

Academic Paper

Reflexivity and reciprocity to maintain trusting relationships in organisational coaching: a practice framework

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Abstract

This paper advances understanding of coaching practice for maintaining trust in organisational coaching relationships. Drawing on a co-produced autoethnographical method, the study illustrates how coaches experience challenges to relational trust and issues of system trust over time. We show how reflexivity allows coaches to consider how the context affects their relationships and offer a practice model for organisational coaches to support cycles of reflexivity and reciprocity for maintaining trust.

Keywords

Organisational coaching, self-reflexivity, critical reflexivity, reciprocity, trust

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Introduction

Organisational coaching is a situated discursive social practice (Fatien, Louis & Islam, 2022; Shoukry & Cox, 2018; Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2018) that takes place with a coach external or internal to the organisation. Navigating complex, power-laden organisational contexts presents challenges for coaches in maintaining trust with their coachees over time. Yet there is little research into how coaches maintain trust in organisational coaching relationships, with a gap in relation to internal coaches (Terblanche & Heyns, 2020). Interpersonal trust allows questioning, open sharing, and mutual understanding between coach and coachee, leading to learning and development (Cox, 2012). Individual coachee perception of coach trustworthiness is complicated by organisational culture and power dynamics and requires critical engagement by the coach, particularly an internal coach. This paper addresses the call for a better understanding of the practices that coaches might use to form and maintain trust in their coaching relationships, taking account of the practice context and its inherent power dynamics (De Haan & Gannon, 2017). We respond to calls for a critical research perspective (Cushion, 2018; Fatien et al., 2022; Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2014) “to

develop accessible models that help practitioners assess how the *context* is affecting them and their clients” (Shoukry & Cox, 2018, p. 423, italics added).

The paper presents an autoethnographical study of an internal organisational coach’s dynamic engagement with coaching relationships in a complex political and professional environment during a team coaching assignment. Our practice experience is rooted in decades of complex organisational contexts and individually our research has explored our own sensemaking in relation to advanced coaching practice. We aim to bring together tacit experiential knowing and critical engagement with theory to illustrate how an internal coach makes judgements to demonstrate trustworthiness and respect coachee vulnerability in their coaching relationships. We draw on theorising about coach reflexivity in support of strategies for navigating organisational coaching dynamics (Fatien et al., 2022) and building reciprocal trust between coach and coachee over time (Cox, 2012).

First, we set out our understanding of core concepts: trust, power, reflexivity, and reciprocity. Second, we explain our co-produced autoethnographical research (Kempster & Stewart, 2010) approach to illustrate lived experiences of coaching practice over time. Third, we offer evocative self-narratives from one author’s practice, interspersed with the conceptual framing to illustrate practices of sensemaking within situated coaching practice drawing on Clarke’s (2005) situational analysis method. Finally, we bring these insights together in to an accessible practice model for organisational coaches that facilitates practices of self-reflexivity and critical reflexivity and reciprocity to support trusting coaching relationships.

Trust and reciprocity in organisational coaching relationships

Research suggests that trust is central to successful coaching relationships, particularly from the viewpoint of the coachee (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Blackman, Moscardo & Gray, 2016; Corrie & Lawson, 2017; De Haan & Gannon, 2017). We draw on Frederiksen’s (2014, p.168) conceptualisation of trust as “continually constituted in a relational process involving both agents and the situations and relationships in which they engage each other”. Our disposition to trust is informed by our experiences of the social structure in which we operate and having opened ourselves up to another person the trust develops over time through the relationship and the context of that relationship. Cox’s (2012) exploration of peer coaching highlights the social complexity of trust in organisational coaching where the history of a relationship, the degree of reciprocity and collegiality within the relationship and the cumulative experiences over time play a part in the willingness to trust and the likelihood of trust developing. Cox (2012) found initial trust was based on shared values and confidentiality, whilst the willingness to share personal details developed over time reinforcing the “balance of reciprocity” (p.430) as sharing without fear of negative consequences led to further trust developing. Two separate studies suggest that coaches can increase coachees’ perceptions of their trustworthiness by displaying consistent integrity and competence (Blackman et al., 2016), including “ability, benevolence and integrity” (Terblanche & Heyns, 2020, p. 10). In internal coaching relationships, the shared environment is particularly significant. Cox (2012, p. 438) identifies the role played by “system trust” in peer coaching pairs where participants question the motives of management involvement and become wary of a bigger agenda operating that erodes relational trust. Our study aims to explore coach practice strategies for demonstrating trustworthiness both in relation to individual and system trust factors that promote reciprocity and coachee trust in the coaching relationship.

Power and neutrality-in-practice in organisational coaching relationships

Organisational agendas, oppressive cultures and mismatched stakeholder expectations place external pressures or perceptions of power on a coaching assignment (Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2014, 2018; Reissner & Du Toit, 2011; Shoukry & Cox, 2018). A coach has power to influence

outcomes and “is very much a part of what emerges” in a dynamic flow of questions and responses when co-creating the coaching experience with their client (Askeland, 2009, p. 73). Askeland (2009) challenges coaches to reconsider their claims to neutrality as “we are always embroiled in our own beliefs and ideologies, and this *will* affect our coaching and the client” (p. 74) and to focus on the context and relationships of the coachee. Shoukry (2017) also challenges the discourse of the coach as a neutral expert inviting moral engagement with the wider social implications of coaching (Gannon, 2021). Internal coaches engaged in supporting organisational change are implicitly aligned as active change agents which challenges an assumed neutral stance.

Fatien et al. (2022, p. 3) propose that coaches’ “neutrality-in-practice” involves dynamic and active engagement with critical and reflexive sensemaking within political and professional environments. Coaches can navigate the tensions and contradictions encountered through formulating strategies to understand and respond actively to practice challenges. For example, through individualisation strategies which arise from dissonance and emotional disturbance in response to tensions experienced whereby the coach perceives the challenge as emanating from their own lack of competence and/or conduct (Fatien et al., 2022). This involves reflexivity and self-development in relation to the perceived lack. Individualisation strategies can be linked to a coach’s active demonstration of ability, benevolence, and integrity to promote trust in the coaching relationship (Terblanche & Heyns, 2020). Secondly, socialisation strategies which arise by distancing from the tensions experienced, whereby the coach perceives the challenge to have organisational and systemic roots in the coaching context (Fatien et al., 2022). This requires the coach to reflexively challenge and manage the external environment of the coaching relationship. Socialisation strategies can be linked to the coach’s active engagement with managing system trust factors affecting the coaching relationship (Cox, 2012). Engaging neutrality through reflexivity requires the coach to practice with self-awareness, derived from individualisation strategies, and with power-awareness, derived from socialisation strategies and value-awareness which emanates from both strategies (Fatien et al., 2022). We bring this dynamic view of coaching neutrality-as-practice together with an understanding of trust as involving reciprocity in organisational coaching relationships to throw light on how coaches might adopt a range of strategies to form and maintain trust in their coaching relationships, taking account of the practice context and its inherent power dynamics (De Haan & Gannon, 2017).

From reflection to reflexivity

Coaching research is inconsistent in recommending how coaches pay attention to the quality of their coaching relationships. Some studies work with the concept of reflection (Gessnitzner & Kauffeld, 2015; Shaw & Glowacki-Dudka, 2019; Welman & Bachkirova, 2010) whilst others call for reflexivity in relation to the power dynamics informing the coaching relationship (Askeland, 2009; Fatien et al., 2022; Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2014, 2018; Reissner & Du Toit, 2011). Cushion (2018) challenges inconsistent and imprecise descriptions of reflective practice within coaching literature, and the lack of criticality in its conceptualisation and in use. Reflection implies an objective observation of our practices against accepted theory and assumes we have conscious awareness of the instinctive tacit knowledge informing the choices we are making. There is a risk that we overlook the socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts in which theory was developed and in which the coaching takes place and assume intrinsic neutrality to the knowledge itself and the context in which we might apply it. Reflexivity is essential in this practice: firstly, to problematise and question one’s self identity as the subject and object of reflection; secondly, “to distinguish reflective practices that are transformative from those complicit with existing power hierarchies” (Cushion, 2018, p. 87). Coaching is a situated practice and organisational contexts demand “a process by which individuals, interpreting their experience from within their situated tradition, come to understand their social context and relationships with others and use this understanding to adapt themselves and their personal projects” (Hibbert, 2021, p. 20). Reflexivity “becomes a resource as we begin to recognize the impact of our own practices and ways of relating on the process of constructing realities” (Cunliffe & Jun, 2005, p. 230).

Reflexive practice incorporates two separate yet related processes of self-reflexivity and critical reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2016; Cunliffe & Jun, 2005). Reflexivity surfaces what is “often taken-for-granted” (Cunliffe, 2002, p.40) and being self-reflexive implies challenging our “prejudice, bias, thoughts and habits” (Cunliffe & Jun, 2005, p. 226); our ways of “being and relating” (Cunliffe & Jun, 2005, p. 230) and often begins with the coach paying attention to “striking moments” (Cunliffe, 2002, p. 42) or of being “struck” (Corlett, 2013, p. 454) by their physical and emotional responses to the coaching relationship and its context. Critical reflexivity focusses on our external environment, contexts, our place, and social identities, and seeks to “identify the social constructions of tradition and ideology that shape our interpretations of experience, to interrupt and challenge the unquestioned norms that we carry and reproduce in this way” (Hibbert, 2021, p.17). Critical reflexivity helps coaches to consider “power relations, either as a subject of power (generating abuse of power as a coach) or object of power (potential victim of abuse of power)” (Fatien Diochon & Nizet, 2019, p. 474). We propose that coaches who are engaged in self- and critical reflexive practice access the self-awareness and power awareness required to support them in empowered action through a range of individualising and/or socialising strategies. We now explore how reflexivity can inform a coach’s awareness of reciprocity in the relationship and its effects on trust.

Reflexivity and reciprocity

Cox (2012) found high trust peer coaching relationships require a balance of reciprocity. Reciprocal exchange between internal organisational coaches and their coachees has the potential to reduce power differentials through sharing vulnerability with each other, thereby building trust in the coaching relationship. Reflexivity supports coaches to navigate the ethical dilemmas of neutrality-in-practice to remain morally engaged (Fatien et al., 2022) and maintain reciprocity in their coaching relationships. This approach requires that coaches examine their lived experience of coaching relationships, as they unfold through time and consider the values underpinning their ongoing choices and actions in those relationships. This may involve stepping out of assumed neutrality in relation to other system stakeholders or demonstrating bonds of attachment and care for the coachee and whatever has been made vulnerable. Reflexivity and reciprocity provide an ethical foundation on which to base coaching relationships and an anchor for coaches in situations of dynamic complexity.

Methodology

To explore reflexivity and reciprocity for maintaining trust in coaching relationships we present a co-produced autoethnographical study (Kempster & Stewart, 2010) based on the first author’s first-hand experiences of coaching an organisational team. We adopt autoethnography to explore the socially embedded and contextually situated nature of coaching relationships (Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013). Autoethnography enables a personal experience to illuminate wider organisational experience (Boyle & Parry, 2007). Based on the first author’s situated practice the co-produced autoethnography facilitates the “iterative and reflexive process of building the story” (Kempster & Stewart, 2010, p. 210). Through our professional discussions we sensed that there was a compelling story to tell and, yet, its personal nature was imbued with risk, exposing a vulnerable self in the service of organisational insights (Boyle & Parry, 2007). Furthermore, it can be challenging to surface “everyday reflexive knowhow of in-the-moment practice” (Simon, 2018, p.50) when much of it may be tacit, sensory rather than linguistically based, and recalled in memory fragments (Mace, 2010). Although Kempster asserts that he would “interrogate” his co-author to reveal practice insights (Kempster & Stewart, 2010, p.211) we describe this process as engaging in reflexive dialogue supporting the first author to surface memories, develop shared understandings between us, challenging assumptions and exploring the why and how of practice. As coaches we are trained to help coachees make sense of experience through listening to their stories, facilitating reflexivity, clarifying meaning and surfacing assumptions (Cox, 2013) so dialogic

inquiry brought our coaching approach in to our research method. The collaborative engagement with artefacts from practice such as interview notes, observations, client feedback, situational analysis maps (Clarke, 2005) and reflexive diaries challenged both authors to take a critical perspective, bringing awareness of the political, social, and relational pressures informing first author's practice choices. Lapadat, (2017) endorses the collaborative approach to autoethnography to bring rigour and potential for collective action.

Developing the autoethnography

We developed the autoethnography in five steps. Firstly, the first author created a reflexive story – a self-narrative (Sparkes, 2000; Taber, 2010) based on a collation of artefacts (Duncan, 2004; Muncey, 2005) from an intensive two-year evaluation of practice working as a Senior Organisation Development Lead in a large complex organisation, and based on autobiographical materials (Chang, 2013), memories and sensemaking from her 20-year career.

Secondly, the second author read the story and together we discussed the content to understand more deeply the story we wanted to tell. Denzin (2013) asserts that stories revolve around an epiphany in a person's life, perhaps a defining moment or a series of events that lead to a moment of change, of learning. The first author characterised their learning epiphany for maintaining trust as the 3Rs: relationships, reflexivity, and reciprocity. Drawing on Chang (2013), the second author posed questions such as: what is the significance of these concepts in your practice? what is important about these concepts for maintaining trust? how can these concepts help us to explain what happened in your story? This inquiry highlighted the first author's use of Clarke's (2005) situational analysis framework to develop their reflexivity and the second author invited them to create an illustrative example from experience.

Thirdly, we developed our deeper understanding of how the 3Rs relate to maintaining trust by jointly writing our conceptual understanding incorporating related concepts of power and neutrality. Through this process we engaged critically and reflexively with the extant theory of trust in coaching relationships in organisational contexts and sought to contribute our own theorising through challenging and building on the "living body of thought" (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 229).

Fourthly, the first author wrote a new version of their story focussed on how the concepts emerged in a chronological retelling with a focus on the practices involved. Together we reviewed and discussed the story again to ensure we were satisfied that the narratives gave compelling insights into maintaining trust through our three original concepts. However, the narrative contained two challenges in writing for publication. We were i) uncomfortable with the risk of exposing coachees whose stories were not ours to tell, and which may be obvious to those in our professional networks and ii) conscious of the professional exposure to the first author in sharing her vulnerable self. We considered how we could tell the story in a way that respected relational ethics with former colleagues (Ellis, 2007). One option was to rewrite the story in fictionalised vignettes (Doloriert and Sambrook, 2009) by creating characters and events drawn from the research material to generalise the coaching context. We also considered if the second author should write these vignettes as a contribution to the "collective interpretation" (Chang, 2013, p. 112) and to soften the "sting of memory" for the first author (Denzin, 2013, p. 128). However, we were concerned we risked losing the "emotional credibility, vulnerability and honesty" of the lived experience (Bochner, 2000, p. 270).

Finally, we concluded the first author could rewrite the practice story, developing composite narratives from the perspective of her current position as a coach educator, and expressing moments of practice relating to trust from her wider experience embedded within the analysis as illustrations of the conceptual themes. As such, this is a "twice told tale, 'revealing' embodied representations from moments of practice" (Denshire, 2014, p. 832) where we create the conditions for "rewriting and hence re-experiencing" (Denzin, 2013, p. 126). Next, we present excerpts from the final story and our theorising to highlight practice themes of recognising power in organisational

contexts, attending to trust in the relationship, engaging in self-reflexivity, engaging in critical reflexivity, and acting reflexively with reciprocity.

Findings

Six practice themes were identified:

1. Recognising power in organisational contexts

On several occasions as a work-based coach, I have been requested to “fix” individuals or teams who have signalled distress and asked for external help. I was seduced by two kinds of hierarchical pressure into accepting these coaching assignments which I did not challenge nor even confront at the time. Firstly, people with higher seniority than me made the requests which gave me a sense of personal security and status in the organisation. Secondly, I derived power and self-esteem from the role of “fixer”, assuming the ability to soothe, mend and facilitate development for those with a lesser status in the organisation due to their being labelled “problematic.” At the time, my failure to pay full attention to interpretation of the power dynamic caused repeated disruption to my coaching relationships and their progress. I believe that raising and discussing these power issues both with the commissioning executives and my coachees would have allowed us to negotiate a more equitable relationship, or at least to acknowledge the inequity and the implicit limitations on the coaching assignment.

Cunliffe (2009) recognises pressures for managers to manipulate others (consciously or not) to achieve organisational goals. This pressure extends to internal coaches working with individuals or teams in organisations and requires them to examine their use of power and how it affects trust in the coaching relationship. This narrative illustrates the first author’s recognition of her explicit and implicit use of power over her coachees. The first author is an embedded and embodied being (Cushion, 2018) and recognises the ethical responsibility to consider her position and actions in relation to the hierarchical seduction that went unchallenged at the time. She sees that multiple stories told by coach, coachee and organisation interact to inform one another in constructive or abusive ways (Reissner and Du Toit, 2011) and reconsiders how to negotiate the boundaries of organisational coaching with transparency to build system trust (Cox, 2012).

2. Attending to trust in the relationship

A critical incident occurred in my coaching practice which led me to pay full attention to the dynamics of power in that context. Following our usual protocol, at the end of an extensive coaching assignment, my colleague conducted a series of interviews with staff to explore their experiences of coaching. After I listened back to the interviews, I felt sick, and I couldn’t sleep for nights. I heard how I represented power, control, and judgement to my coachees and that, contrary to my intentions, I had added to their problems. I reflected on the times in the process when I may have interrupted or led the discussion; I had implicitly reinforced my power as the external change agent, denying my coachees’ agency. I had undermined trust in the very relationships I was seeking to build. For the first time, I was able to fully experience myself as embodied and embedded in this coaching situation and it hurt!

Through hearing, feeling, and paying attention to the coaching relationship failures the first author uncovered valuable insights (Fatien Diochon & Nizet, 2019). The awakening of her sensory responses to her coachees’ interviews was a “striking moment” (Cunliffe, 2002) provoking a movement from self-reflection to self-reflexivity. The first author moved from an emotionally-distanced position which had led to objectifying her coachees to emotionally-engaged, able to process her feelings and make decisions about the issue (Fatien Diochon & Nizet, 2019). The first author undertook a “rigorous critique of habitual practices” (Cunliffe & Jun 2005, p. 228) and

recognised her senior hierarchical position in relation to her coachees and the power, control, and judgement that this had conveyed. Moreover, this had been reinforced by her conversational positioning as external change agent leading the process. Both expressions of power through positioning had denied her coachees' agency in the coaching relationship and support Gessnitzner and Kauffeld's (2015) findings that dominance by the coach in agreement of tasks and goals has a negative effect on coaching outcomes. These insights led her to problematise her self-identity in the coaching relationship and recognise that coaching was primarily a social and embodied experience for all participants, including her as coach. Self-reflexivity enabled her to question her ways of being and "ways of interacting and their effect on other people" (Cunliffe 2008, p. 134). In striving to maintain relational balance between different stakeholders in the hierarchy, she had created relational distortion between herself and her coachees (Fatien et al., 2022) which had eroded their trust in her and the system.

3. Engaging in self-reflexivity: tuning into emotions

I recall that I was often frightened as I walked down the corridor to see teams of people who were mostly suspicious of and hostile to my involvement. I numbed my feelings of fear and put on a brave face to try to build trust and rapport with people who sometimes refused to speak with me or left the room when I arrived. I imagined that I was a neutral coach enabled by well-honed professional skills as a defence against feeling frightened. But this prevented me from listening, feeling, and empathising fully with the different perspectives in those teams and honestly appraising what I and we could do together.

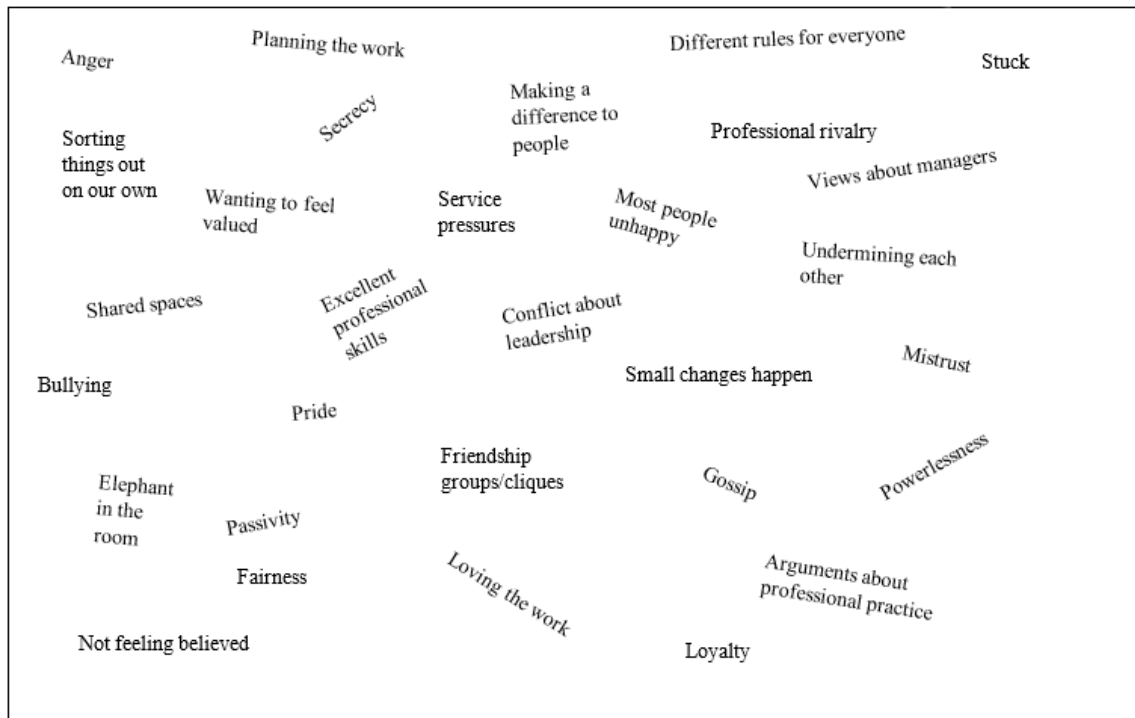
As the first author reflected upon self as coach-in-action by close listening to the interview recordings, she moved away from her previous position of assumed coach neutrality and emotional detachment to experiencing her vulnerability and reciprocal relationship with her coachees. She re-examined the implications of her choices and actions on her coachees' trust. Emotional awareness can inform sensemaking (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015) and empirical research with coaches (Fatien Diochon & Nizet, 2019) suggests that emotional awareness alerts the coach to attend to emerging ethical issues, can aid interpretation of the situation, and help to inform decision making. A significant reframing moment was recognition of the implicit power of her communication choices in the coaching dialogue. This advances Cunliffe's (2009) concept of leader self-reflexivity into the coaching sphere. Listening for and thinking about positional or other forms of power enacted through voice, or other communicative acts, within the coaching relationship is a self-reflexive practice. The first author's resulting self-awareness about her ego and emotional detachment led to reappraisal of her individual conduct and competence and an internal reconnection with the compromised social bond in her coaching relationship, empowering her to consider options for action.

4. Engaging in self-reflexivity: self in relation to others (people and things)

I remember the relief of sharing my feelings about the interview recordings with my coaching supervisor. She encouraged me to write down everything that I could bring to mind in relation to this coaching assignment. I chose to create a messy map using Clarke's (2005) situational analysis framework, having learned about it as a critical research method. Just writing down all the elements at play was liberating and humbling. I found myself making sense through making a mess! How could I expect to create trusting relationships when I was navigating in a jungle?

The self-reflexive map of the situation is shown at Figure 1.

Figure 1. Self-reflexive map (after Clarke, 2005)



In creating a self-reflexive map, the first author was able to see beyond her individual role and notice aspects of the coaching situation that she had overlooked. She could see beyond herself as 'fixer' to being part of a bigger complex picture in an experience that was both 'liberating' and 'humbling.' For organisational coaches, we propose that in turning the gaze inwards on our ways of being we recognise that we are always "in relation to others" (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 134). As illustrated in Figure 1, the others include consideration of "ideas, concepts, discourses, symbols, sites of debate, and cultural 'stuff' [that] may 'matter' in this situation" (Clarke, 2005, p. 88). We are asking – how am I choosing to act in this situation, who am I choosing to be? Clarke (2005) challenges the primacy that we normally give to people in our consideration of situations. She suggests that other non-human elements have an equal role to play in the way the situation exists and unfolds. These elements do not contribute to or frame the situation, they constitute the situation and cannot be separated from it. We propose that situational analysis opens the coach's view of a coaching situation to see their part in it in fresh ways. We suggest that the locus of analysis for coaches is everything in the coaching situation, not limited to the coaching brief, relationship, goal, or problem (although these may feature). This reflexive practice supports organisational coaches to move from over-reliance on individualising strategies focused on their conduct and competence to demonstrate trustworthiness. It turns the coach's attention towards socialisation strategies that address systemic factors eroding perceptions of their trustworthiness.

5 Turning the gaze outwards – critical reflexivity of a coaching context

Having found the messy map so helpful, I continued to a second stage by ordering my map into a table of categories as Clarke (2005) recommends. In doing so, I could begin to analyse the context from a range of perspectives, and distance myself from the emotional experience of it. Completing this exercise reminded me that there were many ways to view this situation and that there were also positive elements. I had overlooked the ways that people in the team had expressed enjoyment of their work, pride in their professional skills, their care for their clients and, most importantly, that they had told me that small changes were happening. Moving from a

messy map to a table of ordered analysis (see Table 1) created further structure and brought the complex, non-linear and fluid nature of the situation into view. When asked to feedback about my coaching evaluation at a senior level, I decided to represent the team's story differently within the organisation, sharing positive aspects of the team's experience of their work and changes they were making. I advocated for greater balance in future team coaching and took a more appreciative approach in future interventions. I understood that individuals in teams that are struggling can find new ways of being together if they can share with each other their individual story of their work in that team. In a similar future coaching situation, I set up a digital storytelling workshop to facilitate this outcome.

Table 1. Critical Reflexive Analysis (after Clarke, 2005)

Individuals and power relations	Groups and power relations	Major issues/debates (usually contested)
Individuals inside the team: permanent and temporary Individuals outside the team but regularly interacting with it Individuals belonging to the team and other teams Power relations derived from seniority of position, time served in the team and informal/formal relationships inside and outside work.	Professional groups Friendship groups Managerial groups Groups involved in specific procedures External departments	Trust - internal and external relationships Fairness and consistency of treatment Respect between colleagues Role boundaries Social responsibilities Relationships with other teams Constructive communication Planning Access to training opportunities Non-adherence to traditions of the team
Political/economic elements	Organisational narratives & discourses (unquestioned norms)	Traditions & ideologies of the context
Multidisciplinary team working Threat to survival of team in face of competition from other providers Economic threats to individual jobs/pay/pensions Few other employment options in local economy	Narratives of the team's history Narratives of the team's present Narratives of the team's future. The team is 'a problem' and needs external help to fix it This is a high performing organisation	Provision of high-quality services Professional work is enjoyable The organisation is becoming a more stressful place to work Adherence to professional protocols/organisational policies/professional codes/workflow procedures

The situational analysis methods enabled the first author to “go beyond ‘the knowing subject’, as centered knower and decision-maker to also address and analyze salient discourses dwelling within the situation of inquiry” (Clarke, 2009, p. 201). Individuals and power relations, groups and power relations, major issues and debates, political and economic elements, organisational narratives and discourses, and the traditions and ideologies of the context all came into view. The analysis allowed the first author to notice what she may have overlooked in relation to the context and the effects this might have on trust. She broadened her view of power and power relations, political and structural aspects which could be eroding coachees’ system trust (Cox, 2012).

Seeing herself as a part of a dynamically complex situation led her to understand that the coaching relationship was produced by a range of discourses, which were having multiple negative effects on trust in the coaching relationship. For example, the team was objectified and disempowered by the narrative of it being ‘a problem’ needing fixing. This was reinforced by the organisational discourse of being a high-performing organisation, held in place by the wider political and economic context. As several studies of coaching relationships point out (e.g., De Haan, Culpin & Curd, 2011; Ianiro et al., 2013; Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2015; Will, Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2016), the coaching relationship is perceived separately in the minds of coaches and their coachees and is subject to different interpretations and evaluations. Frederiksen (2014) describes trusting as a social practice where we continually anticipate how the relationship might unfold combined with our experience of what happens over time. Imposed by hierarchical leaders and positioned as the change agent, the first author was deemed untrustworthy in the eyes of the coachees. She was seen as an active change agent of the organisational regime (Shoukry, 2017) no matter how accomplished her interpersonal skills. The reflexive discussion with an external supervisor provided professional support helping to notice the inherent tensions of her embedded organisational role.

6. Acting with reflexivity and reciprocity

Following this process of attending to the trust in the relationship, then engaging in self- and critical reflexivity, the first author was able to respond to Shoukry and Cox's (2018, p. 425) questions: "How does the combination of the social context and the coach's stance change the way coaching is practised? What differences might be observed in the way the coaching relationship is experienced? How does the language used in coaching change?" Paying attention to the relative power differentials within the coaching context enabled the first author to reconsider the relational engagement between coach and coachee. In the concluding narrative of this story, she describes how she elected to change her stance to practice with reciprocity and notices how the relationships shift in response. She began her new encounter by recounting a poem by Adrian Mitchell, which helped shift her way of being from powerful professional to vulnerable human in relationship with others:

*When I am sad and weary
When I think all hope is gone
When I walk down High Holborn
I think of you with nothing on.*
'Celia Celia' by Adrian Mitchell

Despite feeling vulnerable to rejection, I had to move to a different position with this team by taking the first step. I recognised that I had invited team members to talk about their individual story of coaching to my colleague but had not reciprocated with my own. I introduced the humorous poem above as a counterpoint to feeling stuck AND expression of my own feelings of nakedness before the whole team in a meeting. I remember trembling. I verbalised my experiences of the coaching process recognising that professional notions of neutrality had eroded the fundamentals of a trusting relationship. These had reinforced my expert power and position as a senior leader in the organisation. I admitted to feelings of failure and expressed regret at the role I had played in their negative experience of coaching. I outlined my purposes and motives for working with them in the past, and my hope to collaborate with them in the future. I accompanied my invitation with a picture of party streamers and cocktails, a visual metaphor for congratulating and appreciating the team; suddenly the team began to laugh and exchange banter about the need for champagne. The mood in the room softened. Members of the team began to share their emotional responses to change more openly and to discuss some of the work challenges that faced them.

To practice with reciprocity, the first author recognised that the mutuality inherent in a trusting coaching relationship had been absent and that she needed to share her thoughts and feelings about the experience they had been through together as openly as her coachees had with her. Through this individualising strategy, she demonstrated value and esteem in herself, and in her coachees. In her choice of poetry and personal narrative of regret for her past actions, hopes for a different future relationship, and sharing feelings of joy and pain she re-established equality and trust through the fragility of being human (Ricoeur, 1992). The first author also adopted a socialising strategy guided by reciprocity to address system trust aspects that she had identified as the coaching relationship ended, outlined in the final vignette:

I came under pressure from my manager to withdraw from my coaching involvement. Yet I continued meeting 'under the radar' for some time until trust was restored. I spoke with the person in the department with whom I felt strongest trust and who was trusted by the team and discussed ways she could support the team in an appreciative way going forward. She continued to work with the team beyond this point in a consistent and thoughtful manner. I left the team quietly, trusting them to continue to develop together.

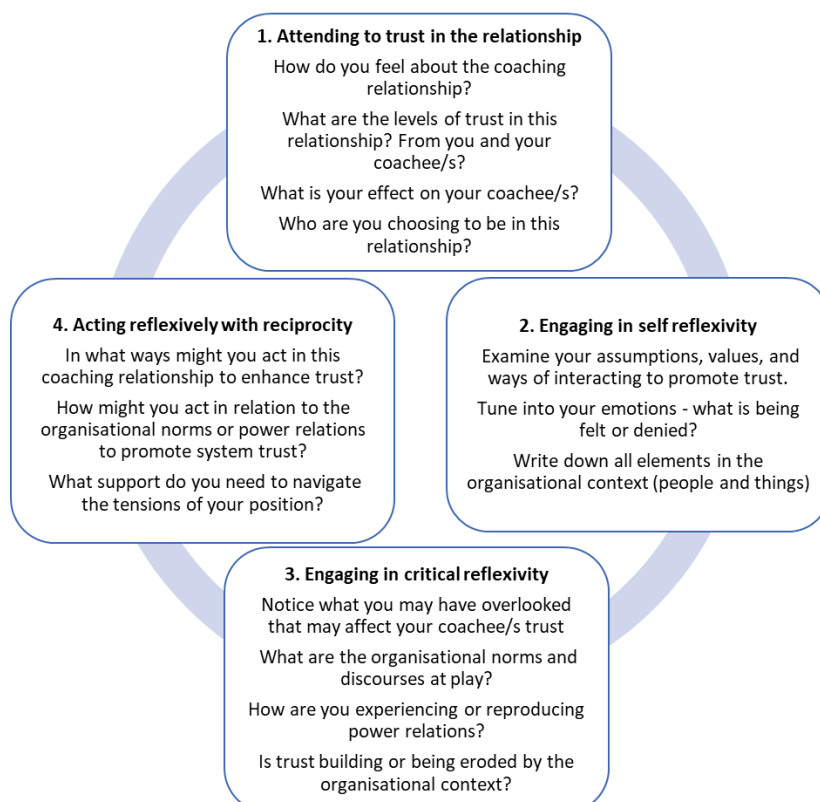
Implications for Practice

Reflexivity and reciprocity for maintaining trust in coaching relationships: A practice framework

The practice narratives illustrate a process of reflexive meaning making to understand how organisational contexts may affect trust in coaching relationships. Ongoing, in-depth critical analysis of the coaching situation provides coaches with options for action to maintain trust as their relationships unfold through time in response to the dynamic complexity of which they are part. Coaches' dynamic practice using both individualising and socialising strategies is vital in maintaining or, as in this case, repairing coachees' trust in the coaching relationship and navigating system trust factors. Based on our study, we make three contributions to practice. Firstly, we illustrate through practice vignettes how organisational coaches may experience the coaching context influencing trust within coaching practice. Secondly, we demonstrate how Clarke's (2005) research method of situational analysis can be applied as an advanced coaching practice method for engaging in self- and critical reflexivity. Thirdly, we build on the insights of practice to offer an accessible coaching model of self- and critical reflexivity and reciprocity to support coaches to maintain trust over time in organisational coaching relationships. In Figure 2 we outline the practice model as a cycle of four stages that may occur once or several times depending on the length and complexity of an organisational coaching assignment.

Our practice model provides a framework to bring the coach close to their internal experience of trust in the relationship. First by paying attention to the relationship (stage 1) then connecting with the internal self and self in relation to others (stage 2), followed by emotionally distancing from that position to examine the structural factors at play (stage 3) before moving into values-based choices about actions to take within and around the coaching relationship including the support required to maintain the coach's well-being (stage 4).

Figure 2: Cycle of reflexivity and reciprocity for maintaining trust in organisational coaching relationships



Conclusion

Given the social and dynamic complexity of trust in organisational coaching relationships, we propose that coaches and those who educate and supervise them, would benefit from self- and critical reflexive on-going evaluation of the way that trust builds or erodes throughout coaching relationships in organisational contexts. As we wrote our autoethnography and the resulting paper, we noticed that centring trust in our reflexive sensemaking was problematic; it kept slipping off the page or out of our awareness. We consider that the personal and professional vulnerability required to engage in reflexivity and reciprocity to maintain trust as an internal organisational coach is demanding and requires resilience and on-going supervision in support. As Gannon (2021, p. 20) notes, coaches are often involved in 'peaceful and discreet behaviour' as activists for social change. We have sought to make this quietly disruptive work more visible and to provide accessible methods to educate and support those who engage in it. We propose that focusing on trust in the coaching relationship and attending to the social structure in which we operate helps coaches to begin a reflexive reappraisal of the coaching situation. Our aim is to empower internal coaches to recognise "balance and reciprocal care" (Cox, 2012, p. 440) in organisational coaching relationships promoting a "reciprocal growth of trust over time" (Cox, 2012, p. 440).

While limited by small scale and the presentation of a single coach's perspective, this study presents a rarely seen or studied aspect of situated organisational coaching practice through time. We recommend further research into how internal coaches navigate the tensions of organisational coaching to establish and maintain trust in their coaching relationships, particularly in situations of asymmetric power relations. We also call for future research into how coachees perceive the trustworthiness of internal coaches, and the interplay between individual and system trust factors on their trust in the coaching relationship. As organisational coaching continues to grow across diverse cultural contexts, we encourage others to share their stories and elucidate their practice choices in the service of advanced ethical coaching practice.

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