

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

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This chapter summarises the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the objectives, methodology, project activity and findings described in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5. The purpose of this chapter is to encapsulate the important issues and conclusions from the research project.

6.1 *Purpose of the research*

The purpose of the research was to investigate what it is that happens, not just in the moment of intervention between coach and client (that moment of change), but what it is that helps to create a transformational shift in thinking, feeling and behaviour on the part of the client as a result of the coaching conversation. My research was action-based, and was completed by analysing the interaction between the researcher as coach, and the language of intervention and experiential interactions with the client, during the coaching conversations.

I have defined the '*coaching conversation*' as the verbal and non-verbal interaction between coach and client during a face-to-face or telephone coaching session. My specific research was based on face-to-face interactions.

The '*coaching intervention*' I defined as "an integration of reflection and thinking on action and experience". The coaching intervention ranges from questions which explore feelings, motivations, perceptions, assumptions and attitudes – to reflected statements, reframed questions, role plays, and structured question frameworks. Coaching interventions are essentially to help the client create paradigm shifts that lead to sustained behavioural change or shifts in performance.

6.2 *Existential phenomenological approach*

The existential phenomenological approach central to this particular research project investigated the significance, meaning and structure of the coaching intervention in the coach/client conversation. As an approach, phenomenology was particularly suited to this research project as it is a search for meaning: it was a search for the structure of the phenomenon of the coaching conversation.

Existential phenomenology emphasises the key themes of human experience, and although human beings share many experiences, ultimately each individual's experience of the world is unique. Each client is unique in the way they think, in the way they see the world, and in the way they interpret thoughts, feelings and events.

My clients ultimately wish to talk about their 'purpose in life' and the anxiety they experience in trying to 'be' who they are and 'do' what they need to do within the complexity of the systems within which they work. The three steps of the existential phenomenological approach (epoché, description, equalisation) were the underlying process which guided my data analysis.

6.2.1 Phenomenological method

The approach to phenomenology I have chosen to use is Spinelli's: "a variety of doctrines whose common focus is directed toward the investigation of our experience of the world" (Spinelli, 1989). This is in alignment to my coaching model in helping clients to identify and understand their worldview through their own eyes, through their own perceptions and assumptions from which they operate.

Phenomenology is about the meaning we give to things – that the "objects which we perceive (including, of course, the people we interact with, as well as ourselves) exist, in the way that they exist; to the meaning that each of us gives them" (Spinelli, 1989: 4). In other words, phenomenology is about the interpretation and the significance that we give to things. This is the heart of the coaching conversation: what meaning, interpretation and significance do clients give to their worldview, assumptions and interpretations of their life as they experience it? So although we bracket – we also interpret; a paradox to be sure.

According to Spinelli, phenomenologists argue that this interpretational process has to be acknowledged when we are talking about Reality because, "Reality, as far as each of us experiences it, is this process" (Spinelli, 1989: 4). Reality is in fact our own interpretation, and it is not a matter of being correct or incorrect. It is our interpretation according to our background, experience and culture and what meaning system we lay over that.

However, embedded in this thesis is a critique of the phenomenological approach, although this method proved to be the most suitable for this particular research project. I addressed the shortcomings of the phenomenological method, and produced an actual critique of the three-stage phenomenological model that I used. Secondly, I developed a critique with each client in Chapter 5: Project Findings where I selected one client transcript per client; read and analysed those six transcripts; and included commentary on the dilemma of using the phenomenological method, particularly in relation to impartiality and bracketing assumptions.

Phenomenology was appropriate as it helped the researcher to become aware of the phenomena emerging and the processes that occur in the coach/client conversation. This particular methodology assisted the researcher in identifying the intervention techniques and the model that frames the conversation.

6.2.2 Intentionality

Intentionality is taken from the Latin *intendere*, which means to stretch forth, and Spinelli defines it as, “The term used to describe the fundamental action of the mind reaching out to the stimuli which make up the real world in order to translate them into its realm of meaningful experience” (Spinelli, 1989: 11).

In reflecting on the coaching conversations with C17 (a client who came to me to help her create structure in the way she approaches her daily life and business), we looked at helping her to reach out and translate her actions and her way of thinking into meaningful experience. She discovered that she thinks linguistically and kinaesthetically, but that does not help her to structure her day. She decided that she needed to interpret her world differently, i.e., visually, in order to have more meaningful experience and make life work better for her.

When we constructed her first learning contract at the end of her first session, she had as her *purpose*: to learn to structure her thinking differently; as her *strategy*: to use the new way of thinking to move forward; and as *specific outcomes*: (1) to learn to structure her thinking differently, (2) to work with the new way of structuring her thinking, and (3) to journal from pictures into visual language.

In this way, intentionality for C17 would mean that she has constructed a kinaesthetic view of the world, and has ascribed meaning to it kinaesthetically and linguistically. She needed to bring in visual thinking to make more sense of her world. We worked around her limiting assumptions that she could not think visually. That changed on the day that we ‘went down a rabbit hole’ in the coaching conversation. She was able to visually describe the ‘rabbit hole’ and come out again into the light of the natural world with a visual reconstruction.

In the coaching conversation, then, the coach is helping the client to interpret their own reality and to interpret how that client constructs meaning within that reality.

Existential phenomenology argues that, “if we are to face up to our potential for being, we must accept our freedom to give meaning to our experience and that whatever meanings we do come up with are not the result of responsibility of outside, predetermined, perhaps even unknowable sources, they are products of our choice” (Spinelli, 1989: 23).

6.2.3 Worldview

All worldviews are culturally, historically and linguistically influenced. There can be no worldview, or relationship to the world, that is free from such influence. That means that for each individual, understanding and relationship with the world takes place within their own cultural and linguistic framework. Yet, because our relation to things is determined by our intentional stance, if an individual describes the experiences of their world without the usual assumptions, this can lead to new cognitive insights. This then is one of the primary reasons for coaching.

In terms of worldview, we are all part of a specific culture, a particular environment with its own unique climate and history; we live within certain social systems and can never release ourselves from these ‘givens’. Sartre (1943) referred to these givens as our “facticity”.

In terms of client and coach working inside the coaching conversation, coaching practitioners develop a model to look at the individual client’s concerns in a structural way. Instead of seeing everything as the person’s personal, emotional or internal issue, problems can be seen as part of an overall situation or worldview. This is similar to a systems thinking approach where the individual is only part of the overall context, system, family, organisation, or society in which they live and interact. I am looking not at causes of behaviour, but at ways of thinking and experiencing thinking about behaviour with clients that lead to more reflective practices.

6.3 Research questions

My research questions have led me to analyse the coaching intervention in terms of: (a) breakthrough shifts in thinking, behaviour and performance; (b) creating transformational change; and (c) how the coaching intervention helps to build the relationship between client and coach. The questions that guided my research are:

1. How does the coaching intervention in the client’s narrative help the client to make breakthrough shifts in thinking, feeling and behaviour – and consequently in performance?
2. What is it in the coaching intervention that creates sustained transformational change for the client, helping the client to make breakthrough shifts in thinking, feeling, language and behaviour – and therefore in performance?
3. What is it about the coaching intervention that makes the client think or behave in a certain way that helps to make a shift: a paradigm shift, a thinking shift, or a perception shift?
4. How do the coach’s interventions help to build the relationship which then leads to shifts in thinking, feeling, and behaviour – and, ultimately, in performance?

6.4 Results of the research

As a result of my research I have:

- (a) Designed and tested an existential model for executive coaching.
- (b) Identified a continual spiralling of four stages inside the coaching conversation: *reflection and awareness; responsibility assumption and commitment; setting goals and action; learning and personal growth leading to change.*
- (c) Identified four existential concerns aligned to each of those stages: *freedom, meaning, choice and anxiety.*
- (d) Developed a code book which is a reference for the coach of coaching interventions and client themes or concerns.
- (e) Demonstrated the importance of the coach working within a flexible coaching model, developing the relationship as the central anchoring of the conversation.
- (f) Structured the coaching conversation around the relationship, experiential learning and existential issues.

6.5 The relationship

The researcher analysed the coaching intervention to see how it helps the client to do, think, perceive or feel, that then leads to a change in behaviour; and what impact this has on the relationship between coach and client. The '*relationship*' became a major focus in examining the impact and the structure of the coaching intervention.

The coach 'holds the space' and needs the skill of 'immediacy' and empathy in the immediate moment. Holding the here and now – holding the client 'where the client is' – has to do with support. As researcher I investigated the coaching intervention to determine what happens in terms of thinking, feeling, and behaviour on the part of the client because of the coaching intervention, and have concluded that what happens is predominantly a result of the continually developing relationship between client and coach.

At the heart of the coaching process, irrespective of the model or approach, seems to be the relationship. This means that it is not necessarily about 'doing' for the client, but more about 'being' for the client – creating trust, a safe space: a safe environment for thinking, feeling and insight to take place. This opens up the relationship to the wider, over-arching umbrella within which the coaching conversation takes place.

In alignment with Ernesto Spinelli's and Irvin Yalom's suggestion that the relationship is the ultimate determinant of success in the client/practitioner relationship, my research has confirmed that the "encounter" between coach and client is where the real work is done.

However, in coaching, we are not looking to change the locus of control as may happen in therapy. Within the relationship we look to help the individual assume responsibility for 'what is working, what is not working, and what if anything can be done differently'. A safe thinking environment is built through the development of the relationship, and the relationship is what helps with the onset of change.

The relationship develops as a result of the 'coaching conversation' with the development of client issues and concerns teased out by the skill and expertise of the coach's interventions. These interventions, however, need to be part of a larger structure, such as a coaching model – as long as the coach operates with complete flexibility within the model to cater for the concerns of the client.

As a result of this research, I have developed an existential coaching model which takes into consideration client concerns and issues: an overall structure which encompasses the *relationship, experiential learning, and existential issues* – and four stages (i.e. *reflection and awareness; assuming responsibility; setting goals and taking action; learning and growth leading to change*). These are aligned to four key existential concerns (i.e. *freedom, meaning, choice and anxiety*) to help the client to identify and replace limiting assumptions, thus moving towards the creation of a more empowering worldview.

6.6 *Experiential learning*

Experiential learning is viewed as an active process in which the learner needs to work with the experience again and again to appreciate the meanings associated with it. In experiential learning, experience is subject to interpretation because the meaning of experience is not a given (in existential terms). In the coaching conversation, the coach intervenes to help the client reflect on and learn from their experience.

This means that the client attaches his/her own meaning to events, and reaches an interpretation of the world. In phenomenological terms, experience is subject to interpretation; but in existential phenomenological terms we do not interpret, we attempt to help the client to bracket their assumptions and describe the phenomena.

In this way, the coach can help the client to identify and replace the limiting assumptions that are barriers to learning.

6.7 *The coaching conversation*

My research has answered the question of whether the coach should create not just a thinking environment but also a learning environment for the client. The coach first needs to develop values such as trust and respect in the relationship. Then in the interpersonal interaction that takes place between the coach and client, the coach helps the client move through the various phases of learning (i.e. reflective observation, concrete experience, active experimentation, and abstract conceptualisation).

In the context of the coaching conversation, when the client talks about their experience, they are creating a story. Storytelling constructs meaning in a different way from merely describing an experience. There is power in language and in content, and the significance comes from the interpretation and structure of the story.

The coach uses interventions to help clients learn from their stories, from their experience – to even see their stories as reconstructions of reality. In this way the coaching interventions help clients to learn, to change and to achieve their outcomes. Learning, and particularly learning from experience, is therefore a major component of the coaching conversation.

Throughout the analysis of the coaching client transcripts, I have identified that each individual coaching conversation has three basic phases – input, throughput, and output – which help to develop the relationship. I have developed specific coaching interventions that are integrated into these phases. These coaching interventions or question frameworks reflect the process of experiential learning that has developed as a result of this project (i.e. reflection and awareness, responsibility assumption, setting goals, personal growth and change).

6.8 *Client themes*

Throughout the four-stage analysis of the coaching transcripts, many themes emerged. In the final analysis of all the client themes, the predominant ones to emerge are:

- Anxiety
- Reflection
- Awareness
- Self-belief
- Self-confidence
- Self-responsibility
- Self-reliance
- Clarity

- Choice
- Purpose
- Meaning
- Goal setting
- Freedom
- Change
- Responsibility
- Performance
- Learning

These are reflected in the existential coaching model with the four stages of the coaching conversation: reflection, responsibility, goals and change which are aligned to the four existential concerns of freedom, meaning, choice, and anxiety. The annexure on Evidence contains a list of all the client themes which emerged in this research project. However, there are infinite possibilities of themes or concerns as each client is unique. I have highlighted the predominant emerging themes.

6.9 *The coaching intervention*

Initially I set out to develop a specific ‘template’ of questions or a question framework. I discovered that for the coach to be flexible and spontaneous — being present to the issues of the client at all times — it is more useful to have a structured coaching model with a series of themes which are addressed through the use of questions or interventions. The code book addresses this by listing the coaching interventions, and the themes that have emerged from the clients’ texts. Although specific questions have shown up as useful it is important that the coach never be prescriptive in their use.

In this project, I have identified three basic stages in the coaching conversation which help to identify the client’s motivations, concerns and issues. This is represented in the input/throughput/output model which has become the centre of the model and develops the relationship:

1. Setting the scene (identifying where the client is now and identifying the menu of topics for discussion and exploration in the coaching session).
2. Defining the priorities and exploring the issues.
3. Identifying the learnings and actions which are a result of the session.

I have identified specific questions within each of the three phases:

1. *Input:*
 - What is on the menu?
 - What do you want to think/talk about?
 - What are your priorities?
2. *Throughput:*
 - What are your observations about your feeling, thinking and behaviour?
 - What are your questions about your feelings, thinking and behaviour?
 - What are you assuming that may be stopping you/limiting you/holding you back?
 - What can you learn from your thinking, feelings and actions?
3. *Output:*
 - What is the overall learning (from your observations, thinking, and assumptions?)
 - What action are you going to take?
 - What are your overall vision/strategy/goals?

In developing the relationship with input/throughput/output the coach begins to work through the four experiential learning phases of: reflection and awareness; assumption of responsibility; setting goals and taking action; personal growth and change. The three levels of the coaching conversation (relationship, experiential learning and existential concerns) are developed through the listening and intervention skills of the coach.

The line of questioning or the way the coach intervenes in the coaching conversation helps to develop awareness, insight, choice and responsibility in the client. One of the key findings of the project has been a reminder of the importance of working flexibly within a coaching model that addresses not just the linear, surface-level objectives of the client, but also one that helps coach and client to develop the relationship in such a way that the deeper issues of being, learning and becoming emerge (for both coach and client).

The interventions in the Final Code Book (see annexure on Evidence) help the coach to understand the importance of asking rather than telling the client what to do. They provide a reference guide to the types of interventions that give flexibility and freedom to the coach; but can be employed to help the client to reflect, assume responsibility, set goals and create change. They have emerged with the identification of limiting paradigms, and can be used to help create more empowering assumptions and a more empowering worldview.

6.9.1 Developing an existential model

Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasises the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe. Existentialist philosophy regards human existence as unexplainable, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for one's acts.

According to Strasser (2002: 31), "phenomenology is the primary tool for existential investigation". In their book, *Existential Time-Limited Therapy, the wheel of existence* (2002), Alison and Freddie Strasser explore time-limited and long-term existential therapies. The existential wheel provides a model or structure where the concepts of *interpersonal relationship, anxiety, freedom to choose and authenticity* are looked at. Other concepts such as the *four worlds, safety, temporality, values, behaviour sedimentations and paradoxes* are elaborated upon as part of the existential model for time-limited existential therapy. This model has made an impact on my evolving coaching model.⁵³

6.9.2 Existential psycho-therapy

As Irvin Yalom explains (Yalom, 1980) there is no official existential psycho-therapy. Other therapies that take existentialism into account are person-centred therapies, Gestalt approaches to psycho-therapy, and psycho-therapy as part of the humanistic psychology movement.

These approaches focus on the "intra-personal dimensions of human existence", where radical existential psycho-therapy "focuses on the inter-personal and supra-personal dimensions which question individual world-views" (Van Deurzen-Smith, 2005: 2). Van Deurzen-Smith says that such existential work aims "at clarifying and understanding personal values and beliefs, making explicit what was previously implicit and unsaid" (Van Deurzen-Smith, 2005: 2). This is the concept that has captured my attention as a coach and directed my research project. How does the coach help the client to make explicit that which has previously been unclear, unsaid and perhaps hovering on the edges of consciousness?

6.9.3 Existential issues

The existential psychotherapeutic approach resists techniques, or a formalised method, that can be followed automatically.

This fundamental point and radical break with more conventional methodologies, is that it is a relationship-based process where the coach must be as aware of their own potential assumptions and cultural givens as that of their client. Clearly, most questioning and probing of the client's assumptions will often be based on the coach's own worldview, and it is the ideal (which the coach should work towards) to divest themselves of their own limiting

paradigms in order that they can Socratically question and probe the client's verbalised reality and assumptions.

It requires the coach to be conscious of their own fallibility; this is a lifetime's striving to greater openness both personally and professionally. It is an existential process for the coach and client, and the coach's fallibility is a part of the process.

The existential goal is that of a whole lived life, which fits with my model of coaching. This is to approach the client as a whole, professionally and personally, working with emotional, rational and spiritual intelligence to understand how they impact on self awareness, self management, cultural competence and social awareness.⁵⁴

6.10 An existential coaching model

I have examined the coaching process from the perspective of the three stages of input / throughput / output which help to develop the relationship. In other words: (1) issues / discussion / menu of topics; (2) interventions / questions / techniques and tools; (3) outcomes / resolutions / insights / goals / summary / conclusion.

Although each coaching session usually begins with reflection, assuming responsibility is the first step towards change and the second step is taking action. This is reflected in my current model which posits four phases of learning: reflection and awareness (of the freedom to stay where one is or move on); responsibility assumption (finding meaning); setting goals and taking action (making choices); and finally learning, growth and change (reflecting anxiety on the journey). (See Appendix 4: Executive Coaching - an Existential Model.)

My research raised the question of how to measure coaching interventions from a phenomenological point of view. However, I did not attempt to measure the coaching intervention. Instead, I described the data and created the code book of coaching interventions and client themes as a result.

Another question was: what are the 'ultimate concerns' to investigate (for example, death, freedom, isolation or meaninglessness), and are they relevant to coaching? This question has been answered as the model has developed. The concerns that have emerged from the research project are *freedom, meaning, choice* and *anxiety*. They are aligned to the four action steps or phases of experiential learning: *reflection, responsibility, setting goals* and *change*.

In creating the coaching model, I have tried to create an open system to allow for energy and information to flow over the boundaries, and to move in and out of the system. For example,

the input / throughput / output micro-system fits into (but is influenced by) the overall Meta structure of the model.

My coaching model is designed to help clients identify the limiting paradigms and assumptions that have created their map or worldview. These limiting paradigms can prevent individuals from achieving the changes they want in their lives, and reinforce the belief that they are not in control of their own emotions, behaviours, values and ultimately their lives. In my coaching model, discussing the issues is the first step (input); the second step is to identify what are the limiting assumptions and where the client is getting stuck (throughput); thirdly, how they can be addressed (output).

At the end of a session within my coaching process with the client — to fully integrate the learning with goals set, and commitment to action — we complete a learning plan to:

- Redefine the vision; where the client is going.
- Outline the strategy; how the client is going to achieve the vision.
- Identify the specific outcomes that need to be accomplished in the next few weeks, in order to work towards achieving the vision and putting the strategy into action.
- Summarise what the client gained from the session, in order to help underline self-reflection and continue to help the client to understand that they are responsible for their own thinking, their own doing, and their own being.

6.10.1 An interpersonal and existential coaching model for the coaching conversation

The development of the coaching model reflects the influence of the last three years from the contemporary coaching and psycho-therapy literature; my participation in several teaching programmes to develop coaches (and the subsequent teaching and supervision of these students) at The Coaching Centre Cape Town (TCC); the teaching and supervision of students on the two I-Coach Practitioners' and Masters' programmes in Cape Town; the learning from my clients in hundreds of client coaching conversations (14 clients); my studies to become a practitioner, trainer and coach for the Nancy Kline Thinking Environment programmes; current and past existential thought in psycho-therapy and phenomenology (May, Husserl, Spinelli, Strasser, van Deurzen, Yalom); contemporary coaching processes and models (Downey, Flaherty, Hargrove, O'Neill, Starr, Whitmore, Whitworth, Wilber); systems of change and paradigmatic thinking (McWhinney); adult stages of development and adult learning theory (Hudson and Kolb); experiential learning theory (Boud, Walker, Cohen, Freire); client-centred therapy (Rogers); Freud's complex theory of the personality; cognitive behavioural theory (Lane, McDermott, Peltier), and finally the analysis of my doctoral research client coaching transcripts (six core clients, and one non-transcribed client).

6.10.2 Input, throughput, output

In its second to last stages, my contemporary model had the I-coach model at its centre (input, throughput, output), and these were placed against a background of four quadrants. These quadrants were circled three times (by relationship, experiential learning, and existentialism). I-T-O has now become the development of the relationship at the centre of the current model.

6.10.3 Four-step process

The inside four quadrants represent Kolb's learning cycle: abstract conceptualisation (top left); active experimentation (top right); concrete experience (bottom right); reflective observation (bottom left). They have now become the four processes:

6.10.4 Reflection and awareness; responsibility assumption; setting goals and action; personal growth and change

The dominant middle four quadrants (inside the relationship and the experiential learning circles) have become: reflection and awareness (top left); responsibility assumption (top right); setting goals and action (bottom right); personal growth and change (bottom left).

6.10.5 Freedom and existence; meaning and becoming; choice and doing; anxiety and being

In the outer four quadrants (inside the experiential learning and existential circles) is freedom and existence (top left); meaning and becoming (top right); choice and doing (bottom right); anxiety and being (bottom left).

6.10.6 Intrinsic/less conscious, extrinsic/more conscious

On the left side of the model (intrinsic, less conscious) are limiting assumptions and limiting paradigms. On the right side of the model (extrinsic, more conscious) are behaviour and performance.

6.10.7 Thinking, feeling, sensing and intuiting

The full circle was formed with the basic Insights Jungian model of thinking (north); extravert (east); feeling (south); and introvert (west).

The model has been refined as it has evolved; the core underpinning philosophies are David Kolb's adult learning theory, David Boud's experiential learning theory, Irvin Yalom's existential psycho-therapy, Ernesto Spinelli's existential phenomenology, Ken Wilber's integral model, the I-Coach model of input/throughput/output, and Will McWhinney's systems

of change and paradigm thinking. I describe the various influences in Appendix 1, and provide the evolving shape of the model and how it influences my current coaching practice. This model has been shaped by the coaching conversations between me and my clients in my research project. As the model has evolved, it has moved from simplicity to complexity back to simplicity.

6.11 Purpose of the model

The purpose of the model is to allow the maximum sense of flexibility in order for the coach to best facilitate the emergence of the client's needs. Each coach and each client is unique, and there must be complete freedom to explore the client's issues in the most effective way. However, the coaching conversation needs to be framed by the coach's ability to listen deeply and to actively intervene only when needed.

The model represents predominant client concerns that have arisen as a result of the research, and it provides four stages for the coaching intervention, with four aligned existential concerns. It provides a structure, but is not prescriptive. Although the relationship is the crux of the coaching conversation, the coach must retain the flexibility not to be prescriptive to the client.

In this model, the coach works with clients at the level of thinking, feeling and behaviour as it impacts on performance. Intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships are impacted, and goals and action steps are agreed during the coaching conversation to create the desired changes. My investigation into the coaching process shows that change can occur at the level of thinking and feeling – but is made explicit through cognitive insight and a developing awareness of limiting assumptions and specific goals that can be achieved.

Previously I have worked within the structure of a coaching model, with question frameworks as part of that model. My new thinking is that the coaching model must reflect the phases of the coaching intervention which also reflect phases of experiential learning (i.e. reflection and awareness; responsibility assumption; setting goals; personal growth and change). Thus the four phases of the coaching intervention takes the client through a process of experiential learning.

In studying existential philosophy, it has been confirmed to me that there are certain themes that are universal to human beings; these are reflected and aligned with the four existential concerns of the coaching intervention (i.e. freedom and existence; meaning and becoming; choice and doing; anxiety and being).

The research has shown that the patterns of coaching intervention questions need to be formulated and based on individual client experience and individual learning styles.

No matter how simple or complex a coaching model, no matter how brilliant the coaching intervention – they must work in conjunction with the phases of experiential learning. Reflection, responsibility, goals and change reflect the phases of experiential learning and form the spiralling four stages of the coaching intervention process.

My research has identified that helping the client achieve an ‘a-ha!’ or insight in each coaching session is not necessarily the result of the coach’s brilliant interventions, it is from the integrated layers of learning that happen as a result of:

- The relationship.
- The coaching model with its template of questions/interventions which are used to work through the client’s issues.
- The phases of learning that occur in the coaching conversation.
- The learning that the client experiences outside of coaching in the workplace.
- Reflection in the coaching conversation where the space for learning is opened up.

6.12 *Developing a model for the coaching intervention*

One of the learnings in developing this coaching model is a deeper understanding of how to build a ‘safe thinking environment’ for the client in the coaching context. In order to build rapport and a ‘safe space’ for the client in the coaching relationship, these are some of the factors that the coach could consider:

- Be willing to be influenced sufficiently.
- Beware rigid adherence to your model.
- Be flexible and spontaneous.
- Avoid a packaged formula – treat each client as unique.
- Build a relationship that is the agent of change.
- Use spontaneously-generated responses for your coaching intervention.
- Learn from your clients.
- Use the ‘throw-ins’ (for example, job shadowing, attending an event, or celebration).
- Work in the ‘here and now’.
- Understand coach and client as travellers on life’s journey simultaneously.

Other learnings that have emerged in developing a coaching model in this research project are:

1. Develop positive regard towards the client

2. Understand the meaning and use of positive philosophical choice.
3. Be flexible inside your coaching model.
4. Be congruent with the client (have a genuine encounter with the client).
5. Never ever replace the process of the client's process with coaching self-disclosure (you can simply 'model' disclosure).
6. Share facts of yourself in the here and now to develop the relationship.
7. Listen, empathise and wait.
8. Share experiences when relevant.
9. Work to identify and replace limiting assumptions with empowering assumptions.
10. Give focused, explicit feedback.
11. Be willing to 'change' yourself.
12. Understand the difference between the coaching and the therapist's intervention.
13. Understand that the relationship is the real agent of change.
14. Explore the interpersonal, existential coaching intervention (reflects anxiety, meaning, life purpose, values, ethics, responsibility, freedom, choice and relationship).

6.13 *Developing a code book of coaching intervention themes*

Some of the key competencies to emerge as a result of developing a code of intervention themes for the coach are:

1. listen
2. question
3. enquire
4. reframe
5. use empathy
6. intuit
7. be flexible
8. acknowledge
9. give credit
10. use disclosure
11. work with positive regard and positive philosophical choice
12. investigate
13. guide
14. query
15. teach empathy

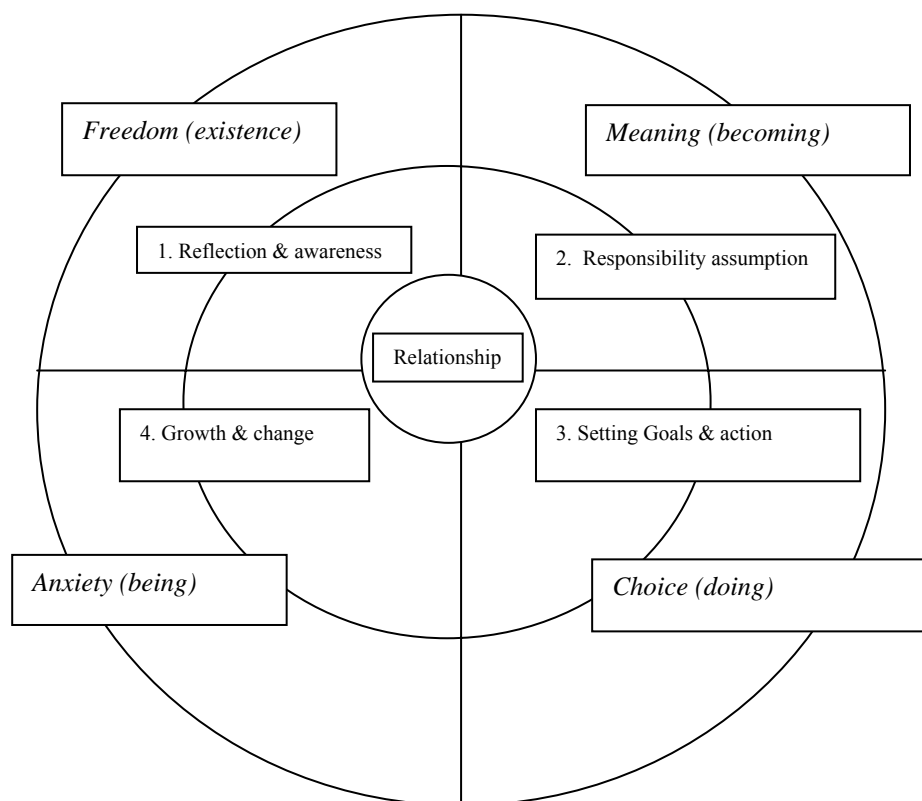
16. ask
17. direct
18. suggest
19. summarise
20. admit mistakes.

6.14 Relationship, experiential learning, and existential concerns

The three concentric circles form the structural underpinning of the model. Relationship is inside the first concentric circle; experiential learning is inside the second concentric circle; existential concerns are inside the outer circle.

The model's component parts are from inside the circle outwards:

1. Relationship: input / throughput / output.
2. Experiential learning: reflection and awareness (insight); responsibility assumption (commitment); setting goals and action (choice); personal growth and change (learning).
3. Existential concerns: freedom and existence, meaning and becoming, choice and doing, anxiety and being.

Figure 6.1 An existential model for the executive coach

The coaching process becomes one of developing the relationship (input / throughput / output) in a four-step process: reflection and awareness, taking responsibility, setting goals and action steps; personal growth and change. The process of coaching helps to develop the relationship. Each of these four stages has an existential concern related to it that must be addressed in managing the relationship (freedom, meaning, choice and anxiety). In the final picture there are four coaching stages to develop the relationship and four existential concerns to be addressed in so doing.

1. *Reflection and awareness* of limiting assumptions, paradigms and worldviews and how they hold the client back from achieving their desired outcomes, and becoming aware of their key purpose. Aligned to:
 - 1a. *Freedom* in their existence – understanding that their sense of freedom or lack of it is what is helping or holding them back from understanding the key purpose of their life (professional and personal).
2. *Responsibility* – taking responsibility for their own thoughts and behaviours and understanding that only they can commit themselves to moving towards or away from their goals. Aligned to:
 - 2a. *Meaning* – moving from awareness of what is holding them back to developing meaning, significance and purpose in where they are now, and where they are going. Understanding the significance and lack of significance in their working and personal environment.
3. *Setting goals and action* – deciding what actions need to be taken to achieve their key goals; setting goals and timelines to their actions; developing a plan. Aligned to:
 - 3a. *Choice* – beginning to know and understand that only they can take steps forward for themselves; taking responsibility means understanding that they do have choices, and making choices will help them to ‘do’ what they need to do.
4. *Personal growth and change* come from taking responsibility, deciding what choices to make, and beginning to absorb the learning from their growth and the changes they have made. Aligned to:
 - 4a. *Anxiety* is a result of growing and changing. Doing something new or differently takes courage; anxiety is often the result. The next step is reflection on the learning, changes, growth and anxieties that have arisen. How they are ‘being’ is a result of choices made, actions taken, anxieties that arise, and finally, reflection.

6.15 Recommendations

My recommendations are a result of my experience and research on this project:

6.15.1 Relationship

As a result of my reading for this project, I became aware that while some models emphasise the importance of the relationship between coach and client, in other models this is not emphasised as the critical component. It is my clear conviction, based both on my reading and research, that no matter what the coach's model, the relationship needs to be the central anchoring focus of the coaching conversation.

My research confirms that at the heart of the coaching process, irrespective of the model or approach, is the relationship. This is not about 'doing' for the client, but about 'being' for the client — creating trust, a safe environment for thinking, feeling and insight to take place. This opens up the relationship within which the coaching conversation takes place, and I believe should be central to all coaching models.

6.15.2 The coaching process

The existential phenomenological approach central to this particular research project investigated the significance, meaning and structure of the coaching intervention in the client-coach conversation.

To be present to the issues of the client at all times, I would recommend that it is important to have a structured coaching model reflecting client concerns which can be addressed through the use of specific questions or interventions. As a result of this research project, I have developed the 'code book' of client themes and coaching interventions for this specific purpose, as well as the existential coaching model.

It is my experience that not all training programmes highlight the specifics of the coaching intervention, nor do they train coaches in the 'how-to's' of asking questions, or the use of question frameworks or question interventions with the complementary skills of active, deep and reflective listening. Many programmes provide teaching in the various underpinnings of coaching (for example cognitive-behavioural psychology, systems thinking, adult learning theory and leadership) but do not actually develop the skill of the coach's intervention within the coaching conversation.

I would recommend that all programmes to train and develop coaches (academic, corporate and commercial) should consider training in the specifics of the coaching conversation, i.e. the ability to formulate and ask questions, and to develop coaching interventions within the overall

structure of a coaching model. I would suggest that coaches be trained in the skill of intervening in the coaching conversation (using questions, interventions and question frameworks) with the specific aim to tease out the client's issues and concerns.

My recommendation is also that all coaches learn how to use question frameworks to identify and transform limiting assumptions into more empowering ones that help the client to be, do or become who or what they desire. (There are two existing question frameworks, the Nancy Kline six-step thinking process and the 10-step Best Year Yet process, which I would highly recommend). I have designed and run an academic programme in the coaching process for the Coaching Centre in Cape Town to train coaches in the skills of intervention. One of the results of this particular research project will be to write a new book on the coaching process — using the new existential coaching model as a basis — to fill in some of the gaps for executive coaches.

Not only would I recommend that coaching question frameworks and interventions be a core element of any programme for coaches, but that supervision be included as a major component of that training. In that way, potential coaches will have the chance not only to learn the 'how-to's of the coaching conversation, but they will also be able to share their cases, and be supervised while actually coaching. The need for supervision is something that my colleagues and I are considering for COMENSA to recommend to all coaches in their continuing professional development (CPD).

6.15.3 Coaching vs. therapy

It was apparent from my study for this research (and this is reflected in my thesis) that there is a great deal of literature on similarities and dissimilarities between coaching and therapy. The boundaries have perhaps not yet been fully drawn, and remain to a certain extent an area of controversy. This is particularly apparent in the country in which I work, South Africa, where coaching is a very new profession. There has been a strong reaction within the therapeutic community; two prominent coaches, for example, have experienced litigation as a result of this 'territorial battle'. I shall be recommending to the new professional body for coaches and mentors in South Africa, COMENSA, that we try to diffuse this conflict by setting up a working committee with interested parties within the therapeutic and coaching communities to explore definitions and boundaries and ways in which suspicion can be overcome. The purpose of this will be to produce mutually beneficial results rather than conflict.

6.15.4 Ethics

One of the wider issues that became apparent during my research project is the vital question of ethics. When I commenced my doctorate, there was no body in South Africa to represent or regulate the coaching profession. This clearly led to the possibility, especially with a relatively new profession, of the abuse of standards and exploitation by opportunistic and not totally professional or ethical practitioners. There have been examples of this. I therefore spearheaded and helped found a professional body to create a standards and ethics code for the coaching profession, which would also make recommendations for continuing professional development.

This experience has highlighted, for me, not only the absolute need for such a body, but the fact that in many other “developing” and “underdeveloped” countries there will be a complete vacuum in this area. In South Africa we sought help from the EMCC (European Mentoring and Coaching Council), and they responded very generously. However, if a relatively developed country such as South Africa did not have such a body, and needed such help, there is clearly a need for such assistance in the developing world. I would suggest that in the interest of the reputation of the coaching profession, established bodies might think of setting up systems to more proactively promote the values and ethics of the coaching profession.

I shall be recommending to COMENSA that we think about our ‘social responsibility’ and see whether there are other countries in Africa, for example, where coaches may be operating in a similar vacuum and might benefit from our experience and expertise. I would recommend that any established ethics institution (such as the EMCC) consider such a mentoring initiative.

6.15.5 Extending the social range of coaching

This particular recommendation has much to do with my work in South Africa and the particular social and historical conditions of that country. The clients in my research project reflect the diverse facets of the South African community. As currently practiced, coaching is usually a top level management or corporate activity. My range of clients made me reflect that in the particular historical realities of South Africa, this often still means that previously privileged executives are still the ones who chiefly benefit from the great riches that coaching has to offer. The irony is that many who would equally benefit are working in the same corporations, but are ‘previously disadvantaged’ (i.e. black men and women who suffered under apartheid), and do not qualify for coaching within their organisations, as they are not employed in sufficiently senior executive positions. With coaching, they might be.

For example, my client C14 would not normally have had the luxury of a coaching experience had I not known her previously and suggested a *pro-bono* coaching relationship. Her work in

developing ‘previously disadvantaged’ women highlights, for me, the fact that not only is my client (C14) a prime candidate for executive coaching, but that other managers in her non-governmental organisation (NGO) would gain immeasurably from such an experience. Sadly, they view coaching as a ‘luxury’ or a ‘privilege’ far beyond their personal or professional financial expectations. This is an ethical dilemma in South Africa which I shall raise with COMENSA, our professional body. I will be recommending that we try to draw up guidelines in order that the coaching profession in South Africa does not appear solely ‘elitist’. This dilemma may or may not apply, to a greater or lesser extent, in other countries, but could be something worth considering by other professional bodies.

This could be extended to include the training of coaches, looking at their gender and background. In the interests of being fully representative – particularly in South Africa – it is important that all facets of society are encouraged to join the profession, to make it truly reflective of the community within which it works. In this instance, for example, COMENSA has already begun to consider these important social issues. I will be recommending that we provide a system of training and mentoring for coaches from disadvantaged backgrounds to ensure that our profession is seen as inclusive rather than exclusive.

6.16 *Impact of the research*

6.16.1 Existential coaching model

This model is entirely new and original. It is not a refinement to previous published models, but is an innovative addition to the coaching model cannon. It has evolved from wide reading in coaching models and frameworks, existential theory and existential therapy approaches, and is heavily based upon the observations and practical experience from my coaching practice. Thus I believe it to be, within the executive coaching field, an entirely fresh approach.

6.16.2 The model proved

The model and practices outlined in my research project have been applied and tested in my coaching practice. I have found it to be highly beneficial with clear results. It is a model which could be followed by any competent and qualified executive coach. I believe that this model broadens and deepens the scope of a relatively new profession.

6.16.3 Model clarity

I believe the model is applicable, practical and well-defined, and to that purpose have designed a clear, rigorously-defined, spiralling, four-stage process which can be demonstrated and implemented.

6.16.4 New book on coaching

The research project will form the basis of a new book to be written 2006 and published in 2007. It will be based on the existential coaching model and my findings from my research. By reaching out to a general professional audience the coaching model will have an impact on the wider coaching profession.

6.16.5 Impact on coaches

The model, new for the coaching profession, highlights the coach/client relationship. This aspect is not always emphasised in executive coaching models. I also believe this existential coaching model will have an impact on fellow coaches enabling them to broaden and deepen their practice with its stress on experiential learning and existential concerns.

6.16.6 Impact on clients

The prioritisation of the coach/client relationship and the existential approach yields considerable benefits for executive coaching clients. Many models merely deal with professional issues, but my research and practice clearly demonstrates that for most clients the division between life and work is an arbitrary one, as is the separation of values and being. Absolutely clear from my research is that what my clients do is related directly to their sense of who they are. Merely dealing with the practical concerns of professional life is often only scratching the surface of their key concerns, and this model will provide a framework for broadening the executive coaching practice.

6.16.7 COMENSA

One of the results of my research was the realisation of the lack of, and desperate need for, an ethics and standards body for coaches in South Africa. As a result of this personal perception, I determined to initiate a dialogue with fellow coaches and mentors to rectify this gap. As a result we have founded an organisation called Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (COMENSA). This has three provincial chapters (Western Cape, Gauteng, and KwaZulu-Natal), nearly 400 members and 20 portfolio committees that are investigating such aspects as research, supervision, ethics, standards of competence, and continuing professional development. I spearheaded the process of founding this organisation and am currently

President Emeritus for COMENSA. The creation of this body is a direct result of my research for this project, and I believe an important initiative in South Africa which will have a long-lasting impact and influence on coaching in this country.

6.16.8 Impact on Middlesex University London

The project is based on solid research and scholarship and I believe will stand up to academic scrutiny. I believe it is an addition to the scholarship of the executive coaching profession, and therefore a benefit to the university. In a new profession, this is a new approach. Furthermore, the ideas contained in this research project for the university will be disseminated widely in a book (like my previous books, intended to be published in the US and the UK). Thus the research conducted under the *aegis* of the university will reach a more general and international professional audience. I frequently speak at international conferences on training and educational development, for example, the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). I will continue to speak at conferences in the USA, UK and South Africa on executive coaching; I believe that the consequent public profile of this research, conducted under the aegis of the University of Middlesex London, will continue to reflect well upon the university internationally.

6.16.9 Impact on the researcher

This has been a fascinating journey which has led me to entirely redefine my coaching model and practice. Above all, this doctoral research has led me to appreciate the centrality of the coach/client relationship, which now informs all my work. Doing this research has increased the academic rigour of my work. Another result is that I have also begun to teach, coach and supervise trainee coaches. I also helped to develop the Practitioner Certificate and Advanced Diploma for coaches at The Coaching Centre in Cape Town.

This project has broadened, deepened and refined my thinking and working practices, and having developed a clear model it has also increased the focus of my professional life. Having shared some of the results with colleagues and seen the results with my clients, it has also given me greater confidence in both my professional abilities and my research findings. One of the most profound effects of this period of intense reading and research has been for me to extend my own professional boundaries, not just as an individual practitioner, but also as a teacher and mentor to other coaches. As a direct result of this project, I have also become extremely interested and involved in the broader implications of the coaching profession, one result of which was my role in helping to found Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (COMENSA), and my resolve to remain involved in the development of coaching as a profession in South Africa.

Finally, the impact of this project on the researcher has been very profound, both personally and professionally, extending my intellectual boundaries and sharpening my professional abilities.

6.17 In conclusion

The recommendations I am making are based on the belief, gained both from my experience and research on this project, that the coaching process has incredible potential and huge riches to offer and I would like to see these spread as widely as possible.