same public sector organization	6 th and Final Session	90	Career and Life Goals
Marjorie	2 nd	Therapeutically trained but widely experienced in organizations in executive coaching	Identified by Researcher	6 coaches from varied coaching traditions (e.g. NLP, solutions focused; social work)	"One off" Session	90	Career and Life Goals
Joanne	3 rd	Humanistic	Identified by Researcher	4 professional coaches of various backgrounds including one coach supervisor	"One off" Session	60	Career and Life Goals
Drew	4 th	Person-centred	Coach's Existing Client	4 student-practitioners studying for a post-graduate qualification in coaching and one coach/consultant	5 th Session (mid-engagement)	60	Focus on immediate business goals (business projects)
Alison	5 th	Gestalt	Identified by Researcher	2 CBC Coaches (One Observer Group)	"One off" Session	60	Starting a new job (making an impact)
	6 th			4 TA coaches (A second and separate Observer-Group)			
Alice	7 th	Non Developmental – focus on client issues	Identified by Researcher	8 coaches from various backgrounds	"One off" Session	60	Career and Life Goals

4.3 Introduction to Client Perspective

Having introduced the Findings Chapters generally, the purpose of this Chapter is now to provide a thematic analysis of the accounts (interviews) of the clients provided typically immediately after their coaching sessions (interviews were completed within 48 hours for two of the 6 clients). The analysis identified 11 themes which are listed in Table 4.1. Each theme will be described in turn. These 11 themes were clustered through further analysis of matching and comparing themes alongside one another both as the research progressed and at the end of the research. However, this led to another interpretive cycle in which 3 overarching higher order themes emerged (which seemed to capture a similarity across many of the initial sub-themes) and which seemed to relate to the client experiencing a sense of control, significance and affirmation. The three higher-order themes seemed to correspond broadly to (Schutz, 1977) interpersonal needs framework which has been popularised through the FIRO-B self-development tool. It would seem that for the client, the coaching process is an experiential process first and foremost in which interpersonal needs are satisfied. This suggests that the content of the coaching conversation (e.g. typically how a client might resolve issues or achieve goals) may be of only secondary importance in helping the client to achieve a sense of resourcefulness.

The clients also constructed their accounts as a user of a service suggesting that the coaching process is not constructed by the client as one in which he is an equal partner. Finally, it was interesting in the analysis and which will be evident across the themes that the actions of the coach were always constructed positively (e.g. a well-timed question; skilful intervention) but that at the same time, the coach was not constructed by the client as doing anything particularly extraordinary. This seemed to suggest that time and space for reflection may be more important than working with a particularly skilful coach. I will begin by considering each sub-theme in turn. I will then consider the higher order analysis towards the end of the chapter.

Table 4.1: Common Themes Expressed In the Accounts of Clients

1	Shifts in clarity, confidence, commitment and capability
2	Holistic experience but punctuated with significant moments
3	An experience of being given total attention with unconditional positive regard
4	A sense of Control
5	A sense of being challenged but gently and in a timely manner
6	A sense of flow and a sense of the experience as natural, healthy and positive
7	A lack of concern or even disliking of techniques and formal process
8	Time for reflection and off-loading
9	Meaning through shared physicality
10	Holding the Coach in High Regard
11	A Readiness to confront challenges

4.04 Theme 1: Shifts in Clarity, Confidence, Commitment and Capability

All clients expressed thinking and feeling more positively about their challenges and of having a sense of being able to address them. Alice's client felt calmer and said she had strategies for addressing her challenges:

"I feel quite calm about it now...about different strategies...thinking about why I would be talking to them...rather than just feeling, 'I've got to do that'...thinking about preparing for it [networking and giving presentations] rather than going in cold."

For Joanne's client, the session had given her a sense of clarity about what she wanted in her career/ future:

"It made me really think, 'what is it I want?'"

For Alison's client, the session had given her a sense of increased self-confidence:

"I came out feeling much more positive; confidence level was much better..."

Overall, this first theme confirmed many anecdotal reports often reported by coaches about the overall benefits expressed by clients. They conveyed an impression of improved well-being/ sense of being able to acknowledge and address their challenges; a sense of increased resourcefulness. This first theme is an overall evaluation of the session as a worthwhile experience.

4.05 Theme 2: Holistic experience but punctuated with significant moments

Most clients recounted their experiences of the session as a whole or as part of an on-going process rather than as a series of discrete significant moments.

“The overall thing really rather than a particular moment...[responding to a question about what stood out]” (Alice’s client)

For Drew’s client, the session was a sub-set of an overall process which extended beyond the session:

“Because we can talk about a concept for hours and hours and not achieve anything but she will come up with an actual exercise... ‘Do this on paper...Come back with some concrete feedback we can talk about at the next session.’ When you have to put your ideas, values, beliefs and concepts on paper, then you start to challenge yourself and consider things really fully.”

In the case of one client, the personal significance of the session was related to previous sessions which again suggested an experience of the session as a programme of learning rather than as a discrete event:

“Certainly with this session it was really helpful just in bringing a lot of the previous sessions back; this was our final session, thinking how does this all link back and where do the links come together? (Tristan’s client) ”

Alice’s client also made a similar comment about the need to leave the session and mull things over:

“The things you can go away and think about rather than what’s being said in the session... rather than a light bulb moment in the session”

These comments suggest that the experience of being coached was described as a holistic experience rather than as a series of significant moments. These findings suggest that being coached is a process in which coaching is an important event rather than a series of events. There may be a parallel in relation to the literature on organizational change which suggests a processual nature of change (Wilson, 1992).

Some moments in the session did however appear to have particular significance for some clients. This indicates that it is still important to consider significant moments in coaching. Alison’s client for example recalled a moment when the coach encouraged her to self-talk positively:

“She made me say it as if I meant it [being a senior manager], and if felt really good...it felt quite empowering, and I came out thinking, I could do this.” (Client Alison)

These findings are interesting in relation to the literature on significant moments (e.g. De Haan, 2010). While it would appear that significant moments are important in coaching, it is important perhaps not to assume that these moments are necessarily more important than the overall coaching session or an overall programme of coaching.

4.06 Theme 3: An experience of being given total attention with unconditional positive regard

The clients conveyed a sense of being listened to attentively, empathically and authentically and how this helped them feel at ease in the session:

“She shows a tremendous amount of empathy... She very much puts me at ease” (Client Drew)

“She was easy to be with...genuinely interested...“She was very, very, very attentive” (Client Marjorie)

“A couple of times empathising with things I was saying...She put me at ease...it was definitely feeling at ease, (Alice’s client)”

“What I remember was that it was very relaxed (Client Alison)”

“She had an honest held interest in you (Client Marjorie)”

There was something psychologically significant for the clients about being listened to, understood and shown emotional warmth. This process put them at ease which in itself seemed important. Much of the coaching literature emphasises the importance of listening to the client (e.g. as summarised by Cox, 2013). These findings emphasise the importance of being listened to from a client’s perspective.

4.07 Theme 4: A Sense of Control

The clients expressed a sense of being in control. This was expressed mainly in terms of the clients’ feeling that they could direct the course of the session and that the coach was working to their (the client’s) agenda:

"He's always very good at making clear that as coachee, I'm very much in control; it's my agenda (Client Tristan)"

"In my view, she did the right thing: go where I want and need to go; it's about me not her (Client Joanne)"

"It was always following where I wanted to go....she always asked me permission...'Can I suggest this?'...so if you don't want to do it, don't do it!" (Client Alison)

4.08 Theme 5: A sense of being challenged but gently and in a timely manner

The clients emphasised a perception of being challenged but without feeling threatened:

"I didn't feel she was putting me on the spot, you know, 'Do something!' ...It was kind of challenging without being really challenging..."I wasn't being asked for hard and fast solutions." (Client Alison)

For one client, even the expression 'challenging' was said with some hesitation suggesting that the client had been simply encouraged to question her assumptions:

"Maybe challenging what you are saying [in response to a question about what the coach was doing]...asking questions... bringing things out of you that you hadn't really thought about before (Alice's session)"

Some clients highlighted the importance of being questioned or challenged at the right time:

“[speaking of what helped the client]...then if you’ve got one or two killer questions at the right time, or statements (Client Joanne)”

“She chose at the right moments to come up with words and concepts... (Client Marjorie)”

These comments suggest that at the heart of the coaching conversation, the basic process of being challenged/ questioned about one’s assumptions and from the client’s perspective, at the right time, was experienced by the client as impactful. The findings indicate that coaching does not have to be a technically complex process. The clients would seem to have considerable resources to respond to prompts and challenges.

4.09 Theme 6: A Sense of Flow: a Natural, Healthy and Positive Experience

The clients expressed a sense of the session flowing and of it being a healthy, natural experience:

“It felt like a really natural coaching session” (Client Drew)

“It was natural...in terms of the way the thing flowed” (Client Joanne)

The clients’ sense of being relaxed seemed to have set the foundations for a flowing session:

“It felt very relaxed; it seemed to flow very easily” (Client Alison)

Tristan’s client also described the session as *“healthy”* and Alison’s client described the session as *“positive”*.

Related to this sense of flow, time passed quickly for the clients:

“That hour and a quarter or whatever it was had gone by with a click of the finger,” (Client Marjorie)

“The time went really quickly. I could not believe an hour had gone by (Client Joanne).”

A sense of flow conveyed in the clients’ accounts suggests that the coaching session from the client’s perspective can be a highly engaging experience akin to the notion of flow in which the client has a sense of a highly challenging process but one over which the client has a sense of mastery and there is a sense of time passing quickly and fluidly (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

4.10 Theme 7: A lack of concern or even disliking of techniques and formal process

The specific techniques or frameworks used by coaches did not stand out in their accounts. Alison’s client, for example only mentioned the client’s use of the empty chair technique once, briefly and negatively in a 30 minute interview (remembering how it had made her feel *“a bit uncomfortable”*). She did not discuss how the coach had asked her to construct her challenge in terms of *“polarities,”* simply focusing instead on how she felt the coach had challenged her to think differently. This suggests perhaps either that she did not notice or recall what the coach was doing or that the offered framework did not have any meaning for the client. What was significant for her was *that she was challenged* rather than *how* she was challenged.

The client in Joanne’s session said that she had felt uncomfortable about the introduction of the time-line exercise but agreed *“to go along with it”* (suggesting perhaps some apprehension). She did describe some benefits she felt she gained from the exercise but

did not dwell on this experience in the interview. It was one element in the overall session rather than *a* critical or *the* critical part of the session for her (theme 2).

More generally, the accounts of the clients suggested that they valued an absence of formal structures. Joanne's client, for example suggests that she had enjoyed what she had constructed as an absence of process:

"I was pleasantly surprised that she was not too concerned about coaching process (Client Joanne)"

This comment and perhaps the discomfort expressed by both Alison and Joanne's clients suggests that more formal process interventions can risk breaking the client's experience of a natural flowing and non-threatening process.

The clients generally struggled to pinpoint exactly what the coach was doing in the sessions to give rise to a sense of a flowing interaction. Overall, they had a sense of the coach doing something that they recognised as effective but struggled to pinpoint what that was.

Joanne's client, while being pleased that the coach had not structured the session in a formal way, suggested that she could when prompted, construct an argument for the coach using process:

"She inspired confidence in me. How did she do this? Building the rapport, setting the context, telling you what the journey is going to be, having something concrete: 'this is what you are going to come out with...'"

This comment however seems to relate more to coaching skills than formal activities and theoretical frameworks. The client was therefore emphasising the relevance of interactional skills generally. Only Drew's client mentioned the usefulness of the techniques her coach used. This suggested that techniques could be valued but were not generally perceived as

the most important elements of the process from the client's perspective. As in the case of the finding expressed in theme 5 (the client valuing the basic process of being challenged), coaching does not appear to need to be a complex technical process for the client to find it valuable.

4.11 Theme 8: Time for reflection and unloading

The clients emphasised having the opportunity to reflect and/or to be encouraged to reflect:

I don't often sit down and think why I'm nervous...it's making you think about what you would not normally think about (Client Alice)

For one client, the coach had not done anything especially dramatic or creative but the occasion had helped her to focus on a perceived need to be more proactive:

"There was nothing earth shattering in there ... but the challenge to you at a personal level around that sort of stuff, on a personal level, for me doesn't happen, partly because... I don't talk to people about this sort of stuff and partly because we don't have time. (Client Joanne)

For a third client, having someone willing to challenge her (i.e. having the opportunity to be challenged) was what was useful:

"Normally, when I'm talking to someone about being nervous, no one really challenges you back whereas she [the coach] challenges you back a little (Client, Drew)"

Similarly, for another client, the coach was addressing issues others wouldn't:

“I don’t think anyone has actually ever said anything...but she was picking up on things that really annoy me and I’m conscious that I do. (Client Alison)”

For another client, having an opportunity to air concerns is what appeared to be valued:

“It was almost like a bit of a burden had been lifted...and it’s because I’ve got such a lot going on at the moment; you have that space to try to clear some of that stuff out. (Client Joanne)”

It seemed that clients valued taking part in a process in which they could talk freely about issues of personal concern that they would not otherwise have the opportunity to do. This gave the impression of coaching as being as much an opportunity to talk through issues as it was in any sense, a skilled conversational process with an expert coach.

4.12 Theme 9: Meaning through shared physicality

The accounts of the clients suggested that the physical presence of the coach had been crucial to the meaning making process. For Joanne's client, the time-line exercise only had meaning because it was done in the physical presence of another:

"You wouldn't do it on your own; it doesn't make any sense [referring to an in-session activity]...it's having someone ask you the right questions..."

Another client appeared to be making sense of his own experiences in relation to the coach's physicality:

"It's only when I play it out in my head and get some reaction from Tristan that an even richer understanding comes forward... so what's resonating for Tristan, responding to his body language...and just the way that happened had some significance because, he started smiling and I thought 'OK, there's something happening here'..."

Tristan's client expressed how the sharing of laughter (understood in this context as a shared physical activity) had led to deeper reflections:

"...We both saw the funny side of it; we both saw the relevance of it....and it led us into something a little bit deeper." (Client Tristan)

It seemed that the process of being with someone, sharing humour, and sharing a perspective enabled new meaning to emerge. This finding points to the social construction process of meaning-making; that is how meaning emerges by interacting with others (McNamee and Gergen, 1992).

The sense of awareness of being in the presence of the coach often extended to a sense of an intimate connection with the coach:

“There is kind of a natural part of the chemistry which is how we are as two individuals who click ... The engagement between two bodies – as I lean forwards...; the open body language, which conveyed a level of respect and ‘relax’ between us. (Client Tristan)”

“At the significant moments of the discussion, she was leaning forward, and showing interest, and on one occasion I recall, we touched hands in a communal spirit... She was very good at eye-contact (Client Marjorie)”

“I did feel a warming towards the coach... a rapport; call it what you like (Client Joanne)”

Some of the comments made by clients seemed to highlight the symbolic importance of physicality generally. One client used the metaphor of movement for explaining his shifts in emotions and thoughts which he seemed to have experienced kinaesthetically:

“So there were times in the session when certain realizations occurred to me and I’m feeling quite up or energised... and I find myself sitting forward and there are other times when I’m feeling quite relaxed. It’s a constant sort of movement you’re going through emotionally as well as cognitively (Client Tristan)”

For Drew’s client, the writing down of learning or action points (quotation already provided, above) seemed to be an important physical activity. For Joanne’s client, the time-line exercise had been meaningful because it was physical:

“The whole getting up and moving thing ... is that it demonstrates some kind of progress in your thinking, so it is physical”

It therefore seems that in-session meaning-making for the client was intimately connected to a shared physical experiencing and an awareness of the physicality/ presence of the coach.

4.13 Theme 10: Holding the Coach in High Regard

All clients perceived their coaches as highly skilful. They highlighted perceptions of the specialist knowledge of the coach, their perceived expertise in picking up on significant statements, the way they drew links and challenged their current perceptions:

*“She is able to pick up on things that I say and then develop that thought process... her experience of knowing how to develop people; so she knows a lot of very good techniques”
(Client Drew)*

She was very, very insightful in terms of picking up on, “So you’ve said this, what about that?” sort of question and in terms of the way she said things...She struck me as very professional; she knew what she was doing...the questions she was asking, the pace, the way she comes across, not rushed, not hurried, she gave me the impression she knew what she was doing. (Client Joanne)

“...and the pin point accuracy to draw out the essence of it; of me just waffling on... (Client Marjorie)”

The clients were genuinely impressed by the skills of the coaches. However, the accounts of the clients also suggested that some of the positive attributions made by the clients about the coaches were based on assumptions rather than on what might be understood as factual evidence. For example, one client had made the assumption that the coach wasn’t working at a developmental level with her because she assumed the coach had understood intuitively that she didn’t need that level of depth of exploration:

“I haven’t done any of that [in depth developmental work] with Drew but I think that is because early on in the process, she realised I did not have to go through any of that

process.”

Another client assumed that the coach had sensed her reluctance to cooperate with particular activities, but had made a judgement call that she would still be open to participate (rather than interpret the coach's actions as a lack of sensitivity to her possible discomfort):

She will have known that I might be uncomfortable with some of the things she was going to suggest, but she still went there; that's a trick; well a skill. (Client Joanne)

The same client even recalled a moment when she assumed that the coach had understood that the overt topic of conversation was not the real issue:

“That question about the ‘Pot of Gold’ is a brilliant [added emphasis] question but doing it in such a way that did not accuse you of anything...so her question is saying to me, ‘So it's really not about gold then is it [laughing]?’ She's really tuning in ... and the look she gave me; we both know it's not about a pot of gold [continuing to laugh].

In the interview with the coach (which will be reported more fully in the next chapter), the coach said that she did not know what the ‘Pot of Gold’ was about; only that she recognised that it was somehow important to the client. It seemed therefore that the client had only assumed that the coach understood what she had meant. The same client had at first been taken aback by the casual dress of the coach but she reflected on this and rationalised this as a possible benefit:

“She would work with a lot of senior people. Why? Because she is non-threatening...If you're dealing with business people, there's a lot to be said for not being like them.”

Alison's client, when invited to take part in an activity about which she did feel uncomfortable, played down any discomfort felt because she had been able to make sense

of the overall engagement as useful (i.e. she did not attribute any insensitivity/ ill-judgement to the coach):

“The whole thing about moving chairs; I just felt, ‘I really don’t want to do this...but then over time [talking about the general discussion points, not the exercise], she was tapping into what I really needed”

She also blamed herself rather than the coach for the discomfort felt:

“I did feel a little uncomfortable moving chairs but that’s more about me...”

In summary, the clients evaluated the coaches very positively even when they:

- a) Did not have ‘hard evidence’ of whether the coach did or did not understand them
- b) Were presented with information that challenged their expectations
- c) Took part in exercises with which they felt uncomfortable

4.14 Theme 11 A Readiness to confront challenges

The accounts of the clients, suggests that they were “ready” to address their challenges.

All clients said that they had arrived at the sessions with very clear objectives about what they wanted to work on in the session; often the issue was imminent. They also had immediate opportunities to put into practice any learning or new ideas gained in the session:

“I came prepared with something I wanted to discuss...something that was imminent. (Client Joanne)”

“I have a networking event this weekend...(Client Drew)”

“I’m about to start a new role... (Client Alison)”

They all expected to benefit from the session. One client said how she came to the session with more positive expectations than when she presented for coaching previously:

“Where I’ve had previous coaching, I’d not bought into it...Having researched it [as part of academic studies] I’ve realised there is a place for it (Client Alice)”

Other clients conveyed a sense of being prepared to commit to the coaching process:

“I look in my diary and I think an hour’s coaching? ...Is there any value in this? And then you think, ‘yes there is: buy into the process!’” (Drew’s client)

Overall, the clients conveyed in their accounts a sense of coming to their coaching sessions with positive expectations and a willingness to address defined and immediate issues. Their sense of the potential of coaching was strengthened by their exposure to broader discourses relating to the relevance of coaching (academia and business discourses). The clients were predisposed to respond positively to the sessions.

4.15 Overview of Themes

Overall, many of the 11 themes emphasise a sense of psychological impact about the process of being coached: theme 3 emphasises a sense of the client being listened to intently, taken seriously and shown emotional warmth (some of the most salient moments expressed by the clients were when the coach gave them affirmations and took them seriously); theme 4 also expresses the client's sense of being in control which seemed important in a psychological sense.

Schutzs' (1958) framework of people needing to feel significant, competent and given affection (mentioned only very briefly in De Haan (2008) but widely used as a development tool in the form of FIRO B, (OPP, 2013) provides a theoretical framework for making sense of how the clients described their experiences:

“With regard to the self-concept, the need for inclusion is the need to feel that the self is significant and worthwhile...The need for control, defined at the level of perceiving the self, is the need to feel that one is a competent, responsible person...The need for affection, defined at the level of the self-concept, is a need to feel that the self is lovable. (Schutz, 1958, 18-20)”

The findings suggest that the widely reported benefits of coaching relate less to the overt, expressed coaching conversation (e.g. by discussing goals, options, solutions, etc.) but more to the psychological impact of the conversation (gaining a sense of significance, competence and self-worth). The sense of the client being listened to intently and being given positive affirmations is strongly related to the alleged beneficial impacts of person-centred coaching (and counselling) but may be common to a range of coaching engagements. These findings will be discussed in some depth in chapter 9.

Gaining a sense of different perspectives (theme 5) was highlighted by the clients so the coaching session was not just described as an experience of satisfying interpersonal needs. New perspectives emerged during the coaching session as the clients gave meaning to the activities in which he was engaged, the prompts/ challenges made by the coaches and their physical presence (theme 9). The meaning that the client took away from the session enabled the client to achieve the outcomes highlighted in theme 1 (shift in clarity, confidence, commitment and sense of capability). The importance of meaning making for the client becomes clearer in light of the findings from the perspectives of the coach and coach-observers and will also be discussed in some depth in chapter 8.

The very process of simply having time to reflect and having one's assumptions challenged (rather than emphasising the use of techniques) was very important for the clients (themes 5 and 7). This was often expressed as simply creating space which suggested that a key ingredient for the coaching process is simply to give time and space to the client; not necessarily to be a *great coach*.

The clients expressed a valued sense of the conversation being free flowing (theme 6) in which they felt at ease (theme 1 and theme 5). These themes parallel the importance of "smoothness/ease" valued by clients undergoing psychotherapy (Stiles, 1980) but could also relate to a sense of safety or a sense of being accepted by the client (satisfaction of an interpersonal need of being valued/loved, respected or even having control which is related to the experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988).

The literature on common factors in psychotherapy is of relevance in making sense of the positive comments made generally by the client. One group of common factors identified by the much cited Grenavage and Norcross (1990) relates to client characteristics (positive expectation, hope or faith). All clients came to the sessions with strong expectations, either as a result of familiarity with academic discourse (Alice's client), business rhetoric of the value of coaching (Drew's client) or because they had been encouraged to take part with an

experienced coach as part of the research process (setting expectations). A second set of common factors relate to therapist qualities (e.g. cultivates hope/enhances expectancies; warmth/positive regard; empathic understanding; socially sanctioned healer and acceptance). Many of the comments made by clients appeared to suggest that these factors could be considered to be impacting on the coaching engagement (e.g. coach empathy, warmth and acceptance in theme 3; unreserved respect for the coach in theme 10). A third area of non-specific factors identified by Grencavage and Norcross (1990) are change processes: simply having the opportunity for catharsis/ventilation; acquisition and practice of new behaviours; provision of rationale. The importance to the client of being able to unload issues or talk about issues which had hitherto been private, were prominent in the accounts of the clients (theme 8). The provision of a rationale did not feature in the clients' accounts although the clients did accept the approaches adopted by the coaches. This suggests that they accepted the approaches taken.

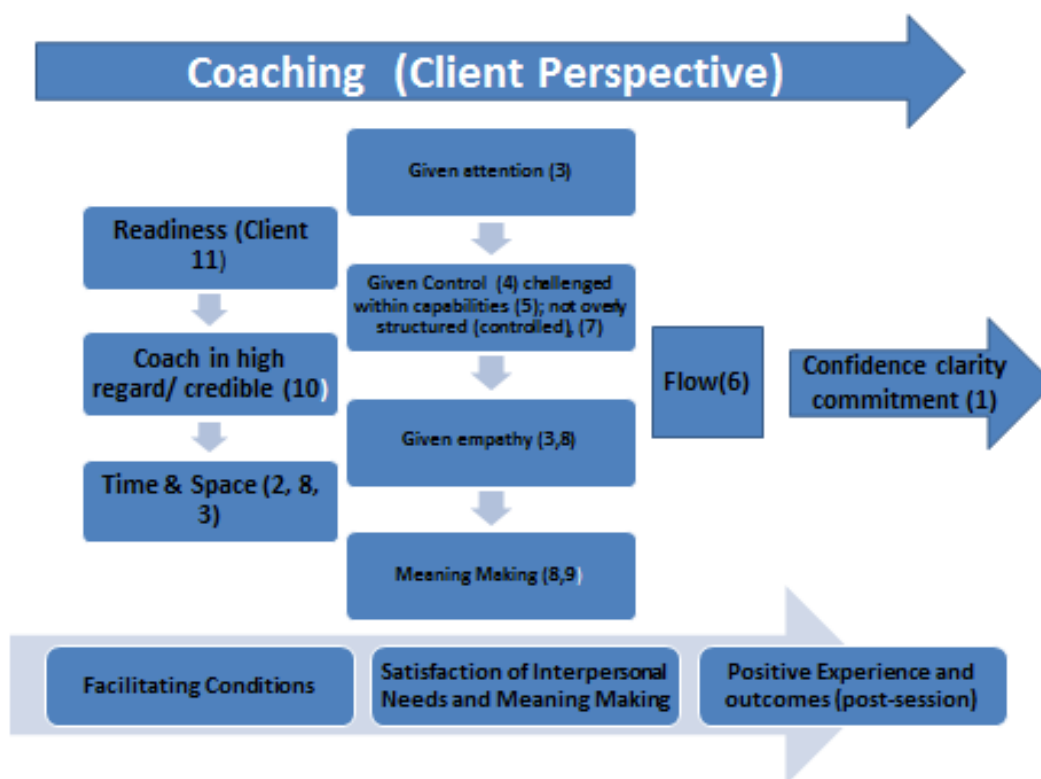
The accounts of the clients did therefore suggest they had experienced their sessions as if they were subject to the same common factors that have been identified in process research in psychotherapy. Given that the clients all reported very positive outcomes in the Inquiry, there was a relationship between common factors and positive outcomes (post session positive reports) for these coaching clients. This finding will also be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

4.16 Summary

Overall, the accounts of the clients indicate that the coaching experience from the client's perspective was a process in which the clients seemed to have benefitted in terms of their psychological well-being (and in particular a sense of having been taken seriously, warmly regarded and given a sense of control). They expressed a sense of resourcefulness and resolve to address personal challenges. The accounts suggest the relevance of the satisfaction of interpersonal needs, meaning-making and common factors in the coaching

process. Based on the themes presented, Figure 4.1 illustrates how these themes can be considered inter-related in order to make sense of the coaching process as identified in the Inquiry. Clients come to coaching in a state of readiness; they hold the coach in high regard and are given the space to reflect both within and outside of sessions. These can be broadly conceptualised as the “Facilitating conditions”. The facilitating conditions can be conceptualised coupled with the in-session behaviours and attitude of the coach to enable the satisfaction of a range of interpersonal needs (being made to feel significant, in control and valued). The client makes meaning of the interpersonal interaction with the coach (including responding to the challenges of the coach) and has the space to construct meaning. This results in a sense of flow (pleasurable sense of gaining of control over issues and time flowing). This, in turn, leads to immediate positive post-session outcomes, including the confidence, clarity and commitment to address issues (resourcefulness).

Figure 4.1: Client Perspective on the Coaching Process



5.0 Chapter 5 The Perspective of The Coach

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the accounts of the coaches. While in the previous chapter what had seemed salient in the accounts of the clients had been the similarity of experiences, what seemed salient in the accounts of the coaches were differences in individual perspectives. However, the individual perspectives did share overarching similarities and are also reported later in the chapter although some prominent similarities will be highlighted as and when of immediate relevance. Moreover, given the constructionist orientation of this research, analysis is always a process of construction. This means that I have made sense of the perspective of the coach as being different in important ways across the accounts; not that there are more differences than similarities in an objective sense. Analysis is always a subjective process of sense-making.

In general, while the clients appeared to focus on their relational engagement with the coach and the affective experience of the session, the coaches tended to focus on what they attended to do, what interpretations they made, what decisions they took and how their decisions informed particular actions. This approach seemed to describe their general orienteering strategies in the session. It seemed that when the clients were given the open invitation to discuss what stood out, they responded to the invitation in a service context; that is as recipients of a service describing what that experience had been like. The coaches constructed the invitation as an opportunity to describe how they provided that service.

This finding might seem unsurprising in that coaches are contracted to provide a service. On the other hand, it seems to suggest that clients readily position themselves as service users and coaches as providers, rather than constructing the coaching process as a collaborative engagement. In effect, the coaches themselves positioned themselves as experts in the intervention, even if this was in the context of trying to encourage collaboration.

The account of each coach will be considered in turn; a descriptor of the overall *orienteeing type* of coaching is suggested when introducing each approach in order to help communicate the overall theme of each coach's account. The accounts will consider the main approaches adopted by the coaches. Towards the end of each section, some space will be dedicated to analysing the actual spoken text from a more discursive perspective (including the use of particular metaphors and linguistic characteristics) as indicated in Chapter 3. This is intended to highlight further the coach's construction of the coaching process. Some detail of how each coach conducted the session from their point of view will be provided. This is considered useful as a point of comparison with other viewpoints in this thesis. It also highlights the rich detail and diversity in coaching process.

5.1 Alison – Phenomenological Experiencing/ Gestalt Coaching

Alison

Particularly salient in the interview with Alison is how she appeared to be drawing on a tradition informed framework (Gestalt psychology) to guide her and the client through the session. Allan and Whybrow (2007) highlight the principles and use of “phenomenology,” “dialogic existentialism” and “holism/field theory” in Gestalt coaching. Related to these principles, they refer to how Gestalt coaches work with experiments often involving polar constructions of self and blocks to awareness.

Alison began her account for example by highlighting how she paid attention to her *immediate phenomenological experience* of the client even before the session had formally started as a guide for identifying the content of the session:

“Even before the session had begun, when we met over a coffee, I was getting a very strong sense of how she is in herself... “She has quite a way of making a very serious point in a

jovial manner which struck me very strongly which then became unsurprisingly one of the themes in the session”

Alison highlighted how she was attending to many detailed and different aspects of the client’s appearance. This focusing of attention also seemed to relate to her Gestalt notions of experiencing the client as the client appeared in the moment of the session:

“A lot of it is visual, even down to the tone of the skin, I watch the muscles around the mouth...the tone of voice, the eye-contact...breathing patterns. I’ve been doing these things for so long I think I do these things without [thinking]...I think there is a big difference between looking and seeing. I am waiting to see what captures my gaze. I’m guided a lot by that...It’s trying to have data as data. I see something which is data and then I make a conclusion. We have a working hypothesis but the key thing is finding out from the other person”

She emphasised how she acknowledged the immediate context/field and drew the client’s attention to this:

“We acknowledged the reality of the situation. So, we acknowledged the set up that we were in.”

She explained how she began to interpret the client’s expressiveness in terms of polar opposites and how she used that information as a basis for experimentation in order to promote awareness:

“What started to emerge were the various different polarities which she was caught between...so we did some exploration...I asked her if she was open to some experimentation...I invited her to inhabit both of those [polarities] as a way of really getting in touch with what they are with a view to seeing what the middle ground was for her.”

Her comments also suggested realist ontology/epistemology; that there were actual positions that the client was caught between that could be discovered.

Before she could conduct the experiment, the coach had to check that the client was willing to experiment; this illustrated how the coach had to attend to specific procedural aspects of the interaction before she could proceed with another action.

“The things I was tracking were ...how compliant is she? ...trying to make sure that I positioned the experiment in such a way that if she really didn’t want to, she would be able to say, ‘that’s not working’.”

Whenever the opportunity arose, she would try to increase the client’s awareness:

“I was inviting her to hold that position for longer and to exaggerate it and say it again and really embody it...see what it feels like...something about integrating the whole self (creating awareness)”

Alison referenced the client’s *“introjects”* (a block to awareness). She also focused on where the client appeared to express the most energy:

“What I’m attending to is where she has more energy in the story”

The coach also highlighted how she *“knew she [the client] would cry”* if she explored particular aspects of the client’s experience and that at one point in the session, she *“knew there was a lot of work to be done”* in relation to exploring some *“past introjects”*. This suggested that the coach could draw on her immediate understanding of the client to decide in light of her experience and knowledge what she could and could not do in the scope of a

single session. It also suggested that the coach was unwilling to be completely open with the client.

All of these principles (the client's energy introjects/ blocks to awareness, attempts to increase awareness) are very common in Gestalt coaching. Alison was moreover explicit about her use of Gestalt principles:

In terms of the Gestalt cycle of experience, it did follow awareness mobilising to action and it did feel that we got to a point where it felt complete."

The coach's account stressed that she could draw on her Gestalt informed phenomenological experiencing of the client to make important judgement calls about how to proceed with the client:

I was also aware of the levels of depth from cognitive to experiential, to somatic to emotional...again it being a first session, a one and only session, I was watching very carefully about what was happening to her emotionally...and guided by her"

These and similar comments suggested that the coach was not applying a particular approach in a mechanistic manner. She emphasised in the above comment and repeatedly in her account how she would always be led by the client and she was always questioning her own expertise:

"I had a very clear idea in my own mind about where I would go with this...and I asked her what her inclination is, so I held onto my expert view which probably wouldn't have been very helpful but invited her to see where she was drawn to and went with where she was going."

She stressed how she was always being respectful of the client's wishes:

"One intervention would be, 'I'm seeing some quite strong emotion...?' Another would be 'What's going on right now?' And that's giving the other person the freedom to either pull themselves together, go with it...."

She also emphasised the relational experience of her engagement with the client:

"I felt very connected with her...I was very focused on her...I felt very moved; that tingling that you get when somebody has looked authentically at themselves...it's a lovely moment"

The engagement with the client had also been experienced somatically which seemed to highlight a strong visceral empathising with the client:

"That bodily sensation, it had quite an 'ouch?' an 'ooh!'"

5.1.1 Analysis of discursive constructions

The coach's account of the session seemed to reveal how the coach positioned herself relative to the client/ coaching process. The coach's repeated use of "we" in the citations provided and generally in her account suggests that she was constructing the coaching process as one of collaboration. She also repeatedly referred to being "led" by the client (and similar) and "inviting" the client, which seems to downplay any possibility of her manipulating or directing the client in the coaching process; these citations also seemed to position the coach as being *of service* to the client, a position of deference. However, paradoxically, the coach asked questions to evaluate how compliant she was, which might be understood to suggest that there was a degree of covert testing of the client (acting on the client) rather than simply responding to the client.

There is a sense in the coach's account that she was constructing her role as simply a medium for observing/ experiencing the client's issues (e.g. which "*emerge*") and her way of being: she merely reflected back observable "*data*" as hypotheses or as possible ways of being (e.g. when working with polarities or simply informing the client of her observations) which the client could then be helped to explore. Her references to not drawing on any expertise in trusting in her own interpretations at the expense of the client's seemed to play down any possible claim to knowing the client better than the client herself, even though the coach amply elaborated on her skill set which suggested that she had a strong sense of her own expertise. She also formulated "hypotheses" which suggested an expert perspective reviewing the client's situation as problematic and providing an expert diagnosis, even if that expertise was open to question. Similarly, even though the coach referred to preferring to work with the client's own sense-making, the coach expressed a sense of the client's past and could contextualise the client's experiencing against existing frames of reference (e.g. *introjects* or *levels of awareness*). This seemed to give her a degree of expert knowledge above that of the client which she was not willing/ thought inappropriate to share. This finding seemed to call into question whether there is or can be equality in power in the coaching relationship if the coach has, or believes she has, a degree of knowledge over and above that of the client, which she feels unable to share.

5.1.2 Summary

In summary, the thematic analysis of Alison's account seems to suggest that the coach responded to the context of the interview by describing how she facilitated the coaching process. This seemed to comprise of attending or noticing particular characteristics of the client which were expressed in the moment of the session in addition to the actual content of the conversation expressed verbally. Her observations led her to make decisions about how to proceed in the session. Alison's account illustrates how a coach can use a guiding framework (for this coach, Gestalt psychology/coaching) in order to help orientate her way through the process. It also suggests that the coaching process can be conceptualised as an orientating activity which is guided by on-going perceptions and decisions made on the basis of those perceptions. An analysis of the discursive constructions of the coach suggested that the coach appeared to attempt to construct the coaching process as a collaborative partnership although she simultaneously conveyed a sense of being an expert, constantly diagnosing and testing the client to inform decisions about how to direct the interaction and what to reveal to the client/ raise in the conversation.

5.2.0 Tristan - thematic Listening



Tristan's account differed to Alison's in his description of his orientation through the facilitation of the session. While Tristan, like Alison appeared to draw on some frames of reference which showed tradition informed influences (he referred explicitly to humanistic and Gestalt influences), what seemed salient in his account was the way he referred to his efforts to identify patterns in the client's narrative and how he then worked with the client to explore those patterns; his orienteering framework was more idiosyncratic than based strictly on the principles of one or more coaching traditions. There was also a sense of the coach

interpreting the client's meaning making, which implied that he was using more interpretive/ social constructionist epistemology:

I'm understanding his meaning making...at times I did bring back in elements that I had remembered from previous sessions: "so how does this fit in? That fit in?" I was trying to join up what I saw as significant in the session...I do like to join up jigsaw bits...

Tristan emphasised his tendency to sense possibilities that emerged in the session in relation to a central theme:

"As he put it, it was very helpful for him to articulate lots of things that he has been thinking about doing. He has a tendency for being a bit more introverted and in so doing, drew out the key theme for him, which has mainly been about...mainly about assertiveness but within that, lots of different strands; doors opened."

Tristan referred to how his sense-making of the client's narrative informed the actions he took in the session:

"I listen intently to the story he is telling and I'm constructing a hypothesis with how is that going to land with what he is trying to achieve. So I'm both listening for the narrative and where there might be blind spots and I'm listening for the language and in particular, I specifically challenge him on direct clean language."

He referred to his sense-making of the client in order to decide if the session was generally useful:

"I guess the biggest navigation for me is: is he getting something out of this? Within what I think needs to happen in a last session? Is he engaged in learning for himself? Is he meeting his needs? Is this useful in the moment for him? Is he engaged? And pretty much

all the way through that: absolutely 'yes!' So, was this on his agenda...and my strong sense was 'Yes.' Was he engaged and learning something? 'Yes!'

When asked how he was making sense of the client, Tristan said that his approach was “*more analytical than intuitive*” which confirmed the impression he was giving (noticing patterns but importantly, analysing them logically as a basis for action). Tristan also demonstrated some other idiosyncratic aspects in his approach. His account emphasised the importance of working with language rather than with changes in the client’s energy or body language:

“I picked up a lot on language use, a lot [humour]; less on body language. I don’t think his body language varied very much. Tone...? I mean he did talk about [pause] sitting forward in the chair at times: ‘Oh I’m excited now’ [pause]”

His account also pointed repeatedly towards a belief in the need to help the client address blocks to awareness, which seemed generally characteristic of a Gestalt approach (and which related to the client’s use of language):

“What I thought was very important, was about how he articulates, what he believes and uses personal language to say, ‘I think this’ as opposed to being more distant: ‘It is like this’.”

Tristan also emphasised how he had generally taken a non-directive approach in the session, other than when he had challenged the client to use the first person in the session. He also explained that the whole session had focused in the main on the client reflecting:

“I offered him the chance to create some time for review....but he wanted the whole session to review...”

It seemed that the coach had adopted a broadly person centred approach in listening to the client and in making occasional reflections. As in the case of Alison, his account also emphasised how he was being led by the client and how he was offering, not his observations but his hypotheses and sense-making of the client's narrative. His requests for the client to use "I" language, the interpretations he made and his more collaborative descriptions (sharing ideas in a "*spirit of mutual endeavour*") did not seem totally aligned with a person centred approach. It seemed generally collaborative with more active suggestions of patterns he sensed. For Tristan, a sense of collaboration seemed to extend to establishing a very strong and authentic relationship:

"We are in relationship and I'm consciously, wanting to be authentic with my client and encourage him to be authentic with me."

Tristan also tended to emphasise the notion of presence and of being of service to the client which has already been alluded to:

"I'm listening, I'm hearing. If I think it and I think it is in service of what he is searching for or working on, I will articulate it and in that way, I bring myself into the room."

He provided a summary of his approach which stressed his general humanistic orientation. The approach also suggested that the process was very useful for him as a reflective exercise:

"I feel like I have been very present with him...it wasn't highly emotional..... this really intrigues me. I see myself as very emotional, potentially very warm and very engaged with my client and what they want and that's about it... Broadly, if I'm doing that, I'm doing a pretty good job. So the key to what I am doing is creating a relationship with someone I can

explore. That's the core of it...In that way, I'm a humanistic coach and within that, I'm using some bits and pieces, especially how people talk to themselves."

However, this review also led him to question whether there was a difference between what he thought he did and what he actually typically does when conducting a session.

He also emphasised that although he had worked as a therapist and still did some psychotherapeutic work, his understanding of coaching was about working at a different level of psychological depth. He considered himself as "*a bit of a not-a-therapist*" when he coached which suggested a construction of the coaching process as quite different to therapy. He did not see any need to explore any possible underlying issues with his present client.

5.2.1 Analysis of discursive constructions

Many of the metaphors Tristan used reinforced a construction of a process of helping the client to identify patterns. The most salient metaphor he used was that of being a master navigator, referring to his own contribution as "*mapping the terrain,*" "*knowing the territory*" and as having "*antennae*". However, he said that his interpretive approach always risked his "*getting ahead of the client*" and risked him "*being a clever coach*". This was something which he tried not to do and said that he thought that he had not done in the session.

For Tristan, there was a particular conflict in the way he tried to reconcile his own potentially self-indulgent satisfaction with the coaching session and the need to ensure that he had been of service to the client. This was most evident in his opening remarks which have been numerated together with the pauses noted, in order to help explain the analysis:

1. *First of all, I enjoyed the session [5 second pause] erm [2 second pause], and I*

2. *think it was useful for [the client] and [laughter and 2 second pause] I suppose there*
3. *was a slightly, no very self- conscious part of me...yeah I think that will be OK, I*
4. *don't think I'll get slaughtered [how observers might review the session] for that*
5. *[2second pause]...and erm [2 second pause]...more to the point I think there were*
6. *bits that were very useful for [the client]...so broadly [2 second pause] I'm happy*
7. *somewhere between happy and very happy how that went.. how that whole*
8. *programme of coaching has gone for [the client] and how much I have been myself*
9. *and been the coach I want to be with him...[5 second pause] and helped him explore*
10. *what he wanted to explore....so...*

This monologue on the part of the coach (he was asked to freely recall the session without any prompts) alternates a sense of self-satisfaction with concern for ensuring that he portrays a sense of himself primarily serving the client's needs (e.g. in line 1 coach refers to his own enjoyment but this satisfaction is quickly countered by reference to the client in line 2). Before the end of line 2, the coach returns to his own satisfaction with the session before returning to the benefits for the client at the end of line 5/ line 6; then towards the end of line 6 he returns to his expressing satisfaction once again with the session, but immediately qualifies that satisfaction in relation to the benefits for the client (end line 7/8). Towards the end of line 8, he returns to self-satisfaction with his own coaching authenticity, before qualifying this comment again at the end of line 9 by referencing the client's benefits. The laughter in line 2 might serve to make light of his expressed self-satisfaction.

The detailed analysis of the opening comments seems to suggest that the coach carefully expresses his own satisfaction with the process, while at the same time ensures that he conveys a sense of coaching being about meeting the client's needs, not his own. The coaching process is therefore constructed as one in which the coach can be satisfied with his own input, but one in which first and foremost the client's needs are seen to be met. .

5.2.2 Summary

Tristan's account seemed to suggest that he adopted an interpretive approach to his facilitation of the coaching session: he was attending to patterns and making judgements as to how to proceed in the session; it was much more explicitly interpretive and much less based on any specific tradition. From an epistemological perspective, Tristan's construction of the coaching session appeared to be less about presenting the client with factual realities, as Alison had done, and more about helping the client construct meaningful narratives. His description suggested a balance between an overall tradition (humanistic orientation) and his own idiosyncratic practices. The notion of being present and being in relationship was particularly emphasised. As in the case of Alison, he used a language that emphasised client service.

5.3 Joanne- Intuitive Listening



In the case of Joanne, her mode of attending to the client was described primarily as “intuition”. Other aspects of her account featured, in particular, a loose structuring of the coaching process, playfulness in her approach and her adopting a phenomenological experiencing of the client. She started her recollection of the session with what appeared to represent a relatively informal process of contracting:

Initially, we just spent a few minutes to just get a bit of contracting going...very loosely; just an understanding of [the client's] understanding of coaching was”

Joanne suggested that the client was of a particular type:

“So that gave me an indication of process...someone who quite liked order and process”

This comment suggested that the coach was being attentive to how she was experiencing the client and how she might need to manage the interaction. She was aware of the interaction being a little stilted at the outset, which she attributed to the client's hesitance:

"I noticed a little tightness...that she hadn't quite got into that dance at the early stage"

This remark suggested that the coach was constructing the coaching process as a dance, as a free flowing process and this seemed to be a benchmark for evaluating the coaching session. Towards the very end of the interview, we returned to this topic in relation to a comment I made about coaching being perhaps a tango. The coach rejected the idea of coaching being a tango, as this would suggest that coaching is not collaboration between two individuals since the man leads in a tango. Joanne then explained how she was sensing not only who the client was, but what was needed to progress the session:

"I had the sense of somebody who was stuck in a decision about the here and now and I had a strong sense of wanting to open that so it became a wider set of thoughts...and what was informing me; there was somebody trying to make a decision about what was the right thing to do without having necessarily thought of the broader picture and context."

This comment seemed to suggest that the coach was describing her experience of the client in both an experiential and an analytical way. She expressed a sense of encountering the client and then categorising the client in a situational context. There was also a degree of sensing expressed in her account; a feeling of needing to "open" things which was not described as a logical process; it was described as a more immediate sensing process.

Joanne recalled how the client presented a couple of issues relating respectively to short and long-term goals. She explained how she and the client agreed to work on the long-term goal first:

“We played around with that a bit [the goal for the session], came to the conclusion between us that it would be quite useful to think about the longer-term goal first, and I was suggesting that, with initially giving Jane the opportunity to accept the suggestion. It was quite a light-holding but it felt like the place to move.”

These comments refer explicitly to playfulness in how she was constructing the coaching process. While the comments suggest a sense of responding in a non-logical way (responding to a feeling about “*the place to move*”), there was also logic in the approach (conclusions were drawn). Her comments in relation to giving the client an “*opportunity*” and her repeated reference to *suggesting* seem to downplay any possibility of directedness on her part. Her comments did refer however to a *holding* of the client and she did seem to imply that there was a suggestion to be accepted by the client. These comments may suggest a degree of directedness on the part of the coach. She also perhaps downplayed the degree of holding by describing it as “light”. It would seem that the coach was projecting a sense of not directing or controlling the process while at the same time indicating that there was some directedness, even if that directedness was agreed.

Joanne’s sensing of the client and her decision-making in the session was described as very immediate:

“I was getting the sense of somebody who was talented, able, professional, resourceful and not necessarily using all of those so I was mindful of using a kind of experiment that would allow her to access all of that for herself and so hence we got up and did a time-line experiment.”

In this statement, the coach projects a sense of responding to a feeling: she finds her and her client getting up; it is not related in her account as a conscious decision even though the coach expresses some deliberations that preceded that act of standing up. The immediacy

of her perceptions and her acting on her perceptions continued to be salient in the account of the coach. Joanne finally made a reference to *'Intuition'* to describe the process she thought she was drawing upon. This comment arose when I asked the coach if she was responding to her physical sense of the client:

"Lots of thinking initially...which is why I wanted to move...We referred to 'feeling' a bit [added emphasis] but not much. I wasn't picking up visceral feeling, [pause] which is quite unusual...and yet there were moments where there was like an intuition about something else going on which is where we moved to different directions or I asked a question... A few times I said, 'I sense'. I was picking up what I was seeing rather than what I was hearing but I didn't refer to the body apart from a couple of times when we started the experiment and I did pick up on a couple of gestures."

These responses to my question suggested that the coach did include a noticing of her own visceral responses to the client, but in this particular situation, the process was more intuitive. These comments are also interesting in how the coach wanted to put to one side the more rational thinking processes. Joanne explained what "intuition" was for her and presented an account that seemed to draw on neurology:

"For me, intuition is a knowing that I am not conscious of formulating so I'm not bringing something into the foreground with deliberateness about it. I'm acting before I've done that...So just before I suggested the experiment, I had a feeling before the thought and I think that intuition is the limbic brain tuning in before the neo-cortex...it's accessing the non-verbal communication...words are not creating the impulse...I was not processing from a language point of view...you engage without words."

She struggled to explain intuition because of its non-linguistic nature:

“Because...the words aren’t there, it is a different level of communication, in a nanosecond, in a moment of exchange. There was a moment of exchange when I had a non-linguistic sense, ‘we need to move’... There was something happening between us, whether it was because we got stuck...I can’t recall any conscious processing. It was a nonverbal connection that led to the agency.”

We discussed whether her approach could lead to mistakes. She laughed, explaining that what was needed was a good supervisor, but that she did not normally get it wrong. She had grown to trust increasingly in her own intuition. Joanne’s account continued to suggest that she was responding very spontaneously to what she observed and to her sensing of the client:

“There was one moment when she referred to herself as being dumb, and I picked her up on that and I wanted to offer her an endorsement because I did not [added emphasis] experience her as dumb and it came back again towards the end..., ‘just because you are not seeing something, it does not mean you are not resourceful’, kind of thing...that really struck me.”

One particularly interesting element of Joanne’s account was when she was talking about the time-line experiment. She indicated that she was unaware of the meaning of a metaphor (“a pot of gold”) that the client used in the time line activity, but did recognise its significance. What counted for the coach in the coaching process was recognising and acknowledging a client experience but not necessarily knowing that experience:

“The light-bulb was going on for her. I didn’t even need to know what she was thinking. There was no need to know what was going on in her mind. Something had happened that was important and I could see that and I could acknowledge it without knowing what it was. I

didn't need to rationalise what was happening for her...to acknowledge through my physical being rather than through words."

The coach's account also related a sense of her being aware of the conflicting tensions experienced by the client, but her capacity to make a decision that would be right for the client:

"I was quite touched that she went with the experiment because I could tell that this would not be in her normal bag...I got a sense of a bit of discomfort but a willingness to play and experiment."

In this comment, the coach also justifies her approach; that is she outlines that the experiment may be uncomfortable, but that any discomfort would be justified through her understanding of the client. Her qualifying the statement, with an expression of empathy (feeling touched) also serves to show compassion and thereby qualifies any action that might be taken that would create discomfort.

The coach also referred on a number of occasions to a sense of joyous connection between her and the client, which suggested that there had been strong rapport/ connection in the engagement:

"There was a moment after a few minutes where she looked at me and we had a bit of an exchange that was quite joyful really. It was like "Ah Ha!" That sort of moment and we had a few of those..."

She had experienced this emotional connection with the client on another occasion in the session:

“There was another connection where she suddenly had an insight about negotiating...it was a lovely smile and “Ah ha”...There was a lovely broad smile and we just stood there in that moment”

5.3.1 Analysis of discursive constructions

Joanna’s language (already highlighted in parts alongside the thematic analysis provided above and to avoid repetition of statements) share many similarities with Alison and Tristan: notions of relationship, being present and being of service; also about the process of enjoyment for the coach, which was present in her account and in the other accounts. This seemed to suggest a broadly humanistic orientation of togetherness. Like the other coaches, there was also a sense of an expertise in being able to make sense of the client’s challenges. Her reference to dance suggested the coaching conversation as a dynamic interactive process. She also used the metaphor of *play and spontaneity* in the coaching session, which suggested a construction of the coaching process as something in a sense, quite natural and free-flowing, rather than a more formal and structured intervention.

5.3.2 Summary

In summary, Joanne described her facilitation of the session in terms of a process of intuition; of sensing what was needed in the moment and responding to that sensing. Her way of sense-making and decision-making in the session was quite different to that of Alison and separately, Tristan. When considered alongside Alison and Tristan’s accounts, it seemed that coaches describe how they make sense and negotiate the interaction very differently, even though there are some broader similarities in terms of how they construct the process (being of service, being able to make sense of the client and of the client’s situation/ being an expert *of sorts*, taking part in a process of collaboration and being of service).

5.4.0 Marjorie - Empathic Listening



Marjorie's account of the session seemed to stress a sense of her responding to her immediate experience of the client. Her approach seemed to emphasise a *felt sense* about the client and how this sensing served as a way of informing her approach to the session.

Marjorie's began her account by stressing the importance of rapport. She described how "*rapport had been built very naturally*" en route to the session (a logistical issue relating to coordination of participants). This seemed to highlight the importance of the relationship for the coach.

When the session started formally, the first thing she noticed was that the client was not responding in a way that was typical of her usual clients:

"The kind of questions I normally ask that get people thinking differently, just didn't work and he was in my experience completely trapped in a very negative story...there was just no hope."

She referred to how most of her typical clients are successful managers who understand coaching as an important developmental process. This client had very little preconception of coaching. He was a professional executive (chartered status) but more used to working as a specialist in small organizations in which there was not a formal career structure. He had also had no real personal developmental experiences in his working history. The coach's account of the client seemed to suggest that clients taking part in coaching typically have a common understanding of the coaching process and of self-development and that this enables them to participate in the process. This was a particularly interesting part of the

discussion, as it suggested that coaching is socially constructed through business discourse and that clients who are not socialized into a discourse of development might not take part in the process in a way in which coaches might expect.

As the session progressed she felt she was struggling to break the client's negative cycle of thinking. She said that she felt a need to communicate more directly with the client:

“So I remember I just put my pen and paper down and just really tried to focus on him and really get a connection”

Connection in this sense (as she elaborated) meant trying to get the client to understand his own negative thinking – he was simply not responding to the suggestions of the coach. She felt a need to interrupt his telling and retelling of the same negative worldview and resorted to giving advice and suggestions. In the moment of the session, and knowing that this was a one-off session without any follow-up, she could see no other way of getting through to the client:

“I had to end up telling him: what I am seeing is that you are just very negative, you are thinking this way; you are very negative. You are not thinking of choices...I explained what I meant by choices”

This was an interesting comment as it suggested that when faced with a client who was not willing to play the game. This suggested that coaching participants normally take part in a cultural practise with defined rules and behaviours. It was in a sense, a language game (Wittgenstein, 2010). The coach had to break out of her normal role as coach and had decided to approach the social context differently. It seemed that for a moment, coaching as a social practice in which there are agreed roles and activities shared by informed participants had not been established.

Marjorie said that she experienced the client as “*bemused*” but did adapt to his way of being:

“I eventually got more in tune with his kind of style”

The above comments suggest that the coach was constructing the coaching process as one in which the coach has to work from the client’s frame of reference. She also explained how she thought that structuring the session would have been inappropriate for the client, as this would have impacted on her sense of the client wanting a free-flowing conversation. She said that she noticed that this client was looking at her intensely, which meant that she had to make sure she mirrored intense eye-contact. All of these behaviours were explained as her way of adapting to the client. The coach therefore seemed to be constructing the process as one of relating to the client which allowed trust and understanding.

The coach was very clear in her explanation that rapport building was something which emerged naturally as a consequence of focusing on the client rather than any conscious attempt to build rapport as a technique:

“I think it is natural [establishing a connection] but you are aware that if you really listen and you really empathize that the connection’s going to build”

Similarly, she was clear in her account that although she was seeking to help the client, she was not pursuing any internal agenda. For example, at one point in the interview, picking up on a comment made by the coach, I asked her about what I had heard in relation to her “*looking for a breakthrough.*” She corrected me: “*No, I said we got a breakthrough.*” These comments on not consciously building a connection or about trying to achieve a breakthrough seem to suggest a particular understanding of the process of conducting a coaching session for this coach. This was about avoiding *wanting* for the client or *wanting* in the process. It was about being there to help the client but not to steer the agenda through her own intentions.

The coach's account of the session tended to express an affective sensing of what the client was expressing:

"His belief system seemed so set and unexamined. I don't think he had ever examined his own point of view...I don't think it had ever been examined, I had that sense of it being unexamined."

The repetition of the word "un/examined" seemed to suggest that the coach was repeating to herself a word which seemed to summarise her experiencing of the client. She seemed to be repeating the word to gain a sense of what the experience was like of being with the client. She was conveying a sense of trying to internalise the worldview of the client.

She further expressed her depth of sensing of the client's worldview when referring to the moment in the session when she put her notepad down to concentrate on the client:

"I was feeling that physically... a sort of trappedness, circularity and 'on' and 'onness'...it's got to stop...physical, intellectual, a mixture [the feeling]...and it's quite interesting because putting that down [the pad] noisily, it was like, 'right we're going to get out of this, I can't take this anymore...it's got to shift...' [picking up on the client's sense of circularity/ entrapment]"

These comments portray a sense of the coach describing how the coaching session was about responding at a multi-dimensional experiential level to the client. Her account also suggested that her understanding of the situation followed her actions; that is she sensed the meaning of putting the pad down only after she had done so. Her account therefore suggested that coaching was about responding in the moment to the client by sensing her overall experiencing of the client.

The coach emphasised the way she was focusing intently on what the client actually said; that is how he was explaining his own way of being. This led to the coach being very surprised when later in the interview; the client appeared to present himself differently:

“He had told me that he was meek and mild and that completely [emphasis] confused me because he had told me earlier that he wore his heart on his sleeve”

This comment suggested that the coach had been listening intently to the client and trying to understand his way of being as he, the client was describing himself. She did not convey a sense of trying to read between the lines of what the client said. She seemed to have adopted a non-judgemental approach towards the client based on what he had actually been saying.

At one point in the discussion, I asked the coach if she had considered role playing at any stage. She said that this was a good suggestion but that it had simply not occurred to her:

“It may have been the extent to which he was unreflective. I may just have thought that that might not have worked.”

This comment could simply reflect the challenge of recalling what happened in the session. On the other hand, it also seemed to suggest that the coach was not actively planning or thinking about frameworks or techniques in the session. This view would be consistent with a more spontaneous orientation to the client which was conveyed in her account generally.

The coach recalled a personal experience of the client in that he reminded her of someone personally close:

“He was cheeky...he that sort of cheeky working class sort of humour, nice smile...he reminded me of....[a relative]”

This comment also supported the coach's description of her relating at a personal experiential level to the client.

The coach expressed in her account a sense of the coaching engagement as being about working with client thinking as a system. The following comment related to a moment of insight that the coach said the client had experienced:

“He processed it. In his own mind he came up with his own insight...You saw the energy of it. He was excited. Something's changed in his system of thought [noticing and sharing a sense of energy/ excitement]”

This comment also suggested that the coach was being particularly attentive to the changes in the client's energy further underpinning how in her account she emphasised her overall experiencing of the client. Later, she made a reference to coaching as a complex system. She referred to how the client had gained a new insight and how this new insight might just be enough to mobilise a change in the client's worldview:

“Something which will give him a steer, to start to make a shift...that might just be enough”

This comment is consistent with chaos theory/ complexity theory whereby a small change can be understood to have a large impact (e.g. in relation to attractor points). (Manson, 2001). The coach seemed to have making sense of behaviour in line with current discourses of complexity.

She expressed a sense of emotional attachment to the client; that is a sense of genuinely hoping and wanting a positive outcome for the client: *“I really hope that he gets that job”* and later, *“What I really loved is when he did finally break through and he got this new angle.”*

This comment also suggests that the coach was making sense of changes in the client in terms of gaining new insights. Earlier in the interview, she had also referred to how the client had gained a new “insight”. These expressions suggest underpinning realist ontology for the coach (that there are new ways of seeing the reality of situations) as had her previous comments about having to tell the client (communicate the reality of the situation).

One strategy the coach seemed to use to help the client perceive the reality of his situation was to encourage him to consider the perspective of others. She referred to a concern that adopting the perspective of others, however, could have provoked a negative reaction in the client:

“That felt courageous [discussing the perspective of others] because I felt he could easily then just think I was a baddie as well and on the baddies’ side”

This suggested that coaching was about taking some risks in the session. The coach also referenced possible developmental issues relating to experiences of bullying which she said were quite beyond the scope of exploration in a short one-off session. She did say however that she might have explored these issues had she had more time even in a single session. This suggested some confidence about working with what might be understood as *deeper issues* while also her view that this would have been inappropriate in the context of a short session. The coach also said that a lot of her coaching work did involve engagements which might be considered therapeutic. Unlike Tristan, her view of coaching and more psychotherapeutic interventions seemed less clear cut.

5.4.1 Analysis of discursive constructions

Marjorie did not use the same language of “we,” “being present with” or of being “of service” to the client. Her reporting of the session was about “he” and then “I”. This suggested a different construction of the coaching process as an intervention of two individuals with different roles and perspectives; perhaps of two individuals working together rather than necessarily one of togetherness. This could have been because the interaction was less of a process of collaboration than in other sessions in which the client and coach respond to a discourse of collaboration. Another possibility is that the coach simply avoided adopting the rhetoric of collaborative language and other terms that many coaches use (e.g. *being authentic, being of service, etc.*).

5.4.2 Summary

Marjorie’s account, like that of Joanne had a strong sense of spontaneity (but not playfulness). The coach conveyed a strong sense of listening as a defining characteristic of her approach and of responding to an overall felt sense of experiencing of the client. By not describing her own feelings other than in relation to the client, she projected a sense of dedication to the client.

5.5.0 Alice - Pragmatic/Behavioural Orientation



Alice’s account of her session related her attentiveness to the specifics of the goals that the client presented. She emphasised how she drew on her knowledge of interpersonal behaviour and business to help the client identify a range of practical solutions. The description seemed very pragmatic. Alice began her account highlighting her wish to help

the client achieve the two goals the client stated she would like to achieve in the session, whilst recognising that this would be ambitious:

“I was conscious that I wanted to get both of those issues in the hour”

She referred to how she made sure that the first ‘issue’ had been covered before moving onto the second (within the available time-frame) which suggested a task-focused, business-like approach:

“I said, ‘before we move onto the next issue, let’s just make sure we are finished with that subject’.”

This comment suggested that she was trying to check the client’s satisfaction before moving on. She said that she wondered if the time pressure had caused some talking over each another but then said that this was not a concern for her as her model of coaching allowed a more free flowing interactional conversation. As the interview progressed, Alice’s account seemed to further substantiate her task focused approach. For example, whereas, Tristan and Alison had both talked about being present with the client and Marjorie had talked about her immediate experiencing of the client, Alice talked about the client “*from a technical perspective*” which suggested that she was constructing the process (and the client) in a more task focused way:

“From a technical perspective, she was very open, very trusting...the trust just seemed to come.”

In this comment, the coach seemed to be valuing, at least in part, the instrumentality of trust (rather than trust as something valued in its own right). Alice reflected on what encouraged clients to open up to her so easily (reflecting for example on the possible influence of her professional background). She also wondered if there was something about her presence that seemed to provide the conditions for clients to be willing to be open with her. This had

been a topic discussed in supervision. This comment also seemed to suggest a similarity with how the clients had generally expressed their sense of physicality in the coaching session.

Alice continued in her account to consider other elements she considered “*technical*” including “*contracting*” and how given more time, she would have spent more time on this. She also said that she would have spent more time encouraging the client to reflect, had the session been longer. These comments suggested that she was particularly attentive to what might be understood as the best practice elements of a coaching session, which she would have liked to have done more of.

During the interview, Alice spent a lot of time outlining how she had developed her own model of coaching based on client feedback. This had led her to develop a model of coaching which very much put at the forefront the offering of advice and suggestions, which she thought were particularly justified in executive coaching and which can be done in a way that is nevertheless consistent with the principles of client autonomy:

“The most contentious one is giving suggestions and advice...you are encouraging people to make their own choices but you are offering advice and suggestions...Leaders particularly; they are often very isolated; they have probably have had some issues they have struggled with for a very long time. It’s about using your experience to helping them learn... So you are not instructing them...you are offering suggestions but then discussing them...They are coming up with ideas; you are coming up with ideas and they will take away one or two of those that really resonate with them...It’s almost like having a bag of ideas both from the coach and the client and then at the end we say ‘OK’...I said ‘What really resonates for you....and she was very clear what resonated for her.”

Alice also referred to how she can be quite challenging in sessions:

“I said to her in the session, ‘you are resisting that bit’ and I mentioned it again so I allow the client to sum up what they took away from it and I then make some observations at the end as well and sometimes that’s a bit challenging for people because they might be resisting something.”

This led to a discussion about whether she had *observed* or *interpreted* what she had observed. Alice concluded that *“she was making observations,”* but my questioning in this area seemed to provoke some reflection on whether she was playing back observations or making interpretations. This was a significant moment in the Inquiry, as it juxtaposed what became a central epistemological theme within this thesis.

Alice continued her resume of the session referring to how she helps clients find their *“authentic place”*:

“...a place where they feel able to operate from...in accordance with their values, their beliefs, how they see themselves developing as a human being, so much more than seeing it as a task...sometimes people get influenced by others...”

This statement illustrated Alice’s sense of coaching as being much more than a task focused or technical activity, in spite of her seemingly pragmatic approach. It also prompted me to ask Alice if she herself had found her *“authentic place”* in way she coached and as illustrated in the session we were discussing. Alice said that the way she practised coaching was more about her *“professional development as a coach”* rather than being her *“authentic place,”* although this thought also provoked considerable reflection on whether there was something about authenticity in her approach:

“What’s interesting in your question is whether I feel more comfortable with that...It’s an interesting question for me...it probably is...probably being more active in that coaching relationship...”

The interview discussion switched more to what the coach had noticed in the session. She reflected on how much she *“enjoyed coaching”*. She then referred to how the client also *“seemed to be enjoying it”*. She also referred to how she would *“bring herself to the session.”* A similar metaphor had been used in the accounts of Alison, Tristan and Joanne suggesting some commonality about the expressed significance of the coach’s persona/presence in the coaching session. There was a sense of the coaches drawing on similar discourses.

Towards the end of the interview, Alice returned to the importance of being focused on the task:

“To be quite honest, the way that I coach, I’m so focused on the issues they’ve brought that I bring everything back to that.”

She contrasted her approach with that of other coaches which focused much more on underlying psychological themes:

“I’m tending not to suss them out...I know some coaches get into almost like psychoanalysing people...whereas I’m not like that...they come and say ‘look these are the two things I want to discuss’ and everything is focused on that...I’m not sitting there saying ‘you’re this type of person’. I’m not even thinking that in my head.”

5.5.1 Analysis of discursive constructions

As in the case of Alison there was a construction of the coaching process as an observational process. There was a sense of defiance in the way in which the coach challenged traditional coaching discourse about giving advice, as there was defiance in the way the coach seemed to suggest that all coaching should not be developmental; it was a call for dealing with the issues presented by the client. Broader notions of authenticity, resistance, balancing challenge and support, coaching as an intervention for the lonely senior executive were prevalent in the account.

5.5.2 Summary

In summary, Alice's account seemed to stress what might be described as a *no-nonsense approach* to coaching; one in which the coach described the way she negotiated the engagement as a striving to perceive the key issues as expressed from the client's perspective without any underlying reading of the client at a deeper level. She then responded to those issues as she understood them in a very rational way and by drawing on her superior knowledge and expertise of interpersonal and business processes.

5.6.0 Drew – Coaching as a Process of Reviewing



Throughout Drew's account there was a strong emphasis on her listening to the progress and plans of the client with respect to current business projects. She talked about how she would challenge any plans that did not seem watertight and would help the client identify new action areas (rather than specific behaviours). The emphasis in her account was

therefore on acting as a trusted confidante or critical friend for the client and as a motivating influence.

Drew began her account of the session by explaining how the session started, with the client reviewing homework from the previous session:

“She started off by saying that the action points she had agreed to do at the last one [session]; there were four and because of various events, haven’t all been actioned which is fine, I understand that.”

The judgement the coach gave about the client’s failure to achieve goals and the general reporting back process on the part of the client seemed to imply that the coach had assumed, in effect a quasi-monitoring role with respect to the client’s goals; a kind of performance check-point.

Drew went on to explain that the client had wanted to talk about her business projects in the session and Drew, respecting the client’s agenda, had given space for the client to do that with some occasional questioning and challenging:

“She spent a lot of the time really, talking about other projects that have come up, so, as far as I am concerned, you know, she dictates what the agenda of the session is, so if that’s what she wants to talk about and that’s what she was freely talking about at the time and I kind of was questioning and challenging as and when appropriate.”

Drew argued that the client had seemed very comfortable with the review process, felt that it was providing an opportunity for the client to clarify actions the client needed to take and had therefore run with that approach:

“The session very was very much almost her processing the logic: ‘and this is what’s happened and that’s why I’ve done that and I need to get those things in place’...she seems to be very comfortable with that style.”

The coach’s account suggested that she had been orienting her sense of direction in the session according to where the client expressed the most energy (i.e. what the client wanted to talk about):

“I don’t go in with an agenda, it’s very much about “What do you want to talk about?” and so that hopefully is given away in the first 5 minutes of the session...the thing that the coachee will kind of start to discuss and pick on and spend a lot of time on, is in my head; what she wants to talk about.”

Drew explained how she gave space in the session for the client to talk freely about one topic (“a big project she’s got involved in”) for the “first half an hour” until it reached a natural point of closure (“It seemed to dry into a natural, ‘Are you comfortable with that?’ ‘Yes I am”). At that point, Drew said that she prompted the client to introduce a new topic to review: ‘Ok what else have you got on?’ These comments seemed to reinforce the role she seemed to have assumed in acting as a check-point. Drew went on to explain how the client then introduced another project and separately gave an update on one of the earlier action points from a previous session, which the coach said took up most of the remaining half an hour of the session:

“So the last half hour was split into two: one was about another project that was coming up and the other one came out of the actions. She talked about the second project...and she seemed quite comfortable; she knew where she was going with that. We talked about some of the issues that might arise, how that would integrate well into her previous actions because a lot of it came out of the 360 report that she had and a lot of that was about

increasing the network that she had and raising her profile...so the second project was allowing her to do that.”

This comment seemed to capture the emphasis in the coaching session from the coach's perspective on the review of projects. Drew continued in her account of the session emphasising the importance of her being a critical friend. She conveyed this by assuming the identity of the client:

“I just want to be able to articulate it and know that in my head it sounds watertight and someone objective and neutral can throw challenge at it.”

She stressed the isolation of senior people, of their not having someone in whom they could confide and how her own experience of senior management gave her credibility with clients as they could sense that she understood their issues:

“I'm able to talk to them at their level because they can't tap the next person on the shoulder. The next person is a report of theirs... I guess I draw on the experience that I've got that says I understand the situation you are in...That's where the credibility comes in.”

Drew said that at the client's executive position in the organization, acting as a sounding board is what would be most useful for her:

“Certainly at [the client's] level...it's not necessarily looking at new roads...I'm not going to be able to show her new roads as she has more experience than I have. It might be just that objective challenge that says, 'Have you thought about this and why do you see it like that?'"

She was also aware that commentators could review her session and question what had been achieved. Yet from Drew's perspective, she thought that the session would be useful:

“But I guess critically someone could look on and say, ‘What constructively did you do?’ But as far as Jane is concerned, I would like to think that constructively, she has processed it, she’s rationalised it, because she wouldn’t come back – she’s far too busy to waste time.”

Drew also emphasised what she constructed as the therapeutic value of the process:

“A lot of the coaching for [the client] has been about processing it in her head, putting the rationale behind it and almost that therapeutic off-load”

She acknowledged that her approach wasn’t about probing in depth. Assuming the voice of an external observer criticising her approach, she said:

“Well, she [Drew] didn’t ask many questions, did she? And she didn’t interrogate this? But I feel that that almost goes against the grain of the conversation and therefore XXX [the client] is more reluctant to freely talk about what she wants to talk about”

As in Marjorie’s account, the coach seemed very reluctant to break the flow of the interaction by introducing too many coaching techniques:

“If I keep bringing her back to issues all the time, then this conversation is hard work. So I think there is an empathy there that says, ‘I can challenge you but I feel that there is something else you want to talk about...I feel that you want to talk about this issue’.

Drew was suggesting in her account, an attempt to tune into what she felt was important for the client, rather than to probe and challenge whenever an opportunity presented itself. In this sense, the coach conveyed a sense of what was important for the client:

“If I kept coming back to ‘what do you mean by you feel?’...If I picked up on that, she’d think ‘What’s the point of this conversation?’ I want to talk about the project. You’re picking me up on particular words...I was there as a sort of motivational bounce-point.”

She emphasised the importance of being able to relate to the client at the client’s level (referring to her own management experience):

“The challenge for me is to understand where that person is coming from, empathise with them and talk to them on a similar level...“I wanted to demonstrate that I was very engaged in what she was saying and genuinely interested”

She also explained that it was important for her to challenge and make suggestions but only as a last resort:

My role is to enable you [as if addressing the client] to articulate and process to that point and if you can’t reveal what the direction is, to throw a few perspectives, maybe a suggestion but not necessarily straight away and just to say, ‘Are you there?’ ‘Where do you need to go from there? ...A lot of that session was allowing the client to have the air time.”

5.6.1 Analysis of discursive constructions

Drew provided some very colourful descriptions of how she coached. As in the case of Joanne, she struggled to articulate in words what might be constructed as the essence of coaching:

“I don’t know that I can explain it...it loses value when you start to articulate it”

She further elaborated:

“There isn’t one element and say, ‘put that in’ but it’s almost a synergy...when you have that magic occurs...you don’t necessarily see it happening in front of you...you can’t say it’s about to happen. It’s when you come out the other side and you say, ‘gosh where did that question come from’. It’s one of those starlit moments...this person understands me...that coach has really understood me that is part of the magic that contributes to your credibility. It’s one of those things that is hard to articulate. I can’t say at 10 past 4 this happened...it’s almost that wholeness...It’s almost like saying if you took a chunk of metal, a bit of water, some petroleum, water, a spark, on their own they are just a heap of junk but if you manufacture them in the right way, it will come out as a formula 1 car.”

In this account of the session, the coach was constructing the process as one of synergy but also of deeply understanding another person. Her references to something magical and difficult to articulate suggests a construction of the coaching process as something intangible yet also very powerful, transcendental.

5.6.2 Summary

Overall, what characterised Drew’s account was the distinctiveness of her stance as a critical friend for a lonely executive; someone who gave the client plenty of space to reflect on her current projects, to check that the client was comfortable with her plans and to challenge her occasionally. She had made a judgement call that the review process was what the client wanted and had respected and worked with that perception. The focus was on the client’s current projects and plans and the client’s progress in achieving them. Her approach was based on trying to grasp an understanding of the client and to convey that understanding to the client.

5.7 Comparisons across Accounts

Although this chapter has tended to highlight what seemed primarily to be differences in accounts, there were some notable similarities, some of which have already been highlighted, such a language of collaboration, of service and of expertise. All coaches focused on how they facilitated the interaction; they all shared ways of making sense/ perceiving what was happening for the client and made decisions about how to proceed in the session. Most focused on the importance of understanding (what might be constructed as) the *inner world* of the client and of the importance of being present and together in relationship. There was an element of the transcendental in their accounts, of experiencing something ephemeral at moments in the session or of this capacity to experience these moments. Many described a range of core practices that would readily appear in accounts of *good coaching practice*, including for example, listening skills, skills of observation, showing empathy, etc. There was the sense of coaching as a natural, freely flowing process in which spontaneity played an important role.

There was an ambivalence expressed with respect to the resourcefulness of the client. On the one hand, all coaches expressed a sense of optimism for their clients; that they were all capable of making progress in addressing their challenges. This suggested an underlying perceived resourcefulness in their clients, perhaps the expression of a humanistic discourse of client resourcefulness. On the other hand, a number of coaches constructed their clients as quite fragile. For example, one coach expressed a perception that the client would cry if she had she opened particular issues. Another coach was reluctant to address particular issues within the given time constraints. These decisions not to address developmental issues may appear to be ethically appropriate but still serve to show a particular ambivalence in relation to client resourcefulness. It also suggested a medical discourse of deeply held emotional issues which need to be managed carefully and in a way that could not be disclosed for some client engagements.

Perhaps most salient in their accounts were the different types of perceptual processing they described and the way they acted on these perceptions. Some of these processes were not only well developed but very individualistic, such as Tristan's interest in language and Drew's focus on the client's reporting of actions. A similar comment has been made by de Haan (2008) in relation to how coaches tend to have their own individual models of coaching. However, overall, there seemed to be a similarity in terms of how the coaches described their accounts. This similarity relates to perceptual and decision-making processes described by (Jung, 1971). In reflecting on Joanne's account for example, there seemed to be a strong conceptual similarity between her account of intuition and Jung's description of the intuitive function:

"It is the function that mediates perceptions in an unconscious way...The peculiarity of intuition is that it is neither sense perception, nor feeling, nor intellectual inference... In intuition a content presents itself whole and complete, without our being able to explain or discover how this content came into existence. Intuition is a kind of instinctive apprehension...it is an irrational function of perception". (p.481).

Similarly, Marjorie's description of her affective response to the client seemed very similar to Jung's description of a *feeling* function:

"...feeling is a kind of judgment, differing from intellectual judgment in that its aim is not to establish conceptual relations but to set up a subjective criterion of acceptance or rejection" (p.434).

Tristan's expressed pattern of sense making seemed to relate to Jung's description of the thinking process:

The term “thinking” should...be confined to the linking up of ideas by means of a concept, in other words, to an act of judgment, no matter whether it is intentional or not.”

Finally, the way Alice described her responding more at face value to what the client was saying seemed to correspond with Jung’s description of how some people respond in a more direct manner:

He relies almost exclusively on his sense impressions, and his whole psychology is oriented by instinct and sensation. He is therefore entirely dependent on external stimuli (146).”

The psychology of Jung has been much popularised through the use of MBTI® as a developmental tool. There are also references within the literature on MBTI® in relation to the use of the tool (e.g. Carr et al., 2008; Stothart, 2011; Passmore et al., 2010). The findings in this research investigation provide an illustration of preferences in use.

5.8 Similarities with the Accounts of the Clients

Overall, the accounts of the coaches were highly congruent with the accounts of the clients. The coaches generally described their offering of affirmations to their clients, of giving them control in the session and of listening intently to them. They spoke of the reflective space they provided. They spoke of gently challenging their clients. They conveyed the sense of connection and relationship, including a sense of physicality that the clients had expressed. All the clients experienced these interventions in the way the coaches described them. The coaches’ narratives also seemed to suggest that they had demonstrated a particular professionalism. This supports the clients’ perceptions of them as experts.

5.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the accounts of the coaches in rich descriptive detail in order to provide the reader with the coaches' perspectives on their coaching sessions. Their accounts tended to suggest that the coaches had very personalised frameworks for conducting coaching sessions. Their accounts also suggested that the coaches were making a range of in-the-moment decisions based on their preferences for attending to particular types of information and then acting on those perceptions. In the next Chapter, I will consider the perspective of the coach-observers.

Key Points

- *Whereas the accounts of the clients had focused on their experience of being with the coach, the accounts of the coaches had focused more on what they had noticed and interpreted, the decisions they had made and the basis upon which those decisions had been made (Table XX summarises the findings across the sessions broadly conceptualised as "Coach's interactive style")*
- *The coaches had a positive impression of the session just as the clients had done*
- *Something appeared to be happening between coach and client – a sense of meaning was emerging between coach and client*

Table 5.1: Coach’s Interactive Style

COACH	WHAT WAS ATTENDED TO	WHAT INTERPRETATIONS WERE MADE	WHAT ACTION FOLLOWED AND WITH WHAT INTENTIONS	OVERALL DESCRIPTION OF STYLE
Alison	The coach was attending primarily to the client’s way of being and descriptions of self that would be relevant within a Gestalt framework (e.g. what was salient in the moment; how the client constructed different versions of herself; “introjects”); she was attending to the emotional strength of the client and to the context of the situation	The coach interpreted what was observed primarily in terms of Gestalt frames of reference (notably the client’s extreme views of self and the need to find a middle ground) although could also draw on other frameworks (e.g. psychodynamic); she made assessments on what would and would not be appropriate/ ethical in the context of the session	The coach carried out interventions typically practised in a Gestalt coaching session (e.g. empty chair technique; encouraging the clients to work with bi-polar constructs); she reflected back observed client behaviours in order to help the client increase awareness; she provided feedback intended to endorse a more positive view of self; she focused on what she noticed moment by moment in the interaction	The style could be considered primarily as “tradition informed” in that what was attended to, interpreted and the actions that were taken appeared to be largely based on the tenets and practices of an established school of practice (Gestalt tradition) <i>Dominant style: Phenomenological Experiencing; Gestalt Coaching (Tradition Informed)</i>
Tristan	The coach was listening for patterns and themes in what the client said and how the client used language	The coach was making interpretations in relation to how the client’s use of language was blocking awareness of self; he was also trying to understand the inter-relationships between different facets of the client’s experience and drawing hypotheses about what the client needed to become aware of in order to progress in the achievement of his goals; the coach was	The coach selectively reflected back those patterns to help the client make sense of his experiences, accomplishments and interactions. The coach would encourage the client to work with more personal language (using “I” rather than “We”) in order to gain a closer sense of his own authority. The coach gave the client ample	The approach of the coach seemed broadly person centred (very reflective and giving ample space for the client to speak with questions and reflections) although with some directedness (language exercises and interpretations) and some Gestalt influences (blocks to awareness); the process appeared very analytical in the sense that the coach was trying to

		consciously reflecting over what he had heard and seen from the client over the whole coaching programme as a basis for the conclusions he was drawing	space to reflect. Simply being present with the client was part of the coach's intervention.	identify patterns and draw hypotheses. Dominant style: Thematic listening (Analytical)
Joanne	The coach was listening in particular to her 'inner sense' of what was experienced as important within the coaching process and meaningful and important for the client.	The coach did not know exactly what was meaningful and important for the client just that something was; the coach was not trying to be analytical	The coach was responded instinctively to her intuitions and immediate reactions (for example by introducing changes in the session; offering endorsements of the positive qualities she perceived in the client). The coach trusted in her intuitions. A sense of being present with the client was particularly important.	The Coach's appeared to be responding primarily to her sense of intuition and spontaneous awareness of the client while drawing on established and well-practised techniques and an awareness of the role of intersubjectivity Dominant style: Intuitive Listening
Marjorie	The coach was listening intently to the client's "narrative" in order to gain a sense of the person's way of being, significant experiences, his values, his personal challenges, his aspirations; her focus was on what the client wanted to relate to her She was also noticing how the client was responding to	The coach gained a <i>felt-sense</i> (Gendlin, 1992) of what was important to the client and what was needed at different moments in the session to best help the client in the context of what was <i>felt</i> as being important for him	The coach initially drew on established interventions that had generally worked in her experience (encouraging the client to reflect with lots of listening initially); she became more assertive and gave advice	The coach emphasised her 'sense' of the client and her 'sense' of the process Dominant style: Empathic listening

	the process and had some awareness of her own sense of self in interaction with the client			
Alice	The coach was listening primarily to understand the specific and practical challenges encountered by the client	She interpreted the challenges in terms of her own specialist knowledge of interpersonal interactions and business life	Drawing on her specialist knowledge she made suggestions in order to help the client identify options for action that could be taken to enable the client to achieve desired goals.	The coach interpreted the challenges of the client as practical issues that could be resolved through the identification of specific behaviours. Dominant style: Pragmatic/ Behavioural
Drew	The coach was listening to the key action areas identified in previous sessions the client had been working on and on the progress that the client appeared to have made in negotiating them working on key action areas that had been highlighted as important in previous coaching sessions; also to the client's future plans.	The coach would draw on her own experience and understanding of business life and management in order to evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of the client's actions and plans.	The coach would challenge the client on any shortcomings she perceived in the client's actions and plans. She offered herself as a sounding board and a motivating influence. She would help the client to develop homework	The overall approach of the client was person centred in terms of encouraging the client to talk and reflect but it was often very conversational and informal; she expressed her opinions Dominant style: Coaching as a process of reviewing (Critical Friend)

6.0 Chapter 6 Observer Perspective

The purpose of asking coaches to review a coaching session was to identify what could be learned about the coaching process from the “outside”. Within this overarching aim, there were two objectives. Firstly, I wanted to understand at a descriptive level what the coaches focused on and what they actually reported observing. This would be interesting in order to be able to compare the accounts of the clients and coaches who, while focusing on different aspects of the coaching session (broadly experience and orientation respectively), generally seemed to share a similar account of the coaching process. Secondly, I wanted to understand what the accounts of the coaching sessions would reveal about how the observers (referred to from this point typically as *coach-observers*) constructed the coaching process; that is what views and beliefs would be expressed which might indicate something about the shape and characteristics of the coaching process shared by a particular community of coaches taking part in the research.

The accounts of the coach-observers tended to focus on what the coach did rather than what happened in the session. This seemed to suggest that the coach-observers made sense of the coaching process as an intervention led by the coach rather than a process in which both client and coach work together collaboratively. However, overall, the most salient finding in the Inquiry was that the coach-observers were very critical of how the coaches facilitated the sessions. For three reviews, there were barely any identifiable positive comments, although when one of these sessions was reviewed by a second group of observers, the comments were generally favourable. For two sessions, there was a mix of views, with some coach-observers expressing a more positive view, although they were in the minority. For one session, the review was overall more balanced, with some very positive comments as well as some negative comments. The expressed views of the coach-observers seemed to reflect normative judgements in relation to how coaching should be practised (i.e. what a coach should/ should not do).

I will provide a summary of the discussions for each of the six observed sessions, providing selective comments from the observers in order to illustrate shared and contrasting viewpoints within each session. As in the case of the report on the experiences of the coaches, I will consider each session in turn. This is because the context of each session seemed particularly relevant in understanding the comments made by the observers (this had seemed less important when analysing and reporting the accounts of the clients given the overarching similarity of experiences reported). For example, for one session, all the observers had been trained as coaches in NLP (neuro-linguistic programming); for another group of coaches, they practised from a transactional analytic (TA) framework. Also, the comments were always in relation to something the coach-observers had noticed about the particular characteristics of the session that they were commenting on.

Each session will also be reported differently. This process is intended to capture something of the unique characteristics of each session review. However, it is also intended to highlight different aspects of the analysis that are always possible when analysing coaching sessions; it would not be possible to cover all possible aspects of all sessions in the scope of the thesis.

The first session reported is intended to show how a coach adopting a humanistic approach can appear to demonstrate what might be constructed as a skilful intervention as promoted in a range of populist coaching texts. However, in spite of demonstrating valued skills, the review still shows how the coach was considered to demonstrate many shortcomings in how he facilitated the session. The main criticisms seemed to relate to how the observers (from an NLP tradition) valued a different style of coaching. Their criticisms were also based on how they interpreted what the coach did.

The second session was the most positively reviewed of all the sessions and illustrates the possibility of a more balanced evaluation of a coach's interventions. Whereas in the first

observer group reported, all coaches were from the same tradition, the coaches in this group came from a broader range of traditions and genres of coaching and this diversity appeared to be illustrated in the range of differing viewpoints expressed in the review. The review of the second session also considers two specific moments that seemed particularly significant in the session and which are highlighted.

The review of the third session is similar to that of the second session in that it presents the perspective of a wide range of coaches. However, in spite of some positive comments, mainly catalysed by one sympathetic observer, the evaluation of the session is more negative. The review of this session is included primarily to identify further a range of issues that seem to be commonly raised by coaches. It also illustrates the general pattern of being critical of the coach when the coach appears to demonstrate behaviours that run counter to assumptions of what constitutes appropriate coaching.

The fourth session is interesting in that unlike any other session reviewed, it presents two separate reviews of the same session: a review of a group of coaches from a cognitive behavioural coaching (CBC) tradition and separately, a review of a group of coaches operating from a transactional analytic (TA) framework. The comments were in some ways very different, yet at the same time, similar in some ways suggesting normative views across coaching traditions. However, the review of the CBC coaches was generally much more positive. This seemed particularly interesting and contrasted with the very negative review by the TA coaches.

The fifth session was also reviewed the most negatively and considers the coaching of a full-time internal coach unlike the other sessions which involved external coaches. The coach was perceived to present a very different way of facilitating a coaching session in relation to what the observers expected or valued. It was considered to represent a form of coaching that would appear to fail to meet normative expectations. The report of this session includes

comments from the client in order to illustrate how the client could express being satisfied with the process, in spite of the very negative evaluation of the coach. More than any other session, it suggested that what might be important in coaching from the client's perspective is her capacity to establish a way of working with the coach that was inter-subjectively meaningful.

The last session adopts the same approach as the reporting of the previous session but systematically compares and contrasts the perspectives of coach, client and observers (only passing references to the perspectives of coach and client are given when reporting the other sessions). This session, more than any other, seemed to illustrate different views across all three perspectives (coach, client and observer) whereas the fifth session served primarily to contrast the perspective of the client in contrast to that of the observers.

The reporting of sessions does not represent the chronological order in which the sessions were analysed, but highlights a structured way of presenting the findings, focusing mainly on observer accounts (first 4 sessions reported) followed by the observer account in contrast to that of the client (1 session) and then finally, to that of the client and coach (1 session). One of the challenges in writing up the research, which had as its aim a very exploratory inquiry, was that the focus of interest in the session would be likely to reveal different aspects of the process. The diverse range of approaches that I have adopted, are intended to express this diversity.

In all session reviews, the comments made by the observers seemed at one level of analysis to be overt declarations of what was considered right or wrong in terms of how the coach facilitated the session. In other cases, the way the observer expressed particular viewpoints merits more detailed analysis as their comments seemed to suggest unspoken assumptions about how coaching should be practised. As in the case of the previous chapter, the reviews of the sessions will therefore take into consideration not only what was said, but how what

was said in order to understand more expansively the way coach-observers appeared to construct the coaching process.

6.1. Session 1 - Tristan



Tristan

The observers highlighted the broad skill set of the coach, including his showing empathy and the way he was perceived to ask many open questions:

“There was quite a strong skill set though around the coach...a lot of positives around the basic techniques ...talk-time and pauses...very encouraging language...lots of ‘Hmms’ and ‘Hmm HMM’/...[humour] that was moving the person on, and quite some good questioning; challenging some statements...”

The humour expressed in his repeated use of the coach’s continuers (“hmms”, Ten Have, 1999) serves to disparage a very reflective approach.

The observers emphasised the “*maturity*” and closeness of the relationship between coach and client. They noted how the coach had given the client plenty of reflective space. One observer noted with an expression of some surprise, that this process had appeared to have been welcomed by the client, as well as to have encouraged him to find his own solutions:

“I think he turned that coachee inside-out! But in a way, the coachee was quite comfortable with that ...and in a way, the coach left the responsibility with the coachee.”

The observer’s repeated reference to “*in a way*” after a humorous reference to the reflective process (“*turned...inside-out*”) seems to allow the observer to give a compliment, but within the context of the normative group view that did not appear to value depth of reflection.

The observers were very critical of many aspects of the coach's approach. They said that the coach could have exploited the strength of relationship by challenging the client more:

“So I might have just said to him, ‘I’ve just observed you look quite uncomfortable with that; what’s really going on for you?’...Because they had such a fantastic rapport, I think you could have done that.”

This view suggests that what the coach-observers valued in the relationship was its instrumentality in allowing more in-depth exploration of issues. They also said that the coach could have role-modelled alternative ways of being, in order to resource the client beyond the session. One observer highlighted the importance she gave to developing “quick thinking” in leadership (application of current business ideas as a core objective of leadership coaching):

“The coach could have changed his pace so that the individual would change his pace and copy him in that....there was an opportunity to capture that thinking on your feet and copy some pace as well...how resourceful it would make you feel in other situations and take it to that fast thinking because as a leader, that’s what we have got to become better at.”

This comment highlights a range of assumptions about how change happens in coaching (role modelling/pacing which in turn allows transference of behaviours outside of the session). They expressed a lot of humour around the closeness of the coaching relationship which appeared “*uncanny*.” One observer even commented how they looked the same and another, with a touch of humour that they appeared to be a mirror image:

“It was almost like both sides of the mirror. They were almost like in perfect harmony.”

The humour they expressed seemed to devalue the relevance of being in a close relationship in coaching. The observers stated that the session needed “*bursts of energy*” which could have been achieved by the coach introducing a range of exercises (e.g. time-

lines or whiteboard activities) and in expressing more enthusiasm and excitement in his reflections. As a last session, the observers expected the coach to be much more “*up-beat*” and “*celebratory*”:

“There wasn’t a lot of this strong praising going on... ‘So that sounds really good, well done!’ because that affirms it here... ‘well actually I got it right’”

These comments illustrate the value the observers gave to action, including verbal behaviours that would raise energy levels over and above a quieter, reflective approach. The observers emphasised a lack of techniques and practical activities which they said were not used in the session and which they thought could have been helpful. These included activities already reported (above) but with one coach giving particular emphasis to the need to “*anchor*”:

“The coachee actually moved forward and his whole body language changed. To me that was an ideal opportunity to..., because you are finishing with that client, to do an anchor, to capture that feeling to capture that resourcefulness so that when he goes into similar situations he can draw on that energy”

They also thought that the client would have benefitted by being more physically active and by writing learning points down:

“If people move, they learn, and if they’re writing down they internalise”

There was a perception that the coach had introduced his own agenda too much into the session; for example by stating what he wanted to observe in the client. For example, one observer noticed the client to say “*That’s what I want to tease out of you*” which caused some concern: “*Well, whose agenda is this?*” This comment seemed to represent a more

general view of what coaches should not do in sessions rather than a comment more related to NLP approaches.

The observers were also concerned that the coach appeared to be using his own, rather than the client's language to summarise the issues and in doing so gave a different meaning to the client's words. One observer recounted an example of when the coach had said,

“What I'm thinking it's about influencing and hierarchical' No, he [the coachee] said, 'it's about a set of skills and relationship building'... You work with the client's words, not with your own set. That's where the agenda started to creep in again because you're projecting your words on them.”

These comments might reflect normative values in coaching about working to the client's agenda, but also the importance of the increasing interest in coaching (e.g. Clutterbuck, 2010; Dunbar, 2005; McMahon and Archer, 2010) in using clean language (Grove, 1998).

The coach-observers referred at one point in the session, to the expression of humour on the part of the coach in relation to waiting until the client arrived at the same insight as he had. They thought that this appeared self-congratulatory. This was an interesting comment given that the coach had wanted to play down any impression of being self-congratulatory (reported in the previous chapter). The coach had also said that he felt his analysis of client patterns could sometimes risk his getting ahead of the client (although he did not think he had got ahead of the client in the recorded session). It seemed therefore, that outside observers could readily identify behaviour patterns (being self-congratulatory and getting ahead of the client) of which the coach was somewhat aware, but did not fully appreciate.

The observers also wanted to see the coach being much more responsive generally to energy changes in the client:

“The coach didn’t shift with it. The client said, ‘I feel really energised’ and the coach just went, ‘Ohhhhh’. It’s like ‘Come on!’ ‘Find out more about why he’s energised and link it to future events!’”

The need for a more direct approach seems to be represented metaphorically in the way the observer spoke as if he were addressing him directly (“*Come on.....!*”).

The observers argued that the coach failed “*to pick up on the client’s kinaesthetic preferences...the coach was still coming back with auditory processing: “that sounds like, that sounds like...”*”

These comments relate specifically to the relevance of using a sensory modality in NLP which is in keeping with the client’s preference. On the other hand, the observers said very little about the coach and client’s working with language. In contrast, the importance of using language in a particular way in the session had been particularly prominent in the coach’s account. It had also featured in the client’s account. The working of language in the session had seemed unclear to the observers. When prompted to discuss the possible significance of language, the conversation quickly drifted into a different discussion topic. This seems to suggest that for the NLP observers, the importance language use held for the coach had held very little meaning for them and was simply *not observed*. In this sense, unless something is meaningful in relation to our own constructions, it will not be readily observable. Stepping into the language of psychology, there seemed to be a degree of selective attention (Treisman, 1964) which has a long history in psychology.

The observers stated that the coach needed to explore issues in more depth (the exclamatory constructions serving to emphasise the observer’s exasperation):

“There were some great one-liners where I thought, ‘now ask the next question’ and he didn’t do it! And I’m thinking, ‘Oh God! You know!’”

The observers said that the coach was not perceived to explore emotions enough, particularly with respect to the client’s energy which was so visible to the observers:

“He [the coach] expresses his own, ‘Oh, I feel very excited by this’ but he doesn’t really go into the emotional element and the thinking behind it [of the client].”

This expression also seems to be a criticism of the coach being self-indulgent. This was a concern that the coach expressed in his interview, suggesting again that the coach-observers could identify characteristic behaviour patterns known to the coach. Towards the end of the session, the coach was heard to refer to an issue that he did not want to open up in the session. This led to a lot of expressed concern on the part of one of the observers:

The coach said, ‘I’m weary of opening anything up too big.’ So what is left? There’s obviously something big lurking that hasn’t been addressed.. So for me, the purist, you haven’t really opened up maybe the true underlying bit...“Probe, dig down, find out, ask questions, open it up!”

The short series of commands in succession, encouraging the coach to be more responsive/active (“*probe, dig down... open it up!*”), is expressed in an imagined context of the coach-observer talking directly to the coach. This seemed to position the coach-observer as an expert telling someone less masterful, what they needed to do. The animated imagined dialogue and directness of the advice given seemed to suggest that the coach-observer had a strong belief in what he was recommending. The reference to something “big, lurking...” seems to suggest an understanding of the coaching process as insight oriented; of a realist construction of a truth to be discovered if the coach had pursued

the investigation more vigorously. This comment seemed to reinforce the realist epistemology expressed by many of the coaches facilitating the sessions.

Another observer thought that the coach had not picked up on what had seemed to have been a particularly significant concern for the client. This added emphasis to the group's view of the need for more depth of inquiry in the session:

“For me, the key piece [not explored by the coach] was when he talked about not getting the job ...He said, ‘I don’t know if I want to be like that.’ But I can relate to that. It’s almost saying, ‘if you have to make a shift upwards you have to make a shift in the way, and that’s something to do with your values and belief systems. So for me, that was quite something fundamental [but not explored].”

The comments made by the observers are interesting in that they suggest that in spite of the coach adopting a very reflective approach, the coach was still observed to fail to explore sufficiently. The group's view seemed to be that depth of exploration did not require a slow reflective approach; the route to discovery was more immediate and simply required the coach to highlight aspects of the client's progress. For example, the coach-observers thought that the coach could have helped the client to have gained a broader perspective of the progress he had made by the coach pointing out *“the impacts of his changes on others”*. They thought the coach could have given the client *“more praise for his achievements”* which would have also helped the client to appreciate the changes he had made. Another observer expressed concern that the coach did not pick up on the client's reference to wanting to *“shift my assertiveness to confidence”*. Yet another coach-observer was concerned that the coach did not explore what the coach had meant by a particular account or had not considered the client's resources (in the space of only sixteen words, two separate criticisms are made; this seemed to suggest the coach-observers wanted to convey an impression of a perception of many shortcomings):

“There was nothing to, ‘let’s examine what you mean by that? What resources have you got...?’”

In summarising the session, one of the observers said that the client had made some progress but that it had taken a long time: *“It took an hour and a half to get there but we had an energy shift.”* Another referred to *“watching paint dry”*.

Overall, there was little expressed disagreement within the group about what was voiced. This may have been due to patterns of seniority and perceived expertise within the group with the quieter members being less verbally active. It might also have been due to the composition of the group who all shared the same organizational context and coaching tradition.

Towards the end of the review, one observer summarised some of the difficulties the observers had had in not understanding what progress had been made between coach and client over the whole programme of coaching. This suggested that he considered it unfair to make an evaluation on a single session in isolation of this understanding. He also expressed an impression that the coach and client had made some good progress together in the session:

“For me, it was just kind of holding a mirror up...’just reflect on everything’ and for me, it’s probably unfair to judge the coach as that being his style. I suspect he was doing all of that deliberately”.

This comment seemed to express an attempt on the part of one coach-observer to go beyond his immediate pre-conceptions of how coaches might always coach. In doing so, he was able to ascribe some positive elements to what he had observed. His comments also highlighted a perception of needing to consider a session in the context of a whole programme of coaching.

6.1.1 Session Summary

A key characteristic of the observers' account was the overall negative evaluation of the session which seemed to contrast with the accounts of the clients and coaches. In spite of the coach showing some skills which the coach-observers acknowledged as useful, the overriding impression they had of the session was that it could have been much more impactful for the client.

The coach-observers expressed a perception of a need for more active engagement on the part of the coach; be this in terms of asking follow up questions, expressing praise, carrying out activities, exploring more and being generally more physically and emotionally responsive. Prominent in their criticism was the importance of techniques which were perceived to be lacking. Techniques were considered ways of resourcing the client beyond the session (e.g. writing things down so that these thoughts would stay with him; moving about physically so that the learning would be embodied; changing pace so that the client would be encouraged to think quicker inside and outside of the session; 'anchoring' so that he would take the energy from the session outside of the session). They expressed assumptions that much of the learning from these activities would take place below the level of consciousness, including validation of the client's progress. There was a realist construction of the coaching process as insight-oriented (something real to discover).

The coach-observers seemed to value activity rather than the relationship. Intimacy was not valued. The closeness of the relationship was referred to jokingly as "*counselling-coaching*" and always with an undercurrent of gentle if respectful humour. Resourcing the client for the future seemed to be more important for the observers than giving space for the client simply to reflect. From the perspective of the coach-observers, resourcing the client would follow from impactful exercises and an energetic and responsive coach (including modelling the coach) rather than a prolonged process of client reflection.

The coach-observers did seem able to identify behavioural aspects of the intervention of which the coach had some awareness and which coach-observers and coach considered as development needs. This suggested that coach-observers could potentially provide a useful input in helping the coach reflect on the frequency of non-desired behaviours. A careful consideration of some of the comments suggested that in spite of expressing very strong values, some of the observers were able to show some flexibility in making sense of the coach's approach, although this was a minority position.

6.1.2 Issues Raised by the Coach-Observers

The comments of the observers raise interesting questions with respect to the following aspects of the coaching process:

- How active a coach might be
- The importance of affirmation/ open expressions of praise
- The importance of techniques and their relevance in learning; the role of techniques in resourcing the client beyond the session
- How easy it might be for a coach to get ahead of a client or to introduce his own agenda; also the importance of working with the client's language
- What an appropriate level of challenge and support should be in any given context
- The extent to which a coach needs to explore issues in detail or in depth
- What the purpose and depth of the relationship should be (a means for creating trust or an opportunity to exploit that trust and how intimate the relationship might be)
- The pace of a coaching session
- How client change generally takes place (e.g. through techniques, through affirmation and/or through changes in underlying representational and unconscious systems)
- The importance of energy shifts in the client during the session

- The importance of developing clients in line with broader leadership discourses (e.g. quicker thinking).

Each of these questions highlights what seems to be considered important in the coaching process. They can be understood from a realist perspective; for example by asking what works in coaching and/or what the coach should do in order to help the client achieve beneficial outcomes. On the other hand, they can also be understood as discourses about coaching; that is ideas, ideologies, debates and/or normative beliefs about how coaching should be and is practised. In this latter sense, the suggestion is that coaches are exposed to competing ideas (through participation in training courses and wider experiences in society) which compete for what coaches will assume is important in practising coaching. Whether specific types of intervention work is not a relevant question; what is relevant is that coaches are exposed to these broader coaching discourses which can be identified through encouraging the kinds of debate described in this chapter. Collectively, these competing discourses contribute to competing constructions of the coaching process which may or may not “work” but are of interest in relation to how they shape and define what is commonly understood to represent coaching as a social practice.

Rather than attempting to consider each of the questions posed in the above summary which express only some views for some coaches about a single session, I will proceed to analyse each of the remaining sessions in the same way as for Tristan’s session. In this way, the intention is to identify a comprehensive list of issues raised across all sessions and then to review the issues in a more comprehensive manner in Chapter 8.

6.2.0 Session 2 - Marjorie



The dominant perspective within the observer group was that the coach had shown excellent listening skills and had given the client a great deal of reassurance:

“As a confidence boost, that is what the coach spotted he needed and that’s what she gave him, because that whole affirmation through very attentive listening, lots of comments about what he had done that was good...lots of positive things...through that style, that would have injected some more energy that would have enabled him to do more things for himself.”

One observer highlighted the coach’s skills in focusing on what was important for the client:

“She did pick up what was really important about his work...she was brilliant at just identifying what was significant to him.”

Another observer thought that her listening skills belied her experience:

“For the first half of the session she was doing a lot of listening and... that showed the experience of her.....in my early days, I would have been very following the process ‘now let’s move on.’”

One coach-observer highlighted what seemed to him to be an underpinning psychological and symbolic dimension to the conversation that had seemed very productive:

“She almost, quietly and hardly you can tell it...gave him permission to say, ‘you don’t have to carry on doing this if you don’t want to.’”

Another coach-observer emphasised what had seemed to be an underpinning affirmation that the coach was giving to the client:

“If it’s a healing process...he is dumping all his stuff ...and she is not criticising him...she is listening to him...it is an acceptance of somebody that they slowly take on board slowly and unconsciously.”

The above comments also highlight what might be considered to be a therapeutic dimension of coaching and a construction of coaching based on unconscious processes. There is also

a suggestion that with experience, formal structuring of the session may diminish in importance.

Some observers criticised the coach for a lack of active intervention however early in the session. They thought that she had spent too long listening to the client and that the session needed pace and direction. A number of comments were made, for example, about a lack of contracting; a need for clearer and earlier goal setting; signposting that the session was coming to an end; asking the client to summarise learning and asking him to provide feedback on the session. One observer summarised this perception as “*Structure was a massive missing.*” There was then a strong general perception in the group that coaching sessions need ample formal structuring.

The comments in relation to structuring were interesting in terms of how they seemed to demonstrate that for some coaches, structuring of the session was considered to be extremely important. The coach had actually said that she had taken the decision not to introduce much structure because she felt that this particular client needed space to be reflective; this comment was also highlighted by one of the observers (above). The discussion of structure therefore raises the question of whether and how much it is always important to introduce formal structure into coaching sessions.

One coach-observer expressed concern that there did not seem to be any explanation on the part of the coach about her approach or checking-in with the client about whether her style and approach were suitable for the client:

“There wasn’t any of that process checking going on in the session...it was like ‘this is what I am and this is what I give and you sit there and take it...I’m not going to check this out with you...there’s something almost ethical about that.’”

There was also a related discussion in the group about contracting which was considered absent in the session. One coach-observer related this to a need “*not to leave any guessing*

to the client". Another coach-observer emphasised the importance of meeting the needs of the client; the question to ask is *"How would you like me to be as a coach?"*

Some of the coach-observers said that the coach had not probed or challenged sufficiently:

"There are so many things he said... 'I'm stupid, I'm thick I'm immature'... none of that was picked up and I thought that was really important because that was very self-deprecating and this required quite a big in-depth discussion."

One coach-observer said that the Coach's lack of challenge and gentle approach simply related to her style which *"some clients prefer"*. The same observer emphasised the context of the session and tried to put herself into the mindset of the coach:

"...because I think she decided very early on in this session: 'this is a one-off session... I'm not going to be too challenging'... her purpose was... to be positive... gentle, empathetic and that did have a positive effect."

The coach-observer making this particular comment, while seemingly supportive of the need for challenge in coaching, did seem to acknowledge that different approaches to dominant views of coaching could be productive. This comment seemed to be similar to one made by one of the NLP coaches observing Tristan's session who suggested that some coaches could be more accepting of alternative approaches.

Another observer was concerned that the coach was responding to the client's seeking of *"direction and approval."* She wanted the coach to encourage the client to stay with the self-reflective process:

"Every time she asked him about himself, he came up against a wall... he did not know how to talk about himself... he could talk about his thoughts quite well but not his feelings. He would ...very quickly he would go off again and talk about his business or somebody else in the business. I never thought she was quick enough to pull him back to 'OK, let's focus on you again'... I asked you about how you felt or thought about that."

The same observer highlighted perceived shortcomings in the client's behaviour which seemed to be present in his criticism of others and suggested that he needed to be held more responsible/ accountable:

"...he could have been encouraged to have taken some responsibility for managing those relationships rather than just applying the stereotypes."

While the above comments related to the client, the implication was that the coach needed to get the client to focus or to encourage the client to be responsible. This comment (as most comments) seemed to be directed at the interventions of the coach and placed accountability for the process on the coach rather than on the dyad or on the part of the client.

One coach-observer expressed concern that the coach had not helped the client to identify specific actions he could take with him beyond the session:

"My biggest criticism is that we ended up with the things he had to do ...and that might be the next session ...but how do you do that? The challenge is to change our behaviour from our patterns... 'Oh this is shit... that one doesn't like me'...he is really brilliant at that".

One coach-observer said that the coach had taken a long time to set goals with the client while another did not think that it had taken long – both coach-observers however acknowledged that goal setting began at around 20 minutes into the session so their perceptions of how much time should be spent before goals might be formulated seemed to vary. One possible difference in perspective could be that very popular models of coaching such as GROW (Whitmore, 2004) encourage coaches to set early goals.

The comments in relation to the structure of the session were not unanimous. While all coach-observers agreed that the session lacked formal process elements (e.g. contracting, summarising learning, signalling the passage of time), one observer stated that there was a 'process structure' in terms of *"goals, understanding a bit more about the client, bringing the*

issues, looking for solutions” although this perception itself was in turn challenged. The debate served to suggest that structure in coaching could be conceptualised differently; first in terms of clear points of punctuation (signposting direction, points in time, agreeing goals and process, etc.) and a less overt approach which seemed to follow a path of exploration, solution seeking, etc.

There were also conflicting views about what an appropriate “*action*” consisted of. For example, whether an action needed a clear behavioural step or simply a commitment to think differently about something and evidenced through writing something down:

“I did not actually feel have a worry that there was not an action plan...he probably would once he had made a commitment to it... writing it down showed his process of committing to it”.

One coach-observer said that she thought a woman coach was right for the client, which was met with a general silence; this seemed to suggest that gender issues were acknowledged in coaching but that the coach-observers had some difficulty in talking about them.

Separately, another coach-observer, while acknowledging the degree of affirmation given to the client, wondered whether this might enrich the coaching experience but not actually promote change. This comment suggested a non-therapeutic perspective of coaching.

There was a discussion in the group as to whether there would have been some benefit in exploring past influences on the formation of values. One coach-observer was very clear that little would have been gained by exploring the past of the client:

“That’s his embedded thinking. You can’t unravel on embedded thinking. All you can do is create new thinking. So giving more attention to what has happened historically is just going to do more and more of it.”

She framed this statement in positive psychology and also suggested some of the coach's questions might have been framed on focusing on experiences of positive work relations to help change mindset.

Another observer (NLP background) suggested that more progress might have been achieved in the session by *"focusing on the positives"*. Many of the comments he made were also in line with NLP discourse in terms of action, changing patterns of perceiving and acting in the world/ behavioural change.

Other coach-observers seemed to be more focused than others on the importance of challenge and in ensuring that there was a respect for formal elements of the coaching process (mentioned earlier in this section).

There was also a discussion around advice giving. The coach had been observed to give advice in the session and this caused mixed views within the group:

"... [It] isn't the coach's role to tell you what to do but to tease that out of you."

Another observer stated that *"She had crossed the boundary"* in giving advice. This was widely supported. One observer in the group said that careful questions should still be the best way forward. However another coach deliberated on whether suggestions were actually more directive than questions and tentatively questioned whether there might be room for some advice giving in coaching:

"Are we getting a little too wedded to this concept that we never give advice?"

The discussion on advice giving was pertinent when considered in relation to making suggestions as it highlighted the possibility of making sense of coaching as a social influence process rather than perhaps as an opportunity to help the client freely explore what might be helpful for a client.

6.2.1 Key Moments

Prompted by the researcher and towards the end of the review, the observers were asked to identify key moments in the session. One coach-observer referred to a moment when the coach put down her notepad which represented “*a change in energy.*” For the coach-observer, this moment seemed to represent a change in momentum allowing progress to be made: “... [*The coach began*] *talking a lot more from that point and moved things on*”. She remembered the coach “*leaning forward*” and how this moment had seemed like “*liberation*”.

Earlier in the discussion, this key moment had been identified by another coach-observer:

“That was, ‘now let’s get down to the business of making some decisions: What is the way forward? Where are you going to go?’”

However, this led to some discussion about what that moment had been about with some coach-observers suggesting that it was a frustrated attempt on the part of the coach to close the session and that she might have been able to close the session more effectively had she been aware of more techniques.

Another coach expressed a key moment as being a moment of client insight; however, he could not recall the exact incident:

“The Ah Ha bit was when he actually realised that it did not have to carry on being as it was and he could make changes if he wanted to.”

Two moments that did seem to have particular importance in the coach’s account did relate to the moment when she put her pad down and separately, when the client looked out of the window and appeared to make a connection between the branches of a tree and some people being good. It was interesting that some coach-observers noticed something significant about these events including one coach-observer’s sense of “*liberation*” that seemed to echo the somatic experience of the coach’s sense of “*stuckness*” and a felt need to make a change. It seemed that one coach-observer at least, was able to share something

of the visceral experience of the coach. A more general point made was that some coach-observers can identify moments which the coach and the client can also construct as significant (the client had also spoken of the impact of the branch metaphor). However, the discussion also showed that some coach-observers could make a very different interpretation of the same event (attempt at closure rather a moment of liberation).

A few other more or less disparate additional comments were made by the coach-observers, relating for example to how one coach-observer wondered if the client was writing things down to please the coach which he considered to be a common occurrence in coaching (client trying to please the coach). One coach-observer wondered how well the coach might have been able to attend to the client if she had been taking notes. Another coach-observer said that it was disrespectful not to ask permission to take notes. This coach-observer highlighted the importance of permission seeking in building a relationship.

Another coach-observer remarked that her perception of a gentle, listening style of the coach had seemed “authentic”. There was also some discussion in the session which centred on what could practicably be done in a recorded one-off coaching session and also around the need to assess how different approaches work with different clients. The overall view was that the coach had conducted an effective session within these constraints; however overall, there were still a range of some more critical comments, as already outlined in this section.

6.2.2.Session Summary

Whereas in the review of Tristan’s session common criticisms were expressed within the group, the expressed viewpoints within the group varied much more. However as in the case of the previous review, many negative comments were still made which contrasted with the accounts of the sessions made by client and coach alike. However, some of the comments were also supportive of the accounts of coach and client, including how the client had been given the opportunity to off-load concerns and had enjoyed the experience of being given affirmations and listened to intently.

The diversity in the comments of the coaches seemed to relate to the influence of different coaching traditions and individual practices within the coach-observer group. The context of the session seemed to provide a forum for reflecting on what coaching is and how it should be practised. I have raised a broad range of topics which were discussed as well as differences in opinions in order to try to convey to the reader the breadth and depth of issues raised. As in the case of Tristan's session, I now summarise the key issues raised and will summarise them at the end of this chapter and discuss them in more depth in chapter 8 and once a more comprehensive list of issues has been identified.

6.2.3 Issues Raised by the Coach-Observers

The comments of the coach-observers raise interesting questions with respect to the following aspects of the coaching process:

- Whether and how much advice giving a coach should give
- The extent to which the coach should balance listening and challenge
- Whether providing a coaching structure relates to specific structuring techniques, including directing the client back to their agenda or a general management of the coaching process (problem, core issues, options, etc.)
- Whether structure should be sacrificed to allow space for reflection
- The ethical importance of being transparent in approach, in adapting to the expectations of the client, in asking permission to take notes and whether it is disrespectful to take notes generally
- Whether the coach should explore the client's history or focus on the future (the latter more aligned with those coach-observers from an NLP, solutions focused and/or positive psychology background)
- Coach-client compatibility including gender and whether this is an important issue
- Which client behaviours express commitment (e.g. clearly stated action plans or writing down key learning points/ intentions)

- The influence of change mechanisms operating below the level of consciousness (being acknowledged; the symbolic significance of writing things down; being given permission to change) compared to the importance of discussing issues in the here and now (e.g. surfacing past issues, agreeing clear action plans)
- Whether the pace of the session should be quick (e.g. some coach-observers more than others wanted the coach in the session to move to challenge more quickly; to increase the pace of the session and to close the session quicker)
- What can be achieved in the space of a single session (some coaches more than others seeming to favour the possibility of addressing issues such as the past history of the client; exploring and challenging much more and achieving clearer actions – e.g. SMART criteria)
- Whether affirmations reinforce existing ways of being (e.g. being childlike)
- The importance of *Ah Ha* moments

6.3.0 Session 3: Alice's Session



Alice's session received a mixed review, with some coaches focusing more on what seemed to be the achievements of the session and others focusing more on the perceived shortcomings in the coach's approach. Criticisms of Alice's session included: using too many continuers; e.g. "hms" (Ten Have, 1999); not listening to the client in the opening stages and being quite cold initially; missing opportunities, including not staying with issues to allow them to be explored sufficiently (although picked up on most of these later); appearing insincere (early in the session); being too directing/forceful; talking over the client/trying to dominate the client; leading the client; picking out what was important for her rather than for the client and not allowing the client to find her own solutions; imposing her own model of coaching on the client at the contracting stage; lecturing the client; adopting an expert position; being focused on herself (at the beginning); not clarifying the goals for the session at the outset or checking progress; not clarifying the direction of the session; losing direction; not giving enough reflective space; not exploring the breadth and depth of issues sufficiently; missing opportunities generally; trying to do too much in a session rather than focusing on one issue well; not challenging self-criticisms made by the client; not picking up on the client's resistance; not picking up on the client's non-verbal expressions; and reinforcing patterns of submissiveness.

Overall, comments about the coach being very directive and instructional were particularly salient:

"I was very struck by the directiveness which would concur with what everyone else has said. I felt very uncomfortable with that."

"I found she lectured, not just gave advice...She could have asked questions to provoke thought."

In adopting a position of advice/ suggestions-giving, she was perceived to be domineering, which undermined some of the positive contributions she was making:

“You’re good at this, you did do this’...so there was quite a strong resource giving on the one hand which was great and then there was a sort of ‘you’ve got to do this, you need to do this.”

One of the coach-observers touched on power differentials that appeared to be created through the directive, expert approach she appeared to be assuming:

“I was very struck by the directiveness...It seems to me, the coach was adopting quite an expert attitude, almost looking down her glasses... So there was this rather strange power differential going on which didn’t allow the client to talk her own stuff...there was one moment in the middle when they both seemed to be talking for what seemed like quite a long time...it was almost like a bit of a power struggle going on there.”

Another coach-observer picked up on the downside of the coach being perceived to assume an expert position:

“I felt that because it did have this unstructured feel and because of the personality of the client, I did feel that at times she was trying to say the right things to please the coach and it was almost like she was saying, ‘yes, yes, I’ll do that’ because she had that kind of personality which is what she represented. ‘I’ve been told I’ve got to do this and now I’m being told how I’m meant to be doing it”

This comment was also interesting in that it was about the client rather than about the coach. However, as in the case of how some coach-observers in Marjorie’s session had commented on the client, here as earlier, the comment seemed to imply that the way the coach was intervening was impacting on the client, rather than being a comment which suggested that the coaching session was a collaborative exchange of actions by both coach and client.

One coach-observer expressed a very different perception about the session compared to the others. She described her own coaching approach as very business-oriented (rather than person-centred or humanistic) and had come into coaching after working for many years as a director in a large organization in sales and marketing but also had considerable experience of training and development in a more distant past. She had quite a different impression of the session compared to many of the other coach-observers. From the outset, she had liked the approach taken by the coach:

“What really impressed me was the subtlety of the way she got to the issues and got the coachee thinking about different things...overall subtle but challenging session”

This comment suggested that the same session could be perceived very differently by different coaches, depending upon their backgrounds. Those coaches from more client-centred and humanistic orientations (identified through personal introductions at the start of the session) seemed to object the most to the approach taken by the coach.

Some other concerns about the session related to a lack of apparent goal setting/ progress checking throughout the session (which also seemed to relate to working collaboratively with the client):

“I think the goals were not clear. I think it was assumed and I think that is why there was a bit of a lack of direction...There wasn't enough reflection and summary – you need to make sure with the client.”

Many comments also related to a perception that the coach had not enabled a discussion of the issues in more depth:

In terms of my own model, what really struck me were the self-critical words: ‘Oh that’s terrible isn’t it? That’s awful isn’t it? All the way through and never once was that reflected back and yet that seemed to me crucial in getting some depth.’

This led to a discussion about whether the coach was also failing to explore “breadth”. One coach-observer tried to summarise how he differentiated between exploring depth in terms of asking exploratory questions around an issue and exploring what might underlie a particular experience or belief:

“But I think you can go into depth about understanding what it is about networking and we got to the business about walking up to somebody: ‘So what’s going through you mind when you are walking up to somebody?’ Or, ‘What do you think they are thinking about you when you walk up to someone?’ So, I think there is a depth of exploration without going into history, psychodynamics...”

This in turn led to a discussion about breadth in relation to helping a client to connect behaviours across different situations:

‘I can do it easily when sitting down’ [the coach-observer assuming the identity of the client]; so for me it would have been, ‘Well, what could you do from sitting down that you could take to standing up? How can you transfer across because you know how to do it so beautifully?’

There was also a distinction about scope in relation to breadth and depth of discussion, which one coach-observer said he thought the coach misjudged in the session (he said the coach might more usefully have only attempted to tackle one of the two presenting issues)

“If she’d gone for depth not breadth, you might have gone for presentation or networking rather than trying to fix both...do you go for bigger or just narrow it down?”

The negative evaluations made by the coach-observers were most prevalent when the observed model of coaching was very different to the one of the coach-observer’s:

“For me the essence of coaching is that you’ve got it inside you and you’re not being told where to go and find it because the likelihood is that they’re telling you the wrong places...If it was that easy most of us would have found out how to do it elsewhere.”

The most positive comments made about the approach of the coach were mainly in relation to the success of the session, which some of the coach-observers openly commented on.

One coach-observer seemed to capture this sentiment:

“But I thought she got good results in the end and I think the client would be pleased with those results around preparation and thinking of these role models who do it [networking and presenting] but aren’t arrogant”

This comment seemed to express some sort of sense-making that the session was in a way successful in spite of all the negative criticism. Perhaps the coaches as in the case of Tristan’s session were struggling to reconcile a sense of the overall success of the session which illustrated many behaviours and coach characteristics that the coach-observers struggled to accept based on their preferred coaching approaches. On the other hand, the coach-observers might have wished to express some favourable comments in light of much negativity.

Similarly another coach-observer was complimentary and picked up on how he thought that although the coach had not necessary fully explored issues as and when they first occurred in the session, she still managed to come back to them and have a positive impact overall:

“I was quite struck by how actually particularly towards the end a lot of the good leads were really picked up on but sometimes they were not picked up on at the time...It seemed like there was a really good conclusion in the hour and she had plenty of good things to think about.”

One coach-observer was also quite taken by her physicality:

“One of the things I noticed a lot: I liked her physicality. There was a real groundedness and centredness...Her body stuff felt reassuring. I would have felt safe had I been with her...She’s not going to be rocked; she’s not going to be taken off her centre but not in a

hard way, she's just physically felt very calm and grounded...I didn't think there was going to be a projection or anything like that."

The coach had said that she did not know what clients found in her that enabled them to be so open with her. Perhaps some coaches can express a sense of being grounded, which some clients (and observers) might sense as reassuring and this encourages them to be open with the coach.

6.3.1 Session Summary

Overall, the coach-observers were quite critical, but there were different views in the group. One of the coach-observers giving the most favourable comments told me after the session that she thought that had she not been in the group, the comments would have been much more critical. She said that she felt that she had been a moderating influence. She had actually been the coach in an earlier session and she said in the discussion that being filmed while coaching was quite challenging (i.e. knowing that the video would be shown to other coaches). She had shared this sense of vulnerability in the group. One of the other coach-observers said that she herself had been quite taken aback by how critical of the coach's approach she had been. She said that this was something she would want to reflect upon after the session. This confirmed that, at least for one coach-observer, how negative she had been in reviewing the session. Many of the negative comments related to similar comments expressed in the previous session in relation to a need to listen to the client, to explore depth, to introduce structure, to work to the client's agenda. These issues were listed in the main in the introductory comments to the review of this session. Overall, the comments again contrasted with the very positive comments voiced by coach and client.

6.3.2 Issues Raised by the Coach-Observers

The comments of the coach-observers raise questions with respect to a range of aspects of the coaching process not hitherto listed:

- The use of continuers in coaching
- The importance of the groundedness/ physicality of the coach
- Equifinality – whether different approaches can still achieve results even if the approach taken is not in accord with one’s preferred approach
- How accepting coaches might be of alternative approaches
- Breadth and depth of exploration

6.4.0 Session 4 - Alison: Cognitive Behavioural Coaches (CBC)



Alison’s coaching session was reviewed initially by two CBC coaches. The review was primarily positive and prompted reflections on practice. The coach-observers tried to make sense of the session from their own cognitive-behavioural frames of reference. One of the two coach-observers was a little more critical than the other with respect to some aspects of the session. However, he also appeared to temper some of his criticism when the other coach expressed a more positive evaluation. This seemed to suggest that in another context, the same coach might have been less positive in his comments. Positive evaluations and general characteristics identified included:

- Clear goal-setting
- A fast and free-flowing session
- A generally good level of rapport between coach and client and coach empathy
- A generally open client, good engagement
- Permission-seeking by the coach; coach generally perceived as client centred (including coach checking assumptions)

- A good skill set demonstrated by the coach including ample paraphrasing, summarising and giving of feedback; generally good use of immediacy (picking up on in-session expressiveness of client)
- A lot of progress made in a short space of time.

Both coach-observers said that the key client issue was self-confidence and they reflected on how they might have addressed this apparent issue from a CBC perspective:

“If I were doing this as a CB coach, then I’d really want to be looking at these beliefs”

They said the coach had however addressed self-confidence (one more than the other) by tackling related issues (e.g. self-presentation in different situations). They also said that in spite of the coach adopting a different approach to how they would have facilitated the interaction (with more emphasis on challenging beliefs explicitly) they said that the coach still seemed to achieve the same results:

“I got the impression that she was getting the same; or similar outcomes by using different techniques.”

This comment, as others described in different sessions, suggested that these coaches were open to accepting alternative coaching approaches. They also said that the session was a little less structured than would be the case using a typical CBC approach but made no apparent evaluation on whether this mattered. It was just something they noticed as different. One coach-observer questioned whether something was a little awkward about the relationship. When reflecting on this, he said he noticed that the coach and client sometimes did not maintain eye-contact when speaking. Later in the session, as the conversation evolved, he said that a lack of eye-contact in parts might have been due to the client not opening up about her self-confidence. This moved the focus of the discussion on the accountability of the client in the coaching process. At one point in the interview, he also questioned the extent to which the client was responding to the coach’s agenda when the client was asked to take part in the empty chair exercise. He commented on what he

observed as discomfort on the part of the client but nevertheless, a willingness to cooperate. This led to a discussion about whether the coach was simply using a technique which might usually work well but was a little ill-timed. One of the two coach-observers questioned whether the coach might have done more contracting at the start of the session in order to anticipate the introduction of exercises but again, this was not seen as a critical issue.

Both coach-observers commented that the coach did not pick up as much as she might have done on possible client strengths. For example they said that the coach might have considered how the client's sense of humour could have been discussed as a resource to enhance the client's self-confidence. They also said that the coach made a couple of interventions that did not seem appropriate in the context of the session; these included one moment when the client was laughing at herself and the coach also laughed, seemingly endorsing the client's negative self-perception and another when the coach expressed an opinion which she shared with the client around being eccentric, which the coach-coach-observers said turned the focus away from the client. One of the coach-observers said that the energy of the session dropped immediately after the empty chair exercise, although they also said that they noticed that it picked up again towards the end of the session.

Other comments made in the discussion related to the challenges of developing an in-depth relationship in the course of one session; this included how open a client is likely to be in the space of a short session and how much could be covered in a single session. One of the coach-observers also pointed out how the coach appeared to give the client a sense of affirmation by the coach asking her to express aloud positive characteristics of self.

6.4.1 Session Summary

In summary, the overarching evaluation of the session was that it had been generally constructive in spite of the perception of some shortcomings; also that the coach had demonstrated generally appropriate skills. One coach-observer was a little more critical than the other. They both expressed a sense of recognition that the session was different in

some ways to their normal approach and were generally open-minded about it. They made attempts to rationalise what the coach was doing in terms of their own frameworks of understanding and many of the shortcomings they highlighted related to what they might have expected to have observed in a more CB type of approach. Unlike in the other sessions analysed, the coach-observers were more accepting of the general approach taken by the coach; they acknowledged that the approach was different, that they would have managed the session differently, but they did not state that the approach was fundamentally flawed. Perhaps in keeping with a cognitive perspective, their comments were soberly analytical rather than emotive. However, this might equally have been due to having only two coaches giving comments and there was little diversity of opinions/ coaching values.

6.4.2 Session 4 - Alison: Transactional Analysts (TA)



The TA coach-observers were very critical of the coach. In fact, not a single comment was made without some qualification that could be constructed as positive in the 30 minute review of the session.

One major concern was that the coach was not perceived to have established a clear “*psychological contract*” at the outset. An initial comment made by one of the coach-observers (unanimously endorsed by the rest of the group and expanded upon by others) summarises the general perception within the group:

I noticed a distinct lack, absence of psychological contract...so they did some discussion about timings...about ‘what do you want the goal to be?’ There was no discussion about what the coachee wanted from the coach in terms of what support they wanted; there was a little bit around I’m just aware that the camera is there; that this is being recorded...So the impact of the absence of psychological contract is that the coach would constantly give

feedback, constantly interrupt and also it felt like the whole session remained at a very superficial level.”

The TA coach-observers expressed a need for a lot of depth in contracting. The discussion led to a question about how the group would have agreed to have discussed the client's “*wriggling*” given that the perception of the coach-observers had been that the coach and the client had not agreed together exactly how the coach would challenge the client when observing her “*wriggle*”:

Observer 1: “At that point I would normally ask: so when will I notice that it is a genuine wriggle because you are uncomfortable or this that and the other? And what do you want from me when that happens? How will it help if I do that? What will you do with that? That's the psychological contract which was absent”

Observer 2: “And what if I get it wrong? What if you say “yes” now and what will happen if I say too much or it gets uncomfortable in some way? How are we going to manage this between us?”

Observer 1: “What protection might you need?”

Similar comments were made in relation to the coach's introduction of an experiment without the coach really ensuring agreement:

“There was not contracting to experiment, there was no rationale for experiment, there was no nothing about what was meant by experiment. It's like I've got this experiment and you're going to do it.”

The transactional analysts were concerned that the coach had not explained the detail of her approach (even though they seemed to acknowledge a statement that the coach had actually said something at least briefly about her approach):

“I heard her say, I’ve said something about my style and I thought, ‘did I miss something’? I can’t remember her saying about her style?”

Many of the comments relating to the need for contracting, point to a desire on the part of coach-observers to ensure equality in the coaching engagement. Any perception of a power differentiation in favour of the coach seemed to attract negative evaluations. Power was referred to explicitly in the review and seemed to underpin the controlling parent – adapted child relationship they perceived in the session. At one point in their review, the TA coach-observers referred explicitly to the perceived ‘power’ dimension:

“The agenda and power stayed with the coach...I’ll say how big it is going to be and how small it is going to be”

As might be expected, given the TA background of the coach-observers, much of the criticism of the coach generally was firmly grounded in transactional analytic theory/ principles which seemed to be theoretically important to the coach-observers and which provided a lens for noticing and interpreting what was observed:

“There was a huge amount of controlling parent to adapted child...that’s the whole session [met with agreement from around the group]”

Similarly:

“As soon as you hear the client saying ‘Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes’ and the mirroring from the client to the coach, that they weren’t separate and equal in relationship; they were transacting from ‘I’m the expert, you’re being done to.... This is coaching and you are behaving as a coachee so the individuals, the people and therefore the issue, the reality of it was completely lost in that; there was no choices from the adapted child; you’re just doing what you think the coach wants you to do...With the client I didn’t have a sense of turning up the knob on the volume of certain things...it was all very much in the middle because she was not adapting to her own voice but to the constraints of what she thought she saw in the coach.”

The coach-observers also referred to broader therapeutic concepts of “rescuing” and “protection” in addition to a continued highly theoretical construction of events. These comments were contextualised in the overriding interpretation of the session which was about the dominating influence of the coach:

“There was a lot of rescuing going on...it was rescuing that had not been asked for [referring to a lack of agreement in the contracting stage]...there wasn't equal effort put in to what was going on...I was also pondering about protection; there was a lot of ‘Yes, Yes, Yes, I agree...Oh yes, Oh well, you can be arrogant.’ Ok so there is permission there but where's the protection? What's the downside? ‘How can you maybe reframe what's the positive and negative of being serious and being fun? When is it appropriate?’ And so, permission, protection, potency...there was no invitation into adult...no decontamination.”

The TA coach-observers were concerned that the client did not attend to the language of the coach. This was a similar comment to that which an NLP observer had made in relation to Tristan's facilitation of the session. This suggests a common view of the importance of respecting the client's use of language. However, for the TA analysts, a failure to use the client's language was more serious:

“There were a number of times that the coach gave the client permission to use her own language and then she took away the language [‘Yes’ echoing around the group] and she did it time and time again...I suspect there's a lot in the client's description of herself as ‘flaky’... And the coach said ‘flaky, if that's the word’... That's a discount of a word with all the resonance that comes from the coachee. So everything I saw was a closing down of the conversation. (Observer, Alison's Session)”

Much of their interpretation related to unconscious processes occurring between coach and client that seemed to be acting at a systemic level of interaction between coach and client:

“I noticed that the ulterior level had switched and we had the coachee rescuing the coach [agreement from around the group] and complying and going along with it and sending out

ulterior of 'it's alright' and 'yeah, you can have that one if you want'...it was at that point, it got really collusive..."

Concerns were expressed when the coach appeared to be persecuting the client subconsciously:

"There was a lovely moment when the client said 'I see myself as competent and self-deprecating' and the coach said 'Gotcha' ...on the surface level the words are saying 'I hear you'; on the psychological level the words are saying 'I've got you'"

One of the consequences of a perceived imbalance in power in Alison's session was that it led to what was perceived in turn as collusion (as already reported earlier). The key manifestation of collusion seemed to be the perception that the client was simply colluding with the coach as a figure of authority (parent – child relationship). When I gave feedback to the coach-observers about how positively the client had experienced the session, the coach-observers expected this. Their view was that the coach and client would have been unaware of the "symbiosis" between them:

"Well, that will happen [responding to my comment about the client feeling a connection with the coach] because I think it is much more about a symbiotic, collusive relationship...In symbiosis, you can get lost in that feeling"

Separately:

"I'm sure she [the client] would say a few positive things because she was very good at rescuing the coach"

And again:

Observer 1: "They both did it very well"

Observer 2: "They fitted each other perfectly"

Observer 3: "Coach-child"

At a deep level, the transactional analysts thought that the client was not being taken seriously:

“The whole scenario was the coach colluding with not taking the coachee seriously which is exactly what the issue was about – she did not listen.”

The coach was also observed to be limiting the expression of possibilities that might otherwise have been open to the client and even encouraging fantastical beliefs:

Observer 1: “The other word was polarity”

Observer 2 interjecting: Yes, everything was ‘either or,’ ‘this or that’. What about all the other options, all the other hypotheses, all the other choices that were missed out?

Observer 1: “Yes a real reinforcement of magical thinking”

Concerns were also expressed when the coach asked the client to sit in the chair in which the coach had been sitting (empty chair technique) because symbolically, the chair represented the coach and because the coach had, in the view of the coach-observers not obtained anything more than the polite compliance of the client to agree to the exercise.

The transactional analysts were particularly critical about Alison for not exploring the meaning of the client’s statements which, they suggested, resulted in there being insufficient exploration of depth in the session:

“The words were picked up with no real understanding about what they meant. What was behind them? What did they look like, feel like, taste like? (Observer, Alison’s session)

The meaning of the client’s in-session behaviours was also often considered not to have been explored or explored sufficiently:

She did not really observe; all that picking up on behavioural cues. The cues were there; actually establishing ‘What does it mean? How does it feel? What was that joke about?’(Observer, Alison’s Session)

This comment also suggests a realist perception (similar to that expressed generally by the coach coach-observers already reported) that there are real issues to uncover that can be indicated symptomatically.

The TA coach-observers thought that there was scope to explore the meaning of bodily gestures; simply highlighting an issue was not enough:

“And she said that, putting her hand in front of her mouth and it was such an opportunity to explore what that was about... She just said, ‘I know you keep putting your hand in front of your mouth’ and I was thinking, ‘yeah and?’”

Alison was also criticised for focusing on activities at the expense of the exploration of the client’s way of being:

“The coachee was asking so many fantastic questions of herself and they were ignored – ‘let’s just go on to another activity’: ‘I keep pulling a face and I don’t know why’; that was completely ignored; ‘I keep laughing and I don’t know why’...” (Observer Alison’s session)

The coach was also criticised for not exploring the feelings of the client:

“She [the coach] said how does it feel when you say it like this? That’s not asking about feelings. “Tell me something I want to hear and I’ll move on to the next question. (Observer, Alison’s session)”

The TA coach-observers expressed concerns that a lack of exploration had prevented the coach from getting to the bottom of the ‘true’ or ‘real’ issue:

“There was no exploration around, ‘you want to be taken more seriously at work...what’s that really about?’ (Alison)

One very experienced coach-observer with a strong theoretical background as a coach and as a psychotherapist said that underlying issues could be addressed very readily and necessarily to put an end to what had seemed a circular discussion:

“There was no exploration of history whose voice was heard, where does that come from, which would have cracked it in about 10 minutes [strong agreement from the rest of the group]... “[It was just] going round and round in circles!”

The TA coaches observing Alison’s session in addition to criticising Alison for not exploring psychological depth, criticised her for not exploring breadth:

“She said she had changed. How had she changed? ...She talked of letting go of ‘bits’ – what bits? There were lots of missed opportunities ...she thought she was in a ‘pigeon hole’ - well what was that all about?”

6.4.3 Comparison between CBC coach-observers and TA Coach-observers

The accounts were quite different in that the CB coach-observers were generally positive about the session (but one of the two coaches more than the other) and open to the possibility of other coaching approaches achieving equal ends. The TA coach-observers expressed very strong views about what they perceived to be inappropriate interventions on the part of the coach. There were some criticisms made by both groups of coaches however and in spite of the general acceptance of the approach by the CB coach-observers. These criticisms included a lack of contracting, the coach laughing inappropriately, a sense of awkwardness in the relationship (but only at times and for only one of the two CBC coaches), a sense of the client responding to the needs of the coach, discomfort at the empty chair technique and a need for more depth of exploration if concepts of depth were expressed differently (about naming and exploring confidence issues in the case of the CB coaches and an expressed sense of superficiality for the TA coaches). Both sets of coach-observers tended to pick up on different aspects of the session according to the tenets of their own particular traditions with the TA coach-observers in particular, using a theoretical language to describe their observations. Given that the coach-observers were from different traditions and took part in review groups, it was interesting that some similar perceptions

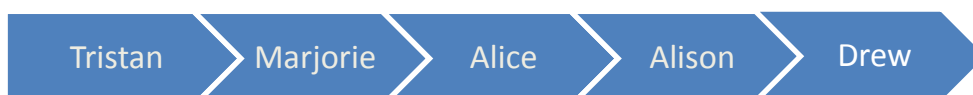
were made which suggested that there could be common normative evaluations of a coach's behaviour that can be made across very different coaching traditions. However, the same process suggested that a coaching session can be evaluated in a generally positive manner from one tradition of coaching and a much more negative manner in another. The negative comments expressed in particular by the TA coach-observers were markedly different to the positive comments expressed by client and coach.

6.4.4 Issues Raised by the Coach-Observers

The session raised a number of issues relating to values and assumptions over and above those already highlighted in the review of previous sessions:

- What it really means to contract with a client
- The importance of being aware of sub-conscious and systemic patterns of interaction including patterns of dominance and collusion
- Whether the behavioural act of permission seeking might camouflage a process of manipulation
- The role of the client in the coaching process

6.5.0 Session Five - Drew



Drew's session also received a great deal of negative criticism. Criticisms of the coach included being an "*administrator*" rather than a coach; "*not establishing the outcomes*" for the session; "*asking closed questions*"; allowing the session to "*meander*"; "*making statements*" covering too many issues superficially; not dealing with issues as and when they were presented; not exploiting opportunities to explore; not exploring depth; showing superficial rapport rather than real empathy; not intervening enough; not challenging; not discussing feelings; leading the client; giving opinions; and fiddling with her chin. Criticisms of the

session (although implying a lack of appropriate interventions made by the coach) included: lacking focus, superficial, having no depth, being an ordinary conversation, not flowing, “*pointless information gathering*” and being “*weird*” in parts.

Overall, the criticisms related primarily to the air of superficiality that the session was perceived to have had. On the surface, it was perceived as an “*information exchange*” with an “*administrator*” or a “*chat*” with a “*friend over coffee*” rather than what the coaches would understand to be a distinctive and productive coaching conversation in which the coach would have explored what might have been behind the coach’s real challenges and motivations. The coach-observers spent much of their review struggling to understand the value of the session. The session was criticised for lacking focus and direction as they thought that no clear outcomes for the session had been agreed at the outset.

The following comment highlights the sentiment of the coach-observers:

I thought it was superficial, there was no depth whatsoever, there was no challenge of the client, there was no ‘how is the client feeling?’ or, anything. There was just nothing there. It was a conversation with an administrator. There was one point when she said [the client] her team might need a bit of training and it was like, she said [the client], ‘I’ll talk to you about that later’ as if she was addressing the administrator who organizes the training...and when she was writing the notes, I thought the client was probably writing a shopping list because that would be the most meaningful thing she could get out of those particular points.”

6.5.1 Contrasting viewpoints: Coach and Client

As explained at the outset in the chapter, I will bring into the discussion many of the comments of the client. The purpose of doing this is to show how the client expressed a very favourable impression of the coaching session even though the comments of the coach-coach-observers had been very negative. This is a pattern that has already been expressed in all of the sessions reported and is therefore usefully explored in more depth in one of the sessions that received a lot of negative criticism.

Drew's client constructed Drew's coaching in the context of long periods of developmental coaching she had had in the past and which she compared to being on the "*psychiatrist's couch*." Having had so much developmental coaching, she said that she believed there was "*less and less*" insight to gain as "*the years go by*". She also said that there were no current opportunities for her further promotion, which she thought was the reason for taking part in developmental coaching and which therefore made inappropriate any in-depth developmental work:

"I've explored a lot of these concepts before so when I set off with this plan with Drew, there was a little bit around, 'what can we do that is different?' And very often when you are coached, the business identifies that you are ready for the next step or ready for more opportunities ...[but] we are currently working in a culture in which there really are no opportunities..."

She therefore constructed the session as something different to in-depth exploration of self and as something much more personal and practical:

"So, what Drew has been working on and what today's session was very much an extension of is; 'what I can do for me personally for laying the foundations for the future, given the constraints within the business?'"

The client suggested that an understanding had been reached between herself and the coach that the sessions would not be developmental:

"From the early stages there was an acceptance between us that I've done this, I've done that, I've been through that process...so there was probably very little merit in going through, 'how do you see yourself as a leader....but I believe that Drew identified that I did not need to go through that process...it's about understanding where I am and my career path and understanding what I've done before and what I need now'"

This citation suggests that the client had, in part, constructed her own sense of development in relation to her past coaching, but also in relation to how the coach had interacted with her.

When asked what stood out for the client in the session, she highlighted how she felt challenged:

“Drew still does manage to challenge me. I still have those moments in the sessions with her when I feel uncomfortable and I think that’s a good sign because she has found something; she’s touching on something that still does need development, less and less as the years go by and less and less as I have more sessions with Drew because we explore things and I challenge her and I say I disagree with that and I go away and think about it but I think she is constantly looking for ways to challenge which is very good.”

The above citation also suggests that the client had constructed an understanding of the coaching process as one in which she would be an active player, challenging the coach and using her interaction with the coach as a source of learning outside of the session. At the same time, she seemed to value the coach’s technical knowledge and this helped her identify issues to think about beyond the session and a framework for doing so:

“She knows a lot of very good techniques. She is very technique driven. She can come up with particular techniques to look at things and that has helped me tremendously because you can come up with a concept and talk for hours and hours and not achieve anything. But she will come up with an actual exercise. She will say, ‘do this on paper...come back with some concrete feedback we can talk about and I find that that is often the challenge because I can talk for England but when you have to put your ideas, values and beliefs and concepts down on a piece of paper then you start to challenge yourself and think of things fully.”

As all of the clients, and as reported in chapter 4, Drew’s client pointed out the “*tremendous amount*” of empathy shown by the coach. The client also pointed out how hard the coach was working to develop the rapport:

“Drew works very, very hard to interact on a very personal level...she very much puts me at ease...so that’s a real strength that she has.”

The client also valued the coach’s business knowledge:

“Her wider knowledge of the business is very good so she is able to pick up on the things that I say and develop that thought process.”

The client highlighted the coach’s verbal skills in stimulating the reflective process:

“Her language skills are very good, her choice of language, the way she gets me to talk about ideas is a strength as well.”

Her language skills also seemed to suit the client’s expectations for her seniority:

“She speaks to me at a level that I expect to be spoken to.”

The client highlighted the client’s body language which was also “very good” and “non-confrontational”.

She also highlighted the informal conversational elements:

“The whole way she starts off the sessions...start off with a bit of a laugh about something that is going on...a sly joke about someone we both know...the normal things that go off between people in an office environment so very much you don’t feel that she is the coach and you are the coachee; it’s two colleagues having a chat about something.”

In reflecting on the coach’s informal approach, the client said she valued the coach’s “relaxed and friendly style” and something about her “body language” which “put her at ease” which seemed to be a similar reference to that identified by one coach in another session in relation to the coach appearing grounded.

There was a suggestion however, in the client’s account about the overall value of the sessions, given the time pressures of the business. This comment seemed to give some

substance to some of the criticisms made by the coach-observers, but the comments could be interpreted in a very different sense (i.e. that coaching is valuable in the context of a very important and challenging workload):

“This business is so fast paced, there aren’t enough hours in the day...I look into my diary in a day like today and I think, ‘an hour’s coaching’; that means I’m going to be working until late tonight...so you start to say, ‘is there any value in this?’ and you think, ‘yes there is’ [banging the table], ‘buy into the process!’”

These comments also suggest that the coach had bought into the organizational discourse of the value of coaching, which might have fuelled a belief in the benefits of the process.

In summary, the client’s perspective was very different from that of the coach-observers. In the case of Drew’s session, the coach had anticipated some of these criticisms (Chapter 8). It seemed that she had a sense of the session as being useful, but that her approach would not have readily conceptualised as productive from an observer perspective.

The analysis of this session suggests that a coach and client can construct a meaningful interaction that can seem meaningless from, perhaps, normative viewpoints of an ideal coaching conversation. The relevance of the inter-subjective creation of meaning will be discussed at length in Chapter 10. This is more usefully done after having considered all sessions from all viewpoints and after analysing perspectives using Q methodology in the following Chapter.

6.5.2 Issues Raised by the Coach-Observers

Drew’s session raises a number of issues about what counts in the coaching process:

- Whether coaches really needs to be in-depth and developmentally focused
- Whether the coach really does need to pick up the client continuously on what they rationalise might be significant statements

- Whether learning and reflection needs to take place in the session or whether reflection can be enacted more successfully outside of the session
- The importance of being a critical friend and the importance of having a business knowledge
- The possibility of the overriding importance of providing a client with space
- That coaching can be inter-subjectively negotiated and meaningful irrespective of how it might be perceived from more normative expectations

6.6.0 Session 6: Joanne



Joanne's session received a lot of criticism by the coaches observing the session. The criticisms included: not connecting with the client; not checking reality; not challenging enough; not exploring enough; not making the most of an exercise; not giving enough options; not understanding the client; not giving enough space; talking too much about herself; talking too much generally; being mechanistic, not understanding the meaning behind a client's metaphor, not having helped the client as much as she might; being nervous; being embarrassed; asking too many questions; missing what the client had said; not listening to the client; colluding with the client; sitting too casually and drinking out of a bottle!

These findings were very surprising given the advanced coaching qualifications of the coach, her international experience in coaching very senior managers in addition to her experience in training and assessing coaches. In the space provided, a selection of the comments of the coach-observers will be highlighted. However, rather than simply illustrating all of these comments with example quotations from the coach-observers which will take a lot of space and has been done in the reporting of the previous session, space will be given here to show differences in the accounts of the coach-observers, coach and client.

The general negativity of the coach-observers is illustrated succinctly in the comments of one of the coach-observers:

“She [the coach] was asking way too many questions; she sometimes interrupted the client, there wasn’t enough sitting back and listening and connecting deeper with the person because she did not ever allow that space...and because she was busy in her own head, she didn’t actually catch that the main thing. One of the main things the client said was that she was missing her high level exec business world.”

In contrast, the client had experienced the coach as “*very, very insightful.*”

One possibility is that the client had simply put the coach on a pedestal, perhaps what might be understood as a “halo effect” and no matter what the coach did, the client was always going to consider the coach as insightful.

In another instance, the coach was perceived by one of the coach-observers to be unprofessional in her manner (too relaxed and drinking out of a bottle rather than using a glass). The client had also said that the coach had appeared to be very informal in her manner, but then suggested that a coach showing these attributes could present a challenge to executives who are too exposed to formality. Again, the client attributed positive characteristics for what seemed on the outside (observer perspective) and initially on the inside (client perspective) as negative attributes. These comments again suggest that the client might still be able to make sense of the coach’s behaviour in a positive way, in spite of normative beliefs about how a coach might be expected to behave.

The above examples relate to impressions of the coach. There were other perspectives on the session that related to the interaction between coach and client. The coach-observers had a strong impression that there was little connection between the coach and client, even a sense of tension and that whenever connection was made it was quickly lost:

First Observer: *"We are not perfect but we are used to picking up on the energy and we've referred to the tension between them, how not relaxed the coach was, some of the behaviour of the client. For me, there was a sense of uneasiness"*

Second Observer: *"Yes, we could see that, we could feel that and her not connecting, not listening and asking too many questions."*

Similarly:

Second Observer again: *"At times I was really bored, because the energy was gone, there wasn't connection and it wasn't moving"*

Later in the discussion:

"It just kept going out of connection and then some moments in and then out".

In contrast, the coach had emphasised in her account how she had experienced moments of connection focusing on one recalled incident in relation to sharing a smile. The client did not mention this specific instance, but did recollect the coach's smile, which suggested that at some level, this or other moments of connection had had some importance. The client also recalled a "warming" towards the coach and a feeling of "rapport." The client did not recount the event at such a heightened level of experience as had the coach. This might have been because the client might not have had such a heightened experience, did not wish to communicate one, or simply did not have the language of "connection". Either way, the views of the coach and client seemed more aligned about having a sense of connection rather than a sense of unease or lack of / losing of connection which the coach-observers had perceived.

The observers might generally have interpreted what the coach had noticed as a lack of fluidity in the early stages and put this down to tension at some level. However, the coach said that she felt no nervousness at all; only an awareness of a lack of opening up on the part of the client early on in the session. One of the coach-observers, in particular,

interpreted this lack of fluidity as nervousness on the part of the coach. Her comment in the discussion was, recalling her reaction at the time, “Oh my God, you’re nervous!” This comment also highlighted perhaps a normative view in coaching that a coach should not be nervous.

Some of the comments made by the observers suggested that they believed they could identify in an objective sense, processes occurring between the coach and client about which the coach and client were unaware. For example one observer suggested that the coach was colluding with the client:

“The coach was colluding with her in saying, ‘You’re really good at this. Part of this I think was for the coach to feel that she still had the empathy...When she [the coach] did the summary, she only did the positive stuff and I thought that was more about the relationship.”

This comment suggests the possibility that the observers of this session (as in the case of the TA analysts) could observe aspects of the relationship that may not have been visible to the coach or client. On the other hand, the coach had said that she had given the client genuine feedback rather than had attempted to build the relationship. The client did not express any apparent doubt in her account about the genuineness of the coach. It is therefore unclear if the observers could identify something happening in the relationship experienced unconsciously/ systemically (their outside perspective giving them a privileged insight) or whether there was nothing unconscious to be observed.

There were parts of the session that were generally seen to be useful and in particular, the exercise involving the time-line/visualisation activity. The coach and client had also found this aspect of the session useful (this has already been highlighted in previous chapters). For the coach-observers, the time-line activity had seemed to be the salvation of the session:

The most exciting bit was that shift that happened when they were talking and this was when the client for the first time asserted herself and because the coach had said, “Over there is

your future...it triggered her visualisation process. So she started to see it and she was excited and I thought that was really good and the shifts that enabled her to move twice along there [referring to the time-line] were also, "Phew, she's got something from this...The idea that she could take more control, she could negotiate, that the other things she wanted like time, were more important...in fact it was time on the beach she wanted [referring to the visualisation activity] not cash. Obviously cash was going to be part of that but also this flexibility and she started to find her own power again to negotiate. So those were the achievements of it [the session]"

There is still some negativity in the comments, however. One suggestion implicit in the above comments about the exercise is that the client had been able to make meaning within the session in spite of the interventions of the coach. It would seem that from this observer's perspective, some minimal intervention on the part of the coach (cueing her visualisation process; line 1) had been enough to help the client gain some progress in her thinking. It is also interesting to note that the coach-observer seemed to express a sense of the client taking control in the session as instrumental in the client becoming more resourceful. This observation seemed to support what had been reported in chapter 4 in relation to the clients generally expressing a sense of control and my suggesting that the clients gaining a sense of control may be important in relation to meeting a client's needs. The observer's expression of relief also highlights the importance of a coaching session being about achieving results in the moment of the session.

Overall however, the observers' accounts suggested that the coach needed to do much more in the session:

"This whole red-herring about the job decision...I would have said "Come on, it's a load of rubbish...it's got nothing to do with your issues here..."

From a discourse perspective, the comments from this observer in relation to challenging the client seemed to suggest the importance of getting to an assumed core issue. The

comments seem to suggest that effective coaching is about not accepting a lack of openness on the part of the client and the way to manage any resistance is by confronting it directly.

A general concern expressed by the coach-observers was that the coach had failed to pick up on significant moments in the coaching conversation:

“A lot of opportunities were missed and a little bit of checking of reality was needed...not enough challenge of the client...she didn’t get the time to think”

For another observer, there wasn’t enough challenge generally:

“For me, there was a big thing about; really, could you help that client understand about herself and her own motive? Keep checking reality. How real is her view of what her choices are...what she really wants... There were loads of questions but there wasn’t a challenge... (“Tell me more about...”)

These and other comments seemed to focus on a perception that the coach was not probing or exploring enough or putting the client’s problem into a broader context. These comments again contrasted with the client’s view that she had been challenged (also that she had not wanted to be challenged in a threatening manner). It may be that the coach had not been challenged from an external perspective (in an objective sense) but had made sense of the situation as being challenged sufficiently from her own point of reference. Equally, plausible however, would seem that the coach had challenged appropriately, but that the coach-observers had simply not observed that.

The observers said that the coach was working to her own agenda. This could simply refer to the coach trying too hard to help the client achieve her goals rather than simply listening to the client:

“...In terms of the efficiency, I think this other internal agenda was being followed with positive intent but that actually got in the way...rather than actually listening to herself [the coach]...too much thinking.”

The client had a strong sense of the session being about her and the coach had also expressed a sense of focusing on the client. It may be that the observers were using a specialised language for understanding “internal agenda”; that is, thinking too much about what she wanted or might need to do. On the other hand, given that the coach felt that she was drawing on intuitive processes in the session rather than lots of thinking, there seems to be a gap between the observers’ observations and the way the coach and client made sense of the interaction.

6.6.1 The Pot of Gold metaphor

One of the most interesting discussion points in the observer session related to the “pot of gold” metaphor. The observers expressed particular concern that the coach had not understood the meaning of the client’s metaphor of a “*pot of gold*” when participating in the time-line/ visualization activity:

One of the intriguing things about the visualisation was that the things that started popping out of that; the ones the coach didn’t pick up on; some really, really important things...the whole beach thing around relaxation, more control over her time, the quality of life came out and the coach going on ‘Pot of Gold, Pot of Gold’.

This comment was understood readily in the context of the discussion and was agreed by all in the group; there was also an expressed disparagement in the remark by the observer’s repetition of “Pot of Gold” which gave rise to some amusement in the group. The perception of the observers was that the coach had given the impression that she had mistaken the client’s metaphor to be about money rather than lifestyle, control and independence.

It is interesting to recall from chapter 5 that the coach had reported that she felt there wasn't a need to articulate the client's meaning:

"There was no need to know what was going on in her [the client's] mind. Something had happened that was important and I could see that and I could acknowledge it without knowing what it was."

The observers' comments therefore, pointed to differences in how meaning should be negotiated with the client. For the coach, what had been important had been acknowledging that something *had* meaning; for the observers, it was important that the coach could *grasp* the meaning. It is perhaps worth recalling at this point, what the client had said about the coach's understanding of the metaphor:

"So that question, "Where's the pot of gold" is a brilliant question.....so her question is really saying to me, "Well it's really not about gold then is it...the look she gave me: "Well we all know it is not about a pot of gold?"

The client seems to have assumed that the coach had understood the issue. The coach-observers' account however, suggests that she hadn't understood the issue. The coach's account suggested that she had not articulated the meaning of the metaphor (i.e. not consciously tried to understand the meaning) but had acknowledged the importance of the meaning.

These different accounts might prompt the question, "who if anyone is *right*?" In a sense, the observers are confirmed in being *right* in that they *accurately* sensed that the coach had not articulated in a conscious sense the meaning of the metaphor. On the other hand, if the coach had been relying on intuition, as she had claimed, then the coach might have understood the client at some level. She might have managed to reflect back an intuitive understanding of the client's meaning and this prompted the client to assume the coach had understood her, or the client herself had sensed an intuitive understanding. Either way, the client and coach were able together to construct meaning around the metaphor. The

observers also noticed that there was something very “powerful” about the exercise so they too seem to have sensed the impact of the metaphor. Discussion around the pot of gold metaphor seems to suggest that what counts in coaching is how the client constructs meaning together with the coach, not whether the coach accurately understands the client, at least at a cognitive level of understanding.

The observers were also concerned that the coach had constrained the client to only two options:

“I got frustrated half-way through because other high level options were not explored. The coachee put A or B. At the very end, we actually got to a C....I think the C could have been teased out right at the beginning. I think that would have broadened and made the experience a richer one, actually for both.”

Even if the coach had made the client more aware of other options, the client had said that she had left the session with a clearer sense of some options (“*bargaining chips*” and “*ideas*”). A more important realisation for the client was that she sensed a need to take action and that in coming to that realisation, “*a bit of a burden had been lifted*”. It therefore appeared that the session had presented a context for her to reflect on her own challenges. The session might therefore have had a symbolic significance for her for a need to take action which is what the client took out of the session rather than any immediate identification of options. This interpretation further supports the contribution of the client’s capacity to make meaning beyond the immediacy of the conversational content that may be at the heart of coaching process. As highlighted earlier, understanding the coaching process as a process of inter-subjective meaning-making will be reviewed after exploring the coaching sessions using Q-methodology.

6.6.2 Session Summary

The instances considered in Joanne’s session call into question whether observers can make legitimate inferences about what is happening in a coaching session, or even if these

inferences can be justified in some objective sense, whether they matter. Overall, the findings are very striking that a highly experienced and reputable coach, who considered that her session had not been untypical, would attract such a lot of negative criticism from a group of other experienced coaches and when the client was generally very happy with the coaching session. Another interesting finding from an analysis of this session was the confidence the coaches expressed in making their assertions and in fact, how critical they could actually be about the practice of another coach; their criticality however was not necessarily any more critical than that of other coaches from other sessions. As in the other sessions reviewed, it would seem that when the coaches are positioned to be analytical, they readily fall into that role. It is also particularly interesting that even though the coach-observers were asked to comment on the session, they tended to focus much more on the characteristics and interventions of the coach. This again suggested an understanding of the coaching process as an intervention provided by an expert coach (reviewed by other experts) rather than a process of collaboration between coach and client.

6.6.3 Issues Raised by the Coach-Observers

The values and beliefs of the observers seem already apparent in the account and suggest some interesting debates in coaching. The following list adds to those presented from the other reviews:

- The coach should bottom line key issues/ confront the client
- The coach should look and act “professionally”
- The coach should not be nervous
- There are always more than two options/ the coach should not constrain options
- Coaching is a rich experience for coach and client
- Depth should be explored and that there are core issues inside the client to be discovered

- The coach is at risk of colluding with the client in giving affirmations
- Connection is important and is achieved through attentive listening
- Experienced coaches have a level of expertise and understanding that enables them to view processes happening within the coaching process about what is really happening in an interaction
- Coaching sessions need to deliver a tangible outcome

6.7 Chapter Summary

The perspective of the coach-observers suggests that from this perspective the coaching process is more about what the coach does rather than what happens between coach and client or what the client does. This suggests that in spite of the rhetoric of collaboration which is prevalent in much coaching literature (e.g. Whitmore, 2011), coaching appears to be constructed typically as an expert intervention.

The accounts of the coach-observers were generally very negative. For 3 groups of coach-observers (two groups including a varied mix of coaching traditions and one a group of transactional analyst coaches), very little could be identified that could be understood as positive perceptions of what the coach did. For one group of coach-observers (varying traditions), the coach still received generally very negative evaluations, seemingly moderated by the influence of one coach and some generally qualified comments. For one group of NLP coach-observers, despite the coach showing competence in what might seem coaching skills widely promoted in the coaching literature (and generally *acknowledged* by the observers), his approach was considered more akin to counselling than coaching and the observers expressed many shortcomings in the coach's approach.

Only one session seemed to attract a mix of views about the coach's performance that did include some very positive comments. Another session that had been negatively reviewed by the main group of 4 observers was given a more balanced evaluation by 2 cognitive behavioural coaches; these coaches seemed to adopt a perspective that alternative

coaching approaches could achieve similar results; they also and, exceptionally considered broader aspects of the session suggesting a more collaborative conceptualisation of the coaching process (but still focused primarily on what the coach did).

Overall, it seemed that the observers expressed what might be understood as normative evaluations, often specific to a particular coaching philosophy about how coaching should be practised. For the NLP observers, coaching was constructed as an active process of promoting change in the client's patterns of thinking and in resourcing the client through the use of techniques and kinaesthetic activities including verbal encouragement, pacing, role-modelling, time-lining and writing. The overall goal was behaviour change and for that group of coaches, outcomes related to managerial discourses of thinking and acting quickly. For the TA coach-observers, the importance of being highly sensitive to the need to avoid patterns of dominance and manipulation in the session seemed to be of overarching importance together with a need to show deep levels of authentic empathy and in-depth exploration of the client's issues. For the cognitive behavioural coaches, the core task was to identify and explore the thoughts and beliefs of the client. For other observers, a wide range of views from different coaching perspectives seemed to be expressed including the importance of not directing the client and giving ample reflective space (client-centred traditions) and some approaches from positive psychology and solutions focused approaches emphasised the importance of addressing solutions rather than exploring past experiences). These differences in normative evaluations seemed to express very different constructions of what coaching is and how it should be practiced.

The accounts of the observers did, at the same time, suggest a range of shared normative views about how coaching should be practised. These normative views included structuring the session (contracting, transparency in approach, signposting, directing/ keeping the client focused and summarising). However, some of the more experienced coach-observers seemed less concerned about overt structuring processes, which in turn might suggest that some constructions of the coaching process may include being quite unstructured in a formal

sense. Other normative values included demonstrating relationship characteristics (empathy, authenticity, respect, giving affirmations but not colluding with the client) and being client-focused (listening intently to the client, not dominating the conversations, not interrupting, working to the client's agenda, using the client's linguistic constructions). These values seemed to relate to the application of valued skills. There were also other shared normative evaluations that were strongly expressed that included exploring depth (understanding what might underlie particular beliefs, assumptions, the way of being of a client including developmental histories; also probing and challenging more) and exploring breadth (the various facets of a problem, how the problem might be manifest in a range of contexts, how learning can be transferred from one context to another; holding the client's issue in the conversation). Coaches who failed to address breadth and/or depth were criticised very negatively. The view was often expressed that what was perceived as in-depth developmental issues or underpinning issues, could be addressed quickly and non-problematically. A failure to explore breadth and depth were often constructed as "missed opportunities". Advice giving (and suggestions that were perceived to be disguised as advice –giving) was generally severely criticised. Other shared normative views included how a coach should appear and included looking and acting in a business-like manner, not being self-congratulatory, not engaging in casual "chit-chat" or share any personal experiences that seemed unrelated to the client's issues. Aspects of demeanour and approach also suggest that a coach is expected not only to be an expert, but to adopt a professional and client-problem focused approach and to deliver results. This seemed aligned with the construction of a coach, in some respects, as a business consultant (but one who does not give advice).

The perspective of the observers called into question whether the coaches could see what was actually happening in the session in an objective sense. This was very difficult to evaluate because there seems to be no "God's eye viewpoint" from which we can assess whether the views of the clients, coaches or observers were more or less accurate. All that it

was possible to identify were similarities and differences in viewpoints. The coach-observers did sometimes seem to share the same perspective of particular characteristics of the coach's interventions or of the coaching session generally. For example, in both Alice and Marjorie's sessions, the coach-observers just as the coach referred said that they had given advice. However, the clients did not refer to being given advice, which suggested that the clients had a different understanding of what being given advice meant, or at least they did not report being given advice as a salient aspect of the session. Both coach-observers and coach had a sense of the coach's perceived shortcomings in the case of Tristan; in fact, it seemed that the coach-observers might have been more aware of them than the coach. This was because the coach had identified particular shortcomings which suggested a "real" problem and the observers were able to identify instances of those perceived shortcomings that the coach himself had not noticed. This seemed to suggest that there were aspects of the session that could be interpreted as bordering on the open/blind area of the Johari window (Luft and Ingham, 1955).

Some coach-observers could sometimes sense something of the heightened experiences described by the participants, which suggested that what coach-observers *notice* might extend beyond *noticing* behaviours and encompassing a more visceral sensing of the coach's experience. The most striking example of this was a sense of "*stuckness*" and then "*liberation*" experienced by one of the coaches in Marjorie's session.

The coach-observers also expressed a shared sense of the power of a particular exercise (visualization process of one of the clients which the client had said had been impactful). The coach-observers could sometimes even share a sense of the energy shifts in a client (as in the case of Tristan's client) but could equally miss any sense of change in energy experienced by the client (as in the case of Alice's client). Some of the above examples suggest a capacity for observers to sense what has been constructed in the literature as key moments in the coaching process (De Haan et al, 2010) but as in the last example in

reference to energy shifts, can suggest that observers and coach alike can miss what might be constructed as a key moment for a client.

Sometimes, the coach-observers seemed to construe experiences that were described quite differently on the inside (e.g. what had appeared as *making a connection* from the inside perspective in the case of Joanne's session was seen as a struggle to *hold connection* from the outside perspective). The observers also highlighted in their accounts some features of the session that seemed irrelevant to the coaches and coach-observers such as the use of continuers (Ten Have, 1999) (Ummm, Ahh, etc.). Perhaps these verbal features of a session somehow become particularly salient when observing a session. Perhaps the use of continuers somehow becomes a less conscious element of the process if the coach and client are more engaged in the free-flowing conversation.

Many of the coach-observers' accounts of the session were however very different to those of the coach and client. This suggested that the coach-observers could "perceive" aspects of the interaction that the participants were unable to perceive; that is, in Johari window terms, the blind window. The TA coach-observers in particular spoke of patterns of dominance, manipulation, symbiosis, collusion, persecution, rescuing, invalidation of client experiences and working to the coach's agenda. However, many other observers, spoke of many of these and other issues using a less formally constructed/ theoretical terminology. It could be argued that these comments express actual observations or valid inferences and interpretations of what was actually happening in the session, perceivable to the coach-observers but invisible to the coach or even to the client.

When I challenged the TA coach-observers about whether they had some sort of privileged viewpoint on what was happening in the coaching session, the observers argued that the coach and client would not be aware of these aspects of the intervention. After the focus groups, I tried to look for evidence of their comments in the video recordings. When I did this (although not a formal and systematic research method), their arguments seemed

credible from my own perspective; that is the patterns they described seemed plausible interpretations. For example, my initial interpretation of Alison's session was that the coach had facilitated the session very well and my interpretation was generally aligned with the comments given by the cognitive behavioural coaches. However, after facilitating the feedback session with the transactional analysts, I did recall a couple of incidents when I had watched the tape and that had occasioned me to question whether the coach merited a more critical evaluation. For example, I noticed the coach and client losing eye-contact which one of the cognitive behavioural observers had also noticed. Similarly, I noticed the coach laughing which the coach herself had regretted. In addition to the video material, during the interview, I did wonder if there was some manipulation of the client when the coach spoke of testing "how compliant" she was. Perhaps paralleling the client's experience, I was more impressed by what had appeared to me as the advanced listening skills of the coach and some other characteristics that I had deemed very positive. I did not therefore personally focus on potentially negative characteristics of the coach's interventions. I also knew that I held and continue to hold a positive impression of the coach (perhaps as a "socially sanctioned healer", Weinberger, 1993) which, as in the case of the clients might have impacted on my overall evaluation of the coach (the observers were more neutral about the capacities of the coach).

While on the one hand, there is an argument to suggest that the coach-observers might be able to perceive actual patterns of interaction, there seemed to be the alternative argument that the observers would only see what their frameworks of understanding would allow them to perceive. When different observers from different coaching traditions (i.e. the cognitive behavioural coaches viewing the same session as the TA observers) saw the "same" session, they often made different "observations." This suggested that the "same" session could be constructed quite differently according to the frameworks of understanding used to observe and interpret the sessions (e.g. from a cognitive behavioural or a trans-analytical perspective).

The particular frameworks of understanding also seemed to circumscribe what could actually be perceived; for example when the NLP coaches seemed to struggle to understand what the coach was trying to achieve by encouraging the client to use the first person pronoun. This seemed to suggest that what is observed is what is understood and known beforehand. Similarly, when coach-observers failed to make sense of what the coach did, they often made sense of the behaviour from their own frames of understanding. For example, when reviewing Marjorie's session, the only way some observers could make sense of the coach's putting down the pen and pad was as an attempt to close the session, given that they had already made sense of the session as a general lack of focus in the session. A failure to agree clear actions in Marjorie's session was only constructed as a lack of action planning by some coaches if it failed to represent what the coaches understood as action planning.

Overall, and as summarised in the above comments, the observers seemed to construct the process in terms of a realist ontology; that is, there were real client issues for a coach to help the client identify and that there were real processes that might not have been observable or conscious to the participants, but were equally real and that expressed observable characteristics of the interaction. From an epistemological perspective, the role of the coach was constructed in terms of probing and challenging, even *cutting to the chase* (for some) to reveal the real issues, the knowledge of which would help in the process of managing unproblematic ways of being, thinking, feeling and acting. The coach would need to probe and challenge, however, from a position of empathy, accurate listening and reflecting back of the client's statements and without any self-interest and in a business-like manner.

At the end of each section, I summarised the key questions that the coach-observers raised. While I have suggested in this summary that the viewpoints of the coach-observers expressed their views about how coaching should be practised, the issues raised by the coach-observers can also be considered to raise practical issues that the coaching profession may benefit from considering and are summarised in Table 6.1. I have

categorised them in relation to emergent themes. This was done by simply identifying apparent similarities in the issues raised. The logical categories are as shown in the table.

Key Points

- *Whereas the clients and the coaches had perceived their sessions very positively, the coach-observers had tended to perceive the sessions in a very negative manner*
- *These differences seemed to relate to the frameworks of understanding that each coach-observer used to make sense of the interaction; these frameworks of understanding were based on specialist knowledge or other assumptions about how coaching should be practised*
- *The findings from the coach-observers seemed to call into question whether anyone can have objective knowledge about “real” events occurring in the coaching session*
- *It seems possible that actions take place in a coaching session which are subjectively interpreted*
- *Perhaps the coach-observers failed to perceive the way both coach and client together were able to give positive interpretations to the action of the other (particularly the client’s interpretation of the coach’s actions).*

Table 6.1 Summary of Issues Raised by Coach-Observers (All Sessions)

COACH BEHAVIOURS
How active should a coach be?
Does a coach need to constantly challenge the client's assumptions?
To what extent might a coach try to interpret what is going on for the client? Could this risk getting ahead of the client?
How important is it for coaches to use the same language as the client? What are the implications for doing so/ not doing so?
What is an appropriate level of challenge and support?
If a coaching contract is time-constrained (e.g. agreed number of sessions), should a coach explore breadth or depth and what might be understood by these dimensions of exploration?
What is the importance of giving affirmations in coaching? Will it risk colluding with the client? Do affirmations risk reinforcing unhelpful ways of being for the client?
When might a coach give advice if at all?
Do coaches limit client options? Are there always multiple-options including those that might not be immediately apparent?
What is the ideal balance between listening and challenging in coaching?
When might a coach "bottom-line" issues and is this helpful?
ETHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL
How important is it for the coach to outline her approach and how much needs to be explained?
Is it disrespectful for a coach to take notes?
Do experienced coaches have a privileged insight into what happens in a coaching session when they observe coaching sessions?
Is coaching a privileged experience and should coaches try to make sure that they benefit from the process as well as the clients?
What should be the scope of contracting? Should it include how the coach might react to the client's expressiveness? Should it include the use of activities at the outset?
How aware are coaches of sub-conscious and systemic patterns of interaction including patterns of dominance and collusion? Can an act of permission seeking lead to self-deception about permission-giving?
CHANGE PROCESS
How does client change take place (e.g. through techniques, changes in what might be understood as underlying representational and unconscious systems)?
Should a coach focus on the client's past or the client's future?
What is the influence of change mechanisms operating below the level of consciousness (being acknowledged; the symbolic significance of writing things down; being given permission to change) compared to the importance of discussing issues in the here and now (e.g. surfacing past issues, agreeing clear action plans)?
Can all coaching approaches achieve the same ends and just as well? What is important in each approach or across approaches?
How much learning takes place after the session? Should the session be considered simply as part of the overall process of client change or in fact a relatively small aspect of the change?
What is the importance of coaching simply as a means of providing the space for reflection?
What is the significance of an energy shift in a client? What signs might a coach look for? How does the coach respond to perceived shifts?
How important are techniques in coaching?
SESSION STRUCTURE
What should be an appropriate pace in a coaching session including different levels

of energy that the coach expresses?
What is meant by structuring the coaching process? How much is about using formal techniques such as bringing the session to a close and how much is about following a framework that might be less explicit? Can structuring a session impede the natural flow for some clients?
GOALS OF COACHING
Should all coaching be developmental?
In what way might executive coaching conversations develop clients' capacities associated with broader leadership discourses (e.g. re quicker thinking)?
What should a coach aim to achieve in a single session of coaching? Can some developmental issues be readily addressed or is a lot of time needed? Is it enough to gain a sense of commitment for action, including more reflexion or should goals be more explicit?
What should be the purpose and depth of the relationship? Should it be sufficient to enable a productive conversation or is it an end in itself?
What is the relative importance of Ah ha moments in comparison to the overall impact of a session or programme of coaching? Should the ah ha moment be the holy grail of coaching?
Should coaching sessions achieve a tangible outcome?
Are there core issues hiding inside the client that need to be uncovered? Is this a helpful mindset for the coach to have?
How important is connection and what is the role of attentive listening rather than deliberately trying to build a connection?
COACH ATTRIBUTES
What is the importance of the 'groundedness' or physicality of the coach?
Should a coach never be nervous in a coaching session?
How important is it for a coach to have business knowledge? Is there scope for a coach to be a critical friend?
How should a coach present herself? How important is it to dress in a business-like manner?

(Some of the points in table 6.1 are expressed as questions because these issues were raised as questions by the coaches in open discussion).

7.0 Chapter 7 Q Methodological Analysis

The overall aim of this chapter is to present the findings from the statistical analysis. This chapter presents a more granular level of analysis than the thematic analyses of the spoken accounts presented in the previous chapters. Given that the CPQSD contained 84 items describing the coaching process, it was possible to make very detailed analyses of the sessions from the perspectives of different groups of participants.

Review of Technical Procedures

The technical procedures for analysing coaching sessions statistically were described in chapter 3. Given that the interim chapters have focused on the thematic analysis, a brief reminder of the main technical procedures for conducting a Q-methodological study is provided here.

The Q-sorts of the client and coach show the way client and coach each separately sorted 84 items in the CPQSD into the chosen number of 13 categories (-6 *Highly Uncharacteristic* of the session through to 0 *Neither Uncharacteristic nor Characteristic* of the session to 6 *Highly Characteristic* of the session). In order to compare the Q-sorts of the coach and client with the viewpoint of the observers for any given session, a factor array can be computer generated using PQ method which gives expression to any factors identifiable in the Q-sorts of the observers when analysed as a separate data set. The observer factor array represents the weighted average loading of those observer Q-sorts loading onto the factor(s). The statistical output is expressed as a Q-sort showing which items the observers tended to rate as *highly characteristic* of the session (e.g. 4, 5 or 6) through to those they tended to rate as highly uncharacteristic (e.g. -4, -5 or -6). The relative ranking of items is in effect the z scores resulting from the factor loadings expressed as an ordinal data set; the z scores are also available in the print-outs (PQ Method).

Factors can also be extracted more generally in the data, for example for all clients, all coaches, all observers and all viewpoints when all Q-sorts are analysed together. One or more factors might be extracted depending on the number of shared viewpoints expressed. In Q methodology, every factor that can be extracted from a group of Q-sorts represents a shared viewpoint, a similarity in how the Q-items are rank-ordered. Each factor can be expressed by creating a factor array. The convention in Q-mode factor analysis is to accept any factor which has an eigenvalue exceeding 1.0.

A key aspect of Q Methodology and as was described in Chapter 3 is to interpret the overall configuration of items expressed in the factor array and/or individual Q-sort; that is to consider what viewpoint is being expressed by placing or tending to place (expressed in a factor array) some items at -6, others at 0 and others at +6. Items placed at the extremities are particularly interesting because they are considered to identify those items that are particularly salient for any given individual (individual Q-sort) or in any overall viewpoint (factor array). Typically in Q Methodology, the researcher will limit the analysis to a description of overall viewpoints (one overall statistical analysis for a particular group of people). When analysing coaching sessions however, there is scope to provide a rich interpretation of competing viewpoints; that is to consider the viewpoints of distinct participant groups (e.g. clients, coaches and observers) and for one session or generally across all sessions. Given that the research question is to explore multiple-perspectives, this is an important feature of the research but does add a great deal of complexity and additional analyses over and above that typically carried out in a Q methodological investigation.

Interpretation in Q methodology is a skilled activity requiring insight and a capacity to interpret the overall configuration of items in a Q-sort. This is particularly so for interpreting the Q-sorts/ factor arrays for coaching sessions in the Inquiry because participants were given ample scope (and as per the brief they were given) to rate items in ways that were personally meaningful for them. For example, an observer might rank the item *Q29 Coach*

shows empathy as highly uncharacteristic of the session. One interpretation could be that the coach did not show what perhaps most coaches would understand as empathy; another could be that the coach was considered to show hostility and a negative placing of Q29 might have been intended to capture this understanding. Another interpretation could be that for most observers, the coach did show empathy but for the particular observer who may be particularly skilled in showing empathy, the coach did not show empathy when compared to his/her own standards. Alternatively, the observer might want to capture in his/her Q-sort that the coach did in general show empathy but at one critical moment in the session, failed to show empathy. Yet another possibility is that the observer mistakenly placed an item as *highly characteristic* when he/she meant to place the item as *highly uncharacteristic* (measurement error). Making sense of items rated as *highly uncharacteristic* seems particularly difficult because a participant completing a Q-sort is making a statement about something being salient owing to some sort of perceived absence.

These interpretive challenges are highlighted in these opening comments in an attempt to provide transparency in the analysis. The reader is asked to reflect on the interpretations made in order to consider if they can be considered credible in light of the data. However, while interpretation is difficult; it is also possible to make sense of the sorting patterns by reflecting on the accounts of participants provided in the interviews. This is more than a simple form of triangulation of the findings as the two separate data sets can be used to inform each other.

Reporting of Findings

The findings are reported as follows:

1. Analyses of individual coaching sessions
2. Analyses of the clients' viewpoints overall
3. Analyses of the coaches' viewpoints overall
4. Analyses of the observers' viewpoints overall

5. Analyses of all viewpoints analysed together

In each analysis (1-5), factors will be extracted from the data and used to create factor arrays representing shared viewpoints (unless stated otherwise, a varimax rotated solution of the extracted factors was used in the analysis and all factors extracted had eigenvalues >1). For example, in 1 (above), factors were extracted to create factor arrays to express shared viewpoints within the groups of observers for each session and compared against the Q-sorts of coach and client for those sessions. For each of the 6 sessions, the best solution was a single factor solution. Those observers not loading onto the factor were excluded from the analysis.

In 2 (above), factors were extracted and factor arrays created to represent shared viewpoints for all clients and only clients, analysed separately from all other Q-sorts. In 5 (above), factors were extracted and factor arrays created for all Q-sorts analysed together irrespective of whether the Q-sorts of observers from one session loaded onto the same factor as a Q-sort from participants associated with different sessions. This final analysis was intended to identify general patterns in the Q-sorting of sessions.

Collectively, the analyses generated a large number of data outputs; a selected range of outputs have been included in Appendix 11 in order to illustrate the general approach. A correlation matrix of all Q-sorts is also provided in Appendix 10; this shows a high level of inter-correlations across Q-sorts. Approximately 40% of all Q-sorts inter-correlated ($p > 0.01$). This finding tends to suggest that participants were sorting Q-sets in a similar manner irrespective of whether they were the coach, client, observers or from one or another session. Block (2008) explains that the correlation matrix is not widely recognised in Q-methodology because theoretical sampling distribution for true correlations expects that any two arrays of Q descriptors taken at random, on average, will correlate zero. However, in Q-sorting, it is likely that descriptors of general relevance will increase the likelihood of showing a positive correlation (83).

While therefore there is a risk that the number of significant inter-correlations between Q-sorts might disguise some more nuanced differences in viewpoints, a high degree of inter-correlations can still be interesting if it highlights very general patterns about how coaching is observed/ experienced to be practised.

Summary of Findings to be outlined in this chapter

Overall, the findings presented in the Chapter suggest that there are similarities and differences in how coach, client and observers make sense of the coaching sessions and that general patterns of similarity identified in correlations between coach and observers, coach and client or client and observers do tend to conceal some nuanced differences in perspectives.

Overall, clients tend to focus on the experiential impact of being coached, particularly relational aspects; they express as salient the practical elements of the session relating to action planning; they express their commitment to the process. Coaches tend to focus more on the technical aspects of the session; they are more evaluative of the way they conducted the session and tend to be self-critical; they make subtle discriminations in relation to specific aspects of the sessions (e.g. understanding v empathy; exploration of emotions v exploration of depth). The observers are highly critical of the coach, particularly when what they observe does not conform to how they believe coaching should be practised. The observers focus on what is readily observable or what they believe can be inferred from their observations. They tend not to capture the depth of meaning making that seems to be constructed between coach and client or for coach and client separately (i.e. what the interaction means for coach and client as individuals). Likewise, the coach might not sense the depth of experiencing or meaning making of the client or at least, does not consider the client's experiencing or meaning making particularly deep from her own internal benchmarks. The process of meaning making for the client seems in part to be related to

how the client makes sense of the coach's in-session behaviour, not just his/her own reflections; meaning appears to be created through social interaction.

Given that all participants were given ample scope to express their subjectivity in their own patterns of Q-sorting about what they perceived, the findings raise epistemological questions about what might be inferred from the findings. On the one hand, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the Q-sorting represents the subjective (individual) views of the participants. At another level of analysis however, the Q-sorting could be interpreted in a similar manner to the spoken comments; that is to reflect normative beliefs (particularly in the case of the observers) about how coaching should be practised. In this way, it could be argued that epistemologically the Q-analysis highlights competing coaching discourses (about how coaching should be practiced).

On the other hand, there was also sufficient similarity across perspectives identified in the Q-analyses that it seemed that the participants were also expressing *something* in their Q-sorting that captures *something* about what seemed to be *actually happening* in a session in a more objective sense. In other words, to some extent at least, all participants could experience or observe a range (but not all) common events/ experiences but how they would interpret them would vary greatly. This seems to provide a path to some middle ground epistemologically between what might be generally observable but which is open to multiple interpretations.

The findings provide therefore some confirmation of the Rashomon experience in coaching identified initially in psychotherapy and in which all participants are exposed to the same script but take away different interpretations of the same events. However, the findings also suggest that there can be some salient sharing of perceptions across perspectives. In summary, the findings from the Q-analysis are broadly consistent with the findings from the spoken accounts. Indeed, each tends to confirm the other.

7.1.0 Analyses of Individual Sessions

In the section which follows, I will present the findings from the analysis of individual sessions. All sessions were analysed statistically although owing to space limitations only the findings of 2 sessions (Tristan and Alice) are presented in this section. The main reason for this is that each session generated a single factor solution (eigenvalue >1) when analysing the Q-sorts of the observers (although only 4/8 observers loaded onto this factor in the case of Alice's session; all observers in the case of Tristan's session loaded onto a single factor); they are also illustrative of the type of findings common to all sessions analysed.

In order to illustrate the way Q-sorts were compared and contrasted in the Inquiry, the data for the first session in this section (Tristan's session) is presented in tabular form with an interpretation of what the participants appeared to be expressing in their sorting patterns on a table by table basis (i.e. the first table showing items rated *highly characteristic* by client; the next table rated as *highly characteristic* by observers, etc.; then the same format but for items rated as *highly uncharacteristic*, etc.). The first session is very detailed and illustrates the type, breadth and depth of analyses that can be made (i.e. what data can be compared against what other data) using Q methodology/Q-technique.

The second session is written up in a more narrative format and without reference to tables. The narrative format is intended to present a more holistic analysis/ less linear than that presented for the first session. The third session is written up in a much more summative manner but with some tabular data and tends to focus on major differences in general rather than by systematically comparing data sets. One of the challenges of writing up analyses of coaching sessions using Q-methodology/Q-technique is to find a way to manage the volume of statistical data and the third analysis is intended to show how this might be done. The write-up of the findings of the individual sessions is therefore intended not only to identify

what can be learned by comparing perspectives but to understand how researchers can best present the findings of a Q methodological investigation.

As already stated, Q Methodology allows a researcher to analyse a coaching session in a lot of detail. In addition to comparing rankings at the polar extremities, using available computer software, it is possible to compare and contrast the largest differences generally across Q-sorts/ factor arrays and which may or may not include the highest scoring items (a ranked ordering of 3 or more places is considered significant). It is also possible to review *Consensus* items which are those items identified where scoring is typically similar.

7.01 Comparison Across Sessions



In order to provide the context for the detailed session by session analysis, Table 7.01 below is derived from the full correlation matrix. It shows on a session by session basis, those Q-sorts correlating significantly on a session by session basis (the full correlation matrix in Appendix 10 shows all correlations, including Q-sorts from different sessions co-correlating). In order to calculate significance between Q-sorts, the formula $2.58 \times (1/\sqrt{\text{No. of items in Q set}})$ can be applied (Watts, 2013). In this case $2.58(1/\sqrt{84}) = 0.28$ ($p \geq 0.01$).

Table 7.01: Table of Significant Inter-correlations

	SESSION 1 (Marjorie)	SESSION 2 (Tristan)	SESSION 3 (Joanne)	SESSION 4 (Alice)	SESSION 5 (Alison)	SESSION 6 (Drew)
COACH & CLIENT	0.46	0.22	0.21	0.24	0.49	NA
CLIENT & OBSERVERS	5/6 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.40-0.64)	6/6 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.36-60)	0/4 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.06-0.21)	2/8 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.07-0.44)	2/6 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.03-0.56)	NA
COACH & OBSERVERS	3/6 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.04-0.49)	2/6 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.13-0.31)	2/4 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.13-0.50)	7/8 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.22-0.46)	0/6 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.02-0.22)	2/5 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.40-0.64)
OBSERVERS & OBSERVERS	11/15 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.31-0.64)	14/15 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.33-0.60)	4/6 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.31-0.58)	22/28 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.28-0.54)	7/15 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.31-0.58)	7/10 Q-sorts CO-CORRELATING SIGNIFICANTLY (0.29-0.57)

The first row of Table 7.01 shows a significant correlation between the Q-sort of coach and client for session 1 and 5 but not for session 2, 3 and 4; the client did not complete a Q-sort for session 6 owing to time constraints. This suggests that sometimes the coach and client rate the session in a similar way in a statistical sense (i.e. rank order the items in the Q-set in a similar manner with a high likelihood that the similarity was not due to chance at $p \geq 0.01$); sometimes they don't.

The second row shows that around 50% of the time the Q-sorts of the clients match the Q-sorts of the observers. There were 30 observers (sessions 1-5) and 5 client Q-sorts enabling up to 30 possible significant within session correlations. In the study, there were 15/30 significant correlations. This again suggests that sometimes the client and observers rate the session in a similar way in a statistical sense; sometimes they don't.

The third row shows that the coach and observers also sometimes match and sometimes don't (16/35 possible significant within same session correlations).

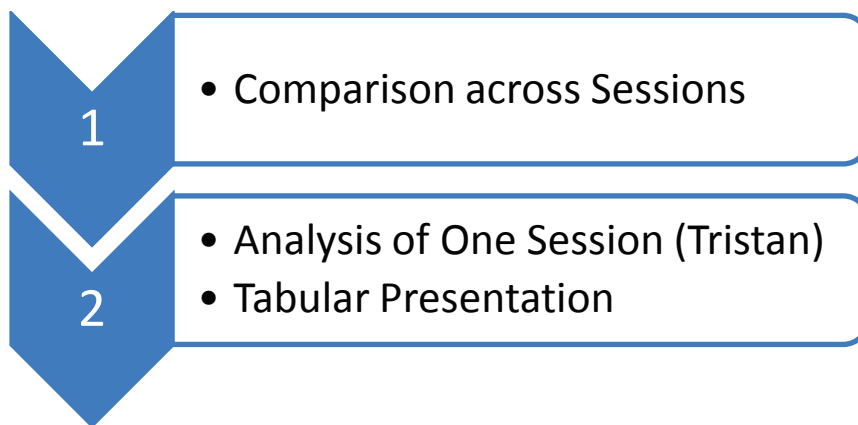
The fourth row shows that the observers generally did match (65/89 Q-sorts – 73%). The more the coaches were from the same school of coaching, the more the Q-sorts co-correlated; for example all TA coach-observers co-correlated and all almost all NLP based coaches co-correlated. This suggests that the more the coaches came from the same school of coaching, the more they tended to observe the same “objective” reality.

Differences however, seem to vary considerably on a session by session basis. For example, in session 4, the Q-sorts of the coach and nearly all observers correlated significantly whereas in session 5, there were no significant correlations between the coach and observers. Sometimes the coach and observer express similar patterns (co-correlate) but the client and the coach don't (session 4); in other cases, the coach and the observers don't express similar patterns but the coach and the client do (Session 5). In yet other cases, the client and the observers tend to express similar patterns but the coach and the observers don't generally (Session 2); in some cases the reverse is true (session 4).

Some of these findings could be explained by Measurement Error. Measurement error could arise as a result of cognitive difficulties in completing the Q-sorts or if some participants didn't address the task conscientiously; this could have led to mixed results in small samples. The cognitive challenges did not seem overly difficult, however. The least experienced participant's Q-sort (the coachee in Marjorie's session who had had very little experience of management development and had no familiarity with coaching) still correlated significantly with the Q-sort of the coach and generally with the observers' Q-sorts. This suggested that even the least experienced person could identify similar aspects of the session to other more experienced participants. Similarly, although some participants often asked for clarification when beginning to sort the items, most said that they understood the task and were given whatever time they needed (in most cases) to complete the sorting (up

to about 45 minutes). Perhaps around 10-15% of participants would have benefitted from having more time but this wasn't possible owing to time constraints. In small sample sizes, *individual variance* might also have adversely impacted on the overall findings. This would reduce the possibility of identifying inter-correlations particularly when sample sizes are particularly low.

7.1.1 Client's Perspective: Tristan's Session



This session was between Tristan, self-reporting as a humanistic coach and a final session with a client in relation to his assertiveness and career planning. The client had himself followed a coaching course in the recent past.

As an initial reference point, it is worth remembering that the summative statistical analysis (Table 7.01) suggested that there was an almost universal agreement about what was happening in the coaching session within the observer group (14/15 Q-sorts inter-correlating significantly); that there was strong agreement between the perspective of the client and the observers (6/6 Q-sorts co-correlating significantly) but that there was some difference in viewpoint of the coach (3/6 significant correlations). (All correlations were positive).

Tables 7.02 and 7.03 show those Q-items rated as *highly characteristic* and *highly uncharacteristic* by the client, respectively (shaded area showing the client's perspective as a reference point). The rating of these items for the observers (factor array) and coach is provided alongside for purposes of comparison. For consistency, all columns in all tables

will be presented in the same order. For example, in Table 7.02, Q18 *There is one or more periods of silent reflection*, the client has ranked this item at 6 (highly characteristic) whereas the coach has ranked this item at -5 (highly uncharacteristic) and the item is expressed in the observer factor array at 6.

Table 7.02: Q-Items rated as most *highly characteristic* in the client's Q Sort

Q No		CLIENT	OBS	COACH
18	THERE IS ONE OR MORE PERIODS OF SILENT REFLECTION	6	6	-5
70	THERE IS A DISCUSSION OF NEW PRACTICES FOR THE CLIENT	6	1	2
1	THERE IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE CLIENT'S CHOICE OF WORDS	5	2	6
34	COACH AND CLIENT APPEAR TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER	5	5	2
45	COACH ASKS QUESTIONS HELPING CLIENT TO ELABORATE	5	3	4
78	THERE IS A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE CLIENT'S PROGRESS	5	4	2

Table 7.03 Q-Items rated as most *Highly Uncharacteristic* in the client's Q Sort

Q No		CLIENT	OBS	COACH
58	COACH APPEARS TO BE PURSUING HER OWN AGENDA	-5	-3	3
17	COACH ASKS CLIENT TO QUANTIFY A FEELING/PERCEPTION/ISSUE USING A SCALE	-5	-4	-1
65	COACH SUGGESTS IN-SESSION ACTIVITY	-5	-5	-2
49	THERE IS A DISCUSSION OF A POTENTIAL REFERRAL	-5	-5	0
82	COACH QUESTIONS CLIENT'S LEVEL OF COMMITMENT	-6	-5	-1
62	COACH IS VERBOSE	-6	-6	0

The dissimilarities in viewpoint between the coach and client (i.e. the ratings are very different) confirm the summative statistical analysis. This seems to contradict the findings from the spoken accounts which suggested ample similarity, even to the extent of the client using the same metaphoric constructions and frames of reference as the coach reported in an earlier Chapter. The ratings between coach and observers however, are much more similar and align with the summative statistics as would be expected.

Table 7.2 highlights the saliency for the client of being asked questions which provoked reflection (Q45); also the practical need for having a way of addressing issues outside of the session (Q70). The client also ranked highly, working with someone with whom he felt there was a shared understanding (Q34). The client's highlighting of progress (Q78) might highlight a sense-making of the coaching session, as a practical activity for the client. This is perhaps reinforced by the client's relatively high rating of new practices (Q70). In summary, the client appeared to value exploration of issues with someone who understood him and the identification of new practices; the session seemed to have a clear practical benefit.

The observers and the coach have given less saliency to the client's construction of the session as being about establishing new practices. In light of the spoken accounts, it is possible that the observers had been disaffected by what for them had been a lack of action-orientation and this might have led to them giving less saliency to action possibilities generally. The coach seems to have also had a sense of the session as a more reflective process than action-informing (lower rating on item Q70) yet paradoxically played down a sense of silence (Q18) compared to client and observers.

In Table 7.03, the client highlights that he is committed to the process (Q82) and that he has the impression of a coach who is very focused on him; that is giving him, the client, space to talk and to work to his own client agenda (Q58, Q62). He also seems to be highlighting a perception of a lack of organized activity, (Q65) which the coach had highlighted in his spoken account. The relative low ranking of any formal activities for the observers (Q65) is very much in accordance with their expressed frustration made in the observer group. Some items might have been highlighted by the client as *highly uncharacteristic* in a negative sense because they may have represented a type of anathema to the client of what the session was about (e.g. Q49 suggesting that for the client coaching was absolutely nothing to do with therapy, whereas for the coach who also practised therapy, it was a non-issue; for the observers who were all very much focused on business application, their similarity in ranking might have also been an expression of a rejection of the notion of therapy in

coaching). Some of the differences in ratings for the coach may reflect a degree of expressed modesty (*Q62 Coach is verbose*), creating perhaps more apparent than actual difference in perspectives. However, it would also seem that some aspects of the session seem to be of less significance to the coach such as the client's commitment (Q82) or the possible similarity with therapy (Q49). The coach however, did seem to express positively a degree of self-criticism in terms of a sense of working to his own agenda (Q58); this would not perhaps necessarily be visible to an external audience although in the spoken discussion, one observer had suggested that the coach had been working to his agenda. This observation however was not commonly identified (-3) and could therefore be understood mainly as private to the coach.

7.1.2 Coach-Observer Perspective: Tristan's Session

Table 7.04: Q-Items rated as most *Highly characteristic* in the Coach-Observers' Q Sort (Factor Array)

Q No		CLIENT	OBS	COACH
33	THERE APPEARS TO BE RAPPORT (STRONG CONNECTION) BETWEEN CLIENT AND COACH	4	6	6
18	THERE IS ONE OR MORE PERIODS OF SILENT REFLECTION	6	6	-5
34	COACH AND CLIENT APPEAR TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER	5	5	2
37	COACH REPEATS CLIENTS WORDS BACK TO HIM	1	5	-3
69	CLIENT SUGGESTS HIS NEXT COURSE OF ACTION	-1	5	0
83	COACH INQUIRES ABOUT CLIENT'S AIM FOR THE SESSION	4	5	2

Table 7.05: Q-Items rated as most *Highly Uncharacteristic* in the Coach-Observers' Q Sort (Factor Array)

Q No		CLIENT	OBS	COACH
57	COACH APPEARS TO BE USING AN INTERVENTION MECHANISTICALLY	-4	-5	0
65	COACH SUGGESTS AN IN-SESSION EXERCISE	-5	-5	-2
49	THERE IS A DISCUSSION OF A POTENTIAL REFERRAL	-5	-5	0
82	COACH QUESTIONS CLIENT'S LEVEL OF COMMITMENT TO COACHING	-6	-5	-1
50	THE SESSION IS FAST PACED	-3	-6	-3
62	COACH IS VERBOSE	-6	-6	0

Tables 7.04 and 7.05 show respectively those Q-items rated as *highly characteristic* and *highly uncharacteristic* by the observers. In general, and as expected, the rankings are similar to those of the client with some if less commonality with the ratings of the coach. The scoring of items as *highly characteristic* of the session in Table 7.04 suggests that the observers had the impression of a very close relationship between client and coach (Q33, Q34) and that the relationship was characterised by long periods of silence. These ratings support the comments made in the observer group.

A sense of togetherness also featured in the Q-sorts of the coach and client although the coach appears to be more discerning in emphasising rapport (Q33) more than understanding (Q34) perhaps giving expression to the generally recognised importance of rapport in humanistic coaching discourse to which he claimed his own approach aligned. The observers seem to have found salient the way the client suggested his course of action (Q69) which might be an expression of the observers' perception of the coach being very non-directive highlighted in their spoken accounts. The importance of having a clear orientation to the session for the observers might be highlighted in the observers' rating of Q83 (they noticed and highlighted this aspect of the session; i.e. the suggestion is that they highlighted this aspect of the session because it was important from their frame of reference). The client also seems to express a similar perspective with respect to the aim of the session. This might have been because the client wanted a practical outcome for the

session or because it was perceived as an expression of the coach's focus on the interests of the client (this interpretation could also be applied to the interpretation made by the observers). It would seem that the coach is more hesitant about the clarity of the aims of the session. Recalling comments made by the coach, this may relate to the coach reporting how at the beginning of the session, the coach questioned how useful/ purposeful the reflective process was for the client. This suggests that while behaviourally, there appeared to be agreement about session aims (observed by coach-observers and noticed by the client), the coach might have deferred judgement, a reflective process that would not have been visible to the observers or to the client.

Table 7.05 shows how the observers expressed a sense of a skilled coach (Q57) and one who gave space for the client to reflect (Q62). This ranking is interesting in that it highlights that in spite of a lot of criticism about the coach provided in the observer group, it would seem that they were not being critical of his expertise, only of his overall style. Their highlighting of Q62 would seem to indicate a general concern that the coach was not being active enough from their perspective, which may also be reflected in the observers' rating of *Q65 Coach suggests in-session exercise*. The observers' rating of *Q82 Coach questions client's level of commitment to coaching* could be a way of the observers expressing the high degree of engagement they perceived in the session as reflected in their spoken account.

7.1.3 Coach Perspective

Table 7.06: Q-Items rated as most *Highly characteristic* in the Coach's Q Sort

Q No		CLIENT	OBS	COACH
1	THERE IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE EFFECT OF THE CLIENT'S CHOICE OF WORDS	5	2	6
33	THERE APPEARS TO BE RAPPORT (STRONG CONNECTION)	4	6	6
13	COACH EXPLORES CLIENT'S EMOTIONS	-1	0	5
15	COACH ENCOURAGES CLIENT TO BECOME AWARE OF HIS IMMEDIATE IN-SESSION EXPERIENCE	2	1	5
44	COACH FOLLOWS UP ON KEY SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS MADE BY CLIENT	4	2	5
54	COACH TAKES AN ACTIVE ROLE IN SESSION	2	0	5

Table 7.07: Q-Items rated as most *Highly Uncharacteristic* in the Coach's Q Sort

Q No		CLIENT	OBS	COACH
80	THERE IS A DISCUSSION ABOUT HOW TO MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF THE ENGAGEMENT	1	-2	-5
81	COACH REDIRECTS CLIENT TO CLIENT'S AGENDA	0	-2	-5
18	THERE IS ONE OR MORE PERIODS OF SILENT REFLECTION	6	6	-5
68	COACH APPEARS TO FOCUS ON A THIRD PARTY'S AGENDA	-4	-2	-5
35	COACH AND CLIENT DISCUSS THEIR RELATIONSHIP	1	0	-6
10	COACH INVITES CLIENT TO CONSIDER OTHER PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES	0	-1	-6

Table 7.06 suggests that the coach had been very focused on technical issues surrounding word choice (Q1) and client experiencing (Q15). Word choice seemed to have had a particular meaning for the coach and client but had little significance for the observers. In the interviews, the coach had emphasised the importance he gave to choice of words and how it had developed a particular meaning for both client and coach over a series of earlier sessions; these comments were supported by the comments of the client. In the observer group, the coach-observers had not made much sense of what the coach and client were

doing in relation to language. It might have been that word choice was therefore of conceptual significance (private understanding) only for the coach and client.

Only the coach emphasised in his Q-sort immediate in-session awareness (Q15). This could be a significant aspect of coaching for the coach given his Gestalt training. The coach's high rating of Q44 (in relation to identifying significant statements) which is shared by the client but less so by the observers, might suggest that coach and client had a particular understanding of what was personally significant between them; this was not readily inferable from the outside. A social constructionist interpretation would be that what was identified as inter-subjectively significant was made so in the moment. In other words, it was because the coach picked up on aspects of the client's statements that those statements became significant. A less erudite explanation however, might simply be that the observers were expressing their concern that the coach and client were not addressing important issues (as was highlighted in their discussion of the session).

The coach's understanding of the exploration of emotions (Q13 rated 5) was much less salient for the client (-1) and observers (0). Similarly, the coach seemed to think that he was much more active in the session (Q54 rated 5) than the observers had observed (0) and the client had experienced (2). These aspects of the session suggest that the coach can have quite different perceptions of how he would rate his own behaviours compared to an external audience or even client. It would seem that the coach and client/observers had different benchmarks or frames of reference for particular behaviours/ client experiences.

The items rated as highly uncharacteristic by the coach were rated in general, quite differently by the observers and coach. The low rating of the coach of Q80 might represent a reflection on the need for evaluation which might be of some significance for a coach as a point of critical reflection on the session; similarly Q35 (relationship). One possibility is that these aspects of a coaching session could be considered technically important and could have been highlighted as the coach reflected on the quality of the engagement. The low

ratings of a series of items relating to others might emphasise the importance the coach believed he gave to the centrality of the client's worldview (Q10, Q68) and respect for the client's self-determination (Q81) which would be aligned with the humanistic orientation of the coach.

7.1.4 Comparing the Observer Perspective against the Coach's Perspective

Table 7.08, shows those items for which there was the greatest difference in ranking of Q-items in the factor array for the observers compared to the ranking of Q-items in the Q-sort of the coach (i.e. not just highest or lowest ranked items although there are overlaps).

Differences are presented in descending order with the largest differences shown in the rows towards the top of the table. This time, the coach-observers' scores are presented first as this was the data on which comparisons were made (for convenience given the constraints of the statistical software). The ranking of the same items in the client's Q-sort is also provided alongside to allow further comparisons. In table 7.08, the differences are shown for those items which observers tended to rate as highly characteristic but the coach as highly uncharacteristic or more neutrally (e.g. 0, 1 or -1). In order to indicate the absolute size of the difference in how any particular item was ranked in the factor array for the observers and the Q-sort of the coach (not in relation to the client's score which is only included for comparison purposes), the magnitude of the difference is expressed as a Z score (Chapter 3) alongside ordinal ratings; the greater the z score, the greater the difference in sorting.

Table 7.8 shows that the observers highlighted what for them had been long periods of silence (Q18). The observers also had the impression that the coach was repeating words back to the client (Q37) which seems to be an expression on the part of the observers of the general impression of observing a reflective process (as highlighted in the observer group discussion). The observers seemed to have had the impression that the session had led to depth of discussion (items Q5, Q4, Q14) and breadth of exploration (Q66, Q6), an

understanding of the session that the coach had not constructed. Table 7.08 also shows that the coach had felt that the relationship had not been discussed (as already highlighted), (Q35). The client had been more ambivalent about all of these issues with a viewpoint midway between the coach and observers, excepting for having an impression of long periods of silence, an issue that seemed negatively salient for the coach (i.e. notable because of its construed absence).

Overall, these differences reinforce what was already becoming apparent in the analysis of the Q-items rated as most *highly characteristic* and *uncharacteristic* of the session. However issues relating to depth and breadth of discussion are more apparent when comparing the largest differences in Q-sorting between observers and coach rather than just examining differences in the highest/lowest ranked items. Given that the coach is also a therapist, for him, there may have been relatively little exploration of depth and breadth and few periods of what he would construct as in-depth silent reflection. However, for the observers who tended to favour more action orientation towards coaching practice (as expressed in their discussion), there was ample breadth and depth of exploration and lots of silences.

The coach's high ratings of some issues in relation to discussing the relationship, suggest that *for him*, this was something he was conscious of not having done (important and relevant) whereas for the observers, it was less of an issue (hence a more neutral rating). This seemed to suggest that the coach was using the Q-sorting to reflect critically on how he had conducted the session from a technical/ quality perspective but again on his terms, which were different to those of the observers.

TABLE 7.08: Descending Array of Differences between Observers' and Coach's Ratings (Items generally rated highly characteristic for the Observers but as highly uncharacteristic or neutral for the coach)

A	B	C	D	E	F
Q No		Z Score Difference	OBSERVERS	COACH	CLIENT
18	THERE IS ONE OR MORE PERIODS OF SILENT REFLECTION	3.5	6	-5	6
37	COACH REPEATS CLIENT'S WORDS BACK TO HIM	2.4	5	-3	1
4	THERE IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE CLIENT'S UNDERLYING MINDSET	2.1	2	-4	0
14	COACH ENCOURAGES CLIENT TO FEEL MORE DEEPLY IN SESSION	1.9	2	-4	0
35	COACH AND CLIENT DISCUSS THEIR RELATIONSHIP	1.9	0	-6	1
10	COACH INVITES CLIENT TO CONSIDER OTHER PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES	1.9	-1	-6	0
5	COACH AND CLIENT EXPLORE THE DEEPER MEANING OF A PRESENTING ISSUE	1.9	4	-2	1
66	COACH BROADENS THE FOCUS OF THE DISCUSSIONS	1.8	2	-3	0
60	THERE IS DISCUSSION OF CLIENT'S FEEDBACK ON COACHING	1.6	1	-3	3

Table 7.09 provides the same information as in Table 7.08 but shows the largest negative differences from the perspective of the observers (i.e. those items rated as *highly uncharacteristic* of the session by the observers compared to higher ratings on the part of the coach).

TABLE 7.09: Ascending Array of negative differences between Observers' and Coach's Ratings (Items generally rated highly Uncharacteristic for the Observers but as highly characteristic or neutral for the coach)

Q No		Z Score Difference	OBSERVER	COACH	CLIENT
57	COACH APPEARS TO BE USING AN INTERVENTION MECHANISTICALLY	-1.6	-5	0	-4
13	COACH EXPLORES CLIENT'S EMOTIONS	-1.8	0	5	-1
49	THERE IS A DISCUSSION OF A POTENTIAL REFERRAL	-1.8	-3	3	-5
24	THERE APPEARS TO BE A PRODUCTIVE USE OF METAPHORS	-1.9	-3	3	-1
62	COACH IS VERBOSE	-1.9	-6	0	-6
58	COACH APPEARS TO BE PURSUING HER OWN AGENDA	-1.9	-3	3	-5
48	THERE IS A DISCUSSION OF BOUNDARIES AND/OR ETHICAL ISSUES	-1.9	-4	2	-4

The rating of items in Table 7.09 suggests that the coach has presented himself self-critically in relation to how the observers and client had made sense of his behaviour with respect to skill (Q57), verbosity (Q62) and following his own agenda (Q58); that is the client and observers not perceiving him as mechanistic, verbose or following his own agenda while the coach seemed more cautious about rating these issues. The coach might have wanted to express a degree of modesty in his Q-sort or might have reflected some private thoughts not visible at a behavioural level (e.g. in relation to agenda seeking). Verbosity (Q62) might also simply reflect his view that by his standards, he had been neither verbose nor quiet relative to his typical way of conducting a coaching session.

The coach's rating of *Q13Coach explores client's emotions* suggests that while the session had not necessarily been deep from the coach's perspective and as discussed above in relation to the observers' perspective (Table 7.09), emotions had been explored. The relative high rating of items such as Q13 in the coach's Q-sort compared to some of the items relating to depth (Table 7.09), suggests that the coach was expressing in his Q-sort

subtle discriminations in how he made sense of the session (i.e. working with emotions but not depth).

The coach's rating of using metaphors productively (Q24) is much higher than the observers. Given that in the spoken discussion, the coach had emphasised the way he liked to work with patterns, it is possible that metaphor generally is something salient for the coach and this was being expressed in his analysis of the session but more of a projection (fantasy) than as an observable behaviour.

Consensus Items

Table 7.10 shows those items about which there was the closest agreement (*consensus items*) with respect to the ranking of particular items for the observers and the coach. As in Tables 7.08 and 7.09, the client's rating is provided for completeness. (In Chapter 3, it was explained that items differing by no more than two items should be considered to have been rated statistically in a similar manner).

Table 7.10 Consensus Q-Items for Coach and Observers

Q No		OBSERVER	COACH	CLIENT
33	THERE APPEARS TO BE RAPPORT (STRONG CONNECTION) BETWEEN CLIENT AND COACH	6	6	4
77	COACH ASKS CLIENT TO DESCRIBE KEY LEARNINGS/TAKE-AWAYS	4	4	2
16	COACH CHALLENGES CLIENT'S PERSPECTIVE OF SITUATION AND/OR OF SELF	4	4	3
72	COACH SUGGESTS HOMEWORK FOR CLIENT	-4	-4	-2
35	COACH ASKS FOR PERMISSION TO GIVE FEEDBACK	-3	-3	1

Table 7.10 highlights how there was some agreement on the extent to which there had been rapport in the session; this had been one of the two most salient observations/ reflections that the coach and observers had had; the client marginally less. There is some agreement that specific events had featured quite prominently in the session including asking the client

to summarise learning (Q77) and challenging of the client's perspective (Q16). Some events had been equally salient by their absence (Q72, Q35).

7.1.5 Summary: Tristan's Session

Overall, the client's perspective expressed in his Q-sort seems to focus on his experience of being coached; in particular of having a sense of a coach who was focused on him and with whom, there was a good understanding. The client also expressed as salient those aspects of the session that seemed to have a practical edge; for example discussing new practices and reflecting on progress. The basic questioning process and the reflections that followed were salient for the client. The client also expressed his own commitment to the process.

The observer perspective was generally aligned with that of the client. The observers tended to emphasise more however, aspects of the session that seemed to highlight a perception of the session as a reflective process with a relatively non-interventionist if skilful coach. These reflective elements seemed consistent with the observers' emphasis in their spoken accounts on the value they gave to action. The observers did not sense some of the meaning making processes that the client and coach seemed to construct together; specifically, the significance of particular statements that the coach explored or the use of language.

The coach seemed to be making nuanced discriminations between aspects of the session (e.g. *emotion* versus *depth*; *rapport* versus *understanding*). He was also focused on quality concerns when evaluating the session (e.g. in relation to establishing a direction; discussing the relationship); his Q-sorting expressed a degree of self-criticality. He seemed generally focused on aspects of the session that may have had particular technical significance for him (e.g. choice of words, significance of in-the-moment experiencing, use of metaphor). However, neither the observers nor the client seemed to give these issues the same importance suggesting that the coach was in some ways making his own unique interpretation of what was significant in the session. The coach's perception of silence in the

session seemed very different to that of the client and observers. This could relate to the coach's background as a therapist in which the session for him, may not have had periods of silence experienced in other contexts. The range of consensus items suggests that there was still some agreement in how the session was understood by all participants even if the coach's Q-sort did not correlate significantly with those of the coach or observers.

It is interesting to note that overall, the observers expressed in their Q-sorts what might seem generally positive characteristics of the coach's approach (e.g. not being mechanistic, having strong rapport, exploring depth, challenging the client's perspective; characteristics emphasised for example in the training of coaches/ competency frameworks). The Q sort analysis therefore seems to help interpret further the verbal accounts of the observers made in the observer group. It seemed that the observers were expressing concern in the observer group about the style of coach and whether this would lead to practical learning; they were not criticising the coach for showing any lack of skills.

In summary, it is difficult to reach a definitive conclusion about the degree of similarity/difference in perspectives of the session. On the one hand, the summative statistical analysis suggested that what the observers saw was aligned with what the client experienced but that there were some differences with the perspective of the coach. The detailed analysis highlighted differences in orientation. For risk of over-simplification, the client was focused on pragmatic value and personal interest. The coach was more focused on quality considerations and contextualising the session (nuanced discriminations and in relation to personal benchmarks). The observers were making salient, observable characteristics of the session (as confirmed by their alignment with the client's Q-sort); they were also expressing their value judgements (e.g. about a lack of activity). The coach also appeared to be identifying characteristics of the session that were not recorded in the Q-sorts of the observers nor in the Q-sort of the client (e.g. use of metaphors, exploration of emotion, in-session depth of experiencing) which suggests that the coach may have been only imagining he was expressing particular behaviours or that particular client experiences

were taking place (i.e. only a fantasy of the coach's assumed approach). In a sense, the Q-sorting did not so much challenge whether the participants experienced or observed different events; the high degree of inter-correlated Q-sorts seems to challenge this overall interpretation. What seemed to differ was how particular events and experiences were interpreted or conceptualised.

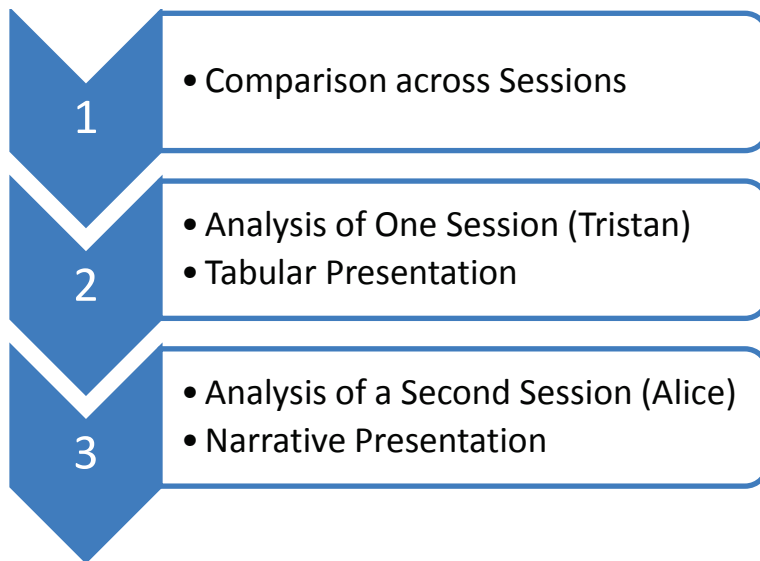
Johari Window

Given the breadth of the inquiry in this section, the findings have been summarised in Table 7.11 (an adaptation of a typical Johari window) in order to show differences in Q-sorts. The Johari window highlights a sense of general agreement about how the session was perceived by all participants (public window). This suggests that to some extent at least, a session can be observed or reported as having been experienced in a similar manner. The private area shows however that there are aspects of the session that are private to the coach and based on his own frames of reference and private thoughts. The blind area suggests that the coach might be so wedded to his own worldview that he might not appreciate how his session might be understood by outsiders or that he might be projecting onto the session only imagined characteristics of the session. The area of potential is intended to highlight how coach and observers may be unaware of what a client might value; it might be that the coach is so wedded to her own conceptualisations of a coaching session that she might overlook what is valued to, or experienced by the client.

Table 7.11 Comparison of Perspectives: Coach and Others (Johari Window)

	PERCEIVED BY OBSERVERS & CLIENT	NOT PERCEIVED BY OBSERVERS
PERCEIVED BY COACH	<p>PUBLIC (Perceived by observers, client and coach)</p> <p>Coach asking questions</p> <p>Coach challenging perspectives</p> <p>Demonstration of rapport</p> <p>Lack of homework setting</p> <p>(VISIBLE BEHAVIOURS)</p>	<p>PRIVATE (Not perceived by observers nor by client)</p> <p>Coach working to own agenda</p> <p>Questioning of overt behaviours (whether the purpose of the session is sufficiently focused)</p> <p>Coach's modesty and critical reflection on whether he had coaching according to assumed best coaching practices (e.g. reflecting on relationship, success of engagement, lack of discussion of client feedback)</p> <p>Coach's sense of focusing on the client (e.g. not asking client to consider other people's perspectives)</p> <p>Meaning of depth of exploration (coach's construction of depth/ mindset as much deeper)</p> <p>Coach making nuanced discriminations (e.g. emotional exploration but not in-depth exploration of mindset; rapport but not understanding)</p> <p>(PRIVATE CONSTRUCTIONS OF COACH)</p>
NOT PERCEIVED BY COACH	<p>BLIND (Perceived by observers and client but not coach)</p> <p>Periods of silent reflection</p> <p>Lack of coach activity Quiet coach</p> <p>Coach's strong capacity to understand client</p> <p>Coach's high skills level</p> <p>Extent to which coach only assumes he is exploring emotions and in-session</p> <p>Coach over-estimating his productive use of metaphors</p> <p>(COACH'S LACK OF AWARENESS OF BEHAVIOURS)</p>	<p>POTENTIAL (Perceived only by client)</p> <p>Importance of new practices for client above many other aspects of the engagement</p> <p>Relative importance to the client of his commitment to process</p> <p>(MEANING OF ENGAGEMENT FOR CLIENT)</p>

7.1.6 Alice's Session



This was a session involving a coach who explained that she drew on her business expertise and knowledge and helped clients address whatever issues they presented; she described her approach as being oriented towards the issues presented rather than trying to engage too much at a psychological level. The client was an experienced manager of a division of a large healthcare business, with approximately 200 staff under her span of accountability; she had previous experience of being coached.

As in the case of Tristan's session, the initial correlation matrix did not show a significant correlation between the client and the coach. For the statistical analysis of this session, there were more significant and positive correlations between the Q-sorts of the coach and the Q-sorts of the observers (7/8 possible correlations) but a weaker set of correlations between the client and the observers (2/8 significant and positive correlations). As in the analysis of Tristan's session, the correlations between observer Q-sorts were predominant (22/28 positive and significant correlations). In short, and unlike in the analysis of Tristan's session, the coach and client appeared to be in broad agreement about what happened in the session but the client appeared to have, at least to some extent, a different perspective.

There needs to be some caution however in this interpretation. In the case of Alice's session and in the spirit of experimentation, all the Q-sorts were initially factor analysed together. This resulted in 4/8 observer Q-sorts and the Q-sorts of both the coach and client loading together onto the same factor. This suggested that a shared viewpoint about the session could still be identified in the data. In other words, overall, there was a significant similarity in how the session had been perceived across perspectives including the perspective of the client. Q-methodology has been compared to quantum theory in the sense of small changes impacting (e.g. the factors that can be extracted by changing the combination of Q-sorts) unpredictably on changes in overall patterns. These issues have been discussed at length by Watts and Stenner (2005a)).

As in the previous factorial analysis of Tristan's session, a factor array was created for the 4 observers who loaded onto this factor but the Q-sorts for the coach and client were removed; this allowed a direct comparison between an expressed shared viewpoint across the observer Q-sorts against the coach and client's Q-sorts. Unique aspects of the client, then the coach, then the observers will be first considered (i.e. differences) after which, general patterns of similarity will be considered.

7.1.7 Observers and Coach Similar, Client different

The client's Q-Sort seemed to portray a sense of her being in control of the decision-making process. This was indicated by her giving less saliency than the coach or observers to those aspects of the session in which the coach and observers expressed the coach's behaviour as more direction-giving. For example, both coach and observers had rated *Q71 Coach suggests possible solutions* at 6 while the client had rated this at -5. Similarly, *Q74 Coach gives advice* was rated by the observers and coach at 5 but at -1 by the client. Although the coach and observers had a sense of the coach being quite directive within the conventions of coaching practice (and highlighted this in their Q-sorts and spoken accounts), the client, experiencing the session outside of coaching discourse (i.e. normative values promoted by

coaching bodies such as ICF, EMCC; e.g. in competency frameworks; in populist coaching texts and in many coach training programmes), seemed to have had a different impression; of a sense of being in control (and highlighted this seemingly in her Q-sort and to some extent, in her spoken account). It may be that coaches may be particularly aware of what might be understood as a coaching discourse about not being directive in coaching and made this apparent in their evaluation of the coaching session. However, for the client, this was not an issue within the realms of everyday experience or expectations about being coached and did not experience being directed. The client's sense of being in control in the session also seems to be highlighted in *Q69 Client suggests his next course of action*, rated at 3 by the client but at only 0 by the observers and -1 by the coach. Similarly, the client had a sense of the coach being less instrumental in identifying resources than either the coach and observers had thought (*Q12 Coach highlights client's resources and how they might be leveraged*, rated at -1 by the client but at 4 and 2 by the coach and observers respectively).

The client gave less prominence to those items which tended to place greater emphasis on the reflections of the coach. For example, the client rated *Q23 Coach describes her perception of the situation* at 0 whereas both the coach and observers rated this item at +4. Similarly, *Q32 Coach discloses own fallibility* was rated by the client at -5 but by the observers at 0 and the coach at -1. It would seem that the client was down-playing those items that put more emphasis on the coach than on her own active constructions in the session suggesting that the session had been sensed as being about her mental processing and verbal expressiveness rather than the coach's.

The client's Q-sort might also have suggested that a discussion of new practices may have been less important than might have appeared to coach and observers. *Q70 There is a discussion of new practices for the client* was rated at 4 by the observers and 6 by the coach while the client only rated this at 1. Taking the client's possible sense of being in control of decision-making, it is possible that the client valued having options rather than necessarily

immediate new action points. This interpretation is further supported by the client's spoken account in which she highlighted the importance of having options.

There were some elements of the experience of the client that the coach and observers did not appear to experience/ notice in the same way. For example, the client highlighted a sense of a shift in energy (*Q41 There appears to be a shift in energy during the coaching session*) which the client rated at 5 but the observers at only 0 and the coach at -5.

Similarly, *Q15 Coach encourages client to become aware of his immediate experience in the session* was rated by the observers and coach at 0 but at 4 by the client.

The coach and observers both seemed to find some aspects of the session more salient than the client including for example *Q24 There appears to be a productive use of metaphors* which both observers and coach rated at -6 whereas the client rated this at 0. This difference may be owing to the coach and observers having a particular language for talking about coaching in which there may be a general awareness of the use of metaphors (e.g. as in Narrative coaching) and a lack of use of metaphors perhaps made this aspect of the session conspicuous by its absence but only for professional coaches (observers and coach). One other difference between the coach and client's Q-Sorts related to the coach's humour (*Q28 Coach uses humour* was rated at +3 by the coach, +4 by the observers but at -3 by the client). Perhaps coaches' humour does not quite have the same sense for the client as for professional coaches!

In summary, there appeared to be some noticeable differences across the Q-sorts of the client and those of the coach and observers. Stepping into the world of the client, it might be helpful to consider that the client was a very experienced manager, and in this capacity, one would assume, used to directing large numbers of people and accustomed to consulting with others in order to arrive at her own final decisions. Irrespective of how the coach might have been engaging with her when viewed from coaching discourse, the client's sense of the coaching process was perhaps one of information gathering for her own decisions as

perhaps in everyday managerial activities. In other words, it would seem that she was constructing the coaching session in terms of what may be her everyday frame of reference. In relation to her own experiences (e.g. her experience of an energy shift and sense of heightened in session experience), unless, she was willing to disclose or express them overtly, then neither the coach nor observers would readily gain any sense of them. Similarly, given her experience of discussing personal issues in the session, perhaps humour would not be a characteristic a business client might readily use to describe a one-off session, or at least for this particular client whereas for a coach, it might be a sign of good rapport or important in a technical sense.

The perspective of the client analysed through her Q-sorting calls into question much of the spoken criticism of the observers who in their verbal feedback had suggested that the coach had been overly directive/ controlling in the session. From the client's perspective, her Q-sorting suggests very clearly that she had felt in control. It also suggests that a client from a business world might interpret the session in a similar manner to that when with direct reports or consultants: a discussion of options which she the manager can then evaluate to arrive at her own decisions.

7.1.8 Observers and Client Similar, Coach Different

Much of the Q-sorting of the coach seemed to indicate her different sense-making of the session relative to the observers and client. Overall, the coach seems to have reflected in her Q-sort what might be described perhaps as a more business-like/ less emotionally engaging understanding of the coaching process in a session which was also portrayed in her spoken account. In support of this interpretation, the coach tended to rate as insignificant relative to the client and observers, items that related to relational intensity, rating *Q42 Coach and client appear to be engaged* at -2 whereas it was rated at +5 for both observers and client. This interpretation is supported by the coach only rating *Q33 There*

appears to be rapport (strong connection) between client and coach at -1 (the client at +3 but by the observers also at -1).

Other aspects of the session that could be understood to have experiential intensity were rated as uncharacteristic relative to the observers and client. For example, the coach rated *Q15 Coach encourages client to become aware of his immediate experience* at -5 compared to +5 for the client and 0 for the observers. In a similar manner, the coach's -4 rating for *Q18 There is one or more periods of silent reflection* in contrast to the observers rating of this item at 1 and the client at +3 seems to be a statement about the session being constructed by the coach as an active conversation rather than an intense process of reflection, and again supporting the coach's spoken account. These Q-items also suggest that the coach may have been unaware of the depth of experiencing on the part of the client or at least have conceptualised depth of experience differently.

The observers also rated *Q9 There is an exploration of the client's in session nonverbal behaviour* at +5 but this item was rated by the coach at -2. The client had also rated Q9 at +6, which suggests that the observers had gleaned an impression of a particular aspect of the session as particularly significant. In the client's spoken account, she also referenced this aspect of the session. The coach's much lower rating of Q9 may relate to the coach not considering relevant any assumed underlying meaning of outward behaviour (in her spoken account she had said that she did not like to adopt a psychological approach to coaching practice).

In summary, the differences highlighted between the coach and the client/observers suggest that the coach had a more practical/ business-like, non-psychological oriented conceptualisation of coaching in which the relevance of in-session experiencing or aspects of intimacy relating to the relationship seemed to be of relatively less significance than they seemed to be for the client and observers. This construction of the coaching process might have impeded her sense-making of the experience of the client.

7.1.9 Coach and Client Similar, Observers Different

It is possible that the observers generally gained a stronger sense of visible signs of physicality than the client and coach. For example, *Q61 coach makes sounds or non-verbally encourages client to continue* was rated by the observers at +6 yet at only 1 and -1 by the client and coach respectively. Perhaps verbal sounds are only *noisy* from the outside.

Aspects of the session that related to breadth and depth of exploration seemed to take on more significance for the observers than for the coach or client (i.e. they sorted the items to highlight a lack of breadth and depth). For example, *Q25 Coach and client explore their differences in perception of self or situation* was rated by the observers at -5 but at 1 by the client and -1 by the coach. *Q5 Coach and client explore the deeper meaning of a presenting issue* was rated at -1 by the observers yet at 2 by the coach and client alike. *Q25 Coach points out potential unconscious motives* was rated at -4 by the observers but at 0 by the client and 1 by the coach. *Q77 Coach asks client to describe key learnings/take-aways* was rated at +4 and +5 respectively by coach and client whereas the observers rated Q77 at 0. Q77 might be an expression of the observers questioning depth of learning. One possible interpretation for these differences is that on the outside only, the session did not seem to have any meaning or breadth/ depth of exploration and learning. This finding supports an interpretation indicated in the analysis of Tristan's session in the previous section and in the spoken accounts generally, that a sense of purposeful endeavour is created within the coaching conversation that may not be sensed outside of that conversation.

The observers also rated *Q35 Coach and client discuss their relationship* at -4 while this item was rated a 0 by coach and client alike. One possibility is that on the outside, this item was salient because the relationship did not seem sufficiently collaborative from the perspective of the observers (as related in the spoken accounts and as something considered relevant within coaching discourse). However, within the interaction, the coach and client perhaps had a sense of a constructive interchange and any discussion of the relationship did not

seem necessary or a particularly salient issue. This finding provides further support for aspects of the session which are only readily understood/ experienced from within the session.

7.1.10 Observers, Coach and Client Similar

27/84 (32%) of the items did not vary by more than 2 rankings across any 3 scores. These similarities had led to coach, client and observers loading onto the same and single factor for the session overall in the initial factorial analysis. In order to show the degree of similarities in scores, similarities are shown by providing a coding framework as follows: OBS = observers; CL = client; CO = Coach. The score is then presented alongside (minus signs are given to indicate disagreement with the statement). For example OBS2 CL2 CO-3 means that both the observer and client rated the Q-item at 2 but the coach rated it at -3.

Some of those items generally rated as highly characteristic included Q4 *There is an exploration of the client's underlying mindset* (OBS 3 CL5 CO3); Q54 *Coach takes an active role in the session* (OBS3 CL2 CO3); Q29 *Coach shows empathy* (OBS4 CL4 CO3); Q39 *Coach checks if her understanding is correct* (OBS3 CL4 CO3); Q45 *Coach asks questions helping the client to elaborate* (OBS3 CL5 CO4); Q13 *coach explores clients emotions* (OBS4 CL4 CO2). Items rated as highly uncharacteristic by all participants were Q50 *The session is fast paced* (OBS-3 CL-3 CO-5); Q84 *There is a discussion of the client's impact on his environment* (OBS-4 CL-2 CO-3).

The level of agreement seems to highlight that there can be considerable agreement about the session irrespective of some differences. Some of the statements highlighted also seem to highlight subtle differences in how the session was perceived. While for example, the session had not been considered deep (reported earlier: Q5 OBS -1 CL2 -1 OBS -1), the session had been considered to allow the exploration of mindset (Q4 OBS3 CL5 CO3) and emotions had also been explored (Q13 OBS4 CL4 CO2). Agreement on Q29 *Coach shows empathy* (OBS4 CL4 CO3) also suggests that the coach was being empathic.

Some of the similarities in Q-sorts seemed to be at odds with what was reported by some observers in the discussion group (that mindset was not being explored; that the coach was not showing empathy; that the coach was talking so much which would seem to suggest that the client would not have been able to elaborate). In order to check out some of these possible contradictions, the individual Q-sorts were reviewed for those observers not loading onto the overall factor (4/8 participants; so far in this section all analysis for the observers has been based on the 4 who did load onto a common factor). For Q4 (above) the other observers rated this at +2, +1, -2 and -4. These comments suggest that the coach was not perceived by two of the participants to be exploring mindset in depth. Q45 was however rated at +2, +4, 0 and +6 suggesting that the coach was generally perceived to be encouraging the client to elaborate. It would seem that in spite of the coach being perceived as directive, the client was still given ample space to talk. Q13 (above) was rated at 0, +3, -3 and 0 which suggested that 3 of the 4 other participants did not think that the coach was exploring emotions. In relation to Q29 (above), the other observers rated this at +1, +4, +2 and +2 which suggested that the coach was generally perceived to show some empathy although this was not generally a defining characteristic of the session and less so than for those 4 loading onto the factor.

These observations seemed to highlight some variety in how the coach was being perceived (individual variance) or perhaps highlight some of the complexity in using the tool (measurement error). There does however still seem to be an overarching conclusion across all Q-sorts: that the coach was generally perceived to be encouraging the client to talk through issues but not entering into what might be constructed as psychological depth nor developing an especially strong relational engagement towards the client; one that might perhaps be described as friendly but not intimate. These comments would be consistent with how the coach described her own session and the high positive correlations between the coach's and observers' Q-sorts.

As in the case of the analysis of Tristan's session, the coach was perceived in the Q-sorting to show what might be constructed from the perspective of coaching discourses to show some positive characteristics (e.g. showing empathy, checking understanding, allowing the client to elaborate, showing high levels of engagement) but these were down-played in the spoken accounts at the expense of the wider criticism of some of the characteristics that were not considered praiseworthy in the spoken discussions. It seems that the breadth of items in the Q-set ensures that a balanced evaluation of the session is provided (unlike the spoken discussions).

7.1.11 Summary Alice's Session

As in the case of Tristan's session, it is not easy to arrive at a definitive conclusion about whether the sessions were perceived in a similar or different manner. In some ways, there were many areas of consensus across the Q-sorts (including many positive and significant correlations across Q-sorts), which suggest we must be careful not to make simplistic assumptions that the same session can be perceived very differently by coach, client and observers. However, at a detailed level of analysis differences in perspective, particularly from the client's viewpoint compared to that of the observers and coach could be discerned.

In spite of the observers noticing and coach's awareness of a high degree of advice-giving and generally high levels of activity on the part of the coach, the client felt very much in control. This suggests that the client's meaning-making might be quite different to how observers might make sense of the experience from the outside. This is an important finding as it suggests that observers, perhaps wedded to their own views of how coaching should be practised might simply be projecting their own value judgements on what is appropriate for the client when the client herself might have an experience which is very different to what might be perceived. The coach hadn't spoken directly about being controlling but this did not seem to be an issue, suggesting perhaps that she had not constructed her intervention in any way as dominating (in spite of the criticism from the observers). However, it did still

seem that the coach had overestimated her perception of self as being more active (if not directive) in terms of how the client had experienced her (e.g. in relation to identifying resources, suggesting new practices, giving her perspective, giving advice, suggesting solutions, etc. all of which the coach rated higher than the client). It may therefore be the case that current discourses of coaching might construct some interventions as much more directive and interventionist than they are actually experienced by the client. The analysis also suggests that some aspects of the client's depth of experiencing can be overlooked by coach and observers alike. Just because a session might seem relatively superficial from a coach's frame of reference (coach and observers), this does not mean that the client might not experience considerable depth in the session (sense of intimacy, sense of energy shift, in session experiencing, etc.).

7.1.12 Summary: Analyses of Individual Sessions

In this section, 2 sessions were described in detail. The first two descriptions illustrate the depth and breadth of analysis that can be carried out using Q methodology; perhaps also the necessity to do this and more, in order to provide a level of analysis that does justice to a relative ranking of 84 items by different participants. The third analysis hopefully conveyed a sense of the session but there was scope for a much more broad ranging analysis.

Perhaps what is achieved in the analyses described in this section is the way this exploratory approach points to the potential for more in-depth research; for example if over many sessions, only the client tends to sense a shift in energy or if clients tend to favour having options rather than concrete action plans; if coaches tend to agree with observers more than they do with the clients when evaluating a session from an analytical perspective (using a Q-sort), etc.

The in-depth session analysis does seem to suggest that coaches and observers do often share a common understanding for making sense of sessions, converging on some formal aspects of the session that the client seems to consider relatively insignificant (e.g. about

whether the relationship might be discussed, whether the coach gives advice, whether the coach encourages the coach to make choices, whether there is depth of exploration, the use of metaphors, etc.). It would seem that professional coaches share a common language for discussing coaching and when describing a session, they can draw on that shared vocabulary. This common understanding seems to encourage a degree of similarity in Q-sorting.

It would also seem that neither the coach nor the client appreciate the depth of experiencing on the part of the client (Stiles and Snow, 1984). The findings also seem to suggest that there is an active process of meaning making taking place between the coach and the client. This is particularly difficult for observers to sense or construct and can lead to observers underestimating the significance of the discussion that is experienced by the client.

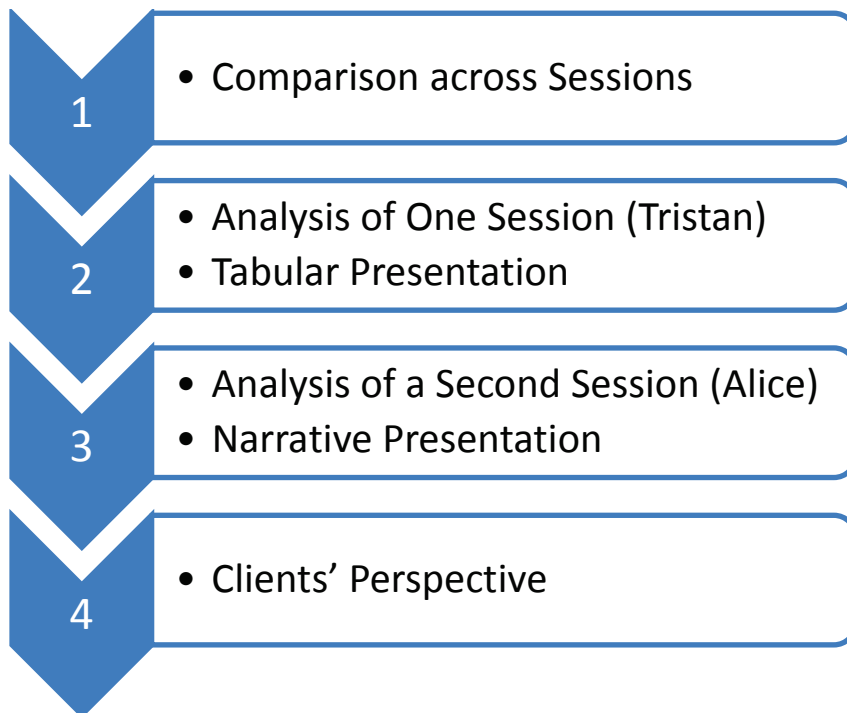
The in-depth analysis highlighted how each participant constructs their experience or observations of a coaching session filtered through their own frames of reference; that is humanistic coaches tend to perceive issues central to their understanding of coaching process (e.g. relational issues); behavioural coaches tend to perceive a lack of activity, etc. In other words, what is observable is at least to some extent constructed, rather than actually occurring in the sessions. It seemed in the analyses that the coaches facilitating the sessions imagined characteristics of the session as they were not reported as being experienced by the client nor were they noticed by the observers. Similarly, the observers noticed what was important to them (e.g. the coach being directive). This sense of construction of the coaching process from an internal point of reference was also apparent in the way the clients sorted the Q-items (Tristan's client constructing the process as one of the discussion of progress and practices; Alice's client as being in control and identifying options; Joanne's client as a deeply engaging experience). These internal constructions were not readily identified by the observers or coach.

Overall therefore, the detailed analyses of the sessions suggest:

- a) That there is both agreement and disagreement about what happens in a coaching session
- b) That similarities between coach-observers and coaches arise owing to the sharing of a common language for describing a session
- c) That similarities arise between coach and client because there is a shared understanding that is co-created in the session
- d) That similarities arise between client and observers because some activities are more or less true in an objective sense: they are visible and happen
- e) That differences arise because coach-observers and coaches have different frames of reference/ standards for evaluating particular characteristics of coaching sessions and because their own ways of conceptualising what is important in the coaching process might colour what is perceived
- f) That differences arise because the meaning-making process is central to the process; clients make sense of the session within their own frameworks of understanding irrespective of what might be occurring in an observable way; similarly, the coach and client create together significance: what they focus on becomes important in the moment that they give attention to particular foci in the coaching session irrespective of how insignificant these foci may appear on the outside

In the next sections, rather than attempt to build up an analysis of the client, coach and observer section session by session, the analyses take a top down perspective by considering each perspective on its own in turn (client, coach, observers); that is, to identify general patterns in the sorting irrespective of the specific sessions in which the participants had been involved. This approach pre-empts the need to conduct a further 3 in-depth analyses of the remaining sessions followed by further detailed thematic analyses. The approach presented is more parsimonious.

7.2. The Client's Perspective



The Q Sorts of the 5 of the 6 clients who completed Q-sorts were analysed together and separate from the other Q-sorts. The purpose of this statistical analysis was to identify any common ways of experiencing the coaching process.

A one factor solution accounted for 45% of the variation in the data. Those items scoring the highest in the factor array are shown in Table 7.12 below. The items scoring lowest are shown in Table 7.13. For purposes of comparison, the rankings for coaches are also provided. These rankings were also obtained by analysing the coaches' Q-sorts together as a separate data set and will be discussed in more detail in a later section. The differences in rankings (final position in the client and coach's factor arrays) are also shown in Table 7.12 and 7.13.

Table 7.12: Q Items rated by the Client as Highly Characteristic

	STATEMENT	COACH RANKING	CLIENT RANKING	Difference
45	Coach asks questions helping client to elaborate	3	+6	3
29	Coach shows empathy	5	+6	1
16	Coach challenges client's perspective of situation and/or self	3	+5	2
33	There appears to be rapport (strong connection) between client and coach	6	+5	1
4	There is an exploration of the client's underlying mindset	-5	+5	11
42	Coach and client appear to be engaged	4	+5	1
40	There is a sense of optimism in the coaching session	2	+4	2
44	Coach follows up on significant statements by clients	5	+4	1
83	Coach inquires about client's aim for the session	4	+4	0
15	Coach encourages client to become aware of his immediate in-session experience	4	+4	0
70	There is a discussion of new practices for the client	1	+4	3
39	Coach checks if her understanding is correct	3	+4	1

Table 7.13: Q Items rated by the Client as Highly *Uncharacteristic*

	STATEMENT	COACH RANKING	CLIENT RANKING	Difference
71	Coach suggests possible solutions	1	-4	3
43	Coach and client use a development plan to guide sessions	-2	-4	2
32	Coach discloses own fallibility	0	-4	4
62	Coach is verbose	-2	-4	2
31	Coach repairs lost connection to the client during the session	0	-4	4
51	The session appears highly structured	-5	-4	1
82	Coach questions client's level of commitment to coaching	-4	-5	1
22	Coach discloses own feelings/. Bodily sensations evoked in the session	-1	-5	4
63	Coach interrupts client	-4	-5	1
68	Coach appears to focus on a third party's agenda	-4	-5	1
57	Coach appears to be using an intervention mechanistically	-2	-6	4
58	Coach appears to be pursuing her own agenda	0	-6	6

The highest ranked items in the factor array seems to suggests that the clients rated as salient those aspects of the session that enabled them to talk through their issues (Q45) with an empathic (Q29) coach with whom they felt connected (Q33), who challenged their perspective (Q16, Q4, Q44) and who encouraged them to reflect on their in-session experiencing (Q15). The process was engaging (Q42), optimistic (Q40), had aims (Q83) and led to a discussion of new practices.

The lowest ranked items in the factor array are shown in Table 7.13. The lowest ranked items in the factor array seem to suggest that the clients experienced the session as being about them rather than the coach (Q58) or anyone else (Q68). They were either not exposed to, or did not consider significant any personal sharing on the part of the coach (Q32, Q22) which again seems to suggest that they experienced the sessions as being about them. Similarly, they appeared to experience a sense of freedom to speak (Q62, Q63). They did not have a strong sense of the coach directing them (Q71). The interaction had appeared free flowing (Q57, Q51 & Q31). The clients also perhaps wanted to make clear their commitment to the process (Q82).

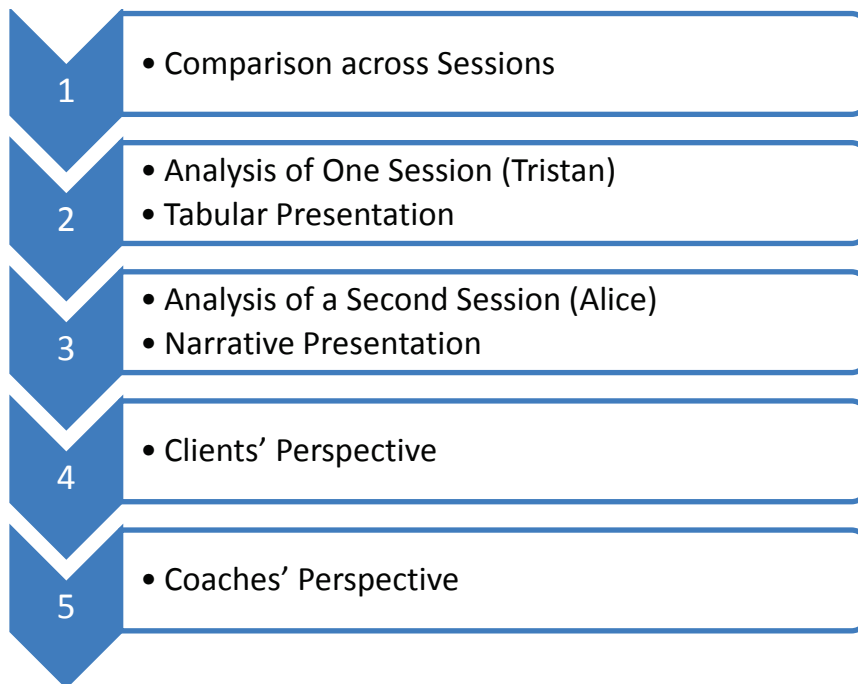
The client analysis indicates the importance of the three dimensions of the working alliance (goal, task and bonds; e.g. (Horvath, 1981; Bordin, 1979) for example the client making salient the importance of *goals* and new practices; commitment to *task* shown for example by the client highlighting his commitment to the process and finding the coach picking up on relevant issues; *bond* shown by a perception of rapport and experience of an empathic coach. The findings also emphasise the importance of the clients' heightened awareness and general sense of exploration of issues (not unconscious processes but of mindset and perspectives) as well as the client having a sense of the session being about their having space to consider alternative perspectives in a free flowing and optimistic conversational exchange. The findings therefore provide a broader perspective than a more limited set of constructs emphasised in the Working Alliance (Tryon et al 2007). The Q methodological analysis of the client perspective, as was the case for the analysis of the interviews also suggests what might be understood as the existence of common factors in the coaching process (Wampold, 2001; Grenavage and Norcross, 1990). Many common factors appeared to be highlighted in the clients' Q-sorting (e.g. empathy, sense of optimism, exploration of inner world of client, new practices, etc.). For risk of over-simplification, the experience of the coaching session was at a very fundamental level that of being asked questions that focused on the client's mindset in a positive atmosphere that allowed new perspectives to emerge and that led to action possibilities. This in turn suggests that coaching in a sense is a very simple process. From the client's perspective, the coach needs to be able to relate well interpersonally and ask questions that provoke reflection and lead to options for action.

In comparing the Q-scores in the client's factor array against the ratings in the coach factor array, arguably, relatively little stands out in terms of differences in items rated as highly characteristic with the exception of one item relating to mindset (Q4). In fact, the average difference in ranked positions (calculated from Table 7.13) for these items is only 15 (ranked differences)/11 statements = 1.36 (differences in rankings are only typically considered

significant when >2 , (Watts and Stenner, 2012)). Coach and client ratings of Q4 however are striking and suggest that the experience was very much explorative from the client's perspective. The client also seems to have given more emphasis to new practices (70) and the coach asking questions to elaborate (Q45). These items may emphasise the saliency of the practical utility of the sessions and the very basic process of being asked questions from the client's perspective. It is possible that coaches may underestimate the saliency of these aspects of the coaching process from the client's perspective.

With respect to differences in relation to highly uncharacteristic items, the client's ratings tend to emphasise the perceived professionalism of the coach (Q57). This difference could be due to the coach's modesty, actual expertise or even a fantasy of expertise projected onto a coach who provides a context to allow client's to think differently. In short, there may be some form of positive attribution process which may or may not be based in what the coach actually does, but may relate more to what is achieved by the client or to how the client makes sense of the coach (referent power; socially sanctioned helper, etc.). There are also differences in rank-ordering of items in relation to those items that relate to what the coach might do, the client tending to score these lower (Q32, Q22, Q58). This seems to be a strong expression of the session being experienced as about them the clients. Q71 might also suggest a sense of the clients doing more of the work (even if advice or suggestions are provided). Q31 would be something to highlight as irrelevant in the context of the perception of a good relationship.

7.3 The Coaches' Perspective



The coach's Q-sorts were analysed separately to all the other Q-sorts. A one factor solution accounted for 22% of the variation and had an eigenvalue of 1.4. All coaches loaded onto this factor. A factor solution which only accounts for 22% of the variation in the data doesn't actually explain much of what is happening ($0.22 \times 0.22 = 5\%$ of the explained variance). The factor is only therefore giving an indication of some commonality but in the context of considerable individual variance and potentially measurement error. This finding alone suggests that there is a need to consider in depth the individual Q-sorts of the respondents to make sense of individual sorting patterns. However, the overall pattern still provides an indication of some commonality across Q-sorts and allows for a degree of comparison across perspectives.

The % of the variance explained by the Q Factor in the coaches' Q sorts is interesting when compared to the Q factor extracted from the clients' Q Sorts which accounted for 45% of the variation in the data. It would seem that the coaches were showing greater dissimilarity in how they evaluated their own sessions than had their clients. This may be because coaches make more nuanced judgements about the session or have a specialised vocabulary (or

understanding of the possible meaning of items) which allowed them to discriminate between items more discerningly (e.g. as suggested when considering the way Tristan had sorted items). The highest and lowest scoring items in the factor array for the coaches are shown in tables 7.14 and 7.15. The values of the clients are also shown for comparative purposes.

Table 7.14: Q Items rated by the Coach as Highly Characteristic

	STATEMENT	COACH RANKING	CLIENT RANKING	Difference
33	There appears to be rapport (strong connection) between client and coach	+6	+5	1
76	Coach encourages client to make choices	+6	2	4
29	Coach shows empathy	+5	+5	0
52	Coach and client appear to bring the session to closure easily	+5	6	1
44	Coach follows up on key/significant statements made by client	+5	+4	1
54	Coach takes an active role during the session	+5	3	2
15	Coach encourages client to become aware of his immediate experience	+4	4	0
83	Coach inquires about client's aim for the session	+4	+4	0
7	There is a discussion about the client's overall goals	+4	2	2
42	There appears to be a shift in energy during the coaching session	+4	5	1
79	Coach and client appear to understand each other	+4	3	1
41	There appears to be a shift in energy during the coaching session	+4	3	1

Table 7.15: Q Items rated by the Coach as Highly *Uncharacteristic*

	STATEMENT	COACH RANKING	CLIENT RANKING	Difference
80	There is a discussion about how to measure the success of the engagement.	-4	0	4
63	Coach interrupts client	-4	-5	1
68	Coach appears to focus on third party's agenda	-4	-5	1
25	Coach and client explore their differences in perceptions of self or situation	-4	-1	3
2	There is an exploration of the client's values	-4	0	4
82	Coach questions client's level of commitment to coaching	-4	-5	1
4	There is an exploration of the client's underlying mindset	-5	5	11
19	There is a discussion of the results of a psychometric instrument	-5	-3	2
51	The session appears highly structured	-5	-4	1
47	There is discussion of issues relating to the termination of coaching	-5	-2	3
14	Coach explores client's emotions	-6	2	9
18	There is one or more moments of silent reflection	-6	0	6

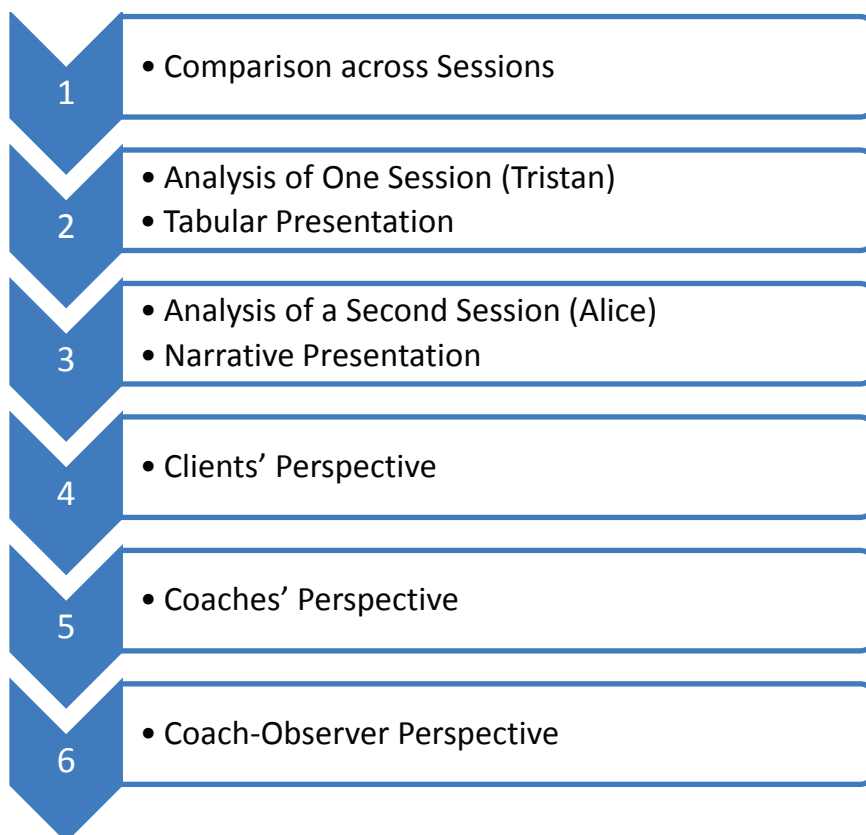
The factor array for the coaches is broadly similar to the factor array of the clients.

Comparing first of all the highest scoring items in the factor array for the coaches, the coaches like the clients highlighted empathy (Q29) and rapport (Q33). They also highlighted session aims (Q83). Like their clients, the coaches had seen themselves picking up on the client's statements (Q44). Collectively, these commonalities also seem to relate to the Working Alliance concept (*goals*: Q83; *tasks*: Q44, Q79; *bond*: Q29 and Q33; Bordin, 1979, Tryon, 2007).

There are relatively few differences between how the coaches rated the sessions as highly characteristic and how the clients did so (as expressed in the factor arrays for the highest ranked items: 14 items/ aggregated differences in places of 12 calculated from table = 1.17). The coaches have given more saliency to encouraging the client to make choices which might relate to a particular nuanced understanding of coaching process or that the clients simply did not feel any pressure to make decisions (as suggested in their spoken accounts).

There were more differences between how the coaches rated the sessions as highly uncharacteristic and how their clients rated the sessions. The main difference was in relation to depth of exploration of mindset (Q4), perceptions (Q25) and exploration of the client's emotions (Q14) and values (Q2); perhaps related to this process, periods of silent reflection (Q18). The experience had been relatively superficial from the perspective of the coaches who as experienced coaches are very likely to have experienced greater levels of depths with clients. For the clients however, perhaps relatively inexperienced in terms of coaching, the experience had been quite profound for them. This finding supports findings in psychotherapy. The coaches were not however unaware of a sense of the client's experiencing (Q15). It seems that the coaches and clients simply held different benchmarks for depth of exploration.

7.4 The Observers' Perspective



The observer's Q Sorts alone were analysed in a separate factor analysis. The best solution was a two factor solution which explained 31% of the variation in the data. The first factor

explained 18% of the variance in the data and the second factor a further 13%. The respective eigenvalues were 7.2 and 3.7 indicating the identification of significant factors. Other solutions were attempted but no significant eigenvalue could be obtained for a third factor. The observers from the various sessions loading significantly onto the 2 factors are as shown in Table 7.16 below:

Table 7.16: Observer Loadings onto Factors 1 and 2

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Notes
Session 1: Tristan	6/6 observers		No confounding
Session 2: Marjorie	6/6 observers		No confounding
Session 3: Joanne		4/4 observers	No confounding
Session 4: Alice	4/8 observers	4/8 observers	4Q-sorts showing loaded onto both factors but the main loading only is showing
Session 5: Alison	1/6 observers	5/6 observers	No confounding
Session 6: Drew	1/5 observers	4/5 observers	3/5 Q-sorts confounding

In summary, the observer Q-sorts for sessions 1 and 2 comprised factor 1; the observer Q-sorts for sessions 3 (Joanne), 5 (Alison) and 6 (Drew) tended to comprise Factor 2 and the Q-sorts from session 4 (Alice) tended to load onto either or both factors. It would seem that sessions 1 and 2 were construed by the observers as broadly similar but qualitatively differently to sessions 3, 5 and 6. Session 4 was construed in a manner somewhere in-between these sets of sessions.

Table 7.17 and 7.18 list the largest differences between Factor 1 and 2 (Items rated highly characteristic on F1 but less so in F2 are showing in Table 7.17 and Items rated as highly uncharacteristic on F1 but more characteristic in F2 in Table 7.18).

Table 7.17: Largest Differences between Factors 1 and 2 (Observer Viewpoints; High Scores on Factor 1)

Q No		Factor 1	Factor 2	Difference
5	COACH AND CLIENT EXPLORE THE DEEPER MEANING OF A PRESENTING ISSUE	3	-6	10
2	THERE IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE CLIENT'S VALUES	3	-6	10
4	THERE IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE CLIENT'S UNDERLYING MINDSET	2	-5	8
18	THERE IS ONE OR MORE PERIODS OF SILENT REFLECTION	1	-5	7
8	COACH POINTS OUT POTENTIAL UNCONSCIOUS MOTIVES	0	-5	5
16	COACH CHALLENGES CLIENT'S PERSPECTIVE OF SITUATION AND/OR OF SELF	3	-2	6
33	THERE APPEARS TO BE RAPPORT (STRONG CONNECTION) BETWEEN CLIENT AND COACH	6	1	5
7	COACH POINTS OUT RECURRENT THEME IN CLIENT'S BEHAVIOUR	4	0	4
44	COACH FOLLOWS UP ON KEY/SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS MADE BY CLIENT	4	-1	5
14	COACH ENCOURAGES CLIENT TO FEEL MORE DEEPLY IN SESSION	0	-4	4
21	COACH GIVES FEEDBACK FROM COACH'S EXPERIENCE OF CLIENT	1	-2	4
13	COACH EXPLORES CLIENT'S EMOTIONS	0	-3	3

Table 7.18: Largest Differences between Factors 1 and 2 (Observer Viewpoints; Low scores on Factor 1)

Q No		Factor 1	Factor 2	Difference
51	THE SESSION APPEARS HIGHLY STRUCTURED	-5	0	5
82	COACH QUESTIONS CLIENT'S LEVEL OF COMMITMENT TO COACHING	-6	-2	4
81	COACH REDIRECTS CLIENT TO CLIENT'S AGENDA	-2	1	4
28	COACH USES HUMOUR	-1	3	4
50	THE SESSION IS FAST PACED	-5	0	5
54	COACH TAKES AN ACTIVE ROLE DURING THE SESSION	2	6	4
46	THERE IS A DISCUSSION OF THE COACHING CONTRACT	-3	2	6
58	COACH APPEARS TO BE PURSUING HER OWN AGENDA	-4	2	7
57	COACH APPEARS TO BE USING AN INTERVENTION MECHANISTICALLY	-6	1	7
63	COACH INTERRUPTS CLIENT	-4	3	8
65	COACH SUGGESTS IN-SESSION EXERCISE/ACTIVITY	-4	5	10
62	COACH IS VERBOSE	-5	5	11

In table 7.17, Q Items 5, 2, 4, 8, 16, 7, 14, 21 and 13 all seem to relate to a perception of an exploration of depth. Item 33 is about the quality of the relationship and item 18 is about giving time for reflection which probably also is important in ensuring an exploration of depth. It would therefore seem that sessions 3, 5 and 6 (factor 2) were considered to be relatively superficial and sessions 1 and 2 (factor 1) relatively much deeper in breadth and depth. Session 3 seems to be occupying a middle ground. The ratings of sessions 3, 5 and 6 confirm many of the negative evaluations given in the spoken comments in the observer groups about a lack of depth and breadth of exploration and a lack of meaningful exploration generally.

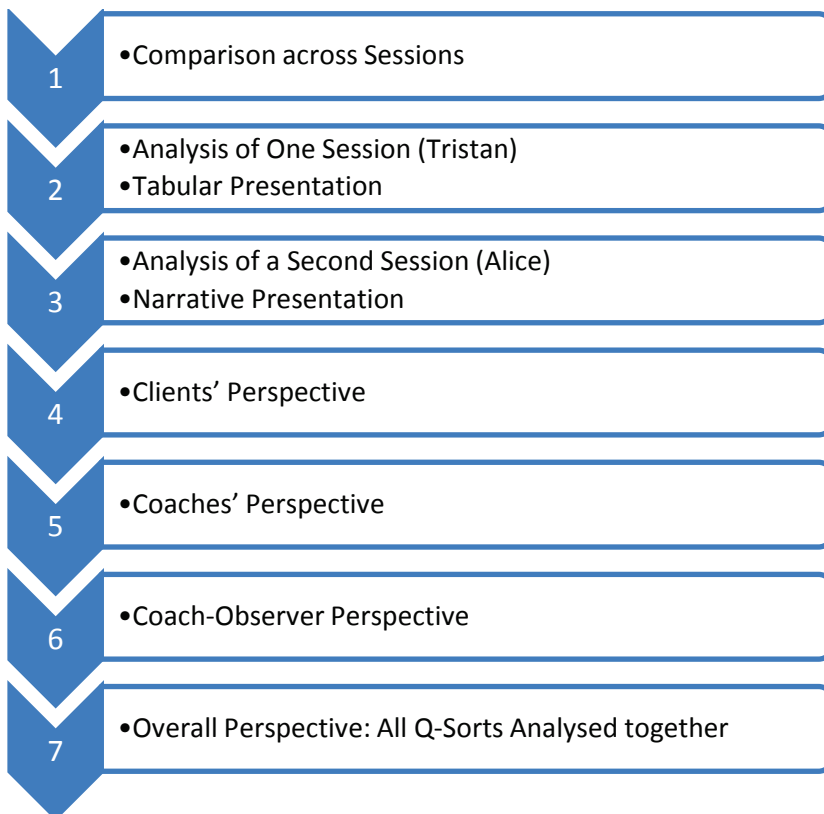
In Table 7.18, the perception of the coaches expressed in Factor 2 (in relation to sessions 3, 5 and 6) seems more negative with a verbose (Q62), interruptive coach (Q63). Taking accounts of the verbal comments, the Q-sorting confirms the impression of coaches in these sessions as appearing overly active in the conversation, using exercises at the expense of discussion and somewhat intent on imposing their own agenda. Factor 1 tends to emphasise the perception of a less structured approach (Q51), greater client commitment (Q82), a much slower paced session. The coach was perceived as less self-interested (Q58), much higher skilled (Q57), more conversationally oriented (Q65) and one giving the space to the client to speak (Q62, Q63). However, the coaching contract was not discussed (Q46) and there was little humour (Q28).

Although it might seem that many of these characteristics seem much more positive for the coaches associated with sessions 1 and 2, it is important to note that many of the observers in sessions 1 and 2 were concerned with the slow, reflective approaches of the coaches which were expressed in the spoken accounts. It is not therefore possible to assume that all coaches will be in favour of the approach demonstrated in Factor 1. On the other hand, most of the criticisms of coaches in the open discussions related to a lack of developmental coaching and/or breadth and depth of exploration. For many coaches therefore, particular in

relation to factor 2, it would seem that they were expressing their dissatisfaction and expressing how coaching should not be practised.

The analysis of the observer Q Sorts seems to indicate overall however a basic distinction between coaching practice; one in which the coach appears to be skilled in conducting a free flowing, explorative, meaningful and developmental conversation focused on the client with good rapport building; and one in which the coach appears to fail to demonstrate these characteristics (i.e. is more focused on own agenda, gives too much direction, doesn't give space for the client to speak, fails to establish rapport, focuses more on activities than the conversation which is moreover, relatively superficial).

7.5 Final Analysis: All Q-Sorts Analysed together



A final overall analysis was carried out in which all the Q-sorts were analysed together. The best solution was considered to be a 3 factor solution representing 36% of the variance. Each factor had eigenvalues suggesting distinct factors (10.3, 4.3 & 2.4). Factor 1 explained 15% of the variance, Factor 2, 9% and Factor 3, 12%. Most Q-sorts loaded onto one of these three factors but there was considerable confounding which meant that only those Q – sorts loading uniquely on a factor were used to generate the factor arrays for the 3 factors. This allows the identification of a clearer distinction between viewpoints expressed in each factor. (A full analysis of this solution by PQ Method is included in the Appendix 11. It is intended to illustrate the principal of Q methodological analyses. It is > 80 pages for a single Q- analysis and includes a full correlation matrix for all Q sorts used in this Inquiry. A full correlation matrix has also therefore been provided separately).

Table 7.19: Q-sorts Loading onto the 3 Factors Extracted when all Q-sorts were analysed together

	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3	CONFOUNDED
Coach Session 1: Marjorie				X (F2 & F3)
Coach Session 2: Tristan			X	
Coach Session 3: Joanne				X (F1 & F2)
Coach Session 4: Alice			X	
Coach Session 5: Alison	X			
Coach Session 6: Drew	X			
Client Session 1: Marjorie				X (F1 & F3)
Client Session 2: Tristan	X			
Client Session 3: Joanne	X			
Client Session 4: Alice	X			
Client Session 5: Alison	X			
Client Session 6: Drew				
Observers Session 1: Marjorie		1/6	2/6	3/6 (F1 & F3)
Observers Session 2: Tristan	5/6			1/6 (F1 & f3)
Observers Session 3: Joanne			4/6	
Observers Session 4: Alice			5/8	3/8 (All Factors)
Observers Session 5: Alison	1/6	4/6		1/6 (F2 & F3)
Observers Session 6: Drew	3/5	2/5		

Factor 1 seems to be represented primarily by Tristan's session even though Tristan's Q-sort did not load onto that session. This is demonstrated by 5/6 observers for that session loading only onto his session and 4/5 of the clients completing Q-sorts; 3/5 observers from Drew's session also loaded onto that factor suggesting that the observers had constructed Drew's session in a similar manner to that of Tristan's.

It would seem that the clients' experience of a coaching session aligned with that observed in Tristan's session even though those sessions were generally evaluated in a different manner by the observers and by the coaches themselves in some cases. However, given also that 2 of the 6 coaches also loaded onto Tristan's session, it would seem that in spite of differing views of the observers, the coaches constructed their approach as being more aligned with that of Tristan's coaching approach.

Tristan's session was analysed in detail in the early part of this chapter and suggested that the coach was perceived as giving ample space for the client to reflect and demonstrated lots of empathy. These were the key experiences of the clients irrespective of how the

observers perceived the sessions; they were also the perceptions of some of the coaches. In spite of the many criticisms made by the observers of Drew's session, factor 2 still highlights the coach's relational engagement and asking of questions. The rankings hide evaluations of perceptions. The observers of Tristan's session and of Drew's session downplayed the basic processes of empathy/ relational engagement and asking of reflective questions which the clients conversely seem to have noticed (and valued given their spoken accounts) and two of the 5 coaches seem to wish to align themselves with. It is perhaps understandable that Drew would align with Tristan's session if 3/5 observers also loaded onto the same factor. For Alison however, she seems to have constructed her session as quite differently to the observers. A detailed comparison of the factors was carried out and confirmed these differences. Given space constraints, the details of the analysis are not reported here.

7.6 Chapter Summary

This session has presented a detailed analysis of the findings from Q-mode factor analyses and comparison or ratings generally across perspectives. The findings tend to suggest that the client constructs the coaching process in some ways differently and in other ways in a similar manner to coaches and observers. Clients tend to make sense of the sessions as experiences in which they are asked reflective questions that prompt new perspectives and options for action with an empathic coach; this is, for them, an explorative process with heightened awareness. The coaches tend to be more focused on 'technical' aspects of their approach (e.g. whether they discussed the relationship, whether they encouraged the client to make choices, etc.). They also considered the sessions to be emotionally unchallenging (fewer periods of silent reflection, less exploration of emotions or mindset). This does not mean however, they that did not think that the clients did not experience the sessions at a relatively deep emotional level; just that for them, based on their experience perhaps, the sessions were not particularly deep. The coaches were aligned with their clients in considering that they had established an effective relational engagement and had generally

explored issues. The observers, while identifying the approach of the coach as relationally engaging, generally used the Q-sorting process to express their dissatisfaction with their perceptions of a lack of depth of exploration or meaningful engagement. It would seem that from the outside, the extent of meaning-making between coach and client can seem particularly superficial.

The analyses did highlight how, in spite of some general similarities in perceptions, there could be considerable differences in perspectives at the level of an individual session. This included for example how a client can make sense of the session in a way perhaps aligned with her own frameworks of understanding irrespective of what might seem to suggest a different type of experience when analysed from the outside but from a viewpoint of coaching discourse. This suggests that clients have a capacity to construct their experiences in particular ways irrespective of what a coach might be observed to do from the outside observer perspective. The individual analyses also highlighted how coaches may be unaware of the inner experiences of clients (e.g. energy shifts) occurring in the sessions.

Key Points

- *The Statistical analysis tended to support the findings from the thematic analysis described in Chapters 4, 5 and 6; that is the clients and coaches both had positive impressions of the sessions and the coach-observers generally negative ones*
- *The statistical analysis suggested that all participants often noticed similar events; this seemed to suggest that how the participants interpreted the events varied; however there were some exceptions to this which suggested that the meaning of events was often privately and subjectively experienced/ constructed*
- *The statistical analysis could be more easily interpreted in light of the spoken accounts and vice-versa; the statistical analysis seemed to provide support for the data interpreted in the thematic analysis*

8.0 Chapter 8 Discussion

This discussion chapter will focus on the central topic of interest in this thesis which is how the investigation contributes to providing an understanding of the coaching process. From the perspective of the client, the most salient finding was perhaps how the process seemed to meet the interpersonal needs of the clients. From the perspective of the coach, the process seemed to be one of perception and decision-making conducted as an expert intervention. From the perspective of the dyad, the process seemed to be one of inter-subjective meaning making. From the perspective of the coach-observers, the process seemed to suggest the social construction of the process of coaching: what is valued or considered important in coaching as a practice. These are high-level findings and will be discussed in some depth in this Chapter. I will also provide a review of the use of conducting the Inquiry using a range of research methods flexibly and in combination. This is because there would seem to be scope for understanding how such a wide ranging and flexible approach could be of general benefit in research and allow an understanding of a phenomenon; in the case of this Inquiry, a coaching session, in breadth and depth.

8.1 Client perspective: coaching as a process of satisfying interpersonal needs

The similarity expressed in the accounts and Q sorting of the clients was a particularly salient characteristic of their perspective of the coaching process. All clients expressed emphatically a sense of being in control in the session and of feeling that they could take more effective control of their personal circumstances after the coaching sessions. They all expressed a sense of being the centre of attention in the sessions; of being taken seriously and of being given positive affirmations; they all expressed a sense of being valued. The accounts of the coaches in chapter 5 seemed to corroborate what we might have expected to have found in the accounts of the clients, providing a form of triangulation of the experiences of the clients. For example, when the clients spoke of being listened to, the coaches spoke of listening to the clients; when the clients spoke of receiving positive affirmations, the coaches spoke of giving positive affirmations; when the clients spoke of being in control, the coaches spoke of giving control of the agenda to the clients.

The accounts of the coach-observers were also very critical when the coach was not perceived to listen to the client, show him respect or allow him to take control; they were cynical of any apparent inauthentic affirmations that were given. Their perspective seemed to further support the perceived importance of listening to the client, allowing the client to take control in the session, determine his own course of action and the importance of the coach being empathic. It seemed that the coach-observers highlighted the importance of these aspects of the coaching process.

The experiences described by the clients seemed to provide what could be conceptualised as the satisfaction of interpersonal needs (client perspective) or the perceived importance of satisfying interpersonal needs (coach and coach-observer perspectives); specifically the need for significance, competence and affection (Schutz, 1977). Many of these client experiences, at the same time seemed to align with the principles of client-centred approaches in which the practitioner adopts a position of positive regard and unconditional

acceptance (meeting perhaps the client's interpersonal needs for significance and affection) and non-directedness (meeting the client's needs to be competent/ to take control). The accounts and Q-sorts of the clients and of the coaches also suggested some characteristics of the approach of the coaches that would suggest some congruence with a general person-centred orientation. This was in spite of the coaches adopting frameworks that were not explicitly person-centred.

Given that all the coaches described different ways of conducting their coaching sessions and did not talk explicitly about a specific client-centred approach (excepting one coach), it would seem that general principles implicit in the client centred approach (e.g. such as listening intently to the client, showing empathy and being accepting of the client) are integral to many coaching traditions and individual coaching styles. One might further argue that if coaching is about satisfying interpersonal needs, what might count in coaching are not particular traditions, techniques or styles deployed by the coach but the principles of person-centred approaches (e.g. Rogers, 1961; Rogers, J, 2008, Joseph and Linley, 2006) which ensure that a client is made to feel significant, competent or cared for.

There may be a parallel in coaching to the early Hawthorne experiments (Franke and Kaul, 1978) in the wider field of organizational behaviour in which what seemed to count in raising employee performance was the process of giving attention to employees rather than their participating in any specific type of intervention. If the giving of attention is what might be valued by the client in coaching, the actual content of the coaching conversation might be of secondary importance. In this context, the overt coaching conversation might be about addressing a new role, a specific problem in the workplace or about increasing a client's self-awareness. However, what might be particularly valued by the client is the way the conversation provides a medium for the satisfaction of interpersonal needs. The Q-sort analysis in particular tended to suggest that the identification of new practices was also important so it would not be appropriate to argue that the coaching process is only about meeting interpersonal needs.

The research raises the question as to whether the satisfaction of a client's interpersonal needs may be instrumental in leading to changes beyond the session. It seems possible that if a client gains a sense of control in the session or experiences being in control that they might then be able to take control of their life situation outside of the coaching session. Similarly, if they gain a sense of being respected, valued or supported in the coaching session, they then might feel more energised and resourceful to take action outside of the coaching conversation. The content of the coaching session then becomes primarily symbolic: actions agreed in the session might not be those that the client ultimately puts into practice. Insights and new perspectives gained in the session may be far less instrumental in effectuating change than having a sense of resourcefulness to address issues or to appreciate the scope for reconceptualising their current situations.

The findings did suggest that what the client took out of the session were general motivational elements and a sense of being resourceful rather than specific actions that they would take away. Most clients did not leave the session with clear action plans, but did leave with an overall sense of positivity gained from the session and a range of possible actions they could take. These comments were also reflected by some of the observers; for example in comments highlighting a sense of the client gaining control or simply the therapeutic benefit of being able to unload concerns and for those concerns not to be criticised by another (acceptance; unconditional positive regard, empathy; e.g. Rogers, 1961; Rogers, J, 2008, Joseph and Linley, 2006).

The goal of much of the psychotherapy process literature discussed in chapter 2 is to identify what aspects of the practitioner-client process experienced in a session lead to long-term outcomes beyond the session (Rice and Greenberg, 1986, Elliott, 2010). The importance of the satisfaction of these needs identified in the Inquiry raises the question of the possible relevance of interpersonal needs satisfaction as an important process outcome measure. The satisfaction of these needs also calls into question the relative importance of specific

insights and actions acquired in a coaching session relative to their symbolic significance in stimulating change.

An understanding of the coaching process as the satisfaction of interpersonal needs might also explain the importance of common factors identified in the literature on psychotherapy. For example, the practitioner's expression of empathy (one salient common factor; Grenavage and Norcross, 1990) may lead to the client gaining a sense of self-worth; the practitioner's expression of optimism and non-directedness (other common factors; Grenavage and Norcross, 1990) may convey to the client a sense of being able to take control; the practitioner's expressions of respect as a socially sanctioned healer (yet another common factor; Grenavage and Norcross, 1990) is interpreted by the client as an authoritative declaration of his (the client's) own significance. Most if not all common factors could be constructed as relevant in some way to the satisfaction of interpersonal needs. This understanding of process could be of as much relevance in psychotherapy as in coaching. In this sense, common factors (Wampold, 2001) should not be constructed as a placebo effect because it would seem that they have some instrumental value in meeting interpersonal needs; the client actually experiences control, personal significance and self-worth. These experiences might in turn promote a sense of resourcefulness and prompt change beyond the session. Client resourcefulness is considered important in the change process in both psychotherapy (e.g. Smith and Grawe, 2005; Flückiger et al, 2009, Flückiger et al, 2012) and coaching (e.g. Greif et al, 2010).

I have put forward the argument so far in this chapter and earlier in the thesis that the perspective of the client suggests the relevance of interpersonal needs. This would suggest that clients have actual interpersonal needs, indicative of realist ontology. This could be considered to present a threat to the overall coherence of this Inquiry which has adopted a social constructionist paradigm. It could however be argued that the needs of the clients were experienced as socially constructed needs rather than universal human needs existing independently of social and cultural influences. In a western world which values

individualism (e.g. Jensen, 1995; Evans 1990), it could be argued that clients have a cultural need to feel significant, in control and valued. We live in a society in which there seems to be cultural pressures to achieve at an individual level, to demonstrate one's competence and a society in which one's sense of value is based on our being individuals rather than as part of a community. Ontologically, the client might "feel" what might be constructed as actual experiences but those experiences can still be regulated by the social and historical context and in this way can still be considered socially constructed

8.2 Coach Perspective: coaching as an expert process directed by the coach

In chapter 5, the starting point was to highlight how the perspective of the coach was differentiated from that of the client primarily in relation to how the coach tended to focus on how she provided a service whereas the client had focused much more on how he had been a service user/ client. These constructions of the coaching process seem to suggest a sense-making of the coaching process as being an expert intervention (i.e. a service provided by an expert).

The findings seemed to suggest that the coaches drew on interpersonal skills, process skills and knowledge to help guide them through the coaching engagement. The coaches suggested their use of interpersonal skills by making decisions about what to say when; they suggested their use of process skills by elaborating in depth about how they drew on a range of processes such as pattern-making, intuition, tradition-informed frameworks and their own experiencing, and sometimes 'testing' of the client to inform their actions. These descriptions highlight their sensing of a broad skill set indicative of a degree of process and interpersonal expertise. The coaches also spoke of their business awareness and/or awareness of the processes of human development, which helped them participate in the content of the coaching conversation or which helped them make decisions about how to relate to the client in the moment of the session. These comments also suggested that the coaches had a degree of expert content knowledge (for example being able to understand the client at a deeper level than the client himself).

While there is a lot of discussion in the wider coaching community about the equality of the relationship and coaching as a process of collaboration, the findings suggest that for the sessions analysed in the Inquiry, the coach still facilitated the session to a greater or lesser extent as a provider of an expert intervention (including having an expert level of knowledge). These findings perhaps prompt us to question what we might mean by coaching as a process of "collaboration." If by collaboration, we mean that the client is in

control of the content and the coach and client together work to help the client address his challenges, this might seem plausible. However, the coach is still constructed by coach, coaches and client alike as an expert.

In parallel to the constructions of the client and coach about the expertise of the coach, the coach-observers also evaluated the coaching session as an expert intervention, with almost all of their comments evaluating what the coach did rather than the client or the dyad had done. In some cases they highlighted their own expertise in being able to make authoritative evaluations. In other words, while there might be ample talk of coaching as a process of collaboration, coaches acting as observers readily focus their concerns on the importance of the coach demonstrating expertise.

This does not mean that the coach did not show respect for the client, ask the client what they wanted to do or talk about, nor that they did not work together to gain a common understanding. This neither means that the coaches acted intentionally upon the client as a passive subject. However, some of the acts of permission-seeking and other behavioural interventions initiated by the coach were often seen by the coach-observers as manipulative or directing, which might suggest that in practice, it is easy for even expert coaches to become directive and to at least appear to *act on* the client.

The different ways in which the coaches described how they conducted the process seemed to suggest the relevance of Jungian frameworks much popularised in MBTI®. The findings from the Inquiry point to how much of the existing research and writings on MBTI® may be overly focused on the client or the relationship rather than the coach. The research also points to the wider possible relevance of intuition and of coaching as a process which can be constructed as an internal process of perception and decision-making on the part of the coach as well as a behavioural one. In this context, Jungian frameworks are relevant in that they provide a conceptual framework for understanding how a coach uses their expertise in perception and decision-making in the unfolding moments of a session.

As in the previous sub-section, it could be argued from a social constructionist perspective that the coaches were not actually drawing on differing cognitive and affective processes in a realist sense. It could be argued that the coaches were simply drawing on a range of discourses such as a discourse of intuition, a discourse of pragmatism (giving practical advice and suggestions in the limited time available for a one-off session) or even a discourse of connecting emotionally with the client. In this sense, the coaches would not be understood to be drawing on actual distinctive perceptual and decision-making processes in the way Jung for example described and as I highlighted in chapter 5. Rather, they were simply enacting different frameworks commonly constructed as ways of describing what coaches might do; they were drawing on culturally available resources which they could employ to conduct the session. As in the case of the clients, this does not mean that the coaches did not believe that they were drawing on processes of intuition or responding to feelings. However, from a socially constructionist perspective, it could be argued that they were making sense of their own experiences and even using these constructs to orientate themselves through the coaching session.

One might take as an example, how a coach claimed to make decisions based on a sense of intuition. From a social constructionist perspective, it could be argued that coaches have knowledge of “intuition;” they consider it useful and valuable for coaches to be able to draw upon “intuition” and then they try to apply what they understand to be “intuition” in a coaching session. In this way, they use “intuition” as a discursive resource rather than apply what might be understood in a realist sense as an actual process unique from other forms of perceiving. Similarly, when coaches find that they have reacted in a particular way, they make sense of the way they have reacted by explaining their reactions as “intuition” but that they can only do this because “intuition” is an available linguistic resource.

This more discursive understanding of the way the coach might be considered to engage in the coaching session puts to one side the relevance of coaching as an internal process and situates the practice of coaching in the social realm. From this perspective, not only does it

seem that coaching is an expression of discourses relating to intuition, feeling and acting as a master guide but calls into question whether other discourses are relevant in making sense of what the coach is attempting to achieve in a coaching session. Implicit in all of the accounts of the coaches in particular, were notions of personal authenticity, helping the client to reach his potential, of the possibilities of personal change and other humanistic discourses. From a discursive perspective, coaching is constructed as less a process of actual behaviours and interventions facilitated by a process-skilled coach and more a process of enacting culturally valued social practices (or at least practices legitimated within a field of practice) drawing on linguistically derived resources. In this sense, the expertise of the coach is as a skilled user of coaching discourse. The coach must appear to demonstrate expertise in enacting socially valued practices and at the same time, enable the client to satisfy needs which have particular cultural significance, including being helped to feel significant, valued, in control and able to take action.

8.3 Perspective of dyad: coaching as a Process of Private and productive Inter-subjective Meaning-Making

In chapter 2, I outlined the social constructionist argument that has been put forward in the literature in psychotherapy. It argues that what counts in psychotherapy is the way meaning is created inter-subjectively between client and therapist (McNamee and Gergen, 1992).

The social constructionist perspective in therapy is closely associated with postmodernism (e.g. Anderson, 1997) and incorporates a range of approaches including narrative therapy and other discursive perspectives (Lock and Strong, 2012). In coaching, a number of approaches seem to have taken their inspiration from these traditions in therapy, including narrative coaching. Many social constructionist approaches can be interpreted as yet more competing traditions sitting alongside for example, transactional analytical, NLP or humanistic models of coaching, which are often juxtaposed in a range of edited editions of coaching (e.g. Palmer and Whybrow, 2007; Cox et al, 2010; Stober and Grant, 2006).

However, the argument can be put forward that a social constructionist interpretation of coaching offers a radically different way of understanding coaching rather than just representing yet another tradition. It is argued in this section of the thesis that it offers a meta-framework for understanding the coaching process.

The findings from the research can be considered to support a social constructionist interpretation of the coaching process. This was demonstrated in many different ways. First of all, the inter-subjective construction of meaning seemed to be paramount in the sessions. In all sessions, irrespective of how meaningless, counter-productive and frustrating the session appeared from the outside, from the inside, the session was described as meaningful, useful and psychologically satisfying. The clients expressed the view that the coach was always ensuring that the client only did what they, the clients agreed to do, was giving them what felt like authentic validations, listening to them intently and showing that they had understood them. All clients left the sessions with a sense of having made progress with the issues that they took to the session.

That which from the observers' perspective had seemed like collusion, dominance and even persecution on the part of the coach had been generally experienced by the client as authentic validation and a sense of the client being in control. That which had seemed like a lack of connection on the outside had seemed like a sense of almost transcendental connection on the inside. What had seemed bizarre on the outside had been conceptualised on the inside as an agreed and meaningful way of working together. That which had seemed a meandering process of reflection seemed to have been an energising and useful activity by client and coach. What had appeared to lack energy on the outside had been interpreted by coach and client as a sense of intense engagement.

Something seemed to be happening within the sessions that occasioned a rich and useful experience on the inside, but which was not perceived in the same way on the outside. In part, this seems to relate to the inter-subjective feedback process occurring within the conversational exchange between coach and client.

Each person gains a sense of how constructive their interactions are with the other based on how they interpret the reactions of the other; these interpretations provide the basis for the moment by moment interactional exchanges in the conversation. A conversational exchange can be understood as a highly inter-subjective meaning-making process in which the actions of the one and the interpretation of the reaction of the other are based upon one's own unique frames of reference. If, for example, as a coach I believe that asking for permission is a way of being directive, then I have no reason to assume that I am being directive particularly if from within my own frame of reference the client accepts my request for me to proceed. If, as a coach, I believe that a person's anxiety levels are evident from my capacity to interpret subtle changes in skin coloration or dilation of the client's pupils, then I will make inferences about the client's level of anxiety in the session and act according to my knowledge of how to proceed when a client expresses anxiety. If, as a coach, I believe that I generally establish a strong connection with a client, then it is perhaps likely that I will experience a sense of connection with the client, particularly if the client reacts to

me in the way I expect when I experience that sense of connection. In short, our frameworks of understanding provide a map for negotiating the interaction with the other. The coach's map is not however an objective description of the client's world. It is a frame of reference which allows the coach to initiate action, make inferences and to respond to their interpretations of the client's reactions and way of being in a particular context.

Another person viewing the conversation on the outside would interpret the utterances and way of being of the other differently; they would respond from different frameworks of understanding. If the observer believes that asking permission is a way of legitimising one's own internal agenda, then the observer will assume that the stage has been set for an act of manipulation; the client's response will be interpreted as compliance rather than agreement. If as an observer, I assume that the coach's chair has symbolic significance and the coach some form of relational power, then the client will always be perceived to be subjugated by that greater authority of the coach when she is asked to sit in that chair. If I believe that connection can only be established over time and as a process of reflecting accurately what the client says, then I will not gain a sense of connection when I observe a session in which the coach does not appear to listen in the manner I expect. Our own frames of reference as observers can therefore create barriers to what we are able to perceive when we act as observers as coaching sessions. In this sense, a coaching conversation can be made public (e.g. through video-recording) but it remains private, inaccessible to others from the outside.

Whenever the coach-observers had a specialised frame of reference/language for interpreting the coaching process, the difference between how the session appeared on the inside and on the outside seemed the greatest. This was most evident in the case of the coaches from a transactional analytical background. However, in principle, all coach-observers had their own systems of meaning which provided a framework for focusing their attention and for making sense of what was observed. The cognitive behavioural coaches identified irrational beliefs; the NLP coach-observers identified a lack of action and failures to

change mental representational frameworks; the transactional analysts focused on patterns of dominance. What was observed was what the language of each coach-observer allowed them to translate into their own sense-making. In part, all coach-observers identified different characteristics of the coaching session. In part they all saw similar events but interpreted them differently and with more or less significance within the coaching process.

The early Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein et al., 1983) argued the limits of language provide a limit to our reality. This seems to be a useful insight for understanding how the frames of reference available to different coach-observers provided limits for making sense of the interaction between coach and client. Given that the coach-observers generally held different ontological assumptions and different languages for describing the coaching process, it would seem likely that how a session appeared on the outside would seem different to how it might appear on the inside. Congruence in observation/ interpretation about what actually happened in a session appeared to occur when the coach-observers and the coach facilitating the session appeared to share similar frameworks of understanding.

One unresolved question, however, is why the client would so readily interpret whatever happened between them as productive. In any conversation, there is still scope for the conversation taking a negative turn. The positivity in the client's experience could in part be understood in relation to the clients' lack of understanding and/or lack of benchmarks about what *good coaching* might be. In this sense, they (or at least the inexperienced clients in the Inquiry) might have been more open-minded/ less judgemental about whatever they experienced. This finding seems to suggest that many clients new to coaching might find the experience beneficial irrespective of what the coach actually does (provided perhaps that the coach is generally attentive to the needs of the client).

For clients more experienced in coaching, the process still needs to make sense and in the Inquiry those clients with prior experience of coaching also seemed to have constructed the

coaching process positively; for example by supposing that the coach knew what they, the clients wanted; by rationalising the behaviour/ characteristics of the coach even if those behaviours/characteristics contradicted their initial expectations; by considering that any failures in understanding was due to their (the client's) insecurities and by holding the coach in high regard. What seemed to count therefore, in terms of the interaction between coach and client, is that the client constructed the exchange as meaningful and the coach as credible.

Once the clients were prepared to make sense of the coaches as credible and able to make sense of the interaction as meaningful, all aspects of the interaction would in turn appear meaningful. When the coach noticed something seemingly *significant*, the client typically thought that whatever was the focus of the coach's noticing was important. If the coach asked the client to conceptualise a problem in a particular way, then that conceptualisation was considered relevant. If the coach asked a question or made a statement that was recalled as helpful, then the coach was understood to have asked an insightful and well-timed question. Even if the coach didn't make a comment, this was interpreted as an indicator that the coach knew that there wasn't a need to say anything (but knew what the real issue was). If the coach missed opportunities to explore issues, as suggested in the accounts of the coach-observers, the clients would simply be unaware that they had *missed opportunities* (particularly if they were inexperienced to coaching or if their beliefs and assumptions about the expertise of the coach were so strongly held) and would not therefore perceive any failing in the coach.

There is of course, the possibility that the coaches were in a realist sense, identifying issues of significance, asking and making well-timed questions and statements. On the other hand, there were so many apparently well-timed statements and questions (perceived by the clients) that on the outside did not seem to be interpreted in the same way, that it is hard not to hold a little scepticism about how much of the client's expressed experience was due to the diagnostic and prescriptive expertise of the coach rather than arising as a result of the

client's capacity to interpret an aspect of an interaction or an utterance of the coach in a constructively meaningful way. In approximately seven hours of recorded face to face coaching there were only the faintest suggestions of anything that the coach had done that had been in some sense constructed as inappropriate. It would be hard to imagine in most other one to one conversations over a 7 hour period, one person would not fail to question the motives, veracity or usefulness of what the other said or did. This suggests that there was likely to have been an overall tendency to construct the process positively rather than to have experienced the session in a more rational/evaluative manner.

Perhaps the atmosphere of trust and the apparent dedication expressed by the coach led the client to believe that whatever the coach did or said would be well-meant, truthful and useful. The status of the practitioner and their capacity to create the right atmosphere (e.g. by showing empathy) is considered relevant as a common factor in therapy (Grencavage and Norcross, 1990). In coaching and possibly in therapy also, the actual experience of empathy might only be part of the way a client is able to make progress (for example by gaining a sense of being valued as argued in the previous section). Empathy might also serve to create a context for making sense of interventions of the coach as trustworthy.

Even if the construction of the process by the client was positive, this did not mean that meaning-making was always shared between coach and client. For example, sometimes the coach and client appeared to have a different understanding of what was being discussed (e.g. a client thinking that the coach had understood when the coach hadn't).

Sometimes the coach had a particular perception of the client/ engagement but did not share this with the client who was unaware of those perceptions. These findings are consistent with the argument so far presented however. If each person applies their own sense-making of a particular aspect of the coaching session, then how each aspect of the session might appear could well be very different. In this sense, both coach and client engage in the same interactional event or series of interactional events but each attributes a different meaning to those events. What might seem to the client as prolonged periods of silence might seem

relatively short to the coach; what might seem to one as deeply explorative to the client might seem as relatively superficial to the coach; what might seem as a non-issue to a coach such as the way she is dressed might be the subject of active processing on the part of the client. The analysis of the coaching sessions in this Inquiry point to the possibility of two people actually engaging in what seems like the one and same conversation when it would seem possible that two people are in a sense each having their own private conversations within the session.

The social context of the coaching session seemed to be very important in how the client made sense of his challenges and how they might be resolved. The exercises that the coach engaged in seemed to take on a particular meaning *necessarily* because the coach was part of the experience. The clients made sense of their own ways of being by taking the feedback of the coach seriously; this was not just verbal feedback or the way the verbal feedback was delivered with conviction but also included the physical reactions of the coach and the topics the coach highlighted as important which seemed to create meaning for the client about their capacities, self-worth and what was important.

Although the observers usually undervalued the interactions between coach and client, they did sometimes gain a sense of the impact of particular in-session exercises, of the process of being allowed to off-load concerns and of the physical and reassuring presence of the coach. These perceptions might have been enabled by the coach-observers applying particular frames of reference to interpret the process; examples perhaps of what can be inferred within the limits of one's language. From a social constructionist perspective, this finding suggests that while coach-observers could not always make sense of the coaching process from the outside, they could make sense of the process when their observations aligned with their sense-making frameworks.

The broader social context (as well as the immediate social context discussed above) of the coaching sessions also seemed to play an important role in the meaning-making process of

the coaching sessions. There were limits for example, to what the coach and client would say and do in the context of a one-off, final or mid-engagement session including how much a client might be willing to reveal or how far a coach might be willing to explore a particular issue. The coach-observers were all also greatly interested in the context of the sessions in order to help them make sense of the sessions.

These comments highlight the relevance of the meaning of the social context as a framework for, in a sense, *creating* the coaching session. Coaching does not happen in isolation of social and cultural expectations. The coach and client work within the boundaries of what seems possible and appropriate within a given social context, including how they should each play out their roles in the interaction. Coaching is much more of a performance that follows the script of social and cultural expectations than might readily be assumed. The client might assume that he is free in the conversation to disclose whatever he wishes. Similarly, the coach might assume that she can make informed decisions about what to or what not to focus on in the conversation. In practice, these judgements are much more constrained by shared social and cultural values (including assumptions about how coaching should be practised) than the coach and client might readily assume. Given the importance of the social context highlighted here, rather than understanding the video-camera as a limitation on what might be understood in a realist sense as the *authenticity* of the coaching session, the video-camera might be constructed simply as another, if particular, dimension of the social context. While on the one hand, the camera made the session public, the coach and client were still generally acting according to how they assumed they should act in a particular fundamentally social context.

If we accept that the coaching session is a process of inter-subjective meaning-making as I have argued in this section, then how the coach actually conducts the session is less relevant than how the client interprets the experience. This means that a coach could conduct a coaching session applying a framework of transactional analysis, Gestalt psychology a psychodynamic framework or any other tradition; she could react more or less

instinctively, look for patterns in the client's life or give direct advice. All of these different forms of coaching would provide a context for meaning-making.

The scope for flexibility in how the coaching session is conducted doesn't necessarily mean that *anything goes* but does suggest that what *goes* must seem meaningful to the client.

The client must believe that the coach is doing something useful, appears to understand them, asks questions that seem relevant and helps them structure problems and solutions in a way that seems useful. The coach must then be able to relate to the coach in a language that seems to offer a credible conceptual framework, show particular valued behavioural characteristics, including apparent questioning and listening skills, as well as behaviours that are likely to promote the satisfaction of particular interpersonal needs (showing apparent empathy; seeking permission/ encouraging client control, giving affirmations). The coach must in a sense play out a script that the client is willing to accept.

These behaviours are likely to relate to the coach's skills in achieving a performance standard that the client expects; in their capacity to respond at an emotional level to the client (i.e. showing sensitivity to the client's emotional needs and helping the client to feel understood) in the way that the client expects; and to be able to participate in a flowing interactional conversation that is constructed by the client as meaningful. The credibility of the coach to promote confidence in the client is also likely to relate to the coach's reputation and artefacts that might symbolise expertise (e.g. expressed confidence, appearance and reputation; each arguably representing a form of representational power).

How successful the coach is in creating a meaningful and constructive engagement for the client also ultimately seems to depend on the client's own frames of reference, standards and willingness to interpret the engagement as meaningful and useful. The authoritative physical presence of the coach also seems important in enabling the client to take seriously his own reflections and to interpret as meaningful whatever is highlighted by the coach as significant in the conversation. Furthermore and building on an argument already outlined, it

seems likely that the sense of wellbeing that the client gains as a result of the coach's empathy, the coach's verbal encouragement for the client to take control of the conversation and intense listening to the client provides a supportive context for enabling the coach to engage in a process of productive meaning-making.

Overall therefore, coaching seems to be a process of inter-subjective meaning-making that can be considered to provide an overarching meta-theoretical framework for conceptualising the coaching process and the principles of which apply to a broad range of coaching traditions. This process is difficult for external observers to understand primarily because they view the process from their own frameworks of understanding and because they are not party to the non-observable inter-subjective process of meaning-making that has been outlined in this section. It is important to emphasise here that this is different to not being able to witness the moment by moment details of the interaction (e.g. changes in skin coloration; subtleties in voice intonation, etc.). This comment was sometimes suggested by the coach-observers who took part in the Inquiry. This latter suggestion tends to imply that a camera cannot capture effectively enough the phenomenological experience of either the coach or client. There may be some substance in this argument. The camera might not capture subtleties in changes in skin coloration or momentary losses in eye contact for example. This suggests that it may never be possible to evaluate effectively a coaching session from the outside. The social constructionist perspective outlined in this section however goes further than this. A momentary loss of eye contact on the part of the client or a sudden change in skin coloration might be more visible to the coach than to the coach-observers. However, those changes would only make sense to the coach provided her frameworks of understanding were attuned to identifying and giving a particular significance to those changes.

8.4 Coaching as an expression of social discourses or as expressions of valued beliefs

One important finding in the research is the scope for understanding the coaching process from within a discursive framework or from a more realist epistemology. While my own position as a researcher is towards a discursive epistemology (one more aligned with a social constructionist epistemology), there is scope for being open to alternative epistemologies. The contribution to understanding of each competing epistemology will be considered in this section in an endeavour to provide as rich as possible an understanding of the coaching process when considered from multiple-perspectives.

A discursive perspective would assume that the coach and client enact practices that are characterised by broader social and cultural beliefs and values, the power of which we might not be consciously aware. The identification of discourses is however problematic. This is because discourses themselves are arguably socially constructed patterns of making sense of experience and therefore can be constructed differently from one researcher or writer to another. Secondly, and perhaps diminishing the usefulness of discourse as an analytical construct, any social practice can be considered to be both constructed by and representative of discourses. Thirdly, identifying the origin, influence or expression of a particular discourse in any given practice is also an interpretive process. There isn't for example a manual listing all possible discourses and the conditions under which each might be identified. This approach would run counter to the spirit of discourse analysts who generally try to avoid using a realist language of cause and effect.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, once a researcher begins to understand the world as an expression of discourses, the world begins to take on a particular complexion. The perspective of transactional analysts becomes an expression of a discourse of power imbalances and interpersonal transactions; the perspective of NLP coach-observers becomes an expression of a discourse of behavioural based learning and the changing of meta-cognitions; the perspective of coach-observers with a humanistic orientation becomes a discourse of humanism, etc.

Foucault (e.g. 1978; 1988) argued that discourses are at their most powerful when we are unaware of their influence; when we accept unquestioningly the way we enact the knowledge implicit in discourse. Often there is an assumption that the insights we might have gained from our training as coaches provide us with an *accurate* way of understanding reality. A discursive based interpretation is much less authoritative and claims only that a particular framework gives us a way of making sense of what we observe and provides a basis for action. Our understanding of reality is metaphoric; the world is interpreted *as if*, rather than *as is*. This does not mean that our metaphoric frameworks are not useful. In coaching, they can provide alternative ways of conducting a coaching session including how we might interpret the behaviour of the other. They can be just as meaningful for the client as for the coach. Different approaches seem able to create a sense of psychological well-being.

Attempting to identify the origin of the discourses played out in the coaching sessions deserves a thesis in its own right. Cushman (1996) achieved this in psychotherapy by attempting to identify the social and cultural influences that had led to its emergence in USA. In this section of this thesis, the aim is merely to highlight their apparent relevance based on the breadth of alternative viewpoints that were expressed that could be understood as competing discourses.

Many of the assumptions expressed in day to day coaching conversations and as expressed in the accounts of the coaches (coach-observers and coaches) included assumptions about learning, unconscious processes or a quest for authenticity. Charcot (1889), Freud (1922), Jung (1936) and other psychoanalysts introduced much of modern day discourses of the unconscious as recently as the turn of the 20th Century. Notions of personal authenticity might be considered to be at least in part attributable to Heidegger (1927). Within a wider existentialist framework, Sartre and Mairret (1960) argued that *we are condemned to be free* in the sense that we have no alternative but to make our own choices in life. The relevance of unconscious processes, personal authenticity and client choice all seemed to be expressed at varying points by coaches or coach-observers. Even the accounts of the coach-observers used to explain the difficulty in making sense of the coaching process through a video-camera (previous section) seem to invoke a discourse of coaching as something transcendental and magical. More modern business discourses (e.g. Hodge et al, 2006) seemed to relate to the way coaches constructed the process as one of providing a service and the *clients* as users of a service. The point being made is that we interpret the world and take action, against the backcloth of these frames of reference. The concept of discourse brings to our attention the possibility that they are sense-making heuristics rather than accurate representations of reality.

Stepping outside of an explicitly discursive analytical framework however, it could be argued that the views expressed by the coaches (coach-observers and coaches alike) did represent an understanding of the coaching process but as an expression of strongly held beliefs and values rather than necessarily expressions of social discourses. Realist frameworks for understanding the reactions of coaches can be identified from within the literature on values (Rokeach, 2008), identity (Sryker, 1987) and social identity theory (Stets and Burke, 2000). Rokeach (2008)) defined values as follows:

“Values are the cognitive representation not only of individual needs but also of societal and institutional demands. They are the joint results of sociological as well as psychological

forces acting upon the individual – sociological because society and its institutions socialise the individual for the common good to internalise shared conceptions of the desirable; psychological because individual motivations require cognitive expression, justification and, indeed, exhortation in socially desired terms” (p.257).

In light of this definition, it seems possible to understand the reactions of the coach-observers in relation to what they perceived to be happening in the coaching sessions. It would seem that coaches (coach-observers) observed examples of coaching practice (e.g. perceptions of the coach not allowing the client to arrive at his own solutions, interpretations of collusion, perceptions of a lack of sensitivity to the client's needs, etc.) that posed a challenge to their own values and they reacted strongly to those perceptions and interpretations by expressing critical comments about the observed sessions and in the way they sorted the items in the Q-set.

Social identity theory (Stets and Burke, 2000) could also be relevant in understanding the reactions of the coach-observers. It provides a framework for understanding the reactions of the coach-observers because it takes into account the influence of local beliefs (such as for example being a member of a particular social community; in the case of the coach-observers, as members of particular coaching communities with a shared framework of understanding; e.g. humanistic or transactional analytic tradition). Stets and Burke (2000) define social identity theory as follows:

“In social identity theory, a social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group... A social group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category. Through a social comparison process, persons who are similar to the self are categorized with the self and are labelled the in-group; persons who differ from the self are categorized as the out- group” (p.225).

From a social identity perspective, the argument could be put forward that the observers in the Investigation are part of competing schools of coaching each with their own defining attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviour that categorise the group:

“Having a particular social identity means being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective” (p.226).

From a social identity theoretical perspective, observers would be making negative evaluations of coaches who showed behaviours different to those valued by the observers and this process of negative attribution would lead to enhanced self-esteem:

“Specifically, one's self-esteem is enhanced by evaluating the in-group and the out-group on dimensions that lead the in-group to be judged positively and the out-group to be judged negatively” (p.226).

In support of social identity theory, it is interesting to note that the strongest criticism came from two observer groups in which there was a particular shared identity (the group of transactional analysts and separately the group of NLP/ behaviourally oriented coaches).

Stets and Burke (2000) consider there is a conceptual similarity between social identity and identity theory. They describe identity theory as follows:

“In identity theory, the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance ... These expectations and meanings form a set of standards that guide behaviour” (p.225).

From an identity theory perspective, Stryker (1987) has argued that individuals will actively seek out situations that will promote a particular identity. In this sense, the observer groups provided opportunities for the participants to reinforce their own identities as coaches. Stets and Burke (2000) refer to the self-identification process as “*self-verification*”:

“...a central cognitive process in identity theory is self-verification or seeing the self in terms of the role as embodied in the identity standard (the cognitive representation of a role containing the meanings and norms that the person associates with the role...When an identity is activated, self-verification occurs. In this process, the person behaves so as to maintain consistency with the identity standard” (p.229).

Whichever framework one might prefer; a discursive account of the viewpoints of the coach or a framework from a realist perspective, it seems somewhat paradoxical that coaches who one might typically assume would show flexibility of thinking (Open-mindedness; Garmston et al, 1993) when evaluating coaching were so very intransigent in their views of how coaches needed to behave in the coaching sessions. From a discursive perspective, this intransigence indicates the power of discourse; from a realist perspective, constructs such as identity (Stryker, 1987) and social identity theory (Stets and Burke, 2000) can be invoked in an attempt to explain their reactions.

8.5 Mixed Method Research

The research Inquiry illustrated how different research methods can provide both unique and complementary insights into the coaching process. Q methodology seemed to provide a level of analysis of a coaching session at both granular and summative levels. The thematic analysis and rich narrative descriptions of the accounts of the participants (what was said) conducted alongside a more discursive based analysis (how they said what they said and in the context of broader social discourses) provided a more critical and expansive investigation into the viewpoints of participants. Together these varying approaches (Q methodology and varying qualitative analyses of spoken accounts) provided a rich description and exploration of the different viewpoints of clients, coaches and observers. This section will explore the relative contributions of each approach.

Q methodology: allowing summative comparisons of viewpoints with statistical validity and reliability

Q methodology allowed summative comparisons of viewpoints to be made across coaches, clients and observers. A single table of data could show statistical similarities and differences for all Q-Sorts completed. One single numeric value expressed as a correlation co-efficient could show whether two viewpoints could be considered statistically similar or different. Similarly, the identification of factors and their display as factor arrays provided a parsimonious description of collective viewpoints. Q-mode factor analysis identified the broad characteristics of shared perspectives and could highlight general patterns of difference and similarity across viewpoints.

Q methodology brought to the Inquiry the language of statistics which as a data reduction method makes clear boundaries between patterns in the data in the form of factors and cuts through the detail of the data. The language of statistics could also provide an authoritative claim (in a probabilistic sense) in relation to patterns in the data and the boundaries of those patterns. For example, the statistical analysis could identify the extent to which all or only

some participants within a group shared a particular viewpoint. The language of statistics also has widespread acceptance within social science research; it is aligned with a more realist paradigm.

The statistical basis of Q methodology highlighted characteristics of the data which are in a sense *objectively true*; that is other researchers using the same methods entering the same data in the same software conducting the analysis in an identical manner could achieve the same results. In this sense, the analyses can be considered to provide a degree of reliability.

Q Methodology: Allowing granular analyses of viewpoints

Q Methodology allowed very detailed analyses to be made of particular characteristics of the coaching session; for example the saliency of particular items which could be identified individually in a Q-set of over 80 characteristics of a coaching session.

By requiring the participants to rank order items, the process imposed a degree of what might be constructed as a *form of objectivity* in the analysis. For example, it could be argued that a coach-observer rating a session was obliged to make a rational evaluation as to whether a coach showed empathy more or less than she explored meaning. Although the coach-observer would always have a subjective impression, there was perhaps scope for the coach-observer to make a ranking decision based on at least some degree of rational evaluation; that is whether one characteristic of the coaching session was more or less observable/ salient than another. In this way, if a coach was in an *objective sense* showing lots of empathy, even if the session appeared to be generally superficial, the research participant would still be at pains to avoid placing an item describing the coach's empathy as less characteristic than an item relating to a lack of meaning. A degree of *objectivity* (how the session actually appeared even if appearance is always from a particular cultural perspective) seemed to be indicated in the way groups of observers often rated the session in a similar manner.

Qualitative Analysis: Allowing a rich interpretive analysis of the data

The thematic analysis tended to provide a rich interpretive analysis of the data. At a macro level, the *similarities* in the accounts of the clients and the *differences* in the accounts between coaches seemed particularly salient. The thematic analysis suggested that the different groups of participant adopted qualitatively different orientations towards their reflections on the coaching session. The clients appeared to express experiences; the coaches, ways of conducting the coaching session and the coach-observers appeared to express valued beliefs/discourses about how coaching should be practised. At a micro level, differences in perspectives in relation to specific events could also be explored. Relatively complex characteristics of the coaching process emerged as salient themes including for example the importance of the way the client drew on the responsiveness of the coach in order to make sense of his own actions or moments of shared physicality/ connection in the session. These dynamic patterns could readily be explored in an unstructured interview.

More generally, the unstructured data collection process gave the participants scope to relate whatever aspects of the process that had seemed significant for them. Ethically, this gave participants scope to dictate the research agenda at least within the limitations of any research process. This unconstrained approach seemed to enable the participants to choose their own focus and seemed to allow clients to adopt a focus on the session that was meaningful for them from within their own terms of reference.

By engaging with the data, repeatedly listening to the accounts, noticing the emphases given to particular statements and the silent pauses, it was possible in a thematic analysis to identify commonalities in the data that were only faintly perceptible in an initial reading but nonetheless became increasingly significant in the data as familiarity with the data analysis increased. In the case of the clients, these patterns related in particular to how the clients appeared to value the process of being listened to, taking control and being affirmed. In the case of the coach-observers, the negative reaction of the participants was salient from the

outset: the speed of the conversational interchanges, the emphases given, the expressions of surprise and the use of humour all contributed to making sense of the reactions of the clients as an affront on their valued ways of coaching. In the qualitative analysis, it was possible to analyse a data set in all of its multi-dimensionality and this allows a rich understanding of the data. This included as a researcher, being open to multiple ways of interpreting the data; that is being mindful of both “what” was said as well as “how” something was said.

The complementarities of alternative research approaches

The use of multiple methods to collect data (Q-sorting, unstructured one to one interview techniques and observer groups including an initial use of a form of interpersonal process recall) together with multiple methods of analysing the data (Q methodology, thematic analysis and discursive informed analyses) collectively seemed to allow a rich understanding of the coaching process or epistemologically, at least how the process was constructed by the participants.

The methods seemed to be complementary. The detailed thematic analyses of the accounts of the participants including understanding the context of the sessions helped direct and inform the interpretation of the data in the factor arrays generated through the statistical analyses. In turn, the detailed patterns of sorting called into question and led to a re-evaluation of what had been assumed in the thematic analyses.

The statistical analyses seemed to allow particular perceptions to be investigated; for example how the client constructed the experience even if the observers held assumptions about how the client had or would likely have experienced the session. The data analytic process seemed to allow the adoption of a hermeneutic cycle in which detail (rank ordering of single or groups of items) could be analysed iteratively in the context of broader patterns (thematic analyses) and broader patterns in light of the detailed positioning of descriptors.

The mixed methods approach seemed to address many possible limitations in the analyses that could be associated with any one approach. While participants could project their own meanings onto how they sorted the Q-items and while the Q-set is considered to be generally descriptive of most (at least) mid-engagement coaching sessions (Bachkirova et al, 2012), participants still had to work with a predetermined set of Q-items. Research participants were also obliged to make fine discriminations between those Q-items and rank the set items as *characteristic* or *uncharacteristic*. A small number of participants did express a sense of discomfort in sorting the items in a prescriptive manner; part of their dissatisfaction might have related to an anti-coaching ethos of being directed. The unstructured interviews and interpersonal process recall did however seem to enable the participants to relate whatever seemed salient to them; this time more in alignment with a coaching ethos. By mixing methods, the research process was assured of a degree of homogeneity which allowed comparability across data sets (Q methodology). At the same time, the research process was assured of a degree of heterogeneity within and across the accounts of the sessions (thematic analysis) which enabled different orientations and individual variety towards the construction of the coaching session to emerge in the research process.

While the qualitative approach ensured that a rich description of the coaching process could be explored, in the context of an observer group, it wasn't always clear if views were shared in a group or if perceptions changed in light of the interpretations of others offered in the observer groups. The Q-sorting process ensured that individual perspectives were identified and differences in findings in the groups (thematic analysis) could be compared systematically against individual perspectives (Q-sorts).

Much of the literature on mixed methods (e.g. Creswell, 2007; Johnson et al, 2004; Tashakkori, 2010) highlights how different methods can work together in a complementary way; for example in relation to how a qualitative approach can inform a quantitative approach in a sequential manner. The mixed methods approach outlined in this thesis

suggests that both can work together simultaneously to inform a rich understanding of a given topic of interest.

8.6 Summary

This chapter has covered a range of themes that seem to be of interest in relation to the main findings described in earlier chapters. In some ways, the themes highlighted seem relatively disparate: a) coaching as a process of meeting interpersonal needs; b) coaching as an expert intervention; c) coaching as a process of meaning-making; d) coaching as an expression of discourses or values and beliefs and e) lessons from using mixed methods. This broad scope related in part to having adopted a multiple perspective lens which led to the first section which related primarily to the client's perspective or experience of coaching; the second section related primarily to the coach's perspective and the third and fourth sections related to the perspective primarily of the observers. The final section was intended as a methodological contribution to the literature.

9.0 CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSIONS

This Chapter will provide a brief summary of the main findings and discussion points raised in this thesis. The immediate implications of these summary points will be considered as they raise general philosophical and professional issues and at a higher level of analysis than in the previous discussion chapter. This chapter will also consider the implications of the Inquiry for research and specific areas of practice including what a coach needs to take into account when practising coaching and in other relevant areas (supervision, assessment of coaches and the formation of coaches). I will also relate the findings to the original research objectives. Finally, the chapter will provide space for some personal reflections to conclude the chapter and overall thesis.

9.01 Client Perspective

From the client's perspective, coaching is primarily an experience; one of being a service user. Clients tend to report very positively this experience immediately after the session. They seem to value in particular the way the coach gives them their full attention, shows them warmth and care and gives them a sense of control. They value taking away from the session, a sense of resourcefulness, new perspectives and possibilities for action. The commonality of experiences seems to suggest that coaching can be understood a process in which the interpersonal needs (Schutz, 1977) of the client are met and which in turn might also be catalytic in a symbolic sense in enabling the client's immediate post-session sense of resourcefulness/new perspective-taking (Greif et al, 2010). In this sense, the coaching conversation might be understood as at least in part, as a symbolic process in which the coach's affirmation of the client leads to the client experiencing a sense of control, self-worth and personal significance (Schutz, 1977) which in turn leads to the client gaining a greater sense of resourcefulness (Flückiner et al, 2009, 2012). The immediate focus of the coaching conversation (content; issues actually discussed) may be less important than the psychological experience of being coached.

9.02 Coach Perspective

Coaches tend to evaluate their coaching sessions as service providers. They tend to focus their accounts of a session in relation to what they attend to in the interaction and on how they make decisions; these processes seem to indicate the use of analytical, intuitive, feeling and sensing based processes reminiscent of a Jungian framework (Jung, 1971) and much popularised in terms of MBTI® processes (e.g. Roush, 1992; Furnham, 1996; Reyneierse, 1997). In a realist sense, there is an argument that coaches do adopt different orientations towards the process. However, from a more constructionist perspective, coaches might be understood to be drawing on different processes of perceiving and decision-making as discursive resources to help them conduct the coaching session and/or to make sense of their own interactions. Coaches also have their own frameworks of understanding or mental models about how coaching works which have been constructed through their experience and training as coaches often in accordance with particular schools of coaching.

9.03 Perspective of the Dyad

Coach and client together create a meaningful engagement that is informed by the client's positive expectations of the process and of the coach. The client's *plasticity* (capacity to construct meaning) enables him to make sense of the coach and of the interventions of the coach in a constructive manner including interpreting positively the coach's feedback and constructing as significant the moment by moment foci of the session. The physical presence of the coach and the broader social context of the session (e.g. whether there is scope for a follow up session; whether the session is a first session; the extent to which each is prepared to make public particular issues; what seems to the coach to be appropriate taking into account the broader social context of the individual and based on social knowledge of what is and is not appropriate to discuss) shape the content, process and significance of the coaching conversation. In this sense, although the conversation is in a sense private, the coach and client are very aware of what seems appropriate and

inappropriate to discuss and how to behave; the participants are always mindful of what might be described as the “third eye” of social norms.

The client’s plasticity seems to provide scope for the coach to apply a broad range of different practices that can all be constructed meaningfully and helpfully by the client. What seems to count in the coaching process is that the client’s own sense-making capacities are sufficiently flexible to construct the engagement meaningfully: what the coach is and does are less important than how flexible the client is in being able to make sense of the coach’s interventions, the coach’s way of being and the client’s own capacity to construct the interaction meaningfully. This philosophy is very much aligned with social constructionist approaches (e.g. Gergen and McNamee, 1992).

9.04 The Observer Perspective

The perspective of the coach-observers suggested that they constructed the process as an expert intervention provided by the coach. This interpretation is based on their tending to comment less on what the client did, on what the coach and client did together or on the session generally and more on their evaluations of the interventions of the coach. This seems to raise an interesting paradox given much of the literature on coaching which emphasises the importance of coaching as a process of collaboration (e.g. Kimsey-House et al, 2010; Whitworth 2011; de Haan, 2008c). It may be that there is considerable rhetoric about how coaching might be conceptualised rather than is conceptualised in practice.

The way coaches observing coaching sessions evaluate coaching sessions seems to highlight important debates within coaching. These debates can be considered *local* discourses (social constructionist perspective; e.g. Edley, 2001a) or simply as debates (more realist ontology) about how coaching should be practised (these were summarised in Table 6.1). At the same time these discourses/debates can be conceptualised as valued beliefs and assumptions about coaching which when challenged presented what seemed to be

experienced as a considerable threat to an observer-coach's sense of identity (Stryker, 1987; Stets and Burke, 2000).

It also seems that coaches when acting as observers perceive and interpret what their own frames of reference enable them to perceive and interpret. In this sense, coach-observers do not make *accurate* observations; their observations are always selective and are interpretations.

9.05 A Rashomon experience or a reasonable consensus?

The Rashomon experience was first coined in the practice of psychotherapy by Mintz et al (1973) although based on already existing research relating to differences in perceptions across clients, practitioners and observers. It would seem that the findings in this Inquiry in some ways support the Rashomon experience and in other ways don't. The in-depth qualitative approach informed by statistical analysis and detailed micro-analysis seems to have helped create a particularly rich understanding of the interactive process. This approach seems to have provided a more in-depth understanding of the interactive process between practitioner and client that that often obtained in psychotherapy process research which has typically focused on general accounts of the session or factor analysis of the data from established post-session questionnaires (e.g. Mintz et al, 1973; Stiles and Snow, 1984; Hafkenschied, 2009). It also seems to have provided a breadth of exploration beyond that provided by only considering critical incidents whether in relation to single or multiple sessions.

The perspectives of the coach and of the client were aligned in the sense that both had a strong sense of how productive the sessions had been. The coach-observers generally did not think the sessions had been productive or had been as productive as they could have been. There was a cynicism on the part of the observers that any immediate post-session

experience of positivity by the client might not translate into increased well-being or client change.

There was a general agreement on the part of the observers that particular behaviours on the part of the coach are important (e.g. that a coach should provoke reflection, a coach should ask meaningful questions; that the coach should listen, etc.). However, the in-depth qualitative analysis showed that coaches tended to construct these concepts differently (e.g. how much reflection is appropriate; what constitutes a meaningful question; listening may mean listening accurately or listening for client significance; etc.). They also evaluated observations of these behaviours differently (e.g. whether a coach had actually “listened” or had/had not been directive). While many of the observers did focus on similar interactions, the coaches did generally tend to notice what was relevant to them given their own frames of reference (e.g. *power relations*, *irrational beliefs*, the degree of *direction* provided by the coach, etc.). In a broad sense, all coach-observers “saw” the same sessions and could all talk to a greater or lesser extent about the same interactions; they could also generally agree on what was important to observe (empathy, listening, etc.). However, what the coaches “saw” was a process of construction rather than a process of observation.

The research also suggested that coach-observers also had difficulty in understanding the sense-making processes occurring inter-subjectively between coach and client. This seems to go beyond not being physically present in the room (i.e. not being able to observe the subtleties of changes in the client or sensing the atmosphere of the session by being physically present). This latter conceptualisation of the coaching session would be indicative of a realist framework (that only the coach is close enough to observe the client). Realist accounts of the coaching process are generally not referenced explicitly but would include a range of approaches which assume the existence of real events happening in the coaching process. De Haan et al (2010) for example refer to the “[shared] reality” of the coaching conversation (p.124). Cognitive-Behavioural models of coaching also assume that clients

have distorted perceptions of reality; that is they make the assumption that there is a real way of understanding the world that we experience (e.g. Williams et al, 2010).

The difficulty the coach-observers appeared to have in sensing the productivity of the engagement of the interaction seemed in part to relate to their not knowing how the coach or client was constructing the process and what was informing their decision-making. This in turn goes beyond not knowing the context of each session (what had already been discussed for example outside of the session or in previous sessions although this broader context was also of importance). The coach observers were only able to make sense of what was expressed behaviourally (e.g. client movement suggesting a shift in energy). They had no way of interpreting what wasn't (e.g. how a client might still have a sense of control irrespective of what the coach might appear to have been doing at a behavioural level). The research suggested that so much of the coaching process seemed to be taking place at a level of interpretation (including the broader positive psychological experience of being coached) that there seemed to be a limit to how much of the coaching session could be understood through observation alone.

9.06 Implications for Research

From a research perspective, the findings suggest that researchers might productively focus their attention on interpersonal meaning-making processes occurring between coach and client rather than on behavioural observations of the coaching process. This could set an agenda for helping coaching researchers to adopt an approach that is qualitatively different to that adopted by many process researchers in psychotherapy. In this way, coaching may be able to develop its own theoretical traditions that could in one day inform psychotherapy process rather than the way coaching research is currently being informed by psychotherapy process research.

The exploratory nature of the research also identified a broad range of issues of interest that could be pursued in further depth and derive from some of the main topics discussed in this research. Research could include the relevance of interpersonal needs (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation; FIRO-B) and coaching; the way coaches make perceptions and decisions in coaching (e.g. the coach's MBTI® preferences and how they orient the coach within the coaching process). Many of the topics and debates highlighted in Table 6.1 could also provide rich pickings for future research projects (e.g. in relation to the impact of advice giving in coaching) either in relation to discursive epistemologies or in relation to alternative epistemologies in which a researcher may wish to consider the impact or significance of adopting particular approaches.

The Inquiry also points to more in-depth research on perspective taking generally. There are rich literatures in philosophy, sociology and psychology for example in relation to perspective taking. The research seems to suggest that in life generally, we may think that we are acting in a *real world* and on the basis of our analysis of *actual* events and experiences. It may be the case that all our observations are much more constructions informed and integral to our sense-making processes and in turn informed by broader social discourses than we might all too readily assume.

9.07 Implications for Practitioners

The research raises a breadth of issues relevant for practitioners. As identified by de Haan (2008), perhaps what does count in coaching is that a coach develops an approach that seems to work for them and that they should have faith in their approach. In this way, the coach feels convinced and the client experiences the coach and the coaching process as convincing. However, there does seem to be a paradox in that the faith that a coach might give to their own mental models might at best, act only metaphorically in the coaching process rather than as a result of any application of a particular social technology.

Coaches might also be mindful that how the client is constructing the process could be quite different to how they as coaches are constructing the process. What might be considered superficial to a coach could be experienced as emotionally challenging for the client and deeply explorative from a client's typical frame of reference.

Coaches might also reflect on the fact that there seems to be various levels of meaning making occurring in the coaching conversation. For example, at one level there is the overt conversation and overt expressions of the issues discussed (e.g. immediate emotional reactions or reflections of either party). At another level, there are the private conversations of coach and client (what either chooses to disclose; also how each makes sense of the engagement and orients towards the engagement) and a private conversation between coach and client (that which is understood but not expressed); this relates to how both participants might be aware of a particular issue or way of being together but neither wishes to name it. There also appears to be a conversation occurring between coach and client at a level of symbolic meaning-making, in which what might really be important in the coaching conversation is not the overt action points identified or new perspectives but the client's sense of resourcefulness (and perhaps the coach's also) achieved through the process of coaching.

9.08 Implications for Educators

The findings of this Inquiry are in many ways challenging to educators of coaching because they can appear to call into question the significance of learning how to coach. What appears to count seems not to be particularly important; only that the coach is convinced and appears convincing. Cynically, the logic of this argument could be extended to suggest that a witch doctor could be just as convinced and convincing as a coach. Or, perhaps even someone crafting their expertise as a coach who uses the medium of dancing, singing or laughing spontaneously could be just as convinced and convincing as the most respected

and established tradition informed coaches provided the client's own frames of reference would allow them to make personally helpful meaning-making out of the experience.

These are extreme statements which would provoke unproductive feedback from educators and practitioners, but do serve to challenge educators to be able to demonstrate that there are important and unique skills for coaches to develop and skills informed by a range of important academic disciplines. In the absence of this, there is scope for an *anything goes* approach in coaching which could lead to very negative experiences for clients and coaches alike. More developmentally aware clients are likely to seek coaches who can demonstrate the application of traditional approaches or who conform perhaps to established norms of behaviour (e.g. sitting together quietly discussing issues); an *anything goes* approach may not work for them. However, there are still plenty of self-proclaimed developmental experts who will all too readily convince would-be clients to engage with them when there doesn't seem to be a strong-evidence base for their practices. The lack of underpinning theory to support life coaching for example has been criticised publically (e.g. Duke, 2005).

Perhaps educators can address some of the issues in particular by developing ethical awareness and by focusing more on the centrality of meaning-making. What becomes important in coaching is not which method or tradition is used to achieve a particular level of meaning-making but that coaches explore how meaning-making can be explored productively and ethically in the coaching process through a diverse range of practices. This includes how coaches can learn how to make use of their preferences for perception and decision-making and ensure that their interventions enhance the resourcefulness of the client.

9.09 Implications for Coaching Assessors

In relation to coaching assessments, the research calls into question whose judgement should count the most. If the observers are very critical of what the coach does yet the client is very positive as was indicated in this Inquiry, then the process of assessment becomes

somewhat problematic. A coach whose client claims they had a positive experience but who is rated unfavourably by assessors might feel that the assessors are evaluating her performance unfairly.

The research also suggests that coaches from different research traditions are likely to evaluate the performance of a coach very differently. The implication of this is that what is assessed is perhaps how well a coach conforms to the subjective expectations of the assessors rather than that they demonstrate a capacity to coach from another vantage point. Perhaps, this suggests (and notwithstanding cost implications) that the approval of coaches needs to ensure that coaches from different traditions are involved in the coaching process and/or that the sponsor of the programme is aware of his/her own conceptualisation of coaching and appoints coaches who will conform to those expectations. However, this process is not necessarily going to identify *better* coaches, only coaches who demonstrate a particular subjective set of expectations. This in turn raises the question of impartiality and the possibility of coaches not demonstrating a particular normalised approach being unsuccessful in assessments.

The research also suggests that clients have tremendous plasticity for making sense of the coaching process. This could mean that coaches who are being assessed working with inexperienced clients or with clients whose expectations of the degree of sophistication on the part of the client might be relatively low might be advantaged in the assessment. This is because these clients would seem likely to express satisfaction with the process and coach. This would be the case if coaches deliberately or unintentionally took account of the reactions of the client. Similarly, if coaches submitted recordings of their session with preferred clients, the assessors may be being given exemplars of relationships in which there is a positive process of inter-subjective meaning-making less based on the coach's capacity to coach and more based on the process of interpersonal meaning making between coach and client which ensures a productive relationship specific to that relationship but not necessarily generalizable to other coaching clients.

If the way coaching works is based more on the client's capacity to make meaning from the engagement than on the expertise of the coach, as suggested by the research, then assessors might be giving too much attention to observing the behavioural expertise or even evaluating the conceptual knowledge on the part of the coach. If a coach's capacity to coach, is in turn, dependent on their capacity to help create meaning, then formal knowledge of coaching may be less important than a human capacity to read and relate to others. This means that some excellent coaches might not be successful at an assessment centre if they cannot demonstrate a supporting body of knowledge that underpins their work, even if they have the human capacity to coach as well or even better than others who do have those underpinning knowledge frameworks.

9.10 Implications for Supervision

The Research described in this thesis is also relevant in the context of coaching supervision (e.g. Hawkins et al, 2010). The immediate relevance of the findings is that, either even experienced coaches, are failing to coach well or at least falling short of expectations of other professional coaches. The research also suggested that coaches may be unaware of how their practices might be perceived externally. Some coaches were also unaware of heightened in-session client self-awareness which could be a topic to explore in depth in supervision. The research suggests that experienced coaches may benefit from working with coaches with very different assumptions about the coaching process in order to identify different aspects of their coaching practice and to evaluate practices differently.

9.11 Limitations

This study, as any research Inquiry, can be considered to have its limitations. The sample sizes were very small. This is also always a trade-off experienced in psychotherapy research. The camera recording and the staging of some sessions impacted to some extent at least, on the behaviour of the coaches and of the clients. Participating in a research process would also have provided a particular context; including for example the possibility

that coach-observers had constructed their task of commenting on a video-recording as an analytical task. The staging of the research and the data generated are therefore contextual. The statistical task was very challenging in that people had to spend a lot of time completing the task and it seemed to present a cognitively demanding challenge for some. My own familiarity with the tool increased and this led to increasingly more sophisticated introductions to the process when working with participants. However, in turn, this led to some loss of consistency in the data collection process.

The ambition of the Inquiry was also very large and this compromised the write-up of the thesis. For example, it became very difficult to remember all the details of the thematic analysis at the same time as the details of individual sessions from multiple-perspectives. There were also so many interesting avenues of analysis that it became an overwhelming task to be as comprehensive as I would have liked to have been in referring findings back to the relevant literature, or for that matter, identifying relevant literatures given the broad scope of the study. The mixed methods methodologies and being mindful of competing epistemologies also further expanded the scale of the task. I was very much aware of the potential for specialising in the research process in particular research methodologies given that I was trying to apply a range of different approaches simultaneously.

In retrospect, there would have been a number of advantages in conducting the research with colleagues. The Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan and Nieß, 2012) for example consists of a team of researcher-practitioners who work together in the analysis of coaching process. This team has also drawn on Master level students to help them in their analysis (de Haan et al, 2010). This has ensured that agreement has been obtained in relation to the classification of events taking place in descriptions of aspects of the coaching process (critical moments; e.g. de Haan et al, 2010). It is likely that the Study Group will have been able to draw on a wide range of expertise within the team. It would seem likely that a team approach in which consensus can be achieved and measured (de Haan et al, 2010) is likely to meet quality standards associated either from within a realist paradigm (e.g.

different forms of validity and reliability; Saunders, 2011) or in qualitative research generally (e.g. trustworthiness, plausibility, credibility; Guba and Lincoln, 1994, McLeod, 2003).

On a more practical level, co-ordinating the data collection as a single researcher was very difficult because I could not involve both coach and client at the same time when engaging these participants in the data collection process. One possibility was to ask both participants to sort the Q-sets at the same time and then to conduct interviews but I would still have had to wait until both participants would have been ready to have moved onto the next phase in the process. In order to meet the time demands of the participants, this led to some inconsistency in the order and timing of data collection. There was also the sheer difficulty of trying to identify contacts, co-ordinate diaries and manage the collection of a large data set. The involvement of others would have led to a more condensed data collection process (in practice, data collection took 18 months). A long data collection process led to some difficulties in ensuring consistency in data collection methods simply by having to remember how previous activities had been conducted. This extensive time period also impacted on acquiring an overall sense of the data.

I would however argue that the research process was rigorous. I attended workshops and conferences on Q-Methodology and read extensively on the topic in order to have confidence in the methodology. I also consulted with experts in the field in order to be assured that my general approach was correct. I read extensively on discursive methods (e.g. Wetherell, 2001; Edwards and Potter, 1992) and social constructionist literature (e.g. Burr, 2003, Franklin, 1995; Edley, 2001; McNamee and Gergen, 1992) in order to have confidence that my overall approach had been generally consistent with these approaches. Elliott, (2005) referring to earlier work of his (2000) has argued that exploratory research in therapy should achieve one or more of the following aims: provide an understanding of events (i.e. be definitional); provide a rich description of a phenomenon (be descriptive); explain what gives rise to phenomena (interpretive); have a critical element (critical/lead to action); be able to identify social and political interests (deconstruction). I would argue that

my findings generally address these aims. I would also argue that as I was writing from an interpretative position, the need for carefully following a controlled data collection process is less important than in a positivist paradigm (McLeod, 2003) even though it is important to describe the overall approach taken. I also prepared written documents such as an agenda in order to help remember how previous interviews and discussion groups had been conducted. The process of collecting audio recordings and having the subjective impressions of participants recorded in Q-sorts also helped to gain a sense of coherence across the data sets.

Overall I do believe that the exploratory approach enabled a broad understanding of the coaching process and one in which more specific areas of investigation can be explored post-thesis. I also believe that as sole researcher, I was still able to gain an overall coherence of the data which might have been lost had a team of researchers divided up the data collection or analysis. The overall approach also helped me personally to develop a capacity for reflexivity (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). I would add finally, that requirements for a PhD thesis is the need for a researcher to show a capacity to conduct research independently which seemed to pre-empt the possibility of involving co-researchers.

9.12 Addressing the Research Question: A Multiple Perspective Analysis

This thesis set out to consider what could be learned by adopting a multiple perspective analysis of a coaching session. The diverse range of methods used in the Inquiry; the tolerance for a range of epistemological assumptions and the diversity of perspectives taken (coaches, clients and observers from a range of backgrounds) has shown that a great deal can be learned about the coaching process through this multi-faced approach. The Inquiry has led to an in-depth understanding of the coaching process, which as one important study in the field, will help to build a theoretical basis for coaching as a profession which is continuing to increase in popularity.

9.13 Personal Reflections

At the end of over four years of working on the PhD, interspersed with personal and work commitments, what is significant for me in the whole research endeavour is actually less about the immediate findings of the Inquiry. What stands out is the human capacity for sense-making, the capacity for interpreting the world as we experience it from multiple-perspectives. The process has encouraged me to interpret the world from a social constructionist perspective. A social constructionist perspective is tolerant of alternative ways of making sense of the realities we experience. It argues for questioning dogma; to always be wary of harm that any viewpoint or ideology can ultimately create and to always be willing to accept that one's own individual viewpoint can be understood very differently by others. Much of human misunderstanding seems to be the consequence of our each making sense of the same realities differently. Social constructionist thinking is a call for negotiating shared understandings, acceptance and tolerance.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 01: Clarification of Methods

Appendix 01: Clarification of Methods

This appendix is intended to make clear the steps taken in organizing the research process such that if another researcher wished to follow the same steps, she/he would be able to understand how to replicate the approach. This appendix focuses primarily on the data collection process as the methodology for data analysis has already been described in some detail in Chapter 3. However, some additional detail in relation to the timing and practicalities of the data collection process are provided.

Step 1: Approving the Research

The first step in the process was the approval of the research internally within the University. This was done by seeking approval of the research proposal through the internal research approval process. This involved the University Ethics Committee and the University Legal Department as well as the close participation of the research supervisory team (i.e. dissertation supervisors). As a result of this process, I was asked to prepare a *Participant Information Sheet* and a *Consent form* for the various potential stakeholders (coaches, clients and sponsors). In the case of coaches, separate *Participant Information Sheets* were prepared for those taking part in Observer Groups and those taking part in conducting actual coaching sessions. The involvement of sponsors was considered necessary where the sponsor might have an interest in agreeing to an employee taking part in the research and clients were asked in writing to seek the approval of their employer as they saw necessary. A copy of the *Participant Information Sheet* for Observers is included Appendix 02, in order to illustrate the general approach. A researcher copying the process would need to agree these documents through their own regulatory procedures.

The design of the *Participant Information Sheet* and *Consent Form* was complicated and detailed because of the inter-relationships and potential legal issues. For example, a client might unwittingly reveal information about his or her organization and/or I as the lead researcher might unwittingly fail to edit any confidential information (e.g. the background

corporate logo in a video). Similarly, in the Observer Groups, there was always a risk that coaches observing actual sessions might have shared confidential information beyond the coaching session. At one point, the University Legal Department was suggesting that coaches participating in the research agree to sign *confidentiality agreements* but this was not considered necessary given the ethical codes of practice to which coaches normally adhere. Moreover, it would have been highly unlikely that coaches would have participated had they been expected to sign confidentiality agreements. As an experienced psychologist with a history of working in organizations, I also thought that I would be able to identify and edit out any references to the client's organization or third parties.

These issues are raised in this summary in order to alert any future researchers of the need to work closely with experts in the field of ethics and legal requirements for video-recorded research involving multiple stakeholders. From a personal perspective, throughout the research process, it is also important for a researcher to be aware of the possible personal and organizational legal repercussions of not complying exactly with any instructions given by the University Legal Department or Ethics Committee.

Identifying Research Participants

The next step in the research process was the identification of Research Participants. Coaches were generally contacted indirectly (via e-mail) rather than personally. In this way, the assumption was made that coaches would feel no obligation to take part and would have time to make a considered decision. Coaches were contacted through existing networks (e.g. coaches following advanced coaching courses; local professional associations/ coaching networks identified through social media such as *Linked-In*). Initially, a general statement about the nature of the research was made available together with my own and supervisory team's contact details. For those coaches who contacted me or other members of the supervisory team, a copy of the *Participant Information Sheet* was sent out together with the *Consent Form*. In a number of cases, one coach would agree to participate in an

Observer Group and would ask if they could contact other coaches who might be interested in taking part (snowballing, Saunders, 2011). This generally happened when very few coaches registered for any one Observer Group and those coaches planning on attending offered to help.

No single coach volunteered to conduct coaching sessions through this engagement process. A small number of experienced coaches known either to myself or the research team were contacted and asked if they might be able to help out in some way (i.e. asked if they might be interested, time available, or if they knew of some coaches who might be interested in taking part). In this way, I, together with the research team felt that we had not made anyone feel compromised to take part. This led to the identification of a target number of six coaches who would be willing to take part. All 6 coaches were sent copies of the *Participant Information Sheet* and *Consent Forms* and were given ample time to arrive at their decision about whether to participate or not. They were only contacted once they had been asked to read all the relevant sheets and once they had responded to me personally by e-mail expressing a possible interest in the research. Any further details were provided (e.g. one coach asked for more personal details and more detail on the research before agreeing to take part).

In the case of clients, initially all coaches agreeing to conduct a video-recorded coaching session were asked to identify existing clients whom they thought would be willing to take part in the research. Two clients were identified through this process. One client was being coached, working as a sole trader and so no sponsor was involved. One other client was a board member working with an internal coach. All other clients were professional contacts known to myself. All of these research participants were asked to participate following the same process as for all other participants (: e-mail, issuing of participant information sheet/ consent form, time to respond, need to respond positively before contacting). For the four sessions in which I identified clients, all clients were informed that the coach would be experienced with an established reputation as a professional coach. The clients wanted

reassurance that their time would be well spent as it involved travel, time and emotional investment. (This process of influence would likely have impacted on the perceptions of the clients and would need to be considered in the analysis).

A small compensation was offered to coaches taking part in the research. Larger compensations were not considered appropriate by the University Ethics Committee. This was £50.00 for coaches providing recorded sessions and the equivalent for coachees; all reasonable expenses were covered. The costs only, were provided for participants in Observer Groups owing to budgetary constraints. Their involvement was considered less demanding than that of the coach and client providing an actual recording of their session. Coaches participating in the Observer Groups were encouraged to consider the possible learning experience of taking part in the research.

Organizing the Schedule

Arranging dates and venues for staging the research was complicated. University requirements meant that the process had to take place either within the University or in an approved location with for example a satisfactory Health and Safety Process in place. All participants taking part in the Observer Groups were sent an agenda ahead of the schedule.

Organizing the schedule often led to many changes in diary dates in order to meet the changing needs of coaches. In one case, two separate Observer Groups were organized owing to a low attendance at the first session (only two coaches attending); the consent of the coach and coachee for running a second observer group were obtained for this via e-mail. There were further complications with some coaches arriving late, delaying the start or interrupting the process. A professional recording of the video was organized using specialist university personnel with the consent of the participants. Arrangements were made to ensure all the necessary equipment was in place, including adequate space for making a recording and with large tables for sorting the Q-items. Refreshments were made available for all participants. In the Observer Groups, the discussion was staged to take

place around a “U” shaped table in order to promote a sense of equality for the discussion, typically, with additional tables around the outside of the room where participants could make their own judgements when rating the Q-items.

Pilot Study

Owing to the challenge of obtaining the participation of coaches and clients, I decided not to run a formal pilot study. Any necessary changes would be made to the process as a result of learning.

Conducting the Recorded Sessions

The first step in the data collection process was the actual collection of video-recordings of coaching sessions. Once, I had identified a coach and client for a session, arrangements were made for the two parties to meet. In all but one instance, coaches and clients met briefly *off-camera* (i.e. I typically arranged for them to have a coffee in private) in order to have the opportunity to exchange any confidential information and to ensure that both parties had the opportunity to simply “break the ice”. In one instance, the coach and client were happy to start the coaching session without any pre-introductions.

I met with each coach ahead of each session, checked out the scope of the sessions and discussed any concerns. I set the room out according to how the coach wanted the room including the positioning of the chairs. Typically, the room was set up with two chairs about 0.5 metres apart at a 135% angle between coach and client. The camera was placed three metres away from the middle of both participants to ensure that both participants were fully in view but without much space around the participants. This maximised the overall view of the interaction rather than just facial expressions. In one case, two cameras were provided to record the full profile of each participant (a *split screen* showing the facial expressions of both participants simultaneously). This was done to evaluate if this appeared to impact on the observation of the interaction and after both coach and client said they felt comfortable with two cameras. (No comments were made by the coach-observers viewing this session

so this did not seem to add or detract from the observation process. My advice for a researcher copying my approach would be to have one camera in the middle because it is less intrusive than when using a split screen and the extra detail of facial expressiveness did not seem to impact on how the coach-observers interpreted the process. Furthermore, the way the participants co-ordinated their body movements using a split-screen was lost).

Once the camera was set up, the video-recorder was switched on and the participants were left alone. At the end of the session, the coach and client came out and it was only at this point that the video-camera was switched off. The coach was asked to spend approximately 1 hour facilitating the session. This was considered representative of a range of coaching practice. Coaches could use more or less time as they wished. In practice, the shortest session was one hour and the longest, approximately, 90 minutes.

Having completed the recordings, all coaches and clients were asked if they wanted to review the recordings in their own time. All coaches and clients said they were happy with their recordings and verbally confirmed their agreement to allow the video-recordings to be used as per the *Participants Information Sheet and Consent Forms*.

Collection of Interview Material and Q-Sorts

There was a need to collect Q-Sorts and interview data from both participants (coach and client) providing the recording. The data collection process varied to accommodate the time constraints of the participants. Coaches and clients were interviewed separately either immediately after the sessions or within two days of the session. The Q-sorting process took around 45 minutes and the interviews up to around 45 minutes although two of the interviews with the clients lasted around 15 minutes in order to meet their personal time commitments.

In principle, the coach would complete the Q-sort while the client completed the Q-sort and the interview. However this was only the case for one coach-client pair as most of the clients and two coaches chose to complete the Q-sort and take part in the interviews within 2

days of the session. For one coach (Drew) and one client (Tristan's client), they agreed to take part in an interview immediately after the session but to complete Q-sorts after the session. For these two research participants, written instructions were provided about how to complete the Q-Sort (Appendix 03) and the participants were asked to place the cards into envelopes and return them to me (SAE) within 48 hours in order not to lose the immediacy of the session. One client seemed not to have time to complete the Q-sort (Drew's client) and in spite of providing her written consent to do so, I decided not to request this. This client did therefore just agree to an interview (client of Drew) and immediately after the session.

Written instructions were given to the coach and to the client about how to sort the cards but in all cases (other than those completing at home after the session), participants wanted me to explain the sorting process. I tried to keep to the spirit of the instructions (Appendix 03).

Tables were laid out around the room we were using. On each table (or two tables placed side by side), I had placed a row of 13 envelopes displaying a number (-6 to 0 to +6) and a sign ("highly uncharacteristic", and "highly uncharacteristic" above each respective side) and on each envelope was written the total number of items to place underneath each envelope.

Once participants had completed the Q-sorts, I would begin the interviews. In all cases, there was a form of natural break between the Q-sorting and the interview. The break was either one of physical differences in space/time (two participants completing the Q-sorts at home). Or the break was more psychological. For example, at the end of the Q-sorting, participants were invited to a quick coffee, were engaged in casual conversation, had a natural comfort break and were taken to a different part of the room for the interview. This wasn't done intentionally to separate the activities. It was done out of consideration to the physical layout of the rooms and the need for a break at that point. However, it seems possible that the gaps in the two processes might have helped reduce the impact of the Q-sorting on the interview and/or of the interview on the Q-sorting.

Either way, the Q-sorting process did not seem to detract from what I would interpret as very individual accounts of the session (i.e. not informed by any obvious common structures

across the sets of cards). Perhaps there are so many cards and which are so open to the coach projecting her/his sense-making of the session (Brown, 1980; p.267) that this process might have had much less influence on the sorting process than one might readily assume. In one instance, the coach did not like the process of sorting the cards and while the coach did complete the process, the conversation seemed to have very little bearing on anything written on the cards. (This was Joanne's session which focused more on her interest in intuition for which there wasn't a specific card).

In the case of all interviews, I started the process by asking the interviewee, simply to respond to the following question:

"What stood out for you in the session?"

This was then followed by an unstructured conversation in which I tried to understand what seemed salient to the interviewee and I explored the issues as and when raised. (The intention to avoid imposing too much of my own construction of what would be considered salient in the interview had led me not to apply a semi-structured approach).

I gave the interviewees as much time as they appeared to need or want before intervening with generally short follow-up questions. Typical questions were: "Could you expand on that point?"; "What else stood out for you?" "What makes that interesting for you?" "What else did you notice?" "What did you notice about the other person?" "What led you to think that?" "What led you to say that?" "What were you aware of at the time of the session?" "What were you trying to do?" "What were you trying to do at that point?" "What were you trying to achieve?" I also prompted the interviewee to respond by being interested in what they said and prompting her/him to elaborate further: "That's interesting!" "I noticed that you highlight..." I also summarised the discussion and then paused to check understanding and to balance the interview conversation. After summarising, I would generally be silent in order to give space for the interviewee to identify whatever he or she found salient at that point.

The interview format focused on wanting to understand the interviewee's construction of the coaching session and in particular what was salient for them in the session based on their interpretation of the question and interview context. I was occasionally asked by the interviewee if they "were on the right lines" and my answer was always that "I was interested in what stood out for them only". I did not follow any particular interview method from the literature. I again relied on my own experience working as a coach. While I did not deliberately draw on any particular interview method, after completing all the data collection, I came across Harlene Anderson's (1997) text on her post-modern approach to therapy in which she argues that her approach is strongly focused on trying to understand the client's frame of reference. It is based on asking open questions and using prompts and summaries in an attempt to understand the client's perspective rather than to try consciously to impose an interpretation upon the spoken account of the client. This approach seemed to strongly align with the approach I had taken but transposed to an interview context rather than that of a therapeutic conversation.

There were some differences in the interviews with the coaches and with the clients. Typically, some of the questions were more focused on the process of conducting the coaching session with the coach. This aligned with my aim to understand what the coach was doing, thinking and feeling in the session. In the case of the client, the emphasis was more on their experience of the process and of the coach. However, I tried to be guided by the client and coach's constructions of whatever they found salient. In some cases, the conversations drifted away from the immediacy of the session. For example, coaches often eventually talked about their broader coaching practice. I simply tried to follow their sense-making patterns of the interview. In retrospect, many of these broader issues at the data analysis phase would help me in making sense of how they had actually conducted their session (e.g. one coach's reference to the importance of "intuition" in her practice).

At the end of all interviews, all coaches and clients were asked to elaborate on how they had sorted the Q-set. This process generally consisted of being led by their accounts of what

they had done (what had stood out for them and why). I would also ask some questions about what I saw at the extremities.

All interview material was audio recorded and in accordance with the *Participant Information Sheet* and *Consent Forms*. The tables were also laid out in the same way as for the coach and client with envelopes for sorting the cards as previously described.

Observer Groups

I viewed all the video-recordings ahead of the Observer Sessions at least twice. This was intended to identify any parts of the recording that I felt could have either disclosed the identity of the client's organization or compromised any third party in any way. This led to some minor editing of one recording only. As in the case of the interviews, I wanted to be led by what the coach-observers said rather than what I personally, had understood from the recording. The recordings were generally shown according to the chronological order in which the recordings were made. However, in the case of the video of the coach who described her approach as Gestalt based, intuitively, I thought it would be particularly interesting to show this to a group of coaches from a very different tradition (this led to two separate Observer Groups; one of two CBC coaches and the other of 4 TA coaches).

In the case of the first Observer Group, I started each "research workshop" with an explanation of the context of the research and explained the process. I gave space for questions and comments. When there were no more questions, I showed the video to the groups. For the first session, I provided very little context setting. I simply said that I had a video-recording of a coaching session and wanted them to comment on the recording. I did not want to predispose participants to making any assumptions about the session. I showed the video recording on a large screen using the available audio-visual equipment in the room used. For this first session only, as the recording was 90 minutes long and I had agreed with the participants a limited amount of time, I cut out 10 minutes of the coaching conversation early in the session at the end of the first 10 minutes of the recording. After coach-observers

had viewed the recording, I gave the participants written instructions. However, as it was very clear that the participants expected to be talked through the sorting process, I explained what they needed to do to sort the Q-Items.

For the following Observer Groups, a professional presentation was refined which explained the context of the research and the data collection process (Appendix 04). The presentation started with an overview of the research and some instructions on how to sort the cards. At the end of the presentation, any questions were answered and the video was shown. A little more context setting was also given to the sessions in response to the requests of the first Observer-Group to provide more contextual information. However context setting still remained brief in order to avoid presenting my own interpretation of the coaching session. Typically, I would explain a little about the role of the person being coached, how the session had been organized (i.e. if I had identified the coach), whether the coach was an external or internal coach, etc. For later research workshops, I also circulated an agenda in advance (Appendix 04).

In all Observer Groups, participants were first asked to sort the Q-items and immediately after the viewing of the video. This process typically took around 45 minutes. Additional verbal instructions were given in line with the instructions provided in the earlier presentation. After completing the Q-sorts, the participants were given a short break and then reassembled to discuss the session. They were asked not to discuss the video during the break. As in the case of the data collection process with coaches and clients, this procedure might have helped separate the two activities and reduce any impact of the Q-sorting onto the discussion which followed.

At the start of the feedback process, I asked each participant to give their “headline” comments about the session. This was then followed by an open discussion (typically 20 minutes) and then a more detailed account of how the Q-items had been sorted (typically a further 60 minutes). This typically took place by moving from one table to another so that

each participant could explain her/his own Q-Sort. This led to individual conversations around each table. In the first two sessions however, there was limited time for detailed discussion of the individual Q-sorts. There were around 6 observers per Observer-Group (details are provided in the main thesis).

In setting the context of the research for the Observer Groups (i.e. the overall research design and aims), I tried not to elaborate too much beyond explaining the practicalities of the Q-sort methodology and how it could lead to an analysis of coaching sessions. I began all the Observer Groups simply by asking “What stood out for you in the coaching sessions?” This was intended to repeat the process that I had carried out with coaches and clients. I then intervened as and when it seemed intuitively interesting in the discussion. For example, asking others if they agreed or disagreed with statements made by other speakers. I did not make use of any particular method of conducting a group discussion but relied on my own experience of having facilitated many discussions as a management trainer and consultant in previous working roles. The questions I asked and other verbal behaviours (e.g. summarising) were very similar to those asked to the coach and client (above). I tried to follow the direction of the conversation set by the participants rather than direct the conversation according to what stood out for me. My approach was therefore consistent with seeking to understand the way the participants constructed their perception of the recording as I had done in the case of the individual interviews. My verbal behavioural was very similar. All conversations were audio-recorded in accordance with the Participants Information Sheet and Consent Forms.

Data Analysis

Data collection took place over an 18 month period between January 2012 and June 2013. This was to fit around the diary commitments as well as managing the volume of data collection. It was inevitable that over this period, I would gradually formulate a view about the meaning of the data (this can be considered an important and integral aspect of

qualitative research; Trafford and Lesham, 2008). However, I tried to avoid listening to the data or analysing the Q-sorts beyond initially checking if the process overall had worked (i.e. if the Q-sorts had been completed; if the interviews had been recorded). This was to avoid developing assumptions about the meaning of the data which I might have transferred to the data collection process.

It was only after all the data had been collected that I began processing the data. This itself posed a challenge as I was unsure whether to start with the statistical data (Q-sorts), with the spoken accounts of the coach, client or observer-groups or, whether to do this in a chronological order. I wondered whether to analyse all the data set for a session or for all the coaches, etc. Given that my unit of analysis was in principle *the session*, it seemed logical to analyse the data at the level of the session, first. However, in order to understand the session, it seemed important to understand how coaches, clients and coach-observers generally interpreted the session. This led to the iterative cycle (hermeneutic cycle) of data collection described in Chapter 3 of moving between part and whole in order to arrive at an overall interpretation of the data. In other words, I would on some occasions spend a whole day analysing a single session. Then, on the following day, I might look at the overall thematic analysis of the coaches. I would then reconsider the single session the following day in light of the thematic analysis and then vice-versa, the following day. This approach is, as explained in Chapter 3 consistent with a hermeneutic approach (e.g. McLeod, 2003; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). This process even continued throughout the write-up as the actual process of writing and the referring back to various literatures, led to changes in my interpretation of the data and the seeking of additional sources of literature.

Appendix 02: Sample Participants Information Sheet (for Observers)

A Multiple-Perspective Analysis of a Coaching Session

Dear Coach

You are being invited to take part in this research study that I conduct as a full-time PhD student. 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?

There is very little research that identifies “what happens” in a coaching session. “What happens” can be understood in terms of observable activities and events occurring in the session. However, what coaches observe when viewing a coaching session could reveal at least as much about how they “construct” the practice of coaching (through their use of language and the ideas and assumptions expressed) as it might identify ‘actual’ events and processes. The purpose of this study therefore sets out to identify the perspectives of coaches reviewing coaching sessions. In order to carry out the investigation, 6 experienced coaches have provided a video-recording (DVD) of one of their own coaching sessions and together with their clients have given me feedback on how they experienced their sessions. I am now showing the recordings of these sessions to small ‘observer groups’ of experienced coaches (typically 4-6 participants per group; each group reviewing one session).

Why have I been invited to participate?

You are being invited to participate as a member of a group of coaches who will be asked to review and comment on one of the session recordings (not one of your own sessions). You have been identified through our knowledge of you as a professional coach or because you have been identified as a professional coach by a trusted contact. It is important to identify experienced coaches for participation in the group context first of all, because experienced coaches are more likely to be able to make qualitative distinctions across different sessions. Secondly, your views are likely to represent an established view within the coaching community, which is of interest in its own right. If you are able to participate, you will be asked to attend a workshop (3 and a quarter hours, approximately) at an agreed date at an agreed venue. The workshop will start with a short introduction to the research. You will then be asked to watch a whole coaching session (1 hour). At the end of the session recording, you will be asked to analyse the session using a tool that has been specially designed to analyse a coaching session. You will then be asked to comment on how you evaluated the session using the tool and to share comments on the session in an open discussion. Finally, you will be given reported feedback from the coach and client.

Do I have to take part?

You are of course under no obligation to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. The consent form requests that you do not intentionally disclose the identities of the participants of the recorded coaching session nor that of any third party referred to in the recording. You will also be asked not to discuss the content of the recorded session outside of the focus group. If you agree to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will be able to compare your evaluation of an actual session with the evaluations of other coaches in the observer group. You will also be informed of the feedback provided by the coach facilitating the session and the client experiencing the session. The analysis may therefore prove useful in reflecting on coaching processes ‘occurring’ in a session and on styles of coaching. You will gain familiarity in using a research tool that has been developed to analyse a coaching session and whose development is described at the following link:
[http://www.instituteofcoaching.org/images/ARticles/OxfordBrookes %20Instrument for microanalysis of Coaching sessions 11 1 2011 pdf](http://www.instituteofcoaching.org/images/ARticles/OxfordBrookes_%20Instrument%20for%20microanalysis%20of%20Coaching%20sessions%2011%201%202011.pdf)

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

The workshop will be audio-recorded and will be transcribed and analysed to generate themes and quotes about perceptions. The data from the use of the tool will also be analysed statistically and interpreted. All the data will be stored securely, be password protected and only pseudonyms will be used following data collection. Data generated will be retained in accordance to the University's policy on Academic integrity and the Data Protection Act. It is intended that the final thesis will be completed by October 2012 (or soon after) and all data will need to be retained for five years following submission. After this, all data will be destroyed. The data will be analysed only by the primary researcher so examiners will only have access to anonymised data.

What should I do if I want to take part?

Within one week of receiving this Information Sheet you will be contacted to see if you still wish to take part. If you decide to go ahead, I will try to identify a mutually convenient time and date although that might not always be possible.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the data analysis will form part of a thesis for the award of PhD with Oxford Brookes University. It is hoped that the data will subsequently be used in publication but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in any written report. Names of all participants will be kept confidential. However, it must be recognised that with small samples it is impossible to guarantee total anonymity. A summary of research findings will be available for all participants. If you wish to receive a copy of this 'Summary of Findings' please request this at the time of the workshop(s). The overall comments and the results of the tool will also be fed back to the coaches who provided the recordings although they will not be informed of the identity of anyone in the observer group. This will be done with sensitivity and constructively by the researcher in his capacity as a chartered psychologist.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is being funded by the Business School of Oxford Brookes University (The International Centre of Coaching and Leadership Development).

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been approved by the supervisory team and the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Expenses

Reasonable travel expenses will be paid and in line with University payment guidelines.

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to discuss further, please contact me directly (amyers@brookes.ac.uk) or one of my two supervisors, Dr Tatiana Bachkirova (tbachkirova@brookes.ac.uk) or Dr Elaine Cox (ecox@brookes.ac.uk). If you have any concerns about the way in which the study is being conducted at any stage, you should contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for your time in reading this outline and for your consideration in taking part.

Adrian Myers, CPsychol, BA, MBA, MSC

Appendix 03: Written Instructions (Q-Sort Process)

Appendix 03: Q Sort Assessment of a Management Coaching Session

Background to the Tool

A Q sort is a simple means of modelling your viewpoint about a relevant topic or 'target object' using a set of provided statements/items. In this case, the target object we want you to think about is *the coaching session you have just viewed*. A set of 84 statements (or potential descriptors) of a coaching session has been provided together with a set of envelopes. By completing this Q Sort, I will be able to compare the way you describe the session you have just participated in or observed in comparison to other coaches, clients or observers who might also be asked to complete a Q Sort. Hopefully, it will also be a useful reflection exercise.

The Q sorting task requires that you allocate *every one* of these statements (cards) a ranking position within the fixed sorting distribution provided (a convention in Q methodology), based upon the extent to which you consider each to be **characteristic** (stand out) in the context of the session. **Characteristic** can have a number of meanings. It can mean that a particular aspect of the session occurred so **frequently** that it made the item stand out as a defining characteristic. On the other hand, an item expressed in one of the cards stood out as highly characteristic because you thought it was of **particular importance** in the context of the session; for example, you felt that an activity/ process took place that had a major impact on the course of the session. Alternatively, an item might have stood out simply because it was in some other way a **dominant feature** of the session.

You are being asked to rank order the items according to how salient they are in your opinion. There are 2 ways of ranking the items. The first way is as has already been described: items are more or less salient in a **characteristic** sense; that is they stand out because they are present and this is salient for you. On the other hand, an item can be salient because it is conspicuous by its

absence. Or, the item stood out because something you normally do in the session did not happen in this session, etc.

Finally, you will need to place some items towards the middle of the distribution. These are items which either do not occur very much and/or seem irrelevant in the context of the session. Let us now consider the mechanics!

The fixed sorting distribution contains 13 rating values, starting with -6 at the *highly uncharacteristic* end of the distribution, through zero, to +6 at the *highly characteristic* end of the distribution.

You will notice that on the table in front of you, I have placed a series of envelopes (matching this distribution) which are marked -6 through to 0 to +6. Also, the number of items that can be placed below each envelope is also indicated on each envelope and is as shown below.

Uncharacteristic Neither UnCh' nor Ch' Characteristic

RATING	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
NO OF CARDS	2	4	6	7	8	9	12	9	8	7	6	4	2

Your task is then to sort the 84 items below the 13 envelopes with the indicated number of items under each envelope. So, the 2 statements which you think are the *most characteristic* of the session should be ranked at the +6 position, the next 4 most characteristic statements should be ranked at the +5 position, and so on.

Similarly, those items that you think are the most *uncharacteristic* of the session should be ranked at the -6 position, the next 4 most *uncharacteristic* statements should be ranked at the -5 position, and so on.

Items towards the middle should be neither *characteristic* nor *uncharacteristic* of the session or less *characteristic* or less *uncharacteristic* of the session than other items.

In order to facilitate this process, I suggest you begin by sorting the items into three more or less even piles:

- 1. Uncharacteristic (left pile)**
- 2. Neither Characteristic nor Uncharacteristic/ Neutral (Middle pile)**
- 3. Characteristic (right pile)**

You can then make finer discriminations between all of the items.

Please note that the scaling assumes that your responses will be *characteristic*, *neutral* or *uncharacteristic* and to varying degrees. In practice, this is just a convenient way of helping you make discriminations between items. What counts is that some items are classified subjectively as more or less characteristic than others on a 13 point scale.

Please feel free to rearrange statements but try not to take too long on the process – what is important is your overall impression. You should set yourself a target time scale of 15 minutes for the first sort (into 3 initial piles) and 30 minutes for the second sort (onto the 13 point scale) but spend as much or as little time as you wish.

Please have one final look at the Q sort configuration you've created to check that it describes your session as well as possible within the time constraints. If

you're not happy, feel free to change the statement rankings until you have the configuration you want. Once you're happy, so am I!

You will be asked to explain your sorting pattern when you have finished. After this, you will be asked at some point to put the cards into the corresponding envelope (2 items in + 6; 4 items in +5, etc) and seal each envelope (this is just for future analysis). Make sure the number of cards in each envelope corresponds with the required number on the front of the envelope.

Thank you for participating in this exercise.

Appendix 04: Research Workshop Presentation

**Guidelines to Participants Taking
Part in Research
(“Sorting Instructions”)**

**A Multiple-Perspective Analysis of a
Coaching Session
Adrian Myers**

“Thank you and Welcome”

Background to Tool

- Developed by Tatiana Bachkirova, Jonathan Sibley and Adrian Myers
- Research Funded by IOC
- Items initially identified based on sharing of knowledge of different genres and coaching traditions/practices
- Items and method developed over a series of 3 focus groups (UK, USA, Canada) involving experienced coaches
- Pantheoretical terminology
- Captures behaviours, events, interaction patterns, atmosphere
- Items consider coach, client and dyadic interactions
- Grounded in “Q-methodology”

Sorting Process

Sorting Process

- Sorting items according to how “characteristic” or “uncharacteristic” they seem to be of a coaching session
- **Characteristic = stands out** because something did or tended to feature (**frequency/ prevalence**) and/or it’s happening caught your attention (**significance**); **and/or any other reason**
- **Uncharacteristic = stands out** because it didn’t or didn’t tend to feature (**low frequency; not prevalent** or **prevalent in an opposite sense** of what is stated on the card and/or its absence caught your attention (**significant because it did not happen**); **and/or any other reason**

...Examples

Sorting Process: “Highly Characteristic”

Example: “The client outlines his concerns”

1. Frequency (happened a lot)
2. Prevalence/ dominating feature (it was a dominating aspect of the session)
3. Significance (happened and its happening had a major impact on the session: helpful or unhelpful)
4. Other reason

Sorting Process: Highly Uncharacteristic

Example: "The client outlines his concerns"

1. Frequency (didn't or hardly happened)
2. Prevalence/ dominating feature (what the session wasn't like)
3. Significance
 1. Didn't happen but should have happened
 2. Didn't happen and should not have happened
4. Other reason

If in doubt.....

Go with what ***“stands out”***

***Seems to characterise the session for you
(in a happening sense)***

***Seems to describe the session in an
uncharacteristic sense for you (in a sense
that something wasn't happening)***

Sorting Process

- For all those items you consider “characteristic” of the session, some will be more or less “characteristic” than others
- Similarly, for all those items you consider “**un**characteristic” of the session, some will be more or less “**un**characteristic” than others
- Some items might seem neither characteristic nor **un**characteristic
- So.....

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
----	----	----	----	---	----	----	----	----

47	13	6	9	1	10	5	2	4
----	----	---	---	---	----	---	---	---

43	8	16	3	17	7	27
----	---	----	---	----	---	----

18	19	12	24	11
----	----	----	----	----

29	14	25
----	----	----

20



(Ignore numbers on cards)

Place to **Left**

“More **Un**characteristic”

Place to **Right**

“More Characteristic”



Place to **Middle:**

Neither characteristic nor **un**characteristic
Sometimes happened/ sometimes didn't

As you face the table!

SORTING THE CARDS INTO CHARACTERISTIC AND UNCHARACTERISTIC PILES

STEP 1: Sort the items into three piles

PILE 1 = Characteristic

PILE 2= Uncharacteristic

PILE 3 = Neither

***STEP 2: Progressively sort these items into the
columns***

Appendix 05: Research Workshop Agenda for Observer Group

Appendix 05: Research Workshop Agenda for Observer Group (Sample)

Invitation to Participate in a Research Project: *Multiple Perspective Analysis of a Coaching Session*

**14.00 – 17.15 Friday 13th July 2012
PG 202, Oxford Brookes University – Wheatley Campus**

- 14.00 Coffee/ Tea and Introductions

- 14.10 Q Methodology and Background to Research/Sorting Guidelines

- 14.30 Redistribution of Participants Information Sheet and Signing of
Consent Forms/ Expense Claims

- 14.40 View Video-Recording of Coaching Session

- 15.40 Sorting of Statements to Describe Session

- 16.20 Break – please hold back discussions!

- 16.30 Group Discussion on sorting and comments on observed session

- 17.15 Close

Adrian Myers CPsychol, MBA, MSC

Full-time PhD Student

Wheatley Campus, Oxford Brookes Business School, Oxford, OX33 1HX

Contact: amyers@brookes.ac.uk or telephone: XXXXX

Appendix 06: Ethical Issues Relating to Managing Feedback

Appendix 06: Ethical Issues Relating to Managing Feedback

The study posed many ethical challenges. A great deal of time was taken in preparing detailed Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms for all stakeholders involved in the research. This included, coaches who would conduct coaching sessions, clients of those coaches, coach-observers and sponsors of coaching sessions.

A major challenge was in managing the unanticipated. At the outset of the research, I had no pre-formed views about what to expect from the coach-observers when asked to evaluate the coaching session. In fact, my assumption was that since the coaches conducting coaching sessions were generally experienced coaches with excellent reputations and various academic and practitioner credentials, I assumed that they would be evaluated very positively by other coaches. In fact, given that my research interest was on the coaching process (what happens between coach and client) rather than on the coach, I had no reason to suppose that coach-observers would, in the main, focus their attention on an evaluation of the coach. In fact, even after I personally had viewed the first coaching session, and had seen the tape recording, I assumed that if coach-observers were to evaluate the coach's performance, they would have done so very positively. This continued throughout the process and I was always surprised by what I interpreted as generally negative criticism of the coach's approach.

It is important not to dismiss the context of the research which might have impacted on the overall process. For example, my own presentation as an academic researcher might have given the impression of a need for criticality; even my positioning of the research, standing at the front of the room in which the Observer-Groups were held might have given the impression of an academic context and an invitation for critical evaluation. Asking the Observer-Groups to sit in a "U" shaped seating arrangement might have recreated a sense of a classroom environment. Some sessions were also held at the University creating perhaps a sense of the need to be critical.

There might also be something in the Coaching Process Q-Set (Bachkirova et al, 2012), hitherto unidentified, which predisposes coach-observers to focus their attention on an evaluation of the coach rather than an evaluation of the process, which was the intended purpose of the instrument.

Finally, it is also important to recognise that I might have inadvertently influenced the process in some other way. For example, in explaining the use of the tool, I might have given examples which might have led participants to believe that I was expecting them to focus on the coach (however, this was not generally done deliberately and in the prepared presentation given in the observer workshops, the example given focused on the client – see presentation in Appendix 04). However, because at the time of conducting the research, I was not thinking about how my actions might have led the coach-observers to focus on the coach, it could have been something I overlooked. There is therefore a need for some modesty in presenting the findings.

Even if I had not influenced the process in the manner considered, there were still aspects of the research context that might have impacted on how the coach conducting the session was perceived. The context of the research was dehumanised in the sense that participants did not know the coach or the client and were only watching a video-recording. It could also be argued that Coach-Observers do not have access to the intimacy of the interaction; that this is something unique to the two participants in the coaching conversation (Anderson, 1997, p.117) and this might have led to a negative evaluation by the Coach-Observers. Another possible influence could simply relate to group dynamics (e.g. Shaw, 1971). Care is needed therefore not to assume that coaches, in some sense, wilfully criticised the coaches in the video-recordings in a negative manner but that their negative reaction could perhaps be explained by a distancing of the engagement.

Moreover, social constructionist research explicitly seeks to understand the situational context in which statements are made by rather than assuming that those people providing

verbal accounts express what might be understood as more or less permanent attitudes (Edwards and Potter, 1992). This should be taken as a further call for contextualising the findings.

Even if I had not introduced inadvertently any bias, in order to help coach-observers understand their reactions, outlining the overall influence of context generally could be relevant in helping them understand their own reactions. Some of the theories proposed elsewhere in this thesis (e.g. in relation to identity theory, Stryker, 1987; and social identity theory, Stets and Burke, 2000) are also relevant in helping coach-observers understand their own responses and should be a warning to the researcher to be aware of the possible impact of research participants generally reflecting or being encouraged to reflect on their own reactions and, of the need to be sensitive in presenting findings. There is a considerable literature that considers challenging emotional processes associated with what is constructed as *identity threats* (e.g. Garza-Guerrero, 1971; Thoits, 1991; Beech and MacIntosh, 2012) for example.

On a practical level, those coaches who asked for feedback on their session were given anonymous feedback but this was requested by only one coach. This was done in a balanced manner, based on my own personal experience of many years of giving feedback as a management training and development consultant and as a chartered psychologist. This process was also anticipated in the Participants Information Sheet (i.e. made known to the coach-observers; see appendix 02).

With regard to all participants, including the coach-observers, I had made as clearly as possible and at the outset of the research, that I was interested in how coaches made sense of the coaching process; that is I had tried to communicate that I was interested in their perspective as a research focus. I had tried to clarify this in the *Participant Information Sheet*:

“However, what coaches observe when viewing a coaching session could reveal at least as much about how they “construct” the practice of coaching (through their use of language and the ideas and assumptions expressed) as it might identify actual events and processes.”

In other words, I had tried to make as clear as possible that I was interested in their reactions.

In the case of the Coach-Observers, I said at the end of all sessions that I was available should anyone want to discuss any issues with me. No one came back to me. However, I was concerned that one of the coach-observers, at one of the Observer Groups said that she had been quite “taken aback” by her own negative reactions to the viewing of the recording and that “she would need to reflect on that”. I could not oblige the coach-observer to discuss the matter with me but the offer was there. I did however at the end of all Observer Groups explain how the reaction of the coach-observers had been similar in previous groups. I also began to offer tentative explanations relating to the possibility of different coaches seemingly constructing the process differently. In this way, I hoped to normalise the behaviour of the coach-observers in the similar way to how a supervisor might help the coach to contextualise their behaviour in supervision (Inskipp and Proctor, 1995).

In conferences and seminars, when presenting the initial findings, there was always the possibility of coaches being present, who might either have facilitated the sessions or acted as coach-observers. On all occasions, the data was presented based on my own developing analysis that coaches have very different views on the coaching process and what was observed was not in some sense, an “objective reality” but more a reflection of the subjectivity of the coach-observers expressing their value judgements about how coaching should be practised. Reassurance was given implicitly to the coaches conducting the sessions that all clients who had participated in the sessions had given very positive feedback about the coach. These comments led to very rich and open discussions in conference about what process are important in coaching process; the role of meaning-

making between coach and client; the difficulty of being able to understand a session as an observer; personal values and experiences in developing one's own coaching approach coach and whether this is in some sense "better" than any other approach; the apparent paradox that coaching is often promoted as a collaborative process (e.g. Whitmore, 2011) yet coaches when asked to comment on someone else's session (in my research) tended to focus on the behaviour and way of being of the coach. These are important topics which actually promote understanding, tolerance and flexibility of thought. Where feedback was collected, the talks were very positively received which suggested that the issue had been addressed with consideration.

Future Dissemination of Research Findings

I intend to circulate a summary of the findings to all participating coaches in acknowledgement of their contribution to the research process. There is a clear need to ensure that this is worded sensitively. The summary should acknowledge the particular contribution of all participants. It should help contextualise how the situational context might have impacted on the way the coach-observers addressed their comments about the coach. The summary should also make clear that some positive comments were also made. The summary should provide participants with the opportunity to comment on the research should they wish to do so and to discuss the process with the researcher in more detail, should they wish to do so. There is also an issue about how to manage the feedback for any participating clients in the study. Where the coach invited their own client, I will send a copy to the coach to send to their client, should they wish to do so. One client did ask for a copy of the findings and I will inform the coach accordingly. There is therefore a need to circulate findings in a way that does not undermine the credibility of any coach. The same processes need to be followed for any future publication in journals.

All attempts to maintain anonymity has been maintained throughout the research process and it is my intention to continue to try to maintain this in any future publication (and as outlined in the Participant Information Sheet).

Lessons for Other Researchers

The research process raised many ethical and legal issues which are discussed here and elsewhere in this thesis. In particular, there is a need for researchers to anticipate the possibility of participants experiencing any sense of identity threat (e.g. Garza-Guerrero, 1971; Thoits, 1991; Beech and MacIntosh, 2012) when research explores personal values.

In particular researchers need to:

1. Ensure that possible impacts of research on research participants are identified beforehand by for example, reviewing the literature on *identity threats* and by pooling ideas about what the research might identify and how any findings might be managed over the course of the research (this is in effect a type of risk assessment)
2. Ensure that the expertise of trusted colleagues is solicited, particularly if one is relatively inexperienced in the research process; other people are likely to help prompt important issues
3. Involve appropriate supervisory channels (e.g. University Ethical Committees and colleagues with expertise in this area)
4. Provide structures to support any participant who might be impacted by the findings (e.g. confidential counselling processes)
5. Ensure that any publication is made in a sensitive and balanced way, mindful of possible limitations of one's own findings as a researcher, and, that takes account of possible contextual factors; also to take account of the possible reactions of multiple-stakeholders
6. Provide opportunities for two –way discussion of findings and to respond to feedback (e.g. at conference)

The issues raised in this research could potentially lead to a useful journal publication in relation to the use of video-material used in a helping context and ethical issues.

Appendix 07: Q-Sorting Process Photograph

Appendix 08: Q-Set (84 Items)

Coach and client explore the deeper meaning of a presenting issue (5)	There is a discussion of the results of a psychometric instrument (19)	Coach interrupts client (63)	Coach discloses own feelings/ bodily sensations evoked in the session (22)	Coach paraphrases the client's statements (38)	Coac cof
Coach appears to be using an intervention mechanistically (57)	There is one or more periods of silent reflection (18)	Coach appears to be pursuing her own agenda (58)	Coach points out potential unconscious motives of the client (out of the client's awareness) (8)	There is a discussion of client's feedback on coaching (60)	Coa
	Client takes initiative in structuring the session (59)	Client suggests his next course of action (69)	Coach encourages client to become more aware of his immediate experience in the session (15)	The session is fast-paced (50)	Th re
	Coach makes explicit a shift in role during the session (e.g., acting as consultant, teacher, therapist) (55)	There is a discussion about the client's overall goals (79)	Coach broadens the focus of discussions (66)	There is a discussion of the client's progress (78)	Co mo
		The session appears highly structured (51)	Coach asks client to quantify feeling / perception / issue using a scale (17)	Coach redirects client to client's agenda (81)	Coa par
		Coach explores client's emotions (13)	There appears to be rapport (strong connection) between client and coach (33)	Coach and client explore their differences in perception of the situation (25)	Th r (e
			There is an exploration of the client's values (2)	Coach repeats client's words back to him (37)	Co ut

Item No	Q-Items
1	There is an exploration of the effect of client's choice of words
2	There is an exploration of the client's values
3	There is an exploration of the client's environmental influences (e.g., organizational, family, politics, history)
4	There is an exploration of the client's underlying mindset (e.g., assumptions, beliefs, stories)
5	Coach and client explore the deeper meaning of a presenting issue
6	Coach works with the client's apparent defensiveness
7	Coach points out recurrent theme in client's behaviour
8	Coach points out potential unconscious motives of the client (out of the client's awareness)
9	There is an exploration of the client's in session non-verbal behavior
10	Coach invites client to consider other people's perspectives
11	Coach invites client to identify resources and how they might be leveraged (including strengths, accomplishments, and/or external resources)
12	Coach initiates clients resources and how they might be leveraged (including strengths, accomplishments, and/or external resources)
13	Coach explores client's emotions
14	Coach encourages client to feel more deeply within session
15	Coach encourages client to become more aware of his immediate experience in the session
16	Coach challenges client's perspective of situation and/or self
17	Coach asks client to quantify feeling / perception / issue using a scale
18	There is one or more periods of silent reflection
19	There is a discussion of the results of a psychometric instrument
20	There is a discussion of external feedback
21	Coach gives feedback from coach's experience of client
22	Coach discloses own feelings/ bodily sensations evoked in the session
23	Coach describes her perception of the situation
24	There appears to be a productive use of metaphors
25	Coach and client explore their differences in perception of the situation
26	Coach expands on client's statements
27	Coach provides reassurance to client
28	Coach uses humor
29	Coach shows empathy
30	Coach shares personal details about herself
31	Coach repairs lost connection to the client during session
32	Coach discloses own fallibility
33	There appears to be rapport (strong connection) between client and coach
34	Coach and client appear to understand each other
35	Coach and client discuss their relationship
36	Coach asks for permission to give feedback
37	Coach repeats client's words back to him
38	Coach paraphrases the client's statements
39	Coach checks if her understanding is correct
40	There is a sense of optimism in the coaching session
41	There appears to be a shift in energy during the coaching session
42	Coach and client appear to be engaged (vs. disengaged)
43	Coach and client use a development plan to guide sessions

44	Coach follows up on key / significant statements made by client
45	Coach asks questions helping the client to elaborate
46	There is a discussion of the coaching "contract"
47	There is a discussion of issues related to the termination of coaching
48	There is a discussion of boundaries and/or ethical issues related to the coaching engagement
49	There is a discussion of a potential referral to an outside specialist (e.g., therapist, doctor, financial advisor)
50	The session is fast-paced
51	The session appears highly structured
52	Coach and client appear to bring the session to closure easily
53	Coach and client discuss the process of the session
54	Coach takes an active role during the session
55	Coach makes explicit a shift in role during the session (e.g., acting as consultant, teacher, therapist)
56	Coach explains the reason behind using a specific intervention
57	Coach appears to be using an intervention mechanistically
58	Coach appears to be pursuing her own agenda
59	Client takes initiative in structuring the session
60	There is a discussion of client's feedback on coaching
61	Coach makes sounds or non-verbally encourages client to continue
62	Coach is verbose
63	Coach interrupts client
64	Client interrupts coach
65	Coach suggests in-session exercise / activity
66	Coach broadens the focus of discussions
67	Coach asks questions that appear to open new possibilities for the client
68	Coach appears to focus on a third-party's agenda (e.g., organization, partner, parents)
69	Client suggests his next course of action
70	There is a discussion of new practices for the client
71	Coach suggests possible solutions
72	Coach suggests homework for client
73	Coach shares her knowledge about topic
74	Coach gives advice
75	Coach follows up on previous homework
76	Coach encourages client to make choices
77	Coach asks the client to describe key learnings / take-aways from session
78	There is a discussion of the client's progress
79	There is a discussion about the client's overall goals
80	There is a discussion about how to measure the success of the coaching engagement
81	Coach redirects client to client's agenda
82	Coach questions client's level of commitment to coaching
83	Coach inquires about client's aim for the session
84	There is a discussion of the client's impact on his environment (e.g., organization, family)

Appendix 09: Correlation Matrix: All Q-Sorts

Appendix 09 Correlation Matrix

Descriptive statistics - Interpretation

The Correlation matrix in Q Methodology is usually only considered a methodological necessity en route to the identification of the Q factors. Block, 2008 explains that the correlation matrix is not widely recognised because theoretical sampling distribution for true correlations expects that any two arrays of Q descriptors taken at random, on average, will correlate zero. However, in Q-sorting, it is likely that descriptors of general relevance will increase the likelihood of showing a positive correlation (83). One can be mindful of this comment in interpreting correlation coefficients but they still give an indication of similarity of perceptions between and across participants. This is important in the context of this Inquiry because the literature suggested that observers and participants might not share similar perspectives.

In order to calculate significance between Q-Sorts, the formula $2.58 \times (1/\sqrt{N})$ (No. of items in Q set) can be applied (Watts, 2013). In this case $2.58(1/\sqrt{84}) = 0.28$ ($p \geq 0.01$). The correlation matrix generated through the PQ Method software is as shown in table 1. The columns and rows represent the by-person Q-sort analysis (i.e. how each Q-sort loads onto every other Q-Sort; the 100% diagonal correlation (in black) simply indicates the mathematical relationship when the by-person is the same Q-Sort. The correlation matrix has been colour coded so that the reader can readily identify correlation coefficients between and across sessions. Statistically significant correlations have been highlighted in the same colour as that given for that session for when the statistically significant correlations are within the same session; they are in red otherwise.

CORRELATION MATRIX: ALL Q-SORTS

Q-Sort	Q SORT (Participant)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	15	17	18	19	20	21	22
1	OBQ MARJORIE	100	36	38	41	45	31	58	24	31	14	14	30	33	11	15	17	35	22	-2	6	31	1
2	OB2 MARJORIE	36	100	39	23	51	52	40	42	18	12	29	34	26	31	11	15	9	13	10	0	27	-14
3	OB3 MARJORIE	38	39	100	26	56	37	42	19	10	46	40	37	47	33	38	39	53	35	16	20	30	7
4	OB 4 MARJORIE	41	23	26	100	37	29	27	4	12	7	14	29	35	12	14	14	28	1	-19	9	13	-13
5	OB 5 MARJORIE	45	51	56	37	100	53	64	49	30	45	45	53	43	37	41	40	45	30	10	6	32	-6
6	OB 6 MARJORIE	31	52	37	29	53	100	51	36	38	20	42	37	33	34	36	20	15	12	6	9	19	-13
7	CL IENT S1 MARJORIE	58	40	42	27	64	51	100	46	28	37	41	38	46	34	34	30	38	35	10	13	35	-14
8	COACH S1 MARJORE	24	42	19	4	49	36	46	100	35	33	33	24	19	25	12	-1	-5	27	17	28	51	9
9	COACH TRISTAN	31	18	10	12	30	38	28	35	100	22	31	31	24	13	23	26	13	24	3	13	36	-6
10	CL IENT S2 TRISTAN	14	12	46	7	45	20	37	33	22	100	52	59	60	52	54	36	33	25	5	15	21	9
11	OB1S2 TRISTAN	14	29	40	14	45	42	41	33	31	52	100	50	48	44	57	37	26	28	3	8	21	-6
12	OB2 S2 TRISTAN	30	34	37	29	53	37	38	24	31	59	50	100	45	33	36	40	40	10	1	0	17	-7
13	OB3 S2 TRISTAN	33	26	47	35	43	33	46	19	24	60	48	45	100	43	58	42	34	23	-2	17	31	0
14	OB4 S2 TRISTAN	11	31	33	12	37	34	34	25	13	52	44	33	43	100	50	17	4	12	-4	15	9	-7
15	OB 5 S2 TRISTAN	15	11	38	14	41	36	34	12	23	54	57	36	58	50	100	39	20	12	-12	9	5	2
16	OB 6 TRISTAN	17	15	39	14	40	20	30	-1	26	36	37	40	42	17	39	100	33	10	-19	4	8	-23
17	CLIENT S3 JOANNE	35	9	53	28	45	15	38	-5	13	33	26	40	34	4	20	33	100	21	12	4	18	-6
18	COACH S3 JOANNE	22	13	35	1	30	12	35	27	24	25	28	10	23	12	12	10	21	100	22	35	50	13
19	OB1 S2 JOANNE	-2	10	16	-19	10	6	10	17	3	5	3	1	-2	-4	-12	-19	12	22	100	18	38	21
20	OB2 S3 JOANNE	6	0	20	9	6	9	13	28	13	15	8	0	17	15	9	4	4	35	18	100	40	16
21	OB3 S3 JOANNE	31	27	30	13	32	19	35	51	36	21	21	17	31	9	5	8	18	50	38	40	100	20
22	OB S4 JOANNE	1	-14	7	-13	-6	-13	-14	9	-6	9	-6	-7	0	-7	2	-23	-6	13	21	16	20	100
23	CLIENT S4 ALICE	19	3	48	33	46	34	32	17	23	44	41	48	37	38	43	35	44	17	-1	-3	18	-12
24	COACH S4 ALICE	33	32	19	15	36	32	49	33	25	14	39	22	28	22	29	28	8	12	-6	-8	36	9
25	OB S1 S4 ALICE	26	33	19	-5	37	39	39	38	30	30	35	34	26	31	18	20	8	23	3	-4	18	8
26	OB2 S4 ALICE	21	12	1	6	11	12	10	26	19	10	5	12	19	4	4	11	-8	10	-1	2	24	29
27	OB3 S4 ALICE	28	26	41	18	45	34	50	40	22	33	28	17	43	34	26	20	20	27	18	16	46	8
28	OB4 S4 ALICE	11	19	12	24	37	46	43	36	16	40	31	40	36	33	33	26	27	-7	3	10	19	-18
29	OB5 S4 ALICE	33	20	18	13	31	18	26	28	25	23	14	28	31	17	5	32	-5	5	12	10	44	16
30	OB6 S4 ALICE	28	41	13	30	30	28	38	18	1	-3	3	10	19	14	1	9	-2	-2	3	-11	2	-12
31	OB7 S4 ALICE	21	43	7	10	37	35	35	47	29	2	20	8	5	24	0	-6	-1	19	13	2	40	6
32	OB8 S4 ALICE	21	17	5	3	18	13	27	23	22	17	16	22	16	31	5	0	8	26	7	18	35	5

33	OB1 S5 CBC BACKGROUND	28	10	31	10	34	16	39	19	24	35	33	45	21	25	4	14	41	27	8	3	11	11
34	OB S5 CBC BACKGROUND	17	16	21	12	35	6	16	20	14	28	17	15	20	17	18	12	9	11	12	41	29	24
35	OB S5 TA BACKGROUND	-7	-6	-5	-18	-3	1	-13	12	11	-10	-13	-12	-10	1	-1	-20	-10	23	29	22	21	31
36	OB S5 TA BACKGROUND	20	19	4	10	7	14	17	33	20	1	5	-14	4	2	-2	-10	-13	24	33	58	52	21
37	OB S5 TA BACKGROUND	10	-2	10	-13	10	2	8	23	17	4	-3	-11	12	3	-15	6	2	33	30	26	50	27
38	OB S5 TA BACKGROUND	-2	-11	-3	-12	-17	3	-5	19	9	-14	-16	-19	-6	-6	-9	-23	-15	25	19	42	38	37
39	CLIENT S5 ALISON	34	5	52	32	46	27	43	20	34	52	41	55	43	23	28	35	52	34	7	23	26	4
40	COACH S5 ALISON	10	-3	35	20	20	20	35	15	22	34	24	24	39	17	35	33	41	26	18	36	24	-12
41	COACH S6 DREW	27	29	42	19	40	39	44	22	16	49	39	53	44	36	30	19	33	18	8	-3	25	9
42	OB1 S6 DREW	15	12	32	14	27	15	28	29	12	31	28	15	41	29	24	14	-4	47	16	33	49	6
43	OB2 S6 DREW	8	29	22	26	27	28	23	41	19	12	21	5	28	25	8	6	-13	14	14	23	36	-2
44	OB3 S5 DREW	16	38	29	30	36	34	36	30	24	31	30	17	30	37	16	21	0	22	-10	7	28	-25
45	OB4 S5 DREW	-7	18	22	-3	27	24	24	38	2	27	31	15	19	30	24	12	-9	32	32	22	29	15
46	OB5 S5 DREW	15	16	2	1	3	1	13	22	10	1	1	-14	10	16	-3	1	-30	20	10	12	34	2

Correlation Matrix Continued

Q-Sort	Q SORT (Participant)	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46
1	OBQ MAR	19	33	26	21	28	11	33	28	21	21	28	17	-7	20	10	-2	34	10	27	15	8	16	-7	15
2	OB2 MAR	3	32	33	12	26	19	20	41	43	17	10	16	-6	19	-2	-11	5	-3	29	12	29	38	18	16
3	OB3 MAR	48	19	19	1	41	12	18	13	7	5	31	21	-5	4	10	-3	52	35	42	32	22	29	22	2
4	OB 4 MAR	33	15	-5	6	18	24	13	30	10	3	10	12	-18	10	13	-12	32	20	19	14	26	30	-3	1
5	OB 5 MAR	46	36	37	11	45	37	31	30	37	18	34	35	-3	7	10	-17	46	20	40	27	27	36	27	3
6	OB 6 MAR	34	32	39	12	34	46	18	28	35	13	16	6	1	14	2	3	27	20	39	15	28	34	24	1
7	CLIENT S1 MAR	32	49	39	10	50	43	26	38	35	27	39	16	-13	17	8	-5	43	35	44	28	23	36	24	13
8	COACH S1 MARJORE	17	33	38	26	40	36	28	18	47	23	19	20	12	33	23	19	20	15	22	29	41	30	38	22
9	COACH TRISTAN	23	25	30	19	22	16	25	1	29	22	24	14	11	20	17	9	34	22	16	12	19	24	2	10
10	CLIENT S2 TRI	44	14	30	10	33	40	23	-3	2	17	35	28	-10	1	4	-14	52	34	49	31	12	31	27	1
11	OB1S2 TRI	41	39	35	5	28	31	14	3	20	16	33	17	-13	5	-3	-16	41	24	39	28	21	30	31	1
12	OB2 S2 TRI	48	22	34	12	17	40	28	10	8	22	45	15	-12	-14	-11	-19	55	24	53	15	5	17	15	-14
13	OB3 S2 TRI	37	28	26	19	43	36	31	19	5	16	21	20	-10	4	12	-6	43	39	44	41	28	30	19	10
14	OB4 S2 TRI	38	22	31	4	34	33	17	14	24	31	25	17	1	2	3	-6	23	17	36	29	25	37	30	16
15	OB 5 S2 TRI	43	29	18	4	26	33	5	1	0	5	4	18	-1	-2	-15	-9	28	35	30	24	8	16	24	-3
16	OB 6 TRI	35	28	20	11	20	26	32	9	-6	0	14	12	-20	-10	6	-23	35	33	19	14	6	21	12	1
17	CLIENT S3 JOANNE	44	8	8	-8	20	27	-5	-2	-1	8	41	9	-10	-13	2	-15	52	41	33	-4	-13	0	-9	-30
18	COACH S3 JOANNE	17	12	23	10	27	-7	5	-2	19	26	27	11	23	24	33	25	34	26	18	47	14	22	32	20
19	OB1 S2 JOANNE	-1	-6	3	-1	18	3	12	3	13	7	8	12	29	33	30	19	7	18	8	16	14	-10	32	10
20	OB2 S3 JOANNE	-3	-8	-4	2	16	10	10	-11	2	18	3	41	22	58	26	42	23	36	-3	33	23	7	22	12
21	OB3 S3 JOANNE	18	36	18	24	46	19	44	2	40	35	11	29	21	52	50	38	26	24	25	49	36	28	29	34

22	OB S4 JOANNE	-12	9	8	29	8	-18	16	-12	6	5	11	24	31	21	27	37	4	-12	9	6	-2	-25	15	2
23	CLIENT S4 ALICE	100	24	27	7	44	40	25	19	11	20	37	12	-4	-10	1	-4	62	41	39	12	24	10	25	-17
24	COACH S4 ALICE	24	100	34	22	44	46	38	36	43	35	25	1	-9	11	0	2	23	11	26	11	15	25	23	10
25	OBS1 S4 ALICE	27	34	100	39	34	35	31	31	44	35	21	5	13	5	12	8	31	15	21	5	21	22	34	5
26	OB2 S4 ALICE	7	22	39	100	27	22	29	13	29	32	5	6	22	23	23	20	17	14	-1	17	32	15	31	32
27	OB3 S4 ALICE	44	44	34	27	100	42	54	39	47	42	23	35	9	30	24	19	39	35	31	29	53	28	25	21
28	OB4 S4 ALICE	40	46	35	22	42	100	26	28	27	30	19	1	-14	6	-14	-7	36	33	29	0	24	30	28	-3
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34	OB S5 CBC	12	1	5	6	35	1	32	4	10	16	9	100	5	42	26	26	28	12	21	24	25	12	22	3
35	OB S5 TA	-4	-9	13	22	9	-14	3	6	22	24	0	5	100	42	32	53	-3	2	-10	14	-2	-20	14	14
36	OB S5 TA	-10	11	5	23	30	6	24	15	29	18	-11	42	42	100	31	56	4	13	1	37	43	22	16	39
37	OB S5 TA	1	0	12	23	24	-14	39	5	25	14	1	26	32	31	100	42	20	7	15	44	14	3	19	35
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45	OB4 S5 DREW	25	23	34	31	25	28	19	11	24	17	3	22	14	16	19	14	23	28	21	29	27	27	100	15
46	OB5 S5 DREW	-17	10	5	32	21	-3	23	11	20	14	-13	3	14	39	35	19	-10	-14	10	57	38	46	15	100

Appendix 10: Methodological Statistics Example (Full data set)

A full copy of an example of the statistical analysis is available in hard copy at the Oxford Brookes University Library

A Multiple Perspective Analysis of a Coaching Session

A.C. Myers

**This is a thesis submitted in partial
fulfilment for the award of Doctor of
Philosophy at Oxford Brookes
University**

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Adrian

Abstract

Although there has been considerable growth in coaching as a field of practice, there is much concern about a lack of research and theory on which coaches base their practice. The key question of what coaching *is* remains an area of much debate. In the absence of any in-depth understanding of the coaching *process*, sponsors and clients of coaching have little clarity about what services they are contracting. Coaches themselves, are compelled to choose an approach that is advocated by a particular coaching school in which they are trained, or to base their practice on their own assumptions. In order to address this need to understand the coaching process, the research described in this thesis sets out to provide an in-depth exploration of the moment-by-moment interactions, between coach and client.

This research design involved the multifaceted analysis of six coaching sessions with six professional coaches and clients. The sessions were video-recorded. The focus of the coaching sessions was on work-related topics. At the end of the sessions, coaches and clients were interviewed and asked to recall what stood out for them in the sessions. Later, each video-recording was shown to one of six groups of typically, six professional coaches, who were asked to comment on their observations. The spoken accounts of all participants were analysed thematically and discursively. The Inquiry also involved the use of Q-methodology, which required all participants to rank-order a series of written items, describing a coaching session.

The findings suggest that for the client, the coaching process is primarily an experience in which the client's interpersonal needs are met and which gives space and structure for the client to change perspectives. For the coach, the coaching process is a form of expert intervention in which she draws on a varied range of habitual ways of processing her experience of the client and makes in-the-moment decisions. At the level of the dyad, coach and client create a sense of meaning together that is difficult for observers to appreciate. In general, participants tended to notice the same events but evaluated them differently.

1.0 Chapter 1 Introduction

There is considerable growth in coaching as a professional practice and academic discipline (Cavanagh and Palmer, 2006; Passmore, 2007; Sperry, 2013; Auerbach, 2012; Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Stern, 2004). This expansion seems to be driven at least in part by faith in the assumed potential of coaching. For example, executive coaching is described as a “must” (Institute of Directors, 2014). The potential of coaching seems even to extend to helping executives become more culturally aware in an increasingly global world (Abbott, 2009; Hilary, 2009).

However, in spite of the popularity and promise of coaching, there is still much debate about what coaching is and how it might or should be considered different to neighbouring practices. There is discussion for example in relation to how coaching might differ from counselling (Bachkirova and Cox, 2004; Spinelli, 2008) or consulting (Allan et al., 2010). Some commentators argue that counselling practices should be included in coaching (Simons, 2006). Others suggest that coaching should be firmly rooted in the coach’s knowledge of contemporary management and political issues (Levinson, 2009). These examples serve to highlight the breadth of opinions that circulate in the literature on what coaching is and how it should be practised.

Edited volumes on coaching practices serve to highlight the diversity in views about coaching as a practice and theoretical discipline. Palmer and Whybrow (2007) for example outline a range of popular approaches that are as varied in their theoretical approaches as solutions focused coaching, Gestalt coaching and motivational interviewing. Similarly, Cox et al (2010) highlight a breadth of diverse approaches that include ontological coaching, psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioural coaching. They outline a range of different coaching genres that include developmental coaching, leadership coaching and skills and performance coaching. They also include chapters that consider different contexts in which coaching takes place (e.g. peer coaching, life coaching).

While on the one hand, alternative coaching traditions, genres and contexts point to the breadth and diversity of ways of practising coaching, they also express different philosophical orientations. For example, Gestalt coaching is rooted in phenomenological psychology (Gillie, 2009); behavioural based coaching (Peel, 2005), adopts a more realist ontology; narrative based approaches adopt more social constructionist ontology (Stelter, 2014). Alternative coaching approaches suggest competing ontological assumptions about the nature of coaching.

One of the difficulties in defining the boundaries of coaching is that coaching has emerged from a range of diverse traditions including for example developmental psychology, education and organizational practices. A survey carried out by Whybrow and Palmer (2006) identified tremendous diversity in the practice of coaching (background of coach, type of coaching practised) across the membership of the Coaching Psychology Forum, the precursor to the Special Group in Coaching Psychology. Similar findings had been reported earlier in the literature (Judge and Cowell, 1997, Kilburg, 1996). In contrast, it has been argued that there may be relatively few differences between varying schools of coaching in spite of the way they are described theoretically (Roberts and Jarrett, 2006). There is therefore uncertainty about whether coaching is as a professional practice different in spite of the diversity of backgrounds and approaches described theoretically. It is also possible that in spite of the different theoretical descriptions of coaching, there may be conceptual commonalities across these traditions, genres and contexts.

In spite of the growth in the practice and promise of coaching, many commentators have expressed concern about the lack of research and established theory on which coaches base their practice (Harakas, 2013; Feldman, 2005; Lowman, 2011; Kilburg, 2004; Joo, 2005; Stewart et al., 2008). There is in particular, a lack of empirical research on coaching process; that is on the analysis of the moment by moment interactions between coach and client. Much extant research seems to focus on the experiences of the client (de Haan et al., 2010).

In a sense, this literature does say *something* about the *process* if what we mean by *process* is at an experiential level of analysis; experiences can also give an insight into what is perceived as the key events taking place within a session of coaching (the recollections of the coach can also highlight key moments from the coach's perspective; (e.g. de Haan and Nieß, 2012). However, most studies that consider the experience of the client (and/or of the coach) say little about the moment by moment in-session experiences or moment by moment occurrences taking place over the course of the interaction. Research on client (and/or coach) experiences tends to focus on a small number of salient moments occurring within the session rather than the whole session.

There is very little research on the perspective of the external observer. Greif et al (2010) have carried out a micro-analytical analysis of the coaching process although this is primarily at a behavioural level and their research focus is mainly on what the coach does rather than on what the client does or on what the coach and client do together. Their research is also firmly grounded in a particular model of coaching (results based coaching), derived from (in the main) student populations and the perspective of a detached, expert observer. In principle, there seems no clear reason for giving more or less importance to the perspective of the coach (what she/he attends to and how he/she arrives at decisions to act during the interaction), to the client (his/her experience of the in-session interactions) or to the external observer (noticing behaviours and perhaps making inferences or evaluations about intentions or other non-visible psychological processes occurring during the interaction). Process can therefore be conceptualised experientially, psychologically or behaviourally. If one considers also social and cultural assumptions expressed in the accounts of participants, then process can also be understood in a normative sense; that is as a cultural discourse (e.g. how a coach *should* behave).

An absence of literature on the coaching process coupled with such a breadth of descriptions of diverse practices identified in coaching practice calls into question the identity of coaching

as a clearly identifiable practice and as a distinct academic discipline. In the absence of a deeper understanding of coaching, it is unclear what coaching might provide over and above neighbouring practices or for that matter, what constitute the active ingredients of coaching (Bono et al., 2009). Nieminen et al. (2013) has questioned what coaching contributes that facilitated multisource feedback cannot provide. In the absence of research and in the absence of the likelihood of large scale funding, researchers and practitioners are making assumptions that research findings in psychotherapy might best be considered readily applicable to practices in coaching (de Haan et al., 2013). Much can still be learned from psychotherapy research. However, one must be mindful about its relevance in coaching. Empirical research is warranted and should be carried out as much as is practicable in order to evaluate similarities and differences between psychotherapy and coaching. This does not necessarily mean conducting comparative research; it could simply mean evaluating if findings in psychotherapy (identified in the literature) are also relevant in coaching. Given the prohibitive costs of large scale quantitative research, more in-depth qualitative approaches in coaching may constitute a more pragmatic approach than large scale quantitative approaches.

It is against this backcloth of a lack of and need for coaching process research that this study originates. In particular, this need is to explore in depth the moment by moment interactions between coach and client and at the level of a whole session. At the same time, it seems important to be mindful of the breadth of views and practices existing within the coaching community. This means that in investigating the coaching process, it would be important to involve a variety of coaches from a range of different traditions in the research process. Given the range of competing philosophical orientations underpinning coaching as well as epistemological possibilities of interpreting the coaching process at different levels of analysis (e.g. at experiential, psychological, social constructionist or cultural levels of analysis), it would seem to be beneficial to explore the coaching process at all these levels rather than for

example to assume that one level only (e.g. as a behavioural interaction) represents the coaching process.

1.1 Research Objectives

This thesis therefore sets out to answer the question: **“What can be learned about the coaching process by analysing a coaching session from multiple perspectives?”** This open-ended question was intended to allow an in-depth and rich exploration of the coaching process. The question would provide scope for an investigation that could in principle consider different physical perspectives; for example the perspective of the coach, client and observers (experienced in different coaching traditions, genres and contexts). It could also provide scope for considering different ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of the coaching process; for example by exploring the coaching process from behavioural, phenomenological, psychological, social constructionist/ cultural perspectives. From a behavioural perspective, the coaching *process* could include the observable interactions between coach and client taking place in a coaching session. From a phenomenological perspective, *process* could be explored in terms of the experience of the client. From a psychological level of analysis, *process* could mean the moment by moment cognitive, affective and somatic processing of the coach facilitating the session. From a social constructionist perspective, the coaching *process* could be understood in terms of the way coach and client, make sense of their interaction and/or in relation to broader social and cultural values/discourses.

In order to address the research question, three broad-ranging objectives were established:

1. Carry out a critical literature review on the literature on process research in psychotherapy and coaching in order to identify how the process between practitioner and client has been conceptualised and what has been learned about the interactive process; establish what can be learned from psychotherapy process research that could be relevant for understanding the nature of coaching process

2. Undertake empirical work in order to gain an understanding of the coaching process; this would mean exploring how clients recount their participation in a coaching session; how coaches manage the interaction (e.g. what they attend to and what decisions they make in the moment by moment interactions) and how coaches acting as observers make sense of the interaction (what they notice and choose to comment on)

3. Make a significant contribution to knowledge by rendering explicit the underlying assumptions coaches make about how coaching sessions should be or could be facilitated and by understanding the client's experience of the moment by moment interactions of an actual coaching session

The first objective would consider the therapeutic literature for the decisions discussed earlier (breadth and depth of research that could potentially be of relevance in understanding coaching process) in addition to the much more limited literature on coaching process. The second objective would provide scope for understanding the process of coaching in a range of different ways and would also provide an insight into what coaches and clients identify or consider particularly important in the practice of coaching. The third objective is derived from the first two objectives and constitutes the knowledge that would be gained as an outcome of the investigation. As a result of the Inquiry, the outcomes would be a clearer understanding of the coaching process at various levels of analysis and an understanding of what is considered important from a range of involved stakeholder perspectives. The study would therefore contribute to understanding what coaching is, how it is practised and how it should be practised (normative perspective) and would help address the gap in the literature in relation to a lack of empirical literature on coaching and specifically in relation to the coaching process taking place in whole actual sessions of coaching.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the data collection process would involve collecting and analysing the perspectives of a diverse range of coaches, clients and coaches acting as observers (referred to as coach-observers in the Inquiry). In brief, 6 actual one-to-one coaching sessions were video recorded (professional coaches with existing clients or with volunteer clients taking part in a one-off session lasting typically for around 60 minutes each). There were two main data collection methods: interviews and card sorting (Q methodology) making the research design mixed methods.

Coaches and clients were asked to describe the coaching sessions by rank -ordering 84 playing style cards (Q-items) upon which descriptors of the coaching session were written. These items represented a *Q-Set* and are integral to Q-methodology. The Q-set (Coaching Process Q-Set, CPQS) had been developed as a research tool in an earlier study (Bachkirova et al., 2012). The way the items are ranked can be compared and contrasted across perspectives (coach, client and observer) using qualitative and quantitative analyses which are integral to Q methodology. The second principle data collection method involved asking coaches and clients to provide their “accounts” of the session immediately after the session in unstructured interviews/ via interpersonal process recall.

At a later stage, groups of coaches were asked to observe the recordings of the coaching sessions (one per group of coaches; typically 6 coaches in an observer group). The observers were asked to rank order the Q-sets and then to participate in an open discussion about their observations/ evaluations of the session.

1.2 Structure of Thesis

This report is structured into a series of Chapters. Chapter 2 presents a literature review. The literature review considers research in both coaching and psychotherapy. There is such a broad and extensive literature in process research in psychotherapy that I have tried to identify and review some of the core areas of study. Pragmatically, I have also reviewed studies that have provided summaries of process research (e.g. reviews, meta-analyses) in

psychotherapy. Similarly, I have identified some studies that are illustrative of the breadth and depth of literature in psychotherapy process research. The literature identified in coaching process is much more limited which highlights the lack of research generally in coaching process.

Chapter 3 is on Research Methodology. This is structured into two parts. Part 1 considers the social constructionist epistemology in this thesis and the hermeneutical approach adopted in the thesis. The second part considers in detail the research methods used. The epistemological assumptions adopted in this thesis provided an important framework for the whole thesis. While I set out to explore the coaching process with an openness to conceptualise the coaching process at various levels of analysis, the assumption that the same phenomena can be viewed very differently is consistent with social constructionist epistemology (Burr, 2003). This means that as a researcher, phenomena in the world are always open to multiple interpretations. In one moment, the coaching process can be constructed as an experience; in a second moment as behaviour; in a third as a psychological attitude; in a fourth as a cultural practice; etc. Phenomena only take the form that they do because we can draw on linguistic resources and cultural frameworks to make sense of whatever we choose to focus our attention upon. This social constructionist epistemology will form a backcloth for the thesis as a whole; it goes beyond simply being included as a section in a research methods chapter. It informs the research question, the nature of the research methods used, how the data is interpreted and the way that the findings are constructed and conclusions drawn. The composition of the thesis itself is in a sense, a process of construction rather than an objective analysis of phenomena.

The research methods were broad ranging. They included Q Methodology (Stephenson, 1935; Watts and Stenner, 2005a; Brown, 1980), interpersonal process recall (Kagan, 1984), unstructured interviews (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2006), observer groups, thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and broader discursive techniques. The breadth of methods used was intended to allow a breadth and depth of data collection and analysis consistent with the

overall multiple-perspective framework. Had only a limited scope of research methods been used, it would not have been possible to explore the coaching process at multiple levels of analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings of a thematic analysis of the client's experience of the coaching session. This led to the identification of 11 main themes and a smaller number of overarching themes. This enabled an understanding of the coaching process from the client's experience of the session and is summarised in a conceptual model of the coaching process (how coaching can be considered to impact the client) from a client's perspective at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the coach and presents in the main a *psychological framework* for understanding what might be constructed as the *internal processes* of the coach (what the coach attended to and how decisions were made). This Chapter considers each of the six coaches describing their sessions in turn. This is different to the previous chapter which identified how the sessions were considered generally. For example in chapter 4, for each theme identified, examples are provided from each and any of the 6 sessions. In the case of Chapter 5, how each coach described their sessions varied and by providing a review of each session in turn in the chapter, this variety is highlighted. In the case of Chapter 4, there appeared to be more similarities across the accounts and it did not therefore seem warranted to consider each client perspective individually.

Chapter 6 presents the findings from the observer groups. As in the case of the accounts of the coaches, there seemed to be more merit in considering each session in turn largely because the context of each session was so very different (e.g. different types of coaches commenting on different types of sessions). This chapter gradually identifies a range of issues presented across different observer groups (summarised in a table at the end of the review of each session in the Chapter) and leads to the presentation of a table that summarises the breadth and depth of issues raised by the coaches. These issues represent key debates about the practice of coaching (what coaches think coaches should or

should not do when they conduct coaching sessions). The perspectives of the observers drew on both thematic analysis and broader discursive techniques.

Chapter 7 presents the findings from the Q Methodological analysis. This is a very detailed Chapter which provides an in-depth analysis of some of the coaching sessions; compares and contrasts individual sessions and compares and contrasts perspectives (coach, client and coach-observers) generally across accounts. It includes a detailed analysis of two of the sessions analysed in the Inquiry and includes a comparison across the perspectives of the coach, client and observers. This Chapter unlike the previous findings Chapters includes a large amount of statistical data and analysis.

Chapter 9 is the discussion chapter and brings together some of the major issues raised across all physical perspectives (coach, client and coach-observers) and from the findings of the analyses of the spoken accounts and from the analysis of the Q-sorting process of all participants. It also considers broader epistemological assumptions. This chapter relates the findings to broader conceptual frameworks as well as to some of the literature considered in Chapter 2. This includes a discussion in relation to common factors and the Rashomon experience (Mintz et al., 1973) which are fully discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 10 provides the overall conclusions to the Inquiry, including limitations, ethical and professional issues in addition to personal reflections at the end of the Inquiry.

1.3 Terms of Reference

In this thesis, I have chosen deliberately to use the first person frequently. I want to give expression to my own interpretative approach in the research process. This is consistent with a social constructionist paradigm that acknowledges the role of construction in the research process (rather than phenomena existing independently of sense-making processes).

In order to be as succinct as possible in this thesis, I have generally referred to the research investigation conducted as the "Inquiry". The term "[spoken] accounts" is also widely used in

the thesis in order to give emphasis to the expressions of the coaches as expressions of shared linguistic resources; social phenomena. This is to avoid referring to (private and essentialist) “thoughts” of the research participants which would not be consistent with a social constructionist paradigm. The choice of terminology is discussed in chapter 3. At various points, I also refer to the “perspective” or “viewpoint” of the various research participants. These terms are again intended simply to convey that something can appear differently from a particular vantage point; there is no intention to claim that a perspective or viewpoint presupposes a uniquely private/ essentialist domain of understanding. Viewpoints/ perspectives can be considered to express cultural beliefs even when expressed by an individual or by a small number of individuals. They can therefore be understood as social/discursive phenomena.

2.0. Chapter 2 Literature Review

Given the broad scope of the research question, there were many bodies of academic and practitioner literature that could have been considered relevant in providing a contextual backdrop to the Inquiry. The literature on 'perspectivism' seemed immediately relevant. This could have related to the writing of a diverse range of scholars from a broad range of academic fields including philosophy, metaphysics and epistemology, ethics, sociology, psychology and often interdisciplinary knowledge such as the sociology of knowledge. Early drafts of the literature review did explore these literatures. My particular interest in the Inquiry was however primarily to explore the interaction between coach and client and these broader bodies of academic knowledge seemed distant from the coaching session as my unit of analysis. On the other hand, an attempt to focus more on the specifics of the interaction between coach and client in a coaching session seemed to highlight an equally diverse range of potentially relevant literature. For example, the backdrop to the interaction could be explored in relation to academic and practitioner literature on behaviourism, social learning, psychodynamics, symbolic interactionism, personal construct theory and sense-making. Given the multi-disciplinary nature of coaching, there seemed to be a breadth of conceptual frameworks that would seem to be of relevance including theories of learning for example.

Initial drafts of the literature review explored many of these areas of literature. Wilber's (2007) integral map suggests that any phenomenon can also be studied at different levels of analysis including phenomenological, behavioural and sociological and systems level perspectives. Perhaps the realization that many diverse areas of literature can be considered relevant in this Inquiry highlights how any researcher will always adopt a particular perspective on a research topic. In this sense, a researcher is always constructing a body of knowledge through his/her framing of the topic of inquiry rather than uncovering a single "truth" about the way phenomena actually exist independently of our own constructions.

Rather than begin the literature review from a theoretical perspective (i.e. from the viewpoint of symbolic interactionism, psychodynamic theory, etc.), the decision was made to focus initially on the literature on the interactive process between coach and client. This is often referred to as “process research.” One challenge in reviewing process research in coaching is that there is a general lack of research. Conversely, there is a wealth of literature in psychotherapy process research that seemed to be of immediate relevance. However, I was also aware that for many practising coaches and academics, coaching can be considered in many respects, fundamentally different to psychotherapy (Cox, 2013). Perhaps, the literature exploring the interactions between teacher and learner, healthcare worker and patient, sales person/ consultant and client, career counsellor and client or any other context of interpersonal interaction would also be just as legitimate in providing a conceptual backdrop to my Inquiry. On the other hand, the literature also seemed sparse in some of these areas. Heppner and Heppner (2003) for example highlight the lack of process research in career counselling.

Another conceptual challenge related to understanding what could be the focus of a literature review in relation to the concept of ‘interaction.’ As will be highlighted in the process literature reviewed in this chapter, much of this literature explores how client change comes about. While this might seem commonsensical, this raises the question if the purpose of the interaction (between psychotherapist and client and/or coach and client) is to achieve some form of change. Perhaps, the purpose of the interaction is simply to gain a new perspective or to derive some sort of personal/ psychological satisfaction from the social interaction. Perhaps the interaction only has cultural meaning as some sort of rite; that is a practice in which people take part because it is part of wider organizational discourse in which participants believe it is worthwhile to take part. In other words if the unit of analysis when studying a coaching session is broken down into a study of the interpersonal dynamics, one might reflect on what is meant by ‘interpersonal process’ and must question whether the way it is commonly defined in existing literature is absolute. There also seemed

to be boundary issues. For example, should the relationship be considered as something separate to process? Or, is the building of the relationship a process issue? If the way of being of the practitioner (traits or states) impacts on the process, should this be considered part of the process or something which might influence the process? The existing literature already defines the boundaries of what is constructed as “process” and that it is important to be mindful of this when reviewing the literature.

Yet another challenge related to circumscribing the literature even after deciding to focus on interpersonal interaction. Initial reviews of the literature suggested that there were relatively discrete areas of literature that seemed important to review including for example literature relating to the influence of non-specific, change processes in coaching (common factors).

There is also a literature that considers the perspective of different witnesses to the change process (the perspectives of the practitioner, client and observer). Each one of these areas seemed so rich in breadth and depth of findings that they could all have merited an in-depth review in their own right; they all seemed to make a contribution in understanding “process”.

Mindful of the choices available, I made the decision to review in particular, the mainstream literature in what is referred to generally in coaching and psychotherapy as “process research,” in addition to available literature which seemed to provide some conceptualisation or empirical study of the interaction between practitioner and client in psychotherapy and coaching. The lack of literature on coaching seemed to suggest the need to provide a theoretical backdrop and psychotherapy research (including counselling) seemed to provide rich pickings for a researcher interested in process. Other coaching writers draw on process research in psychotherapy which seemed to legitimize a rationale for exploring this literature. Moreover, many coaching traditions have been inspired by theoretical literatures which have developed in the context of psychotherapy; many of these are considered in Palmer and Whybrow (2007).

This Chapter will therefore outline primarily the literature in coaching and psychotherapy. The literature review is separated into a number of sections for clarity of communication. Part 1 will consider how the psychotherapy process has been defined and identifies the goals of psychotherapy process research. This will be followed by a discussion of the main findings from some of the most salient texts and articles on psychotherapy process research. This section will consider in particular what has been considered as the *events paradigm/ sub-outcome* perspective in process research through which a number of researchers have developed sophisticated qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyse what is understood as client change processes at a micro-analytical level. This section will end with a discussion of a more pluralistic perspective to psychotherapy process research including a post-modern perspective which will lead into a dedicated section on this perspective. This will be followed by a discussion of the common factors perspective, which argues that therapeutic change comes about as a result of general factors common to all therapies rather than specific orientations or techniques. A section will consider the contribution of psychotherapy research that considers multiple-perspectives (client, therapist and external observers).

In light of these introductory comments, the purpose of the literature review is to understand how psychotherapy process has been conceptualised, what has been learned as a result of investigating psychotherapy process, what the literature on common factors has informed about psychotherapy process and in particular what has been learned by adopting different perspectives on the therapeutic process. A final section in Part 1 will consider what can be learned from this review for understanding and researching coaching process. The second part of the literature review will consider the literature specifically on coaching research. The rationale for beginning with process research in psychotherapy is because of the volume of psychotherapy literature which seems to set the context for exploring coaching process research. In fact many coaching process researchers seem to be adopting frameworks and

approaches from within psychotherapy which seems to justify the relevance of beginning with the literature in psychotherapy.

The breadth of literature covered in the literature review did not come about by searching exclusively on key words such as “process research”. Searching with these keywords provided a helpful start point. However, the research process then developed on the basis of how one article led to the identification of other key articles or terms. For example, the literature on “common factors” was not readily identified with the use of key terms such as “process research” but was identified by adopting a very exploratory approach. In a sense the research process seemed to parallel that of “snowballing” in participant sampling whereby one contact (with the literature rather than a research participant) led to another. The databases used included all those readily available with Oxford Brookes University, including EBSCO, Sage and Emerald. Psych-info was also available via personal membership of the British Psychological Society and the American Psychological Association.

2.01 Defining Process/ Process Research in Psychotherapy and Identifying Goals of Process Research

It is important to be as clear as possible at the outset what the focus of the literature review might be when considering the interactions between practitioner and client. *Process* seems to be a relevant term for beginning to frame a focus of study. Many references to process in the literature on psychotherapy refer to *process research* rather than to *process* as a separate construct. It seems that *process* only becomes a topic of interest when it is a focus of research. Rice and Greenberg (1984) refer to *process research* as “in situation performances” and “interactions of therapy” (p8). Their interest in process research is framed from within a methodological perspective: “The approach we are suggesting...involves the intense scrutiny of recurrent change episodes in psychotherapy, making fine-grained descriptions of these moments of change together with the patterns of

client-therapist interactions that form their context” (p.13). Siegfried (1995) adopts a similar micro-analytical perspective on *process research* as “the branch of psychotherapeutic process research dealing with ‘small chunks’...Researchers hope to eventually discover the relevant mechanisms of a process of therapeutic change...and to understand what causes a person to change his or her behaviour” (p.6). Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) describe psychotherapy *process* as “the content of psychological therapy sessions and the mechanisms through which client change is achieved, both in single sessions and across time” (p.2) while Elliott (2010) alludes to Greenberg’s (1986) description of psychotherapy *process research* as “identifying, describing, explaining and predicting the effects of the processes that bring about therapeutic change” (Greenberg, 1986, p.4).

Greenberg (1986), argues that psychotherapy process research can be analysed at 4 different hierarchical levels: 1) content (what is talked about in a session); 2) speech acts (the different functions served by different linguistic constructions such as informing, advising, promising, etc.); 3) episode (meaningful units of therapeutic interaction intended to achieve particular in-session objectives; e.g. setting the agenda for the session or challenging a particular irrational belief) and; 4) relationship (the overall characteristics of the interaction). Content and Speech acts are at the lowest level and form part of episodes which in turn are nested within the overall context of the relationship. Greenberg stresses the significance of context and how the interpretation of any observable event in a session must be understood both within this hierarchical context and within the specific contextual meaning of what is being discussed.

In summary, *process research* seems to have been generally described in the psychotherapy literature at a micro-analytical level. Researchers have generally defined process research in terms of the detailed interactions between client and therapist and how these interactions bring about client change (e.g. Rice and Greenberg, 1984; Elliott, 2010, Siegfried, 1995). The micro-analytic perspective identified in this section provides a useful point of departure for reviewing what might be understood as psychotherapeutic process.

However, as will be illustrated later in this literature review, some researchers have adopted varying conceptualisations of process; for example in relation to the importance of language, extra-linguistic interactions, behaviour, meaning-making and whether the focus should be on change processes within the client or between the therapist and the client.

2.02 Scoping the Literature: Edited Editions of Psychotherapy Research, Summary Reviews and Journal Articles

A number of edited volumes have attempted to provide overviews of current research practice and findings in process research that have been published over the past 30 years. Edited volumes include Rice and Greenberg, 1984; Toukmanian and Rennie, 1992; Greenberg, 1986; Siegfried, 1995; Greenberg and Pinsof, 1986; Bergin and Garfield, 1994 and Weiss and Sampson, 1986. These editions tend to bring together a range of either conceptual and/or empirical investigations into the psychotherapeutic process; some adopting a more pluralistic perspective than others. For example, Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) considers postmodern as well as positivistic perspectives while Rice and Greenberg tend to focus on what Kaye (1992) describes as the *re-constructionist* approach (which is discussed later). Some of these edited volumes adopt a particular theoretical lens (e.g. Weiss and Sampson, 1986) which provides a psychodynamic perspective of the psychotherapeutic process).

There are so many edited volumes of contributions on psychotherapy process in addition to those mentioned above that it becomes difficult to decide what to include in any review of the literature on psychotherapy process. Erskine (2010) provides an edited volume of contributions that provide clinical case studies from the perspective of transactional analysis while Cain and Seeman (2001) provide a broad ranging handbook of humanistic psychotherapies that includes research contributions on psychotherapy from a humanistic perspective. Lock and Strong (2012) provide an edited volume that outlines post-modern and discursive perspectives in psychotherapy; this edited volume highlights relevant

research, conceptual frameworks and case examples. McNamee and Gergen (1992) provide a review of social constructionist approaches in psychotherapy with case examples. Many of these texts set out to outline the change process rather than find evidence of how change works. Nevertheless, they highlight the breadth and competing ways of understanding how changes in worldview can take place for the client in interaction with the practitioner.

The very different approaches taken tend to suggest that there isn't one single understanding of psychotherapy process; it is always from a perspective be that humanistic, social constructionist, psychodynamic or any other ontological viewpoint. As already highlighted, the particular lens adopted frames *what* is investigated and *how* the subject matter is researched. Rice & Greenberg (1984) for example tend to emphasise more how the therapist brings about change within the *psyche* of the client, while Lock & Strong (2012) believe that the core of psychotherapy process resides in the *interactive communicative process* between client and therapist.

There are many seminal texts that seem to provide a particular contribution to understanding psychotherapy process beyond those that set out to explicitly research psychotherapy process. Wampold (2001) provides a comprehensive review of meta-analyses in psychotherapy efficacy studies/ outcome studies which provides insights into effective mechanisms of change in psychotherapy (i.e. the influence of 'common factors'). Rogers (1951a) presents a seminal text on person-centred therapy whose theories of change processes developed in part through the analysis of audio recordings of therapy sessions. Jones (2000) also discusses lessons from both, empirical research and theory. There is so much that has been written on psychotherapy process and so many past and present theorist-practitioners each giving vignettes of actual practice that it seems that any overview will always be partial and selective.

Researchers who have attempted to provide short summaries of process research in peer reviewed journals tend to acknowledge the enormity of the task (e.g. Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001) or adopt a particular focus (Elliott, 2010 and Greenberg, 1986 who both focus on summarising findings in relation to what has already been referred to in this Chapter as the *re-constructionist* approach). Given the scale of the task, researchers seem to shy away from providing pluralistic qualitative summaries in journal articles. They tend to compile edited volumes of qualitative reviews, limit their findings to case study based investigations or they conduct meta-analytic reviews of effectiveness which abound in the literature (e.g. Barker et al., 1988; Bowers and Clum, 1988; Clum et al., 1993; Clum et al., 1993). Some studies consider the perspectives of therapist, client and observer or address a specific aspect of the interaction (e.g. the relationship). Meta-analyses in psychotherapy research either consider, specific aspects of process that are considered to be relevant in effectuating change or consider the overall effectiveness of psychotherapy. These studies often show little difference or no difference across therapies which allow researchers to draw conclusions about the (lack of) relative efficacy of different approaches. There is also a plethora of papers in psychotherapy that describe or show the application of an arsenal of process instruments that are both used to understand and research psychotherapy process. Timulak (2008) illustrates many of the diverse instruments in use.

2.03 Review of Edited Volumes of Psychotherapy Process Research

The thrust of Rice & Greenberg (1984) and other researchers (e.g. Elliott, 2010; Llewelyn, 1988; Grawe, 1997; Flückiger et al, 2009) working in the same paradigm, amply illustrated in the volume, is to understand the process of client change considered to take place in identifiable discrete *episodes* within the therapy session in interaction with the therapist. Rice & Greenberg (1984) argue that essential to their approach is to understand how change takes place *within* the client rather than to conceptualise the therapy process as something which is *done to* the client by the therapist. In this sense, the authors claim to adopt a client-

centric approach. They suggest that process research should set out to understand changes within the client at three levels:

“The first level which we shall refer to as client process, concerns the manifest client performance in the session. The second level, which we designate as client operations, concerns the client’s internal mental operations. The elementary information-processing operations of cognitive psychology constitute the third level.”

The authors suggest that the second level is where most attention needs to be directed (e.g. the client’s focusing on his inner dialogue, recognising negative self-statements, stopping these statements...) as once a sequence of operations has been identified, practitioners can gain an understanding about what they need to achieve in therapy. The authors suggest that the development of theoretical models of change process can lead to two different forms of eclecticism. One is where therapists from different orientations can incorporate lessons learned from process research, and can apply particular methods demonstrated through research to be effective as and when their main approaches fail to be achieving the necessary results (*technical eclecticism*). A second form of eclecticism would be a new approach to therapy driven by evidence based research (subsequently described in the literature as the *integrationist* approach; more recently adopted by researchers such as Grawe, 1997 and Flückiger et al, 2009). It could therefore be argued that Rice and Greenberg (1984) propose a political agenda for therapeutic process.

The authors suggest that the identification of change mechanisms can make a number of important contributions to knowledge (and practice identified above). First, at a descriptive level it becomes possible to detail the operations that take place in a change episode (level 2) and to construct theoretical models of cognitive-affective information-processing mechanisms that underline the phenomena (level 3). Second, an identified in-session change process can be evaluated in relation to post-session client outcomes.

Rice & Greenberg (1984) illustrate a range of approaches to qualitative research although the longest of 4 sections in their text is dedicated to research drawing on the method of *task analysis*. Rice and Saperia (1984) in the same edition describe task analysis as consisting of a series of steps (: selection and description of the task and task environment; rational analysis; detailed moment-by moment descriptions of client performances; comparison with an idealized model leading to revisions of model). Other research methods included in the edited volume are chapters on what is described as *Interpersonal Process Recall* (IPR) and *Comprehensive Process Analysis*. These methods are broadly similar in terms of how they involve observers, therapist and client; how they apply a battery of research instruments and how they set out to provide detailed analysis of patterns of change.

In evaluating Rice and Greenberg (1984), it is difficult not to be impressed by the rigour, breadth and depth of the research illustrated. There does seem to be some merit from a psychological perspective in understanding client change. An analysis that might otherwise be limited to analysing the behavioural interactions would not provide any insight into possible cognitive-affective processes. There is also a sense of optimism that through a qualitative methodology of micro-analysis, key change mechanisms can be identified and ultimately be managed therapeutically. This is perhaps characteristic of the positivist progressive agenda. It is also apparent that the researchers have at their disposal a large number of existing process measures to facilitate their analysis as well as a well-resourced research team and willing and readily available research participants.

From a more critical perspective however, their analysis seems to suggest that problems are located *inside* the client. In this sense, irrespective of the way the research seems to focus on the client, the client is still positioned as an object of study and whose thoughts and feelings can be acted upon technically, provided mechanisms of change can be identified and understood. A more general criticism relates to the overall methodology. Some therapist-researchers argue against the “application of natural scientific methods to [understand] ...meaningful complexities of human experience” (Walsh and McElwain, 2002).

This viewpoint suggests that even if micro-analytic research methods do provide insights that appear helpful in psychotherapy, they risk being ignored by those therapists wedded to different philosophical frames of reference. Rice & Greenberg (1984) and their associates are in effect proponents of the rational-empiricist tradition:

“The central strategy of the new paradigm can perhaps best be labelled as “rational-empirical” approach...The basis rationalist supposition...is that for a person of a given type, there exist invariances in the organization of his or her inner processes which apply across situations to generate the person’s performance. The rational-empirical approach takes seriously across situations of internal processing characteristics, but also stresses the importance of the performance demands of the class of situations...It is from these invariances in a specific class of situations that processing characteristics that hold across situations can be inferred for a person of a particular type” (p.20).

A final criticism is that the methodological rigour of the reconstructivist approach seems to be very demanding and resource intensive and it is difficult to imagine that researchers traditionally orientated to a more summative process-outcome quantitative methodology will adopt an in-depth microanalytic qualitative methodology. In summary, politics and tradition are in practice perhaps as important if not more influential than scientific discourse alone in researching and in using research findings.

Greenberg (1986) provides a summary of process research. She suggests that extant research has not taken sufficient account of context (i.e. how different actions can have different impacts according to client personality characteristics, the issue being discussed, the phase in therapy, etc.). She also recommends that researchers focus on understanding *patterns* of interaction rather than engage predominantly in quantitative research. Picking up on the same theme covered in Rice and Greenberg (1984), she also expresses concern that too much research has taken place at levels of description that are either too high (e.g. at the level of the relationship) or too low (at the level of specific behaviours). She also

emphasises the importance of adopting “a multilevel, multidimensional, and multi-perspective (observer and participant) approach” (p.6). Her recommendations are useful in attempting to identify an appropriate level of analysis. Her comments in relation to the complexity of interactions and breadth of contextual variables seem to highlight the challenge in researching and understanding coaching process but also of the need for in-depth research that acknowledges the relevance of context and complexity.

Greenberg (1986) usefully summarises two different types of process research: *task analysis* and *sequential analysis*. Task analysis has already been described. Sequential analysis is described by Greenberg as consisting of the analysis of sequential patterns occurring across the therapy session (or series of sessions); for example analysing the type of client response that might follow from a particular type of therapist intervention. Greenberg (1986) highlights these two methods in order to illustrate a material distinction between two types of orientation in process research; task analysis which is focused on a more in-depth qualitative and inductive approach and sequential analysis which generally starts with a limited range of identified patterns of interaction and attempts to monitor, through statistical analysis the impact of these methods on changes in the client. Greenberg (1986) is critical of some of the challenges in this latter type of quantitative research, including the difficulty in identifying lagged effects and the need to establish a priori coding systems in order to monitor antecedents and consequents. However, she still sees merit in this approach and suggests that more sophisticated designs can help address the identification of lagged effects.

Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) produced another volume of qualitatively oriented process research which the authors preface as the “new paradigm” (vii). In the preface to their edition they reference Rice and Greenberg (1986) and in doing so, seem to suggest a conceptual alignment with these authors. Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) preface their volume by challenging the Rogerian (1951) view that it is the attitude of the therapist that is

central to the process of change. Psychotherapeutic change is conceptualised more as a process in which change occurs as the effective negotiation of key events in therapy: “In this initiative, the Rogerian view that there is a global relationship between the therapist attitudes and the client is replaced with the view that therapeutic change is localized in change “episodes” or “events” involving particular performances by the client in response to particular performances by the therapist. Types of change episode are discovered inductively and then modelled through a logico-empirical approach to theory construction.”

These are bold assertions that are explicit about the psychotherapeutic process; in effect as a technology that might require an active client but one that responds to the active technical expertise of the therapist. They also make clear that a rigorous analysis of these interactions is possible and will lead to an identification and understanding of key psychotherapeutic change processes. Their outline is therefore consistent with Rice & Greenberg (1984) and Greenberg (1986). The language of “performance” used by Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) suggests that therapy is a skill to be performed, perhaps like a learned repertoire of a stage performer; in the case of the client, the metaphor suggests that essentially cognitive change processes are played out within the client. Toukmanian and Rennie’s (1992) edited volume provides dedicated chapters outlining methods and examples of detailed studies of “significant events” in therapy (one of an increasing number of technical terms used to describe the focus on episodes or events in therapy and that contributes to the construction of process research as the negotiation of critical events). Their edition includes a broader range of qualitative approaches than those outlined in Rice and Greenberg (1984) and rhetorically, creates the impression of an expanding field of research process. The authors also include conceptual papers presenting models of how change might occur and how these models can be investigated further through micro-analytic qualitative research methods.

Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) published a qualitative review of psychotherapy process research. The authors begin by outlining the sheer scale of process research. Rather than

attempt to provide a comprehensive review, the authors set out to provide an overall organizing framework and provide illustrative examples of different types of process research. They classify existing research studies within 3 broad categories:

- 1) Descriptive studies
- 2) Hypothesis testing
- 3) Change theory linked process research.

They categorise descriptive studies as those that set out to describe the detailed aspects of therapist/client interaction (behaviours, language, thoughts and feelings of both participants). They include within this category, the discovery oriented approaches (advocated by Rice & Greenberg, 1984; Greenberg, 1986 and Toukmanian and Rennie, 1992). They also include comparative studies which compare the perspectives of therapist, client and observers and which have tended to suggest differences in perspectives in relation to the same session. They argue that descriptive studies point to the complexity of interactions occurring within therapy process. They also suggest that there is a relative scarcity of comparative studies. This suggests that there could be some benefit in researching practitioner, client and observer perspectives.

Hypothesis testing (2) relates to studies which attempt to quantify the efficacy of psychotherapy (if therapy works) or effectiveness (what works) of psychotherapy. Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) categorise hypothesis testing studies in turn into 5 sub-categories:

- 1) Those that quantify the impact of techniques within specific types of therapy
- 2) Those which consider patient characteristics and how they impact on process and outcome
- 3) As 2 but for therapist characteristics
- 4) Those which consider timing and context as influencing variables;

5) Studies which consider process factors when outcomes are poor. This analysis highlights perhaps the range of research relevant to understanding psychotherapy process and again points to the relevance of context (2, 3 and 4).

Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) try to provide a balanced account of these studies. Within the first sub-category (impact of techniques), while acknowledging that many studies have done little more than identify factors that are common across therapies (e.g. the quality of the working alliance, therapist encouragement, reassurance, time, explanation and catharsis), they also identify a limited range of studies that highlight the contribution of specific factors (i.e. characteristics of a particular type of therapeutic intervention that have been found to have a differential effect on one or more outcome measures). This is perhaps an important claim because it leaves open the possibility of specific techniques giving rise to specific changes. However, it also provides perhaps an illusory vision of process research ever finding specific change mechanisms or at least that will stand to challenge the relevance of non-specific factors.

With respect to the second subcategory (patient characteristics), Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) while acknowledging that much of this research fails to show superiority of any one form of therapeutic orientation, cite research that suggests that one of the reasons for accounting for a lack of differential impact across studies could relate to client differences and in particular, the differential capacity of some clients for self-healing. They also cite studies that suggest that the therapeutic alliance and outcome can be predicted on the basis of the original level of interpersonal functioning of the client. Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) also suggest that the impact of technique (differential impact of different therapeutic approaches) could be concealed in studies that fail to take account of individual differences. The authors tend not to dwell on the 3rd category of hypothesis testing (therapist characteristics); they do so enough merely to highlight some of the complexities in making predictions on outcome based on variable therapist characteristics. In the 4th sub-category (timing and context), Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) emphasise the relevance of timing and context impacting on

outcome. They give examples of how different interventions might for example only be appropriate or have a particular relevance for the client at particular points in the therapeutic process. In relation to the fifth and final category (retrospective studies when outcomes are poor), the authors review a range of studies which suggest possible factors giving rise to ruptures in the therapeutic relationship.

Their overall conclusion from the study of hypothesis testing (outcome) studies is that demonstrating clear links between process and outcome is extremely difficult owing to myriad variables impacting on outcomes. However, with a degree of optimism, they suggest that provided sufficient attention is given to client and contextual variables, it may be possible to identify antecedents of effective outcomes. In other words, their analysis sets out to suggest that methodological difficulties might have confounded findings in extant research rather than conclude that the failure of a large volume of studies to show differential effects is based on there being no differential effect of any one type of therapy. Their progressivism remains intact.

In relation to the third broad area of process related studies (change theory linked process research) the authors refer to studies which have put forward theories for explaining mechanisms of change. They cite in particular the assimilation model proposed by Stiles et al (1990), an 8 step sequential model of problem resolution and which involves the client “incorporating and integrating a problematic experience into the self” (Stiles et al., 1990, p.189) and separately, therapist responsiveness as well as noting that each school of therapy has its own theoretical assumptions about what is important in therapy and why. In reviewing their third categorisation of process studies, they point to findings that suggest that one reason for researchers failing to identify active ingredients of effective therapeutic interventions is that particular interventions are contextually dependent; that is, more of an active ingredient is not necessary good for you! The authors also suggest that interventions might have a lagged effect beyond the immediate in-session occurrence. They point out that the assimilation model of Stiles et al (1990) takes account of client, problem and person

specific factors. They also cite literature that suggests another reason for failing to identify links between process and outcome could relate to differences in therapist responsiveness and how responsiveness could in turn relate to strength of the alliance. Llewelyn & Hardy (2001) highlight the potential relevance of bodies of conceptual knowledge such as social influence processes and general change processes for further developing theoretical understanding of client change. They also reference studies that suggest that change processes are interactional in the sense that both the actions of therapist and client impact on each other rather than in terms of a one way linear chain of events instigated by the therapist. This example serves to illustrate some of the complexities of understanding change processes.

In their overall evaluation of the literature on psychotherapy process, Llewelyn & Hardy (2001) emphasise a plethora of limitations of the various process research methods (: the challenge of making across study comparisons when a diverse range of methods have been used and different units of analysis have been employed; use of tools without sufficiently rigorous content validity; competing theoretical assumptions; small and unrepresentative samples; different definitions of the same construct; correlation data not demonstrating causality; a failure to take account of competing explanatory models of change; a lack of ecological validity and insufficient attention to interpersonal context). Llewelyn & Hardy (2001, p.15) suggest that a future research programme needs to consider therapy as a “dynamic interactive process” and that a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods will be required to make sense of the complexity of the therapeutic process. They suggest that bodies of knowledge in social psychology and interpersonal influence theory are likely to be important in understanding the interactive process which is set to complement research that has already drawn on theory from within cognitive psychology and psychodynamic theory. Finally, they point to some of the challenges in conducting process research in the future including the necessity and difficulty of acquiring funding to support the research.

The paper by Llewelyn & Hardy (2001) is particularly useful in providing ways to organize and structure process research. It also highlights the breadth and scale of research. Their review serves to question whether a general lack of research demonstrating the relevance of specific factors (e.g. therapy specific techniques) is due to a need for more rigorous research design or whether all therapeutic interventions are equivalent in effect.

The next study that will be considered at some depth in this section is Elliott's (2010) review of the psychotherapy process literature. His paper is relevant in that it provides a more contemporary view. Elliott (2010) like all the other researchers already outlined emphasises the significance of understanding process to understand change. Elliott (2010) argues that all process research needs to demonstrate a range of scientific criteria; part of which includes offering a plausible explanation for hypothesized causal relationships. Elliott (2010) categorizes what he describes as Change Process Research (CPR) in terms of:

- 1) Quantitative Process-Outcome Research (these are studies that Llewelyn and Hardy (2001) identified as *hypothesis testing* and Greenberg (1986) as *efficacy* studies)
- 2) Qualitative Helpful Factors Design (these are studies that ask the client what seemed useful to them in therapy which is carried out either by qualitative interviewing and qualitative analytic methods or by giving clients questionnaires to complete; data collection can be at the end of a session or mid-way through a programme of sessions)
- 3) Micro-analytic Sequential Process Design (which is consistent with Greenberg's (1986) description that was summarised earlier in this section);
- 4) The Significant Events Approach (this incorporates task analysis and other approaches as described by Greenberg, 1986). Elliott's (2010) categorization of the process research literature is primarily methodologically oriented. He briefly describes the competing approaches outlining the appeal and limitation of these categorised approaches.

Similar to the approach taken by Llewelyn and Hardy (2001), he cites literature that has identified several thousand process-outcome studies and suggests that relational variables (e.g. the therapeutic alliance) are characteristic of this body of research that has been demonstrated to have the most significant impact on client outcomes. He outlines how this research typically considers natural variations in one or more *predictor variables* (e.g. quantity of therapist interpretations) and how differences impact on a series of *effect variables*. He suggests that the attraction of this approach is that it is very much aligned with current research practice and has strong intuitive appeal.

However he highlights two principal methodological limitations in outcome related studies:

1) *Measurement problems* which in turn relate to unreliability, basement and ceiling effects and other sampling errors; he also refers to ethical issues if researchers attempt to manipulate variables experimentally

2) *Internal validity problems* which relate to third party and reverse variable causation. He also cites research carried out by some process researchers (e.g. Stiles, 1980) which suggests that mechanistic assumptions of more or less of an intervention, fails to take account of client characteristics and therapist responsiveness.

Elliott (2010) suggests that despite of numerous outcome studies which have been conducted; these studies have generally produced “disappointing results.” He argues that only a relatively small percentage of the variance in client outcome is typically explained by process-outcome studies. In order to illustrate this point, he refers to those studies that have measured therapist empathy as being one of the more robust findings in process outcome studies and suggests that the effect size for therapist empathy is between .2 and .4 which explains a relative small percentage of the overall variance (this would equate to between 4% and 16% of the total variance).

In reviewing studies of the Qualitative Helpful Factors Design, Elliott (2010) refers to the potential of this form of research in generating rich data and developing theories, the ethical

importance of client involvement and ease of data collection. Elliott (2010) concedes relatively little space for this type of research and chooses to highlight a handful of promising studies in this area. He also refers to the gradual increase in studies using this design. This assertion suggests that relatively few studies using this design have actually been carried out (even though studies of this type are becoming more prevalent). The limitations he identifies relate to the possibility of errors of attribution on the part of the clients as they “follow cultural scripts about the effects and nature of therapy or simply mistakenly attributing to therapy changes that are actually independent of therapy, life events, psychobiological processes...or even the effects of research” (p.127).

In relation to *micro-analytic sequential process design*, Elliot (2010) highlights this method's potential for meeting established scientific criteria:

- 1) Identifying causal relationships (co-variation) between process variables; that is the therapist's actions and the client's response (e.g. exploratory questions and client insight)
- 2) A temporal/sequential relationship between therapist action and client response
- 3) A plausible explanation for the causal relationship
- 4) Ecological validity (based in actual practice).

The limitations Elliott describes include:

- 1) The challenge of linking in-session causes and effects with outcomes beyond the session
- 2) Reverse causation (the client's actions causing the therapist's responses)
- 3) Third party causation including the overarching influences such as the therapeutic alliance; similarly lag variables that are not measured could be influencing the client's responses (that is other aspects of the session that might have had an earlier impact than the immediate sequencing of measured therapist actions)

4) The time consuming nature of the research and the skills needed to carry it out which Elliott (2010) suggests is the major challenge of making use of this research method. Elliott (2010) refers to the need to train third party observers (who need to rate sessions), time spent in identifying and preparing detailed transcriptions and finally make use of specialist statistical techniques.

5) The overwhelming volume of potentially independent variables

In summarising studies which apply sequential analysis, Elliott (2010) points out that this research method “has never really caught on” mainly because of the methodological challenges involved.

In considering each of the three methods (Quantitative Process-Outcome Research, Qualitative Helpful Factors Design and Micro-analytic Sequential Process Design), Elliott (2010) highlights exemplary studies and/or points to promising studies that have developed particularly sophisticated research designs and statistical techniques. He also refers to the potential for qualitative methods such as conversational analysis for analysing patterns of language use. However, the last method he outlines (significant events) is presented as the potentially most fruitful and which he argues has addressed many of the shortcomings of the other process research methods. Within significant events, Elliott (2010) includes task analysis and comprehensive process analysis (both of which were outlined earlier).

He suggests that all methods based on the significant events paradigm focus on important moments in therapy. These include moments of insight, empowerment, resolution of therapeutic tasks, ruptures in the relationship and misunderstandings. Elliott (2010) argues that significant events studies incorporate the key principles and techniques of helpful factors designs by involving the client in identifying significant events. He argues that they incorporate some form of sequential analysis of actions and events (although covering more influencing factors than is typical in more traditional forms of sequential process analysis thus permitting more theory building). Finally, the in-session findings are often further

investigated by the relationship of the key findings with post session and longer-term outcomes. In summary, the significant events approach attempts to draw upon all three methods he previously describes. Elliott (2010) suggests that significant event studies are: 1) highly flexible and can be widely applied across different types of therapy; 2) close to practice (ecological validity); 3) a means of drawing upon therapist implicit knowledge; 4) capture something of the richness of the therapy process.

According to Elliott (2010), a major limitation of the significant events paradigm is that it is technically demanding and time consuming. He also suggests that it presents a model of therapy which is task rather than relationship focused. Finally, Elliott (2010) acknowledges that this form of research has not as yet been widely used. However, Elliott (2010), like Greenberg some twenty-six years earlier calls for “systematic methodological pluralism” (echoing Greenberg’s, 1986 call for “multilevel, multidimensional and multiple-perspective approach,” p.6).

Overall, Elliott’s (2010) summary seems very much aligned with those of Rice & Greenberg (1984), Greenberg (1986); Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) and Llewelyn & Hardy (2001). Across all of these reviews, there is a sense of continued optimism that a close investigation of process will allow researchers to identify change mechanisms which will in turn enable a practice of psychotherapy more based in an informed research approach. There is an underlying rational-empirical thesis based in a scientific and evidence based methodology. There is also a sense of the formidable challenges involved in conducting process research yet all express hope that improved research design together with concerted effort will generate productive results. Rhetorically, all use the same strategy of illustrating exemplary studies that seem to have demonstrated, through effective and sophisticated design, the potential for this type of research.

It is difficult not to be sceptical of the real potential for making progress in this arena. If some twenty-six years after Rice & Greenberg’s (1984) initial call for a discovery-oriented

approach is summarised by Elliott (2010) as “disappointing,” it is difficult not to question whether a more sophisticated research design and a more concerted effort will really bring to light change mechanisms considered to be occurring *within* the client.

Perhaps the challenge in undertaking process research is that what is being investigated is the full spectrum of human experience and processes of social interaction. Clients bring to the session their most personal thoughts, present themselves in particular ways, choose what they wish and don't wish to disclose, express a range of emotions and contradictory thoughts. Perhaps this is what many of the researchers are stating when they refer to client variables. Therapists too, take to the session their own understanding of the therapeutic process, make assessments of the client and respond interactively with their clients; they are human too. Perhaps what is at the heart of much process research is a medical model which assumes that particular types of intervention can lead to particular types of outcome. In practice, there may be so much that is unique about human experience and behaviour that different interventions might influence different clients at different times in different ways. What might be needed in coaching process research (that is lessons drawn from psychotherapy process research) is to adopt an orientation which takes account of the different meanings client and coach might take to the interaction.

Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) published an edited volume of research in psychotherapy process. This is an interesting volume of process research because it includes less orthodox approaches to process research as well as the more conventional discovery oriented approaches. In the introductory comments to this edited volume, Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) outline how “despite the massive research in psychotherapy process effective psychotherapeutic variables are still largely unknown” (p.1). This comment points to the continual challenge of identifying specific mechanisms of change. Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) suggest that one of the reasons for a lack of progress is that process variables have been too broadly defined. Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) criticise researchers working in the reconstructive approach for superimposing a technical language over and above

everyday ways of understanding interpersonal processes. Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) suggest that a new language simply creates a new layer of processes to be explained:

“Thus, the working with metaconstructs and metalanguages, i.e. constructs and languages reconstructed above the imprecise commonsense language, necessarily leads to a principally infinite number of explanations of the phenomena under investigation” (p.2).

He suggests that the reconstructive approach risks circular reasoning:

“Even the best psychotherapeutic study on a particular construct...can only prove the occurrence and changes of these process variables by means of operationalizing them in a way to increase the likelihood of detecting the assumed process variables and their changes in the empirical data” (p.3).

He highlights how these approaches have “liberally invented hundreds of “theories” [author’s italics] and explanations of psychotherapeutic changes, processes and outcomes” (p.3).

In order to avoid these challenges, Siegfried (1992) refers to an emerging literature in a range of disciplines which has adopted a “realist bottom-up theory of science or a nominalist bottom-up theory of science” (p.3). He argues that this literature suggests that process researchers should “take ordinary language use as a commonsensically accepted basis of social sciences more seriously” (p.3). The task of psychotherapy becomes one of an explanation of common sense (that is an approach which works from bottom to top). Such an approach “is not an expression of an attempt to explain the “true” or necessary ingredients of a therapeutic process, but a mere specification of socially defined facilitation factors ultimately leading to successful outcome in therapy” (p.4). He suggests that this avenue of research will lead researchers to consider how “ordinary attempts of change and developments differ from therapeutic effects of change and development” (p.5).

Siegfried (1992) then elaborates his argument further by suggesting that a contribution from a broad range of disciplines is needed to understand change processes in therapy: “The

multitude of linguistic descriptors of change alone makes it highly unlikely that one discipline alone could account for all these outcome in psychotherapy” (p.5). He calls for “methodological pluralism” in researching coaching process and claims that his volume of micro-process research is a “first attempt to integrate research of other disciplines on therapeutic processes” (p.5).

Many chapters in the volume adopt the post-modernist critique of traditional rationalist-empirical research exemplified by Rice & Greenberg (1984), (1986) and Elliott (2010). Siegfried (1992) suggests however that many of the post-modernist critiques tend to adopt general critiques rather than focus on the specific interactions of therapy. He concedes that this observation undermines the potential contribution of post-modern contributions. Nevertheless, Toukmanian and Rennie (1992) is useful in at least challenging some of the principles of the modernist approach. This is done particularly well by the chapter provided by Kaye (1992) which can be considered as illustrative of the post-modern critique.

Kaye (1992) contextualised the post-modernist critique of psychotherapy process as follows:

“...the foundationalist mode of inquiry privileged in Western discourse as scientific imposes a particular construction of psychotherapy for research purposes. It is a construction predicated on modernist assumptions and fashioned according to the dictates of logico-empiricism methodology” (p.30).

He is very critical of this approach arguing that “the research based on this version has been misguided, futile and unilluminating” (p.54).

He does concede (if perhaps with some irony) that this approach has achieved two main contributions to knowledge:

- 1) It has demonstrated that psychotherapy is more effective than no therapy
- 2) It has shown that there is no difference in effect between the competing approaches

Given the scale of the psychotherapy research outlined by Llewellyn and Hardy (2001) among others, these comments call into question the whole research enterprise built on the rational-empirical research tradition.

Kaye (1992) suggest that a major problem with psychotherapy generally which is reflected in process research is that psychotherapy assumes that there is an underlying cause or basis for pathology; that this cause is contained within the client or his/her relationships and that specific problems can be diagnosed. For Kaye (1992) these assumptions are socially constructed and promote the assumption that techniques can resolve identifiable problems:

“These beliefs serve to maintain a particular social constructed idea of psychotherapy, viz, as a body of techniques applied by a trained professional with the purpose of ameliorating or “curing” psychological problems. Implicit in this notion is a “medical” analogy modelled on an organic metaphor that psychological problems have their foundation in an underlying specific and identifiable cause that can be diagnosed and treated by intervening with appropriate, purpose-built technique.”

These underlying assumptions impact on the identity and role of practitioners and the power accorded to them in this identity or role:

“...most psychotherapies spell out performative prescriptions: they specify roles for activities whereby change can be induced in another by the specially trained and accredited. This in turn perpetuates the concept of the therapist as having certified and privileged knowledge. He or she is a member of an “esoteric order”...a socially sanctioned expert.”

Kaye (1992) argues that underlying assumptions about the nature of psychotherapy has set a positivistic research agenda:

“Within this frame, it would appear sensible to set out to examine what is done in therapy, by whom, to whom and under what conditions. Accordingly (and given the reductionism and atomism endemic to scientific methodology), the investigation of psychotherapy has been

marked by attempts (a) to isolate its effective ingredients, (b) to unearth a putative underlying mechanism, and (c) to separately examine client, therapist, and technical components” (p.37).

Kaye’s (1992) concern is that research approaches that attempt to identify universal causal laws cannot possibly capture the complexity of the interaction:

“Not only is this ideal-type design unrealistic in proposing that real-life practices conform to artificial quasilaboratory conditions, but it does not fit with the complexity and unpredictability of communication in the therapeutic encounter. It asks us essentially to base our research on an image of a group of identically cloned therapists mechanistically using the same words in the same manner in the same sequence to a group of identical clients who manifest...exactly the same problem”.

He suggests that nonspecific variables will always confound the results of research studies because psychotherapy is a holistic and integrated process. He cites comments made by Tomm et al. (1983) in the context of family therapy in order to illustrate how a reductionist approach renders the research so devoid of context and distant from actual practice that practitioners often fail to find research useful:

“The holistic patterns which may have first attracted the interest of the scientist are obliterated as soon as they are broken down for study...Perhaps this is why clinicians so frequently complain that the findings of family researchers are trivial and useless in practice (Tomm, 1983, p.39 cited in Kaye, 1992, p.46)”

Kaye (1992) echoing Siegfried’s (1992) comments (above) argues that the questions posed by the researcher construct the nature of the phenomena being investigated and that has led to a transformation of psychotherapy process:

“The thrust of my argument is that research questions posed from within the parameters delimited by the canons of scientific research tend to be disconnected from psychotherapy

and indeed transform it into something else. For not only are the questions we bring to therapy theory-laden, but our theories construct the phenomena they are designed to explain” (p.38).

Kaye (1992) aligns his position alongside those of well-known post-modernist therapists including Kenneth Gergen, Harold Goolishian and Harelene Anderson:

“..it has become customary among therapists of a postfoundational persuasion to construct people as living narratives negotiated in the social arena, actively constructed in discourse with others, drawing on culturally provided constructs and utilizing the genres, canons and rules of the culture for the negotiation of meaning. These psychotherapists have accordingly begun to evolve a framework for both theory and practice derived from the hermeneutic tradition, social constructionism and narrative theory. Within this framework, people’s narratives are likened to texts, which are amenable to restorying. In this way, the metaphor of the therapist as co-author of a new, less problematic narrative has been born...From this position, therapy is construed as the activity of generating meanings which might potentially transform experience through collaborative dialogue. It is an activity that takes its meanings from the meanings that emerge from the dialogic interaction.”

This viewpoint is echoed in many social constructionist perspectives of psychotherapy beyond and more recent than those cited by the research (e.g. Wong, 2006; Orange et al., 1997; Lock & Strong, 2012). According to Kaye (1992), from this conceptualisation of therapy, a different research methodology is needed. He proposes that process research should primarily be interpretive and hermeneutic:

“Where what is sought is knowledge-through-understanding of a process in which constructions of reality are being explored deconstructed and reconstructed in the context of dialogue- a process dependent on intersubjective understanding and the sharing of meaning – an interpretive approach is called for” (p.49).

Kaye (1992) points to the potential of discourse analytic methods. These could serve to question current assumptions about psychotherapy and create new ways of understanding psychotherapy. This approach could include a deconstructive reading of the therapeutic discourse used by the participants (e.g. to understand what version of events is being constructed). He suggests that discourse analytic methods could also be used a) to explore the metaphors and constructs the participants draw upon (e.g. hypothesising, reframing); b) to evaluate the impact of words used (e.g. how particular words might lead to exploration); c) to explore the co-creation of meaning. More specifically, he suggests that inquiry within a discourse analytic framework could take one of three forms:

- 1) *Reconstitutive inquiry* which “seeks to provide an account which restores or reveals the meaning of the text in its own terms by uncovering the hidden themes which constitute it” (p.51).

- 2) *Elucidatory inquiry* which seeks to understand the broader social and cultural influences that inform psychotherapeutic discourse

- 3) *Generative inquiry* which “construes research as productive rather than reproductive...it seeks to produce a new understanding of a given field of inquiry...Such a form of inquiry involves the reinterpretation of resymbolisation of discourse via dialogic exchange in a novel context or from a novel perspective (p.52)”. Kaye (1992) summarises the potential for a more interpretive approach as follows:

“In sum, interpretive approaches to knowledge point two ways – toward the illumination of the meanings that organize our knowing and to the creation of meanings which might extend our understanding” (p.53).

In summary, this section has given a lot of space to some of the prominent names in psychotherapy research. Those researchers who have tried to provide insight into psychotherapy process from within the rational-empirical tradition appear to have struggled to identify the active ingredients of therapy. Whereas post-modernist commentators such as Kaye (1992) highlight the need for a new approach based on understanding the construction of meaning in the therapeutic process (both within therapy and in relation to understanding therapy as a discourse), those more bound to the rational-empirical tradition seem to remain firm to the belief that more sophisticated designs will enable identification and understanding of the process of change as a manageable technology.

2.04 More Recent Contributions to the Postmodern Perspective

Almost twenty years later and many more discursive approaches have appeared in the literature including Spong (2010) and an edited volume of discursive perspectives (Lock & Strong, 2012). Spong (2010) outlines the challenge of broaching the topic of discourse analysis in psychotherapy as there isn't a consensus about what the term means or should include:

“Discourse analysis means different things to different writers, and this is in part because the term discourse is itself used in multiple, and sometimes contradictory ways...Discourse can refer to spoken language only, or to spoken and written language...Others see discourse as wider than just the ways in which language is used, and include in a discourse a range of social practices...which are involved in making meaning” (p.2).

She suggests that a broad definition of discourse analysis can inform therapy in five different ways:

- 1) By examining language use in therapy
- 2) By helping clients understand how they are positioned with respect to dominant discourses and to invite them to adopt new subject positions

- 3) By understanding and working with how client groups are constructed or construct themselves
- 4) By identifying underpinning discourses associated with particular models of therapy
- 5) By providing an analysis of broader social structures, meanings and power relations and their impact in constructing particular discourses relevant for psychotherapy as an institution

Some of the approaches outlined by Spong (2010) appear to be of direct relevance to understanding the moment by moment interactions in therapy; others appear to have a more postmodern and broader sociological orientation.

Lock and Strong (2012) provide a range of chapters by varying research oriented practitioners which attempt to explicate social constructionist/ discursive approaches to therapy. These are orienting texts which outline the social constructionist agenda rather than concise summaries of social constructionist or discursive approaches. The agenda setting thrust of this work seems to suggest that the momentum is growing for a new direction in understanding psychotherapy process research, at least from some quarters. What does seem to be shared among the contributors to this volume is a view of the psychotherapeutic process as *collaborative interaction* and some key principles that underline this paradigmatic stance. Levin and Bava (2012) outline some of these principles which can be summarised as follows: 1) a position of not-knowing, of the therapist as being curious and open to how the client constructs his or her realities (their truths rather than one discoverable truth); 2) of establishing and maintaining a sense of connection with the client which includes avoiding recurring to professional discourses when threatened and that might serve to establish unequal power relations between client and therapist; 3) being highly reflective throughout the whole engagement with the client and while not discarding professional knowledge, being tentative in making suggestions and always seeking to prioritise how the client makes sense of his/her realities; 4) through a strong sense of connectedness and joint endeavour, new meanings can be created that allow the client to

achieve a greater sense of wellbeing and ability to cope; 5) therapy is understood as a performance rather than a series of behaviours:

“The therapist is a person who is situated in social, cultural, political and historical contexts. These social locations intersect with each other...making unique performances. Similarly, the client brings into play his or her unique performance. The intersection of these two performances is where the client-therapist relationship plays out. This relationship gets improvised within each conversational space and turn. This we are enacting situated practices” (p.132).

The social constructionist’s account of the psychotherapeutic process is very different to that which is associated with the more positivistic approaches described earlier. Both camps refer to “performance” but in one tradition, this term refers to the execution of automatic process within the client or skilled repertoires on the part of the therapist; in the discursive tradition, it is more about improvisation and the collaborative negotiation of meaning against a socio-cultural backdrop.

2.05 The Psychotherapy Process Q Set

There are so many different ways by which psychotherapy process has been researched that it is difficult to present a simple summary that does justice to the breadth and depth of the type of investigation conducted. An attempt to do this was carried out earlier in this chapter by reviewing in particular reviews of psychotherapy process research. This was intended to illustrate how a more social constructionist interpretation of the psychotherapeutic process appears to be gaining popularity. One particular area of psychotherapy research was however overlooked yet is still usefully reviewed. This relates to the *psychotherapy process Q-set* and is relevant for two reasons. First, it presents a different method for analysing psychotherapy sessions. Second, it is based on Q methodology which will constitute one of the main research methods used in this Inquiry. This section will briefly review this tool and how it has been used in psychotherapy research.

The psychotherapy process Q-set (PQS) has been developed and used in research by Enrico Jones and his associates in the USA since the mid-1980. Rather than analysing significant events or behavioural sequences in therapy sessions, Jones and his associates have analysed whole psychotherapy sessions using the psychotherapy process Q Set (PQS). The PQS consists of 100 short statements (e.g. 10-15 words) typically presented on playing sized cards. The statements or *items* are intended to capture the most significant process elements of a range of common psychotherapies, including therapist technique and patient affect. The items are expressed in non-technical language in order to enable application of the tool across a wide range of psychotherapies. Process is expressed in terms of what the patient and therapist do as well as what happens between them (dyad).

The instrument was developed in consultation with subject matter experts (experienced psychotherapists). It is typically used by trained researchers and subject matter experts to identify the defining characteristics of psychotherapy sessions. The instrument requires judges to sort the items into a normal distribution consisting of a typical nine categories, with -1 to -4 representing least characteristic of the therapeutic hour; 0, neutral or irrelevant; and +1 to +4 most characteristic of the session; the technique is ipsative so that items are rated relative to one another in their salience in describing a therapeutic hour (Jones et al., 1988). The tool is used from within a realist epistemology and makes use of a range of statistical techniques.

A number of studies have been carried out by Jones and associates using the PQS; including for example, Price and Jones (1998); Ablon and Jones (1998); Ablon and Jones (1999); Coombs et al., (2002); Ablon et al., 2006); Pole et al., (2002); Ablon and Jones, (2002). These studies often set out to identify an idealised prototype of a given psychotherapy. This is typically achieved by asking experts to rank order Q-items as highly characteristic/ uncharacteristic of a chosen psychotherapy; the list of ranked items then becomes a template for describing the psychotherapy. The prototypes can then be used to compare idealised sessions against actual practice, to compare the efficacy of one form of

therapy against another and to identify factors associated with client change (when used for example alongside outcome measures). For example, Jones and Pulos (1993) found that trained practitioners could use the tool reliably to distinguish between different types of psychotherapy. Having established the reliability of the instrument, they were able to proceed to a second investigation in which they found that patient improvement generally was related to psychodynamic technique irrespective of the intervention type that the client had actually received. In other words, if clients received cognitive behavioural therapy; provided that process elements characteristic of psychodynamic technique were present; then patient improvement would be more likely. In a separate study, Ablon and Jones (2002) identified that how therapists conduct therapy in practice is different to the form of psychotherapy to which a therapist might claim allegiance.

The PQS presents an alternative way of researching psychotherapy process and one that seems to compete against other forms of micro-analytic research methods. It does not seem easy to ascertain the relative effectiveness of one method against another. This is because most studies using particular methods which attempt to identify mechanisms of change seem to point to the need for more research yet are always offering the promise of interesting possibilities. It isn't even clear if it is meaningful to ask if one method is likely to be more useful than another. This is because what really might count in therapy is the general meaning making process rather than the identification of specific ingredients. The next section will consider how many researchers have called into question whether the search for specific ingredients will always prove illusory; given that what often seems to be important in therapy are not specific activities or processes but more general factors common to all psychotherapies.

2.06 Common Factors

One of the key findings in psychotherapy process research is the finding that positive client outcomes are associated with factors common across therapeutic interventions (common

factors) rather than as a result of specific types of interventions or techniques applied within interventions (specific factors). There are some claims for the role of specific factors for some diagnosable conditions (Reisner, 2005). The findings in relation to common factors are interesting in many ways, not least because they have often been identified as a by-product of much research that has been carried out in order to identify relative differences in effectiveness between different types of therapeutic approach. They are also interesting in that they call into question the whole premise of psychotherapy as a technology (a set of tools and techniques that can be applied by an informed expert) rather than as a collaborative relationship in which what seems to count in therapy is in the main, working with a therapist who is empathic and provides an opportunity for the client to resolve his or her own difficulties in open and flexible dialogue with the therapist. In short, common factors undermine the medical model of psychotherapy and present a serious challenge to those researchers highlighted earlier in this Chapter who seek to identify specific mechanisms of client change.

A useful starting point for reviewing the literature on common factors is the research of Grencavage and Norcross (1990). Like many articles on common factors, the authors pay homage to Rosenzweig (1936) for his much cited adage, "Everybody has won and all must have prizes" (the famous Dodo Bird verdict in *Alice in Wonderland*) by which the best part of a century ago, the relevance of non-specific aspects of the interaction bringing about positive changes in the client such as client catharsis, the therapist's personality and interpretative process (plausible interpretations not necessarily correct ones) were suggested as being more important than the specific influence of therapy specific interventions. In other words, all therapeutic interventions were in principle, equivalent and what counted was the existence and impact of underlying common factors. Grencavage and Norcross (1990) outline how some support was gained for this view from a range of therapists, notably Carl Rogers (1951b).

Over time a number of papers have been published which have suggested a range of identifiable common factors impacting on the therapeutic process. Grencavage and Norcross (1990) in a review of the literature, identified 89 different commonalities; 41% of which related to change processes, 21% to therapist qualities; 15% to the therapeutic relationship; 6% relating to client characteristics; and 17% to treatment structure. Change processes were defined as “transtheoretical means by which change occurs in psychotherapy” (p.374) and included catharsis, the practice of new behaviours, fostering insight and the client’s acceptance of a convincing rationale for the treatment. Therapist qualities included general positive descriptions of the therapist, their capacity to cultivate hope and positive expectations, their warmth and positive regard, their empathy and their acceptance of the client; having some authority as an expert (“socially sanctioned healer”) was also considered significant. The therapeutic relationship relates to what is created between the client and therapist (e.g. an experience of intimacy, engagement). Client characteristics were identified primarily as attitudinal, whereby a client has positive expectations about the potential for change and actively seeks help. Finally, treatment structure seems to be the most related to what might seem at face value to be specific factors (e.g. use of techniques, adherence to a theory). However, Grencavage and Norcross (1990) consider these effects as primarily ritualistic; that is it is they have an effect primarily because of their symbolic significance. Another influence the authors categorised under treatment structure was the exploration of the inner world of the client.

In another analysis of the data but within the same study, Grencavage and Norcross (1990) identified the most common elements across categories appearing in the literature they reviewed. The most consensual common elements were the development of a therapeutic alliance (56%), the opportunity for catharsis (38%), the acquisition and practice of new behaviours (32%), the client’s positive expectancies (26%), beneficial therapist qualities (24%) and a provision of a rationale as a change process (24%).

In a separate review of the literature, Assay and Lambert (1999) concluded that the therapeutic alliance had a major impact on client improvement, accounting for 30% of the overall improvement. His review included an assessment of the impact of extra-therapeutic effects which he estimated to account for 40% of client improvement. He suggested that a further 15% of client improvement was due to a placebo effect and only 15% to specific techniques. By extra-therapeutic effects, Assay and Lambert (1999) refer to two main factors; first client variables (e.g. how motivated the client is to change and to engage in a therapeutic relationship, the nature of their difficulties and personality characteristics); second, the resources that clients have at their disposition (e.g. family and friends and access to support groups and the self-help literature).

Wampold's (2001) text on "The Great Psychotherapy Debate" provided very strong grounds for accepting the relevance of common factors. Wampold (2001) conducted a comprehensive review of psychotherapy outcomes including several meta-analyses of meta-analyses. Given the comprehensiveness of the study, it is difficult to do justice to the statistical and analytical rigour as well as the scope of the study in a short summary. The following comments are intended merely to highlight some of the key findings.

Wampold (2001) outlines two competing models for understanding psychotherapy; one founded on the medical model in which it is assumed ingredients characteristic of a theoretical approach govern the effectiveness of psychotherapy; a second "contextual model" emphasises a holistic approach and is based on the assumption that common factors govern the effectiveness of psychotherapy. Wampold (2001) argues that a distinction needs to be made between a "common factors model" and a "contextual model". A common factors model assumes that there are a set of factors, each of which make an important contribution to outcome. In a contextual model, the meaning given to the psychotherapeutic process by therapist and client are critical contextual phenomena (e.g. that it is a helpful process and worthy of engagement). Wampold (2001) argues that a contextual model should be considered as a meta-model because:

- 1) Common factors are shared across therapies and do not therefore represent a specific type of therapy
- 2) Contextual characteristics are integral to the specific traditions rather than components that can be isolated and researched separately
- 3) That which counts is the meaning participants give to the particular approach in which participants are engaged.

He warns against making simplistic assumptions; for example against the assumption that person-centred approaches (given their emphasis on the therapeutic relationship which is highlighted as important in the common factors literature) be considered as a contextual model; he argues that client-centred therapies are examples of approaches based on a medical model which goes beyond empathic understanding. Moreover, he argues that any psychotherapeutic approach could in principle create effective relationships that could promote change.

Wampold's (2001) study involved the meta-analysis of meta-analyses carried out in psychotherapy prior to 2001. These studies included 68 separate meta-analyses carried out by Grissom (1996). Wampold (2001) concluded that the average effect size for psychotherapy is 0.81 which would be considered large in social science research (i.e. meaning that 79 out of every 100 clients receiving therapy would be better off than clients not receiving therapy and would account for 14% of the outcome variance): "Simply stated, psychotherapy is remarkably efficacious" (p 71). Wampold (2001) reviewed meta-analyses in order to identify if some psychotherapies were more efficacious than others (relative efficacy unlike the earlier review which had considered absolute efficacy); his review included meta-analytic studies conducted in the 1990's that he argued had been conducted with methodological rigour. He concludes that with the exception of some studies for the treatment of depression and anxiety, there are very little or zero differences across

therapies. This leads him to argue that the medical model, based on the assumption that specific ingredients are responsible for client outcomes, does not hold true.

Wampold (2001) reviewed studies that had considered specifically the importance of the working alliance. His review suggested an overall outcome correlation of $r = .22$ (this is equivalent to $d = .45$ or 5% of the variability in outcome effectiveness). This demonstrated a moderately strong relationship between the alliance and outcome. Wampold (2001) also considered the importance of allegiance and adherence to particular models of therapy. This review suggested that adherence to a particular model was not associated with beneficial outcomes in comparison with those studies that allowed therapists to adopt a more eclectic approach. Wampold (2001) also considered the impact of the therapist. These studies indicated that therapists within a given treatment account for a large proportion of the variance in outcomes. Wampold (2001) cites a study conducted by Crits-Christoph et al (1991) which estimated 9% of the variability to be due to therapist effect, thus further supporting the contextual over the medical model: in brief, it is the therapist that counts not the intervention.

As a final coup de grace in his deconstruction of the medical model, Wampold (2001) revisits Asay and Lambert's (1999) descriptive statistics (based on content analysis) with the findings from his statistical analysis and argues that if only 13% of client outcome can be attributed to psychotherapy and if therapists represents 9% of outcome effectiveness, then $9/13\%$ of the overall variability of psychotherapy is due to the effectiveness of the therapist (a proxy measure for common factors) = 70%. If specific effects at most explain 1% of client outcome variance, then this equates to $0.01/0.13\%$ of total variance in psychotherapeutic outcome = 8%. In summary, 8% of the variance in client outcomes relates to specific effects, 70% to common factors and 22% is unexplained variance. Wampold (2001) suggests that this in the main relates to differences in clients.

Overall, in evaluating the findings and recommendations of Wampold (2001), it is difficult not to be convinced of the key arguments in light of the volume of statistical support provided based on a thorough review and analysis of existing literature. It has also unsurprisingly generated strong opposition (e.g. Chwalisz, 2001a). It tends to leave the practitioner somewhat deflated given that the message appears to be that any form of intervention can work provided both the practitioner and client commit to it. He undermines the foundations of psychotherapy selecting psychotherapy as a target for criticism:

“...psychotherapy is indeed a myth, created by Freud and maintained by people’s belief in the endeavour” (p.2310).

Wampold (2001) asks therapists not to be despondent and to relish in the understanding that “it is the healing context and the meaning that the client gives to the experience that are important” (p.219) but it really does seem that this statement suggests “that anything goes” provided it seems credible for both therapist and client.

Since Wampold (2001), a number of articles have been published providing further support for common factors. Most of these studies appear to provide further support for the supremacy of common over specific factors (e.g. Luyten and Van Houdenhove, 2013; Mones and Schwartz, 2007; Castonguay et al., 1996; Harris Jr et al., 2006). However, the literature is not without its critics although some of these critics (e.g. Chwalisz, 2001b), appears to be more concerned about the political implications of the significance of common factors rather than on the validity of data that supports their existence. Some researchers in psychotherapy also continue to focus on research which suggests that specific mechanisms of change can still be identified. Honos-Webb et al (2003) continue to propose the relevance of the assimilation model of change and don’t even mention the relevance of common factors in their investigation. The perspective of Chwalisz (2001) perhaps reminds us of the institutional power of psychotherapy as much as reminds us not to discard the possibility of the identification of specific mechanisms of change occurring within the client.

2.07 Comparing Perspectives: *the Rashomon Experience*

In this section, I will briefly summarise what has become known as the *Rashomon Experience* in psychotherapy and its relevance in coaching practice. I will begin by setting the context for understanding the *Rashomon Experience*. This will involve referring initially, briefly to Mintz et al (1973) where the term seems to have been first used in psychotherapy. I will then outline the implications of the *Rashomon Experience* for practitioners in psychotherapy and coaching. I will refer to the wider social science literature on *Rashomon* (but only briefly) as this helps to contextualise its relevance in understanding the metaphor. This will be followed by a review of the literature on *Rashomon* in psychotherapy and coaching. Overall, I will argue that the *Rashomon Experience* has important implications both from an academic perspective (ontologically and epistemologically) and in relation to coaching practice. I will argue however that focused research in psychotherapy on the *Rashomon Experience* is under-researched. I will also argue that the concept of the *Rashomon Experience* needs more clarification. Overall, this approach will reflect a broad range of perspectives on the *Rashomon Experience*.

The coining of the Rashomon Experience in Psychotherapy

In psychotherapy process research, Mintz et al (1973) found that clients, therapists and independent expert-observers tended to disagree about when a therapist was demonstrating *good therapy* (even though there was broad agreement about what *good therapy* should consist of and there was a good level of agreement in describing the client's in-session emotions). Mintz et al (1973) also found that there was no more agreement between any view-pair (i.e. between client and therapist, client and observer, therapist and observer and observer and observer) either in descriptions or evaluations of the session. It seemed that the process of observing or of experiencing a session led to different interpretations of the interaction. The authors alluded to this finding as the *Rashomon experience*, based on Akira

Kurosawa's classic (1950) film in which different witnesses present different and inconsistent accounts of the *same* event.

Implications of the Rashomon Experience

Overall, the *Rashomon experience* is very important both in psychotherapy and as a backdrop to coaching process research because it could be interpreted to suggest that the evaluation of actual sessions in a helping context is essentially, a subjective process. From an academic perspective, the *Rashomon experience* raises the question whether there is an "objective reality" in a helping relationship or whether there are only subjective impressions and interpretations of interactions between practitioner and client.

From the perspective of coaching practice (and other helping relationships), the *Rashomon experience* (or *effect*) is problematic. For example, in relation to the assessment of coaches, we might ask if any one position is in some sense privileged in really understanding what is *good* or *bad* practice. Similarly, in the context of the supervision of coaching, it is unclear if the supervisor can gain an objective insight into what is happening in the coaching interaction. It would seem that the supervisor might simply be making yet another interpretation of the interpretation of the coach but without really being able to "see through" the account of the supervisee into the "reality" of the experience. Moreover, it isn't clear that even if the supervisor can gain a sense of what is happening or whether the supervisor's judgement should be given an authoritative voice in deciding what is good or bad practice. This is important in relation to the normative function of supervision (Inskipp and Proctor, 1995) whereby the supervisor intends to monitor, evaluate and standardise good coaching practice.

While the above comments imply a constructionist or relativist perspective (e.g. Gergen, 1999) on the implications of *Rashomon*, even if we assume that an "objective reality" does exist in a helping relationship, Mintz et al's (1973) study would still seem to suggest that the coach and client seem to value different aspects of the helping relationship. The study also

highlights the objective difficulty in making common evaluations of effective practice across perspectives. Therefore, even from a positivist perspective, it isn't clear what supervisors or trainers need to focus on in order to help coaches evaluate what they need to do to manage the helping relationship effectively. For example, should supervisors and trainers/educators focus on ensuring that the client's expectations are met (i.e. to respond to what clients might appear to value) or should they focus more on ensuring that the practitioner facilitates the process in a way that is considered appropriate theoretically? Also, given the difficulties in evaluating sessions, how do they also arrive at a clear judgement about whether practice is actually carried out effectively?

Rashomon in Social Science Research

The metaphoric use of the *Rashomon* film appears to have gained some ground in social science research. A search on Google Scholar, using *Rashomon* as a key word in the *title of the article* identified 345 citations; 204 of which refer to publications since 1996. Some of these articles focus on the challenges of reconciling perceptions of events including for example, issues relating the Israeli-Palestine conflict (e.g. Kacowicz, 2005) which seems to highlight the broader challenges in reconciling differing perspectives. Other papers are used to explore differences in perspectives in traumatic events such as for example the research of Roth and Mehta (2002) which explores differences in viewpoints on lethal school killings. This latter study aims to elucidate broader epistemological and ontological issues in relation to perspective-taking but also illustrates how perspectives can be routed in shared communal understandings. The notion of *Rashomon* appears therefore to have found some use in social science research to help elucidate differences in perspectives in different social groups. These differences seem to relate to differences in local meanings (Gergen, 1993). The use of the *Rashomon* metaphor seems relevant when considering its relevance in psychotherapy and coaching because it demonstrates how the concept can be used to help understand differences in perspectives across broad topics of interest.

Rashomon in Psychotherapy

A number of academic papers written between the mid-1950s and the early 1990s set out to explore differences in perspectives between therapists and clients and/or therapists, clients and observers. These studies were evaluated in Weiss et al's (1996) review of a total of 41 papers written during this time period. Weiss et al (1996) do not refer specifically to the *Rashomon experience* but do conclude that "there is great variability in the extent to which clients and therapists agree in evaluating various dimensions of therapy" (p.493). The 41 studies reviewed seem very broad ranging in focus. For example, twenty-three of the studies focus on perceptions of the results of therapy; 10 studies deal with competing descriptions of the client's problems and 3 studies consider the quality of the therapeutic relationship. Weiss et al (1996) highlight how many of the earlier studies (up until the mid-70's) focused primarily on the perspective of the therapist which seems to suggest that up until this point in time, few studies had taken into account the perspectives of observers or clients.

Only 6 of the 41 studies (including Mintz et al, 1973) reviewed by Weiss et al 1996, compare differences in perspective between therapist and client in relation to a specific session. The review includes Stiles and Snow (1984) which suggests that clients tend to value sessions that are *smooth* (reflecting comfort and relaxation) while therapists tend to value sessions that are perceived as *deep* ("powerful" and "valuable"; p. 63). Two of the other 4 studies highlighted (Dill-Standiford et al, 1988; Schwartz and Bernard, 1981) are reported to align with the findings of Stiles and Snow (1984). A fifth study considers the degree of therapist experience and client agreement while the sixth study (Marziale, 1984) considers therapist and client perceptions of behaviours that were identified to contribute to the therapeutic relationship.

The review of Weiss et al (1996) is important in highlighting the scope of studies that have considered differences in perspectives. In particular, the research evaluating differences in

perspectives for whole sessions seems quite limited up until the time of writing, beyond a small number of studies identified by Weiss et al (1996). It would seem that while *Rashomon* appears a powerful metaphor in social science and as quoted by Mintz et al (1973), it has not constituted a mainstream area of research in psychotherapy. This is paradoxical given the apparent grounds for assuming its relevance in a helping context.

The Rashomon Experience in Coaching

The possible relevance of the *Rashomon experience* in understanding the perspectives of different participants in coaching process has been taken up by the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (de Haan and Nieß, 2012). Early research by this team of researchers (e.g. De Haan, 2008a; De Haan, 2008b and De Haan et al, 2008) seemed to indicate the existence of the *Rashomon experience* in coaching when the research team began to explore the descriptions of critical moments of clients and coaches experienced in coaching sessions. However, in later studies (e.g. De Haan et, 2010, De Haan and Nieß, 2012), the authors collected data which led them to re-evaluate their earlier findings and which led them to conclude that the *Rashomon experience* might be less relevant in coaching than in psychotherapy (these differences are explored further in section 2.15 of this Chapter; starting p. 99). This conclusion was based on their finding considerable agreement in their later investigations between coaches and clients who often identified the same critical moments in coaching sessions. Agreement was found “both in their recall/selection and in their emphasis/interpretation” (p. 125). Only two examples of shared critical moments are provided however in de Haan et al (2010) although many individual incidents of critical moments are provided. It is not therefore possible to review the original data showing similarities independently.

In the case of the examples of critical moments provided in de Haan and Nieß (2012), the authors conclude that there were differences in how the same events were interpreted by

client and coach (this study provides a detailed case study description of critical moments identified by both coach and client over a period of time):

“...the coach and the client referred to the same moments as being critical in the coaching sessions... the coach mostly described moments of self-doubt as being critical...[while] the client focused on moments of new learning and a positive change in the coaching relationship” (p.198).

However, the high degree of similarity in the identification of critical moments suggested that there was still considerable “similarity in experience of both persons...which disconfirms the “Rashomon conjecture”” (p.209).

It is not therefore clear whether the Rashomon experience is or is not relevant in coaching. Much seems to depend on the weighting one might wish to give to the relative importance on the one hand, of similarities in evaluation/interpretation and on the other, identification. There is also a need for more transparency in the reporting of shared interpretations of critical incidents.

There may be a benefit in the Ashridge Critical Moment Study Group (de Haan and Neiß, 2012) providing more data of shared interpretations/ evaluations of the same critical incident or more studies which explore this. It would seem however that clients and coaches do, at the least, identify similar moments.

Recent Studies of Perspective Taking in Psychotherapy

Since the paper of Weiss et al (1996), there seems to have been a lack of literature comparing perspectives of sessions of psychotherapy. A search on PsycNET (APA) using the search term *Rashomon (any field)* narrowed within *psychotherapeutic processes*

identified only 3 studies, all of which predated Weiss et al (1996). A search on PsychSource also using “Rashmon” as a key term only identified one article preceding this date. Given the pre-eminence of the Session Evaluation Questionnaire (SEQ) in Mintz et al (1973), which was used as a tool for exploring perspectives in that study, a further search was carried out in PsycNET (APA) using the term *session evaluation questionnaire* narrowed by *psychotherapeutic processes*. This search only identified 13 studies written in or after 1996, the date of Weiss et al (1996) publication. None of the abstracts of these studies suggests an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of therapist and client and/or that of the observer. A search on PsychSource also using *session evaluation questionnaire* only identified 1 study published post 1996. This study (Hafkenscheid, 2010) focuses on the factor analytic structure of the SEQ. While these searches do not represent an exhaustive search of available databases, they do include a significant number of contemporary journals on psychotherapy process. As a final search in the literature exploring perspective taking specifically, a search was performed in *Psychotherapy Research* as a mainstream journal publishing articles on coaching process and using the terms *client rating* and *therapist rating* and separately *patient rating* and *therapist rating (any field)* in both cases); the former listed 9 studies and the latter, 8. In the case of the former search, 5 of the studies focused on perspectives of the therapeutic relationship. One of the other 4 studies related to differing evaluations of outcomes; another on the use of immediacy in therapy; one on the perception of risk and one reviewing P technique. These results suggest that there has been little or no interest in exploring further, competing perspectives on whole sessions of therapy. It is also interesting to note that de Haan et al (2010) while the authors do highlight the lack of evidence for *Rashomon*, the authors also tend to identify broadly, the same literature as that I have identified. This again seems to suggest a lack of focused and more recent literature on *Rashomon* since Weiss et al, 1996. (The authors also make a specific reference to another early study: Yalom and Elkin, 1974. This is not included in the Weiss et al study, 1996).

Research Exploring the Therapeutic Relationship

There does however seem to have been considerable interest in exploring differences in perspectives between therapist and client in relation to the therapeutic relationship.

Differences in perspectives on the client-practitioner relationship are particularly important as the relationship (e.g. agreement on tasks, goals and a sense of relationship; Bordin, 1979) is considered an important common factor (Wampold, 2001).

It seems possible that most resources for research comparing differences in perspective have adopted this orientation. The most recent meta-analysis readily identifiable in the literature on perspectives of the *therapeutic relationship* (and similar terms including for example, the *working alliance*) is that of Tryon et al, 2007. This study, reviewing 53 studies in refereed journals (1985-2006), reported a moderately positive correlation (0.36) between the views of therapists and clients with clients tending to evaluate the relationship more positively than their therapists ($d = 0.63$). A moderately positive correlation does not justify refuting the suggestion of a *Rashomon experience* however in therapist-client evaluations of the working alliance. It would seem that both practitioner and client recognise the typical intimacy of the relationship (and as reported by Tryon et al (2007), including breakdowns in the relationship) but clients generally have a stronger sense of intimacy than their therapists. Tryon et al (2007) make no references to *Rashomon* but do cite other studies outside of psychotherapy that have found divergence in assessments of parent-child and teacher-child evaluations (Reynolds and Kamphaus, 1992) and father and mother evaluations of adolescents (Christensen et al, 1992). References to these studies are intended to highlight research which has found diverging perspectives in relationship evaluations. The authors suggest that differences between clients and therapists in alliance ratings may be due to the different experiences of the participants, with clients for example comparing their experience of the therapist relationship against a backdrop of less collaborative medical practitioner-

client and other day to day exchanges. Therapists on the other hand have a wider client base against which to make evaluations of the strength/ characteristics of the relationship. Tryon et al (2008) conducted a review of the literature on the therapeutic relationship using a larger data set of 63 studies. The authors found that therapists tend only to use the top 30% of rating points on relationship measures while clients tend only to use the top 20%. The authors suggest that this might reflect:

“... the possibility that clients and therapists do not differentiate among lower rating points on the scales, tend to rate the alliance according to a social desirability or dissonance-reducing response set, or provide ratings that accurately reflect the alliance” (p. 546”).

This is an important finding as it suggests that, while not ruling out the possibility of “accuracy”, general similarities in evaluations of the working alliance could be an artefact of rating measures rather than a reflection of what might be considered actual differences in subjective evaluations. As in their previous study, the authors do not refer to the *Rashomon experience* but the implication is that any lessons taken from studies of the therapeutic relationship which suggest similarity in perspectives may not be considered reliable.

Research Exploring “Helpful Events”

In addition to the research on the therapeutic alliance which seems of relevance in understanding the Rashomon experience in psychotherapy, there seems to have been some interest since Weiss et al (1996) in evaluating *helpful events*. A search on PsycNET (APA) identified 8 entries narrowed within *psychotherapeutic processes* for *helpful events* search item: *title*). A search on *Helpful Aspects of Therapy Questionnaire* however, (search item: *any field*) identified 54 results, although this reduced to only 7 when the search was narrowed to *psychotherapeutic processes*. Only one of these latter studies considered the perspective of both therapist and client.

Holowaty and Paivio (2012), (identified in searching in databases for studies in “helpful events”) cite some articles that do take into account the client’s perspective (specifically, Castonguay et al., 2010; Elliott, Slatick, & Urman, 2001; Gallegos, 2005; Gershefski, Arnkoff, Glass, & Elkin, 1996; Grafanaki & McLeod, 1999; Klein & Elliott, 2006), but also point out the general lack of literature that considers the client’s perspective. Similarly, Denhag et al (2012), (also identified in databases), refer to a lack of client involvement when conducting “clinical trials” (p.720). While this review of the literature is not comprehensive, these sources which were identified seem to suggest that the client perspective has not been extensively researched in psychotherapy. This is also confirmed by Llewelyn and Hardy (2001).

It may be that there is more literature on helpful events that a more in-depth review of terms associated with *helpful events* might be able to identify. De Haan et al (2010) for example identify a range of literature on helpful events that seem to have taken account of the client’s perspective. Their references include Yalom (1970) and Bloch et al (1979). De Haan et al (2010) also cite Llewelyn (1988) who compared the descriptions of clients and therapists of helpful events. Llewelyn (1988) found that:

“...during therapy the types of event most frequently reported by clients were reassurance/relief and problem solution events, whereas therapists reported the clients’ gaining of cognitive and affective insight” (p. 223).

This comment seems to provide confirmation of the Rashomon experience in psychotherapy. Llewelyn (1988) does not use the metaphor of Rashomon to support her own findings but does allude to the Mintz (1973) study. De Haan et al (2010) cite a range of other literature on helpful events (mainly pre 1988) but the authors do not highlight any differences in perspectives identified in this literature.

Other Process Literature in Psychotherapy

Some articles identified in the literature, which do compare perspectives of therapist and client, seem very specific and versed in particular theoretical assumptions. This means that they only provide partial insights into how therapists, clients and/or observers evaluate therapeutic sessions overall. Gumz et al (2012) for example set out to explore patterns of “destabilisation” between therapist and client and this literature seems to align more appropriately with the broader field of ruptures (e.g. Safran, Muran, & Proskurov (2009) and to which the authors refer). Other studies take account of multiple perspectives but the context of the research is very specific. For example, Martino et al (2009) compare the perspectives of supervisors, independent observers and therapists (but not clients) in evaluating adherence and competence of therapists in the use of Motivational Enhancement Therapy. It is still interesting to note however that in this study, “there was poor agreement [between independent raters and supervisors] regarding the extent to which the specific interventions occurred within sessions” (189). Denhag et al (2012) include a review Martino et al (2009) alongside a limited number of other studies in their preamble to their own study which compares the perspectives of supervisors and independent judges. They refer to a lack of research which systematically compares these perspectives. They only identify 2 studies (Borders and Fong, 1992; Chevron and Rounsaville, 1983) in addition to Marino et al (2009), neither of which found agreement between the two types of rater. In their own study, Denhag et al (2012) confirmed “this relative lack of agreement” (p.727), when comparing the perspectives of independent raters and supervisors in evaluating adherence and competence of therapists in their application of a range of psychotherapies. Supervisors tended to rate adherence and competence more highly. Denhag et al’s (2012) review focuses on reasons for these differences which include difficulties in identifying particular techniques and possible problems in using measuring scales.

Research building on Grawe's integrationist framework

Recently, there appears to have been some renewed interest in considering the perspective of clients and therapists as part of the overall goal of understanding change mechanisms. Mander et al, 2012 reports some publications in German which have developed a new tool for evaluating the in-session experiencing of therapist and client. The tool the authors refer to is the Bernese Post Session Report; BPSR (Fluckiger et al, 2009) which is grounded on Grawe's (1997) integrationist framework of mechanisms of change across psychotherapies. As summarised in Mander et al (2012), Grawe's framework consists of *resource activation, problem actuation, mastery, clarification of meaning* and the *therapeutic alliance*). The BPSR "measures Grawe's mechanisms of change" (p.105) and "other relevant aspects" (p.107). It is useful to note that in their discussion of the literature on multiple-perspective taking as a preamble to the development of the BPSR, McCarthy and Barber (2009) refer to lack of multiple-perspective taking in psychotherapy process literature. They refer to how survey instruments have been developed either for use by external observers or by therapists and with little intended involvement of the client. This further suggests that the literature on multiple-perspectives is under-explored. Referring to existing literature, the authors highlight how the therapist and external observers' perspectives have been seen as more "objective" and "informed" (p. 97) and which has led to a neglect of the client perspective.

Mander et al, 2012 report on the development of a new instrument based in part on this original tool (:Scale for the Multiperspective Assessment of General Change Mechanisms in Psychotherapy; SACiP) which as the name suggests takes account of therapist and client perspectives. The SACiP also draws on the WAI (Mader et al, 2012) and comprises 5 scales (*emotional bond; problem actuation; resource activation; clarification of meaning; agreement on collaboration* and *mastery*). The authors report on the initial application of the tool which:

“...found that the patient ratings were consistently higher than the therapist ratings on five of the six mechanisms of change. Further, although significant, patient and therapist ratings of change mechanisms were only lowly correlated ($r=.2$).” (p. 112).

The authors conclude that:

“...the findings of the present study show for the first time ever that differences between patient and therapist ratings are not restricted to alliance ratings but also apply to the other mechanisms of change. As suggested by Tryon et al. (2007), patients and therapists generally may consider different anchor points as crucial when they evaluate therapeutic processes. Unfortunately, to this day there are no studies that have examined the reasoning behind those patient and therapist ratings” (p. 112).

Mander et al (2012) do not make any explicit references to Rashomon, largely because the spirit of their work is more about understanding change mechanisms rather than exploring differences in perspectives. However, making an allusion to Rashomon would not be inappropriate. The authors highlighting of a lack of studies exploring the reasoning of differences in perspective would seem to call for renewed interest in the Rashomon experience.

Rashomon and Post Modernism

Before concluding this review, it seems pertinent to highlight that differences in perspectives would be expected in a post-modern construction of the helping relationship. This perspective is eloquently summarised by Anderson (1997):

“Understanding in any conversation is always circumscribed by the context of the conversation and is necessarily always unique to its context (Garfinkel, 1967; Shotter, 1993a). It must be known within the development of the conversation itself, and can only be known by those involved in it (Garfinkel, 1967), not by an observer. Likewise, as David Hoy (1986), referring to hermeneutic understanding suggests, “there is no privileged standpoint for understanding” (p. 399). For instance, therapists (or supervisors or consultants or team members) often talk of a “metaposition,” referring to a privileged position above or outside an event (for example, behind a one-way mirror). We cannot be meta to an event or to a therapy conversation. We simply participate in it; that is, observe it, hear it, or converse in it from different positions, from different angles, from different preunderstandings. Each position is one of many possible ones. Each person in a conversation participates from a unique perspective and experience; for various reasons, these may be quite different from those of other participants. This is part of the reason that the experiences of a therapist in a therapy room and the observers behind the one-way mirror often differ. It is one explanation of why a child welfare worker’s, a parent’s, and a therapist’s experience of the same interview can be so different or a mother’s report of dinner with her daughter’s boyfriend can vary so from the daughter’s or the boyfriend’s recollection.” (pp. 114-5)

It may be therefore that what is required in understanding differences in the accounts provided by different witnesses to the helping relationship reviewed in this review is less a question of explaining differences in identifying *objective realities* and more a question of viewing the interaction from a different philosophical paradigm.

Conclusion on literature on Alternative Perspectives/ Rashomon Experience

This review does not claim to be a complete review of the literature on *Rashomon*. As with much of the literature in psychotherapy, the pursuit of a broad topic of knowledge seems to emanate from within and across a broad spectrum of more or less varied sets of distinct sets

of literature (e.g. research on the *Relationship/ Working alliance*; research on *helpful events/events paradigm*). This makes a focused review on identifying differences in perspectives problematic.

A key conclusion from this review is that the literature generally tends to suggest a divergence of views between the perspectives of practitioner, observer and client and that most of these studies preceded Weiss et al (1996). The articles which would most strongly support this assertion in addition to Mintz et al (1973) would include Stiles and Snow (1984), Llewelyn (1988) and Weiss et al (1996). More recent studies would include Mandler (2012). Other articles have also been highlighted in this review but I would argue that these are the most authoritative articles that would support the existence of the *Rashomon Experience*.

Overall, the literature therefore supports the existence of Rashomon (Mintz et al, 1973) when there are different witnesses to the helping relationship in therapy. Moreover, differences relate primarily to differences in evaluation rather than in differences in the observation of agreed events. This conclusion for the psychotherapy literature is also supported by de Haan et al (2010).

The recent assertions from the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan and Nieß, 2012), cautions us not to make early conclusions about the existence of the *Rashomon experience* in coaching. However at the same time, studies conducted by this Group (Day et al, 2010 and Day and Nieß, 2012) still do not provide sufficient transparency at this stage to conclude that Rashomon is not relevant in coaching in terms of interpretation/evaluation of different aspects of a session. The authors support this conclusion by making reference to their limited data set (de Haan et al, 2010, p.125).

It is also important to decide on what basis we might conclude more dissimilarity than similarity when deciding whether a Rashomon experience should be considered a valid

description in either psychotherapy or coaching. Should a correlation of 0.36 (Tyron et al, 2007) for example be considered to show similarity in perspectives or dissimilarity? More clarification is needed in order to understand on what basis we might conclude that perspectives may or may not be considered essentially similar or dissimilar.

2.08 Coaching provided by professional coaches in an Organizational Context

It is becoming somewhat of a cliché to state that there is a lack of research in coaching in organizations even if there are signs that it is increasing. Grant (2011) estimated that 634 articles on coaching had been published between 2000 and January 2011 of which 231 were empirical investigations. His summary suggested that over the 10 year period, there had been a gradual increase in empirical research (45% articles published in 2010). Grant (2011) only considered articles published in two databases (*Psych-Info* and *Business Source Premier*) so the study is not exhaustive but does give an indication of the scale and scope of coaching research. Passmore (2010) notes a “*plethora*” of articles have been published since 2006. However he argues that most of these are atheoretical, offering case studies or new coaching models devised by coaching practitioners. He suggests that two questions should predominate: “*Firstly, does coaching have an effect and what effect does it have on the coachee? Secondly, what does the coach do which contributes to change in the coachee?*”. The first area of research refers largely to post-session outcome research. The second area relates more specifically to process. These two areas of research directly parallel research in psychotherapy.

2.09 Empirical Studies on Coaching Sessions

Very few studies could be identified in a wide ranging literature review that had analysed actual coaching sessions. Greif et al (2010) refer to “recent observation studies of coaching behaviour” but their paper refers only briefly to two empirical studies (Behrendt, 2006 and Schmidt and Thamm, 2008), the former related to line managers as coaches and the latter involved trained graduate students coaching other students. Greif et al (2010) outline a model of coaching which is based in the literature but in the literature on psychotherapy and primarily that conducted by Grawe (2000). The coaching “process model” derived from Grawe (2000) offers an integrated approach to coaching based on 7 “general success factors” (p99). These are: *Esteem and emotional support; problem reflection; self-reflection; affect reflection and calibration; clarification of goals; resource activation; support of transfer into practice*. Greif et al (2010) stress the importance of resource activation in relation to achieving successful outcomes. The model seems intuitively to have some commonsensical components such as reflection and clear goals which are coaches generally are encouraged to employ (e.g. ICF competencies). The components also appear to be generally similar to common factors in psychotherapy; for example, Grencavage and Norcross’s (1990) references to the importance of reflection on the client’s inner world and the importance of the client acquiring and practicing new behaviours. However Greif et al’s (2010) model is theoretically driven seeking primarily to activate self-mobilizing processes with the client. Greif et al (2010) refer to the similarity of the model with a solutions focused approach. It is not therefore clear in what way the model is not just another conceptualisation/ model of coaching derived from psychotherapy rather than one derived specifically for coaching and from an empirical evidence base. The authors acknowledge a need to adapt the approach to the specific needs of a client, including the client’s personality. Therefore, the model seems to adopt a broadly flexible and constructivist approach to coaching.

Greif et al (2010) refer to the reader to an on-going publication of the “Coaching Success Factors Observation Manual” (now Version 4, 2010) that summarises much of the process research conducted to inform and validate the model. More details are provided in the manual on the two studies already summarised above; also (Geißler, 2009), (English translation not available) which identified a range of behaviours shown by the coach (*shows attention, asks, mirrors, questions/confronts/criticizes, explains, gives feedback and prompts the client to act*) and client reactions initiated by the coach (*focuses cognitively on a subject; describes concretely or reflects on the process, the causes or the meaning, evaluates and develops action intentions*). Content analysis identified *asking questions* to be the most frequent observed communicative behaviour (26-61% of verbal communications) and client reactions were the most frequent type of response (24-52% of responses). This pattern was uncharacteristic for the one session that appeared problematic, justifying the importance of patterns in the 9/10 sessions that appeared to achieve beneficial outcomes.

Greif et al et al (2010) refer the readers to a study in which they had validated the model by interviewing coaches about their practice (Greif et al, 2008). They also cite other literature that tends to support their general approach (e.g. Mäthner et al., 2005). The methods outlined are described in the manual. The methods are very rigorous and involve the training of observers, the detailed scrutiny of video-recordings and detailed application of statistical techniques. Their observation instrument is also described in detail (*Cubus Analyse*; Grawe et al., 1994) and which is derived from psychotherapy. This methodology allows the authors to relate outcomes to process variables. Greif et al et al (2010) refer to the study of Schmidt and Thamm (2008) which showed significant correlations between some coach behaviours and outcomes (*facilitation of self-reflection* and a reduction in *helplessness; resource activation* and *goal satisfaction; verbal empathy* and *behaviour* and *goal reflection; support of transfer* and self-ratings of *time management* and *information management; non-verbal reinforcement* and *emotional insight*). Contrary to expectations they found that *non-verbal reflections* correlated with *negative affect* and *self-reflection*

correlates with *de-motivation* (Schmidt and Thamm, 2008 cited in Greif et al et al, 2010, p6-7).

The observation manual provides details regarding the specific behaviours coaches need to show in order to enact the seven success factors; for example “Esteem and Emotional Support” is sub-divided into three broad behaviours which in turn are broken down into a series of even more specific behaviours. Trained coders evaluating the behaviours of the coach follow specific guidelines for rating the behaviours of the coach.

Greif et al (2010) make some interesting evaluations in relation to coaching. For example, they distinguish coaching from therapy in terms of coaching’s specific tendency to enable self-developmental processes in the client; also in its focus on the achievement of results through self-reflection: “The facilitation of intensive results oriented self-reflection is one of the core competencies and functions of coaching. It distinguishes coaching from types of counselling that are less evasive” (p.101). However this comment is immediately qualified: “In this respect coaching can be compared to psychotherapy” (p.101). Thus, we are left a little uncertain about how coaching might be different to counselling but similar to psychotherapy. Greif et al’s (2010) distinction relates to the degree of challenge so the distinction seems to be quantitative rather than qualitative.

Overall, Greif et al (2010) present an interesting methodology for studying coaching. Unlike much of the literature in coaching, they present empirical findings. Their research also appears to be gaining some momentum with the researchers highlighting future programmes of empirical research. They also amply demonstrate how in-depth quantitative process research can be conducted in coaching and produce some potentially useful findings. The most salient limitation is probably that their research so far has been conducted with students and line managers rather than with actual coaches. There is also a danger that they will only find in their research what the design of their research investigation will allow

them to find; one is perhaps reminded of the early Wittgenstein (1929) who argued that our knowledge is limited by the language that we have to describe the world (Martland, 1975). The approach of Greif et al (2010) also seem to be very much focused on what the coach does rather than on what the coach and client do together and this undermines a collaborative conceptualization of the coaching process.

2.10 Critical Moments

This section of the thesis presents a summary (rather than a critique) of the literature on *critical moments* in coaching and focuses on six principal papers identified in this review and published by the various members of the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan and Nieß, 2012). Given the author's constructionist epistemological position, this summary will inevitably include a degree of interpretation although an attempt will generally be made to summarise the literature (i.e. outline the main concepts, methodology and findings) with only occasional references beyond what the authors actually state in order to help contextualise their research.

Eric de Haan is the lead, single or contributing author of the 6 principle papers identified in the literature (de Haan, 2008a; de Haan, 2008b; Day, de Haan, Sills, Bertie and Blass, 2008; de Haan, Bertie, Day and Sills, 2010a; de Haan, Bertie, Day and Sills, 2010b; de Haan and Nieß, 2012). Similar, work-in-progress and/or Dutch versions of these papers appear in a range of other publications including de Haan and Blass (2007), de Haan (2008c), de Haan, Sills, Day and Bertie (2006) and de Haan (2006a, 2006b). Through these articles, the coaching interaction is presented as a series of moment by moment interactions in which some of these interactions take on a particular significance for coach, client or both. The papers present the authors empirical findings based on questionnaires and/or interviews with coachees and coaches. The context of the coaching upon which the research is based relates mainly to work-related, (but not exclusively) one to one coaching (e.g. executive coaching). The authors' research adopts a methodological approach informed by an

established tradition in psychotherapy process research which over the past 40 years has led to the publication of a range of studies within what is described in the literature as the *events paradigm* (Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001). The authors cite many studies in psychotherapy research in setting the context for their own investigations (e.g. Elliott, 1985 cited in Day et al, 2008, p. 620). The authors also situate their research methodologically in the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954 cited in de Haan et al, 2010, p. 127).

This summary will include an overview of the main findings from the 6 principle papers in chronological order. It will also include a summary of an initial exploratory study (De Haan et al, 2006) as this is particularly useful in setting the context for the studies which follow. The other papers tend to follow a logical and chronological account of the collection and analysis of data. In brief, De Haan (2008a) presents an analysis of the recollections of critical moments of 49 novice coaches collected through written assignments produced as part of an on-going coaching module at Ashridge Management College. De Haan (2008b) presents descriptions of critical moments for experienced coaches (e-mail responses collected from 47 coaches reporting 8 or more years of coaching experience). Day, de Haan, Sills, Bertie and Blass (2008) present an analysis of critical moments following in-depth interviews with 30 experienced coaches. De Haan, Bertie, Day and Sills (2010a) present an analysis of critical moments of clients gathered through a survey and some interview material. De Haan, Bertie, Day and Sills (2010b) compare and contrast clients and coaches accounts of critical moments taken immediately after events. Finally, de Haan and NieB (2012) present a detailed case study of an interaction between coach and client. De Haan et al (2010) report a full data set at the time of writing of 352 critical moments.

De Haan et al (2006)

De Haan et al (2006) present an initial overview of their on-going research in *critical moments* in coaching. This relates to previous work reported for example in De Haan 2006a and De Haan 2006b. The authors set the context for their research. It is inspired by similar

research in psychotherapy; the authors cite for example Rice and Greenberg (1984) who have sought for a number of years to understand how change occurs in a helping context and have contributed to the development of methods which allow a rich exploration of the helping relationship. The authors suggest the probable relevance of common factors and of the importance of the relationship as a common factor (the authors cite Wampold, 2001 who proposed that change occurs in psychotherapy through a range of factors common to all therapies). They describe their approach as “narrative and qualitative in nature” and their interest in “meaning, in an inductive manner” (p. 5). The context of the research is also set in the context of the needs and scope of supervision:

“We wanted to explore which of these tasks [of supervision] and types [of supervision] are common in the world of coaching...”(p. 7).

This context setting is relevant because it highlights the focus on the authors research programme. There will be an assumption that the relationship is important in the coaching encounter and that material is likely to provide some lessons for supervision.

The authors do not provide at the outset an explicit definition of a *critical moment* but contextualise its occurrence and implications:

“Tense, exciting and difficult moments may occur, and the coach is alone while responding to them. Executive coaches recognise that these challenging moments can be real opportunities for growth for both coachee and coach – but they can also be blocks or obstacles to the coaching process if not recognised or addressed well. They can hinder or undermine the ‘working alliance’ between coachee and coach, as much as they can deepen the relationship and open up new avenues for growth” (p. 4).

A critical moment is thereby contextualised as emotionally challenging; functionally, it is presented as a point of transition in the coaching process which can be either generative or destructive of the coaching process and/or the coaching relationship. There is an assumption that these points of transition can be successfully managed.

From a methodological perspective, De Haan et al's (2006) conceptualisation of a *critical moment* informed the research design (i.e. its emotional impact and existence as a challenge/dilemma). For example, the instructions given to research participants were as follows:

“Describe briefly one critical moment (an exciting, tense or significant moment) – or, in the later research, also a challenge, or a dilemma – with one of your coaches. Think about what was critical in the coaching journey, or a moment when you did not know quite what to do” (p. 8).

The authors report that participants were able to identify “moments of dilemma, challenge and indecision for the coach” (p. 9).

De Haan et al (2006) describe the types of dilemma, challenge and moments of indecision, identified in the research, in some detail. In summary, for inexperienced coaches, these moments were reported to be associated with the coach's own insecurities and doubts; for example in relation to their “own suitability for the role of coach” (p. 21). Based on these findings, the researchers elaborate on their understanding of a *key* or *critical* moment that they had presented earlier in the paper and which I referenced earlier in this summary:

“...a critical moment is a difficult, awkward moment that hinders the coach and puts him/her off balance, while on the other hand it is precisely in and as a result of such moments that the coach can learn something about him or herself, about the coaching relationship and ultimately about the coachee”(p. 12).

If these moments are successfully managed, they have the potential for becoming “breakthrough moments” or if they are not; they represent “missed opportunities” (12).

The authors state that their research identified fewer reports of doubt on the part of experienced coaches. Rather than provide descriptive details of the critical moments of experienced coaches (saving this for subsequent publications), the authors highlight how the

critical moments of experienced coaches led to change provided the coach was open to, and made use of, their experience in the coaching session (e.g. following intuition, reflecting back their observations, etc.) and provided the coach was able to manage his/her own internal tensions (intrapersonal skills). In the concluding comments in the article, the authors highlight the importance of critical moments in promoting client change. Critical moments are therefore conceptualised as generally instrumental in the coaching process; they are moments when the coach can draw on his/her intrapersonal awareness to bring about client change:

“Overwhelmingly, the examples of critical incidents and challenges offered by and discussed with the experienced coaches, related to their paying attention to their own responses in the moment...and finding a way of using the response in service of raising the client’s awareness of some aspects of themselves or the situation. This very often seemed to be a moment of change and progression for the client...” (p. 21).

The authors make several references to the literature on coaching and psychotherapy that either appear to have informed or support the research findings. A key text that the authors cite is O’Neill (2000) to which De Haan and al (2006) reference their findings in relation to the coach needing to reconcile “Strength, daring and containment” (backbone)...and acceptance, readiness and warmth”(heart)” (p. 13).

De Haan, 2008a

De Haan (2008a) presents a detailed description of the critical moments described by the inexperienced coaches in De Haan et al (2007). A random sample of 42 of 56 critical moments collected from 49 novice coaches is classified into 19 different types of critical moment. De Haan points out that these moments “could have been classified differently” but “fall naturally under the headings” (p. 92). The classifications are broad ranging; for example, “Building a Relationship,” “Am I good enough,” “Deferring your opinion,” “Breakthroughs”, “Directing the conversation,” “Team coaching” (pp.92-97). De Haan

(2008a) proceeds to analyse all 56 critical moments as 4 types of doubt: “Doubts About Every Coaching Conversation and Every Moment in a Coaching Conversation,” “Doubts About the Coaching Relationship,” “Doubts about Guiding the Coaching Conversations” and “Doubts About the Boundaries of Coaching Conversations (pp. 99-102).” The author then provides a “Synthesis” (p.102) in which coaches are advised about how they might “better handle these tensions and doubts”(p.102). Four broad suggestions are proposed: *understanding* that “The Critical Moment Says Something About the Coach and About the Coaching”; that “Critical Moments Are Breakthrough Moments”; that “The More Critical Moments, the Better the Coaching”; that “Coaches Can Only Continue to Learn Thanks to Their Critical Moments” (pp.102-3). In his overall conclusions, de Haan (2008a) argues that “the effectiveness of coaches seems determined primarily by their ability to doubt, not to know what is coming next, and to greet what comes next with questions” (p.105). The centrality of doubting is also explained in relation to the title of the article (“I doubt therefore I coach”, p. 91):

“Like Descartes...the coach experiences a significant turning point when he shifts his own attention away from the many doubts and uncertainties...and toward the activity of doubting itself”(p.105).

De Haan, 2008b

De Haan (2008b) presents the findings of critical moments of the experienced coaches reported in De Haan et al (2006). The presentation of the data follows a similar format to that presented for inexperienced coaches in 2008a (initial description of critical moments, analysis and synthesis). In his initial presentation, De Haan (2008b) categorises critical moments into 18 sub-categories which in turn are categorised at a super-ordinate level into three broad themes (: “Managing Key Conditions,” “Deepening the coaching conversation and the coaching relationship” and “Handling what happens in the coaching conversation and the coaching relationship”: 109-121). As in his previous article (de Haan, 2008a), de

Haan points out that “many critical moments can be categorized under a number of different headings” (p.109) indicating, as in his earlier analysis (2008a), epistemologically, an interpretative analysis. The 18 sub-categories present a broad range of reported critical moments. For example one coach reported a critical moment as the coach making a suggestion to go for a walk which led to a “useful conversation” (p.109). Another example is a coach reporting an instance of disclosing one of his/her own experiences to the client: “talking about an experience of my own” (p.114).

In his “analysis” (p.122), de Haan (2008b) categorises the critical moments provided by experienced coaches as 8 different types of anxiety (e.g. “Anxiety About the Boundaries of Coaching,” “Anxiety Due to the Specific Behaviour of the Coachee,” “Anxiety stepping Mainly From the Coach”; pp. 122-7). In a process of “Synthesis” (p.127), De Haan (2008b) makes some suggestions about how the coach might address these challenges. De Haan (2008b) refers to these challenges as “struggles,” because, “they are recurring challenges that experienced coaches cannot avoid but need to handle as well as possible” (p.127). The struggles (4 types) are “The Struggle to Stay “Fresh and Receptive””; “The Struggle to Retain and Increase the Coach’s Ability to Put Things Into Perspective”; “The Struggle to Contribute “Containment” to the Relationship” and “The Struggle to Contribute the Coach’s Own Observations” (pp.127-9).

In his conclusions, De Haan (2008b) cites psychotherapy research by Carlberg (1997) which suggests that *turning points* (moments of change) occur in therapy; these moments are characterised by unpredictability and an increased sense of inter-subjectivity between practitioner and client (“emotional meeting”; p. 130). De Haan (2008b) suggests that many (but not all) of the *critical moments* in his data set (77%) suggest these occurrences. He then draws his article to a conclusion by arguing that the “quality of coaches is determined primarily by their ability to tolerate tension and to tackle the ongoing struggle with new tensions and uncertainties” (p.131). This comment represents another movement in his reflections and suggests that client change is brought about through the coach’s skill in

exploiting the tensions he/she inevitably experiences. Coaching is therefore constructed as the coach's capacity to manage tension and uncertainty and in part, informs the title of the article ("I Struggle and Emerge").

Day et al, 2008

Day, de Haan, Stills, Bertie and Blass, 2008 provide a detailed analysis of the interview data reported briefly in 2008a. This consisted of an analysis of 51 critical moments collected from 28 experienced coaches identifying critical moments over their past 12 months of coaching. The authors continue to develop their understanding of critical moments:

"... critical moments are unforeseen and characterised by intense emotions and anxiety within the coaching relationship. These moments were most often seen to be turning points in the work...[These moments] resulted in either insight for their clients or a distancing, or even breakdown, in the coaching relationship. Their accounts indicate that the outcome of these moments is influenced by the coach's containment of both their and their client's emotions. This process of containment involved coaches being aware of their own emotions and the reactions of their client, making a link with what was taking place in the coaching relationship and reflecting on their experience with their client in a manner that led to heightened awareness for the client. In situations where a distancing occurred between coach and client, this was associated with either an aggressive response or an avoidant response by one or both parties... These findings demonstrate the importance to the coaching process of personal insight on the part of the coach, reflexivity in the coaching relationship and emotional containment by both the coach and the coaching supervisor" (p. 207)."

This summary highlights the authors understanding of the significance and existence of critical moments; in particular, that critical moments are *turning points* characterised by

intense emotions and anxiety that can lead to client insight and/or an improvement or deterioration/breakdown in the coaching relationship. The more the coach seems able to remain calm and reflective, the greater the likelihood of a successful outcome. The authors also draw on a range of concepts from psychotherapy and learning generally to support their arguments including Bion's (1963) notion of containment in psychotherapy. The authors emphasise the importance of supervision in helping the clients to manage these situations. The centrality of the relationship is highlighted by the authors in that the critical incidents present a potential threat to the relationship and/or a moment in the relationship when something occurs which has a particular impact on the progress of coaching/ client insight. Overall, their findings seem to suggest that effective coaching is about the coach and client working reflexively and with uncertainty. At some point, an occasion will arise, which if handled reflexively will be instrumental in the client's progress or will lead to a deterioration/breakdown in the relationship.

The analysis provided by the authors is broadly in line with that provided in De Haan (2008b). Examples are given which provide what might be taken as evidence for the experiencing of intense client and coach emotions, tensions in the relationship; tensions relating to the boundaries of coaching and changes in the relationship. The authors refer to critical moments arising unexpectedly. The authors identify a range of forms of anxiety and doubt experienced by the coach which accompany critical moments. The identification of anxieties is consistent with and is supportive of De Haan's (2008b) identification of the significance of coach anxiety. However, there is a greater emphasis on the notion of managing ruptures in the relationship. The authors provide evidence of the sequential nature of interactions that supports their claim of the importance of containment (citing Bion, 1963) on the part of the coach. The backdrop of conceptual frameworks provided in the psychotherapeutic literature provides additional plausibility and credibility to their findings. The importance of the therapist managing the client's expression of negative feelings or hostility is for example also widely highlighted in the psychotherapy literature (e.g. Bachelor

and Horvarth, 1999). Day et al, 2008 emphasise additionally, the importance of *shared* reflection in addition to remaining calm. The authors do not discuss however whether the importance of shared reflection is relevant in the psychotherapy literature. The importance of shared reflection seems to be quite similar and provides support for the relevance of *immediacy* in coaching advocated by O'Neill (2000).

De Haan et al, 2010

Having discussed the accounts of critical moments provided by clients and by coaches in previous studies (principally and chronologically; De Haan et al, 2008a, 2008b; Day et al, 2008), the authors now consider the accounts of clients and coaches in relation to the same moments. Eighty-Six critical moment descriptions were reported immediately at the end of coaching sessions; 43 from coaches and 43 from clients. The data was collected from 14 coaches (with their clients) and related to 21 coaching sessions. Unlike in previous studies, the reporting of the critical moments tended to focus more on “new realisations and insights as most critical” (p.109). The authors relate their findings to their previous research which had given more emphasis to moments of doubt and anxiety including ruptures. They argue that everyday coaching is associated with moments of insight whereas if coaches are prompted to reflect on their careers, they will tend to focus more on key moments of tension. The authors report finding in their new study reported in De Haan et al (2010) “substantial agreement about the specific moments that were critical in the sessions and why” (p. 109). The authors argue that this agreement calls into question the so called Rashomon effect in psychotherapy as well as their previous research which has suggested that practitioner and client often place a different emphasis on events occurring in the helping relationship. Implicit in the notion of Rashomon is the individual’s construction of the coaching interaction (i.e. in which the process is given subjective meaning and significance by the participants). De Haan et al (2010) however present a somewhat realist account of events in coaching

sessions as objective realities actually occurring in coaching sessions with both coach and client attending to the same “reality’ of the conversation” (p.124).

It is perhaps interesting to point out how the more recent research on critical moments conducted by the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan and Nieß, 2012) reports a higher level of agreement about the identification of significant events than in psychotherapy. Cummings, Hallberg, et al. (1992) for example found that clients and counsellors recalled the same important event 34% of the time, whereas Cummings, Martin, et al. (1992) found that they recalled it 39% of the time. Similarly, Martin and Stelmaczonek (1988) found that counsellors and clients recalled the same event as most important in a session 33% of the time. De Haan et al (2010) do not discuss these differences in detail but do suggest that one of the reasons for a high level of agreement between coaches and clients could be related to their shared background: “...coach and client are essentially similar being both 21st century professionals with an interest in leadership and development” (de Haan et al, 2010, p.124).

De Haan and Biess, 2012

In their most recent published study identified on critical moments, De Haan and Nieß (2012) present a case study involving the content analysis of the reported critical moments described by coach and client taking part in a programme of coaching (10 X 90 minute sessions over a 7 month period). As in de Haan et al, 2010, the authors found a high level of concordance in the coach and client identification of critical moments (approximately 50% of the descriptions) although the coach tended to focus mainly on moments of self-doubt and the client on moments of new learning and positive change in the relationship (the coding of coach and client anti-correlated; p.205). The study also found that the number of client insights (typical critical moments for clients) decreased over time while the coaching

relationship appeared to strengthen. These findings point to the possibility of regularities in patterns over time in coaching.

The authors still conclude however that the identification of critical moments refutes the existence of the Rashomon effect; the authors, thereby giving more emphasis to the process of identification than that of interpretation:

“...For us, the most encouraging finding was the similarity of experience of both persons in the room...which disconfirms the “Rashomon conjecture” of entirely different recollections in helping relationships” (p.209).

Conclusion (Critical Moments)

The research on critical moments demonstrates a rigorous and generally transparent approach in coaching process research. The analyses throughout the studies demonstrate a high level of methodological sophistication and involve multiple researchers adding to the validity and reliability of their findings. The methodological approaches are clearly outlined and draw on both qualitative and statistical techniques. The details of the critical moments are often presented in full which allows one to critique the categorisation of types of critical moments as well as the nature and consequences of a critical moment.

Overall, the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan and Nieß, 2012) provides a body of literature which gives an insight into the coaching process and which had hitherto and still remains largely under-researched. In many ways, the described experiences of novice coaches in earlier studies highlight a broad range of professional, ethical and boundary issues that coaches need help to negotiate early in their careers. The experiences of more experienced coaches in some of the subsequent studies highlight a broad range of the continued challenges that coaches face and for which they need support through supervision and continued professional development. The earlier studies on the descriptions of critical moments by experienced coaches provide an insight into the on-going process of managing one's own and one's client's emotions at tense moments as well as the relevance

of working with immediacy (O'Neil, 200). The experiences of clients highlight the importance for the client in gaining new insights. The coding and categorisation of critical events also provides taxonomy for understanding critical events considered to occur in the coaching process and which can be used or critiqued by other researchers. Collectively, these findings constitute a substantial contribution both to the academic literature and to practice.

2.11 Coaching Typologies

A number of studies have been carried out that have adopted an inductive analysis of the behaviours of coach. Stein (2009) analysed actual coaching sessions and interviewed coaches about how they had conducted their sessions. Stein identified 16 conversational identities employed by a coaches (e.g. *agenda facilitator*, *narrative listener*, *challenger*, etc.), which could be classified within three major frames (*process frame*, *content frame* and *relationship frame*; frames being defined by the task). The notion of a conversational identity is demonstrated in the content of the language used by the coach (for example if the coach encourages the client to come back to his original agenda, the coach will be acting as *agenda facilitator*). Stein (2009) suggests that the typology could be useful as a basic vocabulary and tool for self-reflection on the part of the coach and as a mechanism for evaluating if there is a difference between what coaches say they do and actually do. Stein (2009) presents an interesting descriptive study derived from actual coaching sessions. Her findings suggest that coaches can adapt different approaches in different contexts although she highlights how some coaches might have a particular preference for a particular approach. Her findings also seem to point to the diversity of coaching practices.

One challenge in understanding the framework is perhaps to consider what might determine the boundaries of a conversational identity. In conversational analysis for example, boundaries can be identified in relation to a *turn construction unit*, (Ten Have, 1999).

Similarly in speech act theory, there are specific semantic definitions for specific syntactic constructions (Searle et al., 1980). Stein's typology could also be criticised for its focus on the coach rather than at the dyadic level (actions and impacts). Finally, because the typology focuses on the semantic use of language, it overlooks possible unconscious processes and/or non-verbal interactions (Mehrabian, 1977). However, overall, the study very usefully begins to provide a conceptual framework for understanding aspects of the coaching process.

In a similar multiple typologies oriented approach to Stein (2009), Jackson (2005) produced a five- dimensional typology reflecting attitudinal and conceptual differences in the way coaches said they practiced coaching. The five dimensions are as follows:

1. Systematic methodology – Flexible Personal Methodology
2. Explicit Foundations of Practice – Less Explicit Foundations of Practice
3. Pragmatic Competency Coaching – Facilitative Open Scope Coaching
4. Personal Presence Achieves Outcomes – Procedure Achieves Outcomes
5. Concrete - Philosophical

This multi-dimensional typology for defining the practice of coaching highlights the potential for generating frameworks for understanding the breadth and scope of practice beyond single dimensional typologies (*cognitive behavioural coaching, Gestalt coaching, etc.*) but as Jackson acknowledges, his exploratory study was based on interviews with only five coaches, is based on his interpretation of the data (using a range of mixed methods) and should not be generalised. The dimensions also seem to overlap in the descriptions Jackson provides; for example the first dimension is evidenced “by reference to doctrinal authority” while the fourth dimension takes account of “adherence to doctrine” Nonetheless, the study has its merits; for example in highlighting a range of methodologies that could be usefully applied to make sense of what coaches do (in this case, grounded theory, repertory grid technique, clustering; non-parametric statistical analysis and linkage analysis). It also

highlights some potential differentiators between practicing coaches. Finally, while focused on the coach, the analysis goes beyond behaviours, generating higher order constructs (typologies) that incorporate behaviours and other aspects of the practices of coaches.

2.12 Parallel Process Research

There is some literature on coaching which attempts to make sense of coaching process at a less conscious/ non behavioural level. Day (2010) for example discusses the relevance of the “parallel process” in coaching. This refers to how unconscious relational dynamics in one context or system can be replicated in another system (p. 868). He provides a detailed case example of working with the parallel process.

Day (2010) contextualises this research within broader debates in psychoanalysis relating to what has been described as the “relational turn”. He argues that this represents an emerging paradigm change within psychoanalysis representing “a movement from “one person” psychology to a “two person” psychology which privileges inter-subjectivity over understanding individuals as separate independent entities that can be studied objectively” (p.865). He contrasts the “relational turn” with a more traditional psychoanalytic paradigm which “has tended to see the therapist and client as independent actors in unconscious interactions, with the client’s contribution being known as “transference” and the therapist’s response to the client being known as “counter-transference” (p.866).

2.13 Conclusions to Literature Chapter

This chapter set out to provide a review of the literature on process research in both psychotherapy and coaching. In this conclusion, I will present a summary of the main findings and key arguments presented. I will then consider the lessons coaching process

researchers can take from the body of literature on psychotherapy process which has been given particular consideration in this chapter.

The key theme presented in this chapter has been the emergence of a social constructionist interpretation of the psychotherapy process (e.g. Kaye, 1992; McNamee and Gergen, 1992; Spong, 2010; Anderson, 1997; Wong, 2006; Orange et al, 1997, Gergen, 1999, Goolishian, 1987; Lock and Strong, 2012; Levin and Brava, 2012). This understanding of psychotherapy process adopts a holistic approach to understanding the interaction between practitioner and client, as a meaning-making process. This understanding contrasts with that of more positivist and mainstream, qualitatively-oriented psychotherapy process researchers (e.g. Rice and Greenberg, 1984; Greenberg, 1986; Elliott, 1986, Llewelyn, 1988; Grawe, 1997 and Flückiger et al, 2009).

Some researchers within this latter tradition have focused on specific types of qualitative approaches such as the “events paradigm” (Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001). Other process researchers in psychotherapy have adopted a positivist-oriented approach but have used more quantitative based techniques (e.g. as summarised in Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001; Elliott, 2010 and Greenberg, 1986). There is also a breadth of literature that has investigated specific aspects of the psychotherapy process, including the Working Alliance (e.g. Tryon, 2007); ruptures in the relationship (e.g. Safran et al, 2009), immediacy (e.g. Kasper et al, 2008) and therapist responsiveness (e.g. Stiles et al, 1990).

Overall, the leading proponents of qualitative oriented approaches (Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001; Elliott, 2010; Greenberg) tend to agree that the way in which therapeutic change is achieved still needs much more research and improved research designs. All of these proponents however, agree that in principle, it will prove possible to identify a set of specific mechanisms that are associated with change in therapy. Some psychotherapy process authors have also called for more involvement of the client’s perspective on the psychotherapeutic process (e.g. *Holowaty and Paivio*, 2012). A relative lack of the

perspective of the client particularly in light of the findings in relation to the *Rashomon conjecture* (i.e. that perspectives seem to differ according to the stakeholder perspective taken in psychotherapy) seems to point to a useful area of future research in psychotherapy. Greenberg's (1996) call for "methodological pluralism" (p.6) also seems particularly relevant given the breadth of understanding that different methods and perspectives on the psychotherapeutic process appear to provide.

A number of reviews of the literature on psychotherapy outcomes (Grencavage and Norcross, 1990; Assay and Lambert, Wampold, 2001) have led to the argument that *common* rather than *specific* factors are associated with client improvement in therapy; that is, general factors common to all psychotherapies (including for example, the therapeutic relationship, the opportunity for catharsis, etc.). Wampold (2001) has argued that the existence of these general factors undermines the notion of psychotherapy as a *medical model* which involves the application of specific therapeutic interventions. Wampold (2001) advocates instead, a *contextual* model of change, which as the term implies, takes into consideration, broader contextual, non-specific factors associated with the change process. While Wampold (2001) does not reject the possibility therefore of developing a body of knowledge that can identify general causal factors associated with change across a wide range of psychotherapies, it could be argued that his notion of a contextual model, can be reconciled with a social constructionist interpretation of change as a meaning-making process.

This summary sets the context for highlighting some of the lessons that coaching process researchers might take from the psychotherapy process literature:

Psychotherapy is effective (Wampold, 2001). Given the similarity of psychotherapy and coaching as *helping conversations*, and given the lack of available resources (unlike in psychotherapy), there seems to be an argument for not investing these limited resources

into researching the effectiveness of coaching. This argument has been made convincingly by de Haan (2008c)

1. Coaching process can draw on a well-resourced arsenal of process methods, methodologies and tools for exploring process including for example, interpersonal process recall (Kagan and Kagan, 1991) and Q-sort methodologies (e.g. Ablon and Jones, 1993). Q-sorting has been used in particular by Bachkirova et al (2012) and in this current thesis. Coaching researchers can also learn to apply statistical methods used in psychotherapy process; for example, the use of Cohen's Kappa (1960) has been used extensively in studies comparing the perspective of different participants/observers when evaluating therapy sessions or aspects of therapy (Weiss et al, 1996); this technique has been used by the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan et al, 2010) for establishing levels of agreement between researchers evaluating data collected on *critical moments* in coaching sessions.
2. The lesson from psychotherapy for coaching process researchers, more generally, is to avoid rediscovering what is already available and/or to consider the possibility of developing measures derived from psychotherapy where this might lead to resource savings
3. Conversely, coaching researchers can identify content areas and methodological approaches in psychotherapy process research which have been under-addressed and tailor coaching process research in a way that might be considered consistent with the values of the emerging discipline of coaching; for example, the client's perspective has been largely neglected in psychotherapy process research (Holowaty and Paivio, 2012) yet the coaching literature is arguably very client-centric (e.g. Whitworth, 2011).

4. Coaching researchers can use or adapt definitions of process provided within psychotherapy as a benchmark and orienteering framework for investigating coaching process; this will also be useful longer-term in understanding similarities and differences between psychotherapy and coaching via empirical research. The research carried out by the Ashridge Critical Moment Study Group (de Haan and Neiß, 2012) has already for example been able to contextualise findings from coaching in relation to findings in psychotherapy (i.e. that the Rashomon experience may be of lesser significance in the coaching process; e.g. de Haan et al, 2010)

5. Coaching researchers can use or adapt the organizing frameworks provided within psychotherapy; for example Llewelyn and Hardy's (2001) categorisation of *exploratory studies, hypothesis testing and theory development* and within this particular sub-groups such as studies within the "events paradigm" (Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001). These are useful organizing and orienteering frameworks and will also enable the transfer of learning from psychotherapy. It is interesting to note that the "events paradigm" approach has already been adopted by the Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan and Nieß, 2012). This group has also compared and contrasted differences between experienced and novice practitioners (reviewed by Llewelyn and Hardy, 2001), further demonstrating the transposition of organizing research frameworks from psychotherapy (e.g. de Haan et al, 2010) into coaching research.

6. Coaching process researchers can begin their analysis of coaching with a basic language and set of concepts for understanding aspects of the psychotherapeutic interaction that could be relevant for understanding aspects of the coaching interaction including immediacy (e.g. Kasper et al, 2008); therapist responsiveness

(Stiles et al, 1990); the Working Alliance (e.g. Tryon, 2007); and ruptures in the relationship (e.g. Safran et al, 2009).

7. There appear to be a number of topical issues in psychotherapy process research in which there has been a great deal of research interest: e.g. common factors and in particular, the relevance of the therapeutic relationship (Wampold, 2001). Coaching process researchers can build on these findings; for example to explore broader contextual factors associated with change common to all forms of coaching. The more recent literature associated with the integrationist approach (e.g. Grawe, 1997 and Flückiger et al, 2009) is already being adapted by process researchers in coaching (e.g. Greif et al, 2010)
8. The interest in more discursive approaches in psychotherapy (e.g. Spong et al, 2012; McNamee and Gergen, 1992, Anderson, 1997) suggests that coaching researchers might productively explore coaching process more holistically as a process of meaning-making; also that multiple-perspectives might be considered (including the client's perspective) and without recourse to the construction of a new theoretical language (Toukmanian and Rennie (1992)
9. More generally, the breadth of psychotherapy process research alerts us to be tolerant of a breadth of different research approaches and paradigms in order to increase our understanding of coaching; also to appreciate that our understanding of process in a helping relationship is always from a particular perspective; be this from a witness to the interaction (practitioner, client and/or observer for example) or from a particular theoretical orientation.
10. Finally, "coaching" process researchers might try to contextualise both psychotherapy process and coaching process as complementary strands of research within the broader context of research in "helping relationships"; this would help avoid

unwittingly stigmatising many people who might otherwise be considered pathological and in need of medical (therapeutic) treatment

Risks for Coaching Process Researchers

There are some risks that coaching researchers need to take into account however when drawing on the literature in psychotherapy; for example:

1. While assuming in the literature discussed in this chapter that there are fundamental similarities between psychotherapy and coaching, some authors emphasise what they consider to be important differences between psychotherapy and coaching (e.g. Favorite, 1995; Jatska and Ratey, 2004). Cox (2012) has also argued that the two fields of practice are different and highlights how coaching draws on a range of particular traditions in addition to psychotherapy, including adult learning development, business practice and organizational change. There is therefore a need to consider carefully the relevance of methods, techniques, classifications and concepts used in psychotherapy
2. If coaching researchers draw on methodologies, research techniques, organizing frameworks, taxonomies and prior findings from psychotherapy, there is the risk that coaching research simply repeat lessons without the creation of any new knowledge; a need to develop a unique and distinct body of academic knowledge and practice has been highlighted in the literature (e.g. Hamlin et al, 2008).
3. There is also a risk that a process which might arguably be conceptualised as a meaning-making interaction and one readily understood through the use of everyday concepts becomes reconstituted in a veil of theoretical language derived from

psychotherapy process; we are reminded of Kaye's (1992) warning not to privilege scientific discourse

3.0 Chapter 3 Research Philosophy and Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research philosophy underpinning the research undertaken in this Inquiry. It is also to outline the research methods used. Part 1 of this chapter will focus on the social constructionist approach adopted. It will include a discussion of the importance of discourse and meaning making in the social constructionist perspective. It will situate the research in relation to alternative ontological and epistemological assumptions which I will argue can still be incorporated within a social constructionist understanding providing alternative frameworks are considered as perspectives rather than epistemologically privileged and authoritative ways to access what might be conceptualised as *truth*. In Part 2, I will begin by outlining the methods used in the Inquiry (Q Methodology, Interpersonal Process Recall (Elliott, 1986), Unstructured Interviews and Observer Groups). I will then explain how I used the Coaching Process Q-Set (Bachkirova et al, 2012) in the Inquiry and provide brief details of what this tool is and how it was used. I will then focus on the specifics of the research design including decisions in relation to sampling and involvement of research participants. After discussing the details of the design, I will outline the data collection and analysis methods. Towards the end of Part 2, I will discuss quality and ethical issues. Throughout this chapter I have tried to identify my own voice in the Inquiry. What I mean by this is I have made an attempt to apply my own sense-making of existing paradigms and research methods and apply them to address the research questions I posed at the outset. In doing so, I have used a very broad set of research methods and this has necessitated some flexibility and innovation in applying them. However, I argue that a flexible use of methods allows a researcher to gain a breadth and depth of understanding of phenomena, and in the case of the Inquiry, of a coaching session and what can be understood by analysing a coaching session. Moreover, I argue that the research process is always a subjective engagement with a topic of personal interest and what counts is to make explicit one's assumptions and to be mindful of possible limitations. This is part of the

process of finding one's own voice but also one that acknowledges the need to be transparent about what that voice is claiming and on what grounds.

3.1.0 PART 1:

The first part of this chapter will outline the ontological and epistemological assumptions which provide a backcloth to this thesis. I will begin by outlining my general philosophical position. I will then consider this position in the context of understanding a coaching session. This will lead to a discussion on the importance of perspective taking when designing research, the importance of discourse in this thesis and the relevance of social constructionism in therapy. This later consideration is important because it sets the scene for considering the relevance of social constructionism in coaching. I will provide an overall summary of the first part of the chapter before proceeding to the second part which will look at methods more specifically.

3.1.1 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

The philosophical orientation in this thesis has taken its point of departure from the literature on social constructionism. This is a very broad church and one that is made all the more difficult to demarcate owing to the usage of similar philosophical orientations, research methodologies and concepts described variously as social constructivism, constructivism, interpretivism, relativism or post-modernism. The aim in this section is simply to make clear my own philosophical position rather than offer a treatise on conceptual differences. My choice of social *constructionism* in preference to the similar notion of social *constructivism* is based largely on my own reading in this field which tends to favour the term social constructionism (Gergen, 1999; Gergen, 1998; Burr, 2003; Parker, 1998; Shotter, 1993; Edley, 2001b).

There are no authoritative definitions of social constructionism. Definitions are situated in a realist philosophical framework and are attempts to capture what would be argued from a social constructionist perspective as ineffable features of the world that would be considered

to exist independently of the transitory, historical and culturally relevant meanings that we use to make sense of experience. Many writers who tend to adopt what might be considered a social constructionist orientation (see the list provided at the bottom of the previous page) adopt different ways of conceptualising and approaching their subject matter. However, these writers tend to share broad similarities in their ontological and epistemological assumptions.

One shared understanding is that there is nothing in the world that exists independently of the way we might make sense of whatever we wish to focus our attention upon. Tables are only tables because in most world dominant cultures we have an understanding of what a table is and what purpose it stands for. Likewise, constructs such as *beliefs*, *emotions*, *sensations*, *cognitions*, *values* and even *shared understandings* only *exist* in the ways that we understand them because language provides us with a vocabulary for giving meaning to aspects of experience (Burr, 2003). The very words on this page are derived from a shared cultural understanding. From a social constructionist perspective, it can be argued that *concepts* are taken to be social constructions, ways of making sense of our experience and for communicating with others. *Concepts* do not accurately reflect reality because there is no reality that exists independently of how we choose to make sense of it.

Social constructionism is often criticised for suggesting that there is no real world beyond language; that a *tree* as much as a *belief* is nothing other than a linguistic construction. From this critique, social constructionism becomes tarred with the typical anti-relativist and post-modernist critique that there is only *perspective*. I would argue that this is a misunderstanding of the spirit of social constructionism. It is only possible to have a perspective because there is something in the material world about which we can have a perspective. However any object of our attention is always open to multiple interpretations; even the boundaries of the object upon which we focus our attention are always open to change. For example, when we look at the open countryside, we can look at a tree as something existing separately within the landscape or as an indistinguishable part of the

landscape. A tree can be conceptualised from multiple frames of reference; for example as an object of art, as a fuel source or as a biological entity. A tree will take on different meanings for anyone looking at a tree; for some people it will be associated perhaps with happy childhood memories; for some cultures, the association will be with ancestral spirits.

These points may seem obvious and compatible with a realist framework. One might argue that *real* objects in the world can always be understood from different frames of reference but that each perspective helps build an overall understanding of a given phenomenon; for example, it is only by looking at a building from 360 degrees that the overall features of a building can be known. However, from a social constructionist perspective, objects in the world take on particular meanings always derived from cultural, social and historical frames of reference available in language. Rather than gaining a more comprehensive understanding of phenomena, different perspectives present alternative constructions for understanding phenomena. Different perspectives contribute perhaps to a richer or more sophisticated understanding of the world we experience around us.

Whether one talks of trees or emotions, from a social constructionist perspective, these concepts are always open to multiple understandings and any attempt to provide a single, universal and time-immemorial definition is illusory. However, this does not mean that “objects” don’t exist in a materialist sense; just that we can understand them differently and our frames of reference for understanding them will inform how we will act towards them.

These points are made by Gergen, 1990:

“This does not mean that there is nothing outside language, nothing beyond what we make it out to be. However, it does argue that because our conjoint formulations of what is the case are typically embedded within our patterns of action, our formulations are enormously important in constructing our future” (p.5).

Social constructionism does sensitize us to be wary of concepts which might only *appear* to exist as entities independently of our own sense-making processes. For example, in

everyday language we assume that a range of *mental* concepts such as *attitudes, beliefs, values, memories* and *personality* exist just as much as we assume that concepts such as *tree, pain* or *Manchester* exist. Objects in the material world do differ. Pain is commonly described as a felt sensation or as an experience and Manchester is somewhere we might travel to. There are therefore boundaries to objects in the material world and the scope of possibilities for how we might engage with them or experience them. These boundaries are however much more blurred from within a social constructionist framework than from within a realist framework. It becomes very difficult, for example, to draw boundaries between what in language seem similar constructs such as *beliefs, attitudes, values* or *emotions*. It also seems unclear how one might draw a clear boundary between *pain* and *pleasure*. Ask any sadomasochist! It might also be difficult to distinguish when a particular design of a *chair* might better be understood as a *table* or when a *prophetic vision* becomes *madness*, or be better understood as a *neurological condition* or simply as a *worldview*. How we make sense of phenomena will always be influenced by cultural understandings.

It is only when we try to make clear demarcations across phenomena that we acknowledge the difficulty in circumscribing phenomena. Phenomena only become clearly demarcated to the extent that we have concepts expressed in language that allow us to make claims of clear demarcations. However as our constructs will always be subject to change as societies and cultures change over time, and even as we might contest differences in any point in time, there will always be alternative concepts for making sense of the phenomena we experience.

The outline presented so far in this section of social constructionism is relevant in this thesis because the whole Inquiry is focused on different ways of making sense of a *coaching session*. By outlining the social constructionist paradigm, and my own position in the context of this house with many rooms, my own philosophical position becomes clearer. The next section will briefly outline the subject of my Inquiry from a social constructionist framework.

3.1.2 Describing the Research Focus from a social constructionist perspective: a coaching session

A coaching session, first of all, is understood to *exist* in the sense that it is understood as a practice that can be readily distinguishable from other activities such as going shopping or climbing a tree. However, when one tries to provide sharper definitions around coaching that might differentiate it from what might be considered neighbouring disciplines such as consultancy, psychotherapy, counselling and career counselling, the task can appear challenging. It is, of course, possible to try to make demarcations around these neighbouring disciplines (e.g. Cox, 2013) but one always risks constructing artificial and simplistic distinctions such as ‘counselling is about dealing with one’s past’ or ‘dealing with emotional problems’ and ‘consultancy is about giving advice’ particularly when there are so many different genres, traditions and contexts in which coaching takes place and so many coaches who are trained and experienced in counselling and who reflect these experiences in their practice. Of course, there may be differences in emphasis or typicality and attempts to draw distinctions and boundaries will no doubt continue to be made. However, an effort to make differentiations seems to suggest the complexity in arriving at clearly demarcated boundaries. My argument is that this is because of the futility of the challenge of attempts to define *actual* boundaries across phenomena rather than any lack of clarity about what coaching is, as opposed to many other professional practices. Other practices only gain authority and the appearance of definitional boundaries because they are regulated; that is they are institutionalised and this gives them an appearance of uniqueness and universality. Coaching has not been institutionalised in the same way for example as *psychotherapy* or *legal advocacy*. It is for this reason that attempts to define coaching can appear to be complicated.

In this Inquiry, definitional problems were prominent from the outset. It was unclear, for example, whether the sessions I recorded could legitimately be described as *coaching sessions* rather than some other form of intervention; also whether the sessions might best

be categorised as “developmental,” “skills” or “performance coaching”; or whether the sessions investigated might best be classified as “executive” or “leadership” coaching sessions for example. I was often asked to clarify what I had actually recorded at seminars and conferences. Definitional issues were particularly blurred in that four of the six sessions that I studied were *one-off* engagements to which I invited people I identified as *coaches* and separately, others I identified as *clients* to take part in what I referred to as a *coaching session*. Neither clients nor coaches questioned what I meant by a coaching session as they either worked as coaches or had some shared understanding of what that term meant. In this context, the terms themselves situate coaching in a business discourse of commercial transactions between practitioners and clients.

The engagements I organized were considered *coaching sessions* within the scope of the study because this was what the coaches and clients were asked to participate in and this is what the participants understood they were doing. They were defined by a common understanding. The content of two of the sessions recorded in the Inquiry related in part to career decisions (although not as the sole focus of the conversations). This suggested that what happened in the sessions might also be understood from a career counselling perspective. The clients varied in their seniority but all spoke of work related concerns. However, in the sessions, broader life issues were sometimes discussed; this suggested some similarities with life-coaching. In one session, the focus of the conversation seemed to relate to learning networking skills and public speaking; in another session, the focus was much more on the person’s values. The sessions did therefore seem to express overlaps with the many extant definitions in the literature that have attempted to demarcate different contexts and genres of coaching associated with organizations (e.g. leadership coaching, performance coaching, executive coaching, etc.).

It was not really that clear if the sessions could clearly be demarcated from therapy in that one of the coaches was particularly concerned about her client’s sense of wellbeing (how his current work situation was so out of line with his values that it was making him unhappy). An

observer highlighted a cathartic therapeutic dimension to this session, which seemed to indicate a least some possible therapeutic element. The focus of the session was however about the client's career choices so the focus was arguably more on work decisions than emotions or values in and of themselves. From a social constructionist perspective, and as should be clear from the earlier discussion, difficulties in distinguishing boundaries is to be expected and perhaps made all the more pronounced when an element of stage-management in constructing coaching sessions is applied (i.e. organizing one-off sessions outside of a specific organizational context or outside an on-going contracted programme of coaching). I have therefore tried to use a very simple description for circumscribing the subject of the Inquiry by referring to the engagements recorded as "coaching sessions" as this was readily understood to be the case by all participants and neither coach nor client in any way, described them as being anything other than coaching sessions. However, I am also trying to make the point that the difference seems to be as much about how one makes sense of what one is doing (coaching as something which is socially constructed) rather than necessarily any clear boundaries existing in an objective sense that clearly differentiates one practice from another.

3.1.3 Perspective Taking as a Research Design

The social constructionist perspective is relevant in this thesis because it is based on the assumption that whenever one considers any topic of interest, it will always be from a particular perspective; be this the perspective of the coach, client or a group of observers be this from the perspective of different research methods or be this from the perspective of different epistemological assumptions. In the latter case for example, I argue from a social constructionist perspective that it is possible to make sense of the world through the lens of phenomenology, through the lens of realism or from the perspective of any other ontological and epistemological framework. However, from a social constructionist perspective, any alternative ontological or epistemological framework is just a perspective or a lens for making sense of the world we experience. If a phenomenological study claims to reveal

something about subjective reality or if a realist perspective claims to clearly identify a particular phenomenon and its causal relationships with other phenomena, then rather than assuming that these studies have identified *the truth* about phenomena; they would be understood as providing *a way* (and only a way) of making sense of the world around us. However, this would not mean that these perspectives do not have any value. I suggest that a social constructionist perspective is able to tolerate other epistemologies because they can be constructed as ways of make sense of the world around us; not as ineffable truths but as frameworks for meaning-making.

3.1.4 Discourse

The concept of *Discourse* is central to social constructionism and is particularly relevant in the context of this Inquiry. Burr (2003) describes a discourse as follows:

“...a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event, person or class of persons, a particular way of representing it in a certain light” (p.64).

This description suggests that *discourse* refers to persuasive and constructed accounts of reality; about *what is* and *what is not*. There is also an implicit sense of morality (normalising values) and a sense of the way things are understood and presented to be in Burr’s (2003) description. In order to illustrate this sense of a discourse, Burr (2003) gives the example of discourses on fox hunting; one that promotes foxhunting as pest control and another as an immoral sport. Advocates of both positions construct a picture of what is right and wrong. From a social constructionist perspective, discourses are important conceptually because they present alternative constructions of reality which are based in socially shared understandings.

Foucault (1972, p49) focuses on the relevance of action in discourses. He refers to discourses as “practices which form the objects of which they speak” by which he

emphasised how all activities including declarative statements construct the way the world is understood to be and this process has practical consequences. Butler (1999) who has been greatly influenced by the writing of Foucault gives the example of how when a baby is born, the midwife might typically raise the baby and declare that “this is a girl” (p.15). This very act is a way of proclaiming gender constructions from the first moments of life. We are born into a world of discourse that shapes the way we make sense of the world and the world makes sense of us. Through our actions we give expression to existing discourses and help shape new discourses. Foucault (1978) argues, however, that there will always be resistance to dominant discourses which is how new discourses emerge over time.

The above descriptions of discourse suggest that when, as researchers we interview participants, what we tend to hear are the *expressions of discourse* rather than *individual thoughts* expressed by individual research participants. We hear how existing discourses *speak through* individuals rather than how individuals express their own *individual views* about a topic of interest (Burr, 2003). In interviewing coaches in this study, either as observers or as facilitators of coaching sessions, the assumption made was therefore that they were reflecting discourses about what coaching is and how it should be practised. Disagreements with dominant perspectives represent resistance to existing typical constructions or what we might refer to as *local discourses* (i.e. existing within a wider community of coaches and may relate to specific practices such as the role of advice-giving) rather than reflecting broader social discourses (e.g. such as a discourse of liberty, freedom or gender). However broader social discourses (e.g. humanism, managerialism, individualism, etc.) are also likely to be expressed in the accounts of coaches as we are all subject to wider social discourses. Clients also speak from the position of clients contracting coaching; they too are exposed to discourses of coaching through their participation in organizational life where they may be familiar with the practice of coaching as part of leadership and personal development.

The long-established philosophical tradition beginning with Descartes's positioning of thought preceding language, is directly challenged by the notion of discourse. Rather than treating spoken communication (e.g. the accounts of research participants) as reflecting the private thoughts of individuals, discourse reflects pre-existing socially constructed ways of making sense of the world; spoken language becomes a social rather than an individual construct.

There is a diverse breadth and depth of writing in discourse analysis and the intention in this section is not to attempt to map the landscape of this challenging field; only to make clear my position in using my construction of discourse. I also acknowledge that rather than describing the way coaches express discourses about coaching in any spoken account provided, one could simply argue that coaches are expressing dominant views and beliefs about coaching. Any challenge to these dominant views can simply be described as *debates* in coaching. These terms are more consistent with a realist paradigm. The terms *discourse* and *debate* and separately, *discourse* and *viewpoint* are both describing the same objects of our attention (phenomena) but express different epistemological and ontological assumptions. If we use the words *views* or *beliefs*, then epistemologically, we assume that we are finding out what is going on in the *mind* of the individual. If we use the word *debate*, we are assuming that different individual views are to a greater or lesser extent shared or contested. If by contrast, we use the words *discourse*, the emphasis moves from the private to the social realm. This is what is meant by discourses *speaking through* individuals. We are of course conscious that we are voicing what we might describe as views and beliefs. However, epistemologically, there is a much stronger sense of identifying social rather than individual phenomena when we use the term *discourse*.

Some social constructionist writers might use discursive research methods that focus at a micro-analytical level of analysis; others tend to focus on wider social discourses and underpinning ideologies that seem far removed from everyday interactions. Burr (2003) refers to these approaches respectively as *Micro* and *Macro* social constructionism. A key distinction between the two approaches is that micro social constructionism assumes that

individuals can make use of linguistic resources to present a particular version of events; this is a process that is done consciously. This is a relevant concept in the Inquiry as the assumption is being made, consistent with what Burr (2003) describes as micro-constructionism, that individuals are not just puppets of broader social and local discourses. There is a sense that individuals can use linguistic resources rather than simply being determined by them.

One prominent writer working at a level of micro-social constructionism is Edley (2001a) who for example has described how men when speaking about sex will consciously position themselves in relation to a wide range of local discourses about sex (*local* in the sense that the topic is relatively circumscribed in relating to men and how men talk about sex). Similarly, Wetherell and Potter (1988) focus on how speakers will position themselves with respect to different discourses on race depending upon the situational context in which they find themselves. Both Edley (2001b) and Wetherell and Potter (1988) contextualise their research within the research framework of *discursive psychology* which acknowledges the role of the individual as a conscious user of discourses. They refer to the variety of local discourses as *interpretative repertoires*, by which they draw an analogy with how for example a person can draw on a range of ways of talking about a particular topic, just as a ballerina might draw on a range of different patterns of movement.

The spirit of social constructionism will be prevalent in the Inquiry rather than a rigid adherence to terms such as “interpretative repertoires,” “micro” or “macro” social constructionism. This Inquiry is intended to be broad ranging, to provide a broad exploration of the coaching process and the use of specific terminology can tend to constrain what can and cannot be addressed in an investigation. In keeping with the standpoint of a tolerance of multiple perspectives in social constructionism, all terms used can be considered simply as ways of making sense of our experience. What I consider to be important in this Inquiry is to try to convey a sense of what is related in the accounts of all research participants which are always open to multiple interpretations; these interpretations include considering

something as a *discourse* (social constructionist epistemology) or as a *debate* (realist epistemology).

I will also typically use the terms “account,” “perspective” or “viewpoint” intermittently and frequently in this thesis as opposed to the “interview” or the “thoughts” of the research participants. This is because these words tend not presuppose any private language on the part of the participant or to reflect any actual representation of how something might *be*. A perspective or viewpoint, for example, can simply represent how something appears from a particular vantage point; not necessarily how something *is*. Similarly, an account suggests that a version of an event can be something constructed (by the individual and through wider social discourses) whereas the “thoughts” of an individual suggest that there is no active process of construction.

3.1.5 Social Constructionism in Therapy

In keeping with the assumption in this Inquiry that a great deal can be learned from the literature on psychotherapy about the nature and practice of coaching, this section will briefly consider the relevance of the social constructionist approach in therapy. The relevance of social constructionism in therapy was considered in the previous chapter. The intention in this chapter section is to indicate how the principles of social constructionism applied in therapy can be applied methodologically in this Inquiry.

One writer who amply illustrates what I would describe as the spirit of social constructionism in therapy is Anderson (1997) who outlines six philosophical assumptions underpinning her approach:

1. “Human systems are language and meaning-generating systems
2. Constructions of reality are forms of social action rather than independent individual mental processes
3. An individual mind is a social composition, and self, therefore, becomes a social, relational composition

4. The reality and meaning that we attribute to ourselves and others and to the experiences and events of our lives are interactional phenomena created and experienced by individuals in conversation and action (through language) with one another and themselves
5. Language is generative, gives order and meaning to our lives and our world, and functions as a form of social participation
6. Knowledge is relational and is embodied and generated in language and our everyday practices” (p.3)

Anderson outlines the meaning behind these principles over the course of almost three hundred pages, so it is difficult to do justice to the spirit of her approach. These principles are implicit in most of the points already highlighted in this chapter: that meaning making and language lie at the heart of social constructionism; that reality is socially constructed; that our sense of self is the product of our inter-relations with others and our cultural heritage; that language and action are closely related and that language is a form of action; that meaning resides between individuals rather than within the individual and that therapy is a collaborative process. Other social constructionist therapists include Kenneth and Mary Gergen and Tom Anderson. These writers among others were considered in the literature review. They all share in emphasising the relevance of meaning-making which will be a key feature of the methodological approach. This means that in the Inquiry, I will in particular be interested in how the research participants make sense of what they describe and that meaning-making between client and coach will be of particular importance.

3.1.6 Summary of Part 1

In the first part of this Chapter, I have outlined my allegiance to social constructionism and outlined my particular position with respect to this overall paradigm and how it will apply to the research approach adopted in this Inquiry. Specifically, the assumptions made are as follows:

- That when coaches as research participants respond in interviews, they are expressing local and broader social discourses; local discourses refer to how the practice of coaching is constructed; discourses may be specific to a particular group of coaches from a particular coaching tradition or more generally shared across many different coaches; challenges to existing discourses are understood as expressions of resistance which have the capacity to become assimilated into existing discourses or to challenge and replace them; new discourses represent new ways of constructing coaching practice
- That from a realist perspective, discourses are understood as opinions, beliefs, assumptions and similar terminology that give more emphasis to the individual in holding their own individual views; aggregations of individual views reflect collective opinions, beliefs and assumptions; wherever dominant opinions, beliefs and assumptions are challenged, there is scope for new debates to take place which may lead to a more effective way of practising coaching
- That given that it has been argued that a realist perspective can be understood from within a social constructionist framework; that is as an interpretive perspective rather than as a reflection of how the world is; the Inquiry will be tolerant of considering a realist framework while making clear that realism is just a perspective rather than a reflection of reality

- That not only do discourses speak through individuals but also that individuals are users of discourse and can adopt particular positions with respect to discourses
- That meaning is central to social constructionism; rather than focusing on understanding causal mechanisms that impact on other phenomena either in a linear or systemic way; central to any social constructionist research Inquiry is to discover how research participants work with meaning; that is how they construct the social realities they experience

Having outlined the epistemological and ontological assumptions in this Chapter and having broadly outlined what the reader is likely to find over the course of reading the findings from this Inquiry, I will in the next section discuss the research methods used.

3.2.0 Part 2: Research Design

The second part of this chapter will consider in depth the research design employed in this Inquiry. I will begin by outlining the principles of the research design and the options that were considered possible. I will then consider the data collection methods and then the data analysis methods. The section on data collection methods will consider the use of interpersonal process recall, interviews and observer groups. The early sections will explain these methods. I will also outline how these approaches were integrated in an overall coherent approach. I will then outline in some detail Q-methodology as a key method of data collection. I will then return to some of these methods but in order to explain how they were administered. I will also consider the relevance of conducting a pilot study and ethical issues. I will then consider data analysis.

3.2.1. Principles of Research Design

The purpose of the Inquiry was to consider what could be learned about the coaching process by analysing a coaching session from multiple-perspectives. This was purposively a very broad focus. It seemed that very many different research methods would be able to

contribute to addressing the research topic. For example, it would be possible from a realist perspective to design a research instrument that might be able to identify and quantify particular types of behavioural interactions including types of verbal expressions. There were also in existence already established assessment tools and methodological approaches that had been identified in the literature review. There was scope to build on the emerging literature on critical moments in coaching sessions using the critical incident technique. There were grounds for conducting a phenomenological analysis of how the coaching process had been experienced by coach and client. There was also the possibility of understanding the coaching session in relation to the practice of coaching as a socially constructed phenomenon. Foucault (1988) for example has considered therapy as an institutional practice and Cushman (1996) has also provided an extensive review of how psychotherapy has emerged over time in America. This Inquiry could attempt to parallel those studies but with respect to coaching rather than therapy/psychotherapy. Wilber's (2007) conceptualisation of methodological pluralism seemed to suggest scope for multiple ways of constructing and researching any phenomenon and could readily (and did initially) provide a conceptual framework for addressing the Inquiry. The alternative ways of investigating a coaching session seems to be endless.

Reflections on methodology led me to choose an approach that would allow for a very broad range of perspectives in making sense of the coaching process. This is consistent with the original research question. This would be based on the following principles:

1. Adopting different experiential perspectives (e.g. that of the client, the coach and observers); there was also precedent for this approach in psychotherapy
2. Adopting different epistemological assumptions (e.g. considering how a session might look from a behavioural perspective, a phenomenological perspective or a discursive perspective); this process would also include analysing the session at different levels of analysis (more micro and macro levels of analysis)

3. Adopting different research methods (e.g. considering what might be learned about a coaching session by using a range of qualitative and quantitative techniques: in this case the assumption being made is that the methods used construct what is found)

In following these broad principles, it is possible to provide a very rich and broad exploration of the coaching process. In the following sections, I will outline the specific data collection methods used. This section will focus on the types of data collection methods and techniques used as well as the rationale for their selection.

3.2.2.0 Data Collection Methods

At the design stage, Q methodology seemed to offer a timely and pragmatic research design choice. The detail of Q methodology will be described in more depth shortly. My intention initially is to provide an overview of the data collection methods and too much description of this method will detract from this purpose. In brief, Q methodology typically involves asking research participants to rank-order a series of statements describing a topic of interest and then in the analysis phase interpreting how participants ranked those items drawing on patterns of statistical correlation (i.e. comparing how participants rank-ordered items relative to others). At the time of preparing my research proposal, I had been participating in the development of a tool (: the Coaching Process Q-Set, Bachkirova et al., 2012) designed to analyse a coaching session using Q methodology. The initial research project set out to develop and test the tool. The tool provides eighty written descriptors of typical coaching sessions. These descriptors had been validated as representing a comprehensive range of typical characteristics of coaching sessions in the development and testing of the tool (coaches were asked to use the descriptors to rate an imagined session that they would typically conduct; also to comment on any notable absences in descriptors). This initial study suggested that the tool held some value for analysing coaching sessions. The next step in the process would be to use the tool to investigate actual coaching sessions. A Q methodological approach would also seem to offer both the possibility of interpreting

coaching sessions at micro and broader levels of analysis, meeting the need to evaluate the coaching session at different levels of analysis and from different epistemological perspectives. That is coach, client and observers could be asked to rate a coaching session by sorting the eighty descriptors in relation to their experience/ observation of the session (i.e. in principle, the sorting process could be used to identify something about their phenomenological experience of being coached, coaching or observing a coaching session). At the same time, the sorting process, in principle, could be used to try to identify actual differences in how coach, client and observers rated the session (i.e. to identify in a more realist/objective sense what the coach and client did/ didn't do (and created between them such as the atmosphere in the session) by comparing ratings across the participants (this would be a more behavioural level of analysis). The same process could also in principle provide some scope for analysing the sorting of the items from a more interpretive perspective; that is to make inferences about what meanings or values were being expressed in the patterns of sorting expressed by the participants.

This latter perspective would go beyond trying to understand and describe the experience of being coached, coaching or observing a coaching session in two different ways. First, the sorting of the items could be used as a basis for understanding the meaning-making process occurring between coach and client. For example, if the coach was perceived by the client to be very argumentative, then the client might use the descriptors to capture this sense of the coach being argumentative. This latter perspective is more overtly social constructionist in the emphasis it gives to the meaning making process. Secondly, the sorting of the items could also, in principle, reveal something about the dominant discourses (also a social constructionist perspective) and debates (realist perspective) prevailing within the coaching community. These possibilities are described in the Table 3.1 below, together with their potential for making both an academic contribution to knowledge and a contribution to practice.

Table 3.1: Research Design Possibilities: Epistemological Assumptions, Contribution to Knowledge and Practice

	Behavioural/Realist Perspective (Micro level)	Phenomenological Perspective	Social Constructionist Perspective (Micro level)	Social Constructionist Perspective (Macro level)	Realist Perspective (Macro level)
Epistemological Assumptions	The sorting patterns express observed events actually occurring in the coaching session	The sorting patterns express the experience of being coached (client perspective), coaching (coach perspective) or observing a coaching session (observer perspective)	The sorting patterns express the meaning making process occurring between coach and client (how one person interprets the interventions of the other and makes sense of their own interventions or interprets their ways of being in the session); this can be perceived. Interpretations of the interactions can be made by coach, client and observers	The sorting patterns express broader discourses existing within the coaching community and society about how coaching should be practised.	The sorting patterns express debates about how coaching should be practised
Contribution to academic Knowledge	Understanding what can be considered to happen in a coaching session	Understanding what it feels like to be coached, coach or observe a coaching session	Understanding the importance of meaning-making in the coaching process	Understanding how broader discourses influence the practice of coaching	Understanding what issues need to be addressed to improve the practice of coaching
Contribution to Practice	Helping coaches understand what they might need to do differently (e.g. feedback)	Coaches can understand their own impact more clearly and what they might need to do to respond to this experience. Providing insight into the experience of coaches so that coach trainers can help them manage any tensions and issues experienced	Coaches can use the meaning making process as a resource to help the client progress the issues brought to coaching	Coaches and educators can challenge existing norms in order to improve the overall client experience of being coached	Development of answers to further the effectiveness of coaching (e.g. through further research)

3.2.2.1 Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR)

Consistent with the research objectives and in accordance with principle 2 (above), I did not want to be constrained to only one research instrument and approach. I therefore decided to include in the research design Interpersonal process recall. Interpersonal Process Recall

(IPR) is a qualitative research technique which attempts to gather the recollections of participants in relation to an event as soon after the event as possible. The technique was developed by Bloom and Heyns (1956) for exploring student thought processes but it was first used in psychotherapy research by Kagan (1984) and has been used since extensively in psychotherapy process research and in particular by Elliott and associates (: Elliott, 1983; Elliott et al., 1994; Elliott, 1986; Elliott and Shapiro, 1988; Elliott and James, 1989a; Rhodes et al., 1994) Typically, integral to the application of the technique is the use of video material. For example, at the end of a session of psychotherapy, a therapist and client are asked to view sections of a video-recording and asked to describe what was happening during the moments of the recording.

In my own research, I was less interested in identifying specific events in a session as my unit of analysis was a whole coaching session. I also did not want to impose the frame of reference onto the participants that a coaching session might be about identifying significant events. I therefore decided to ask participants (coaches observing sessions as well as the coach and client) to freely recall what they remembered about the coaching session with particular reference to “what stood out for them about the session”. This was intended to give the participants the opportunity to construct the session as a series of specific events or more holistically.

3.2.2.2 Interviews

One problem with IPR however, as a research technique, is that I did not expect the free recall of the session to last for very long. IPR alone would restrict the quantity of potentially useful data that could be collected in the form of spoken accounts. For the coach and client (each interviewed separately), I therefore decided to conduct an unstructured interview after an initial unprompted recall of what appeared salient in the session. The interviews would be unstructured in order to allow participants autonomy in continuing with their own frames of reference about what had stood out for them in the session. In practice, this would mean

adopting a non-directive coaching style of interviewing, asking research participants to elaborate on the points they made and keeping my own interventions to a minimum. If another researcher were to try to replicate the process, it would mean asking open questions such as “What do you mean by that?” “Could you say a little more about that...anything else?” “What else stood out for you?”

By keeping the interviews separate for coach and client, neither would impact directly on the other’s account. In this way, the data collected would be more subjective (individual viewpoints rather than a shared coach-client viewpoint co-constructed in a shared interview). This would have provided an interesting perspective but given the findings in the literature review in relation to the supposed Rashomon experience (e.g. Mintz et al., 1973; Elliott and James, 1989b; Stiles and Snow, 1984), it was considered useful to keep these apart.

3.2.2.3 Observer Groups

In order to obtain the observer perspective, I decided to invite professional coaches to observe video recordings of the coaching sessions, the accounts of which had already been provided by coach and client. All coaches and clients had agreed to provide recorded sessions for this purpose. The decision to collect data from observer groups rather than via individual interviews was considered to represent a pragmatic way of identifying dominant views and opinions within groups of coaches. In a group discussion, it was assumed that participants would tend towards common areas of consensus and disagreement in relation to what was commonly understood to be the key aspects of a session worth talking about. The observer group process was also intended to allow space for participants to challenge each other on what was observed and not observed and would likely create debates that would not arise in the absence of challenge in individual interviews. In this way, the group discussion would, in principle, allow the identification of the most salient and contentious issues.

The format of conducting the observer groups was intended to parallel the interviewing of coaches and clients. As in the case of the interviews with coaches and clients, the sessions therefore began with an open question of what stood out as salient: “What stood out for you?” This was then followed by asking exploratory questions in the same manner as in the case of the individual interviews.

The process for conducting the observer groups was more structured than for the individual interviews given the dynamics of groups rather than being able to check understanding on a one to one basis when explaining the process individually. The session began with a formal overview of the process. In order to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to contribute, each participant was asked to provide their own accounts of the session in turn before broadening the discussion to allow anyone to speak at any time. As a researcher and experienced group facilitator, I felt able to pick up on any behavioural indicators of a wish for any participant to express or challenge a particular viewpoint.

3.2.2.4 Coherence in Data Collection Methods

There was, however, what could be considered as an overall coherence in the data collection methods used. Q methodology aims primarily to understand what is considered *salient* from a research participant’s perspective. Participants sort items (e.g. the eighty items in the CPQS) *self-referentially*; that is they rank order items according to what is salient to them, from their own personal perspective. The principle of personal saliency/ subjectivity was therefore a key element of all the data collection techniques. Participants would highlight what was salient to them when freely recalling the session they had observed or had experienced. Similarly, the unstructured interviews would allow participants as much as possible to work from their own frames of reference rather than my own as the researcher. In this way, while a multiple range of data collection methods were used, the overall coherence of the data was achieved by focusing on collecting subjective data (views, opinions, observations, feelings, etc.) primarily at an individual level (coach and client

interviews and sorting of the descriptors) but also at a collective level (in the observer groups but with ample opportunity for individual to voice their own particular viewpoints).

This section has focused primarily on the principles underpinning the research methods and techniques used. In the next section, I will elaborate in some depth on Q methodology as it is less common than interview or group methods for collecting data and needs therefore some elaboration. In a later section, I will provide more detail on the specifics of how the data collection process of Q Methodology, IPA and the unstructured interview process were conducted together. It is not possible to do this without first understanding more about the process of data collection in Q Methodology. I will also provide details on the research participants in a later section.

3.2.2.5. Q-Methodology

Q methodology was developed from the 1930's by William Stephenson, (Stephenson, 1935; Stephenson, 1953; Stephenson, 1936; Stephenson, 1980; Stephenson, 1952) who wanted to develop a methodology for researching subjective viewpoints. Stenner and Stainton Rogers (2004) have argued that Q Methodology is best described as a "qualiquantilogical" approach rather than qualitative or quantitative as it attempts to work with subjectivity rather than objectivity, involves ample interpretation on the part of the researcher and at the same time makes use on statistical techniques.

In Q-methodological studies, research participants (*P Sample*) are typically provided with a set of *stimuli* (Q Set) which they are asked to rank order (*Q Sort*) according to a *specific condition of instruction* (e.g. according to how much they agree/ disagree, like/dislike or consider the stimuli to be characteristic/uncharacteristic of a particular topic, concept or other topic of interest). Typically, the Q-set takes the form of playing sized cards upon which are written 5-10 word statements in relation to a topic of interest. For example, in the CPQS, the following 3 items are written on separate playing style cards:

Q73: Coach Shares her knowledge about topic

Q71: Coach suggests possible solutions

Q51: The session appears highly structured

In using the CPQS, research participants (in principle, coach, client or observers of an actual or imagined coaching session) are asked to Q-sort Q-items according to “what seemed most characteristic to them in describing the session”. They are asked to decide if the coach appeared to be *suggesting possible solutions* more than the coach seemed to be *sharing her knowledge* about a topic. Similarly, each research participant is asked to decide if the session appeared more or less *highly structured* than it seemed that the coach was *suggesting possible solutions* or *sharing her knowledge* about the topic. Given that there are eighty items in the CPQS, a research participant has to make relative judgement calls with respect to all of these eighty items. Those items that stand out the most are considered to represent what the participants consider to be most *characteristic* of the session.

Typically in the Q-sorting process, participants are asked to rate items according to how characteristic the items are in a negative sense as well as in a positive sense. For example, an item such as Q71 might stand out (i.e. be considered *highly characteristic* of a session) because from a participant’s perspective, the coach didn’t *suggest possible solutions*. Some items might not seem from the participant’s perspective to be particular relevant or interesting when describing a coaching session. For example, Q71 might, for whatever reason simply not stand out in a positive or negative sense for the research participant. This would mean that this item would typically be placed in a mid-position in the ranking process as being neither *characteristic nor uncharacteristic*.

Given that some items are likely to stand out as *highly characteristic* of the coaching session, others as *highly uncharacteristic* and yet others as *neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic* of the session, the sorting process broadly categories items in these 3 ways:

- Highly characteristic (most salient in a positive sense)
- Neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic (not salient in any way)
- Highly uncharacteristic (most salient in a negative sense)

In order to simplify the data collection process, particularly when using eighty items, sorting items initially into three piles according to these categories is a relatively easy way of completing an initial sorting of the items. The research participants can then go back and make relative distinctions between twenty-five to thirty items within each of these three broad categories.

This process is further facilitated by asking participants to sort the items into columns with each column representing either more or less salience than an adjacent column. Figure 3.1 provides the actual distribution used in the analysis.

The distribution shows how items can be sorted into eleven columns. In column ele11, a research participant would place the items he/she considers to be the most characteristic of the session; in column 1, he/she would place the items he/she would consider to be the most uncharacteristic of the session. In column 7, the participant would place those items that seemed to say the least about the session. All items that a participant placed in the columns in-between columns 11, 1 and 7 would be more or less characteristic/ uncharacteristic of the session. For example items placed in column 8 would still be considered to be relatively insignificant in relation to how the research participant had made sense of the session but more characteristic than items in column 7. Similarly, items placed in column 2 would stand out in a negative sense as being highly uncharacteristic of the session but a little less so than those items placed in column 1.

By asking research participants to place items into a forced distribution, the subsequent statistical analysis of the data can be simplified. There are fewer items towards the beginning and last columns in order to accentuate perceptual differences between items. This is based on the assumption that fewer items are placed at the ends of a statistical

distribution (Block, 1961). In order to enable a subsequent statistical analysis in the data analysis process, the items are given a numerical rating.

Figure 3.1: Example of a Completed Q-sort

Completed Q-Sort

-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
82	53	47	13	6	9	1	10	5	2	4	41	81
19	54	58	43	8	16	3	17	7	27	30	63	37
	75	64	45	18	83	12	24	11	84	36	80	
(2)	72	70	46	21	29	14	25	15	39	79	77	(2)
		76	59	28	42	20	26	31	40	62		
	(4)	69	60	32	48	22	34	35	75	55	(4)	
			67	44	49	23	65	38	74			
		(6)		51	56	33	66	57		(6)		
			(7)		61	50	68		(7)			
				(8)		52		(8)				
					(9)	78	(9)					
						71						
							(12)					
-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

A research participant is asked to rate q-items relative to one another (statements on playing style cards; each card is given a number 1-84). Those items considered “characteristic” of a session are given the rating of 1, 2,3,4,5 or 6 with 6 representing those items considered to be *most characteristic* of the session. Those items rated as *uncharacteristic* of the session are ranked -1, -2, -3, -4, and -5 with -6 representing those q-items considered most “uncharacteristic” of a session. In the Inquiry, an early version of the CPQS was used which had more items than the final version. The full set of items in in Appendix 8. The pyramid shape is the result of limiting the number of items that can be ranked in the different columns and therefore compels the participants to make subtle discriminations between items. Later in this Chapter, I will refer to a “factor array” which is a factor representation of the viewpoint of a group of research participants (e.g. all coaches, all clients; all coach-observers, etc.). The factor array illustrates the relative positioning of items (ordinal ranking of z scores resulting from the weighted averaging of scores within the data set) and allows a researcher to interpret the overall pattern of sorting expressed by a particular group.

In order to ensure that the participants understood the task, all observers were given a short presentation ahead of completing the Q-sort. Participants appeared to welcome this approach. The same information was provided but verbally to coaches and clients with ample opportunity to provide clarification. The attached presentation used to explain the process is included in Appendix 4.

Highly characteristic was defined in 4 different ways:

1. The extent to which a particular item seemed to characterise the session overall (i.e. an item seemed to encapsulate a/the central overall feature(s) of the session based on frequency or in terms of appearing to provide a dominating backdrop to the session), (**Happened and Characterised the Session**)
2. The extent to which an item stood out because its manifestation seemed very important in the broader context of the session (that is its manifestation seemed to ensure the effectiveness of the coaching process including the development of the coaching relationship), (**Happened and it was important that it did**)
3. The extent to which an item stood out but should not have been expressed or was expressed but inappropriately (i.e. it led to an unsatisfactory coaching process; it impacted negatively on the relationship, etc.). (**Happened but should not have happened or happened in the wrong way**)
4. The extent to which an item stood out because it seemed otherwise salient; for example if an item seemed unusual, interesting or different to what a coach observing a session might normally do and these aspects of the element made the item salient, (**Happened and seemed unusual/unexpected**)

Highly Uncharacteristic was defined inversely to the ways outlined above:

1. The extent to which a particular item seemed to be very **uncharacteristic** of the session (i.e. an item seemed definitely not to encapsulate a/the central overall feature(s) of the session; that is it was infrequent or did not happen in the session or was not a dominating backdrop to the session), (***Didn't happen and did not characterise the session/ characterised the session by its absence***)
2. The extent to which an item stood out because a particular item did not feature in the session but should have featured (that is for example; that it did not occur seemed to ensure the effectiveness of the coaching process including the maintenance of the coaching relationship), (***Did not happen but should not have happened***)
3. The extent to which an item did not happen and should not have happened (***Did not happen and rightly should not have happened***)
4. The extent to which an item stood out because its absence seemed otherwise salient; for example it did not happen but an observer might have expected it to have happened (***Did not happen and it seemed unusual that it didn't***)

Neither Characteristic nor uncharacteristic was defined in terms of being neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic in any of the ways described above.

In order not to overwhelm the participants, they were informed that the key principle was to sort items according to what seemed salient to them in sorting the items. Some items would seem more salient than other items for many reasons; these were the items that they should place as highly characteristic. Some items would also stand out as highly uncharacteristic because they did not happen. Some examples were given to encourage understanding. I

explained that the ways I had suggested that items might differ were only examples and did not have to be followed normatively. Most participants appeared to understand the main principles of the task, if not the specifics of the varying ways in which they might have sorted the items. The physical sorting was done manually on large desks and in the case of the observer groups, spaced out in the rooms used. For the observer groups, I also circulated to help explain the task on an individual basis when asked or when participants seemed to be seeking clarification.

This section has outlined in some depth Q methodology (but only in relation to Q methodology as a data collection technique). I have now outlined the principles of all data collection methods used. In the sections which follow, I will describe how the various data collection methods were co-ordinated, provide details on the research participants and provide details on the coaching sessions used.

3.2.2.6 Selection of Research Participants

The decision was made to analyse six actual coaching sessions. In this way, the data collected would be true to practice rather than derived in a contrived way. The choice of six sessions was a pragmatic decision based on what could reasonably be studied within the scope of a PhD thesis. However, it was also thought that interviews with six coaches and separately six clients would enable the possibility of conducting a meaningful thematic and separately meaningful thematic analysis from within each perspective studied; that is be able to identify shared experiences and meanings that could apply to a wider population. The intention would not be to generalize the findings but it would be to identify shared experiences that could be of relevance in general in coaching and that could be explored further.

I also wanted to analyse more than one session in order to capture something of variety in the individual ways coaches might conduct coaching sessions and differences in coaching practices generally. There were many conceptual possibilities about what sort of coaching

sessions to analyse including stage of coaching (e.g. first, mid-engagement, end session), type of coaching tradition (e.g. psychodynamic, behavioural) employed by the coach and type of coaching genre (performance coaching, developmental coaching, etc.). In practice, I would be reliant on my own network of contacts and on overcoming what seemed like considerable resistance to take part. Possible contributors I identified claimed it would be too invasive and compromise confidentiality. (This was an interesting finding in itself as it suggested something about a discourse of coaching as a private practice). In practice, I therefore identified two coaches who were willing to provide a video-recording of their sessions with actual clients. In the case of four other sessions, I secured the cooperation of four coaches on the condition that I would find four clients who would take part in a one-off session. All participants were identified through personal networks. The coaches were given pseudonyms (henceforth in this thesis: Tristan, Marjorie, Joanne, Alice, Alison and Drew) to protect confidentiality although one coach had only two years of full-time experience; this was Drew who was working as an internal coach. All other coaches had several years of experience and held a range of relevant qualifications. Three of the six coaches had or were working towards doctoral level qualifications in coaching; two of the coaches were qualified to work with clients at a psychotherapeutic level. Most had other relevant professional qualifications (e.g. two coaches as chartered psychologists) and two of the coaches were involved in the assessment and training of coaches. The clients were all keen to be coached and to bring a real issue to the session. All clients were either very familiar or broadly familiar with coaching with the exception of Marjorie's client who had no real awareness of coaching as a practice.

An attempt was made to identify as broad a spectrum as possible of coaches to observe a coaching session. This was intended to capture something of the diversity of practices of coaching. Coaches were chosen because I wanted to understand what aspects of the coaching process the coaches would pick up on and whether there would be similarities or differences in their observations. Their perspective would be one from within the community

of practising coaches. They would be able to make informed comments on their observations and sorting of the descriptors. Other perspectives would have been of interest but qualitatively different (e.g. an academic's perspective, a purchaser's perspective, etc.).

Details of the sessions are provided in Table 3.2. There was no intentional matching of observers to coaches. There were generally practical restrictions on who would be able to participate when. An assumption was made that a group of six coaches (minimum of four and maximum of six) would be appropriate for a useful discussion. Only one session was viewed twice. This was because only two coaches attended the first viewing and more coaches were needed to capture a range of views on the session.

Table 3.2: Participant Details: Coaches and Clients

Session	Coach	Approach	Client	Session Type & duration	Main Content	Observers
1	Tristan	Humanistic / eclectic	Self-employed consultant/marketing professional	Final Session of a series of 6 (90 mins)	Assertiveness, career planning and learning/outcomes of coaching	6 NLP qualified FT internal coaches (large UK organization)
2	Joanne	Humanistic / eclectic	Experienced HR Manager, Services	One-off session (60 mins)	How values might influence career choice	4 highly experienced FT coaches (eclectic)
3	Alison	Gestalt	Experienced HR Manager, manufacturing sector	One-off session (60 mins)	Managing a transition to a new job, new organization	4 experienced coach/consultants qualified in the application of transactional analysis in organizations and in one to one coaching (main session)
4	Marjorie	Humanistic / eclectic	Experienced Lawyer	One-off session (90 mins)	How values might inform career choice	6 experienced coaches (range of backgrounds)
5	Alice	Behavioural	Private sector hospital manager	One-off session (60 mins)	How to network and present more effectively and with confidence	8 experienced coaches (range of backgrounds)
6	Drew (FT Internal coach)	Person-centred	Board Member, large UK publishing company	Mid-engagement	Review of current projects and planning next steps	4 coaches studying for an Masters in coaching (varying levels of experience) and 1 professional development consultant with experience of coaching

3.2.2.7. Data Collection Process

Different types of data were collected: 1) the coaching session (as material for showing to the observer groups); 2) Q Sorts and Interviews (from the clients, coaches and observers). In this section, I will also discuss the process for collecting Q data, the relevance of a pilot study and ethical considerations.

The coaches who would be facilitating the sessions with clients identified by me were given minimal background to the clients. I did not want to introduce preconceptions. Fortunately, they did not request details other than to know that they would be coaching a volunteer. For those coaches and clients meeting for the first time, they were asked to spend a few minutes alone together ahead of the session. This was an ethical decision on my part based on the assumption that coaches and clients would be able to discuss any private contracting issues. I also wanted both participants to be at ease with each other ahead of the process; another ethical and professional consideration.

The coaches were introduced to the room in which they would be coaching ahead of meeting the client. The rooms chosen were as comfortable as possible and typical of many coaching environments. In some cases, professional rooms used for coaching were hired. The coaches were encouraged to set up the room however they wished beforehand and this usually consisted of an arrangement of two chairs about half a metre apart. This process was also intended to mitigate any anxiety on the part of the volunteer coaches.

A professional recording of the session was arranged whereby a cam-recorder (audio and video) was set up and running at the start of the sessions. However, no one was present during the recording other than the coach and client. When the clients came out of the room, the recordings were switched off. Both coaches and clients were asked to conduct their sessions as *actual* rather than as role plays and to run the sessions for an hour or for however long they considered appropriate. This duration was intended to represent actual practice as much as possible. The camera was positioned equidistant to the participants,

approximately 3 metres away from the participants for 5/6 sessions. In the case of one session, two cameras were positioned; one on the client and the other on the coach. This was intended to experiment with the actual recording process and provide more detail of the participants. The recording could then be transferred to juxtapose two images; that is a split-screen effect. The impact of this was to take away the space immediately between the two participants and perhaps therefore some of the interchanging body movements but provided more detail of facial expressions.

The data collection process had to be conducted to meet the time constraints of the participants. In three cases (sessions 2, 3 & 4), the clients and the coaches were interviewed within 48 hours of the coaching session. In two cases (session 5 & 6), the client was interviewed and completed a Q sort while the coach waited; in another case (session 1), the coach completed a Q-sort while the client was interviewed and then the client completed the Q sort from home the following day and was given written details about how to complete the task.

All coaches and clients typically completed the Q sorting after the interview. While the interview process would likely impact on how the Q-items would be sorted, this was an inevitable part of the process conducted by a single researcher. However, given that there were a substantial number of q-items to sort, the reflective interview process was likely to help prompt the sorting process; it would arguably be more considered.

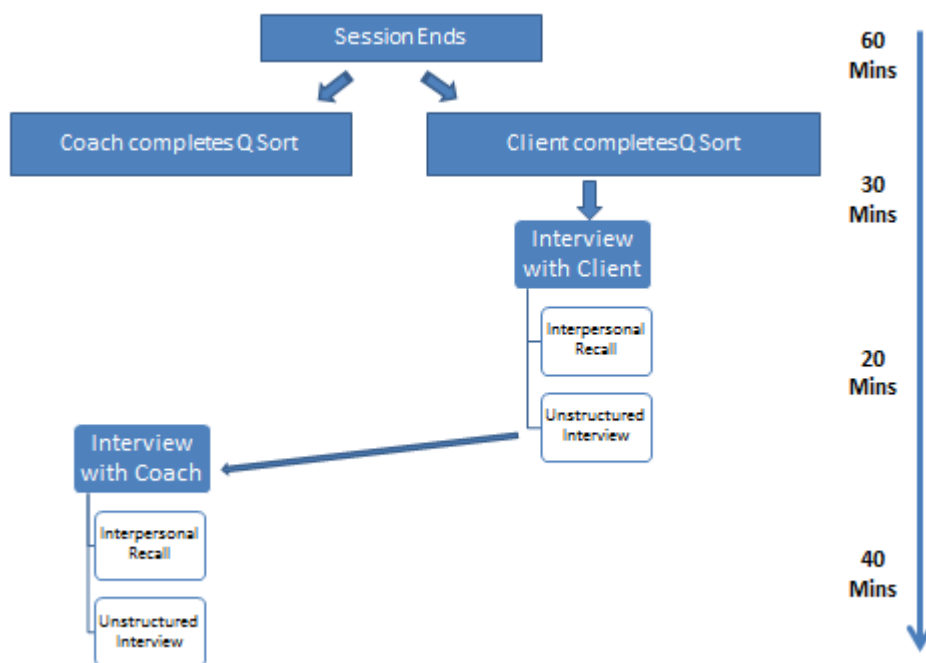
The interviews with the coaches (including the initial IPR/free recall of the session) lasted typically around 60 minutes; the interviews with clients lasted around 10 – 45 minutes depending on how much time the clients were able to give and that seemed to produce a freely flowing conversation. All interviews were recorded using a digital auditory recorder.

In the case of the observer groups, all coach-observers were asked to complete Q Sorts immediately after viewing a recording of the session and before taking part in open discussions. This was intended to maximise the expression of individual viewpoints in the Q

Sorts which would otherwise have likely been unduly influenced by the group discussion. Having completed the sorting process, the open discussions typically lasted for an hour although almost two hours in the case of session 4.

The typical data collection process for the coaches and clients is illustrated in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3: Data Collection Process: Coaches and Clients



In the observer groups, the videos of the recording sessions were shown in full in order to ensure that all participants would be able to identify and talk about the same content.

However, in the case of session 1, 15 minutes of the first session was edited out between 10 and 25 minutes of the actual session which had lasted 90 minutes as the participants did not have time to view the whole recording. This part of the tape was taken out on my judgement call that this part of the session involved the client doing most of the talking with minimal intervention on the part of the coach in the session. It relates to Tristan's session and this issue will be discussed when discussing his session in depth in later chapters. In the case of one session, there was a problem with the audio-visual equipment (part of the challenge of using so many different rooms) in spite of seeking the help of a technician. This meant that

the sound of the conversation was not as loud as it would have been under ideal conditions. The sound was still loud enough however to hear the spoken exchanges but might have impacted for example on the perception of energy in the session for example. All video recordings were projected on standard classroom type large screens. In most cases, a classroom type environment was used but laid out to try to encourage open discussion (cabaret style).

The observer groups were also conducted more formally than were the individual interviews. It involved a phased approach. The format included an initial presentation to contextualise the research. This was followed by a viewing of the recording, a formal presentation to outline the Q-sorting process and then the interview process. The process typically started by asking each participant in turn to provide an overview of what had stood out for them in the session (stage 1). This was followed by a more general open discussion (stage 2). In a third stage, the observers were asked to explain how they had each sorted the Q-items which in turn led to a more general discussion prompted by how each observer had sorted the Q-items. All discussions were audio-recorded. The process took approximately 3 - 4 hours per observer group; this included up to 90 minutes to view the sessions; 45 minutes to complete the sorting process and one hour to discuss the sessions and a short break for refreshments. Up to 30 minutes was also given to explaining the sorting process and introducing the CPQS/ background to the research. A similar time commitment was needed for coaches and clients although part of this was intentionally of immediate benefit for the clients and less time was given to formal explanation.

Each participant was asked to sort the cards in columns on a large table. The photograph in Appendix 7 illustrates a completed Q-sort. Each participant was asked to put the cards into the envelopes placed above each column. I monitored the process to ensure that the right number of items was placed into the right number of columns and into the correct envelopes.

3.2.2.8 Pilot Studies

Given the challenge of setting up a pilot study in addition to 6 actual coaching sessions and in order to give recognition to a substantial number of participants, the decision was made not to conduct a formal pilot study. However, lessons from the earlier sessions were incorporated into the later sessions. Some of the lessons from the first session included the introduction of the phased approach (outlined above) to ensure that the views of all observers would be expressed; inclusion of a formal presentation to explain how to sort the items and to contextualise the research.

3.2.2.9 Ethical and Legal Considerations

The study was approved by the University Ethics Committee. Legal issues were also considered by relevant personnel within the University in relation to the publication of reports and use of video-recordings. Tailored participant Information Sheets (PIS) were provided for coaches, clients, observers and for sponsors, if requested. An example of the PIS for the observers is provided in Appendix 2. Assurances were given to all participants in relation to the management of confidentiality. The interviews with the clients were kept relatively short depending upon how well I knew the interviewee and in order to minimise any potential discomfort with the reflective process. In the case of the observer groups, the sessions were kept within agreed time commitments or were renegotiated mid-session in the case of one session only. In the case of some coach interviews and some observer groups, the coaches appeared to be valuing the reflective process and in order not to curtail their reflections, the interviews/ discussions were extended above that originally planned. In retrospect, more detailed planning of timings would have been helpful ethically. This would have helped to ensure time commitments were clearly agreed and appropriate for the reflective process.

3.2.3.0 Data Analysis:

Having considered in some depth the data collection process, this section will consider the approach taken to data analysis.

3.2.3.1 Q Methodology

There is a clearly defined process for conducting Q mode factor analysis; the approach draws largely on that described by Watts and Stenner (2012). However, there is a wealth of writing on Q methodology which has arisen in the wake of Stephenson and this also informed the analysis (Brown, 1980; Block, 2008; McKeown and Thomas, 2013; Dziopa and Ahern, 2011; Watts and Stenner, 2005a). Having collected rank ordered data, it is possible to make statistical comparisons in relation to how one person has sorted items compared to another. The first step in the process is therefore to obtain a correlation matrix of the participants' Q-Sorts. This produces a single figure (correlation co-efficient) indicating the extent to which the overall pattern of sorting of one participant correlates with the overall pattern of sorting of each other participant. This means that for a hypothetical study in which there were 11 participants, there would be 10 correlations coefficients for each participant and 100 correlations coefficients shown on a grid altogether although half of these would be repeated (i.e. the correlation of participant 1 with participant 2 would be the same as the correlation co-efficient for participant 2 with participant 1).

Q Factor analysis is then carried out to group together participants (by-person factor analysis; Watts & Stenner, 2005) in order to identify common patterns of sorting. For example, if participants 1, 3, 7 and 9 tended to sort the items in a similar manner (tending to rate the same Q-items as highly characteristic and the same Q-items as highly uncharacteristic), the factor analytic process will identify these common sorting patterns and a factor can be extracted from the data representing this shared sorting pattern. Similarly, participants 2, 5 and 8 might also show similar patterns of sorting and finally, participants 10 and 11 might tend to sort in a similar manner. In this hypothetical case, 3 factors might be

extracted in the by-person factor analysis. For a factor to be extracted, only two participants need to show a similarity in their sorting patterns. The convention to consider a factor as significant is when the eigenvalue exceeds 1.00. Typically, centroid or principal components analyses are utilized to extract factors. Varimax or judgemental (hand) rotations are used to maximise statistical differences (Watts and Stenner, 2012).

Having extracted and rotated the factors, factor loadings can be calculated based on the total number of items in the Q-Set (Watts and Stenner, 2012). Q-sorts that load onto more than one factor are considered to be confounded and are discarded. This ensures that viewpoints captured in the factors are clearly differentiated.

The next step in the process is to produce a factor array which is intended to represent a best-fit for those participants loading onto the factor. A factor array is the normalized weighted average z score for each Q item derived from all of those participants in the P sample (research participants) loading onto (i.e. defining) the factor (Dziopa et al, 2011, p. 41). Visually, the factor array produces an idealised Q-sort which can be displayed as a Q-sort with the Q-item with the highest weighted average positive z score being given the highest ranking and the highest weighted average negative z score being given the lowest ranking. All other scores occupy mid ranking positions. In other words, the factor array has the appearance of an actual Q-sort and shows the relative ranked positions for all Q-items. To go back to our hypothetical example, if participants, 1, 3, 9 and 7 tended to rate "Coach interrupts client" at +4, +5, +6 and +2, overall that item might occupy the position of +6 in the factor array.

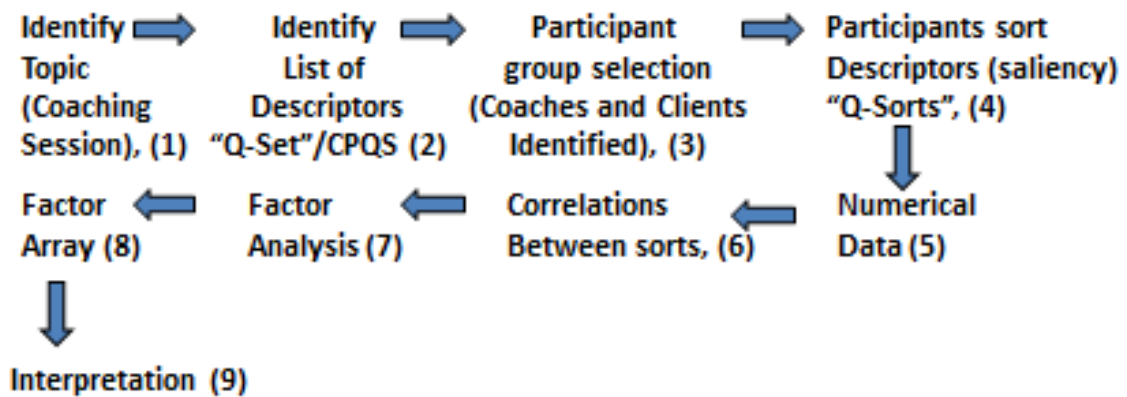
In most Q-methodological studies, the purpose of the Inquiry is to identify the range of opinions a group of people might hold with respect to a topic of interest. One factor analysis is conducted for a group of perhaps 20 or more participants and typically a Q-set will contain between 40 and 60 Q-items. Typically 3-6 factors might be extracted. Watts and Stenner (2005b) for example, wanted to establish different viewpoints on the meaning of love and

each factor identified in their study was intended to represent different viewpoints. In the literature on Q-methodology, it isn't always clear what is meant by a viewpoint. On the one hand, it can be considered spatially in that factor loadings can be displayed graphically in two or three dimensions showing where each participant loads in relation to any 2 or 3 factors displayed in two or three dimensions at any one time. Each factor on a graphical display represents a particular viewpoint. With rotation, the views of particular groups of participants can be maximised. An analogy described by Watts (2010) is when theatre-goers might view the same stage performance but what will be seen on stage will vary depending on whether one is viewing the stage from the stalls, the circle or upper circle and where one is positioned (on the left hand side, right hand side or middle). In other words, the factor analytic process allows for the same event to be perceived differently by different participants based upon the particular perspective they might take with respect to a topic of interest. Stainton-Rogers (1996) has suggested that different viewpoints (factors) can be considered to represent broader social discourses; that is to reflect the varying ways a topic of interest is talked about and understood in a particular social, historical and cultural context. Q methodology has also been used however in psychotherapy research to identify specific behavioural and other characteristics of therapeutic sessions demonstrating different epistemological assumptions about what can be identified through Q-methodology.

This Chapter has covered Q Methodology in some detail. A summary of the Q Methodological Process is provided in Figure 3.3 below.

Figure 3.4: Q Methodology: Overall Process

Q-Methodology (Process Steps)



3.2.3.2 Hermeneutic Approach and Thematic Analysis

At the outset of the research, I had been very open-minded with respect to what data the IPR/ unstructured interviews might provide. Depending upon the research interest or orientation of the researcher the same data could for example be interpreted as phenomenological data, discursive data or in a more objectivist sense, reports of actual processes occurring in the session. From a social constructionist perspective, all data is open to the way a researcher might wish to construct whatever he or she finds.

In keeping with the original objective to focus on saliency, I tried to identify what seemed salient in the spoken accounts. "Saliency analysis" has recently been considered a key element of thematic analysis (Buetow, 2010). Buetow (2010, p.123) highlights how saliency

analysis “identifies and keeps visible what stands out from qualitative data. It highlights which units of meaning are salient at the data surface (primary salience) while also exposing the salience of latent messages (secondary salience). It thereby aims to facilitate clarity and the production of salient conclusions.”

In this context, saliency was constructed as what stood out to me as a researcher based on what the participants said and how whatever was said was expressed. I was reminded of McLeod’s (2003) emphasis on hermeneutics in relation to *letting the text* speak to the researcher. At first, this approach seemed unconventional. I felt that competent researchers needed to be very clear about what they wanted to identify and what specific methods they would apply to identify whatever it was that they wished to identify. However, the more I thought about this, the more I thought that methods are at least in some degree, rhetorical devices for convincing the researcher and his/her would-be audience in the ‘truth’ of the findings. Take away the methods and one is left with the researcher and the text; there is an encounter and what is required is the skill of the researcher to make sense of the data in the context in which it is generated.

The principle of the hermeneutic cycle (McLeod, 2003; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009) seemed very important. I found that by listening repeatedly to small fragments of one interview and then listening to the whole interview and then listening to the another fragment of another interview and then a whole interview and so on repeatedly, patterns within the data took on a particular shape. From my philosophical perspective, there is always a process of construction, of sense-making on the part of the researcher. This is different to what one might readily understand as interpretation in a more objectivist sense. From an objectivist perspective, interpretation implies finding out what the data means, as if there were some inherent meaning to the text. The influence of existing frameworks of understanding is implicit in social constructionist and interpretive approaches. A process of construction emphasises more the way a researcher shapes the data. This is not to say that there are no inherent patterns in the data but it is to acknowledge that meaning arises

through the projection of the researcher's own assumptions, frameworks and exposure to local and broader social discourses as well as the influences of the methods used. This principle is aligned with Gadamer's (2008) hermeneutic *fusion of horizons*. A richer understanding of the data emerges as a researcher applies his/her own fore-understanding to understand the data: the data speaks to the researcher and the researcher speaks to the data, out of which a new understanding emerges.

The recordings of the interviews were not fully transcribed. As a researcher, I was not convinced that methodological rigour can lead to the identification of truth; in this sense the importance of rigour in methodology is a discursive construction. This is not the same however as being generally methodical, analytical and transparent in one's assumptions. I also found that by listening to the accounts, I recreated more of a sense of the original interviews and discussions. I could also gain a sense of recollection of what I noticed as salient at the time of the interviews. When particular aspects of the recordings seemed salient, I wrote comments down so that I could reflect on the detail of the text, again from a hermeneutic framework, cycling to and from the original recordings and the written transcriptions.

The first repeats of listening to the accounts (first the clients' accounts, then the coaches' accounts and then the coach-observer accounts) were intended to allow me to gain an overall sense of the focus and sentiment of the discussions. This wasn't done with any particular explicit framework; it was an attempt to allow the data to appeal to my tacit frames of reference.

Given the large data sets based on the spoken accounts and the fact that typically in Q methodology, only one data set is analysed. Pragmatically, I therefore applied a more abbreviated form of thematic analysis than some traditional thematic analyses described in the research methods literatures. I also suggest that conceptually, there are no assurances that a meticulously detailed 'bottom-up' line by line analysis of the data or a systematic

coding of the data would necessarily lead to a more trustworthy interpretation of the data than a messier hermeneutic cycling whereby I as a researcher could cycle between the detail of comments made, the overall sense of a client's account and the overall sense of the clients' accounts. It also seemed helpful to make sense of the clients' accounts by taking account simultaneously of the accounts of the coach and observers. In fact, it was not possible to do otherwise as I collected data first from the clients and coaches and then from the observer groups so I always took my initial understanding of the data from the interviews to the discussion groups. It was never possible just to collect data as I was conscious that an informal process of interpretation began (and could not be avoided) the moment I started to collect data.

In order to illustrate the principle of analysis, I will illustrate the general approach in this paragraph. I began by listening to the accounts of the client from the first session. I got a sense that the experience had been extremely positive for him. This same sense of positivity was conveyed by the coach. There were particular characteristics of the client and coaches accounts that just seemed to stand out for me as personally salient; for example how the client and coach shared the same language (e.g. metaphors relating to coaching as a maritime exploration). I then showed the recording to a group of observers who practised from a neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) school of coaching (all were trained practitioners or master practitioners) who seemed extremely critical of the coach and session. I was quite taken aback by their reactions. This same pattern was repeated for all other discussions. This led me to explore what had made the session so productive for the coach and client and yet so unacceptable from the perspective of the observers. In an initial analysis, several disparate shared experiences seemed to emerge from within the clients' accounts (e.g. the coaches always showing empathy; all clients having positive expectations, etc.). The analysis of the accounts of the observers seemed to suggest a range of common criticisms (coach not exploring enough; coach not getting at the real issue, etc.). The accounts of the coaches seemed to sit in the middle with the coaches simply explaining what they did in a

relatively unperturbed manner. It was only by cycling between the three sets of accounts with curiosity and with a drawing on my own tacit frames of reference and recent and continued wider reading of relevant literature that a higher level meaning of the accounts emerged.

This meaning was both energised and enacted by an analysis of more detailed comments made by individuals. There were particular moments in all of the accounts that seemed to hold an especial significance for the speakers. These moments captured my curiosity; for example, in the case of one client who really paused and mulled over the experience of being listened to. This had been very impactful for him. It was only by contextualising the description of that experience in the light of the analysis of the clients' accounts overall as well as those of the coach and observers that the meaning of what the client said became clearer. Similarly, it was often only by comparing accounts with respect to particular events that the meaning of particular events became clearer within the overall reflective process. The findings from the Q methodological analysis were also used to help inform the analysis of the thematic analysis and vice versa to inform the Q methodological analysis.

The analysis of the data also continued through the write-up phase. As I tried to structure the findings and the interpretations of the findings in the discussion chapter of this thesis, new patterns of understanding continued to emerge resulting in changes in the ways I had categorised the themes. The actual writing process was a way of engaging with the text but yet from another angle as a form of reflective writing, leading to several redrafts of the findings. Working visually and kinaesthetically on the computer seemed to help the pattern construction process and contributed to a sense of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). The continued engagement with the literature as part of the write-up continued to energise the reflective process.

3.2.3.3 Discursive Analyses

Given the exploratory nature of the research and the formulation of the research question on applying multiple-perspectives there seemed to be scope for including discursive perspectives in the analysis. This was the most challenging part of the analysis as there seemed to be a multiplicity of ways of analysing the data discursively. At one level, many of the coaches had used vivid metaphors which seemed to express something about how they had constructed the coaching process. There seemed to be ample scope for including the use of metaphors to help inform the overall thematic analysis (that is to interpret the meaning of how language was used to describe the coaching process). From another discursive perspective, there seemed to be a careful positioning of how the speakers wanted to be perceived; in particular how the coaches wanted to be perceived to future observers. These apparent attempts to present a particular identity seemed to indicate something about the coaching process; that is coaching as an enactment of professional identity.

At one level, I would suggest that analysing discourses can be considered relatively simple methodologically. For example, shared opinions can be considered as discourses. It then becomes a matter of identifying shared patterns of talking about coaching and naming these as discourses (e.g. whether coaches should give advice, whether a coach should be empathic, etc.). This approach to discourse is described in the literature as *interpretative repertoires* and was discussed earlier in this chapter.

At a level of aggregation, some of the shared ways of talking about discourses begin to show a degree of similarity with broader social discourses. Naming discourses at this higher level goes beyond the immediacy of the coaching community of which the research participants could be considered to represent some of its members. In much of the literature on discourse analysis and from a critical perspective, there is a sense of shared views about prevailing discourses in society such as a discourse of managerialism (e.g. Newman and Clark, 1994; Clegg et al, 2005), a discourse of humanism (Wolfe et al, 2005; Ellerman, 1998),

a discourse of individualism (Jensen, 1995; Evans 1990) and other broad discourses. Academics of a discourse analytical persuasion seem to match their findings to their awareness of these broader understandings of dominant social discourses, already described in academic literature. There isn't a ready-made manual of "discourses" that a researcher can use for comparative purposes however. This would run counter to the principle of discourses as somewhat difficult to circumscribe and reify as objective entities.

In the Inquiry, some attempt has been made to first of all identify the ways the participants spoke about coaching. These shared patterns of talking were simply identified in the Inquiry as discourses in order not to over-complicate the analysis. The shared patterns of talking were identified as an integral part of the thematic analysis described in the section above. At higher levels of analysis, I have tried to relate them to broader social discourses with which I was generally familiar as suggested is a typical process in the discursive literature. In order not to be dogmatic however, I have also considered the possibility of shared ways of talking about events as opinions, debates, views, beliefs and assumptions. The reader is encouraged to adopt a position of epistemological openness and to reflect on how the data might be interpreted.

3.2.3.4 Q Analysis

The technical procedures for collecting Q data were described earlier in this Chapter. The Q-sorts generated by the client and coach show the way client and coach sorted the 84 items in the Coaching Process Q-set (CPQS) into 13 columns (-6 *Highly Uncharacteristic* of the session through to 0 *Neither Uncharacteristic nor Characteristic* of the session to +6 *Highly Characteristic* of the session).

In order to compare the Q-sorts of the coach and client with the viewpoint of the observers for any given session, a factor array can be created to express a shared viewpoint within the group of observers. The observer factor array represents the weighted average loading of those Q-sorts loading onto any factor (shared statistical correlations among Q-sorts) that can

be extracted from a set of observer Q-sorts. The observer factor array is therefore a representation of the factor and for purpose of comparison, displayed as a Q-sort with rankings of -6 (highly uncharacteristic of the session) to 0 (neither uncharacteristic nor characteristic) to +6 (highly characteristic) as in the case of the Q-sort of the coach and of the client. In this way, an observer perspective can be compared directly against the Q-sort of the coach and the Q-sort of the client for any given session.

Factors can also be extracted more generally in the data, for example for all clients, all coaches, all observers and all viewpoints when all Q-sorts are analysed together. One or more factors might be extracted depending on the number of shared viewpoints expressed. In Q methodology, every factor that can be extracted from a group of Q-sorts represents a shared viewpoint, a similarity in how the Q-items are rank-ordered. Each factor can be expressed by creating a factor array.

A key aspect of Q Methodology is to interpret the overall configuration of items expressed in the factor array and/or individual Q-sort; that is to consider what viewpoint is being expressed by placing or tending to place (expressed in a factor array) some items at -6, others at 0 and others at +6. Items placed at the extremities are particularly interesting because they are considered to identify those items that are particularly salient for any given individual (individual Q-sort) or in any overall viewpoint (factor array). Typically in Q Methodology, the researcher will limit the analysis to a description of overall viewpoints (one overall statistical analysis for a particular group of people). When analysing coaching sessions however, there is scope to provide a rich interpretation of competing viewpoints; that is to consider the viewpoints of distinct participant groups (e.g. clients, coaches and observers) and for one session or generally across all sessions. Given that the research question is to explore multiple-perspectives, this is an important feature of the research but does add a great deal of complexity and additional analyses over and above that typically carried out in a Q methodological investigation.

Interpretation in Q methodology generally is difficult and particularly so for interpreting Q-sorts/ factor arrays for coaching sessions in the present Inquiry because participants were given ample scope to rate items in ways that were personally meaningful for them. For example, an observer might rank the item *Q29 Coach shows empathy as highly uncharacteristic* of the session. One interpretation could be that the coach did not show what perhaps most coaches would understand as empathy; another could be that the coach was considered to show hostility and a negative placing of Q29 might have been intended to capture this understanding. Another interpretation could be that for most observers, the coach did show empathy but for the particular observer who may be particularly skilled in showing empathy, the coach did not show empathy when compared to his/her own standards. Alternatively, the observer might want to capture in his/her Q-sort that the coach did generally show empathy but at one critical moment in the session, failed to show empathy. Yet another possibility is that the observer mistakenly placed an item as *highly characteristic* when he/she meant to place the item as *highly uncharacteristic* (measurement error). Making sense of items rated as *highly uncharacteristic* seems particularly difficult because a participant completing a Q-sort is making a statement about something being salient owing to some sort of perceived absence. These challenges are highlighted in these opening comments in an attempt to provide transparency in the analysis. The reader is asked to reflect on the interpretations made in order to consider if they can be considered credible in light of the data. However, while interpretation is difficult; it is also possible to make sense of the sorting patterns by reflecting on the accounts of participants provided in the interviews. The reader is also invited to take account of these comments which are used in this Chapter to support the interpretations made.

A series of different analyses were carried out as follows:

1. An analysis of individual coaching sessions (6)
2. An analysis of the clients' viewpoints overall (1)
3. An analysis of the coaches' viewpoints overall (1)

4. An analysis of the observers' viewpoints overall (1)
5. An analysis of all viewpoints analysed together (1)

In each analysis (1-5), factors were extracted from the data and used to create factor arrays representing shared viewpoints. For example, in 1 (above), factors were extracted to create factor arrays to express shared viewpoints within the groups of observers for any one session and compared against the Q-sorts of coach and client. In 2 (above), factors were extracted and factor arrays created to represent shared viewpoints for all clients and only clients, analysed separately from all other Q-sorts. In 5 (above), factors were extracted and factor arrays created for all Q-sorts analysed together irrespective of whether the Q-sorts of observers from one session load onto the same factor as a Q-sort from participants associated with different sessions. The overall aim of these analyses was to identify and interpret viewpoints. In other words, the aim is to identify and interpret shared perceptions of what is constructed to be happening when considering a coaching session or coaching sessions generally from the viewpoints of coaches, clients and observers.

The Q-sorts of the client and coach show the way client and coach sorted 84 items in the Coaching Process Q-set (CPQS) into 13 columns (-6 *Highly Uncharacteristic* of the session through to 0 *Neither Uncharacteristic nor Characteristic* of the session to +6 *Highly Characteristic* of the session).

3.2.4. Summary

The research methodology described in this Inquiry is ambitious and complex. The breadth of research methods and techniques were considered necessary to understand the complexity of coaching sessions. The data collection process obtains data from 3 different types of participant and uses a range of methods/techniques (Q technique, interpersonal process recall, unstructured interviews and observer groups). The data analysis draws on Q methodology, thematic analysis and a range of discursive approaches. The Q methodological approach alone is extremely ambitious in the way a series of analyses were

carried out within a single study and that the level of analysis has been at a micro-analytic level (82 descriptors) as well as at a more interpretive level of analysis.

Epistemologically, I have argued that the approach is social constructionist in its openness to be accepting of alternative epistemological approaches but alternative epistemologies, consistent with a social constructionist ontology assumes that all epistemologies are just constructions; they are perspectives on the phenomena we experience. I have also argued that the meaning making process is at the core of all constructions of the world we experience which is a core concept in a social constructionist approach.

The overall coherence in the approach is based on the overarching hermeneutical methodology which tries to make sense of the data by comparing the detail to the whole and vice-versa. This means identifying individual comments, use of metaphor, moments of personal saliency, rank ordering of items at an individual participant level and relating these observations at a broader categorical level (within or across categories). It means comparing the findings from a Q analysis to the findings from a thematic analysis to the findings from a more discursive analysis of the language used in the way participants describe coaching. Collectively, these alternative ways of making sense of the same focus of attention (a coaching session) allows for what is intended to be a rich and sophisticated understanding of the coaching process.

4.0 Chapter 4 Introduction to Findings and the Client Perspective

Different ways of presenting the findings were considered, including the presentation of findings on a session by session basis. One advantage of presenting the findings session by session is that it would have made very clear who the coach, client and observers were for each session. It would have also made clear how the session came about (i.e. whether I had identified the coach or if the session was a mid-engagement session, what the content of the session had been, etc.). By way of contrast, in presenting the accounts of the sessions for the client, the coach and the coach-observers separately and in sequence, the reader would risk losing some of the contextual information for each session. Initially, the sessions were written up as whole sessions (i.e. as separate individual cases) but this presentation of the findings led to a loss of sense of similarities and/or differences in the way, the sessions were described by the various clients, coaches and coach-observers participating in the research. One other possibility was simply to choose one session and write it up as a detailed case study and argue that this case illustrated the way coaches, clients and coach-observers typically evaluated the session. However, this approach seemed to lose a great deal of transparency and much of the collected data would simply be omitted.

There was the added complication that I had carried out two different types of analysis of the spoken accounts; first of all, a thematic analysis and then a discursive analysis as outlined in the previous chapter. There was also the challenge of writing up the statistical analyses as they had been very detailed and had been used to analyse each session as well as the sorting patterns of the clients, the coaches and the coach-observers separately. The analysis had also taken into account an overall statistical analysis of all the perspectives considered together. These patterns were all interesting in their own right and could be compared systematically alongside the perspectives of the spoken accounts. However, comparing and contrasting such a large data set seemed very complicated. In some ways, the thesis could be considered to consist of 3 separate analyses:

1. A thematic analysis of the spoken accounts of a range of witnesses to the coaching interaction (clients, coaches and coach-observers)
2. A discursive analysis of the same
3. A statistical (Q-methodological) analysis of a range of coaching sessions

These considerations and early drafts of the thesis led to two major decisions in relation to writing the thesis. First, I would write up the thesis into separate chapters. The First 3 chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) would address the findings from 1 and 2 above. A fourth chapter (Chapter 7) would address the third analysis (above) separately.

In writing up the first 3 chapters, there seemed to be some logic in presenting the findings first of all in terms of the descriptions of the clients, then of the coaches and then finally of the coach-observers. The logic was based on beginning with what might be considered the output of coaching; that is the actual experience of the client. This would be followed by an account of the coach as it was through the coach's facilitation of the session that the coach's experience would be influenced. Finally, presenting the accounts of the coach-observers would imply some distance from the immediacy of the session. The accounts of the coach-observers would present an overall evaluation of what the client and coach had done together.

With respect to Chapter 7, the Q-methodological analysis, the decision was made to structure these findings in a particular sequence. First of all, given that statistical analysis is essentially a technique for reducing data and for making overall comparisons between data sets (Field, 2013), it seemed logical to begin by presenting an overall analysis of the sessions. This was also considered a useful starting point for writing up the statistical analysis as the reader may be looking for an overall sense of what the sessions are indicating overall, having considered a bottom up analysis of first the client's, the coach's and then the coach-observers' perspective (Chapters 4-6). Having started with an overview of the sessions, it seemed logical to follow this by analysing a couple of sessions in depth.

Given that Q methodology has not been used to analyse coaching sessions before, to my best knowledge, I decided to illustrate how a Q methodological analysis could be written up in two different ways (presenting the data systematically in tables and then in a more narrative format). The write-up for the first session would also present a modified Johari window (Luft and Ingham, 1955) in order to facilitate understanding of the different perspectives considered for a single session. This would then be followed by a separate analysis of the clients' perspective (all clients' Q-sorts for all sessions considered together); the coach's perspective (all Q-sorts of coaches considered together) and then all Q-sorts for the coach-observers. Finally, an overall analysis would be provided, as would be traditional in a conventional Q-methodological study (Dziopa et al, 2011) in an attempt to make sense of all the statistical data already presented in some detail.

This is a formidable set of data for the reader to progress her or his way through. Ultimately, there did not seem an easier or more meaningful way of presenting the findings that would demonstrate transparency. In order to help the reader follow the threads of the findings, the Chapters are presented in a logical sequence and as already indicated in the preceding paragraphs:

Chapter 4: The Perspective of the Clients (thematic and discursive analysis)

Chapter 5: The Perspective of the Coach (thematic and discursive analysis)

Chapter 6: The Perspective of the Coach-Observers (thematic and discursive analysis)

Chapter 7: Q Methodological Analysis

Some simple graphics are presented in order to help the reader follow the exposition and threads of the findings. In Chapter 4, it should already be possible to readily identify the main themes that are been discussed as the themes are presented early in the chapter and then are considered one by one. A higher level of analysis is suggested towards the end of the Chapter and a diagram is presented which summarises the client's experience.

In Chapter 5, it should be possible to follow which coach is being discussed since I have added icons to show the progression of one coach's account to another. In Chapter 6, it should be clear what session is being discussed because similar icons have been provided. In Chapter 7, additional icons are intended to help orient the reader through the chapter. At the end of Chapter 5, a table is provided in order to help pull the findings for that Chapter together; this table shows differences in the approaches of coaches. In Chapter 6, a table also summarises the issues raised across the sessions by the coach-observers. Finally, summaries are provided at the end of each chapter to help the reader quickly recap the main points argued and a list of key points is intended to help the reader gain a sense of the emerging arguments which will be picked up in the discussion chapter of this thesis (Chapter 8).

In order to orient the reader at the outset, an overview of the sessions analysed followed by details of each session are presented below. The reader can therefore refer back to this section when reading the Chapters which follow.

4.1 Context to Coaching Sessions: Participant and Session Details

It was not considered ethical to obtain all the background demographic details of the coaches and clients participating in the study. All participants were already making a significant commitment to take part (giving up their time, travelling to a venue, reading documentation before attending, etc.). When some of the participants had been identified through a third party (e.g. one coach had contacted another to ask if they would be willing to take part in the study), ethically, I did not think I could ask them for too much background to their practice. This seemed too intrusive. I therefore obtained whatever data I was able to identify over the course of the study as and when it arose naturally in conversation. It was particularly difficult to obtain details of the coach-observers as the composition of each Observer-Group kept changing owing to problems coordinating diaries. The participation of

some coaches also became dependent upon other contacts I had already established; some commitments were only made just ahead of the sessions.

I am also hesitant to provide too many details of the participants for reasons of confidentiality. For example, if I were to state that a coach is well known to Brookes with a doctoral qualification and adopts a cognitive-behavioural orientation, already, some readers of the thesis may be able to identify that person. Some details are therefore deliberately withheld. Coaches were also recruited from a range of locations with varying loyalties to different institutions in order to further protect confidentiality.

The difficulty in obtaining and presenting personal details highlights a challenge in conducting in-depth, qualitative research with professional coaches and their clients.

4.02 Overview of Coaching Sessions: Participant Details and Overall Context

In total, 6 coaching sessions were recorded. Four of these sessions were “one-off” sessions in that I identified a coach and a client who were willing to hold a single coaching session with no agreed follow up. All four clients were asked to come to the coaching session with a clear issue they would like to address. The coaches and clients did not know each other beforehand. All coaches were asked to facilitate each session as a real coaching conversation and requested to conduct the session in the way they would do normally. The sessions took place in the most appropriate coaching environment possible (i.e. quiet rooms with comfortable chairs) given the constraints of the research. This was intended to make the context as close to a natural coaching context as possible. No fees were charged for the sessions. Two other sessions were mid-engagement sessions in which the coaches and their respective clients agreed to take part in the research. One of these sessions involved an internal coach with their client. The other session was a private arrangement between a coach and their existing client. Four sessions lasted approximately one hour; two other sessions lasted 80 and 90 minutes respectively. The content of the sessions varied from life and career goals (3 sessions), starting a new role (1 session), developing presence at work

(networking and giving presentations; 1 session) and managing current business projects (1).

Coaches were recruited through personal and University networks. All coaches were very experienced. Three coaches are experienced in assessing coaches; two are experienced coach supervisors. All coaches had coaching specific qualifications. Two coaches, at the time of the field research, were working towards doctoral qualifications and two were qualified at doctoral levels. All coaches had extensive experience of executive coaching at director level in organizations. Some coaches had other backgrounds in addition to coaching (e.g. therapy and/or organizational development).

All 4 clients participating in the one-off sessions were known to me through professional networks. Two of the clients that I recruited had backgrounds in Human Resources and Organizational Development. Another was identified through another contact and was a manager of a private hospital. The fourth coach was a legal professional. All coach-observers were recruited through personal networks and social media. The coach-observers varied in their experience. Some were known to me and had extensive coaching experience. Other coaches were asked to come to the sessions if they would consider themselves to be “experienced”. During conversations and e-mail correspondence, some of the coaches provided additional information which suggested considerable experience as coaches. For one group, the coach-observers were largely students on a post graduate course in Coaching but all had experience of paid coaching. Some coach-observers may have been relatively less experienced but this would not have been the norm and it became too intrusive to establish their backgrounds. Some of the coach-observers had published in coaching or had other practitioner credentials (e.g. were coaching-supervisors or were involved in the development and certification of coaches).

The sessions were viewed some weeks after the recording of the sessions. Each session was shown once to a different group of coach-observers. However, in the case of one

session, two viewings were arranged owing to low numbers of coach-observers for the first viewing. Each session was viewed generally in accordance with the chronological order in which they were recorded. However, some video-recordings were held back for particular Observer Groups. For example, knowing that the composition of two observer groups would be TA and the CBC coaches, I thought it would be interesting to show them a recording of a contrasting style (Gestalt coach).

Neither coach nor client was present in the observer-groups. The details of the sessions are provided below. In describing the sessions, I have largely made reference to some of the summative descriptions provided by the coach and/or observers. In some cases, I have highlighted some critical moments (De Haan et al, 2010) which became at some point a focus of all discussions for that session.

Tristan's Session

This was the first session that was recorded and the first which was shown to an Observer-Group. Tristan has several years of coaching experiencing. He is also a qualified therapist. He described his approach as broadly humanistic, including Gestalt based influences. His client was at the time between careers and had held managerial positions in an international organization. The client himself had a background in consultancy projects and had had some experience of coaching others. The session was a final session of 6 that had taken place over several months. According to the coach, the sessions had focused on career goals and assertiveness. According to the coach, the focus of the session was primarily that of the client reflecting on his learning from the coaching over the previous months. The coach would help the client make connections between different issues as they arose.

The session lasted 90 minutes and was shown almost in its entirety (excluding 10 minutes between 10 and 20 minutes of the actual recording in order to work within the time constraints of the audience) to a group of 6 observers working as full-time coaches in the public sector. All participants were delivering coaching at a senior level within the public

sector as well as delivering coach-training programmes for managers. All coaches had qualifications in NLP including some at Master- Practitioner level although some coaches also had broader qualifications in coaching. Their expressed preference was to apply an NLP informed approach. According to the coach-observers, the session was observed to be one in which the coach gave ample reflective space to the client. Core content issues included the client's expressed desire to be more assertive. The client was observed to spend most of the session reviewing the progress he felt he had made; this included family, work and personal impacts. The coach was observed to ask the client to repeat statements, using "I" (The coach explained that this was intended to help the client to take ownership of the issues he raised) and to show a range of established questioning and listening skills.

Joanne's Session

Joanne described her approach as humanistic and gestalt based. She said that she drew on what we agreed could be described as "intuition," although this term did not fully capture what she did in a session (words seemed evasive). Her session involved a contact identified by myself to be coached. The client was an experienced HR professional invited to take part in a one-off session. The client had been coached before but by someone who had adopted what she described as a more business-like, task-focused, behaviourally oriented type of approach (this description was given by way of contrasting her experience of Joanne).

The session lasted for one hour and was shown in its entirety to 4 highly experienced coaches used to operating at senior levels. The coach-observers came from varied backgrounds; three having worked at senior levels in industry (at least two at director levels); one coach was working as a coach-supervisor. All coaches had post-graduate coaching qualifications or equivalent; one at a doctorate level.

The content of the session initially focused on the client discussing with the help of the coach, whether she should take a new job she had just been offered and if so, on what terms. The session then seemed to take a broader life-goal focus with the client being

asked to take part in a time-line/ visualization exercise in which she was asked to think where she would like to be at some future point. The client referred to a metaphor of a 'Pot of Gold' on a beach. The metaphor would become a key point of discussion in the interviews. The client would argue that she thought that the coach knew the real meaning of the 'Pot of Gold' (i.e. that it was not about money); the coach said she did not know nor that she did not need to know; the observers thought that the coach needed to know.

Alison's Session

Alison described her approach as Gestalt based. The session lasted for one hour and was shown in its entirety first, to 2 coaches from a cognitive-behavioural school of coaching; one of whom had a professional doctorate in coaching; the second was also highly experienced; both coaches working at senior levels in executive coaching. Given the low numbers of observers, a second session was organized in which involved 5 observers from a transactional analysis background. All 5 observers delivered one to one coaching in addition to other OD based interventions.

The client was about to start a new job with a new organization at a more senior level. She was apprehensive about the role change and the focus of the session was on helping her to make a good impression when she started. The client and coach talked about the different ways she could be or appear to others. During the course of the session, coach invited the client to take part in the Empty Chair technique (e.g. as outlined in Rogers, 2008) to explore these differences.

Marjorie's Session

Marjorie explained that many of her client engagements often tended to be people seeking in-depth exploration of self and values. She said that she was often recruited through her personal networks to help more challenging clients. She has a doctoral qualification in clinical psychology although hasn't worked as a clinical psychologist for many years. She provided me with an outline of her approach which appeared to emphasise a client centred

approach; however, she outlined a broad knowledge base of psychometrics and psychological models of development which she also appeared to draw upon in her coaching practice. At the time of writing, she had over 20 years of coaching experience. Her client was a contact identified by myself. He is a highly experienced legal professional. He had no experience of coaching or of personal development generally, having worked mostly in small professional organizations.

The session lasted for 90 minutes and was shown in its entirety to a group of 6 coaches from a mix of backgrounds. One coach had an NLP background, another a professional doctorate in coaching, another said she adopted a solutions focused approach, one other coach had a background in coaching in Education at senior levels; another was using coaching in a social work context; the sixth coach referred to extensive coaching engagements in which she had participated but did not declare her coaching practice.

The content of the session was based around the client's negative conception of his profession and his immediate working environment. The focus of the session moved towards an exploration of how the client might be able to work in an environment more aligned with his own personal values. The coach explained that she tried to encourage the client to reflect as much as possible but having found this difficult and in the context of a one-off session, she decided to give advice and make suggestions. A critical moment (e.g. De Haan et al, 2010) in the session according to the coach was when the client looked outside and noticed that not all branches are necessarily bad which was his interpretation of what the coach had been telling him. There was, according to the coach, another critical moment in the session when the coach put down her pad and said that she tried to get the client to focus on what she was saying. Some observers saw this as a moment in the session when the coach tried to close the coaching session, which had not been the expressed intention of the coach.

Alice

Alice is another highly experienced coach with a professional doctorate in coaching. She described her approach as tending to focus on the issues of the client and as described by the client rather than on trying to read too much behind what the client was saying. This suggested what I would construct as a non-developmentally oriented model of coaching. She said that coaching should be conversational and that making suggestions is an important aspect of her model of coaching. She agreed to coach a client in a one-off session and whom I had identified. The coach was the General Manager of a large private sector hospital. She had been coached before and was favourable to coaching having learned about coaching through a senior level business course. The session was shown to a group of 8 coaches of varying coaching traditions. Some of the coaches said that they favoured a person-centred approach, others a general humanistic orientation, one coach a solutions-focused informed approach and one coach was a highly experienced senior manager with formal coaching qualifications and also experienced at coaching at senior levels; one other had doctoral level qualifications and was highly experienced in coaching. One of the coaches had already participated in the research as the coach of one of the sessions (and made this known in the Observer-Group). The focus of the session was on the client's apprehension in relation to giving presentations and networking at board level.

Drew

Drew had been working as an internal coach in a large organization for the past two years. She was completing a professional doctorate in coaching. The session involved a board member of the organization who said that in her distant past she had experienced developmental coaching. The session was the fifth in a series of 6 contracted sessions. The session was shown in its entirety (60 minutes) to a selection of students completing a Masters Degree in Coaching and one coach-consultant; all had coaching experience.

Quite a lot of time was spent at the beginning of the session in relation to a general catch-up on events. The session then focused on two main business projects in which the client had been involved. The coach described the projects and the coach mainly listened asking a few questions from time to time in relation to her progress on the projects. At points in the session, both coach and client would write down action points for the client to address beyond the session; they included some points for reflection.

The following table summarises the details of the sessions, provided as a point of immediate reference for reading this chapter.

TABLE 4.0: Summary of Coaching Sessions

Coach	Observer Group Viewing Order	Coach Background	Client	Observer Group	Session Type	Duration (Mins)	Session Scope
Tristan	1 st	Humanistic	Coach's Existing Client	6 NLP Coaches working as internal coaches in the same public sector organization	6 th and Final Session	90	Career and Life Goals
Marjorie	2 nd	Therapeutically trained but widely experienced in organizations in executive coaching	Identified by Researcher	6 coaches from varied coaching traditions (e.g. NLP, solutions focused; social work)	"One off" Session	90	Career and Life Goals
Joanne	3 rd	Humanistic	Identified by Researcher	4 professional coaches of various backgrounds including one coach supervisor	"One off" Session	60	Career and Life Goals
Drew	4 th	Person-centred	Coach's Existing Client	4 student-practitioners studying for a post-graduate qualification in coaching and one coach/consultant	5 th Session (mid-engagement)	60	Focus on immediate business goals (business projects)
Alison	5 th	Gestalt	Identified by Researcher	2 CBC Coaches (One Observer Group)	"One off" Session	60	Starting a new job (making an impact)
	6 th			4 TA coaches (A second and separate Observer-Group)			
Alice	7 th	Non Developmental – focus on client issues	Identified by Researcher	8 coaches from various backgrounds	"One off" Session	60	Career and Life Goals

4.3 Introduction to Client Perspective

Having introduced the Findings Chapters generally, the purpose of this Chapter is now to provide a thematic analysis of the accounts (interviews) of the clients provided typically immediately after their coaching sessions (interviews were completed within 48 hours for two of the 6 clients). The analysis identified 11 themes which are listed in Table 4.1. Each theme will be described in turn. These 11 themes were clustered through further analysis of matching and comparing themes alongside one another both as the research progressed and at the end of the research. However, this led to another interpretive cycle in which 3 overarching higher order themes emerged (which seemed to capture a similarity across many of the initial sub-themes) and which seemed to relate to the client experiencing a sense of control, significance and affirmation. The three higher-order themes seemed to correspond broadly to (Schutz, 1977) interpersonal needs framework which has been popularised through the FIRO-B self-development tool. It would seem that for the client, the coaching process is an experiential process first and foremost in which interpersonal needs are satisfied. This suggests that the content of the coaching conversation (e.g. typically how a client might resolve issues or achieve goals) may be of only secondary importance in helping the client to achieve a sense of resourcefulness.

The clients also constructed their accounts as a user of a service suggesting that the coaching process is not constructed by the client as one in which he is an equal partner. Finally, it was interesting in the analysis and which will be evident across the themes that the actions of the coach were always constructed positively (e.g. a well-timed question; skilful intervention) but that at the same time, the coach was not constructed by the client as doing anything particularly extraordinary. This seemed to suggest that time and space for reflection may be more important than working with a particularly skilful coach. I will begin by considering each sub-theme in turn. I will then consider the higher order analysis towards the end of the chapter.

Table 4.1: Common Themes Expressed In the Accounts of Clients

1	Shifts in clarity, confidence, commitment and capability
2	Holistic experience but punctuated with significant moments
3	An experience of being given total attention with unconditional positive regard
4	A sense of Control
5	A sense of being challenged but gently and in a timely manner
6	A sense of flow and a sense of the experience as natural, healthy and positive
7	A lack of concern or even disliking of techniques and formal process
8	Time for reflection and off-loading
9	Meaning through shared physicality
10	Holding the Coach in High Regard
11	A Readiness to confront challenges

4.04 Theme 1: Shifts in Clarity, Confidence, Commitment and Capability

All clients expressed thinking and feeling more positively about their challenges and of having a sense of being able to address them. Alice's client felt calmer and said she had strategies for addressing her challenges:

"I feel quite calm about it now...about different strategies...thinking about why I would be talking to them...rather than just feeling, 'I've got to do that'...thinking about preparing for it [networking and giving presentations] rather than going in cold."

For Joanne's client, the session had given her a sense of clarity about what she wanted in her career/ future:

"It made me really think, 'what is it I want?'"

For Alison's client, the session had given her a sense of increased self-confidence:

"I came out feeling much more positive; confidence level was much better..."

Overall, this first theme confirmed many anecdotal reports often reported by coaches about the overall benefits expressed by clients. They conveyed an impression of improved well-being/ sense of being able to acknowledge and address their challenges; a sense of increased resourcefulness. This first theme is an overall evaluation of the session as a worthwhile experience.

4.05 Theme 2: Holistic experience but punctuated with significant moments

Most clients recounted their experiences of the session as a whole or as part of an on-going process rather than as a series of discrete significant moments.

“The overall thing really rather than a particular moment...[responding to a question about what stood out]” (Alice’s client)

For Drew’s client, the session was a sub-set of an overall process which extended beyond the session:

“Because we can talk about a concept for hours and hours and not achieve anything but she will come up with an actual exercise... ‘Do this on paper...Come back with some concrete feedback we can talk about at the next session.’ When you have to put your ideas, values, beliefs and concepts on paper, then you start to challenge yourself and consider things really fully.”

In the case of one client, the personal significance of the session was related to previous sessions which again suggested an experience of the session as a programme of learning rather than as a discrete event:

“Certainly with this session it was really helpful just in bringing a lot of the previous sessions back; this was our final session, thinking how does this all link back and where do the links come together? (Tristan’s client) ”

Alice’s client also made a similar comment about the need to leave the session and mull things over:

“The things you can go away and think about rather than what’s being said in the session... rather than a light bulb moment in the session”

These comments suggest that the experience of being coached was described as a holistic experience rather than as a series of significant moments. These findings suggest that being coached is a process in which coaching is an important event rather than a series of events. There may be a parallel in relation to the literature on organizational change which suggests a processual nature of change (Wilson, 1992).

Some moments in the session did however appear to have particular significance for some clients. This indicates that it is still important to consider significant moments in coaching. Alison’s client for example recalled a moment when the coach encouraged her to self-talk positively:

“She made me say it as if I meant it [being a senior manager], and if felt really good...it felt quite empowering, and I came out thinking, I could do this.” (Client Alison)

These findings are interesting in relation to the literature on significant moments (e.g. De Haan, 2010). While it would appear that significant moments are important in coaching, it is important perhaps not to assume that these moments are necessarily more important than the overall coaching session or an overall programme of coaching.

4.06 Theme 3: An experience of being given total attention with unconditional positive regard

The clients conveyed a sense of being listened to attentively, empathically and authentically and how this helped them feel at ease in the session:

“She shows a tremendous amount of empathy... She very much puts me at ease” (Client Drew)

“She was easy to be with...genuinely interested...“She was very, very, very attentive” (Client Marjorie)

“A couple of times empathising with things I was saying...She put me at ease...it was definitely feeling at ease, (Alice’s client)”

“What I remember was that it was very relaxed (Client Alison)”

“She had an honest held interest in you (Client Marjorie)”

There was something psychologically significant for the clients about being listened to, understood and shown emotional warmth. This process put them at ease which in itself seemed important. Much of the coaching literature emphasises the importance of listening to the client (e.g. as summarised by Cox, 2013). These findings emphasise the importance of being listened to from a client’s perspective.

4.07 Theme 4: A Sense of Control

The clients expressed a sense of being in control. This was expressed mainly in terms of the clients’ feeling that they could direct the course of the session and that the coach was working to their (the client’s) agenda:

"He's always very good at making clear that as coachee, I'm very much in control; it's my agenda (Client Tristan)"

"In my view, she did the right thing: go where I want and need to go; it's about me not her (Client Joanne)"

"It was always following where I wanted to go....she always asked me permission...'Can I suggest this?'...so if you don't want to do it, don't do it!" (Client Alison)

4.08 Theme 5: A sense of being challenged but gently and in a timely manner

The clients emphasised a perception of being challenged but without feeling threatened:

"I didn't feel she was putting me on the spot, you know, 'Do something!' ...It was kind of challenging without being really challenging..."I wasn't being asked for hard and fast solutions." (Client Alison)

For one client, even the expression 'challenging' was said with some hesitation suggesting that the client had been simply encouraged to question her assumptions:

"Maybe challenging what you are saying [in response to a question about what the coach was doing]...asking questions... bringing things out of you that you hadn't really thought about before (Alice's session)"

Some clients highlighted the importance of being questioned or challenged at the right time:

“[speaking of what helped the client]...then if you’ve got one or two killer questions at the right time, or statements (Client Joanne)”

“She chose at the right moments to come up with words and concepts... (Client Marjorie)”

These comments suggest that at the heart of the coaching conversation, the basic process of being challenged/ questioned about one’s assumptions and from the client’s perspective, at the right time, was experienced by the client as impactful. The findings indicate that coaching does not have to be a technically complex process. The clients would seem to have considerable resources to respond to prompts and challenges.

4.09 Theme 6: A Sense of Flow: a Natural, Healthy and Positive Experience

The clients expressed a sense of the session flowing and of it being a healthy, natural experience:

“It felt like a really natural coaching session” (Client Drew)

“It was natural...in terms of the way the thing flowed” (Client Joanne)

The clients’ sense of being relaxed seemed to have set the foundations for a flowing session:

“It felt very relaxed; it seemed to flow very easily” (Client Alison)

Tristan’s client also described the session as *“healthy”* and Alison’s client described the session as *“positive”*.

Related to this sense of flow, time passed quickly for the clients:

“That hour and a quarter or whatever it was had gone by with a click of the finger,” (Client Marjorie)

“The time went really quickly. I could not believe an hour had gone by (Client Joanne).”

A sense of flow conveyed in the clients’ accounts suggests that the coaching session from the client’s perspective can be a highly engaging experience akin to the notion of flow in which the client has a sense of a highly challenging process but one over which the client has a sense of mastery and there is a sense of time passing quickly and fluidly (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

4.10 Theme 7: A lack of concern or even disliking of techniques and formal process

The specific techniques or frameworks used by coaches did not stand out in their accounts. Alison’s client, for example only mentioned the client’s use of the empty chair technique once, briefly and negatively in a 30 minute interview (remembering how it had made her feel *“a bit uncomfortable”*). She did not discuss how the coach had asked her to construct her challenge in terms of *“polarities,”* simply focusing instead on how she felt the coach had challenged her to think differently. This suggests perhaps either that she did not notice or recall what the coach was doing or that the offered framework did not have any meaning for the client. What was significant for her was *that she was challenged* rather than *how* she was challenged.

The client in Joanne’s session said that she had felt uncomfortable about the introduction of the time-line exercise but agreed *“to go along with it”* (suggesting perhaps some apprehension). She did describe some benefits she felt she gained from the exercise but

did not dwell on this experience in the interview. It was one element in the overall session rather than *a* critical or *the* critical part of the session for her (theme 2).

More generally, the accounts of the clients suggested that they valued an absence of formal structures. Joanne's client, for example suggests that she had enjoyed what she had constructed as an absence of process:

"I was pleasantly surprised that she was not too concerned about coaching process (Client Joanne)"

This comment and perhaps the discomfort expressed by both Alison and Joanne's clients suggests that more formal process interventions can risk breaking the client's experience of a natural flowing and non-threatening process.

The clients generally struggled to pinpoint exactly what the coach was doing in the sessions to give rise to a sense of a flowing interaction. Overall, they had a sense of the coach doing something that they recognised as effective but struggled to pinpoint what that was.

Joanne's client, while being pleased that the coach had not structured the session in a formal way, suggested that she could when prompted, construct an argument for the coach using process:

"She inspired confidence in me. How did she do this? Building the rapport, setting the context, telling you what the journey is going to be, having something concrete: 'this is what you are going to come out with...'"

This comment however seems to relate more to coaching skills than formal activities and theoretical frameworks. The client was therefore emphasising the relevance of interactional skills generally. Only Drew's client mentioned the usefulness of the techniques her coach used. This suggested that techniques could be valued but were not generally perceived as

the most important elements of the process from the client's perspective. As in the case of the finding expressed in theme 5 (the client valuing the basic process of being challenged), coaching does not appear to need to be a complex technical process for the client to find it valuable.

4.11 Theme 8: Time for reflection and unloading

The clients emphasised having the opportunity to reflect and/or to be encouraged to reflect:

I don't often sit down and think why I'm nervous...it's making you think about what you would not normally think about (Client Alice)

For one client, the coach had not done anything especially dramatic or creative but the occasion had helped her to focus on a perceived need to be more proactive:

"There was nothing earth shattering in there ... but the challenge to you at a personal level around that sort of stuff, on a personal level, for me doesn't happen, partly because... I don't talk to people about this sort of stuff and partly because we don't have time. (Client Joanne)

For a third client, having someone willing to challenge her (i.e. having the opportunity to be challenged) was what was useful:

"Normally, when I'm talking to someone about being nervous, no one really challenges you back whereas she [the coach] challenges you back a little (Client, Drew)"

Similarly, for another client, the coach was addressing issues others wouldn't:

“I don’t think anyone has actually ever said anything...but she was picking up on things that really annoy me and I’m conscious that I do. (Client Alison)”

For another client, having an opportunity to air concerns is what appeared to be valued:

“It was almost like a bit of a burden had been lifted...and it’s because I’ve got such a lot going on at the moment; you have that space to try to clear some of that stuff out. (Client Joanne)”

It seemed that clients valued taking part in a process in which they could talk freely about issues of personal concern that they would not otherwise have the opportunity to do. This gave the impression of coaching as being as much an opportunity to talk through issues as it was in any sense, a skilled conversational process with an expert coach.

4.12 Theme 9: Meaning through shared physicality

The accounts of the clients suggested that the physical presence of the coach had been crucial to the meaning making process. For Joanne's client, the time-line exercise only had meaning because it was done in the physical presence of another:

"You wouldn't do it on your own; it doesn't make any sense [referring to an in-session activity]...it's having someone ask you the right questions..."

Another client appeared to be making sense of his own experiences in relation to the coach's physicality:

"It's only when I play it out in my head and get some reaction from Tristan that an even richer understanding comes forward... so what's resonating for Tristan, responding to his body language...and just the way that happened had some significance because, he started smiling and I thought 'OK, there's something happening here'..."

Tristan's client expressed how the sharing of laughter (understood in this context as a shared physical activity) had led to deeper reflections:

"...We both saw the funny side of it; we both saw the relevance of it....and it led us into something a little bit deeper." (Client Tristan)

It seemed that the process of being with someone, sharing humour, and sharing a perspective enabled new meaning to emerge. This finding points to the social construction process of meaning-making; that is how meaning emerges by interacting with others (McNamee and Gergen, 1992).

The sense of awareness of being in the presence of the coach often extended to a sense of an intimate connection with the coach:

“There is kind of a natural part of the chemistry which is how we are as two individuals who click ... The engagement between two bodies – as I lean forwards...; the open body language, which conveyed a level of respect and ‘relax’ between us. (Client Tristan)”

“At the significant moments of the discussion, she was leaning forward, and showing interest, and on one occasion I recall, we touched hands in a communal spirit... She was very good at eye-contact (Client Marjorie)”

“I did feel a warming towards the coach... a rapport; call it what you like (Client Joanne)”

Some of the comments made by clients seemed to highlight the symbolic importance of physicality generally. One client used the metaphor of movement for explaining his shifts in emotions and thoughts which he seemed to have experienced kinaesthetically:

“So there were times in the session when certain realizations occurred to me and I’m feeling quite up or energised... and I find myself sitting forward and there are other times when I’m feeling quite relaxed. It’s a constant sort of movement you’re going through emotionally as well as cognitively (Client Tristan)”

For Drew’s client, the writing down of learning or action points (quotation already provided, above) seemed to be an important physical activity. For Joanne’s client, the time-line exercise had been meaningful because it was physical:

“The whole getting up and moving thing ... is that it demonstrates some kind of progress in your thinking, so it is physical”

It therefore seems that in-session meaning-making for the client was intimately connected to a shared physical experiencing and an awareness of the physicality/ presence of the coach.

4.13 Theme 10: Holding the Coach in High Regard

All clients perceived their coaches as highly skilful. They highlighted perceptions of the specialist knowledge of the coach, their perceived expertise in picking up on significant statements, the way they drew links and challenged their current perceptions:

*“She is able to pick up on things that I say and then develop that thought process... her experience of knowing how to develop people; so she knows a lot of very good techniques”
(Client Drew)*

She was very, very insightful in terms of picking up on, “So you’ve said this, what about that?” sort of question and in terms of the way she said things...She struck me as very professional; she knew what she was doing...the questions she was asking, the pace, the way she comes across, not rushed, not hurried, she gave me the impression she knew what she was doing. (Client Joanne)

“...and the pin point accuracy to draw out the essence of it; of me just waffling on... (Client Marjorie)”

The clients were genuinely impressed by the skills of the coaches. However, the accounts of the clients also suggested that some of the positive attributions made by the clients about the coaches were based on assumptions rather than on what might be understood as factual evidence. For example, one client had made the assumption that the coach wasn’t working at a developmental level with her because she assumed the coach had understood intuitively that she didn’t need that level of depth of exploration:

“I haven’t done any of that [in depth developmental work] with Drew but I think that is because early on in the process, she realised I did not have to go through any of that

process.”

Another client assumed that the coach had sensed her reluctance to cooperate with particular activities, but had made a judgement call that she would still be open to participate (rather than interpret the coach's actions as a lack of sensitivity to her possible discomfort):

She will have known that I might be uncomfortable with some of the things she was going to suggest, but she still went there; that's a trick; well a skill. (Client Joanne)

The same client even recalled a moment when she assumed that the coach had understood that the overt topic of conversation was not the real issue:

“That question about the ‘Pot of Gold’ is a brilliant [added emphasis] question but doing it in such a way that did not accuse you of anything...so her question is saying to me, ‘So it's really not about gold then is it [laughing]?’ She's really tuning in ... and the look she gave me; we both know it's not about a pot of gold [continuing to laugh].

In the interview with the coach (which will be reported more fully in the next chapter), the coach said that she did not know what the ‘Pot of Gold’ was about; only that she recognised that it was somehow important to the client. It seemed therefore that the client had only assumed that the coach understood what she had meant. The same client had at first been taken aback by the casual dress of the coach but she reflected on this and rationalised this as a possible benefit:

“She would work with a lot of senior people. Why? Because she is non-threatening...If you're dealing with business people, there's a lot to be said for not being like them.”

Alison's client, when invited to take part in an activity about which she did feel uncomfortable, played down any discomfort felt because she had been able to make sense

of the overall engagement as useful (i.e. she did not attribute any insensitivity/ ill-judgement to the coach):

“The whole thing about moving chairs; I just felt, ‘I really don’t want to do this...but then over time [talking about the general discussion points, not the exercise], she was tapping into what I really needed”

She also blamed herself rather than the coach for the discomfort felt:

“I did feel a little uncomfortable moving chairs but that’s more about me...”

In summary, the clients evaluated the coaches very positively even when they:

- a) Did not have ‘hard evidence’ of whether the coach did or did not understand them
- b) Were presented with information that challenged their expectations
- c) Took part in exercises with which they felt uncomfortable

4.14 Theme 11 A Readiness to confront challenges

The accounts of the clients, suggests that they were “ready” to address their challenges.

All clients said that they had arrived at the sessions with very clear objectives about what they wanted to work on in the session; often the issue was imminent. They also had immediate opportunities to put into practice any learning or new ideas gained in the session:

“I came prepared with something I wanted to discuss...something that was imminent. (Client Joanne)”

“I have a networking event this weekend...(Client Drew)”

“I’m about to start a new role... (Client Alison)”

They all expected to benefit from the session. One client said how she came to the session with more positive expectations than when she presented for coaching previously:

“Where I’ve had previous coaching, I’d not bought into it...Having researched it [as part of academic studies] I’ve realised there is a place for it (Client Alice)”

Other clients conveyed a sense of being prepared to commit to the coaching process:

“I look in my diary and I think an hour’s coaching? ...Is there any value in this? And then you think, ‘yes there is: buy into the process!’” (Drew’s client)

Overall, the clients conveyed in their accounts a sense of coming to their coaching sessions with positive expectations and a willingness to address defined and immediate issues. Their sense of the potential of coaching was strengthened by their exposure to broader discourses relating to the relevance of coaching (academia and business discourses). The clients were predisposed to respond positively to the sessions.

4.15 Overview of Themes

Overall, many of the 11 themes emphasise a sense of psychological impact about the process of being coached: theme 3 emphasises a sense of the client being listened to intently, taken seriously and shown emotional warmth (some of the most salient moments expressed by the clients were when the coach gave them affirmations and took them seriously); theme 4 also expresses the client's sense of being in control which seemed important in a psychological sense.

Schutz's (1958) framework of people needing to feel significant, competent and given affection (mentioned only very briefly in De Haan (2008) but widely used as a development tool in the form of FIRO B, (OPP, 2013) provides a theoretical framework for making sense of how the clients described their experiences:

“With regard to the self-concept, the need for inclusion is the need to feel that the self is significant and worthwhile...The need for control, defined at the level of perceiving the self, is the need to feel that one is a competent, responsible person...The need for affection, defined at the level of the self-concept, is a need to feel that the self is lovable. (Schutz, 1958, 18-20)”

The findings suggest that the widely reported benefits of coaching relate less to the overt, expressed coaching conversation (e.g. by discussing goals, options, solutions, etc.) but more to the psychological impact of the conversation (gaining a sense of significance, competence and self-worth). The sense of the client being listened to intently and being given positive affirmations is strongly related to the alleged beneficial impacts of person-centred coaching (and counselling) but may be common to a range of coaching engagements. These findings will be discussed in some depth in chapter 9.

Gaining a sense of different perspectives (theme 5) was highlighted by the clients so the coaching session was not just described as an experience of satisfying interpersonal needs. New perspectives emerged during the coaching session as the clients gave meaning to the activities in which he was engaged, the prompts/ challenges made by the coaches and their physical presence (theme 9). The meaning that the client took away from the session enabled the client to achieve the outcomes highlighted in theme 1 (shift in clarity, confidence, commitment and sense of capability). The importance of meaning making for the client becomes clearer in light of the findings from the perspectives of the coach and coach-observers and will also be discussed in some depth in chapter 8.

The very process of simply having time to reflect and having one's assumptions challenged (rather than emphasising the use of techniques) was very important for the clients (themes 5 and 7). This was often expressed as simply creating space which suggested that a key ingredient for the coaching process is simply to give time and space to the client; not necessarily to be a *great coach*.

The clients expressed a valued sense of the conversation being free flowing (theme 6) in which they felt at ease (theme 1 and theme 5). These themes parallel the importance of "smoothness/ease" valued by clients undergoing psychotherapy (Stiles, 1980) but could also relate to a sense of safety or a sense of being accepted by the client (satisfaction of an interpersonal need of being valued/loved, respected or even having control which is related to the experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988).

The literature on common factors in psychotherapy is of relevance in making sense of the positive comments made generally by the client. One group of common factors identified by the much cited Grencavage and Norcross (1990) relates to client characteristics (positive expectation, hope or faith). All clients came to the sessions with strong expectations, either as a result of familiarity with academic discourse (Alice's client), business rhetoric of the value of coaching (Drew's client) or because they had been encouraged to take part with an

experienced coach as part of the research process (setting expectations). A second set of common factors relate to therapist qualities (e.g. cultivates hope/enhances expectancies; warmth/positive regard; empathic understanding; socially sanctioned healer and acceptance). Many of the comments made by clients appeared to suggest that these factors could be considered to be impacting on the coaching engagement (e.g. coach empathy, warmth and acceptance in theme 3; unreserved respect for the coach in theme 10). A third area of non-specific factors identified by Grencavage and Norcross (1990) are change processes: simply having the opportunity for catharsis/ventilation; acquisition and practice of new behaviours; provision of rationale. The importance to the client of being able to unload issues or talk about issues which had hitherto been private, were prominent in the accounts of the clients (theme 8). The provision of a rationale did not feature in the clients' accounts although the clients did accept the approaches adopted by the coaches. This suggests that they accepted the approaches taken.

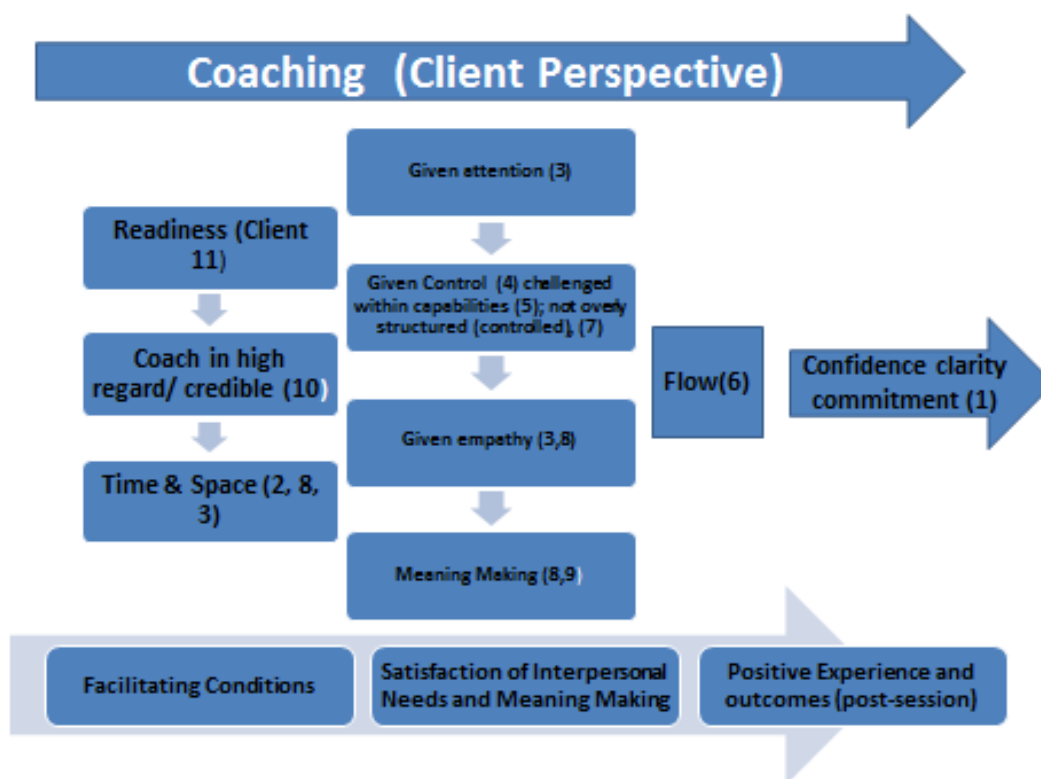
The accounts of the clients did therefore suggest they had experienced their sessions as if they were subject to the same common factors that have been identified in process research in psychotherapy. Given that the clients all reported very positive outcomes in the Inquiry, there was a relationship between common factors and positive outcomes (post session positive reports) for these coaching clients. This finding will also be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

4.16 Summary

Overall, the accounts of the clients indicate that the coaching experience from the client's perspective was a process in which the clients seemed to have benefitted in terms of their psychological well-being (and in particular a sense of having been taken seriously, warmly regarded and given a sense of control). They expressed a sense of resourcefulness and resolve to address personal challenges. The accounts suggest the relevance of the satisfaction of interpersonal needs, meaning-making and common factors in the coaching

process. Based on the themes presented, Figure 4.1 illustrates how these themes can be considered inter-related in order to make sense of the coaching process as identified in the Inquiry. Clients come to coaching in a state of readiness; they hold the coach in high regard and are given the space to reflect both within and outside of sessions. These can be broadly conceptualised as the “Facilitating conditions”. The facilitating conditions can be conceptualised coupled with the in-session behaviours and attitude of the coach to enable the satisfaction of a range of interpersonal needs (being made to feel significant, in control and valued). The client makes meaning of the interpersonal interaction with the coach (including responding to the challenges of the coach) and has the space to construct meaning. This results in a sense of flow (pleasurable sense of gaining of control over issues and time flowing). This, in turn, leads to immediate positive post-session outcomes, including the confidence, clarity and commitment to address issues (resourcefulness).

Figure 4.1: Client Perspective on the Coaching Process



5.0 Chapter 5 The Perspective of The Coach

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the accounts of the coaches. While in the previous chapter what had seemed salient in the accounts of the clients had been the similarity of experiences, what seemed salient in the accounts of the coaches were differences in individual perspectives. However, the individual perspectives did share overarching similarities and are also reported later in the chapter although some prominent similarities will be highlighted as and when of immediate relevance. Moreover, given the constructionist orientation of this research, analysis is always a process of construction. This means that I have made sense of the perspective of the coach as being different in important ways across the accounts; not that there are more differences than similarities in an objective sense. Analysis is always a subjective process of sense-making.

In general, while the clients appeared to focus on their relational engagement with the coach and the affective experience of the session, the coaches tended to focus on what they attended to do, what interpretations they made, what decisions they took and how their decisions informed particular actions. This approach seemed to describe their general orienteering strategies in the session. It seemed that when the clients were given the open invitation to discuss what stood out, they responded to the invitation in a service context; that is as recipients of a service describing what that experience had been like. The coaches constructed the invitation as an opportunity to describe how they provided that service.

This finding might seem unsurprising in that coaches are contracted to provide a service. On the other hand, it seems to suggest that clients readily position themselves as service users and coaches as providers, rather than constructing the coaching process as a collaborative engagement. In effect, the coaches themselves positioned themselves as experts in the intervention, even if this was in the context of trying to encourage collaboration.

The account of each coach will be considered in turn; a descriptor of the overall *orienteeing type* of coaching is suggested when introducing each approach in order to help communicate the overall theme of each coach's account. The accounts will consider the main approaches adopted by the coaches. Towards the end of each section, some space will be dedicated to analysing the actual spoken text from a more discursive perspective (including the use of particular metaphors and linguistic characteristics) as indicated in Chapter 3. This is intended to highlight further the coach's construction of the coaching process. Some detail of how each coach conducted the session from their point of view will be provided. This is considered useful as a point of comparison with other viewpoints in this thesis. It also highlights the rich detail and diversity in coaching process.

5.1 Alison – Phenomenological Experiencing/ Gestalt Coaching

Alison

Particularly salient in the interview with Alison is how she appeared to be drawing on a tradition informed framework (Gestalt psychology) to guide her and the client through the session. Allan and Whybrow (2007) highlight the principles and use of “phenomenology,” “dialogic existentialism” and “holism/field theory” in Gestalt coaching. Related to these principles, they refer to how Gestalt coaches work with experiments often involving polar constructions of self and blocks to awareness.

Alison began her account for example by highlighting how she paid attention to her *immediate phenomenological experience* of the client even before the session had formally started as a guide for identifying the content of the session:

“Even before the session had begun, when we met over a coffee, I was getting a very strong sense of how she is in herself... “She has quite a way of making a very serious point in a

jovial manner which struck me very strongly which then became unsurprisingly one of the themes in the session”

Alison highlighted how she was attending to many detailed and different aspects of the client’s appearance. This focusing of attention also seemed to relate to her Gestalt notions of experiencing the client as the client appeared in the moment of the session:

“A lot of it is visual, even down to the tone of the skin, I watch the muscles around the mouth...the tone of voice, the eye-contact...breathing patterns. I’ve been doing these things for so long I think I do these things without [thinking]...I think there is a big difference between looking and seeing. I am waiting to see what captures my gaze. I’m guided a lot by that...It’s trying to have data as data. I see something which is data and then I make a conclusion. We have a working hypothesis but the key thing is finding out from the other person”

She emphasised how she acknowledged the immediate context/field and drew the client’s attention to this:

“We acknowledged the reality of the situation. So, we acknowledged the set up that we were in.”

She explained how she began to interpret the client’s expressiveness in terms of polar opposites and how she used that information as a basis for experimentation in order to promote awareness:

“What started to emerge were the various different polarities which she was caught between...so we did some exploration...I asked her if she was open to some experimentation...I invited her to inhabit both of those [polarities] as a way of really getting in touch with what they are with a view to seeing what the middle ground was for her.”

Her comments also suggested realist ontology/epistemology; that there were actual positions that the client was caught between that could be discovered.

Before she could conduct the experiment, the coach had to check that the client was willing to experiment; this illustrated how the coach had to attend to specific procedural aspects of the interaction before she could proceed with another action.

“The things I was tracking were ...how compliant is she? ...trying to make sure that I positioned the experiment in such a way that if she really didn’t want to, she would be able to say, ‘that’s not working’.”

Whenever the opportunity arose, she would try to increase the client’s awareness:

“I was inviting her to hold that position for longer and to exaggerate it and say it again and really embody it...see what it feels like...something about integrating the whole self (creating awareness)”

Alison referenced the client’s *“introjects”* (a block to awareness). She also focused on where the client appeared to express the most energy:

“What I’m attending to is where she has more energy in the story”

The coach also highlighted how she *“knew she [the client] would cry”* if she explored particular aspects of the client’s experience and that at one point in the session, she *“knew there was a lot of work to be done”* in relation to exploring some *“past introjects”*. This suggested that the coach could draw on her immediate understanding of the client to decide in light of her experience and knowledge what she could and could not do in the scope of a

single session. It also suggested that the coach was unwilling to be completely open with the client.

All of these principles (the client's energy introjects/ blocks to awareness, attempts to increase awareness) are very common in Gestalt coaching. Alison was moreover explicit about her use of Gestalt principles:

In terms of the Gestalt cycle of experience, it did follow awareness mobilising to action and it did feel that we got to a point where it felt complete."

The coach's account stressed that she could draw on her Gestalt informed phenomenological experiencing of the client to make important judgement calls about how to proceed with the client:

I was also aware of the levels of depth from cognitive to experiential, to somatic to emotional...again it being a first session, a one and only session, I was watching very carefully about what was happening to her emotionally...and guided by her"

These and similar comments suggested that the coach was not applying a particular approach in a mechanistic manner. She emphasised in the above comment and repeatedly in her account how she would always be led by the client and she was always questioning her own expertise:

"I had a very clear idea in my own mind about where I would go with this...and I asked her what her inclination is, so I held onto my expert view which probably wouldn't have been very helpful but invited her to see where she was drawn to and went with where she was going."

She stressed how she was always being respectful of the client's wishes:

"One intervention would be, 'I'm seeing some quite strong emotion...?' Another would be 'What's going on right now?' And that's giving the other person the freedom to either pull themselves together, go with it...."

She also emphasised the relational experience of her engagement with the client:

"I felt very connected with her...I was very focused on her...I felt very moved; that tingling that you get when somebody has looked authentically at themselves...it's a lovely moment"

The engagement with the client had also been experienced somatically which seemed to highlight a strong visceral empathising with the client:

"That bodily sensation, it had quite an 'ouch?' an 'ooh!'"

5.1.1 Analysis of discursive constructions

The coach's account of the session seemed to reveal how the coach positioned herself relative to the client/ coaching process. The coach's repeated use of "we" in the citations provided and generally in her account suggests that she was constructing the coaching process as one of collaboration. She also repeatedly referred to being "led" by the client (and similar) and "inviting" the client, which seems to downplay any possibility of her manipulating or directing the client in the coaching process; these citations also seemed to position the coach as being *of service* to the client, a position of deference. However, paradoxically, the coach asked questions to evaluate how compliant she was, which might be understood to suggest that there was a degree of covert testing of the client (acting on the client) rather than simply responding to the client.

There is a sense in the coach's account that she was constructing her role as simply a medium for observing/ experiencing the client's issues (e.g. which "*emerge*") and her way of being: she merely reflected back observable "*data*" as hypotheses or as possible ways of being (e.g. when working with polarities or simply informing the client of her observations) which the client could then be helped to explore. Her references to not drawing on any expertise in trusting in her own interpretations at the expense of the client's seemed to play down any possible claim to knowing the client better than the client herself, even though the coach amply elaborated on her skill set which suggested that she had a strong sense of her own expertise. She also formulated "hypotheses" which suggested an expert perspective reviewing the client's situation as problematic and providing an expert diagnosis, even if that expertise was open to question. Similarly, even though the coach referred to preferring to work with the client's own sense-making, the coach expressed a sense of the client's past and could contextualise the client's experiencing against existing frames of reference (e.g. *introjects* or *levels of awareness*). This seemed to give her a degree of expert knowledge above that of the client which she was not willing/ thought inappropriate to share. This finding seemed to call into question whether there is or can be equality in power in the coaching relationship if the coach has, or believes she has, a degree of knowledge over and above that of the client, which she feels unable to share.

5.1.2 Summary

In summary, the thematic analysis of Alison's account seems to suggest that the coach responded to the context of the interview by describing how she facilitated the coaching process. This seemed to comprise of attending or noticing particular characteristics of the client which were expressed in the moment of the session in addition to the actual content of the conversation expressed verbally. Her observations led her to make decisions about how to proceed in the session. Alison's account illustrates how a coach can use a guiding framework (for this coach, Gestalt psychology/coaching) in order to help orientate her way through the process. It also suggests that the coaching process can be conceptualised as an orientating activity which is guided by on-going perceptions and decisions made on the basis of those perceptions. An analysis of the discursive constructions of the coach suggested that the coach appeared to attempt to construct the coaching process as a collaborative partnership although she simultaneously conveyed a sense of being an expert, constantly diagnosing and testing the client to inform decisions about how to direct the interaction and what to reveal to the client/ raise in the conversation.

5.2.0 Tristan - thematic Listening



Tristan's account differed to Alison's in his description of his orientation through the facilitation of the session. While Tristan, like Alison appeared to draw on some frames of reference which showed tradition informed influences (he referred explicitly to humanistic and Gestalt influences), what seemed salient in his account was the way he referred to his efforts to identify patterns in the client's narrative and how he then worked with the client to explore those patterns; his orienteering framework was more idiosyncratic than based strictly on the principles of one or more coaching traditions. There was also a sense of the coach

interpreting the client's meaning making, which implied that he was using more interpretive/ social constructionist epistemology:

I'm understanding his meaning making...at times I did bring back in elements that I had remembered from previous sessions: "so how does this fit in? That fit in?" I was trying to join up what I saw as significant in the session...I do like to join up jigsaw bits...

Tristan emphasised his tendency to sense possibilities that emerged in the session in relation to a central theme:

"As he put it, it was very helpful for him to articulate lots of things that he has been thinking about doing. He has a tendency for being a bit more introverted and in so doing, drew out the key theme for him, which has mainly been about...mainly about assertiveness but within that, lots of different strands; doors opened."

Tristan referred to how his sense-making of the client's narrative informed the actions he took in the session:

"I listen intently to the story he is telling and I'm constructing a hypothesis with how is that going to land with what he is trying to achieve. So I'm both listening for the narrative and where there might be blind spots and I'm listening for the language and in particular, I specifically challenge him on direct clean language."

He referred to his sense-making of the client in order to decide if the session was generally useful:

"I guess the biggest navigation for me is: is he getting something out of this? Within what I think needs to happen in a last session? Is he engaged in learning for himself? Is he meeting his needs? Is this useful in the moment for him? Is he engaged? And pretty much

all the way through that: absolutely 'yes!' So, was this on his agenda...and my strong sense was 'Yes.' Was he engaged and learning something? 'Yes!'

When asked how he was making sense of the client, Tristan said that his approach was “*more analytical than intuitive*” which confirmed the impression he was giving (noticing patterns but importantly, analysing them logically as a basis for action). Tristan also demonstrated some other idiosyncratic aspects in his approach. His account emphasised the importance of working with language rather than with changes in the client’s energy or body language:

“I picked up a lot on language use, a lot [humour]; less on body language. I don’t think his body language varied very much. Tone...? I mean he did talk about [pause] sitting forward in the chair at times: ‘Oh I’m excited now’ [pause]”

His account also pointed repeatedly towards a belief in the need to help the client address blocks to awareness, which seemed generally characteristic of a Gestalt approach (and which related to the client’s use of language):

“What I thought was very important, was about how he articulates, what he believes and uses personal language to say, ‘I think this’ as opposed to being more distant: ‘It is like this’.”

Tristan also emphasised how he had generally taken a non-directive approach in the session, other than when he had challenged the client to use the first person in the session. He also explained that the whole session had focused in the main on the client reflecting:

“I offered him the chance to create some time for review....but he wanted the whole session to review...”

It seemed that the coach had adopted a broadly person centred approach in listening to the client and in making occasional reflections. As in the case of Alison, his account also emphasised how he was being led by the client and how he was offering, not his observations but his hypotheses and sense-making of the client's narrative. His requests for the client to use "I" language, the interpretations he made and his more collaborative descriptions (sharing ideas in a "*spirit of mutual endeavour*") did not seem totally aligned with a person centred approach. It seemed generally collaborative with more active suggestions of patterns he sensed. For Tristan, a sense of collaboration seemed to extend to establishing a very strong and authentic relationship:

"We are in relationship and I'm consciously, wanting to be authentic with my client and encourage him to be authentic with me."

Tristan also tended to emphasise the notion of presence and of being of service to the client which has already been alluded to:

"I'm listening, I'm hearing. If I think it and I think it is in service of what he is searching for or working on, I will articulate it and in that way, I bring myself into the room."

He provided a summary of his approach which stressed his general humanistic orientation. The approach also suggested that the process was very useful for him as a reflective exercise:

"I feel like I have been very present with him...it wasn't highly emotional..... this really intrigues me. I see myself as very emotional, potentially very warm and very engaged with my client and what they want and that's about it... Broadly, if I'm doing that, I'm doing a pretty good job. So the key to what I am doing is creating a relationship with someone I can

explore. That's the core of it...In that way, I'm a humanistic coach and within that, I'm using some bits and pieces, especially how people talk to themselves."

However, this review also led him to question whether there was a difference between what he thought he did and what he actually typically does when conducting a session.

He also emphasised that although he had worked as a therapist and still did some psychotherapeutic work, his understanding of coaching was about working at a different level of psychological depth. He considered himself as *"a bit of a not-a-therapist"* when he coached which suggested a construction of the coaching process as quite different to therapy. He did not see any need to explore any possible underlying issues with his present client.

5.2.1 Analysis of discursive constructions

Many of the metaphors Tristan used reinforced a construction of a process of helping the client to identify patterns. The most salient metaphor he used was that of being a master navigator, referring to his own contribution as *"mapping the terrain," "knowing the territory"* and as having *"antennae"*. However, he said that his interpretive approach always risked his *"getting ahead of the client"* and risked him *"being a clever coach"*. This was something which he tried not to do and said that he thought that he had not done in the session.

For Tristan, there was a particular conflict in the way he tried to reconcile his own potentially self-indulgent satisfaction with the coaching session and the need to ensure that he had been of service to the client. This was most evident in his opening remarks which have been numerated together with the pauses noted, in order to help explain the analysis:

1. *First of all, I enjoyed the session [5 second pause] erm [2 second pause], and I*

2. *think it was useful for [the client] and [laughter and 2 second pause] I suppose there*
3. *was a slightly, no very self- conscious part of me...yeah I think that will be OK, I*
4. *don't think I'll get slaughtered [how observers might review the session] for that*
5. *[2second pause]...and erm [2 second pause]...more to the point I think there were*
6. *bits that were very useful for [the client]...so broadly [2 second pause] I'm happy*
7. *somewhere between happy and very happy how that went.. how that whole*
8. *programme of coaching has gone for [the client] and how much I have been myself*
9. *and been the coach I want to be with him...[5 second pause] and helped him explore*
10. *what he wanted to explore....so...*

This monologue on the part of the coach (he was asked to freely recall the session without any prompts) alternates a sense of self-satisfaction with concern for ensuring that he portrays a sense of himself primarily serving the client's needs (e.g. in line 1 coach refers to his own enjoyment but this satisfaction is quickly countered by reference to the client in line 2). Before the end of line 2, the coach returns to his own satisfaction with the session before returning to the benefits for the client at the end of line 5/ line 6; then towards the end of line 6 he returns to his expressing satisfaction once again with the session, but immediately qualifies that satisfaction in relation to the benefits for the client (end line 7/8). Towards the end of line 8, he returns to self-satisfaction with his own coaching authenticity, before qualifying this comment again at the end of line 9 by referencing the client's benefits. The laughter in line 2 might serve to make light of his expressed self-satisfaction.

The detailed analysis of the opening comments seems to suggest that the coach carefully expresses his own satisfaction with the process, while at the same time ensures that he conveys a sense of coaching being about meeting the client's needs, not his own. The coaching process is therefore constructed as one in which the coach can be satisfied with his own input, but one in which first and foremost the client's needs are seen to be met. .

5.2.2 Summary

Tristan's account seemed to suggest that he adopted an interpretive approach to his facilitation of the coaching session: he was attending to patterns and making judgements as to how to proceed in the session; it was much more explicitly interpretive and much less based on any specific tradition. From an epistemological perspective, Tristan's construction of the coaching session appeared to be less about presenting the client with factual realities, as Alison had done, and more about helping the client construct meaningful narratives. His description suggested a balance between an overall tradition (humanistic orientation) and his own idiosyncratic practices. The notion of being present and being in relationship was particularly emphasised. As in the case of Alison, he used a language that emphasised client service.

5.3 Joanne- Intuitive Listening



In the case of Joanne, her mode of attending to the client was described primarily as “intuition”. Other aspects of her account featured, in particular, a loose structuring of the coaching process, playfulness in her approach and her adopting a phenomenological experiencing of the client. She started her recollection of the session with what appeared to represent a relatively informal process of contracting:

Initially, we just spent a few minutes to just get a bit of contracting going...very loosely; just an understanding of [the client's] understanding of coaching was”

Joanne suggested that the client was of a particular type:

“So that gave me an indication of process...someone who quite liked order and process”

This comment suggested that the coach was being attentive to how she was experiencing the client and how she might need to manage the interaction. She was aware of the interaction being a little stilted at the outset, which she attributed to the client's hesitance:

"I noticed a little tightness...that she hadn't quite got into that dance at the early stage"

This remark suggested that the coach was constructing the coaching process as a dance, as a free flowing process and this seemed to be a benchmark for evaluating the coaching session. Towards the very end of the interview, we returned to this topic in relation to a comment I made about coaching being perhaps a tango. The coach rejected the idea of coaching being a tango, as this would suggest that coaching is not collaboration between two individuals since the man leads in a tango. Joanne then explained how she was sensing not only who the client was, but what was needed to progress the session:

"I had the sense of somebody who was stuck in a decision about the here and now and I had a strong sense of wanting to open that so it became a wider set of thoughts...and what was informing me; there was somebody trying to make a decision about what was the right thing to do without having necessarily thought of the broader picture and context."

This comment seemed to suggest that the coach was describing her experience of the client in both an experiential and an analytical way. She expressed a sense of encountering the client and then categorising the client in a situational context. There was also a degree of sensing expressed in her account; a feeling of needing to "open" things which was not described as a logical process; it was described as a more immediate sensing process.

Joanne recalled how the client presented a couple of issues relating respectively to short and long-term goals. She explained how she and the client agreed to work on the long-term goal first:

“We played around with that a bit [the goal for the session], came to the conclusion between us that it would be quite useful to think about the longer-term goal first, and I was suggesting that, with initially giving Jane the opportunity to accept the suggestion. It was quite a light-holding but it felt like the place to move.”

These comments refer explicitly to playfulness in how she was constructing the coaching process. While the comments suggest a sense of responding in a non-logical way (responding to a feeling about “*the place to move*”), there was also logic in the approach (conclusions were drawn). Her comments in relation to giving the client an “*opportunity*” and her repeated reference to *suggesting* seem to downplay any possibility of directedness on her part. Her comments did refer however to a *holding* of the client and she did seem to imply that there was a suggestion to be accepted by the client. These comments may suggest a degree of directedness on the part of the coach. She also perhaps downplayed the degree of holding by describing it as “light”. It would seem that the coach was projecting a sense of not directing or controlling the process while at the same time indicating that there was some directedness, even if that directedness was agreed.

Joanne’s sensing of the client and her decision-making in the session was described as very immediate:

“I was getting the sense of somebody who was talented, able, professional, resourceful and not necessarily using all of those so I was mindful of using a kind of experiment that would allow her to access all of that for herself and so hence we got up and did a time-line experiment.”

In this statement, the coach projects a sense of responding to a feeling: she finds her and her client getting up; it is not related in her account as a conscious decision even though the coach expresses some deliberations that preceded that act of standing up. The immediacy

of her perceptions and her acting on her perceptions continued to be salient in the account of the coach. Joanne finally made a reference to *'Intuition'* to describe the process she thought she was drawing upon. This comment arose when I asked the coach if she was responding to her physical sense of the client:

"Lots of thinking initially...which is why I wanted to move...We referred to 'feeling' a bit [added emphasis] but not much. I wasn't picking up visceral feeling, [pause] which is quite unusual...and yet there were moments where there was like an intuition about something else going on which is where we moved to different directions or I asked a question... A few times I said, 'I sense'. I was picking up what I was seeing rather than what I was hearing but I didn't refer to the body apart from a couple of times when we started the experiment and I did pick up on a couple of gestures."

These responses to my question suggested that the coach did include a noticing of her own visceral responses to the client, but in this particular situation, the process was more intuitive. These comments are also interesting in how the coach wanted to put to one side the more rational thinking processes. Joanne explained what "intuition" was for her and presented an account that seemed to draw on neurology:

"For me, intuition is a knowing that I am not conscious of formulating so I'm not bringing something into the foreground with deliberateness about it. I'm acting before I've done that...So just before I suggested the experiment, I had a feeling before the thought and I think that intuition is the limbic brain tuning in before the neo-cortex...it's accessing the non-verbal communication...words are not creating the impulse...I was not processing from a language point of view...you engage without words."

She struggled to explain intuition because of its non-linguistic nature:

“Because...the words aren’t there, it is a different level of communication, in a nanosecond, in a moment of exchange. There was a moment of exchange when I had a non-linguistic sense, ‘we need to move’... There was something happening between us, whether it was because we got stuck...I can’t recall any conscious processing. It was a nonverbal connection that led to the agency.”

We discussed whether her approach could lead to mistakes. She laughed, explaining that what was needed was a good supervisor, but that she did not normally get it wrong. She had grown to trust increasingly in her own intuition. Joanne’s account continued to suggest that she was responding very spontaneously to what she observed and to her sensing of the client:

“There was one moment when she referred to herself as being dumb, and I picked her up on that and I wanted to offer her an endorsement because I did not [added emphasis] experience her as dumb and it came back again towards the end..., ‘just because you are not seeing something, it does not mean you are not resourceful’, kind of thing...that really struck me.”

One particularly interesting element of Joanne’s account was when she was talking about the time-line experiment. She indicated that she was unaware of the meaning of a metaphor (“a pot of gold”) that the client used in the time line activity, but did recognise its significance. What counted for the coach in the coaching process was recognising and acknowledging a client experience but not necessarily knowing that experience:

“The light-bulb was going on for her. I didn’t even need to know what she was thinking. There was no need to know what was going on in her mind. Something had happened that was important and I could see that and I could acknowledge it without knowing what it was. I

didn't need to rationalise what was happening for her...to acknowledge through my physical being rather than through words."

The coach's account also related a sense of her being aware of the conflicting tensions experienced by the client, but her capacity to make a decision that would be right for the client:

"I was quite touched that she went with the experiment because I could tell that this would not be in her normal bag...I got a sense of a bit of discomfort but a willingness to play and experiment."

In this comment, the coach also justifies her approach; that is she outlines that the experiment may be uncomfortable, but that any discomfort would be justified through her understanding of the client. Her qualifying the statement, with an expression of empathy (feeling touched) also serves to show compassion and thereby qualifies any action that might be taken that would create discomfort.

The coach also referred on a number of occasions to a sense of joyous connection between her and the client, which suggested that there had been strong rapport/ connection in the engagement:

"There was a moment after a few minutes where she looked at me and we had a bit of an exchange that was quite joyful really. It was like "Ah Ha!" That sort of moment and we had a few of those..."

She had experienced this emotional connection with the client on another occasion in the session:

“There was another connection where she suddenly had an insight about negotiating...it was a lovely smile and “Ah ha”...There was a lovely broad smile and we just stood there in that moment”

5.3.1 Analysis of discursive constructions

Joanna’s language (already highlighted in parts alongside the thematic analysis provided above and to avoid repetition of statements) share many similarities with Alison and Tristan: notions of relationship, being present and being of service; also about the process of enjoyment for the coach, which was present in her account and in the other accounts. This seemed to suggest a broadly humanistic orientation of togetherness. Like the other coaches, there was also a sense of an expertise in being able to make sense of the client’s challenges. Her reference to dance suggested the coaching conversation as a dynamic interactive process. She also used the metaphor of *play and spontaneity* in the coaching session, which suggested a construction of the coaching process as something in a sense, quite natural and free-flowing, rather than a more formal and structured intervention.

5.3.2 Summary

In summary, Joanne described her facilitation of the session in terms of a process of intuition; of sensing what was needed in the moment and responding to that sensing. Her way of sense-making and decision-making in the session was quite different to that of Alison and separately, Tristan. When considered alongside Alison and Tristan’s accounts, it seemed that coaches describe how they make sense and negotiate the interaction very differently, even though there are some broader similarities in terms of how they construct the process (being of service, being able to make sense of the client and of the client’s situation/ being an expert *of sorts*, taking part in a process of collaboration and being of service).

5.4.0 Marjorie - Empathic Listening



Marjorie's account of the session seemed to stress a sense of her responding to her immediate experience of the client. Her approach seemed to emphasise a *felt sense* about the client and how this sensing served as a way of informing her approach to the session.

Marjorie's began her account by stressing the importance of rapport. She described how "*rapport had been built very naturally*" en route to the session (a logistical issue relating to coordination of participants). This seemed to highlight the importance of the relationship for the coach.

When the session started formally, the first thing she noticed was that the client was not responding in a way that was typical of her usual clients:

"The kind of questions I normally ask that get people thinking differently, just didn't work and he was in my experience completely trapped in a very negative story...there was just no hope."

She referred to how most of her typical clients are successful managers who understand coaching as an important developmental process. This client had very little preconception of coaching. He was a professional executive (chartered status) but more used to working as a specialist in small organizations in which there was not a formal career structure. He had also had no real personal developmental experiences in his working history. The coach's account of the client seemed to suggest that clients taking part in coaching typically have a common understanding of the coaching process and of self-development and that this enables them to participate in the process. This was a particularly interesting part of the

discussion, as it suggested that coaching is socially constructed through business discourse and that clients who are not socialized into a discourse of development might not take part in the process in a way in which coaches might expect.

As the session progressed she felt she was struggling to break the client's negative cycle of thinking. She said that she felt a need to communicate more directly with the client:

“So I remember I just put my pen and paper down and just really tried to focus on him and really get a connection”

Connection in this sense (as she elaborated) meant trying to get the client to understand his own negative thinking – he was simply not responding to the suggestions of the coach. She felt a need to interrupt his telling and retelling of the same negative worldview and resorted to giving advice and suggestions. In the moment of the session, and knowing that this was a one-off session without any follow-up, she could see no other way of getting through to the client:

“I had to end up telling him: what I am seeing is that you are just very negative, you are thinking this way; you are very negative. You are not thinking of choices...I explained what I meant by choices”

This was an interesting comment as it suggested that when faced with a client who was not willing to play the game. This suggested that coaching participants normally take part in a cultural practise with defined rules and behaviours. It was in a sense, a language game (Wittgenstein, 2010). The coach had to break out of her normal role as coach and had decided to approach the social context differently. It seemed that for a moment, coaching as a social practice in which there are agreed roles and activities shared by informed participants had not been established.

Marjorie said that she experienced the client as “*bemused*” but did adapt to his way of being:

“I eventually got more in tune with his kind of style”

The above comments suggest that the coach was constructing the coaching process as one in which the coach has to work from the client’s frame of reference. She also explained how she thought that structuring the session would have been inappropriate for the client, as this would have impacted on her sense of the client wanting a free-flowing conversation. She said that she noticed that this client was looking at her intensely, which meant that she had to make sure she mirrored intense eye-contact. All of these behaviours were explained as her way of adapting to the client. The coach therefore seemed to be constructing the process as one of relating to the client which allowed trust and understanding.

The coach was very clear in her explanation that rapport building was something which emerged naturally as a consequence of focusing on the client rather than any conscious attempt to build rapport as a technique:

“I think it is natural [establishing a connection] but you are aware that if you really listen and you really empathize that the connection’s going to build”

Similarly, she was clear in her account that although she was seeking to help the client, she was not pursuing any internal agenda. For example, at one point in the interview, picking up on a comment made by the coach, I asked her about what I had heard in relation to her “*looking for a breakthrough.*” She corrected me: “*No, I said we got a breakthrough.*” These comments on not consciously building a connection or about trying to achieve a breakthrough seem to suggest a particular understanding of the process of conducting a coaching session for this coach. This was about avoiding *wanting* for the client or *wanting* in the process. It was about being there to help the client but not to steer the agenda through her own intentions.

The coach's account of the session tended to express an affective sensing of what the client was expressing:

"His belief system seemed so set and unexamined. I don't think he had ever examined his own point of view...I don't think it had ever been examined, I had that sense of it being unexamined."

The repetition of the word "un/examined" seemed to suggest that the coach was repeating to herself a word which seemed to summarise her experiencing of the client. She seemed to be repeating the word to gain a sense of what the experience was like of being with the client. She was conveying a sense of trying to internalise the worldview of the client.

She further expressed her depth of sensing of the client's worldview when referring to the moment in the session when she put her notepad down to concentrate on the client:

"I was feeling that physically... a sort of trappedness, circularity and 'on' and 'onness'...it's got to stop...physical, intellectual, a mixture [the feeling]...and it's quite interesting because putting that down [the pad] noisily, it was like, 'right we're going to get out of this, I can't take this anymore...it's got to shift...' [picking up on the client's sense of circularity/ entrapment]"

These comments portray a sense of the coach describing how the coaching session was about responding at a multi-dimensional experiential level to the client. Her account also suggested that her understanding of the situation followed her actions; that is she sensed the meaning of putting the pad down only after she had done so. Her account therefore suggested that coaching was about responding in the moment to the client by sensing her overall experiencing of the client.

The coach emphasised the way she was focusing intently on what the client actually said; that is how he was explaining his own way of being. This led to the coach being very surprised when later in the interview; the client appeared to present himself differently:

“He had told me that he was meek and mild and that completely [emphasis] confused me because he had told me earlier that he wore his heart on his sleeve”

This comment suggested that the coach had been listening intently to the client and trying to understand his way of being as he, the client was describing himself. She did not convey a sense of trying to read between the lines of what the client said. She seemed to have adopted a non-judgemental approach towards the client based on what he had actually been saying.

At one point in the discussion, I asked the coach if she had considered role playing at any stage. She said that this was a good suggestion but that it had simply not occurred to her:

“It may have been the extent to which he was unreflective. I may just have thought that that might not have worked.”

This comment could simply reflect the challenge of recalling what happened in the session. On the other hand, it also seemed to suggest that the coach was not actively planning or thinking about frameworks or techniques in the session. This view would be consistent with a more spontaneous orientation to the client which was conveyed in her account generally.

The coach recalled a personal experience of the client in that he reminded her of someone personally close:

“He was cheeky...he that sort of cheeky working class sort of humour, nice smile...he reminded me of....[a relative]”

This comment also supported the coach's description of her relating at a personal experiential level to the client.

The coach expressed in her account a sense of the coaching engagement as being about working with client thinking as a system. The following comment related to a moment of insight that the coach said the client had experienced:

“He processed it. In his own mind he came up with his own insight...You saw the energy of it. He was excited. Something's changed in his system of thought [noticing and sharing a sense of energy/ excitement]”

This comment also suggested that the coach was being particularly attentive to the changes in the client's energy further underpinning how in her account she emphasised her overall experiencing of the client. Later, she made a reference to coaching as a complex system. She referred to how the client had gained a new insight and how this new insight might just be enough to mobilise a change in the client's worldview:

“Something which will give him a steer, to start to make a shift...that might just be enough”

This comment is consistent with chaos theory/ complexity theory whereby a small change can be understood to have a large impact (e.g. in relation to attractor points). (Manson, 2001). The coach seemed to have making sense of behaviour in line with current discourses of complexity.

She expressed a sense of emotional attachment to the client; that is a sense of genuinely hoping and wanting a positive outcome for the client: *“I really hope that he gets that job”* and later, *“What I really loved is when he did finally break through and he got this new angle.”*

This comment also suggests that the coach was making sense of changes in the client in terms of gaining new insights. Earlier in the interview, she had also referred to how the client had gained a new “insight”. These expressions suggest underpinning realist ontology for the coach (that there are new ways of seeing the reality of situations) as had her previous comments about having to tell the client (communicate the reality of the situation).

One strategy the coach seemed to use to help the client perceive the reality of his situation was to encourage him to consider the perspective of others. She referred to a concern that adopting the perspective of others, however, could have provoked a negative reaction in the client:

“That felt courageous [discussing the perspective of others] because I felt he could easily then just think I was a baddie as well and on the baddies’ side”

This suggested that coaching was about taking some risks in the session. The coach also referenced possible developmental issues relating to experiences of bullying which she said were quite beyond the scope of exploration in a short one-off session. She did say however that she might have explored these issues had she had more time even in a single session. This suggested some confidence about working with what might be understood as *deeper issues* while also her view that this would have been inappropriate in the context of a short session. The coach also said that a lot of her coaching work did involve engagements which might be considered therapeutic. Unlike Tristan, her view of coaching and more psychotherapeutic interventions seemed less clear cut.

5.4.1 Analysis of discursive constructions

Marjorie did not use the same language of “we,” “being present with” or of being “of service” to the client. Her reporting of the session was about “he” and then “I”. This suggested a different construction of the coaching process as an intervention of two individuals with different roles and perspectives; perhaps of two individuals working together rather than necessarily one of togetherness. This could have been because the interaction was less of a process of collaboration than in other sessions in which the client and coach respond to a discourse of collaboration. Another possibility is that the coach simply avoided adopting the rhetoric of collaborative language and other terms that many coaches use (e.g. *being authentic, being of service, etc.*).

5.4.2 Summary

Marjorie’s account, like that of Joanne had a strong sense of spontaneity (but not playfulness). The coach conveyed a strong sense of listening as a defining characteristic of her approach and of responding to an overall felt sense of experiencing of the client. By not describing her own feelings other than in relation to the client, she projected a sense of dedication to the client.

5.5.0 Alice - Pragmatic/Behavioural Orientation



Alice’s account of her session related her attentiveness to the specifics of the goals that the client presented. She emphasised how she drew on her knowledge of interpersonal behaviour and business to help the client identify a range of practical solutions. The description seemed very pragmatic. Alice began her account highlighting her wish to help

the client achieve the two goals the client stated she would like to achieve in the session, whilst recognising that this would be ambitious:

“I was conscious that I wanted to get both of those issues in the hour”

She referred to how she made sure that the first ‘issue’ had been covered before moving onto the second (within the available time-frame) which suggested a task-focused, business-like approach:

“I said, ‘before we move onto the next issue, let’s just make sure we are finished with that subject’.”

This comment suggested that she was trying to check the client’s satisfaction before moving on. She said that she wondered if the time pressure had caused some talking over each another but then said that this was not a concern for her as her model of coaching allowed a more free flowing interactional conversation. As the interview progressed, Alice’s account seemed to further substantiate her task focused approach. For example, whereas, Tristan and Alison had both talked about being present with the client and Marjorie had talked about her immediate experiencing of the client, Alice talked about the client “*from a technical perspective*” which suggested that she was constructing the process (and the client) in a more task focused way:

“From a technical perspective, she was very open, very trusting...the trust just seemed to come.”

In this comment, the coach seemed to be valuing, at least in part, the instrumentality of trust (rather than trust as something valued in its own right). Alice reflected on what encouraged clients to open up to her so easily (reflecting for example on the possible influence of her professional background). She also wondered if there was something about her presence that seemed to provide the conditions for clients to be willing to be open with her. This had

been a topic discussed in supervision. This comment also seemed to suggest a similarity with how the clients had generally expressed their sense of physicality in the coaching session.

Alice continued in her account to consider other elements she considered “*technical*” including “*contracting*” and how given more time, she would have spent more time on this. She also said that she would have spent more time encouraging the client to reflect, had the session been longer. These comments suggested that she was particularly attentive to what might be understood as the best practice elements of a coaching session, which she would have liked to have done more of.

During the interview, Alice spent a lot of time outlining how she had developed her own model of coaching based on client feedback. This had led her to develop a model of coaching which very much put at the forefront the offering of advice and suggestions, which she thought were particularly justified in executive coaching and which can be done in a way that is nevertheless consistent with the principles of client autonomy:

“The most contentious one is giving suggestions and advice...you are encouraging people to make their own choices but you are offering advice and suggestions...Leaders particularly; they are often very isolated; they have probably have had some issues they have struggled with for a very long time. It’s about using your experience to helping them learn... So you are not instructing them...you are offering suggestions but then discussing them...They are coming up with ideas; you are coming up with ideas and they will take away one or two of those that really resonate with them...It’s almost like having a bag of ideas both from the coach and the client and then at the end we say ‘OK’...I said ‘What really resonates for you....and she was very clear what resonated for her.”

Alice also referred to how she can be quite challenging in sessions:

“I said to her in the session, ‘you are resisting that bit’ and I mentioned it again so I allow the client to sum up what they took away from it and I then make some observations at the end as well and sometimes that’s a bit challenging for people because they might be resisting something.”

This led to a discussion about whether she had *observed* or *interpreted* what she had observed. Alice concluded that *“she was making observations,”* but my questioning in this area seemed to provoke some reflection on whether she was playing back observations or making interpretations. This was a significant moment in the Inquiry, as it juxtaposed what became a central epistemological theme within this thesis.

Alice continued her resume of the session referring to how she helps clients find their *“authentic place”*:

“...a place where they feel able to operate from...in accordance with their values, their beliefs, how they see themselves developing as a human being, so much more than seeing it as a task...sometimes people get influenced by others...”

This statement illustrated Alice’s sense of coaching as being much more than a task focused or technical activity, in spite of her seemingly pragmatic approach. It also prompted me to ask Alice if she herself had found her *“authentic place”* in way she coached and as illustrated in the session we were discussing. Alice said that the way she practised coaching was more about her *“professional development as a coach”* rather than being her *“authentic place,”* although this thought also provoked considerable reflection on whether there was something about authenticity in her approach:

“What’s interesting in your question is whether I feel more comfortable with that...It’s an interesting question for me...it probably is...probably being more active in that coaching relationship...”

The interview discussion switched more to what the coach had noticed in the session. She reflected on how much she *“enjoyed coaching”*. She then referred to how the client also *“seemed to be enjoying it”*. She also referred to how she would *“bring herself to the session.”* A similar metaphor had been used in the accounts of Alison, Tristan and Joanne suggesting some commonality about the expressed significance of the coach’s persona/presence in the coaching session. There was a sense of the coaches drawing on similar discourses.

Towards the end of the interview, Alice returned to the importance of being focused on the task:

“To be quite honest, the way that I coach, I’m so focused on the issues they’ve brought that I bring everything back to that.”

She contrasted her approach with that of other coaches which focused much more on underlying psychological themes:

“I’m tending not to suss them out...I know some coaches get into almost like psychoanalysing people...whereas I’m not like that...they come and say ‘look these are the two things I want to discuss’ and everything is focused on that...I’m not sitting there saying ‘you’re this type of person’. I’m not even thinking that in my head.”

5.5.1 Analysis of discursive constructions

As in the case of Alison there was a construction of the coaching process as an observational process. There was a sense of defiance in the way in which the coach challenged traditional coaching discourse about giving advice, as there was defiance in the way the coach seemed to suggest that all coaching should not be developmental; it was a call for dealing with the issues presented by the client. Broader notions of authenticity, resistance, balancing challenge and support, coaching as an intervention for the lonely senior executive were prevalent in the account.

5.5.2 Summary

In summary, Alice's account seemed to stress what might be described as a *no-nonsense approach* to coaching; one in which the coach described the way she negotiated the engagement as a striving to perceive the key issues as expressed from the client's perspective without any underlying reading of the client at a deeper level. She then responded to those issues as she understood them in a very rational way and by drawing on her superior knowledge and expertise of interpersonal and business processes.

5.6.0 Drew – Coaching as a Process of Reviewing



Throughout Drew's account there was a strong emphasis on her listening to the progress and plans of the client with respect to current business projects. She talked about how she would challenge any plans that did not seem watertight and would help the client identify new action areas (rather than specific behaviours). The emphasis in her account was

therefore on acting as a trusted confidante or critical friend for the client and as a motivating influence.

Drew began her account of the session by explaining how the session started, with the client reviewing homework from the previous session:

“She started off by saying that the action points she had agreed to do at the last one [session]; there were four and because of various events, haven’t all been actioned which is fine, I understand that.”

The judgement the coach gave about the client’s failure to achieve goals and the general reporting back process on the part of the client seemed to imply that the coach had assumed, in effect a quasi-monitoring role with respect to the client’s goals; a kind of performance check-point.

Drew went on to explain that the client had wanted to talk about her business projects in the session and Drew, respecting the client’s agenda, had given space for the client to do that with some occasional questioning and challenging:

“She spent a lot of the time really, talking about other projects that have come up, so, as far as I am concerned, you know, she dictates what the agenda of the session is, so if that’s what she wants to talk about and that’s what she was freely talking about at the time and I kind of was questioning and challenging as and when appropriate.”

Drew argued that the client had seemed very comfortable with the review process, felt that it was providing an opportunity for the client to clarify actions the client needed to take and had therefore run with that approach:

“The session very was very much almost her processing the logic: ‘and this is what’s happened and that’s why I’ve done that and I need to get those things in place’...she seems to be very comfortable with that style.”

The coach’s account suggested that she had been orienting her sense of direction in the session according to where the client expressed the most energy (i.e. what the client wanted to talk about):

“I don’t go in with an agenda, it’s very much about “What do you want to talk about?” and so that hopefully is given away in the first 5 minutes of the session...the thing that the coachee will kind of start to discuss and pick on and spend a lot of time on, is in my head; what she wants to talk about.”

Drew explained how she gave space in the session for the client to talk freely about one topic (“a big project she’s got involved in”) for the “first half an hour” until it reached a natural point of closure (“It seemed to dry into a natural, ‘Are you comfortable with that?’ ‘Yes I am”). At that point, Drew said that she prompted the client to introduce a new topic to review: ‘Ok what else have you got on?’ These comments seemed to reinforce the role she seemed to have assumed in acting as a check-point. Drew went on to explain how the client then introduced another project and separately gave an update on one of the earlier action points from a previous session, which the coach said took up most of the remaining half an hour of the session:

“So the last half hour was split into two: one was about another project that was coming up and the other one came out of the actions. She talked about the second project...and she seemed quite comfortable; she knew where she was going with that. We talked about some of the issues that might arise, how that would integrate well into her previous actions because a lot of it came out of the 360 report that she had and a lot of that was about

increasing the network that she had and raising her profile...so the second project was allowing her to do that.”

This comment seemed to capture the emphasis in the coaching session from the coach's perspective on the review of projects. Drew continued in her account of the session emphasising the importance of her being a critical friend. She conveyed this by assuming the identity of the client:

“I just want to be able to articulate it and know that in my head it sounds watertight and someone objective and neutral can throw challenge at it.”

She stressed the isolation of senior people, of their not having someone in whom they could confide and how her own experience of senior management gave her credibility with clients as they could sense that she understood their issues:

“I'm able to talk to them at their level because they can't tap the next person on the shoulder. The next person is a report of theirs... I guess I draw on the experience that I've got that says I understand the situation you are in...That's where the credibility comes in.”

Drew said that at the client's executive position in the organization, acting as a sounding board is what would be most useful for her:

“Certainly at [the client's] level...it's not necessarily looking at new roads...I'm not going to be able to show her new roads as she has more experience than I have. It might be just that objective challenge that says, 'Have you thought about this and why do you see it like that?'"

She was also aware that commentators could review her session and question what had been achieved. Yet from Drew's perspective, she thought that the session would be useful:

“But I guess critically someone could look on and say, ‘What constructively did you do?’ But as far as Jane is concerned, I would like to think that constructively, she has processed it, she’s rationalised it, because she wouldn’t come back – she’s far too busy to waste time.”

Drew also emphasised what she constructed as the therapeutic value of the process:

“A lot of the coaching for [the client] has been about processing it in her head, putting the rationale behind it and almost that therapeutic off-load”

She acknowledged that her approach wasn’t about probing in depth. Assuming the voice of an external observer criticising her approach, she said:

“Well, she [Drew] didn’t ask many questions, did she? And she didn’t interrogate this? But I feel that that almost goes against the grain of the conversation and therefore XXX [the client] is more reluctant to freely talk about what she wants to talk about”

As in Marjorie’s account, the coach seemed very reluctant to break the flow of the interaction by introducing too many coaching techniques:

“If I keep bringing her back to issues all the time, then this conversation is hard work. So I think there is an empathy there that says, ‘I can challenge you but I feel that there is something else you want to talk about...I feel that you want to talk about this issue’.

Drew was suggesting in her account, an attempt to tune into what she felt was important for the client, rather than to probe and challenge whenever an opportunity presented itself. In this sense, the coach conveyed a sense of what was important for the client:

“If I kept coming back to ‘what do you mean by you feel?’...If I picked up on that, she’d think ‘What’s the point of this conversation?’ I want to talk about the project. You’re picking me up on particular words...I was there as a sort of motivational bounce-point.”

She emphasised the importance of being able to relate to the client at the client’s level (referring to her own management experience):

“The challenge for me is to understand where that person is coming from, empathise with them and talk to them on a similar level...“I wanted to demonstrate that I was very engaged in what she was saying and genuinely interested”

She also explained that it was important for her to challenge and make suggestions but only as a last resort:

My role is to enable you [as if addressing the client] to articulate and process to that point and if you can’t reveal what the direction is, to throw a few perspectives, maybe a suggestion but not necessarily straight away and just to say, ‘Are you there?’ ‘Where do you need to go from there? ...A lot of that session was allowing the client to have the air time.”

5.6.1 Analysis of discursive constructions

Drew provided some very colourful descriptions of how she coached. As in the case of Joanne, she struggled to articulate in words what might be constructed as the essence of coaching:

“I don’t know that I can explain it...it loses value when you start to articulate it”

She further elaborated:

“There isn’t one element and say, ‘put that in’ but it’s almost a synergy...when you have that magic occurs...you don’t necessarily see it happening in front of you...you can’t say it’s about to happen. It’s when you come out the other side and you say, ‘gosh where did that question come from’. It’s one of those starlit moments...this person understands me...that coach has really understood me that is part of the magic that contributes to your credibility. It’s one of those things that is hard to articulate. I can’t say at 10 past 4 this happened...it’s almost that wholeness...It’s almost like saying if you took a chunk of metal, a bit of water, some petroleum, water, a spark, on their own they are just a heap of junk but if you manufacture them in the right way, it will come out as a formula 1 car.”

In this account of the session, the coach was constructing the process as one of synergy but also of deeply understanding another person. Her references to something magical and difficult to articulate suggests a construction of the coaching process as something intangible yet also very powerful, transcendental.

5.6.2 Summary

Overall, what characterised Drew’s account was the distinctiveness of her stance as a critical friend for a lonely executive; someone who gave the client plenty of space to reflect on her current projects, to check that the client was comfortable with her plans and to challenge her occasionally. She had made a judgement call that the review process was what the client wanted and had respected and worked with that perception. The focus was on the client’s current projects and plans and the client’s progress in achieving them. Her approach was based on trying to grasp an understanding of the client and to convey that understanding to the client.

5.7 Comparisons across Accounts

Although this chapter has tended to highlight what seemed primarily to be differences in accounts, there were some notable similarities, some of which have already been highlighted, such a language of collaboration, of service and of expertise. All coaches focused on how they facilitated the interaction; they all shared ways of making sense/ perceiving what was happening for the client and made decisions about how to proceed in the session. Most focused on the importance of understanding (what might be constructed as) the *inner world* of the client and of the importance of being present and together in relationship. There was an element of the transcendental in their accounts, of experiencing something ephemeral at moments in the session or of this capacity to experience these moments. Many described a range of core practices that would readily appear in accounts of *good coaching practice*, including for example, listening skills, skills of observation, showing empathy, etc. There was the sense of coaching as a natural, freely flowing process in which spontaneity played an important role.

There was an ambivalence expressed with respect to the resourcefulness of the client. On the one hand, all coaches expressed a sense of optimism for their clients; that they were all capable of making progress in addressing their challenges. This suggested an underlying perceived resourcefulness in their clients, perhaps the expression of a humanistic discourse of client resourcefulness. On the other hand, a number of coaches constructed their clients as quite fragile. For example, one coach expressed a perception that the client would cry if she had she opened particular issues. Another coach was reluctant to address particular issues within the given time constraints. These decisions not to address developmental issues may appear to be ethically appropriate but still serve to show a particular ambivalence in relation to client resourcefulness. It also suggested a medical discourse of deeply held emotional issues which need to be managed carefully and in a way that could not be disclosed for some client engagements.

Perhaps most salient in their accounts were the different types of perceptual processing they described and the way they acted on these perceptions. Some of these processes were not only well developed but very individualistic, such as Tristan's interest in language and Drew's focus on the client's reporting of actions. A similar comment has been made by de Haan (2008) in relation to how coaches tend to have their own individual models of coaching. However, overall, there seemed to be a similarity in terms of how the coaches described their accounts. This similarity relates to perceptual and decision-making processes described by (Jung, 1971). In reflecting on Joanne's account for example, there seemed to be a strong conceptual similarity between her account of intuition and Jung's description of the intuitive function:

"It is the function that mediates perceptions in an unconscious way...The peculiarity of intuition is that it is neither sense perception, nor feeling, nor intellectual inference... In intuition a content presents itself whole and complete, without our being able to explain or discover how this content came into existence. Intuition is a kind of instinctive apprehension...it is an irrational function of perception". (p.481).

Similarly, Marjorie's description of her affective response to the client seemed very similar to Jung's description of a *feeling* function:

"...feeling is a kind of judgment, differing from intellectual judgment in that its aim is not to establish conceptual relations but to set up a subjective criterion of acceptance or rejection" (p.434).

Tristan's expressed pattern of sense making seemed to relate to Jung's description of the thinking process:

The term “thinking” should...be confined to the linking up of ideas by means of a concept, in other words, to an act of judgment, no matter whether it is intentional or not.”

Finally, the way Alice described her responding more at face value to what the client was saying seemed to correspond with Jung’s description of how some people respond in a more direct manner:

He relies almost exclusively on his sense impressions, and his whole psychology is oriented by instinct and sensation. He is therefore entirely dependent on external stimuli (146).”

The psychology of Jung has been much popularised through the use of MBTI® as a developmental tool. There are also references within the literature on MBTI® in relation to the use of the tool (e.g. Carr et al., 2008; Stothart, 2011; Passmore et al., 2010). The findings in this research investigation provide an illustration of preferences in use.

5.8 Similarities with the Accounts of the Clients

Overall, the accounts of the coaches were highly congruent with the accounts of the clients. The coaches generally described their offering of affirmations to their clients, of giving them control in the session and of listening intently to them. They spoke of the reflective space they provided. They spoke of gently challenging their clients. They conveyed the sense of connection and relationship, including a sense of physicality that the clients had expressed. All the clients experienced these interventions in the way the coaches described them. The coaches’ narratives also seemed to suggest that they had demonstrated a particular professionalism. This supports the clients’ perceptions of them as experts.

5.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the accounts of the coaches in rich descriptive detail in order to provide the reader with the coaches' perspectives on their coaching sessions. Their accounts tended to suggest that the coaches had very personalised frameworks for conducting coaching sessions. Their accounts also suggested that the coaches were making a range of in-the-moment decisions based on their preferences for attending to particular types of information and then acting on those perceptions. In the next Chapter, I will consider the perspective of the coach-observers.

Key Points

- *Whereas the accounts of the clients had focused on their experience of being with the coach, the accounts of the coaches had focused more on what they had noticed and interpreted, the decisions they had made and the basis upon which those decisions had been made (Table XX summarises the findings across the sessions broadly conceptualised as "Coach's interactive style")*
- *The coaches had a positive impression of the session just as the clients had done*
- *Something appeared to be happening between coach and client – a sense of meaning was emerging between coach and client*

Table 5.1: Coach’s Interactive Style

COACH	WHAT WAS ATTENDED TO	WHAT INTERPRETATIONS WERE MADE	WHAT ACTION FOLLOWED AND WITH WHAT INTENTIONS	OVERALL DESCRIPTION OF STYLE
Alison	The coach was attending primarily to the client’s way of being and descriptions of self that would be relevant within a Gestalt framework (e.g. what was salient in the moment; how the client constructed different versions of herself; “introjects”); she was attending to the emotional strength of the client and to the context of the situation	The coach interpreted what was observed primarily in terms of Gestalt frames of reference (notably the client’s extreme views of self and the need to find a middle ground) although could also draw on other frameworks (e.g. psychodynamic); she made assessments on what would and would not be appropriate/ ethical in the context of the session	The coach carried out interventions typically practised in a Gestalt coaching session (e.g. empty chair technique; encouraging the clients to work with bi-polar constructs); she reflected back observed client behaviours in order to help the client increase awareness; she provided feedback intended to endorse a more positive view of self; she focused on what she noticed moment by moment in the interaction	The style could be considered primarily as “tradition informed” in that what was attended to, interpreted and the actions that were taken appeared to be largely based on the tenets and practices of an established school of practice (Gestalt tradition) <i>Dominant style: Phenomenological Experiencing; Gestalt Coaching (Tradition Informed)</i>
Tristan	The coach was listening for patterns and themes in what the client said and how the client used language	The coach was making interpretations in relation to how the client’s use of language was blocking awareness of self; he was also trying to understand the inter-relationships between different facets of the client’s experience and drawing hypotheses about what the client needed to become aware of in order to progress in the achievement of his goals; the coach was	The coach selectively reflected back those patterns to help the client make sense of his experiences, accomplishments and interactions. The coach would encourage the client to work with more personal language (using “I” rather than “We”) in order to gain a closer sense of his own authority. The coach gave the client ample	The approach of the coach seemed broadly person centred (very reflective and giving ample space for the client to speak with questions and reflections) although with some directedness (language exercises and interpretations) and some Gestalt influences (blocks to awareness); the process appeared very analytical in the sense that the coach was trying to

		consciously reflecting over what he had heard and seen from the client over the whole coaching programme as a basis for the conclusions he was drawing	space to reflect. Simply being present with the client was part of the coach's intervention.	identify patterns and draw hypotheses. Dominant style: Thematic listening (Analytical)
Joanne	The coach was listening in particular to her 'inner sense' of what was experienced as important within the coaching process and meaningful and important for the client.	The coach did not know exactly what was meaningful and important for the client just that something was; the coach was not trying to be analytical	The coach was responded instinctively to her intuitions and immediate reactions (for example by introducing changes in the session; offering endorsements of the positive qualities she perceived in the client). The coach trusted in her intuitions. A sense of being present with the client was particularly important.	The Coach's appeared to be responding primarily to her sense of intuition and spontaneous awareness of the client while drawing on established and well-practised techniques and an awareness of the role of intersubjectivity Dominant style: Intuitive Listening
Marjorie	The coach was listening intently to the client's "narrative" in order to gain a sense of the person's way of being, significant experiences, his values, his personal challenges, his aspirations; her focus was on what the client wanted to relate to her She was also noticing how the client was responding to	The coach gained a <i>felt-sense</i> (Gendlin, 1992) of what was important to the client and what was needed at different moments in the session to best help the client in the context of what was <i>felt</i> as being important for him	The coach initially drew on established interventions that had generally worked in her experience (encouraging the client to reflect with lots of listening initially); she became more assertive and gave advice	The coach emphasised her 'sense' of the client and her 'sense' of the process Dominant style: Empathic listening

	the process and had some awareness of her own sense of self in interaction with the client			
Alice	The coach was listening primarily to understand the specific and practical challenges encountered by the client	She interpreted the challenges in terms of her own specialist knowledge of interpersonal interactions and business life	Drawing on her specialist knowledge she made suggestions in order to help the client identify options for action that could be taken to enable the client to achieve desired goals.	The coach interpreted the challenges of the client as practical issues that could be resolved through the identification of specific behaviours. Dominant style: Pragmatic/ Behavioural
Drew	The coach was listening to the key action areas identified in previous sessions the client had been working on and on the progress that the client appeared to have made in negotiating them working on key action areas that had been highlighted as important in previous coaching sessions; also to the client's future plans.	The coach would draw on her own experience and understanding of business life and management in order to evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of the client's actions and plans.	The coach would challenge the client on any shortcomings she perceived in the client's actions and plans. She offered herself as a sounding board and a motivating influence. She would help the client to develop homework	The overall approach of the client was person centred in terms of encouraging the client to talk and reflect but it was often very conversational and informal; she expressed her opinions Dominant style: Coaching as a process of reviewing (Critical Friend)

6.0 Chapter 6 Observer Perspective

The purpose of asking coaches to review a coaching session was to identify what could be learned about the coaching process from the “outside”. Within this overarching aim, there were two objectives. Firstly, I wanted to understand at a descriptive level what the coaches focused on and what they actually reported observing. This would be interesting in order to be able to compare the accounts of the clients and coaches who, while focusing on different aspects of the coaching session (broadly experience and orientation respectively), generally seemed to share a similar account of the coaching process. Secondly, I wanted to understand what the accounts of the coaching sessions would reveal about how the observers (referred to from this point typically as *coach-observers*) constructed the coaching process; that is what views and beliefs would be expressed which might indicate something about the shape and characteristics of the coaching process shared by a particular community of coaches taking part in the research.

The accounts of the coach-observers tended to focus on what the coach did rather than what happened in the session. This seemed to suggest that the coach-observers made sense of the coaching process as an intervention led by the coach rather than a process in which both client and coach work together collaboratively. However, overall, the most salient finding in the Inquiry was that the coach-observers were very critical of how the coaches facilitated the sessions. For three reviews, there were barely any identifiable positive comments, although when one of these sessions was reviewed by a second group of observers, the comments were generally favourable. For two sessions, there was a mix of views, with some coach-observers expressing a more positive view, although they were in the minority. For one session, the review was overall more balanced, with some very positive comments as well as some negative comments. The expressed views of the coach-observers seemed to reflect normative judgements in relation to how coaching should be practised (i.e. what a coach should/ should not do).

I will provide a summary of the discussions for each of the six observed sessions, providing selective comments from the observers in order to illustrate shared and contrasting viewpoints within each session. As in the case of the report on the experiences of the coaches, I will consider each session in turn. This is because the context of each session seemed particularly relevant in understanding the comments made by the observers (this had seemed less important when analysing and reporting the accounts of the clients given the overarching similarity of experiences reported). For example, for one session, all the observers had been trained as coaches in NLP (neuro-linguistic programming); for another group of coaches, they practised from a transactional analytic (TA) framework. Also, the comments were always in relation to something the coach-observers had noticed about the particular characteristics of the session that they were commenting on.

Each session will also be reported differently. This process is intended to capture something of the unique characteristics of each session review. However, it is also intended to highlight different aspects of the analysis that are always possible when analysing coaching sessions; it would not be possible to cover all possible aspects of all sessions in the scope of the thesis.

The first session reported is intended to show how a coach adopting a humanistic approach can appear to demonstrate what might be constructed as a skilful intervention as promoted in a range of populist coaching texts. However, in spite of demonstrating valued skills, the review still shows how the coach was considered to demonstrate many shortcomings in how he facilitated the session. The main criticisms seemed to relate to how the observers (from an NLP tradition) valued a different style of coaching. Their criticisms were also based on how they interpreted what the coach did.

The second session was the most positively reviewed of all the sessions and illustrates the possibility of a more balanced evaluation of a coach's interventions. Whereas in the first

observer group reported, all coaches were from the same tradition, the coaches in this group came from a broader range of traditions and genres of coaching and this diversity appeared to be illustrated in the range of differing viewpoints expressed in the review. The review of the second session also considers two specific moments that seemed particularly significant in the session and which are highlighted.

The review of the third session is similar to that of the second session in that it presents the perspective of a wide range of coaches. However, in spite of some positive comments, mainly catalysed by one sympathetic observer, the evaluation of the session is more negative. The review of this session is included primarily to identify further a range of issues that seem to be commonly raised by coaches. It also illustrates the general pattern of being critical of the coach when the coach appears to demonstrate behaviours that run counter to assumptions of what constitutes appropriate coaching.

The fourth session is interesting in that unlike any other session reviewed, it presents two separate reviews of the same session: a review of a group of coaches from a cognitive behavioural coaching (CBC) tradition and separately, a review of a group of coaches operating from a transactional analytic (TA) framework. The comments were in some ways very different, yet at the same time, similar in some ways suggesting normative views across coaching traditions. However, the review of the CBC coaches was generally much more positive. This seemed particularly interesting and contrasted with the very negative review by the TA coaches.

The fifth session was also reviewed the most negatively and considers the coaching of a full-time internal coach unlike the other sessions which involved external coaches. The coach was perceived to present a very different way of facilitating a coaching session in relation to what the observers expected or valued. It was considered to represent a form of coaching that would appear to fail to meet normative expectations. The report of this session includes

comments from the client in order to illustrate how the client could express being satisfied with the process, in spite of the very negative evaluation of the coach. More than any other session, it suggested that what might be important in coaching from the client's perspective is her capacity to establish a way of working with the coach that was inter-subjectively meaningful.

The last session adopts the same approach as the reporting of the previous session but systematically compares and contrasts the perspectives of coach, client and observers (only passing references to the perspectives of coach and client are given when reporting the other sessions). This session, more than any other, seemed to illustrate different views across all three perspectives (coach, client and observer) whereas the fifth session served primarily to contrast the perspective of the client in contrast to that of the observers.

The reporting of sessions does not represent the chronological order in which the sessions were analysed, but highlights a structured way of presenting the findings, focusing mainly on observer accounts (first 4 sessions reported) followed by the observer account in contrast to that of the client (1 session) and then finally, to that of the client and coach (1 session). One of the challenges in writing up the research, which had as its aim a very exploratory inquiry, was that the focus of interest in the session would be likely to reveal different aspects of the process. The diverse range of approaches that I have adopted, are intended to express this diversity.

In all session reviews, the comments made by the observers seemed at one level of analysis to be overt declarations of what was considered right or wrong in terms of how the coach facilitated the session. In other cases, the way the observer expressed particular viewpoints merits more detailed analysis as their comments seemed to suggest unspoken assumptions about how coaching should be practised. As in the case of the previous chapter, the reviews of the sessions will therefore take into consideration not only what was said, but how what

was said in order to understand more expansively the way coach-observers appeared to construct the coaching process.

6.1. Session 1 - Tristan



Tristan

The observers highlighted the broad skill set of the coach, including his showing empathy and the way he was perceived to ask many open questions:

“There was quite a strong skill set though around the coach...a lot of positives around the basic techniques ...talk-time and pauses...very encouraging language...lots of ‘Hmms’ and ‘Hmm HMM’/...[humour] that was moving the person on, and quite some good questioning; challenging some statements...”

The humour expressed in his repeated use of the coach’s continuers (“hmms”, Ten Have, 1999) serves to disparage a very reflective approach.

The observers emphasised the “*maturity*” and closeness of the relationship between coach and client. They noted how the coach had given the client plenty of reflective space. One observer noted with an expression of some surprise, that this process had appeared to have been welcomed by the client, as well as to have encouraged him to find his own solutions:

“I think he turned that coachee inside-out! But in a way, the coachee was quite comfortable with that ...and in a way, the coach left the responsibility with the coachee.”

The observer’s repeated reference to “*in a way*” after a humorous reference to the reflective process (“*turned...inside-out*”) seems to allow the observer to give a compliment, but within the context of the normative group view that did not appear to value depth of reflection.

The observers were very critical of many aspects of the coach's approach. They said that the coach could have exploited the strength of relationship by challenging the client more:

"So I might have just said to him, 'I've just observed you look quite uncomfortable with that; what's really going on for you?'...Because they had such a fantastic rapport, I think you could have done that."

This view suggests that what the coach-observers valued in the relationship was its instrumentality in allowing more in-depth exploration of issues. They also said that the coach could have role-modelled alternative ways of being, in order to resource the client beyond the session. One observer highlighted the importance she gave to developing "quick thinking" in leadership (application of current business ideas as a core objective of leadership coaching):

"The coach could have changed his pace so that the individual would change his pace and copy him in that....there was an opportunity to capture that thinking on your feet and copy some pace as well...how resourceful it would make you feel in other situations and take it to that fast thinking because as a leader, that's what we have got to become better at."

This comment highlights a range of assumptions about how change happens in coaching (role modelling/pacing which in turn allows transference of behaviours outside of the session). They expressed a lot of humour around the closeness of the coaching relationship which appeared "uncanny." One observer even commented how they looked the same and another, with a touch of humour that they appeared to be a mirror image:

"It was almost like both sides of the mirror. They were almost like in perfect harmony."

The humour they expressed seemed to devalue the relevance of being in a close relationship in coaching. The observers stated that the session needed "bursts of energy" which could have been achieved by the coach introducing a range of exercises (e.g. time-

lines or whiteboard activities) and in expressing more enthusiasm and excitement in his reflections. As a last session, the observers expected the coach to be much more “*up-beat*” and “*celebratory*”:

“There wasn’t a lot of this strong praising going on... ‘So that sounds really good, well done!’ because that affirms it here... ‘well actually I got it right’”

These comments illustrate the value the observers gave to action, including verbal behaviours that would raise energy levels over and above a quieter, reflective approach. The observers emphasised a lack of techniques and practical activities which they said were not used in the session and which they thought could have been helpful. These included activities already reported (above) but with one coach giving particular emphasis to the need to “*anchor*”:

“The coachee actually moved forward and his whole body language changed. To me that was an ideal opportunity to..., because you are finishing with that client, to do an anchor, to capture that feeling to capture that resourcefulness so that when he goes into similar situations he can draw on that energy”

They also thought that the client would have benefitted by being more physically active and by writing learning points down:

“If people move, they learn, and if they’re writing down they internalise”

There was a perception that the coach had introduced his own agenda too much into the session; for example by stating what he wanted to observe in the client. For example, one observer noticed the client to say “*That’s what I want to tease out of you*” which caused some concern: “*Well, whose agenda is this?*” This comment seemed to represent a more

general view of what coaches should not do in sessions rather than a comment more related to NLP approaches.

The observers were also concerned that the coach appeared to be using his own, rather than the client's language to summarise the issues and in doing so gave a different meaning to the client's words. One observer recounted an example of when the coach had said,

“What I'm thinking it's about influencing and hierarchical' No, he [the coachee] said, 'it's about a set of skills and relationship building'... You work with the client's words, not with your own set. That's where the agenda started to creep in again because you're projecting your words on them.”

These comments might reflect normative values in coaching about working to the client's agenda, but also the importance of the increasing interest in coaching (e.g. Clutterbuck, 2010; Dunbar, 2005; McMahon and Archer, 2010) in using clean language (Grove, 1998).

The coach-observers referred at one point in the session, to the expression of humour on the part of the coach in relation to waiting until the client arrived at the same insight as he had. They thought that this appeared self-congratulatory. This was an interesting comment given that the coach had wanted to play down any impression of being self-congratulatory (reported in the previous chapter). The coach had also said that he felt his analysis of client patterns could sometimes risk his getting ahead of the client (although he did not think he had got ahead of the client in the recorded session). It seemed therefore, that outside observers could readily identify behaviour patterns (being self-congratulatory and getting ahead of the client) of which the coach was somewhat aware, but did not fully appreciate.

The observers also wanted to see the coach being much more responsive generally to energy changes in the client:

“The coach didn’t shift with it. The client said, ‘I feel really energised’ and the coach just went, ‘Ohhhhh’. It’s like ‘Come on!’ ‘Find out more about why he’s energised and link it to future events!’”

The need for a more direct approach seems to be represented metaphorically in the way the observer spoke as if he were addressing him directly (“*Come on.....!*”).

The observers argued that the coach failed “*to pick up on the client’s kinaesthetic preferences...the coach was still coming back with auditory processing: “that sounds like, that sounds like...”*”

These comments relate specifically to the relevance of using a sensory modality in NLP which is in keeping with the client’s preference. On the other hand, the observers said very little about the coach and client’s working with language. In contrast, the importance of using language in a particular way in the session had been particularly prominent in the coach’s account. It had also featured in the client’s account. The working of language in the session had seemed unclear to the observers. When prompted to discuss the possible significance of language, the conversation quickly drifted into a different discussion topic. This seems to suggest that for the NLP observers, the importance language use held for the coach had held very little meaning for them and was simply *not observed*. In this sense, unless something is meaningful in relation to our own constructions, it will not be readily observable. Stepping into the language of psychology, there seemed to be a degree of selective attention (Treisman, 1964) which has a long history in psychology.

The observers stated that the coach needed to explore issues in more depth (the exclamatory constructions serving to emphasise the observer’s exasperation):

“There were some great one-liners where I thought, ‘now ask the next question’ and he didn’t do it! And I’m thinking, ‘Oh God! You know!’”

The observers said that the coach was not perceived to explore emotions enough, particularly with respect to the client’s energy which was so visible to the observers:

“He [the coach] expresses his own, ‘Oh, I feel very excited by this’ but he doesn’t really go into the emotional element and the thinking behind it [of the client].”

This expression also seems to be a criticism of the coach being self-indulgent. This was a concern that the coach expressed in his interview, suggesting again that the coach-observers could identify characteristic behaviour patterns known to the coach. Towards the end of the session, the coach was heard to refer to an issue that he did not want to open up in the session. This led to a lot of expressed concern on the part of one of the observers:

The coach said, ‘I’m weary of opening anything up too big.’ So what is left? There’s obviously something big lurking that hasn’t been addressed.. So for me, the purist, you haven’t really opened up maybe the true underlying bit...“Probe, dig down, find out, ask questions, open it up!”

The short series of commands in succession, encouraging the coach to be more responsive/active (“*probe, dig down... open it up!*”), is expressed in an imagined context of the coach-observer talking directly to the coach. This seemed to position the coach-observer as an expert telling someone less masterful, what they needed to do. The animated imagined dialogue and directness of the advice given seemed to suggest that the coach-observer had a strong belief in what he was recommending. The reference to something “big, lurking...” seems to suggest an understanding of the coaching process as insight oriented; of a realist construction of a truth to be discovered if the coach had pursued

the investigation more vigorously. This comment seemed to reinforce the realist epistemology expressed by many of the coaches facilitating the sessions.

Another observer thought that the coach had not picked up on what had seemed to have been a particularly significant concern for the client. This added emphasis to the group's view of the need for more depth of inquiry in the session:

"For me, the key piece [not explored by the coach] was when he talked about not getting the job ...He said, 'I don't know if I want to be like that.' But I can relate to that. It's almost saying, 'if you have to make a shift upwards you have to make a shift in the way, and that's something to do with your values and belief systems. So for me, that was quite something fundamental [but not explored]."

The comments made by the observers are interesting in that they suggest that in spite of the coach adopting a very reflective approach, the coach was still observed to fail to explore sufficiently. The group's view seemed to be that depth of exploration did not require a slow reflective approach; the route to discovery was more immediate and simply required the coach to highlight aspects of the client's progress. For example, the coach-observers thought that the coach could have helped the client to have gained a broader perspective of the progress he had made by the coach pointing out *"the impacts of his changes on others"*. They thought the coach could have given the client *"more praise for his achievements"* which would have also helped the client to appreciate the changes he had made. Another observer expressed concern that the coach did not pick up on the client's reference to wanting to *"shift my assertiveness to confidence"*. Yet another coach-observer was concerned that the coach did not explore what the coach had meant by a particular account or had not considered the client's resources (in the space of only sixteen words, two separate criticisms are made; this seemed to suggest the coach-observers wanted to convey an impression of a perception of many shortcomings):

“There was nothing to, ‘let’s examine what you mean by that? What resources have you got...?’”

In summarising the session, one of the observers said that the client had made some progress but that it had taken a long time: *“It took an hour and a half to get there but we had an energy shift.”* Another referred to *“watching paint dry”*.

Overall, there was little expressed disagreement within the group about what was voiced. This may have been due to patterns of seniority and perceived expertise within the group with the quieter members being less verbally active. It might also have been due to the composition of the group who all shared the same organizational context and coaching tradition.

Towards the end of the review, one observer summarised some of the difficulties the observers had had in not understanding what progress had been made between coach and client over the whole programme of coaching. This suggested that he considered it unfair to make an evaluation on a single session in isolation of this understanding. He also expressed an impression that the coach and client had made some good progress together in the session:

“For me, it was just kind of holding a mirror up...’just reflect on everything’ and for me, it’s probably unfair to judge the coach as that being his style. I suspect he was doing all of that deliberately”.

This comment seemed to express an attempt on the part of one coach-observer to go beyond his immediate pre-conceptions of how coaches might always coach. In doing so, he was able to ascribe some positive elements to what he had observed. His comments also highlighted a perception of needing to consider a session in the context of a whole programme of coaching.

6.1.1 Session Summary

A key characteristic of the observers' account was the overall negative evaluation of the session which seemed to contrast with the accounts of the clients and coaches. In spite of the coach showing some skills which the coach-observers acknowledged as useful, the overriding impression they had of the session was that it could have been much more impactful for the client.

The coach-observers expressed a perception of a need for more active engagement on the part of the coach; be this in terms of asking follow up questions, expressing praise, carrying out activities, exploring more and being generally more physically and emotionally responsive. Prominent in their criticism was the importance of techniques which were perceived to be lacking. Techniques were considered ways of resourcing the client beyond the session (e.g. writing things down so that these thoughts would stay with him; moving about physically so that the learning would be embodied; changing pace so that the client would be encouraged to think quicker inside and outside of the session; 'anchoring' so that he would take the energy from the session outside of the session). They expressed assumptions that much of the learning from these activities would take place below the level of consciousness, including validation of the client's progress. There was a realist construction of the coaching process as insight-oriented (something real to discover).

The coach-observers seemed to value activity rather than the relationship. Intimacy was not valued. The closeness of the relationship was referred to jokingly as "*counselling-coaching*" and always with an undercurrent of gentle if respectful humour. Resourcing the client for the future seemed to be more important for the observers than giving space for the client simply to reflect. From the perspective of the coach-observers, resourcing the client would follow from impactful exercises and an energetic and responsive coach (including modelling the coach) rather than a prolonged process of client reflection.

The coach-observers did seem able to identify behavioural aspects of the intervention of which the coach had some awareness and which coach-observers and coach considered as development needs. This suggested that coach-observers could potentially provide a useful input in helping the coach reflect on the frequency of non-desired behaviours. A careful consideration of some of the comments suggested that in spite of expressing very strong values, some of the observers were able to show some flexibility in making sense of the coach's approach, although this was a minority position.

6.1.2 Issues Raised by the Coach-Observers

The comments of the observers raise interesting questions with respect to the following aspects of the coaching process:

- How active a coach might be
- The importance of affirmation/ open expressions of praise
- The importance of techniques and their relevance in learning; the role of techniques in resourcing the client beyond the session
- How easy it might be for a coach to get ahead of a client or to introduce his own agenda; also the importance of working with the client's language
- What an appropriate level of challenge and support should be in any given context
- The extent to which a coach needs to explore issues in detail or in depth
- What the purpose and depth of the relationship should be (a means for creating trust or an opportunity to exploit that trust and how intimate the relationship might be)
- The pace of a coaching session
- How client change generally takes place (e.g. through techniques, through affirmation and/or through changes in underlying representational and unconscious systems)
- The importance of energy shifts in the client during the session

- The importance of developing clients in line with broader leadership discourses (e.g. quicker thinking).

Each of these questions highlights what seems to be considered important in the coaching process. They can be understood from a realist perspective; for example by asking what works in coaching and/or what the coach should do in order to help the client achieve beneficial outcomes. On the other hand, they can also be understood as discourses about coaching; that is ideas, ideologies, debates and/or normative beliefs about how coaching should be and is practised. In this latter sense, the suggestion is that coaches are exposed to competing ideas (through participation in training courses and wider experiences in society) which compete for what coaches will assume is important in practising coaching. Whether specific types of intervention work is not a relevant question; what is relevant is that coaches are exposed to these broader coaching discourses which can be identified through encouraging the kinds of debate described in this chapter. Collectively, these competing discourses contribute to competing constructions of the coaching process which may or may not “work” but are of interest in relation to how they shape and define what is commonly understood to represent coaching as a social practice.

Rather than attempting to consider each of the questions posed in the above summary which express only some views for some coaches about a single session, I will proceed to analyse each of the remaining sessions in the same way as for Tristan’s session. In this way, the intention is to identify a comprehensive list of issues raised across all sessions and then to review the issues in a more comprehensive manner in Chapter 8.

6.2.0 Session 2 - Marjorie



The dominant perspective within the observer group was that the coach had shown excellent listening skills and had given the client a great deal of reassurance:

“As a confidence boost, that is what the coach spotted he needed and that’s what she gave him, because that whole affirmation through very attentive listening, lots of comments about what he had done that was good...lots of positive things...through that style, that would have injected some more energy that would have enabled him to do more things for himself.”

One observer highlighted the coach’s skills in focusing on what was important for the client:

“She did pick up what was really important about his work...she was brilliant at just identifying what was significant to him.”

Another observer thought that her listening skills belied her experience:

“For the first half of the session she was doing a lot of listening and... that showed the experience of her.....in my early days, I would have been very following the process ‘now let’s move on.’”

One coach-observer highlighted what seemed to him to be an underpinning psychological and symbolic dimension to the conversation that had seemed very productive:

“She almost, quietly and hardly you can tell it...gave him permission to say, ‘you don’t have to carry on doing this if you don’t want to.’”

Another coach-observer emphasised what had seemed to be an underpinning affirmation that the coach was giving to the client:

“If it’s a healing process...he is dumping all his stuff ...and she is not criticising him...she is listening to him...it is an acceptance of somebody that they slowly take on board slowly and unconsciously.”

The above comments also highlight what might be considered to be a therapeutic dimension of coaching and a construction of coaching based on unconscious processes. There is also

a suggestion that with experience, formal structuring of the session may diminish in importance.

Some observers criticised the coach for a lack of active intervention however early in the session. They thought that she had spent too long listening to the client and that the session needed pace and direction. A number of comments were made, for example, about a lack of contracting; a need for clearer and earlier goal setting; signposting that the session was coming to an end; asking the client to summarise learning and asking him to provide feedback on the session. One observer summarised this perception as “*Structure was a massive missing.*” There was then a strong general perception in the group that coaching sessions need ample formal structuring.

The comments in relation to structuring were interesting in terms of how they seemed to demonstrate that for some coaches, structuring of the session was considered to be extremely important. The coach had actually said that she had taken the decision not to introduce much structure because she felt that this particular client needed space to be reflective; this comment was also highlighted by one of the observers (above). The discussion of structure therefore raises the question of whether and how much it is always important to introduce formal structure into coaching sessions.

One coach-observer expressed concern that there did not seem to be any explanation on the part of the coach about her approach or checking-in with the client about whether her style and approach were suitable for the client:

“There wasn’t any of that process checking going on in the session...it was like ‘this is what I am and this is what I give and you sit there and take it...I’m not going to check this out with you...there’s something almost ethical about that.’”

There was also a related discussion in the group about contracting which was considered absent in the session. One coach-observer related this to a need “*not to leave any guessing*

to the client". Another coach-observer emphasised the importance of meeting the needs of the client; the question to ask is *"How would you like me to be as a coach?"*

Some of the coach-observers said that the coach had not probed or challenged sufficiently:

"There are so many things he said... 'I'm stupid, I'm thick I'm immature'... none of that was picked up and I thought that was really important because that was very self-deprecating and this required quite a big in-depth discussion."

One coach-observer said that the Coach's lack of challenge and gentle approach simply related to her style which *"some clients prefer"*. The same observer emphasised the context of the session and tried to put herself into the mindset of the coach:

"...because I think she decided very early on in this session: 'this is a one-off session... I'm not going to be too challenging'... her purpose was... to be positive... gentle, empathetic and that did have a positive effect."

The coach-observer making this particular comment, while seemingly supportive of the need for challenge in coaching, did seem to acknowledge that different approaches to dominant views of coaching could be productive. This comment seemed to be similar to one made by one of the NLP coaches observing Tristan's session who suggested that some coaches could be more accepting of alternative approaches.

Another observer was concerned that the coach was responding to the client's seeking of *"direction and approval."* She wanted the coach to encourage the client to stay with the self-reflective process:

"Every time she asked him about himself, he came up against a wall... he did not know how to talk about himself... he could talk about his thoughts quite well but not his feelings. He would ...very quickly he would go off again and talk about his business or somebody else in the business. I never thought she was quick enough to pull him back to 'OK, let's focus on you again'... I asked you about how you felt or thought about that."

The same observer highlighted perceived shortcomings in the client's behaviour which seemed to be present in his criticism of others and suggested that he needed to be held more responsible/ accountable:

"...he could have been encouraged to have taken some responsibility for managing those relationships rather than just applying the stereotypes."

While the above comments related to the client, the implication was that the coach needed to get the client to focus or to encourage the client to be responsible. This comment (as most comments) seemed to be directed at the interventions of the coach and placed accountability for the process on the coach rather than on the dyad or on the part of the client.

One coach-observer expressed concern that the coach had not helped the client to identify specific actions he could take with him beyond the session:

"My biggest criticism is that we ended up with the things he had to do ...and that might be the next session ...but how do you do that? The challenge is to change our behaviour from our patterns... 'Oh this is shit... that one doesn't like me'...he is really brilliant at that".

One coach-observer said that the coach had taken a long time to set goals with the client while another did not think that it had taken long – both coach-observers however acknowledged that goal setting began at around 20 minutes into the session so their perceptions of how much time should be spent before goals might be formulated seemed to vary. One possible difference in perspective could be that very popular models of coaching such as GROW (Whitmore, 2004) encourage coaches to set early goals.

The comments in relation to the structure of the session were not unanimous. While all coach-observers agreed that the session lacked formal process elements (e.g. contracting, summarising learning, signalling the passage of time), one observer stated that there was a 'process structure' in terms of *"goals, understanding a bit more about the client, bringing the*

issues, looking for solutions” although this perception itself was in turn challenged. The debate served to suggest that structure in coaching could be conceptualised differently; first in terms of clear points of punctuation (signposting direction, points in time, agreeing goals and process, etc.) and a less overt approach which seemed to follow a path of exploration, solution seeking, etc.

There were also conflicting views about what an appropriate “*action*” consisted of. For example, whether an action needed a clear behavioural step or simply a commitment to think differently about something and evidenced through writing something down:

“I did not actually feel have a worry that there was not an action plan...he probably would once he had made a commitment to it... writing it down showed his process of committing to it”.

One coach-observer said that she thought a woman coach was right for the client, which was met with a general silence; this seemed to suggest that gender issues were acknowledged in coaching but that the coach-observers had some difficulty in talking about them.

Separately, another coach-observer, while acknowledging the degree of affirmation given to the client, wondered whether this might enrich the coaching experience but not actually promote change. This comment suggested a non-therapeutic perspective of coaching.

There was a discussion in the group as to whether there would have been some benefit in exploring past influences on the formation of values. One coach-observer was very clear that little would have been gained by exploring the past of the client:

“That’s his embedded thinking. You can’t unravel on embedded thinking. All you can do is create new thinking. So giving more attention to what has happened historically is just going to do more and more of it.”

She framed this statement in positive psychology and also suggested some of the coach's questions might have been framed on focusing on experiences of positive work relations to help change mindset.

Another observer (NLP background) suggested that more progress might have been achieved in the session by *"focusing on the positives"*. Many of the comments he made were also in line with NLP discourse in terms of action, changing patterns of perceiving and acting in the world/ behavioural change.

Other coach-observers seemed to be more focused than others on the importance of challenge and in ensuring that there was a respect for formal elements of the coaching process (mentioned earlier in this section).

There was also a discussion around advice giving. The coach had been observed to give advice in the session and this caused mixed views within the group:

"... [It] isn't the coach's role to tell you what to do but to tease that out of you."

Another observer stated that *"She had crossed the boundary"* in giving advice. This was widely supported. One observer in the group said that careful questions should still be the best way forward. However another coach deliberated on whether suggestions were actually more directive than questions and tentatively questioned whether there might be room for some advice giving in coaching:

"Are we getting a little too wedded to this concept that we never give advice?"

The discussion on advice giving was pertinent when considered in relation to making suggestions as it highlighted the possibility of making sense of coaching as a social influence process rather than perhaps as an opportunity to help the client freely explore what might be helpful for a client.

6.2.1 Key Moments

Prompted by the researcher and towards the end of the review, the observers were asked to identify key moments in the session. One coach-observer referred to a moment when the coach put down her notepad which represented “*a change in energy.*” For the coach-observer, this moment seemed to represent a change in momentum allowing progress to be made: “... [*The coach began*] *talking a lot more from that point and moved things on*”. She remembered the coach “*leaning forward*” and how this moment had seemed like “*liberation*”.

Earlier in the discussion, this key moment had been identified by another coach-observer:

“That was, ‘now let’s get down to the business of making some decisions: What is the way forward? Where are you going to go?’”

However, this led to some discussion about what that moment had been about with some coach-observers suggesting that it was a frustrated attempt on the part of the coach to close the session and that she might have been able to close the session more effectively had she been aware of more techniques.

Another coach expressed a key moment as being a moment of client insight; however, he could not recall the exact incident:

“The Ah Ha bit was when he actually realised that it did not have to carry on being as it was and he could make changes if he wanted to.”

Two moments that did seem to have particular importance in the coach’s account did relate to the moment when she put her pad down and separately, when the client looked out of the window and appeared to make a connection between the branches of a tree and some people being good. It was interesting that some coach-observers noticed something significant about these events including one coach-observer’s sense of “*liberation*” that seemed to echo the somatic experience of the coach’s sense of “*stuckness*” and a felt need to make a change. It seemed that one coach-observer at least, was able to share something

of the visceral experience of the coach. A more general point made was that some coach-observers can identify moments which the coach and the client can also construct as significant (the client had also spoken of the impact of the branch metaphor). However, the discussion also showed that some coach-observers could make a very different interpretation of the same event (attempt at closure rather a moment of liberation).

A few other more or less disparate additional comments were made by the coach-observers, relating for example to how one coach-observer wondered if the client was writing things down to please the coach which he considered to be a common occurrence in coaching (client trying to please the coach). One coach-observer wondered how well the coach might have been able to attend to the client if she had been taking notes. Another coach-observer said that it was disrespectful not to ask permission to take notes. This coach-observer highlighted the importance of permission seeking in building a relationship.

Another coach-observer remarked that her perception of a gentle, listening style of the coach had seemed “authentic”. There was also some discussion in the session which centred on what could practicably be done in a recorded one-off coaching session and also around the need to assess how different approaches work with different clients. The overall view was that the coach had conducted an effective session within these constraints; however overall, there were still a range of some more critical comments, as already outlined in this section.

6.2.2.Session Summary

Whereas in the review of Tristan’s session common criticisms were expressed within the group, the expressed viewpoints within the group varied much more. However as in the case of the previous review, many negative comments were still made which contrasted with the accounts of the sessions made by client and coach alike. However, some of the comments were also supportive of the accounts of coach and client, including how the client had been given the opportunity to off-load concerns and had enjoyed the experience of being given affirmations and listened to intently.

The diversity in the comments of the coaches seemed to relate to the influence of different coaching traditions and individual practices within the coach-observer group. The context of the session seemed to provide a forum for reflecting on what coaching is and how it should be practised. I have raised a broad range of topics which were discussed as well as differences in opinions in order to try to convey to the reader the breadth and depth of issues raised. As in the case of Tristan's session, I now summarise the key issues raised and will summarise them at the end of this chapter and discuss them in more depth in chapter 8 and once a more comprehensive list of issues has been identified.

6.2.3 Issues Raised by the Coach-Observers

The comments of the coach-observers raise interesting questions with respect to the following aspects of the coaching process:

- Whether and how much advice giving a coach should give
- The extent to which the coach should balance listening and challenge
- Whether providing a coaching structure relates to specific structuring techniques, including directing the client back to their agenda or a general management of the coaching process (problem, core issues, options, etc.)
- Whether structure should be sacrificed to allow space for reflection
- The ethical importance of being transparent in approach, in adapting to the expectations of the client, in asking permission to take notes and whether it is disrespectful to take notes generally
- Whether the coach should explore the client's history or focus on the future (the latter more aligned with those coach-observers from an NLP, solutions focused and/or positive psychology background)
- Coach-client compatibility including gender and whether this is an important issue
- Which client behaviours express commitment (e.g. clearly stated action plans or writing down key learning points/ intentions)

- The influence of change mechanisms operating below the level of consciousness (being acknowledged; the symbolic significance of writing things down; being given permission to change) compared to the importance of discussing issues in the here and now (e.g. surfacing past issues, agreeing clear action plans)
- Whether the pace of the session should be quick (e.g. some coach-observers more than others wanted the coach in the session to move to challenge more quickly; to increase the pace of the session and to close the session quicker)
- What can be achieved in the space of a single session (some coaches more than others seeming to favour the possibility of addressing issues such as the past history of the client; exploring and challenging much more and achieving clearer actions – e.g. SMART criteria)
- Whether affirmations reinforce existing ways of being (e.g. being childlike)
- The importance of *Ah Ha* moments

6.3.0 Session 3: Alice's Session



Alice's session received a mixed review, with some coaches focusing more on what seemed to be the achievements of the session and others focusing more on the perceived shortcomings in the coach's approach. Criticisms of Alice's session included: using too many continuers; e.g. "hms" (Ten Have, 1999); not listening to the client in the opening stages and being quite cold initially; missing opportunities, including not staying with issues to allow them to be explored sufficiently (although picked up on most of these later); appearing insincere (early in the session); being too directing/forceful; talking over the client/trying to dominate the client; leading the client; picking out what was important for her rather than for the client and not allowing the client to find her own solutions; imposing her own model of coaching on the client at the contracting stage; lecturing the client; adopting an expert position; being focused on herself (at the beginning); not clarifying the goals for the session at the outset or checking progress; not clarifying the direction of the session; losing direction; not giving enough reflective space; not exploring the breadth and depth of issues sufficiently; missing opportunities generally; trying to do too much in a session rather than focusing on one issue well; not challenging self-criticisms made by the client; not picking up on the client's resistance; not picking up on the client's non-verbal expressions; and reinforcing patterns of submissiveness.

Overall, comments about the coach being very directive and instructional were particularly salient:

"I was very struck by the directiveness which would concur with what everyone else has said. I felt very uncomfortable with that."

"I found she lectured, not just gave advice...She could have asked questions to provoke thought."

In adopting a position of advice/ suggestions-giving, she was perceived to be domineering, which undermined some of the positive contributions she was making:

“You’re good at this, you did do this’...so there was quite a strong resource giving on the one hand which was great and then there was a sort of ‘you’ve got to do this, you need to do this.”

One of the coach-observers touched on power differentials that appeared to be created through the directive, expert approach she appeared to be assuming:

“I was very struck by the directiveness...It seems to me, the coach was adopting quite an expert attitude, almost looking down her glasses... So there was this rather strange power differential going on which didn’t allow the client to talk her own stuff...there was one moment in the middle when they both seemed to be talking for what seemed like quite a long time...it was almost like a bit of a power struggle going on there.”

Another coach-observer picked up on the downside of the coach being perceived to assume an expert position:

“I felt that because it did have this unstructured feel and because of the personality of the client, I did feel that at times she was trying to say the right things to please the coach and it was almost like she was saying, ‘yes, yes, I’ll do that’ because she had that kind of personality which is what she represented. ‘I’ve been told I’ve got to do this and now I’m being told how I’m meant to be doing it”

This comment was also interesting in that it was about the client rather than about the coach. However, as in the case of how some coach-observers in Marjorie’s session had commented on the client, here as earlier, the comment seemed to imply that the way the coach was intervening was impacting on the client, rather than being a comment which suggested that the coaching session was a collaborative exchange of actions by both coach and client.

One coach-observer expressed a very different perception about the session compared to the others. She described her own coaching approach as very business-oriented (rather than person-centred or humanistic) and had come into coaching after working for many years as a director in a large organization in sales and marketing but also had considerable experience of training and development in a more distant past. She had quite a different impression of the session compared to many of the other coach-observers. From the outset, she had liked the approach taken by the coach:

“What really impressed me was the subtlety of the way she got to the issues and got the coachee thinking about different things...overall subtle but challenging session”

This comment suggested that the same session could be perceived very differently by different coaches, depending upon their backgrounds. Those coaches from more client-centred and humanistic orientations (identified through personal introductions at the start of the session) seemed to object the most to the approach taken by the coach.

Some other concerns about the session related to a lack of apparent goal setting/ progress checking throughout the session (which also seemed to relate to working collaboratively with the client):

“I think the goals were not clear. I think it was assumed and I think that is why there was a bit of a lack of direction...There wasn't enough reflection and summary – you need to make sure with the client.”

Many comments also related to a perception that the coach had not enabled a discussion of the issues in more depth:

In terms of my own model, what really struck me were the self-critical words: ‘Oh that’s terrible isn’t it? That’s awful isn’t it? All the way through and never once was that reflected back and yet that seemed to me crucial in getting some depth.’

This led to a discussion about whether the coach was also failing to explore “breadth”. One coach-observer tried to summarise how he differentiated between exploring depth in terms of asking exploratory questions around an issue and exploring what might underlie a particular experience or belief:

“But I think you can go into depth about understanding what it is about networking and we got to the business about walking up to somebody: ‘So what’s going through you mind when you are walking up to somebody?’ Or, ‘What do you think they are thinking about you when you walk up to someone?’ So, I think there is a depth of exploration without going into history, psychodynamics...”

This in turn led to a discussion about breadth in relation to helping a client to connect behaviours across different situations:

‘I can do it easily when sitting down’ [the coach-observer assuming the identity of the client]; so for me it would have been, ‘Well, what could you do from sitting down that you could take to standing up? How can you transfer across because you know how to do it so beautifully?’

There was also a distinction about scope in relation to breadth and depth of discussion, which one coach-observer said he thought the coach misjudged in the session (he said the coach might more usefully have only attempted to tackle one of the two presenting issues)

“If she’d gone for depth not breadth, you might have gone for presentation or networking rather than trying to fix both...do you go for bigger or just narrow it down?”

The negative evaluations made by the coach-observers were most prevalent when the observed model of coaching was very different to the one of the coach-observer’s:

“For me the essence of coaching is that you’ve got it inside you and you’re not being told where to go and find it because the likelihood is that they’re telling you the wrong places...If it was that easy most of us would have found out how to do it elsewhere.”

The most positive comments made about the approach of the coach were mainly in relation to the success of the session, which some of the coach-observers openly commented on.

One coach-observer seemed to capture this sentiment:

“But I thought she got good results in the end and I think the client would be pleased with those results around preparation and thinking of these role models who do it [networking and presenting] but aren’t arrogant”

This comment seemed to express some sort of sense-making that the session was in a way successful in spite of all the negative criticism. Perhaps the coaches as in the case of Tristan’s session were struggling to reconcile a sense of the overall success of the session which illustrated many behaviours and coach characteristics that the coach-observers struggled to accept based on their preferred coaching approaches. On the other hand, the coach-observers might have wished to express some favourable comments in light of much negativity.

Similarly another coach-observer was complimentary and picked up on how he thought that although the coach had not necessary fully explored issues as and when they first occurred in the session, she still managed to come back to them and have a positive impact overall:

“I was quite struck by how actually particularly towards the end a lot of the good leads were really picked up on but sometimes they were not picked up on at the time...It seemed like there was a really good conclusion in the hour and she had plenty of good things to think about.”

One coach-observer was also quite taken by her physicality:

“One of the things I noticed a lot: I liked her physicality. There was a real groundedness and centredness...Her body stuff felt reassuring. I would have felt safe had I been with her...She’s not going to be rocked; she’s not going to be taken off her centre but not in a

hard way, she's just physically felt very calm and grounded...I didn't think there was going to be a projection or anything like that."

The coach had said that she did not know what clients found in her that enabled them to be so open with her. Perhaps some coaches can express a sense of being grounded, which some clients (and observers) might sense as reassuring and this encourages them to be open with the coach.

6.3.1 Session Summary

Overall, the coach-observers were quite critical, but there were different views in the group. One of the coach-observers giving the most favourable comments told me after the session that she thought that had she not been in the group, the comments would have been much more critical. She said that she felt that she had been a moderating influence. She had actually been the coach in an earlier session and she said in the discussion that being filmed while coaching was quite challenging (i.e. knowing that the video would be shown to other coaches). She had shared this sense of vulnerability in the group. One of the other coach-observers said that she herself had been quite taken aback by how critical of the coach's approach she had been. She said that this was something she would want to reflect upon after the session. This confirmed that, at least for one coach-observer, how negative she had been in reviewing the session. Many of the negative comments related to similar comments expressed in the previous session in relation to a need to listen to the client, to explore depth, to introduce structure, to work to the client's agenda. These issues were listed in the main in the introductory comments to the review of this session. Overall, the comments again contrasted with the very positive comments voiced by coach and client.

6.3.2 Issues Raised by the Coach-Observers

The comments of the coach-observers raise questions with respect to a range of aspects of the coaching process not hitherto listed:

- The use of continuers in coaching
- The importance of the groundedness/ physicality of the coach
- Equifinality – whether different approaches can still achieve results even if the approach taken is not in accord with one’s preferred approach
- How accepting coaches might be of alternative approaches
- Breadth and depth of exploration

6.4.0 Session 4 - Alison: Cognitive Behavioural Coaches (CBC)



Alison’s coaching session was reviewed initially by two CBC coaches. The review was primarily positive and prompted reflections on practice. The coach-observers tried to make sense of the session from their own cognitive-behavioural frames of reference. One of the two coach-observers was a little more critical than the other with respect to some aspects of the session. However, he also appeared to temper some of his criticism when the other coach expressed a more positive evaluation. This seemed to suggest that in another context, the same coach might have been less positive in his comments. Positive evaluations and general characteristics identified included:

- Clear goal-setting
- A fast and free-flowing session
- A generally good level of rapport between coach and client and coach empathy
- A generally open client, good engagement
- Permission-seeking by the coach; coach generally perceived as client centred (including coach checking assumptions)

- A good skill set demonstrated by the coach including ample paraphrasing, summarising and giving of feedback; generally good use of immediacy (picking up on in-session expressiveness of client)
- A lot of progress made in a short space of time.

Both coach-observers said that the key client issue was self-confidence and they reflected on how they might have addressed this apparent issue from a CBC perspective:

“If I were doing this as a CB coach, then I’d really want to be looking at these beliefs”

They said the coach had however addressed self-confidence (one more than the other) by tackling related issues (e.g. self-presentation in different situations). They also said that in spite of the coach adopting a different approach to how they would have facilitated the interaction (with more emphasis on challenging beliefs explicitly) they said that the coach still seemed to achieve the same results:

“I got the impression that she was getting the same; or similar outcomes by using different techniques.”

This comment, as others described in different sessions, suggested that these coaches were open to accepting alternative coaching approaches. They also said that the session was a little less structured than would be the case using a typical CBC approach but made no apparent evaluation on whether this mattered. It was just something they noticed as different. One coach-observer questioned whether something was a little awkward about the relationship. When reflecting on this, he said he noticed that the coach and client sometimes did not maintain eye-contact when speaking. Later in the session, as the conversation evolved, he said that a lack of eye-contact in parts might have been due to the client not opening up about her self-confidence. This moved the focus of the discussion on the accountability of the client in the coaching process. At one point in the interview, he also questioned the extent to which the client was responding to the coach’s agenda when the client was asked to take part in the empty chair exercise. He commented on what he

observed as discomfort on the part of the client but nevertheless, a willingness to cooperate. This led to a discussion about whether the coach was simply using a technique which might usually work well but was a little ill-timed. One of the two coach-observers questioned whether the coach might have done more contracting at the start of the session in order to anticipate the introduction of exercises but again, this was not seen as a critical issue.

Both coach-observers commented that the coach did not pick up as much as she might have done on possible client strengths. For example they said that the coach might have considered how the client's sense of humour could have been discussed as a resource to enhance the client's self-confidence. They also said that the coach made a couple of interventions that did not seem appropriate in the context of the session; these included one moment when the client was laughing at herself and the coach also laughed, seemingly endorsing the client's negative self-perception and another when the coach expressed an opinion which she shared with the client around being eccentric, which the coach-coach-observers said turned the focus away from the client. One of the coach-observers said that the energy of the session dropped immediately after the empty chair exercise, although they also said that they noticed that it picked up again towards the end of the session.

Other comments made in the discussion related to the challenges of developing an in-depth relationship in the course of one session; this included how open a client is likely to be in the space of a short session and how much could be covered in a single session. One of the coach-observers also pointed out how the coach appeared to give the client a sense of affirmation by the coach asking her to express aloud positive characteristics of self.

6.4.1 Session Summary

In summary, the overarching evaluation of the session was that it had been generally constructive in spite of the perception of some shortcomings; also that the coach had demonstrated generally appropriate skills. One coach-observer was a little more critical than the other. They both expressed a sense of recognition that the session was different in

some ways to their normal approach and were generally open-minded about it. They made attempts to rationalise what the coach was doing in terms of their own frameworks of understanding and many of the shortcomings they highlighted related to what they might have expected to have observed in a more CB type of approach. Unlike in the other sessions analysed, the coach-observers were more accepting of the general approach taken by the coach; they acknowledged that the approach was different, that they would have managed the session differently, but they did not state that the approach was fundamentally flawed. Perhaps in keeping with a cognitive perspective, their comments were soberly analytical rather than emotive. However, this might equally have been due to having only two coaches giving comments and there was little diversity of opinions/ coaching values.

6.4.2 Session 4 - Alison: Transactional Analysts (TA)



The TA coach-observers were very critical of the coach. In fact, not a single comment was made without some qualification that could be constructed as positive in the 30 minute review of the session.

One major concern was that the coach was not perceived to have established a clear “*psychological contract*” at the outset. An initial comment made by one of the coach-observers (unanimously endorsed by the rest of the group and expanded upon by others) summarises the general perception within the group:

I noticed a distinct lack, absence of psychological contract...so they did some discussion about timings...about ‘what do you want the goal to be?’ There was no discussion about what the coachee wanted from the coach in terms of what support they wanted; there was a little bit around I’m just aware that the camera is there; that this is being recorded...So the impact of the absence of psychological contract is that the coach would constantly give

feedback, constantly interrupt and also it felt like the whole session remained at a very superficial level.”

The TA coach-observers expressed a need for a lot of depth in contracting. The discussion led to a question about how the group would have agreed to have discussed the client's “*wriggling*” given that the perception of the coach-observers had been that the coach and the client had not agreed together exactly how the coach would challenge the client when observing her “*wriggle*”:

Observer 1: “At that point I would normally ask: so when will I notice that it is a genuine wriggle because you are uncomfortable or this that and the other? And what do you want from me when that happens? How will it help if I do that? What will you do with that? That's the psychological contract which was absent”

Observer 2: “And what if I get it wrong? What if you say “yes” now and what will happen if I say too much or it gets uncomfortable in some way? How are we going to manage this between us?”

Observer 1: “What protection might you need?”

Similar comments were made in relation to the coach's introduction of an experiment without the coach really ensuring agreement:

“There was not contracting to experiment, there was no rationale for experiment, there was no nothing about what was meant by experiment. It's like I've got this experiment and you're going to do it.”

The transactional analysts were concerned that the coach had not explained the detail of her approach (even though they seemed to acknowledge a statement that the coach had actually said something at least briefly about her approach):

“I heard her say, I’ve said something about my style and I thought, ‘did I miss something’? I can’t remember her saying about her style?”

Many of the comments relating to the need for contracting, point to a desire on the part of coach-observers to ensure equality in the coaching engagement. Any perception of a power differentiation in favour of the coach seemed to attract negative evaluations. Power was referred to explicitly in the review and seemed to underpin the controlling parent – adapted child relationship they perceived in the session. At one point in their review, the TA coach-observers referred explicitly to the perceived ‘power’ dimension:

“The agenda and power stayed with the coach...I’ll say how big it is going to be and how small it is going to be”

As might be expected, given the TA background of the coach-observers, much of the criticism of the coach generally was firmly grounded in transactional analytic theory/ principles which seemed to be theoretically important to the coach-observers and which provided a lens for noticing and interpreting what was observed:

“There was a huge amount of controlling parent to adapted child...that’s the whole session [met with agreement from around the group]”

Similarly:

“As soon as you hear the client saying ‘Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes’ and the mirroring from the client to the coach, that they weren’t separate and equal in relationship; they were transacting from ‘I’m the expert, you’re being done to.... This is coaching and you are behaving as a coachee so the individuals, the people and therefore the issue, the reality of it was completely lost in that; there was no choices from the adapted child; you’re just doing what you think the coach wants you to do...With the client I didn’t have a sense of turning up the knob on the volume of certain things...it was all very much in the middle because she was not adapting to her own voice but to the constraints of what she thought she saw in the coach.”

The coach-observers also referred to broader therapeutic concepts of “rescuing” and “protection” in addition to a continued highly theoretical construction of events. These comments were contextualised in the overriding interpretation of the session which was about the dominating influence of the coach:

“There was a lot of rescuing going on...it was rescuing that had not been asked for [referring to a lack of agreement in the contracting stage]...there wasn't equal effort put in to what was going on...I was also pondering about protection; there was a lot of ‘Yes, Yes, Yes, I agree...Oh yes, Oh well, you can be arrogant.’ Ok so there is permission there but where's the protection? What's the downside? ‘How can you maybe reframe what's the positive and negative of being serious and being fun? When is it appropriate?’ And so, permission, protection, potency...there was no invitation into adult...no decontamination.”

The TA coach-observers were concerned that the client did not attend to the language of the coach. This was a similar comment to that which an NLP observer had made in relation to Tristan's facilitation of the session. This suggests a common view of the importance of respecting the client's use of language. However, for the TA analysts, a failure to use the client's language was more serious:

“There were a number of times that the coach gave the client permission to use her own language and then she took away the language [‘Yes’ echoing around the group] and she did it time and time again...I suspect there's a lot in the client's description of herself as ‘flaky’... And the coach said ‘flaky, if that's the word’... That's a discount of a word with all the resonance that comes from the coachee. So everything I saw was a closing down of the conversation. (Observer, Alison's Session)”

Much of their interpretation related to unconscious processes occurring between coach and client that seemed to be acting at a systemic level of interaction between coach and client:

“I noticed that the ulterior level had switched and we had the coachee rescuing the coach [agreement from around the group] and complying and going along with it and sending out

ulterior of 'it's alright' and 'yeah, you can have that one if you want'...it was at that point, it got really collusive..."

Concerns were expressed when the coach appeared to be persecuting the client subconsciously:

"There was a lovely moment when the client said 'I see myself as competent and self-deprecating' and the coach said 'Gotcha' ...on the surface level the words are saying 'I hear you'; on the psychological level the words are saying 'I've got you'"

One of the consequences of a perceived imbalance in power in Alison's session was that it led to what was perceived in turn as collusion (as already reported earlier). The key manifestation of collusion seemed to be the perception that the client was simply colluding with the coach as a figure of authority (parent – child relationship). When I gave feedback to the coach-observers about how positively the client had experienced the session, the coach-observers expected this. Their view was that the coach and client would have been unaware of the "symbiosis" between them:

"Well, that will happen [responding to my comment about the client feeling a connection with the coach] because I think it is much more about a symbiotic, collusive relationship...In symbiosis, you can get lost in that feeling"

Separately:

"I'm sure she [the client] would say a few positive things because she was very good at rescuing the coach"

And again:

Observer 1: "They both did it very well"

Observer 2: "They fitted each other perfectly"

Observer 3: "Coach-child"

At a deep level, the transactional analysts thought that the client was not being taken seriously:

“The whole scenario was the coach colluding with not taking the coachee seriously which is exactly what the issue was about – she did not listen.”

The coach was also observed to be limiting the expression of possibilities that might otherwise have been open to the client and even encouraging fantastical beliefs:

Observer 1: “The other word was polarity”

Observer 2 interjecting: Yes, everything was ‘either or,’ ‘this or that’. What about all the other options, all the other hypotheses, all the other choices that were missed out?

Observer 1: “Yes a real reinforcement of magical thinking”

Concerns were also expressed when the coach asked the client to sit in the chair in which the coach had been sitting (empty chair technique) because symbolically, the chair represented the coach and because the coach had, in the view of the coach-observers not obtained anything more than the polite compliance of the client to agree to the exercise.

The transactional analysts were particularly critical about Alison for not exploring the meaning of the client’s statements which, they suggested, resulted in there being insufficient exploration of depth in the session:

“The words were picked up with no real understanding about what they meant. What was behind them? What did they look like, feel like, taste like? (Observer, Alison’s session)

The meaning of the client’s in-session behaviours was also often considered not to have been explored or explored sufficiently:

She did not really observe; all that picking up on behavioural cues. The cues were there; actually establishing ‘What does it mean? How does it feel? What was that joke about?’(Observer, Alison’s Session)

This comment also suggests a realist perception (similar to that expressed generally by the coach coach-observers already reported) that there are real issues to uncover that can be indicated symptomatically.

The TA coach-observers thought that there was scope to explore the meaning of bodily gestures; simply highlighting an issue was not enough:

“And she said that, putting her hand in front of her mouth and it was such an opportunity to explore what that was about... She just said, ‘I know you keep putting your hand in front of your mouth’ and I was thinking, ‘yeah and?’”

Alison was also criticised for focusing on activities at the expense of the exploration of the client’s way of being:

“The coachee was asking so many fantastic questions of herself and they were ignored – ‘let’s just go on to another activity’: ‘I keep pulling a face and I don’t know why’; that was completely ignored; ‘I keep laughing and I don’t know why’...” (Observer Alison’s session)

The coach was also criticised for not exploring the feelings of the client:

“She [the coach] said how does it feel when you say it like this? That’s not asking about feelings. “Tell me something I want to hear and I’ll move on to the next question. (Observer, Alison’s session)”

The TA coach-observers expressed concerns that a lack of exploration had prevented the coach from getting to the bottom of the ‘true’ or ‘real’ issue:

“There was no exploration around, ‘you want to be taken more seriously at work...what’s that really about?’ (Alison)

One very experienced coach-observer with a strong theoretical background as a coach and as a psychotherapist said that underlying issues could be addressed very readily and necessarily to put an end to what had seemed a circular discussion:

“There was no exploration of history whose voice was heard, where does that come from, which would have cracked it in about 10 minutes [strong agreement from the rest of the group]... “[It was just] going round and round in circles!”

The TA coaches observing Alison’s session in addition to criticising Alison for not exploring psychological depth, criticised her for not exploring breadth:

“She said she had changed. How had she changed? ...She talked of letting go of ‘bits’ – what bits? There were lots of missed opportunities ...she thought she was in a ‘pigeon hole’ - well what was that all about?”

6.4.3 Comparison between CBC coach-observers and TA Coach-observers

The accounts were quite different in that the CB coach-observers were generally positive about the session (but one of the two coaches more than the other) and open to the possibility of other coaching approaches achieving equal ends. The TA coach-observers expressed very strong views about what they perceived to be inappropriate interventions on the part of the coach. There were some criticisms made by both groups of coaches however and in spite of the general acceptance of the approach by the CB coach-observers. These criticisms included a lack of contracting, the coach laughing inappropriately, a sense of awkwardness in the relationship (but only at times and for only one of the two CBC coaches), a sense of the client responding to the needs of the coach, discomfort at the empty chair technique and a need for more depth of exploration if concepts of depth were expressed differently (about naming and exploring confidence issues in the case of the CB coaches and an expressed sense of superficiality for the TA coaches). Both sets of coach-observers tended to pick up on different aspects of the session according to the tenets of their own particular traditions with the TA coach-observers in particular, using a theoretical language to describe their observations. Given that the coach-observers were from different traditions and took part in review groups, it was interesting that some similar perceptions

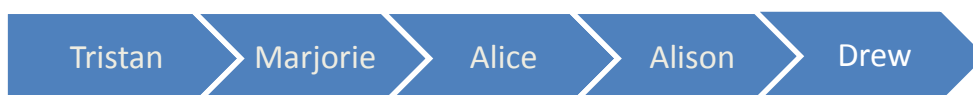
were made which suggested that there could be common normative evaluations of a coach's behaviour that can be made across very different coaching traditions. However, the same process suggested that a coaching session can be evaluated in a generally positive manner from one tradition of coaching and a much more negative manner in another. The negative comments expressed in particular by the TA coach-observers were markedly different to the positive comments expressed by client and coach.

6.4.4 Issues Raised by the Coach-Observers

The session raised a number of issues relating to values and assumptions over and above those already highlighted in the review of previous sessions:

- What it really means to contract with a client
- The importance of being aware of sub-conscious and systemic patterns of interaction including patterns of dominance and collusion
- Whether the behavioural act of permission seeking might camouflage a process of manipulation
- The role of the client in the coaching process

6.5.0 Session Five - Drew



Drew's session also received a great deal of negative criticism. Criticisms of the coach included being an "*administrator*" rather than a coach; "*not establishing the outcomes*" for the session; "*asking closed questions*"; allowing the session to "*meander*"; "*making statements*" covering too many issues superficially; not dealing with issues as and when they were presented; not exploiting opportunities to explore; not exploring depth; showing superficial rapport rather than real empathy; not intervening enough; not challenging; not discussing feelings; leading the client; giving opinions; and fiddling with her chin. Criticisms of the

session (although implying a lack of appropriate interventions made by the coach) included: lacking focus, superficial, having no depth, being an ordinary conversation, not flowing, “*pointless information gathering*” and being “*weird*” in parts.

Overall, the criticisms related primarily to the air of superficiality that the session was perceived to have had. On the surface, it was perceived as an “*information exchange*” with an “*administrator*” or a “*chat*” with a “*friend over coffee*” rather than what the coaches would understand to be a distinctive and productive coaching conversation in which the coach would have explored what might have been behind the coach’s real challenges and motivations. The coach-observers spent much of their review struggling to understand the value of the session. The session was criticised for lacking focus and direction as they thought that no clear outcomes for the session had been agreed at the outset.

The following comment highlights the sentiment of the coach-observers:

I thought it was superficial, there was no depth whatsoever, there was no challenge of the client, there was no ‘how is the client feeling?’ or, anything. There was just nothing there. It was a conversation with an administrator. There was one point when she said [the client] her team might need a bit of training and it was like, she said [the client], ‘I’ll talk to you about that later’ as if she was addressing the administrator who organizes the training...and when she was writing the notes, I thought the client was probably writing a shopping list because that would be the most meaningful thing she could get out of those particular points.”

6.5.1 Contrasting viewpoints: Coach and Client

As explained at the outset in the chapter, I will bring into the discussion many of the comments of the client. The purpose of doing this is to show how the client expressed a very favourable impression of the coaching session even though the comments of the coach-coach-observers had been very negative. This is a pattern that has already been expressed in all of the sessions reported and is therefore usefully explored in more depth in one of the sessions that received a lot of negative criticism.

Drew's client constructed Drew's coaching in the context of long periods of developmental coaching she had had in the past and which she compared to being on the "*psychiatrist's couch*." Having had so much developmental coaching, she said that she believed there was "*less and less*" insight to gain as "*the years go by*". She also said that there were no current opportunities for her further promotion, which she thought was the reason for taking part in developmental coaching and which therefore made inappropriate any in-depth developmental work:

"I've explored a lot of these concepts before so when I set off with this plan with Drew, there was a little bit around, 'what can we do that is different?' And very often when you are coached, the business identifies that you are ready for the next step or ready for more opportunities ...[but] we are currently working in a culture in which there really are no opportunities..."

She therefore constructed the session as something different to in-depth exploration of self and as something much more personal and practical:

"So, what Drew has been working on and what today's session was very much an extension of is; 'what I can do for me personally for laying the foundations for the future, given the constraints within the business?'"

The client suggested that an understanding had been reached between herself and the coach that the sessions would not be developmental:

"From the early stages there was an acceptance between us that I've done this, I've done that, I've been through that process...so there was probably very little merit in going through, 'how do you see yourself as a leader....but I believe that Drew identified that I did not need to go through that process...it's about understanding where I am and my career path and understanding what I've done before and what I need now'"

This citation suggests that the client had, in part, constructed her own sense of development in relation to her past coaching, but also in relation to how the coach had interacted with her.

When asked what stood out for the client in the session, she highlighted how she felt challenged:

“Drew still does manage to challenge me. I still have those moments in the sessions with her when I feel uncomfortable and I think that’s a good sign because she has found something; she’s touching on something that still does need development, less and less as the years go by and less and less as I have more sessions with Drew because we explore things and I challenge her and I say I disagree with that and I go away and think about it but I think she is constantly looking for ways to challenge which is very good.”

The above citation also suggests that the client had constructed an understanding of the coaching process as one in which she would be an active player, challenging the coach and using her interaction with the coach as a source of learning outside of the session. At the same time, she seemed to value the coach’s technical knowledge and this helped her identify issues to think about beyond the session and a framework for doing so:

“She knows a lot of very good techniques. She is very technique driven. She can come up with particular techniques to look at things and that has helped me tremendously because you can come up with a concept and talk for hours and hours and not achieve anything. But she will come up with an actual exercise. She will say, ‘do this on paper...come back with some concrete feedback we can talk about and I find that that is often the challenge because I can talk for England but when you have to put your ideas, values and beliefs and concepts down on a piece of paper then you start to challenge yourself and think of things fully.”

As all of the clients, and as reported in chapter 4, Drew’s client pointed out the “*tremendous amount*” of empathy shown by the coach. The client also pointed out how hard the coach was working to develop the rapport:

“Drew works very, very hard to interact on a very personal level...she very much puts me at ease...so that’s a real strength that she has.”

The client also valued the coach’s business knowledge:

“Her wider knowledge of the business is very good so she is able to pick up on the things that I say and develop that thought process.”

The client highlighted the coach’s verbal skills in stimulating the reflective process:

“Her language skills are very good, her choice of language, the way she gets me to talk about ideas is a strength as well.”

Her language skills also seemed to suit the client’s expectations for her seniority:

“She speaks to me at a level that I expect to be spoken to.”

The client highlighted the client’s body language which was also “very good” and “non-confrontational”.

She also highlighted the informal conversational elements:

“The whole way she starts off the sessions...start off with a bit of a laugh about something that is going on...a sly joke about someone we both know...the normal things that go off between people in an office environment so very much you don’t feel that she is the coach and you are the coachee; it’s two colleagues having a chat about something.”

In reflecting on the coach’s informal approach, the client said she valued the coach’s “relaxed and friendly style” and something about her “body language” which “put her at ease” which seemed to be a similar reference to that identified by one coach in another session in relation to the coach appearing grounded.

There was a suggestion however, in the client’s account about the overall value of the sessions, given the time pressures of the business. This comment seemed to give some

substance to some of the criticisms made by the coach-observers, but the comments could be interpreted in a very different sense (i.e. that coaching is valuable in the context of a very important and challenging workload):

“This business is so fast paced, there aren’t enough hours in the day...I look into my diary in a day like today and I think, ‘an hour’s coaching’; that means I’m going to be working until late tonight...so you start to say, ‘is there any value in this?’ and you think, ‘yes there is’ [banging the table], ‘buy into the process!’”

These comments also suggest that the coach had bought into the organizational discourse of the value of coaching, which might have fuelled a belief in the benefits of the process.

In summary, the client’s perspective was very different from that of the coach-observers. In the case of Drew’s session, the coach had anticipated some of these criticisms (Chapter 8). It seemed that she had a sense of the session as being useful, but that her approach would not have readily conceptualised as productive from an observer perspective.

The analysis of this session suggests that a coach and client can construct a meaningful interaction that can seem meaningless from, perhaps, normative viewpoints of an ideal coaching conversation. The relevance of the inter-subjective creation of meaning will be discussed at length in Chapter 10. This is more usefully done after having considered all sessions from all viewpoints and after analysing perspectives using Q methodology in the following Chapter.

6.5.2 Issues Raised by the Coach-Observers

Drew’s session raises a number of issues about what counts in the coaching process:

- Whether coaches really needs to be in-depth and developmentally focused
- Whether the coach really does need to pick up the client continuously on what they rationalise might be significant statements

- Whether learning and reflection needs to take place in the session or whether reflection can be enacted more successfully outside of the session
- The importance of being a critical friend and the importance of having a business knowledge
- The possibility of the overriding importance of providing a client with space
- That coaching can be inter-subjectively negotiated and meaningful irrespective of how it might be perceived from more normative expectations

6.6.0 Session 6: Joanne



Joanne's session received a lot of criticism by the coaches observing the session. The criticisms included: not connecting with the client; not checking reality; not challenging enough; not exploring enough; not making the most of an exercise; not giving enough options; not understanding the client; not giving enough space; talking too much about herself; talking too much generally; being mechanistic, not understanding the meaning behind a client's metaphor, not having helped the client as much as she might; being nervous; being embarrassed; asking too many questions; missing what the client had said; not listening to the client; colluding with the client; sitting too casually and drinking out of a bottle!

These findings were very surprising given the advanced coaching qualifications of the coach, her international experience in coaching very senior managers in addition to her experience in training and assessing coaches. In the space provided, a selection of the comments of the coach-observers will be highlighted. However, rather than simply illustrating all of these comments with example quotations from the coach-observers which will take a lot of space and has been done in the reporting of the previous session, space will be given here to show differences in the accounts of the coach-observers, coach and client.

The general negativity of the coach-observers is illustrated succinctly in the comments of one of the coach-observers:

“She [the coach] was asking way too many questions; she sometimes interrupted the client, there wasn’t enough sitting back and listening and connecting deeper with the person because she did not ever allow that space...and because she was busy in her own head, she didn’t actually catch that the main thing. One of the main things the client said was that she was missing her high level exec business world.”

In contrast, the client had experienced the coach as “*very, very insightful.*”

One possibility is that the client had simply put the coach on a pedestal, perhaps what might be understood as a “halo effect” and no matter what the coach did, the client was always going to consider the coach as insightful.

In another instance, the coach was perceived by one of the coach-observers to be unprofessional in her manner (too relaxed and drinking out of a bottle rather than using a glass). The client had also said that the coach had appeared to be very informal in her manner, but then suggested that a coach showing these attributes could present a challenge to executives who are too exposed to formality. Again, the client attributed positive characteristics for what seemed on the outside (observer perspective) and initially on the inside (client perspective) as negative attributes. These comments again suggest that the client might still be able to make sense of the coach’s behaviour in a positive way, in spite of normative beliefs about how a coach might be expected to behave.

The above examples relate to impressions of the coach. There were other perspectives on the session that related to the interaction between coach and client. The coach-observers had a strong impression that there was little connection between the coach and client, even a sense of tension and that whenever connection was made it was quickly lost:

First Observer: *"We are not perfect but we are used to picking up on the energy and we've referred to the tension between them, how not relaxed the coach was, some of the behaviour of the client. For me, there was a sense of uneasiness"*

Second Observer: *"Yes, we could see that, we could feel that and her not connecting, not listening and asking too many questions."*

Similarly:

Second Observer again: *"At times I was really bored, because the energy was gone, there wasn't connection and it wasn't moving"*

Later in the discussion:

"It just kept going out of connection and then some moments in and then out".

In contrast, the coach had emphasised in her account how she had experienced moments of connection focusing on one recalled incident in relation to sharing a smile. The client did not mention this specific instance, but did recollect the coach's smile, which suggested that at some level, this or other moments of connection had had some importance. The client also recalled a "warming" towards the coach and a feeling of "rapport." The client did not recount the event at such a heightened level of experience as had the coach. This might have been because the client might not have had such a heightened experience, did not wish to communicate one, or simply did not have the language of "connection". Either way, the views of the coach and client seemed more aligned about having a sense of connection rather than a sense of unease or lack of / losing of connection which the coach-observers had perceived.

The observers might generally have interpreted what the coach had noticed as a lack of fluidity in the early stages and put this down to tension at some level. However, the coach said that she felt no nervousness at all; only an awareness of a lack of opening up on the part of the client early on in the session. One of the coach-observers, in particular,

interpreted this lack of fluidity as nervousness on the part of the coach. Her comment in the discussion was, recalling her reaction at the time, “Oh my God, you’re nervous!” This comment also highlighted perhaps a normative view in coaching that a coach should not be nervous.

Some of the comments made by the observers suggested that they believed they could identify in an objective sense, processes occurring between the coach and client about which the coach and client were unaware. For example one observer suggested that the coach was colluding with the client:

“The coach was colluding with her in saying, ‘You’re really good at this. Part of this I think was for the coach to feel that she still had the empathy...When she [the coach] did the summary, she only did the positive stuff and I thought that was more about the relationship.”

This comment suggests the possibility that the observers of this session (as in the case of the TA analysts) could observe aspects of the relationship that may not have been visible to the coach or client. On the other hand, the coach had said that she had given the client genuine feedback rather than had attempted to build the relationship. The client did not express any apparent doubt in her account about the genuineness of the coach. It is therefore unclear if the observers could identify something happening in the relationship experienced unconsciously/ systemically (their outside perspective giving them a privileged insight) or whether there was nothing unconscious to be observed.

There were parts of the session that were generally seen to be useful and in particular, the exercise involving the time-line/visualisation activity. The coach and client had also found this aspect of the session useful (this has already been highlighted in previous chapters). For the coach-observers, the time-line activity had seemed to be the salvation of the session:

The most exciting bit was that shift that happened when they were talking and this was when the client for the first time asserted herself and because the coach had said, “Over there is

your future...it triggered her visualisation process. So she started to see it and she was excited and I thought that was really good and the shifts that enabled her to move twice along there [referring to the time-line] were also, "Phew, she's got something from this...The idea that she could take more control, she could negotiate, that the other things she wanted like time, were more important...in fact it was time on the beach she wanted [referring to the visualisation activity] not cash. Obviously cash was going to be part of that but also this flexibility and she started to find her own power again to negotiate. So those were the achievements of it [the session]"

There is still some negativity in the comments, however. One suggestion implicit in the above comments about the exercise is that the client had been able to make meaning within the session in spite of the interventions of the coach. It would seem that from this observer's perspective, some minimal intervention on the part of the coach (cueing her visualisation process; line 1) had been enough to help the client gain some progress in her thinking. It is also interesting to note that the coach-observer seemed to express a sense of the client taking control in the session as instrumental in the client becoming more resourceful. This observation seemed to support what had been reported in chapter 4 in relation to the clients generally expressing a sense of control and my suggesting that the clients gaining a sense of control may be important in relation to meeting a client's needs. The observer's expression of relief also highlights the importance of a coaching session being about achieving results in the moment of the session.

Overall however, the observers' accounts suggested that the coach needed to do much more in the session:

"This whole red-herring about the job decision...I would have said "Come on, it's a load of rubbish...it's got nothing to do with your issues here..."

From a discourse perspective, the comments from this observer in relation to challenging the client seemed to suggest the importance of getting to an assumed core issue. The

comments seem to suggest that effective coaching is about not accepting a lack of openness on the part of the client and the way to manage any resistance is by confronting it directly.

A general concern expressed by the coach-observers was that the coach had failed to pick up on significant moments in the coaching conversation:

“A lot of opportunities were missed and a little bit of checking of reality was needed...not enough challenge of the client...she didn't get the time to think”

For another observer, there wasn't enough challenge generally:

“For me, there was a big thing about; really, could you help that client understand about herself and her own motive? Keep checking reality. How real is her view of what her choices are...what she really wants... There were loads of questions but there wasn't a challenge... (“Tell me more about...”)

These and other comments seemed to focus on a perception that the coach was not probing or exploring enough or putting the client's problem into a broader context. These comments again contrasted with the client's view that she had been challenged (also that she had not wanted to be challenged in a threatening manner). It may be that the coach had not been challenged from an external perspective (in an objective sense) but had made sense of the situation as being challenged sufficiently from her own point of reference. Equally, plausible however, would seem that the coach had challenged appropriately, but that the coach-observers had simply not observed that.

The observers said that the coach was working to her own agenda. This could simply refer to the coach trying too hard to help the client achieve her goals rather than simply listening to the client:

“...In terms of the efficiency, I think this other internal agenda was being followed with positive intent but that actually got in the way...rather than actually listening to herself [the coach]...too much thinking.”

The client had a strong sense of the session being about her and the coach had also expressed a sense of focusing on the client. It may be that the observers were using a specialised language for understanding “internal agenda”; that is, thinking too much about what she wanted or might need to do. On the other hand, given that the coach felt that she was drawing on intuitive processes in the session rather than lots of thinking, there seems to be a gap between the observers’ observations and the way the coach and client made sense of the interaction.

6.6.1 The Pot of Gold metaphor

One of the most interesting discussion points in the observer session related to the “pot of gold” metaphor. The observers expressed particular concern that the coach had not understood the meaning of the client’s metaphor of a “*pot of gold*” when participating in the time-line/ visualization activity:

One of the intriguing things about the visualisation was that the things that started popping out of that; the ones the coach didn’t pick up on; some really, really important things...the whole beach thing around relaxation, more control over her time, the quality of life came out and the coach going on ‘Pot of Gold, Pot of Gold’.

This comment was understood readily in the context of the discussion and was agreed by all in the group; there was also an expressed disparagement in the remark by the observer’s repetition of “Pot of Gold” which gave rise to some amusement in the group. The perception of the observers was that the coach had given the impression that she had mistaken the client’s metaphor to be about money rather than lifestyle, control and independence.

It is interesting to recall from chapter 5 that the coach had reported that she felt there wasn't a need to articulate the client's meaning:

"There was no need to know what was going on in her [the client's] mind. Something had happened that was important and I could see that and I could acknowledge it without knowing what it was."

The observers' comments therefore, pointed to differences in how meaning should be negotiated with the client. For the coach, what had been important had been acknowledging that something *had* meaning; for the observers, it was important that the coach could *grasp* the meaning. It is perhaps worth recalling at this point, what the client had said about the coach's understanding of the metaphor:

"So that question, "Where's the pot of gold" is a brilliant question.....so her question is really saying to me, "Well it's really not about gold then is it...the look she gave me: "Well we all know it is not about a pot of gold?"

The client seems to have assumed that the coach had understood the issue. The coach-observers' account however, suggests that she hadn't understood the issue. The coach's account suggested that she had not articulated the meaning of the metaphor (i.e. not consciously tried to understand the meaning) but had acknowledged the importance of the meaning.

These different accounts might prompt the question, "who if anyone is *right*?" In a sense, the observers are confirmed in being *right* in that they *accurately* sensed that the coach had not articulated in a conscious sense the meaning of the metaphor. On the other hand, if the coach had been relying on intuition, as she had claimed, then the coach might have understood the client at some level. She might have managed to reflect back an intuitive understanding of the client's meaning and this prompted the client to assume the coach had understood her, or the client herself had sensed an intuitive understanding. Either way, the client and coach were able together to construct meaning around the metaphor. The

observers also noticed that there was something very “powerful” about the exercise so they too seem to have sensed the impact of the metaphor. Discussion around the pot of gold metaphor seems to suggest that what counts in coaching is how the client constructs meaning together with the coach, not whether the coach accurately understands the client, at least at a cognitive level of understanding.

The observers were also concerned that the coach had constrained the client to only two options:

“I got frustrated half-way through because other high level options were not explored. The coachee put A or B. At the very end, we actually got to a C....I think the C could have been teased out right at the beginning. I think that would have broadened and made the experience a richer one, actually for both.”

Even if the coach had made the client more aware of other options, the client had said that she had left the session with a clearer sense of some options (“*bargaining chips*” and “*ideas*”). A more important realisation for the client was that she sensed a need to take action and that in coming to that realisation, “*a bit of a burden had been lifted*”. It therefore appeared that the session had presented a context for her to reflect on her own challenges. The session might therefore have had a symbolic significance for her for a need to take action which is what the client took out of the session rather than any immediate identification of options. This interpretation further supports the contribution of the client’s capacity to make meaning beyond the immediacy of the conversational content that may be at the heart of coaching process. As highlighted earlier, understanding the coaching process as a process of inter-subjective meaning-making will be reviewed after exploring the coaching sessions using Q-methodology.

6.6.2 Session Summary

The instances considered in Joanne’s session call into question whether observers can make legitimate inferences about what is happening in a coaching session, or even if these

inferences can be justified in some objective sense, whether they matter. Overall, the findings are very striking that a highly experienced and reputable coach, who considered that her session had not been untypical, would attract such a lot of negative criticism from a group of other experienced coaches and when the client was generally very happy with the coaching session. Another interesting finding from an analysis of this session was the confidence the coaches expressed in making their assertions and in fact, how critical they could actually be about the practice of another coach; their criticality however was not necessarily any more critical than that of other coaches from other sessions. As in the other sessions reviewed, it would seem that when the coaches are positioned to be analytical, they readily fall into that role. It is also particularly interesting that even though the coach-observers were asked to comment on the session, they tended to focus much more on the characteristics and interventions of the coach. This again suggested an understanding of the coaching process as an intervention provided by an expert coach (reviewed by other experts) rather than a process of collaboration between coach and client.

6.6.3 Issues Raised by the Coach-Observers

The values and beliefs of the observers seem already apparent in the account and suggest some interesting debates in coaching. The following list adds to those presented from the other reviews:

- The coach should bottom line key issues/ confront the client
- The coach should look and act “professionally”
- The coach should not be nervous
- There are always more than two options/ the coach should not constrain options
- Coaching is a rich experience for coach and client
- Depth should be explored and that there are core issues inside the client to be discovered

- The coach is at risk of colluding with the client in giving affirmations
- Connection is important and is achieved through attentive listening
- Experienced coaches have a level of expertise and understanding that enables them to view processes happening within the coaching process about what is really happening in an interaction
- Coaching sessions need to deliver a tangible outcome

6.7 Chapter Summary

The perspective of the coach-observers suggests that from this perspective the coaching process is more about what the coach does rather than what happens between coach and client or what the client does. This suggests that in spite of the rhetoric of collaboration which is prevalent in much coaching literature (e.g. Whitmore, 2011), coaching appears to be constructed typically as an expert intervention.

The accounts of the coach-observers were generally very negative. For 3 groups of coach-observers (two groups including a varied mix of coaching traditions and one a group of transactional analyst coaches), very little could be identified that could be understood as positive perceptions of what the coach did. For one group of coach-observers (varying traditions), the coach still received generally very negative evaluations, seemingly moderated by the influence of one coach and some generally qualified comments. For one group of NLP coach-observers, despite the coach showing competence in what might seem coaching skills widely promoted in the coaching literature (and generally *acknowledged* by the observers), his approach was considered more akin to counselling than coaching and the observers expressed many shortcomings in the coach's approach.

Only one session seemed to attract a mix of views about the coach's performance that did include some very positive comments. Another session that had been negatively reviewed by the main group of 4 observers was given a more balanced evaluation by 2 cognitive behavioural coaches; these coaches seemed to adopt a perspective that alternative

coaching approaches could achieve similar results; they also and, exceptionally considered broader aspects of the session suggesting a more collaborative conceptualisation of the coaching process (but still focused primarily on what the coach did).

Overall, it seemed that the observers expressed what might be understood as normative evaluations, often specific to a particular coaching philosophy about how coaching should be practised. For the NLP observers, coaching was constructed as an active process of promoting change in the client's patterns of thinking and in resourcing the client through the use of techniques and kinaesthetic activities including verbal encouragement, pacing, role-modelling, time-lining and writing. The overall goal was behaviour change and for that group of coaches, outcomes related to managerial discourses of thinking and acting quickly. For the TA coach-observers, the importance of being highly sensitive to the need to avoid patterns of dominance and manipulation in the session seemed to be of overarching importance together with a need to show deep levels of authentic empathy and in-depth exploration of the client's issues. For the cognitive behavioural coaches, the core task was to identify and explore the thoughts and beliefs of the client. For other observers, a wide range of views from different coaching perspectives seemed to be expressed including the importance of not directing the client and giving ample reflective space (client-centred traditions) and some approaches from positive psychology and solutions focused approaches emphasised the importance of addressing solutions rather than exploring past experiences). These differences in normative evaluations seemed to express very different constructions of what coaching is and how it should be practiced.

The accounts of the observers did, at the same time, suggest a range of shared normative views about how coaching should be practised. These normative views included structuring the session (contracting, transparency in approach, signposting, directing/ keeping the client focused and summarising). However, some of the more experienced coach-observers seemed less concerned about overt structuring processes, which in turn might suggest that some constructions of the coaching process may include being quite unstructured in a formal

sense. Other normative values included demonstrating relationship characteristics (empathy, authenticity, respect, giving affirmations but not colluding with the client) and being client-focused (listening intently to the client, not dominating the conversations, not interrupting, working to the client's agenda, using the client's linguistic constructions). These values seemed to relate to the application of valued skills. There were also other shared normative evaluations that were strongly expressed that included exploring depth (understanding what might underlie particular beliefs, assumptions, the way of being of a client including developmental histories; also probing and challenging more) and exploring breadth (the various facets of a problem, how the problem might be manifest in a range of contexts, how learning can be transferred from one context to another; holding the client's issue in the conversation). Coaches who failed to address breadth and/or depth were criticised very negatively. The view was often expressed that what was perceived as in-depth developmental issues or underpinning issues, could be addressed quickly and non-problematically. A failure to explore breadth and depth were often constructed as "missed opportunities". Advice giving (and suggestions that were perceived to be disguised as advice –giving) was generally severely criticised. Other shared normative views included how a coach should appear and included looking and acting in a business-like manner, not being self-congratulatory, not engaging in casual "chit-chat" or share any personal experiences that seemed unrelated to the client's issues. Aspects of demeanour and approach also suggest that a coach is expected not only to be an expert, but to adopt a professional and client-problem focused approach and to deliver results. This seemed aligned with the construction of a coach, in some respects, as a business consultant (but one who does not give advice).

The perspective of the observers called into question whether the coaches could see what was actually happening in the session in an objective sense. This was very difficult to evaluate because there seems to be no "God's eye viewpoint" from which we can assess whether the views of the clients, coaches or observers were more or less accurate. All that it

was possible to identify were similarities and differences in viewpoints. The coach-observers did sometimes seem to share the same perspective of particular characteristics of the coach's interventions or of the coaching session generally. For example, in both Alice and Marjorie's sessions, the coach-observers just as the coach referred said that they had given advice. However, the clients did not refer to being given advice, which suggested that the clients had a different understanding of what being given advice meant, or at least they did not report being given advice as a salient aspect of the session. Both coach-observers and coach had a sense of the coach's perceived shortcomings in the case of Tristan; in fact, it seemed that the coach-observers might have been more aware of them than the coach. This was because the coach had identified particular shortcomings which suggested a "real" problem and the observers were able to identify instances of those perceived shortcomings that the coach himself had not noticed. This seemed to suggest that there were aspects of the session that could be interpreted as bordering on the open/blind area of the Johari window (Luft and Ingham, 1955).

Some coach-observers could sometimes sense something of the heightened experiences described by the participants, which suggested that what coach-observers *notice* might extend beyond *noticing* behaviours and encompassing a more visceral sensing of the coach's experience. The most striking example of this was a sense of "*stuckness*" and then "*liberation*" experienced by one of the coaches in Marjorie's session.

The coach-observers also expressed a shared sense of the power of a particular exercise (visualization process of one of the clients which the client had said had been impactful). The coach-observers could sometimes even share a sense of the energy shifts in a client (as in the case of Tristan's client) but could equally miss any sense of change in energy experienced by the client (as in the case of Alice's client). Some of the above examples suggest a capacity for observers to sense what has been constructed in the literature as key moments in the coaching process (De Haan et al, 2010) but as in the last example in

reference to energy shifts, can suggest that observers and coach alike can miss what might be constructed as a key moment for a client.

Sometimes, the coach-observers seemed to construe experiences that were described quite differently on the inside (e.g. what had appeared as *making a connection* from the inside perspective in the case of Joanne's session was seen as a struggle to *hold connection* from the outside perspective). The observers also highlighted in their accounts some features of the session that seemed irrelevant to the coaches and coach-observers such as the use of continuers (Ten Have, 1999) (Ummm, Ahh, etc.). Perhaps these verbal features of a session somehow become particularly salient when observing a session. Perhaps the use of continuers somehow becomes a less conscious element of the process if the coach and client are more engaged in the free-flowing conversation.

Many of the coach-observers' accounts of the session were however very different to those of the coach and client. This suggested that the coach-observers could "perceive" aspects of the interaction that the participants were unable to perceive; that is, in Johari window terms, the blind window. The TA coach-observers in particular spoke of patterns of dominance, manipulation, symbiosis, collusion, persecution, rescuing, invalidation of client experiences and working to the coach's agenda. However, many other observers, spoke of many of these and other issues using a less formally constructed/ theoretical terminology. It could be argued that these comments express actual observations or valid inferences and interpretations of what was actually happening in the session, perceivable to the coach-observers but invisible to the coach or even to the client.

When I challenged the TA coach-observers about whether they had some sort of privileged viewpoint on what was happening in the coaching session, the observers argued that the coach and client would not be aware of these aspects of the intervention. After the focus groups, I tried to look for evidence of their comments in the video recordings. When I did this (although not a formal and systematic research method), their arguments seemed

credible from my own perspective; that is the patterns they described seemed plausible interpretations. For example, my initial interpretation of Alison's session was that the coach had facilitated the session very well and my interpretation was generally aligned with the comments given by the cognitive behavioural coaches. However, after facilitating the feedback session with the transactional analysts, I did recall a couple of incidents when I had watched the tape and that had occasioned me to question whether the coach merited a more critical evaluation. For example, I noticed the coach and client losing eye-contact which one of the cognitive behavioural observers had also noticed. Similarly, I noticed the coach laughing which the coach herself had regretted. In addition to the video material, during the interview, I did wonder if there was some manipulation of the client when the coach spoke of testing "how compliant" she was. Perhaps paralleling the client's experience, I was more impressed by what had appeared to me as the advanced listening skills of the coach and some other characteristics that I had deemed very positive. I did not therefore personally focus on potentially negative characteristics of the coach's interventions. I also knew that I held and continue to hold a positive impression of the coach (perhaps as a "socially sanctioned healer", Weinberger, 1993) which, as in the case of the clients might have impacted on my overall evaluation of the coach (the observers were more neutral about the capacities of the coach).

While on the one hand, there is an argument to suggest that the coach-observers might be able to perceive actual patterns of interaction, there seemed to be the alternative argument that the observers would only see what their frameworks of understanding would allow them to perceive. When different observers from different coaching traditions (i.e. the cognitive behavioural coaches viewing the same session as the TA observers) saw the "same" session, they often made different "observations." This suggested that the "same" session could be constructed quite differently according to the frameworks of understanding used to observe and interpret the sessions (e.g. from a cognitive behavioural or a trans-analytical perspective).

The particular frameworks of understanding also seemed to circumscribe what could actually be perceived; for example when the NLP coaches seemed to struggle to understand what the coach was trying to achieve by encouraging the client to use the first person pronoun. This seemed to suggest that what is observed is what is understood and known beforehand. Similarly, when coach-observers failed to make sense of what the coach did, they often made sense of the behaviour from their own frames of understanding. For example, when reviewing Marjorie's session, the only way some observers could make sense of the coach's putting down the pen and pad was as an attempt to close the session, given that they had already made sense of the session as a general lack of focus in the session. A failure to agree clear actions in Marjorie's session was only constructed as a lack of action planning by some coaches if it failed to represent what the coaches understood as action planning.

Overall, and as summarised in the above comments, the observers seemed to construct the process in terms of a realist ontology; that is, there were real client issues for a coach to help the client identify and that there were real processes that might not have been observable or conscious to the participants, but were equally real and that expressed observable characteristics of the interaction. From an epistemological perspective, the role of the coach was constructed in terms of probing and challenging, even *cutting to the chase* (for some) to reveal the real issues, the knowledge of which would help in the process of managing unproblematic ways of being, thinking, feeling and acting. The coach would need to probe and challenge, however, from a position of empathy, accurate listening and reflecting back of the client's statements and without any self-interest and in a business-like manner.

At the end of each section, I summarised the key questions that the coach-observers raised. While I have suggested in this summary that the viewpoints of the coach-observers expressed their views about how coaching should be practised, the issues raised by the coach-observers can also be considered to raise practical issues that the coaching profession may benefit from considering and are summarised in Table 6.1. I have

categorised them in relation to emergent themes. This was done by simply identifying apparent similarities in the issues raised. The logical categories are as shown in the table.

Key Points

- *Whereas the clients and the coaches had perceived their sessions very positively, the coach-observers had tended to perceive the sessions in a very negative manner*
- *These differences seemed to relate to the frameworks of understanding that each coach-observer used to make sense of the interaction; these frameworks of understanding were based on specialist knowledge or other assumptions about how coaching should be practised*
- *The findings from the coach-observers seemed to call into question whether anyone can have objective knowledge about “real” events occurring in the coaching session*
- *It seems possible that actions take place in a coaching session which are subjectively interpreted*
- *Perhaps the coach-observers failed to perceive the way both coach and client together were able to give positive interpretations to the action of the other (particularly the client’s interpretation of the coach’s actions).*

Table 6.1 Summary of Issues Raised by Coach-Observers (All Sessions)

COACH BEHAVIOURS
How active should a coach be?
Does a coach need to constantly challenge the client's assumptions?
To what extent might a coach try to interpret what is going on for the client? Could this risk getting ahead of the client?
How important is it for coaches to use the same language as the client? What are the implications for doing so/ not doing so?
What is an appropriate level of challenge and support?
If a coaching contract is time-constrained (e.g. agreed number of sessions), should a coach explore breadth or depth and what might be understood by these dimensions of exploration?
What is the importance of giving affirmations in coaching? Will it risk colluding with the client? Do affirmations risk reinforcing unhelpful ways of being for the client?
When might a coach give advice if at all?
Do coaches limit client options? Are there always multiple-options including those that might not be immediately apparent?
What is the ideal balance between listening and challenging in coaching?
When might a coach "bottom-line" issues and is this helpful?
ETHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL
How important is it for the coach to outline her approach and how much needs to be explained?
Is it disrespectful for a coach to take notes?
Do experienced coaches have a privileged insight into what happens in a coaching session when they observe coaching sessions?
Is coaching a privileged experience and should coaches try to make sure that they benefit from the process as well as the clients?
What should be the scope of contracting? Should it include how the coach might react to the client's expressiveness? Should it include the use of activities at the outset?
How aware are coaches of sub-conscious and systemic patterns of interaction including patterns of dominance and collusion? Can an act of permission seeking lead to self-deception about permission-giving?
CHANGE PROCESS
How does client change take place (e.g. through techniques, changes in what might be understood as underlying representational and unconscious systems)?
Should a coach focus on the client's past or the client's future?
What is the influence of change mechanisms operating below the level of consciousness (being acknowledged; the symbolic significance of writing things down; being given permission to change) compared to the importance of discussing issues in the here and now (e.g. surfacing past issues, agreeing clear action plans)?
Can all coaching approaches achieve the same ends and just as well? What is important in each approach or across approaches?
How much learning takes place after the session? Should the session be considered simply as part of the overall process of client change or in fact a relatively small aspect of the change?
What is the importance of coaching simply as a means of providing the space for reflection?
What is the significance of an energy shift in a client? What signs might a coach look for? How does the coach respond to perceived shifts?
How important are techniques in coaching?
SESSION STRUCTURE
What should be an appropriate pace in a coaching session including different levels

of energy that the coach expresses?
What is meant by structuring the coaching process? How much is about using formal techniques such as bringing the session to a close and how much is about following a framework that might be less explicit? Can structuring a session impede the natural flow for some clients?
GOALS OF COACHING
Should all coaching be developmental?
In what way might executive coaching conversations develop clients' capacities associated with broader leadership discourses (e.g. re quicker thinking)?
What should a coach aim to achieve in a single session of coaching? Can some developmental issues be readily addressed or is a lot of time needed? Is it enough to gain a sense of commitment for action, including more reflexion or should goals be more explicit?
What should be the purpose and depth of the relationship? Should it be sufficient to enable a productive conversation or is it an end in itself?
What is the relative importance of Ah ha moments in comparison to the overall impact of a session or programme of coaching? Should the ah ha moment be the holy grail of coaching?
Should coaching sessions achieve a tangible outcome?
Are there core issues hiding inside the client that need to be uncovered? Is this a helpful mindset for the coach to have?
How important is connection and what is the role of attentive listening rather than deliberately trying to build a connection?
COACH ATTRIBUTES
What is the importance of the 'groundedness' or physicality of the coach?
Should a coach never be nervous in a coaching session?
How important is it for a coach to have business knowledge? Is there scope for a coach to be a critical friend?
How should a coach present herself? How important is it to dress in a business-like manner?

(Some of the points in table 6.1 are expressed as questions because these issues were raised as questions by the coaches in open discussion).

7.0 Chapter 7 Q Methodological Analysis

The overall aim of this chapter is to present the findings from the statistical analysis. This chapter presents a more granular level of analysis than the thematic analyses of the spoken accounts presented in the previous chapters. Given that the CPQSD contained 84 items describing the coaching process, it was possible to make very detailed analyses of the sessions from the perspectives of different groups of participants.

Review of Technical Procedures

The technical procedures for analysing coaching sessions statistically were described in chapter 3. Given that the interim chapters have focused on the thematic analysis, a brief reminder of the main technical procedures for conducting a Q-methodological study is provided here.

The Q-sorts of the client and coach show the way client and coach each separately sorted 84 items in the CPQSD into the chosen number of 13 categories (-6 *Highly Uncharacteristic* of the session through to 0 *Neither Uncharacteristic nor Characteristic* of the session to 6 *Highly Characteristic* of the session). In order to compare the Q-sorts of the coach and client with the viewpoint of the observers for any given session, a factor array can be computer generated using PQ method which gives expression to any factors identifiable in the Q-sorts of the observers when analysed as a separate data set. The observer factor array represents the weighted average loading of those observer Q-sorts loading onto the factor(s). The statistical output is expressed as a Q-sort showing which items the observers tended to rate as *highly characteristic* of the session (e.g. 4, 5 or 6) through to those they tended to rate as highly uncharacteristic (e.g. -4, -5 or -6). The relative ranking of items is in effect the z scores resulting from the factor loadings expressed as an ordinal data set; the z scores are also available in the print-outs (PQ Method).

Factors can also be extracted more generally in the data, for example for all clients, all coaches, all observers and all viewpoints when all Q-sorts are analysed together. One or more factors might be extracted depending on the number of shared viewpoints expressed. In Q methodology, every factor that can be extracted from a group of Q-sorts represents a shared viewpoint, a similarity in how the Q-items are rank-ordered. Each factor can be expressed by creating a factor array. The convention in Q-mode factor analysis is to accept any factor which has an eigenvalue exceeding 1.0.

A key aspect of Q Methodology and as was described in Chapter 3 is to interpret the overall configuration of items expressed in the factor array and/or individual Q-sort; that is to consider what viewpoint is being expressed by placing or tending to place (expressed in a factor array) some items at -6, others at 0 and others at +6. Items placed at the extremities are particularly interesting because they are considered to identify those items that are particularly salient for any given individual (individual Q-sort) or in any overall viewpoint (factor array). Typically in Q Methodology, the researcher will limit the analysis to a description of overall viewpoints (one overall statistical analysis for a particular group of people). When analysing coaching sessions however, there is scope to provide a rich interpretation of competing viewpoints; that is to consider the viewpoints of distinct participant groups (e.g. clients, coaches and observers) and for one session or generally across all sessions. Given that the research question is to explore multiple-perspectives, this is an important feature of the research but does add a great deal of complexity and additional analyses over and above that typically carried out in a Q methodological investigation.

Interpretation in Q methodology is a skilled activity requiring insight and a capacity to interpret the overall configuration of items in a Q-sort. This is particularly so for interpreting the Q-sorts/ factor arrays for coaching sessions in the Inquiry because participants were given ample scope (and as per the brief they were given) to rate items in ways that were personally meaningful for them. For example, an observer might rank the item *Q29 Coach*

shows empathy as highly uncharacteristic of the session. One interpretation could be that the coach did not show what perhaps most coaches would understand as empathy; another could be that the coach was considered to show hostility and a negative placing of Q29 might have been intended to capture this understanding. Another interpretation could be that for most observers, the coach did show empathy but for the particular observer who may be particularly skilled in showing empathy, the coach did not show empathy when compared to his/her own standards. Alternatively, the observer might want to capture in his/her Q-sort that the coach did in general show empathy but at one critical moment in the session, failed to show empathy. Yet another possibility is that the observer mistakenly placed an item as *highly characteristic* when he/she meant to place the item as *highly uncharacteristic* (measurement error). Making sense of items rated as *highly uncharacteristic* seems particularly difficult because a participant completing a Q-sort is making a statement about something being salient owing to some sort of perceived absence.

These interpretive challenges are highlighted in these opening comments in an attempt to provide transparency in the analysis. The reader is asked to reflect on the interpretations made in order to consider if they can be considered credible in light of the data. However, while interpretation is difficult; it is also possible to make sense of the sorting patterns by reflecting on the accounts of participants provided in the interviews. This is more than a simple form of triangulation of the findings as the two separate data sets can be used to inform each other.

Reporting of Findings

The findings are reported as follows:

1. Analyses of individual coaching sessions
2. Analyses of the clients' viewpoints overall
3. Analyses of the coaches' viewpoints overall
4. Analyses of the observers' viewpoints overall

5. Analyses of all viewpoints analysed together

In each analysis (1-5), factors will be extracted from the data and used to create factor arrays representing shared viewpoints (unless stated otherwise, a varimax rotated solution of the extracted factors was used in the analysis and all factors extracted had eigenvalues >1). For example, in 1 (above), factors were extracted to create factor arrays to express shared viewpoints within the groups of observers for each session and compared against the Q-sorts of coach and client for those sessions. For each of the 6 sessions, the best solution was a single factor solution. Those observers not loading onto the factor were excluded from the analysis.

In 2 (above), factors were extracted and factor arrays created to represent shared viewpoints for all clients and only clients, analysed separately from all other Q-sorts. In 5 (above), factors were extracted and factor arrays created for all Q-sorts analysed together irrespective of whether the Q-sorts of observers from one session loaded onto the same factor as a Q-sort from participants associated with different sessions. This final analysis was intended to identify general patterns in the Q-sorting of sessions.

Collectively, the analyses generated a large number of data outputs; a selected range of outputs have been included in Appendix 11 in order to illustrate the general approach. A correlation matrix of all Q-sorts is also provided in Appendix 10; this shows a high level of inter-correlations across Q-sorts. Approximately 40% of all Q-sorts inter-correlated ($p > 0.01$). This finding tends to suggest that participants were sorting Q-sets in a similar manner irrespective of whether they were the coach, client, observers or from one or another session. Block (2008) explains that the correlation matrix is not widely recognised in Q-methodology because theoretical sampling distribution for true correlations expects that any two arrays of Q descriptors taken at random, on average, will correlate zero. However, in Q-sorting, it is likely that descriptors of general relevance will increase the likelihood of showing a positive correlation (83).

While therefore there is a risk that the number of significant inter-correlations between Q-sorts might disguise some more nuanced differences in viewpoints, a high degree of inter-correlations can still be interesting if it highlights very general patterns about how coaching is observed/ experienced to be practised.

Summary of Findings to be outlined in this chapter

Overall, the findings presented in the Chapter suggest that there are similarities and differences in how coach, client and observers make sense of the coaching sessions and that general patterns of similarity identified in correlations between coach and observers, coach and client or client and observers do tend to conceal some nuanced differences in perspectives.

Overall, clients tend to focus on the experiential impact of being coached, particularly relational aspects; they express as salient the practical elements of the session relating to action planning; they express their commitment to the process. Coaches tend to focus more on the technical aspects of the session; they are more evaluative of the way they conducted the session and tend to be self-critical; they make subtle discriminations in relation to specific aspects of the sessions (e.g. understanding v empathy; exploration of emotions v exploration of depth). The observers are highly critical of the coach, particularly when what they observe does not conform to how they believe coaching should be practised. The observers focus on what is readily observable or what they believe can be inferred from their observations. They tend not to capture the depth of meaning making that seems to be constructed between coach and client or for coach and client separately (i.e. what the interaction means for coach and client as individuals). Likewise, the coach might not sense the depth of experiencing or meaning making of the client or at least, does not consider the client's experiencing or meaning making particularly deep from her own internal benchmarks. The process of meaning making for the client seems in part to be related to

how the client makes sense of the coach's in-session behaviour, not just his/her own reflections; meaning appears to be created through social interaction.

Given that all participants were given ample scope to express their subjectivity in their own patterns of Q-sorting about what they perceived, the findings raise epistemological questions about what might be inferred from the findings. On the one hand, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the Q-sorting represents the subjective (individual) views of the participants. At another level of analysis however, the Q-sorting could be interpreted in a similar manner to the spoken comments; that is to reflect normative beliefs (particularly in the case of the observers) about how coaching should be practised. In this way, it could be argued that epistemologically the Q-analysis highlights competing coaching discourses (about how coaching should be practiced).

On the other hand, there was also sufficient similarity across perspectives identified in the Q-analyses that it seemed that the participants were also expressing *something* in their Q-sorting that captures *something* about what seemed to be *actually happening* in a session in a more objective sense. In other words, to some extent at least, all participants could experience or observe a range (but not all) common events/ experiences but how they would interpret them would vary greatly. This seems to provide a path to some middle ground epistemologically between what might be generally observable but which is open to multiple interpretations.

The findings provide therefore some confirmation of the Rashomon experience in coaching identified initially in psychotherapy and in which all participants are exposed to the same script but take away different interpretations of the same events. However, the findings also suggest that there can be some salient sharing of perceptions across perspectives. In summary, the findings from the Q-analysis are broadly consistent with the findings from the spoken accounts. Indeed, each tends to confirm the other.

7.1.0 Analyses of Individual Sessions

In the section which follows, I will present the findings from the analysis of individual sessions. All sessions were analysed statistically although owing to space limitations only the findings of 2 sessions (Tristan and Alice) are presented in this section. The main reason for this is that each session generated a single factor solution (eigenvalue >1) when analysing the Q-sorts of the observers (although only 4/8 observers loaded onto this factor in the case of Alice's session; all observers in the case of Tristan's session loaded onto a single factor); they are also illustrative of the type of findings common to all sessions analysed.

In order to illustrate the way Q-sorts were compared and contrasted in the Inquiry, the data for the first session in this section (Tristan's session) is presented in tabular form with an interpretation of what the participants appeared to be expressing in their sorting patterns on a table by table basis (i.e. the first table showing items rated *highly characteristic* by client; the next table rated as *highly characteristic* by observers, etc.; then the same format but for items rated as *highly uncharacteristic*, etc.). The first session is very detailed and illustrates the type, breadth and depth of analyses that can be made (i.e. what data can be compared against what other data) using Q methodology/Q-technique.

The second session is written up in a more narrative format and without reference to tables. The narrative format is intended to present a more holistic analysis/ less linear than that presented for the first session. The third session is written up in a much more summative manner but with some tabular data and tends to focus on major differences in general rather than by systematically comparing data sets. One of the challenges of writing up analyses of coaching sessions using Q-methodology/Q-technique is to find a way to manage the volume of statistical data and the third analysis is intended to show how this might be done. The write-up of the findings of the individual sessions is therefore intended not only to identify

what can be learned by comparing perspectives but to understand how researchers can best present the findings of a Q methodological investigation.

As already stated, Q Methodology allows a researcher to analyse a coaching session in a lot of detail. In addition to comparing rankings at the polar extremities, using available computer software, it is possible to compare and contrast the largest differences generally across Q-sorts/ factor arrays and which may or may not include the highest scoring items (a ranked ordering of 3 or more places is considered significant). It is also possible to review *Consensus* items which are those items identified where scoring is typically similar.

7.01 Comparison Across Sessions



In order to provide the context for the detailed session by session analysis, Table 7.01 below is derived from the full correlation matrix. It shows on a session by session basis, those Q-sorts correlating significantly on a session by session basis (the full correlation matrix in Appendix 10 shows all correlations, including Q-sorts from different sessions co-correlating). In order to calculate significance between Q-sorts, the formula $2.58 \times (1/\sqrt{\text{No. of items in Q set}})$ can be applied (Watts, 2013). In this case $2.58(1/\sqrt{84}) = 0.28$ ($p \geq 0.01$).

Table 7.01: Table of Significant Inter-correlations

	SESSION 1 (Marjorie)	SESSION 2 (Tristan)	SESSION 3 (Joanne)	SESSION 4 (Alice)	SESSION 5 (Alison)	SESSSION 6 (Drew)
COACH & CLIENT	0.46	0.22	0.21	0.24	0.49	NA
CLIENT & OBSER VERS	5/6 Q-sorts CO- CORRELA TING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.40-0.64)	6/6 Q-sorts CO- CORRELA TING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.36-60)	0/4 Q-sorts CO- CORRELA TING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.06-0.21)	2/8 Q-sorts O- CORRELA TING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.07-0.44)	2/6 Q-sorts CO- CORREL ATING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.03-0.56)	NA
COACH & OBSER VERS	3/6 Q-sorts CO- CORRREL ATING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.04-0.49)	2/6 Q-sorts CO- CORRREL ATING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.13-0.31)	2/4 Q-sorts CO- CORRREL ATING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.13-0.50)	7/8 Q-sorts CO- CORRREL ATING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.22-0.46)	0/6 Q-sorts CO- CORRELA TING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.02-0.22)	2/5 Q-sorts CO- CORRREL ATING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.40-0.64)
OBSER VERS & OBSER VERS	11/15 Q- sorts CO- CORRELA TING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.31-0.64)	14/15 Q- sorts CO- CORRELA TING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.33-0.60)	4/6 Q-sorts CO- CORRELA TING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.31-0.58)	22/28 Q- sorts CO- CORRELA TING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.28-0.54)	7/15 Q- sorts CO- CORRELA TING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.31-0.58)	7/10 Q- sorts CO- CORRELA TING SIGNFICA NTLY (0.29-0.57)

The first row of Table 7.01 shows a significant correlation between the Q-sort of coach and client for session 1 and 5 but not for session 2, 3 and 4; the client did not complete a Q-sort for session 6 owing to time constraints. This suggests that sometimes the coach and client rate the session in a similar way in a statistical sense (i.e. rank order the items in the Q-set in a similar manner with a high likelihood that the similarity was not due to chance at $p \geq 0.01$); sometimes they don't.

The second row shows that around 50% of the time the Q-sorts of the clients match the Q-sorts of the observers. There were 30 observers (sessions 1-5) and 5 client Q-sorts enabling up to 30 possible significant within session correlations. In the study, there were 15/30 significant correlations. This again suggests that sometimes the client and observers rate the session in a similar way in a statistical sense; sometimes they don't.

The third row shows that the coach and observers also sometimes match and sometimes don't (16/35 possible significant within same session correlations).

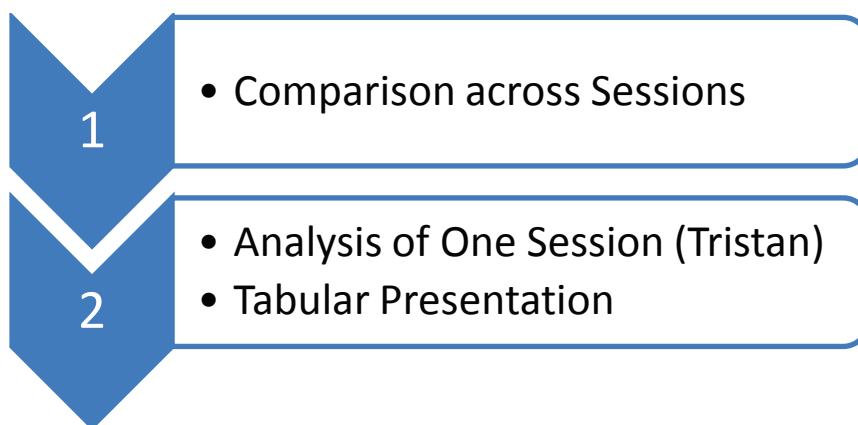
The fourth row shows that the observers generally did match (65/89 Q-sorts – 73%). The more the coaches were from the same school of coaching, the more the Q-sorts co-correlated; for example all TA coach-observers co-correlated and all almost all NLP based coaches co-correlated. This suggests that the more the coaches came from the same school of coaching, the more they tended to observe the same “objective” reality.

Differences however, seem to vary considerably on a session by session basis. For example, in session 4, the Q-sorts of the coach and nearly all observers correlated significantly whereas in session 5, there were no significant correlations between the coach and observers. Sometimes the coach and observer express similar patterns (co-correlate) but the client and the coach don't (session 4); in other cases, the coach and the observers don't express similar patterns but the coach and the client do (Session 5). In yet other cases, the client and the observers tend to express similar patterns but the coach and the observers don't generally (Session 2); in some cases the reverse is true (session 4).

Some of these findings could be explained by Measurement Error. Measurement error could arise as a result of cognitive difficulties in completing the Q-sorts or if some participants didn't address the task conscientiously; this could have led to mixed results in small samples. The cognitive challenges did not seem overly difficult, however. The least experienced participant's Q-sort (the coachee in Marjorie's session who had had very little experience of management development and had no familiarity with coaching) still correlated significantly with the Q-sort of the coach and generally with the observers' Q-sorts. This suggested that even the least experienced person could identify similar aspects of the session to other more experienced participants. Similarly, although some participants often asked for clarification when beginning to sort the items, most said that they understood the task and were given whatever time they needed (in most cases) to complete the sorting (up

to about 45 minutes). Perhaps around 10-15% of participants would have benefitted from having more time but this wasn't possible owing to time constraints. In small sample sizes, *individual variance* might also have adversely impacted on the overall findings. This would reduce the possibility of identifying inter-correlations particularly when sample sizes are particularly low.

7.1.1 Client's Perspective: Tristan's Session



This session was between Tristan, self-reporting as a humanistic coach and a final session with a client in relation to his assertiveness and career planning. The client had himself followed a coaching course in the recent past.

As an initial reference point, it is worth remembering that the summative statistical analysis (Table 7.01) suggested that there was an almost universal agreement about what was happening in the coaching session within the observer group (14/15 Q-sorts inter-correlating significantly); that there was strong agreement between the perspective of the client and the observers (6/6 Q-sorts co-correlating significantly) but that there was some difference in viewpoint of the coach (3/6 significant correlations). (All correlations were positive).

Tables 7.02 and 7.03 show those Q-items rated as *highly characteristic* and *highly uncharacteristic* by the client, respectively (shaded area showing the client's perspective as a reference point). The rating of these items for the observers (factor array) and coach is provided alongside for purposes of comparison. For consistency, all columns in all tables

will be presented in the same order. For example, in Table 7.02, Q18 *There is one or more periods of silent reflection*, the client has ranked this item at 6 (highly characteristic) whereas the coach has ranked this item at -5 (highly uncharacteristic) and the item is expressed in the observer factor array at 6.

Table 7.02: Q-Items rated as most *highly characteristic* in the client's Q Sort

Q No		CLIENT	OBS	COACH
18	THERE IS ONE OR MORE PERIODS OF SILENT REFLECTION	6	6	-5
70	THERE IS A DISCUSSION OF NEW PRACTICES FOR THE CLIENT	6	1	2
1	THERE IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE CLIENT'S CHOICE OF WORDS	5	2	6
34	COACH AND CLIENT APPEAR TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER	5	5	2
45	COACH ASKS QUESTIONS HELPING CLIENT TO ELABORATE	5	3	4
78	THERE IS A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE CLIENT'S PROGRESS	5	4	2

Table 7.03 Q-Items rated as most *Highly Uncharacteristic* in the client's Q Sort

Q No		CLIENT	OBS	COACH
58	COACH APPEARS TO BE PURSUING HER OWN AGENDA	-5	-3	3
17	COACH ASKS CLIENT TO QUANTIFY A FEELING/PERCEPTION/ISSUE USING A SCALE	-5	-4	-1
65	COACH SUGGESTS IN-SESSION ACTIVITY	-5	-5	-2
49	THERE IS A DISCUSSION OF A POTENTIAL REFERRAL	-5	-5	0
82	COACH QUESTIONS CLIENT'S LEVEL OF COMMITMENT	-6	-5	-1
62	COACH IS VERBOSE	-6	-6	0

The dissimilarities in viewpoint between the coach and client (i.e. the ratings are very different) confirm the summative statistical analysis. This seems to contradict the findings from the spoken accounts which suggested ample similarity, even to the extent of the client using the same metaphoric constructions and frames of reference as the coach reported in an earlier Chapter. The ratings between coach and observers however, are much more similar and align with the summative statistics as would be expected.

Table 7.2 highlights the saliency for the client of being asked questions which provoked reflection (Q45); also the practical need for having a way of addressing issues outside of the session (Q70). The client also ranked highly, working with someone with whom he felt there was a shared understanding (Q34). The client's highlighting of progress (Q78) might highlight a sense-making of the coaching session, as a practical activity for the client. This is perhaps reinforced by the client's relatively high rating of new practices (Q70). In summary, the client appeared to value exploration of issues with someone who understood him and the identification of new practices; the session seemed to have a clear practical benefit.

The observers and the coach have given less saliency to the client's construction of the session as being about establishing new practices. In light of the spoken accounts, it is possible that the observers had been disaffected by what for them had been a lack of action-orientation and this might have led to them giving less saliency to action possibilities generally. The coach seems to have also had a sense of the session as a more reflective process than action-informing (lower rating on item Q70) yet paradoxically played down a sense of silence (Q18) compared to client and observers.

In Table 7.03, the client highlights that he is committed to the process (Q82) and that he has the impression of a coach who is very focused on him; that is giving him, the client, space to talk and to work to his own client agenda (Q58, Q62). He also seems to be highlighting a perception of a lack of organized activity, (Q65) which the coach had highlighted in his spoken account. The relative low ranking of any formal activities for the observers (Q65) is very much in accordance with their expressed frustration made in the observer group. Some items might have been highlighted by the client as *highly uncharacteristic* in a negative sense because they may have represented a type of anathema to the client of what the session was about (e.g. Q49 suggesting that for the client coaching was absolutely nothing to do with therapy, whereas for the coach who also practised therapy, it was a non-issue; for the observers who were all very much focused on business application, their similarity in ranking might have also been an expression of a rejection of the notion of therapy in

coaching). Some of the differences in ratings for the coach may reflect a degree of expressed modesty (*Q62 Coach is verbose*), creating perhaps more apparent than actual difference in perspectives. However, it would also seem that some aspects of the session seem to be of less significance to the coach such as the client's commitment (Q82) or the possible similarity with therapy (Q49). The coach however, did seem to express positively a degree of self-criticism in terms of a sense of working to his own agenda (Q58); this would not perhaps necessarily be visible to an external audience although in the spoken discussion, one observer had suggested that the coach had been working to his agenda. This observation however was not commonly identified (-3) and could therefore be understood mainly as private to the coach.

7.1.2 Coach-Observer Perspective: Tristan's Session

Table 7.04: Q-Items rated as most *Highly characteristic* in the Coach-Observers' Q Sort (Factor Array)

Q No		CLIENT	OBS	COACH
33	THERE APPEARS TO BE RAPPORT (STRONG CONNECTION) BETWEEN CLIENT AND COACH	4	6	6
18	THERE IS ONE OR MORE PERIODS OF SILENT REFLECTION	6	6	-5
34	COACH AND CLIENT APPEAR TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER	5	5	2
37	COACH REPEATS CLIENTS WORDS BACK TO HIM	1	5	-3
69	CLIENT SUGGESTS HIS NEXT COURSE OF ACTION	-1	5	0
83	COACH INQUIRES ABOUT CLIENT'S AIM FOR THE SESSION	4	5	2

Table 7.05: Q-Items rated as most *Highly Uncharacteristic* in the Coach-Observers' Q Sort (Factor Array)

Q No		CLIENT	OBS	COACH
57	COACH APPEARS TO BE USING AN INTERVENTION MECHANISTICALLY	-4	-5	0
65	COACH SUGGESTS AN IN-SESSION EXERCISE	-5	-5	-2
49	THERE IS A DISCUSSION OF A POTENTIAL REFERRAL	-5	-5	0
82	COACH QUESTIONS CLIENT'S LEVEL OF COMMITMENT TO COACHING	-6	-5	-1
50	THE SESSION IS FAST PACED	-3	-6	-3
62	COACH IS VERBOSE	-6	-6	0

Tables 7.04 and 7.05 show respectively those Q-items rated as *highly characteristic* and *highly uncharacteristic* by the observers. In general, and as expected, the rankings are similar to those of the client with some if less commonality with the ratings of the coach. The scoring of items as *highly characteristic* of the session in Table 7.04 suggests that the observers had the impression of a very close relationship between client and coach (Q33, Q34) and that the relationship was characterised by long periods of silence. These ratings support the comments made in the observer group.

A sense of togetherness also featured in the Q-sorts of the coach and client although the coach appears to be more discerning in emphasising rapport (Q33) more than understanding (Q34) perhaps giving expression to the generally recognised importance of rapport in humanistic coaching discourse to which he claimed his own approach aligned. The observers seem to have found salient the way the client suggested his course of action (Q69) which might be an expression of the observers' perception of the coach being very non-directive highlighted in their spoken accounts. The importance of having a clear orientation to the session for the observers might be highlighted in the observers' rating of Q83 (they noticed and highlighted this aspect of the session; i.e. the suggestion is that they highlighted this aspect of the session because it was important from their frame of reference). The client also seems to express a similar perspective with respect to the aim of the session. This might have been because the client wanted a practical outcome for the

session or because it was perceived as an expression of the coach's focus on the interests of the client (this interpretation could also be applied to the interpretation made by the observers). It would seem that the coach is more hesitant about the clarity of the aims of the session. Recalling comments made by the coach, this may relate to the coach reporting how at the beginning of the session, the coach questioned how useful/ purposeful the reflective process was for the client. This suggests that while behaviourally, there appeared to be agreement about session aims (observed by coach-observers and noticed by the client), the coach might have deferred judgement, a reflective process that would not have been visible to the observers or to the client.

Table 7.05 shows how the observers expressed a sense of a skilled coach (Q57) and one who gave space for the client to reflect (Q62). This ranking is interesting in that it highlights that in spite of a lot of criticism about the coach provided in the observer group, it would seem that they were not being critical of his expertise, only of his overall style. Their highlighting of Q62 would seem to indicate a general concern that the coach was not being active enough from their perspective, which may also be reflected in the observers' rating of *Q65 Coach suggests in-session exercise*. The observers' rating of *Q82 Coach questions client's level of commitment to coaching* could be a way of the observers expressing the high degree of engagement they perceived in the session as reflected in their spoken account.

7.1.3 Coach Perspective

Table 7.06: Q-Items rated as most *Highly characteristic* in the Coach's Q Sort

Q No		CLIENT	OBS	COACH
1	THERE IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE EFFECT OF THE CLIENT'S CHOICE OF WORDS	5	2	6
33	THERE APPEARS TO BE RAPPORT (STRONG CONNECTION)	4	6	6
13	COACH EXPLORES CLIENT'S EMOTIONS	-1	0	5
15	COACH ENCOURAGES CLIENT TO BECOME AWARE OF HIS IMMEDIATE IN-SESSION EXPERIENCE	2	1	5
44	COACH FOLLOWS UP ON KEY SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS MADE BY CLIENT	4	2	5
54	COACH TAKES AN ACTIVE ROLE IN SESSION	2	0	5

Table 7.07: Q-Items rated as most *Highly Uncharacteristic* in the Coach's Q Sort

Q No		CLIENT	OBS	COACH
80	THERE IS A DISCUSSION ABOUT HOW TO MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF THE ENGAGEMENT	1	-2	-5
81	COACH REDIRECTS CLIENT TO CLIENT'S AGENDA	0	-2	-5
18	THERE IS ONE OR MORE PERIODS OF SILENT REFLECTION	6	6	-5
68	COACH APPEARS TO FOCUS ON A THIRD PARTY'S AGENDA	-4	-2	-5
35	COACH AND CLIENT DISCUSS THEIR RELATIONSHIP	1	0	-6
10	COACH INVITES CLIENT TO CONSIDER OTHER PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES	0	-1	-6

Table 7.06 suggests that the coach had been very focused on technical issues surrounding word choice (Q1) and client experiencing (Q15). Word choice seemed to have had a particular meaning for the coach and client but had little significance for the observers. In the interviews, the coach had emphasised the importance he gave to choice of words and how it had developed a particular meaning for both client and coach over a series of earlier sessions; these comments were supported by the comments of the client. In the observer group, the coach-observers had not made much sense of what the coach and client were

doing in relation to language. It might have been that word choice was therefore of conceptual significance (private understanding) only for the coach and client.

Only the coach emphasised in his Q-sort immediate in-session awareness (Q15). This could be a significant aspect of coaching for the coach given his Gestalt training. The coach's high rating of Q44 (in relation to identifying significant statements) which is shared by the client but less so by the observers, might suggest that coach and client had a particular understanding of what was personally significant between them; this was not readily inferable from the outside. A social constructionist interpretation would be that what was identified as inter-subjectively significant was made so in the moment. In other words, it was because the coach picked up on aspects of the client's statements that those statements became significant. A less erudite explanation however, might simply be that the observers were expressing their concern that the coach and client were not addressing important issues (as was highlighted in their discussion of the session).

The coach's understanding of the exploration of emotions (Q13 rated 5) was much less salient for the client (-1) and observers (0). Similarly, the coach seemed to think that he was much more active in the session (Q54 rated 5) than the observers had observed (0) and the client had experienced (2). These aspects of the session suggest that the coach can have quite different perceptions of how he would rate his own behaviours compared to an external audience or even client. It would seem that the coach and client/observers had different benchmarks or frames of reference for particular behaviours/ client experiences.

The items rated as highly uncharacteristic by the coach were rated in general, quite differently by the observers and coach. The low rating of the coach of Q80 might represent a reflection on the need for evaluation which might be of some significance for a coach as a point of critical reflection on the session; similarly Q35 (relationship). One possibility is that these aspects of a coaching session could be considered technically important and could have been highlighted as the coach reflected on the quality of the engagement. The low

ratings of a series of items relating to others might emphasise the importance the coach believed he gave to the centrality of the client's worldview (Q10, Q68) and respect for the client's self-determination (Q81) which would be aligned with the humanistic orientation of the coach.

7.1.4 Comparing the Observer Perspective against the Coach's Perspective

Table 7.08, shows those items for which there was the greatest difference in ranking of Q-items in the factor array for the observers compared to the ranking of Q-items in the Q-sort of the coach (i.e. not just highest or lowest ranked items although there are overlaps).

Differences are presented in descending order with the largest differences shown in the rows towards the top of the table. This time, the coach-observers' scores are presented first as this was the data on which comparisons were made (for convenience given the constraints of the statistical software). The ranking of the same items in the client's Q-sort is also provided alongside to allow further comparisons. In table 7.08, the differences are shown for those items which observers tended to rate as highly characteristic but the coach as highly uncharacteristic or more neutrally (e.g. 0, 1 or -1). In order to indicate the absolute size of the difference in how any particular item was ranked in the factor array for the observers and the Q-sort of the coach (not in relation to the client's score which is only included for comparison purposes), the magnitude of the difference is expressed as a Z score (Chapter 3) alongside ordinal ratings; the greater the z score, the greater the difference in sorting.

Table 7.8 shows that the observers highlighted what for them had been long periods of silence (Q18). The observers also had the impression that the coach was repeating words back to the client (Q37) which seems to be an expression on the part of the observers of the general impression of observing a reflective process (as highlighted in the observer group discussion). The observers seemed to have had the impression that the session had led to depth of discussion (items Q5, Q4, Q14) and breadth of exploration (Q66, Q6), an

understanding of the session that the coach had not constructed. Table 7.08 also shows that the coach had felt that the relationship had not been discussed (as already highlighted), (Q35). The client had been more ambivalent about all of these issues with a viewpoint midway between the coach and observers, excepting for having an impression of long periods of silence, an issue that seemed negatively salient for the coach (i.e. notable because of its construed absence).

Overall, these differences reinforce what was already becoming apparent in the analysis of the Q-items rated as most *highly characteristic* and *uncharacteristic* of the session. However issues relating to depth and breadth of discussion are more apparent when comparing the largest differences in Q-sorting between observers and coach rather than just examining differences in the highest/lowest ranked items. Given that the coach is also a therapist, for him, there may have been relatively little exploration of depth and breadth and few periods of what he would construct as in-depth silent reflection. However, for the observers who tended to favour more action orientation towards coaching practice (as expressed in their discussion), there was ample breadth and depth of exploration and lots of silences.

The coach's high ratings of some issues in relation to discussing the relationship, suggest that *for him*, this was something he was conscious of not having done (important and relevant) whereas for the observers, it was less of an issue (hence a more neutral rating). This seemed to suggest that the coach was using the Q-sorting to reflect critically on how he had conducted the session from a technical/ quality perspective but again on his terms, which were different to those of the observers.

TABLE 7.08: Descending Array of Differences between Observers' and Coach's Ratings (Items generally rated highly characteristic for the Observers but as highly uncharacteristic or neutral for the coach)

A	B	C	D	E	F
Q No		Z Score Difference	OBSERVERS	COACH	CLIENT
18	THERE IS ONE OR MORE PERIODS OF SILENT REFLECTION	3.5	6	-5	6
37	COACH REPEATS CLIENT'S WORDS BACK TO HIM	2.4	5	-3	1
4	THERE IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE CLIENT'S UNDERLYING MINDSET	2.1	2	-4	0
14	COACH ENCOURAGES CLIENT TO FEEL MORE DEEPLY IN SESSION	1.9	2	-4	0
35	COACH AND CLIENT DISCUSS THEIR RELATIONSHIP	1.9	0	-6	1
10	COACH INVITES CLIENT TO CONSIDER OTHER PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES	1.9	-1	-6	0
5	COACH AND CLIENT EXPLORE THE DEEPER MEANING OF A PRESENTING ISSUE	1.9	4	-2	1
66	COACH BROADENS THE FOCUS OF THE DISCUSSIONS	1.8	2	-3	0
60	THERE IS DISCUSSION OF CLIENT'S FEEDBACK ON COACHING	1.6	1	-3	3

Table 7.09 provides the same information as in Table 7.08 but shows the largest negative differences from the perspective of the observers (i.e. those items rated as *highly uncharacteristic* of the session by the observers compared to higher ratings on the part of the coach).

TABLE 7.09: Ascending Array of negative differences between Observers' and Coach's Ratings (Items generally rated highly Uncharacteristic for the Observers but as highly characteristic or neutral for the coach)

Q No		Z Score Difference	OBSERVER	COACH	CLIENT
57	COACH APPEARS TO BE USING AN INTERVENTION MECHANISTICALLY	-1.6	-5	0	-4
13	COACH EXPLORES CLIENT'S EMOTIONS	-1.8	0	5	-1
49	THERE IS A DISCUSSION OF A POTENTIAL REFERRAL	-1.8	-3	3	-5
24	THERE APPEARS TO BE A PRODUCTIVE USE OF METAPHORS	-1.9	-3	3	-1
62	COACH IS VERBOSE	-1.9	-6	0	-6
58	COACH APPEARS TO BE PURSUING HER OWN AGENDA	-1.9	-3	3	-5
48	THERE IS A DISCUSSION OF BOUNDARIES AND/OR ETHICAL ISSUES	-1.9	-4	2	-4

The rating of items in Table 7.09 suggests that the coach has presented himself self-critically in relation to how the observers and client had made sense of his behaviour with respect to skill (Q57), verbosity (Q62) and following his own agenda (Q58); that is the client and observers not perceiving him as mechanistic, verbose or following his own agenda while the coach seemed more cautious about rating these issues. The coach might have wanted to express a degree of modesty in his Q-sort or might have reflected some private thoughts not visible at a behavioural level (e.g. in relation to agenda seeking). Verbosity (Q62) might also simply reflect his view that by his standards, he had been neither verbose nor quiet relative to his typical way of conducting a coaching session.

The coach's rating of *Q13Coach explores client's emotions* suggests that while the session had not necessarily been deep from the coach's perspective and as discussed above in relation to the observers' perspective (Table 7.09), emotions had been explored. The relative high rating of items such as Q13 in the coach's Q-sort compared to some of the items relating to depth (Table 7.09), suggests that the coach was expressing in his Q-sort

subtle discriminations in how he made sense of the session (i.e. working with emotions but not depth).

The coach's rating of using metaphors productively (Q24) is much higher than the observers. Given that in the spoken discussion, the coach had emphasised the way he liked to work with patterns, it is possible that metaphor generally is something salient for the coach and this was being expressed in his analysis of the session but more of a projection (fantasy) than as an observable behaviour.

Consensus Items

Table 7.10 shows those items about which there was the closest agreement (*consensus items*) with respect to the ranking of particular items for the observers and the coach. As in Tables 7.08 and 7.09, the client's rating is provided for completeness. (In Chapter 3, it was explained that items differing by no more than two items should be considered to have been rated statistically in a similar manner).

Table 7.10 Consensus Q-Items for Coach and Observers

Q No		OBSERVER	COACH	CLIENT
33	THERE APPEARS TO BE RAPPORT (STRONG CONNECTION) BETWEEN CLIENT AND COACH	6	6	4
77	COACH ASKS CLIENT TO DESCRIBE KEY LEARNINGS/TAKE-AWAYS	4	4	2
16	COACH CHALLENGES CLIENT'S PERSPECTIVE OF SITUATION AND/OR OF SELF	4	4	3
72	COACH SUGGESTS HOMEWORK FOR CLIENT	-4	-4	-2
35	COACH ASKS FOR PERMISSION TO GIVE FEEDBACK	-3	-3	1

Table 7.10 highlights how there was some agreement on the extent to which there had been rapport in the session; this had been one of the two most salient observations/ reflections that the coach and observers had had; the client marginally less. There is some agreement that specific events had featured quite prominently in the session including asking the client

to summarise learning (Q77) and challenging of the client's perspective (Q16). Some events had been equally salient by their absence (Q72, Q35).

7.1.5 Summary: Tristan's Session

Overall, the client's perspective expressed in his Q-sort seems to focus on his experience of being coached; in particular of having a sense of a coach who was focused on him and with whom, there was a good understanding. The client also expressed as salient those aspects of the session that seemed to have a practical edge; for example discussing new practices and reflecting on progress. The basic questioning process and the reflections that followed were salient for the client. The client also expressed his own commitment to the process.

The observer perspective was generally aligned with that of the client. The observers tended to emphasise more however, aspects of the session that seemed to highlight a perception of the session as a reflective process with a relatively non-interventionist if skilful coach. These reflective elements seemed consistent with the observers' emphasis in their spoken accounts on the value they gave to action. The observers did not sense some of the meaning making processes that the client and coach seemed to construct together; specifically, the significance of particular statements that the coach explored or the use of language.

The coach seemed to be making nuanced discriminations between aspects of the session (e.g. *emotion* versus *depth*; *rapport* versus *understanding*). He was also focused on quality concerns when evaluating the session (e.g. in relation to establishing a direction; discussing the relationship); his Q-sorting expressed a degree of self-criticality. He seemed generally focused on aspects of the session that may have had particular technical significance for him (e.g. choice of words, significance of in-the-moment experiencing, use of metaphor).

However, neither the observers nor the client seemed to give these issues the same importance suggesting that the coach was in some ways making his own unique interpretation of what was significant in the session. The coach's perception of silence in the

session seemed very different to that of the client and observers. This could relate to the coach's background as a therapist in which the session for him, may not have had periods of silence experienced in other contexts. The range of consensus items suggests that there was still some agreement in how the session was understood by all participants even if the coach's Q-sort did not correlate significantly with those of the coach or observers.

It is interesting to note that overall, the observers expressed in their Q-sorts what might seem generally positive characteristics of the coach's approach (e.g. not being mechanistic, having strong rapport, exploring depth, challenging the client's perspective; characteristics emphasised for example in the training of coaches/ competency frameworks). The Q sort analysis therefore seems to help interpret further the verbal accounts of the observers made in the observer group. It seemed that the observers were expressing concern in the observer group about the style of coach and whether this would lead to practical learning; they were not criticising the coach for showing any lack of skills.

In summary, it is difficult to reach a definitive conclusion about the degree of similarity/difference in perspectives of the session. On the one hand, the summative statistical analysis suggested that what the observers saw was aligned with what the client experienced but that there were some differences with the perspective of the coach. The detailed analysis highlighted differences in orientation. For risk of over-simplification, the client was focused on pragmatic value and personal interest. The coach was more focused on quality considerations and contextualising the session (nuanced discriminations and in relation to personal benchmarks). The observers were making salient, observable characteristics of the session (as confirmed by their alignment with the client's Q-sort); they were also expressing their value judgements (e.g. about a lack of activity). The coach also appeared to be identifying characteristics of the session that were not recorded in the Q-sorts of the observers nor in the Q-sort of the client (e.g. use of metaphors, exploration of emotion, in-session depth of experiencing) which suggests that the coach may have been only imagining he was expressing particular behaviours or that particular client experiences

were taking place (i.e. only a fantasy of the coach's assumed approach). In a sense, the Q-sorting did not so much challenge whether the participants experienced or observed different events; the high degree of inter-correlated Q-sorts seems to challenge this overall interpretation. What seemed to differ was how particular events and experiences were interpreted or conceptualised.

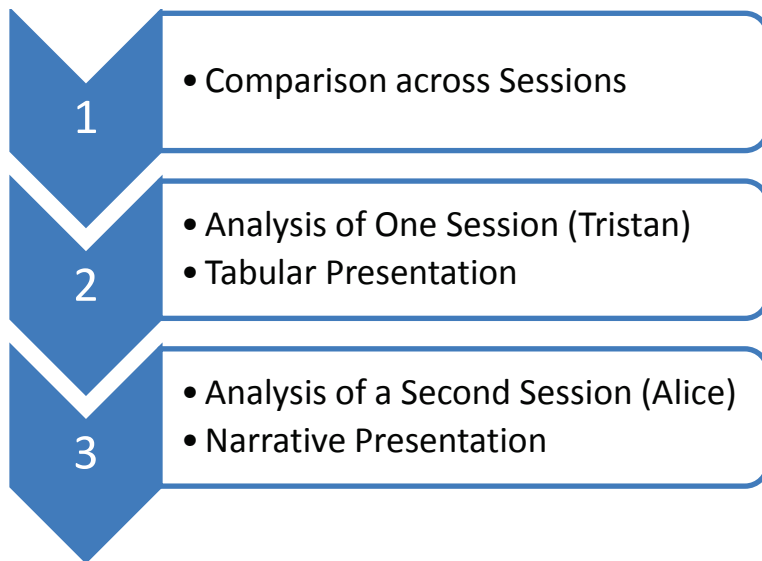
Johari Window

Given the breadth of the inquiry in this section, the findings have been summarised in Table 7.11 (an adaptation of a typical Johari window) in order to show differences in Q-sorts. The Johari window highlights a sense of general agreement about how the session was perceived by all participants (public window). This suggests that to some extent at least, a session can be observed or reported as having been experienced in a similar manner. The private area shows however that there are aspects of the session that are private to the coach and based on his own frames of reference and private thoughts. The blind area suggests that the coach might be so wedded to his own worldview that he might not appreciate how his session might be understood by outsiders or that he might be projecting onto the session only imagined characteristics of the session. The area of potential is intended to highlight how coach and observers may be unaware of what a client might value; it might be that the coach is so wedded to her own conceptualisations of a coaching session that she might overlook what is valued to, or experienced by the client.

Table 7.11 Comparison of Perspectives: Coach and Others (Johari Window)

	PERCEIVED BY OBSERVERS & CLIENT	NOT PERCEIVED BY OBSERVERS
PERCEIVED BY COACH	<p>PUBLIC (Perceived by observers, client and coach)</p> <p>Coach asking questions</p> <p>Coach challenging perspectives</p> <p>Demonstration of rapport</p> <p>Lack of homework setting</p> <p>(VISIBLE BEHAVIOURS)</p>	<p>PRIVATE (Not perceived by observers nor by client)</p> <p>Coach working to own agenda</p> <p>Questioning of overt behaviours (whether the purpose of the session is sufficiently focused)</p> <p>Coach's modesty and critical reflection on whether he had coaching according to assumed best coaching practices (e.g. reflecting on relationship, success of engagement, lack of discussion of client feedback)</p> <p>Coach's sense of focusing on the client (e.g. not asking client to consider other people's perspectives)</p> <p>Meaning of depth of exploration (coach's construction of depth/ mindset as much deeper)</p> <p>Coach making nuanced discriminations (e.g. emotional exploration but not in-depth exploration of mindset; rapport but not understanding)</p> <p>(PRIVATE CONSTRUCTIONS OF COACH)</p>
NOT PERCEIVED BY COACH	<p>BLIND (Perceived by observers and client but not coach)</p> <p>Periods of silent reflection</p> <p>Lack of coach activity Quiet coach</p> <p>Coach's strong capacity to understand client</p> <p>Coach's high skills level</p> <p>Extent to which coach only assumes he is exploring emotions and in-session</p> <p>Coach over-estimating his productive use of metaphors</p> <p>(COACH'S LACK OF AWARENESS OF BEHAVIOURS)</p>	<p>POTENTIAL (Perceived only by client)</p> <p>Importance of new practices for client above many other aspects of the engagement</p> <p>Relative importance to the client of his commitment to process</p> <p>(MEANING OF ENGAGEMENT FOR CLIENT)</p>

7.1.6 Alice's Session



This was a session involving a coach who explained that she drew on her business expertise and knowledge and helped clients address whatever issues they presented; she described her approach as being oriented towards the issues presented rather than trying to engage too much at a psychological level. The client was an experienced manager of a division of a large healthcare business, with approximately 200 staff under her span of accountability; she had previous experience of being coached.

As in the case of Tristan's session, the initial correlation matrix did not show a significant correlation between the client and the coach. For the statistical analysis of this session, there were more significant and positive correlations between the Q-sorts of the coach and the Q-sorts of the observers (7/8 possible correlations) but a weaker set of correlations between the client and the observers (2/8 significant and positive correlations). As in the analysis of Tristan's session, the correlations between observer Q-sorts were predominant (22/28 positive and significant correlations). In short, and unlike in the analysis of Tristan's session, the coach and client appeared to be in broad agreement about what happened in the session but the client appeared to have, at least to some extent, a different perspective.

There needs to be some caution however in this interpretation. In the case of Alice's session and in the spirit of experimentation, all the Q-sorts were initially factor analysed together. This resulted in 4/8 observer Q-sorts and the Q-sorts of both the coach and client loading together onto the same factor. This suggested that a shared viewpoint about the session could still be identified in the data. In other words, overall, there was a significant similarity in how the session had been perceived across perspectives including the perspective of the client. Q-methodology has been compared to quantum theory in the sense of small changes impacting (e.g. the factors that can be extracted by changing the combination of Q-sorts) unpredictably on changes in overall patterns. These issues have been discussed at length by Watts and Stenner (2005a)).

As in the previous factorial analysis of Tristan's session, a factor array was created for the 4 observers who loaded onto this factor but the Q-sorts for the coach and client were removed; this allowed a direct comparison between an expressed shared viewpoint across the observer Q-sorts against the coach and client's Q-sorts. Unique aspects of the client, then the coach, then the observers will be first considered (i.e. differences) after which, general patterns of similarity will be considered.

7.1.7 Observers and Coach Similar, Client different

The client's Q-Sort seemed to portray a sense of her being in control of the decision-making process. This was indicated by her giving less saliency than the coach or observers to those aspects of the session in which the coach and observers expressed the coach's behaviour as more direction-giving. For example, both coach and observers had rated *Q71 Coach suggests possible solutions* at 6 while the client had rated this at -5. Similarly, *Q74 Coach gives advice* was rated by the observers and coach at 5 but at -1 by the client. Although the coach and observers had a sense of the coach being quite directive within the conventions of coaching practice (and highlighted this in their Q-sorts and spoken accounts), the client, experiencing the session outside of coaching discourse (i.e. normative values promoted by

coaching bodies such as ICF, EMCC; e.g. in competency frameworks; in populist coaching texts and in many coach training programmes), seemed to have had a different impression; of a sense of being in control (and highlighted this seemingly in her Q-sort and to some extent, in her spoken account). It may be that coaches may be particularly aware of what might be understood as a coaching discourse about not being directive in coaching and made this apparent in their evaluation of the coaching session. However, for the client, this was not an issue within the realms of everyday experience or expectations about being coached and did not experience being directed. The client's sense of being in control in the session also seems to be highlighted in *Q69 Client suggests his next course of action*, rated at 3 by the client but at only 0 by the observers and -1 by the coach. Similarly, the client had a sense of the coach being less instrumental in identifying resources than either the coach and observers had thought (*Q12 Coach highlights client's resources and how they might be leveraged*, rated at -1 by the client but at 4 and 2 by the coach and observers respectively).

The client gave less prominence to those items which tended to place greater emphasis on the reflections of the coach. For example, the client rated *Q23 Coach describes her perception of the situation* at 0 whereas both the coach and observers rated this item at +4. Similarly, *Q32 Coach discloses own fallibility* was rated by the client at -5 but by the observers at 0 and the coach at -1. It would seem that the client was down-playing those items that put more emphasis on the coach than on her own active constructions in the session suggesting that the session had been sensed as being about her mental processing and verbal expressiveness rather than the coach's.

The client's Q-sort might also have suggested that a discussion of new practices may have been less important than might have appeared to coach and observers. *Q70 There is a discussion of new practices for the client* was rated at 4 by the observers and 6 by the coach while the client only rated this at 1. Taking the client's possible sense of being in control of decision-making, it is possible that the client valued having options rather than necessarily

immediate new action points. This interpretation is further supported by the client's spoken account in which she highlighted the importance of having options.

There were some elements of the experience of the client that the coach and observers did not appear to experience/ notice in the same way. For example, the client highlighted a sense of a shift in energy (*Q41 There appears to be a shift in energy during the coaching session*) which the client rated at 5 but the observers at only 0 and the coach at -5.

Similarly, *Q15 Coach encourages client to become aware of his immediate experience in the session* was rated by the observers and coach at 0 but at 4 by the client.

The coach and observers both seemed to find some aspects of the session more salient than the client including for example *Q24 There appears to be a productive use of metaphors* which both observers and coach rated at -6 whereas the client rated this at 0. This difference may be owing to the coach and observers having a particular language for talking about coaching in which there may be a general awareness of the use of metaphors (e.g. as in Narrative coaching) and a lack of use of metaphors perhaps made this aspect of the session conspicuous by its absence but only for professional coaches (observers and coach). One other difference between the coach and client's Q-Sorts related to the coach's humour (*Q28 Coach uses humour* was rated at +3 by the coach, +4 by the observers but at -3 by the client). Perhaps coaches' humour does not quite have the same sense for the client as for professional coaches!

In summary, there appeared to be some noticeable differences across the Q-sorts of the client and those of the coach and observers. Stepping into the world of the client, it might be helpful to consider that the client was a very experienced manager, and in this capacity, one would assume, used to directing large numbers of people and accustomed to consulting with others in order to arrive at her own final decisions. Irrespective of how the coach might have been engaging with her when viewed from coaching discourse, the client's sense of the coaching process was perhaps one of information gathering for her own decisions as

perhaps in everyday managerial activities. In other words, it would seem that she was constructing the coaching session in terms of what may be her everyday frame of reference. In relation to her own experiences (e.g. her experience of an energy shift and sense of heightened in session experience), unless, she was willing to disclose or express them overtly, then neither the coach nor observers would readily gain any sense of them. Similarly, given her experience of discussing personal issues in the session, perhaps humour would not be a characteristic a business client might readily use to describe a one-off session, or at least for this particular client whereas for a coach, it might be a sign of good rapport or important in a technical sense.

The perspective of the client analysed through her Q-sorting calls into question much of the spoken criticism of the observers who in their verbal feedback had suggested that the coach had been overly directive/ controlling in the session. From the client's perspective, her Q-sorting suggests very clearly that she had felt in control. It also suggests that a client from a business world might interpret the session in a similar manner to that when with direct reports or consultants: a discussion of options which she the manager can then evaluate to arrive at her own decisions.

7.1.8 Observers and Client Similar, Coach Different

Much of the Q-sorting of the coach seemed to indicate her different sense-making of the session relative to the observers and client. Overall, the coach seems to have reflected in her Q-sort what might be described perhaps as a more business-like/ less emotionally engaging understanding of the coaching process in a session which was also portrayed in her spoken account. In support of this interpretation, the coach tended to rate as insignificant relative to the client and observers, items that related to relational intensity, rating *Q42 Coach and client appear to be engaged* at -2 whereas it was rated at +5 for both observers and client. This interpretation is supported by the coach only rating *Q33 There*

appears to be rapport (strong connection) between client and coach at -1 (the client at +3 but by the observers also at -1).

Other aspects of the session that could be understood to have experiential intensity were rated as uncharacteristic relative to the observers and client. For example, the coach rated *Q15 Coach encourages client to become aware of his immediate experience* at -5 compared to +5 for the client and 0 for the observers. In a similar manner, the coach's -4 rating for *Q18 There is one or more periods of silent reflection* in contrast to the observers rating of this item at 1 and the client at +3 seems to be a statement about the session being constructed by the coach as an active conversation rather than an intense process of reflection, and again supporting the coach's spoken account. These Q-items also suggest that the coach may have been unaware of the depth of experiencing on the part of the client or at least have conceptualised depth of experience differently.

The observers also rated *Q9 There is an exploration of the client's in session nonverbal behaviour* at +5 but this item was rated by the coach at -2. The client had also rated Q9 at +6, which suggests that the observers had gleaned an impression of a particular aspect of the session as particularly significant. In the client's spoken account, she also referenced this aspect of the session. The coach's much lower rating of Q9 may relate to the coach not considering relevant any assumed underlying meaning of outward behaviour (in her spoken account she had said that she did not like to adopt a psychological approach to coaching practice).

In summary, the differences highlighted between the coach and the client/observers suggest that the coach had a more practical/ business-like, non-psychological oriented conceptualisation of coaching in which the relevance of in-session experiencing or aspects of intimacy relating to the relationship seemed to be of relatively less significance than they seemed to be for the client and observers. This construction of the coaching process might have impeded her sense-making of the experience of the client.

7.1.9 Coach and Client Similar, Observers Different

It is possible that the observers generally gained a stronger sense of visible signs of physicality than the client and coach. For example, *Q61 coach makes sounds or non-verbally encourages client to continue* was rated by the observers at +6 yet at only 1 and -1 by the client and coach respectively. Perhaps verbal sounds are only *noisy* from the outside.

Aspects of the session that related to breadth and depth of exploration seemed to take on more significance for the observers than for the coach or client (i.e. they sorted the items to highlight a lack of breadth and depth). For example, *Q25 Coach and client explore their differences in perception of self or situation* was rated by the observers at -5 but at 1 by the client and -1 by the coach. *Q5 Coach and client explore the deeper meaning of a presenting issue* was rated at -1 by the observers yet at 2 by the coach and client alike. *Q25 Coach points out potential unconscious motives* was rated at -4 by the observers but at 0 by the client and 1 by the coach. *Q77 Coach asks client to describe key learnings/take-aways* was rated at +4 and +5 respectively by coach and client whereas the observers rated Q77 at 0. Q77 might be an expression of the observers questioning depth of learning. One possible interpretation for these differences is that on the outside only, the session did not seem to have any meaning or breadth/ depth of exploration and learning. This finding supports an interpretation indicated in the analysis of Tristan's session in the previous section and in the spoken accounts generally, that a sense of purposeful endeavour is created within the coaching conversation that may not be sensed outside of that conversation.

The observers also rated *Q35 Coach and client discuss their relationship* at -4 while this item was rated a 0 by coach and client alike. One possibility is that on the outside, this item was salient because the relationship did not seem sufficiently collaborative from the perspective of the observers (as related in the spoken accounts and as something considered relevant within coaching discourse). However, within the interaction, the coach and client perhaps had a sense of a constructive interchange and any discussion of the relationship did not

seem necessary or a particularly salient issue. This finding provides further support for aspects of the session which are only readily understood/ experienced from within the session.

7.1.10 Observers, Coach and Client Similar

27/84 (32%) of the items did not vary by more than 2 rankings across any 3 scores. These similarities had led to coach, client and observers loading onto the same and single factor for the session overall in the initial factorial analysis. In order to show the degree of similarities in scores, similarities are shown by providing a coding framework as follows: OBS = observers; CL = client; CO = Coach. The score is then presented alongside (minus signs are given to indicate disagreement with the statement). For example OBS2 CL2 CO-3 means that both the observer and client rated the Q-item at 2 but the coach rated it at -3.

Some of those items generally rated as highly characteristic included Q4 *There is an exploration of the client's underlying mindset* (OBS 3 CL5 CO3); Q54 *Coach takes an active role in the session* (OBS3 CL2 CO3); Q29 *Coach shows empathy* (OBS4 CL4 CO3); Q39 *Coach checks if her understanding is correct* (OBS3 CL4 CO3); Q45 *Coach asks questions helping the client to elaborate* (OBS3 CL5 CO4); Q13 *coach explores clients emotions* (OBS4 CL4 CO2). Items rated as highly uncharacteristic by all participants were Q50 *The session is fast paced* (OBS-3 CL-3 CO-5); Q84 *There is a discussion of the client's impact on his environment* (OBS-4 CL-2 CO-3).

The level of agreement seems to highlight that there can be considerable agreement about the session irrespective of some differences. Some of the statements highlighted also seem to highlight subtle differences in how the session was perceived. While for example, the session had not been considered deep (reported earlier: Q5 OBS -1 CL2 -1 OBS -1), the session had been considered to allow the exploration of mindset (Q4 OBS3 CL5 CO3) and emotions had also been explored (Q13 OBS4 CL4 CO2). Agreement on Q29 *Coach shows empathy* (OBS4 CL4 CO3) also suggests that the coach was being empathic.

Some of the similarities in Q-sorts seemed to be at odds with what was reported by some observers in the discussion group (that mindset was not being explored; that the coach was not showing empathy; that the coach was talking so much which would seem to suggest that the client would not have been able to elaborate). In order to check out some of these possible contradictions, the individual Q-sorts were reviewed for those observers not loading onto the overall factor (4/8 participants; so far in this section all analysis for the observers has been based on the 4 who did load onto a common factor). For Q4 (above) the other observers rated this at +2, +1, -2 and -4. These comments suggest that the coach was not perceived by two of the participants to be exploring mindset in depth. Q45 was however rated at +2, +4, 0 and +6 suggesting that the coach was generally perceived to be encouraging the client to elaborate. It would seem that in spite of the coach being perceived as directive, the client was still given ample space to talk. Q13 (above) was rated at 0, +3, -3 and 0 which suggested that 3 of the 4 other participants did not think that the coach was exploring emotions. In relation to Q29 (above), the other observers rated this at +1, +4, +2 and +2 which suggested that the coach was generally perceived to show some empathy although this was not generally a defining characteristic of the session and less so than for those 4 loading onto the factor.

These observations seemed to highlight some variety in how the coach was being perceived (individual variance) or perhaps highlight some of the complexity in using the tool (measurement error). There does however still seem to be an overarching conclusion across all Q-sorts: that the coach was generally perceived to be encouraging the client to talk through issues but not entering into what might be constructed as psychological depth nor developing an especially strong relational engagement towards the client; one that might perhaps be described as friendly but not intimate. These comments would be consistent with how the coach described her own session and the high positive correlations between the coach's and observers' Q-sorts.

As in the case of the analysis of Tristan's session, the coach was perceived in the Q-sorting to show what might be constructed from the perspective of coaching discourses to show some positive characteristics (e.g. showing empathy, checking understanding, allowing the client to elaborate, showing high levels of engagement) but these were down-played in the spoken accounts at the expense of the wider criticism of some of the characteristics that were not considered praiseworthy in the spoken discussions. It seems that the breadth of items in the Q-set ensures that a balanced evaluation of the session is provided (unlike the spoken discussions).

7.1.11 Summary Alice's Session

As in the case of Tristan's session, it is not easy to arrive at a definitive conclusion about whether the sessions were perceived in a similar or different manner. In some ways, there were many areas of consensus across the Q-sorts (including many positive and significant correlations across Q-sorts), which suggest we must be careful not to make simplistic assumptions that the same session can be perceived very differently by coach, client and observers. However, at a detailed level of analysis differences in perspective, particularly from the client's viewpoint compared to that of the observers and coach could be discerned.

In spite of the observers noticing and coach's awareness of a high degree of advice-giving and generally high levels of activity on the part of the coach, the client felt very much in control. This suggests that the client's meaning-making might be quite different to how observers might make sense of the experience from the outside. This is an important finding as it suggests that observers, perhaps wedded to their own views of how coaching should be practised might simply be projecting their own value judgements on what is appropriate for the client when the client herself might have an experience which is very different to what might be perceived. The coach hadn't spoken directly about being controlling but this did not seem to be an issue, suggesting perhaps that she had not constructed her intervention in any way as dominating (in spite of the criticism from the observers). However, it did still

seem that the coach had overestimated her perception of self as being more active (if not directive) in terms of how the client had experienced her (e.g. in relation to identifying resources, suggesting new practices, giving her perspective, giving advice, suggesting solutions, etc. all of which the coach rated higher than the client). It may therefore be the case that current discourses of coaching might construct some interventions as much more directive and interventionist than they are actually experienced by the client. The analysis also suggests that some aspects of the client's depth of experiencing can be overlooked by coach and observers alike. Just because a session might seem relatively superficial from a coach's frame of reference (coach and observers), this does not mean that the client might not experience considerable depth in the session (sense of intimacy, sense of energy shift, in session experiencing, etc.).

7.1.12 Summary: Analyses of Individual Sessions

In this section, 2 sessions were described in detail. The first two descriptions illustrate the depth and breadth of analysis that can be carried out using Q methodology; perhaps also the necessity to do this and more, in order to provide a level of analysis that does justice to a relative ranking of 84 items by different participants. The third analysis hopefully conveyed a sense of the session but there was scope for a much more broad ranging analysis.

Perhaps what is achieved in the analyses described in this section is the way this exploratory approach points to the potential for more in-depth research; for example if over many sessions, only the client tends to sense a shift in energy or if clients tend to favour having options rather than concrete action plans; if coaches tend to agree with observers more than they do with the clients when evaluating a session from an analytical perspective (using a Q-sort), etc.

The in-depth session analysis does seem to suggest that coaches and observers do often share a common understanding for making sense of sessions, converging on some formal aspects of the session that the client seems to consider relatively insignificant (e.g. about

whether the relationship might be discussed, whether the coach gives advice, whether the coach encourages the coach to make choices, whether there is depth of exploration, the use of metaphors, etc.). It would seem that professional coaches share a common language for discussing coaching and when describing a session, they can draw on that shared vocabulary. This common understanding seems to encourage a degree of similarity in Q-sorting.

It would also seem that neither the coach nor the client appreciate the depth of experiencing on the part of the client (Stiles and Snow, 1984). The findings also seem to suggest that there is an active process of meaning making taking place between the coach and the client. This is particularly difficult for observers to sense or construct and can lead to observers underestimating the significance of the discussion that is experienced by the client.

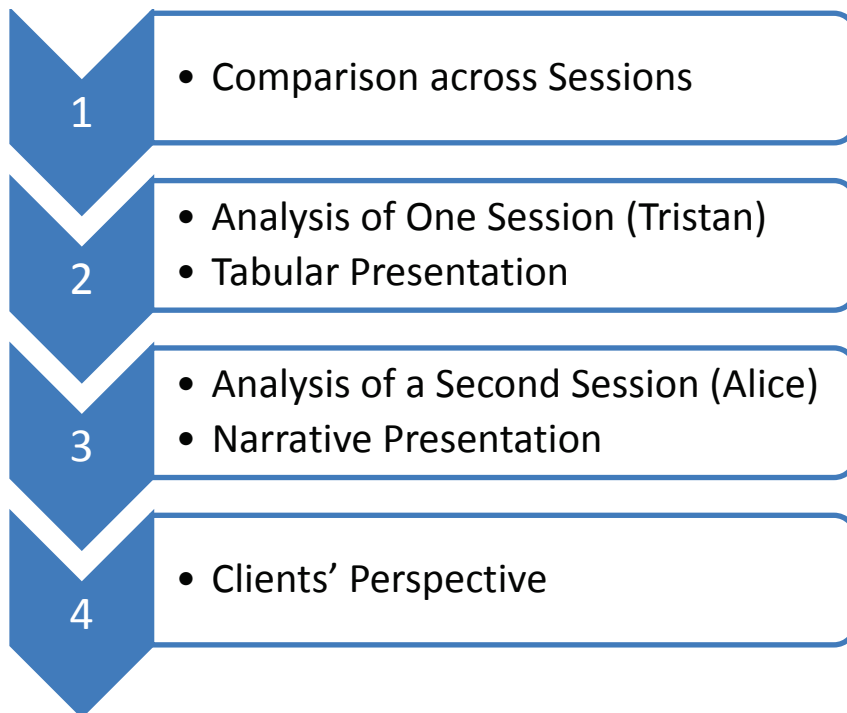
The in-depth analysis highlighted how each participant constructs their experience or observations of a coaching session filtered through their own frames of reference; that is humanistic coaches tend to perceive issues central to their understanding of coaching process (e.g. relational issues); behavioural coaches tend to perceive a lack of activity, etc. In other words, what is observable is at least to some extent constructed, rather than actually occurring in the sessions. It seemed in the analyses that the coaches facilitating the sessions imagined characteristics of the session as they were not reported as being experienced by the client nor were they noticed by the observers. Similarly, the observers noticed what was important to them (e.g. the coach being directive). This sense of construction of the coaching process from an internal point of reference was also apparent in the way the clients sorted the Q-items (Tristan's client constructing the process as one of the discussion of progress and practices; Alice's client as being in control and identifying options; Joanne's client as a deeply engaging experience). These internal constructions were not readily identified by the observers or coach.

Overall therefore, the detailed analyses of the sessions suggest:

- a) That there is both agreement and disagreement about what happens in a coaching session
- b) That similarities between coach-observers and coaches arise owing to the sharing of a common language for describing a session
- c) That similarities arise between coach and client because there is a shared understanding that is co-created in the session
- d) That similarities arise between client and observers because some activities are more or less true in an objective sense: they are visible and happen
- e) That differences arise because coach-observers and coaches have different frames of reference/ standards for evaluating particular characteristics of coaching sessions and because their own ways of conceptualising what is important in the coaching process might colour what is perceived
- f) That differences arise because the meaning-making process is central to the process; clients make sense of the session within their own frameworks of understanding irrespective of what might be occurring in an observable way; similarly, the coach and client create together significance: what they focus on becomes important in the moment that they give attention to particular foci in the coaching session irrespective of how insignificant these foci may appear on the outside

In the next sections, rather than attempt to build up an analysis of the client, coach and observer section session by session, the analyses take a top down perspective by considering each perspective on its own in turn (client, coach, observers); that is, to identify general patterns in the sorting irrespective of the specific sessions in which the participants had been involved. This approach pre-empts the need to conduct a further 3 in-depth analyses of the remaining sessions followed by further detailed thematic analyses. The approach presented is more parsimonious.

7.2. The Client's Perspective



The Q Sorts of the 5 of the 6 clients who completed Q-sorts were analysed together and separate from the other Q-sorts. The purpose of this statistical analysis was to identify any common ways of experiencing the coaching process.

A one factor solution accounted for 45% of the variation in the data. Those items scoring the highest in the factor array are shown in Table 7.12 below. The items scoring lowest are shown in Table 7.13. For purposes of comparison, the rankings for coaches are also provided. These rankings were also obtained by analysing the coaches' Q-sorts together as a separate data set and will be discussed in more detail in a later section. The differences in rankings (final position in the client and coach's factor arrays) are also shown in Table 7.12 and 7.13.

Table 7.12: Q Items rated by the Client as Highly Characteristic

	STATEMENT	COACH RANKING	CLIENT RANKING	Difference
45	Coach asks questions helping client to elaborate	3	+6	3
29	Coach shows empathy	5	+6	1
16	Coach challenges client's perspective of situation and/or self	3	+5	2
33	There appears to be rapport (strong connection) between client and coach	6	+5	1
4	There is an exploration of the client's underlying mindset	-5	+5	11
42	Coach and client appear to be engaged	4	+5	1
40	There is a sense of optimism in the coaching session	2	+4	2
44	Coach follows up on significant statements by clients	5	+4	1
83	Coach inquires about client's aim for the session	4	+4	0
15	Coach encourages client to become aware of his immediate in-session experience	4	+4	0
70	There is a discussion of new practices for the client	1	+4	3
39	Coach checks if her understanding is correct	3	+4	1

Table 7.13: Q Items rated by the Client as Highly *Uncharacteristic*

	STATEMENT	COACH RANKING	CLIENT RANKING	Difference
71	Coach suggests possible solutions	1	-4	3
43	Coach and client use a development plan to guide sessions	-2	-4	2
32	Coach discloses own fallibility	0	-4	4
62	Coach is verbose	-2	-4	2
31	Coach repairs lost connection to the client during the session	0	-4	4
51	The session appears highly structured	-5	-4	1
82	Coach questions client's level of commitment to coaching	-4	-5	1
22	Coach discloses own feelings/. Bodily sensations evoked in the session	-1	-5	4
63	Coach interrupts client	-4	-5	1
68	Coach appears to focus on a third party's agenda	-4	-5	1
57	Coach appears to be using an intervention mechanistically	-2	-6	4
58	Coach appears to be pursuing her own agenda	0	-6	6

The highest ranked items in the factor array seems to suggests that the clients rated as salient those aspects of the session that enabled them to talk through their issues (Q45) with an empathic (Q29) coach with whom they felt connected (Q33), who challenged their perspective (Q16, Q4, Q44) and who encouraged them to reflect on their in-session experiencing (Q15). The process was engaging (Q42), optimistic (Q40), had aims (Q83) and led to a discussion of new practices.

The lowest ranked items in the factor array are shown in Table 7.13. The lowest ranked items in the factor array seem to suggest that the clients experienced the session as being about them rather than the coach (Q58) or anyone else (Q68). They were either not exposed to, or did not consider significant any personal sharing on the part of the coach (Q32, Q22) which again seems to suggest that they experienced the sessions as being about them. Similarly, they appeared to experience a sense of freedom to speak (Q62, Q63). They did not have a strong sense of the coach directing them (Q71). The interaction had appeared free flowing (Q57, Q51 & Q31). The clients also perhaps wanted to make clear their commitment to the process (Q82).

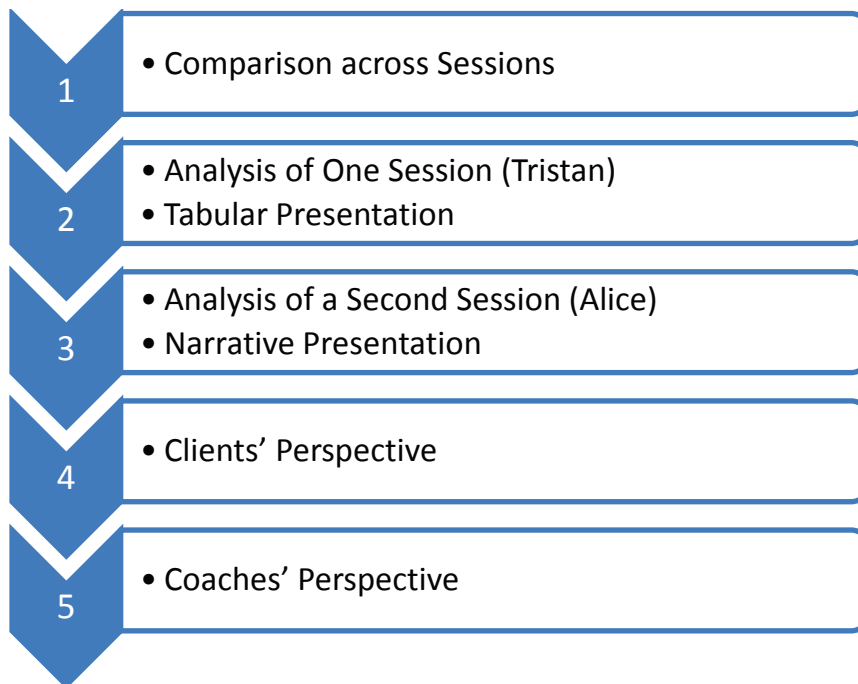
The client analysis indicates the importance of the three dimensions of the working alliance (goal, task and bonds; e.g. (Horvath, 1981; Bordin, 1979) for example the client making salient the importance of *goals* and new practices; commitment to *task* shown for example by the client highlighting his commitment to the process and finding the coach picking up on relevant issues; *bond* shown by a perception of rapport and experience of an empathic coach. The findings also emphasise the importance of the clients' heightened awareness and general sense of exploration of issues (not unconscious processes but of mindset and perspectives) as well as the client having a sense of the session being about their having space to consider alternative perspectives in a free flowing and optimistic conversational exchange. The findings therefore provide a broader perspective than a more limited set of constructs emphasised in the Working Alliance (Tryon et al 2007). The Q methodological analysis of the client perspective, as was the case for the analysis of the interviews also suggests what might be understood as the existence of common factors in the coaching process (Wampold, 2001; Grencavage and Norcross, 1990). Many common factors appeared to be highlighted in the clients' Q-sorting (e.g. empathy, sense of optimism, exploration of inner world of client, new practices, etc.). For risk of over-simplification, the experience of the coaching session was at a very fundamental level that of being asked questions that focused on the client's mindset in a positive atmosphere that allowed new perspectives to emerge and that led to action possibilities. This in turn suggests that coaching in a sense is a very simple process. From the client's perspective, the coach needs to be able to relate well interpersonally and ask questions that provoke reflection and lead to options for action.

In comparing the Q-scores in the client's factor array against the ratings in the coach factor array, arguably, relatively little stands out in terms of differences in items rated as highly characteristic with the exception of one item relating to mindset (Q4). In fact, the average difference in ranked positions (calculated from Table 7.13) for these items is only 15 (ranked differences)/11 statements = 1.36 (differences in rankings are only typically considered

significant when >2 , (Watts and Stenner, 2012)). Coach and client ratings of Q4 however are striking and suggest that the experience was very much explorative from the client's perspective. The client also seems to have given more emphasis to new practices (70) and the coach asking questions to elaborate (Q45). These items may emphasise the saliency of the practical utility of the sessions and the very basic process of being asked questions from the client's perspective. It is possible that coaches may underestimate the saliency of these aspects of the coaching process from the client's perspective.

With respect to differences in relation to highly uncharacteristic items, the client's ratings tend to emphasise the perceived professionalism of the coach (Q57). This difference could be due to the coach's modesty, actual expertise or even a fantasy of expertise projected onto a coach who provides a context to allow client's to think differently. In short, there may be some form of positive attribution process which may or may not be based in what the coach actually does, but may relate more to what is achieved by the client or to how the client makes sense of the coach (referent power; socially sanctioned helper, etc.). There are also differences in rank-ordering of items in relation to those items that relate to what the coach might do, the client tending to score these lower (Q32, Q22, Q58). This seems to be a strong expression of the session being experienced as about them the clients. Q71 might also suggest a sense of the clients doing more of the work (even if advice or suggestions are provided). Q31 would be something to highlight as irrelevant in the context of the perception of a good relationship.

7.3 The Coaches' Perspective



The coach's Q-sorts were analysed separately to all the other Q-sorts. A one factor solution accounted for 22% of the variation and had an eigenvalue of 1.4. All coaches loaded onto this factor. A factor solution which only accounts for 22% of the variation in the data doesn't actually explain much of what is happening ($0.22 \times 0.22 = 5\%$ of the explained variance). The factor is only therefore giving an indication of some commonality but in the context of considerable individual variance and potentially measurement error. This finding alone suggests that there is a need to consider in depth the individual Q-sorts of the respondents to make sense of individual sorting patterns. However, the overall pattern still provides an indication of some commonality across Q-sorts and allows for a degree of comparison across perspectives.

The % of the variance explained by the Q Factor in the coaches' Q sorts is interesting when compared to the Q factor extracted from the clients' Q Sorts which accounted for 45% of the variation in the data. It would seem that the coaches were showing greater dissimilarity in how they evaluated their own sessions than had their clients. This may be because coaches make more nuanced judgements about the session or have a specialised vocabulary (or

understanding of the possible meaning of items) which allowed them to discriminate between items more discerningly (e.g. as suggested when considering the way Tristan had sorted items). The highest and lowest scoring items in the factor array for the coaches are shown in tables 7.14 and 7.15. The values of the clients are also shown for comparative purposes.

Table 7.14: Q Items rated by the Coach as Highly Characteristic

	STATEMENT	COACH RANKING	CLIENT RANKING	Difference
33	There appears to be rapport (strong connection) between client and coach	+6	+5	1
76	Coach encourages client to make choices	+6	2	4
29	Coach shows empathy	+5	+5	0
52	Coach and client appear to bring the session to closure easily	+5	6	1
44	Coach follows up on key/significant statements made by client	+5	+4	1
54	Coach takes an active role during the session	+5	3	2
15	Coach encourages client to become aware of his immediate experience	+4	4	0
83	Coach inquires about client's aim for the session	+4	+4	0
7	There is a discussion about the client's overall goals	+4	2	2
42	There appears to be a shift in energy during the coaching session	+4	5	1
79	Coach and client appear to understand each other	+4	3	1
41	There appears to be a shift in energy during the coaching session	+4	3	1

Table 7.15: Q Items rated by the Coach as Highly *Uncharacteristic*

	STATEMENT	COACH RANKING	CLIENT RANKING	Difference
80	There is a discussion about how to measure the success of the engagement.	-4	0	4
63	Coach interrupts client	-4	-5	1
68	Coach appears to focus on third party's agenda	-4	-5	1
25	Coach and client explore their differences in perceptions of self or situation	-4	-1	3
2	There is an exploration of the client's values	-4	0	4
82	Coach questions client's level of commitment to coaching	-4	-5	1
4	There is an exploration of the client's underlying mindset	-5	5	11
19	There is a discussion of the results of a psychometric instrument	-5	-3	2
51	The session appears highly structured	-5	-4	1
47	There is discussion of issues relating to the termination of coaching	-5	-2	3
14	Coach explores client's emotions	-6	2	9
18	There is one or more moments of silent reflection	-6	0	6

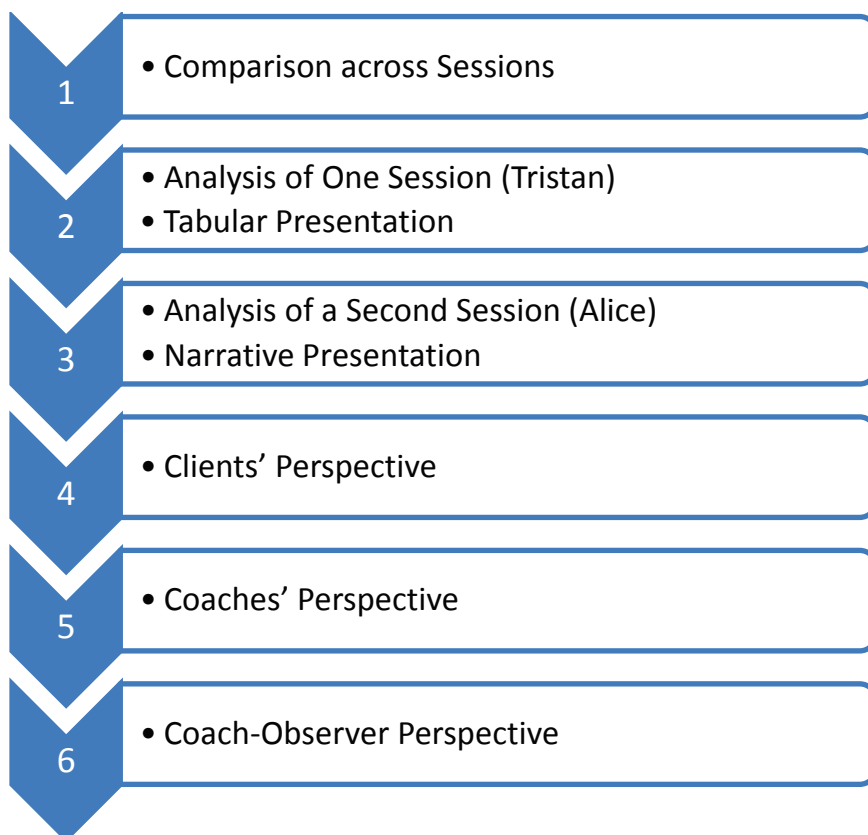
The factor array for the coaches is broadly similar to the factor array of the clients.

Comparing first of all the highest scoring items in the factor array for the coaches, the coaches like the clients highlighted empathy (Q29) and rapport (Q33). They also highlighted session aims (Q83). Like their clients, the coaches had seen themselves picking up on the client's statements (Q44). Collectively, these commonalities also seem to relate to the Working Alliance concept (*goals*: Q83; *tasks*: Q44, Q79; *bond*: Q29 and Q33; Bordin, 1979, Tryon, 2007).

There are relatively few differences between how the coaches rated the sessions as highly characteristic and how the clients did so (as expressed in the factor arrays for the highest ranked items: 14 items/ aggregated differences in places of 12 calculated from table = 1.17). The coaches have given more saliency to encouraging the client to make choices which might relate to a particular nuanced understanding of coaching process or that the clients simply did not feel any pressure to make decisions (as suggested in their spoken accounts).

There were more differences between how the coaches rated the sessions as highly uncharacteristic and how their clients rated the sessions. The main difference was in relation to depth of exploration of mindset (Q4), perceptions (Q25) and exploration of the client's emotions (Q14) and values (Q2); perhaps related to this process, periods of silent reflection (Q18). The experience had been relatively superficial from the perspective of the coaches who as experienced coaches are very likely to have experienced greater levels of depths with clients. For the clients however, perhaps relatively inexperienced in terms of coaching, the experience had been quite profound for them. This finding supports findings in psychotherapy. The coaches were not however unaware of a sense of the client's experiencing (Q15). It seems that the coaches and clients simply held different benchmarks for depth of exploration.

7.4 The Observers' Perspective



The observer's Q Sorts alone were analysed in a separate factor analysis. The best solution was a two factor solution which explained 31% of the variation in the data. The first factor

explained 18% of the variance in the data and the second factor a further 13%. The respective eigenvalues were 7.2 and 3.7 indicating the identification of significant factors. Other solutions were attempted but no significant eigenvalue could be obtained for a third factor. The observers from the various sessions loading significantly onto the 2 factors are as shown in Table 7.16 below:

Table 7.16: Observer Loadings onto Factors 1 and 2

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Notes
Session 1: Tristan	6/6 observers		No confounding
Session 2: Marjorie	6/6 observers		No confounding
Session 3: Joanne		4/4 observers	No confounding
Session 4: Alice	4/8 observers	4/8 observers	4Q-sorts showing loaded onto both factors but the main loading only is showing
Session 5: Alison	1/6 observers	5/6 observers	No confounding
Session 6: Drew	1/5 observers	4/5 observers	3/5 Q-sorts confounding

In summary, the observer Q-sorts for sessions 1 and 2 comprised factor 1; the observer Q-sorts for sessions 3 (Joanne), 5 (Alison) and 6 (Drew) tended to comprise Factor 2 and the Q-sorts from session 4 (Alice) tended to load onto either or both factors. It would seem that sessions 1 and 2 were construed by the observers as broadly similar but qualitatively differently to sessions 3, 5 and 6. Session 4 was construed in a manner somewhere in-between these sets of sessions.

Table 7.17 and 7.18 list the largest differences between Factor 1 and 2 (Items rated highly characteristic on F1 but less so in F2 are showing in Table 7.17 and Items rated as highly uncharacteristic on F1 but more characteristic in F2 in Table 7.18).

Table 7.17: Largest Differences between Factors 1 and 2 (Observer Viewpoints; High Scores on Factor 1)

Q No		Factor 1	Factor 2	Difference
5	COACH AND CLIENT EXPLORE THE DEEPER MEANING OF A PRESENTING ISSUE	3	-6	10
2	THERE IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE CLIENT'S VALUES	3	-6	10
4	THERE IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE CLIENT'S UNDERLYING MINDSET	2	-5	8
18	THERE IS ONE OR MORE PERIODS OF SILENT REFLECTION	1	-5	7
8	COACH POINTS OUT POTENTIAL UNCONSCIOUS MOTIVES	0	-5	5
16	COACH CHALLENGES CLIENT'S PERSPECTIVE OF SITUATION AND/OR OF SELF	3	-2	6
33	THERE APPEARS TO BE RAPPORT (STRONG CONNECTION) BETWEEN CLIENT AND COACH	6	1	5
7	COACH POINTS OUT RECURRENT THEME IN CLIENT'S BEHAVIOUR	4	0	4
44	COACH FOLLOWS UP ON KEY/SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS MADE BY CLIENT	4	-1	5
14	COACH ENCOURAGES CLIENT TO FEEL MORE DEEPLY IN SESSION	0	-4	4
21	COACH GIVES FEEDBACK FROM COACH'S EXPERIENCE OF CLIENT	1	-2	4
13	COACH EXPLORES CLIENT'S EMOTIONS	0	-3	3

Table 7.18: Largest Differences between Factors 1 and 2 (Observer Viewpoints; Low scores on Factor 1)

Q No		Factor 1	Factor 2	Difference
51	THE SESSION APPEARS HIGHLY STRUCTURED	-5	0	5
82	COACH QUESTIONS CLIENT'S LEVEL OF COMMITMENT TO COACHING	-6	-2	4
81	COACH REDIRECTS CLIENT TO CLIENT'S AGENDA	-2	1	4
28	COACH USES HUMOUR	-1	3	4
50	THE SESSION IS FAST PACED	-5	0	5
54	COACH TAKES AN ACTIVE ROLE DURING THE SESSION	2	6	4
46	THERE IS A DISCUSSION OF THE COACHING CONTRACT	-3	2	6
58	COACH APPEARS TO BE PURSUING HER OWN AGENDA	-4	2	7
57	COACH APPEARS TO BE USING AN INTERVENTION MECHANISTICALLY	-6	1	7
63	COACH INTERRUPTS CLIENT	-4	3	8
65	COACH SUGGESTS IN-SESSION EXERCISE/ACTIVITY	-4	5	10
62	COACH IS VERBOSE	-5	5	11

In table 7.17, Q Items 5, 2, 4, 8, 16, 7, 14, 21 and 13 all seem to relate to a perception of an exploration of depth. Item 33 is about the quality of the relationship and item 18 is about giving time for reflection which probably also is important in ensuring an exploration of depth. It would therefore seem that sessions 3, 5 and 6 (factor 2) were considered to be relatively superficial and sessions 1 and 2 (factor 1) relatively much deeper in breadth and depth. Session 3 seems to be occupying a middle ground. The ratings of sessions 3, 5 and 6 confirm many of the negative evaluations given in the spoken comments in the observer groups about a lack of depth and breadth of exploration and a lack of meaningful exploration generally.

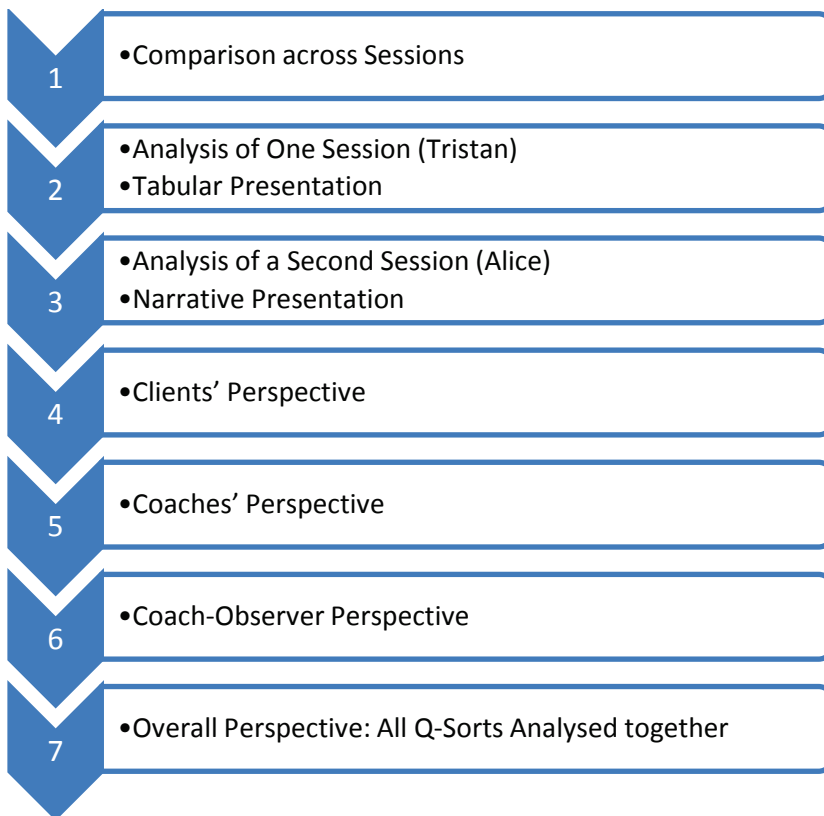
In Table 7.18, the perception of the coaches expressed in Factor 2 (in relation to sessions 3, 5 and 6) seems more negative with a verbose (Q62), interruptive coach (Q63). Taking accounts of the verbal comments, the Q-sorting confirms the impression of coaches in these sessions as appearing overly active in the conversation, using exercises at the expense of discussion and somewhat intent on imposing their own agenda. Factor 1 tends to emphasise the perception of a less structured approach (Q51), greater client commitment (Q82), a much slower paced session. The coach was perceived as less self-interested (Q58), much higher skilled (Q57), more conversationally oriented (Q65) and one giving the space to the client to speak (Q62, Q63). However, the coaching contract was not discussed (Q46) and there was little humour (Q28).

Although it might seem that many of these characteristics seem much more positive for the coaches associated with sessions 1 and 2, it is important to note that many of the observers in sessions 1 and 2 were concerned with the slow, reflective approaches of the coaches which were expressed in the spoken accounts. It is not therefore possible to assume that all coaches will be in favour of the approach demonstrated in Factor 1. On the other hand, most of the criticisms of coaches in the open discussions related to a lack of developmental coaching and/or breadth and depth of exploration. For many coaches therefore, particular in

relation to factor 2, it would seem that they were expressing their dissatisfaction and expressing how coaching should not be practised.

The analysis of the observer Q Sorts seems to indicate overall however a basic distinction between coaching practice; one in which the coach appears to be skilled in conducting a free flowing, explorative, meaningful and developmental conversation focused on the client with good rapport building; and one in which the coach appears to fail to demonstrate these characteristics (i.e. is more focused on own agenda, gives too much direction, doesn't give space for the client to speak, fails to establish rapport, focuses more on activities than the conversation which is moreover, relatively superficial).

7.5 Final Analysis: All Q-Sorts Analysed together



A final overall analysis was carried out in which all the Q-sorts were analysed together. The best solution was considered to be a 3 factor solution representing 36% of the variance. Each factor had eigenvalues suggesting distinct factors (10.3, 4.3 & 2.4). Factor 1 explained 15% of the variance, Factor 2, 9% and Factor 3, 12%. Most Q-sorts loaded onto one of these three factors but there was considerable confounding which meant that only those Q – sorts loading uniquely on a factor were used to generate the factor arrays for the 3 factors. This allows the identification of a clearer distinction between viewpoints expressed in each factor. (A full analysis of this solution by PQ Method is included in the Appendix 11. It is intended to illustrate the principal of Q methodological analyses. It is > 80 pages for a single Q- analysis and includes a full correlation matrix for all Q sorts used in this Inquiry. A full correlation matrix has also therefore been provided separately).

Table 7.19: Q-sorts Loading onto the 3 Factors Extracted when all Q-sorts were analysed together

	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3	CONFOUNDED
Coach Session 1: Marjorie				X (F2 & F3)
Coach Session 2: Tristan			X	
Coach Session 3: Joanne				X (F1 & F2)
Coach Session 4: Alice			X	
Coach Session 5: Alison	X			
Coach Session 6: Drew	X			
Client Session 1: Marjorie				X (F1 & F3)
Client Session 2: Tristan	X			
Client Session 3: Joanne	X			
Client Session 4: Alice	X			
Client Session 5: Alison	X			
Client Session 6: Drew				
Observers Session 1: Marjorie		1/6	2/6	3/6 (F1 & F3)
Observers Session 2: Tristan	5/6			1/6 (F1 & f3)
Observers Session 3: Joanne			4/6	
Observers Session 4: Alice			5/8	3/8 (All Factors)
Observers Session 5: Alison	1/6	4/6		1/6 (F2 & F3)
Observers Session 6: Drew	3/5	2/5		

Factor 1 seems to be represented primarily by Tristan's session even though Tristan's Q-sort did not load onto that session. This is demonstrated by 5/6 observers for that session loading only onto his session and 4/5 of the clients completing Q-sorts; 3/5 observers from Drew's session also loaded onto that factor suggesting that the observers had constructed Drew's session in a similar manner to that of Tristan's.

It would seem that the clients' experience of a coaching session aligned with that observed in Tristan's session even though those sessions were generally evaluated in a different manner by the observers and by the coaches themselves in some cases. However, given also that 2 of the 6 coaches also loaded onto Tristan's session, it would seem that in spite of differing views of the observers, the coaches constructed their approach as being more aligned with that of Tristan's coaching approach.

Tristan's session was analysed in detail in the early part of this chapter and suggested that the coach was perceived as giving ample space for the client to reflect and demonstrated lots of empathy. These were the key experiences of the clients irrespective of how the

observers perceived the sessions; they were also the perceptions of some of the coaches. In spite of the many criticisms made by the observers of Drew's session, factor 2 still highlights the coach's relational engagement and asking of questions. The rankings hide evaluations of perceptions. The observers of Tristan's session and of Drew's session downplayed the basic processes of empathy/ relational engagement and asking of reflective questions which the clients conversely seem to have noticed (and valued given their spoken accounts) and two of the 5 coaches seem to wish to align themselves with. It is perhaps understandable that Drew would align with Tristan's session if 3/5 observers also loaded onto the same factor. For Alison however, she seems to have constructed her session as quite differently to the observers. A detailed comparison of the factors was carried out and confirmed these differences. Given space constraints, the details of the analysis are not reported here.

7.6 Chapter Summary

This session has presented a detailed analysis of the findings from Q-mode factor analyses and comparison or ratings generally across perspectives. The findings tend to suggest that the client constructs the coaching process in some ways differently and in other ways in a similar manner to coaches and observers. Clients tend to make sense of the sessions as experiences in which they are asked reflective questions that prompt new perspectives and options for action with an empathic coach; this is, for them, an explorative process with heightened awareness. The coaches tend to be more focused on 'technical' aspects of their approach (e.g. whether they discussed the relationship, whether they encouraged the client to make choices, etc.). They also considered the sessions to be emotionally unchallenging (fewer periods of silent reflection, less exploration of emotions or mindset). This does not mean however, they that did not think that the clients did not experience the sessions at a relatively deep emotional level; just that for them, based on their experience perhaps, the sessions were not particularly deep. The coaches were aligned with their clients in considering that they had established an effective relational engagement and had generally

explored issues. The observers, while identifying the approach of the coach as relationally engaging, generally used the Q-sorting process to express their dissatisfaction with their perceptions of a lack of depth of exploration or meaningful engagement. It would seem that from the outside, the extent of meaning-making between coach and client can seem particularly superficial.

The analyses did highlight how, in spite of some general similarities in perceptions, there could be considerable differences in perspectives at the level of an individual session. This included for example how a client can make sense of the session in a way perhaps aligned with her own frameworks of understanding irrespective of what might seem to suggest a different type of experience when analysed from the outside but from a viewpoint of coaching discourse. This suggests that clients have a capacity to construct their experiences in particular ways irrespective of what a coach might be observed to do from the outside observer perspective. The individual analyses also highlighted how coaches may be unaware of the inner experiences of clients (e.g. energy shifts) occurring in the sessions.

Key Points

- *The Statistical analysis tended to support the findings from the thematic analysis described in Chapters 4, 5 and 6; that is the clients and coaches both had positive impressions of the sessions and the coach-observers generally negative ones*
- *The statistical analysis suggested that all participants often noticed similar events; this seemed to suggest that how the participants interpreted the events varied; however there were some exceptions to this which suggested that the meaning of events was often privately and subjectively experienced/ constructed*
- *The statistical analysis could be more easily interpreted in light of the spoken accounts and vice-versa; the statistical analysis seemed to provide support for the data interpreted in the thematic analysis*

8.0 Chapter 8 Discussion

This discussion chapter will focus on the central topic of interest in this thesis which is how the investigation contributes to providing an understanding of the coaching process. From the perspective of the client, the most salient finding was perhaps how the process seemed to meet the interpersonal needs of the clients. From the perspective of the coach, the process seemed to be one of perception and decision-making conducted as an expert intervention. From the perspective of the dyad, the process seemed to be one of inter-subjective meaning making. From the perspective of the coach-observers, the process seemed to suggest the social construction of the process of coaching: what is valued or considered important in coaching as a practice. These are high-level findings and will be discussed in some depth in this Chapter. I will also provide a review of the use of conducting the Inquiry using a range of research methods flexibly and in combination. This is because there would seem to be scope for understanding how such a wide ranging and flexible approach could be of general benefit in research and allow an understanding of a phenomenon; in the case of this Inquiry, a coaching session, in breadth and depth.

8.1 Client perspective: coaching as a process of satisfying interpersonal needs

The similarity expressed in the accounts and Q sorting of the clients was a particularly salient characteristic of their perspective of the coaching process. All clients expressed emphatically a sense of being in control in the session and of feeling that they could take more effective control of their personal circumstances after the coaching sessions. They all expressed a sense of being the centre of attention in the sessions; of being taken seriously and of being given positive affirmations; they all expressed a sense of being valued. The accounts of the coaches in chapter 5 seemed to corroborate what we might have expected to have found in the accounts of the clients, providing a form of triangulation of the experiences of the clients. For example, when the clients spoke of being listened to, the coaches spoke of listening to the clients; when the clients spoke of receiving positive affirmations, the coaches spoke of giving positive affirmations; when the clients spoke of being in control, the coaches spoke of giving control of the agenda to the clients.

The accounts of the coach-observers were also very critical when the coach was not perceived to listen to the client, show him respect or allow him to take control; they were cynical of any apparent inauthentic affirmations that were given. Their perspective seemed to further support the perceived importance of listening to the client, allowing the client to take control in the session, determine his own course of action and the importance of the coach being empathic. It seemed that the coach-observers highlighted the importance of these aspects of the coaching process.

The experiences described by the clients seemed to provide what could be conceptualised as the satisfaction of interpersonal needs (client perspective) or the perceived importance of satisfying interpersonal needs (coach and coach-observer perspectives); specifically the need for significance, competence and affection (Schutz, 1977). Many of these client experiences, at the same time seemed to align with the principles of client-centred approaches in which the practitioner adopts a position of positive regard and unconditional

acceptance (meeting perhaps the client's interpersonal needs for significance and affection) and non-directedness (meeting the client's needs to be competent/ to take control). The accounts and Q-sorts of the clients and of the coaches also suggested some characteristics of the approach of the coaches that would suggest some congruence with a general person-centred orientation. This was in spite of the coaches adopting frameworks that were not explicitly person-centred.

Given that all the coaches described different ways of conducting their coaching sessions and did not talk explicitly about a specific client-centred approach (excepting one coach), it would seem that general principles implicit in the client centred approach (e.g. such as listening intently to the client, showing empathy and being accepting of the client) are integral to many coaching traditions and individual coaching styles. One might further argue that if coaching is about satisfying interpersonal needs, what might count in coaching are not particular traditions, techniques or styles deployed by the coach but the principles of person-centred approaches (e.g. Rogers, 1961; Rogers, J, 2008, Joseph and Linley, 2006) which ensure that a client is made to feel significant, competent or cared for.

There may be a parallel in coaching to the early Hawthorne experiments (Franke and Kaul, 1978) in the wider field of organizational behaviour in which what seemed to count in raising employee performance was the process of giving attention to employees rather than their participating in any specific type of intervention. If the giving of attention is what might be valued by the client in coaching, the actual content of the coaching conversation might be of secondary importance. In this context, the overt coaching conversation might be about addressing a new role, a specific problem in the workplace or about increasing a client's self-awareness. However, what might be particularly valued by the client is the way the conversation provides a medium for the satisfaction of interpersonal needs. The Q-sort analysis in particular tended to suggest that the identification of new practices was also important so it would not be appropriate to argue that the coaching process is only about meeting interpersonal needs.

The research raises the question as to whether the satisfaction of a client's interpersonal needs may be instrumental in leading to changes beyond the session. It seems possible that if a client gains a sense of control in the session or experiences being in control that they might then be able to take control of their life situation outside of the coaching session. Similarly, if they gain a sense of being respected, valued or supported in the coaching session, they then might feel more energised and resourceful to take action outside of the coaching conversation. The content of the coaching session then becomes primarily symbolic: actions agreed in the session might not be those that the client ultimately puts into practice. Insights and new perspectives gained in the session may be far less instrumental in effectuating change than having a sense of resourcefulness to address issues or to appreciate the scope for reconceptualising their current situations.

The findings did suggest that what the client took out of the session were general motivational elements and a sense of being resourceful rather than specific actions that they would take away. Most clients did not leave the session with clear action plans, but did leave with an overall sense of positivity gained from the session and a range of possible actions they could take. These comments were also reflected by some of the observers; for example in comments highlighting a sense of the client gaining control or simply the therapeutic benefit of being able to unload concerns and for those concerns not to be criticised by another (acceptance; unconditional positive regard, empathy; e.g. Rogers, 1961; Rogers, J, 2008, Joseph and Linley, 2006).

The goal of much of the psychotherapy process literature discussed in chapter 2 is to identify what aspects of the practitioner-client process experienced in a session lead to long-term outcomes beyond the session (Rice and Greenberg, 1986, Elliott, 2010). The importance of the satisfaction of these needs identified in the Inquiry raises the question of the possible relevance of interpersonal needs satisfaction as an important process outcome measure. The satisfaction of these needs also calls into question the relative importance of specific

insights and actions acquired in a coaching session relative to their symbolic significance in stimulating change.

An understanding of the coaching process as the satisfaction of interpersonal needs might also explain the importance of common factors identified in the literature on psychotherapy. For example, the practitioner's expression of empathy (one salient common factor; Grenavage and Norcross, 1990) may lead to the client gaining a sense of self-worth; the practitioner's expression of optimism and non-directedness (other common factors; Grenavage and Norcross, 1990) may convey to the client a sense of being able to take control; the practitioner's expressions of respect as a socially sanctioned healer (yet another common factor; Grenavage and Norcross, 1990) is interpreted by the client as an authoritative declaration of his (the client's) own significance. Most if not all common factors could be constructed as relevant in some way to the satisfaction of interpersonal needs. This understanding of process could be of as much relevance in psychotherapy as in coaching. In this sense, common factors (Wampold, 2001) should not be constructed as a placebo effect because it would seem that they have some instrumental value in meeting interpersonal needs; the client actually experiences control, personal significance and self-worth. These experiences might in turn promote a sense of resourcefulness and prompt change beyond the session. Client resourcefulness is considered important in the change process in both psychotherapy (e.g. Smith and Grawe, 2005; Flückiger et al, 2009, Flückiger et al, 2012) and coaching (e.g. Greif et al, 2010).

I have put forward the argument so far in this chapter and earlier in the thesis that the perspective of the client suggests the relevance of interpersonal needs. This would suggest that clients have actual interpersonal needs, indicative of realist ontology. This could be considered to present a threat to the overall coherence of this Inquiry which has adopted a social constructionist paradigm. It could however be argued that the needs of the clients were experienced as socially constructed needs rather than universal human needs existing independently of social and cultural influences. In a western world which values

individualism (e.g. Jensen, 1995; Evans 1990), it could be argued that clients have a cultural need to feel significant, in control and valued. We live in a society in which there seems to be cultural pressures to achieve at an individual level, to demonstrate one's competence and a society in which one's sense of value is based on our being individuals rather than as part of a community. Ontologically, the client might "feel" what might be constructed as actual experiences but those experiences can still be regulated by the social and historical context and in this way can still be considered socially constructed

8.2 Coach Perspective: coaching as an expert process directed by the coach

In chapter 5, the starting point was to highlight how the perspective of the coach was differentiated from that of the client primarily in relation to how the coach tended to focus on how she provided a service whereas the client had focused much more on how he had been a service user/ client. These constructions of the coaching process seem to suggest a sense-making of the coaching process as being an expert intervention (i.e. a service provided by an expert).

The findings seemed to suggest that the coaches drew on interpersonal skills, process skills and knowledge to help guide them through the coaching engagement. The coaches suggested their use of interpersonal skills by making decisions about what to say when; they suggested their use of process skills by elaborating in depth about how they drew on a range of processes such as pattern-making, intuition, tradition-informed frameworks and their own experiencing, and sometimes 'testing' of the client to inform their actions. These descriptions highlight their sensing of a broad skill set indicative of a degree of process and interpersonal expertise. The coaches also spoke of their business awareness and/or awareness of the processes of human development, which helped them participate in the content of the coaching conversation or which helped them make decisions about how to relate to the client in the moment of the session. These comments also suggested that the coaches had a degree of expert content knowledge (for example being able to understand the client at a deeper level than the client himself).

While there is a lot of discussion in the wider coaching community about the equality of the relationship and coaching as a process of collaboration, the findings suggest that for the sessions analysed in the Inquiry, the coach still facilitated the session to a greater or lesser extent as a provider of an expert intervention (including having an expert level of knowledge). These findings perhaps prompt us to question what we might mean by coaching as a process of "collaboration." If by collaboration, we mean that the client is in

control of the content and the coach and client together work to help the client address his challenges, this might seem plausible. However, the coach is still constructed by coach, coaches and client alike as an expert.

In parallel to the constructions of the client and coach about the expertise of the coach, the coach-observers also evaluated the coaching session as an expert intervention, with almost all of their comments evaluating what the coach did rather than the client or the dyad had done. In some cases they highlighted their own expertise in being able to make authoritative evaluations. In other words, while there might be ample talk of coaching as a process of collaboration, coaches acting as observers readily focus their concerns on the importance of the coach demonstrating expertise.

This does not mean that the coach did not show respect for the client, ask the client what they wanted to do or talk about, nor that they did not work together to gain a common understanding. This neither means that the coaches acted intentionally upon the client as a passive subject. However, some of the acts of permission-seeking and other behavioural interventions initiated by the coach were often seen by the coach-observers as manipulative or directing, which might suggest that in practice, it is easy for even expert coaches to become directive and to at least appear to *act on* the client.

The different ways in which the coaches described how they conducted the process seemed to suggest the relevance of Jungian frameworks much popularised in MBTI®. The findings from the Inquiry point to how much of the existing research and writings on MBTI® may be overly focused on the client or the relationship rather than the coach. The research also points to the wider possible relevance of intuition and of coaching as a process which can be constructed as an internal process of perception and decision-making on the part of the coach as well as a behavioural one. In this context, Jungian frameworks are relevant in that they provide a conceptual framework for understanding how a coach uses their expertise in perception and decision-making in the unfolding moments of a session.

As in the previous sub-section, it could be argued from a social constructionist perspective that the coaches were not actually drawing on differing cognitive and affective processes in a realist sense. It could be argued that the coaches were simply drawing on a range of discourses such as a discourse of intuition, a discourse of pragmatism (giving practical advice and suggestions in the limited time available for a one-off session) or even a discourse of connecting emotionally with the client. In this sense, the coaches would not be understood to be drawing on actual distinctive perceptual and decision-making processes in the way Jung for example described and as I highlighted in chapter 5. Rather, they were simply enacting different frameworks commonly constructed as ways of describing what coaches might do; they were drawing on culturally available resources which they could employ to conduct the session. As in the case of the clients, this does not mean that the coaches did not believe that they were drawing on processes of intuition or responding to feelings. However, from a socially constructionist perspective, it could be argued that they were making sense of their own experiences and even using these constructs to orientate themselves through the coaching session.

One might take as an example, how a coach claimed to make decisions based on a sense of intuition. From a social constructionist perspective, it could be argued that coaches have knowledge of “intuition;” they consider it useful and valuable for coaches to be able to draw upon “intuition” and then they try to apply what they understand to be “intuition” in a coaching session. In this way, they use “intuition” as a discursive resource rather than apply what might be understood in a realist sense as an actual process unique from other forms of perceiving. Similarly, when coaches find that they have reacted in a particular way, they make sense of the way they have reacted by explaining their reactions as “intuition” but that they can only do this because “intuition” is an available linguistic resource.

This more discursive understanding of the way the coach might be considered to engage in the coaching session puts to one side the relevance of coaching as an internal process and situates the practice of coaching in the social realm. From this perspective, not only does it

seem that coaching is an expression of discourses relating to intuition, feeling and acting as a master guide but calls into question whether other discourses are relevant in making sense of what the coach is attempting to achieve in a coaching session. Implicit in all of the accounts of the coaches in particular, were notions of personal authenticity, helping the client to reach his potential, of the possibilities of personal change and other humanistic discourses. From a discursive perspective, coaching is constructed as less a process of actual behaviours and interventions facilitated by a process-skilled coach and more a process of enacting culturally valued social practices (or at least practices legitimated within a field of practice) drawing on linguistically derived resources. In this sense, the expertise of the coach is as a skilled user of coaching discourse. The coach must appear to demonstrate expertise in enacting socially valued practices and at the same time, enable the client to satisfy needs which have particular cultural significance, including being helped to feel significant, valued, in control and able to take action.

8.3 Perspective of dyad: coaching as a Process of Private and productive Inter-subjective Meaning-Making

In chapter 2, I outlined the social constructionist argument that has been put forward in the literature in psychotherapy. It argues that what counts in psychotherapy is the way meaning is created inter-subjectively between client and therapist (McNamee and Gergen, 1992).

The social constructionist perspective in therapy is closely associated with postmodernism (e.g. Anderson, 1997) and incorporates a range of approaches including narrative therapy and other discursive perspectives (Lock and Strong, 2012). In coaching, a number of approaches seem to have taken their inspiration from these traditions in therapy, including narrative coaching. Many social constructionist approaches can be interpreted as yet more competing traditions sitting alongside for example, transactional analytical, NLP or humanistic models of coaching, which are often juxtaposed in a range of edited editions of coaching (e.g. Palmer and Whybrow, 2007; Cox et al, 2010; Stober and Grant, 2006).

However, the argument can be put forward that a social constructionist interpretation of coaching offers a radically different way of understanding coaching rather than just representing yet another tradition. It is argued in this section of the thesis that it offers a meta-framework for understanding the coaching process.

The findings from the research can be considered to support a social constructionist interpretation of the coaching process. This was demonstrated in many different ways. First of all, the inter-subjective construction of meaning seemed to be paramount in the sessions. In all sessions, irrespective of how meaningless, counter-productive and frustrating the session appeared from the outside, from the inside, the session was described as meaningful, useful and psychologically satisfying. The clients expressed the view that the coach was always ensuring that the client only did what they, the clients agreed to do, was giving them what felt like authentic validations, listening to them intently and showing that they had understood them. All clients left the sessions with a sense of having made progress with the issues that they took to the session.

That which from the observers' perspective had seemed like collusion, dominance and even persecution on the part of the coach had been generally experienced by the client as authentic validation and a sense of the client being in control. That which had seemed like a lack of connection on the outside had seemed like a sense of almost transcendental connection on the inside. What had seemed bizarre on the outside had been conceptualised on the inside as an agreed and meaningful way of working together. That which had seemed a meandering process of reflection seemed to have been an energising and useful activity by client and coach. What had appeared to lack energy on the outside had been interpreted by coach and client as a sense of intense engagement.

Something seemed to be happening within the sessions that occasioned a rich and useful experience on the inside, but which was not perceived in the same way on the outside. In part, this seems to relate to the inter-subjective feedback process occurring within the conversational exchange between coach and client.

Each person gains a sense of how constructive their interactions are with the other based on how they interpret the reactions of the other; these interpretations provide the basis for the moment by moment interactional exchanges in the conversation. A conversational exchange can be understood as a highly inter-subjective meaning-making process in which the actions of the one and the interpretation of the reaction of the other are based upon one's own unique frames of reference. If, for example, as a coach I believe that asking for permission is a way of being directive, then I have no reason to assume that I am being directive particularly if from within my own frame of reference the client accepts my request for me to proceed. If, as a coach, I believe that a person's anxiety levels are evident from my capacity to interpret subtle changes in skin coloration or dilation of the client's pupils, then I will make inferences about the client's level of anxiety in the session and act according to my knowledge of how to proceed when a client expresses anxiety. If, as a coach, I believe that I generally establish a strong connection with a client, then it is perhaps likely that I will experience a sense of connection with the client, particularly if the client reacts to

me in the way I expect when I experience that sense of connection. In short, our frameworks of understanding provide a map for negotiating the interaction with the other. The coach's map is not however an objective description of the client's world. It is a frame of reference which allows the coach to initiate action, make inferences and to respond to their interpretations of the client's reactions and way of being in a particular context.

Another person viewing the conversation on the outside would interpret the utterances and way of being of the other differently; they would respond from different frameworks of understanding. If the observer believes that asking permission is a way of legitimising one's own internal agenda, then the observer will assume that the stage has been set for an act of manipulation; the client's response will be interpreted as compliance rather than agreement. If as an observer, I assume that the coach's chair has symbolic significance and the coach some form of relational power, then the client will always be perceived to be subjugated by that greater authority of the coach when she is asked to sit in that chair. If I believe that connection can only be established over time and as a process of reflecting accurately what the client says, then I will not gain a sense of connection when I observe a session in which the coach does not appear to listen in the manner I expect. Our own frames of reference as observers can therefore create barriers to what we are able to perceive when we act as observers as coaching sessions. In this sense, a coaching conversation can be made public (e.g. through video-recording) but it remains private, inaccessible to others from the outside.

Whenever the coach-observers had a specialised frame of reference/language for interpreting the coaching process, the difference between how the session appeared on the inside and on the outside seemed the greatest. This was most evident in the case of the coaches from a transactional analytical background. However, in principle, all coach-observers had their own systems of meaning which provided a framework for focusing their attention and for making sense of what was observed. The cognitive behavioural coaches identified irrational beliefs; the NLP coach-observers identified a lack of action and failures to

change mental representational frameworks; the transactional analysts focused on patterns of dominance. What was observed was what the language of each coach-observer allowed them to translate into their own sense-making. In part, all coach-observers identified different characteristics of the coaching session. In part they all saw similar events but interpreted them differently and with more or less significance within the coaching process.

The early Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein et al., 1983) argued the limits of language provide a limit to our reality. This seems to be a useful insight for understanding how the frames of reference available to different coach-observers provided limits for making sense of the interaction between coach and client. Given that the coach-observers generally held different ontological assumptions and different languages for describing the coaching process, it would seem likely that how a session appeared on the outside would seem different to how it might appear on the inside. Congruence in observation/ interpretation about what actually happened in a session appeared to occur when the coach-observers and the coach facilitating the session appeared to share similar frameworks of understanding.

One unresolved question, however, is why the client would so readily interpret whatever happened between them as productive. In any conversation, there is still scope for the conversation taking a negative turn. The positivity in the client's experience could in part be understood in relation to the clients' lack of understanding and/or lack of benchmarks about what *good coaching* might be. In this sense, they (or at least the inexperienced clients in the Inquiry) might have been more open-minded/ less judgemental about whatever they experienced. This finding seems to suggest that many clients new to coaching might find the experience beneficial irrespective of what the coach actually does (provided perhaps that the coach is generally attentive to the needs of the client).

For clients more experienced in coaching, the process still needs to make sense and in the Inquiry those clients with prior experience of coaching also seemed to have constructed the

coaching process positively; for example by supposing that the coach knew what they, the clients wanted; by rationalising the behaviour/ characteristics of the coach even if those behaviours/characteristics contradicted their initial expectations; by considering that any failures in understanding was due to their (the client's) insecurities and by holding the coach in high regard. What seemed to count therefore, in terms of the interaction between coach and client, is that the client constructed the exchange as meaningful and the coach as credible.

Once the clients were prepared to make sense of the coaches as credible and able to make sense of the interaction as meaningful, all aspects of the interaction would in turn appear meaningful. When the coach noticed something seemingly *significant*, the client typically thought that whatever was the focus of the coach's noticing was important. If the coach asked the client to conceptualise a problem in a particular way, then that conceptualisation was considered relevant. If the coach asked a question or made a statement that was recalled as helpful, then the coach was understood to have asked an insightful and well-timed question. Even if the coach didn't make a comment, this was interpreted as an indicator that the coach knew that there wasn't a need to say anything (but knew what the real issue was). If the coach missed opportunities to explore issues, as suggested in the accounts of the coach-observers, the clients would simply be unaware that they had *missed opportunities* (particularly if they were inexperienced to coaching or if their beliefs and assumptions about the expertise of the coach were so strongly held) and would not therefore perceive any failing in the coach.

There is of course, the possibility that the coaches were in a realist sense, identifying issues of significance, asking and making well-timed questions and statements. On the other hand, there were so many apparently well-timed statements and questions (perceived by the clients) that on the outside did not seem to be interpreted in the same way, that it is hard not to hold a little scepticism about how much of the client's expressed experience was due to the diagnostic and prescriptive expertise of the coach rather than arising as a result of the

client's capacity to interpret an aspect of an interaction or an utterance of the coach in a constructively meaningful way. In approximately seven hours of recorded face to face coaching there were only the faintest suggestions of anything that the coach had done that had been in some sense constructed as inappropriate. It would be hard to imagine in most other one to one conversations over a 7 hour period, one person would not fail to question the motives, veracity or usefulness of what the other said or did. This suggests that there was likely to have been an overall tendency to construct the process positively rather than to have experienced the session in a more rational/evaluative manner.

Perhaps the atmosphere of trust and the apparent dedication expressed by the coach led the client to believe that whatever the coach did or said would be well-meant, truthful and useful. The status of the practitioner and their capacity to create the right atmosphere (e.g. by showing empathy) is considered relevant as a common factor in therapy (Grencavage and Norcross, 1990). In coaching and possibly in therapy also, the actual experience of empathy might only be part of the way a client is able to make progress (for example by gaining a sense of being valued as argued in the previous section). Empathy might also serve to create a context for making sense of interventions of the coach as trustworthy.

Even if the construction of the process by the client was positive, this did not mean that meaning-making was always shared between coach and client. For example, sometimes the coach and client appeared to have a different understanding of what was being discussed (e.g. a client thinking that the coach had understood when the coach hadn't).

Sometimes the coach had a particular perception of the client/ engagement but did not share this with the client who was unaware of those perceptions. These findings are consistent with the argument so far presented however. If each person applies their own sense-making of a particular aspect of the coaching session, then how each aspect of the session might appear could well be very different. In this sense, both coach and client engage in the same interactional event or series of interactional events but each attributes a different meaning to those events. What might seem to the client as prolonged periods of silence might seem

relatively short to the coach; what might seem to one as deeply explorative to the client might seem as relatively superficial to the coach; what might seem as a non-issue to a coach such as the way she is dressed might be the subject of active processing on the part of the client. The analysis of the coaching sessions in this Inquiry point to the possibility of two people actually engaging in what seems like the one and same conversation when it would seem possible that two people are in a sense each having their own private conversations within the session.

The social context of the coaching session seemed to be very important in how the client made sense of his challenges and how they might be resolved. The exercises that the coach engaged in seemed to take on a particular meaning *necessarily* because the coach was part of the experience. The clients made sense of their own ways of being by taking the feedback of the coach seriously; this was not just verbal feedback or the way the verbal feedback was delivered with conviction but also included the physical reactions of the coach and the topics the coach highlighted as important which seemed to create meaning for the client about their capacities, self-worth and what was important.

Although the observers usually undervalued the interactions between coach and client, they did sometimes gain a sense of the impact of particular in-session exercises, of the process of being allowed to off-load concerns and of the physical and reassuring presence of the coach. These perceptions might have been enabled by the coach-observers applying particular frames of reference to interpret the process; examples perhaps of what can be inferred within the limits of one's language. From a social constructionist perspective, this finding suggests that while coach-observers could not always make sense of the coaching process from the outside, they could make sense of the process when their observations aligned with their sense-making frameworks.

The broader social context (as well as the immediate social context discussed above) of the coaching sessions also seemed to play an important role in the meaning-making process of

the coaching sessions. There were limits for example, to what the coach and client would say and do in the context of a one-off, final or mid-engagement session including how much a client might be willing to reveal or how far a coach might be willing to explore a particular issue. The coach-observers were all also greatly interested in the context of the sessions in order to help them make sense of the sessions.

These comments highlight the relevance of the meaning of the social context as a framework for, in a sense, *creating* the coaching session. Coaching does not happen in isolation of social and cultural expectations. The coach and client work within the boundaries of what seems possible and appropriate within a given social context, including how they should each play out their roles in the interaction. Coaching is much more of a performance that follows the script of social and cultural expectations than might readily be assumed. The client might assume that he is free in the conversation to disclose whatever he wishes. Similarly, the coach might assume that she can make informed decisions about what to or what not to focus on in the conversation. In practice, these judgements are much more constrained by shared social and cultural values (including assumptions about how coaching should be practised) than the coach and client might readily assume. Given the importance of the social context highlighted here, rather than understanding the video-camera as a limitation on what might be understood in a realist sense as the *authenticity* of the coaching session, the video-camera might be constructed simply as another, if particular, dimension of the social context. While on the one hand, the camera made the session public, the coach and client were still generally acting according to how they assumed they should act in a particular fundamentally social context.

If we accept that the coaching session is a process of inter-subjective meaning-making as I have argued in this section, then how the coach actually conducts the session is less relevant than how the client interprets the experience. This means that a coach could conduct a coaching session applying a framework of transactional analysis, Gestalt psychology a psychodynamic framework or any other tradition; she could react more or less

instinctively, look for patterns in the client's life or give direct advice. All of these different forms of coaching would provide a context for meaning-making.

The scope for flexibility in how the coaching session is conducted doesn't necessarily mean that *anything goes* but does suggest that what *goes* must seem meaningful to the client.

The client must believe that the coach is doing something useful, appears to understand them, asks questions that seem relevant and helps them structure problems and solutions in a way that seems useful. The coach must then be able to relate to the coach in a language that seems to offer a credible conceptual framework, show particular valued behavioural characteristics, including apparent questioning and listening skills, as well as behaviours that are likely to promote the satisfaction of particular interpersonal needs (showing apparent empathy; seeking permission/ encouraging client control, giving affirmations). The coach must in a sense play out a script that the client is willing to accept.

These behaviours are likely to relate to the coach's skills in achieving a performance standard that the client expects; in their capacity to respond at an emotional level to the client (i.e. showing sensitivity to the client's emotional needs and helping the client to feel understood) in the way that the client expects; and to be able to participate in a flowing interactional conversation that is constructed by the client as meaningful. The credibility of the coach to promote confidence in the client is also likely to relate to the coach's reputation and artefacts that might symbolise expertise (e.g. expressed confidence, appearance and reputation; each arguably representing a form of representational power).

How successful the coach is in creating a meaningful and constructive engagement for the client also ultimately seems to depend on the client's own frames of reference, standards and willingness to interpret the engagement as meaningful and useful. The authoritative physical presence of the coach also seems important in enabling the client to take seriously his own reflections and to interpret as meaningful whatever is highlighted by the coach as significant in the conversation. Furthermore and building on an argument already outlined, it

seems likely that the sense of wellbeing that the client gains as a result of the coach's empathy, the coach's verbal encouragement for the client to take control of the conversation and intense listening to the client provides a supportive context for enabling the coach to engage in a process of productive meaning-making.

Overall therefore, coaching seems to be a process of inter-subjective meaning-making that can be considered to provide an overarching meta-theoretical framework for conceptualising the coaching process and the principles of which apply to a broad range of coaching traditions. This process is difficult for external observers to understand primarily because they view the process from their own frameworks of understanding and because they are not party to the non-observable inter-subjective process of meaning-making that has been outlined in this section. It is important to emphasise here that this is different to not being able to witness the moment by moment details of the interaction (e.g. changes in skin coloration; subtleties in voice intonation, etc.). This comment was sometimes suggested by the coach-observers who took part in the Inquiry. This latter suggestion tends to imply that a camera cannot capture effectively enough the phenomenological experience of either the coach or client. There may be some substance in this argument. The camera might not capture subtleties in changes in skin coloration or momentary losses in eye contact for example. This suggests that it may never be possible to evaluate effectively a coaching session from the outside. The social constructionist perspective outlined in this section however goes further than this. A momentary loss of eye contact on the part of the client or a sudden change in skin coloration might be more visible to the coach than to the coach-observers. However, those changes would only make sense to the coach provided her frameworks of understanding were attuned to identifying and giving a particular significance to those changes.

8.4 Coaching as an expression of social discourses or as expressions of valued beliefs

One important finding in the research is the scope for understanding the coaching process from within a discursive framework or from a more realist epistemology. While my own position as a researcher is towards a discursive epistemology (one more aligned with a social constructionist epistemology), there is scope for being open to alternative epistemologies. The contribution to understanding of each competing epistemology will be considered in this section in an endeavour to provide as rich as possible an understanding of the coaching process when considered from multiple-perspectives.

A discursive perspective would assume that the coach and client enact practices that are characterised by broader social and cultural beliefs and values, the power of which we might not be consciously aware. The identification of discourses is however problematic. This is because discourses themselves are arguably socially constructed patterns of making sense of experience and therefore can be constructed differently from one researcher or writer to another. Secondly, and perhaps diminishing the usefulness of discourse as an analytical construct, any social practice can be considered to be both constructed by and representative of discourses. Thirdly, identifying the origin, influence or expression of a particular discourse in any given practice is also an interpretive process. There isn't for example a manual listing all possible discourses and the conditions under which each might be identified. This approach would run counter to the spirit of discourse analysts who generally try to avoid using a realist language of cause and effect.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, once a researcher begins to understand the world as an expression of discourses, the world begins to take on a particular complexion. The perspective of transactional analysts becomes an expression of a discourse of power imbalances and interpersonal transactions; the perspective of NLP coach-observers becomes an expression of a discourse of behavioural based learning and the changing of meta-cognitions; the perspective of coach-observers with a humanistic orientation becomes a discourse of humanism, etc.

Foucault (e.g. 1978; 1988) argued that discourses are at their most powerful when we are unaware of their influence; when we accept unquestioningly the way we enact the knowledge implicit in discourse. Often there is an assumption that the insights we might have gained from our training as coaches provide us with an *accurate* way of understanding reality. A discursive based interpretation is much less authoritative and claims only that a particular framework gives us a way of making sense of what we observe and provides a basis for action. Our understanding of reality is metaphoric; the world is interpreted *as if*, rather than *as is*. This does not mean that our metaphoric frameworks are not useful. In coaching, they can provide alternative ways of conducting a coaching session including how we might interpret the behaviour of the other. They can be just as meaningful for the client as for the coach. Different approaches seem able to create a sense of psychological well-being.

Attempting to identify the origin of the discourses played out in the coaching sessions deserves a thesis in its own right. Cushman (1996) achieved this in psychotherapy by attempting to identify the social and cultural influences that had led to its emergence in USA. In this section of this thesis, the aim is merely to highlight their apparent relevance based on the breadth of alternative viewpoints that were expressed that could be understood as competing discourses.

Many of the assumptions expressed in day to day coaching conversations and as expressed in the accounts of the coaches (coach-observers and coaches) included assumptions about learning, unconscious processes or a quest for authenticity. Charcot (1889), Freud (1922), Jung (1936) and other psychoanalysts introduced much of modern day discourses of the unconscious as recently as the turn of the 20th Century. Notions of personal authenticity might be considered to be at least in part attributable to Heidegger (1927). Within a wider existentialist framework, Sartre and Mairret (1960) argued that *we are condemned to be free* in the sense that we have no alternative but to make our own choices in life. The relevance of unconscious processes, personal authenticity and client choice all seemed to be expressed at varying points by coaches or coach-observers. Even the accounts of the coach-observers used to explain the difficulty in making sense of the coaching process through a video-camera (previous section) seem to invoke a discourse of coaching as something transcendental and magical. More modern business discourses (e.g. Hodge et al, 2006) seemed to relate to the way coaches constructed the process as one of providing a service and the *clients* as users of a service. The point being made is that we interpret the world and take action, against the backcloth of these frames of reference. The concept of discourse brings to our attention the possibility that they are sense-making heuristics rather than accurate representations of reality.

Stepping outside of an explicitly discursive analytical framework however, it could be argued that the views expressed by the coaches (coach-observers and coaches alike) did represent an understanding of the coaching process but as an expression of strongly held beliefs and values rather than necessarily expressions of social discourses. Realist frameworks for understanding the reactions of coaches can be identified from within the literature on values (Rokeach, 2008), identity (Sryker, 1987) and social identity theory (Stets and Burke, 2000). Rokeach (2008)) defined values as follows:

“Values are the cognitive representation not only of individual needs but also of societal and institutional demands. They are the joint results of sociological as well as psychological

forces acting upon the individual – sociological because society and its institutions socialise the individual for the common good to internalise shared conceptions of the desirable; psychological because individual motivations require cognitive expression, justification and, indeed, exhortation in socially desired terms” (p.257).

In light of this definition, it seems possible to understand the reactions of the coach-observers in relation to what they perceived to be happening in the coaching sessions. It would seem that coaches (coach-observers) observed examples of coaching practice (e.g. perceptions of the coach not allowing the client to arrive at his own solutions, interpretations of collusion, perceptions of a lack of sensitivity to the client's needs, etc.) that posed a challenge to their own values and they reacted strongly to those perceptions and interpretations by expressing critical comments about the observed sessions and in the way they sorted the items in the Q-set.

Social identity theory (Stets and Burke, 2000) could also be relevant in understanding the reactions of the coach-observers. It provides a framework for understanding the reactions of the coach-observers because it takes into account the influence of local beliefs (such as for example being a member of a particular social community; in the case of the coach-observers, as members of particular coaching communities with a shared framework of understanding; e.g. humanistic or transactional analytic tradition). Stets and Burke (2000) define social identity theory as follows:

“In social identity theory, a social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group... A social group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category. Through a social comparison process, persons who are similar to the self are categorized with the self and are labelled the in-group; persons who differ from the self are categorized as the out- group” (p.225).

From a social identity perspective, the argument could be put forward that the observers in the Investigation are part of competing schools of coaching each with their own defining attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviour that categorise the group:

“Having a particular social identity means being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective” (p.226).

From a social identity theoretical perspective, observers would be making negative evaluations of coaches who showed behaviours different to those valued by the observers and this process of negative attribution would lead to enhanced self-esteem:

“Specifically, one's self-esteem is enhanced by evaluating the in-group and the out-group on dimensions that lead the in-group to be judged positively and the out-group to be judged negatively” (p.226).

In support of social identity theory, it is interesting to note that the strongest criticism came from two observer groups in which there was a particular shared identity (the group of transactional analysts and separately the group of NLP/ behaviourally oriented coaches).

Stets and Burke (2000) consider there is a conceptual similarity between social identity and identity theory. They describe identity theory as follows:

“In identity theory, the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance ... These expectations and meanings form a set of standards that guide behaviour” (p.225).

From an identity theory perspective, Stryker (1987) has argued that individuals will actively seek out situations that will promote a particular identity. In this sense, the observer groups provided opportunities for the participants to reinforce their own identities as coaches. Stets and Burke (2000) refer to the self-identification process as “*self-verification*”:

“...a central cognitive process in identity theory is self-verification or seeing the self in terms of the role as embodied in the identity standard (the cognitive representation of a role containing the meanings and norms that the person associates with the role...When an identity is activated, self-verification occurs. In this process, the person behaves so as to maintain consistency with the identity standard” (p.229).

Whichever framework one might prefer; a discursive account of the viewpoints of the coach or a framework from a realist perspective, it seems somewhat paradoxical that coaches who one might typically assume would show flexibility of thinking (Open-mindedness; Garmston et al, 1993) when evaluating coaching were so very intransigent in their views of how coaches needed to behave in the coaching sessions. From a discursive perspective, this intransigence indicates the power of discourse; from a realist perspective, constructs such as identity (Stryker, 1987) and social identity theory (Stets and Burke, 2000) can be invoked in an attempt to explain their reactions.

8.5 Mixed Method Research

The research Inquiry illustrated how different research methods can provide both unique and complementary insights into the coaching process. Q methodology seemed to provide a level of analysis of a coaching session at both granular and summative levels. The thematic analysis and rich narrative descriptions of the accounts of the participants (what was said) conducted alongside a more discursive based analysis (how they said what they said and in the context of broader social discourses) provided a more critical and expansive investigation into the viewpoints of participants. Together these varying approaches (Q methodology and varying qualitative analyses of spoken accounts) provided a rich description and exploration of the different viewpoints of clients, coaches and observers. This section will explore the relative contributions of each approach.

Q methodology: allowing summative comparisons of viewpoints with statistical validity and reliability

Q methodology allowed summative comparisons of viewpoints to be made across coaches, clients and observers. A single table of data could show statistical similarities and differences for all Q-Sorts completed. One single numeric value expressed as a correlation co-efficient could show whether two viewpoints could be considered statistically similar or different. Similarly, the identification of factors and their display as factor arrays provided a parsimonious description of collective viewpoints. Q-mode factor analysis identified the broad characteristics of shared perspectives and could highlight general patterns of difference and similarity across viewpoints.

Q methodology brought to the Inquiry the language of statistics which as a data reduction method makes clear boundaries between patterns in the data in the form of factors and cuts through the detail of the data. The language of statistics could also provide an authoritative claim (in a probabilistic sense) in relation to patterns in the data and the boundaries of those patterns. For example, the statistical analysis could identify the extent to which all or only

some participants within a group shared a particular viewpoint. The language of statistics also has widespread acceptance within social science research; it is aligned with a more realist paradigm.

The statistical basis of Q methodology highlighted characteristics of the data which are in a sense *objectively true*; that is other researchers using the same methods entering the same data in the same software conducting the analysis in an identical manner could achieve the same results. In this sense, the analyses can be considered to provide a degree of reliability.

Q Methodology: Allowing granular analyses of viewpoints

Q Methodology allowed very detailed analyses to be made of particular characteristics of the coaching session; for example the saliency of particular items which could be identified individually in a Q-set of over 80 characteristics of a coaching session.

By requiring the participants to rank order items, the process imposed a degree of what might be constructed as a *form of objectivity* in the analysis. For example, it could be argued that a coach-observer rating a session was obliged to make a rational evaluation as to whether a coach showed empathy more or less than she explored meaning. Although the coach-observer would always have a subjective impression, there was perhaps scope for the coach-observer to make a ranking decision based on at least some degree of rational evaluation; that is whether one characteristic of the coaching session was more or less observable/ salient than another. In this way, if a coach was in an *objective sense* showing lots of empathy, even if the session appeared to be generally superficial, the research participant would still be at pains to avoid placing an item describing the coach's empathy as less characteristic than an item relating to a lack of meaning. A degree of *objectivity* (how the session actually appeared even if appearance is always from a particular cultural perspective) seemed to be indicated in the way groups of observers often rated the session in a similar manner.

Qualitative Analysis: Allowing a rich interpretive analysis of the data

The thematic analysis tended to provide a rich interpretive analysis of the data. At a macro level, the *similarities* in the accounts of the clients and the *differences* in the accounts between coaches seemed particularly salient. The thematic analysis suggested that the different groups of participant adopted qualitatively different orientations towards their reflections on the coaching session. The clients appeared to express experiences; the coaches, ways of conducting the coaching session and the coach-observers appeared to express valued beliefs/discourses about how coaching should be practised. At a micro level, differences in perspectives in relation to specific events could also be explored. Relatively complex characteristics of the coaching process emerged as salient themes including for example the importance of the way the client drew on the responsiveness of the coach in order to make sense of his own actions or moments of shared physicality/ connection in the session. These dynamic patterns could readily be explored in an unstructured interview.

More generally, the unstructured data collection process gave the participants scope to relate whatever aspects of the process that had seemed significant for them. Ethically, this gave participants scope to dictate the research agenda at least within the limitations of any research process. This unconstrained approach seemed to enable the participants to choose their own focus and seemed to allow clients to adopt a focus on the session that was meaningful for them from within their own terms of reference.

By engaging with the data, repeatedly listening to the accounts, noticing the emphases given to particular statements and the silent pauses, it was possible in a thematic analysis to identify commonalities in the data that were only faintly perceptible in an initial reading but nonetheless became increasingly significant in the data as familiarity with the data analysis increased. In the case of the clients, these patterns related in particular to how the clients appeared to value the process of being listened to, taking control and being affirmed. In the case of the coach-observers, the negative reaction of the participants was salient from the

outset: the speed of the conversational interchanges, the emphases given, the expressions of surprise and the use of humour all contributed to making sense of the reactions of the clients as an affront on their valued ways of coaching. In the qualitative analysis, it was possible to analyse a data set in all of its multi-dimensionality and this allows a rich understanding of the data. This included as a researcher, being open to multiple ways of interpreting the data; that is being mindful of both “what” was said as well as “how” something was said.

The complementarities of alternative research approaches

The use of multiple methods to collect data (Q-sorting, unstructured one to one interview techniques and observer groups including an initial use of a form of interpersonal process recall) together with multiple methods of analysing the data (Q methodology, thematic analysis and discursive informed analyses) collectively seemed to allow a rich understanding of the coaching process or epistemologically, at least how the process was constructed by the participants.

The methods seemed to be complementary. The detailed thematic analyses of the accounts of the participants including understanding the context of the sessions helped direct and inform the interpretation of the data in the factor arrays generated through the statistical analyses. In turn, the detailed patterns of sorting called into question and led to a re-evaluation of what had been assumed in the thematic analyses.

The statistical analyses seemed to allow particular perceptions to be investigated; for example how the client constructed the experience even if the observers held assumptions about how the client had or would likely have experienced the session. The data analytic process seemed to allow the adoption of a hermeneutic cycle in which detail (rank ordering of single or groups of items) could be analysed iteratively in the context of broader patterns (thematic analyses) and broader patterns in light of the detailed positioning of descriptors.

The mixed methods approach seemed to address many possible limitations in the analyses that could be associated with any one approach. While participants could project their own meanings onto how they sorted the Q-items and while the Q-set is considered to be generally descriptive of most (at least) mid-engagement coaching sessions (Bachkirova et al, 2012), participants still had to work with a predetermined set of Q-items. Research participants were also obliged to make fine discriminations between those Q-items and rank the set items as *characteristic* or *uncharacteristic*. A small number of participants did express a sense of discomfort in sorting the items in a prescriptive manner; part of their dissatisfaction might have related to an anti-coaching ethos of being directed. The unstructured interviews and interpersonal process recall did however seem to enable the participants to relate whatever seemed salient to them; this time more in alignment with a coaching ethos. By mixing methods, the research process was assured of a degree of homogeneity which allowed comparability across data sets (Q methodology). At the same time, the research process was assured of a degree of heterogeneity within and across the accounts of the sessions (thematic analysis) which enabled different orientations and individual variety towards the construction of the coaching session to emerge in the research process.

While the qualitative approach ensured that a rich description of the coaching process could be explored, in the context of an observer group, it wasn't always clear if views were shared in a group or if perceptions changed in light of the interpretations of others offered in the observer groups. The Q-sorting process ensured that individual perspectives were identified and differences in findings in the groups (thematic analysis) could be compared systematically against individual perspectives (Q-sorts).

Much of the literature on mixed methods (e.g. Creswell, 2007; Johnson et al, 2004; Tashakkori, 2010) highlights how different methods can work together in a complementary way; for example in relation to how a qualitative approach can inform a quantitative approach in a sequential manner. The mixed methods approach outlined in this thesis

suggests that both can work together simultaneously to inform a rich understanding of a given topic of interest.

8.6 Summary

This chapter has covered a range of themes that seem to be of interest in relation to the main findings described in earlier chapters. In some ways, the themes highlighted seem relatively disparate: a) coaching as a process of meeting interpersonal needs; b) coaching as an expert intervention; c) coaching as a process of meaning-making; d) coaching as an expression of discourses or values and beliefs and e) lessons from using mixed methods. This broad scope related in part to having adopted a multiple perspective lens which led to the first section which related primarily to the client's perspective or experience of coaching; the second section related primarily to the coach's perspective and the third and fourth sections related to the perspective primarily of the observers. The final section was intended as a methodological contribution to the literature.

9.0 CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSIONS

This Chapter will provide a brief summary of the main findings and discussion points raised in this thesis. The immediate implications of these summary points will be considered as they raise general philosophical and professional issues and at a higher level of analysis than in the previous discussion chapter. This chapter will also consider the implications of the Inquiry for research and specific areas of practice including what a coach needs to take into account when practising coaching and in other relevant areas (supervision, assessment of coaches and the formation of coaches). I will also relate the findings to the original research objectives. Finally, the chapter will provide space for some personal reflections to conclude the chapter and overall thesis.

9.01 Client Perspective

From the client's perspective, coaching is primarily an experience; one of being a service user. Clients tend to report very positively this experience immediately after the session. They seem to value in particular the way the coach gives them their full attention, shows them warmth and care and gives them a sense of control. They value taking away from the session, a sense of resourcefulness, new perspectives and possibilities for action. The commonality of experiences seems to suggest that coaching can be understood a process in which the interpersonal needs (Schutz, 1977) of the client are met and which in turn might also be catalytic in a symbolic sense in enabling the client's immediate post-session sense of resourcefulness/new perspective-taking (Greif et al, 2010). In this sense, the coaching conversation might be understood as at least in part, as a symbolic process in which the coach's affirmation of the client leads to the client experiencing a sense of control, self-worth and personal significance (Schutz, 1977) which in turn leads to the client gaining a greater sense of resourcefulness (Flückiner et al, 2009, 2012). The immediate focus of the coaching conversation (content; issues actually discussed) may be less important than the psychological experience of being coached.

9.02 Coach Perspective

Coaches tend to evaluate their coaching sessions as service providers. They tend to focus their accounts of a session in relation to what they attend to in the interaction and on how they make decisions; these processes seem to indicate the use of analytical, intuitive, feeling and sensing based processes reminiscent of a Jungian framework (Jung, 1971) and much popularised in terms of MBTI® processes (e.g. Roush, 1992; Furnham, 1996; Reyneierse, 1997). In a realist sense, there is an argument that coaches do adopt different orientations towards the process. However, from a more constructionist perspective, coaches might be understood to be drawing on different processes of perceiving and decision-making as discursive resources to help them conduct the coaching session and/or to make sense of their own interactions. Coaches also have their own frameworks of understanding or mental models about how coaching works which have been constructed through their experience and training as coaches often in accordance with particular schools of coaching.

9.03 Perspective of the Dyad

Coach and client together create a meaningful engagement that is informed by the client's positive expectations of the process and of the coach. The client's *plasticity* (capacity to construct meaning) enables him to make sense of the coach and of the interventions of the coach in a constructive manner including interpreting positively the coach's feedback and constructing as significant the moment by moment foci of the session. The physical presence of the coach and the broader social context of the session (e.g. whether there is scope for a follow up session; whether the session is a first session; the extent to which each is prepared to make public particular issues; what seems to the coach to be appropriate taking into account the broader social context of the individual and based on social knowledge of what is and is not appropriate to discuss) shape the content, process and significance of the coaching conversation. In this sense, although the conversation is in a sense private, the coach and client are very aware of what seems appropriate and

inappropriate to discuss and how to behave; the participants are always mindful of what might be described as the “third eye” of social norms.

The client’s plasticity seems to provide scope for the coach to apply a broad range of different practices that can all be constructed meaningfully and helpfully by the client. What seems to count in the coaching process is that the client’s own sense-making capacities are sufficiently flexible to construct the engagement meaningfully: what the coach is and does are less important than how flexible the client is in being able to make sense of the coach’s interventions, the coach’s way of being and the client’s own capacity to construct the interaction meaningfully. This philosophy is very much aligned with social constructionist approaches (e.g. Gergen and McNamee, 1992).

9.04 The Observer Perspective

The perspective of the coach-observers suggested that they constructed the process as an expert intervention provided by the coach. This interpretation is based on their tending to comment less on what the client did, on what the coach and client did together or on the session generally and more on their evaluations of the interventions of the coach. This seems to raise an interesting paradox given much of the literature on coaching which emphasises the importance of coaching as a process of collaboration (e.g. Kimsey-House et al, 2010; Whitworth 2011; de Haan, 2008c). It may be that there is considerable rhetoric about how coaching might be conceptualised rather than is conceptualised in practice.

The way coaches observing coaching sessions evaluate coaching sessions seems to highlight important debates within coaching. These debates can be considered *local* discourses (social constructionist perspective; e.g. Edley, 2001a) or simply as debates (more realist ontology) about how coaching should be practised (these were summarised in Table 6.1). At the same time these discourses/debates can be conceptualised as valued beliefs and assumptions about coaching which when challenged presented what seemed to be

experienced as a considerable threat to an observer-coach's sense of identity (Stryker, 1987; Stets and Burke, 2000).

It also seems that coaches when acting as observers perceive and interpret what their own frames of reference enable them to perceive and interpret. In this sense, coach-observers do not make *accurate* observations; their observations are always selective and are interpretations.

9.05 A Rashomon experience or a reasonable consensus?

The Rashomon experience was first coined in the practice of psychotherapy by Mintz et al (1973) although based on already existing research relating to differences in perceptions across clients, practitioners and observers. It would seem that the findings in this Inquiry in some ways support the Rashomon experience and in other ways don't. The in-depth qualitative approach informed by statistical analysis and detailed micro-analysis seems to have helped create a particularly rich understanding of the interactive process. This approach seems to have provided a more in-depth understanding of the interactive process between practitioner and client that that often obtained in psychotherapy process research which has typically focused on general accounts of the session or factor analysis of the data from established post-session questionnaires (e.g. Mintz et al, 1973; Stiles and Snow, 1984; Hafkenscheid, 2009). It also seems to have provided a breadth of exploration beyond that provided by only considering critical incidents whether in relation to single or multiple sessions.

The perspectives of the coach and of the client were aligned in the sense that both had a strong sense of how productive the sessions had been. The coach-observers generally did not think the sessions had been productive or had been as productive as they could have been. There was a cynicism on the part of the observers that any immediate post-session

experience of positivity by the client might not translate into increased well-being or client change.

There was a general agreement on the part of the observers that particular behaviours on the part of the coach are important (e.g. that a coach should provoke reflection, a coach should ask meaningful questions; that the coach should listen, etc.). However, the in-depth qualitative analysis showed that coaches tended to construct these concepts differently (e.g. how much reflection is appropriate; what constitutes a meaningful question; listening may mean listening accurately or listening for client significance; etc.). They also evaluated observations of these behaviours differently (e.g. whether a coach had actually “listened” or had/had not been directive). While many of the observers did focus on similar interactions, the coaches did generally tend to notice what was relevant to them given their own frames of reference (e.g. *power relations*, *irrational beliefs*, the degree of *direction* provided by the coach, etc.). In a broad sense, all coach-observers “saw” the same sessions and could all talk to a greater or lesser extent about the same interactions; they could also generally agree on what was important to observe (empathy, listening, etc.). However, what the coaches “saw” was a process of construction rather than a process of observation.

The research also suggested that coach-observers also had difficulty in understanding the sense-making processes occurring inter-subjectively between coach and client. This seems to go beyond not being physically present in the room (i.e. not being able to observe the subtleties of changes in the client or sensing the atmosphere of the session by being physically present). This latter conceptualisation of the coaching session would be indicative of a realist framework (that only the coach is close enough to observe the client). Realist accounts of the coaching process are generally not referenced explicitly but would include a range of approaches which assume the existence of real events happening in the coaching process. De Haan et al (2010) for example refer to the “[shared] reality” of the coaching conversation (p.124). Cognitive-Behavioural models of coaching also assume that clients

have distorted perceptions of reality; that is they make the assumption that there is a real way of understanding the world that we experience (e.g. Williams et al, 2010).

The difficulty the coach-observers appeared to have in sensing the productivity of the engagement of the interaction seemed in part to relate to their not knowing how the coach or client was constructing the process and what was informing their decision-making. This in turn goes beyond not knowing the context of each session (what had already been discussed for example outside of the session or in previous sessions although this broader context was also of importance). The coach observers were only able to make sense of what was expressed behaviourally (e.g. client movement suggesting a shift in energy). They had no way of interpreting what wasn't (e.g. how a client might still have a sense of control irrespective of what the coach might appear to have been doing at a behavioural level). The research suggested that so much of the coaching process seemed to be taking place at a level of interpretation (including the broader positive psychological experience of being coached) that there seemed to be a limit to how much of the coaching session could be understood through observation alone.

9.06 Implications for Research

From a research perspective, the findings suggest that researchers might productively focus their attention on interpersonal meaning-making processes occurring between coach and client rather than on behavioural observations of the coaching process. This could set an agenda for helping coaching researchers to adopt an approach that is qualitatively different to that adopted by many process researchers in psychotherapy. In this way, coaching may be able to develop its own theoretical traditions that could in one day inform psychotherapy process rather than the way coaching research is currently being informed by psychotherapy process research.

The exploratory nature of the research also identified a broad range of issues of interest that could be pursued in further depth and derive from some of the main topics discussed in this research. Research could include the relevance of interpersonal needs (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation; FIRO-B) and coaching; the way coaches make perceptions and decisions in coaching (e.g. the coach's MBTI® preferences and how they orient the coach within the coaching process). Many of the topics and debates highlighted in Table 6.1 could also provide rich pickings for future research projects (e.g. in relation to the impact of advice giving in coaching) either in relation to discursive epistemologies or in relation to alternative epistemologies in which a researcher may wish to consider the impact or significance of adopting particular approaches.

The Inquiry also points to more in-depth research on perspective taking generally. There are rich literatures in philosophy, sociology and psychology for example in relation to perspective taking. The research seems to suggest that in life generally, we may think that we are acting in a *real world* and on the basis of our analysis of *actual* events and experiences. It may be the case that all our observations are much more constructions informed and integral to our sense-making processes and in turn informed by broader social discourses than we might all too readily assume.

9.07 Implications for Practitioners

The research raises a breadth of issues relevant for practitioners. As identified by de Haan (2008), perhaps what does count in coaching is that a coach develops an approach that seems to work for them and that they should have faith in their approach. In this way, the coach feels convinced and the client experiences the coach and the coaching process as convincing. However, there does seem to be a paradox in that the faith that a coach might give to their own mental models might at best, act only metaphorically in the coaching process rather than as a result of any application of a particular social technology.

Coaches might also be mindful that how the client is constructing the process could be quite different to how they as coaches are constructing the process. What might be considered superficial to a coach could be experienced as emotionally challenging for the client and deeply explorative from a client's typical frame of reference.

Coaches might also reflect on the fact that there seems to be various levels of meaning making occurring in the coaching conversation. For example, at one level there is the overt conversation and overt expressions of the issues discussed (e.g. immediate emotional reactions or reflections of either party). At another level, there are the private conversations of coach and client (what either chooses to disclose; also how each makes sense of the engagement and orients towards the engagement) and a private conversation between coach and client (that which is understood but not expressed); this relates to how both participants might be aware of a particular issue or way of being together but neither wishes to name it. There also appears to be a conversation occurring between coach and client at a level of symbolic meaning-making, in which what might really be important in the coaching conversation is not the overt action points identified or new perspectives but the client's sense of resourcefulness (and perhaps the coach's also) achieved through the process of coaching.

9.08 Implications for Educators

The findings of this Inquiry are in many ways challenging to educators of coaching because they can appear to call into question the significance of learning how to coach. What appears to count seems not to be particularly important; only that the coach is convinced and appears convincing. Cynically, the logic of this argument could be extended to suggest that a witch doctor could be just as convinced and convincing as a coach. Or, perhaps even someone crafting their expertise as a coach who uses the medium of dancing, singing or laughing spontaneously could be just as convinced and convincing as the most respected

and established tradition informed coaches provided the client's own frames of reference would allow them to make personally helpful meaning-making out of the experience.

These are extreme statements which would provoke unproductive feedback from educators and practitioners, but do serve to challenge educators to be able to demonstrate that there are important and unique skills for coaches to develop and skills informed by a range of important academic disciplines. In the absence of this, there is scope for an *anything goes* approach in coaching which could lead to very negative experiences for clients and coaches alike. More developmentally aware clients are likely to seek coaches who can demonstrate the application of traditional approaches or who conform perhaps to established norms of behaviour (e.g. sitting together quietly discussing issues); an *anything goes* approach may not work for them. However, there are still plenty of self-proclaimed developmental experts who will all too readily convince would-be clients to engage with them when there doesn't seem to be a strong-evidence base for their practices. The lack of underpinning theory to support life coaching for example has been criticised publically (e.g. Duke, 2005).

Perhaps educators can address some of the issues in particular by developing ethical awareness and by focusing more on the centrality of meaning-making. What becomes important in coaching is not which method or tradition is used to achieve a particular level of meaning-making but that coaches explore how meaning-making can be explored productively and ethically in the coaching process through a diverse range of practices. This includes how coaches can learn how to make use of their preferences for perception and decision-making and ensure that their interventions enhance the resourcefulness of the client.

9.09 Implications for Coaching Assessors

In relation to coaching assessments, the research calls into question whose judgement should count the most. If the observers are very critical of what the coach does yet the client is very positive as was indicated in this Inquiry, then the process of assessment becomes

somewhat problematic. A coach whose client claims they had a positive experience but who is rated unfavourably by assessors might feel that the assessors are evaluating her performance unfairly.

The research also suggests that coaches from different research traditions are likely to evaluate the performance of a coach very differently. The implication of this is that what is assessed is perhaps how well a coach conforms to the subjective expectations of the assessors rather than that they demonstrate a capacity to coach from another vantage point. Perhaps, this suggests (and notwithstanding cost implications) that the approval of coaches needs to ensure that coaches from different traditions are involved in the coaching process and/or that the sponsor of the programme is aware of his/her own conceptualisation of coaching and appoints coaches who will conform to those expectations. However, this process is not necessarily going to identify *better* coaches, only coaches who demonstrate a particular subjective set of expectations. This in turn raises the question of impartiality and the possibility of coaches not demonstrating a particular normalised approach being unsuccessful in assessments.

The research also suggests that clients have tremendous plasticity for making sense of the coaching process. This could mean that coaches who are being assessed working with inexperienced clients or with clients whose expectations of the degree of sophistication on the part of the client might be relatively low might be advantaged in the assessment. This is because these clients would seem likely to express satisfaction with the process and coach. This would be the case if coaches deliberately or unintentionally took account of the reactions of the client. Similarly, if coaches submitted recordings of their session with preferred clients, the assessors may be being given exemplars of relationships in which there is a positive process of inter-subjective meaning-making less based on the coach's capacity to coach and more based on the process of interpersonal meaning making between coach and client which ensures a productive relationship specific to that relationship but not necessarily generalizable to other coaching clients.

If the way coaching works is based more on the client's capacity to make meaning from the engagement than on the expertise of the coach, as suggested by the research, then assessors might be giving too much attention to observing the behavioural expertise or even evaluating the conceptual knowledge on the part of the coach. If a coach's capacity to coach, is in turn, dependent on their capacity to help create meaning, then formal knowledge of coaching may be less important than a human capacity to read and relate to others. This means that some excellent coaches might not be successful at an assessment centre if they cannot demonstrate a supporting body of knowledge that underpins their work, even if they have the human capacity to coach as well or even better than others who do have those underpinning knowledge frameworks.

9.10 Implications for Supervision

The Research described in this thesis is also relevant in the context of coaching supervision (e.g. Hawkins et al, 2010). The immediate relevance of the findings is that, either even experienced coaches, are failing to coach well or at least falling short of expectations of other professional coaches. The research also suggested that coaches may be unaware of how their practices might be perceived externally. Some coaches were also unaware of heightened in-session client self-awareness which could be a topic to explore in depth in supervision. The research suggests that experienced coaches may benefit from working with coaches with very different assumptions about the coaching process in order to identify different aspects of their coaching practice and to evaluate practices differently.

9.11 Limitations

This study, as any research Inquiry, can be considered to have its limitations. The sample sizes were very small. This is also always a trade-off experienced in psychotherapy research. The camera recording and the staging of some sessions impacted to some extent at least, on the behaviour of the coaches and of the clients. Participating in a research process would also have provided a particular context; including for example the possibility

that coach-observers had constructed their task of commenting on a video-recording as an analytical task. The staging of the research and the data generated are therefore contextual. The statistical task was very challenging in that people had to spend a lot of time completing the task and it seemed to present a cognitively demanding challenge for some. My own familiarity with the tool increased and this led to increasingly more sophisticated introductions to the process when working with participants. However, in turn, this led to some loss of consistency in the data collection process.

The ambition of the Inquiry was also very large and this compromised the write-up of the thesis. For example, it became very difficult to remember all the details of the thematic analysis at the same time as the details of individual sessions from multiple-perspectives. There were also so many interesting avenues of analysis that it became an overwhelming task to be as comprehensive as I would have liked to have been in referring findings back to the relevant literature, or for that matter, identifying relevant literatures given the broad scope of the study. The mixed methods methodologies and being mindful of competing epistemologies also further expanded the scale of the task. I was very much aware of the potential for specialising in the research process in particular research methodologies given that I was trying to apply a range of different approaches simultaneously.

In retrospect, there would have been a number of advantages in conducting the research with colleagues. The Ashridge Critical Moment-Study Group (De Haan and Nieß, 2012) for example consists of a team of researcher-practitioners who work together in the analysis of coaching process. This team has also drawn on Master level students to help them in their analysis (de Haan et al, 2010). This has ensured that agreement has been obtained in relation to the classification of events taking place in descriptions of aspects of the coaching process (critical moments; e.g. de Haan et al, 2010). It is likely that the Study Group will have been able to draw on a wide range of expertise within the team. It would seem likely that a team approach in which consensus can be achieved and measured (de Haan et al, 2010) is likely to meet quality standards associated either from within a realist paradigm (e.g.

different forms of validity and reliability; Saunders, 2011) or in qualitative research generally (e.g. trustworthiness, plausibility, credibility; Guba and Lincoln, 1994, McLeod, 2003).

On a more practical level, co-ordinating the data collection as a single researcher was very difficult because I could not involve both coach and client at the same time when engaging these participants in the data collection process. One possibility was to ask both participants to sort the Q-sets at the same time and then to conduct interviews but I would still have had to wait until both participants would have been ready to have moved onto the next phase in the process. In order to meet the time demands of the participants, this led to some inconsistency in the order and timing of data collection. There was also the sheer difficulty of trying to identify contacts, co-ordinate diaries and manage the collection of a large data set. The involvement of others would have led to a more condensed data collection process (in practice, data collection took 18 months). A long data collection process led to some difficulties in ensuring consistency in data collection methods simply by having to remember how previous activities had been conducted. This extensive time period also impacted on acquiring an overall sense of the data.

I would however argue that the research process was rigorous. I attended workshops and conferences on Q-Methodology and read extensively on the topic in order to have confidence in the methodology. I also consulted with experts in the field in order to be assured that my general approach was correct. I read extensively on discursive methods (e.g. Wetherell, 2001; Edwards and Potter, 1992) and social constructionist literature (e.g. Burr, 2003, Franklin, 1995; Edley, 2001; McNamee and Gergen, 1992) in order to have confidence that my overall approach had been generally consistent with these approaches. Elliott, (2005) referring to earlier work of his (2000) has argued that exploratory research in therapy should achieve one or more of the following aims: provide an understanding of events (i.e. be definitional); provide a rich description of a phenomenon (be descriptive); explain what gives rise to phenomena (interpretive); have a critical element (critical/lead to action); be able to identify social and political interests (deconstruction). I would argue that

my findings generally address these aims. I would also argue that as I was writing from an interpretative position, the need for carefully following a controlled data collection process is less important than in a positivist paradigm (McLeod, 2003) even though it is important to describe the overall approach taken. I also prepared written documents such as an agenda in order to help remember how previous interviews and discussion groups had been conducted. The process of collecting audio recordings and having the subjective impressions of participants recorded in Q-sorts also helped to gain a sense of coherence across the data sets.

Overall I do believe that the exploratory approach enabled a broad understanding of the coaching process and one in which more specific areas of investigation can be explored post-thesis. I also believe that as sole researcher, I was still able to gain an overall coherence of the data which might have been lost had a team of researchers divided up the data collection or analysis. The overall approach also helped me personally to develop a capacity for reflexivity (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). I would add finally, that requirements for a PhD thesis is the need for a researcher to show a capacity to conduct research independently which seemed to pre-empt the possibility of involving co-researchers.

9.12 Addressing the Research Question: A Multiple Perspective Analysis

This thesis set out to consider what could be learned by adopting a multiple perspective analysis of a coaching session. The diverse range of methods used in the Inquiry; the tolerance for a range of epistemological assumptions and the diversity of perspectives taken (coaches, clients and observers from a range of backgrounds) has shown that a great deal can be learned about the coaching process through this multi-faced approach. The Inquiry has led to an in-depth understanding of the coaching process, which as one important study in the field, will help to build a theoretical basis for coaching as a profession which is continuing to increase in popularity.

9.13 Personal Reflections

At the end of over four years of working on the PhD, interspersed with personal and work commitments, what is significant for me in the whole research endeavour is actually less about the immediate findings of the Inquiry. What stands out is the human capacity for sense-making, the capacity for interpreting the world as we experience it from multiple-perspectives. The process has encouraged me to interpret the world from a social constructionist perspective. A social constructionist perspective is tolerant of alternative ways of making sense of the realities we experience. It argues for questioning dogma; to always be wary of harm that any viewpoint or ideology can ultimately create and to always be willing to accept that one's own individual viewpoint can be understood very differently by others. Much of human misunderstanding seems to be the consequence of our each making sense of the same realities differently. Social constructionist thinking is a call for negotiating shared understandings, acceptance and tolerance.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 01: Clarification of Methods

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This appendix is intended to make clear the steps taken in organizing the research process such that if another researcher wished to follow the same steps, she/he would be able to understand how to replicate the approach. This appendix focuses primarily on the data collection process as the methodology for data analysis has already been described in some detail in Chapter 3. However, some additional detail in relation to the timing and practicalities of the data collection process are provided.

Step 1: Approving the Research

The first step in the process was the approval of the research internally within the University. This was done by seeking approval of the research proposal through the internal research approval process. This involved the University Ethics Committee and the University Legal Department as well as the close participation of the research supervisory team (i.e. dissertation supervisors). As a result of this process, I was asked to prepare a *Participant Information Sheet* and a *Consent form* for the various potential stakeholders (coaches, clients and sponsors). In the case of coaches, separate *Participant Information Sheets* were prepared for those taking part in Observer Groups and those taking part in conducting actual coaching sessions. The involvement of sponsors was considered necessary where the sponsor might have an interest in agreeing to an employee taking part in the research and clients were asked in writing to seek the approval of their employer as they saw necessary. A copy of the *Participant Information Sheet* for Observers is included Appendix 02, in order to illustrate the general approach. A researcher copying the process would need to agree these documents through their own regulatory procedures.

The design of the *Participant Information Sheet* and *Consent Form* was complicated and detailed because of the inter-relationships and potential legal issues. For example, a client might unwittingly reveal information about his or her organization and/or I as the lead researcher might unwittingly fail to edit any confidential information (e.g. the background

corporate logo in a video). Similarly, in the Observer Groups, there was always a risk that coaches observing actual sessions might have shared confidential information beyond the coaching session. At one point, the University Legal Department was suggesting that coaches participating in the research agree to sign *confidentiality agreements* but this was not considered necessary given the ethical codes of practice to which coaches normally adhere. Moreover, it would have been highly unlikely that coaches would have participated had they been expected to sign confidentiality agreements. As an experienced psychologist with a history of working in organizations, I also thought that I would be able to identify and edit out any references to the client's organization or third parties.

These issues are raised in this summary in order to alert any future researchers of the need to work closely with experts in the field of ethics and legal requirements for video-recorded research involving multiple stakeholders. From a personal perspective, throughout the research process, it is also important for a researcher to be aware of the possible personal and organizational legal repercussions of not complying exactly with any instructions given by the University Legal Department or Ethics Committee.

Identifying Research Participants

The next step in the research process was the identification of Research Participants. Coaches were generally contacted indirectly (via e-mail) rather than personally. In this way, the assumption was made that coaches would feel no obligation to take part and would have time to make a considered decision. Coaches were contacted through existing networks (e.g. coaches following advanced coaching courses; local professional associations/ coaching networks identified through social media such as *Linked-In*). Initially, a general statement about the nature of the research was made available together with my own and supervisory team's contact details. For those coaches who contacted me or other members of the supervisory team, a copy of the *Participant Information Sheet* was sent out together with the *Consent Form*. In a number of cases, one coach would agree to participate in an

Observer Group and would ask if they could contact other coaches who might be interested in taking part (snowballing, Saunders, 2011). This generally happened when very few coaches registered for any one Observer Group and those coaches planning on attending offered to help.

No single coach volunteered to conduct coaching sessions through this engagement process. A small number of experienced coaches known either to myself or the research team were contacted and asked if they might be able to help out in some way (i.e. asked if they might be interested, time available, or if they knew of some coaches who might be interested in taking part). In this way, I, together with the research team felt that we had not made anyone feel compromised to take part. This led to the identification of a target number of six coaches who would be willing to take part. All 6 coaches were sent copies of the *Participant Information Sheet* and *Consent Forms* and were given ample time to arrive at their decision about whether to participate or not. They were only contacted once they had been asked to read all the relevant sheets and once they had responded to me personally by e-mail expressing a possible interest in the research. Any further details were provided (e.g. one coach asked for more personal details and more detail on the research before agreeing to take part).

In the case of clients, initially all coaches agreeing to conduct a video-recorded coaching session were asked to identify existing clients whom they thought would be willing to take part in the research. Two clients were identified through this process. One client was being coached, working as a sole trader and so no sponsor was involved. One other client was a board member working with an internal coach. All other clients were professional contacts known to myself. All of these research participants were asked to participate following the same process as for all other participants (: e-mail, issuing of participant information sheet/ consent form, time to respond, need to respond positively before contacting). For the four sessions in which I identified clients, all clients were informed that the coach would be experienced with an established reputation as a professional coach. The clients wanted

reassurance that their time would be well spent as it involved travel, time and emotional investment. (This process of influence would likely have impacted on the perceptions of the clients and would need to be considered in the analysis).

A small compensation was offered to coaches taking part in the research. Larger compensations were not considered appropriate by the University Ethics Committee. This was £50.00 for coaches providing recorded sessions and the equivalent for coachees; all reasonable expenses were covered. The costs only, were provided for participants in Observer Groups owing to budgetary constraints. Their involvement was considered less demanding than that of the coach and client providing an actual recording of their session. Coaches participating in the Observer Groups were encouraged to consider the possible learning experience of taking part in the research.

Organizing the Schedule

Arranging dates and venues for staging the research was complicated. University requirements meant that the process had to take place either within the University or in an approved location with for example a satisfactory Health and Safety Process in place. All participants taking part in the Observer Groups were sent an agenda ahead of the schedule.

Organizing the schedule often led to many changes in diary dates in order to meet the changing needs of coaches. In one case, two separate Observer Groups were organized owing to a low attendance at the first session (only two coaches attending); the consent of the coach and coachee for running a second observer group were obtained for this via e-mail. There were further complications with some coaches arriving late, delaying the start or interrupting the process. A professional recording of the video was organized using specialist university personnel with the consent of the participants. Arrangements were made to ensure all the necessary equipment was in place, including adequate space for making a recording and with large tables for sorting the Q-items. Refreshments were made available for all participants. In the Observer Groups, the discussion was staged to take

place around a “U” shaped table in order to promote a sense of equality for the discussion, typically, with additional tables around the outside of the room where participants could make their own judgements when rating the Q-items.

Pilot Study

Owing to the challenge of obtaining the participation of coaches and clients, I decided not to run a formal pilot study. Any necessary changes would be made to the process as a result of learning.

Conducting the Recorded Sessions

The first step in the data collection process was the actual collection of video-recordings of coaching sessions. Once, I had identified a coach and client for a session, arrangements were made for the two parties to meet. In all but one instance, coaches and clients met briefly *off-camera* (i.e. I typically arranged for them to have a coffee in private) in order to have the opportunity to exchange any confidential information and to ensure that both parties had the opportunity to simply “break the ice”. In one instance, the coach and client were happy to start the coaching session without any pre-introductions.

I met with each coach ahead of each session, checked out the scope of the sessions and discussed any concerns. I set the room out according to how the coach wanted the room including the positioning of the chairs. Typically, the room was set up with two chairs about 0.5 metres apart at a 135% angle between coach and client. The camera was placed three metres away from the middle of both participants to ensure that both participants were fully in view but without much space around the participants. This maximised the overall view of the interaction rather than just facial expressions. In one case, two cameras were provided to record the full profile of each participant (a *split screen* showing the facial expressions of both participants simultaneously). This was done to evaluate if this appeared to impact on the observation of the interaction and after both coach and client said they felt comfortable with two cameras. (No comments were made by the coach-observers viewing this session

so this did not seem to add or detract from the observation process. My advice for a researcher copying my approach would be to have one camera in the middle because it is less intrusive than when using a split screen and the extra detail of facial expressiveness did not seem to impact on how the coach-observers interpreted the process. Furthermore, the way the participants co-ordinated their body movements using a split-screen was lost).

Once the camera was set up, the video-recorder was switched on and the participants were left alone. At the end of the session, the coach and client came out and it was only at this point that the video-camera was switched off. The coach was asked to spend approximately 1 hour facilitating the session. This was considered representative of a range of coaching practice. Coaches could use more or less time as they wished. In practice, the shortest session was one hour and the longest, approximately, 90 minutes.

Having completed the recordings, all coaches and clients were asked if they wanted to review the recordings in their own time. All coaches and clients said they were happy with their recordings and verbally confirmed their agreement to allow the video-recordings to be used as per the *Participants Information Sheet and Consent Forms*.

Collection of Interview Material and Q-Sorts

There was a need to collect Q-Sorts and interview data from both participants (coach and client) providing the recording. The data collection process varied to accommodate the time constraints of the participants. Coaches and clients were interviewed separately either immediately after the sessions or within two days of the session. The Q-sorting process took around 45 minutes and the interviews up to around 45 minutes although two of the interviews with the clients lasted around 15 minutes in order to meet their personal time commitments.

In principle, the coach would complete the Q-sort while the client completed the Q-sort and the interview. However this was only the case for one coach-client pair as most of the clients and two coaches chose to complete the Q-sort and take part in the interviews within 2

days of the session. For one coach (Drew) and one client (Tristan's client), they agreed to take part in an interview immediately after the session but to complete Q-sorts after the session. For these two research participants, written instructions were provided about how to complete the Q-Sort (Appendix 03) and the participants were asked to place the cards into envelopes and return them to me (SAE) within 48 hours in order not to lose the immediacy of the session. One client seemed not to have time to complete the Q-sort (Drew's client) and in spite of providing her written consent to do so, I decided not to request this. This client did therefore just agree to an interview (client of Drew) and immediately after the session.

Written instructions were given to the coach and to the client about how to sort the cards but in all cases (other than those completing at home after the session), participants wanted me to explain the sorting process. I tried to keep to the spirit of the instructions (Appendix 03).

Tables were laid out around the room we were using. On each table (or two tables placed side by side), I had placed a row of 13 envelopes displaying a number (-6 to 0 to +6) and a sign ("highly uncharacteristic", and "highly uncharacteristic" above each respective side) and on each envelope was written the total number of items to place underneath each envelope.

Once participants had completed the Q-sorts, I would begin the interviews. In all cases, there was a form of natural break between the Q-sorting and the interview. The break was either one of physical differences in space/time (two participants completing the Q-sorts at home). Or the break was more psychological. For example, at the end of the Q-sorting, participants were invited to a quick coffee, were engaged in casual conversation, had a natural comfort break and were taken to a different part of the room for the interview. This wasn't done intentionally to separate the activities. It was done out of consideration to the physical layout of the rooms and the need for a break at that point. However, it seems possible that the gaps in the two processes might have helped reduce the impact of the Q-sorting on the interview and/or of the interview on the Q-sorting.

Either way, the Q-sorting process did not seem to detract from what I would interpret as very individual accounts of the session (i.e. not informed by any obvious common structures

across the sets of cards). Perhaps there are so many cards and which are so open to the coach projecting her/his sense-making of the session (Brown, 1980; p.267) that this process might have had much less influence on the sorting process than one might readily assume. In one instance, the coach did not like the process of sorting the cards and while the coach did complete the process, the conversation seemed to have very little bearing on anything written on the cards. (This was Joanne's session which focused more on her interest in intuition for which there wasn't a specific card).

In the case of all interviews, I started the process by asking the interviewee, simply to respond to the following question:

"What stood out for you in the session?"

This was then followed by an unstructured conversation in which I tried to understand what seemed salient to the interviewee and I explored the issues as and when raised. (The intention to avoid imposing too much of my own construction of what would be considered salient in the interview had led me not to apply a semi-structured approach).

I gave the interviewees as much time as they appeared to need or want before intervening with generally short follow-up questions. Typical questions were: "Could you expand on that point?"; "What else stood out for you?" "What makes that interesting for you?" "What else did you notice?" "What did you notice about the other person?" "What led you to think that?" "What led you to say that?" "What were you aware of at the time of the session?" "What were you trying to do?" "What were you trying to do at that point?" "What were you trying to achieve?" I also prompted the interviewee to respond by being interested in what they said and prompting her/him to elaborate further: "That's interesting!" "I noticed that you highlight..." I also summarised the discussion and then paused to check understanding and to balance the interview conversation. After summarising, I would generally be silent in order to give space for the interviewee to identify whatever he or she found salient at that point.

The interview format focused on wanting to understand the interviewee's construction of the coaching session and in particular what was salient for them in the session based on their interpretation of the question and interview context. I was occasionally asked by the interviewee if they "were on the right lines" and my answer was always that "I was interested in what stood out for them only". I did not follow any particular interview method from the literature. I again relied on my own experience working as a coach. While I did not deliberately draw on any particular interview method, after completing all the data collection, I came across Harlene Anderson's (1997) text on her post-modern approach to therapy in which she argues that her approach is strongly focused on trying to understand the client's frame of reference. It is based on asking open questions and using prompts and summaries in an attempt to understand the client's perspective rather than to try consciously to impose an interpretation upon the spoken account of the client. This approach seemed to strongly align with the approach I had taken but transposed to an interview context rather than that of a therapeutic conversation.

There were some differences in the interviews with the coaches and with the clients. Typically, some of the questions were more focused on the process of conducting the coaching session with the coach. This aligned with my aim to understand what the coach was doing, thinking and feeling in the session. In the case of the client, the emphasis was more on their experience of the process and of the coach. However, I tried to be guided by the client and coach's constructions of whatever they found salient. In some cases, the conversations drifted away from the immediacy of the session. For example, coaches often eventually talked about their broader coaching practice. I simply tried to follow their sense-making patterns of the interview. In retrospect, many of these broader issues at the data analysis phase would help me in making sense of how they had actually conducted their session (e.g. one coach's reference to the importance of "intuition" in her practice).

At the end of all interviews, all coaches and clients were asked to elaborate on how they had sorted the Q-set. This process generally consisted of being led by their accounts of what

they had done (what had stood out for them and why). I would also ask some questions about what I saw at the extremities.

All interview material was audio recorded and in accordance with the *Participant Information Sheet* and *Consent Forms*. The tables were also laid out in the same way as for the coach and client with envelopes for sorting the cards as previously described.

Observer Groups

I viewed all the video-recordings ahead of the Observer Sessions at least twice. This was intended to identify any parts of the recording that I felt could have either disclosed the identity of the client's organization or compromised any third party in any way. This led to some minor editing of one recording only. As in the case of the interviews, I wanted to be led by what the coach-observers said rather than what I personally, had understood from the recording. The recordings were generally shown according to the chronological order in which the recordings were made. However, in the case of the video of the coach who described her approach as Gestalt based, intuitively, I thought it would be particularly interesting to show this to a group of coaches from a very different tradition (this led to two separate Observer Groups; one of two CBC coaches and the other of 4 TA coaches).

In the case of the first Observer Group, I started each "research workshop" with an explanation of the context of the research and explained the process. I gave space for questions and comments. When there were no more questions, I showed the video to the groups. For the first session, I provided very little context setting. I simply said that I had a video-recording of a coaching session and wanted them to comment on the recording. I did not want to predispose participants to making any assumptions about the session. I showed the video recording on a large screen using the available audio-visual equipment in the room used. For this first session only, as the recording was 90 minutes long and I had agreed with the participants a limited amount of time, I cut out 10 minutes of the coaching conversation early in the session at the end of the first 10 minutes of the recording. After coach-observers

had viewed the recording, I gave the participants written instructions. However, as it was very clear that the participants expected to be talked through the sorting process, I explained what they needed to do to sort the Q-Items.

For the following Observer Groups, a professional presentation was refined which explained the context of the research and the data collection process (Appendix 04). The presentation started with an overview of the research and some instructions on how to sort the cards. At the end of the presentation, any questions were answered and the video was shown. A little more context setting was also given to the sessions in response to the requests of the first Observer-Group to provide more contextual information. However context setting still remained brief in order to avoid presenting my own interpretation of the coaching session. Typically, I would explain a little about the role of the person being coached, how the session had been organized (i.e. if I had identified the coach), whether the coach was an external or internal coach, etc. For later research workshops, I also circulated an agenda in advance (Appendix 04).

In all Observer Groups, participants were first asked to sort the Q-items and immediately after the viewing of the video. This process typically took around 45 minutes. Additional verbal instructions were given in line with the instructions provided in the earlier presentation. After completing the Q-sorts, the participants were given a short break and then reassembled to discuss the session. They were asked not to discuss the video during the break. As in the case of the data collection process with coaches and clients, this procedure might have helped separate the two activities and reduce any impact of the Q-sorting onto the discussion which followed.

At the start of the feedback process, I asked each participant to give their “headline” comments about the session. This was then followed by an open discussion (typically 20 minutes) and then a more detailed account of how the Q-items had been sorted (typically a further 60 minutes). This typically took place by moving from one table to another so that

each participant could explain her/his own Q-Sort. This led to individual conversations around each table. In the first two sessions however, there was limited time for detailed discussion of the individual Q-sorts. There were around 6 observers per Observer-Group (details are provided in the main thesis).

In setting the context of the research for the Observer Groups (i.e. the overall research design and aims), I tried not to elaborate too much beyond explaining the practicalities of the Q-sort methodology and how it could lead to an analysis of coaching sessions. I began all the Observer Groups simply by asking “What stood out for you in the coaching sessions?” This was intended to repeat the process that I had carried out with coaches and clients. I then intervened as and when it seemed intuitively interesting in the discussion. For example, asking others if they agreed or disagreed with statements made by other speakers. I did not make use of any particular method of conducting a group discussion but relied on my own experience of having facilitated many discussions as a management trainer and consultant in previous working roles. The questions I asked and other verbal behaviours (e.g. summarising) were very similar to those asked to the coach and client (above). I tried to follow the direction of the conversation set by the participants rather than direct the conversation according to what stood out for me. My approach was therefore consistent with seeking to understand the way the participants constructed their perception of the recording as I had done in the case of the individual interviews. My verbal behavioural was very similar. All conversations were audio-recorded in accordance with the Participants Information Sheet and Consent Forms.

Data Analysis

Data collection took place over an 18 month period between January 2012 and June 2013. This was to fit around the diary commitments as well as managing the volume of data collection. It was inevitable that over this period, I would gradually formulate a view about the meaning of the data (this can be considered an important and integral aspect of

qualitative research; Trafford and Lesham, 2008). However, I tried to avoid listening to the data or analysing the Q-sorts beyond initially checking if the process overall had worked (i.e. if the Q-sorts had been completed; if the interviews had been recorded). This was to avoid developing assumptions about the meaning of the data which I might have transferred to the data collection process.

It was only after all the data had been collected that I began processing the data. This itself posed a challenge as I was unsure whether to start with the statistical data (Q-sorts), with the spoken accounts of the coach, client or observer-groups or, whether to do this in a chronological order. I wondered whether to analyse all the data set for a session or for all the coaches, etc. Given that my unit of analysis was in principle *the session*, it seemed logical to analyse the data at the level of the session, first. However, in order to understand the session, it seemed important to understand how coaches, clients and coach-observers generally interpreted the session. This led to the iterative cycle (hermeneutic cycle) of data collection described in Chapter 3 of moving between part and whole in order to arrive at an overall interpretation of the data. In other words, I would on some occasions spend a whole day analysing a single session. Then, on the following day, I might look at the overall thematic analysis of the coaches. I would then reconsider the single session the following day in light of the thematic analysis and then vice-versa, the following day. This approach is, as explained in Chapter 3 consistent with a hermeneutic approach (e.g. McLeod, 2003; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). This process even continued throughout the write-up as the actual process of writing and the referring back to various literatures, led to changes in my interpretation of the data and the seeking of additional sources of literature.

Appendix 02: Sample Participants Information Sheet (for Observers)

A Multiple-Perspective Analysis of a Coaching Session

Dear Coach

You are being invited to take part in this research study that I conduct as a full-time PhD student. 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?

There is very little research that identifies “what happens” in a coaching session. “What happens” can be understood in terms of observable activities and events occurring in the session. However, what coaches observe when viewing a coaching session could reveal at least as much about how they “construct” the practice of coaching (through their use of language and the ideas and assumptions expressed) as it might identify ‘actual’ events and processes. The purpose of this study therefore sets out to identify the perspectives of coaches reviewing coaching sessions. In order to carry out the investigation, 6 experienced coaches have provided a video-recording (DVD) of one of their own coaching sessions and together with their clients have given me feedback on how they experienced their sessions. I am now showing the recordings of these sessions to small ‘observer groups’ of experienced coaches (typically 4-6 participants per group; each group reviewing one session).

Why have I been invited to participate?

You are being invited to participate as a member of a group of coaches who will be asked to review and comment on one of the session recordings (not one of your own sessions). You have been identified through our knowledge of you as a professional coach or because you have been identified as a professional coach by a trusted contact. It is important to identify experienced coaches for participation in the group context first of all, because experienced coaches are more likely to be able to make qualitative distinctions across different sessions. Secondly, your views are likely to represent an established view within the coaching community, which is of interest in its own right. If you are able to participate, you will be asked to attend a workshop (3 and a quarter hours, approximately) at an agreed date at an agreed venue. The workshop will start with a short introduction to the research. You will then be asked to watch a whole coaching session (1 hour). At the end of the session recording, you will be asked to analyse the session using a tool that has been specially designed to analyse a coaching session. You will then be asked to comment on how you evaluated the session using the tool and to share comments on the session in an open discussion. Finally, you will be given reported feedback from the coach and client.

Do I have to take part?

You are of course under no obligation to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. The consent form requests that you do not intentionally disclose the identities of the participants of the recorded coaching session nor that of any third party referred to in the recording. You will also be asked not to discuss the content of the recorded session outside of the focus group. If you agree to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will be able to compare your evaluation of an actual session with the evaluations of other coaches in the observer group. You will also be informed of the feedback provided by the coach facilitating the session and the client experiencing the session. The analysis may therefore prove useful in reflecting on coaching processes ‘occurring’ in a session and on styles of coaching. You will gain familiarity in using a research tool that has been developed to analyse a coaching session and whose development is described at the following link:
[http://www.instituteofcoaching.org/images/ARticles/OxfordBrookes %20Instrument for microanalysis of Coaching sessions 11 1 2011 pdf](http://www.instituteofcoaching.org/images/ARticles/OxfordBrookes_%20Instrument%20for%20microanalysis%20of%20Coaching%20sessions%2011%201%202011.pdf)

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

The workshop will be audio-recorded and will be transcribed and analysed to generate themes and quotes about perceptions. The data from the use of the tool will also be analysed statistically and interpreted. All the data will be stored securely, be password protected and only pseudonyms will be used following data collection. Data generated will be retained in accordance to the University's policy on Academic integrity and the Data Protection Act. It is intended that the final thesis will be completed by October 2012 (or soon after) and all data will need to be retained for five years following submission. After this, all data will be destroyed. The data will be analysed only by the primary researcher so examiners will only have access to anonymised data.

What should I do if I want to take part?

Within one week of receiving this Information Sheet you will be contacted to see if you still wish to take part. If you decide to go ahead, I will try to identify a mutually convenient time and date although that might not always be possible.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the data analysis will form part of a thesis for the award of PhD with Oxford Brookes University. It is hoped that the data will subsequently be used in publication but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in any written report. Names of all participants will be kept confidential. However, it must be recognised that with small samples it is impossible to guarantee total anonymity. A summary of research findings will be available for all participants. If you wish to receive a copy of this 'Summary of Findings' please request this at the time of the workshop(s). The overall comments and the results of the tool will also be fed back to the coaches who provided the recordings although they will not be informed of the identity of anyone in the observer group. This will be done with sensitivity and constructively by the researcher in his capacity as a chartered psychologist.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is being funded by the Business School of Oxford Brookes University (The International Centre of Coaching and Leadership Development).

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been approved by the supervisory team and the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Expenses

Reasonable travel expenses will be paid and in line with University payment guidelines.

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to discuss further, please contact me directly (amyers@brookes.ac.uk) or one of my two supervisors, Dr Tatiana Bachkirova (tbachkirova@brookes.ac.uk) or Dr Elaine Cox (ecox@brookes.ac.uk). If you have any concerns about the way in which the study is being conducted at any stage, you should contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for your time in reading this outline and for your consideration in taking part.

Adrian Myers, CPsychol, BA, MBA, MSC

Appendix 03: Written Instructions (Q-Sort Process)

Appendix 03: Q Sort Assessment of a Management Coaching Session

Background to the Tool

A Q sort is a simple means of modelling your viewpoint about a relevant topic or 'target object' using a set of provided statements/items. In this case, the target object we want you to think about is *the coaching session you have just viewed*. A set of 84 statements (or potential descriptors) of a coaching session has been provided together with a set of envelopes. By completing this Q Sort, I will be able to compare the way you describe the session you have just participated in or observed in comparison to other coaches, clients or observers who might also be asked to complete a Q Sort. Hopefully, it will also be a useful reflection exercise.

The Q sorting task requires that you allocate *every one* of these statements (cards) a ranking position within the fixed sorting distribution provided (a convention in Q methodology), based upon the extent to which you consider each to be **characteristic** (stand out) in the context of the session. **Characteristic** can have a number of meanings. It can mean that a particular aspect of the session occurred so **frequently** that it made the item stand out as a defining characteristic. On the other hand, an item expressed in one of the cards stood out as highly characteristic because you thought it was of **particular importance** in the context of the session; for example, you felt that an activity/ process took place that had a major impact on the course of the session. Alternatively, an item might have stood out simply because it was in some other way a **dominant feature** of the session.

You are being asked to rank order the items according to how salient they are in your opinion. There are 2 ways of ranking the items. The first way is as has already been described: items are more or less salient in a **characteristic** sense; that is they stand out because they are present and this is salient for you. On the other hand, an item can be salient because it is conspicuous by its

absence. Or, the item stood out because something you normally do in the session did not happen in this session, etc.

Finally, you will need to place some items towards the middle of the distribution. These are items which either do not occur very much and/or seem irrelevant in the context of the session. Let us now consider the mechanics!

The fixed sorting distribution contains 13 rating values, starting with -6 at the *highly uncharacteristic* end of the distribution, through zero, to +6 at the *highly characteristic* end of the distribution.

You will notice that on the table in front of you, I have placed a series of envelopes (matching this distribution) which are marked -6 through to 0 to +6. Also, the number of items that can be placed below each envelope is also indicated on each envelope and is as shown below.

Uncharacteristic Neither UnCh' nor Ch' Characteristic

RATING	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
NO OF CARDS	2	4	6	7	8	9	12	9	8	7	6	4	2

Your task is then to sort the 84 items below the 13 envelopes with the indicated number of items under each envelope. So, the 2 statements which you think are the *most characteristic* of the session should be ranked at the +6 position, the next 4 most characteristic statements should be ranked at the +5 position, and so on.

Similarly, those items that you think are the most *uncharacteristic* of the session should be ranked at the -6 position, the next 4 most *uncharacteristic* statements should be ranked at the -5 position, and so on.

Items towards the middle should be neither *characteristic* nor *uncharacteristic* of the session or less *characteristic* or less *uncharacteristic* of the session than other items.

In order to facilitate this process, I suggest you begin by sorting the items into three more or less even piles:

- 1. Uncharacteristic (left pile)**
- 2. Neither Characteristic nor Uncharacteristic/ Neutral (Middle pile)**
- 3. Characteristic (right pile)**

You can then make finer discriminations between all of the items.

Please note that the scaling assumes that your responses will be *characteristic*, *neutral* or *uncharacteristic* and to varying degrees. In practice, this is just a convenient way of helping you make discriminations between items. What counts is that some items are classified subjectively as more or less characteristic than others on a 13 point scale.

Please feel free to rearrange statements but try not to take too long on the process – what is important is your overall impression. You should set yourself a target time scale of 15 minutes for the first sort (into 3 initial piles) and 30 minutes for the second sort (onto the 13 point scale) but spend as much or as little time as you wish.

Please have one final look at the Q sort configuration you've created to check that it describes your session as well as possible within the time constraints. If

you're not happy, feel free to change the statement rankings until you have the configuration you want. Once you're happy, so am I!

You will be asked to explain your sorting pattern when you have finished. After this, you will be asked at some point to put the cards into the corresponding envelope (2 items in + 6; 4 items in +5, etc) and seal each envelope (this is just for future analysis). Make sure the number of cards in each envelope corresponds with the required number on the front of the envelope.

Thank you for participating in this exercise.

Appendix 04: Research Workshop Presentation

**Guidelines to Participants Taking
Part in Research
("Sorting Instructions")**

**A Multiple-Perspective Analysis of a
Coaching Session
Adrian Myers**

“Thank you and Welcome”

Background to Tool

- Developed by Tatiana Bachkirova, Jonathan Sibley and Adrian Myers
- Research Funded by IOC
- Items initially identified based on sharing of knowledge of different genres and coaching traditions/practices
- Items and method developed over a series of 3 focus groups (UK, USA, Canada) involving experienced coaches
- Pantheoretical terminology
- Captures behaviours, events, interaction patterns, atmosphere
- Items consider coach, client and dyadic interactions
- Grounded in “Q-methodology”

Sorting Process

Sorting Process

- Sorting items according to how “characteristic” or “uncharacteristic” they seem to be of a coaching session
- **Characteristic = stands out** because something did or tended to feature (**frequency/ prevalence**) and/or it’s happening caught your attention (**significance**); **and/or any other reason**
- **Uncharacteristic = stands out** because it didn’t or didn’t tend to feature (**low frequency; not prevalent** or **prevalent in an opposite sense** of what is stated on the card and/or its absence caught your attention (**significant because it did not happen**); **and/or any other reason**

...Examples

Sorting Process: “Highly Characteristic”

Example: “The client outlines his concerns”

1. Frequency (happened a lot)
2. Prevalence/ dominating feature (it was a dominating aspect of the session)
3. Significance (happened and its happening had a major impact on the session: helpful or unhelpful)
4. Other reason

Sorting Process: Highly Uncharacteristic

Example: "The client outlines his concerns"

1. Frequency (didn't or hardly happened)
2. Prevalence/ dominating feature (what the session wasn't like)
3. Significance
 1. Didn't happen but should have happened
 2. Didn't happen and should not have happened
4. Other reason

If in doubt.....

Go with what ***“stands out”***

***Seems to characterise the session for you
(in a happening sense)***

***Seems to describe the session in an
uncharacteristic sense for you (in a sense
that something wasn't happening)***

Sorting Process

- For all those items you consider “characteristic” of the session, some will be more or less “characteristic” than others
- Similarly, for all those items you consider “**un**characteristic” of the session, some will be more or less “**un**characteristic” than others
- Some items might seem neither characteristic nor **un**characteristic
- So.....

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
----	----	----	----	---	----	----	----	----

47	13	6	9	1	10	5	2	4
----	----	---	---	---	----	---	---	---

43	8	16	3	17	7	27
----	---	----	---	----	---	----

18	19	12	24	11
----	----	----	----	----

29	14	25
----	----	----

20



(Ignore numbers on cards)

Place to **Left**

“More **Un**characteristic”

Place to **Right**

“More **Characteristic**”



Place to Middle:

Neither characteristic nor **un**characteristic
Sometimes happened/ sometimes didn't

As you face the table!

SORTING THE CARDS INTO CHARACTERISTIC AND UNCHARACTERISTIC PILES

STEP 1: Sort the items into three piles

PILE 1 = Characteristic

PILE 2= Uncharacteristic

PILE 3 = Neither

***STEP 2: Progressively sort these items into the
columns***

Appendix 05: Research Workshop Agenda for Observer Group

Appendix 05: Research Workshop Agenda for Observer Group (Sample)

Invitation to Participate in a Research Project: *Multiple Perspective Analysis of a Coaching Session*

**14.00 – 17.15 Friday 13th July 2012
PG 202, Oxford Brookes University – Wheatley Campus**

- 14.00 Coffee/ Tea and Introductions

- 14.10 Q Methodology and Background to Research/Sorting Guidelines

- 14.30 Redistribution of Participants Information Sheet and Signing of
Consent Forms/ Expense Claims

- 14.40 View Video-Recording of Coaching Session

- 15.40 Sorting of Statements to Describe Session

- 16.20 Break – please hold back discussions!

- 16.30 Group Discussion on sorting and comments on observed session

- 17.15 Close

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Appendix 06: Ethical Issues Relating to Managing Feedback

Appendix 06: Ethical Issues Relating to Managing Feedback

The study posed many ethical challenges. A great deal of time was taken in preparing detailed Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms for all stakeholders involved in the research. This included, coaches who would conduct coaching sessions, clients of those coaches, coach-observers and sponsors of coaching sessions.

A major challenge was in managing the unanticipated. At the outset of the research, I had no pre-formed views about what to expect from the coach-observers when asked to evaluate the coaching session. In fact, my assumption was that since the coaches conducting coaching sessions were generally experienced coaches with excellent reputations and various academic and practitioner credentials, I assumed that they would be evaluated very positively by other coaches. In fact, given that my research interest was on the coaching process (what happens between coach and client) rather than on the coach, I had no reason to suppose that coach-observers would, in the main, focus their attention on an evaluation of the coach. In fact, even after I personally had viewed the first coaching session, and had seen the tape recording, I assumed that if coach-observers were to evaluate the coach's performance, they would have done so very positively. This continued throughout the process and I was always surprised by what I interpreted as generally negative criticism of the coach's approach.

It is important not to dismiss the context of the research which might have impacted on the overall process. For example, my own presentation as an academic researcher might have given the impression of a need for criticality; even my positioning of the research, standing at the front of the room in which the Observer-Groups were held might have given the impression of an academic context and an invitation for critical evaluation. Asking the Observer-Groups to sit in a "U" shaped seating arrangement might have recreated a sense of a classroom environment. Some sessions were also held at the University creating perhaps a sense of the need to be critical.

There might also be something in the Coaching Process Q-Set (Bachkirova et al, 2012), hitherto unidentified, which predisposes coach-observers to focus their attention on an evaluation of the coach rather than an evaluation of the process, which was the intended purpose of the instrument.

Finally, it is also important to recognise that I might have inadvertently influenced the process in some other way. For example, in explaining the use of the tool, I might have given examples which might have led participants to believe that I was expecting them to focus on the coach (however, this was not generally done deliberately and in the prepared presentation given in the observer workshops, the example given focused on the client – see presentation in Appendix 04). However, because at the time of conducting the research, I was not thinking about how my actions might have led the coach-observers to focus on the coach, it could have been something I overlooked. There is therefore a need for some modesty in presenting the findings.

Even if I had not influenced the process in the manner considered, there were still aspects of the research context that might have impacted on how the coach conducting the session was perceived. The context of the research was dehumanised in the sense that participants did not know the coach or the client and were only watching a video-recording. It could also be argued that Coach-Observers do not have access to the intimacy of the interaction; that this is something unique to the two participants in the coaching conversation (Anderson, 1997, p.117) and this might have led to a negative evaluation by the Coach-Observers. Another possible influence could simply relate to group dynamics (e.g. Shaw, 1971). Care is needed therefore not to assume that coaches, in some sense, wilfully criticised the coaches in the video-recordings in a negative manner but that their negative reaction could perhaps be explained by a distancing of the engagement.

Moreover, social constructionist research explicitly seeks to understand the situational context in which statements are made by rather than assuming that those people providing

verbal accounts express what might be understood as more or less permanent attitudes (Edwards and Potter, 1992). This should be taken as a further call for contextualising the findings.

Even if I had not introduced inadvertently any bias, in order to help coach-observers understand their reactions, outlining the overall influence of context generally could be relevant in helping them understand their own reactions. Some of the theories proposed elsewhere in this thesis (e.g. in relation to identity theory, Stryker, 1987; and social identity theory, Stets and Burke, 2000) are also relevant in helping coach-observers understand their own responses and should be a warning to the researcher to be aware of the possible impact of research participants generally reflecting or being encouraged to reflect on their own reactions and, of the need to be sensitive in presenting findings. There is a considerable literature that considers challenging emotional processes associated with what is constructed as *identity threats* (e.g. Garza-Guerrero, 1971; Thoits, 1991; Beech and MacIntosh, 2012) for example.

On a practical level, those coaches who asked for feedback on their session were given anonymous feedback but this was requested by only one coach. This was done in a balanced manner, based on my own personal experience of many years of giving feedback as a management training and development consultant and as a chartered psychologist. This process was also anticipated in the Participants Information Sheet (i.e. made known to the coach-observers; see appendix 02).

With regard to all participants, including the coach-observers, I had made as clearly as possible and at the outset of the research, that I was interested in how coaches made sense of the coaching process; that is I had tried to communicate that I was interested in their perspective as a research focus. I had tried to clarify this in the *Participant Information Sheet*:

“However, what coaches observe when viewing a coaching session could reveal at least as much about how they “construct” the practice of coaching (through their use of language and the ideas and assumptions expressed) as it might identify actual events and processes.”

In other words, I had tried to make as clear as possible that I was interested in their reactions.

In the case of the Coach-Observers, I said at the end of all sessions that I was available should anyone want to discuss any issues with me. No one came back to me. However, I was concerned that one of the coach-observers, at one of the Observer Groups said that she had been quite “taken aback” by her own negative reactions to the viewing of the recording and that “she would need to reflect on that”. I could not oblige the coach-observer to discuss the matter with me but the offer was there. I did however at the end of all Observer Groups explain how the reaction of the coach-observers had been similar in previous groups. I also began to offer tentative explanations relating to the possibility of different coaches seemingly constructing the process differently. In this way, I hoped to normalise the behaviour of the coach-observers in the similar way to how a supervisor might help the coach to contextualise their behaviour in supervision (Inskipp and Proctor, 1995).

In conferences and seminars, when presenting the initial findings, there was always the possibility of coaches being present, who might either have facilitated the sessions or acted as coach-observers. On all occasions, the data was presented based on my own developing analysis that coaches have very different views on the coaching process and what was observed was not in some sense, an “objective reality” but more a reflection of the subjectivity of the coach-observers expressing their value judgements about how coaching should be practised. Reassurance was given implicitly to the coaches conducting the sessions that all clients who had participated in the sessions had given very positive feedback about the coach. These comments led to very rich and open discussions in conference about what process are important in coaching process; the role of meaning-

making between coach and client; the difficulty of being able to understand a session as an observer; personal values and experiences in developing one's own coaching approach coach and whether this is in some sense "better" than any other approach; the apparent paradox that coaching is often promoted as a collaborative process (e.g. Whitmore, 2011) yet coaches when asked to comment on someone else's session (in my research) tended to focus on the behaviour and way of being of the coach. These are important topics which actually promote understanding, tolerance and flexibility of thought. Where feedback was collected, the talks were very positively received which suggested that the issue had been addressed with consideration.

Future Dissemination of Research Findings

I intend to circulate a summary of the findings to all participating coaches in acknowledgement of their contribution to the research process. There is a clear need to ensure that this is worded sensitively. The summary should acknowledge the particular contribution of all participants. It should help contextualise how the situational context might have impacted on the way the coach-observers addressed their comments about the coach. The summary should also make clear that some positive comments were also made. The summary should provide participants with the opportunity to comment on the research should they wish to do so and to discuss the process with the researcher in more detail, should they wish to do so. There is also an issue about how to manage the feedback for any participating clients in the study. Where the coach invited their own client, I will send a copy to the coach to send to their client, should they wish to do so. One client did ask for a copy of the findings and I will inform the coach accordingly. There is therefore a need to circulate findings in a way that does not undermine the credibility of any coach. The same processes need to be followed for any future publication in journals.

All attempts to maintain anonymity has been maintained throughout the research process and it is my intention to continue to try to maintain this in any future publication (and as outlined in the Participant Information Sheet).

Lessons for Other Researchers

The research process raised many ethical and legal issues which are discussed here and elsewhere in this thesis. In particular, there is a need for researchers to anticipate the possibility of participants experiencing any sense of identity threat (e.g. Garza-Guerrero, 1971; Thoits, 1991; Beech and MacIntosh, 2012) when research explores personal values.

In particular researchers need to:

1. Ensure that possible impacts of research on research participants are identified beforehand by for example, reviewing the literature on *identity threats* and by pooling ideas about what the research might identify and how any findings might be managed over the course of the research (this is in effect a type of risk assessment)
2. Ensure that the expertise of trusted colleagues is solicited, particularly if one is relatively inexperienced in the research process; other people are likely to help prompt important issues
3. Involve appropriate supervisory channels (e.g. University Ethical Committees and colleagues with expertise in this area)
4. Provide structures to support any participant who might be impacted by the findings (e.g. confidential counselling processes)
5. Ensure that any publication is made in a sensitive and balanced way, mindful of possible limitations of one's own findings as a researcher, and, that takes account of possible contextual factors; also to take account of the possible reactions of multiple-stakeholders
6. Provide opportunities for two –way discussion of findings and to respond to feedback (e.g. at conference)

The issues raised in this research could potentially lead to a useful journal publication in relation to the use of video-material used in a helping context and ethical issues.

Appendix 07: Q-Sorting Process Photograph

Appendix 08: Q-Set (84 Items)

Item No	Q-Items
1	There is an exploration of the effect of client's choice of words
2	There is an exploration of the client's values
3	There is an exploration of the client's environmental influences (e.g., organizational, family, politics, history)
4	There is an exploration of the client's underlying mindset (e.g., assumptions, beliefs, stories)
5	Coach and client explore the deeper meaning of a presenting issue
6	Coach works with the client's apparent defensiveness
7	Coach points out recurrent theme in client's behaviour
8	Coach points out potential unconscious motives of the client (out of the client's awareness)
9	There is an exploration of the client's in session non-verbal behavior
10	Coach invites client to consider other people's perspectives
11	Coach invites client to identify resources and how they might be leveraged (including strengths, accomplishments, and/or external resources)
12	Coach initiates clients resources and how they might be leveraged (including strengths, accomplishments, and/or external resources)
13	Coach explores client's emotions
14	Coach encourages client to feel more deeply within session
15	Coach encourages client to become more aware of his immediate experience in the session
16	Coach challenges client's perspective of situation and/or self
17	Coach asks client to quantify feeling / perception / issue using a scale
18	There is one or more periods of silent reflection
19	There is a discussion of the results of a psychometric instrument
20	There is a discussion of external feedback
21	Coach gives feedback from coach's experience of client
22	Coach discloses own feelings/ bodily sensations evoked in the session
23	Coach describes her perception of the situation
24	There appears to be a productive use of metaphors
25	Coach and client explore their differences in perception of the situation
26	Coach expands on client's statements
27	Coach provides reassurance to client
28	Coach uses humor
29	Coach shows empathy
30	Coach shares personal details about herself
31	Coach repairs lost connection to the client during session
32	Coach discloses own fallibility
33	There appears to be rapport (strong connection) between client and coach
34	Coach and client appear to understand each other
35	Coach and client discuss their relationship
36	Coach asks for permission to give feedback
37	Coach repeats client's words back to him
38	Coach paraphrases the client's statements
39	Coach checks if her understanding is correct
40	There is a sense of optimism in the coaching session
41	There appears to be a shift in energy during the coaching session
42	Coach and client appear to be engaged (vs. disengaged)
43	Coach and client use a development plan to guide sessions

44	Coach follows up on key / significant statements made by client
45	Coach asks questions helping the client to elaborate
46	There is a discussion of the coaching "contract"
47	There is a discussion of issues related to the termination of coaching
48	There is a discussion of boundaries and/or ethical issues related to the coaching engagement
49	There is a discussion of a potential referral to an outside specialist (e.g., therapist, doctor, financial advisor)
50	The session is fast-paced
51	The session appears highly structured
52	Coach and client appear to bring the session to closure easily
53	Coach and client discuss the process of the session
54	Coach takes an active role during the session
55	Coach makes explicit a shift in role during the session (e.g., acting as consultant, teacher, therapist)
56	Coach explains the reason behind using a specific intervention
57	Coach appears to be using an intervention mechanistically
58	Coach appears to be pursuing her own agenda
59	Client takes initiative in structuring the session
60	There is a discussion of client's feedback on coaching
61	Coach makes sounds or non-verbally encourages client to continue
62	Coach is verbose
63	Coach interrupts client
64	Client interrupts coach
65	Coach suggests in-session exercise / activity
66	Coach broadens the focus of discussions
67	Coach asks questions that appear to open new possibilities for the client
68	Coach appears to focus on a third-party's agenda (e.g., organization, partner, parents)
69	Client suggests his next course of action
70	There is a discussion of new practices for the client
71	Coach suggests possible solutions
72	Coach suggests homework for client
73	Coach shares her knowledge about topic
74	Coach gives advice
75	Coach follows up on previous homework
76	Coach encourages client to make choices
77	Coach asks the client to describe key learnings / take-aways from session
78	There is a discussion of the client's progress
79	There is a discussion about the client's overall goals
80	There is a discussion about how to measure the success of the coaching engagement
81	Coach redirects client to client's agenda
82	Coach questions client's level of commitment to coaching
83	Coach inquires about client's aim for the session
84	There is a discussion of the client's impact on his environment (e.g., organization, family)

Appendix 09: Correlation Matrix: All Q-Sorts

Appendix 09 Correlation Matrix

Descriptive statistics - Interpretation

The Correlation matrix in Q Methodology is usually only considered a methodological necessity en route to the identification of the Q factors. Block, 2008 explains that the correlation matrix is not widely recognised because theoretical sampling distribution for true correlations expects that any two arrays of Q descriptors taken at random, on average, will correlate zero. However, in Q-sorting, it is likely that descriptors of general relevance will increase the likelihood of showing a positive correlation (83). One can be mindful of this comment in interpreting correlation coefficients but they still give an indication of similarity of perceptions between and across participants. This is important in the context of this Inquiry because the literature suggested that observers and participants might not share similar perspectives.

In order to calculate significance between Q-Sorts, the formula $2.58 \times (1/\sqrt{N})$ (No. of items in Q set) can be applied (Watts, 2013). In this case $2.58(1/\sqrt{84}) = 0.28$ ($p \geq 0.01$). The correlation matrix generated through the PQ Method software is as shown in table 1. The columns and rows represent the by-person Q-sort analysis (i.e. how each Q-sort loads onto every other Q-Sort; the 100% diagonal correlation (in black) simply indicates the mathematical relationship when the by-person is the same Q-Sort. The correlation matrix has been colour coded so that the reader can readily identify correlation coefficients between and across sessions. Statistically significant correlations have been highlighted in the same colour as that given for that session for when the statistically significant correlations are within the same session; they are in red otherwise.

CORRELATION MATRIX: ALL Q-SORTS

Q-Sort	Q SORT (Participant)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	15	17	18	19	20	21	22
1	OBQ MARJORIE	100	36	38	41	45	31	58	24	31	14	14	30	33	11	15	17	35	22	-2	6	31	1
2	OB2 MARJORIE	36	100	39	23	51	52	40	42	18	12	29	34	26	31	11	15	9	13	10	0	27	-14
3	OB3 MARJORIE	38	39	100	26	56	37	42	19	10	46	40	37	47	33	38	39	53	35	16	20	30	7
4	OB 4 MARJORIE	41	23	26	100	37	29	27	4	12	7	14	29	35	12	14	14	28	1	-19	9	13	-13
5	OB 5 MARJORIE	45	51	56	37	100	53	64	49	30	45	45	53	43	37	41	40	45	30	10	6	32	-6
6	OB 6 MARJORIE	31	52	37	29	53	100	51	36	38	20	42	37	33	34	36	20	15	12	6	9	19	-13
7	CL IENT S1 MARJORIE	58	40	42	27	64	51	100	46	28	37	41	38	46	34	34	30	38	35	10	13	35	-14
8	COACH S1 MARJORE	24	42	19	4	49	36	46	100	35	33	33	24	19	25	12	-1	-5	27	17	28	51	9
9	COACH TRISTAN	31	18	10	12	30	38	28	35	100	22	31	31	24	13	23	26	13	24	3	13	36	-6
10	CL IENT S2 TRISTAN	14	12	46	7	45	20	37	33	22	100	52	59	60	52	54	36	33	25	5	15	21	9
11	OB1S2 TRISTAN	14	29	40	14	45	42	41	33	31	52	100	50	48	44	57	37	26	28	3	8	21	-6
12	OB2 S2 TRISTAN	30	34	37	29	53	37	38	24	31	59	50	100	45	33	36	40	40	10	1	0	17	-7
13	OB3 S2 TRISTAN	33	26	47	35	43	33	46	19	24	60	48	45	100	43	58	42	34	23	-2	17	31	0
14	OB4 S2 TRISTAN	11	31	33	12	37	34	34	25	13	52	44	33	43	100	50	17	4	12	-4	15	9	-7
15	OB 5 S2 TRISTAN	15	11	38	14	41	36	34	12	23	54	57	36	58	50	100	39	20	12	-12	9	5	2
16	OB 6 TRISTAN	17	15	39	14	40	20	30	-1	26	36	37	40	42	17	39	100	33	10	-19	4	8	-23
17	CLIENT S3 JOANNE	35	9	53	28	45	15	38	-5	13	33	26	40	34	4	20	33	100	21	12	4	18	-6
18	COACH S3 JOANNE	22	13	35	1	30	12	35	27	24	25	28	10	23	12	12	10	21	100	22	35	50	13
19	OB1 S2 JOANNE	-2	10	16	-19	10	6	10	17	3	5	3	1	-2	-4	-12	-19	12	22	100	18	38	21
20	OB2 S3 JOANNE	6	0	20	9	6	9	13	28	13	15	8	0	17	15	9	4	4	35	18	100	40	16
21	OB3 S3 JOANNE	31	27	30	13	32	19	35	51	36	21	21	17	31	9	5	8	18	50	38	40	100	20
22	OB S4 JOANNE	1	-14	7	-13	-6	-13	-14	9	-6	9	-6	-7	0	-7	2	-23	-6	13	21	16	20	100
23	CLIENT S4 ALICE	19	3	48	33	46	34	32	17	23	44	41	48	37	38	43	35	44	17	-1	-3	18	-12
24	COACH S4 ALICE	33	32	19	15	36	32	49	33	25	14	39	22	28	22	29	28	8	12	-6	-8	36	9
25	OB S1 S4 ALICE	26	33	19	-5	37	39	39	38	30	30	35	34	26	31	18	20	8	23	3	-4	18	8
26	OB2 S4 ALICE	21	12	1	6	11	12	10	26	19	10	5	12	19	4	4	11	-8	10	-1	2	24	29
27	OB3 S4 ALICE	28	26	41	18	45	34	50	40	22	33	28	17	43	34	26	20	20	27	18	16	46	8
28	OB4 S4 ALICE	11	19	12	24	37	46	43	36	16	40	31	40	36	33	33	26	27	-7	3	10	19	-18
29	OB5 S4 ALICE	33	20	18	13	31	18	26	28	25	23	14	28	31	17	5	32	-5	5	12	10	44	16
30	OB6 S4 ALICE	28	41	13	30	30	28	38	18	1	-3	3	10	19	14	1	9	-2	-2	3	-11	2	-12
31	OB7 S4 ALICE	21	43	7	10	37	35	35	47	29	2	20	8	5	24	0	-6	-1	19	13	2	40	6
32	OB8 S4 ALICE	21	17	5	3	18	13	27	23	22	17	16	22	16	31	5	0	8	26	7	18	35	5

33	OB1 S5 CBC BACKGROUND	28	10	31	10	34	16	39	19	24	35	33	45	21	25	4	14	41	27	8	3	11	11
34	OB S5 CBC BACKGROUND	17	16	21	12	35	6	16	20	14	28	17	15	20	17	18	12	9	11	12	41	29	24
35	OB S5 TA BACKGROUND	-7	-6	-5	-18	-3	1	-13	12	11	-10	-13	-12	-10	1	-1	-20	-10	23	29	22	21	31
36	OB S5 TA BACKGROUND	20	19	4	10	7	14	17	33	20	1	5	-14	4	2	-2	-10	-13	24	33	58	52	21
37	OB S5 TA BACKGROUND	10	-2	10	-13	10	2	8	23	17	4	-3	-11	12	3	-15	6	2	33	30	26	50	27
38	OB S5 TA BACKGROUND	-2	-11	-3	-12	-17	3	-5	19	9	-14	-16	-19	-6	-6	-9	-23	-15	25	19	42	38	37
39	CLIENT S5 ALISON	34	5	52	32	46	27	43	20	34	52	41	55	43	23	28	35	52	34	7	23	26	4
40	COACH S5 ALISON	10	-3	35	20	20	20	35	15	22	34	24	24	39	17	35	33	41	26	18	36	24	-12
41	COACH S6 DREW	27	29	42	19	40	39	44	22	16	49	39	53	44	36	30	19	33	18	8	-3	25	9
42	OB1 S6 DREW	15	12	32	14	27	15	28	29	12	31	28	15	41	29	24	14	-4	47	16	33	49	6
43	OB2 S6 DREW	8	29	22	26	27	28	23	41	19	12	21	5	28	25	8	6	-13	14	14	23	36	-2
44	OB3 S5 DREW	16	38	29	30	36	34	36	30	24	31	30	17	30	37	16	21	0	22	-10	7	28	-25
45	OB4 S5 DREW	-7	18	22	-3	27	24	24	38	2	27	31	15	19	30	24	12	-9	32	32	22	29	15
46	OB5 S5 DREW	15	16	2	1	3	1	13	22	10	1	1	-14	10	16	-3	1	-30	20	10	12	34	2

Correlation Matrix Continued

Q-Sort	Q SORT (Participant)	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46
1	OBQ MAR	19	33	26	21	28	11	33	28	21	21	28	17	-7	20	10	-2	34	10	27	15	8	16	-7	15
2	OB2 MAR	3	32	33	12	26	19	20	41	43	17	10	16	-6	19	-2	-11	5	-3	29	12	29	38	18	16
3	OB3 MAR	48	19	19	1	41	12	18	13	7	5	31	21	-5	4	10	-3	52	35	42	32	22	29	22	2
4	OB 4 MAR	33	15	-5	6	18	24	13	30	10	3	10	12	-18	10	13	-12	32	20	19	14	26	30	-3	1
5	OB 5 MAR	46	36	37	11	45	37	31	30	37	18	34	35	-3	7	10	-17	46	20	40	27	27	36	27	3
6	OB 6 MAR	34	32	39	12	34	46	18	28	35	13	16	6	1	14	2	3	27	20	39	15	28	34	24	1
7	CLIENT S1 MAR	32	49	39	10	50	43	26	38	35	27	39	16	-13	17	8	-5	43	35	44	28	23	36	24	13
8	COACH S1 MARJORE	17	33	38	26	40	36	28	18	47	23	19	20	12	33	23	19	20	15	22	29	41	30	38	22
9	COACH TRISTAN	23	25	30	19	22	16	25	1	29	22	24	14	11	20	17	9	34	22	16	12	19	24	2	10
10	CLIENT S2 TRI	44	14	30	10	33	40	23	-3	2	17	35	28	-10	1	4	-14	52	34	49	31	12	31	27	1
11	OB1S2 TRI	41	39	35	5	28	31	14	3	20	16	33	17	-13	5	-3	-16	41	24	39	28	21	30	31	1
12	OB2 S2 TRI	48	22	34	12	17	40	28	10	8	22	45	15	-12	-14	-11	-19	55	24	53	15	5	17	15	-14
13	OB3 S2 TRI	37	28	26	19	43	36	31	19	5	16	21	20	-10	4	12	-6	43	39	44	41	28	30	19	10
14	OB4 S2 TRI	38	22	31	4	34	33	17	14	24	31	25	17	1	2	3	-6	23	17	36	29	25	37	30	16
15	OB 5 S2 TRI	43	29	18	4	26	33	5	1	0	5	4	18	-1	-2	-15	-9	28	35	30	24	8	16	24	-3
16	OB 6 TRI	35	28	20	11	20	26	32	9	-6	0	14	12	-20	-10	6	-23	35	33	19	14	6	21	12	1
17	CLIENT S3 JOANNE	44	8	8	-8	20	27	-5	-2	-1	8	41	9	-10	-13	2	-15	52	41	33	-4	-13	0	-9	-30
18	COACH S3 JOANNE	17	12	23	10	27	-7	5	-2	19	26	27	11	23	24	33	25	34	26	18	47	14	22	32	20
19	OB1 S2 JOANNE	-1	-6	3	-1	18	3	12	3	13	7	8	12	29	33	30	19	7	18	8	16	14	-10	32	10
20	OB2 S3 JOANNE	-3	-8	-4	2	16	10	10	-11	2	18	3	41	22	58	26	42	23	36	-3	33	23	7	22	12
21	OB3 S3 JOANNE	18	36	18	24	46	19	44	2	40	35	11	29	21	52	50	38	26	24	25	49	36	28	29	34

22	OB S4 JOANNE	-12	9	8	29	8	-18	16	-12	6	5	11	24	31	21	27	37	4	-12	9	6	-2	-25	15	2
23	CLIENT S4 ALICE	100	24	27	7	44	40	25	19	11	20	37	12	-4	-10	1	-4	62	41	39	12	24	10	25	-17
24	COACH S4 ALICE	24	100	34	22	44	46	38	36	43	35	25	1	-9	11	0	2	23	11	26	11	15	25	23	10
25	OBS1 S4 ALICE	27	34	100	39	34	35	31	31	44	35	21	5	13	5	12	8	31	15	21	5	21	22	34	5
26	OB2 S4 ALICE	7	22	39	100	27	22	29	13	29	32	5	6	22	23	23	20	17	14	-1	17	32	15	31	32
27	OB3 S4 ALICE	44	44	34	27	100	42	54	39	47	42	23	35	9	30	24	19	39	35	31	29	53	28	25	21
28	OB4 S4 ALICE	40	46	35	22	42	100	26	28	27	30	19	1	-14	6	-14	-7	36	33	29	0	24	30	28	-3
29	OB5 S4 ALICE	25	38	31	29	54	26	100	34	37	40	10	32	3	24	39	22	30	0	35	24	31	15	19	23
30	OB6 S4 ALICE	19	36	31	13	39	28	34	100	28	21	19	4	6	15	5	2	17	17	16	9	29	15	11	11
31	OB7 S4 ALICE	11	43	44	29	47	27	37	28	100	51	10	10	22	29	25	21	8	-15	15	5	36	25	24	20
32	OB8 S4 ALICE	20	35	35	32	42	30	40	21	51	100	22	16	24	18	14	19	23	3	14	6	15	5	17	14
33	OB1 S5 CBC	37	25	21	5	23	19	10	19	10	22	100	9	0	-11	1	-1	56	22	34	3	-4	-6	3	-13
34	OB S5 CBC	12	1	5	6	35	1	32	4	10	16	9	100	5	42	26	26	28	12	21	24	25	12	22	3
35	OB S5 TA	-4	-9	13	22	9	-14	3	6	22	24	0	5	100	42	32	53	-3	2	-10	14	-2	-20	14	14
36	OB S5 TA	-10	11	5	23	30	6	24	15	29	18	-11	42	42	100	31	56	4	13	1	37	43	22	16	39
37	OB S5 TA	1	0	12	23	24	-14	39	5	25	14	1	26	32	31	100	42	20	7	15	44	14	3	19	35
38	OB S5 TA	-4	2	8	20	19	-7	22	2	21	19	-1	26	53	56	42	100	11	13	7	22	15	-12	14	19
39	CLIENT S5 ALISON	62	23	31	17	39	36	30	17	8	23	56	28	-3	4	20	11	100	49	57	33	15	18	23	-10
40	COACH S5 ALISON	41	11	15	14	35	33	0	17	-15	3	22	12	2	13	7	13	49	100	19	22	11	10	28	-14
41	COACH S6 DREW	39	26	21	-1	31	29	35	16	15	14	34	21	-10	1	15	7	57	19	100	36	19	29	21	10
42	OB1 S6 DREW	12	11	5	17	29	0	24	9	5	6	3	24	14	37	44	22	33	22	36	100	39	49	29	57
43	OB2 S6 DREW	24	15	21	32	53	24	31	29	36	15	-4	25	-2	43	14	15	15	11	19	39	100	51	27	38
44	OB3 S5 DREW	10	25	22	15	28	30	15	15	25	5	-6	12	-20	22	3	-12	18	10	29	49	51	100	27	46
45	OB4 S5 DREW	25	23	34	31	25	28	19	11	24	17	3	22	14	16	19	14	23	28	21	29	27	27	100	15
46	OB5 S5 DREW	-17	10	5	32	21	-3	23	11	20	14	-13	3	14	39	35	19	-10	-14	10	57	38	46	15	100

Appendix 10: Methodological Statistics Example (Full data set)

A full copy of an example of the statistical analysis is available in hard copy at the Oxford Brookes University Library