A shift in the room – myth or magic? How do coaches create transformational shifts in a short period of time?

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Abstract

Although transformational learning is widely acknowledged within coaching, little is known about how such learning could be achieved in practice through coaching. Even less is known about how transformation can be achieved within a short period of time. This article reports on research that explores whether transformational shifts in the room can be achieved. The study was conducted using a grounded theory approach with 12 coaches and five clients. Findings demonstrated that transformational shifts evolve over the course of the coaching engagement, rather than happening live in the room. This led to the development of the Evolving Transformational Shift (ETS) model that identifies the interventions that help to increase the possibility of such learning to occur.

Key Words: coaching, transformational learning, shift in the room, sustained change, Evolving Transformational Shift coaching model

Introduction

Within the professional coaching literature transformational learning is accredited great relevance. Bachkirova *et al* (2011) identified transformational learning, as one of the main adult learning theories at the heart of coaching practice; Askew and Carnell (2011) state that transformational coaching, more than any other coaching approach, will lead to sustainable change, the ultimate aim of coaching (Bachkirova et al, 2011); and research from Duckworth and De Haan (2009) highlights that coaching approaches corresponding with how transformational learning is facilitated are more likely to lead to positive coaching outcomes. As it appears, transformational learning has a lot to offer to the practice of coaching, as it is understood today.

However, despite its relevance, very little coaching research is available illuminating how coaches actually achieve transformational learning in their practice (Sammut, 2014; Hannsmann, 2014). Although lessons can be learned from other fields like adult education, also here the current knowledge base is critiqued for its lack of clarity on how to apply this in practice (Taylor and Laros, 2014). Therefore, the current research set out to explore what it is that coaches actually do to achieve transformational learning within their clients.

In researching this phenomenon, the specific focus is on how transformation` can be achieved within a short period of time. As coaching has become more mainstream, taking up bigger parts of corporate budgets, organisations have become more demanding when it comes to the return on investment (ROI) of coaching (Phillips and Phillips, 2005; Lawrence and Whyte, 2014). As argued by several authors (Jay, 2003; Elkins, 2003), personal transformation can have profound results for clients, but also for their companies. Therefore, increased understanding of how such profound learning could be achieved within a short period of time could support coaches in their efforts to face these increased ROI demands. It is in this light of the need for speedy results that Hawkins and Smith (2011) coined the term 'shift in the room'

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(p.232), advocating that a transformational change should happen live during the coaching session. Although their model provides valuable insights, it is predominantly conceptual and relying on their personal experiences. Therefore, this research sets out to explore empirically if and how transformational learning can be achieved within a short period of time.

This article the main findings of the literature review and how the research was designed and conducted. This is followed by an overview of the main research findings, implications for stakeholders and the Evolving Transformational Shift (ETS) model will be presented. Limitations and areas for further research conclude the paper.

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review was to get a better understanding of what transformational learning is, and how it could be fostered. Already within the coaching literature it appeared that there is not one definition describing transformational learning. For example, Cox and Jackson (2011) and Bachkirova (2011) describe transformation as a long-term, evolutionary process where individuals develop their whole person to all they can be. On the other hand, Hawkins and Smith (2011, 2013) describe a shift in the room as a transformational experience that occurs frequently and will help clients to act and think differently in response to a dilemma. Here the focus seems to be not so much on the whole being, but more on transforming those parts that create the individual's sense of 'being stuck'.

Also, beyond the coaching literature there are different perspectives on transformational learning. One well known theory is Mezirow's (2000) view on transformational learning. According to his cognitive/rational theory meaning is made out of experiences and these experiences are filtered through meaning perspectives or habits of mind. Transformative learning happens when an event is encountered that challenges what is believed and a perspective is revised (Cranton and Wright, 2008). Critical reflection and discourse are the main means to foster this transformational learning. However, this theory is critiqued for its emphasis on rationality and limited attention to other ways of knowing (Brookfield, 2000).

An alternative perspective is provided by Dirkx (2000), who emphasises emotive, imaginal, spiritual and arts based facets of learning, those that reach beyond rationality (Dirkx, 2000). Dirkx argued that on a daily basis the unconscious plays a powerful role in shaping our thoughts, feelings and actions. The dialogue with the unconscious is not established verbally, but to allow unconscious elements to come into awareness focus should be on intuitive and imaginative ways of knowing like writing, journaling, and drawing (Dirkx, 2000).

As Cranton and Taylor (2012) state, the term transformation has become a catchall for a wide variety of definitions of transformational experiences. Nevertheless, despite the particular definition of transformational learning, the outcome is the same or similar; 'a deep shift in perspective, leading to more open, more permeable and better justified meaning perspectives', but the ways of getting there can differ (p.3). This implies that participants of this research might not share the same definition of transformational learning and definition of a shift in the room as perceived by the participants of this research needs to be established.

In relation to how transformational learning is fostered a wide variety of research is available, highlighting different elements of the transformational learning process. Key contributors are Taylor (2007), Taylor and Snyder (2012) and Taylor and Laros (2014) who reviewed all major empirical research of the last 15 years (1999-2014). This allowed Taylor and Laros (2014) to identify six interdependent core elements, or 'practices' (p.137) in relation to fostering transformation: work with the individual's experience, promote critical reflection, engage in dialogue, apply a holistic orientation, be aware of context and establish authentic relationships. However, unfortunately Taylor and Laros (2014) fail to provide further explanation and additional research has been reviewed to get a better understanding of each of the

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six practises. The main findings are presented in the second column of Table 1, where they add more detail to the six core competences (first column). Among them are (critical) reflection of past experiences and/or

experiences within the moment, rational and affective ways of knowing, client's readiness, a positive and supportive disposition of the coach and establishing non-judgemental relationships.

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the available literature on fostering transformational learning. However, despite its vast amount, the current literature is also criticised for its lack of clarity of how to apply this in practice (Taylor and Laros, 2014). Also, none of these studies particularly focused on how to achieve transformational learning within a short time frame. Only the CLEAR-model from Hawkins and Smith (2011, 2013) seems to describe this phenomenon, where a transformational shift can be created by following five steps: ***C****ontracting*, ***L****istening*, ***E****xploring,* ***A****ction* and ***R****eview.* Although this model provides relevant insights, it does concern a conceptual model, predominantly based on the personal experiences of the authors. Specifics of this model are presented in the third column of Table 1.

Finally, literature concerning coaching approaches resulting in quick or sudden results was reviewed. Although this did not concern transformational learning, it highlighted alternative ways to achieve profound learning quickly. Of particular interest was Kets de Vries (2014) account of Aha-moments. Although only conceptual, this paper describes a process of *preparation, incubation, illumination* and *verification*, in which the author emphasises the importance of work done outside of awareness; unconsciously mulling over the problem. This suggests that next to whatever is happening in the outside arena, between the coach and coachee (e.g. critical discourse, authentic relationships), what is happening within the client might be relevant as well.

Methodology

The research follows the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), which assumes that research data is co-constructed between researcher and participants and coloured by the researcher's perspectives and values. Consequently, this study is not about finding an exact picture of reality but about constructing one that is applicable for those who share the problem under investigation (Cutcliffe, 2000; Charmaz, 2014).

Grounded theory was the preferred methodology as it allowed for investigating the phenomenon of a shift in the room itself as opposed to researching what such a shift would mean to coaches or clients (Creswell, 2007). The aim was to research what coaches actually *do* to achieve a shift in the room and this orientation towards action and process (e.g. How do people do x?), as opposed to states and conditions (e.g. What do people want? or Why do people do x?), fits more with grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin's (1990, p.38). Furthermore, grounded theory lends itself to a useful and practical outcome of the study, a model that could guide coaches in their efforts to achieve a shift in the room.

	Core practices (Taylor and Laros, 2014)	Contributions of the wider literature (Various authors)	CLEAR model (Adapted from Hawkins and Smith, 2013)
1	Emphasis on **individual experience**; prior experience and what is 'experienced' within the learning event itself	• The primary medium of transformational learning (Taylor and Laros, 2014) • Individual experience could be thoughts, feelings or emotions (Mezirow, 2000; Dirkx, 2006)	• Individual experience is central to conversation, with predominant focus on reflecting on past events. • The experience to be reflected upon is very specific as a result of focused contracting
2	Promotion of **critical reflection**	• The coach supports becoming aware of hidden assumptions, critical reflection and exploration of options and actions (Brockbank and McGill, 2006; Taylor, 2007; Askew and Carnell, 2011) • Alternative view: becoming aware of what is happening in someone's inner world is sufficient and no critical reflection is needed (Merriam, 2004; Dirkx *et al.*, 2006) • The coach can challenge clients by asking incisive questions, confronting inconsistencies and/or using tools like ABCDE, Drama Triangles (Blakey and Day, 2009; Cox, 2013) • Attitude coach: expresses belief in the client, has a future outlook and promotes hope and possibilities, supporting the client when experiencing fear and discomfort (Rostron, 2006; Cranton and Wright, 2008) • Recognise readiness to change (Berger, 2004, Hannsmann, 2014).	• Role of the coach is to challenge the clients underlying beliefs and assumptions, using Heron's Confronting, Catalytic and Cathartic interventions styles • The coach functions as a partner in dialogue to challenge but also to help generate other perspectives and courses of action • Attitude coach: the coach should 'embody' the change as required from the coachee (act as an example and express optimism for the possibility of change. • Craft of the coach; be aware and give high levels of attention, respond with fearless compassion. There is a notion of the coach waiting for a felt sense about what is needed next to make the shift happen.
3	Engaging in a **dialogue** with self and others		
4	Holistic **orientation**; inclusive of other ways of knowing (affective and relational)	• Cognitive/ rational: reflecting on past experience by means of e.g. dialogue, journal, life history exercises, concept maps (Mezirow, 2000; Cox, 2013) • Extrarational: reflecting on emotions, feelings or images experienced within the moment by means of e.g. journal, drawing, writing, performance/ dance (Taylor, 1997; Dirkx ,2000) • Integrated approach: requires *both* reflection and non-reflective activities (Kiely, 2002, 2005; Yorks and Kasl, 2006)	• Reflecting on feelings is one of the four levels of engagement, however, predominantly refers to reflecting on emotions caused by past events instead of emotions experienced within the moment. After achieving cognitive insight additional effort is needed to create an 'embodied shift' (232) by e.g. role-play and rehearsal suggesting inclusion of non-cognitive elements • Emphasises holistic knowing by the coach herself by the use of self and waiting for the felt sense.
5	Awareness of **context**: helping learners develop an appreciation of how personal and sociocultural factors influence learning	• Influence of environment on uncritically assimilate assumptions (Lyon, 2001; Cox 2013) • Social acceptance, acknowledgement and possible appreciation by peers can support or block transformation (Nohl, 2009; Lyon, 2001)	• Explore if assumptions are remainders of past life or still valid • Recognition that changes that take place in the room affects relationships in the wider system.
6	Importance of establishing **authentic relationship**	• Established by: non-evaluative feedback, acceptance, presence, no hierarchy, voluntary participatio shared goals and authenticity (Eisen, 2001; Cranton and Wright, 2008; Taylor and Snyder, 2012)	• Notion of trust, which is built in the stages of Contracting and Listening. Notion of limbic resonance.

Table 1: Overview of the six core practices, complemented by contributions of the wider literature

Several different views on grounded theory exist (Charmaz 2014) and a major difference between them is their view on the status of the literature review. Classic grounded theory argues in favour of delaying the literature review to ensure the researcher is as free and open as possible to discover, and to avoid forcing pre-existing concepts on the data (Glaser and Straus, 1967). However, Thornberg (2012) argues that ignoring 'established theories and research findings implies a loss of knowledge' (p.245) and should be 'used, not to mechanically derive a hypothesis to test (as in deduction), but as a source of inspiration, seeing and interpretation in order to detect pattern' (p.247). Existing literature can be used to generate ideas about how to look at the data, which is also the approach taken for this study. The literature review conducted at the start of this research served to create a frame of reference for this study, guiding the research question,

which in turn informed the choice of paradigm and consequently the choice of methodology. This is presented in Figure 2, which is a visual representation of the research design. It shows how grounded theory was applied for this study.

Data collection & analysis

To recruit participants, an advertisement was distributed to several coaching network groups. For the first six interviews, only coaches with experience in transformational coaching (purposive sampling) were selected. In a grounded theory approach, collecting data happens simultaneously with data analysis and the developing theory guides what and where the next set of data is collected (Charmaz, 2014). For further data collection, another group of five coaches with experience in transformational coaching was chosen with the intention of checking and enriching the emerging categories as well as exploring whether new categories would emerge.

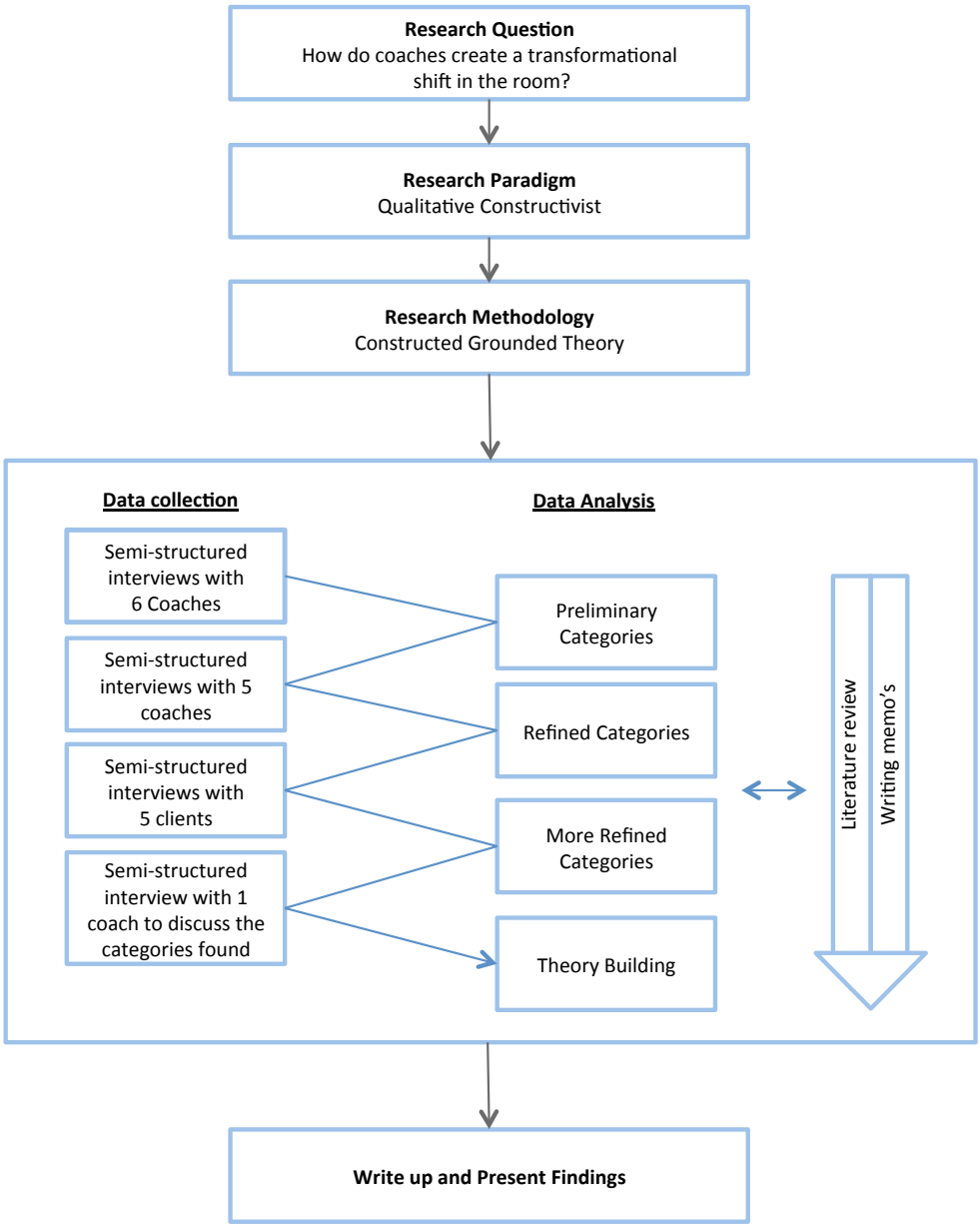

Figure 1. Research Design (partly adapted from Creswell 2013)

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To complement the data collection, five clients who actually experienced a transformational shift themselves, were interviewed. The intention was to address gaps in the emerging theory and to explore additional categories, based on their different experience and points of view. Finally, one more semi-structured interview with a coach was conducted to seek feedback on the emerged theory in an attempt to achieve theoretical saturation. All the interviews were semi-structured, took between 60-90 minutes, were conducted either face to face or via Skype and were all audiotaped and fully transcribed. For this research in total 17 participants were interviewed. Table 1 outlines the demographics and background of the participants.

	Male	Female	Age		Years of experience		Background and Training	Residence
First group of coaches	2	4	< 40	1	< 10	2	Positive Psychology, NLP, Solution Focus, Client Centred, GROW, EFT, Voice Dialogue, Mind Detox, Psychology, Counselling, Person Centred, Neuroscience	UK
			40 - 50	2	10 - 15	2		
			51 - 60	2	16 - 20	1		
			> 60	1	> 20	1		
Second group of coaches & final coach interviewed	2	4	< 40	-	< 10	2	NLP, Grow, Systemic Team coaching, Strengths Coaching, Constellations, Timeline Therapy, Coaching courses (level 5 to MA), Integral Development Coaching, Learning to Listen (work with horses), Coaching Supervision	UK
			40 - 50	2	10 - 15	2		
			51 - 60	4	16 - 20	1		
			> 60	-	> 20	1		
	Male	Female	Age		# Coaching sessions		Experience with coaching	Residence
Group of clients	2	3	< 40	1	< 5	1	First coaching experience ever, had several experiences with coaching/ counselling before hand, followed coaching courses themselves	UK
			40 - 50	2	5 - 10	3		
			51 - 60	2	11 - 20	1		
			> 60	-	> 20	-		

Table 1. Demographics and background of participants

For data analysis, Charmaz's (2014) constructivist approach was followed. The first analytical step concerned initial coding, which involved line-by-line, sentence-by-sentence and incident-by-incident coding, followed by focused coding where the most frequent and/or significant codes were selected to sift through and analyse large amounts of data. Mind maps were created to enhance the conceptualisation of theory development. By applying the method of constant comparison it has been ensured that the emerging theory was truly grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2014).

Memos were written throughout the whole process of data collection and analysis to ensure analysis took place early on in the research process. Focused codes were scrutinised and potential gaps were identified.
Directed by the emerging categories, relevant literature was explored. All literature was treated as another form of data for testing and refining the emergent theory. It was used to explain the data already collected and assimilated into the theory building process. It also positioned this study within the wider research landscape.

Findings

Four key categories, each with several sub-themes, emerged from the data: Understanding of a 'shift in the room'; Setting the scene; Working in the reflective space; The happening of the 'shift in the room'.

1. Understanding of a 'shift in the room'

Before discussing *how* a shift in the room can be achieved, a definition of *what* participants of this research perceived such a shift to be was established. At the start of this study a shift in the room was defined as a transformational experience happening live in a coaching session, transforming a client's perspective and mainly affecting the way of thinking. The process in which this occurs is assumed to start with a) an insight, a moment in which the client truly embraces a new way of seeing the issue, followed by b) changed behaviour resulting from this insight. The latter seems to be supported by the findings of this research, emphasising that the two stages seem to be indissolubly connected. Without changed behaviour, the insight would merely be an Aha-moment. To be able to classify a shift in the room as a transformational experience, proof needs to be found in the client's behaviour. In relation to the other elements, the participants of this research held a far richer definition of a shift in the room. Participants did describe a change In perspective by becoming aware of someone's habitual behaviour, limiting beliefs or conflicting needs which very much resonates with Mezirow's (2000) and Dirkx's (2000) view on transformational learning. However, they also described how increased awareness of how individuals interact with their environment leads to perspective change. One coach's perspective demonstrates this:

We were looking at some quite complicated situations he'd got himself into at work. There was a lot of emotion. After doing an exercise with transactional analysis, this then led to a whole series of realisations about how his behaviour was actually making the situation far worse and causing many more problems for him in the workplace, but also for everybody else as well.

This seems to fit with Torbert's (2004) and Fisher's *et al.* (2003) view on developmental learning. The extent to which someone is able to understand the perspectives and needs of the people around them, signposts the development into a more complex and integrated worldview is. It appears that changing perspective does not solely concern becoming aware of personal beliefs, it is also about becoming aware of how people interact in the wider system. Albeit via a different route, in both cases the client will obtain a more complex and integrated way of seeing.

Different views existed about the frequency in which a shift in the room could occur and the time needed to achieve such a shift. For some coaches it concerned dramatic and powerful changes, happening infrequently, for others they occurred on a regular basis. Tisdell (2012) describes how dramatic changes, happening infrequently, affect clients on multiple domains (emotions, rational, physical or spiritual) and transformations happening more often mainly affect someone's thinking. In a way transformational learning could be perceived to happen along this continuum and it seems to come down to the coach's personal view about transformational learning what they believe to be the case. If it is believed, either by the participants of this research or maybe even by the reader of this paper, that true transformation only concerns big and dramatic changes, it becomes difficult to see that transformational shifts in the room can happen frequently. However, on the other hand, the more someone is able to also consider smaller changes as transformational, the more the opposite is possible. Becoming aware of one's own beliefs about transformational learning seems a relevant exercise, as one of the participating coaches seems to realise himself:

> *Actually some other thought has occurred to me. Oh yes, I hadn't really considered it that way, I initially wouldn't call it transformation, I call it gentle awareness raising. Oh my goodness, I just, you know what? I have been thinking about this entirely the wrong way. I see this completely differently now as a result of this conversation. You have opened up some stuff I hadn't even considered. Actually a little gentle awareness raising and the person suddenly gets hit between the eyes with something that impacts on them in a sort of significant way.*

In relation to the time needed to allow for a shift in the room to happen coaches described a variety of possibilities, from happening in one session to evolving over a longer period of time. For example, planting a seed in the first couple of sessions, which grows into an insight in a later session; reflection on work done during a session that leads to an insight in between sessions; experiencing an insight during a session,

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however more sessions are needed to support behavioural changes. The shift seems to occur within but also over the course of the coaching journey.

This rich definition proves to be a valuable aid in facing the increased demands on coaching. As a shift in the room can be achieved in more ways than initially thought, the likelihood of its occurrence increases as well. It also causes the term *shift in the room* not be appropriate anymore and is replaced by *transformational shift* to better capture the findings of this research.

2. Setting the scene

This category describes elements that do not directly lead to a transformational shift, but appear to be essential in providing the right situation for one to occur. These are a) a caring and trusting relationship, b) the readiness and commitment of the client to do the hard work that is needed to come to meaningful insights and c) the full presence and dedication of the coach to help their clients on this journey. These are not necessarily new concepts when it comes to fostering transformational learning. However, by reviewing neurological research an original view is provided on why these conditions are relevant. For example, as articulated by one of the coaches, trust is needed to come to profound insights:

> *Then there is a process of creating that relationship of trust, really, and have the person sense you and experience you in in such a way that they are prepared to open themselves in such a way and be vulnerable enough within. They feel supported enough that they can let themselves come to the point of having the insight.*

According to Zull (2002) and Johnson (2006), knowledge is stored in neuronal networks and to change knowledge, change in these neuronal networks is required. This restructuring of the brain is called brain plasticity and when clients experience a supportive and caring attitude from the coach, chemicals in the brain are stimulated that make the brain more plastic. Hence more neuronal networking and meaningful learning can take place (Cozolino, 2002). To be *able* in the first place to consider new ways of seeing, a caring and trusting environment is vital. The presence of trust as well as the other key conditions seems essential, because their absence is identified as the main obstacles to preventing a transformational shift from happening.

3. Working in the reflective space

To actually make a transformational shift happen, coaches are not consciously applying any technique or approach to help clients come to their insights. Instead, each next question/ intervention is determined by what is happening within the moment, like one of the coaches expresses as follows:

> *I think there is a sixth sense. There is an intuition and you hear. There is a change in skin tone, the eyes go a bit shiny, the emotions come in, you can see all those things, but there's something else. Sometimes it is a throwaway comment that's just…you can't always put a finger on it, but it's important to that person and I would say "Oh, that's really interesting that you said that, do you want to talk a bit more about that?"*

Coaches make numerous decisions within the moment, relying heavily on their empathetic, sensing and intuitive skills. A key element seems to be affective attunement: 'the ability to hear, see, sense, interpret, and respond to the client's verbal and nonverbal cues in a way that communicates to the client that he/she is genuinely seen, felt, and understood' (Wylie and Turner, 2011, p.8). This seems particularly relevant, because as Goleman (1966) states, people's emotions are rarely put into words, far more often they are expressed through other cues. The ability to pick up non-verbal cues makes coaches more attuned to the clients' real needs or wants and this not only supports building trust, but also creates resonance in the relationship. This refers to a process in which initial exploration and reflection leads to an increased sense of connectedness. By means of skilful attunement, the coach increasingly understands the client, which makes the client feel more and more understood. Whatever question or intervention the coach is offering

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next, this increasingly resonates with the client's real needs, potentially leading to profound insights. The better these skills are developed, the better the coach is able to attend to the relationship and gather and read information provided by the client.

It can be assumed that mastery of these skills will increase the coach's effectiveness in creating transformational shifts. Unfortunately, these skills are both learned and practised tacitly (Goleman, 1996). This suggests that coaches cannot develop these skills by reading or talking about them because articulation of the craft leads to an impoverished version of actual practice (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Polanyi (1962) argued that the way to develop these skills is to observe the master. Therefore, less experienced coaches might increase their ability tremendously when enough time is spent with coaches already mastering these skills. This emphasises the importance of working together and/or observing other coaches in order to master the art of coaching. Demonstrations, interaction with supervisors or coach-the-coach sessions could provide opportunity for coaches to learn the tacitly displayed skills of master coaches be but there might also be an opportunity for existing coaching courses to facilitate this type of learning in a more structured way. This in turn will help the profession to face the increasing demands from the outer world, especially when transformational change is required.

The data also suggested that during the process of reflection, coaches may form a hunch of what might help their clients forward, as expressed below:

> *So, it may well be that you can be in advance of the client in knowing what it is they need. I also think that you can see insights.*
>
> *From what they're telling, I can see what's happening. So, I can see….to me it's crystal clear. How do I get them to see that?*

It appears that acting as a 'third eye' and actually *acting* upon this hunch triggers the formation of the insight:

> *What she did was, she was the outsider who said, "I see all these things and I think you may be going here or you may be going there and you've got this option. Are you seeing them as well?" She helped me to focus my efforts and be a bit more strategic. If I hadn't had this conversation with her, I would have stayed in marketing fulltime. It totally changed my career.*

Based on the personal style of the coach this approach can be more or less gentle, but it concerns directing the coaching conversation nevertheless. Johnson (2006) explains this by stating that the questions asked by coaches stimulate the neuronal process of reflection. During reflection the brain searches and makes neuronal connections between the presented (new) knowledge and what is already known (Zull, 2002: p.164). So, when a coach provides a 'new' perspective, observation or question, the client starts to make neuronal connections between this new piece of information and what they already know. It is during this activity that new ways of thinking or seeing are formed, or in other words, insights are established, which seems to be instigated by what the coach has offered.

However, the notion that coaches direct the course of the conversation in any way seems to be controversial. Traditional coaching principles expect coaches to be non-directive (Blakey & Day, 2012) and assume that clients are resourceful (Rogers, 2008). The non-directive principle requires that 'the coach does not direct the topic or discussion within the coaching session' in any way (Blakey & Day, 2012, p.33). Many coaches embrace these traditions, as did the coaches participating in this research. They are uncomfortable with the notion that directing the coaching conversation can facilitate a transformational shift. As one coach said, ''*I find it a bit arrogant to assume to know what a client needs*'. However, as expressed in the following quotations, other coaches argued that only asking non-directive questions could be a limited view:

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I think the idea that coaching is about asking questions is such a limited view of what coaching is about. I would almost say that, yes, you need to ask good questions in order to elicit a response, but I actually think it's much more about the observation that you can offer, the distinctions that you can offer, the curiosity that you can reflect back that actually where the power is.

I think that is the role of the coach, to see the blind spots. I always talk about blind spots in my sessions. Telling people the coaching is all about addressing the blind spots, but because they're blind spots you don't know that you have them so I have to.

Also Blakey and Day (2012) challenged this non-directive stance and argued, that these non-directive traditions have been useful to develop coaching to a professional level, yet it is questionable to what extent they might cause limitations as well. This research demonstrates it is not only a useful, but also an effective intervention, and maybe it is time to re-evaluate these traditions and consider the merits of different but seemingly effective coaching interventions.

4. The happening of the 'shift in the room'

This category captures how coaches know profound learning took place and how they knew the learning experience was transformational. It appears that an insight is characterised by a moment of silence, a moment in which clients seem to withdraw within themselves. During these moments of silence, the brain is not thinking logically or analytically, but engaging a part of itself that makes links across the whole brain. During this process, a new map, a so-called super-map is created out of already existing maps and it is this newly created map that provides the actual insight (Rock & Page, 2009). These moments of silence may last for a few seconds, hours or years (Aldous, 2007), which explains how clients can come to insights not only during the session, but also at a later stage when they further reflect on what has been discussed.

The moment the unconscious drops the solution in the conscious mind, the moment in which clients become aware of their insight; they experience a somatic arousal (Aldous, 2007; Hadamard, 1945). This moment is also known as illumination, which participants described as 'answers are bubbling up' and 'insights appear suddenly'. Similarly, although 'holding silences' was not described as a deliberate intervention to allow insights to occur, it seems a vital strategy to allow for breakthrough moments as it allows clients to do the needed inner work. This does not mean a coach should just stop talking and be quiet but should demonstrate skill in knowing when and how to keep the silence (Kline, 1999; McLeod, 2002).

However, the insight itself will not lead to changed behaviour automatically. The insight might create a new super-map in the brain that allows for different behaviour; this does not mean it will be automatically chosen by the brain as the new way to behave. As Duhigg (2012) explains, when it comes to changing habitual behaviour, effort should be put into actually using this new map and the more often the brain does this, the deeper the behaviour becomes ingrained to the point where the new behaviour becomes automatic. A very powerful way to achieve this is to start with actual practice within and between the coaching sessions straight away. To achieve true transformational change, it seems highly advisable for coaches to dedicate sufficient time to actual practice.

The findings discussed above lead to the development of the 'Evolving Transformational Shift' model (Figure 2). In the model, the horizontal axis represents how the shift is no longer a shift in the room but can evolve over time. The vertical axis demonstrates how over time the experience will have more and more impact on the client. The insight itself might not lead to transformational learning straight away but by emphasising behavioural change more profound and sustainable effects will be achieved. Although this new model suggests a linear process, in practice the actual experience of a transformational shift is less straightforward and clients appear to go back and forth in their learning journey. The intention is to show how one stage supports and leads into the other, in which all stages function as building blocks towards a full transformational shift experience.

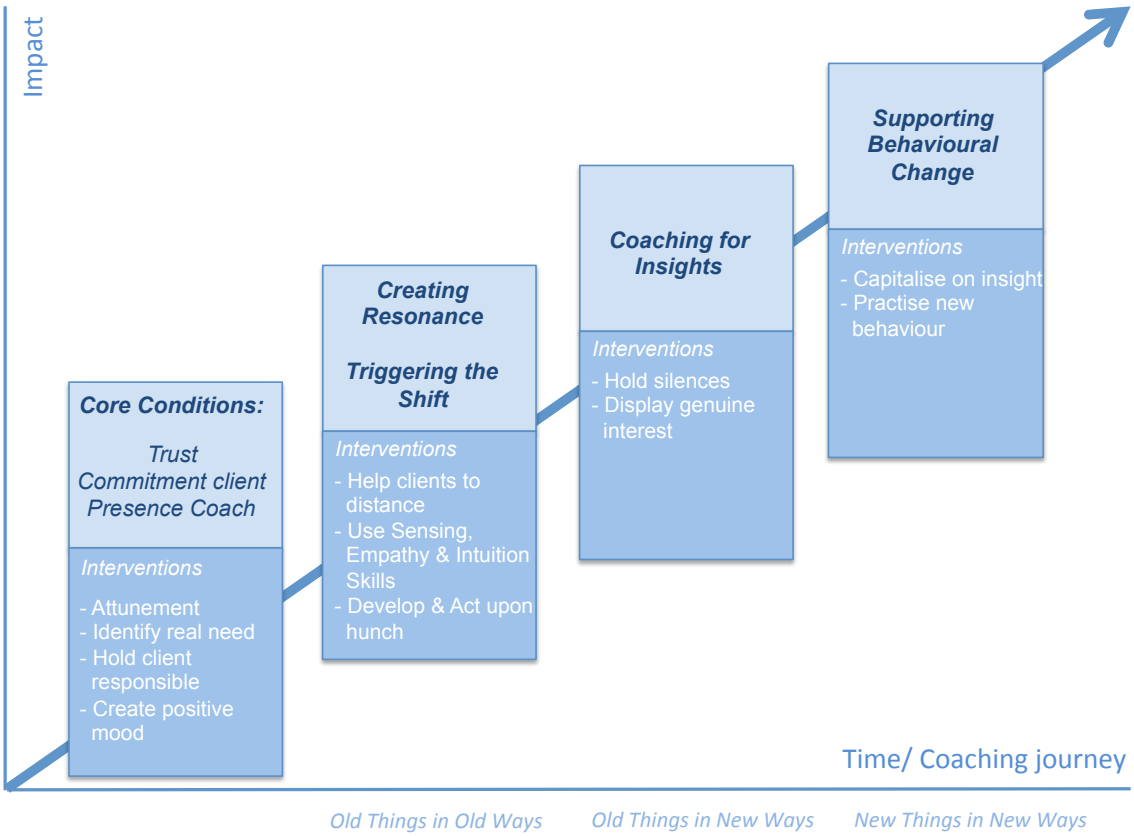

Figure 2. Evolving Transformational Shift model (ETS)

Conclusion

The research set out to explore if and how transformational shifts could be achieved within a short period of time. The findings describe how a transformational shift *evolves*, as opposed to happening live in the room. It was suggested that increasing brain plasticity, affective attunement, developing and acting upon hunches, holding the silence, and establishing actual practice all seem to be critical coaching interventions. The findings led to the development of the Evolving Transformational Shift model, which could be used to help increase the possibility of such learning occurring. Coaches who aim to achieve profound results in a short time frame could benefit from this model by incorporating it into their practice, or by focusing on one or more interventions to improve their performance.

This research challenged Hawkins and Smith's (2011) notion of a shift in the room. Although the insight might happen live in a session, the complete transformational shift evolves over a longer period of time. This suggests the shift in the room is a myth: however, it is not magic either. Although the experience of sudden insights might feel like magic to clients, they are not entirely unexpected. They are the result of hard work that has taken place leading up to these moments. It is therefore through the dedication and skilled interventions of the coach that an evolving transformational shift could be generated. The ETS-model is a valuable counterpart of the CLEAR model from Hawkins and Smith (2011) and may serve coaches who aim to achieve a shift in the room but find themselves unsuccessful in their attempts. Instead of starting to question their own capabilities, they would be better served by adjusting their practice or their expectations in order to accommodate evolving transformational shifts instead. Supervisors who have

acquainted themselves with the ETS-model might also be better equipped to support coaches who face similar challenges.

Limitations and areas for further research

The ETS-model offers an interpretive portrayal of the studied world and cannot be widely generalized. The model would benefit from further development with, for example, action research to make it relevant for a wider range of coaches and circumstances. Also, more research could identify what might influence the individual variables of the ETS-model. For example, does a directive approach help clients come to insights faster than a non-directive approach?

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