

Discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge:

A grounded theory study of learning in life coaching

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Keywords

Life coaching, personal coaching, coaching, learning, self, self-knowledge, discovery, application, integration, process, relationship, questioning, reflecting, listening, accountability, action, responsibility, transformative learning, mentoring, self-directed learning, social learning, reflective learning, adult learning, experiential learning, transformative learning, deep learning, authentic learning, action learning, inductive learning, discovery learning, powerful learning, lifelong learning, accelerated learning, problem-based learning, emotional intelligence

Abstract

Professional coaching is a rapidly expanding field with interdisciplinary roots and broad application. However, despite abundant prescriptive literature, research into the process of coaching, and especially life coaching, is minimal. Similarly, although learning is inherently recognised in the process of coaching, and coaching is increasingly being recognised as a means of enhancing teaching and learning, the process of learning in coaching is little understood, and learning theory makes up only a small part of the evidence-based coaching literature. In this grounded theory study of life coaches and their clients, the process of learning in life coaching across a range of coaching models is examined and explained. The findings demonstrate how learning in life coaching emerged as a process of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge, which culminated in the development of self. This process occurred through eight key coaching processes shared between coaches and clients and combined a multitude of learning theory.

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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Griffiths', written in a cursive style.

Kerryn Griffiths

26 February, 2008.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Examined in this thesis is the process of learning in life coaching from the perspectives of coaches and clients across a range of coaching models. Provided in this chapter is an overview of the background to the research, the research problem and research questions. The origin, scope, justification and significance of the study are also outlined, as are the methodology and methods and overall structure of the thesis. The chapter concludes with some definitions for key terms used throughout the thesis.

Background to the research

Professional coaching may be defined as a goal-directed, multi-faceted process for enhancing people, work and life. As an industry, coaching has, and is still, experiencing rapid growth (Brock, 2006). However, due to the limited size of its body of research and evidence base, coaching rests on weak foundations. Furthermore, much confusion still surrounds the understanding of what coaching is, and there is wide variation in the means by which coaching is facilitated. Thus, coaching now exists in many different forms (Grant, 2005). However, regardless of the form of coaching being applied, coaching appears to be underpinned by a goal-directed framework and a number of common processes, such as listening, questioning, and accountability (Grant, 2006; International Coach Federation, 1999). In addition, frequently reported outcomes of coaching include heightened self-awareness, enhanced wellbeing and improved goal attainment (Campbell & Gardner, 2005; Creane, 2002; Duff, 2002; Grant, 2003; Green, Oades, & Grant, 2006; Hurd, 2002; International Coach Federation, 1998; Paige, 2002; Spence & Grant, 2005).

To date, research has been focused on executive and workplace coaching. However, while there is abundant prescriptive literature explaining *how to do life coaching*, there is little research into the process of life coaching itself. Furthermore, of those studies which do exist, most examine the outcomes and impact of life coaching or the process from the perspective of either coach or client. In addition, while learning is recognised as an inherent part of the coaching process, little is known about how and why it occurs, with adult learning theory being recognised as a dominant influence. Furthermore, although coaching is increasingly being recognised as a tool for enhancing teaching and learning in educational contexts and schools, there is little understanding of the process of coaching and its relationship to learning.

Research problem and questions

The review of the literature identifies several striking gaps in knowledge relating to learning in life coaching. It highlights how more evidence is needed to better understand:

- the degree to which learning occurs in the coaching process;
- the *process* of life coaching;
- the collaboration between perspectives and processes of coaches *and* clients;
- the process of coaching across different models;
- the process of learning in coaching;
- the significance of learning in coaching;
- how the process of learning in coaching relates to existing learning theory; and
- the potential significance of coaching to the process of learning.

These needs form the foundations for the study reported in this thesis and underpin the following research questions:

- To what degree does learning occur in life coaching?
- What kind of learning occurs during life coaching?
- How does learning occur in life coaching?
- How do coaches facilitate learning?

- How do clients experience learning?
- What is the significance of learning in life coaching?

Origin, scope and significance of the study

This study stemmed from a combination of my personal and professional experience in both education and life coaching. The depth of learning I observed in coaching contrasted with surface learning I observed in the classroom. This led to the hypothesis that learning may be a key process in facilitating coaching outcomes and suggested also that coaching processes may in turn be used to enhance learning. Thus, this study of learning in life coaching has the potential to make a significant contribution to the fields of coaching and education. Greater understanding of the underlying learning processes involved in coaching is likely to add to the field's growing evidence base and has the potential to directly inform coaching practice. In addition, a learning-centred theory of coaching may provide a springboard for the utilisation of coaching processes in classrooms.

Until now, most coaching research has focused on assessing the efficacy and traits of executive coaching. Some studies have explored the efficacy of executive coaching (Paige, 2002) and the behaviour of managerial coaching techniques (Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999), while others have examined its effects on productivity (Olivero, Bane, & Kopelman, 1997) and individual lives (Hurd, 2004). Comparatively fewer studies have explored life coaching and those which do exist, mostly examine its outcomes (Campbell & Gardner, 2003; Grant, 2003; Green et al., 2006; Spence & Grant, 2005) or the process from the perspective of either coaches or clients, but not both (Creane, 2002; Wilkins, 2000). Indeed, while there is some empirical knowledge of the impact of life coaching, little is known about the process itself, the similarities or differences between models, and how coaches and clients collaborate to create coaching outcomes.

In particular, there seems to be no current research which purposefully explores a cross-section of coaching models, nor has any attempt been made to compare the experience of coaching from both coach and client perspectives within the same

study. Thus, while extended research is needed in all aspects of coaching (Grant, 2001; Zeus & Skiffington, 2002) specific recommendations point to further study into coaching with priority on analysing the effects of coaching across different models (Grant, 2001), the discussion of educational theories in relation to coaching (Wilkins, 2000) and conducting empirically based systematic research aimed at establishing a theoretical framework for coaching (Grant, 2001).

Finally, the behavioural sciences as well as business and organisational sectors have dominated recent coaching research (Zeus & Skiffington, 2002), and within the educational literature, there appear to be no investigations which purposefully examine the actual learning processes involved in coaching. Only Wilkins' (2000) study achieved a cross-sectional overview of the coaching process and highlighted the implications for educational leadership and current learning models and theories. Therefore, although psychological literature may have provided insight and explanation into the phenomena under investigation in this study, because of logistical limitations, in addition to the demand for greater understanding of coaching in relation to learning theory, this study intentionally incorporated minimal psychological theory. For the same reasons, although literature relating to neuro-linguistic programming (Bandler & Grinder, 1982) appears to share a number of links associated with the processes that emerged in this study, neuro-linguistic programming literature has not been included in this discussion. In so doing, focus is maintained on the coaching literature and that of education and learning.

Therefore, the findings of this study have a number of implications for both the fields of coaching and education. The findings highlight potential inconsistencies and gaps in the current bodies of coaching and education literature and identify areas for future research. In addition, the findings reveal the breadth of learning theories involved in the process of life coaching. This may make a significant contribution to the growth of evidence-based coaching literature and to the understanding and acceptance of coaching in the field of education.

Methodology and methods

Qualitative interpretive inquiry was identified as the best means of appreciating the interpersonal, interpretive and complex nature of life coaching. In addition, because there is minimal existing research, grounded theory methodology was adopted in order to actively build a theory of learning in life coaching. Notably, to avoid ‘railroading’ findings, traditional grounded theory studies do not include a literature review, but rather, use the literature as another form of data in building theory. However, common university protocol required the inclusion of a literature review in this thesis, and therefore, a broad overview of the literature relating to coaching, life coaching and learning in coaching is provided in Chapter Two. In addition, to fulfil the objectives of this grounded theory study, the major review of literature appears within the presentation of the findings in chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight. Therefore, the initial literature review in Chapter Two covers only those bodies of literature that had already been identified in the literature as relevant in a discussion of learning in life coaching. In contrast, the findings chapters reveal a greater breadth of related bodies of literature that verify and further explain the emergent findings of this study. The limitations associated with the use of the literature review in this study are discussed in detail in the final chapter.

This study utilised an integrative grounded theory design, combining the epistemologies of the leading grounded theorists, Barney Glaser (1965; 1992), Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990; 1997), and Kathy Charmaz (2003b; 2004; 2006). This design allowed theory to *emerge*, as Glaser suggested, *systematic verification*, as Strauss and Corbin proposed, and acknowledgement of the *constructivist* role of the researcher, as Charmaz argued. Thus, the theory presented in this thesis emerged directly from and was verified against, data that I, as the researcher, collected from over 25 hours of interviews with five purposefully selected PCC (Professional Certified Coach) or MCC (Master Certified Coach) ICF (International Coach Federation) accredited coaches, and nine of their respective clients. Then, through a three-part process of analysis, categories emerged from the data, as did relationships between emergent processes, and finally, by integrating the categories into a united whole, a learning-centred theory of coaching was generated.

Indeed, the title of this thesis, “Discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge”, reflects the major categories and the learning-centred theory of coaching that emerged from the data itself.

Structure of this thesis

This thesis is structured as follows. Within this chapter a brief introduction to coaching and a brief outline of the study has been provided. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature in coaching and life coaching, of learning in coaching, and also of the use of coaching in learning. It comments on the lack of empirical research existing in the field of coaching, particularly in life coaching, and also the gap in knowledge in the understanding of the process of learning in coaching and coaching for learning. In so doing, the chapter gives the reader a background understanding of the phenomena involved in the process of learning in life coaching and makes a case for further research in this area.

Chapter Three describes qualitative grounded theory methodology, justifying its use through a discussion of its historical roots and symbolic interactionism. It explains grounded theory methodology and its various forms, including the integrative methodology adopted within this study, and outlines the characteristics of this study, which distinguish it as grounded theory methodology. Chapter Three closes with a discussion of the nature of grounded theory as a research process that promotes a complementary interplay between qualitative and quantitative paradigms and comments on its particular suitability to the topic of learning in coaching. Following on from this, Chapter Four explains the actual methods by which this study was carried out, describing the processes of respondent selection, data collection, data analysis and theory generation, and ends with a discussion of my role as the researcher and issues relating to the study’s validity, reliability and ethics.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present the findings of the study, that is, the process of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge. This process is explained through the major categories that emerged from data analysis. Therefore, data samples are scattered throughout these chapters to provide evidence for, and reveal, the way in

which the grounded theory emerged. As the reader is likely to notice, some data samples are used multiple times. Indeed, the data was so rich and interconnected, that in many cases one example illustrated several phenomena.

Chapter Five reveals how the process of discovering self-knowledge occurred through the combined processes of relating between coaches and clients, coaches questioning clients, clients reflecting and coaches listening to clients. It explains the way in which coaches and clients related together *allowed* clients to discover self-knowledge, how coaches questioning their clients *drove* the process of discovery by triggering clients to reflect, how reflection, in turn, was the process *within* which clients discovered self-knowledge, and finally, how self-knowledge and learning were *noticed* and *recognised* through the process of coaches listening to their clients.

Explained in Chapter Six is the process of applying self-knowledge through the combined processes of relating, holding accountable and taking action. This chapter includes a discussion of how clients' relationships with coaches and other people in their lives provided a context for clients to apply emergent self-knowledge and learning, and how the process of coaches holding clients accountable served to *encourage and compel* clients to apply self-knowledge. Also provided in Chapter Six is a thorough explanation of the process by which coaches and clients *designed how to implement* and apply self-knowledge within the process of taking action, and how coaches used questions to hold clients accountable and to design action.

Presented in Chapter Seven is the process of integrating self-knowledge, which occurred largely through the combined processes of taking responsibility and self-coaching. Explained in this chapter are the processes of *making meaning* through listening, *aligning* through holding clients accountable and taking *integrative* action. Chapter Seven then reveals how, as a result of these learning processes, together with the key coaching processes associated with discovering and applying self-knowledge, the processes of clients taking responsibility and self-coaching unfolded.

Finally, Chapter Eight sums up the process learning in life coaching through the core category of developing self. It reveals the relationships, intersections and culmination of the major processes of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge, and in

so doing, establishes a set of theoretical propositions for learning-centred coaching, which in turn may also be applied as a means of facilitating coaching-centred learning. The original research questions are woven throughout this chapter in order to specifically highlight how the intended research aims have been fulfilled by the findings of this study. Chapter Eight concludes with a discussion of the implications and significance of the research, as well its limitations and recommendations for further research.

Definitions

The following definitions are provided for the benefit of the reader:

Coaching is a goal-directed, multi-faceted process for enhancing people, work and life.

Learning occurs through experience and results in a permanent or lasting change in knowledge, skill or attitude (Lawton & Gordon, 1996; Rowntree, 1981).

Grounded theory is a form of qualitative research, which integrates both inductive and deductive research techniques to facilitate the development of a set of theoretical propositions that explain the phenomena under investigation and serve to generate new theory.

Self emerged in this study as clients' underlying sense of who they really were and was made up of clients' current circumstances, desires, emotions, values and thinking.

Self-knowledge is "self-specifying information" (Polkinghorne, 2000, p. 270), which emerged in this study as clients' knowledge of their current circumstances, desires, emotions, values and thinking.

Current circumstances include clients' physical bodies, relationships with other people, as well as other aspects of their surrounding world such as their jobs, income or their material possessions.

Emotions include clients' positive and negative feelings.

Desires include clients' wants, goals, visions, targets, purposes, outcomes or intentions.

Values include what clients consider important or what they care about, often referred to as fundamental or core.

Thinking relates to clients' thinking patterns that hinder their progress toward desires, often referred to as blocks, holding self back, as well as limitations, limiting beliefs, limiting thinking, self-limiting, clients' framework, beliefs or belief systems, perceptions, assumptions, negative self-talk, patterns/patterning, programs/programming and meaning.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Despite the escalating popularity of professional coaching for enhancing business, work and life, there is little empirical understanding of its process and the theoretical foundations from which it has sprung. The body of coaching research is in its infancy and in particular, research pertaining to life coaching is especially limited. Although learning is inherently recognised in the process of coaching, to date, education and learning theory contribute only minimally to evidence-based coaching literature.

This chapter provides a review of current knowledge related to coaching and, more specifically, learning in life coaching. It begins by explaining what coaching is, outlining its inter-disciplinary roots, variety in forms, underlying framework, common processes and outcomes, and more specifically, existing empirical research into life coaching. The chapter then discusses the significance of learning in the coaching process, illustrates the extent to which education and learning theory contribute to the body of coaching literature, and highlights increased recognition of coaching as a means of enhancing teaching and learning in the field of education. In so doing, within this chapter, the reader is given a background understanding of the phenomena involved in the process of learning in life coaching, and a case is made for further research in this area.

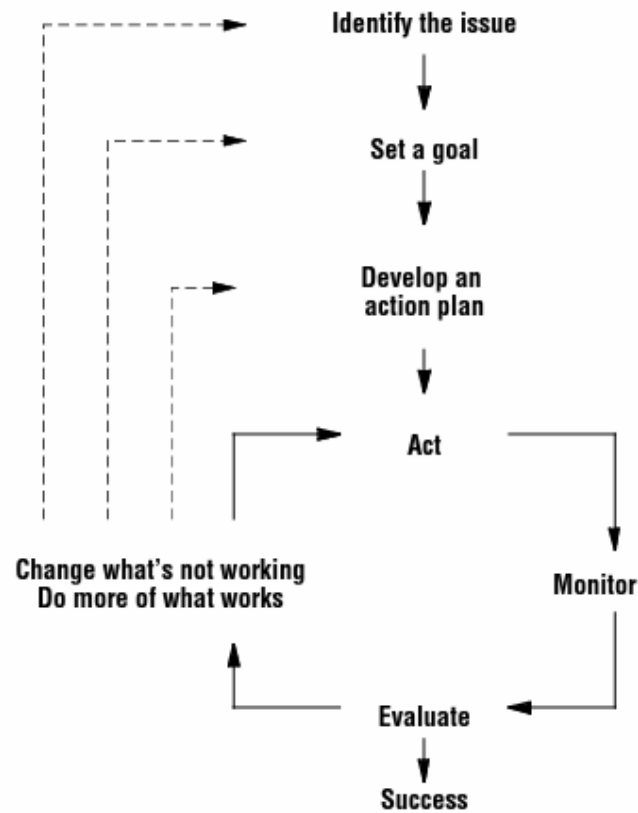
What is coaching and what is it for?

Because of the rapid and exponential growth in the field of coaching over the last decade (Brock, 2006; Grant, 2004) and the limited size of its current evidence base, considerable confusion surrounds the understand of what coaching is, where it comes from and what it does. In a survey of 1,338 coaches (Gale, Liljenstrand, Pardieu, & Nebeker, 2002), the myriad of titles under which coaches operate were highlighted. While personal coach, executive coach, life coach and business coach are among the

most common, professional coach, developmental coach, mentor and consultant are also widely used. This extensive variety of coaching titles is in turn reflective of the varied definitions (Grant, 2005) and forms of coaching which exist today. In addition, coaching claims a host of inter-disciplinary roots including, but not limited to, education, the self-help movement, social systems theory, psychotherapy, communications studies, athletic motivation, the holistic movement, adult development theories and management and leadership (Stein, 2004). Furthermore, there exists substantial debate from academia (Bachkirova & Cox, 2004; Hart, Blattner, & Leipsic, 2001), industry (Garvey, 2004; Wilson & McMahon, 2006), the media (Bauza, 2007; Capell, 2007) and practitioners (Martin, 2001; Skiffington & Zeus, 2003) about the distinctions between coaching and counselling/therapy. In fact, it appears that while there are specific differences, there is a significant degree of similarity between coaching and counselling processes (Kemp, 2005). This also appears to be the case with other 'helping roles' like that of training, consulting, tutoring and mentoring (Zeus & Skiffington, 2002).

Executive coaching is by far the most dominant form of coaching in the marketplace and current research. Executive coaching includes feedback-based coaching, relationship-based coaching or content-focused coaching (Thach & Heinselman, 1999), as well as various forms of organisational coaching (Skiffington & Zeus, 2003). In addition, different forms of executive coaching practice are continually emerging (Anderson, 2002; Grant, 2006; Gray, 2006; Richard, 1999; Rotenberg, 2000). The field of life coaching, also known as personal coaching, displays similar degrees of variation. Creane (2002) identified four broad branches of personal coaching including psychodynamic, phenomenological, developmental and cognitive-behavioural models of coaching. In addition, many coach training schools have developed, published and propagated their own models (Coach U, 2005; Flaherty, 1999; Hudson, 1999; Rock, 2001; Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 1998). Furthermore, there is an increasing number of scholarly papers which draw upon existing evidence from other theoretical bodies such as humanism (Stober, 2006), appreciative inquiry (Orem, 2004), narrative liminality (Drake, 2005) and emotional intelligence (Chapman, 2005; David, 2005), resulting in the emergence of even more branches of and forms of coaching.

Despite the eclectic nature of coaching, it appears that a common framework underpins the process and may be used to build a definition of coaching. Within the branches of executive and life coaching, there are several acronym-based, multipurpose models of coaching. These were the fore-runners in the development of coaching and demonstrate a common framework across different forms. This underlying framework identifies clients' future goals or visions, assesses this with their current realities and then proceeds with creative brainstorming and action to accelerate, maintain, and evaluate clients' progress toward their goals. GROW, Goal – Reality – Options – What next/Way forward/Wrap-up/Will do (Whitmore, 2002), is the most well known of these acronym-based coaching models and paved the way for others (Dembrowski & Eldridge, 2003; Libri, 2004). These prescriptive acronym-based models also led to the emergence of solution-focused and goal-directed coaching process, which is evident in the literature (Grant, 2006; Green et al., 2006; Greene & Grant, 2003). This is a common process in coaching, whereby problems are identified, after which goals are set. Then, through the development of action plans, clients take action, monitor and evaluate their progress, adjust their course of action and eventually achieve success. This process is succinctly captured in Figure 2.1 below:

Figure 2.1*Generic model of goal-directed self-regulation*

(Grant, 2006, p. 154)

The prevalence of goal-directed or solution-focused approaches to coaching is particularly demonstrated through Bono, Purvanova and Towler's (2004) survey of the state of coaching practice, in which goal-directed coaching was one of two most common approaches used by coaches.

Process coaching was the other most common approach used by coaches in Bono, Purvanova and Towler's (2004) study. Accordingly in the literature, there is recognition of a number of processes which underpin coaching. These have been demonstrated through experience-based theory (Evered, 1989; Hargrove, 2003; Whitmore, 2002; Whitworth et al., 1998), as well as through empirical studies from perspectives of both coaches and clients (Bono et al., 2004; Creane, 2002; Gale et al., 2002; Hurd, 2004; Paige, 2002; Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004; Wilkins, 2004).

Throughout this literature, elements of coaching which have been shown to impact most upon successful outcomes include:

- trust and confidentiality within a coaching relationship;
- communication within the partnership;
- coaches' multi-level, active engagement in deep listening;
- coaches' ability to generate powerful questions;
- feedback (self-generated or coach-generated);
- self-regulated movement through the coaching cycle;
- the degree of self-monitoring, self-evaluation and self-awareness generated;
- focusing on the client;
- the generation of accountability and responsibility;
- the development of problem-solving techniques;
- the provision of a support system for concrete action and practice; and
- dealing with aspects of self-sabotage, resistance and emotions.

These common coaching elements are reflected in the core coaching competencies of the International Coach Federation (ICF), which include creating a trusting and intimate coaching relationship, listening, questioning, designing actions, planning, creating awareness, planning and goal setting and managing progress and accountability (International Coach Federation, 1999). Although there is “no one recognised body that could be regarded as the arbiter of [coaching] standards” (Kearns, 2006, p. 42), in the general population, there is, however, wide acceptance of the ICF as a credible coaching body (Carr, 2006; O'Neill & Broadbent, 2003; T+D, 2006; Underwood, 2005).

Further, the literature reveals a number of common coaching outcomes that illustrate benefits and utilities of coaching. Although outcomes can be wide and varied (International Coach Federation, 1998), a range of qualitative and quantitative studies appear to demonstrate universal outcomes of coaching, regardless of the form of coaching being applied (Campbell & Gardner, 2005; Creane, 2002; Duff, 2002; Grant, 2003; Green et al., 2006; Hurd, 2002; International Coach Federation, 1998; Paige, 2002; Spence & Grant, 2005). These outcomes include:

- heightened self-awareness, self-acceptance, and a sense of well-being;
- improved goal-setting and goal attainment;
- enhanced quality of life, life balance, and lower stress levels;
- increased self-discovery, self-confidence, and self-expression;
- better communication and problem-solving skills;
- changed and broader perspectives and insight;
- improved reception and use of feedback;
- improved understanding of consequences of actions;
- practical application of theory;
- more effective thinking strategies;
- positive changes in behaviour;
- a deeper sense of self, increased awareness of wants, and present-focus;
- the ability to identify challenges and blocks; and
- generally functioning as a better person.

Despite confusion surrounding the understanding of what coaching is and its many forms, a definition of coaching may therefore be drawn from the literature as follows:

Coaching is a goal-directed, multi-faceted process for enhancing people, work and life.

What do we really know about life coaching?

While prescriptive literature pertaining to life coaching, also known as personal coaching, and its facilitation is abundant (Coach U, 2005; Hargrove, 1995, 2003; Martin, 2001; Richardson, 2000; Thorne, 2001; Whitworth et al., 1998), research into life coaching has been described as “an empirical vacuum” (Spence & Grant, 2005, p. 145). As a result, in recent years, a number of studies have been published which examine the impact and outcomes of life coaching. Several studies have revealed that life coaching has a positive impact on goal attainment and goal striving (Grant, 2003; Green et al., 2006; Spence & Grant, 2005), in addition to wellbeing (Grant, 2003; Green et al., 2006). These studies also demonstrate that clients who are engaged in life coaching have increased levels of self-reflective insight (Grant, 2003), a greater sense

of environmental mastery (Spence & Grant, 2005), and enhanced hope (Green et al., 2006). Furthermore, Campbell and Gardner (2005) also suggested that life coaching “may have potential for building resilience and wellbeing in young people” (p. 10), while Creane (2002) highlighted how main themes in personal coaching outcomes included clients’ identification of wants and self-discovery and clients moving forward in their lives and feeling more positive about themselves.

In contrast to executive and workplace coaching, few studies specifically examine life coaching. Furthermore, of those life coaching studies which do exist, most appear to examine its outcomes (Campbell & Gardner, 2005; Grant, 2003; Green, Oades, & Grant, 2005; Newnham-Kanas, Irwin, & Morrow, 2006; Spence & Grant, 2005), and to date, empirical research which explains the *process* of life coaching appears to be limited. In particular, most studies appear to examine the process of life coaching from the perspective of either coaches or their clients. While Wilkins (2000) examined personal coaching from the perspective of coaches, Creane (2002) examined it from the perspective of clients. Therefore, there is little understanding of how coaches and clients collaborate in the process. Similarly, until now, it seems that few studies have pinpointed and evaluated the effects of coaching across different models (Grant, 2001). In summary, while there is some empirical knowledge of the impact of life coaching, little is known about the process itself, the similarities or differences between models, and how coaches and clients collaborate to create coaching outcomes.

What is learning and why does it matter to coaching?

The literature on learning is as abundant as coaching literature is sparse. Learning may be viewed from the perspectives of various philosophical disciplines and schools of thought, and each has its own definition of what learning is and how it should be facilitated. In addition, there is a range of learning theories which explain specific kinds of learning that are appropriate to particular kinds of learners or that yield particular kinds of outcomes. Therefore, the task of identifying one definition of learning is difficult. Despite this, educational dictionaries (Lawton & Gordon, 1996; Rowntree, 1981) appear to agree that:

Learning occurs through experience and results in a permanent or lasting change in knowledge, skill or attitude.

Learning is inherently recognised in the process of coaching in both prescriptive and evidence-based literature. Foundational prescriptive texts consistently identify the role of learning in the coaching process (Whitmore, 2002; Whitworth et al., 1998).

Whitworth et al. (1998) explained that a major part in the coach's job is to "deepen the learning" (p. 5), while the International Coach Federation (ICF) proposed the facilitation of "learning and results" (International Coach Federation, 1999, p. 4) as one of four major coaching processes (see appendix A). Furthermore, coaching has been described as "a vehicle and a platform for learning" (Zeus & Skiffington, 2002, p. 20), "a model for effective learning" (Griffiths, 2005, p. 55) and a "holistic multifaceted approach to learning and change" (Skiffington & Zeus, 2003, p. 30). It has featured in some empirical studies as a "forum for learning" (Creane, 2002, p. iv) and a "personal education pathway" (Duff, 2002, p. 7). Similarly, in her phenomenological study of organisational coaching, Hurd (2004) stated that coaching "creat[es] the conditions for learning and behavioural change" (p. 41), depicting the coaching process as one of "learning for life" (p. 33). Thus, as Skiffington and Zeus (2003) suggested, it appears that "learning is at the heart of coaching" (p. 30), and it seems to be implicitly understood that in order to achieve coaching outcomes, learning must occur. Yet, despite wide recognition of the inherent significance of learning in coaching, there is only minimal literature or research which currently draws links between coaching and specific learning theory. Those links which have been made to date highlight the relevance of adult learning, and in particular experiential, transformative and lifelong learning, as well as mentoring theory and self-directed learning.

Adult learning

Adult learning theory has been recognised as an important theoretical influence in the field of coaching. Grant (2005) identified adult education, including workplace learning and development, as one of four key knowledge domains underpinning

evidence-based coaching. Similarly, Cox (2006) explained the critical relevance of adult learning theory to coaching. By operating from a responsive goal-centred framework, adult learning theory recognises learners' need to clearly understand the benefits, value and reason for learning, thereby facilitating understanding of what is most useful to real life (Knowles, 1975; Rogers, 1986; Skiffington & Zeus, 2003). This is similar to coaching, as both address individuals' needs and their readiness to learn through a goal-oriented, self-directed approach that makes connections between new learning and life experience.

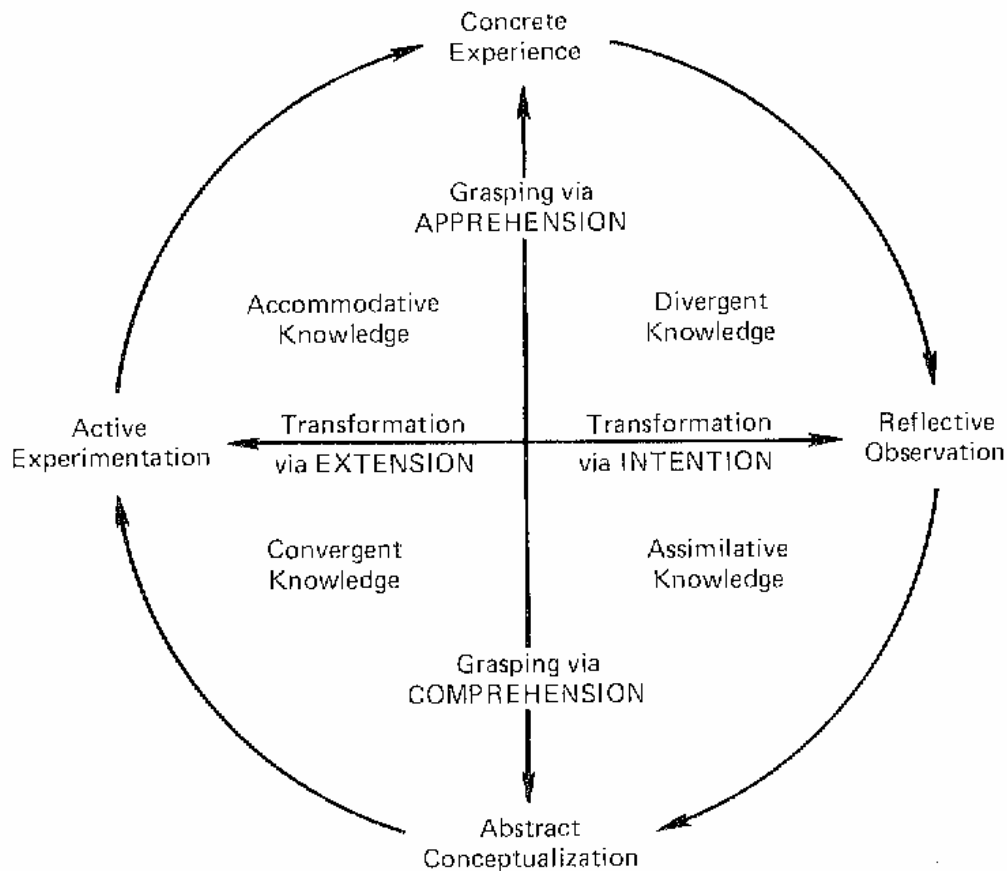
In addition, adult learning and coaching share a problem-centred context that is based on immediate goals, needs, and concrete situations. This is characterised by "short bursts of learning activity" (Rogers, 1986, p. 76). Furthermore, both adult learning and coaching take into account various learning styles, such as analogical thinking, trial and error, and the formation of a meaningful whole (Rogers, 1986). In addition, they maintain a respect of the learners' already acquired knowledge and experience and the importance of feedback. Lastly, a number of specific theories within the broader field of adult education have been recognised for their contributions to and influence in coaching. In particular, experiential, transformative and lifelong learning are most widely reflected in the literature and are therefore explained further below.

Experiential learning

Experiential learning makes an important contribution to coaching theory. Coaching literature highlights how coaching provides an opportunity to learn through experience (Hudson, 1999; Hurd, 2002), and Kopf and Kreuze (1991) proposed that an experiential learning model forms the foundation for coaching practice. In addition, Grant's (2006) aforementioned cycle of goal-directed self-regulation (see Figure 2.1 on p. 9 of this thesis) bears a striking resemblance to Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning (see Figure 2.2 below). Just as Grant's cycle of goal-directed self-regulation involves identifying a problem, setting a goal, taking action, and monitoring and evaluating progress, Kolb's cycle of experiential learning involves concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active

experimentation in the process of knowledge creation. Therefore, it would seem that experiential learning theory underpins the coaching framework.

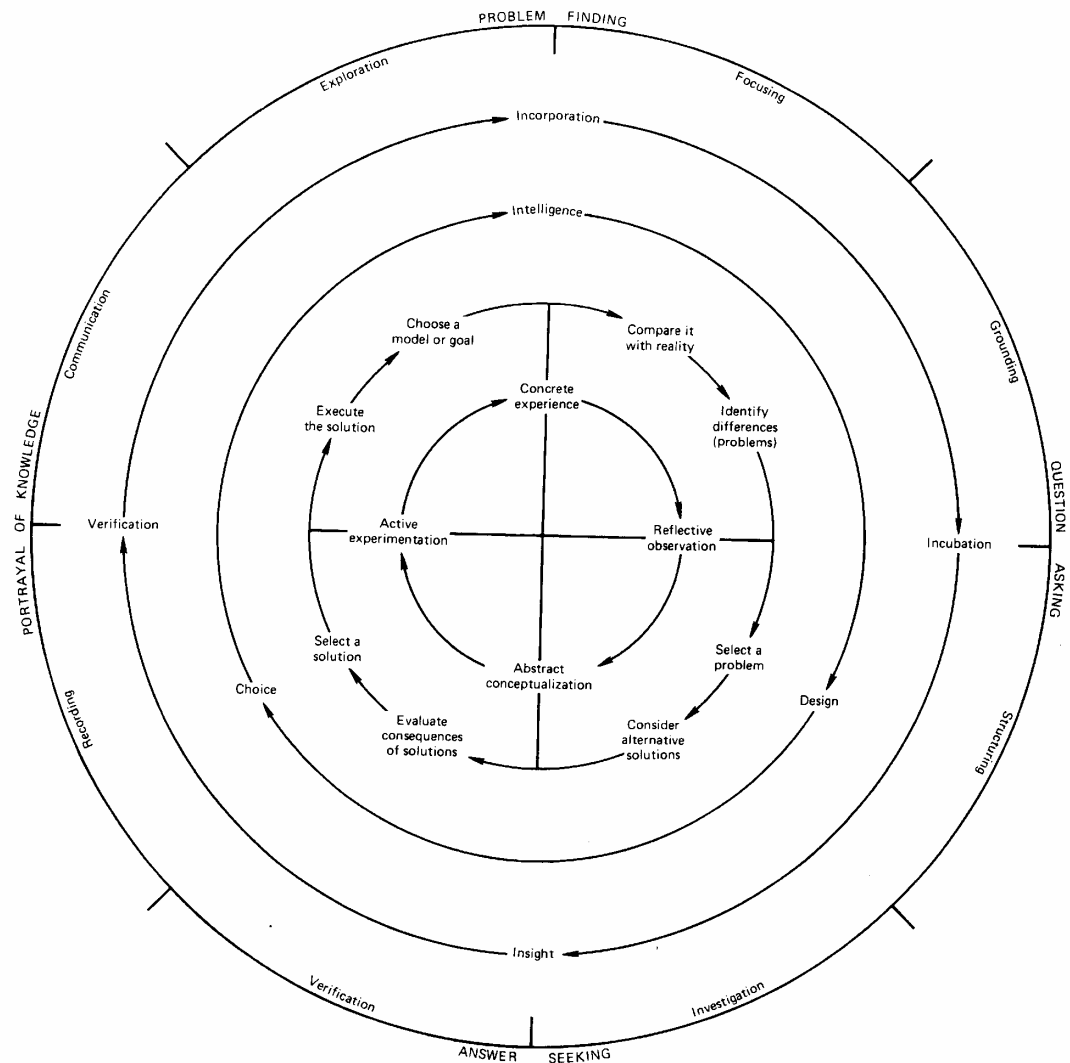
Figure 2.2



*Structural dimensions underlying the process of experiential learning
and the resulting basic knowledge forms (Kolb, 1984, p. 42)*

Kolb's theory also includes a synthesis of adaptive processes, the foundations of which lie in scientific enquiry and problem-solving, decision-making and creative process. Moreover, Kolb stipulated that "there may be great payoff in the integration of findings from these specialized areas into a single general adaptive model" (1984, p. 33). Comparing the coaching framework and processes with Kolb's basic adaptive processes shown in figure 2.3, it seems that coaching provides such integration.

Figure 2.3



Similarities among conceptions of basic adaptive processes

(Kolb, 1984, p. 33)

Notably, at the top of and surrounding this adaptive model is the problem, and at the opposite end is answer-seeking. This can be directly correlated with clients entering coaching with a need for change and using coaching to uncover and discover the answers that will bring about this change. These two points can be seen to act as “creative tension” (Hargrove, 1995, p. 90) in coaching, which pulls clients from their current realities toward their future visions. Then, between these two points, Kolb

identified question asking, a dominant communicative coaching process and portrayal of knowledge, which in turn reflects the learning base clients progressively build. This is facilitated by processes like those explained within the goal-directed coaching framework. Finally, at the centre of the model is the coaching/learning cycle.

Experiential learning is repeatedly linked to the foundations and success of the coaching process. Hurd's (2002) discussions with organisational coaching clients highlighted the importance of experiential and contextual learning, demonstrating how clients actively engage in learning experiences within a context that is real and of immediate concern. Furthermore, the problem-solving capacity of coaching is evidenced in studies like that of Ellinger and Bostrom (1999), within which managerial coaches explicitly encouraged their clients to think for themselves rather than be directed, thereby developing responsibility and problem-solving skills. In addition, Moran (2003) studied the effects of coaching in a working team in a manufacturing plant and highlighted coaching as a form of incidental, informal, skills-based experiential learning. Finally, various sources recognise the utility of coaching in the transfer of training (Joyce & Showers, 1981; Olivero et al., 1997; Wang & Wentling, 2001), as through experience, theoretical learning is practically applied and integrated into the mind and actions of clients (Skiffington & Zeus, 2003).

Transformative learning

The transformative value of coaching is being increasingly recognised in both the prescriptive and empirical coaching literature (Cashman, 2003; Clifford-Rapp, 2005; Duff, 2002; Gray, 2006; Hargrove, 1995; Wilkins, 2004). Cox (2006) identifies transformative learning theory as having particular relevance to the field of coaching. As in coaching, learners who are engaged in transformative learning examine their beliefs, assumptions, and values. This results in transformation of meaning and perspectives and personal and social change (King & Wright, 2000; Taylor, 2000). These processes and outcomes are reflected in the coaching literature. While Creane's (2002) study accentuated learning in coaching in terms of shifts in perspectives among clients, Cashman (2000) recognised a stronger push for coaching to move away from the transactional model "concerned primarily with competencies, learning

skills, and techniques to a transformative model focused on shifting people's views, values, and sense of purpose” (p. 11). In addition, within his study of clients’ perspectives of personal coaching, Duff (2002) realised the potential of coaching to “facilitate[e] a transformational learning experience” (p. 2). Similarly, Hargrove (1995; 2003) described transformational learning in coaching as a triple loop process that moves through levels of skill and capability development, reshaping patterns of thinking and behaviour and ultimately resulting in a transformation of clients’ personal contexts and perspectives of themselves.

Most interestingly, Mezirow (2000), the leader in the development of the transformative learning theory, also described specific phases of transformation:

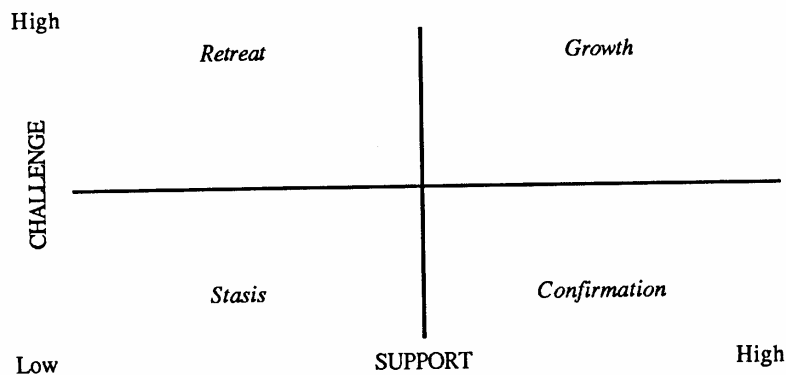
1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective (p. 22)

When reflecting on coaching as a whole, there appears to be strong similarity between Mezirow’s stages in transformation and the coaching framework and processes described earlier within this chapter. Clients typically come to personal coaching with a need to improve on aspects of their lives or work. They then proceed to assess their current realities and assess their underlying beliefs. Next, they brainstorm the possibilities for change, after which they plan and implement a course of action. During this stage, they episodically acquire the skills and knowledge needed to reach their goals and begin ‘test driving’ their new roles or strategies. Confidence and competence are gradually built and ultimately, the transformation becomes a natural state of being. Given the strong similarity between the processes of transformative

learning and coaching, Wilkins (2004) proposed that “coaching stands alone as a unique relationship where the often difficult process of transformative learning is fully supported” (p. 74).

Mezirow (2000) also identified different components involved within the transformative learning process. He highlighted the value of meaningful contexts and also Habermas’ (1978) instrumental and communicative learning and reflective discourse. While the former focus on problem solving, environment manipulation and inferred meaning in communication, the latter promotes reflective, emotionally mature dialogue in facilitating transformation. Habermas’ (1978) domains of technical, practical and emancipatory learning are also mirrored in the outcomes of coaching. Clients experience technical learning of skills and content to reach their goals, practical learning as they become more aware of and enhance their interpersonal relationships, and emancipatory learning during which they develop heightened self-awareness, self-understanding, and transformation in terms of shifts in perspective (International Coach Federation, 1998). In addition, Daloz (1986) considered the transformational power of adult learning experiences under the umbrella of effective teaching and mentoring. Of particular interest within his discussions of adults’ search for meaning, change and development and educational journey are Daloz’s strategies for guiding adults through periods of difficult transition. He explains the importance of providing a vision coupled with the right balance of support and challenge. This is shown in figure 2.4 below:

Figure 2.4



The effects of support and challenge on development

(Daloiz, 1986, p. 214)

Similarly, support and challenge are fostered by the coaching framework and common processes presented earlier. Coaching poses challenge through a problem-based, goal-directed framework, accountability and reassessment of assumptions and perceptions. It couples this with the support of a trusting coaching relationship, active listening, feedback and encouragement. Thus, a combination of high support and high challenge results in maximum growth and, ultimately, in transformation.

Lifelong learning

Coaching has also been recognised as a vehicle for facilitating and supporting lifelong learning (Bowen, 2002; Nuissl, 2001). The concept of lifelong learning reflects the changing nature of learning in our society, as learning is no longer seen as preparation for life, but rather as an integral part of it (Harrison, Reeve, Hanson, & Clarke, 2002; Jarvis, 2004). Learning “is now seen as a key feature of participation in social and economic life... as the conditions in which we live and work are subject to ever more rapid change... We learn not only for the purposes of gaining formal qualifications but also to obtain and keep employment, develop expertise in a leisure activity, deal with changes in relationships or manage personal finances” (Harrison et al., 2002, p.

1). The outcomes of coaching reflected in the literature demonstrate the capacity of coaching to facilitate lifelong learning. In her study of the impact of organizational coaching on individual lives, Hurd (2004) revealed how coaching creates an environment in which people continually learn and grow, which in turn results in a process of “learning for life” (p. 42). Similarly, Guest (2006) explained how coaching supports learners in continuing professional development and lifelong learning. This is a characteristic of learning organizations. Indeed, lifelong learning is currently being used to create competitive economic advantage, and coaching is increasingly being recognised as a tool for creating learning organizations (Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999; Hurd, 2004). However, currently in the literature on lifelong learning, attention is being “directed toward the alleged outcomes of learning, rather than the processes through which it might be achieved” (Harrison et al., 2002, p. 2). Therefore, to date, the extent to which coaching theory and particularly learning-centred coaching theory, may contribute to the understanding of the process of facilitating lifelong learning, remains largely untapped.

Mentoring theory

Mentoring theory further contributed in laying the foundations for coaching practice. Many early, as well as recent, coaching handbooks treat coaching as a close relative of mentoring and explain the processes together (Brockbank & McGill, 2006; Law, 2007; Parsloe, 1992; Rhodes, Stokes, & Hampton, 2004; Stone, 1999). Like coaching, mentoring provides assistance and feedback and fosters the learning and development of mentees through a relationship based on personal support (Ehrich, 1999). Combining similar elements of encouragement, self-management, support and evaluation (Parsloe & Wray, 2000), both coaching and mentoring are learner-centred and utilise conversation processes, such as questioning, reforming statements, summarizing, listening reflectively and personal reflection in order to evoke learning (Zachary, 2000). Lastly, similar to the aims of the mentoring process, Skiffington and Zeus (2003) highlighted that the ultimate learning outcome of the coaching process is that “finally, the learner internalises the ‘teaching function’ of the coach and becomes his or her own teacher” (p. 22). Therefore, the major differences between coaching and mentoring appear to rest in the hierarchies of the relationships and the intended

outcomes. While mentoring is characterised by an expert-novice relationship, coaching encourages an equal, expert-expert partnership. In addition, rather than being content focused, coaching has a commitment to goal-directed action. Finally, one particular aspect of mentoring also reflected within coaching literature is the reciprocal relationship between mentor and mentee (Ehrich, 1999). Coaching literature indicates that while clients learn, coaches learn also (Zeus & Skiffington, 2002).

Self-directed learning

Coaching has been recognised as a process which facilitates self-directed learning (Skiffington & Zeus, 2003). In fact, Grant (2001) and Greene and Grant (2003) defined the role of the coach as one in which the coach “facilitates the self-directed learning, personal growth and goal attainment of the coachee” (Grant, 2001, p. ix). Knowles (1975) described self-directed learning as “a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes” (p. 18). Similarly, in her grounded theory study of personal coaching, Wilkins (2000) highlighted the role of self-directed learning in coaching as “[t]he coach helps the client to assess his/her needs ... [with] the assumption ... that the client is the director of his/her own learning” (p. 164). In addition, Bolhuis and Voeten (2001) described how teachers assume the role of a coach when facilitating self-directed learning in secondary schools. Therefore, it appears that coaching is increasingly being recognised as means of facilitating self-directed learning, both among adults in organizational contexts and with adolescents in schools.

Coaching for learning

Just as various forms of learning are evident in the coaching process, so also it appears that the value of coaching for enhancing learning in schools and formal education is increasingly being recognised. Coaching is currently used as a means of enhancing educational leadership and teaching. While coaching is utilised as a

leadership and/or self-preservation tool for school principals (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2004; Hogan, 2004; Killion, 2002; Veenman & Denessen, 2001), it is also used as a means of facilitating teachers' professional development (Vidmar, 2005; Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, & Bolhuis, 2007). In particular, Cognitive Coaching is frequently used to assist teachers in delving into the thinking behind their practices, helping them to self-monitor, self-analyse and self-evaluate their teaching practices and thereby maximise student learning (Costa, 1991, 1992, 2000; Costa & Garmston, 1994; Edwards, 2004, 2005; Garmston, 1993). In fact, using coaching as a tool for ongoing professional development for teachers, in the aim of improving student learning, can be seen in increasing references to school-based coaching programs (Cordingley, 2005, 2006; Glazer & Hannafin, 2006; Knight, 2007; Knowles, 1975; Ross, 1992; Sweeney, 2007). Thus, it appears that coaching may have particular utility in enhancing teaching.

In addition, the recognition of coaching as a means of enhancing learning is also growing. Coaching is used as a means of facilitating effective learning in the fields of nursing (Aviram, Ophir, Raviv, & Shiloah, 1998; Grealish, 2000; Lasater, Luce, Yolpin, Terwilliger, & Wild, 2007), medicine (Newman & Peile, 2002), clinical education (Ladyshevsky, 2002) and also in dissertation supervision (Gordon, 2003; Holmberg, 2006; Spillet & Moisiwicz, 2004). In addition, there is a rapidly accelerating trend in schools to re-define the role of the teacher from that of instructor to one of facilitator and 'coach'. This corresponds with the onset of the information technology age, which demands that teachers become more than a means of information transfer and adopt the behaviour of a coach (Brown, 2006; Denning, 1999; Smith, 2002; White, 2005). Further, the term 'coaching' is being loosely applied in educational literature to denote forms of assistance and support (Nesselrodt & Alger, 2005), as an alternative to 'telling' (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003), as a means of enhancing students' performance (Bagnall, 1999; Brunner, Artelt, Krauss, & Baumert, 2007; Kenny & Faunce, 2004; Weiser, 1998), literacy or reading (Bacon, 2005), and to assist students with learning disabilities (Luder, 2000), as well as gifted students (Dansinger, 2000). Finally, references to 'coaching' especially appear in problem-based learning environments (Hsu & Heller, 2005; Spence, 2004; Tan, 2004) and e-learning (Orey, Koenecke, & Crozier, 2003).

However, while coaching is increasingly being recognised as a tool for improved educational leadership, teaching and learning (Schelfhout et al., 2006; Van Velzen & Tillema, 2004), within the literature relating to coaching, especially those of schools, there appears to be a gross misconception in the understanding of the process of coaching. Therefore, as Cossentino (2004) suggested, “being a coach ... implies being a 'certain kind of teacher' ... but exactly what such being entails remains shrouded in uncertainty” (p. 464). In fact, throughout educational literature, few references to coaching actually reflect the common framework and processes of coaching described in the literature. Thus, while schools and formal education contexts are increasingly recognising the value of coaching as a means of enhancing educational leadership, teaching, and learning, little is understood about the process of coaching itself and its relationship to learning.

Addressing the needs

This review of the literature has highlighted several gaps in knowledge relating to learning in life coaching, as well as the understanding of coaching as a means of enhancing teaching and learning. The review has revealed that more evidence is needed to better understand:

- the degree to which learning occurs in the coaching process;
- the *process* of life coaching;
- the collaboration between perspectives and processes of coaches *and* clients;
- the process of coaching across different models;
- the process of learning in coaching;
- the significance of learning in coaching;
- how the process of learning in coaching relates to existing learning theory; and
- the potential significance of coaching to the process of learning.

These needs, combined from the fields of coaching and education and learning, form the foundations for the study reported in this thesis and underpin the following research questions:

- To what degree does learning occur in life coaching?
- What kind of learning occurs during life coaching?
- How does learning occur in life coaching?
- How do coaches facilitate learning?
- How do clients experience learning?
- What is the significance of learning in life coaching?

A study which responds to these research questions is likely to have significance to the field of coaching, as well as to the fields of education and learning. As Wilkins (2000) emphasised, “the coaching model has implications for educational leadership as a tool for facilitating learning” (p. ii). In addition, education and learning theory have important implications for building the body of evidence-based coaching knowledge. The literature suggests that there is already recognition of the potential significance of the application of coaching theory to enhance learning in schools and formal education. In addition, while adult learning, and in particular experiential, transformative and lifelong learning, as well as mentoring theory and self-directed learning have contributed to the current body of evidence-based coaching literature, there remains a wealth of theory and evidence in the broader field of education and learning, which has not yet been explored or capitalised upon by coaching. Therefore, the full extent of learning theory, its contribution to coaching and coaching theory, and its contribution to learning have not been recognised. As a result, a learning-centred theory of coaching may make an important contribution to the growing evidence base for coaching and also to the field of education. In the next two chapters, the methodology and methods used to best respond to the research questions and yield a learning-centred theory of coaching are explained.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter describes, explains and justifies grounded theory as the methodology applied to this study of the learning processes underpinning life coaching. Grounded theory is a form of qualitative research, yet both its conception and development were heavily influenced by the quantitative paradigm. As such, grounded theory integrates both inductive and deductive research techniques. These techniques facilitate the development of a set of theoretical propositions that explain the phenomena under investigation and serve to generate new theory. In this way, not only does grounded theory meet the demands of the emerging body of coaching research, but it also supports the fulfilment of the research aim of explaining how learning occurs in life coaching. In addition, the historical roots and integrative processes of grounded theory align well with, and reflect the nature of coaching itself. This kinship in turn enhances understanding and appreciation of the phenomena under investigation.

This chapter begins with an explanation and critical analysis of quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. In the light of these two distinct influences, the historical perspective from which grounded theory arose is defined as a form of qualitative interpretive inquiry that provides a practical set of symbolic interactionist methods. Explained next in the chapter is the grounded theory methodology. Firstly, three different approaches to grounded theory are described, after which the integrative design adopted within this study is explained. Next, key characteristics that distinguish grounded theory from other methodologies are outlined. These include the notions and practices of theoretical sampling, sensitivity and saturation, as well as the unconventional use of literature within grounded theory. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of the nature of grounded theory as a research process that promotes a complementary interplay between qualitative and quantitative paradigms and comments on its particular suitability to a study of learning in coaching.

Influential research paradigms

Quantitative research

Quantitative research stems from a positivist paradigm, which is characterised by the assumption of a singular, observable reality. Originating in the natural sciences, a quantitative researcher's role is to observe and measure, deductively seeking to explain and predict trends and relationships between variables through the systematic use of precise sampling, experimental designs, and statistical analysis (Burns, 2000; Creswell, 2002; Glesne, 1999; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In this way, objectivity and control are achieved and hypotheses are tested (Burns, 2000), thereby delivering reliability, validity and with that, generalisable results (Burns, 2000; Creswell, 2002; Glesne, 1999). Traditionally favoured as the only empirical research (Burns, 2000), quantitative research has a long history and many strengths.

Despite the historical foundations and above mentioned strengths of quantitative research, the implementation of such methods poses a number of limitations and difficulties for studies of coaching (Abbott & Grant, 2004). Because there is extremely limited research on coaching, there exist few reliable instruments for measuring the variables associated with it. Indeed, many measures are borrowed from other disciplines and, due to the complex nature of coaching processes, still require further development (Grant, 2002). As a result, existing studies of life coaching which employ quantitative methodology acknowledge some confirmed and potential errors in using scales adopted or adapted from other disciplines (Campbell & Gardner, 2005; Grant, 2003). This indicates that more understanding of coaching is needed before scales can be developed that are valid and reliable, particularly in relation to the under-researched area of learning within life coaching.

The control of variables is also a source of error for quantitative study. The client context is a key feature of the coaching intervention and the removal of such effects in order to control variables can be difficult (Abbott & Grant, 2004). Factors such as extrinsic environmental influences within the lives of respondents, in addition to their

intrinsic interpretations and choices, are fundamental to coaching and are therefore difficult to control without compromising authenticity. Indeed, as Burns (2000) suggested, the study of human beings within education and the behavioural sciences is far more complex than studies of the natural sciences. Therefore, the adoption of quantitative methods can lead to the exclusion of some important factors. Such exclusions can arise because the researcher's viewpoint, rather than that of the respondents, is highlighted in quantitative research (Creswell, 2002). Therefore, in the light of the lack of empirical evidence to describe and explain learning processes in life coaching, it seems too early to determine which variables are important to explore in a quantitative study. Indeed, quantitative studies require a greater understanding of the influential phenomena surrounding a topic, in order to effectively determine hypotheses for testing and inform the design of an effective study.

Thus, despite the advantages of quantitative research, the limitations it imposes on an exploratory study of this kind seem inappropriate at this early stage in the generation of research into coaching. In contrast, the rich description and explanation offered by qualitative research has the potential to inform and enhance quantitative study by providing guidelines for the manipulation of variables, as well as the development of measurement instruments. To this end, detailed in the following section is an explanation of qualitative research, the approach which forms the foundations for this grounded theory study.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research evolved from interpretivist and constructivist paradigms that acknowledge multiple realities and foster understanding through sensitive, inclusive exploration. It arose at a time when the human element was becoming "recognised increasingly as a critical and determining factor in the definition of truth and knowledge" (Burns, 2000, p. 10). Therefore, at the heart of qualitative research is the appreciation of the contextual nature of socially constructed, complex, and changeable realities (Burns, 2000; Creswell, 2002; Glesne, 1999).

Qualitative studies encourage and support rich understanding of phenomena. They attempt to gain multiple perspectives by taking advantage of smaller sample sizes, by conducting in-depth analysis of descriptions, themes and experience, and by capitalising on meaning and interpretation (Burns, 2000; Creswell, 2002; Glesne, 1999). Qualitative researchers use themselves as the instrument of observation and are actively engaged in the research process. Furthermore, they are guided by respondents' viewpoints. Thus, through questions, interaction with respondents and data, and with sensitivity to subjectivity, qualitative researchers come to understand, interpret, and reveal how respondents construct their surrounding worlds, and with that, the phenomena under examination (Glesne, 1999). It is this kind of authentic, fundamental understanding that is likely to be of utmost significance in fields in which there is scant research.

Historically, qualitative research has received much criticism from quantitative perspectives. One key criticism referred to is a lack of reliability and validity due to the subjective role of researchers and the impact of their interaction with the respondents. However, with the advent of the new research paradigm, a new set of qualifying criteria was also embraced to ensure reliability and validity in qualitative research. Glesne (1999) referred to this as "increasing trustworthiness" (p. 32), and along with other researchers (Creswell, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1996), she outlined a number of verification procedures for ensuring validity in qualitative research. These are significantly different from the verification techniques used in traditional quantitative approaches and their application to this study is discussed within the methods detailed in following chapter. These methods explain and demonstrate how qualitative researchers' interaction with respondents and the data is intentionally used as an integral and acknowledged part of the research process, rather than being perceived as a limitation. Similarly, the length of time involved in qualitative data collection, although perceived as a limitation from a quantitative viewpoint, is a defining characteristic of the qualitative research process and is therefore also used as means of supporting trustworthiness. Thus, the criticisms directed at qualitative inquiry do not need to be viewed as criticism *per se*. Indeed, the determining question is not, "Which approach is *right*?" but rather, "Which approach is *most appropriate for the research questions*?" Given the strengths of qualitative research outlined above and the potential it holds for exploring and explaining a new field of interest, by

acknowledging, understanding and, if necessary, accounting for criticism, qualitative research appears to be the most appropriate for this study.

Although predominantly qualitative, this study is holistic in its appreciation of the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. Qualitative research has the unique capacity to reveal processes, appreciate wholeness, and fathom meaning in order to deliver rich understanding. However, quantitative research provides an effective framework for deductively seeking explanations and relationships between variables. As Silverman (2000) suggested, it is a common perception that exploratory qualitative research does well to inform later quantitative research. Indeed, this was one of the original aims of grounded theory, and as such, is the intention underlying the qualitative foundations of this study. Qualitative research permits the uninhibited exploration of the authentic nature of phenomena, without confining it prematurely to insufficiently substantiated controls and manipulations, which, at this early stage of research into the topic, would be a likely risk. Thus, qualitative research promotes a *dot-to-dot* exploration of phenomena and subsequently leads to the formation of a coherent pattern or picture (Glesne, 1999), which in turn can influence future quantitative research. Such is one aspect of the interplay between qualitative and quantitative research in this study, as one is intended to feed off and complement the other. Furthermore, through the use of interpretive inquiry, a strand of qualitative research that incorporates both inductive and deductive processes, another level of qualitative-quantitative interplay is achieved. Thus, detailed within the ensuing section is a comprehensive justification for the use of interpretive inquiry as the practical approach to qualitative research within this study.

Interpretive inquiry

Interpretive inquiry is a strand of qualitative research that is essentially inductive in nature, yet which is also influenced by deductive logic. Not only does it have the sensitivity to capture the complexities of coaching processes, but it also has the capacity to deliver a holistic understanding of phenomena that are experientially different from case to case. As noted, interpretive research is primarily inductive and, as a secondary function, is then complemented by a deductive framework. Thus,

“meaningful realities are emergent, collaborative, and symbolic in nature” as theory is “developed inductively through iterative testing of tentative explanations against the experience of ongoing interaction with group members” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 11). Through the observation of patterned human interactions, in the interpretivist tradition phenomena are considered consequential and causal (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As such, interpretive inquiry appreciates the qualities of a process, as well as *how* social experience and meaning are created (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). These are essential factors in responding to the research questions relating to *how* coaches facilitate learning, *how* clients experience learning and how significant the process of learning in coaching is.

Interpretive inquiry also has the unique capacity to allow an exchange and interplay between the researcher and the data. It encourages the creation of new knowledge through the interdependence of the researcher and the researched (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Not only is this reflected in the nature of coaching relationships and therefore lends itself well to examination of such complex, intertwining and subjective phenomena, but it also gives the researcher adaptability, allowing the study to move with the data, rather than forcing the data to align with an outside agenda. As in coaching, where a client’s agenda determines the coaching that takes place, the story the data is telling also dictates the findings of the study. Indeed, rather than quantitatively applying an instrument of measurement, in interpretive research, the researcher *becomes* the instrument for inquiry during both data collection and analysis (Glesne, 1999; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, a researcher undergoes prolonged immersion in the phenomena under investigation and, by utilising the insight of experience throughout all stages of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) this form of inquiry promotes a degree of flexibility and appreciation that cannot be achieved using the controls and measures of quantitative studies.

Interpretive inquiry is the most appropriate method of ensuring the achievement of this study’s aim of explaining the process of learning in life coaching. The nature of coaching itself is mirrored by, and therefore can be better appreciated and understood, with interpretive inquiry. As demonstrated within the chapters of this thesis, like coaching, interpretive research “sprawls between and crosscuts all of the human

disciplines” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.7), through a deep understanding of human actions, motives and feelings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As discussed within the review of literature, both clients and coaches draw multiple interpretations from their individual coaching journeys. It is within this multi-dimensional coaching partnership that experience, context, multiple reality, interaction and meaning between coach, client and the immediate environment are inextricably interconnected. Indeed, it is the responsibility of the researcher to effectively value and understand this complex web of interrelated elements. This is ensured by the framework and strategies provided by qualitative interpretive inquiry. Furthermore, qualitative interpretive inquiry provides a platform for the adoption of grounded theory methodology, which aims to generate explanatory theory and therefore has the capacity to meet the demands of the current body of coaching research. Evolving in response to the symbolic interactionist movement, grounded theory methodology is explained in the following sections.

Symbolic interactionism

In order to appreciate the historical development of and current approaches to grounded theory, it is helpful to gain an understanding of symbolic interactionism as the philosophy of thought which laid its foundations. Arising from an attempt to merge the “interpretive, subjective study of human experience” with the positivist, “objective science of human conduct” (Denzin, 1992, p. 2), the symbolic interactionist movement endeavoured to “conform to criteria borrowed from the natural sciences” (Denzin, 1992, p. 2). However, despite its intention to create a unified process between interpretivist and positivist approaches, symbolic interactionism experienced a continual tension between these two paradigms. As Denzin (1992) explained, this led to a long history of differing perspectives in which symbolic interactionism evolved cumulatively through a synthesis of theories of great thinkers. Combining theories of the development of self (Cooley), consciousness (James) and their interaction with society (Mead), the individual was acknowledged as an active observer and meaning creator (Dewey), who in turn collaborated with others in complex social interaction (Blumer), thereby forming social change (Park). Thus, symbolic interactionism was born as a movement toward developing theories of understanding society as a collective, social interaction, which involved self and the

making of personal meaning (Denzin, 1992; Prus, 1996), and which fit “the actual, lived, emotional experiences of interacting human beings” (Denzin, 1992, p. 23). This influence is in turn apparent in the intention of grounded theory to understand interactive processes.

The symbolic interactionist influences of George Mead and Herbert Blumer were particularly significant in the development of grounded theory. Mead identified the concept of mind as a process by which one makes sense of the encountered world. In turn, he acknowledged its interconnectedness with self, the object of one’s own awareness, and society, which is the meaningful interaction between people through symbolic representations. Finally, Mead pinpointed language as the connecting bridge between both (Blumer, 1969; Prus, 1996). Extending Mead’s work, Blumer identified society as an ongoing production of action, within which people generate meaning about themselves and others through their interactions (Prus, 1996). Blumer viewed symbolic interactionism as being founded on three premises: i) human action occurs on the basis of derived meanings; ii) meaning is generated through interaction with others; and iii) interpretive processes that occur in interaction allow meanings to be experienced and modified (Blumer, 1969). Thus, the defining point of symbolic interactionism, not unlike coaching, acknowledges meaning as a product of social interaction experienced through an interpretive process between both self and society (Blumer, 1969). As such, it forms the foundations of interpretivist research approaches like grounded theory, which are “designed to yield verifiable knowledge of human group life and human conduct” (Blumer, 1969, p. 21).

By acknowledging the subtle nuances of human interaction and meaning creation as defined by Mead and Blumer above, symbolic interactionism challenged the dominance of the positivist, quantitative research tradition of the time and supported the development and acceptance of qualitative, interpretivist inquiry and with that, grounded theory. In his writing, Blumer openly attacked the positivist tradition by challenging the validity of the application of scientific protocol to the study of the social world (Blumer, 1969). In this way, the symbolic interactionist movement emerged as a counter to scientific methods and provided a new framework of study. Interestingly, it capitalised on the original antagonism between quantitative and qualitative research and provided a premise for *empirical validation*, combining

positivist rigour with interpretivist sensitivity. Indeed, the premises of symbolic interactionism, articulated by Mead and extended by Blumer, laid the foundations for a focused examination of phenomena and the meaningful relationships existing between them, which in turn paved the way for the development of grounded theory.

Grounded theory

Foundations and aims of grounded theory

When considering the history of tension between quantitative and qualitative philosophies, it is interesting to note that grounded theory, in springing from a symbolic interactionism platform, evolved from a synergistic interplay between the two. As explained earlier, in the 1960s, the credibility of quantitative research overpowered that of qualitative studies (Kennedy & Lingard, 2006). Despite this and to the credit of symbolic interactionist provocations from the likes of Blumer, it soon became apparent that quantitative research rarely led to the development of new theory, as it relied heavily on the testing of hypotheses extracted from existing theory (Charmaz, 2004). As a result, the coalition of positivist Barney Glaser and the symbolic interactionist influences of Anselm Strauss brought forth a new approach to research which sought to combine, in one methodology, the deductive reliability of quantitative research with the sensitivity and inductive exploratory features of interpretive inquiry (Charmaz, 2004; Kennedy & Lingard, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This resulted in the development of grounded theory as a methodology that delivers scientific rigour while emphasising the generation of new theory, rather than verification of existing theory (Kennedy & Lingard, 2006).

Thus, grounded theory orchestrates a unique interplay between qualitative and quantitative techniques. Firstly, when investigating a new field of inquiry, qualitative means are utilised to explore and discover what is significant. This leads to the development of hypotheses which arise from the data itself. Following this, a rigorous set of comparative techniques is applied to ensure that the hypotheses are reliable, thereby giving grounded theory a quantitative flavour. However, reliability is not achieved through the use of external measures. Indeed, the qualitative data is again

utilised and used *as* the measure, as hypotheses are constantly tested against old data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, theory is developed inductively *and* deductively, as themes, categories, and theories emerge and are iteratively compared to existing and incoming data. Not surprising, given the qualitative and quantitative influences in grounded theory, multiple methods of inquiry are particularly appropriate to grounded theory studies (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Indeed, researchers are reminded that it is the study that dictates the methods to be applied (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this way, a grounded theorist endeavours to remain flexible and open. This allows the integrative qualitative and quantitative nature of grounded theory to support the emergence of an empirically validated theory, which in turn may be presented as a set of propositions or as a model. Grounded theory methods enable a researcher to appreciate the complex array of multiple meanings, the result being that a researcher learns to work with and capitalise on a sizable degree of ambiguity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theorists become absorbed in the research process, allowing the study and their own developing theories to be shaped by the flow of ideas that emerge from the data itself. Self-reflective and sceptical of established theories, through its rigorous stages of analysis, grounded theory therefore promotes a critical distance between the researcher and the data, whilst still maintaining a sensitive appreciation of the phenomena at hand.

Grounded theory emerged as a form of interpretive inquiry that has the capacity to generate empirically based, explanatory theory. Indeed, it provides the best means for appreciating and conceptualising the broad learning processes involved in the interaction between coaches, clients and coaching contexts, as it “provide[s] a set of inductive steps that successively lead the researcher from studying concrete realities to rendering a conceptual understanding of them” (Charmaz, 2003a, p.311). Rooted in the data, grounded theorists first develop a substantive theory. This provides an empirical representation of an area and then culminates in a formal theory to deliver a conceptual understanding of the empirical phenomena (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this way, grounded theory promotes explanatory power across substantive areas (Charmaz, 2003b). Indeed, “the intent of a grounded theory study is to generate or discover a theory that explains a concept, process, or interaction among individuals” (Miller & Salkind, 2002, p.154). It involves the collection of data, usually by way of interview, through multiple visits to the field. These are interspersed with a constant

comparative method of analysis. Thus, continual data collection informs the development of the theory, which is firmly grounded in the data (Miller & Salkind, 2002) and is therefore rooted in the reality of the phenomena it represents (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As a result, grounded theory not only provides the means of extending existing bodies of research, but also holds significant value for practice.

Thus, the use of grounded theory is particularly well suited to areas where current theories are inadequate, as it offers a broad explanation and generic theory of processes of interaction. As it evolved to challenge the previously dominant mode of inquiry that aimed to test hypotheses, rather than generate them, the main aim and purpose of grounded theory is to generate *new* theory. This, in turn, is achieved through an integral, primarily inductive, yet systematically deductive approach, and as a result, findings are considered not only authentic, but also trustworthy and can therefore be reliably used to influence the design of future studies. In addition, because the integrative grounded theory design employed within this study was influenced by three theorists from positivist, post-positivist and constructivist perspectives, its potential to appeal to varied academic audiences, as well as practitioners, is increased. Each of these perspectives is discussed in the following sections in order to demonstrate the capacity of grounded theory to effectively respond to the research questions at hand and make a significant contribution to the body of coaching research.

Processes of grounded theory

The underlying analytic process of grounded theory is the use of constant comparison. This is an iterative method of research that continually tests and re-tests hypotheses, as they emerge from ongoing data collection and data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kennedy & Lingard, 2006). Through this process, grounded theory therefore answers to four criteria: fit, understanding, generality and control. These criteria are also used as a measure of reliability (Glaser, 1992). In this way, a theory which is grounded in the data *fits* the realities in the eyes of respondents, practitioners and researchers. It *works* in that it explains major variations and therefore has *relevance*, and with that, it is readily *modifiable* when new data presents variations in relation to

the phenomena under study. Thus, grounded theory seeks to mirror the reality of the phenomena under investigation in a way that is comprehensible to all involved parties. Furthermore, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990), by pinpointing, understanding and capitalising upon negative cases, properties and range of dimension of phenomena are explained and expanded. As a result, grounded theory findings can be generalised in a variety of circumstances, which in turn is made possible by an element of control applied to future conditions and situations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Grounded theory processes are purposefully implemented and simultaneously interwoven from beginning to end. Firstly, data is collected from purposefully chosen respondents. Secondly, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, the findings of which guide the collection of more data (Kennedy & Lingard, 2006). In this way, analytic categories are progressively created directly from the data, which in turn lead to the development of preliminary hypotheses explaining the behaviour and processes of the phenomena under investigation. These hypotheses then inform the development of the study and are tested against existing and new data. Finally, a grounded theory study comes to a close when data is deemed sufficiently explanatory of the phenomena at hand. Thus, the original purpose is borne in mind at all levels of a grounded theory study, and through the constant interchange of processes throughout, maintains a flexibility which ensures the fulfilment of the research aims.

Grounded theorists balance both closeness to and distance from the data. While “both theory and data analysis involve interpretation ... interpretation [is nevertheless] based on systematically carried out inquiry” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 8). Furthermore, multiple techniques are used to recognise bias and provide a way of thinking about data through various levels of abstraction and conceptualisation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In summary, by combining positivist rigour with interpretivist connection in relation to the data, a grounded theorist has the capacity to present theory that is significant for both non-academic and academic audiences. Indeed, this aligns well with the recent push toward establishing a scientist-practitioner milieu within the coaching field, in order to support a constant and reciprocal interchange between practice and theory (Stober, 2004).

Approaches to grounded theory

Over the years, the approaches to grounded theory used by various researchers have been subjected to ongoing debate (Charmaz, 2003b; Eaves, 2001). This was quite aptly summarised by Charmaz (2003b) as “Who’s got the real grounded theory?” (p.256). This argument perpetuates the historical positivist-interpretivist antagonism and continues to question the balance of interplay between the two. Furthermore, throughout their publications, grounded theorists appear to ‘squabble’ over the technicalities of the methodology. As Glaser and Strauss, the forefathers of grounded theory parted ways, two distinct approaches to grounded theory subsequently emerged. In addition, out of this distinction and the ensuing debate, a third approach was proposed in an attempt to reconcile the differences. Below, the distinctive features of these three approaches are briefly characterised, after which the integrative approach adopted within this study is outlined.

Glaser’s emerging design

The major process underpinning Glaser’s approach to grounded theory is allowing the emergence of categories and themes through constant comparison. Firstly, in order to avoid contaminating or railroading categories as they are developing, Glaser (1992) discouraged prior reading. He emphasised that everything is data and therefore, initial reference to literature is used only as a means of gaining an overall picture of the research problem. Indeed, Glaser asserted that a thorough review of the literature should only be undertaken after the theory has emerged from the data (Hunter, Hari, Egbu, & Kelly, 2005). In Glaserian grounded theory, the use of literature occurs during the final stages of the study, during which time categories and their relational hypotheses are being densified and sorted. Only when categories have emerged and are well established should literature be used to reconcile differences, show similarities, and add to or extend theory (Glaser, 1992). Once again, this demonstrates how grounded theory can be particularly useful in areas where little research exists.

Glaser's approach to grounded theory supports the emergence of categories at all stages within a study. He proposed that sampling begin with an interviewee who has a broad general knowledge of the topic. In this way, the emerging concepts which emanate from one broad question indicate the direction of and shape the study (Cutcliffe, 2000). Glaser, therefore, strongly emphasised gathering data without forcing preconceived questions or frameworks upon it. He also argued for analysis through the process of constant comparison rather than forceful questioning (Charmaz, 2003b). Thus, the underlying philosophy of Glaser's approach is from a realist's standpoint, which assumes that there is an external reality to discover and record and consequently expose (Kennedy & Lingard, 2006). In Glaserian grounded theory, this is achieved almost solely through the application of constant comparative methodology (Glaser, 1965), in which the neutral observer stance is maintained, independent of the data. This process allows the theory and categories to simply emerge and also allows the data to 'speak' (Locke, 1996). Through constant comparison of stories within the data, "data become transparent" and researchers "see the basic social process in the field through [their] participants telling [them] what is significant" (Charmaz, 2003b, p. 257).

Glaser maintained that the sole purpose of grounded theory is to generate theory, therefore yielding hypotheses only. These hypotheses are then intended to be verified through traditional positivist modes of inquiry. Indeed, the original intent of grounded theory was to break away from the demands of verification, the overriding aim of research at the time (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, in strong opposition to the grounded theory work proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), which Glaser (1992) claimed also seeks to verify theory through specific questioning, Glaser emphasised that grounded theory relies not on systematic questioning, but on an inherent trust in the process and a "true emergent creativity" (p. 110). This in turn gives rise to the discovery of "emergent, relevant integration of a theory" (p. 110). In contrast, Glaser argued that Strauss and Corbin's method could only be seen as an attempt to controllably deliver and "force" theory generation, in order to ensure verification of emerging hypotheses (Glaser, 1992). Strauss and Corbin's differing approach to grounded theory is further described below.

Strauss and Corbin's systematic design

Glaser (1992) pointed out that the purpose of Strauss and Corbin's (1998) systematic design is to actively generate *and verify* theory. Strauss and Corbin's approach explicitly sets out a series of methodological steps that they argued would make the application of grounded theory more accessible to researchers (Kennedy & Lingard, 2006). Through these steps, and also through a dependence on methodological rigour to generate reliable theory, systematic grounded theory serves not only to generate theory, but also to promote reliability of the interpretations (Charmaz, 2003b). However, Glaser responded with assertions that Strauss and Corbin's method is not actually grounded theory (Glaser, 1992). Instead, he described it as full conceptual description (Eaves, 2001; Melia, 1996) which, through stringent methodological techniques of analysis, "precludes true emergence of theory by 'forcing' the data to fit with preconceived ideas" (Kennedy & Lingard, 2006, p. 102).

The difference between the approaches of Glaser and Strauss and Corbin lies in their different perceptions of the researcher-data relationship, which in turn is evident in their analytic processes. Glaser portrayed the researcher as a passive observer, who simply discovers or allows the natural world to be revealed. On the other hand, Strauss and Corbin acknowledge the interactive role of the researcher through their emphasis on active and provocative analytic strategies (Annells, 1996; Locke, 1996). As such, in systematic grounded theory, analytic questions help researchers to micro-analyse and break down data (Annells, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Then, by combining the emergent hypotheses with the methodological applications of verification suggested by Strauss and Corbin, an assumed external reality is discovered, recorded *and* verified. In this way and despite the ongoing interaction, scientific distance is still said to be maintained through the adherence to analytic systemisation and technical jargon within the stages of analysis (Charmaz, 2003). Furthermore, through the deductive strength of testing emerging hypotheses against previous and incoming data, this kind of positivist style rigour aims to ensure that the researcher remains a neutral, although active, observer and supports the emergence of reliable and authentic theory. Thus, Strauss and Corbin provide an active set of techniques for bringing about the emergence of a grounded theory. This is in contrast

to Glaser, who simply promotes the necessity of discipline and restraint on the researcher's part in order to maintain neutrality and integrity to allow the emergence to proceed (Glaser, 1992).

Another distinctive feature of the Strauss and Corbin method is their proposed use of the literature in order to identify phenomena for investigation and subsequently analyse through a process of deduction (Locke, 1996). Glaser criticised this as risking forcing data (Glaser, 1992) in terms of "looking for data rather than at the data set as a whole" (Hunter et al., 2005, p. 59). In addition, Strauss and Corbin promoted the second review of literature as a process of selective sampling that is woven into the emerging theories as they develop within the stage of theory generation (Cutcliffe, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this way, leads provided by the literature encourage grounded theorists to engage with and systematically explore the full range of categorical and conceptual possibilities. Thus, in addition to the active role of the researcher in the generation of theory and therefore the creation of knowledge, influences of a constructivist approach in grounded theory become evident. This approach is explained further below.

Charmaz's constructivist design

In response to the conflict arising between the emerging and systematic designs, Charmaz (2003b) proposed a design which "resolves recent criticism of the method, and reconciles positivist assumptions and postmodernist critiques" (p. 270). She challenged the positivist view that social realities exist independent of human action and promoted an approach which recognises the underlying meanings, views and values of both respondents and researchers, thereby embracing the symbolic interactionist view of meaning (Blumer, 1969). In this way, constructivist grounded theorists distinguish between the real and the true, acknowledging the existence of constructed real worlds, in which truth is based upon human perspective, as opposed to single, universal, lasting truths. Thus, constructivist grounded theorists recognise the consequences of the interaction that occurs within both data collection and analysis, thereby promoting pragmatic applicability and practical significance. As such, constructivist grounded theory not only acknowledges the influence of the

researcher's interaction with the data during collection and analysis, but also with the respondents themselves. It therefore becomes a method in which the viewer is part of what is being viewed (Charmaz, 2003b, p. 273), yet simultaneously adopts a set of methods which "separate the observer from the observed, so that valid, scientific observations [can] be made" (Denzin, 1992, p. 7).

Charmaz (2003b) promoted the use of "grounded theory methods as flexible, heuristic strategies, rather than as formulaic procedures" (p. 251). Constructivist grounded theorists therefore shy away from rigid application of methods, in order to focus on the interpretation and understanding of respondents' meanings. This highlights the point that interview data is merely a reconstruction of an experience, rather than experience itself (Charmaz, 2003b) and with that, the positivist assumption of a singular reality is diminished. In this way, constructivist grounded theorists acknowledge that "social reality does not exist independent of human action" (Charmaz, 2003b, p. 269) and explicitly defines and extends the consequences of an interactive approach to grounded theory, which was originally proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Thus, "categories, concepts, and theoretical levels of an analysis emerge from the researcher's interactions within the field and questions about the data" (Charmaz, 2003b, p.271), and as such represent the combined interpretations of respondents and researcher. The researcher is therefore acknowledged as integral to, and not separate from, the creation of meaning and knowledge, and with that, the emergent grounded theory. Indeed, as Charmaz (2003b) explained, a constructivist approach to grounded theory allows researchers to seek meanings, views and values and clarify views of reality. It therefore addresses assumptions underlying the data and acknowledges the role of feelings and experience. To this end, and for the purposes of fulfilling the proposed research questions, the constructivist grounded theory approach aims to flexibly employ, rather than rigidly adhere to, grounded theory strategies.

Integrative grounded theory design

As evidenced within the above sections on emergent, systematic and constructivist approaches to grounded theory, each grounded theorist can have a different

interpretation and therefore application of grounded theory methods. Indeed, Charmaz (2003b) argued that “grounded theory offers a set of flexible strategies, not rigid prescriptions” (p. 256) and that grounded theory need not be tied to a single epistemological position (Charmaz, 2006). In the light of these statements, this study integrates methodology features from all three approaches described above. In doing so, it proposes an integrative grounded theory design which is predominantly emergent, with constructivist roots and systematic overtones. As such, Glaser’s notion of emergence is borne in mind at all stages in the study, yet the inherent constructivist influence on any theory which emerges is nevertheless acknowledged. In addition, this study integrates systematic procedures suggested by Strauss and Corbin as an overall framework for investigation. Not unlike the work of other grounded theorists, this study “draw[s] more broadly on the methodological writing of both of the founders of the method as well as other contemporary grounded theory methodologists” (Kennedy & Lingard, 2006, p. 102). Thus, as Charmaz (2006) encouraged, this study facilitates “a union of comparative methods and interaction in grounded theory” (p. 178), and like other studies, employs a “hybrid approach” (Lee, Perara, & Rahman, 2006, p. 150) to grounded theory.

The influence of the emerging design, which allows theory “to emerge from the data” (Creswell, 2002, p. 445), is applied in this study. Due to the current limited empirical understanding of learning processes in coaching, an emerging design was deemed congruent to ensure that the findings of the study would be grounded in and shaped by the data itself, rather than by “specific, pre-set categories” (Creswell, 2002, p. 445). The latter, as Glaser (1992) claimed, is a potential weakness of the Strauss and Corbin method, as it tends to force data through complex questioning and rigid methodological procedures. In contrast, an emerging design serves to “fit the realities in the eyes of participants, practitioners, and researchers” (Creswell, 2002, p. 445) and therefore enhances authenticity. In addition, the detached discipline required of an emergent grounded theorist in allowing theory to emerge is not unlike the process of coaching as facilitated by coaches. It consequently lends itself well to a study of the associated phenomena. Thus, emergent influences are evident in the design of this study’s approach to data analysis and theory generation. This is further explained in detail in the next chapter.

While the emergent approach to analysis ensures the inductive nature of this study, a systematic design provides a framework for more rigorous deductive approaches applied to the study's conceptualisation, data collection and verification of hypotheses and theory. In the first instance, and as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), in this study, a literature review serves to identify phenomena for investigation. Thus, the existing literature informs the design of the study, as well as the methods of inquiry. As can be seen in the following chapter, deductive logic based on information provided by the literature also influenced the initial stages of data collection and theoretical sampling. This process serves to extend emerging hypotheses and is integral in the process of theory generation. As emergent techniques set the parameters for hypotheses to emerge from the data through constant comparison, systematic deductive analysis, involving ongoing testing and re-testing of emerging hypotheses, validates and ensures the reliability of findings. This interplay between inductive and deductive grounded theory is further explained in the following chapter, in which the grounded theory strategies for data collection and analysis are detailed. In summary, these elements of a systematic design that are adopted within this study not only ensure focus, but also foster methodological rigour, thereby enhancing validity and credibility.

As coaching involves the understanding and appreciation of meaning, constructivist grounded theory ideologies that underpin this study recognise the nature of knowledge creation both in coaching and in research of this kind. Indeed, it would be contradictory and inauthentic to attempt to separate the underlying meanings, views and values of researcher and respondents within this study. Implicitly, a constructivist approach acknowledges the existence of constructed real worlds. Therefore, this philosophy prevails over all stages of this study, from conception to publication, as the interaction between researcher and researched and their consequent influences on the emergent theory are developed. This is further described in the following chapter. Not only do the constructivist roots of this study support the active pursuit of meaning during data collection and their detailed examination and interpretation during data analysis, but they also influence the methods of reporting. Thus, meaningful stories of respondents are revealed, yet findings are still grounded in scientific theory. This is important when considering the potential significance this study may hold for both for practitioners, as well as academics. In this way, through scientific processes, sense

can be made of the personal stories from both coaches and clients. This forges the link between practice and academia and draws new insight into the practice of coaching and the associated learning processes.

Key characteristics of grounded theory

This study displays key distinguishing features of grounded theory throughout its conception and application. There has been much criticism of grounded theory studies for their failure to adhere to certain principles. In addition, there has also been some debate around what constitutes the essential principles of grounded theory (Eaves, 2001). As a result, a number of distinguishing characteristics have been identified through the literature, and these are purposefully included in the methodology of this study.

Studies which adopt the grounded theory methodology fundamentally examine the nature of social and social-psychological processes and primarily focus on discovery and theory development, rather than verification of existing theory. Thus, a determining characteristic is the generation of new theory. Through iterative and simultaneous methods of data collection and analysis, which are in turn informed by theoretical sampling to refine, extend and complete emergent categories, both the process and the product of the research are inductively derived from the study itself. The application of grounded theory techniques leads to increasingly abstract levels of analysis, through the use of a data coding process, comparative methods analysis, memo writing, as well as the integration of the theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2003b; Eaves, 2001; Kennedy & Lingard, 2006). While these methods and their application within this study are addressed in the following chapter, provided below are explanations of those aspects which are particularly characteristic of grounded theory.

Theoretical sampling

Theoretical sampling is an essential element of grounded theory. This kind of sampling is informed by the themes and concepts which emerge from the ongoing collection and analysis of data, as respondents are selected on their capacity to help to develop theory through their experience with the process being studied (Miller & Salkind, 2002). Thus, there are no pre-defined limits on the number of respondents, interviews and data sources, and calculated decisions are needed in order to achieve a fullness of the understanding of the phenomena (Backman & Kyngas, 1999). A prerequisite for conducting theoretical sampling is the development of a set of relevant categories for explaining the data (Charmaz, 2003a). In order to achieve this, preliminary data is collected first through the use of purposeful sampling, which involves the purposeful selection of respondents based on preconceived preliminary dimensions of the phenomena (Cutcliffe, 2000; Miller & Salkind, 2002). To this end, whilst Cutcliffe (2000) argued that grounded theorists begin with respondents who have a broad general knowledge, Backman and Kyngas (1999) suggested starting with “selective sampling aimed at phenomenological variation ... [which] then proceeds to theoretical sampling” (p. 149). Indeed, whether broad or purposefully varied, “it appears that they [grounded theorists] do enter into a process of purposeful sampling, which is then superseded by theoretical sampling as the data/theory highlight the direction which further sampling needs to follow” (Cutcliffe, 2000, p. 1477).

Theoretical sampling allows a researcher to develop analytic power (Charmaz, 2003a) and is considered to be a major factor in the effectiveness of grounded theory (Kennedy & Lingard, 2006). Through its inherent flexibility, it builds into the study a self-correcting mechanism. As such, grounded theorists are encouraged to continually return to the field to recruit new respondents in order to develop specific theoretical categories, fill in holes in the data and refine ideas (Charmaz, 2003b). In this way, categories become complete and full of rich data, rather than lacking in substantive evidence. Consequently, this helps the researcher to define the properties, conditions, and the range of variation within categories and to pinpoint links and gaps that exist between categories. Indeed, “the emerging theory points to the next steps – the sociologist does not know them until he [sic] is guided by emerging gaps in his [sic]

theory and by research questions suggested by previous answers” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 47). The underlying questions guiding theoretical sampling are: “What groups or subgroups does one turn to *next* in data collection? And for *what* theoretical purpose?” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 47). Thus, the defining criteria of theoretical sampling are theoretical purpose and relevance. This kind of sampling then produces the conditions under which comparative methods can be efficiently employed in order to fully develop the emerging theory and increase its explanatory power (Charmaz, 2003b).

Theoretical sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity plays an important role within a grounded theory study. It implies a comprehensive and broad awareness of theory, personal experience, knowledge, understanding and skill. This serves to assist the researcher in conceptualising and formulating a theory as it emerges from the data during the explication of categories, properties and hypotheses (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In their original work, Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed that “the root sources of all significant theorizing is the sensitive insights of the observer himself [sic],” and that “the theorist's task is to make the most of his [sic] insights by developing them into systematic theory” (p. 256). Indeed, this is both the definition and purpose of theoretical sensitivity. It provides the awareness for necessary links to be made between the generation of concepts from the data and the relationship between them and the models of theory (Glaser, 1992).

There are two levels at which the influence of theoretical sensitivity prevails: substantive codes and theoretical codes. As Glaser (1992) explained, substantive codes are generated through personal sensitivity, which involves personal experience and intimate knowledge of the data. As conceptual meanings are captured within the properties of categories, patterns are revealed. In contrast, theoretical codes are generated through analytic and theoretical training. They provide a conceptual understanding of substantive codes and demonstrate how they relate to each other theoretically. Thus, grounded theorists do not generate new ideas *per se*, but rather propose new connections between conceptual ideas. Furthermore, it is theoretical

sensitivity which promotes the conceptualisation and integration of such relational hypotheses (Glaser, 1992).

As previously noted, a goal of grounded theory is to avoid ‘contamination’ of data with preconceived concepts that stem from sources other than the data and may or may not prove relevant (Glaser, 1978). This explains the use of the term *sensitivity*, which highlights the unobtrusive but facilitative role of outside theory in the grounded theory process. Indeed, theoretical sensitivity is considered lost when a researcher prematurely commits to a preconceived theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This is considered detrimental to developing valid grounded theory. However, through the rigour of grounded theory data analysis techniques, as described in the following chapter, and through the implementation of strategies such as reflective journals and continual self-questioning, risk of premature commitment to specific theories is minimised. Theoretical sensitivity also involves an acknowledgement of a researcher’s “personal and temperamental bent” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 46), in order to increase sensitivity and decrease risk of railroading. In this way, theoretical insight is achieved, thereby facilitating the uninhibited exploration of the phenomena, which in turn leads to the development of categories and hypotheses on both empirically substantive and conceptually formal levels. In summary, broad, detached theoretical sensitivity increases the credibility of a study (Glaser, 1978) and can also be used to inform its preliminary foundations. Not only does it give rise to the specific research questions and guide theoretical sampling, but it may also be used as a secondary source of data as supplementary validations during the final stages of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus, theoretical sensitivity is embedded within all stages of this study.

Theoretical saturation

The term *theoretical saturation* is used to describe the point at which the collection of more data would be counterproductive to the aims and purpose of the study (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kennedy & Lingard, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This is the point at which the theory and its categories and subcategories have been exposed in all their complexity through the categorisation of all of the incidents, thus

revealing a sufficient number of regularities and yielding no new examples of properties of conceptual categories (Locke, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In practical terms, this means:

When the researcher is convinced that his [sic] conceptual framework forms a systematic theory, that it is a reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied, that it is couched in a form possible for others to use in studying a similar area, and that he [sic] can publish his [sic] results with confidence, then he [sic] is near the end of his [sic] research. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.255)

Indeed, at saturation, many interchangeable incidents exist and as Glaser (1992) suggested, “it is unnecessary to keep collecting more incidents which keep indicating the same patterns and no new properties of it” (p. 40). Thus, according to the premise of grounded theory, data collection continues until it neither serves to expand or enrich the evolving explanation, which in turn consists of “a small set of highly relevant categories and their properties connected by theoretical codes into an integrated theory” (Glaser, 1992, p. 42).

The capacity to determine, and even more so demonstrate, the arrival at the point of saturation has attracted some criticism and debate, as it appears too easy to claim. Charmaz (2003a) suggested it is “an elastic category that contracts and expands to suit the researcher’s definitions rather than any consensual standard” (p. 325). Such comments emphasise the subjectivity of such claims. Despite this, Charmaz (2003a) also suggested that this weakness may be overcome through sustained field research, as is the case in this study. Furthermore, as Glaser (1992) suggested, another parameter for determining saturation and concluding the study is the stage at which new incidents may be seen as interchangeable indices for the same concept.

Use of the literature

One particular characteristic of grounded theory includes the use of a literature review to complete the study, rather than primarily as a fore-runner, as is the case in other research methodologies. In this way, the review of literature is capitalised upon either

to support the generation of the theory or to support the claims the theory makes. As discussed above, however, the precise moment at which the literature is used within a study depends on the chosen design. As in other studies, an initial review of the literature may be used in a grounded theory study to identify gaps in knowledge within the field of study and to help provide rationales for the research (Backman & Kyngas, 1999; Cutcliffe, 2000). In this way, it is used to provide preliminary guidelines for the research, as was the case in this study. As data is collected and analysed and new concepts emerge, according to the systematic approach and also adopted within this integrative grounded theory design, reflections and explanations in the literature can be sought to enhance understanding and provide new leads for the purposeful and theoretical collection of data. In this process, the literature is used as a secondary form of data to validate or further explore findings, rather than to railroad the study in particular directions based on existent literature (Charmaz, 2004). Thus, in this study, the literature is used at all stages; for the purposes of conceptualisation, development and most especially in this case, as a form of secondary data validation.

Explanatory grounded theory

Grounded theory, and particularly the integrative design adopted within this study, has an almost contradictory and dualistic nature, which serves to balance out the methods to form comprehensive and reliable explanatory theory. Firstly, and as explained earlier, stemming from the symbolic interactionist tension between quantitative and qualitative paradigms, it is both flexible and systematic at the same time, coupling inductive qualitative inquiry with the deductive techniques of quantitative investigation. As the data pulls in one direction, the grounded theorist is compelled to respond. Yet at the same time, controls are applied as the study swings between inductive and deductive logic. In this way, hypotheses evolve from the data inductively through interpretation. These are then tested deductively, overlaying a hypothesis on various examples from the data. Thus, it is a combination of allowing interpretations to emerge and placing interpretations on those in turn, as findings are discovered and validated (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Although “[i]t requires time and theoretical sensitivity to move from the data to the theory and back” (Backman & Kyngas, 1999, p. 148), a grounded theorist, upon mastering the delicate tight-rope act,

has the unique capacity to deliver a theory which has the power to inform both practice and research. Indeed, in uniting the influences of both positivism and interpretivism, grounded theory optimises the exploratory research process. As such, it is a particularly suitable methodology to use in a field like coaching, which is still in its infancy and which lacks research, especially of the phenomena surrounding the process of learning in coaching. This is further discussed in the following section.

Grounded theory and coaching

A grounded theory approach is particularly akin to the current body of coaching research and specifically, research into the process of learning in coaching. Firstly, such a design has the capacity to appreciate the culmination of processes, actions and interactions (Creswell, 2002), all of which also make up the ‘dance of coaching’. Secondly, the core of grounded theory design lies in the generation of a theory (Creswell, 2002), which in turn paves the way for the achievement of this study’s aim of creating a theory for learning in coaching. Thirdly, “grounded theory provides a means for developing theory in which theories are inadequate or non-existent” (Creswell, 2002, p. 447), and as Chemnitz and Swanson (1986) suggested, “grounded theory makes its greatest contribution in areas in which little research has been done” (p. 7). In reference to the relevant literature, this is certainly the case in the broad field of coaching, and particularly in relation to the process of learning in coaching. Therefore, at this early stage in the growth of coaching-related research, a grounded theory study is appropriate in order to discover variables to be further explored, tested and verified in future studies. Fourthly, grounded theory has already been successfully used in the fields of psychotherapy (Rennie, 2002) and counselling (Cutcliffe, 2006; Whitcher & Tse, 2004), and, given the similarities between coaching and therapy/counselling, may be assumed to apply well also to a study of coaching.

Lastly, grounded theory methods closely resemble the process of coaching. Not unlike coaching itself, grounded theory involves a cross-examination of data, from different perspectives and through the lens of an array of questions. Indeed, both symbolic interactionist-derived grounded theory and coaching require “examining the given analytical element by approaching it in a variety of different ways, viewing it from

different angles, asking many different questions of it, and returning to its scrutiny from the standpoint of such questions” (Blumer, 1969, p. 44). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that many of the processes of data collection and analysis are also similar to the process of coaching, as clients, together with their coaches, examine situations arising in their life, critically reflect on the actions/interactions taken and use the consequences of such action to conceptualise a ‘theory’ or rather, a plan for future action. While these similarities in nature between grounded theory and coaching were not determining factors in the choice of design, the shared understanding of these processes does, however, support the generation of the theory of learning in coaching. This is discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

Summary

When considering the premise of emergence in grounded theory, semantically, it could be said that a requisite of a grounded theory study is that a researcher must first be *immersed* in the phenomena and its relevant data. As such, this has been integrated throughout the methodology within this study. The use of the processes described throughout this chapter allows the researcher to become immersed in the phenomena under study and in the data itself. In this way, the researcher is in a position to “think with [the] data” and reflect upon what is learnt, while constantly making “new connections” and “gaining new insights” (Glesne, 1999, p. 137). This in turn informs the design of the study and significantly supports the generation of theory.

This chapter has provided an outline of the qualitative, interpretive nature of grounded theory and its quantitative influences, which serve to combine inductive and deductive approaches. The reader has been given an overview of the historical background, purposes and process of grounded theory and an understanding of the variation in approaches. The integrative approach, combining features of emerging, systematic and constructivist grounded theory, has been described and, through the use of iterative constant comparison, data is collected and analysed and theory is generated. Importantly, theory generation has been shown to be of particular significance to the field of coaching. Indeed, grounded theory is a methodology which has the capacity to

fulfil the aims of this study, revealing the answers to the research questions and facilitating the emergence of a theory for the process of learning in coaching.

In the following chapter, the application of grounded theory methodology in this study is described and explained. In detailing the applied methods, the points made within this chapter are demonstrated and highlight the practical rigour of grounded theory. Thus, grounded theory studies reveal what is actually happening, as opposed to what one might assume to be happening and, in doing so, maintain a fit between theory and the actual lived experience of those concerned. The methods discussed in the next chapter therefore provide a practical framework for the implementation of the above described methodology and, with that, the development of authentic grounded theory which holds meaning for respondents, researchers and practitioners alike.

Chapter Four

Methods

Outlined in this chapter are the methods adopted in this study. The chapter includes an explanation of the methods, which were based on grounded theory methodology, and which informed the processes of respondent selection, data collection, data analysis and theory generation. Concluding the chapter is a discussion of my role as the researcher and issues relating to the study's validity, reliability and ethics.

Respondent selection

A total of five coaches and nine of their respective past and current clients participated in this grounded theory study. Described within this section are the methods of purposeful, maximal sampling that were initially used to identify and approach suitable coaches and clients for participation in the beginning stages of the study. Following this, the methods of theoretical sampling are explained, revealing how themes and concepts emerging from the ongoing collection and analysis of data informed the selection of coaches and their clients in the intermediate, advanced and closing stages of the study.

Sampling overview

A combination of purposeful, maximal variation and theoretical sampling was used progressively, in this order, to recruit respondents in this study. As detailed in the previous chapter, in grounded theory, purposeful sampling is used as a forerunner to theoretical sampling. Thus, in this study, a purposeful, snowball, maximal variation sampling approach was employed to initiate the study and consequently form its foundations.

The first two coach respondents were chosen purposefully to set the parameters for maximal variation, which aims to elicit “multiple perspectives” (Creswell, 2002, p. 194). These coaches were identified and approached using a form of snowball sampling, whereby recommendations and information were provided by significant others (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2000). Coach training schools were purposefully identified and approached in order to locate high-calibre coaches, who employed different models of coaching, and who could identify and gain the agreement of relevant clients for participation. By combining the viewpoints of both coaches and clients from significantly different models of coaching, “insights gained from different perspectives ... add[ed] to the richness of the understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Kennedy & Lingard, 2006, p. 103). As such, this enabled the elicitation of learning processes from different coaching approaches which, in turn, combined to form a collective, comprehensive scope of the varied coaching models and methodologies present in the field.

In theoretical sampling, which is a key characteristic of grounded theory studies, respondents are selected based on their experience with the process being studied and their capacity to help to develop theory. In this way, findings that were elicited from the data derived from initial purposeful sampling influenced respondent selection in the later stages of the study. This enabled exploration of the full range of variations within categories and properties, and thereby delivered depth of data (Cutcliffe, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Furthermore, the comparison of groups provided added control over generality (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Not only does this approach to sampling support the aims of grounded theory, but it also answers the call from the current body of coaching literature to examine coaching across models and from both coach and client perspectives. The remainder of this section details the implementation of purposeful, maximal variation and theoretical sampling within the study.

Identifying and approaching coach training schools

As discussed in Chapter Two, the rapid emergence of coaching has led to varying understandings of what coaching is (Grant, 2004). For this reason and due to the

popularity of coaching, many professionals such as consultants, trainers, and therapists have adopted the term *coaching* to describe their service (Grant, 2004). In order to avoid perpetuating such confusion and to ensure the reliability of this study, International Coach Federation (ICF) accreditation and certification was used as a guideline for the selection of coach training schools and coaches respectively. Firstly, ICF accredited and pending-accreditation training schools were identified using the ICF website (International Coach Federation, 2006). With the exception of non-English speaking schools, it was possible to gain an overview of each school's philosophy and approach to coaching from their respective public websites. Based on this information, in addition to professional knowledge from time spent in the field, coach training schools were initially prioritised and subsequently approached based on several criteria:

- Promotion of life/personal coaching
- Apparent uniqueness of coaching methods to support maximal variation
- Presence within the global coaching industry

Through the adherence to this criteria, the study fulfilled the four criteria of grounded theory: fit, understanding, generality and control (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This is an important consideration in the light of the large degree of variation present in the coaching field. As such, the findings from this study span the breadth of a number of coaching styles and therefore aim to represent those elements which may be fundamental to most, if not all. A total of 28 ICF accredited training schools were reviewed using their public websites. Three had Australian bases, while the remaining schools were based internationally. Later, an additional two newly accredited Australian training schools were also reviewed.

Burns (2000) advises that gaining entry to a field “is best accomplished through a mutual contact who can recommend the researcher to the gatekeeper” (p. 401), and this recommendation was borne in mind and maintained wherever possible at all levels of field entry. Using the criteria described above, three preferred training schools were identified in Australia, and key personnel recommended by personal referrals from the field were then approached by email. Unfortunately, not all coach

training schools could be approached in this way. Another eight training schools in North America were approached using normal public avenues via their websites, first by email, and if that yielded no response, then by phone. Eventually, contact was established with all approached training schools, and four of these were in a position to provide recommendations for coaches who matched the original predetermined criteria (see appendix B). While other training schools provided several recommendations or sent out a call for respondents to their database, these potential respondents did not fulfil the necessary criteria. Later, two training schools based in the United Kingdom were also approached by public avenues, but cooperation was not gained. This experience supports Burns' above comments demonstrating that cooperation is indeed best elicited through mutual contacts. Similarly, the coaches who participated in this study were approached through the referrals from their coach training schools, and later, one coach was recruited from my own professional network. Their agreement in participating is attributed to this referrals-based approach. In contrast, general calls for respondents, placed in the ICF global newsletter and on a coach discussion forum, did not have the same success, as potential participants did not fulfil the predetermined criteria. Similarly, in the later stages of the study, individual emails sent to theoretically selected coaches, without introductions being made first by their associated training organization, did not elicit favourable responses.

Selecting and approaching coaches

All coaches participating in this study were professional coaches with coach-specific training and designated PCC (Professional Certified Coach) or MCC (Master Certified Coach) ICF accreditation, with no fewer than 2000 hours of paid coaching experience. Therefore, they adhered to ICF principles and could be relied upon to reflect the common coaching framework and processes outlined in chapter one. In this way, authenticity was ensured in that respondents accurately represented the most recognised regulator of coaching in the world (Kearns, 2006).

Coach respondents were approached in a number of ways, depending on what information their training schools were able to provide. One coach training school

nominated six of their most qualified and experienced Australian coaches. These coaches were approached personally by email, three of whom registered their interest in participating. One of these coaches was later invited to participate in the study. This coach accepted the invitation and agreed to a statement of consent. A similar approach was adopted for another coach training school, which was relatively young in comparison to the prior example, and, despite the support for research into coaching from the training school and the nomination of five potential coaches, this approach did not yield any interest. For another coach training school, all coaches on their database were sent a generic email. In this case, there were no immediate responses. This potentially indicates one of two things: either the call for respondents was not effective, or there were not enough or any coaches from this coach training school, who had the required level of experience and were interested in participating.

Another coach training school published the names of all of their coaches, ranked by their levels of experience on their public internet site. Therefore, in this case, three of the most experienced coaches were approached, all of whom replied, two of whom registered their interest and one of whom was later invited to participate due to her greater capacity to immediately fulfil the predetermined criteria. From yet another coach training school, coaches were approached via the public discussion group made available on their website. Although this approach yielded substantial interest, a recommendation provided by the coach school administration directly led to the recruitment of a coach who best matched the needs of the study. In all cases, an introductory email (see appendix C) was sent to all recommended/interested coaches. Attached to this email was an information sheet (see appendix D) which outlined the aims, details and commitment of participating in the study. Also attached was a brief questionnaire (see appendix E), which was designed to elicit information that would assist in theoretical sampling and the selection of the most suitable coach for this study of the learning processes in life/personal coaching.

Submitted questionnaires obtained from the interest generated through the above described methods were perused, and respondents were selected based on the degree to which they fulfilled the predetermined criteria. This criteria targeted coaches who: coached to a large degree with the framework of the relevant coach training model; had substantial past and current experience in coaching personal/life coaching clients,

had no significant expertise in the field of education, and: who were ICF certified. Originally, the criteria stipulated that the coaches needed to have coached for at least two years, and had at least ten paying clients for a minimum of twelve hours over period of three months or more, with 500 or more accumulated paid coaching hours. However, after the recruitment of the first two coaches, who both had over 2000 hours of paid coaching, with no less than fifty clients for a minimum of three months each, and at least five years' experience, this became the new benchmark for the selection of all participating coaches. All participating coaches, at the time of recruitment, were currently coaching clients for a minimum of thirty hours per month.

Originally, it was intended that coaches should not have a background in education, in order to avoid the potential risk of premature conceptualisation of coaching data with educational or learning theory. Thus, the aim was to elicit raw coaching data in order to uncover what was there, rather than what educational theory might suggest was there. However, several of the participating coaches who fulfilled the above criteria did indeed have some professional experience in either the field of education directly or in related fields. Consequently, the potential risk of premature conceptualisation was avoided by focusing heavily on coaching experience, rather than theory in the interviews. As such, it was found that the education backgrounds of these coaches did not impede the collection of raw coaching data.

An invitation email (see appendix F) was sent to each selected coach. This outlined the requirements of participation, as well as that of clients, and included an information sheet (see appendix D), informed consent (see appendix G) and criteria for selecting client respondents (see appendix H). The first four coaches were invited to participate across the space of six months, as ongoing data collection and preliminary analysis indicated the need for complementary perspectives that would contribute to theoretical purpose and relevance. All coaches who were selected and invited in this way agreed to participate and returned their informed consent statements.

After data collection and analysis was completed for the first four coaches and their clients, theoretical sampling led to the recruitment of one last coach and one of her respective clients. This coach was invited to participate after a coincidental

conversation from the field identified her as being able to shed significant light on the processes that were emerging from the data. In addition, as this coach had completed several foundational coach training courses, her participation was perceived to act as unifier of the different models of coaching that had until now been studied.

Furthermore, she served to represent many coaches in the field who have not trained with ICF accredited training schools. A formal invitation was sent and accepted.

Finally, because the previous data collection showed little difference between data gathered from past or current clients, and because of the sheer volume of data which had already been collected through multiple interviews, just one client was recruited to complement this coach's participation.

Selecting and approaching clients

In the third phase of the respondent selection process, coaches were asked to nominate two clients, one past and one current, based on predetermined criteria (see appendix H). Coaches began this process immediately after consenting to participate themselves, and contact was established with participating clients relatively quickly and easily. After interest was determined, clients were sent a formal invitation to participate (see appendix I). This outlined the requirements of their participation and included an information sheet (see appendix D) and informed consent (see appendix G).

Although coaches were given a set of criteria to guide their selection of clients, several difficulties were faced in having these met by participating clients. Several participating coaches who were approached via their training schools were also largely involved in training or coaching new coaches from their relevant coach training schools. This is likely one reason why they were recommended by their coach training schools and also helps to explain the continued dominance of the original training model in their current coaching practice. Whilst this supported the aims of the study, it did, however, restrict client selection, as many of their clients were also coaches themselves or trainee coaches. As one of the features of this study was to draw data from both the coach and client experience, this was considered to be a limitation and therefore was avoided wherever possible. Thus, only two participating

clients in this study were also trained coaches. However, in each case, their experience as both a client in the process, coupled with the sensitivity of coach training and experience, brought an unexpected and insightful dimension to the study.

Data collection

Data collection involves the identification of data to be collected and the selection and implementation of the most effective means of collecting it. As a result, interviews were adopted as the major means of data collection in this study, and the interview methods implemented in this study are described below. In addition, document collection provided some supplementation to data gathered in interviews and is also explained. Finally, consistent with grounded theory methodology, the literature was also used as an additional form of data. However, as this was explained in detail within the last chapter, it is not included here.

Interviews

Grounded theory interviews are focused and provide a tight fit between data collected and the analysis of data (Charmaz, 2003). With this in mind, in-depth qualitative interviewing is naturally suited to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003), because it provides the flexibility to simultaneously explore and target phenomena, using open-ended questions coupled with the sensitivity of the researcher's own insight (Charmaz, 2003). Interestingly, not unlike coaching conversations, such interviews facilitate a goal-directed conversation, enabling the researcher to exhibit direct control over the construction of the data. This, in turn, boosts the level of analytic control (Charmaz, 2003), as data becomes focused and rich, thereby promoting thorough analysis and exploration.

Questions are drafted, implemented and adjusted as the interview becomes a flexible emergence of ideas, issues and themes that are pursued and expanded as data becomes increasingly focused and conceptual categories more complete (Charmaz, 2003). It is this precise combination of flexibility and control which holds the researcher in a

position of responsive power and progressively narrows the focus of the data. Therefore, rich data is obtained, facilitating the generation of strong theory as the emerging theoretical framework develops (Charmaz, 2003).

Interview questions and design

Kvale (1996) explained an interview as “literally an inter view” (p. 44). He suggested seven stages of an interview investigation, which facilitate “an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a common theme” (p. 44). The process begins with thematizing, in which the conceptual and theoretical phenomena for exploration are identified. Kvale argued the importance of obtaining a pre-knowledge before beginning the interview process. This includes understanding the what, why and how of the investigation: which subject matter is to be studied, for which purposes and being familiar with the different methods of interviewing.

Kvale’s (1996) recommendations were reflected throughout the process of interview design within this study. After completing a review of the literature to establish sensitivity to the field, salient points were noted, and questions were devised to address them. While this is not typical of a grounded theory study, which traditionally takes an open-ended, discovery approach initially and gradually becomes more focused, this preparation promoted researcher sensitivity and ensured that the later developed broad questions would be comprehensive in their coverage. An exhaustive list of questions was refined into several categories of questions that were then trialled with one non-participating coach and then refined again to produce several overarching guiding questions (see appendix J). These aimed to uncover the meaning of the respondents within different dimensions of the topic of study.

The original research questions informed the selection of interview questions. Additionally, one background question was created to launch respondents into open conversation. Questions for coaches corresponded with questions for both past and current clients to ensure that data would correlate and enable full exploration of phenomena from the perspectives of both coach and client. In all cases, questions were worded and ordered in a way that would encourage respondents to tell of their

experience of coaching “in their terms ... and in a depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of their meanings” (Jones, 2004, p. 258). The final questions were piloted with one non-participating coach and two non-participating clients, after which interview guides (see appendix K) were drawn up to outline the process of the interview with each respondent. These questions were asked in preliminary data collection and served to provide substantial leads for specific follow-up questions, which responded to the phenomena emerging from ongoing data analysis. In this way, the interview guides were used to collect foundational data, which, in turn, provided a rich base for further, deeper, and more focused interviewing, as well as theoretical sampling.

Interview techniques

Style

Kvale (1996) suggested that interviews should be spontaneous, rich and specific. This was maintained throughout each interview during the study. The interview guide was used flexibly within interviews, and interviewee answers were dominant, with only short interviewer questions inserted in between, thereby allowing for follow-ups, clarification and increased focus. In most cases, interviews were a natural flow of conversation about coaching with an underlying but imperceptible interview agenda. Furthermore, verification of researcher interpretation was sought throughout the course of each interview. Interviewer confidence and sensitivity was increasingly developed, and purposeful questions were largely developed *on the spot*. This process was aided by the lengthy preparation of interview questions described earlier, through the ongoing analysis of data, and also by continual coaching practice, which involved a similar process of generating key questions through active listening. On the whole, interviews achieved a delicate balance between allowing the interviewee to direct the course of the interview and steering the interview to fulfil the needs of data collection and theory generation.

Phone versus face-to-face

In order to ensure participation of coaches and clients, it was necessary to conduct more than ninety percent of the interviews by phone. Common limitations of interviewing by phone normally arise in gaining the participation of individuals (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Shuy, 2003). However, because coaching itself is predominantly facilitated by phone, this was not a concern. Indeed, the use of telephone interviewing in this study provided numerous advantages, including reducing interviewer effects, thereby supporting contextual naturalness of respondents and reaching respondents who would not otherwise have been reached (Shuy, 2003). Furthermore, in comparing the few face-to-face interviews that were conducted with the phone interviews, the latter were found to be equally rich in data.

Recording and transcription

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Respondents were made aware that the interview was being recorded, and as interviews proceeded, notes were also made. These notes were used to follow up on significant points during the interview. They were also perused and used during data analysis. Existing data, rudimentary and ongoing data analysis, as well as researcher sensitivity influenced the choice of in-interview follow-ups. I transcribed every interview and sent these transcriptions to respondents for checking, before I began analysis. Only minor amendments were made in most cases. However, sometimes further clarification was provided. This process of self-transcribing interviews, although time consuming, was a key to developing an intimate familiarity with the data which, in turn, paved the way for ongoing and effective data analysis and theory generation.

Length and time

The number of interviews was driven by the concept of data saturation where a researcher returns to the field until categories are complete. In the words of Glaser and Strauss (1967):

When the researcher is convinced that his [sic] conceptual framework forms a systematic theory, that it is a reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied, that it is couched in a form possible for others to use in studying a similar area, and that he [sic] can publish his [sic] results with confidence, then he [sic] is near the end of his [sic] research. (p. 255)

Data collection began in June 2005 and finished in July 2006, thus spanning a period of over one year. A total of 24 interviews were conducted, including nine coach interviews and fifteen client interviews. Notably, four coaches participated in two interviews each, while past clients participated in one interview each and current clients participated in two or three interviews at different points throughout their coaching experience. This amounted to a total of over 25 hours of interviews, with approximately equal amounts of data provided by both coaches and clients. Furthermore, because of the similarity between coaching conversations and in-depth interviewing, all respondents were familiar with expressing themselves within this kind of context. As a result, interviews were especially rich in data.

Document collection

Documents “provide valuable information in helping researchers understand central phenomena in qualitative studies” (Creswell, 2002, p. 209). Document collection in this study involved the collection and perusal of both private and public written documents related to coaching. They included client folders, ICF policies, as well as ongoing researcher memos. These documents provided further insight into the details of coaching sessions and coaching processes, as they were examined and analysed,

and served to enhance the authenticity of researcher interpretation, analysis and theory development.

Client folders and documentation

Creswell (2002) recommended the use of personal documents as a rich source of information. In this regard, some complete and partial client folders and documentation were collected, which included coaching preparation questionnaires, coaching agreements, agreed goals/vision/aims/outcomes, session preparation forms/worksheets, session worksheets, readings and/or client work. Client folders were therefore used in two ways during the research process. Clients often referred to them during their interviews to remind them of their experiences. Furthermore, in several cases, copies of such documentation clarified the processes that were being examined.

ICF policies

Like personal documents, public documents can provide a good source of authentic data for a qualitative study (Creswell, 2002). The ICF core coaching competencies (see appendix A) document was used as data within this study and was therefore studied and analysed accordingly.

Data analysis

An overview

Data analysis in grounded theory is an ongoing process which begins from the very first interview and continues until the final writing of the research paper (Kvale, 1996). It allows the researcher to become fully aware of nuances (Charmaz, 2003) and as Glesne (1999) emphasised, it enables a researcher to continually “focus and shape the study as it proceeds” (p. 130). This intuitive process is particularly important to

this study, as it involves the exploration of very new coaching territory. In this way, the early leads in data analysis provided a foundation for subsequent data collection and respondent sampling.

Eaves (2001) described data analysis as a cyclical process. It begins with writing reflective memos that ignite a question-driven conversation between the researcher and the data. In this way, “data analysis is like a discussion between the actual data, the created theory, the memos and the researcher” (Backman & Kyngas, 1999, p. 149). Within this conversation, interpretations, clarifications, explanations and commentaries pave the way toward an understanding of the phenomena at hand (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This, in turn, is communicated to an audience. Thus, data analysis is a process of making sense of the threads of knowledge that are scattered across the field of inquiry by the respondents. The researcher takes on the task of examining each thread and progressively weaving them together to form an elaborate tapestry that tells a story. Piece by piece, the puzzle is scrutinised, and gradually, each piece finds its right place, *fits*, and comes together to complete the picture.

The process of data analysis adopted in this study is a combination of the approaches outlined by Glaser (1992), Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2003b). It utilises constant comparative method for “conceptual power” (Glaser, 1992, p. 41), within the broad frameworks governed by open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Finally, it embeds this within an appreciation of the essential constructivist nature of building theory, acknowledging the existence of multiple realities and the mutual creation of knowledge by the researcher and the respondents themselves (Charmaz, 2003b).

Coding and categorisation

Coding and categorisation form the foundations of data analysis. “To *analyse* means to separate something into parts or elements” (Kvale, 1996, p. 184), and, therefore, as data is broken down into ‘chunks’ of data, often called units of data (Kvale, 1996; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), each new category represents a piece of the puzzle. The process of coding and categorisation enables examination of minute details of the

data, helping “to break the data apart and reconstruct them to form an interpretive scheme” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 65). Thus, major categories are developed through “a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting ... collected data ... that are applicable to [the] research purpose” (Glesne, 1999, p. 135). Glesne (1999) characterised these raw categories as major data “clumps” (p. 135), which are then coded and broken down into *sub-chunks* or properties (Creswell, 2002). These, in turn, are also coded. From these clumps, hypotheses are formed, which serve to explain the phenomena under investigation, and which are validated by returning to the data and testing their general applicability (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Categories may be prescribed deductively and overlayed upon the data, or they may emerge inductively from the data itself (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The latter approach is the one used within this study. Indeed, Charmaz (2004) heralded that the most important basic rule for a grounded theorist is to study the emerging data. This suggestion was applied within this study, and, as Kvale (1996) proposed, it resulted in the development of a keen sense of awareness of the respondents’ implicit meanings and experience, thereby enhancing understanding and data analysis. As the respondents told their stories, the investigation went deeper through concurrent data analysis and data collection, and with that, new dimensions of the phenomena under investigation were brought to light, with each unit of data playing an integral role.

Codes are used to label categories and facilitate the comparison of concepts and generation of theory. Coding facilitates the discovery of possible themes, which are then held together with authentic examples from data (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). They may be derived *nvivo*, from catchy phrases in the data itself, from literature, or through the adoption of terms which are considered categorically comprehensive. Both methods were used in this study. Charmaz (2003b) recommended the use of action codes in order to emphasise the nature of grounded theory as a study of interrelated processes, rather than static topics. In this way, coding serves to generate further explanations and to gain understanding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), as was the case in this study. Codes evolved as categories were uncovered. They subsequently provided pivot points from which the data and categories were related and interrelated to ultimately form a whole. Thus, by means of the codes, emerging hypotheses were

validated and tested, as comparisons were drawn and reliability was checked (Kvale, 1996). Indeed, in this study, and as Charmaz (2003b) suggested, the discovery and development of categories and their representative codes led to the discovery and development of concepts and the theory itself.

Constant comparison

The process of grounded theory data analysis is described by Creswell (2002) as a gradual process of developing categories of information called the “constant comparative procedure” (p. 451). It is an inductive approach that leads the researcher from specific data to broad theory through a constant comparison and re-comparison of incidents within the data. Through this process, the categories and subsequently the theories become *grounded* in the data. Through this constant comparative procedure of comparing different people, different times, different incidents and different data with categories and categories with categories (Charmaz, 2003b), validity is enhanced. This process was used in this study to derive the major categories of descriptions and themes, which in turn led to the development of the theory proposed within this thesis.

The use of the constant comparison method allows an analyst to get “to the desired conceptual power, quickly, with ease and joy. Categories emerge upon comparison and properties emerge upon more comparison” (Glaser, 1992, p. 43). In this way, the process of constant comparison is not intended to fracture a single observation, giving each idea a conceptual name, as this would lead the researcher to drown in a surplus of categories and properties that yield no analysis (Glaser, 1992). In contrast, by comparing incident with incident in order to identify patterns, sort categories and integrate relevant concepts into core variables and conceptual names, categories and theory may be developed. During this process, substantive theory, based on empirical evidence, leads to formal theory that explains the conceptual area. Indeed, by starting with the substantive area, the emerging theory remains true to the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

While the intention of comparative analysis is not to validate theory *per se*, inherent in its process is a checking function. Although grounded theory arose out of an argued need to move away from traditional verification in order to focus on new, emerging theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), “generation of theory through comparative analysis both subsumes and assumes verifications and accurate descriptions, but *only* to the extent that the latter are in the service of generation. Otherwise they are sure to stifle it” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 28). Thus, it is emphasised that constant comparison aims first and foremost to generate *theory*. Priority is placed on the development of conceptual categories and hypotheses that arise from the data and which, although being relevant theoretical abstractions, may not be comprehensively accurate. As a result, through constant comparison, it is the examined similarity in data that delivers generality and explanatory power (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), rather than rigid adherence to systematic processes for validation, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) proposed. Indeed, in their original publication on grounded theory, both Glaser and Strauss (1967) pointed out that “a focus on testing can thus easily block the generation of a more rounded and more dense theory” (p. 27). This comment justifies the use of Strauss and Corbin’s strategies as a framework for analysis, insofar as their partial adoption provides a system for developing theory with the use of some validation techniques that do not inhibit the emergence of theory. In this way, the framework is used to ensure that “both implicitly and explicitly, the analyst continually checks out his [sic] theory as the data pour in” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 26), while avoiding explicit verification beyond testing hypotheses.

A framework for analysis

The strategies proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) provide a systematic framework for moving from data to theory. Such a framework is particularly useful for novice grounded theorists, as was the case in this study. Therefore, Strauss and Corbin’s systematic framework of analysis was used to guide the development of theory to the degree that it still supported the nature of emergence in classical grounded theory. This framework encourages a researcher to move from open coding, in which relatively indiscriminate data gathering and analysis occurs, to axial coding, within which situations are actually sought out in order to gather and analyse data

specifically about how categories are interrelated and the extent of their variation. From this point, selective coding culminates the process of analysis, using focused and deliberate sampling to generate data which, upon analysis, can validate and develop emerging theory (Locke, 1996). In this way, Strauss and Corbin (1998) promoted a three-step systematic procedure of coding and analysis, through which information is assembled in a theoretical paradigm by means of processes which expand, interrelate and refine categories. The emergent theory is presented as a series of propositions or relational statements about categories in the theoretical model (Miller & Salkind, 2002). Thus, as highlighted earlier, it is the job of grounded theory not to generate new concepts *per se*, but rather to generate new relationships between concepts (Glaser, 1992), which in turn are ensured by the progressive and cyclic movement through the open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

Open coding

Open coding is the first stage in the analytic process whereby “concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). It is a process by which text is opened up and exposes the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained therein” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). In this way, data is “broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). The concepts that arise during this phase of analysis form the foundations of the developing theory. They are clustered together based on the similarity of their characteristic nature or meaning (Kennedy & Lingard, 2006), and they represent more abstract concepts that, in turn, form the categories. Such categories symbolise specific phenomena emerging from the data.

Concepts may exist in multiple categories as the researcher constantly digs deeper to reveal the full range of potential meanings. Each category is then examined to uncover its properties and dimensions, these being the specific characteristics or attributes of a phenomenon and the range of variation within them respectively. Where necessary, sub-categories also provide further clarification and specification in this regard (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Such sub-categories serve to deliver great

explanatory power as they provide answers to the where, when, why, who and how of phenomena.

The process of open coding within this study consisted of line by line coding, as well as coding of sentences, paragraphs and entire documents (see appendix L). As constant comparison progressed, data collection and analysis became increasingly focused, thereby indicating the most generative units to code and analyse (Glaser, 1992). Coding proceeded for whatever categories or properties emerged from the data and, as such, gradually, repeated “patterns [were] formed [as] groups of properties align[ed] themselves along various dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.117). While Glaser (1992) asserted that open coding comes to an end when it yields a core category, Strauss and Corbin (1998) advocated an intermediate step called axial coding. This step and its significance to this study are outlined below, demonstrating how axial coding served to generate hypotheses and build theory.

Axial coding

The process of interrelating dimensions and properties of categories and sub-categories is called *axial coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In its fullest form, this procedure involves viewing properties of categories developed through the open-coding stage and identifying “the variety of conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences associated with a phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.126). It dissects categories through their axis so that relationships may be drawn between categories and sub-categories. Then, cues in the data are examined to determine how major categories may be related to each other at the property and dimensional level. This process crosscuts the dimensions of the categories and explores the actual words of respondents, as well as researchers’ conceptualisation of this (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, axial coding is both inductive and deductive, as it “reassemb[les] data that were fractured during open coding ... [as] categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124).

In opposition to Glaser's (1992) insistence on simply allowing patterns to emerge, Strauss and Corbin (1998) detail an active procedure for implementing axial coding. This process was implemented within this study, as it provided a background for thinking about the data as it was emerging. Thus, during open coding, focus was maintained on the emerging categories and dimensions, including their conditions, actions/interactions and consequences. These properties, however, were not probed or forced out of the data through direct questioning, as Strauss and Corbin recommended. Instead, emerging cues in the data were *identified*, rather than actively *sought*. This in turn related categories to subcategories and led to the development of comprehensive statements. Remembering that:

The important issue is not so much one of identifying and listing which conditions are causal, intervening, or contextual. Rather, what the analyst should focus on is the complex interweaving of events (conditions) leading up to a problem, an issue, or a happening to which persons are responding through some form of action/interaction, with some sort of consequences. In addition, the analyst might identify changes in the original situation (if any) as a result of that action/interaction. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 132)

Thus, the main purpose of axial coding in exploring and defining the connections between categories (Kennedy & Lingard, 2006) was maintained, while still supporting the intended emergent paradigm within grounded theory.

As a result of this phase of analysis, each property demonstrates “a *set of circumstances or situations*, in which phenomena are embedded” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 128), and actions/interactions indicate respondents' responses to such conditions. In this way, consequences are determined by examining the results that respondent actions yield. This, when related to the phenomenon at hand, leads to the formation of hypotheses and the theory itself (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin's (1998) phase of axial coding graduates to selective coding, as “a category is considered *saturated* when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136), and most of the variation has been accounted for. However, in this study, theoretical saturation

remains pending until the theory is developed. As Glaser suggested (1992), movement into the phase of theory generation begins gradually and inherently as the processes of coding yields in and of itself a core category. As a result of this approach, the researcher must learn to tolerate a certain degree of ambiguity and uncertainty at this stage, as the process becomes “very abstract and takes place deep in the researcher’s mind and partly unconsciously” (Backman & Kyngas, 1999, p. 150).

Selective coding and theory generation

Selective coding is the final analytic process whereby, through open and axial coding, the categories are integrated and refined and reassembled as *one* in the form of a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). “Integration occurs over time, beginning with the first steps in analysis and often not ending until the final writing” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 61). Thus, a core category emerges from the major categories in the data, and this provides an umbrella for the development of the theory. “Once a commitment is made to a central idea, major categories are related to it through explanatory statements of relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 61). Thus, the interrelationship of the categories in the axial coding phase provides the platform for selective coding and the generation and refining of the theory. In terms of this study, therefore, this process supports the development of an in-depth explanation of the learning processes involved in coaching and serves to generate a theory for learning in coaching.

The core category is a crucial element in building theory because “[i]t consists of all the products of analysis condensed into a few words that seem to explain what ‘this research is all about’ ... pull[ing] other categories together to form an explanatory whole” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 146). The core category may be one of the existing categories or, in cases where none of the categories capture the essence of the study effectively, may be one category that serves to represent them all. The core category is not forced. It appears frequently in the data, and indications of it exist within the majority of cases, leading to the natural development of a logical and consistent theory. As this theory is further refined and integrated with other concepts, its depth and explanatory power grow. Indeed, when building theory, the researcher’s aim is density. In this way, through the expansion of the salient properties and

dimensions of a category, variation, category precision and explanatory power are increased (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, even when conditions vary, the explanation remains readily applicable, as the underlying criterion of the core category is that it is central and that all other major categories relate to it (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Indeed, “a substantive theory is relevant to the people concerned and is readily modifiable ... [while] a formal theory is developed further than a substantive theory. It meets the criteria of fit, relevance and easy modification” (Backman & Kyngas, 1999, pp. 147-148). In this way, formal theory emerges from a study of a phenomenon closely examined within varied situations (Eaves, 2001).

While Strauss and Corbin (1998) propose a method for selecting and experimenting with core categories, Glaser (1992) maintains that “integration of theory is best when it emerges, like the concepts. The theory should never just be put together, nor should a formal-theory model be applied to it until one is sure it will fit, and will not force the data” (p. 41). This latter process was adopted within this study and was facilitated through constant comparison and the asking of one neutral question: what category or property of category does this incident indicate? Through iterative repetition and a focus on this one goal, the core category emerged. It did not need to *be* found, as Strauss and Corbin suggested, but simply revealed itself. In fact, as Glaser (1992) argued, “integration is not as difficult as Strauss says. It just emerges in sorting with theoretical codes” (p. 76). This was the experience within this study. Indeed, the whole process of grounded theory facilitated this natural progression to the core category, after which data analysis was limited to those areas relating to the core, as concepts and relationships were integrated and expounded to form theory.

Memos

Memo writing is a crucial tool in analysis and building grounded theory. Not only does it capture the creativity of the process, but it serves to develop the emergent theory at progressive levels of abstraction, playing a central role in shaping the theory from the data (Kennedy & Lingard, 2006; Miller & Salkind, 2002). Charmaz (2003b) identified memo writing as an intermediate step between coding and the first draft of the completed analysis, as it sparks thinking and the perception of data and codes

from new vantage points. In addition, it provides invaluable leads for collecting data, elaborating process, exploring codes, and a chronological recording of researchers' stages of analytic development. For this reason, memo writing was used throughout the stages of data collection, analysis, and the writing of findings within this study. It assisted in gaining a holistic understanding of the fragmented data analysis and provided an anchor for development of the emerging theory (Backman & Kyngas, 1999; Eaves, 2001; Glaser, 1992).

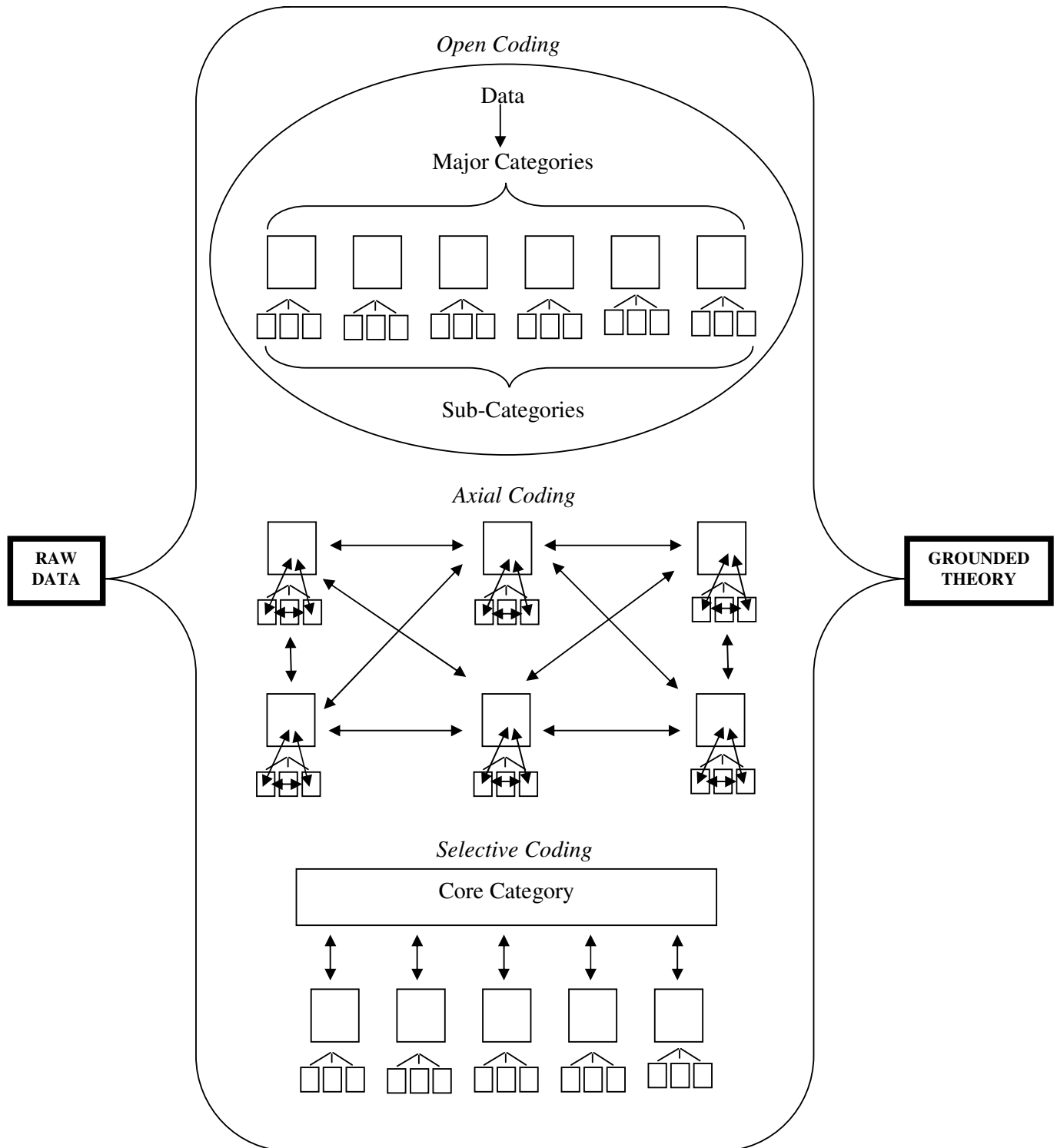
A unified process

Grounded theory provides unification across a number of levels. Firstly, it unites the research process with theoretical development, using inductive strategies to develop and make sense of data and build theory (Charmaz, 2004). Secondly, it emphasizes the unification of data collection and analysis, which are implemented simultaneously. This complementary partnership allows for prolonged immersion in the phenomena under investigation, thereby justifying claims for data saturation (Charmaz, 2003b) and utilising the insight of experience throughout all stages of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thirdly, data gathered from different sources is treated as one. Thus, coach, client, and documentary data collaboratively contributed to the generation of theory in this study.

In addition, through the unified approach adopted within this study, open, axial and selective coding, although explained here as three distinct stages, in fact were not implemented as stages at all, but rather as *ways of seeing* which were executed in unison with each other, so as to sustain the philosophy of emergence. Similarly, Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested that open and axial coding proceed together, rather than sequentially. Furthermore, Glaser (1992) characterised the phase of selective coding as integral, in that it organically emerges from these processes. Indeed, as both Strauss and Corbin and Glaser agreed, it is automatic for relational hypotheses to begin arising in the researcher's mind at all points throughout the study, and as such, "integration occurs over time, beginning with the first steps in analysis and often not ending until the final writing" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 161). Thus, the whole process is executed in unison, and not unlike coaching, forms a dance that

promotes meaning and understanding within an emergent paradigm. This whole process is shown in the figure 4.1 below:

Figure 4.1



The unified process of coding and theory generation

The above illustration demonstrates the unification of the processes for “collecting data, identifying categories, connecting these categories, and forming a theory” (Creswell, 2002, p. 439). This serves to form a powerful collaboration for theory construction. In this study, and as the diagram illustrates, these processes were implemented simultaneously and in unison, as raw data was progressively translated into theory. Thus, it was an integral procedure whereby concepts became categories, which in turn represented the collective experience of many people, and ultimately formed a set of interrelated concepts that made up the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Gradually and interdependently, the processes unite to reach the ultimate goal:

In the beginning, one’s hypotheses may seem unrelated, but as categories and properties emerge, develop in abstraction, and become related, their accumulating interrelations form an integrated central theoretical framework, *the core of the emerging theory*. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 40)

The approach to grounded theory used in this study also unifies the research methods with the experiences of those involved within them. In allowing interpretivist subjectivity to instinctively guide the research toward the fulfilment of its aims, it displays constructivist roots. In this way, it is acknowledged that not only do the interpretations of researchers shape their emergent codes (Charmaz, 2003b), but also, the interpretations of the respondents behind the words that they speak impact upon the course of the study. Indeed, there are two major avenues for analysis: that of respondents’ actual experience, as well as that of their interpretations of their experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Both are examined within this study and therefore combine to shape the presented grounded theory. In so doing, this theory is grounded in positivist actual experience, as well as constructivist interpretation of experience.

Another major component of this study is the interplay between the researcher and data, where the researcher continually responds and reacts to the data. Through this process, as the researcher, I immersed myself in and allowed myself and my thoughts to be shaped by the data, as I listened to and allowed it to speak. In doing so, I was forced to consider the range of the data, but the data was also forced through my lens of interpretation. Despite systems of rigour and verification, the data still passed

through my field of interpretation, and therefore cannot be considered separate. Indeed, “from the grounded theory perspective, the researcher is a social being who also creates and recreates social processes. Therefore, previous experiences are also data ... [and] the researcher uses them in order to understand better the processes being observed” (Backman & Kyngas, 1999, pp. 148-149). Like Charmaz (2003b), this study acknowledges the art and science of analytic product and process. Like Glaser and, to a degree, Strauss and Corbin, it also supports an objective, external reality, and through the employment of their scientific techniques, aims to uncover this. However, this study also acknowledges the role of interpretation in interpretive inquiry and therefore moves with the fluidity of a work of art. Thus, the final level of unification is achieved, combining positivist and constructivist influences to create grounded theory.

Techniques and tools

When undertaking a qualitative study, several techniques and tools may be employed to support the extrapolation of findings and the fulfilment of research questions. In this study, extensive manual note-taking, in addition to the use of a computer software package called Nvivo, were used to collect and analyse data more effectively throughout the development of the proposed theory and also to support the writing of the thesis.

Note-taking

Detailed notes were taken throughout each interview and were used as the basis for follow-up questions and to record insights as they emerged. In addition, they were reviewed and integrated during data analysis to provide spontaneous insight into familiar data by providing signposts for interpretation and analysis. The notes taken during interviews also formed the basis of analysis and, with that, assisted in the generation of theory. Notes were recorded together in a series of notebooks and, as a result, were easy to flick through, providing quick overviews of interviews, as well as a temporal record of the development of theory.

Nvivo

Nvivo is a computer software package which supports the analysis of data and the generation of grounded theory. There has been much debate around the use of computer software packages to support data analysis in grounded theory. Hunter, Hari, Egbu and Kelly (2005) outline the advantages of using software packages. The main benefits of software packages involve using software as a support to analysis, rather than as a means of analysis itself. Therefore, despite the assistance that software provides, much work is still required. Having all the data contained “within a single analytical environment” (p. 62) is highlighted as the main advantage of software programs such as Nvivo. This was certainly the experience throughout this study, as Nvivo was used from beginning to end. In the beginning, it was used to organise the data into categories and to store a large number of memos. As the study progressed, it was used to easily locate examples related to phenomena and check them against each other. Lastly, after the core category and majors categories had been largely developed, the data held within Nvivo was easily transferred to word processing software and formed the foundations for refining the theory and the reporting of findings.

Numerous researchers support the use of data software programs. They are known to be helpful for the analysis of large amounts of data which require close inspection (Charmaz, 2003b; Creswell, 2002), such as the micro-analysis techniques of Strauss and Corbin (1998). This is especially so when the researcher is comfortable using computers and is adequately trained in using the data analysis program. On both counts, this was the case in this study. Not only did the study synthesise a large amount of qualitative data, but it also employed the use of micro-analysis as described by Strauss and Corbin. Furthermore, I possessed advanced computer skills and also engaged in specific training in the use of the Nvivo software package. In addition, Hesse-Biber (2004) suggested that analytic software can also promote faster, more detailed, and more verifiable coding, as well as theory generation. As such, it can reduce the amount of time required for coding, indexing, retrieval and data storage. Thus, it supports a tighter analysis and allows the researcher to focus on generating and testing the theory. In short, “it is clear that the interpretation of qualitative data is

enriched by the use of computer software programs” (Hesse-Biber, 2004, p. 544). However, at the same time, Hesse-Biber suggested that a researcher must employ strategies for overcoming the common limitations of analytic software. That is, a researcher must be proactive, be aware of the intentions of the use of analytic software, and thoroughly understand its limitations.

Hesse-Biber (2004) outlined a number of risks frequently associated with the use of software packages, including: the potential for the researcher to become separated from the data; the fear of the researcher becoming a passive bystander as the computer dredges the data without theoretical insight, and; a focus on quantity of data, rather than quality to the detriment of in-depth analysis and fullness of data. Hunter, Hari, Egbu and Kelly (2005) elaborated in providing an overview of analytic software debates, suggesting that software programs i) cannot account for multiple meanings; ii) cannot do analysis on their own; iii) are little different from manual methods; iv) only assist in coding, and analysis needs still to be done manually; v) risk losing richness in data; vi) provide only the means of doing a general analysis; and vii) restrict the researcher from becoming familiar with the data.

The above limitations associated with software packages were easily accounted for by the use of Nvivo, which is an off-shoot of NUDIST, a program which was explicitly aimed at assisting in grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2003b). First, Nvivo allowed words, terms, and phrases to be categorised with multiple meanings. Second, it was understood and acknowledged that Nvivo would be used to assist data coding and organization. Therefore, analysis was still done manually. Third, large chunks of data were coded, in order to maintain richness of data. Fourth, Nvivo was able to be manipulated in order to account for detailed analysis. Finally, familiarity with the data was still maintained through manual transcription and constant revisiting of the data. In summary, Nvivo allowed the data to be handled as editable rich text and, through its “Node System” (Creswell, 2002, p. 263) and inter-linking tools, it provided structured and unstructured ways of representing and manipulating data systematically. Its features also include fully editable documents, which support original coding and a large capacity for defining properties and attributes (Creswell, 2002). In addition, Nvivo supported the benefits of using data analysis software outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) in that it provided a integrated system for

coding, memo-ing, data linking, as well as search and retrieval and conceptual/theory development. Lastly, it provided functions for multiple searches and mapping relationships on screen, both of which proved helpful.

Validity, reliability, trustworthiness and authenticity

One of the main criticisms of qualitative studies is that they are unable to control for bias in the research process. In grounded theory studies, the researcher interacts with the data, and this raises doubts about the trustworthiness of the findings. However, and as discussed in the previous chapter, qualitative researchers argue the socially constructed nature of reality and the integral interaction between meaning and context. For this reason, values, beliefs, and assumptions must be considered as part of the research process. Thus, Glesne (1999) highlighted the need for researchers to be alert to their biases and subjectivities. As a result, and in keeping with the methodological philosophy, it is necessary for a researcher to acknowledge tacit knowledge and underlying assumptions and bring them into the light of examination, exposing their interaction with the development of theory.

There is a need for the grounded theory researcher to acknowledge his/her prior knowledge and tacit knowledge to bring such knowledge into the open, to discuss how it has affected the theory development ... Yet, importantly, the mechanism for checking the authenticity or representativeness of such knowledge and insight exists within the grounded theory method, whereby such trustworthiness is achieved by exploring the possible or emerging concepts/categories in further interview. (Cutcliffe, 2000, p. 1479)

The creative process the researcher brings to the study is acknowledged. Yet through the self-checking mechanism within the constant comparative analysis process, trustworthiness is achieved, as emerging concepts, regardless of whether they emerge directly or indirectly from the data, are cross-examined and tested in further data collection or by reviewing existing data. In other words, “[t]he categories and hypotheses must be verified against the data by comparing the categories with each

other, with the data and with the researcher's conclusions" (Backman & Kyngas, 1999, p. 149).

Numerous other aspects boost the trustworthiness and authenticity of this qualitative study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasised the importance of prolonged engagement within the field to enhance credibility. This is reflected in the methods of data collection in this study, which continued until the point of saturation. Indeed, Glesne (1999) stated that "time is a major factor in the acquisition of trustworthy data" (p. 151). Through an extended period of combined data collection and analysis, during which time I continually returned to the field for further exploration, clarification and depth-probing, data collection inevitably spanned more than twelve months, thereby supporting reliability through length of time (Boyatzis, 1998). In addition, during this time, both theoretical and practical relationships with the field were maintained. Not only did I conduct the research, but I was also continually engaging in the process of coaching and being coached. This elicited the opportunity to both experience and experiment with the hypotheses and theory that emerged from the study, thereby providing another means for supporting the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study.

Credibility is also increased through the use of multiple data sources, provided for through interviews with both coaches and past and current clients, through various forms of document collection, and through the sensitive comparison of theoretical perspectives, in addition to respondent checking of transcripts. In addition, the constant comparative and testing and re-testing systematic procedure of grounded theory adds to credibility. This is especially the case with the additional use of an *audit trail* in the coding process. This was easily ensured through the use of Nvivo. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also suggested eliciting the assistance of outsiders to audit fieldwork notes and analytic interpretations to encourage credibility. Within this study, this occurred through ongoing discussions with coaching colleagues, mentors and academic colleagues.

Authenticity has also been mentioned throughout this chapter, particularly in relation to the selection of respondents. Indeed, the respondent selection criteria (see appendices B & H) were designed to recruit respondents that were representative of

the general target sample of coaches and clients, thus enhancing authenticity. Additionally, as open-ended questions delved into the *experiences* of respondents, this again upholds the authenticity of the data. Finally, one element of trustworthiness lies in the discussion of limitations associated within the study. This is included in Chapter Eight.

Traditionally, “validity refers to whether a measure is actually measuring what a researcher thinks it is measuring, [whereas] [r]eliability refers to whether or not the measure produces the same result each time it is used to measure the same thing” (Hesse-Biber, 2004, p. 538). However, according to the original intention of grounded theory, traditional methods of evaluation for validity and reliability do not suffice. Indeed, grounded theory has unique criteria for judging its trustworthiness and authenticity. As explained earlier, these are: fit, work, relevance and modifiability (Glaser, 1992). Within this study, fit was supported through the gradual movement from substantive empirical data to conceptual, formal theory. It was further supported through constant-comparison (Glaser, 1965) and the integration of literature. By sampling for and explaining major variations, work was achieved, and through the combination of fit and work, relevance was also attained. Finally, as this study’s findings present a theory which, as yet, remains largely unverified, inherent within it is a readiness for modification as new data presents itself (Glaser, 1992). It must be remembered that the purpose of grounded theory is to generate *theory* and findings from such studies are inherently valid, despite the fact that they are largely unverified. Indeed, it is not the intention of grounded theorists to generate *and* verify new theory. Thus, as long as grounded theory studies conform to the above mentioned unique grounded theory measures of reliability and trustworthiness, validity of findings is ensured.

Ethical considerations

As Glesne (1999) acknowledged, “ethical considerations are inseparable from your everyday interactions with research respondents and with your data” (p. 113). For this reason, ethical considerations have been taken into account at all levels of this study. Firstly, all involved parties were fully informed of the study and its purposes. As

coaches were approached via their training schools, the training schools were also made aware of the focus of the study and the involvement of their coaches. Although it was anticipated that descriptions of coaches and their use of respective coaching models might be of particular ethical concern to these training schools, this proved not to be the case. Thus, informed consent was sought from all respondents under the understanding that coaches' and clients' anonymity would be maintained, and that aliases would be used in reporting findings. In addition, coaching-related documents were only obtained if permission was granted from all associated parties. Furthermore, coaches and clients were given an opportunity to correct, clarify or add to transcripts.

Ethical considerations relating to reciprocal benefit were also provided for within the nature of this study. Coaches had the opportunity to become involved in actively *growing* the body of literature of evidence-based coaching. Furthermore, they had an opportunity to reflect upon their coaching practices and experiences in a focused way. In addition, they had first-hand experience in developing an understanding of the learning processes at play in a coaching partnership, the understanding of which is necessary for effective coaches (Skiffington & Zeus, 2003). Clients, on the other hand, had the opportunity to reflect on their coaching experiences, which reminded them of and reinforced the learning that occurred during their coaching sessions. In fact, one client commented:

I think it [the interview process] has had a positive impact ... because it's again going back over what's been done. There's always reinforcing and clarifying. I guess some words have come out of my mouth that I didn't expect to, but that's what happens when you're clarifying. You check and you're a good active listener, and you sort respond in a positive way and reflect back what I've said. (Client 2)

Thus, reflection provided by interviews served to reconnect clients with their experiences of coaching and also further their learning. In addition, clients had the opportunity to gain a greater insight into their personal learning experiences, the knowledge of which may benefit them in their future journeys. Furthermore, as a form of *debriefing*, through the rapport generated during interviews and through emails,

coaches and clients were made to feel welcome, should they have wished to further discuss any issues or queries that may have arisen during their interviews, on reflection or from reading the thesis. Finally, both coach training schools and respondents were assured that access to the final thesis in addition to any published papers would be made available to them on completion of the study.

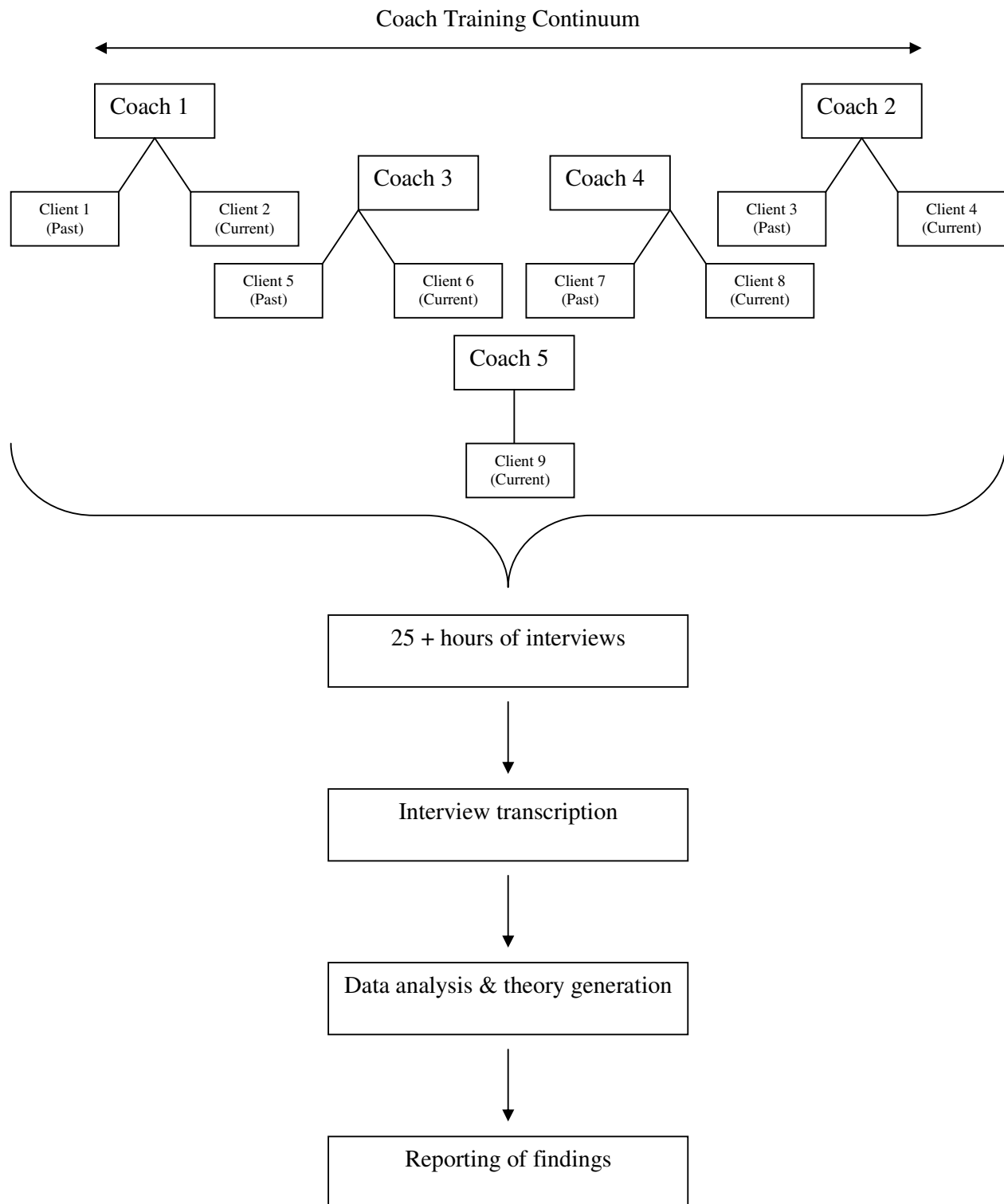
Ethical considerations associated with relevant bodies were also adhered to during the course of study. As ethical considerations associated with this study were considered to be of low risk, *Queensland University of Technology University Human Research Ethics Committee* granted this study *Level 1 (Low Risk) Ethical Clearance*. As such, it was not considered possible for respondents or definable groups to be identified by the published data, as aliases were used, and specific *identifiable* information was not necessary for the purposes of this study, or when provided, was substituted and shown in square brackets [] with similar but different information. Furthermore, all involved parties were adults independent of all influential relationships and were in the position to be able to give informed consent. The only ethical issue which remained was in relation to the subject matter of the interviews, which sometimes involved sensitive aspects of respondents' behaviour relating to their personal coaching issues. However, clients volunteered this information, and because of aliases used and the substitution of some information, this did not pose significant risk. Finally, as a member of the ICF and throughout the course of this study, I continued to uphold the ICF code of ethics (International Coach Federation, 2004), maintaining integrity in professional conduct at large and with the clients, ensuring confidentiality and privacy and avoiding or managing conflicts of interest should they arise (see appendix M). Furthermore, as this study was presented to the ICF coaching research special interest group and research committee, as well as promoted in the ICF global newsletter, the ICF was aware of and gave support to the research being conducted with its certified coaches.

Summary

Explained in this chapter were the methods relating to the development of the grounded theory, which, in turn, is presented in the following chapters. The process utilised purposeful sampling, followed by theoretical sampling, both of which supported the shaping of the theory. Interviews with coaches and clients were utilised as the major form of data collection, which, in turn, was supplemented by data gathered through document collection and reviews of the literature.

The data was analysed through a three-way constant comparative procedure, which involved opening up the data, relating emerging categories within and among themselves, and building a grounded theory. Furthermore, the chapter highlighted how this process was aided by a number of techniques and tools. The complete research process is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 4.2 below:

Figure 4.2



The research process

Finally, the chapter concluded with a discussion of validity and reliability and ethical considerations. While it is necessary to expound the methods by which a study proceeds, it must be remembered that in judging grounded theory, much emphasis rests on the underlying criteria of grounded theory. Therefore, in considering the methods applied within this study, they may only be evaluated in the light of the findings presented within the following chapters and whether they serve to fulfil fit, work, relevance and modifiability, in relation to the process of learning in coaching.

Chapter Five

Discovering Self-Knowledge

Consistent with grounded theory methodology, and in order to clarify, validate and extend findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hunter et al., 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the learning-centred theory of coaching explained in this and the following chapters is integrated with a discussion of the literature. While this approach is not intended to provide comprehensive validation or an explanation of every phenomenon which emerged in this study, it does aim to demonstrate “scholarliness” and “illustrate where literature is incorrect, is overly simplistic or partially explains a phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 52). Thus, it purposefully focuses on identifying gaps and potential inaccuracies in the coaching literature and attempts to reconcile these by illustrating the links between the coaching process and learning theory.

Overview of findings

The findings and discussion in this chapter and in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight address the research questions presented at the end of Chapter Two:

- To what degree does learning occur in life coaching?
- What kind of learning occurs during life coaching?
- How does learning occur in life coaching?
- How do coaches facilitate learning?
- How do clients experience learning?
- What is the significance of learning in life coaching?

Because of the nature of grounded theory and the intricacy of the process of coaching, it was not possible to answer each research question directly. As a result, this chapter begins by explaining the process of discovering, the first major category which

emerged within this grounded theory study of learning life coaching. In Chapter Six, the second major category, the process of applying, is explained, followed by the process of integrating in Chapter Seven. Finally, in Chapter Eight, the core category in this grounded theory of learning in life coaching is explained as a unified process of developing self. In addition, with the understanding of the coaching/learning process provided in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, the final chapter addresses each research question specifically, thereby summing up the findings of this study and its fulfilment of the research aims.

Each major category that emerged in this grounded theory of learning in life coaching consists of several distinct sub-categories. Each sub-category represents a key coaching process: relating, questioning, reflecting, listening, holding clients accountable, taking action, taking responsibility, and self-coaching. When combined together, these key coaching processes form the distinct learning processes of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge and culminate in a unified process. Thus, the processes are so intertwined that little delineation between them exists. While lines have been drawn between the key processes that form the major categories in the process of learning in life coaching, there is significant overlap, and each process is dependent upon the others for its facilitation. Thus, the above mentioned key coaching processes do not exclusively facilitate just one major learning process, and instead may emerge within one, two, or all three learning processes of discovery, application *and* integration of self-knowledge.

Throughout these findings and discussion, and consistent with grounded theory, data collected from both coaches and clients is treated as a whole. Therefore, while respondents' words are referenced to the respective coach or client in brackets (except where words were spoken by more than one person, in which case no reference is given), unless there was a distinct discrepancy between coaches and clients, the source of the quote was not considered important. In addition, throughout the presentation of these findings, it is assumed that clients predominantly discover, apply and integrate self-knowledge. Therefore, to avoid repetition, clients are not specifically referred to, and only in some cases, in which coaches also learn, are specific references made to distinguish who is engaging in the learning process. Similarly, as each major process (such as listening or reflecting) usually involved

interplay between coach and client action, and because distinctions are fully explained within each respective section, no distinctions are made elsewhere to indicate coaches' or clients' involvement in the processes. Likewise, in references to the facilitation of learning, neither coaches nor clients are specified, as both are collaboratively responsible for facilitating learning, as is explained by the grounded theory presented in these chapters. Finally, any names or other identifying information, which appeared in data samples, have been substituted with aliases to maintain anonymity. Such aliases appear in [square brackets].

Discovering Self-Knowledge

Discovering self-knowledge occurred through the combined processes of relating between coaches and clients, coaches questioning clients, clients reflecting and coaches listening to clients. First and foremost, the way in which coaches and clients related together *allowed* clients to discover self-knowledge. Secondly, coaches questioning their clients *drove* the process of discovery, as it caused clients to reflect. Reflection, in turn, was the third process *within* which clients discovered self-knowledge, and finally, it was through the process of coaches listening to their clients that clients' discoveries, self-knowledge and learning were *noticed* and *recognised*. This awareness of self-knowledge was then used to further clients' learning about themselves through extended questioning, reflection and listening or through the process of applying and integrating. The key coaching processes of relating, questioning, reflecting, and listening, and their contribution to the process of discovering self-knowledge and facilitating learning in life coaching are explained in this chapter.

Relating

The way in which coaches and clients related emerged as a key process in facilitating learning in life coaching. The process of relating between coaches and clients created conditions which *supported* client discovery of self-knowledge, because the relationship *allowed* clients to reveal and discover themselves. Therefore, it provided

a strong foundation for those key processes that were also involved in the discovery of self-knowledge, such as questioning, reflecting and listening, which are explained later in this chapter. As a result, the coach-client relationship acted:

like a breeding ground... it was like putting [clients] in a hothouse... Where it's warm and fuzzy and you get fed liquid fertilizer... The whole environment was just conducive to growth... [My coach] was like sunshine on a plant... Like she was just... yeah, that's the only way I can put it, but school wasn't like that. Like there were some teachers which I probably did really well under, because they took the time, and I've also done Tech, and I did really well under one teacher because she was affirming and positive and warm...
(Client 3)

The finding that the coach-client relationship is significant in the process of learning in life coaching is supported throughout both prescriptive and evidence-based coaching literature (Bluckert, 2005; Creane, 2002; Flaherty, 2005; International Coach Federation, 1999; Marshall, 2006; Rogers, 2004; Stober, 2006; Stober & Grant, 2006; Whitworth et al., 1998). However, to date, there have been no studies, which specifically focus on the process of relating between coaches and their clients. As such, and although the literature highlights key characteristics of coach-client relationships, which in turn emerged within this study, it does not empirically explain how these conditions may be created. Therefore, the findings from this study make an important contribution to coaching theory as they explain, not just the essential conditions in coach-client relationships, but also how to create them. Furthermore, the findings reveal how the characteristics of the coach-client relationship *allowed* and encouraged clients to make discoveries, and with that, facilitated the process of learning in life coaching.

Accepting

Of all the elements within the coach-client relationship, coaches' acceptance or non-judgement of clients was referred to most frequently by all coaches and most clients. Acceptance was cultivated through coaches refraining from judging their clients, and

this *allowed* clients to reveal themselves, and with that, discover previously unknown or hidden self-knowledge:

For one thing, she's [my coach is] a 100% accepting of any human being exactly as they are, and she transmits that really very clearly, a complete non-critical, love acceptance, which is really very beautiful... you never get the sense of anything ever being quote unquote "wrong." (Client 8)

Similarly, the characteristic of non-judgement is also reflected in coaching literature (Clifford-Rapp, 2005). In fact, when clients described the coaching relationship as *safe*, a common reference also in the literature (Clifford-Rapp, 2005; Hurd, 2004; International Coach Federation, 1999), it most often meant that they felt safe from judgement:

...I really feel I can say things to her [my coach] ... you know, in life, people you say things to them, and they go don't be silly that's ridiculous. I feel I can say my true feelings to her without being judged... (Client 4)

So you know, it's really helpful to be able to review an issue with someone and not have to worry about any kind of judgement or anything like that. (Client 6)

...I didn't feel any need to protect myself with anything. It was a very safe environment. (Client 8)

Through acceptance, coaches communicated to the clients that they were essentially *OK*, that they were neither right nor wrong and that they did not need to be *fixed*. This allowed clients to speak openly and engage in a process of discovery through reflection, as coaches engaged in the process of listening:

I guess the core really is that the client does feel valued, and that they feel that it's a safe space to talk and really express things, because that is what allows them to move forward, you know, when they can actually express what they have never told anyone else...(Coach 2)

I'm connecting from the heart, I'm listening from the heart, and I'm not trying to fix her, I'm not trying to do anything, I'm just going to listen to her to give her space to say what she needs to say in that moment. (Coach 5)

She really clearly has conveyed to me there is no right or no wrong answer and no expectation on her part, so I don't have a part of me guarded, and I certainly am far less resistant than I used to be. (Client 8)

While coaching literature recognises the significance of acceptance in the process of coaching (Oades, Caputi, Robinson, & Partridge, 2005), it provides minimal explanation of the actual process of accepting. However, the body of therapy and counselling literature provides greater understanding of this process (Kemp, 2005). In particular, in her discussion of the humanist contributions to coaching, Stober (2006) highlights the significance of acceptance, which in turn is a hallmark of Rogerian theory (Rogers, 1961). Therefore, the process of coaches refraining from judging their clients appears to reflect Rogers' notion of unconditional positive regard, a crucial element in the therapist-client relationship (Bluckert, 2005). The findings of this study shed some light on the counselling/coaching debate evident in the literature (Bachkirova & Cox, 2004; Hart et al., 2001) and identify similarities between the two processes.

In addition, coaches' attitudes toward learning played an important role in the cultivation of acceptance through non-judgement. When clients revealed something about themselves, coaches viewed this information as one piece of information to be used to help clients discover more self-knowledge and, in turn, progress them toward their desires:

So, for example, you might come to a session and say, "Well I didn't do any of my actions this week," and so instead of saying, "Well why didn't you do it?" which you don't ask as a coach, what you want to do is ask a learning question, and so I'd be saying things like, "What did you learn as a result of not doing the actions?" or, "Is this something that you know that you're doing in other areas, you know, you commit to doing things and then don't follow through. How do you feel about the fact that you haven't done your actions

this week? What consequences are there for you?” So it’s not about me, it’s actually about the client, getting them to learn something. (Coach 1)

It appeared, therefore, that in order to be accepting, coaches listened to their clients *instead* of judging them:

As coaches, it’s not for us to judge, it’s to hear... (Coach 2)

I learnt that when I ask at the end [what clients found most valuable in a session]...the most important thing was that you really heard, that you really listened to them deeply, and that they get the sense that you value them as a person, and that allows them to tell you things you know they have never told anyone else. (Coach 2)

It’s a combination of not just what [my coach] has said, it has more to do with what [my coach] has heard me say and her way of reflecting it, which is non-evasive, non-threatening, non-judgemental. (Client 8)

The relationship between listening and non-judgement was apparent in client reports that other people in their lives were not able to listen to them, because they could not move beyond subjective judgements and interpretations. This link is also supported in the literature (Nelson-Jones, 2006).

Being honest

Honesty was another key element of the coach-client relationship that influenced clients’ discovery of self-knowledge. Some of the examples provided above reveal the way in which coaches, in *accepting* clients, allowed clients to be *honest* with coaches, which led to greater discovery of self-knowledge. This was evidenced throughout the data:

There's a fair degree of trust that's built in the coaching relationship that enables the person to be real and honest in a way that they probably don't in other parts of their life. (Coach 1)

I guess the core really is that the client does feel valued, and that they feel that it's a safe space to talk and really express things...they can actually express what they have never told anyone else... (Coach 2)

I feel I can say my true feelings to her without being judged... (Client 4)

Such honesty allowed clients to reveal and discover more about themselves. This is supported by Creane (2002), whose study revealed that clients felt that they “were able to be honest about who they are and what they want” (p. 138) with their coaches. In addition, while clients were honest with coaches, in this study, coaches were also honest with clients:

They want the support of somebody who's going to be objective and honest with them, who doesn't have an agenda, to be able to help them. (Coach 1)

I will always be truthful with a client. I will tell the truth, but in a sensitive and constructive way. (Coach 2)

I would say that I can always depend on [my coach] to sort of give me real honesty and no judgement. (Client 6)

Similarly, Stober (2006) highlights the importance of coaches giving honest feedback to clients. In this study, honest feedback was also referred to as *feedback*, *making suggestions*, as well as coaches *pinpointing* or *pointing things out* to clients, by way of reflective listening and questioning:

If I'm noticing that they're doing something that's sabotaging themselves, then I will point that out. So, “When you stay up till three in the morning eating junk food, and you don't feel well enough to go to work, what's that?” (Coach 3)

[My coach] would point those [realisations] out. Either she would say it, or she would guide me to realizing it ... judging myself or something like that.

(Client 1)

In fact, coaches used the process of questioning and listening to be honest with their clients, and this helped avoid judgement and cultivate acceptance. This process was often referred to as coaches acting as *sounding boards*. Similarly, humour was also highlighted as an effective way of being honest, making light of otherwise *serious* topics. Honesty with clients was also facilitated by coaches giving positive feedback and encouragement. In fact, while clients reported feeling uncomfortable receiving positive feedback elsewhere in their lives, in coaching, they were able to accept it, and this assisted in the discovery *and* acceptance of self-knowledge. This, in turn, appeared to be related to the level of trust existing between coaches and clients.

Trusting

In this study, clients needed to trust coaches in order to discover self-knowledge. As Client 1 noted, *You've got to trust your coach to get you there or to guide you there.* Trust is also recognised widely in the coaching literature (Bluckert, 2005; Costa & Garmston, 1994; Creane, 2002; Flaherty, 2005; International Coach Federation, 1999; Rogers, 2004). Trust was initially built by coaches through their display of professionalism, credibility and assurances of confidentiality. However, while coaches did not mention professionalism or credibility as one aspect of developing trust, clients frequently did so. Clients described how they assessed the competency of coaches during initial interactions. Confidentiality was also referred to by both coaches and clients as another means by which trust was developed:

I'm pretty up front with people about the fact that whatever's discussed with me remains in strictest confidence...(Coach 1)

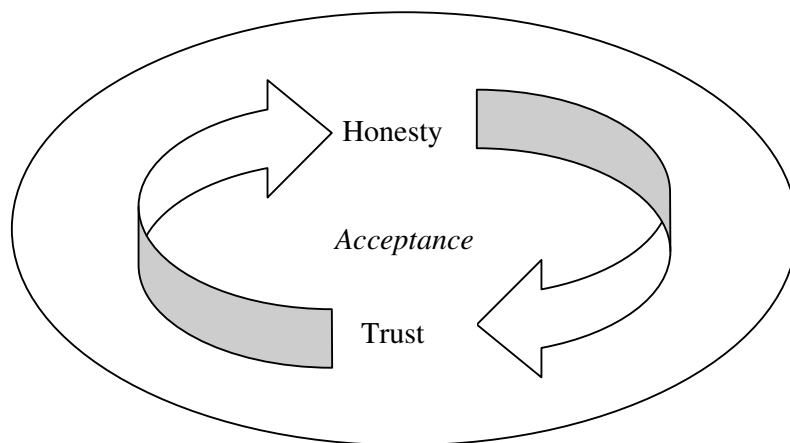
She [a client] didn't trust anybody locally. She thought no-one would keep it confidential, so in the end, she went to [another city] to see somebody. (Coach 2)

It's great to have a coach in a confidential situation where you're dealing with a difficult situation. (Client 6)

The pace of the coaching, referred to as *baby-steps*, was a further factor identified as influential in building trust with clients, as were the sensitivity and compassion displayed by coaches.

Trust was further developed through the processes of accepting and being honest. As a result, there appeared to be an independent relationship whereby coaches' acceptance and non-judgement of clients resulted in greater client trust, and therefore client honesty. This iterative cycle is illustrated in Figure 5.1 below:

Figure 5. 1



The interdependent relationship between acceptance, honesty and trust in the coach-client relationship

Respondents frequently reported that clients shared aspects of themselves with coaches that they were not likely to share with others, and which they were sometimes not aware of themselves, until sharing it with their coaches. Thus, the degree of trust in a coaching relationship emerged as more than some clients experienced elsewhere

in their lives. This allowed them to open themselves up to vulnerability and increased discovery of self-knowledge:

Well, the fact he rang me took a lot of courage, because this is a person that wouldn't normally ask for help, and the fact that he was engaging in coaching was a huge leap of faith for him and exercised trust, as well...(Coach 1)

You had to look at yourself a lot more [in coaching], you have to confront yourself... take steps in doing things that scare you and there's not always an answer in sight...there's an answer there, but you're not sure you're going to get there yourself, so you know you can feel vulnerable, inadequate, stupid, all those sorts of things... (Client 1)

In fact, it appeared that clients discovered self-knowledge particularly when they felt vulnerable. Thus, clients' trust in coaches was an important element within the process of discovering self-knowledge.

Maintaining equality

Like the coaching literature (Hurd, 2002; Richardson, 2000; Whitworth et al., 1998), maintaining equality in the coach-client relationship emerged as an important aspect of coaches and clients relating together and, therefore, the process of clients discovering self-knowledge. It was also an influential factor in promoting client responsibility. Equality was referred to in different ways, including *partners* or *partnership*, *mutually respectful* and as an *adult friendship*.

Equality was fostered as coaches and clients shared responsibility for the coaching processes and the process of learning. Client 2 referred to this as *a two-way street*, while Client 3 humorously commented that *two heads are better than one, even if they are only sheep*:

*I'm in charge of the process, but they're in charge of the actual processing...
I'm in charge of the process. I know what I'm doing. I know what works in*

terms of how we progress forward, but I don't make any major decisions for the client. The client makes all the decisions, the client answers all of the questions, the client comes to all the realisations, so I'm there as a facilitator of the process, but the client does the processing. (Coach 1)

We both know what our responsibilities are, what we agree to...By setting the context, so we know how we are actually going to work together, the client and the coach, and that this is a partnership, this is not, "I'm the expert and you know nothing." (Coach 2)

I mean, it's a two-way street. There's listening, there's feedback. Even though I was talking about a lot of my stuff, there were comments coming back that I could respond to. (Client 2)

Therefore, while coaches were largely responsible for the major processes of listening, questioning and holding accountable, clients were responsible for reflecting, taking action and taking responsibility. In this way, the coach-client relationship was equal. As one coach highlighted, a coach points a client in the direction of the door, but a client is responsible for walking through it:

Sometimes when you encounter something really fresh and you go, "Yikes!" You find something about yourself and then you go, "Yikes!" And you can close that door very quickly but a coach invariably literally supports you in that moment so you don't go back. (Coach 4)

Equality was also fostered through reciprocal learning in coaching. As clients discovered self-knowledge, so coaches discovered their clients. Clients were expected to discover their own answers, as coaches did not know the answers to the questions they asked of clients, until clients discovered them. This process also supported the creation of acceptance and non-judgement. By inviting clients to become involved in the coaching process and to discover their own answers, coaches were *not required* to make judgements:

I think it was four weeks, like I said to [my coach], “Well tell me what I need to know,” but she doesn’t know either. She’s also working it out with me, she hasn’t got the answer, and her job is to help coach it and bring it out of me.

(Client 4)

You know, ‘cause a coach a coach doesn’t tell you a lot of things. They get you to seek them out yourself, and they ask you probing questions that make you think that you actually have the answers to, but you may not have been aware of it. (Client 6)

In terms of just wanting to discuss issues with, even if you’re going to do it with a colleague or a friend, there’s often a lot of advice giving, and there’s a lot of people telling you what to do, and I think what’s different about coaching is that you end up telling yourself what to do, and coaching helps bring that out. (Client 6)

The notion that coaches and clients learn collaboratively has important implications for teachers, who usually know the answers to the questions they ask students. Like coaching, collaborative learning involves “a small group of two or more students work[ing] together to fulfil an assigned task within a particular domain of learning to achieve a joint goal” (Erkens, Prangma, & Jaspers, 2006, p. 235). Similarly, collaborative learning partners, like coaches and their clients, have “a common interest in solving the problem at hand” (Erkens et al., 2006, p. 235). Indeed, among the respondents of this study, there were “problems at hand” that emerged from clients’ current circumstances. Thus, clients had an interest in solving them, as did coaches who were being for their services. In addition, similar to the process in coaching, to achieve a collaborative learning goal, “the collaboration partners will have to coordinate their activities and their thinking” (Erkens et al., 2006, p. 235). This study’s findings suggest not only that coaching is a means of facilitating collaborative learning, but also that the literature related to collaborative learning environments may be utilised to better understand the process of learning in coaching.

Equality between coaches and clients was also evident in this study, as coaches viewed the learning process as one not only for clients, but also for themselves. This

notion of reciprocal learning is supported by Freire (1990), who argued that “whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning” (p. 31). Learning reciprocity is also evidenced in the coaching literature (Creane, 2002; Zeus & Skiffington, 2002) and the mentoring literature (Ehrich, 1999).

Equality within the coach-client relationship was enhanced, because coaches frequently *checked in* with clients to ensure agreement on the direction/s being taken. For example, when agreeing on action, coaches and clients engaged in negotiations, and clients were free to modify action and to *take or leave* anything discussed during a session. Furthermore, coaching always began with a formal agreement (see appendix P), in which the expectations of both coaches and clients were set down, including agreement on the payment of fees. This supported the cultivation of distance and detachment between coaches and clients, a phenomenon which respondents described as important:

Because with coaching, there's somebody supporting you, there's a place to go to whine and cry about it that's safe and that's not attached to the rest of your life. (Coach 3)

So what was really exciting is to be talking to somebody who could really, really hear me, and who was really interested in what it was I wanted my life to be like, and it's the kind of conversation that I could have with other people, my mother, my father and my husband, but they have a different stake in it, you know? In a way, they couldn't really listen to it, because they don't have the skills really or the competence that a coach has, or that [my coach] has. My husband would get defensive and say, "What about...", so he'd worry. "What about this? Does this mean you're never going to work again? And what about that?" (Client 7)

Despite the importance of detachment, clients also referred to the friendliness and warmth of relationships with coaches. Coaches were willing to show and share their personal sides when they considered it beneficial to clients. Sessions were conversational in manner, described as *warm* and with the presence of emotion. Because of the honesty shared between coaches and clients described earlier, the

coach-client relationship was also intimate. Thus, another aspect of maintaining equality in the coach-client relationship appeared to involve the creation of a unique balance of distance and intimacy:

It's semi-formal. There's a formality to it, but it's semi-formal... it's full of sort of contradictions, in a way, because it's adult learning, and it's sort of conversational, but I know what [my coach's] role, clearly what her role is.
(Client 2)

While distance supported the processes of coaches listening, questioning and holding clients accountable, friendliness and intimacy increased client trust in coaches and being honest, reflecting, taking action and taking responsibility. Therefore, the equal balance of distance and intimacy, in turn, supported the shared and equal process of coaching and learning.

Interestingly, despite the focus on equality throughout the coaching relationship, equality was perceived to be greater toward the end of coaching relationships. Clients noted that coaches employed more direction at the start of coaching. As one client clearly articulated:

It also made me feel that I'm then a bit more of an equal in the relationship. I've always felt that way, but not like that, but it's also about how I steer the ship, as well. Like, her expertise is in coaching and business ... direction... but it's also about me doing that, you know, within the coaching context. I don't know if I'm making sense... At the very beginning, I was talking to [my coach], I was wanting reliance on an expert, and then I discovered that I'm the expert, and she's the expert. (Client 2)

Gradually, through the process of coaching, a sense of equality was strengthened as clients became more aware of their role in the coaching process and began to take responsibility by self-questioning, listening to themselves and holding themselves accountable. As a result, clients developed the ability to continually discover self-knowledge and further their own learning. Thus, they became self-directed learners,

as they actively participated in their own learning, engaged metacognitively and took personal responsibility for their learning (Areglado, Bradley, & Lane, 1996).

Being purposeful

The relationship between coach and client had a clear purpose. The coaching purpose related to client desires, and this influenced the interaction between coaches and clients and the course of learning. Both parties were clear on the expected outcomes of coaching, as well as the expectations of each other:

I guess one way to explain it is, how can you know that this is the target when you don't know where the target is? So there's the likely[hood that] the coaching relationship is not going to work. If you're not clear what you want and I'm not clear what you want, you just end up somewhere. (Coach 2)

I lay out literally what I see is the purpose of the program, which is sort of the why of the program and some specific outcomes. (Coach 4)

You're really focused and you know the reason why you're there... (Coach 5)

It's almost a conversation that's got its own set of goals...You don't go off track too much, you stay on track, you cut to the chase, you get to the heart of it...(Client 2)

The process that she [my coach] uses ... it begins with an understanding of what it is the parties are getting together for. (Client 5)

Every interaction in the coach-client relationship was grounded within the agreed purpose, and client discoveries emerged in the light of this purpose. Interestingly, Client 4 highlighted how her experience of coaching changed during her final sessions, when she had achieved her desires, and there was no longer a clear purpose. Thus, the discovery of self-knowledge appeared to be stronger when a well-defined

purpose was underlying the coach-client relationship, as clients were more willing to realise/hear/do things when they were aware of the reason why:

I guess she [my coach] probably had the idea of... this is where you are, I can see where you want to be, I can see the process you need to go through, you just need to do it. I think that's what she did, and I just did what she said!

(Client 1)

I knew several things. She would not have suggested it in the manner in which she suggested it, unless she profoundly believed it wasn't good for me. (Client 8)

This notion of purposefulness, its relationship to learning and its facilitation in coaching is strongly supported by mentoring theory. In particular, Megginson (2005) explains how mentoring relationships begin with a broad agreement on the purpose of the relationship, and that a distinct sense of purpose is the basis of the relationship, which he calls “goal clarity” (p. 27). Therefore, it appears that in this way, learning in coaching is not unlike that of mentoring.

Being attracted

The relationship between coach and client was founded upon some degree of mutual attraction. Being attracted emerged as the final significant element in coaches and clients relating, which enhanced the discovery of self-knowledge and the facilitation of learning. When first establishing coaching relationships, clients felt a certain degree of attraction toward coaches. Similarly, coaches also commented that they needed to feel some sort of connection with clients. This attraction was attributed to a number of factors, including synergy, energy, similar values or characteristics, which coaches exhibited and which clients wanted:

I noticed that I really need to feel a personal connection with my coach. I'm speaking of myself and my coach, and so that's one of the things I try to do

with my clients, is make sure that they feel enough of a personal connection with me. (Coach 3)

There's a feeling of mutual relationship and connection. Does this feel like the right fit? Do they feel that this is the right coach for them and do I feel that this is a good fit? And if there is, if it feels like a good fit, then we move into the intake. (Coach 4)

I read [my coach]'s article [in a magazine], and you see lots of it, you know, get rich and all that type of thing, and just that article really, really made sense, and I thought that's what I want to achieve in life... (Client 4)

The time was right to just pick up the phone, and I rang both women [coaches], but I clicked more with [my coach] on the phone. (Client 2)

These examples highlight the different kinds of attraction that clients and coaches experienced. This was referred to as a coaching *fit* and appeared to increase the motivation of both clients and coaches to engage in the process of discovery and learning. There was also another kind of attraction where the issues or challenges that clients were experiencing reflected those of coaches:

I attracted almost what I call or what [some people call] restorative clients. They were high achievers, but they had lots and lots of issues to work through. Personal issues ... So obviously, I attracted those clients, because, like I was saying before, they brought issues to me that I had to address myself, and as I worked through that, I no longer attract them. (Coach 2)

[I learn from my clients] all the time. It's this energetic thing, again energy, but it happens that whatever issues I'm working on myself, come up with my clients. (Coach 3)

Although the coaching literature recognises the notion of *fit* between coaches and clients, social learning theory provides rich insight into the nature of attraction in the coach-client relationship, as it is reflected in this study. Bandura (1977), for example,

explains how personal determinants such as emotional ties like attraction ensure opportunities for people to impact upon each other. Similarly, when two people's values, personal standards and beliefs are consistent, the more likely two people are to continue a relationship, just as when there is an expectation of reward or success (Salkind, 2004), as in the fulfilment of desires in coaching. This suggests that the quality of attraction between coaches and clients may be a prerequisite for the process of discovering self-knowledge and therefore for social learning. This phenomenon is also illustrated in mentoring theory as “a core alignment of values between mentor and mentee, both in terms of initial attraction or liking and in sustaining the relationship over time” (Megginson, 2005, p. 28). Notably, this has important implications in schooling and higher education contexts, where learners and teachers have little choice in determining with whom they learn, as they are controlled by external forces relating to content, curricula and timetabling.

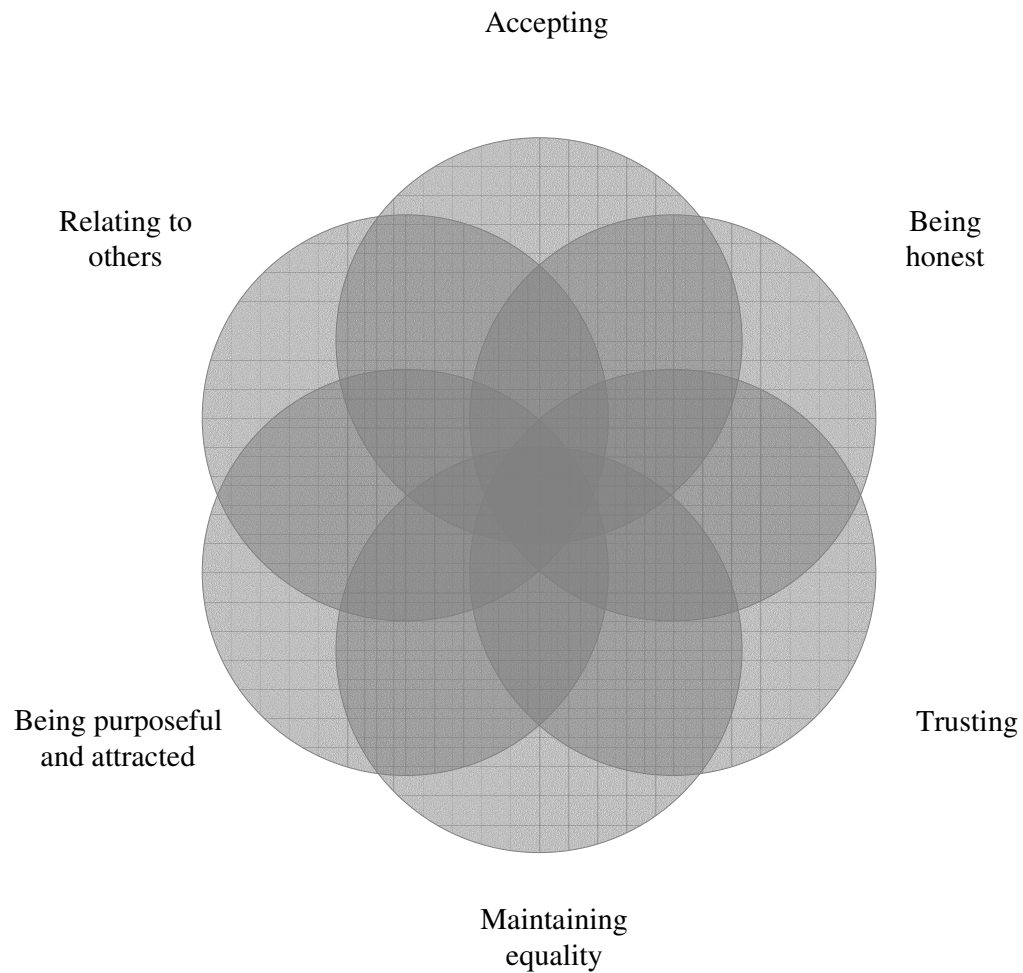
Relating to others

Clients relating to others also emerged as significant in the process of learning in life coaching. Interactions with others appeared to provide *a context from which* clients' discovery of self-knowledge stemmed. Both coaches and clients described how client relationships with others were the most often discussed coaching topic. Coach 1 described several times how listening to, questioning and reflecting on client interactions with others led to clients learning about emotions and thinking. Similarly, Coach 4 described how one client became aware that he was treating those around him in ways he did not wish to be treated himself, which revealed a mismatch in values. Client relationships with others, therefore, provided the grounding for coaching conversations, and, with that, the discovery of self-knowledge. In addition, the process of clients relating to others contributed largely to the process of applying self-knowledge. This is explained in more detail in Chapter Seven.

Summary: Relating

The way in which coaches and clients related emerged as an important process in discovering self-knowledge and facilitating learning in life coaching. The qualities of the coach-client relationship cultivated an environment which *supported* client discovery of self-knowledge, *allowing* them to reveal and discover themselves. Because coaches accepted clients, clients were able to be honest with coaches and trust them. This enabled clients to reveal and discover themselves. In addition, equality between coach and client meant that clients were also expected to discover their own answers. This process was grounded in a clear purpose for the relationship, as well as in intrinsic attraction between coaches and clients. Both enabled constructive interaction. Furthermore, client relationships provided *a context from which* clients discovered self-knowledge. The process of relating in discovering self-knowledge is illustrated in Figure 5.2 below:

Figure 5.2



The process of relating in discovering self-knowledge

The process of relating provided a platform for clients to discover self-knowledge and learn in life coaching, as it formed a foundation for other key processes, such as questioning, reflecting and listening. These are explained in the remainder of this chapter.

Questioning

Questioning emerged as a key process in learning in life coaching, because it *drove* the process of discovering self-knowledge. Coach 1's immediate and emphatic answer to a query about how her clients came to realisations was simply, *I ask lots of questions*. Similarly, Client 4 commented, *she's [my coach is] asking the questions all the time, and it's taken a lot of different questions for me to get there [to where I was at that point]*. Other clients echoed this, with Client 7 noting, *It (learning) happened through the kinds of questions that she [my coach] asked me*, and Client 6 stating, *what she does is she asks me questions, and so if I say a certain thing, she will ask me a probing question*.

Questioning was described by coaches as a quality of *curiosity* and a process of *inquiry, discovery, and expansion*. Clients also perceived questioning as a process of *discovery and expansion*, as well as *honing in, probing, and shining a light* (Client 5). Regardless of the term adopted to describe the process, questioning played a significant role in discovering self-knowledge and learning in this study. It was the means by which clients' existing self-knowledge was challenged and therefore drove the coaching/learning process. In addition, questioning was integrated with other key coaching processes. It stemmed from the process of listening, triggered clients' processes of reflection and was also used to hold clients accountable for taking action and for taking responsibility. Furthermore, while coaches generally facilitated the process of questioning, toward the end of coaching, clients developed the ability to question themselves and with that, facilitate their own independent and ongoing learning.

The significance of questioning is recognised throughout the coaching literature (Bono et al., 2004; Creane, 2002; Gale et al., 2002; Hurd, 2004; Paige, 2002; Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004; Wilkins, 2004), and the ICF (International Coach Federation, 1999) describes "powerful questioning" (p. 1) as one of its core competencies. However, while most prescriptive texts explain the process of questioning (Whitmore, 2002; Whitworth et al., 1998), to date, this has not been empirically validated. Therefore, the findings presented here provide evidence and an explanation of the

process of questioning in facilitating learning in life coaching. In addition, as other bodies of literature provide rich information about the process of questioning and its influence in learning (Dickson & Hargie, 2006), these findings in turn suggest that this knowledge may be used to inform the coaching process.

Going deeper

Questioning emerged as a process of *going deeper* through a series of scaffolded questions which stimulated client reflection on different aspects of themselves and their situations:

I've been questioned in such a way or been led in such a way that I really have to think about things a bit differently or think about things from another perspective. (Client 2)

While one client referred to going deeper through questioning as a process of *honing in* (Client 3), another referred to it as a process of *layering* (Client 2). In general, coaches referred to questioning as *creating awareness*. However, despite differences in terminology, what characterised the process of *going deeper* was a series of questions that progressively opened up clients' comments for further exploration, leading them to reflect more deeply on their understandings of themselves and to discover and re-discover self-knowledge:

Going deeper and deeper and a train of questions that, you know, "What were you feeling? ... And what were your thoughts?" (Coach 4)

As Client 3 commented, *it's not just any old questions either*, but rather the process involved *key questions ...[that] actually get deeply enough into you... to get a little insight*. As coaches listened to their clients, what they heard, observed or noticed through the process of listening provided an anchor and context for *going deeper* through questioning:

Sometimes there will be just a slight change in inflection, and I'll ask right there, "What are you feeling right now?" ...And if they come up with, "I'm feeling afraid," and then I'll stay with them and say, "OK what did that feel like in your body?" (Coach 4)

If I say a certain thing, she will ask me a probing question...and that gets me talking about it. (Client 6)

Coaches followed up on the *leads* provided by clients and used them to encourage clients to reflect more deeply through questioning. In fact, the first indicator of a deep question was clients' frequent reactions to *stop* or *pause*, before answering their coaches' questions. This was a characteristic moment:

People don't really stop to think about, well hang-on, not only what is this costing me by continuing this pattern of behaviour or thinking, but what do I get from continuing this pattern of behaviour? (Coach 1)

Questions she asked, like, "What really makes you happy?" You know, you don't really stop. When you have a busy life, you don't really stop to think. You think you know what makes you happy, but she tries to make you see... So it's a really in depth. (Client 4)

In contrast to coaches making statements or *telling*, the process of questioning gave clients the opportunity to *think*, as coach questions triggered client reflection, which in turn resulted in them discovering or re-discovering self-knowledge:

I ask lots of questions, ask lots of questions to create awareness about what's going on, what I notice, so instead of saying, "Hey, you're compromising two of your values by doing this." I will ask them, "How does this decision support each of your values?" So then they go back and reflect. (Coach 1)

The ah-ha is the asking a question which is asked at a higher level than anyone else that has actually asked them before, in a different way, so they've

got to actually stop and think to actually retrieve the information in the unconscious... They have to actually stop and retrieve. (Coach 5)

Questions that might elicit more response or thoughtful response on my part, so that she's getting to a deeper and deeper level in my unconscious as to what was happening in a given circumstance...Most of what I do is ROTE, so when she [my coach] triggers that deeper thought process, it then makes me more aware, and when I articulate how I actually felt, then it really brings it to my consciousness. (Client 8)

Other clients explicitly commented on the intentional way in which questions were *crafted* (Client 8) by coaches to encourage them to think more carefully:

So the questions come back, and it makes me refine my answers, refine my thoughts. (Client 2)

She's asking me questions to make me think about how I'm going to answer. (Client 4)

Therefore, clients' answers to questions were not automatic, nor reactionary. They usually required thought and consideration and probed deep dimensions of clients' self-knowledge. In fact, the process of *going deeper* caused clients to reflect on aspects of themselves that they had previously not given much thought to:

I pay attention to where they hang out habitually and areas that might be less developed, less attention paid to... of what's missing in their life. (Coach 4)

So she will trigger some thought on my part, and then I'm actually able to access the feelings more than the superficial detail of what has gone on... So unless someone approaches me and is interested in the underlying detail, it doesn't occur to me. (Client 8)

Thus, the process of *going deeper* appeared to be one in which coaches used questions to engage their clients in reflection on new or less familiar aspects of themselves. The

power in “powerful questioning” (International Coach Federation, 1999, p. 1), therefore, lay in the degree to which questions triggered clients to reflect upon themselves. While Brockbank and McGill (2006) illustrate the link between questioning and the facilitation of reflective learning, like most works including those on coaching, they focus attention on the construction of different kinds of questions. However, in this study, there were some *questions* which triggered client reflection, but which, by virtue of linguistic construction, were not *questions* at all. Brief directives, statements, and humour were examples of this. Pictures, analogies, and metaphors were also used to prompt clients to reflect more deeply, and silence was also a strategy which encouraged client reflection. Therefore, the process of *going deeper*, although predominantly facilitated through questioning, was also achieved also through other means. As a result, the findings of this study revealed that what was paramount, were the skills of the coach to *go deeper* by *triggering client reflection* using whichever means.

The finding that questioning was primarily used to trigger reflection is supported by the reflective learning literature. Daudelin (1996) noted that the process of questioning increases the learning power of reflection, and that:

just one hour spent reflecting on one aspect of a challenging situation, using some general questions and guidelines... can significantly increase learning from that situation. (p. 45)

While questioning forms a part of most prescriptive coaching texts, which profile pages of powerful questions to ask of clients (Martin, 2001; Whitmore, 2002; Whitworth et al., 1998), it appears that none have made the link between the role of questioning in engaging clients in the reflective learning process. The study findings indicate that the primary rule in questioning is not one of asking open versus closed questions *per se*, as coaching (Brockbank & McGill, 2006; Whitworth et al., 1998) and educational (Dickson & Hargie, 2006) literature explain. Rather, the primary rule in questioning may be one of asking *questions which evoke reflection* and thus direct questions toward helping clients to discover self-knowledge.

When coaches went deeper with clients, usually by way of questions in conversation, a framework for questioning emerged. While this pattern appeared as a driving force in coaching conversations, it was virtually imperceptible upon first glance, both to me, as the researcher, and to respondents. In fact, respondents attributed the process of *going deeper* largely to an intuitive sense. However, while the process of *going deeper* was intuitively felt by coaches, a predictable pattern did emerge which aligned with the process of listening. Thus, just as Coach 4 used *frameworks in [her] mind*, which she referred to as *windows that she looked out of*, so it appeared that there was a framework which underpinned the process of questioning by coaches. Furthermore, as learning may be enhanced by actively asking students questions at higher levels of cognition (Dickson & Hargie, 2006), so it seems that the discovery of self-knowledge was enhanced in this study by coaches asking the clients questions at *deeper* levels of self-knowledge:

I guess a coaching conversation is different just by virtue of the fact that there is a bit of a structure that's used by the coach... you know the structure tended to be along the lines of, for example, the session would start, "What is it you'd like coaching on?" And it could become a question of exploration with certain questions... (Client 5)

In some ways, this framework was similar to the sequence of questioning proposed by Whitmore (2002). However, while Whitmore focuses on goal-directed sequencing of questions through the GROW (Goal – Reality –Options - What next/Way forward/Wrap-up/Will do) model, the framework of questions which emerged in this study included a sequence of questions that related to clients' sense of self, that is, clients understanding of who they really were. In particular, Neisser's (1988) theory of self-knowledge, which depicts five aspects of "self-specifying information" (Polkinghorne, 2000, p. 270), highlighted a pattern in the data where the process of questioning saw coaches questioning clients about similar kinds of self-knowledge, including current circumstances, desires, emotions, values, thinking and behaviour. This framework for going deeper through questioning clients' self-knowledge drove the process of discovering self-knowledge and was crucial in the process of learning in life coaching. Therefore, it is explained below.

Questioning client current circumstances

The findings of this study highlight how questioning clients about their current circumstances typically ignited the process of discovering self-knowledge. This included questioning clients about their physical bodies, relationships with other people, as well as other aspects of their surrounding worlds such as their jobs, income, or their material possessions.

This focus in questioning occurred at the beginning of each coaching relationship and was described by coaches as standard practice. Various forms of question-based reflective assessments were used by coaches to gain an insight into *what was going on*, a term frequently used to refer to clients' current circumstances. For example, Coach 3 used an assessment called *the wheel of life* to gauge satisfaction in the major categories of a client's life (see appendix N), and Coach 1 used what she called a *snap-shot* to review and summarise all major aspects of the life of a client. In addition, Coaches 2, 3 and 5 all used *questionnaires* to gather information about clients' current circumstances. For all coaches, these tools were supplemented with question-based conversations that further explored this area. Coaches listened carefully to clients' reflections on their current circumstances, and these reflections were then used to question them about their feelings toward their current circumstances, as well as their desires for the coaching relationship. Therefore, questioning clients about their current circumstances led them to discover further self-knowledge.

Often referred to as *checking in*, questioning clients' current circumstances at the beginning of coaching sessions also formed a part of coaches' standard practice in this study. As one coach said, *It [the check-in] gives me a sense of what's going on in their immediate life but also how that relates to the purpose and outcomes we're working on* (Coach 4). Questioning clients about current circumstances, therefore, informed the direction of coaching sessions and the learning therein. This process often occurred through *session preparation forms* (see appendix O). In some cases, clients were evidently asked by their coaches to submit their own summary of their current circumstances prior to sessions, in which cases clients engaged in their own independent reflection prior. In still other cases, the check-in process simply occurred

through conversations relating to how things were and what was going on. Regardless of the method adopted, the process of *checking in* on and questioning clients' current circumstances directly informed the direction of each coaching session and provided a context for the discovery of self-knowledge, as clients' desires for each session stemmed from reviewing their current circumstances and their feelings toward them.

Questioning clients about their current circumstances generally elicited descriptive, rather than reflective responses, and this served the additional purpose of *anchoring conversations*. Through listening, coaches were able to trigger the process of reflection by *crafting* (Client 8) questions which stemmed from clients' current circumstances and caused them to consider and discover a *deeper* dimension of self-knowledge. Indeed, one client noted that coaching conversations seemed to *just fall out of* (Client 9) this process:

Well, she was just checking in with me to see if she heard me correctly with the detail and the content, but then she would also identify something else that was going on... She could pick out what I was saying on another level. (Client 1)

A spontaneous response is, "How was your day?", "My day was good." A thoughtful response is, "How was your day?", "My day was good", "What did you do?", "My husband and I had dinner", "How was your conversation over dinner?", "Well, actually..." It causes me to stop and reflect, "Yeah, the overall picture of my day was good, but there were these deeper things that went along in the course of the day." So she will trigger some thought on my part, and then I'm actually able to access...more than the superficial detail of what has gone on. (Client 8)

These examples highlight how coaches used clients' descriptions of their current circumstances to identify aspects of self-knowledge to explore in greater depth through questioning and with that discover further self-knowledge:

I was asking what's going on in their lives... and so I enquired more about, "Tell me more about what happened?" You know, "What are the

circumstances under which you feel you eat? What do you feel after that? Does the hunger go away?" ...I was enquiring, and in that dialogue, engaging with her in a way that is going deeper and deeper and a train of questions... "What were you feeling?" ... and, "What were your thoughts?" (Coach 4)

[A conversation with my coach] just happens. We might start off by going through what I've done and what I haven't done, and if I haven't done stuff, why I haven't done it, and sometimes there's a trigger there. Otherwise, it might be just talking about what's worrying me. I mean, before every meeting I usually put in what I've done, what I haven't done, any circumstances that I'm experiencing now, any positives. So yeah, and you just discuss those things, and other things just fall out of that... (Client 9)

Both of these examples highlight how the process of going deeper through questioning actually stemmed from and was anchored to client responses in relation to their current circumstances. Therefore, questioning clients about their current circumstances usually formed the context for the discovery of self-knowledge and learning.

Questioning client emotions

Although client reflection on current circumstances sometimes naturally led to reflection on emotions, typically, client responses to being questioned about current circumstances gave rise to coaches specifically questioning clients about emotions. This included questioning clients about positive and negative feelings. As coaches listened to clients describe their current circumstances, they frequently noticed or sensed underlying feelings and questioned clients to connect with, reflect on and discover, further-discover or re-discover these emotions:

She'll generally select something either related to the day-to-day information or to my description of my activities or my feelings and want a deeper look at it... She'll generally approach that with some questions... and then she'll lead me down a path... in further depth, perhaps in terms of my feelings. You know,

maybe she has detected some frustration or some anger or a pattern, and she'll follow that lead, pretty generally with questions that might elicit more response, or thoughtful response, on my part, so that she's getting to a deeper and deeper level in my unconscious as to what was happening in a given circumstance. (Client 8)

As coaches identified clients' underlying feelings, they *crafted* (Client 8) questions to allow their clients to discover and explore those feelings more fully. A three-stage process emerged, which may have spanned a number of sessions or the entire coaching relationship. Firstly, coaches questioned clients to identify feelings. These feelings informed the direction of the coaching and the course of learning and discovery therein:

We check in, "So how are you feeling today?" [My coach] will ask me how I'm feeling about my... goals... If I've gone from being excited to feeling fearful in two weeks, then we've got something to talk about. (Client 2)

As emotions were identified, coaches questioned clients to reflect on their emotions, sometimes feeling or acknowledging them for the first time:

The first thing I would do is just sit with the fear without trying to cover it up. Acknowledge it. Enable them to feel that I hear it and feel it. (Coach 4)

Furthermore, coaches encouraged clients to reflect on the circumstances in which their feelings arose, to understand why they felt the way they did and what impact this was having on their progress toward their desires. Thus, questioning client emotions was integrated with questioning clients' current circumstances and desires. As an example, Coach 1 explained how anger was preventing her client from moving toward her desire of losing weight. Through the process of coaching, the client identified the anger, gained insight into its origins and realised the impact it was having on herself and her daughter. The client was then able to more successfully maintain a healthy diet.

Questioning clients about their emotions also provided opportunities for clients and coaches to access further dimensions of self-knowledge:

I'll create the space for them to take the time...I'll be quiet for a second and say, "Just try to tap into what the feelings are."... From that place, the excavation then goes deeper, because when they can tap into the feelings, they have more access to what's going on. When they tap into thoughts behind the feelings, there's a little bit more access. (Coach 4)

Thus, it appeared that questioning about clients' current circumstances produced opportunities for questioning about emotions. Furthermore, client reflection on their emotions, in turn, provided sign-posts for and gateways to further questioning and discovery about deeper dimensions of self-knowledge, such as their desires.

Questioning client desires

In this study, coaches frequently questioned clients about their desires. This process emerged from clients' responses to questions about feelings in relation to current circumstances and involved questioning clients about their *wants, goals, visions, targets, purposes, outcomes* or *intentions*. This was also referred to as *focusing on what clients wanted*. In fact, clients reportedly had a tendency to focus on what they did *not* want, that is, what they did not like about their current circumstances. As a result, many times, clients were unaware of their desires, and therefore, coaches encouraged them to discover, re-discover or clarify their desires, and with that, extend their self-knowledge.

Questioning clients about their desires occurred in depth at the outset of coaching. Client reflection on current circumstances and related emotions paved the way for coaches to question clients about their desires, as coaches questioned clients about the changes they hoped to make through the coaching process. Therefore, as Client 1 said when he first came to coaching, *I think I was basically unhappy. The main thing was I didn't enjoy my career...* As a result, he was questioned toward identifying a desired

outcome for coaching, which related to getting enjoyment from a new job. Similarly, Client 7 said of herself before coaching:

You know, it felt like here I was going about 120 miles an hour in my job and life, and how could I actually slow down and create the kind of life that I really wanted for my family and for myself. (Client 7)

Thus, Client 7 was questioned to identify a desired outcome for coaching, which involved ...*compos[ing] and liv[ing] [her] life in a way that is a more authentic expression of [her] aspirations, vocation and relationships* (Client 7).

Determining the desires of clients through questioning emerged as an ongoing process of *visioning* (Coach 3). In *visioning*, clients were questioned to extend, clarify and further discover knowledge about their desires. This process was referred to as *staying on track*. Coaches highlighted the ways in which they questioned clients about their desires:

There's this HR manager that I'm working with at the moment. One of the things that he wanted to work on was his self-esteem and self-confidence, and one of the questions I asked him was, "Well if you achieved a different level of self-esteem or self-confidence, how would I know that? How would you know that? What would be different about your world?" (Coach 2)

Let's say someone says, "I want to open a business." So, "How big would this business be?" would be my question, and then they would say, "Well, I was thinking I would have two employees." "Well, how big could it be?" So expanding that, expanding, pushing them, nudging them in a gentle way, or in an assertive way, to think bigger, think outside the box, and then let them decide where they're going to settle. (Coach 3)

This extended process reportedly served to foster motivation and typically occurred at the beginning of a coaching relationship with, or just after, the process of identifying clients' desires, and to some degree, whenever new desires emerged. In addition to

questioning, visual strategies and writing were also used to trigger clients' reflection on their desires.

Asking questions about clients' desires, although occurring in depth at the outset of coaching, was also used consistently throughout. Just as questioning clients about current circumstances and related emotions led to the identification and discovery of clients' desires at the outset of coaching, coaches in this study described a similar, although much briefer process of questioning clients about desires at the beginning of coaching sessions. Interestingly, however, clients did not appear to notice, or at least did not mention, any process of identifying desires or outcomes at the beginning of coaching sessions. Similarly, there was a less structured and almost imperceptible process of coaches questioning their clients about their desires, which also occurred within coaching conversations:

One of the clients, she was a non-smoker, and her boss used to come into her office, sit down and discuss things, smoke like a chimney and blow the smoke in her face. She put up with that for, oh, probably about two years, and so we then explored it, rather than say, "Go and tell him to stop smoking," I said, "What you would like to have happen? You're obviously not happy with him smoking." So it's actually identifying what the person really wants. (Coach 2)

To be able to say that I need to have this really difficult conversation with [my husband] about this topic, and I'm concerned about having it...she might say, "What are you hoping to say? What are you hoping to get out of the conversation?" (Client 7)

These examples reveal how coaches consistently questioned clients about desires within coaching conversations. This finding suggests that the coaching literature, which focuses on goal setting at the outset of coaching (Grant, 2006), fails to acknowledge the significance of the *ongoing* process of questioning clients about their desires. Finally, coaches regularly asked clients to reflect on previously established desires and, in particular, on how clients felt they were progressing toward these:

Well, usually I just check in with them what they want to be coached on...Where are they in their goals or in the things they want to accomplish.
(Coach 3)

Thus, questioning clients about their desires was ongoing throughout the process of coaching. It allowed clients to clarify and articulate their desires more fully and served to foster motivation. This is not unlike adult learning theory, which suggests that the factors for effective learning for adults are meaningful engagement, motivation, reason for learning, and learning which is problem-centred and based on immediate goals and needs (Rogers, 1986).

Questioning client values

Coaches also questioned clients about values. Values were typically defined by respondents as *what someone considers important* or *what someone cares about*. Furthermore, they were referred to as *fundamental* and *core* and were also linked to a notion of *purpose*.

Questions about client values served to trigger client reflection on and discovery of what those values were, as well as the values by which clients were currently living. Questioning clients about values occurred through exercises used at the outset of coaching and reappeared within conversations as clients were asked to reflect on their current circumstances, emotions and/or desires:

Like, say for example, someone comes to me, and often they're having conflict with [their husband]... They've probably talked to twenty people that day, and they shouldn't be doing this or should be doing this, so what happens is they're processing at the same level. I don't know too many friends who will go up a level and go, "Well, communication, for what purpose do you really want to communicate, anyway?" We're going to a higher level, and then they go, "Oh, why do I want to communicate?" ... And they may go, "Because I want to build a strong relationship," and then I go, "Fantastic, communication is a form of building a strong relationship. What are other

forms that will help you to build a strong relationship besides communication?” (Coach 5)

Once coaches identified client values, coaches often questioned the degree to which their clients were living by and honouring their values:

So when they make a decision about something, and I’m really mindful of what their values are, I’ll say, “Oh that’s really interesting [Jan].” I’ll say, “So you know, back in session two, you defined your values to be this, this and this. How does this decision support your values?” And so then, you might reflect on them and say, “Well, actually, it compromises most of them.” (Coach 1)

Well, again, I suppose what falls out... we talked about values and stuff like that. You know, things that are important to you and where you’re not... where you’re failing—not failing—but...seeing where you want to be in those areas, so, well, why aren’t you, and talk about it... (Client 9)

Thus, these findings reveal how coaches actively questioned their clients about their values in order to further discover and expand this dimension of their self-knowledge.

Questioning client thinking

Questioning clients about their thinking emerged as an integral part of *going deeper*. This questioning focused on thinking patterns that hindered client progress toward desires. Such thinking patterns were typically referred to as *blocks*, *holding self back*, as well as *limitations*, *limiting beliefs*, *limiting thinking*, *self-limiting* or clients’ *framework*. In all cases and examples mentioned in this study, questioning client thinking related to questioning *beliefs* or *belief systems*, *perceptions*, *assumptions*, *negative self-talk*, *patterns/patterning*, *programs/programming* and *meaning*, which had developed into patterns of thinking over the course of their life experiences.

Like the other layers of questioning, questioning client thinking emerged largely from the process of questioning clients’ current circumstances, emotions, desires and/or

values. Indeed, client reflections on feelings in relation to their current circumstances, in contrast to their desires, usually provided clues for questioning clients about their thinking:

Because I go, “This is how I feel about my parents, this is how I feel my parents think about me, but you know I think that’s the reason why I don’t do a lot of things,” and she goes, “Well if you did do those things, what’s the worst that would happen?” And I just said, “Well my parents would think I’m this, my parents would think I’m that,” and she goes, “Well how is that any different from what you’re thinking now?” [pause] It’s not. How about that? [laugh] (Client 1)

This client’s feelings about his parents provided an opening for his coach to question him about this thinking and how it was holding him back. This example also highlights the way in which questioning clients about thinking also involved questioning the validity of client thinking. This is indicative of cognitive behavioural therapy, which involves three processes of changing belief systems, namely the identification of thought patterns, questioning their validity and then challenging them (Corcoran, 2004). In addition, questioning clients about their thinking frequently involved coaches questioning the impact of client thinking on current circumstances, emotions and desires:

This not good enough thing came up, and I said “Oh, OK, how does that affect you?” And so we really explored how that particular thinking was impacting on her whole life right now, and she realised that...although it prevented her from having lots of things, it also, in a sense, kept her safe from failure. If she didn’t try, she wouldn’t lose, or she wouldn’t be condemned or criticised, and so there was a lot of avoidance. (Coach 1)

Rather than blaming anyone else, they can stop and reflect, “What I am thinking and how does this impact the outcome I am getting.” It empowers the client. (Coach 2)

This process of questioning clients to identify, challenge and realise the impact of their thinking was recognised as one which empowered clients. Interestingly, however, to date, this does not appear to be featured in the coaching literature as a significant questioning process.

Questioning client behaviour

Two forms of questioning client behaviour emerged in this study. Firstly, coaches questioned clients about the impact that their emotions, thinking and values had on their behaviour. Secondly, coaches questioned clients about the impact their behaviour had on their feelings, current circumstances and progress toward their desires. This process included questions such as what *impact, effect, consequences* or *outcomes* something had on clients' lives, or, as Coach 3 humorously described, *the Dr Phil question... How's that working for ya?* or some version thereof.

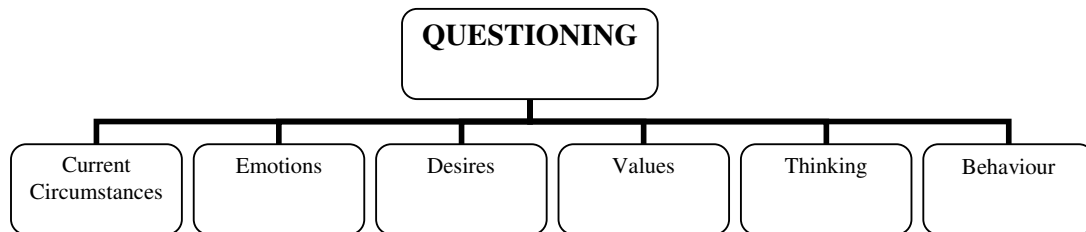
Both forms of questioning client behaviour are well illustrated in an example given by Coach 1. She recounted an experience with a client where she first questioned his feelings of wanting to scream and cry after receiving negative feedback at a work meeting. As a result of exploring these feelings, he was able to recognise a pattern of behaviour in which he withdrew when he received such feedback and was unable to respond. As a result of this, he realised that his behaviour was not supporting his desire of having self-esteem and confidence. He was subsequently able to change his behaviour and, in turn, his feelings improved. This example highlighted the way in which clients' reflection on their feelings allowed this coach to question her client to recognise his behaviour and its impact on his desires.

Summary: Questioning

Questioning emerged as an important process in facilitating learning in life coaching, as it *drove* the process of discovering self-knowledge by challenging client self-knowledge and triggering client reflection. Thus, questioning simply *forces people to really think* (Coach 1). It occurred through a process of *going deeper* as coaches,

whether consciously or unconsciously, consistently appeared to apply a framework of questioning which honed in on particular dimensions of client self-knowledge. The process of questioning to discover self-knowledge is illustrated in Figure 5.3 below:

Figure 5.3



The process of questioning in discovering self-knowledge

Notably, however, while there appeared to be a trend in the order of questions, this order was not evident in all instances. In addition, coaches did not question clients about every dimension of self-knowledge. Therefore, these findings differ from Whitmore's (2002) proposed sequence of questions, which follow the GROW (Goal – Reality – Options – What next/Way forward/Wrap-up/Will do) model, and coaches in this study questioned as deeply as they needed to in order to move their clients toward their desires, and the *depth* and direction of questioning was different for each client:

You know, if you're weaving a tapestry of life, there's a thread and it might go up and down and around, but it's consistent throughout, and of course some threads get tied off, and that's the end of them. (Coach 3)

I don't think there's a bottom per se, because it's deep shifting... We're trying to just excavate what's going in the present, and then, I don't feel like I have to get to a bottom. It's just get to a certain level of what's going on here, and therefore, what might support them going forth. (Coach 4)

Thus, the process of *going deeper* through questioning was used as a means of triggering clients to reflect in order to discover self-knowledge and progress toward the fulfilment of their desires. An explanation of the process of clients reflecting follows.

Reflecting

Reflecting emerged as a key process in the facilitation of learning in life coaching, as it was the process *within which* clients discovered self-knowledge:

Often times, just reflecting on what's going on for [clients] will in itself raise opportunities for insights. (Coach 1).

The process of reflection was described by coaches and clients as *reflecting on* or *thinking about*. It was also referred to as *tapping into*, *looking at*, *examining*, *reviewing*, *observing* *considering*, or *wondering*. Similarly, respondents often referred to clients *thinking deeply*, *thinking a lot* or *thinking hard*, emphasising the depth and breadth of client reflection. The process of reflection was also often coupled with the words *stop*, *hang on* or *go back*, emphasising the way in which the process caused clients to pause and reconsider. Furthermore, the process of reflection often involved clients thinking significantly more than usual and in ways they were not familiar with:

I'd go through this process, and like I said, the solution was somewhere over here and not where I expected it to be and... I'm thinking in this direction, she had answers over there, how did she know to give me that problem to get me to reach this? (Client 1)

Client reflection was triggered by questions from coaches. It was the process of trying to answer coaches' questions that *forced* clients to engage in the process of reflection. As one coach commented, *I'm in charge of the process, but they're [clients are] in charge of the actual processing* (Coach 1). Thus, client reflection emerged as the complementary process to coach questioning.

The process of reflecting in life coaching is one of reflective learning, which is defined as:

an intentional process, where social context and experience are acknowledged, in which learners are active individuals, wholly present, engaging with others, and open to challenge. (Brockbank, McGill, & Beech, 2002, p. 6)

Reflective learning is an important component of experiential learning in combining learning, experience and meaning (Moon, 2004) and also of transformative learning (Cranton, 1994). Reflective learning also supports the process of relating, in that the influence of an individual's social context is recognised and learning is acknowledged as a social activity (Brockbank et al., 2002; Moon, 2004).

The capacity of coaching to facilitate reflective learning is well recognised. In particular, Brockbank and McGill (2006) addressed the process of facilitating reflective learning through mentoring and coaching and explain the influence of processes like listening and questioning. In addition, Grant's study (2003) revealed how clients who are engaged in life coaching develop increased levels of self-reflective insight. The significance of reflection in the process of learning is also evidenced throughout the education literature. It is a key component of deep learning, as reflection "works to transform surface learning into deep learning and change practice" (Lockyer, Gondocz, & Thiverierge, 2004, p. 50). Similarly, authentic learning theory integrates reflective thinking and metacognition and also links it to open-ended inquiry (Callison & Lamb, 2004; Gatlin & Edwards, 2007; Herrington & Herrington, 2006; Renzulli, Gentry, & Reis, 2004; Rule, 2006).

Not knowing

A state of *not knowing* and willingness to *not know* or be "*wrong*" emerged as fundamental in the process of reflection. Clients' sense of knowing appeared to impact upon the depth to which they engaged in reflection. Thus, some clients openly reported an awareness of how little they felt they knew. In turn, these clients also reported having significantly more depth in their reflection process, by using words

such as *thinking hard* and *a lot*. Other clients commented on the fact that they already knew much of what they learnt in coaching. Interestingly, these clients did not report such intensity in their reflective process. This suggests that clients reflected intensely when they felt they did not know.

Several respondents highlighted the link between learning and client awareness of not knowing. Coach 4 reported that such awareness often arose when people discovered that something which they believed to be true suddenly was not true. This began the reflective process. Several clients demonstrated how they were open to being wrong and to making the discovery that something they thought they knew may not actually be true. In addition, Client 7 recalled how she was unable to engage in learning when she thought she already knew the answer. Therefore, it appeared that clients' certainty about their knowing influenced the degree to which they were *coachable* and the degree to which they were able to engage in the process of discovery. Thus, this finding revealed that the process of reflection and therefore discovering self-knowledge may be enhanced by *asking clients questions* that challenge their understanding of themselves and what they believe to be true. This enables clients to *get a crack in the shell open enough that [they are] able to get out of [themselves] enough to make the discovery* (Client 8).

Similarly, the findings of this study suggest that coaches *not knowing* also set the foundation for the client reflective and discovery process. This was referred to by coaches as *curiosity*, which is supported by the literature (Whitworth et al., 1998). Many times, respondents used the pronoun *we* in reference to the process of reflection and also when talking about the learning, insights or realisations of clients that emerged during the reflective process. Therefore, as coaches made discoveries, so did clients, and when clients made discoveries, so too did coaches. Client 4 expressed how she wanted her coach to give her the answers and was at first surprised to find that her coach did not know the answer. Another client echoed this:

I think you had to look at things in different ways, and when you don't know the answer to a problem and the solution can't be provided to you, you have to start thinking laterally, you have to start thinking creatively. (Client 1)

Several clients highlighted the fact that they were not being given answers by their coaches and that this was an important part of the coaching/learning process. In fact, one client pointed out that when she was given answers in the past, she did not engage in reflection at all:

I'm finding it [coaching] very exciting, I mean just exciting beyond belief. I remember 30 years ago, a psycho—analyst I guess it was, was saying to me that yes doesn't mean anything if you don't have the right to say no, and I thought, "Well that's a very profound statement, so profound I can't even bother to think about it." (Client 8)

Thus, a willingness of coaches and clients to *not know* emerged as a prerequisite to the process of reflecting, discovering self-knowledge and learning in life coaching.

Stopping

In this study, *stopping* or *pausing* emerged as a crucial factor in the process of reflecting and therefore the process of discovering self-knowledge. The importance of *stopping* or *pausing* was revealed in the frequency of the use of the words *stop*, *hang on*, *sit down* or *go back*, which preceded references to the process of reflecting. This indicated a momentary pause in order to engage in the process of reflection. Furthermore, the use of these words in association with reflection appeared to be unconscious:

And people don't really stop to think about, well, hang-on, not only what is this costing me by continuing this pattern of behaviour or thinking, but what do I get from continuing this pattern of behaviour? (Coach 1)

Rather than blaming anyone else, they can stop and reflect, "What I am thinking, and how does this impact the outcome I am getting?" It empowers the client. (Coach 2)

They've got to actually stop and think to actually retrieve the information in the unconscious. (Coach 5)

Hence, an important aspect of the process of reflection was asking clients questions, which required them to stop and reflect in order to discover an answer. In order for this to occur, coaches and clients needed to *make space* for engagement in the reflection process. *Space* was frequently referred to by respondents as giving clients time to reflect on and discover their own answers. This was typically facilitated through silence and often resulted in “forcing” clients to reflect and discover answers to questions:

Often times, what I find is that clients will ask themselves the question, for example, “Why do I always do that?” or “How come it’s always me?” or “Why does this always happen to me?” etc, etc. They never answer the question, so as a coach, we want to pick up on all of that, and we want to challenge people to actually answer the questions, not just pose them. (Coach 1)

This process was sometimes referred to by coaches as *holding the space*, which was simply the act of *allowing clients the time* to engage deeply in reflection:

“Give me what you’re feeling emotionally,” and then they’ll pause, and I’ll create the space for them to take the time, and I’ll be quiet for a second and say, “Just try to tap into what the feelings are.” (Coach 4)

Thus, when the space was held, coaches were actually *holding their clients in reflection*. Therefore, *making space* was crucial in the process of allowing clients to reflect and learning to emerge:

I ‘spose, to me, a skill of a really good coach is to be able to ask a question. As a coach, maybe I’m observing some sort of behaviour, whatever, within the client, but for the coach to hang on to that and not actually reveal that yet, because when the client is going to try hard, you know, an insight to what they’re doing, it’s much more powerful for them to use that insight. (Coach 5)

Coaching gave clients the opportunity to reflect, because, as several respondents commented, *most people don't take the time to think about stuff as thoroughly [as we do in coaching]* (Coach 3). Thus, each coaching session in itself provided an opportunity for clients to engage in reflection:

She [my coach] asked like, "What really makes you happy?" You know, you don't really stop, when you have a busy life, you don't really stop to think.
(Client 4)

It is hard to pin me down. It seems to be very hard for me to get a minute to myself to reflect and do things and then do inner work, and because I have been running at such a rapid pace for so many years, to break that habit has really been a challenge for [my coach]. (Client 8)

Through the process of coaching, clients typically made more *space* in their lives and devoted more time to reflection. The reflective learning literature also supports the findings of this study which linked reflection to stopping and pausing and making space. Daudelin (1996) commented on the time-consuming nature of reflection and how a greater emphasis on action usually inhibits the process of reflection. Indeed, this is significant in the field of coaching, where a focus on action can be dominant.

Reflecting through conversation and writing

In this study, clients reflected through conversation and writing. Although clients also reflected through visualisation, drawing and other imagery, only the two main reflective mediums are explained here. Conversations were predominantly used to facilitate reflection during sessions as coaching conversations, driven by questioning, gave clients the opportunity to *think aloud* and *articulate* their thoughts. The use of reflective conversations is reinforced in the coaching literature (Cordingley, 2006; Edwards, 2004; Gwyn-Paquette & Tochon, 2003). This is characteristic of reflective dialogue, which in turn is recognised as “the basis of successfully mentoring and coaching” (Brockbank & McGill, 2006, p. 45). It also reflects the influence of

Habermas' (1978) reflective discourse, which acknowledges the importance of reflective, emotionally mature dialogue.

Talking assisted clients in engaging in the reflective process:

Some people are more external processors than others. They actually need to say things, get a reaction, hear it reflected back in order to know what it is they want. (Coach 3)

Well, I think one of the things that I do know about myself is that I need to... I'm very analytical, but I also really need to sort of run ideas past people. (Client 6)

The above suggests that coaching may be particularly effective for clients who prefer this mode of reflection where coaches provided a *sounding board* ... *so that people have the opportunity to really process their own thoughts* (Coach 3). In addition, reflecting through conversation allowed clients to recognise thoughts, as they emerged in their consciousness. Respondents reported on the way that clients, in the process of answering coaches' questions, became aware of their own thoughts and *heard* themselves, as they came to realisations and discovered their own answers:

She would let me talk on, and gradually, she carefully sort of crafted her questions, and I started to hear myself. (Client 8)

One client described this as a *light bulb moment* (Client 2), thus illustrating the importance of discovery and learning through reflective conversation. Furthermore, if clients failed to hear themselves, coaches had the opportunity to reflect their reflections back to them, thereby encouraging deeper reflection. This resulted in an iterative cycle of *reflection on reflection*:

So for me to learn things and progress, I have to do activities or listen to what I'm actually saying. Have someone sort of repeat it to me, "Ah, so that's where the key is," ...I mean, it [the session] flows, and it's chatty, but there's definitely times when we'll stop and re-evaluate and check in, and there's

check points and little markers along the way during that flowing conversation, so it flows, and it's nice, and it's friendly, and it's chatty, and it's not lecturing, but I definitely have markers along the way, which just let me hear what I've just said, or have been saying. (Client 2)

Thus, one advantage of reflecting through conversation was that it gave clients the opportunity to engage in iterative reflection. As they reflected, and then reflected on their reflections, clients discovered deeper and more comprehensive self-knowledge.

Writing emerged as a dominant means of facilitating learning between coaching sessions and as a means of *making the invisible visible* (Coach 2). Respondents referred to a coaching folder that contained the written work related to their coaching. Indeed, several clients had these folders at hand when participating in interviews, and some folders were used to provide another source of verification in the research process. The importance of the written reflective process was evident in the frequent reference to *getting things out and onto paper* by respondents in this study. Respondents typically reported how clients could see more clearly when they reflected *on paper*:

Just getting out of my head and the sense of feeling overwhelmed, and getting it on paper, so it kind of clarified areas. Yes, I was feeling overwhelmed, and it came out in my scoring, sort of scores were a bit lower than usual, perhaps compared to last month's, I think they would've been. (Client 2)

Through writing, coaches were given the opportunity to view client reflections and to *pick out* aspects of their writing and explore them further. In addition, this facilitated an iterative form of deeper learning through reflection on reflections:

Then we'll come back and have a conversation about what their reflections revealed, and usually that's a really powerful moment, when people do get insight just from talking about what was in their head versus what they wrote on paper, because sometimes it looks very different ... so it may not make sense at the time, but then upon reflection or upon debriefing with me, there

could be a very valuable insight that they may have as a result of something that didn't make sense to them at the time of writing. (Coach 1)

From the outset of coaching, reflection through writing was encouraged. Extended questionnaires served to ignite the reflective process even before the first coaching session (see appendix Q):

I will send a pre-[coaching] questionnaire to the client which describes a bit of my methodology. It also asks a series of questions that I invite them to reflect on prior to even talking to them, and in some ways the coaching process begins there, because a lot of the coaching is a reflective process. (Coach 4)

[My coach] has a fairly comprehensive intake form that she asks her new clients to fill out...so what I did is really spend a lot of time over the course of a month, filling this out. (Client 7)

Coaches also used session preparation forms (see appendix O) to guide clients in reflecting prior to sessions. However, such forms and preparatory reflections were optional, and in both the coaching preparation forms and session preparation forms, questions served to guide client reflection (see appendix O & Q) and to anchor it through the writing process. In addition, some coaches used emails to reflect whole sessions back to clients.

Writing was also used between coaching sessions to maintain and extend the reflective learning process. Coaching homework or action involved writing activities, whereby clients thoughtfully considered questions, issues or ideas that had emerged from coaching sessions. Journaling was also used as a mode of ongoing reflection. As a result of between-session written reflection, clients reported being surprised at what emerged from the writing process. Client 4 commented, *"Bloody hell? Where did that come from within me to say all this stuff?...Once I start typing or writing, things are just pouring out."* As such, reflection through writing was beneficial to some clients, and while Client 4's reflections *poured out* of her in writing, she found reflecting in conversation somewhat more difficult. This suggests that learning in coaching may be

more effective if coaches consider, assess and capitalise on clients' preferred and strongest modes of reflection during coaching.

Respondents commented on the way in which the written reflective process helped clients gain clarity, come to realisations, and with that make discoveries:

So, for example with the stage fright one, the presentation one, in her head it was, "Oh too scary, I can't do it, what are people going to think, da-da-da-da-da," and then, when she was writing down, you know, "What are the things that would get in the way of me doing this really well?" she realised it was all her stuff, it was all stuff in her head, it wasn't physical external things, it was all internal factors. (Coach 1)

Just getting out of my head and the sense of feeling overwhelmed and getting it on paper, so it kind of clarified areas. (Client 2)

Notably, writing is recognised as a method of inquiry and a way of finding out about the self and a topic (Richardson, 2004). Like conversation, written reflection provided a tangible means of mediating the reflective process. In addition, through the medium of a written *task*, clients were *forced* to reflect when they may not have otherwise done so:

Yeah, well, it was by typing it up... [pause searching for word] making me think about where I want to be in the future. (Client 4)

You try writing a list of fifty things that you like to do, well, I was stuck on one! You know, because you don't think about it, and you're just doing what you're doing without any real purpose. (Client 9)

Just as Richardson (2004) argues, writing is a way of knowing rather than just a way of telling. In coaching, writing tasks were typically not used for anything apart from helping clients to better understand themselves through the process:

For instance, I have a project that she suggested that I write the letter of love to my husband, but prior to writing that, what I would do would be to create a list of all the things that work well and all the things that don't work well, and in my letter of love, discuss with him all of the wonderful aspects of our life and then the things that we might be able to improve together. (Client 8)

Whether or not she sends it [the letter] to him is almost beside the point, but she might ... What she's getting out of it is becoming clear on what she wants and also what she wants to ask him. (Coach 4)

Thus, writing was recognised in this study as important, as it anchored the reflective process so that clients could discover more about themselves. It was also used to anchor the process of reflection through observation, as clients kept written records of their observations. Respondents reported exercises whereby clients consciously observed and recorded their feelings throughout the day, their likes, dislikes, their strengths or particular activities/interactions.

Reflecting on self-knowledge, action, reflection and progress

The processes of questioning and reflecting collaboratively served to help clients to discover self-knowledge. Therefore, the examples demonstrating the process of going deeper through questioning also illustrate the process of clients reflecting and are not repeated here. Respondents commented on the way in which coaches particularly made space for clients to reflect on and tap into their feelings. This was an opportunity for clients to fully acknowledge and process their feelings. Clients also spent a significant amount of time reflecting on their desires during the coaching process. At the outset of coaching, clients reflected on their desires for the coaching itself. At the beginning of, or before, sessions, they reflected on their desires for each session. In addition, as new topics arose in coaching, clients reflected on what they desired in relation to those topics. Finally, because the process of client reflection was complementary to the process of questioning, clients also reflected on their current circumstances, values, thinking and behaviour. Grant (2006) similarly describes self-reflection in coaching as a process of “thinking about one’s thoughts, feelings, and

behaviours” (p. 155). This supports the findings of the study, but these findings also reveal where gaps may be evident in current coaching research. In particular, values emerged as an important part of reflection, as did reflection on client desires.

Reflecting on action was a further key form of reflection in this study. Sessions started off by reflecting on what clients had or had not done in between sessions. This reflection often provided a gateway to client reflection and, therefore, the discovery of self-knowledge:

We [my coach and I] made a task of saying no five times in the next week, and it did include saying no to this friend [who was very demanding], and then we reflected on that, so she didn't really need to know the details of what I said no to or when I said no, just how did that feel. (Client 2)

Prior to and during coaching sessions, clients recounted and reflected upon their experiences in taking action, and their coaches posed questions, as explained in the previous section, to engender deeper reflection and generate further discovery of self-knowledge:

So the goal was x, “These were the actions you were going take this week around that particular goal and we’re working through [this strategy], how did you go, what were your insights, what did you learn?” So what I’m doing is asking all the questions to tease out the learnings and the insights that the client had as a result of performing those actions. (Coach 1)

So it’s really, every conversation that we have follows this methodology ... of checking in, seeing how I was doing on my practices, what I was learning about myself, what I would do differently, where I was having resistance, what was up with me that might be really different and unexpected that was kind of a current event, and almost always, there was more than one distinction made that really helped me see something in a fresh way. (Client 7)

The phenomenon of inaction paradoxically emerged as an important part of the discovery of self-knowledge in this study and was referred to by both coaches and

clients as an important element in the coaching/learning process. Reflection on inaction, during or in some cases outside coaching sessions, was seen to lead to significant learning:

From week to week, there will be certain things that a coachee will do or not do that creates an opportunity to explore what's going on. (Coach 1)

If they had some homework, you know, how did it go, what did they learn, if they didn't do it, so what was that about? (Coach 3)

If there was some reason I was balking at doing a homework activity, for example, registering my business name, we will look at that. We'll look at why, what's behind me not doing that ... it's never judgemental. It's just, "Oh OK, we better take that a bit easy," or "What specifically do you have to do to get over that hump of not being able to do a piece of activity?" (Client 2)

Inaction was treated in the same way as taking action. Just as coaches questioned clients to reflect on action, so, too, did they question clients to reflect on inaction. Thus, reflection on action and inaction led to clients discovering self-knowledge. Similarly, just as action often led to important learning that progressed clients toward their desires, so, too, did inaction. Therefore, in responding to inaction, coaches reinforced the value of learning, as opposed to goal achievement.

Unlike coaching literature, which appears to place emphasis on reflecting on action through the goal-directed process of self-regulation (Grant, 2006), in this study, it appeared that reflection on action, although important, was no more important than other processes of reflection. In fact, reflection on action (or inaction) appeared to be *a means* of facilitating a form of meta-reflection, in which clients reflected on their understanding of themselves, current circumstances, emotions, desires, values and thinking, and, with that, discovered self-knowledge.

Because much coaching homework or action involved reflective tasks, the process of reflecting on clients' coaching actions resulted in clients also reflecting on their reflections. This was usually a process in which coaches asked their clients outright

what they had learnt. This process provided opportunities for clients to reflect on their learning and, in turn, deepen that learning. This was frequently the process in which patterns were seen. The process also occurred at the end of each session, as clients were asked to reflect on their coaching sessions, which were reflective processes in themselves. In this process, clients were sometimes asked to name *what was most valuable* (Coach 2) for them during the session, or they were asked to reflect on what they had *discovered* in the session and what action they might take. Therefore, it appeared that coaching formed an iterative process of reflecting on reflection to continually deepen and extend clients' learning.

Reflection on clients' current circumstances, together with their desires for coaching, also gave rise to a process of reflecting on their progress, or *checking in*. This usually occurred at some stage within each coaching session and was an ongoing process throughout coaching. Reflecting on client progress was also a process which usually occurred toward the end of a coaching relationship and served as a conclusion:

There was 60 questions I had to answer, and that sort of evaluates where I am in my planning and what, how I perceive myself and what [coaching] has got me, and I suppose it gives [my coach] an analysis and myself, as well, it's very good, actually, of where I'm really at so far in my personal development.

(Client 4)

There was definitely an end ... and in preparation for it, I was given what's called a life design exercise, where I did a complete inventory of where my life was at the nine month point of this program. It was partly appreciation and appreciative inquiry into the sort of amazing changes that I made and set out to do, so it was not getting over that, but being able to see sort of the courage that it took, and what was still to come ... and to also reflect on where I was at that point, and where I was headed, to sort of leave me with an additional sense of what practice would be especially good to continue to deepen in confidence. (Client 7)

As the above examples demonstrate, reflection on progress appeared to involve clients reflecting on current circumstances and their acquired self-knowledge and feelings toward both.

Ongoing reflection

In this study, the process of reflection emerged as ongoing. As one client casually pointed out, *the coaching, by the way, goes on in her [my coach's] absence* (Client 8). All clients engaged in the process of reflection to some degree between sessions, as *a lot of the coaching does require the client to go away and do a lot of reflecting* (Coach 1). Therefore, the process of reflecting outside of coaching sessions was just as important as reflecting during coaching sessions:

All the way through, you've got this person sitting opposite you asking all these questions, and then you're going away doing all this homework and then reflecting, and it's all about you. (Coach 1)

In addition, clients engaged in reflection independently, without having been assigned *homework* by their coaches:

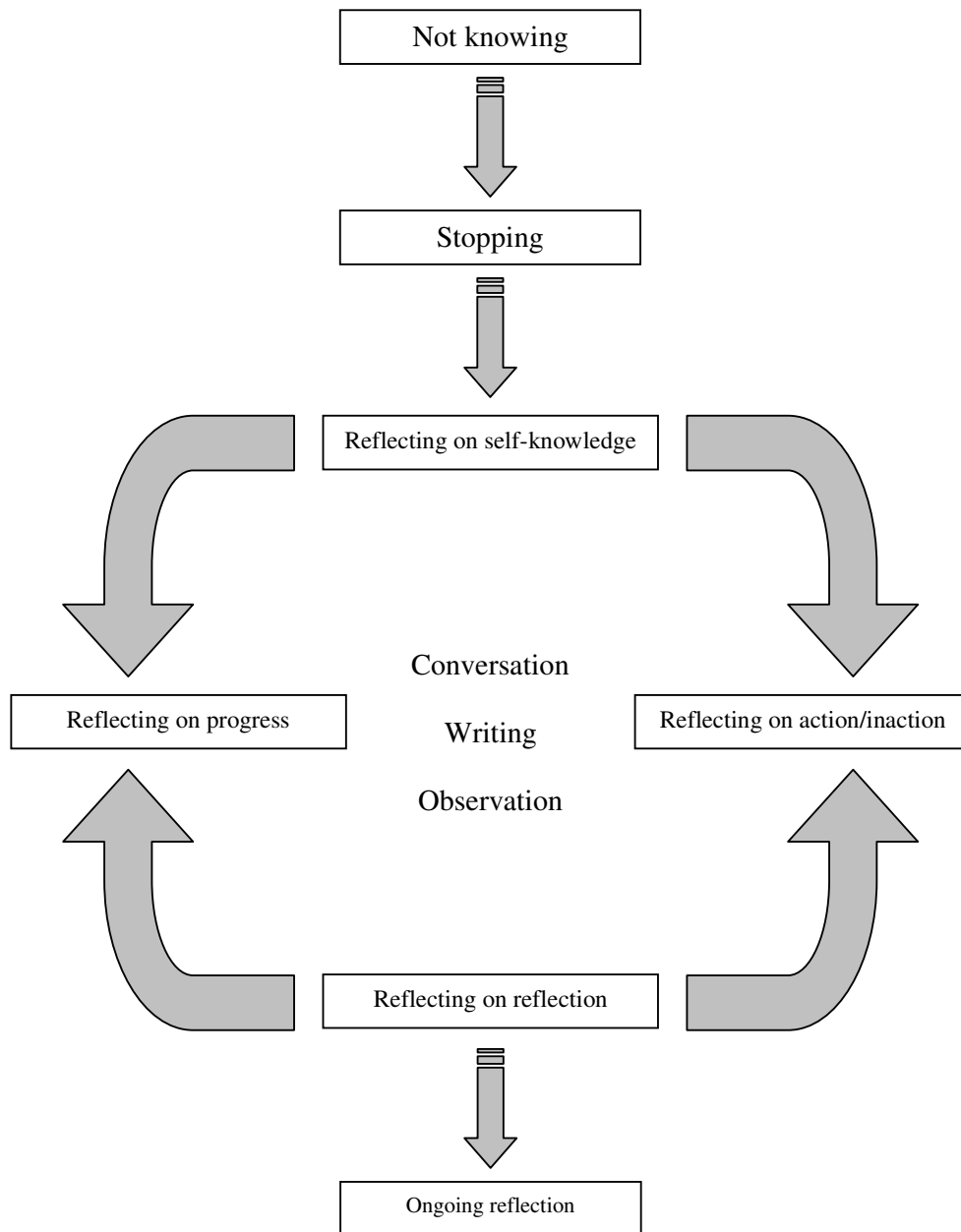
What she's given me, I converted almost into like a table format, where I was able to sort of, still using the same tools, just identify the issue or the real issue and not the perceived issue, and what I needed to do to move on and get past that ... and use specific examples in my life, like whatever the conflict was, and just work through the process of the conflict resolution. (Client 9)

Thus, ongoing reflection, especially outside of coaching sessions, was an integral part of discovering self-knowledge and facilitating learning in life coaching.

Summary: Reflecting

Reflecting emerged as an important process in facilitating learning life coaching, as it was the process *within which* clients discovered self-knowledge. Clients and coaches *not knowing* and also *stopping to make space* emerged as prerequisite to the process of reflection and discovery. Thereafter, clients reflected largely through conversation, as well as through writing and, to some degree, observation. Clients reflected on various dimensions of self-knowledge, action, progress and learning and also reflected on their own reflections. In addition, clients engaged in ongoing reflection, as the process of reflecting *outside* of coaching sessions and *inside* daily life was an integral part of the reflective process. The process of reflection in discovering self-knowledge is illustrated in Figure 5.4:

Figure 5.4



The process of reflecting in discovering self-knowledge

The process of iterative reflection gave rise to the discovery of self-knowledge and, therefore, learning in life coaching. These discoveries and learning were, in turn, *noticed* through the process of listening, which is explained below.

Listening

It was through the process of listening that coaches identified clients' discovery of self-knowledge. The process of listening was described as *deep* as coaches listened *beyond* clients' words, *listening and seeing with all of their senses* (Client 7) to uncover and make meaning of clients' emergent self-knowledge. Therefore, the process of listening involved more than simply an aural skill-set, as coaches listened, observed, identified and made meaning. This appeared to be the process by which clients' self-knowledge was first *recognised* and *noticed*. It was facilitated through reflective and reciprocal listening, as coaches reflected back to clients what they heard their clients saying and clients listened to their coaches. This resulted in coaches *being present* and clients being *seen*. While coaches were largely responsible for listening to clients, toward the end of coaching, clients developed the ability to listen to themselves, and with that, continually discover self-knowledge in the absence of a coach.

Throughout the prescriptive coaching literature, the process of listening in coaching has been identified as significant. "Active listening" (International Coach Federation, 1999, pp. 2-3) is one of the eleven coaching core competencies identified by the ICF, and listening is one of five major processes identified by the foundational co-active coaching model (Whitworth et al., 1998). While the process of listening is given much recognition in prescriptive coaching literature and in the industry (Mobley, 1999; Orth, Wilkinson, & Benfari, 1987), there is surprisingly little evidence-based or empirically grounded literature that actually explains the *process* of listening. However, as *good listening skills* were identified as the top ranking quality of counsellors (Burnard, 1999), this suggests that coaching is similar to the process of counselling. Therefore, the findings of this study may be particularly useful to ascertain the degree to which counselling theory may inform coaching.

Deep and purposeful listening

Listening emerged in this study as a process in which coaches listened deeply to their clients. Coaches listened *beyond the words* (Coach 3) of their clients and consistently listened for underlying information about their clients:

Often, what I find, and this is just so funny, is that what they're coming with, what the issue is, isn't really the main one. There's usually something underneath it, so this is the part of coaching where it's really important to be listening to what clients are saying at a deeper level. (Coach 3)

I mean, coaches are gifted people, and they just ... hone in on information and see something that is between the lines or is a little bit beyond what might have been said. (Client 3)

Deep listening allowed, as Coach 2 said, *the invisible to be made visible* and was frequently characterised by references to something *underneath, underlying, beneath, below or deeper than* what clients were saying on a surface level. *Pinpointing* and *picking up on* were the most frequent terms used by clients when describing their coaches' listening. In addition, *tapping into, tuning into, tuning in* and *connecting* were also frequently used terms, as well as *identify* and *recognise*.

It also appeared that coaches' deep and purposeful listening facilitated the process of *being present* with their clients. This was referred to by coaches as being *in the moment* or *being with* clients. The words and processes which coaches used to describe *being present* were similar to the words they used to describe the process of listening. In fact, although the coaching literature suggests that *being present* is a quality in and of itself (International Coach Federation, 1999), this study revealed that coaches were present with their clients *as a result of* deep and purposeful listening.

When coaches *listen[ed] to what clients [were] saying at a deeper level* (Coach 3), clients were often not aware of what their coaches picked up on. Conversely, it appeared that even coaches were sometimes unaware of exactly what they were

hearing. However, patterns emerged in the data that revealed the way in which deep listening was facilitated, as coaches purposefully listened for and focused on information which related to client sense of self, that is, self-knowledge. Indeed, as Coach 2 highlighted, clients did not typically articulate self-knowledge clearly, and coaches tended to listen *for* it:

[They don't articulate it] so clearly, but you listen for it, and you hear it. I mean, they're not going to clearly say, "Well this is what it is," but you listen for it, because they often, clients don't hear the words that they're actually saying. (Coach 2)

The notion of purposeful listening was reminiscent of “focused listening” (Whitworth et al., 1998, p. 35) in the foundational co-active coaching text. However, while the co-active coaching model identifies the importance of focus in the process of listening, it fails to explain clearly what coaches focus *on*. As a result, the findings here provide rich insight into a key coaching process.

Uncovering self-knowledge

Respondents described the way in which coaches engaged in a process of listening for and *uncovering* information about client self-knowledge. Coaches listened for clients' emotions, desires, values and thinking, and this was usually gleaned from listening to clients' talk about current circumstances. Through listening, coaches often heard the self-knowledge of clients, before clients were even aware of that knowledge themselves. This phenomenon was somewhat supported by the literature, as ICF core coaching competencies describe how, through active listening, coaches “hear the clients' concerns, goals, values and beliefs” (International Coach Federation, 1999, p. 3).

Indicative of the influences of emotion-focused therapy in coaching, *uncovering* client feelings was the dominant form of purposeful listening highlighted by the respondents in this study. The first level which coaches and clients referred to when describing the

process of listening was the way in which coaches listened to and honed in on feelings:

I might have been describing things in detail, but she could pick out what I was saying on another level, probably things like if I was resentful of something or angry at something, really tapping into the feelings behind what I was saying. (Client 2)

Generally, she'll ask me to tell her what's happening, and I may have a conversation with her very much like one I'm having with you on my day-to-day details. I've been off on a trip, I've been with my husband ... and she'll generally select something either related to the day-to-day information or to my description of my activities or my feelings and want a deeper look at it. (Client 8)

She's [my coach is] very much able to tap into my reactions. She sensed some things that I was feeling or experiencing and was able to make me expand on those things. (Client 9)

Uncovering client desires was also a significant aspect of deep and purposeful listening. As Client 7 stated, *the coach is almost able to, in a way, listen beneath that and sort of interpret what it is they're really hearing us longing for*. Client desires usually emerged from reflections on feelings. As Coach 2 said, it was through exploring a client's *tolerations* (things which frustrated them, but which they put up with) that she was able to hear what her client really wanted. Therefore, when Coach 4 said, *We must learn to sense what the emotions are and what they are telling us*, it appeared that clients' emotions strongly reflected their desires:

I hadn't been able to pin down what it was I was trying to achieve, and [my coach] listened really quite intently, and ... at the end of this conversation, and it may well have taken a couple of conversations, ... she recognised that I needed to—or maybe it was very obvious—that I needed to establish some sort of balance in my life. (Client 8)

Just as uncovering client feelings was an important step in the process of uncovering their desires, so it led to *uncovering* client values. As Coach 4 identified, *All emotions point us to what we care about*, and patterns emerged in the data which consistently highlighted how coaches listened to identify client values. Thus, uncovering *what was important* was another way in which coaches listened purposefully on a deeper level:

I'm using my senses to hear and understand what they're meaning, so the meaning behind the words ... I get to know what's important to them. I use values a lot in coaching. (Coach 3)

And she [my coach] often picks out, as well, bits of ...values and other things in what it is telling her that helps me sort of evaluate things in a different way. (Client 6)

Uncovering limiting thinking was also facilitated by coaches through the process of listening. Limiting thinking was often referred to as *negative self talk*, *self-sabotaging* or references to the *saboteur*:

Part of the coaching was to identify what are the things that get in her way of achieving some of the things that she wants to achieve, and we realised that one of the things was her negative self-talk, and so we started exploring, "OK, so what is that negative self-talk? Give it a voice. Write it down. What is it saying to you?" And so this not good enough thing came up. (Coach 1)

Just by noticing. By listening. "Ok what's going on here? Notice what you're saying to yourself in your head." (Coach 3)

So most of the time, she did hit the mark and it made me realise... why I keep doing certain things or patterns or how I'm self-sabotaging, but she was able to pick out those things. (Client 2)

When I'm denigrating myself and kind of holding myself back from doing. Where I'm not seeing a possibility or an avenue of action, because I don't think I can do it. Something where I'm limiting myself, and often, that's a

place where this side of me stops just... she [my coach] would shine a light on it... She would name it. She would notice it. (Client 5)

Thus, the study findings suggest an inherent pattern which guided the way in which coaches purposefully listened for and thereby engaged in the process of uncovering self-knowledge. In this way, the process of discovering self-knowledge appeared to be facilitated by listening through *layers* (Client 2) of self-knowledge.

Picking up on clues

The process of deep and purposeful listening and uncovering and discovering self-knowledge involved picking up on *clues* (Coach 3). This extended beyond the aural skill-set, as coaches were *listening and seeing with all of their senses* (Client 7). Clients frequently remarked, often seemingly in awe, on the way in which their coaches detected that which was underlying coaching conversations:

The thing that amazes me too is that ... even with talking to somebody over the phone, they can pick up on these ... just the ability that they have that they can actually pick up on these things, and they're not even sitting across the table from you. It's just... I think that's amazing... she honed in. (Client 3)

She would name it. She would notice it. Sometimes, it's quite subtle and almost not even conscious, and so part of the skill of a good coach is to notice those little subtle things that are happening. It may even just be a change in voice quality, a shift in the tenor of the conversation ... kind of quietness or something, so she's pretty skilled in that ... She's a good noticer. (Client 5)

While most clients appeared to be unaware of the *triggers* (Client 9), coaches specifically referred to *clues*. As Coach 3 noted, these clues *gave away what was really going on* and therefore facilitated the process of purposeful and deep listening and contributed to the process of clients discovering self-knowledge and learning about themselves.

Client *energy* was a frequently reported trigger noted by coaches. Interpreting the energy level of a client was, at first, a somewhat intangible listening process. However, on further examination, it became evident that it was a process of focusing on tangible clues, such as listening for the presence of feelings through such factors as the speed at which clients spoke or their voice intonation or inflection:

What I mean by listening for the energy? It's listening for how—in my words—how excited or not excited, how emotional or not emotional the person is when they're speaking about a subject ... because when people talk about something that's really important to them, their voice and their energy changes. There's just so much more vitality in their voice ... It's like listening to their inflections, listening to the words that they're choosing and the speed with which they're speaking and the force, you know, all of those things that give away clues as to what's really going on. (Coach 3)

Voice intonation and inflection were commonly used to uncover and hone in on client feelings, as were clients' word choices and language. Body language and facial expression were also frequently reported clues, and coaches *listened* for other visual clues, such as client behaviour, physical appearance and bodily structure.

In *listening and seeing with all of their senses* (Client 7), coaches used client patterns of behaviour as another means by which to uncover and discover self-knowledge. Respondents noted that coaches picked up on specific and repetitive behaviour and used this as the basis for facilitating the discovery of self-knowledge:

Picking up on threads from previous conversations ... clients will bring what's going on for them now, and sometimes it's more of the same, in which case if I notice that this is a repeating pattern ... then I'll point that out. (Coach 3)

Most of the time, she did hit the mark, and it made me realise what, why I keep doing certain things or patterns, or how I'm self-sabotaging, but she was able to pick out those things. (Client 2)

This explains the ways in which coaches listened for the *presence* of certain clues. However, this study revealed that coaches also picked up on what was *not* present and therefore used *absence* as a clue in the process of deep and purposeful listening. This was described as listening for *what's missing*, as well as *mismatches*. It emerged as a process whereby coaches became aware of contradictions in client self-knowledge or between their self-knowledge and behaviour or current circumstances:

Whatever's underlying, like if there's an emotion that's not being expressed or if I'm hearing anger, and the person isn't saying anger, I might say that ... and also for ... the congruence between their expression and the words they're saying, so it's matching, listening for the matches and the mismatches.
(Coach 3)

If a client shows up with a desire for deepening his relationship with people, let's say one of several outcomes, and then, in the process of getting to know this person, he never ever mentions their wife or their children, as a coach, you would notice that something's missing. (Client 7)

The identification of mismatches usually became apparent to coaches when clients highlighted the importance of one thing, and yet client conversation content and/or behaviour appeared to contradict or undermine this statement. Thus, it typically presented as discordance between client values, current circumstances and desires:

When they make a decision about something, and I'm really mindful of what their values are, I'll say, "Oh that's really interesting [Michelle]." I'll say, "So you know, back in session two you defined your values to be this, this and this. How does this decision support your values?" And so then you might reflect on them and say, "Well actually it compromises most of them." And so then, that's a whole new conversation about, "OK. So what does that mean?"
(Coach 1)

The identification of such mismatches supported the process of discovering self-knowledge, as it constructed the opportunity for further exploration and the discovery of self-knowledge:

We look at where in their lives their values are being honoured, and where they are being compromised, and we have a whole conversation around, “OK so what’s going on there? Are there any patterns here?” (Coach 1)

I guess it [having my values on my wall] helps, because I started to recognise when I was doing things that didn’t fit those values. It helped me understand why I was so stressed out or unhappy and things like that. (Client 1)

This process of identifying missing information was also supported by the literature. The ICF (International Coach Federation, 1999) described active listening as listening for “what the client is saying and is not saying, to understand the meaning of what is said in the context of the clients’ desires” (pp. 2-3). In addition, Grant (2006), in his discussion of congruence, alluded to the process of identifying mismatches in terms of “*competing or conflicting goals*” (p. 161). However, unlike the findings of this study, Grant did not illustrate how the process of listening facilitates an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining congruence throughout coaching, rather than just in terms of goal setting.

Coaches also listened for, heard and responded to client learning. This emerged in three ways as coaches listened for clients’ existing knowledge, for the ways in which clients learnt best and also for the emergence of learning within the coaching process:

If someone’s not being able to manage time correctly ... first of all, I’d say to my client, “If you were my teacher and you were to teach me ten time management skills, what would you teach me?” So I’d listen and see if they know time management skills. (Coach 5)

Also listening for examples of learning and growth in their lives, what’s put them ahead, what’s supported their growth in other situations ... Through listening to what they have to say, identifying as they tell their story what’s successful ... Listening for, “U-huh, OK, so when this person is challenged, it shuts them down,” so this isn’t moving them forward, so I would find another way to try to move them forward or toward whatever they want. (Coach 3)

All of a sudden, she came up with so much energy and she sat up in her chair, and she just couldn't wait to get into the session and I'm thinking, "O-oh, something has happened here". (Coach 1)

As a result of the above, coaches were able to meet their clients *where they were*, capitalise on successful learning strategies and avoid ineffective modes of learning. They also progressively evaluated clients' learning during the process of coaching and used this to inform their ongoing learning.

Finally, intuition was also used as a clue within the listening process in discovering self-knowledge. Coaches referred to this as *knowing*. Intuition differed from the above clues, as it emerged as seemingly unexplainable words, pictures, feelings or incidents that arose within coaches themselves, or that arose within the coaching space and were noticed by coaches:

I'm listening with my ears, I'm listening with my eyes, I'm listening with the pictures in my head, I'm listening with the feelings in my stomach, I'm listening. (Coach 3)

How do I hear it?... It's more intuitively at times. (Coach 2)

She tried to be intuitive, as well. (Client 4)

There is something way more than just mirroring, where the coach is really listening and seeing with all of their senses. (Client 7)

Thus, coaches appeared to listen by picking up on clues from a variety of sources and merging them together in a form of processing:

She [my coach] never loses this intensity, and ... you're very aware that she's absorbing not just the language, not just the wording, the expressions that people have, but their aura or ... whatever they're emitting emotionally, and she processes it. (Client 8)

This form of processing was often referred to as a *sense* or an *intuitive sense*. However, an *intuitive sense* was, in fact, a process of detecting clues through deep and purposeful listening. Furthermore, it appeared that coaches, who were inherently so skilled in carrying out this process that they had reached a level of unconscious competence, were not always aware of what they were doing, and as a result, referred to it as an *intuitive sense*. However, *intuition* made up only one small part of the process of deep and purposeful listening. As a result, the findings of this study suggest that the significance of *intuition* in coaching, referred to by coaches in this study and in the literature (Whitworth et al., 1998), may be somewhat over-estimated.

Reflective listening

Reflective listening, also often referred to as *mirroring*, formed an integral part of the process of listening and discovering self-knowledge. *Reflective listening* incorporated the process of reflection and therefore resulted in significant client learning. It emerged as a process by which coaches reflected back to their clients what they had just *heard* through the processes of deep and purposeful listening:

For me to learn things and progress, I have to do activities or listen to what I'm actually saying, have someone sort of repeat it to me, "Ah so that's where the key is." (Client 2)

It goes back to my earlier remark at it's a combination of not just what [my coach] has said, it has more to do with what [my coach] has heard me say and her way of reflecting it, which is non-evasive, non-threatening, non-judgemental. She's taken what she has heard from me, and has very succinctly simply mirrored it back in a way that I see it or hear it or feel it. (Client 8)

Reflective listening was likened to the process of giving *feedback* and of the coach acting as a *sounding board*. It often involved coaches reflecting back to clients exactly what they said, utilising clients' words in the process, as this allowed clients to *hear themselves*:

I do a lot of reflection, reflecting back what I'm hearing in the person's words. I don't paraphrase. Rarely do I paraphrase ... because they already have their words as structures in their brain, and so I want them to hear back what they said, and they're more likely to get it if the words come back the way that they already have the structures in their brain ... What I call parrot-phrasing... you know, like parrot the bird. Parrot-phrasing, para-phrasing, parrot-phrasing.
(Coach 3)

We have to learn to assess each person for who they are and how they see the world and what their structures of interpretation are, and speak to them through their language and into their world in a way that they hear. (Coach 4)

Reflective listening also frequently included reflecting back to clients the self-knowledge or clues which coaches noticed through deep and purposeful listening:

Sharing with the client what I hear ... I may say, you know, "Can I just stop here for a moment and share what I actually heard you saying?" And sometimes it's the direct words, and sometimes it's what I heard the person not saying, which perhaps is what's between the lines, as well. (Coach 2)

As a coach, well mostly depending on the situation, I'll either challenge it [the mismatch], like "You didn't sound that excited about that. I mean here you're telling me that this is the most important thing in your life and you sounded kind of uninterested," so that would be something I would say, for example.
(Coach 3)

In addition, reflective listening was most frequently displayed through questioning, as coaches reflected what they had heard in the form of questions to facilitate further learning and discovery of self-knowledge:

She [my client] said, "There's nothing I can do about it," and so I just pick up on her language and say, "Nothing you can do about what?" [pause] and so,

you know, just kind of getting her to talk out loud about stuff that she's harbouring inside. (Coach 1)

The clearest example I can give you was as I was running through this monologue of activities that I had done, taking care of this daughter and taking care of my granddaughter and my husband needed this, was just the simple little phrase, "And who's taking care of you?" because it was just, it was a question, "And who's taking care of you [Sandra]?" A little voice, but there was no challenge. It wasn't something I had to defend myself against. It was almost as if she spoke to the unconscious. (Client 8)

In addition, sometimes, the process of reflective listening did not just occur verbally within coaching sessions, as some clients described the way in which their coaches reflected back whole sessions in writing and how this added to their clarity:

I also write a lot of my own notes, as well, but by having her type it up, it just adds that bit more clarity to it. (Client 4)

Reflective listening, whether by means of direct reflection, reflective questioning or through written reflective summaries, typically allowed clients to hear or see themselves and, as a result, discover or re-discover themselves. This phenomenon of clients hearing themselves is supported by Cordingley (2006), who highlighted the value of clients hearing themselves. Clients hearing or seeing themselves, in turn, led clients to take action toward the fulfilment of their desires:

Then, she [my client] started to talk, and she didn't hear herself, how she really needed to clean up her life, and how she has needed to simplify her life, and even she was talking about it, she didn't hear the words herself... When I made her aware of what she was expressing, she was amazed. It did lead to a big change. She ended up selling her house, which was far too huge for her, and bought a smaller house, which was an old style house, which she loves and moved, and she was just so happy. (Coach 2)

Because when I would speak, she basically does similar to what you're doing, and that is she would just recap what I just said, and she would pull things out of what I'd just spoken about, and then when she'd do that, yeah, it just allowed me to see it from her point of view and open my eyes to the possibility of there being a bit that I hadn't seen myself. (Client 3)

It is important to note that although coaches were frequently *on the mark* in what they heard, it did not appear to be important that coaches' reflective listening was *correct*. *Incorrect* reflective listening emerged as equally important, as it gave clients the opportunity to validate and further clarify or reject what coaches had said, which usually led to further discovery of self-knowledge through questioning, reflecting and listening:

"You said that and all I can see is stars in the sky," and that's just a picture that would come to me, and so then I would just wait and see what they do with it, and sometimes they'll say, "Well, that doesn't make any sense to me" or, "You know, that's my vision. Ever since I was a little kid, I look at the sky, and that's when I knew I could be a movie star," or whatever. (Coach 3)

When someone else does that, when they say something that's hit the mark or hit the nail on the head, it feels right, you can go, "U-huh," but when they're off the mark, it's quite easy to go, "No that isn't what I'm feeling." It's really, it's much clearer ... so most of the time she did hit the mark, and it made me realise what, why I keep doing certain things or patterns, or how I'm self-sabotaging. (Client 2)

Mirroring is where she would reflect back to me what I'd written or said, and I would agree or disagree, or I would explain that more or whatever needed to be done. (Client 3)

There was one final aspect of reflective listening that no respondents directly commented on, but which was evident in the culmination of the listening process itself. It appeared that an important part of reflective listening was the way in which coaches, through their behaviour, encouragement of action, holding clients

accountable, through the relationship and everything that they did, actually reflected clients back to themselves. This process demonstrated the quality of listening, as what coaches heard became embodied by the coaching process itself. Therefore, the whole process of coaching appeared to be one in which clients had themselves reflected back to them, and with that, discovered themselves. In this way, as Coach 4 said, clients felt *they were uniquely seen for who they are*.

Reciprocal listening

These findings have mostly explained the way in which coaches listened. However, a further important aspect of the listening/learning process, although less frequent, was the process by which clients listened to both their coaches and themselves. In this study, clients demonstrated a willingness and readiness to listen to their coaches, and one client stated that the process of *listening to each other* (Client 2) brought about learning. This was also an important element of the reflective listening process described above.

Client willingness to listen to coaches appeared to be enhanced by a number of factors. Most clients displayed a deep respect and admiration for their coaches and valued their knowledge and expertise. However, despite their coaches' knowledge, several clients commented on the fact that their coaches did not *tell them much*. One client highlighted that it was because of this lack of *telling* that she really listened when her coach did suggest something:

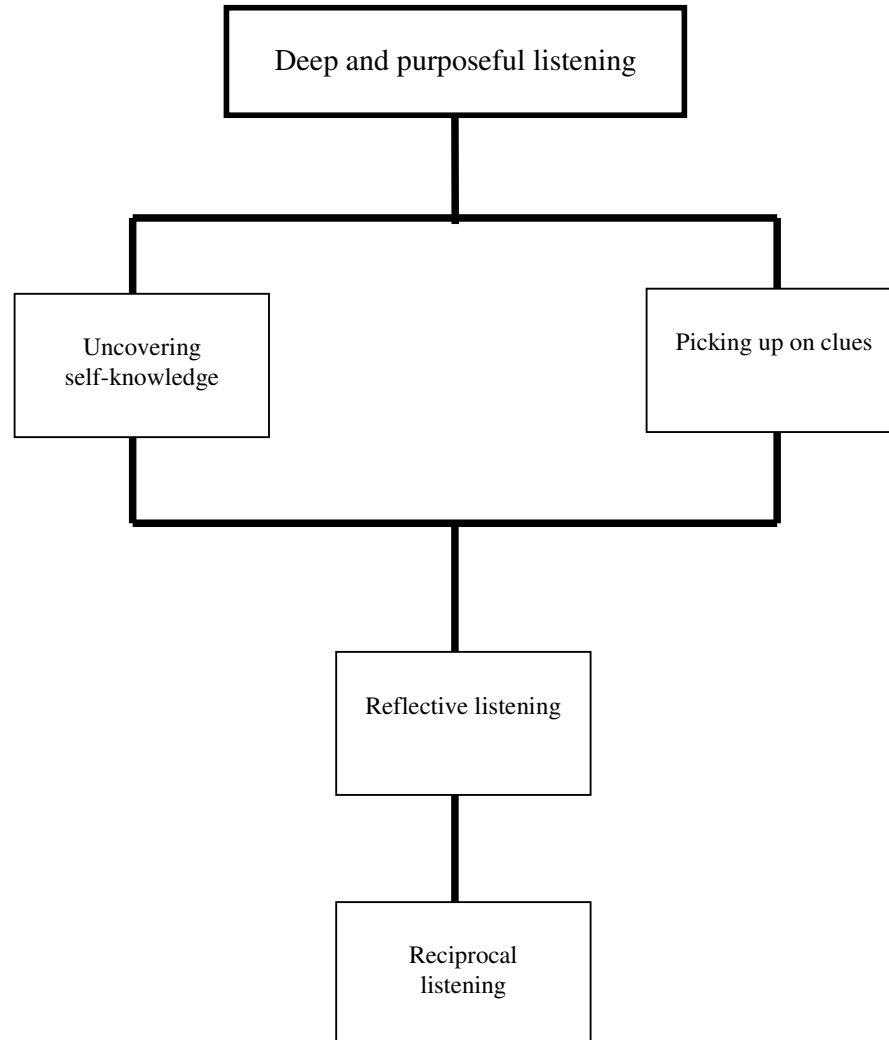
That was the first thing that she really sort of strongly suggested, as strong as she ever is, which is very gentle, where she pointedly said, "I don't think this is good for you," and I heard her loud and clear, because it wasn't cluttered with someone saying a thousand times, "I don't think this is good or that's good or the other thing's good." This was an item, and she felt strongly about it, but she worded it very gently. (Client 8)

This example also points to the deep sense of trust that clients had in their coaches, which, in turn, supported client readiness to listen to and learn from coaches. In

addition, it appeared that coaches' listening processes served to gauge whether clients were ready to hear something. Therefore, when coaches did *tell* clients something (which they often did in very subtle and indirect ways, often asking for permission first and also using analogies), clients were willing to listen. Furthermore, the fact that clients had sought out coaching, suggested a readiness to listen to and learn from coaches.

Summary: Listening

Listening emerged as an important process in facilitating learning and discovering self-knowledge, as it was the process by which clients' existing and emergent self-knowledge was identified and by which clients themselves were recognised and *seen*. This occurred through a process of deep and purposeful listening, in which coaches uncovered clients' self-knowledge by picking up on clues and reflecting this back to clients. Learning was also facilitated through reciprocal listening as clients demonstrated a willingness to listen to coaches and also listened to themselves. The process of listening in discovering self-knowledge is illustrated in Figure 5.5 below:

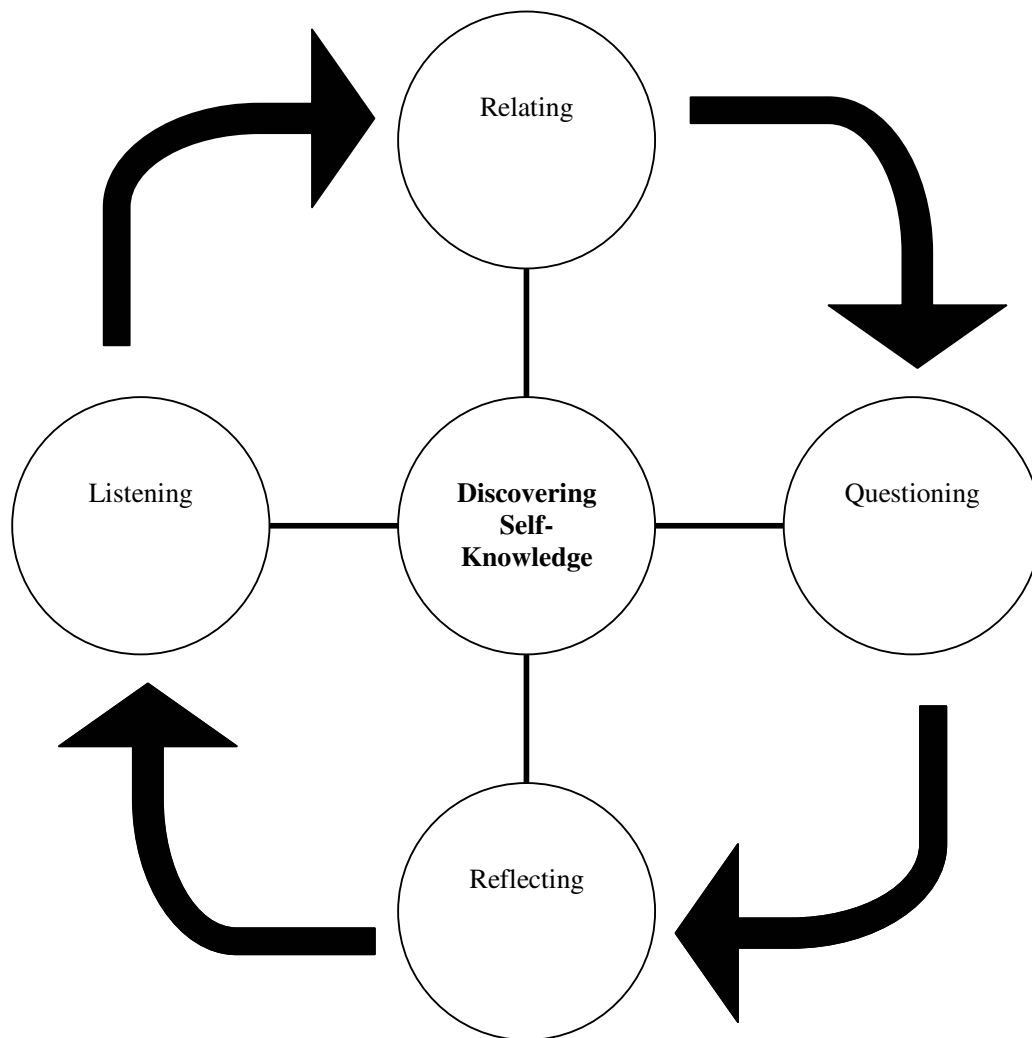
Figure 5.5*The process of listening in discovering self-knowledge*

This process of listening was continual throughout the coaching process. Listening supported the acceptance and trust fostered by coaches, provided a foundation for and was driven by the process of questioning, which, in turn, triggered the process of reflecting. The interdependent relationship between these four key coaching processes in discovering self-knowledge is explained and illustrated next.

Summary: Discovering self-knowledge

The process of discovering self-knowledge emerged as an iterative cycle which combined four key coaching processes of relating, questioning, reflecting and listening. Firstly, an accepting, honest, trusting, equal, purposeful and attraction-based relationship between coaches and clients formed a foundation for and *supported* the process of discovering self-knowledge. Secondly, questioning *drove* the process of discovering self-knowledge, as coaches used questions to explore, challenge and extend clients' self-knowledge and trigger the process of clients reflecting. Importantly, it was *within* the process of reflecting that clients first discovered self-knowledge, and finally, coaches listened to clients' reflections, within which process clients' discoveries and self-knowledge were identified and *noticed*. This, then, formed an iterative cycle as emergent self-knowledge formed the basis for further discovery of self-knowledge through the same processes. In this way, learning was further encouraged, deepened, extended and reinforced through relating, questioning, reflecting and listening. This iterative cycle of discovering self-knowledge is illustrated in Figure 5.6 below:

Figure 5.6



The process of discovering self-knowledge in life coaching

When clients discovered self-knowledge through the combined processes of relating, questioning, reflecting and listening, they then applied it. The process of applying self-knowledge, which occurred through relating, coaches holding clients accountable and clients taking action, is explained in the following chapter.

Chapter Six

Applying Self-Knowledge

Applying self-knowledge occurred through the combined processes of relating, holding accountable and taking action. Firstly, clients' relationships with coaches provided a safe place for clients to practice, after which clients often applied self-knowledge in relationships with other people in their lives. Thus, clients' relationships with others provided *a context for* them to apply newly acquired self-knowledge. Secondly, the process of coaches holding clients accountable served to encourage and compel clients to apply self-knowledge. Thirdly, coaches and clients *designed* how to *implement* and apply self-knowledge within the process of taking action. Finally, coaches used questions to hold clients accountable and to design action.

The process of applying self-knowledge also provided a new platform for clients to further discover self-knowledge. In addition, it formed the foundation for clients to integrate self-knowledge. The key coaching processes of relating, coaches holding clients accountable, clients taking action and coaches questioning clients for accountability and action and their contribution to the process of applying self-knowledge and facilitating learning in life coaching are explained in this chapter.

Relating

Clients relating to other people in their lives emerged as significant in the process of applying self-knowledge, as clients often applied self-knowledge *in* their interactions with others. Client 7 described how she practised introducing herself and her “new identity” at social gatherings and parties. Similarly, Client 2 referred to a script she wrote for a conversation that she intended to have with her mother, and which was based on the knowledge of her feelings acquired in a coaching session. In addition, Coach 2 described how one of her clients, after realising how much she was “putting

up with” in her life, practised *making requests* of her boss, who continually blew cigarette smoke in her face. Finally, when Client 8 became aware of how tired she was feeling, she described how she needed to practise not doing things for others in her family in order to take care of herself. Client relationships with others, therefore, provided an immediate context in which clients could apply self-knowledge.

Respondents frequently reported that client relationships with other people changed as a result of coaching. In particular, those relationships could deepen or deteriorate as a result of coaching, and some friction typically emerged within the process. Most frequently, temporary friction was reported, especially with partners and spouses:

I can't remember if it was through the phone coaching or through the other sessions that we did, and I rang up one time, and I had got to know myself pretty well, and I discovered that maybe I wasn't in love with my husband anymore. He didn't do it for me ... It was a real test for both of us. (Client 3)

There was intermittently all kinds of ... you know, he [my husband] had all kinds of reactions, which is very, very normal, and the coaching really helped me be with the reaction and enter into conversations that were able to deepen our relationship, as opposed to push us apart, and it came close sometimes. I mean there were moments when I really felt like, “Oh my God, what's the effect this is really going to have? Maybe we'll separate.” (Client 7)

I can tell you it's not very smooth. I certainly ruffle some feathers, when I say “No, I can't”, “I'd prefer not to.” (Client 8)

In fact, in two cases, coaches reported that this typical experience of friction in client relationships with others could lead to the deterioration of a relationship completely:

When I change, the people in my environment suddenly no longer get from me what they're used to or want, so they start complaining and actually say, “You are getting worse. What on what on earth are you doing? You are getting worse by the minute,” so it's really, really crucial for me as a coach to make them [clients] aware right at the start of the coaching relationship of this

possibility and what this means. In other words, to highlight that as they grow some people will move out of their life and other people will move into their life. (Coach 2)

There are also partners that, relationships break away, because one of them has, through their own work supported by a coach, become much more aware, conscious and life—self—directional, and so I know that one person that I worked with, they are now separated, because they're not in the same place. (Coach 4)

Despite temporary friction, most respondents reported that clients ultimately *deepened* relationships with others in their lives:

She needed to get the courage to really address those issues [about her husband having an affair], and they did, eventually. Their marriage is OK. I saw them walking through the town holding hands. (Coach 2)

It deepened my relationships, as opposed to push people further apart. (Client 7)

I've made much more of an effort to continue to find a way to reach him [my husband] ... and gradually, the conversations are expanding. They're less artificial, he's less apt to run, and we're more apt to be able to have a discussion that ends up being successful. It's not a walk in the park, but it's a distinct improvement. (Client 8)

In addition, respondents frequently reported enhanced awareness in client interaction with others in their lives:

What he [my client] had come back to is remembering that he was beginning to treat people the way he did not want to be treated ... and now he's able to see others with respect. (Coach 4)

I find what's really interesting is that I really take a lot more note of other people, especially close friends who are near to me, and how a lot of people do play small in their lives. (Client 4)

[If it weren't for coaching] I would've been less ... I would've not cared as much for the impact that this was having on other people ... so it taught me how to be with intense emotion, both mine and the people around me, namely my husband, and how to not, to sort of be hard on a topic but easy on the person. (Client 7)

This finding was supported by Grant (2006), who noted that coaching is particularly effective for clients in fields where interpersonal skills are necessary. Interestingly, however, the coaching literature does not highlight the potential friction that may arise in clients' relationships with others. While Grant (2006) points out that coaching is particularly effective for clients in fields where interpersonal skills are necessary, and better communication skills are commonly reported as coaching outcomes (International Coach Federation, 1998; Grant, 2001b; Hurd, 2002; Creane, 2002; Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004; Duff, 2002), current coaching literature does not comprehensively explain the process of clients relating to other people in their lives and how this impacts upon and is influential in the coaching/learning process.

In contrast, social learning theory and symbolic interactionism provide some explanation for the process of clients relating to others, highlighting the significance of the role of other people play in the process of learning about oneself. While Cooley (1966) highlighted the link between the development of self and the social environment, Mead (1956) acknowledged self as a reflection of the views of others (Gergen, 1971). Thus, social learning theory and symbolic interactionism suggest that learning about oneself could not occur without the interaction of clients with others. Furthermore, in his discussion of the therapeutic use of self in counselling relationships, Wosket (1999) supported this conclusion, as he explained that the self is predominantly constructed through interaction with others. Social learning theory also provides some insight into the phenomenon of friction arising between clients and other people in their lives. As noted in the last chapter, Bandura (1977) argued that relationships are likely to continue when parties share similar values and beliefs

(Salkind, 2004). Therefore, in the light of Bandura's theory, and as coaching emerged as a process in which clients learnt about, clarified and often redefined their values and beliefs, it is understandable that clients' existing relationships may experience friction. This reiterates the significance of social learning theory in coaching and suggests that it may be of value in evidence-based coaching literature.

Holding clients accountable

Coaches holding clients accountable emerged as a key coaching process in applying self-knowledge and facilitating learning in life coaching. The process of holding clients accountable continually reminded, supported and compelled clients to apply acquired self-knowledge by taking action. Notably, the process of holding clients accountable was facilitated *through* questioning, reflecting and listening. It was, therefore, intertwined with the process of discovering self-knowledge. Similarly, the process of holding clients accountable *led to* clients taking responsibility. Thus, holding clients accountable was also influential in the process of integrating self-knowledge, which is explained in Chapter Eight.

The term *holding clients accountable* or *accountability* was used predominantly by coaches in this study. While some clients also referred to these words, most described the process of being held accountable as *keeping on track*, *follow-up*, *check-in*, *review* or a *reminder*. In addition, when asked how his coach *pushed* or *challenged* him, Client 5 replied, *She [my coach] might hold me accountable*. Thus, *holding clients accountable* also emerged in this study as a synonym for *challenging* clients. Similarly, respondents referred to accountability as having to *face* and *deal with* issues that they might have preferred to ignore.

Accountability is recognised throughout the coaching literature as an important component of coaching (Bono et al., 2004; Creane, 2002; Gale et al., 2002; Hurd, 2004; Paige, 2002; Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004; Wilkins, 2004). In particular, "Managing progress and accountability" (International Coach Federation, 1999, p. 4) is one of the ICF's eleven core coaching competencies, and Marshall (2006) identified accountability as a critical factor in coaching practice that leads to

successful outcomes. Similarly, accountability is at the base of Stober and Grant's (2006) meta-model for coaching. Nevertheless, while the coaching literature supports the significance of accountability, it provides little explanation of *the process* of holding clients accountable and focuses mainly on holding clients accountable to action (International Coach Federation, 1999; Stober & Grant, 2006; Whitworth et al., 1998). Yet, the findings of this study revealed a multi-dimensional process of holding clients accountable. This included holding them accountable to taking action, as well as to their learning, to themselves and to making progress. Furthermore, the findings of this study illustrate the process of *how* clients were held accountable and how this process served to foster responsibility among clients.

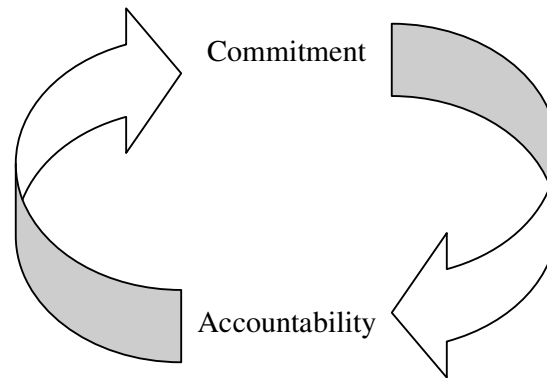
Fostering commitment

Fostering client commitment emerged as an important aspect of holding clients accountable and therefore applying self-knowledge and facilitating learning in life coaching. The significance of commitment in the coaching/learning process was also supported in the coaching literature. In particular, Stober and Grant (2006) drew on knowledge of human change and identified commitment as one of several principles in effective coaching, regardless of the coaching model being applied.

The data gathered from both coaches and their clients in this study revealed a strong relationship between accountability and commitment. Many times, the words commitment and accountability were used interchangeably by coaches:

Creating accountability is actually saying, "OK. Well do you want to take an action around this? Is this something you'd like to commit to doing?" (Coach 1)

As this example highlights, it appeared that accountability was predominantly facilitated by coaches, whereas clients were largely in control of their level of commitment. However, several strategies emerged that coaches used to actively foster client commitment and thereby hold clients accountable. Thus, accountability and commitment emerged from the data as interdependent, as shown in Figure 6.1 below:

Figure 6.1*Interdependence between accountability and commitment*

By fostering client commitment to coaching, the process of holding clients accountable was supported. In addition, increased accountability resulted in clients becoming more committed to themselves, and with that, taking responsibility. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that commitment was both a prerequisite and an outcome of coaches holding clients accountable, and that this led to the process of clients taking responsibility and integrating self-knowledge.

While clients' extrinsic commitment to coaching strengthened the degree to which coaches could hold clients accountable, the process of holding clients accountable also fostered clients' intrinsic commitment. Clients frequently reported feeling predominantly committed to coaches in the early stages of coaching. This was especially highlighted among those clients who were interviewed at the beginning and end of their coaching. Extrinsic commitment was reported directly and was indirectly evident in frequent use of the words *had to* in relation to early coaching tasks. The commitment served as a significant driving force in clients' persistence with coaching, especially in the early stages, and with that, gave coaches the opportunity to hold them accountable. However, toward the end of coaching, clients displayed increased intrinsic commitment to themselves. They referred to *having to* do something less frequently and, instead, expressed more commitment to their own

desires, feelings, values and ultimately to themselves. This process was highlighted in the comment below:

One of the things that has occurred in the coaching is the more I've experienced the coaching the more willing I have become to receive the coaching, and the more I have experienced it with the greater willingness.

(Client 8)

Interestingly, Client 8 initially participated in sessions with her coach largely because she felt obligated. However, this same client became so intrinsically committed that she enrolled herself in another series of coaching directly after the commitment of the first had ended.

As a result of developing an intrinsic commitment, clients were more easily held accountable and often times held themselves accountable, thereby taking responsibility. Client 1 admitted that she wanted to quit coaching. When asked what stopped her, she described how at first it was her commitment to her coach, but as a result of this commitment, she *went back and thought, these are my notes, what's going on here for me... [and] owned them*. Commitment, therefore, provided the foundation for holding clients accountable in this study, and therefore, contributed to clients discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge.

Commitment was initially fostered extrinsically through a process of *setting up an agreement* about the terms and nature of the coaching relationship. Such agreements made clear the responsibilities of both coaches and clients:

We actually need to have an agreement with a client ... because it adds clarity ... because we both know what our responsibilities are, what we agree to. It's part of setting the context. (Coach 2)

Such an agreement in coaching strongly reflects mentoring theory, which gives focus to agreement on the purpose of the relationship and, in particular, “alignment of expectations about roles and behaviours” (Megginson, 2005, p. 30). This is referred to as a relationship agreement or contract and, like coaching, “may cover, for example,

frequency, duration and location of meetings, expectations about contact between meetings, issues of confidentiality, boundaries, expected behaviours and ethical factors” (Megginson, 2005, p. 33).

The ways in which agreements were set up between coaches and clients in this study varied widely. One coach adopted a formal process in which both coach and client signed a contract, while other coaches referred to less formal and more collaborative agreements. Despite variations in the degree of formality, most coaching agreements in this study outlined the roles of both coaches and clients (see appendix P). Like mentoring, they also included other aspects of the extrinsic coaching commitment, including time, action, logistics, fees and sessions.

In this study, coaches required clients to make a minimum commitment of at least twelve hours of coaching over at least three months. However, there was a large degree of variation among coach-client sets relating to how the coaching proceeded. While one client committed to twelve sessions of coaching across three months, others committed to a varied number of sessions across nine months. Furthermore, in most cases, the agreed length of coaching was treated as a minimum, and coaching often extended past this time. All clients in this study fulfilled the commitment of the minimum number of sessions/hours, and in all cases these spanned more months than originally agreed. Several respondents reported clients ending the coaching relationship when the required number of sessions was fulfilled. However, some clients chose to continue coaching beyond the initial commitment. In addition, three clients returned for a second coaching series, and in such cases, new agreements were set up.

The fact that all clients in this study fulfilled their original commitment is attributed to the explicit process of agreeing on the terms of the coaching, including payment of fees. Because coaching fees were mentioned by most respondents, fees were considered an integral part of fostering commitment and accountability, and with that, facilitating learning in life coaching. One client explicitly stated that it was the commitment to the coaching sessions, not her goals, that *kept [her] going*, and she saw this as *fulfil[ing] [her] part of the bargain* (Client 2).

However, client needs, not necessarily coaching agreements, were also used as the criteria for determining when a coaching relationship ended. This occurred when clients felt they had made enough progress, regardless of whether they had fulfilled their desires. Therefore, progress and determining the ending of coaching relationships was based more on client feelings, especially toward their current circumstances and desires. One coach highlighted this concisely:

Even [if] I have an agreement with a client, if a client achieves what they set out to do earlier, I do not hold the client to that agreement ... I worked with one client, because she was going through the divorce, and she just needed to get a bit of distance ... we had a six month agreement, and after three months she said, "I'm fine now. I think I have done what I needed to do," and so we stopped. (Coach 2)

Thus, coaching agreements appeared to be superseded by client needs, which in turn were influenced by the relationship between clients' current circumstances, desires and emotions. Fostering commitment through coaching agreements was, therefore, intertwined with clients learning about themselves. In addition, client progress was not necessarily determined by fulfilment of their desired outcomes for coaching. Interestingly, no clients in this study reported completely fulfilling their originally agreed desires for coaching. Most reported partial fulfilment and also identified a range of other unanticipated outcomes that they were equally, if not more, satisfied with.

The amount of time required also made up one facet of the agreements and represented a large commitment for most clients. In addition to coaching homework, this included regular sessions, which varied in length. While some coaches had standard sessions of thirty, forty or usually sixty minutes, several coaches adjusted the session length to their clients' needs. Client 8 explained how her coach increased the frequency of calls for shorter lengths of time, which helped her avoid slipping back into patterns in between sessions. Similarly, Client 4 reported sessions of two and three hours long, while Client 7 reported a whole day's "session", which was used to conclude her coaching experience. These examples indicate that coaching strictly *by the hour* was not the norm, and that a more flexible approach to coaching sessions and

agreements, which responded to clients' needs, was adopted by most coaches. This appeared to demonstrate that the process of fostering commitment, although initially established extrinsically by way of an agreement, led to increased commitment to clients' needs from both coaches and clients, and in turn, consolidated the process of applying self-knowledge.

The logistics of coaching relationships were also part of *setting up coaching agreements*. This added to the formality of the coach-client relationship, encouraged clients' extrinsic commitment to coaching and helped coaches hold clients accountable. *Setting up coaching agreements* included discussion and agreement on such things as the timing of sessions, the mode of sessions, other forms of support during coaching, cancellations, confidentiality and an expectation of the amount and kind of action that clients may be required to take throughout coaching. In some cases, it was unclear to what degree coaching action was discussed and whether clients had consciously committed:

At some point, I felt badly that I was so unable to connect with her. I really had no awareness that I was dodging her. In retrospect, I can see that I was dodging the occasion just because, although I wanted the results, I think I probably didn't want to have to deal with an effort. (Client 8)

In addition, clients' desires for coaching were agreed upon at the same time agreements were set up. However, in some cases, clients' desired outcomes did not form a part of the written coaching agreement or the commitment. Thus, clients' desires appeared to form only an implicit part of the coaching agreement. Unfortunately, the study data does not explain this phenomenon. However, the absence of written agreement on clients' desired coaching outcomes may suggest why a pattern emerged, whereby clients initially exhibited more commitment to coaches than to themselves. It also raises the question as to whether explicit agreements which include clients' desired outcomes might foster clients' commitment to themselves and responsibility earlier in the coaching relationship.

Regardless of the different ways in which agreements were initially set up, in all cases, coaching agreements were flexible and responsive to client needs. In this way,

the process of applying self-knowledge was further supported, promoted and reflected within the coaching structure itself. Thus, this study suggests that agreement on the ways in which coaches and clients were to work together and remain responsive to client needs, played an integral role in fostering commitment, accountability and therefore the process of applying self-knowledge.

Holding clients accountable to learning

Holding clients accountable to learning emerged as the most significant form of accountability in this study of life coaching. Firstly, clients were held accountable to learning for themselves, rather than relying on the coach to give them the answers. Secondly, they were then held accountable to acting on their learning by committing to take action based on the discovery of self-knowledge, which emerged throughout coaching. Thirdly, clients were held accountable to doing what they said they would do. As a result, the process of holding clients accountable emerged as not just a process of holding clients accountable to action *per se*, as the coaching literature suggests (International Coach Federation, 1999; Whitworth et al., 1998). Rather, accountability emerged as a process in which clients were first and foremost held accountable to learning, in addition to *acting upon* learning.

The process of holding clients accountable to action appeared to be underpinned by holding clients accountable to learning. The first level of accountability to learning emerged as coaches held their clients accountable to *finding their own answers*. Thus, clients were held accountable to doing their *own* learning. Coaches facilitated this process through suspending judgement and through questioning, making space for clients to reflect and by noticing client learning, as it emerged through the process of listening. Coaches also encouraged clients to take action that would promote learning:

[I encourage self-directed learning] by asking questions and having them come up with the answers. (Coach 1)

As a coach, maybe I'm observing some sort of behaviour, whatever, within the client, but for the coach to hang on to that and not actually reveal that yet,

because when the client is going try hard... [to get] an insight to what they're doing, it's much more powerful for them to use that insight. (Coach 5)

You get all these different things, like she really probes your mind and doesn't give me the answers. I have to look for my own answers. (Client 4)

A further component emerged as clients were held accountable to the learning which developed throughout coaching. This contributed to the iterative learning process in coaching. As clients discovered self-knowledge, in turn, they were held accountable to applying this learning in their lives:

Well, I did say that toward the end of the coaching session my approach is, "Now, what have you learned about during the coaching session and what are you committed to doing by the next coaching session?" (Coach 2)

Holding clients accountable to their learning emerged as the precursor to holding clients accountable to action, and close data analysis revealed that clients taking action was, in fact, a result of being held accountable to their learning in coaching:

You know, when there's something I say that's important to me, she [my coach] might point out that there's something I could be doing about that. (Client 5)

Therefore, it appeared that clients were not so much held accountable to taking action, as the literature suggests, but rather, clients were held accountable to *acting on their learning*. Therefore, in most cases and, as explained in the next section, client action stemmed from clients discovering self-knowledge and was a result of being held accountable to their own learning. Thus, the process of holding clients accountable compelled clients to continually apply and build on their self-knowledge, rather than retreat from it:

Sometimes when you encounter something really fresh and you go, "Yikes!" You find something about yourself, and then you go, "Yikes," and you can

close that door very quickly ... but a coach invariably literally supports you in that moment so you don't go back. (Coach 4)

This example demonstrates how the process of holding clients accountable supports client learning on deeper and deeper levels. Several respondents reflected on this phenomenon, highlighting a client preference to *push [things] out of the way* (Coach 1), *go into denial* (Client 2) or *ignore* things. In fact, when asked about what she felt she was getting out of coaching at the time, Client 2 commented, *a lot of support not to quit!* Holding clients accountable to their learning, therefore, emerged as the major form of accountability in this study, which resulted in clients being held accountable to their self-knowledge, and thus to themselves.

Holding clients accountable to themselves

By being held accountable to the learning they discovered during coaching, and because this learning related to clients' self-knowledge, clients were ultimately held accountable to themselves. Therefore, clients were held accountable to their desires, emotions and values, by continually being encouraged to apply this self-knowledge in the context of their lives. This resulted in clients taking responsibility for their current circumstances. Clients were held accountable to their desires in different ways. The most overt form occurred through reminders from coaches. Reminders often came in the form of comments or, more frequently, questions about how something was going, and this served to direct or re-direct client attention toward their desires:

What coaching also helps me do, and [my coach] does this from time to time, she'll say, "Remember three months ago you had a goal of doing blah ... Where are you with that?" And so it kinda helps to keep me on track. (Client 6)

In addition, other more subtle forms of holding clients accountable to desires occurred through the process of listening. As coaches heard or observed discrepancies, otherwise referred to as *mismatches*, between clients' current circumstances and/or behaviours and desires, they reflected this to clients:

It [my coach's process] would really help me see that I was probably being too hard on myself, that I was expecting more than what was reasonable to expect, that I might have been missing the point altogether and just treating it as something that was on my to-do list, you know, at a time when I was really trying to live differently and more authentically. (Client 7)

Some coaches reinforced accountability of clients by checking in on clients' desires either at the beginning or end of every session and by implementing other forms of evaluation. In other instances, coaches assumed a more casual manner by keeping the clients' desires for coaching in the background of all coaching conversations and utilising this knowledge in the process of questioning. However, within the limits of this study, it was not possible to determine what kind of impact the variation in styles of client accountability had on coaching and learning outcomes.

Interestingly, in some cases, coaches deliberately did not hold clients accountable to their original desired outcomes for coaching. In such cases, client learning had led to the development of new desires, which in some cases overrode or cancelled out clients' original desires:

Sometimes, clients will have come up with something different than what they came into because of the awareness that they didn't have when they started. (Coach 2)

A client of Coach 2, who, at the outset of coaching wanted *to have a very successful coaching business with x number of clients*, learnt through the process of coaching that she *really wanted to have more freedom, more time for herself ... So she became actually less outcome-focused ... [and] the greatest outcome for her was that she really felt at ease and content with her life and let go of the pressure she had put herself under* (Coach 2). Thus, it appeared that while coaches held their clients accountable to the agreed desired outcomes for coaching, as clients learnt more about themselves and clarified their desires, coaches held clients accountable to the new self-knowledge and learning, rather than fixed "goals". This finding has implications for the abundant coaching literature, which places emphasis on goal direction and

attainment (Grant, 2003; 2006). In addition, it reflects the recent emergence of more holistic, awareness-based coaching (Oades et al., 2005; Topp, 2007), which in turn may suggest one reason why desired outcomes for coaching do not form a part of written coaching agreements.

Throughout the coaching process, clients were also held accountable to their emotions. Through the process of listening to clients, coaches identified underlying emotions and encouraged them to explore those feelings. As a result, clients were guided toward being aware of and acknowledging their feelings and, in turn, were held accountable to what they discovered. If clients discovered anger or resentment, they were held accountable to this learning and encouraged to take action. As Client 9 realised, *I'm always going to feel like this until I do something about it*. In addition, clients frequently explained how they discovered the presence of certain feelings, and their coaches held them accountable to confronting and *dealing* with their emotions. Through this process, clients became responsible for their feelings.

In addition, clients were particularly held accountable to their values. This emerged as an integral part of the coaching process:

Part of my role is to hold that client accountable to those values for every decision that they make throughout the coaching series. (Coach 1)

This process usually occurred in conversations, as coaches heard or observed a disparity between a client's behaviour or thinking and values. Coaches brought this to clients' attention through reflective listening or questioning, as they held clients accountable to *honouring* their values:

[My coach] might hold me accountable. You know, when there's something I say that's important to me, she might point out that there's something I could be doing about that. (Client 5)

We talked about values and stuff like that, you know, things that are important to you and where ... you're failing—not failing—but ... seeing where you want to be in those areas, so well why aren't you and talk about it. (Client 9)

As a result, clients were held accountable to and took responsibility for their values. This was described by coaches as clients as *being true* to one's values and to oneself. Furthermore, by being held accountable to these different dimensions of self-knowledge, clients ultimately took responsibility for the impact this self-knowledge had on their current circumstances and, with that, took responsibility *for* their current circumstances.

Holding clients accountable to taking action

After being held accountable to discovering learning *for* themselves, coaches held clients accountable to applying learning *about* themselves. The latter was ensured through being held accountable to taking action. This process involved not only coaches and clients engaging in a process of agreeing on action, but more so involved coaches holding clients accountable to *actually taking action*, that is, implementing the agreed upon action. This occurred through a regular process referred to as *checking in* and, in some cases, examining inaction.

After action had been agreed upon during sessions, respondents reported that coaches held their clients accountable to this action. It was usually referred to as *checking in*, described earlier as a process in which clients reflected on their current circumstances, desires and related feelings. However, in this case, when holding clients accountable to taking action, coaches specifically enquired about, or clients specifically reported on, what they had or had not done between sessions. This process of checking in on action was usually facilitated through conversation at the beginning of sessions, although in many cases, clients also submitted preparation forms (see appendix O) or brief summaries to coaches prior to sessions:

I give [my client] homework, and so I check on ... how he's done, how it's going and any situations that are arising as a result of the changes he's making. (Coach 3)

We might start off by going through what I've done and what I haven't done and if I haven't done stuff, why I haven't done it, and sometimes there's a trigger there. (Client 9)

Sometimes, clients were also held accountable between sessions:

Then, I ask him to report back to me, like in two days or the end of the week, or at our next coaching session, depending on how tightly he wants the reins held on what he's done. (Coach 3)

By holding clients accountable to taking action, clients were constantly reminded to actually take action. In addition to facilitating the application of self-knowledge, this provided opportunities for ongoing learning through reflection, as coaches, when holding clients accountable to “homework”, also encouraged clients to reflect on their experiences. Therefore, holding clients accountable emerged as an important process in facilitating experiential learning, as it encouraged clients to gain “concrete experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 42). As Kolb (1984) highlighted, concrete experience, in turn, leads to reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, active experimentation and with that, the creation of knowledge.

Although it was important that clients engaged in action to facilitate experiential learning, inaction also emerged as a significant factor in the process of holding clients accountable and also furthered the process of discovering self-knowledge and the facilitation of learning in life coaching:

From week to week, there will be certain things that a coachee will do or not do that creates an opportunity to explore what's going on, and the coach's role is to challenge the person to explore what's going on. (Coach 1)

In fact, taking *no* action emerged as equally valuable as taking action in this study, as it allowed clients to reflect, not so much on their experiences, but more so on their emotions and thinking that may have been getting in the way of actually taking action. Therefore, throughout this study, clients reported that coaches adopted an inquisitive

approach to holding them accountable for inaction, as they also used client inaction to facilitate the process of discovering self-knowledge:

For example, ... you might come to a session and say, “Well I didn’t do any of my actions this week,” and so, instead of saying, “Well why didn’t you do it?” which you don’t ask as a coach, what you want to do is ask a learning question, and so I’d be saying things like, “What did you learn as a result of not doing the actions?” or “Is this something that you’re doing in other areas, you know, you commit to doing things, and then don’t follow through. How do you feel about the fact that you haven’t done your actions this week? What consequences are there for you?” So it’s not about me, it’s actually about the client, getting them to learn something for something they either have or have not done. (Coach 1)

Coaches, therefore, approached accountability for action that clients did not take with *curiosity*, rather than judgement. In this way, they sought to understand clients, and in so doing, facilitated the process of discovering self-knowledge. As the example from Coach 1 above indicates, coaches did not ask clients *why* they did not take action. One coach suggested that asking why someone did not do something undermines the trust and acceptance in the coaching relationship and does not support learning:

We find that the “Why” question doesn’t lead to a learning. The “Why” question creates an opportunity to deliver some sort of justification and can create some defensiveness for the person as well, and we don’t want that in a coaching environment. We want people to actually learn from situations, rather than feel that they have to justify or defend their behaviours. (Coach 1)

Interestingly, while coaches typically did not ask “why”, clients still interpreted their questions as asking why. In particular, Client 2 summarised the process of exploring inaction with her coach as *just a whole lot of questioning that made me get to the bottom of probably why*. Thus, although coaches thought that they were refraining from asking why clients did not do something, the data suggests that clients interpreted coaches’ questions as such, regardless:

Because I can check in each session with [my coach] and hand over my tasks, so to speak, and say, “Look, I didn’t get to this this session,” and we can discuss why. (Client 2)

Despite the above interpretation, these discussions did not appear to arouse defensiveness among clients. Therefore, it appeared that an avoidance by coaches to seek an explanation for inaction focused client attention on learning, rather than justifying, while still coming to understand why. Therefore, unlike in schools where teachers may not want to hear students’ excuses for incomplete homework, it appeared that coaches valued clients’ reasons for inaction, as it gave them a greater insight into clients’ sense of self, and with that, allowed them to discover more self-knowledge:

Like people know what they need to do most of the time. We’re just all human, and we don’t do it ... you know, there’s I’m scared, I’m tired, it might be a big risk, I might lose my relationship. You know, there are lots of reasons why people don’t do things. (Coach 3)

The process of holding clients accountable to action and, as a result, reflecting on inaction, produced valuable insights on the part of both coaches and clients. Thus, *holding clients accountable to action* by examining inaction was a process which strongly supported both the application and discovery of self-knowledge and therefore learning in life coaching.

Holding clients accountable to making progress

In addition to holding clients accountable to learning, to themselves and to taking action, coaches continually held their clients accountable to making progress. The most common representation of progress was clients’ fulfilment of desires:

From session to session, I want this person to feel a sense of achievement around making progress toward the goals. (Coach 1)

I've probably achieved five out of ten [intentions] so far, which to me is fantastic. (Client 4)

However, as noted earlier, fulfilment of clients' desires was not the only benchmark of progress. As Coach 1 noted, *when I say progress, it could be no progress, you know, but they've had an insight about why that's been the case.* Therefore, learning or insight also emerged as one way in which progress was evaluated in this study. In addition, behaviour change and the demonstration of new skills or competencies were other ways for determining progress:

So someone goes, "I really want to cold-call." ... At the end of the day, the evidence is, are they going to do it? (Coach 5)

When I felt I was able to really show up differently and talk to him [my husband] about things that were really important to me, that's when I felt like, wow, I've taken on this, I'm really beginning to take on this new identity.
(Client 7)

Finally, clients developed the ability to facilitate coaching processes independent of coaches, and this was also considered to be significant and perhaps the most sustainable form of progress:

I think the biggest thing is to actually read over my own stuff, to go back and get what I want out of it. I know I was committed to the coaching session, and I turned up for it, even though I wanted to quit, but that critical time just before it, I actually went back and thought, "These are my notes, what's going on here for me?" I owned them ... so I wasn't looking, "Gee, I'm a failure." I was just looking at items that hadn't been done, so I guess I learnt about reconnecting instead of burying my head in the sand ... It was concrete. I could actually go to a page and look at a list of things and say, "OK, that hasn't been done. That's OK. It's just one item on a list." ... At this point it's my responsibility to identify that to [my coach], and I liked that. I was like owning it. I was accepting responsibility for it. (Client 2)

Sometimes, I sort of get my feelings hurt over something, whereas now I say, “Hang on a tic, why are you thinking like that?” And I just talk myself through the whole process and realise that I got my feelings hurt over nothing, so I just find that I am using the tools that [my coach] has given me and continuing to do that. (Client 9)

As seen from the above, for clients, a significant measure of progress related to their perceived capacity to manage their own ongoing learning and to use this knowledge to better manage their current circumstances. Therefore, these findings once more suggest that the common tendency in coaching literature to focus on goal direction and attainment (Grant, 2003; Grant, 2006) may not accurately reflect the process of life coaching. Indeed, a more holistic, awareness-based coaching, reflected in models emerging most recently in the coaching literature (Oades et al., 2005; Topp, 2007), may better support the process of client learning and development.

Summary: Holding clients accountable

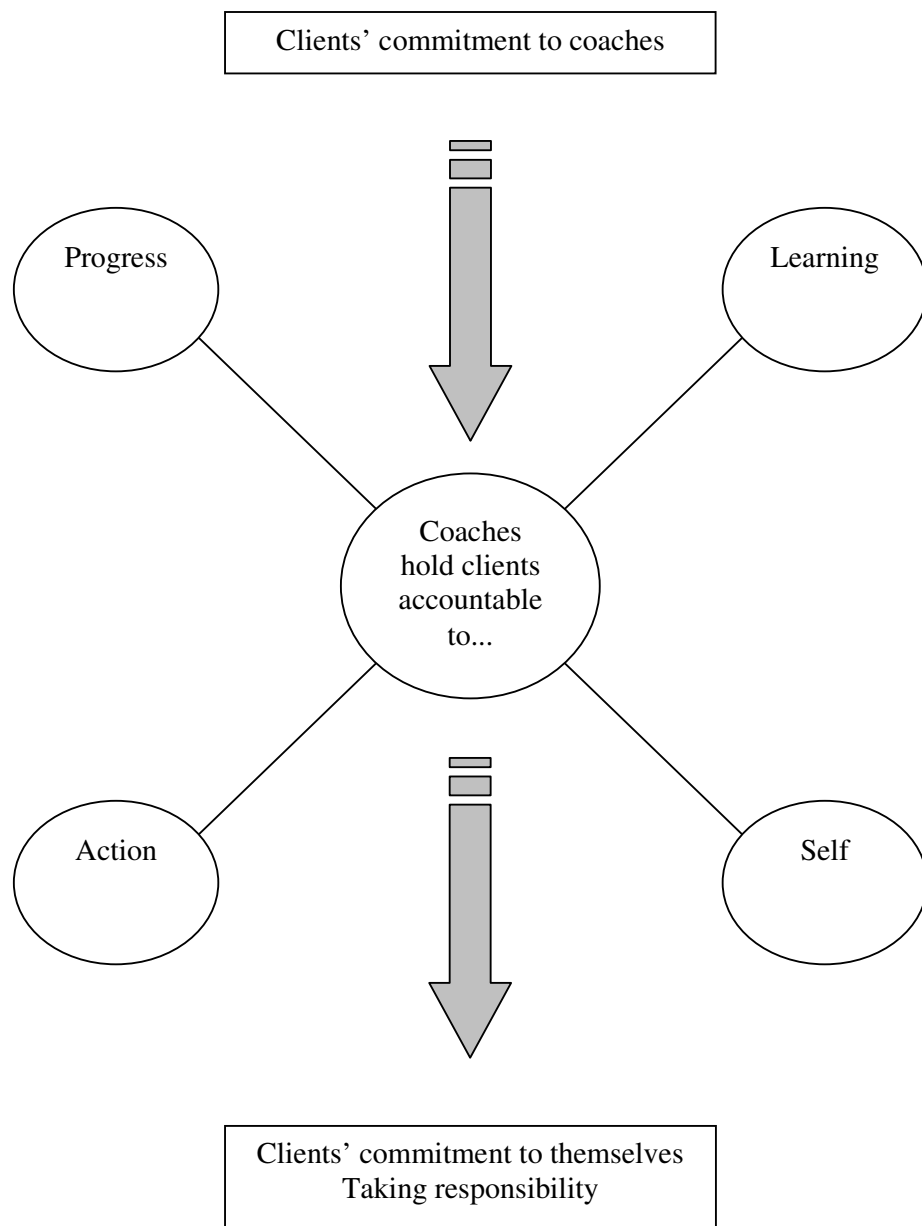
Holding clients accountable emerged as an important process in applying self-knowledge. In addition, holding clients accountable also led to further discovery of self-knowledge, paved the way for the integration of self-knowledge, and was therefore significant in the broader process of facilitating learning in life coaching. Holding clients accountable was the process by which clients were continually supported and compelled to learn for themselves and apply emergent self-knowledge through action. They were then held accountable to implementing agreed action or learning from inaction and were consistently held accountable to making progress. Progress was measured, not just by progress toward clients’ desires, but also by the degree of learning and insight, behaviour and competencies, and the extent to which clients began facilitating their own ongoing learning. Commitment emerged as a precursor to holding clients accountable and also an outcome, as clients were held accountable to commitments made to coaching and ultimately to themselves. Furthermore, this process provided opportunities for the reflective learning process and also raised opportunities for iterative and ongoing discovery of self-knowledge.

As a result, the findings of this study suggest that holding clients accountable was an important process in accelerating clients' learning:

Well, I think it's accelerated. Mostly, I think people would do what they end up doing in coaching, just not as quickly ... so, for example ... this client that's changed all these things in her life. She probably would have done those things without going through coaching, but it would have taken her longer. She's transformed almost every aspect of her life in ten months. Actually it was shorter than that, it was about seven months, and I'm sure she would have done it in a year or two, but with the coaching, with having accountability and somebody really questioning her, what's this, what's this, it's moved her forward faster. (Coach 3)

The process of holding clients accountable in applying self-knowledge is illustrated in Figure 6.2 below:

Figure 6.2



The process of holding clients accountable in applying self-knowledge

The process of coaches holding clients accountable was related to the clients taking action. The process of clients taking and designing action is explained next.

Taking action

Taking action emerged as a key coaching process in applying self-knowledge and facilitating learning in life coaching. As Coach 5 said, *[clients are] learning, as long as they're moving*. The process was referred to by coaches and clients in a variety of ways, including *homework, homeplay, exercises, tasks, activities, practices, fieldwork* or simply as the things clients *will do*. Taking action manifested as a process whereby clients applied their learning in the context of their current circumstances and in their relationships with other people. It also contributed to the process of discovering self-knowledge, as action itself often involved questioning and reflecting and led to the discovery of self-knowledge. In addition, taking action also formed an iterative learning cycle, which created ongoing and authentic learning opportunities for clients to continually extend and build upon their emergent learning.

Action is recognised in the coaching literature as an integral part of coaching. It forms one component of the acronym-based coaching models, such as the fourth stage in Whitmore's (2002) GROW (Goal – Reality –Options - What next/Way forward/Wrap-up/Will do) model. It also is an important part of the goal-directed coaching framework, where through the development of action plans, clients take action, monitor and evaluate progress, adjust their course of action and eventually achieve success (Grant, 2006). The significance of taking action in the learning process is also supported by experiential and action learning literature. In experiential learning, taking action forms a part of concrete experience and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). In turn, the influence of experiential learning in coaching has been recognised (Cox, 2006). However, action learning, which to date remains largely unrecognised in the coaching literature, focuses on the relevance of action in the learning process, as “there can be no learning without action and no action without learning” (Revans in Mcloughlin, 2004, p. 433). Action learning, like experiential learning, facilitates learning through reflective inquiry, as it fosters individuals' examination and questioning of their own experiences (Smith & O'Neil, 2003).

However, the premise of action learning is to encourage action learners to pause and ask questions of themselves and then to act on these questions, as “it's only by

bartering our own misunderstandings that we learn better how to understand” (Revans in Weinstein, 2002, p. 3). Therefore, action learning appears to comprehensively reflect the intertwined discovery and applied learning processes which emerged in this study. In addition, Smith and O’Neil (2003) highlighted seven elements of action learning, which clearly align with learning processes already revealed in this thesis:

1. respondents tackle real problems (no “right” answer) in real time;
2. respondents meet in small stable learning groups (called “Sets”);
3. each Set holds intermittent meetings over a fixed program cycle;
4. problems are relevant to a respondent’s own workplace realities;
5. a supportive collaborative process is followed in a Set;
6. process is based on reflection, questioning, conjecture and refutation;
7. respondents take action between set meetings to resolve their problem.

(Smith & O’Neil, 2003, pp. 63-64)

As in the first element of action learning, wherein action learners tackle real problems, clients arrive at coaching dissatisfied with some aspect of their current circumstances. Like the second, third and fourth elements above, coaching clients work together with coaches (a small stable learning group called a “set”) and have regular coaching sessions (intermittent meetings) toward desired outcomes that stem from their original circumstances (problems are relevant to a respondent’s own reality). As in the fifth and sixth elements of action learning, coaches and clients work in partnership within a supporting and trusting relationship (supportive collaborative process followed in a set), with coaches questioning clients to engage them in reflection as they discover self-knowledge, disperse false assumptions and develop new understanding (process based on reflection, questioning, reflection, conjecture and refutation). Finally, as in the last element of action learning, this learning is then applied through action between sessions and leads to the fulfilment of clients’ desires (respondents take action between meetings to resolve problem).

Despite the almost mirror image between the stages of action learning and the processes of learning in life coaching as they have emerged in this study, to date, action learning has been linked to coaching only in workplace, executive or organisational contexts (Choi, 2005; O’Neil, 2001; O’Neil & Lamm, 2000; Sullivan,

2006). In such cases, coaching is frequently used as a strategy for facilitating action learning (Yorks, Dilworth, Marquardt, Marsick, & O'Neil, 2000) and is also linked to the transfer of knowledge (Wang & Wentling, 2001). Thus, historically emerging from the workplace, action learning has been little used at an individual level. This study, however, provides some evidence of the application of action learning beyond the context of the workplace and highlights its relevance to life coaching.

Designing action

Taking action was integral to directly or indirectly fulfilling client desires. Action emerged in a multitude of forms, including reflective, written, imaginative, visual, behavioural, physical, social or observation-based action. Despite seemingly unlimited variation, the common element was that the action, regardless of its form, served to progress clients toward the fulfilment of their desires.

In many cases, the connection between client action and desires was obvious to both coaches and clients. As an example, Client 2 set a goal to start a new business. Therefore, an action which moved her toward her desire involved *looking into basics like registering a business name*. There were also some cases where the link between clients' desired outcomes and their actions was not immediately apparent to the clients. For example, a suggested action for Client 8 was to attend yoga classes. Although at the start of her coaching, she was unable to appreciate the value in this, after finally attending a yoga class, she realised how it did indeed support her progress toward her desires. Thereafter, she was significantly more motivated in attending yoga classes.

Examples such as these, from clients who were interviewed at different points throughout coaching, also revealed a link between client motivation, action and the fulfilment of their desires. Frequently, the intrinsic motivation of clients was higher at the end of coaching when they could clearly see the links between their action and their desires. On the other hand, during the earlier stages of coaching, when clients could not see the link as clearly, word choice such as *I had to* suggested that clients were more extrinsically motivated by coaches. Thus, the findings of this study suggest

that clients' intrinsic motivation was higher when *they* (as opposed to coaches) perceived a link between action and its relationship to their desires.

Furthermore, taking action was not always an easy process for the clients, and as a result, the link between action, fulfilling desires and client motivation emerged as an important element in the process. Taking action was often referred to by clients as *hard* or *difficult*, and this was also observed by coaches. However, despite this difficulty, all clients in this study appeared to maintain a positive attitude toward this aspect of the coaching process. Two reasons are suggested for this finding. As noted already, when clients could see the link between actions and desires, they felt intrinsically motivated to take further action. Secondly, before clients became committed to any kind of action between sessions, their expressed agreement was usually first elicited. As one client said of her coach's practice, *she'll make a suggestion and ... try to elicit my buy into the suggestion* (Client 8). The process of agreeing on action consistently occurred either at the end of a coaching session or at the end of a discussion on a particular topic within a session. This pattern was displayed throughout the data, and the following example highlights this process succinctly:

It varies in the sense that we may discuss in depth a number of topics, so if she's [my coach has] got enough depth of understanding on one topic, she may make a suggestion early in the conversation, and if we've gotten onto several, there may be several suggestions, and then towards the end of the conversation, she'll pretty generally summarise, and ... she'll ask me, "What are the things you are going to do? What are you going to do?" And I will then state back to her what it is that I've heard that I plan to do, so that she's aware of what my understanding is of what her suggestions were, and if I think I'm going to be able to do that. (Client 8)

In addition, a process of agreeing on amounts of action sometimes occurred at the beginning of coaching relationships:

I will typically give him homework, and we negotiate this at the beginning. It's part of designing, "Do you want homework?" If so, "How much?" If not, "OK how do you want to work through things?" (Coach 3).

In this study, there was significant variation in the amount of action upon which coaches and clients agreed. While some clients reported high levels of action, with multiple tasks between sessions, others referred to relatively minimal action, with just one or two tasks agreed upon between sessions. Without exception, however, all clients agreed on some action throughout the coaching process. One coach noted:

I haven't had many [clients] who don't want homework, but I remember one woman who was very clear, "I do not want homework, I will not do homework," and she didn't make that much progress. I think she really wanted a miracle cure. She wanted her life to change without doing anything different. (Coach 3)

Thus, this example points to an agreement on action as necessary to the coaching/learning process and reflects the action learning philosophy that "there can be no learning without action and no action without learning" (Revans in Mcloughlin, 2004, p. 433). Yet, although some action is necessary, it could at the same time be very minimal:

The homework might be as simple as think about this question, or, you know, just think about it and let me know what comes up for you as you're thinking about it, so it wouldn't necessarily be like paint the side of your house. I mean, it kind of depends, so it wouldn't be like something so big that it's going to overtake them. (Coach 3)

In addition, clients who agreed to multiple tasks between sessions did not necessarily make more progress than those clients who typically agreed to only one or two. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that the process of agreeing on action was influenced less by the degree of action and more by the quality of action. Furthermore, when clients were able to see a clear link between the suggested action

and their desires, agreement on action was easily established. Client 8 highlighted this willingness in terms of perceived success in moving toward her desires:

One of the things that has occurred in the coaching is the more I've experienced the coaching, the more willing I have become to receive the coaching, and the more I have experienced it with the greater willingness, the larger the opportunity to actually experience the change, and the more aware I am in the absence of the coach to notice opportunities for change, so the experience is growing exponentially. It's starting from a very tiny small spot and growing, you know, very, very, very slowly in the beginning to a much faster and bigger growth rate at this time, and a huge willingness now ... I think success always makes one more willing. (Client 8)

However, where the link between clients' desires and a particular action were not immediately obvious, trust in the coach and the process of coaching appeared to be the defining factor in agreeing on action: *I guess I just had to have faith in the process, and when she'd give me an exercise, "Yeah right, OK, I'll do this, I'll do that."* (Client 1) Sometimes, a process of negotiation would occur in order to reach agreement on action:

If I hear something that I really want the client to address, then I make a request, but also share with the client, ask—inform—the client that they always have got the option to say yes, no or modify that request. (Coach 2)

Clients were also free to independently modify their agreed on action as they felt the need:

[She] gave me something that explained the process, but then sent me away, and from what she's given me, I sort of converted that, because I like to do everything on a computer ... What she's given me, I converted almost into like a table format, where I was able to sort of—still using the same tools—just identify the issue or the real issue and not the perceived issue, and what I needed to do to move on and get past that. (Client 9)

While in some cases it was not clear whether clients had actively or passively agreed to take certain action, it was not possible to determine whether this had an impact on their learning. Nevertheless, clients displayed a degree of autonomy in relation to the action they took during their coaching, and this was largely supported by a process of agreeing on action.

Frequently, action was designed and agreed upon as a result of direct guidance from coaches. This kind of action was typically referred to as *suggestions* or *requests*. Coaches made suggestions about specific action after listening to and observing clients and drawing conclusions about what would be best to apply emergent self-knowledge. They also considered what would forward the discovery of self-knowledge and learning to progress clients toward their desires:

There's an assessment that happens through inquiry and through the engagement with the client that allows me to see how this person views the world, which then points you to what the core issue is and then how to design for them. (Coach 4)

She'd sort of go, "OK, well, I see. What you need to do is this, or your problem is xy. Here's an exercise to do to confront that". (Client 1)

In many cases, the suggestions that coaches made to clients required clients to do or think about things that would never have occurred to them otherwise. One prime example of a coach making a suggestion that had not occurred to the client was Coach 4's request that her client give up drinking a beverage which was high in caffeine. Coach 4 suggested this so that the client could slow down long enough to notice how she felt and, with that, progress toward her desire of taking care of herself. This was something that had not occurred to the client at all and something that she normally would have been unwilling to do. Trusting her coach, she complied with the request willingly and discovered that it allowed her to slow down and acknowledge her own needs. Trust was therefore important in encouraging clients to take suggested actions:

I guess the coach just sits back and watches you go through the whole series of things, knowing that you are heading in the right direction, where you don't

really know if you are or not. You know what I mean? That's where the trust comes into it. You've got to trust your coach to get you there or to guide you there. (Client 1)

Through listening to and observing clients, coaches were able to make suggestions for action that helped clients to discover, apply and integrate learning, which then progressed clients toward their desires:

Well, I had somebody reflecting back to me, if I was doing, what I just described, which I often did then and sometimes still do. I was jumping right to , "I need you to hear me about this," and was aggressive or jumping right to action. There was no space for the other person. You know, she [my coach] would tell me that, say, "What might you say that's more of a conversation for a relationship that would allow him sort of to enter into the field between you?" (Client 7)

Coaches also frequently prompted clients to take some kind of action, without making direct suggestions about what that action might be. At such times, clients were expected to come up with some way in which they could take action in relation to some learning or self-knowledge that had emerged during coaching sessions. Often, and particularly at the outset of coaching, coaches and clients collaboratively brainstormed possible action. Later in the coaching process, clients came up with ideas for action independently, both with and without prompting. In some cases, after being prompted for action, clients asked their coaches for suggestions. Thus, the process of prompting action involved coaches asking their clients to consider what action they could take:

Then we come toward the end of the coaching session, I, for example, may say, "Well, based on what you learnt now about yourself, what is it that you commit to doing?" And that's what I hold the client accountable for, what they commit to doing. (Coach 2).

I may ask them, “So what is it that you want to do about it now? You have discovered that you really want to do this, but you don’t allow yourself, so what are you going to do about it?” (Coach 2)

Clients frequently referred to coaches *making suggestions*, while coaches more frequently referred to prompting action. For example, one client described the coaching process as one long series of making suggestions:

I guess the process was me and her discussing, and her going, “Well then, before next session, I want you to do this, want you to do that.” That was what I needed, I guess someone to go, “Well OK, now you’ve done this, good, now you do this. OK. Where are you at now? OK. Good. Now that you’re here, go and do this.” ... It was basically through discussions in each session, and then she’d go, “Well ok, here’s an exercise for you to do, here’s an exercise for you to do’. Like that. (Client 1)

Notably, this client’s coach did not describe her coaching process in this way. In fact, in recounting innumerable coaching situations, only once did she report making a direct suggestion. In all other examples, Client 1’s coach reported prompting for *some kind* of action. Thus, there emerged a distinct pattern of discrepancy in coaches’ and clients’ interpretations of suggested action. While there is no conclusive evidence to explain this phenomenon, one theoretical proposition is that coaches may typically refrain (or, as this study suggests, believe themselves to refrain) from making suggestions in order to maintain equality in the coaching relationship. In so doing, coaches might consider that this avoids the expert-novice approach that is characteristic of mentoring or consulting and supports the expert-expert relationship of coaching. In addition, as several coaches highlighted, any suggestions made usually stemmed directly from what coaches heard the client say. In this way, *technically*, coaches may not have considered themselves to be making suggestions at all, but rather mirroring what they heard clients say.

However, as this study demonstrates, clients interpreted this more as a process of coaches making suggestions, rather than prompting action. Thus, the equality within the coaching relationship appeared to be less at the outset of coaching, when

suggested action was more frequent. In all cases, suggested action, whether by means of making suggestions or prompting action, was used more frequently at the beginning of coaching than toward the end. This indicates that clients became more adept in sensing the need for specific action or some kind of action as coaching progressed. Thus, while the coach-client relationship is perceived as equal, clients initially view the relationship in terms of expert and novice. However, through the process of coaching, this graduates to an expert-expert relationship.

Several forms of taking action emerged in this study and these are addressed in the following discussion.

Reflecting

Action that involved reflecting provided a context in which learning began. This was evident both at the beginning of coaching and throughout coaching whenever a new topic was broached within a session. Reflective action occurred usually through writing, but also through other mediums in conjunction with imaginative envisioning, as clients clarified their desires. Observation was another mode of action used in reflective action to help clients develop awareness of what was going on in a particular area. These forms of action encouraged clients to engage in reflection and led to the initial discovery of self-knowledge. In addition, clients reflected on this action with coaches through the processes of questioning and listening and, in turn, discovered further self-knowledge. In this way, reflective action sparked an iterative learning process.

Reflective action was predominantly designed by coaches or came directly from their coaching resource bank. It included questionnaires that were used at the beginning of most coaching relationships, as well as reflection questions or topics given by many coaches throughout. Reflective action also included the use of observation activities, as well as coaching *tools* or *exercises* that focused on a specific topic considered relevant by a coach to a client's emergent self-knowledge. Among many examples, these included tools or exercises which related to such topics as values, communication or conflict management. In addition, books or readings also served as

a means of promoting reflection to commence the discovery learning process or further the applied learning process.

In some cases, coaches and clients collaboratively designed reflective action. Coaches usually highlighted the area for further investigation based on client learning which emerged during sessions, and together, coaches and their clients designed an action to extend this learning. For example, one client, together with her coach, created a *writing task* in which she *looked at are there any issues of someone in [her] background who didn't get their chance to be successful, and how did that impact on her* (Client 2). This action emerged within a coaching session and mid-way through the series when the topic of success arose. Similarly, another collaboratively designed action was reported when Client 9 recounted how her coach gave her some information and a tool on the phenomenon of cause and effect, and she modified it to produce a computer tool which she used as a form of observation to help her *identify the issue or the real issue and not the perceived issue, and what [she] needed to do to move on and get past that* (Client 9).

Reflections from action were typically brought back to the following coaching session. Reflective action then formed a basis for the coach to facilitate learning within that coaching session, using the processes of questioning, reflecting and listening. Thus, reflective action frequently served to form the context for learning, as coaches and clients engaged in the processes related to discovering self-knowledge that were explained in the previous chapter. Therefore, reflective action not only sparked the discovery of self-knowledge, but also iteratively built upon and advanced emergent self-knowledge:

A lot of the coaching does require the client to go away and do a lot of reflecting, and so as coaches, we pose questions to encourage inquiry and discovery, and so the client will go away and entertain possibility and look at opportunity and look at what is real for them in this moment, and then we'll come back and have a conversation about what their reflections revealed, and usually that's a really powerful moment when people do get insight just from talking about what was in their head versus what they wrote on paper, because sometimes it looks very different. (Coach 1)

Well before every session, I would have to prepare a series of questions. I'd have to actually go over them, and then the phone call would involve going through each of the answers, and so we sort of pulled them to pieces. (Client 4)

Reflective action fuelled coaching conversations and therefore the learning process. It generated reflections, which in turn were examined, reflected upon, questioned, clarified or extended through further action, and they resulted in the discovery and extension of self-knowledge and facilitation of learning. In addition, this reflective action led to other forms of action, which in turn led to further application of self-knowledge.

Following up

Action that involved following up furthered, added to or built upon client learning or progress. Thus, follow-up action served to apply self-knowledge in that it extended learning related to a particular topic to progressively more advanced levels of understanding. Follow-up action typically occurred in *follow-up* to previous client action. Hence, it displayed a logical sequence of action which was required to move clients step-by-step toward their desires. As one client highlighted:

There'll be overhang from the week before, and there'll be follow-up. It's like a building block for some activities. (Client 2)

Sometimes, they're [actions are] connected to each week, so I look what I did the week—the fortnight—before, and we just go through that and discuss it, so [my coach] can sort of identify key areas, and there might be spin-offs from that. It's an obvious progression. (Client 2)

Thus, the main characteristic of follow-up action was that it had clear progression, like that of *building blocks* or *spin-offs*, as mentioned by the client above. Coach 3

recounted the follow-up actions of one of her clients (not involved in this study), whose desires involved losing weight:

Her first steps were literally first steps, and those were that she would walk from her house to the sidewalk, like two times a day, and then she gradually got it up to five times a day, and so she was starting very, very slowly, and then she went on to joining weightwatchers, losing weight, getting fit. She lost 185 pounds, and she's kept it off. (Coach 3)

Thus, follow-up action was progressive and step-by-step, as clients appeared to logically and sequentially move toward their desires.

Preparing

Action that involved preparing emerged as action that helped clients *prepare* to take action that they perceived as difficult and that would significantly progress them toward their desires. It was used when clients did not feel ready or able to take the action that they knew would move them forward and therefore acted as an intermediary or, as some respondents referred to it, a *baby step*. In this study, preparatory action often took place during coaching sessions together with coaches. Coach 1 described how one of her clients, who had a relationship goal, had difficulty sharing authentically when meeting people. Thus, a preparatory action in their coaching session was for him to firstly *[try] a pick-up line with [his coach] using what [he did] as a hobby as an example of what [he does], like come from a real state*. When he experienced difficulty doing this, the preparatory action turned into a running exercise, in which physical exertion allowed him to:

just [declare] it out loud ... without making it wrong or bad ... and then he said, "I realised how silly it was. That it's not a big deal." [He was] making it a big deal in [his] head, and so that was a major breakthrough for him, and so now going out and chatting to people about who he is and what he does is very easy. (Coach 1)

Similar examples highlighted this kind of preparatory action:

There's a fair amount of practice that I do with [my coach] as well, where I say, "Can I just say to you what I think I'm going to say to this person and get your feedback on how that made you feel or how you think it will be responded to?" And that sort of practice is so important in helping the interchange go as well as it could. (Client 6)

As this example demonstrates, preparatory action also often involved a reflective process, which usually occurred outside coaching sessions. For Client 2, who was experiencing underlying negative feelings toward her parents, her coach *asked for perhaps a script of what [she] would say to [her] mum next time [she] [met] her...* She used this as means of ensuring that she communicated effectively. Similarly, Coach 4 explained how she suggested that a client write a letter to her husband, not with the aim of sending it to him and bringing about change, but rather to prepare her to communicate more effectively about what she wanted of him in the future:

Whether or not she sent the letter, but it was a way for her to get in touch with where she really was, and what her request would be of her husband if she were able to make it ... Whether or not she sends it to him is almost beside the point, but she might. (Coach 4)

Each of these examples highlights how preparatory action was reported to prepare clients to be able to take the action that was initially difficult and that would significantly progress them toward their desires.

Applying

In this study, action that involved applying served to implement and consolidate client learning. After clients learned something new about themselves, coaches in this study immediately encouraged some kind of action whereby they would use this learning:

They are learning and integrating that into their life there and then. (Coach 2)

It's just, Ok, we've come up with this issue around money this session, so that's an insight, and sometimes that insight determines what activities I might do the following session. (Client 2)

As these examples suggest, applied action was informed by client learning, and this learning was implemented directly in clients' lives. Applied action was recognised as an important form of action by coaches, with two coaches explicitly emphasising the need for clients to actively use their learning:

It comes back to when I was saying that people learn and they have got increased awareness, but they haven't taken action. They haven't actually used it, and therefore they feel even more imprisoned than they were before. (Coach 2)

Even if you're moving and you're not completely getting the results that you want, [you're] developing skills and insights and learning on the way. If you're stuck doing the same thing that you've always done, then you're not learning. You may know the knowledge, but you're not implementing the knowledge. (Coach 5)

Furthermore, applied action was perceived as a fundamental link between learning and achieving coaching outcomes, gaining competence and growing:

Learning is ... you have an insight, and you've actually learnt something. Growing is ... you actually use it in some way and experience a different outcome as a result. (Coach 1)

The issue for most people is not knowledge. What people know is amazing, what people do is disappointing, so it's not about knowledge. (Coach 5)

Action emerged predominantly from client learning. In this sense, most action was a form of applied action, regardless of the way in which it was designed or facilitated:

[My coach's suggestions for actions will] pretty generally be toward the end of ... they'll be at the end of the conversation. She will take the thread that she has noticed and generally draw a mental picture of where I see the intersections of thought and behaviour and result, and then she'll make a suggestion, and, you know, try to elicit my buy into the suggestion. (Client 8)

As applied action emerged as the application of self-knowledge which arose through the coaching process, it therefore also served to consolidate client learning. As a result, clients frequently described the experience of learning in coaching as being *reinforcing, solid, concrete and practical*, as it served to *consolidate* or *cement* what they already knew or had newly discovered.

Similarly, some applied action took the form of practice, whereby clients repeated a particular action until it began to feel comfortable and became a natural way of being. As Client 9 highlighted, *every little thing that I do makes it a little bit easier next time.*

Like give them a practice making requests five times a day, and I might give them a request, give them another practice to say no ten times a day and just feel that. (Coach 4)

Then I'd force myself or teach myself to start looking at things in a different way in a more positive light, rather than a negative way ... I just went through that process over and over and over. (Client 1)

Things like go to a party and introduce yourself to three new people now that you've left the corporate world. You know, practise that, check it out, see what you say, say whatever you want to say. (Client 7)

As Client 7 pointed out, the coaching relationship fostered *a safe place to practice*. Therefore, the acceptance fostered in the coach-client relationship directly impacted upon clients' willingness to engage in practice action, as both clients and coaches described this practise stage as somewhat awkward:

So they have to go through the conscious incompetence, and that's where the coach's role is to help encourage ... and assist that person to start doing, to go through that awkward stage of creating the new behaviour. (Coach 5)

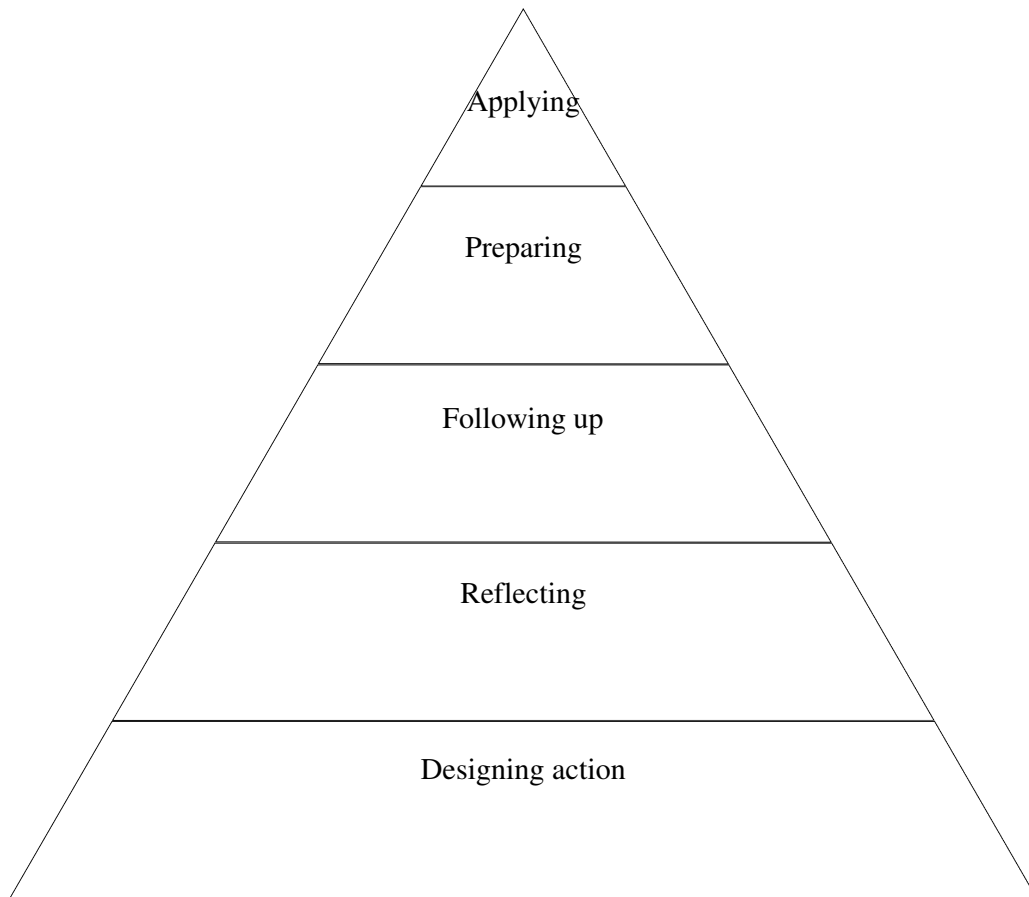
I mean, it felt in the beginning, as a beginner, bumpy, awkward. I wanted to rely on what was really familiar and known. I like being able to say, "I'm the [president] at blah-blah-blah." I liked that. It felt safe, predictable. It was part of my identity. It reinforced who I'd been. (Client 7)

The process of practising led to clients integrating their learning naturally into their lives. *[Since practising saying "no"], it's just so much easier. It comes much more timely and naturally. (Client 2)* Thus, *practice action* assisted clients in sustaining coaching outcomes also after the coaching relationship ended.

Summary: Taking action

Clients taking action emerged as an important process in applying self-knowledge and facilitating learning in life coaching. Stemming from the process of being held accountable, the process of taking action involved coaches and clients designing and agreeing on different forms of action that involved clients: reflecting, predominantly to discover self-knowledge and often extending emergent self-knowledge; following up, to build on emergent self-knowledge; preparing, to prepare clients apply self-knowledge through difficult action, and; applying, to apply and consolidate self-knowledge. The process of taking action in applying self-knowledge is illustrated in Figure 6.3 below:

Figure 6.3



The process of taking action in applying self-knowledge

Thus, the process of taking action not only applied self-knowledge, but also provided a context for the process of discovering self-knowledge. In addition, it paved the way for the process of integrating self-knowledge, as is explained in the next chapter.

Questioning for accountability and action

The processes of holding clients accountable and for designing action were largely facilitated by coaches through questioning. After clients had discovered self-knowledge, coaches questioned clients about what action they could take. Thus, through questioning, coaches held their clients accountable to committing to take action. This process typically occurred at the end of sessions, but also during conversation:

Based on what we have discovered during the coaching session now, what are you committing to doing by next session? (Coach 2)

Toward the end of the conversation, she'll [my coach will] pretty generally summarise ... She'll ask me, "What are the things you are going to do? What are you going to do?" (Client 8)

In following up on agreed action at the beginning of the next session, coaches also typically questioned clients to hold them accountable to implementing action:

Well, usually I just ... check in with them ... If they had some homework, you know, how did it go, what did they learn, if they didn't do it, so what was that about. (Coach 3)

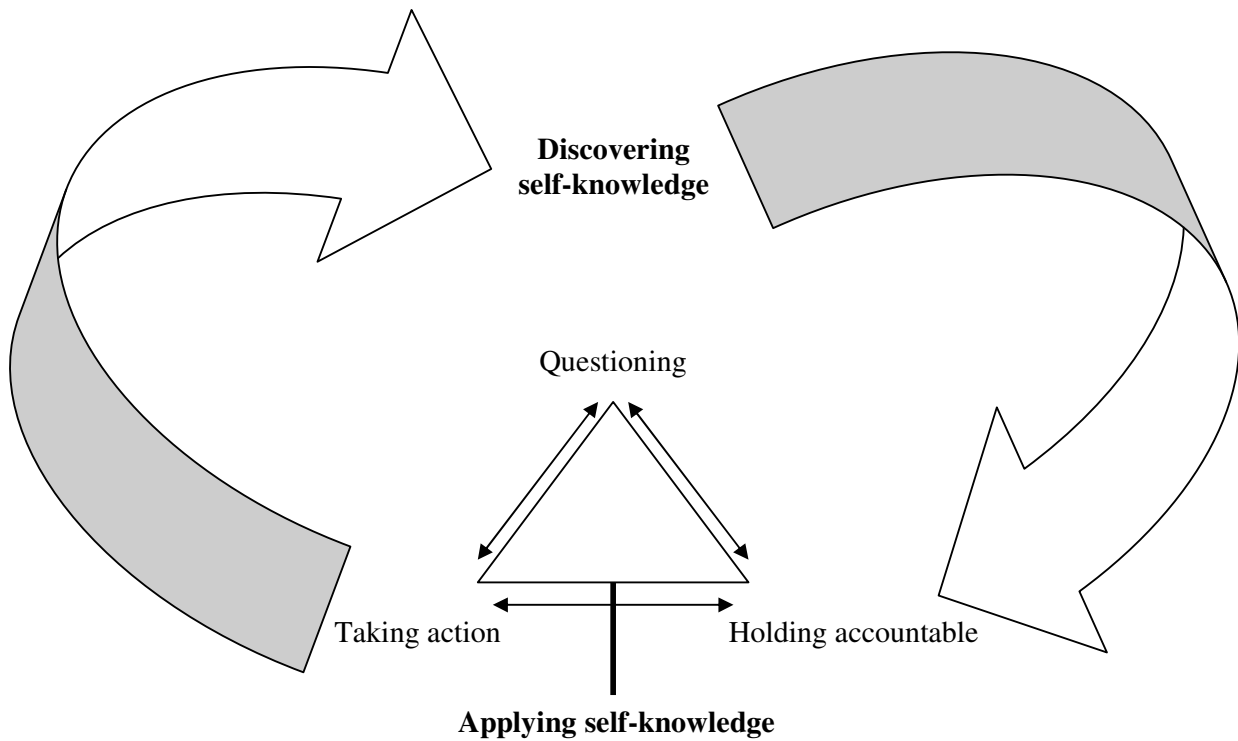
We might start off by going through what I've done and what I haven't done, and if I haven't done stuff, why I haven't done it. (Client 9)

Thus, questioning, which drove the process of discovering self-knowledge, also drove the process of applying self-knowledge, as it was the means by which coaches facilitated the planning of action and held clients accountable. This highlights the way in which the key coaching processes, although predominantly associated with discovering, applying *or* integrating self-knowledge, were not clearly delineated into discreet processes and instead collaborated to support and facilitate other major learning processes.

Summary: Applying self-knowledge

The process of applying self-knowledge emerged as a process which extended, consolidated and deepened learning through holding clients accountable and clients taking action. By fostering commitment, clients were held accountable to learning, to self-knowledge and therefore to themselves, to taking action and to making progress. This resulted in the process of taking action, whereby various forms of action were designed to stimulate reflection, implement self-knowledge and learning and progress clients toward their desires. In addition, the two processes of holding clients accountable and taking action were largely facilitated through questioning. Applying self-knowledge was further intertwined with the processes of discovering self-knowledge, as the action clients took, as a result of being held accountable, in turn fuelled further discovery of self-knowledge by providing stimulus for questioning, reflecting and listening. The process of applying self-knowledge and its relationship to discovering self-knowledge are illustrated in Figure 6.4 below:

Figure 6.4



*The process of applying self-knowledge
and its relationship to discovering self-knowledge in life coaching*

The process of discovering self-knowledge provided a platform for the process of applying self-knowledge, which in turn was used to further the discovery of self-knowledge. Finally, the combination of coaches holding clients accountable and clients taking action to apply self-knowledge also resulted in clients taking responsibility and, with that, set the groundwork for integrating self-knowledge, as is explained in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven

Integrating Self-Knowledge

Integrating self-knowledge occurred largely through the combined processes of taking responsibility and self-coaching. It was also complemented and facilitated through a process of *making meaning* through listening, *aligning* through holding clients accountable and taking *integrative* action. Firstly, the process of integrating self-knowledge began through the process of *making meaning*, as coaches listened to their clients and interrelated self-knowledge to *make meaning*. Secondly, coaches holding clients accountable compelled clients to address and resolve inconsistencies between their dimensions of self. Thirdly, learning was automatically integrated into clients' lives as they took integrative action. These processes, together with the key coaching processes associated with discovering and applying self-knowledge, resulted in clients taking responsibility and self-coaching.

Listening

The process of listening contributed to the integration of self-knowledge, as coaches and clients integrated dimensions of self-knowledge together to *make meaning*. In this process, and not unlike the unified process of grounded theory analysis described in Chapter Four, seemingly disparate dimensions of self-knowledge, which were noticed through the process of listening, were meshed together to form a whole picture contributing to a client's sense of self. Coach 3 likened this process to the threads in *weaving a tapestry*, Coach 4 to *putting pieces together* and Client 7 as a process of *blending*. Thus, self-knowledge was discovered from a variety of sources, and, when integrated together as a whole, gave clients a more complete understanding of themselves and enabled them to move toward the fulfilment of their desires.

The notion of *blending* provided a concise description of the way in which meaning was made through the process of listening in life coaching. It first involved coaches interpreting what they heard as they sensed clients' self-knowledge and used this to advance clients' further discovery and application of self-knowledge:

I think it's the skill of a competent coach. You know, someone who has the ability to listen, discern, interpret and then make recommendations, sort of, to shift you out of your current world enough that really stirs you up, has you a little agitated, you know, pushes you out of your comfort zone. (Client 7)

Coaches interpreted self-knowledge in terms of what influence it was having on clients' progress towards their desires:

It's kind of a dance of me questioning and then naming what I'm seeing, reflecting what I'm hearing and using my intuition, and using what I know about human behaviour with the idea of moving people forward towards what they want from a place of deeper knowledge about who they are. (Coach 3)

Thus, clients integrated self-knowledge in order to move toward the fulfilment of their desires. In addition, clients were able to interpret and make this meaning themselves, especially towards the end of coaching. This usually occurred in what one client described as a *light-bulb moment* (Client 2) when the final "piece of the puzzle" clicked into place, and she could see clearly what was holding her back from fulfilling her desires:

It's a bit like a word dump, and you get all of your words out of your head, and then, suddenly, you see the trends or the patterns or "Oh yeah, that's what I was trying to get at." ... It's that whole light bulb moment thing, like you've got the words out of your head ... It just highlights key things, key issues. (Client 2)

This process of clients *making meaning* usually emerged through the process of reflective listening explained in Chapter Five. In addition, the way in which coaches listened for mismatches, explained in Chapter Five as coaches listening for

discordance between different dimensions of self-knowledge, supported the process of integrating self-knowledge, as clients were held accountable to aligning different dimensions of self-knowledge.

Holding clients accountable

The process of holding clients accountable contributed to the integration of self-knowledge. This involved an alignment of the different dimensions of self-knowledge when discordance, contradictions or mismatches emerged. Just as clients were held accountable to self-knowledge, so too were they held accountable to ensuring that each different dimension of self-knowledge supported the other. As Coach 5 pointed out, clients' thoughts needed to support their desires, and therefore, the process of coaching involved recognition of thinking patterns and an alignment of thinking with desires. Similarly, clients were also held accountable by coaches to their behaviour to ensure that it supported their progress towards their desires, honoured their values and also fostered positive emotions. In this sense, clients were ultimately held accountable to themselves and took responsibility for creating their current circumstances.

The phenomenon of alignment is referred to in coaching literature as *congruence*, which may be defined as “a way of being genuine, being real” (Brockbank & McGill, 2006, p. 155). Grant (2006) refers to self-concordance in a discussion on goal alignment and explains how important it is that goals are *self-congruent*. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that by holding clients accountable to self-knowledge and to themselves, clients integrate self-knowledge and become more congruent. This process leads to deep learning, transformative learning and lifelong learning, all of which involve clients actively integrating knowledge and experience.

Taking action

Although integration of self-knowledge occurred largely as a result of repeated and ongoing application of self-knowledge, as explained in the last chapter, in this study, integration also occurred spontaneously and automatically. Thus, integrative action

emerged as a form of action in which clients engaged independently and often unconsciously as a consequence of the learning acquired through their coaching experiences. Client 8 described this as learning which was *automatically integrated* into her life:

[The learning that I've done in coaching] ... is on a much deeper, instinctive level, as opposed to in the cognitive [level] ... this feels as if it just almost bypasses all of the outer layers of the brain and goes to the core, the core, the heart, the soul, the inner brain. The result of it is I feel that it integrates. When I'm able to see or hear or feel, it seems to immediately integrate into me, into my being, not flawlessly, but pretty automatically ... The coaching that I've had thus far, I feel has automatically integrated into me ... it's not requiring conscious thought, and it's not requiring practising or exercise. It is simply occurring spontaneously. (Client 8)

Here, integrative action appeared to require little or no conscious thought or intention. Furthermore, clients did not report any feelings of awkwardness while engaging in integrative action, unlike when applying self-knowledge through the other forms of taking action explained in the last chapter. In addition, the learning which preceded integrative action was commonly referred to by respondents as a *shift*, an *insight*, *ah-ha* or *light bulb moment* and as an *epiphany*. After such insight and integrative action, coaches and clients reported that clients could not *go back* after the experience:

An epiphany ... it's just something that hits you, I suppose. Suddenly, things change. You know, you look at something one way, and then all of a sudden you look at it a different way, and you realise that now that you know whatever you've just realised, you can't go back sort of thing. (Client 1)

It's the discovery in that experience that really makes a huge impact. It's so profound that I don't think that I could slip back. I think from an intellectual point of view, I can see that one could slip back, but I would have to pull the wool over my eyes and make a conscious decision, I don't want to see anything further, in order to regress. (Client 8)

Integrative action usually stemmed from the process of reflection and caused clients to spontaneously and independently take action without suggestion or prompting, and often without consultation with a coach. This frequently occurred between sessions:

I think it was like session 5 or something, without consultation with his life coach, he rang me up from the ... Mall and he said, "I did it! I quit! Today!" And I was in shock thinking, "Oh my god, what have I done?!" And he came into the next session, and he said, "I've bitten the bullet, and I feel really good. I've started writing a business plan," and he just went for it. He just said, "That's it, no more. I'm not going to hold myself back anymore. I'm going to stop thinking small." He quit. He did that by himself. (Coach 1)

In this study, integrative action appeared to result in clients making significant progress toward their desires. It usually emerged along with the process of clients taking responsibility and was a deciding factor in integrating self-knowledge and facilitating coaching outcomes.

Taking responsibility

Taking responsibility emerged as a key coaching process in integrating self-knowledge and facilitating learning in life coaching. When clients took responsibility, it was a turning point in the learning process. It was referred to by respondents in a variety of ways, including *owning*, *empowering*, *doing something about something*, *facing things head on*, *dealing with* and *handling things*, *standing up for oneself* and *not making excuses*. Taking responsibility was the point at which clients became aware of their own capacity to change their circumstances and to create the life and/or the person they wanted to be:

It's all about raising awareness and creating responsibility for the experience that you have of your life. (Coach 1)

Toward the end of coaching, most clients appeared to assume more responsibility in their lives:

I've got a lot more confidence ...It's just taught me to face things more head on. I mean, I dipped and ducked and waved to try to get away from responsibility, and all sorts of things, and yeah, I'm now taking responsibility.

(Client 3)

I just feel I can handle conflict now, whereas before I would sort of hide from it ... I would just pretend like it doesn't exist until it started chewing me up inside, so whereas now I don't. I deal with it. I think about it and solve it.

(Client 9)

The process of clients taking responsibility occurred as clients began making choices based on their learning. As a result, they integrated self-knowledge, aligning their current circumstances with their desires and values and redefining their sense of self. Furthermore, by taking responsibility, clients took control of their learning.

The role of self-knowledge in taking responsibility has been directly related to self-directed learning. In particular, Mezirow (1985) stated that “self-knowledge is a prerequisite for autonomy in self-directed learning” (p. 27). Similarly, Areglado, Bradley, and Lane (1996) highlighted how in self-directed learning, the growing self feels involved in shaping its own destiny and is the centre around which an individual's perceptions are organised, as learners take personal responsibility for their learning. Responsibility is also recognised as an important process in coaching (Oades et al., 2005; Somers, 2007; Stober & Grant, 2006). In particular, Clifford-Rapp (2005) explained how self-responsibility and choice underpinned transformational change in coaching clients. In addition, Cossentino (2004) pointed to the link between accountability, responsibility and learning, as she describes a teacher's adoption of coaching processes. However, although the literature identifies responsibility as an important part of coaching, there is minimal, if any literature, which explains the actual process of coaching clients taking responsibility. Thus, the findings presented here have the potential to make an important contribution to coaching theory.

Owning

It was the view of the respondents that at the outset of coaching clients avoided taking responsibility and then, through the process of discovering and applying self-knowledge, they gradually came to *own* their current circumstances, desires, emotions, and other self-knowledge. This resulted in the integration of self-knowledge.

Clients were candid in describing how, on reflection, they avoided responsibility at the beginning of coaching, referring to it as *dipping and ducking, dodging, running and hiding* and *running a mile*. At this point, clients felt that there was nothing they could do to change a situation, or that they were unable to do what they knew was necessary:

A sense of resignation that there's not much that he can do to change that right now, and for me it was more about he has awareness, but doesn't want to take responsibility just yet. (Coach 1)

Sometimes ... we know there are things that we could do or should do but until we're ready to actually do something about it, that we're ready to take responsibility, you know, we make a choice. (Coach 1)

Several strategies for avoiding responsibility emerged from the study data. This behaviour prevented clients taking responsibility and when noticed, could be used to accelerate the discovery, application and integration of self-knowledge. *Blaming* others or external conditions was one way in which clients avoided responsibility:

I think a lot of people are very quick to point the finger and blame other people for things that are going on, but when they realise that they contribute to whatever's happened, it's like "Oh my god! This is my stuff and I've got to take responsibility for that." (Coach 1)

It's coming back to taking personal responsibility, because otherwise I just blame everyone else for what happened, and I will never get independence and freedom if I don't take responsibility. (Coach 2)

Just as taking responsibility accelerated the process of learning, blaming inhibited the process. Therefore, just as the quality of *not knowing* enabled clients to discover self-knowledge through reflection, not blaming other people or things allowed clients to discover and apply self-knowledge and led them to take responsibility through integrating self-knowledge:

Rather than blaming anyone else, they can stop and reflect, "What I am thinking and how does this impact the outcome I am getting?" It empowers the client. (Coach 2)

Blaming appeared to emerge when clients did not have enough self-knowledge, so they were unable or unwilling to see their own responsibility in their current circumstances:

See, if I have no idea how I come across, then I can't make any changes, and I will always force other people to change, because I will see the cause or whatever outside myself. (Coach 2)

Thus, while blame inhibited the discovery of self-knowledge, it was also dissipated *through* the discovery of self-knowledge:

Understanding who they are, what beliefs are, what values are, how we can't change others, we can only change ourselves. (Coach 5)

Clients *being victims* also emerged as a significant way in which they avoided taking responsibility, and this impeded learning and the integration of self-knowledge. This was a state in which clients felt that other people or external factors had control over their situation, and that they had no power to change their current circumstances:

The people feel being controlled, they feel the victim, and so when they get out of that what often happens is that they become the controller, so they swing, the pendulum swings right over to the other side, and we have to get them slowly back to the middle again, so they can actually see what they are doing.

(Coach 3)

When clients were in this state, they were unable to integrate self-knowledge. Client 2 related an experience in which she was *waffling around in the self pity* about how her parents treated her. However, when her coach *picked up* on her underlying feelings and brought these to the client's attention, the client was able to acknowledge her feelings (discover self-knowledge) and see that she was not communicating these feelings to her parents. As a result of this learning, she was able to take action (apply self-knowledge) that would change her experience. Thus, like blaming, while victimisation impeded clients' discovery and application of self-knowledge, discovering self-knowledge also dissipated the victim mentality. In addition, clients overcame the tendency to assume the victim role through the process of discovering and applying self-knowledge. Furthermore, clients felt able to change their lives as they integrated self-knowledge.

Feeling obligated to others also emerged as a way in which clients avoided taking responsibility for themselves and their situations. This state was frequently highlighted in the use of the words *have to*, as in the sense of having to take care of other people and other things. This limited clients' energy, time and attention for discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge. Thus, by limiting the degree to which clients were obligated to others, clients, in turn, increased their opportunities to discover and apply self-knowledge, integrate this learning into their lives and take responsibility for themselves:

There was a client I was speaking to this morning who ... one of the goals is "to do my job really well", and he knows what that means, but what he does is he does everybody else's job really well and therefore his job suffers ... He needs to feel that he's contributing to results. He likes to actually feel needed and wanted and a sense of achievement from succeeding, from doing rather than leading ... By the end, he realised that he needed to let go and actually

allow his subordinates to learn and to blossom, and for him to focus on the next stage of development and learning for himself, but he couldn't do that until he saw that he really did get in the way of others. (Coach 1)

Well, something had to intercede for me to take care of myself. I had to get sick or I had to go away. We have a little apartment in [on the south coast]. It was not uncommon for me to get on an airplane and go down there and sit alone, and that would take care of me, but in the interaction of the family and the "Mum I need," and "Mum will you blah, blah," or "[Jan] please get me," or "[Jan] do this," I have a hard time hearing my own needs. (Client 8)

These examples highlight the ways in which clients reportedly took responsibility for others, and with that, avoided taking responsibility for themselves and reduced their opportunities for learning and growth. Therefore, by noticing when clients felt obligated to other people and things, coaches were able to accelerate learning.

Similarly, *thinking small* also emerged as a way by which clients avoided responsibility and reduced the opportunity for learning. Thinking small meant that clients undervalued or underestimated themselves or their capabilities:

He just said, "That's it, no more. I'm not going to hold myself back anymore. I'm going to stop thinking small." (Coach 1)

I've learnt a lot of thing through [my coach], as far as knowing what my real traits are and basically not playing myself small ...It's more like just being confident and knowing, well that's how I am and accepting it, and I just find that my personality seems to have come through stronger, as in with more confidence, and yeah, just being a lot more in tune with who I really am and not being afraid of it. (Client 4)

As these examples highlight, through discovering self-knowledge, clients realised their strengths, gained more confidence and stopped thinking small. As a result, clients had a greater capacity to take action, apply their learning and take

responsibility for their situations, as they integrated acquired self-knowledge into their lives:

It also reminded me of what I'm capable of ... It's almost like a quiet knowing, and other little things that might pop up, and interactions with people or roadblocks, they don't seem to worry that much. (Client 2)

Therefore, by discovering and applying self-knowledge, clients were able to see themselves and their strengths more clearly, thereby integrating self-knowledge and accelerating learning.

The degree to which clients were willing to take responsibility influenced client *coachability*. Client *coachability* emerged as a measure of the ease with which clients engaged in discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge. However, while clients frequently displayed some avoidance of responsibility at the outset of coaching, the fact that they were coached at all indicated a willingness to take some responsibility:

[People who take on coaching] definitely want to do something about it. They're ready to take responsibility and change the experience of whatever's going on for them right now. (Coach 1)

While a sense of responsibility led to clients taking on coaching, responsibility did not necessarily extend across all topics which arose in coaching. As one coach highlighted, the coaching process involved gauging whether clients were ready or not to take responsibility for particular self-knowledge:

It's when the client feels at that stage that they are ready to address that ... It's like putting your toe in the water, am I ready to go in there or not, no it's too cold, no I'm not going in there, and so then, you're not forcing a client to open up something that they are not ready for. (Coach 2)

Through the process of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge, clients gradually began to take responsibility by *owning* self-knowledge, learning, and as a

result, their current circumstances and lives. Ownership emerged when clients, through discovering and applying self-knowledge, felt a necessity to change their situations and realised that they were the only ones who could create such change. This was the point at which they integrated self-knowledge, often through the integrative action explained earlier:

She was sick and tired of the existing situation, and it was almost that she had to get to that point to realise that “I need to do something to change this,” and that’s when she realised—and I realised—that she was ready to do that.
(Coach 1)

I think the biggest thing is to actually really to read over my own stuff, to go back and get what I want out of it ... I actually went back and thought, “These are my notes, what’s going on here for me?” I owned them. (Client 2)

By realising that I’m always going to feel like this until I do something about it. (Client 9)

Ownership was created as clients discovered and applied self-knowledge. This was the point at which integration occurred. In addition, ownership was enhanced as coaches encouraged clients to take responsibility for the coaching process itself:

A skill of a really good coach is to be able to ask a question. As a coach, maybe I’m observing some sort of behaviour, whatever, within the client, but for the coach to hang on to that and not actually reveal that yet, because when the client is going try hard [to get] an insight to what they’re doing, it’s much more powerful for them to use that insight. (Coach 5)

That’s a more powerful way of learning. I’m totally responsible for those insights ... In the end, I became responsible for it. I became responsible for what I wanted to learn and what I wanted to communicate to her that session.
(Client 2)

Thus, by giving clients ownership over the coaching process, coaches *empowered* clients to take responsibility not just for themselves, but also for their own learning.

Making choices

Making choices was an important process in taking responsibility and integrating self-knowledge. The process of *making choices* was one in which clients recognised different possibilities and decided upon one and took action. This typically occurred when one dimension of self-knowledge was compromising another dimension of self-knowledge and required a choice. This supported the integration of self-knowledge and usually involved a process of *letting go*.

Coaches encouraged clients to take responsibility and integrate self-knowledge by questioning clients about the decisions and choices they made on the basis of accumulated self-knowledge:

When they make a decision about something, and I'm really mindful of what their values are, I'll say, "Oh that's really interesting [Michelle]." I'll say, "So you know, back in session two you defined your values to be this, this and this. How does this decision support your values?" And so then you might reflect on them and say, "Well actually it compromises most of them," and so then that's a whole new conversation about, "OK. So what does that mean?"
(Coach 1)

Clients, therefore, developed the ability to make more choices based on their self-knowledge. This was referred to as *making conscious choices* (Coach 3):

I think that there's a way to reveal to people what their motivations are and get them to choose, to be in the choice. They may decide to stay exactly where they are, and keep the status quo, and they may decide, "Oh wow, this is not working for me, I need to do something different here." (Coach 3)

Choice. It's all about—I think for me—your beliefs and your values ... think about the process along the journey to the goals ... Choice. Everyone's got choice ... I think it's having the ability to be solution focused and see the consequences of your choices, so it's giving the consequences of the choices and how that will impact you on a personal level. (Coach 5)

At the start of coaching, clients were generally not aware of their choices and felt they had no control over a situation:

I want them [clients] to change their perspective and see it a different way and realise that perhaps it doesn't have to be that way. (Coach 5)

She's having me pay attention to what I'm feeling, and I think, for the most part, I have been reacting automatically, as opposed to being aware of what my feeling is and then making a decision about how I wish to respond in a given instant, and currently I'm having a choice instead of just a reaction. (Client 8)

As Client 8 suggested, choice was different to a reaction and involved conscious reflection. She needed to reflect in order to discover her feelings and then used this knowledge to make a choice. In other cases, clients reflected on their values or their desires. Therefore, as clients increased their self-knowledge and a capacity for discovering and applying self-knowledge, they also increased their ability to choose. Therefore, the discovery of self-knowledge opened up the possibility of choice:

Well, it's again raising the client's awareness and making them aware how they're dealing with a situation and what different ways they could deal with it. (Coach 2)

Bring it to my attention. Valuable information ... Then, we'd talk a bit about it, and then I'd have to make a choice of some kind ... The choice could be to ignore it and move on or to maybe, I don't know, try to do something about it ... I can make choices about it, it's conscious. I can decide how I want to deal with it or what I want to do. (Client 5)

In particular, knowledge of their own values was a means by which clients made choices:

Well, I define a value as something that motivates a person, that is important to that person, that not necessarily runs their life, but that underlies a lot of their choices. (Coach 3)

I did some values clarification ... that's six words over there above my kitchen sink that we narrowed down to six key words that I like to live by, and therefore any decision that I make, instead of panicking and making it a big deal, I can go to those six words and go, "Does it check in with those six words?" (Client 2)

The emphasis on values in the decision-making process reflects the influence of self-determination theory in coaching. Self-determination theory explains how values underpin intrinsic motivation and therefore choice (Deci & Ryan, 1996). However, in this study, some clients also made choices based on their desires and others based on their feelings:

It's getting them to know who they are more clearly so that they can take responsibility for what they want and make choices, take action, in a way that is going to get them what they want, rather than more of the same or not what they want. (Coach 3)

She's having me pay attention to what I'm feeling, and I think, for the most part, I have been reacting automatically, as opposed to being aware of what my feeling is and then making a decision about how I wish to respond in a given instant, and currently I'm having a choice instead of just a reaction. (Client 8)

Similarly, insight into their own thinking allowed clients to consciously choose their actions according to their desires for a particular situation:

I was probably very cynical after awhile saying, “Oh people will just let you down anyway, or they’ll stab you in the back, and don’t let them get too close,” ... but I think I allowed myself to drop my defences a little bit after awhile. I think defences are always there, but you don’t have to have them raised. You can choose when to raise them, I think, rather than immediately raise them. (Client 1)

Instead of having thinking that I’m shy and that makes me not being able to be a leader, but looking at it from the other point of view, well, you can take up the reigns, when you need to, but you can also relinquish things. (Client 3)

Letting go emerged as integral to the process of making choices. *Letting go* was defined in this study as a process where clients acknowledged and relinquished aspects of themselves such as desires, emotions, values, thinking or behaviour:

Whether it’s letting go of control, letting go of perfectionism, letting go of fear, that’s very much a part of coaching. (Coach 1)

This was a process of aligning self-knowledge and was important in the process of integrating learning. Clients let go of those aspects of themselves that hindered their progress toward, or did not align with, their desires or values:

Because one of the things I came from, I was a real high achiever, really outcome- focused, so naturally I attracted those kinds of clients too, and to become more effective or get a different life, one needs actually to really slow down and let go of pushing to get ahead. (Coach 2)

Several coaches used the example of clients valuing being right and how this impacted negatively upon their relationships with others. Through the process of coaching, clients let go of the need to be right, in order to foster improved relationships which they valued clearly more than being right. In some cases, respondents explained how clients let go of old desires that no longer aligned with new values. For example, Coach 2 described how a client’s desire for a successful

business compromised her value of having time for herself. The client let go of her old desire for a successful business in order to honour a current value.

In a further case, Client 1 became aware of his anxiety about forming a relationship. He described it as such: *I got to a point where I achieved that goal when I decided not to worry about it anymore ... I let it go. It wasn't controlling me anymore.* Thus, as in this case, letting go also involved clients coordinating and managing different dimensions of self-knowledge based on what was most important to them:

Again it got me back to thinking of little chunks, small goals. It got me back to writing things down, you know, get them out of your head, put them on paper; what's important, put to the side things that can wait, come back later, really going for those things that will put me in a forward motion. (Client 2)

The process of letting go most often involved a letting go of emotions. This occurred as clients gained an understanding of their feelings and how these impacted upon other dimensions of self, particularly their current circumstances. Client 1, who sought a relationship, needed to let go of anger from a previous relationship. He went through a reflective process to come to a full understanding of why he was so angry and was then able to let go of his anger. Similarly, Client 6 had a goal of running an effective organization and needed to fire an employee who was letting down the organization. She acknowledged the associated feelings of guilt, understood how they did not relate to her main desire of running an effective organization and ultimately let them go, enabling her to fire the employee. Thus, by letting go of certain emotions, clients were able to move toward their desires.

By developing similar understanding, clients frequently let go of their limiting thinking patterns, beliefs and assumptions:

Well, once they've had a shift, they go, "Well, you know what? That doesn't work for me anymore, I understand." ... In other words they can let go of the old beliefs and bring in a more empowering belief. When they do that, that's where they have change. (Coach 5)

If you see yourself in a certain way, it's easy to see, because that's what you think of yourself, and one of the main things that I've got out of it is the realisation that I've branded in my own mind that I'm not a leader, and I'm not creative, and I'm not this, but then I realise that I am. (Client 4)

Clients also let go of behaviour that did not support their desires or values. Client 8 wanted to create more balance in her life and needed to let go of a high caffeine habit. This allowed her to slow down and focus on and respond to her needs. Similarly, clients needed to let go of certain patterns of behaviour they exhibited in their interactions with other people. In two cases, letting go also emerged as a process of clients letting go of people in their lives who no longer aligned with their new sense of self:

There are also partners that, relationships break away, because one of them has through their own work, supported by a coach, become much more aware, conscious and life—self directional, and so I know that one person that I worked with, they are now separated, because they're not in the same place. (Coach 4)

Thus, in this study, choice appeared to be underpinned by all areas of client self-knowledge. Furthermore, as clients continued to discover and apply self-knowledge through the process of coaching, the ability of clients to make choices and decisions appeared to grow stronger:

I was able to say yes instead of being indecisive because it checked in with all of those things [my values]. (Client 2)

I can make choices about it, it's conscious. I can decide how I want to deal with it or what I want to do. (Client 3)

I had a very hard time making decisions. You know, do I want to do this or do I not want to do this? Do I want to go out to dinner or do I not want to go out to dinner? ... [Now] I'm in transition from always dancing the dance as soon

as the tune starts, from any of the members of the family, to listening to the tune and hearing the request, and then making a decision. (Client 8)

The enhanced decision making skills are attributed to two processes. Firstly, as explained above, clients' increased self-knowledge meant greater recognition of choices and how they aligned with their sense of self. Secondly, the coaching process actively encouraged or compelled clients to be responsible and to make their own decisions:

I don't make any major decisions for the client. The client makes all the decisions, the client answers all of the questions, the client comes to all the realisations. (Coach 1)

It's put in the lap of the person who's being coached about what they would like to address ... so it's very clear, and you know the first challenge is not to answer, "Gee, I don't know." The challenge is to sort of be prepared to do something in that time allotted. In other words, you are asked to be an active participant. (Client 5)

Clients made an initial decision to take on coaching. In addition, they typically determined the outcomes of coaching, the focus and outcomes of coaching sessions and also the action which they would take between sessions. Thus, the process of coaching constructed a model for clients to let their self-knowledge lead them in their choices and decision-making. This is characteristic of authentic learning, whereby learners engage in learning meaningfully and make decisions and choices that have real world relevance and impact (Callison & Lamb, 2004; Gatlin & Edwards, 2007; Herrington & Herrington, 2006; Renzulli et al., 2004; Rule, 2006).

Becoming free

Taking responsibility through owning, making choices and letting go was an important part of generating a sense of freedom in clients. The notion of clients becoming free was described in a variety of ways, including being *freed up*, *having*

rights, being empowered, being less restricted, the sky's the limit, having a voice, not being trapped or imprisoned, breaking out of a shell, reaching a new platform, being unlocked or without the chains. Furthermore, new horizons and new possibilities were related outcomes of coaching. Clients became free at the point at which they integrated self-knowledge and redefined their sense of self.

At the outset of coaching, clients were perceived as being *imprisoned* by or *chained* to a sense of self, which was inaccurate or incomplete. Several clients likened the process of becoming free to a feeling of breaking through a shell:

I feel as if I'm breaking out of a shell that has contained me ... much like an egg shell, and the shell formed in the course of time and habit, leaving me only the continuation of the patterns that had created the shell, and I feel much like a chick must in pecking through the shell, and I have a bigger world, I have more options. I definitely have more freedom. (Client 8)

Through learning about themselves, clients were able to take responsibility by owning their experiences, making choices, and letting go, and thus appeared to break through an invisible barrier:

It gives them freedom to create what they want without the programming, without the fears, without the chains, if you like, that have been holding them back for many years. (Coach 1)

To free them up ... that's probably what I was aiming for and wanting for people is that they become free from their own imprisonment. I want for people to free themselves from their self-imposed limitations and develop their independence. You know that they free themselves up from their own beliefs from their own limitations. (Coach 2)

The process of clients becoming free was often associated with learning moments, integrative action and lasting learning. Several respondents used words which denoted freedom when describing some of the learning that clients experienced:

A breakthrough is a huge insight. A breakthrough is a big ah-ah moment that just unleashes a person's energy toward what they want. It just frees them up from the place that they've been in to a place of possibility. (Coach 1)

It was a bit a wake up call, and I sort of thought, "Hmm OK," but it was liberating, because better it that day than ten years down the track, or you know, like I'm not one to lose time, so I'd rather be aware of it than not aware of it. (Client 3)

This state was often characterised by creativity and expression as clients demonstrated a greater capacity to create or re-create new possibilities and to express themselves more fully:

It gives them freedom. It gives them freedom of choice, it gives them freedom of expression. It gives them freedom to create what they want ... They've learnt something about themselves and their abilities that takes their relationship of who they are to a whole new level. (Coach 1)

I think that's the reason that I am able to describe the kinds of changes that I've made in my life that are really lasting. I never set out to be living in a different place or having the sort of life that I have now, per se, but it left me being able to create that on my own after the coaching ended. (Client 7)

In addition, clients' experiences of learning appeared to become heightened as clients expressed feelings of excitement, amazement and joy during coaching:

It's really exciting ... As each week unfolds, there's always something new, and it's awesome. (Client 4)

Now it's just so amazing ... for some reason, today, I just really got there. I completed that circle, to know where I want to go, and now I can at least start on pursuing that, and it feels fantastic now. (Client 4)

The moss has sort of scraped off, and I do feel like it's on a roll, and it's actually feeling very good. I'm excited about it. I'm genuinely excited about it.
(Client 8)

This heightened experience associated with clients becoming free, although referred to in different ways, is supported widely throughout the literature. While Loevinger's (1976) integrated self is characterised by spontaneity and creativity, Maslow (1968) explained how, for a self-actualising person, "the powers of the person come together in a particularly efficient and intensely enjoyable way, and in which he is more integrated and less split" (p. 97). It is also reflected in the concept of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1979). However, while Goleman (1995) states that "flow represents perhaps the ultimate in harnessing the emotions in the service of performance and learning", the findings of this study suggest that it is not just emotional intelligence, but also more comprehensive self-knowledge that can be harnessed in the service of performance and learning. Thus, as Moon (2004) suggested, "without appropriate self-management, a learner will not have the capacity to cope with maximum efficiency in learning tasks or to progress in her understanding of the structure of knowledge" (p. 44).

Gaining self-confidence

Among the respondents in this study, clients *gaining self-confidence* appeared to be an outcome of the process of taking responsibility and of the process of life coaching itself. Self-confidence was also referred to as *trusting oneself* and *growing stronger*. Coach 1 highlighted the links between learning about self, taking responsibility, making choices, letting go, becoming free and gaining confidence:

Whether it's letting go of control, letting go of perfectionism, letting go of fear, that's very much a part of coaching ... It gives them freedom. It gives them freedom of choice, it gives them freedom of expression. It gives them freedom to create what they want without the programming, without the fears, without the chains, if you like, that have been holding them back for many years ... The result of all that is that they build their sense of self-confidence and self-

esteem, that they've learnt something about themselves and their abilities that takes their relationship of who they are to a whole new level. (Coach 1)

This example highlights the way in which the process of gaining confidence emerged through the process of taking responsibility. Furthermore, it demonstrates the way in which taking responsibility stemmed from the discovery and application of self-knowledge.

As coaching progressed, most clients reported significant increases in their levels of confidence:

Instead of never opening it and thinking, "Oh it's too much, I won't be able to achieve it," I actually opened the folder again and circled things and reread, so I was actually forced to reconnect with the coaching material, and that's when I felt good about that, and obviously I dealt with it again during the session so ... [I] kind of got a bit more confidence back, so I felt confident. (Client 2)

I really think confidence is a key, because ... it's made me realise that I usually have the answers and that I have to find ways to get to them, and I don't need someone else to tell me, and that's very good for confidence, and then what I find that getting to those answers becomes easier and easier, because my own level of self-trust is that much greater. (Client 6)

As these examples highlight, many clients remarked on the way in which they gained confidence through the process of coaching, and how this was linked to what they had learnt about themselves. Furthermore, clients' increased confidence meant that they could take more responsibility than they previously could:

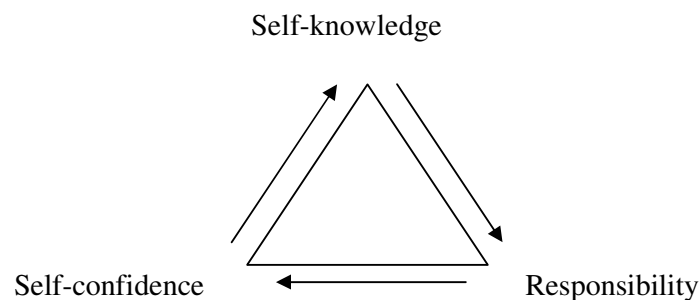
As I become more confident, I'm more likely to network and reach out to people and ask questions and take it a bit further. (Client 2)

I know a lot more about myself ... so I've become much more secure in myself. I've become stronger. I'm involved in a lot more things externally now than I ever have been ... (Client 3)

I just never stand up for myself ... and I felt like I had been dealing with lawyers, and I felt like I'd gotten ripped off a little bit, and, you know, I've sorted it all out logically and was able to just go in and say, "Well, you know what? This is the actual facts and here we go and you know I'm not prepared to pay this much money, which is forty percent more than what you quoted me, but before I could never have done that. (Client 9)

Thus, self-knowledge led clients to take responsibility, and taking responsibility enhanced clients' self-confidence. In turn, greater self-confidence caused clients to take more responsibility, which in turn allowed them to learn more about themselves. This relationship is shown in Figure 7.1 below:

Figure 7.1



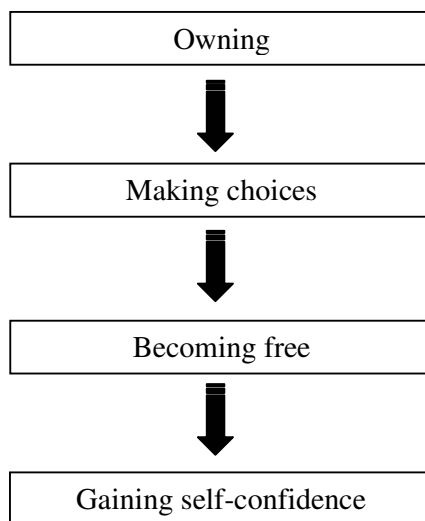
The interdependent relationship of self-knowledge, responsibility and self-confidence

Confidence, as the coaching literature suggests (Creane, 2002; Duff, 2002; Hurd, 2002; International Coach Federation, 1998), was a significant outcome of the process of taking responsibility and the discovery, application and integration of self-knowledge. Furthermore, this highlights the capacity of coaching to facilitate transformative learning, as like transformative learning, coaching builds self-confidence through “reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22).

Summary: Taking responsibility

The process of taking responsibility resulted in learning that was *really lasting* (Client 7). It was the process by which clients fully integrated self-knowledge, as they owned their self-knowledge and learning, made choices based on their knowledge of themselves, let go of those aspects of self that did not align with their new self-knowledge and became free and confident in themselves. The process of taking responsibility in integrating self-knowledge is illustrated in Figure 7.2 below:

Figure 7.2



The process of taking responsibility in integrating self-knowledge

The process of taking responsibility frequently resulted in clients coaching themselves, as they integrated not just self-knowledge but also key coaching processes into every day living. This is explained in the following section.

Self-Coaching

Self-coaching emerged as a key coaching process in the integration of self-knowledge and the facilitation of learning in life coaching. Self-coaching was a process within which clients facilitated key coaching processes independently, predominantly with themselves, but also with other people in their lives. Coaching, and in particular the outcome of self-coaching, was referred to by respondents through the *age-old metaphor* (Coach 4) of being taught to fish, rather than being given fish. In this way, the learning derived from coaching was recognised as a lasting phenomenon:

Give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day, teach him to fish, he'll eat for life.

(Client 1)

Thus, the process of integrating involved not just the integration of self-knowledge, but also the integration of coaching/learning processes, so that clients continued to self-coach even in the absence of their coaches:

The coaching, by the way, goes on in her [my coach's] absence ... One of the things that has occurred in the coaching is the more I've experienced the coaching, the more willing I have become to receive the coaching, and the more I have experienced it with the greater willingness, the larger the opportunity to actually experience the change, and the more aware I am in the absence of the coach to notice opportunities for change, so the experience is growing exponentially. (Client 8)

Thus, clients continued discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge in the absence of coaches and also after coaching had ended. This occurred as clients developed a coach-like relationship with themselves, and in some cases, with others in their lives. They self-questioned, self-reflected, listened to themselves and held themselves accountable. This finding is supported by Skiffington and Zeus (2003), who highlighted that the ultimate learning outcome of the coaching process is that “finally, the learner internalises the ‘teaching function’ of the coach and becomes his or her own teacher” (p. 22). Similarly, Costa and Garmston (1994) pointed out that the

ultimate goal of using Cognitive Coaching is for teachers, who engage in Cognitive Coaching, to become self-coaching.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) provides some explanation for the phenomenon of self-coaching and highlights that “people are more likely to do as they *see* others do than they are to do what others *tell* them to do” (Salkind, 2004, p. 212). Therefore, just as a significant tenet of social learning theory is that learning occurs through an implicit process of modelling without direct reinforcement (Salkind, 2004), so coaching appears to model for clients a process of coaching themselves. Clients continue to discover, apply and integrate self-knowledge in the absence of their coaches, and in some cases they also encourage this learning process for other people in their lives.

This finding has two important implications. Firstly, it highlights how coaching develops skills of lifelong learning, as clients develop a lasting ability to facilitate their own ongoing learning and to extend this learning to others. Secondly, the finding that coaching clients gradually learn and demonstrate self-coaching habits has important implications for the training of coaches and the teaching of coaching skills. In short, it appears that coaching may be an effective means of teaching others to coach.

Relating to self

The process of clients relating to themselves emerged as being significant in the process of integrating self-knowledge, as clients developed a relationship with themselves, which largely mirrored their relationships with their coaches. However, while the coaching literature recognises clients’ relationships with themselves among the outcomes of coaching in terms of heightened self-awareness and self-acceptance (Campbell & Gardner, 2005; Creane, 2002; Duff, 2002; Grant, 2003; Green et al., 2006; Hurd, 2002; International Coach Federation, 1998; Paige, 2002; Spence & Grant, 2005), it does not explain the process of clients relating to themselves, nor its influence in the coaching/learning process. Therefore, these findings have the potential to make an important contribution to coaching theory, as they, perhaps for

the first time, identify and explain the process of clients relating to themselves in coaching.

The characteristics of the relationships that clients developed with themselves largely mirrored those of the coach-client relationship. These characteristics appeared to emerge as a result of clients' relationships with coaches and were most evident toward the end of coaching. In particular, clients developed self-acceptance, self-honesty and self-trust, and just as coaches observed clients, so too clients began to observe themselves. Self-acceptance, like acceptance fostered by coaches, was important, as it *allowed* clients to accept and engage with new self-knowledge as it emerged. Similarly, in his discussion of conscious living, Branden (1997) proposed that "self-acceptance is the foundation of growth and change" (p. 58). Therefore, in a process like coaching which encourages growth, self-acceptance is crucial.

Self-acceptance was experienced by clients simply as *just being happy with who you are and what you do* (Client 4). As coaches accepted their clients through non-judgement, many clients in this study reported becoming aware of the degree to which they judged themselves. When clients first began coaching, they often displayed a significant amount of self-judgement:

I don't need to beat myself up about it [not doing things]. It's not about me failing. It's just that these tasks haven't been done. (Client 2)

I learnt with [my coach] that I used to be extremely critical of myself. I was my own worst enemy. (Client 3)

However, through listening, accepting their clients without judgement and focusing clients on learning about themselves, coaches provided a model for non-judgement and therefore self-acceptance:

By posing the questions, the client will take those questions and then commit pen to paper, and just, you know, without judgement. (Coach 1)

I may be asking, in this particular case, I was asking what's going on in their lives, and they spoke about several things, and then they change to ... the client was getting self-critical, and so I enquired more about, "Tell me more about what happened? You know, what are the circumstances under which you feel you eat? What do you feel after that? Does the hunger go away?"
(Coach 4)

The examples above illustrate the way in which the process of questioning often served to distract clients from their usual mode of self-judgement and allowed them to achieve enough distance to review themselves objectively and to discover self-knowledge. The result was less self-judgement and greater acceptance of themselves. Such self-acceptance was frequently characterised by the words, *it's OK* , or *I'm OK*:

What else did I learn? I guess the other one was to accept myself as I was, rather than, you know, I realized I was judging myself a lot, so I learnt not to do that as much. (Client 1)

[I learnt] to review myself. I am who I am, and if I do something, and somebody says, "Oh that probably wasn't appropriate," or whatever, then I say to myself, "Look at what I've done," and go, "Yeah, OK, that probably wasn't, that's OK, I'm still OK," because before I wasn't OK if somebody said something to me about myself. I would immediately take it as a personal attack. (Client 3)

As a result of this self-acceptance, clients were able to integrate self-knowledge and become more comfortable with and true to themselves, as well as more self-confident:

It's much more aligned with my basic instinct, if you like, and philosophy ... This feels a lot more comfortable. (Client 2)

I've learnt a lot of things through [my coach], as far as knowing what my real traits are and basically not playing myself small, and I just find that my personality seems to have come through stronger, as in with more confidence,

and yeah, just being a lot more in tune with who I really am and not being afraid of it. (Client 4)

Self-confidence was especially fostered as clients learnt to accept positive aspects of themselves that they had not previously accepted. Coach 1 referred to a client who needed to accept that he was capable of making his new business a success. Similarly, Client 4 described how she needed to accept that she had certain qualities that she had previously denied. This often occurred when coaches gave honest feedback and encouragement:

I get quite a bit of positive feedback in my work, but it can be kind of embarrassing to accept it ... I don't know, but it feels a bit strange to get it even though, in the end, you're happy about it, but with [my coach], she just says it, and she says it as a fact and you can sort of go, "Yeah thanks, you're right, I did do that really well," and that's kinda a good thing for your confidence, as well. (Client 6)

In addition, the process of clients accepting themselves also impacted on their abilities to be more truthful and honest, which in turn encouraged clients to discover more self-knowledge.

Honesty also emerged within clients' relationships with self. This is supported in the literature on *self* (Lightfoot & Lyra, 2000). Self-honesty began as an intentional effort which clients found somewhat difficult:

Eventually, she opened up about the real issue for coming to coaching. Her husband had several affairs, and she never told anyone not even her own family. This was a huge burden for her and had eroded her self-esteem and self-worth, and that was extremely painful for her, so as it turned out, she had to keep moving always back to the past. She couldn't move forward. (Coach 2)

She's asking really, really in-depth things, what I stand for, and why and you haven't really asked yourself these things. What is it you know? So that was basically very, very hard to be honest. (Client 4)

In fact, clients being honest with themselves and their coaches appeared to be interrelated. While clients being honest with themselves was a prerequisite for their being honest with their coaches, at the same time, the process of being honest with their coaches appeared to allow clients to be honest with themselves:

It's about honesty and truth, not that I was being dishonest when I said yes, but this is what I need to say now, because if I don't, I won't achieve the things I need to get done or won't be being true to my values. (Client 2)

Furthermore, the greater ease clients experienced in being honest with themselves was influenced by their development of self-acceptance. Therefore, just as in the coach-client relationship, self-honesty and self-acceptance also appeared to be interdependent in clients' relationships with themselves. Thus, although clients found it difficult to be honest at first, it was encouraged by their coaches' acceptance. This, in turn, led to self-acceptance, which, in turn, resulted in enhanced self-honesty and again, greater self-acceptance and further discovery of self-knowledge:

Somewhere in this process, I made a decision to have no guards, to be as open as I could, as honest as I can be with myself and those who are putting their effort into trying to help, and I really think the reward is commensurate with the effort to keep that open channel. (Client 8)

Thus, clients integrated self-knowledge through another iterative relationship cycle. In addition, through the cultivation of self-acceptance and self-honesty, clients also developed greater self-trust, as they integrated new self-knowledge into their sense of self. Self-trust was often characterised by clients' enhanced ability to make independent decisions and engage in action based on what they knew to be right for them, regardless of what others might think, say or do:

They build their sense of self-confidence and self-esteem, that they've learnt something about themselves and their abilities that takes their relationship of who they are to a whole new level ... so what I notice is that if people build that self-confidence and self-esteem, they start trusting themselves a lot more,

they start trusting the way they make decisions based on their values a lot more, and they rely far less on the external world for validation or approval.

(Coach 1)

I've got a lot more confidence ... It's just taught me to face things more head on. I mean, I dipped and ducked and waved to try to get away from responsibility and all sorts of things and, yeah, I'm now taking responsibility.

(Client 3)

Clients' self-trust was very much linked to the process of taking responsibility, as clients learnt to make choices based on their knowledge of themselves and resulted in increased confidence. In addition, greater self-trust was also highlighted by clients' increased use of their intuition:

Having intuition? I think that grows as they start trusting themselves a lot more as they start really connecting with who they are. (Coach 1)

I'm learning to trust my intuition more and more. (Client 4)

Therefore, through the integration of self-knowledge and the key coaching processes of relating, clients also began to trust themselves.

Toward the end of coaching, clients also reported increased coach-like behaviour in their interactions with other people. Honesty was most frequently mentioned, with coaches and clients highlighting the ways in which their clients engaged more honestly with others. Both Clients 1 and 2 engaged in an honest conversation with their parents. Similarly, Clients 2, 8 and 9 were more likely to tell people when they did not want to do something. Client honesty with others also resulted in improved communication between them:

I have now been able to get into a dialogue with him [my husband], and when he goes to cut me off, I've been successful in disrupting that by saying, "You're not hearing me, let me finish," and if I say that several times, begrudgingly, he'll let me complete my thought. (Client 8)

Similarly, some clients developed more acceptance of others:

If I was having a hard time with my mum or something, “Well just think of, she’s probably not happy where she is, so don’t judge her so harshly, because it may not be her choice to be like this,” so instead of being so critical on people, that’s allowed me to go, “Oh hang on, you know, I don’t know what’s going on in them, so how can I ... be so hard on people?” (Client 3)

Several clients also reported using coaching strategies with other people in their lives:

I’m also passing that along to my family and to other people now actually, and I find I’m doing it a lot more, sort of making them look within themselves a bit and asking themselves, “Well, what are you doing with your life,” type of thing. (Client 4)

Finally, clients developed observer-like relationships with themselves. This process was fostered through the major processes of listening, questioning and reflecting, as coaches helped their clients to *get outside themselves*, *see* and *discover* themselves:

They’re [clients are] much more aware of the process, of the journey, and also learning why when things don’t happen that there is a reason, and not getting frustrated, but actually become almost the observer. (Coach 2)

Part of the strategy is to enable the client to observe themselves. (Coach 4)

I could actually witness my own behaviour patterns or my own thought processes. (Client 2)

She helps you make the observation, but it really does become your discovery. (Client 8)

The constant repetition and modelling of these processes resulted in clients self-questioning, self-reflecting and listening to themselves. These processes are explained below.

Self-questioning

As a result of coaches continually and repeatedly questioning their clients to reflect more deeply on their self-knowledge, clients integrated the process of questioning into their daily living and developed a habit of questioning themselves:

I'd pick a scenario, I'd go, "At what point do I feel negative about myself? Why is that? Could it be looked at another way? Or was there a fear? What was the fear about? How could I see that differently? And what would be a better alternative?...Or what is that I'm afraid of there? You know, what's the real issue? I think it's this? No, no, no. That's not right. Or this. No, go deeper." (Client 1)

The other thing that I'm noticing is that I am frequently paying attention to how do you feel, or what do you think, or is this OK. I'm asking small questions of myself that I have never asked. (Client 8)

Sometimes, I sort of get my feelings hurt over something, whereas now I say, "Hang on a tic, why are you thinking like that?" And I just talk myself through the whole process and realise that I got my feelings hurt over nothing, so I just find that I am using the tools that [my coach] has given me and continuing to do that. (Client 9)

These examples reveal how clients began facilitating coaching conversations with themselves by self-questioning. This process appeared to promote the ongoing discovery of self-knowledge and self-directed learning. This, in turn, fostered sustainable coaching outcomes.

Self-reflecting

Just as clients integrated the process of self-questioning, so too did they integrate the process of reflecting on daily living, no longer needing coaches to trigger the reflective process through questioning. Clients reported an enhanced ability and increase in the practice of engaging in reflection seemingly unconsciously, spontaneously and unintentionally in the absence of coaches:

I actually spent, say ten minutes ... and went back and circled all the things that I hadn't done, so I then I could say to [my coach], "Look at what I haven't done and look what it's saying to me," so it's a bit of self-directed learning in a way. (Client 2)

I think what I've gained is an enhanced self-awareness to probe a little bit deeper when someone says something, think a little bit, you know, always read between the lines, and think about what's that about, and if I have a, you know, an emotional reaction to something, or some kind of reaction, to really be thinking about, "Hm," sort of dispassionately think, "Oh, I wonder why I had that?" (Client 6)

I'm in transition from always dancing the dance as soon as the tune starts from any of the members of the family to listening to the tune and hearing the request and then making a decision, and this is a very different state. (Client 8)

Thus, the process of reflection appeared to foster in clients what Client 8 referred to as *thoughtful behaviour*:

So I'm going from completely ROTE behaviour to more thoughtful behaviour, but it's not, it seems to be running fairly smoothly. It's not an artificial effort to have the thoughtful behaviour. The thoughtful behaviour seems to be the product of the success at having opened the door a little bit. (Client 8)

This notion of thoughtful behaviour is reflected in the spiritual self-help literature as conscious living (Branden, 1997). Therefore, it suggests that coaching may be a process which encourages spiritual learning and yet which bypasses religion. Indeed, this finding accords with the spiritual experience in self-directed learning, as Bedard (1995) suggests that a spiritual experience “allows the adult to open up to oneself and initiate a search whose parameters will be dictated by the experience itself” (p. 129).

Listening to self

Toward the end of coaching, clients integrated the process of continually listening to themselves, and with that, facilitated the ongoing discovery of self-knowledge in the absence of a coach. This process was usually combined with the process of self-questioning and self-reflecting and was humorously referred to as *talking to oneself*.

Throughout the process of coaching, and more so, toward the end, clients displayed an increased ability or willingness to listen to themselves. Clients began to listen to or *hear* themselves as they spoke to their coaches and also in the absence of a coach:

You know, she would call and say, “How are you?” And [I would reply], “I’m so busy,” or, “I’m so tired,” and she would let me talk on, and gradually, she carefully sort of crafted her questions, and I started to hear myself. Hear.
(Client 8)

I’m in transition from always dancing the dance as soon as the tune starts from any of the members of the family to listening to the tune and hearing the request and then making a decision, and this is a very different state. (Client 8)

Thus, clients appeared to develop the capacity to consistently listen to and hear themselves, thereby facilitating their own ongoing discovery of self-knowledge and learning.

Holding self accountable

As a result of developing an intrinsic commitment to themselves through the process of being held accountable, as explained in the previous chapter of applying self-knowledge, often clients developed a habit of holding themselves accountable. One client admitted that she wanted to quit coaching. When asked what stopped her, she described how at first it was her commitment to her coach, but as a result of this comment, she *went back and thought, these are my notes, what's going on here for me... [and] owned them*. This example demonstrates how clients like this became committed to themselves through their initial extrinsic commitment to their coaches, and that this ultimately resulted in clients learning to hold themselves accountable. In this way, clients became committed to their acquired self-knowledge and held themselves accountable to its application and integration.

In addition, just as coaches held clients accountable to finding their own answers, clients gradually integrated this process of discovering self-knowledge into daily living. Indeed, this cultivated the self-coaching process, itself. This was especially evident among the clients who were interviewed at different points throughout their coaching series. Several clients commented on how difficult they found the process of finding their own answers at the start of coaching. Toward the end of coaching, such comments had decreased substantially, and clients were engaging in the processes of questioning, reflecting and listening to themselves independently. This suggests that, as a result of being consistently held accountable to generating their own learning, clients, in turn, integrated this process and developed the capacity to facilitate their own ongoing learning, even in the absence of their coaches.

Summary: Self-Coaching

The process of self-coaching resulted in a form of self-directed learning, as clients integrated not just self-knowledge, which emerged during coaching, but also integrated key coaching processes so that they were in a position to further the discovery, application and integration of self-knowledge for themselves and, at times, for others in their lives. This occurred as clients integrated a way of relating to

themselves and to other people that mirrored the coach-client relationship. In addition, clients adopted an unconscious practice of questioning, reflecting and listening to themselves. Finally, clients learnt to hold themselves accountable to their emergent self-knowledge and also to the ongoing process of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge. This is illustrated in Figure 7.3 below:

Figure 7.3

Coach...	Client...	Self-coaching client...
Relates to client	Relates to others	Relates to self and others
Questions client		Questions self and others
	Reflects	Reflects
Listens to client		Listens to self and others
Holds client accountable		Holds self accountable
	Takes action	Takes action
	Takes responsibility	Takes responsibility

Clients' integration of key coaching processes in self-coaching

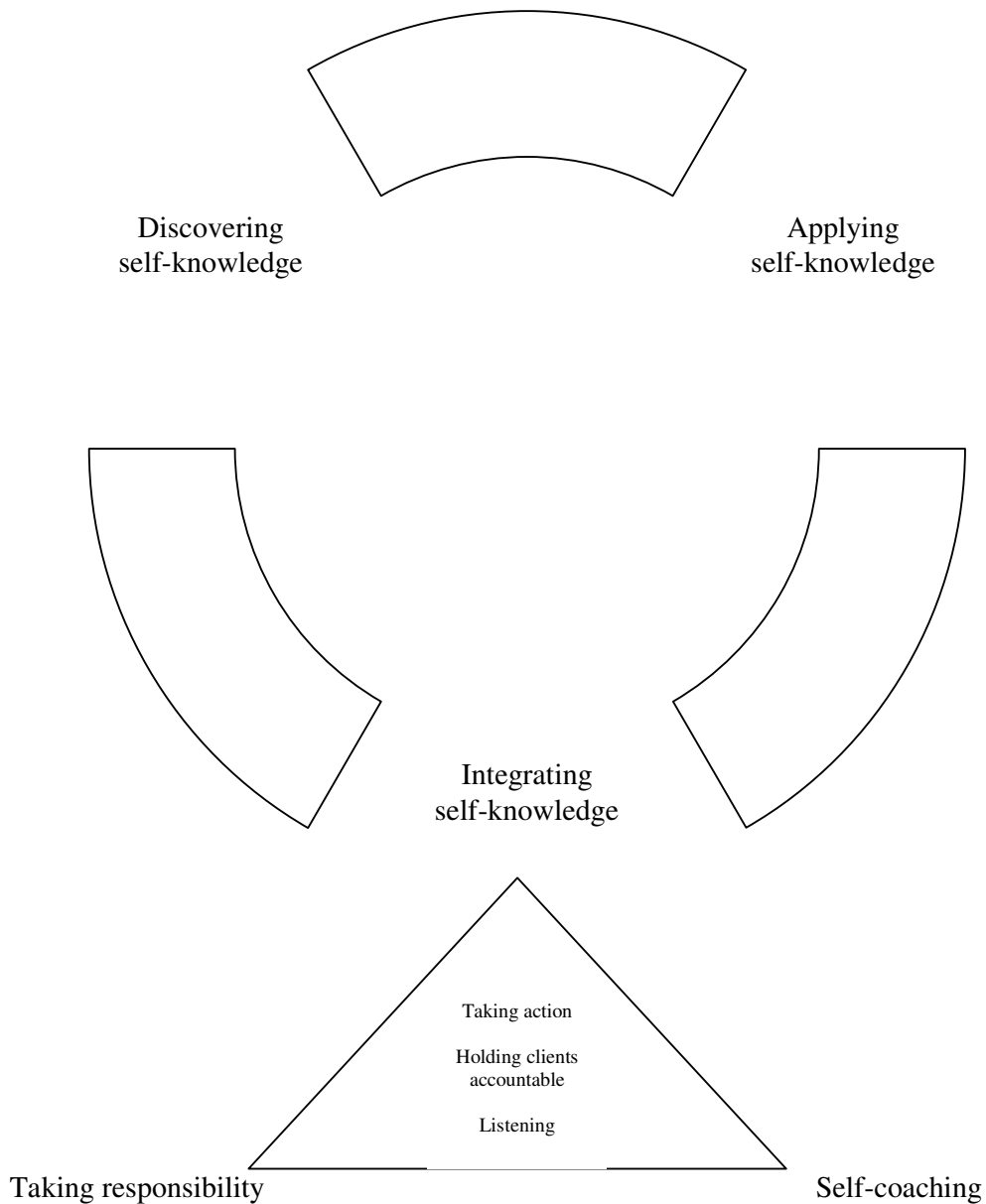
The left-hand box shows those processes which coaches initially facilitate in coordination with the client processes, shown in the middle box. The right-hand box highlights how clients integrate the processes to facilitate the self-coaching process independently, thereby resulting in the lasting facilitation of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge.

Summary: Integrating self-knowledge

Integrating self-knowledge emerged as a process by which clients embodied the self-knowledge and learning that they discovered and applied during coaching. The

process involved coaches making meaning through listening, coaches holding clients accountable to aligning difference dimensions of self, clients taking action which immediately integrated into their lives, as well taking responsibility and self-coaching. By taking responsibility, clients owned various dimensions of self, made choices based on their emergent self-knowledge and set themselves free, resulting in enhanced self-confidence. The process of integrating self-knowledge was then extended, as clients integrated the coaching processes of relating, reflecting and listening to themselves and holding themselves accountable, and in facilitating these processes independently, set up a means of continuing to discover, apply and integrate self-knowledge in an iterative cycle, even in the absence of a coach. The process of integrating self-knowledge and its relationship to discovering and applying self-knowledge is illustrated in Figure 7.4 below:

Figure 7.4



The process of integrating self-knowledge and its relationship to discovering and applying self-knowledge

The process of integrating self-knowledge simultaneously stemmed from and served to sustain the processes of discovering and applying self-knowledge. Thus, these three learning processes united and culminated in a united a process of developing self. This is explained in the final chapter.

Chapter Eight

Developing Self

The previous three chapters explained the processes of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge, as they emerged in this study of learning in life coaching. These three major learning processes knitted together to form the core category of this grounded theory study: developing self. The core category is a crucial element in building grounded theory, as it explains the broad process of learning in life coaching. Thus, the findings of this study demonstrate the way in which learning in life coaching is made up of three major learning processes involving the discovery, application and integration of self-knowledge, which in turn culminate in a process of developing self. This core category responds to all the research questions, as “it consists of all the products of analysis condensed into a few words that seem to explain what ‘this research is all about’” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 146). The core category, therefore, “pulls other categories together to form an explanatory whole” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 146) and explains how the broad process of learning in life coaching unfolded.

This chapter contains an explanation of the broad process of learning in life coaching and reveals the relationships, intersections and culmination of the major processes of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge, within a process of developing self. In so doing, a set of theoretical propositions for learning-centred coaching are established, which in turn may also be applied as a means of facilitating coaching-centred learning. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of the research, as well its limitations. The original research questions are woven throughout this chapter in order to specifically highlight how the intended research aims have been fulfilled by the findings of this study.

Developing

In response to the research questions, “How does learning occur in life coaching?”, “How do coaches facilitate learning?” and “How do clients experience learning?”, learning in life coaching was predominantly facilitated through the complementary coach-client processes explained in the previous chapters:

- Coaches fostered an accepting, honest, trusting, equal, purposeful and attraction-based relationship
- Coaches questioned clients
- Client reflected
- Coaches listened to clients’ reflections
- Coaches held clients accountable to learning
- Clients took action
- Clients took responsibility

However, these processes were progressively facilitated more independently by clients, as they began to self-coach toward the end of coaching, taking over the roles of coaches. This was explained in the previous chapter.

The combination of the above processes culminated in a process of development through a three-way learning process of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge. Clients had a strong tendency to emphasise that during coaching, learning was more like a process of discovery or rediscovery:

I think part of coaching or developing is all about re-finding who we are so we can express it. (Coach 4)

Sometimes, it seems like a bit of a revisiting or a reinforcing of things ... that I thought I was aware of, but I actually wasn't. I wasn't sitting down and allocating time to why I do want to change some things in my life. I was just sitting with I want to change them. I wasn't sitting with the why's and the how's and the feelings and the actions I could take and the meaning. (Client 2)

I think I've discovered a lot. (Client 8)

This occurred predominantly through the key coaching processes of clients relating to coaches, coaches questioning clients, clients reflecting and coaches listening to clients. Learning through discovering or re-discovering reflected the nature of inductive and especially discovery learning, in which students use their existing resources to discover what they need to know to find their own solutions to a challenge (Prince & Felder, 2007). Therefore, the findings of this study suggest two things. Firstly, inductive and especially discovery learning theory may have the potential to make a significant contribution to the understanding of the process of learning in coaching. Secondly, one of the major limitations of inductive learning/teaching is the time required for teachers to create real life challenges that suit learners (Prince & Felder, 2007). However, this study highlights the abundance of challenges already present within learners' lives and suggests that coaching may offer a means of harnessing these to provide ongoing inductive learning opportunities that are uniquely matched to the knowledge level, skills and readiness of learners.

In many cases in the study, respondents indicated that although clients had acquired particular knowledge many years ago, it was not until they applied this knowledge in their lives through coaching that they felt they had really learnt:

Well, learning for me is not having some new ideas in my head. Learning for me is using it in my life so my life becomes more of what I want and allows me to make the contribution that I want to make, to do the things I want to do.

(Coach 2)

If you're stuck doing the same thing that you've always done, then you're not learning. You may know the knowledge, but you're not implementing the knowledge. (Coach 5)

I think it's [learning] a whole lot of small insights ... It's tapping into past experiences and knowledge and applying it ... through that, practical application. (Client 2)

Thus, for respondents in this study, learning in life coaching involved not just discovering or re-discovering self-knowledge, but also applying it in their lives. This occurred as clients related to other people in their lives, as coaches held clients accountable and as clients took action based on acquired self-knowledge. This form of applied learning is, in turn, reflected in coaching literature, as coaching is recognised as an effective tool for the transfer of training (Joyce & Showers, 1988; Olivero et al., 1997; Wang & Wentling, 2001). Furthermore, application is an important component of experiential learning which involves, among other things, concrete experience and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Therefore, this study empirically provides some evidence of the significance of experiential learning in the process of learning in life coaching.

However, many respondents still did not consider that learning had taken place simply as a result of discovering/rediscovers and applying of self-knowledge. A further component of learning in life coaching emerged in which clients integrated self-knowledge into their lives:

What we learn becomes part of who we are. (Coach 4)

I think it [learning] means it becomes more ... more settled into my being, the bones of who I am. The more one learns something, the more they absorb, and it becomes part of who they are. (Client 5)

Well, for me, true learning is not what you read or hear about, it's what you integrate, and so it could be that you've learnt it initially from hearing it or whatever, but when you really learn it, it's something that you've changed what you're doing ... it's all about application and integration. (Client 6)

The coaching that I've had thus far, I feel, has automatically integrated into me. (Client 8)

This integrative learning process occurred as clients related to themselves, as coaches listened to clients, held them accountable, as clients took action, and most obviously, as clients took responsibility and began to self-coach. Furthermore, respondents

commented how clients could *never go back* because this learning had become part of who they were. In fact, at the outset of coaching, it appeared that clients only had a partial, and at times, an “incorrect” understanding of who they were. Thus, through the process of learning in life coaching, clients discovered/rediscovered self-knowledge, applied it to their lives and integrated it into their sense of self and being:

Blood was flowing to a part of my body, but now it's all over. I can experience all of myself. I'm not just getting bits and pieces like I was before. It was sort of like a jig-saw puzzle, and I only had a few pieces at a time, whereas now, I've got the whole thing mapped out. (Client 3)

If you've known your self in such a way ... in a limited capacity, you really don't recognise yourself as the whole of who you are. You only know bits and pieces of who you are ... I really became cemented in who I am and acknowledged all of that. (Client 3)

It's just sort of made me ... more in tune with myself ... it's just that understanding, and now being able to incorporate it into all aspects of my life. (Client 4)

These findings are widely supported in the literature. As part of the process of becoming self-aware, Goswami (1993) referred to “integration of information about the self” (p. 202). Thus, the common outcome of coaching relating to enhanced self-awareness appears to be facilitated through a process of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge. Furthermore, Grant's (2006) integrated goal-focused approach to executive coaching identifies an “integrated sense of self” (p. 164) to be at the core of the theory, highlighting the importance of self-congruency. Thus, coaching literature appears to already reflect the phenomenon of integration as it emerged in this study.

In addition, deep learning involves discovery of meaning and emphasises the active integration of new information with past and present knowledge and experience (Arnau, 2003; David, 2001). Therefore, coaching appears to provide a means of facilitating deep learning. In addition, the process of integration, together with

discovery and application, are also linked to a more recent move toward powerful learning environments (De Corte, Verschaffel, Entwistle, & van Merriënboer, 2003; Könings, Brand-Gruwel, & van Merriënboer, 2005). As a result, coaching appears to facilitate deep *and* powerful learning and may have the potential to significantly contribute to these learning theories. Similarly, Mezirow's (2000) last stage of transformative learning depicts "a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective" (p. 22). Thus, this study suggests that the process of learning in life coaching is one of deep, powerful *and* transformative learning.

The process of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge described in this study is also reflected in common definitions of learning. The definition of learning highlighted earlier in the literature review explained that *Learning occurs through experience and results in a permanent or lasting change in knowledge, skill or attitude* (Lawton & Gordon, 1996; Rowntree, 1981). Each element of this definition was reflected in the findings of this study as clients' experiences were harnessed to create changes in their self-knowledge, and clients felt they could *never go back* after this process. As a result of this experience, through the discovery, application and integration of self-knowledge, learning in life coaching emerged as lasting:

The kinds of changes that I've made in my life that are really lasting ... It [coaching] left me being able to create that on my own after the coaching ended. (Client 7)

This is some of the beauty of her technique. You make the discovery. She makes the suggestion. She helps you make the observation, but it really does become your discovery ... It's the discovery in that experience that really makes a huge impact. It's so profound that I don't think that I could slip back. (Client 8)

In addition, the discovery, application and integration of self-knowledge appeared to culminate in accelerated learning:

Mostly, I think people would do what they end up doing in coaching, just not as quickly or ... as easily ... I think coaching enables people to make the changes they would normally make in their lives, but it's more effortless, it's easier and it tends to happen faster ... it's, you know, being conscious.(Coach 3)

Each week just sort of gets easier, because I'm understanding what I've got to give to get out of myself. (Client 4)

It's made me realise that I usually have the answers, and that I have to find ways to get to them, and I don't need someone else to tell me ... getting to those answers becomes easier and easier, because my own level of self-trust is that much greater. (Client 6)

It's [the coaching is] starting from a very tiny small spot and growing, you know, very, very, very slowly in the beginning to a much faster and bigger growth rate as this time. (Client 8)

The emergence of accelerated learning is better understood in the light of accelerated learning theory (Ostrander & Schroeder, 1981; Rose & Nicholl, 1998). Like the process of learning in life coaching as explained in this study, accelerated learning environments involve a holistic approach to learning. This especially involves intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence, varied modes of learning, collaborative learning, positive and trusting relationships, applied learning in practice contexts and using experience, reflection and adult learning theories of building on learning, using learners' day-to-day worlds and adult identity theories (Boyd, 2004). Thus, the findings of this study suggest that the life coaching process appears to provide a means of accelerating learning.

Self

When investigating the research question, “What kind of learning occurs during life coaching?”, most respondents experienced difficulty in identifying exactly what it was clients actually learnt:

How would I describe it [the learning that clients experience in coaching]?

That’s probably a little bit hard. (Coach 2)

I think I did [learn from coaching]. Exactly what it was, I think it’s hard to say. (Client 1)

It’s hard for me to actually to put it into words but it’s[learning is] in me, does that make sense? (Client 3)

I don’t know how to describe it [what I learnt in coaching] ... words fail on trying to describe it. (Client 8)

It appeared that respondents found it difficult to describe what clients learnt in coaching, because learning related more to their knowledge of themselves, as opposed to any particular content area or skills. Therefore, learning about self through the discovery, application and integration of self-knowledge emerged as the dominant form of learning in life coaching, as respondents consistently agreed that clients understood more about themselves as a result of coaching:

There’s almost a different level of consciousness brought to the table in terms of how much they really know about themselves. (Coach 1)

[Clients] learn about themselves and learn about how they come across to others. (Coach 2)

I’ve learnt so much about myself. (Client 4)

I think I've learnt stuff about myself. (Client 6)

The significance of self and self-knowledge is evident in respondents' most frequently mentioned coaching outcomes: *self-confidence*, *self-esteem*, *enhanced self-awareness* and *clarity*. It is also supported by coaching literature where a range of qualitative and quantitative studies have demonstrated universal outcomes of coaching that relate to the notion of self, including heightened self-awareness, self-acceptance, increased self-discovery, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-expression, increased awareness of wants and a deeper sense of self (Creane, 2002; Duff, 2002; Grant, 2003; Grant, 2001; Hurd, 2004; International Coach Federation, 1998; Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004).

Self emerged as clients' underlying sense of who they really were. It was often qualified by respondents with the use of the word *real* or *really*, emphasising the authenticity of the experience. As one client said, it's *what I'm really about* (Client 4). *Self* was also depicted as being made up of client values, their behaviour, identity and *all the stuff that just says, "Oh, this is you"* (Client 2). Indeed, the comment, *basically without any crap, it's just the real me* (Client 4), provided a concise explanation of *self* as it emerged in life coaching. These definitions of *self* are consistent with the abundant literature pertaining to the notion *self* (Chaudhary, 2003; Gergen, 1971; Jourard, 1971; Lightfoot & Lyra, 2000), and therefore, this body of literature was used to shed light on some of the unexplained phenomena in this study. For example, Polkinghorne (2000) claimed that "there is no such entity as the self, or if there is such an entity, it cannot be known" (pp. 267-268). In the light of this statement, in addition to other theorists' claims of the changeable, contradictory and elusive nature of *self* (Chaudhary, 2003; Gergen, 1971; Gone, Miller, & Rappaport, 1999; Hermans, 1999), it is not surprising that respondents in this study found it difficult to describe exactly what clients learnt in the process of coaching. Furthermore, it may explain why coaching literature acknowledges learning and self-related outcomes, but fails to explain the processes by which such outcomes are facilitated. Similarly, in grappling with the notion of *self* in the process of learning, the literature on *self* was used, as Charmaz (2004) suggested, as a secondary form of data in this grounded theory study and served to enhance understanding of the complex phenomena at hand. Consequently, this also suggests that the body of literature on *self* may be included in evidence-based coaching literature.

Neisser's (1988) theory of self-knowledge, depicting five aspects of "self-specifying information" (Polkinghorne, 2000, p.270), highlighted a pattern in the data that revealed the dimensions of self-knowledge in life coaching. As a result, five distinct dimensions of self-knowledge were identified in life coaching. These included learning about clients' current circumstances, desires, emotions, values and thinking. While other forms of self-knowledge, such as learning about clients' behaviour, also emerged in this study, only those that appeared in all coach-clients sets and across all key coaching processes are explained here.

It is important to note that Neisser's theory simply triggered recognition of patterns that had already emerged through data analysis. Therefore, the dimensions of self-knowledge proposed in this study are different from Neisser's and uniquely represent self-knowledge as it emerged in life coaching. Furthermore, these dimensions of self-knowledge and their influence on learning in coaching are also supported elsewhere in the literature. In particular, while "recent progressive ideas include emotional elements in learning" (Brockbank et al., 2002, p. 5), in their discussion of the nature and context of learning, Brockbank, McGill and Beech suggest that three domains of doing, thinking and feeling facilitate deep and significant learning. Therefore, the findings of this study which suggest that learning in life coaching involves developing self through the discovery, application and integration of self-knowledge related to clients' current circumstances, desires, emotions, values and their thinking, suggest not only that coaching facilitates deep learning, but that it may also *deepen deep learning*. Furthermore, Jarvis' (2007) definition of lifelong learning appears to provide a comprehensive reflection of learning as it emerged in this study of life coaching:

[Lifelong learning is defined as] the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and sense) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person. (p. 1)

Thus, as has been recognised (Bowen, 2002; Nussli, 2001), the process of developing self through discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge in life coaching appears to be one of lifelong learning. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that, because the lifelong learning literature to date has “directed [attention] toward the alleged outcomes of learning, rather than the processes through which it might be achieved” (Harrison et al., 2002, p. 2), coaching then may be considered to provide one critical explanation for the facilitation of lifelong learning.

Current circumstances

Clients’ current circumstances formed one component of self. Notably, a large proportion of the outcomes that were identified by respondents in this study were related to clients’ current circumstances. They were typically visible and often measurable aspects of clients’ lives and included *achievement, getting what they want, getting different results, success, change, improved life* or things simply *going well*. The wide scope covered by the term *current circumstances* also included *better/improved relationships*, as well as *better communication*. Similar outcomes are also evident in the coaching literature (Campbell & Gardner, 2005; Creane, 2002; Duff, 2002; Grant, 2003; Green et al., 2006; Hurd, 2002; International Coach Federation, 1998; Paige, 2002; Spence & Grant, 2005). In addition, clients’ current circumstances also feature prominently within the acronym-based, multipurpose models of coaching, which underpin the coaching framework (Dembrowski & Eldridge, 2003; Libri, 2004; Whitmore, 2002). Furthermore, the emergence of clients’ current circumstances as a dimension of self-knowledge was also reflected by Neisser’s (1988) *ecological* and *interpersonal* selves.

This study revealed that clients’ reported current circumstances provided a context from which the major coaching processes emerged. The circumstances *triggered* the coaching process and all the other major processes therein, as clients generally sought out and initiated coaching due to some kind of dissatisfaction with their current circumstances:

I was pretty much stuck in a rut for many years, and I tried everything I could think, but just couldn't get out of it. I think I was basically unhappy. The main thing was I didn't enjoy my career ... and I couldn't see a way out. (Client 1)

I haven't been happy with work, it's just like a means to an end, and I had some creative ideas for this small business idea and just wondered why I was stuck, and why I wasn't taking the risks to have a go at that. (Client 2)

For two clients in this study, dissatisfaction in relation to their current circumstances did not trigger coaching. In one case, the client had sought out coaching because it was a requirement of his coach training. In the other, coaching was offered as a part of a work package. Interestingly, these clients reported less significant experiences of learning than did other respondents. Therefore, the study findings suggest that learning was fostered to a greater degree when clients' dissatisfaction with their current circumstances motivated them to initiate coaching and was therefore crucial in the process of learning.

This finding is supported in the educational literature. From the perspective of adult learning theory, Mezirow (2000) explained that a "disorienting dilemma" (p. 22) is the first phase of meaning in transformative learning. Similarly, authentic learning theory explains that learning is enhanced when learners explore and discover their worlds meaningfully through real-world problems (Callison & Lamb, 2004; Gatlin & Edwards, 2007; Herrington & Herrington, 2006; Renzulli et al., 2004; Rule, 2006). In addition, inductive teaching and learning strategies and, in particular, problem-based learning, also reflect this phenomenon, as "students are presented with a challenge and then learn what they need to know to address the challenge" (Prince & Felder, 2007, p. 14). Interestingly however, in the coaching literature, Grant's (2006) model of goal-directed self-regulation appears to be the only evidence of the influence of clients' current circumstances in triggering the coaching/learning process. In fact, findings from a study of the effects of organizational coaching on individual lives and how clients interpreted the experience of coaching (Dunn, 2004) identify setting and reaching career goals, creating a more fulfilling life and personal growth as the driving factors. Thus, according to existing coaching literature, clients' desires, not their dissatisfaction with their current circumstances, triggers coaching. This

represents a significant inconsistency between the findings of this study and the current literature on coaching. It, therefore, suggests that further research is needed to better understand the coaching/learning process and to capitalise on existing learning theory to facilitate more effective coaching.

Clients learning about their current circumstances also influenced the direction of coaching. This factor directed the coaching relationship as a whole, as well as individual coaching sessions and was facilitated through the major discovery processes of coaches relating to clients, coaches questioning clients, clients reflecting and coaches listening to clients, as was explained in Chapter Five. In addition, clients' current circumstances were used as a context in which clients could apply self-knowledge and as a benchmark for evaluating progress. Throughout coaching, coaches held clients accountable to desires, as well as to other self-knowledge. At the end of each coaching session or conversation, clients were encouraged to reconsider current circumstances and how they could take action to change them based on newly acquired self-knowledge. For example, one client who sought the courage to leave his company, eventually quit his job, after he realised that the only thing stopping him was his own fears and *he threw himself right into creating details about the vision that he had for his new business, and within a week, he had a business plan written* (Coach 2). Thus, in holding clients accountable to taking action based on acquired self-knowledge, clients took responsibility for their current circumstances and ultimately changed them. Indeed, this was the process by which clients fulfilled their desires.

Desires

Just as Neisser's (1988) *extended self* includes reference to an anticipated future self, so clients' desires made up one part of self. After discovering desires through the coach-client relationship, being questioned by coaches, engaging in reflection and being listened to, clients were held accountable to their desires by coaches and, as a result, took action toward them and took responsibility for fulfilling them.

Existing coaching literature places significant emphasis on the importance of goals and goal attainment in coaching and the practice of solution-focused or goal-directed

coaching (Berg & Szabo, 2005; Grant, 2003; Grant, 2001b; Grant, 2005; Green et al., 2006; Hurd, 2004; Wilkins, 2004). However, in this study, clients' emergent *desires* sometimes superseded *goals*, which were set at the outset of coaching. In addition, some coaches were very specific in clarifying that *goals* and *goal achievement* were not an important part of their process. This suggests that clients' *goals* and *desires* were interpreted as two different things, and that the coaching literature, which focuses on goals, may be somewhat inconsistent.

The literature on deep learning shed some light on this phenomenon. Performance goals, which are frequently characterised by external motivation, are linked to surface learning and result in the lowest student motivation and performance levels (Simons, Dewitte, & Lens, 2004). In contrast, goals derived from intrinsic or internal motivation such as clients' desires are referred to as learning/task/mastery goals and have been shown to promote deep learning (Gordon & Debus, 2002; Hill & Woodland, 2002; Seo & Park, 2001; Simons et al., 2004). Therefore, it seems that coaches, and therefore their clients, place more significance on learning/task/mastery goals. This is also reflected somewhat in the findings from Bowles and Picano's (2006) study of work productivity and quality of life, which highlighted how working toward company missions often superseded goals. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that learning about clients' desires is reflective of learning/task/mastery goals and promotes deep learning in coaching. Furthermore, they suggest that the literature on deep learning may have the capacity to make an important contribution to coaching theory, and that further research may be needed to determine the significance and impact of goals versus clients' desires within the coaching framework.

Emotions

In this study, self also encompassed clients' emotions. This finding is reflected by Neisser (1988), whose *private self* consists of unshared personal experience such as emotions. The significance of emotions in learning about self is particularly evident in the following comment:

All emotions point us to what we care about. We must learn to sense what the emotions are and what they are telling us. (Coach 4)

Similarly, Frankl (1973) stated that, “There is revealed in man’s emotions a deep wisdom superior to all reason” (p. 108). After discovering emotions as a result of the coach-client relationship, being questioned by coaches, engaging in reflection and being listened to, clients were held accountable to taking action based on learning about emotions. After developing sufficient understanding of their feelings, clients managed those feelings either by expressing them or by letting them go. As a result, clients took responsibility for their emotions and began *making choices* that would increase the generation of positive emotions and decrease the emergence of negative emotions. In one example, a client felt anger in relation to being overweight and used her newly acquired understanding to relate differently to herself and her daughter, thereby letting go of the anger and enabling her to take more responsibility for her diet. Similarly, Client 6 explained how her feelings of guilt about the need to fire an employee were preventing her from achieving her desires of maintaining an effective organization, and that by identifying and understanding this emotion through a conversation with her coach, she was able to let go of the guilt and take responsibility for creating an effective organization. Similar processes of learning about emotions were also highlighted in Mezirow’s (2000) stages of transformative learning. “Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22) was depicted as a stage in transformational learning. Taylor (2000) explains how this occurs through a process of critical reflection and rational discourse, like that provided by the processes of listening, questioning and reflecting in coaching. Therefore, coaching theory may have the potential to make a contribution to transformative learning theory, in particular the facilitation of “Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22), which to date does not appear to be specifically explained.

Interestingly, there is an ongoing debate about the differences between counselling/therapy and coaching. One argument in this debate distinguishes coaching from therapy on the basis of the focus on emotions. Coaching conversations have been depicted as being largely related to business and work objectives, and as structured and task focused, while therapeutic conversations have been described as

undefined processes of discovery in which clients expressed feelings and processed emotions (Hart et al., 2001). However, the findings of this study highlighted that learning about feelings, through a process of *identifying, understanding and dealing with feelings*, was an equally important part of the life coaching process. Therefore, the process of learning about emotions in coaching and its contribution to self-knowledge may be better understood in relation to the literature on therapy, and in particular, emotion-focused therapy (EFT). The EFT therapist recognises that emotions are fundamental in the construction of self, and that people are constantly in the process of making sense of their emotions (Greenberg, 2001). Furthermore, EFT therapists also recognise the role of reflection in learning about emotions, which in turn emerged as a major category in this study. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that the literature, which has a tendency to exclude a focus on emotions in the process of coaching, may be somewhat misconstrued. In addition, it suggests that the body of counselling/therapy literature, and in particular, EFT, may have important implications for coaching's growing evidence base, as well as that of transformative learning.

Clients learnt about emotions through the processes of listening, questioning and reflecting, and emotions appeared to surface because of their clients' perceived gap between current circumstances and their desires. Furthermore, clients taking action and taking responsibility led to changes in clients' emotions. Respondents reported an increase in clients' perceptions of positive emotions and a decrease in perceptions of negative emotions. Respondents frequently noted that clients felt calmer or more peaceful at the end of coaching, in addition to the presence of feelings such as happiness, motivation, appreciation, courage and fulfilment. This was summed up as *feeling better* or an *enhanced experience of life*. Thus, Goleman's (1995) theory of emotional intelligence (EI) appears to be at play in the process of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge in life coaching, as emotions are not just "contained and channelled, but positive, energized, and aligned with the task at hand" (p. 90). In fact, coaching literature has already recognised the role of emotional intelligence in coaching, with Chapman's (2005) study revealing discernible increases in self-reported EI scores, and David (2005) advocating that an emotional intelligence framework be integrated into evidence-based coaching, as "a focus on the function of

emotions and emotional information is increasingly being recognised as pivotal” (p. 58).

Values

Values made up another component of self in this study of learning in life coaching. As one coach noted through the process of coaching, clients *get deeply in touch with their values and what’s important to them* (Coach 2), and respondents suggested that learning about clients’ values was a defining feature of the coaching process:

What I imagine is most people don’t take the time to think about stuff as thoroughly and within the framework that I would use ... I think most people don’t spend as much time as they could, or as they do in coaching, just thinking about what’s important to them. (Coach 3)

Values are important in coaching, because they’re sort of ... part of what the person fundamentally thinks is important and valuable. (Client 5)

Upon entering coaching, and in comparison to other areas of self-knowledge that have been mentioned, clients were unaware of their own values. As one coach pointed out, many people *may not even know their values* (Coach 5). Furthermore, by learning about their values, clients better understood their emotions and their desires:

Becoming aligned with your values, you become more congruent, and you become more motivated, more emotionally involved with your goals, you want them. (Coach 5)

I started to recognise when I was doing things that didn’t fit those values. It helped me understand why I was so stressed out or unhappy and things like that. (Client 1)

I guess when I went to [my coach], I’d lost my direction a bit ... What do I really want out of life? And simple things like what are my values? (Client 9)

Both coaches and clients highlighted the process of *uncovering values* (Coach 3) as significant. While some coaches used specific tools for uncovering values at the outset of a coaching relationship, all respondents described this as a natural process that occurred within coaching conversations through questioning, reflecting and listening. Indeed, this ongoing process was referred to more often and with greater emphasis than values exercises, which were used at the outset of coaching. Furthermore, clients were held accountable especially to their values, were encouraged to honour their values in taking action and eventually allowed their values to influence their choices in the process of taking responsibility.

The importance of clients learning about values as an integral part of the coaching/learning process is reflected in the work of Mezirow (1985) on self-directed learning. Mezirow stated that, “In essence, the purpose of learning is to enable us to understand the meaning of our experiences and to realize values in our lives” (p. 17). Similarly, Brookfield (1985) explained that self-directed learning occurs when external, technical learning is integrated with internal, reflective learning, as adults discover that their knowledge and values are constructed and are therefore open to reinterpretation and recreation. Furthermore, some educators propose a means of learning about values that is similar to that which emerged in this study (Boyer, 1977; Godwin, 2006). In particular, Godwin (2006) suggested that such a focus would encourage students to take more responsibility for their actions and ownership of their behaviours. This is, in turn, evidenced within this study, as learning about values underpinned client choices in the major process of taking responsibility and is also linked to self-determination theory, which explains how values underpin intrinsic motivation and therefore choice (Deci & Ryan, 1996).

Surprisingly, the significance of values in the learning process suggested in this study is not consistent with the significance of values portrayed within the body of evidence-based coaching literature. Values are frequently mentioned as an important component of coaching goals (Auerbach, 2006; Grant, 2006) and in the literature on goal and task orientation and motivational theory (Buss & Kearsley, 1976; Locke, 1996; Locke & Latham, 2002). In addition, values assessment exercises are featured in many prescriptive coaching models (Coach U, 2005; Whitworth et al., 1998).

However, the role that values play in the coaching process and conversations does not appear to have featured prominently in any empirical coaching studies or scholarly papers to date. Although Marshall's (2006) study of the critical factors in coaching identified values clarification as an important part of the process, apart from indicating that coaches used value clarification exercises, it did not explain how the process actually came about. Therefore, little seems to be known about how values fit into the coaching process, despite a strong acknowledgement of *the value of values* in coaching (Cashman, 2003).

Thinking

In this study, self also encompassed client thinking. This was reflected in Neisser's (1988) *conceptual self*, which, among other things, consisted of a person's beliefs and assumptions. Clients and coaches related coaching conversations in which clients learnt about thinking as they reflected on their current circumstances, desires and feelings. One client explained how her coach helped her to see that she was being too hard on herself and had excessively high expectations, pointing out that this learning emerged from a discussion about her struggles with a particular practice that was to progress her toward her desires. Similarly, in another example, a client who was struggling with her diet recognised that her feelings of anger at being called a marshmallow as a child had led to a belief that being overweight made her unlovable. Furthermore, the recognition and examination of this thinking pattern allowed the client to challenge and overcome this thinking and, with that, improve her diet. Coaches generally recognised thinking patterns first. Then, as one client said: *Either [the coach] would say it, or she would guide me to realising that, you know, say, oh, well, judging myself or something like that* (Client 1). This occurred through the processes of the coach listening, questioning and inviting the client to reflect.

Learning about clients' thinking patterns also involved understanding how they had developed and how such patterns shaped clients' current circumstances and affected their progress toward their desires. As an example, through engaging in a process of listening, questioning and reflecting with her coach, one client realised that she had developed a pattern of thinking, "I'm not good enough", after a childhood experience

of baking (and slightly burning) a cake and having her father embarrass her in front of a crowd. Through the same processes, she also came to understand that this created a lot of avoidance behaviour in her life, so that she would be *safe from failure ... [and] she wouldn't be condemned or criticised* (Coach 1). This stopped her from moving toward her desires. As a result of better understanding themselves and through the process of continually being held accountable to their self-knowledge and progress toward their desires, clients were able to take action toward their desires and free themselves from old thinking patterns in the process of taking responsibility.

“A critical assessment of assumptions” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22) was depicted as a stage in transformational learning, and Taylor (2000) explained how this occurs through a process of critical reflection and rational discourse, like that provided by the processes of listening, questioning and reflecting in coaching. However, the process and significance of learning about clients’ thinking in life coaching is best reflected in the literature relating to cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). In fact, coaching literature has already recognised the influence of CBT in the coaching process (Grant, 2001; Green et al., 2006). CBT emphasises the connection between thoughts, feelings and behaviour. In particular, cognitive theory focuses on the rationality of thinking patterns, while behaviour theory relates to the development, maintenance or elimination of behaviour patterns (Corcoran, 2004). CBT proposes five areas of functional analysis: social, environmental, emotional, cognitive and physical. Notably, this also strengthens the relationships highlighted in this study between the components of self-knowledge. In addition, Corcoran (2004) explains that CBT is effective because:

Many problems in living result from misconceptions—conclusions that are based too much on habits of thought rather than external evidence—that people have about themselves, other people, and their life situations. (p. 43).

This was the case in the examples noted above. Therefore, not only do the findings of this study recognise the contribution of CBT in the process of learning about and developing self in life coaching, but they also suggest that like EFT, CBT may also have the potential to contribute to transformative learning theory, and that coaching may represent a means of bridging psychological and learning theory.

Summary: Learning in life coaching

The process of relating provided a foundation for learning in life coaching. While the coach-client relationship *allowed* clients to discover self-knowledge, much of which was stimulated by clients' relationships with others, clients applied emergent self-knowledge in their relationships with others and integrated it into their sense of self in their relationships with themselves.

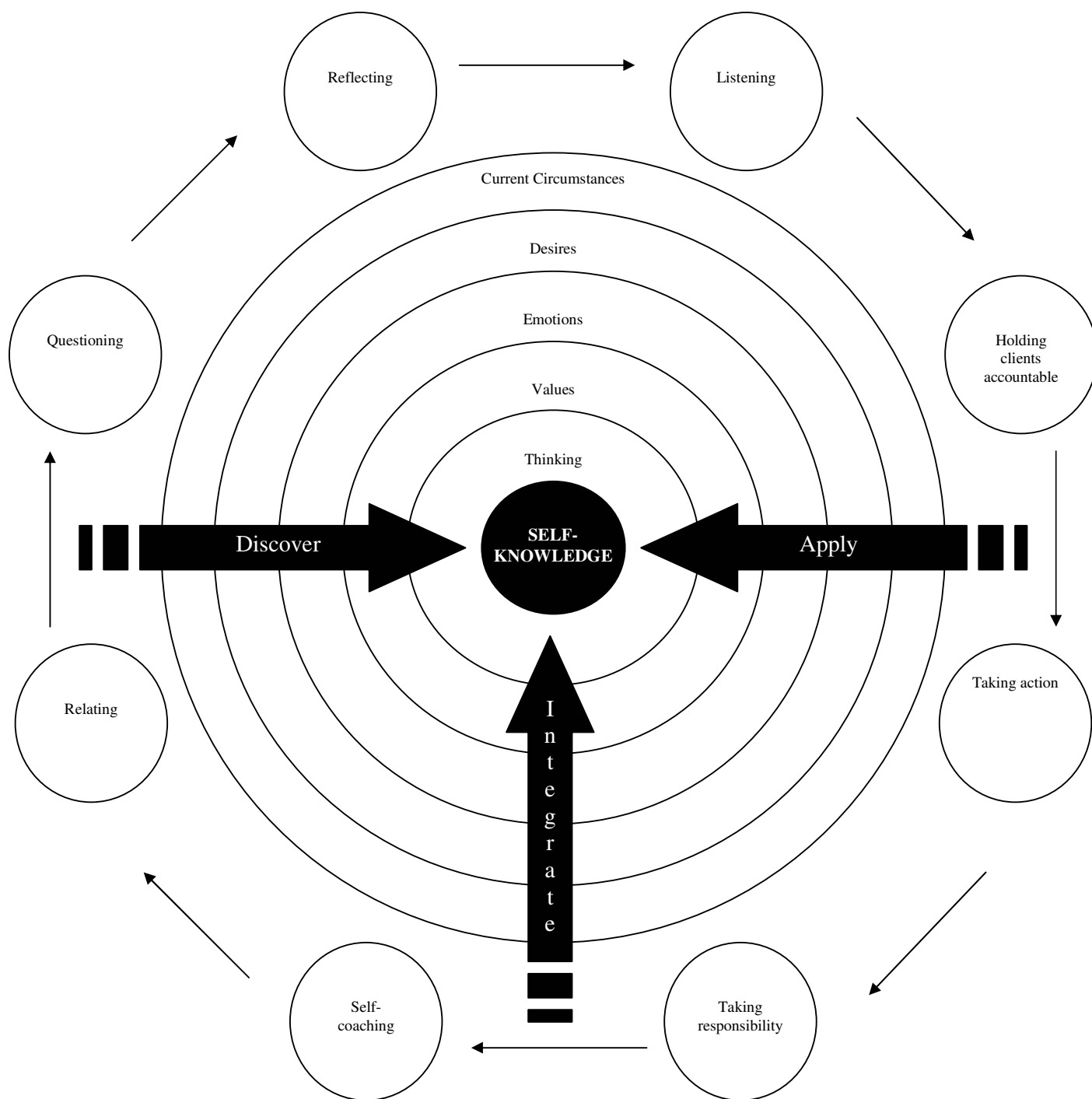
In addition, coaches' questioning, reflecting and listening contributed to the process of clients discovering self-knowledge. As coaches' questioning *drove* the discovery of clients' self-knowledge, triggering the reflective process, clients' self-knowledge emerged *within* the reflecting process, and self-knowledge was *recognised* through coaches listening to clients.

After discovering self-knowledge through the combined processes of relating, listening, questioning and reflecting, coaches then held clients accountable to emergent self-knowledge and, as a result, clients were *compelled* to take action to *demonstrate* and apply their acquired self-knowledge.

While some of this action was immediately integrated into clients' sense of self, clients usually engaged in a process of taking responsibility to integrate self-knowledge, as they began making choices based on accumulated learning and freed themselves from previously limited self-knowledge. Finally, clients also demonstrated an ability to facilitate the coaching process independently, thereby revealing that they had not only integrated self-knowledge, but also the coaching process itself.

The process of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge formed an iterative learning cycle, which was continually built upon, deepened and extended, and which culminated as a process of developing self. This broad process of learning in life coaching through the process of developing self is summarised in Figure 8.1 below:

Figure 8.1



Learning in life coaching through the process of developing self

Implications

This section includes a discussion of the significance of the findings which emerged from this study of learning in life coaching. It particularly addresses the final research questions, “To what degree does learning occur in life coaching?” and “What is the significance of learning in life coaching?” It also highlights those findings which clarify or extend the current body of coaching literature.

When asked how much was learnt in coaching, many respondents spontaneously and immediately exclaimed about the enormity of client learning:

At [the end of a coaching series], it's more than obvious that that's what they've done [learning], and that blows them away. (Coach 1)

Oh, a huge amount! (Coach 3)

Oh, heaps! I'm at a different level. (Client 4)

I absolutely learnt so much personally in my own development. (Client 7)

For me, this [how much I've learnt in coaching] is huge ... I've only taken a baby step, but in terms of where I've been, I feel that it's a quantum leap. (Client 8)

Furthermore, a response from Client 1 in relation to how he learnt what he did in coaching revealed the way in which the whole process of coaching culminated as a learning process in itself:

The whole process of coaching is all about learning, I think. If I didn't want to learn, or if I didn't need to learn, then I wouldn't have been there, and I think everything that I did in coaching was all about learning. So every process, every frustration, every exercise I had to do, every conversation I had with

[my coach], was all about learning, so I guess how it happened was in everything, so how do you describe everything? (Client 1)

Indeed, the previous chapters have revealed how the process of learning in life coaching through the discovery, application and integration of self-knowledge and the development of self, in fact, incorporates more than fifteen distinct learning theories:

- Collaborative learning
- Mentoring
- Self-directed learning
- Social learning
- Reflective learning
- Adult learning
- Experiential learning
- Transformative learning
- Deep learning
- Authentic learning
- Action learning
- Inductive learning
- Discovery learning
- Powerful learning
- Lifelong learning
- Accelerated learning
- Problem-based learning
- Emotional intelligence

This suggests not only that learning is interwoven throughout the process of coaching, but that coaching provides a means of facilitating a dynamic interchange between multiple learning theories. This has implications for the fields of coaching and education. Firstly, the bodies of literature related to the above learning theories have the potential to make a significant contribution to the growing field of evidence-based coaching. Secondly, as learning is inherently viewed as a means by which coaching outcomes are achieved, coaching practice may be improved as coaches gain a deeper

understanding of the learning theories underpinning coaching. Thus, as Law (2007) argued:

[While coaching offers] an opportunity for learning, the outcome cannot be guaranteed as given, and, for learning to take place, coaches ... must actively engage in the learning process during the coaching ... journey. (p. 49)

Thirdly, by recognising coaching as a process which combines a range of learning theories, educators are likely to be more willing to understand and adopt coaching processes to enhance student learning. Similarly, coaching may be used as a means of facilitating those kinds of learning which can be difficult to facilitate or for which the process of facilitation is not yet well understood. Thus, as the findings of this study have revealed how learning in coaching is deep, powerful, transformative, authentic, inductive, problem-based, lifelong and ultimately accelerated, it has the potential to inform these learning theories. In this way, coaching may be seen as a dynamic “learning strategy... [which is] utilized by the learner in order to acquire, manipulate, or use knowledge and information” (Hrimech, 1995, p. 88).

The dynamic interchange of learning theories in the coaching/learning process stemmed from, responded to and flowed through clients’ sense of self. Thus, the findings of this study identify the value of self and self-knowledge in the coaching learning process and as an objective of learning in its own right. Therefore, just as coaching practice is likely to be enhanced through improved understanding of the learning theories which underpin it, so also the body of literature pertaining to *self* may contribute to the growing body of evidence-based coaching.

In addition, while “knowing the self and knowing ‘about’ the subject are intertwined” (Richardson, 2004, p. 476), in the field of education, the value of *self* and self-knowledge remain largely unacknowledged. This is despite the current information age, in which the only barriers between learners and their learning of content appear to be the learners themselves. Therefore, the process of life coaching, which facilitates the discovery, application and integration of self-knowledge and the development of self, may be used in educational contexts to assist learners in navigating, deepening and accelerating their own learning.

Because this study found that learning occurred through commonly recognised key coaching processes, and this *whole* process appeared to combine together to culminate as a process of learning, the findings of this study explain not just the process of learning in coaching, but also provide important empirical explanation of key coaching processes, which to date have been little understood. This may hold particular significance for coaches, as in depth empirical explanation of the actual process of relating to clients, questioning and listening to them and holding them accountable may provide valuable signposts for coaching practice.

Given the capacity of grounded theory to explain new relationships between old concepts, the findings of this study, therefore, shed significant light on how major processes of coaching relate to each other and fit together to culminate in learning and coaching outcomes. This is particularly evident in the shared coach and client processes presented in this study, as this study appears to provide the first empirical and comprehensive explanation of the *process* (as opposed to outcomes) of life coaching from the combined perspectives of *both* coaches and clients. Therefore, the findings reveal, for the first time, the way in which coach and client processes complement each other, and how the tendency to focus on coaches' competencies that are evident in the literature omits an important factor in the coaching equation and fails to recognise and promote clients' progressive graduation to self-coaching. In addition, as the study purposefully recruited coaches who were trained in distinctively different coaching methods, the analysis addressed those processes which underpin various forms of coaching, rather than one prevalent coaching model.

As this study utilised grounded theory, a methodology which is particularly suited to fields in which little research has been done and which has the capacity to identify gaps and inconsistencies in prevailing assumptions, the findings of this study also reveal numerous areas for future research into coaching. One of the main aims of grounded theory is to generate theory which may be used to empirically (rather than theoretically) identify variables for engaging in further quantitative research. Therefore, every major category and phenomenon presented in these findings essentially requires further research, testing and validation. In particular, the findings of this study highlight the need for further research to clarify the degree to which

goals versus clients' desires are involved in the coaching process. Similarly, more research is needed to understand the way in which other aspects of clients' sense of self, including emotions, values and thinking, are threaded throughout the coaching process. In addition, the findings of this study demonstrate how clients of life coaching began to unconsciously and independently facilitate the coaching process for themselves, and to some degree, for other people in their lives. In the light of this, further research that examines the efficacy of coach training versus training *through* coaching may significantly improve the quality of coaching practice.

Finally, the findings of this study provide a key definition for learning in life coaching and also suggest a basic learning process which may underpin different coaching methods and various fields of coaching. Learning in life coaching may be defined as *the discovery, application and integration of self-knowledge*. However, because this process culminated through commonly recognised key coaching processes, this suggests that the process of learning in *any* coaching may involve discovery, application and integration, while the kind of knowledge which is generated may differ, depending on the type of coaching being facilitated. Therefore, as this study has shown, life coaching clients discover, apply and integrate *self*-knowledge. However, a client of executive or business coaching may be likely to discover, apply and integrate knowledge also, but the knowledge dimensions may differ substantially. Thus, this study demonstrates that the discovery, application and integration of self-knowledge is a fundamental learning process which underpins life coaching. Yet, it also *suggests* that the process of discovering, applying and integrating may be a fundamental learning process which could underpin all coaching, and only the dimensions of knowledge differ, rather than the learning process. Therefore, further research is recommended to validate the learning process which emerged from this study across different types of coaching and to discover the dimensions of knowledge that may be related to different fields of coaching.

Limitations

Any discussion of implications of a study must be considered together with the limitations of the study from which the implications were drawn. A number of

methodological limitations were associated with the use of grounded theory in this study. First and foremost, a potential limitation may be perceived to have arisen through the necessary adherence to common university protocol in completing a thorough review of the literature prior to the start of a study. One of the defining characteristics of traditional grounded theory is the absence of a literature review prior to commencement of a study so as to avoid railroading emergent findings based on current knowledge and assumptions (Cutcliffe, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Despite this, a thorough literature review was completed. However, while this may be considered to be a potential limitation by grounded theory traditionalists, another viewpoint suggests that the use of a literature review to precede data collection in grounded theory studies may serve to gauge what is already known about a phenomenon and in turn devise a logical starting point (Backman & Kyngas, 1999; Cutcliffe, 2000). In particular, Cutcliffe (2000) asserted that “the current extent and depth of knowledge available regarding the phenomenon” (p. 1480) also helps the researcher “to consider what is the most appropriate methodology” (p. 1480) and can help the researcher to make distinctions between related concepts, thus enhancing theoretical sensitivity. This was certainly the case in this study. In fact, it seemed as though I did not choose grounded theory as the methodology, but rather the literature demanded its use. This is as Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested, as the literature review served to identify phenomena for investigation and informed the design of the study as well as the methods of inquiry. Furthermore, in comparing the original theoretical framework (see appendix R) with the learning-centred theory of coaching that emerged in the study, it is clear that the initial review of the literature had been promptly forgotten after its writing and had by no means *forced* the data into pre-existing categories. Indeed, the contrast was such that it strengthened the authenticity of the findings and validated the implementation of grounded theory methods.

A further methodological consideration involves the degree to which data collection and analysis proceeded simultaneously. In this study, much time was spent studying the data prior to in-depth data analysis through detailed note-taking, by listening to interviews repeatedly, as well as self-typing and rereading transcripts. Although this process provided a valuable foundation for later in-depth analysis and key signposts for theoretical sampling and data collection, line-by-line analysis began after approximately 35% of the data had been collected. As a result, early respondents were

selected by means of purposeful maximal variation sampling, rather than theoretical sampling. However, although this is not a common characteristic of traditional grounded theory, recent grounded theorists suggest that purposeful or “selective sampling aimed at phenomenological variation ... then proceeds to theoretical sampling” (Backman & Kyngas, 1999, p. 149). In addition, theoretical sampling was further limited, as it was difficult to establish whether coaches could provide insight into the particular phenomena that were arising in data analysis. As a result, coaches’ background training was used as the criteria for selection in theoretical sampling, and only one coach, who came from my professional network and met the criteria for participating in this study, was theoretically selected based on her knowledge of emergent phenomena.

A final limitation in relation to the implementation of grounded theory in this study arose in the use of interview question guides. While the third, fourth and fifth coach-client sets were theoretically sampled, and because theoretical sampling of the third and fourth coach-client sets was largely based on knowledge of coaches’ background training, rather than the coaches themselves, the same interview guide was used for the first four coach-client sets in order to establish which phenomena they could shed light on. While this is not normally a feature of grounded theory studies, it benefited this study, as it avoided the risk of premature commitment to analytic categories. As a result, this method of interviewing served to verify that the categories emerged authentically, as direct and focused questioning was only used as respondents introduced the phenomena themselves. Finally, after the four coach-client sets, there was enough data to demonstrate that categories were emergent and in no way forced. Thus, in interviews with the final coach-client set, focused interviewing only was needed, which served to fill gaps in the categories and emergent theory.

Other potential limitations are associated with the use of grounded theory, yet as these were identified prior to the study, they have been actively avoided throughout. The possibility for premature commitment to analytic categories is one key risk that can compromise the quality of a grounded theory study (Eaves, 2001), and the power of grounded theory can be compromised by premature commitment to a set of analytic categories governed by a theoretical framework (Creswell, 2002). However, through adherence to the processes described in all stages of the methodology, as well as the

intentional divergence from traditional grounded theory explained above, this limitation was minimised. The use of technical jargon and its meaning has also been identified as a weakness of the grounded theory methodology, as is a general lack of clarity around the key terms such as theory, category and saturation (Eaves, 2001). In response, this study provided extensive explanations of the necessary terms within the chapters on methodology and methods. Lastly, the ongoing debate around the various approaches to grounded theory has the potential to cast doubt upon the authenticity of its application (Eaves, 2001). However, as Eaves suggested (2001), it is irrelevant who is right about grounded theory. More important is the conscious consideration and justification of the application of the chosen methods for their designed purpose. This has been maintained throughout this thesis. Indeed, “every researcher who uses GT method will tend to develop his or her own variations of technique” and therefore “grounded theorists must be open and honest about their methods” (Eaves, 2001, p. 662). This comprehensive explanation of potential limitations associated with grounded theory methodology and the direct explanation provided within this thesis, attempts to provide an audit trail of the grounded theory methods adopted and adapted within this study.

A number of other limitations relate to the study methods and study respondents. The first was the absence of observational data. At the outset of the study, due the confidential, intimate and often vulnerable interaction between coaches and clients, it was not deemed appropriate to use observation as a means of collecting data. Similarly, document collection was also limited, due to the confidentiality implicit in coaching relationships and in most cases, due to the distance and commitments of respondents. However, as the study developed, it became clear how observation would have served as a source of data that may have been used to ensure reliability of findings. Furthermore, with better understanding of the coaching field, it became apparent that observation by way of recorded coaching sessions used for coach certification and mentoring practices would not have presented such a risk in confidentiality. As a result, this study has also identified the value of capitalising on the abundance of recorded coaching sessions used for the purposes of coach certification and mentoring practices in future coaching research.

Secondly, only coaching experiences which were deemed “successful” by both coaches and clients were utilised in this study. In addition, coaches had full control over selection of the clients to participate in this study. As the study progressed, it became apparent that the emergent categories could be better validated by comparing and contrasting the degree to which they were or were not present in coaching experiences which were not deemed “successful”. In fact, this possibility was suggested to participating coaches. However, while some coaches were willing, some were not, and due to the logistical limitations of the study, this avenue was not followed. Therefore, this study has also identified a potentially rich and controversial area for future research in examining the conditions of “unsuccessful” coaching.

Thirdly, limitations exist in relation to the use of purposive snowball sampling. This type of sampling is reliant upon recommendations from significant others, who may or may not be subjective or biased (Cavana et al, 2000). In this study, training schools recommended three of the participating coaches, and all coaches chose their participating clients. Therefore, to some degree, I was not in control of participant selection. Despite this, confirmation of fulfilment of the pre-determined criteria before respondents were invited to become part of the study was aimed to counteract this potential limitation, thereby improving authenticity and generalisability.

Finally, only ICF certified coaches were used in this study. Through the rigours of this certification process and their training from ICF accredited training organisations, this study may only reveal the processes of coaches who were trained or certified as such and may not fit coaches who do not align with the ICF. While this study attempted to address this limitation by recruiting coaches from the Association for Coaching (AC), another professional coaching body based in the UK, this attempt was not successful. This may suggest that these coaches did not have the level of experience of ICF coaches, or that other professional coaching bodies may not have yet reached the maturity of the ICF. As such, the findings of this study, as intended, reflect the practice of *the majority coaching world*, which in turn reflects the trends in the literature, but their generisability to non-ICF coaching bodies remains to be seen. Therefore, another avenue for future research may be an examination of the same or similar processes among non-ICF coaches.

Any qualitative study will attract comment in relation to bias. In this study, this risk presented itself in two forms. The first was respondent bias, particularly in relation to coaches, who may have had a perceived *stake* in promoting a certain kind of coaching that may or may not have been practice-based. This was actively challenged through probing and a focus on actual experience and examples, rather than opinion. Nonetheless, because there was no observation, all data was collected through respondents' fields of interpretation. However, as coaches and their clients were interviewed separately, this process allowed for some comparing and contrasting of data and identification of discrepancies.

The second form of bias was associated with my own subjectivity as the researcher. While this was acknowledged and actively challenged throughout the study, all findings derived from this study emerged through my lens of experience. Although grounded theory suggests that researcher experience is another form of data which assists in the process of analysis, it nevertheless includes some degree of bias. In particular, I exhibited an initial evangelical perception of coaching and an underlying assumption that coaching fostered "good" learning. However, in the light of this potential risk in researcher bias, I engaged in challenging discussions with colleagues and supervisors, and as a result, such biases were actively uncovered and noted in conversations, through memos and a reflective journal. Consequently, bias was minimised, as it was intentionally used to question the data in order to maintain analytic distance.

A further limitation emerged within the process of analytic integration and theory generation. It became apparent that the process of learning in coaching was, in fact, the whole process of coaching, and a whole study could easily have been devoted to each one of the major categories to fully explain the process, properties, dimensions and conditions. As a result, the notion of theoretical saturation in grounded theory, the point at which the collection of more data would be counterproductive to the aims and purpose of the study (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kennedy & Lingard, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), was difficult to define. Therefore, as Charmaz (2003a) suggested, it is "an elastic category that contracts and expands to suit the researcher's definitions rather than any consensual standard" (p. 325), and the study drew to a close when the broad processes had been understood in relation to their influence on

learning. As a result, further research, which specifically examines the individual categories/processes presented in the study findings, is strongly recommended.

In addition, in many instances the data presented some very interesting phenomena, but due to time constraints and sheer manageability of data, they could not be followed up. For example, although behaviour appeared to be part of clients' self-knowledge, within the limitations of this study, it was not possible to gain complete clarity on whether it was integral to the process of discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge or an outcome of it. Psychological literature may have provided important insight into this phenomenon. However, again, because of the logistical limitations of the study and my non-psychological background, integration of psychological literature with the theory was also limited, and focus was maintained on the coaching literature and that of education and learning. Therefore, the findings of this study intentionally incorporated minimal psychological theory, and it appeared that coaching may serve to bridge psychological and learning theory. As it was not permissible within the limitations of this study to validate this claim, future studies which endeavour to gain a thorough understanding of psychological principles in relation to major processes which emerged from the study would be valuable. Similarly, although literature relating to neuro-linguistic programming (Bandler & Grinder, 1982) appears to share a number of links associated with the processes that emerged in this study, neuro-linguistic programming literature has not been included in this discussion. Therefore, future studies, which aim to examine the findings of this study in relation to neuro-linguistic programming, may be worthwhile. Indeed, the sheer breadth of phenomena which seemed to cross-cut so many disciplines emphasises the inter-disciplinary nature of coaching, but also presented a *mission impossible* for a grounded theorist, who used the literature to extend and validate findings. Therefore, the discussion of findings together with the literature needed to be confined to coaching and learning literature, and further research is suggested to account for those other bodies of related literature, such as psychology and neuro-linguistic programming, which may shed more light on the emergent theory.

The final limitation associated with this study relates to the objective of grounded theory methodology, which is to produce *theory*, and this must be borne in mind when considering the findings presented in this thesis. The very purpose of grounded theory

is to avoid imposing pre-determined theoretical assumptions on data, as it aims to provide empirically grounded theory that may be used to fuel future research into areas about which little current knowledge exists. Therefore, it is emphasised that the findings presented here are *theoretical*, and while measures have been taken to ensure validity, reliability, trustworthiness and authenticity, further research needs to be undertaken to quantify the findings. Furthermore, while grounded theorists attempt to generate new theory, by engaging in this study, I discovered that new knowledge is rarely, if ever, new. Therefore, rather than claim that this grounded theory study of learning in life coaching yielded new theory, it would be more appropriate to say that it revealed *new relationships between existing theory*, and with that it fulfilled the aims of grounded theory and responded to the demands of the current bodies of coaching and education literature.

Conclusion

Professional coaching is a rapidly expanding field with interdisciplinary roots and broad applications. However, despite abundant prescriptive literature, research into the process of coaching and especially life coaching is minimal. Similarly, although learning is inherently recognised in the process of coaching, and coaching is increasingly being recognised as a means of enhancing teaching and learning, the process of learning in coaching has been little understood, and learning theory has made up only a small part of the evidence-based coaching literature.

This grounded theory study was aimed at generating new theory to explain the process of learning in life coaching. It addressed the following research questions:

- i. To what degree does learning occur in life coaching?
- ii. What kind of learning occurs during life coaching?
- iii. How does learning occur in life coaching?
- iv. How do coaches facilitate learning?
- v. How do clients experience learning?
- vi. What is the significance of learning in life coaching?

Learning was recognised by respondents as a major process in life coaching (i), which related to clients' knowledge of themselves or self-knowledge (ii). Learning occurred through the development of self as clients discovered, applied and integrated self-knowledge (iii). Within this process, coaches fostered an accepting, honest, trusting, equal and purposeful relationship with clients, questioned and listened to them and held them accountable to learning (iv), while clients reflected, took action, took responsibility and progressed to self-coaching, gradually taking over the processes that were initially facilitated by coaches (v). Finally, the findings of this study demonstrated how this process utilised and combined more than fifteen learning theories, which ultimately served to deepen and accelerate learning (vi).

The findings of this study strengthen the foundations of evidence-based coaching and also provide many directions for future research into coaching. Not only do the findings provide a definition and explanation of the process of learning in life coaching, but they also contribute to making explicit the links between the process of life coaching and existing learning theory. In addition, by explaining how coaches and clients facilitated learning in life coaching and thereby explaining many key coaching processes which, to date, have remained unexplained, the findings of this study have significant potential to directly inform coaching practice. Lastly, as this thesis provides a learning-centred theory of coaching that explains how learning in life coaching occurs by developing self through discovering, applying and integrating self-knowledge, these findings may be used as a springboard for utilising coaching processes within schools and other educational settings to deepen and accelerate learning.

Appendices

Appendix A

ICF Core Coaching Competences – Page 1/4

Coaching Core Competencies

The following eleven core coaching competencies were developed to support greater understanding about the skills and approaches used within today's coaching profession as defined by the ICF. They will also support you in calibrating the level of alignment between the coach-specific training expected and the training you have experienced.

Finally, these competencies were used as the foundation for the ICF Credentialing process examination. The core competencies are grouped into four clusters according to those that fit together logically based on common ways of looking at the competencies in each group. The groupings and individual competencies are not weighted - they do not represent any kind of priority in that they are all core or critical for any competent coach to demonstrate.

[View Professional Coaching Core Competencies As PDF File](#)

A. SETTING THE FOUNDATION

1. MEETING ETHICAL GUIDELINES AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS
2. ESTABLISHING THE COACHING AGREEMENT

B. CO-CREATING THE RELATIONSHIP

3. ESTABLISHING TRUST AND INTIMACY WITH THE CLIENT
4. COACHING PRESENCE

C. COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

5. ACTIVE LISTENING
6. POWERFUL QUESTIONING
7. DIRECT COMMUNICATION

D. FACILITATING LEARNING AND RESULTS

8. CREATING AWARENESS
9. DESIGNING ACTIONS
10. PLANNING AND GOAL SETTING
11. MANAGING PROGRESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

NOTE: Each competency listed on the following pages has a definition and related behaviors. Behaviors are classified as either those that should always be present and visible in any coaching interaction (in regular font), or those that are called for in certain coaching situations and, therefore, not always visible in any one coaching interaction (in italics).

A. SETTING THE FOUNDATION

1. **Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards** - Understanding of coaching ethics and standards and ability to apply them appropriately in all coaching situations
 - a. *Understands and exhibits in own behaviors the ICF Standards of Conduct (see list, Part III of ICF Code of Ethics),*
 - b. *Understands and follows all ICF Ethical Guidelines (see list),*
 - c. *Clearly communicates the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions,*

Appendix A

ICF Core Coaching Competences – Page 2/4

- d. *Refers client to another support professional as needed, knowing when this is needed and the available resources.*
- 2. **Establishing the Coaching Agreement** - Ability to understand what is required in the specific coaching interaction and to come to agreement with the prospective and new client about the coaching process and relationship
 - a. *Understands and effectively discusses with the client the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship (e.g., logistics, fees, scheduling, inclusion of others if appropriate),*
 - b. *Reaches agreement about what is appropriate in the relationship and what is not, what is and is not being offered, and about the client's and coach's responsibilities,*
 - c. *Determines whether there is an effective match between his/her coaching method and the needs of the prospective client.*

B. CO-CREATING THE RELATIONSHIP

- 3. **Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client** - Ability to create a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust
 - a. *Shows genuine concern for the client's welfare and future,*
 - b. *Continuously demonstrates personal integrity, honesty and sincerity,*
 - c. *Establishes clear agreements and keeps promises,*
 - d. *Demonstrates respect for client's perceptions, learning style, personal being,*
 - e. *Provides ongoing support for and champions new behaviors and actions, including those involving risk taking and fear of failure,*
 - f. *Asks permission to coach client in sensitive, new areas.*
- 4. **Coaching Presence** - Ability to be fully conscious and create spontaneous relationship with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident
 - a. *Is present and flexible during the coaching process, dancing in the moment,*
 - b. *Accesses own intuition and trusts one's inner knowing - "goes with the gut",*
 - c. *Is open to not knowing and takes risks,*
 - d. *Sees many ways to work with the client, and chooses in the moment what is most effective,*
 - e. *Uses humor effectively to create lightness and energy,*
 - f. *Confidently shifts perspectives and experiments with new possibilities for own action,*
 - g. *Demonstrates confidence in working with strong emotions, and can self-manage and not be overpowered or enmeshed by client's emotions.*

C. COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

- 5. **Active Listening** - Ability to focus completely on what the client is saying and is not saying, to understand the meaning of what is said in the context of the client's desires, and to support client self-expression
 - a. *Attends to the client and the client's agenda, and not to the coach's agenda for the client,*
 - b. *Hears the client's concerns, goals, values and beliefs about what is and is not possible,*
 - c. *Distinguishes between the words, the tone of voice, and the body language,*
 - d. *Summarizes, paraphrases, reiterates, mirrors back what client has said to ensure clarity and understanding,*
 - e. *Encourages, accepts, explores and reinforces the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, suggestions, etc.,*
 - f. *Integrates and builds on client's ideas and suggestions,*
 - g. *"Bottom-lines" or understands the essence of the client's communication and helps the client get there rather than engaging in long descriptive stories,*
 - h. *Allows the client to vent or "clear" the situation without judgment or attachment in order to move on to next steps.*

Appendix A

ICF Core Coaching Competences – Page 3/4

6. **Powerful Questioning** - Ability to ask questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client
 - a. Asks questions that reflect active listening and an understanding of the client's perspective,
 - b. Asks questions that evoke discovery, insight, commitment or action (e.g., those that challenge the client's assumptions),
 - c. Asks open-ended questions that create greater clarity, possibility or new learning
 - d. Asks questions that move the client toward what they desire, not questions that ask for the client to justify or look backwards.
7. **Direct Communication** - Ability to communicate effectively during coaching sessions, and to use language that has the greatest positive impact on the client
 - a. Is clear, articulate and direct in sharing and providing feedback,
 - b. Reframes and articulates to help the client understand from another perspective what he/she wants or is uncertain about,
 - c. Clearly states coaching objectives, meeting agenda, purpose of techniques or exercises,
 - d. Uses language appropriate and respectful to the client (e.g., non-sexist, non-racist, non-technical, non-jargon),
 - e. *Uses metaphor and analogy to help to illustrate a point or paint a verbal picture.*

D. FACILITATING LEARNING AND RESULTS

8. **Creating Awareness** - Ability to integrate and accurately evaluate multiple sources of information, and to make interpretations that help the client to gain awareness and thereby achieve agreed-upon results
 - a. Goes beyond what is said in assessing client's concerns, not getting hooked by the client's description,
 - b. Invokes inquiry for greater understanding, awareness and clarity,
 - c. Identifies for the client his/her underlying concerns, typical and fixed ways of perceiving himself/herself and the world, differences between the facts and the interpretation, disparities between thoughts, feelings and action,
 - d. Helps clients to discover for themselves the new thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, moods, etc. that strengthen their ability to take action and achieve what is important to them,
 - e. Communicates broader perspectives to clients and inspires commitment to shift their viewpoints and find new possibilities for action,
 - f. Helps clients to see the different, interrelated factors that affect them and their behaviors (e.g., thoughts, emotions, body, background),
 - g. Expresses insights to clients in ways that are useful and meaningful for the client,
 - h. *Identifies major strengths vs. major areas for learning and growth, and what is most important to address during coaching,*
 - i. *Asks the client to distinguish between trivial and significant issues, situational vs. recurring behaviors, when detecting a separation between what is being stated and what is being done.*
9. **Designing Actions** - Ability to create with the client opportunities for ongoing learning, during coaching and in work/life situations, and for taking new actions that will most effectively lead to agreed-upon coaching results
 - a. Brainstorms and assists the client to define actions that will enable the client to demonstrate, practice and deepen new learning,
 - b. Helps the client to focus on and systematically explore specific concerns and opportunities that are central to agreed-upon coaching goals,
 - c. Engages the client to explore alternative ideas and solutions, to evaluate options, and to make related decisions,

Appendix A

ICF Core Coaching Competences – Page 4/4

- d. Promotes active experimentation and self-discovery, where the client applies what has been discussed and learned during sessions immediately afterwards in his/her work or life setting,
- e. Celebrates client successes and capabilities for future growth,
- f. Challenges client's assumptions and perspectives to provoke new ideas and find new possibilities for action,
- g. *Advocates or brings forward points of view that are aligned with client goals and, without attachment, engages the client to consider them,*
- h. *Helps the client "Do It Now" during the coaching session, providing immediate support,*
- i. *Encourages stretches and challenges but also a comfortable pace of learning.*
- 10. **Planning and Goal Setting** - Ability to develop and maintain an effective coaching plan with the client
 - a. Consolidates collected information and establishes a coaching plan and development goals with the client that address concerns and major areas for learning and development,
 - b. Creates a plan with results that are attainable, measurable, specific and have target dates,
 - c. Makes plan adjustments as warranted by the coaching process and by changes in the situation,
 - d. *Helps the client identify and access different resources for learning (e.g., books, other professionals),*
 - e. *Identifies and targets early successes that are important to the client.*
- 11. **Managing Progress and Accountability** - Ability to hold attention on what is important for the client, and to leave responsibility with the client to take action
 - a. Clearly requests of the client actions that will move the client toward their stated goals,
 - b. Demonstrates follow through by asking the client about those actions that the client committed to during the previous session(s),
 - c. Acknowledges the client for what they have done, not done, learned or become aware of since the previous coaching session(s),
 - d. Effectively prepares, organizes and reviews with client information obtained during sessions,
 - e. *Keeps the client on track between sessions by holding attention on the coaching plan and outcomes, agreed-upon courses of action, and topics for future session(s),*
 - f. *Focuses on the coaching plan but is also open to adjusting behaviors and actions based on the coaching process and shifts in direction during sessions,*
 - g. *Is able to move back and forth between the big picture of where the client is heading, setting a context for what is being discussed and where the client wishes to go,*
 - h. *Promotes client's self-discipline and holds the client accountable for what they say they are going to do, for the results of an intended action, or for a specific plan with related time frames,*
 - i. *Develops the client's ability to make decisions, address key concerns, and develop himself/herself (to get feedback, to determine priorities and set the pace of learning, to reflect on and learn from experiences),*
 - j. *Positively confronts the client with the fact that he/she did not take agreed-upon actions.*

Appendix B

Email to training schools with coach selection criteria

Date

Dear ,

Your coach training has been recommended as one which develops and delivers quality coaches within the coaching world. I am currently conducting a PhD study into the dimensions of learning within life/personal coaching and would therefore like to draw upon the accumulated experiences of one of your coaches. I have attached an information sheet to this letter so that you may fully understand the aims and details of the study.

I would like you to nominate up to five coaches who predominantly coach using your model and focus on personal/life coaching clients. The coaches need to have coached for at least two years and had at least ten paying clients for a minimum of twelve hours over period of three months or more. Their accumulated paid coaching hours should be approximately 500 or more. It is preferable that these coaches also be ICF certified, except if you feel that a particular unaccredited coach would be a valuable source of data. Lastly, for the purposes of this study, it is necessary that these coaches do not have a professional background in education.

In the near future, I will follow up this email to seek your suggestions for potential coaches to approach after you have had time to give it some thought. Alternatively however, you may simply send me an email including their names and email addresses, after which I will contact them to determine their interest. I also invite you to contact me if you have any questions about the details of the study. I thank you for your time and look forward to the potential opportunity of working with you and your coaches in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Kerryn Griffiths

Appendix C

Participant selection introductory email – Page 1/2

Date

Dear ,

You have been nominated by your coach training school to be considered for participation in a study that aims to explore the dimensions of learning in life coaching and draws upon the experiences of up to ten coaches potentially from around the world who each coach using a unique coaching model. I have attached a summary of the study for your information.

For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to ensure that your professional background and experiences are complimentary to its aims. Therefore, if you have read the attached summary and would like to participate, it would be greatly appreciated if you could complete the attached questionnaire and return it to me within the next seven days. All responses to this questionnaire will remain confidential and formal invitations to participate in this study will be sent out pending the evaluation of all interested participants.

I thank you for your time and look forward to the potential opportunity of working with you in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Kerryn Griffiths

Appendix C

Participant selection introductory email – Page 2/2

Date

Dear ,

Thank you for your interest in participating in a study that aims to explore the dimensions of learning in life coaching. The study hopes to draw upon the experiences of up to ten coaches potentially from around the world who each coach using a unique coaching model. I have attached a summary of the study for your information.

For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to ensure that your professional background and experiences are complimentary to its aims. Therefore, if you have read the attached summary and would like to participate, it would be greatly appreciated if you could complete the attached questionnaire and return it to me within the next seven days. All responses to this questionnaire will remain confidential.

Once again, I thank you for your interest and look forward to the potential opportunity of working with you in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Kerryn Griffiths

Appendix D

Participant information sheet – Page 1/2

The Dimensions of Learning in Life Coaching

Information Sheet

Background

The success of life coaching in enhancing individuals' life experience, self-awareness and personal empowerment is gaining increased media and public attention. Despite this, as a profession it still lacks a significant body of knowledge to claim credible foundations. Large gaps exist in the understanding of what coaching is and how it works and in particular, there appear to be few investigations or texts which explore learning in coaching explicitly. However, numerous texts and studies refer to learning as an implicit part of coaching that leads to successful coaching outcomes. Therefore a study of the learning processes underlying coaching practice is warranted and indeed, much needed.

Focus of the study

This study aims to explore the dimensions of learning in life coaching through the experiences of coaches and clients across a range of coaching models. In doing so, the active learning processes underlying life coaching practice and the factors which give rise to them will be explained. The coaches invited to participate in this study will be International Coach Federation (ICF) certified (or equivalent) coaches who each have a different coach training background and therefore now coach using a unique model. Unlike other studies that explore coaching from only one perspective, this study also ties together the experiences of both coaches and their respective clients. Coaches will speak from their accumulated experience with many clients, while their past/current clients will share their personal experience as a client within the process. In both cases, the study aims to explore learning within coaching partnerships: what kind of learning happens and how it comes about, which will be revealed through the accounts and recollections of real examples from both coach and client perspectives.

Participants/ interviewees in the study

Up to ten coaches will be recruited for the study and may be located in different parts of the world. Selected coaches will be sent an invitation and will be asked to seek the agreement of one past/current client to participate, selection of which will be guided by a simple checklist. Coaches and clients from each approach will be interviewed separately and all interviews will be informal, largely unstructured and will be conducted by phone. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed and transcriptions will be given to the relevant participants for checking, comments and amendments. Participants will be reimbursed for any costs incurred by participating in this study.

Appendix D

Participant information sheet – Page 2/2

Stages of data collection

The project is divided into several stages of data collection and analysis, each of which will focus on a different aspect of the study as follows.

Stage One: July 2005 - February 2006 Preliminary Coach/Client Interviews

Interviews with coaches and their past and current client sets across a broad spectrum of coaching approaches.

Stage Two: March 2006 – December 2006 Focused Coach/Client Interviews

Focused interviews with targeted coaches/clients in order to develop and extend themes which emerged within stage one. These may include interviews with new and current participants.

Previously collected data will be used to guide ongoing selection of coach-client sets for participation in the study and to determine necessary follow-ups. Follow-up interviews may occur at any time until December 2006.

Relevant document collection of coaching worksheets, notes or other documentation will occur with permission throughout all stages of the study. Finally, participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or comment.

Estimated timeline for study completion

Whilst data collection has the potential to continue until December 2006, findings will be in the process of being developed and written up throughout 2006. In this way, it is expected that the study will be drawn to a close, finalised and presented between December 2006 and June 2007.

Reporting

All participant comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially and the names of individual persons are not required in any of the responses. Findings from this study will make up a PhD thesis and this will be available online worldwide via various dissertation databases. It is also anticipated that findings from this study will be included in conference papers and journal articles. These papers will be made available to each of the participants as they are disseminated or published. It is also possible that the findings from this study may lead to the publication of a book relating to learning in coaching.

Ethics

This project will adhere to strict ethical procedures at all times. Please contact the Research Ethics Officer on + 61 7 3864 2340 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this project.

Researcher

Kerryn Griffiths (Tel: +61 7 3393 3234; Email: k4.griffiths@student.qut.edu.au)
Centre for Learning Innovation, Queensland University of Technology.

Appendix E

Coach questionnaire

Potential Participant Questionnaire for Coaches
Please provide the following information and return within 7 days
All responses will remain confidential

Full Name					
Email					
International Postal Address					
International Telephone		Fax		Mobile Cell	
How long have you been coaching?					
How many hours of paid coaching have you accumulated?					
How many clients have you coached for three months or longer?					
What is your current coaching load? <i>i.e. avg hours/month</i>					
Which level of ICF certification do you hold?					
What kind of coaching do you predominantly do? <i>e.g. personal/life, executive, workplace, business etc</i>					
Do you have a professional background in education? <i>If yes, please give details</i>					
What coach specific training have you done? <i>Please give details</i>					
To what degree do you still coach using this/these model/s and or style/s?					
How would you describe the model, approach or strategy you currently use?					
How would you describe your personal coaching style?					

Thank you for your time. You will be hearing from me soon!
Kerryn

Appendix F

Coach invitation

Date

Dear ,

I wish to invite you and one of your recently completed clients to participate in a study that aims to explore learning in life/personal coaching and understand the factors which give rise to it. As you have been identified as a longstanding and well-experienced life/personal coach operating with a unique coaching approach and with a background that complements this study's aims, your experiences and observations are of particular interest to me.

The study, "The Dimensions of Learning in Life Coaching", will draw upon the experiences of up to ten coaches, who each coach using a unique coaching approach, and their respective clients. Your participation will involve engaging in one phone interview of approximately an hour in length, in addition to the possibility of up to three shorter follow-up interviews until December 2006. During these conversations I will be asking you questions to probe the depths of your experience and observations in relation to learning in coaching. Should you choose to participate, you are also required to nominate and obtain prior agreement of one of your past clients as soon as possible. A checklist to guide your choice of clients is attached to this email. Participation for this client is expected to require up to an hour's interview, again with the possibility of one or two follow-up interviews until December 2006. This time will be used to explore your clients' personal experiences and perspectives of learning during their coaching series with you. All interviews will be recorded and you and your client will be given copies of your transcripts for your perusal, comments, additions and/or amendments. Finally, to participate in this study I may also ask both you and your client for permission to peruse any coaching related documentation that may provide further insight into this study.

There are a number of benefits that both you and your client would gain through participating in this study. Participating coaches have found participation rewarding and have remarked on how the interview process has further clarified the processes in which they are engaging. For your past clients, engaging in interviews with me will give them the opportunity to review, reflect and reconnect with the insights and discoveries made during their coaching. This has the potential to give added value to the service you provide. In addition, not only will you have the opportunity to develop a conscious understanding of the learning you are facilitating in your role as a coach, but both you and your client may develop a greater awareness of your own learning processes. Lastly, through your participation in this study you will be significantly contributing to the current urgency of growing the body of evidence-based coaching theory and literature. This has positive implications for coaching as a profession and therefore for the future of all coaches.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation in this project. All of your comments and responses will be treated confidentially and as a participant you will remain anonymous. Findings gathered through this study are likely to be published in international journals and conference proceedings and the entire study will be accessible worldwide via the internet.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you may withdraw from participation at any time during the project without comment or penalty and your decision to participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT. As a student of the university I am obligated to follow very strict ethical procedures at all times. Please contact the Research Ethics Officer on 3864 2340 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this project.

Please find attached a copy of the information sheet which outlines the details of this study. In addition, I'm available to discuss any questions or concerns that you may have in relation to this study. Please don't hesitate to call or email me at any time. I will follow up this email to determine your interest in the next few days or alternatively you may let me know via email of your decision. Should you wish to participate you will also be asked to agree to a statement of consent which will be emailed upon receipt of your interest in participating. I hope that you and your client will be able to participate in this study and help to generate further understanding and recognition of the power of the coaching process.

Yours sincerely,

Kerryn Griffiths

Appendix G

Informed consent

Research Project: The Dimensions of Learning in Life Coaching

Kerryn Griffiths
Centre for Learning Innovation
Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane, Australia

Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information about this project detailed within the information sheet and your letter of invitation;
- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction;
- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the researcher;
- understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty;
- understand that you can contact the researcher if you have any questions about the project, or the Research Ethics Officer on 3864 2340 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project;
- agree to participate in the project.

Name

Signature

Date

____ / ____ / ____

Appendix H

Criteria for selecting client participants

Client Selection Checklists

Please use the checklists below to guide your choice of participating clients. When you have found a past client who fulfils the criteria and is interested in becoming part of the study, please inform me, after which an invitation will be sent to this client. Use the second checklist when approaching a new/current client for participation. Advise me when you have established their interest and I will send them an invitation. New clients need to be found within two months of your invitation letter. Please let me know if this will not be possible.

Checklist to guide selection of past client

- ☐ self-initiated the opportunity to be coached
- ☐ had a minimum of 12 hours of coaching with you over a period of at least 3 months
- ☐ paid for this service
- ☐ was coached toward goals that were predominantly personal/life-related
- ☐ self-reports their coaching to have been successful
- ☐ has no professional background or professional experience directly in education
- ☐ is not a coach or is not in training to become a coach
- ☐ agrees to participate in the study
- ☐ predominantly engaged in coaching by phone (if interviews will be conducted by phone)

Checklist to guide selection of new/current client

- ☐ self-initiated the opportunity to be coached
- ☐ signed agreement for a minimum of 12 hours of coaching with you over a period of at least 3 months
- ☐ agreed to pay for this service
- ☐ is going to be coached toward goals that are predominantly personal/life-related
- ☐ has no professional background or professional experience directly in education
- ☐ is not a coach or is not in training to become a coach
- ☐ agrees to participate in the study
- ☐ predominantly engaged in coaching by phone (if interviews will be conducted by phone)

Appendix I
Client invitation

Date

Dear ,

I wish to invite you to participate in a study that aims to explore the dimensions of learning in life/personal coaching. Your coach, ___, is taking part in this study and has identified you as one of his/her clients who has had an in-depth and successful experience of life coaching. I am therefore interested in hearing about your experiences. The study, “The Dimensions of Learning in Life Coaching”, will draw upon coaching experiences like yours in order to develop new coaching theory. You may refer to the attached information sheet for details about this study.

The study will comprise of up to ten coaches and twenty of their respective clients potentially from around the world. Your involvement is expected to require up to an hour’s interview, with the possibility of one or two short follow-up interviews until December 2006. This time will be used to explore your personal experiences and perspectives of learning during your coaching series with ___. At different stages, I may also ask for your permission to access your personal coaching folder, worksheets and any work you did in relation to coaching.

All interviews will be recorded and you will be given copies of interview transcripts for your perusal, comments, additions and/or amendments. This study has the potential to offer you a number of benefits. Firstly you will be given a valuable opportunity to revisit and talk about your experiences of coaching, thus consolidating and deepening your developments, achievements and lessons. This is likely to add a new and enriching dimension to your coaching experience. Furthermore, you are likely to gain a greater awareness of your own learning style, which can stand you in good stead for future learning and goal achievement. Lastly, through your participation in this study you will be contributing to the wider acceptance of coaching as well as furthering the understanding of modes of learning.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation in this project. All of your comments and responses will be treated confidentially and as a participant you will remain anonymous. Findings gathered through this study are likely to be published in international journals and conference proceedings and the entire study will be accessible worldwide via the internet.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you may withdraw from participation at any time during the project without comment or penalty and your decision to participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT. As a student of the university I am obligated to follow very strict ethical procedures at all times. Please contact the Research Ethics Officer on 3864 2340 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this project.

I’m available to discuss any questions or concerns that you may have in relation to this study. Please don’t hesitate to call or email me at any time. I will follow up this email to determine your interest or alternatively you may let me know via email of your decision. Directly after this email, I will send you another email titled “Statement of Consent”. Should you wish to participate, you will simply need to read the email and if you are in agreement, click “reply” and “send” from your usual email address, ensuring that the text remains in the body of the email. I hope that you will be able to participate in this study and help to generate further understanding and recognition of the coaching process in order to maximise its impact on more people like you.

Yours sincerely,

Kerryn Griffiths

Appendix J

Piloted interview questions – Page 1/3

Sample Interview Questions for Coaches

Background

- What made you decide to become a coach?
- What did you do before coaching? How this influence your coaching?
- What do you enjoy about the coaching process now?
- What do you feel are the most important aspects of your coaching?
- What makes _____ (*name aspect*) so important? (*repeat for each*)
- How would you describe your coaching style?

Process

- What are the specific aspects of the coaching process that you assume move clients forward in their lives?
- In what ways have you noticed clients participating in the coaching process to move themselves forward in their lives?
- How would you describe the coaching process that you use?
- What do you do in a typical session?

Learning

- What evidence is there of client 'learning' while they're in coaching?
- How would you describe the learning that occurs during your coaching process?
- Across your clients, what are some common characteristics of learning during coaching?
- What is it about your coaching process that makes this happen?
- How do you recognise client learning?
- What are the most likely aspects of your coaching process that makes learning happen?
- Can you recall some specific examples of when this happened with certain clients?
- At which stages of your coaching process does learning most frequently occur?
- Can you recall some specific examples of when this happened with certain clients?
- In your experience, what brings clients to the point when they learn something? Can you recall some specific examples of when this happened with certain clients?
- To what degree do you as a coach facilitate learning? How do you do this?
- To what degree do your clients facilitate their own learning? How do they do this?
- How is learning in coaching different/similar to learning done in school/uni/other courses?
- To what degree do clients learn through: action/experience; reflection; conversation/coaching session; challenges/issues; problems (examples)
- What makes some clients learn more than others?
- How often do you feel you learn from your clients? (specific examples)
- What is it about certain things during coaching that make it a point of learning for you?

Appendix J

Piloted interview questions – Page 2/3

Sample Interview Questions for Past Clients

Background

- What made you decide to go and see a life coach? How did that form a part of your coaching experience?
- What did you enjoy about the coaching process?
- What did you feel were the most important aspects of coaching for you?
- What makes _____ (*name aspect*) so important? (*repeat for each*)
- How would you describe your coach's style?

Process

- How would you describe the overall process of coaching that changed your life?
- What was your coach's role in this process?
- How was this similar/different to what you'd normally do?
- What was your role in the coaching process?
- How was this similar/different to what you'd normally do?
- What did you do in a typical session?

Learning

- To what degree did you learn while you were in coaching?
- How do you know that you learnt?
- How would you describe the learning that occurred for you?
- What exactly did you learn during coaching?
- What was it that brought about this learning?
- What was your coach's role in this?
- What was your role?
- Can you recall some specific examples during your coaching when this happened? (specific examples)
- At which stages in your coaching did learning occur? Can you recall some specific examples of when this happened?
- What would you say brought you to the point of learning? How would you describe this point? Can you recall some specific examples of when this happened?
- To what degree did your coach facilitate your learning? How did s/he do this?
- To what degree did you facilitate your own learning? How did you do this?
- How was the learning that you experienced in coaching different/similar to learning you've done in school/uni/other courses?
- To what degree did you learn through: action/experience; reflection; conversation/coaching session; challenges/issues; problems (examples)

Appendix J

Piloted interview questions – Page 3/3

Sample Interview Questions for Current Clients

Background

- What made you decide to go and see a life coach? How is that forming a part of your coaching experience?
- What do you enjoy about the coaching process now?
- What are the most important aspects of the coaching process for you now?
- What makes _____ (*name aspect*) so important? (*repeat for each*)
- How would you describe your coach's style?

Process

- How would you describe the overall process of coaching as you see it now?
- What is your coach's role in this process?
- How is this similar/different to what you'd normally do?
- What is your role in the coaching process?
- How is this similar/different to what you'd normally do?
- What do you do in a typical session?

Learning

- To what degree do you learn during your coaching sessions?
- To what degree are you learning through the whole process of coaching?
- How do you know that you are learning?
- How would you describe the learning that is unfolding for you?
- What exactly are you learning from coaching?
- What is it that is bringing about this learning?
- What is your coach's role in this?
- What is your role?
- What are some recent experiences of this happening? (specific examples)
- How would you describe the stage that you're at now in coaching?
- What would you say brought you to the point of learning? How would you describe this point? Can you recall some specific examples this happening?
- To what degree is your coach facilitating your learning? How is s/he doing this?
- To what degree are you facilitating your own learning? How are you doing this?
- How is the learning that you are experiencing in coaching different/similar to learning you've done in school/uni/other courses?
- To what degree are you learn through: action/experience; reflection; conversation/coaching session; challenges/issues; problems (examples)

Appendix K

Interview guides – Page 1/4

Coach

Preliminary Coach Interviews (up to 1 hour)

Background

- ☐ What is it that often brings clients to you?
 - What do they often end up getting out of coaching?

Coaching Process

- ☐ Could you step me through the process you follow with most of your clients?
 - How does this process compare to what people normally do when they are going about doing something without a coach?

Document Collection

- ☐ What documents do you have that might support anything you've said today?
E.g. coach/client materials, resources, notes

Extended Coach Interviews (1-2 hours)

Learning

- ☐ Would you say that your clients learn much through coaching?
 - How do you know?
- ☐ What do you understand learning as?
 - How does this happen in coaching?
- ☐ How does the learning clients experience in coaching compare with the learning done in other contexts e.g. school/uni/other training?
- ☐ Do you have clients who seem to learn more than others? Could you tell me about the differences between the clients who seem to have 'big learning' and those who don't?
- ☐ What about you – how often do you learn from your clients?

Document Collection

- ☐ What documents do you have that might support anything you've said today?
E.g. coach/client materials, resources, notes

Follow-Up Interviews (up to 3x approx. 30mins)

- ☐ Pinpoint any gaps in knowledge and design questions to elicit knowledge
- ☐ Pinpoint areas for follow-up from prior interviews and design questions to uncover further information
- ☐ Pinpoint areas for follow-up from document collection and design questions
 - I noticed that you seemed to have big learning around.... how did that happen?

Appendix K

Interview guides – Page 2/4

Past Client Interviews (1-2 hours)

Background

- ☐ What made you decide to go and see a life coach?
 - What did you end up getting out of it?

Coaching Process

- ☐ Could you step me through the process you and your coach followed?
 - How does this process compare to what you'd normally do when you go about doing something?

Learning

- ☐ Would you say you learnt much from coaching?
 - How do you know?
- ☐ What do you understand learning as?
 - How did this happen in coaching?
- ☐ How does the learning you experienced in coaching compare with the learning you've done in other contexts e.g. school/uni/other training?

Document Collection

- ☐ What documents do you have that might support anything you've said today? E.g. coach/client materials, resources, notes

Follow-Up Interviews (up to 3x approx. 30mins)

- ☐ Pinpoint any gaps in knowledge and design questions to elicit knowledge
- ☐ Pinpoint areas for follow-up from prior interviews and design questions to uncover further information
- ☐ Pinpoint areas for follow-up from document collection and design questions
 - I noticed that you seemed to have big learning around.... how did that happen?

Appendix K

Interview guides – Page 3/4

Current Client Interviews (3x 30mins-1hour)

After Session 4

Background

- ☐ What made you decide to go and see a life coach?
 - ☐ What are you actually getting out of it?

Coaching Process

- ☐ Could you step me through the process you and your coach have followed so far/since our last conversation?
 - ☐ How does this process compare to what you'd normally do when you go about doing something?

Learning

- ☐ Have you learnt much so far/since our last conversation?
 - ☐ How do you know?
- ☐ What do you understand learning as?
 - ☐ How is this happening in coaching?
 - ☐ How does the learning you're experiencing in coaching compare with the learning you've done

Document Collection

- ☐ What documents do you have that might support anything you've said today? E.g. coach/client materials, resources, notes

After Session 8

Background

- ☐ What do you feel you are getting out of coaching at the moment?

Coaching Process

- ☐ Could you step me through the process you and your coach have followed since our last conversation?
 - ☐ How does this process compare to what you'd normally do when you go about doing something?

Learning

- ☐ Have you learnt much since our last conversation?
 - ☐ How do you know?
- ☐ In our first interview, you said that learning is ...? Has your understanding of learning changed since we last spoke? What do you now see learning as?
 - ☐ How is this happening in coaching?
- ☐ How does the learning you're experiencing in coaching now compare with the learning you've done in other contexts e.g. school/uni/other training?

Document Collection

- ☐ What documents do you have that might support anything you've said today? E.g. coach/client materials, resources, notes

After Session 12

Background

- ☐ What do you feel you have gotten out coaching?

Coaching Process

- ☐ Could you step me through the process you and your coach have followed since our last conversation?
 - ☐ How does this process compare to what you'd normally do when you go about doing something?

Learning

- ☐ Have you learnt much since our last conversation?
 - ☐ How do you know?
- ☐ In our first interview, you said that learning is ...? Has your understanding of learning changed since we last spoke? What do you now see learning as?
 - ☐ How is this happening in coaching?
- ☐ How does the learning you've experienced in coaching compare with the learning you've done in other contexts e.g. school/uni/other training?

Appendix K

Interview guides – Page 4/4

Document Collection

- What documents do you have that might support anything you've said today? E.g. coach/client materials, resources, notes

Follow-Up Interview (*possibility of 1 of approx. 30mins if permission is granted*)

- Pinpoint any gaps in knowledge and design questions to elicit knowledge
- Pinpoint areas for follow-up from prior interviews and design questions to uncover further information
- Pinpoint areas for follow-up from document collection and design questions
 - I noticed that you seemed to have big learning around.... how did that happen?

Across the board for 'digging':

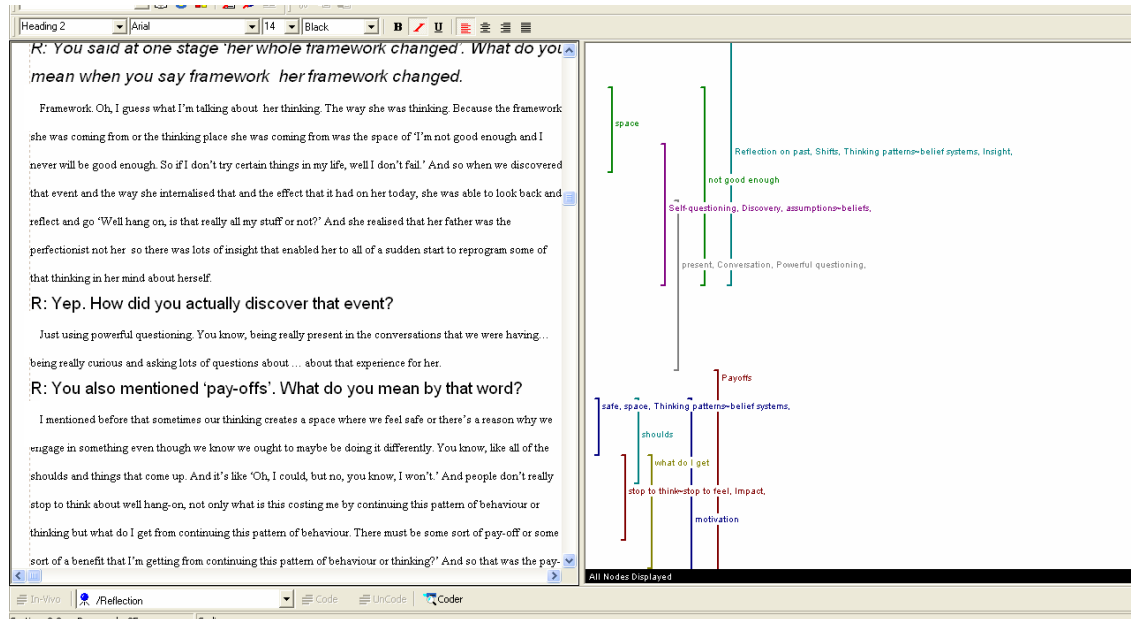
- *Coach's role*
- *Client's role*
- *Typical session*
 - *Examples, evidence, explanation, detail, stories, tours, sequence to find out how learning came about*
 - *Listen for significant factors e.g. action/experience; reflection; conversation/coaching session; challenges/issues; problems, goal, motivation, focus, coincidence, social interaction, coaching relationship*
 - *Useful questions throughout to dig deeper:*
 - *How did that work?*
 - *What do you mean when you say ...?*
 - *Can you give me an example?*
 - *You said ... how did that actually come about?*
 - *You could've done ... before – what is it about coaching that got you to do actually it?*
 - *How is the coach ...? How are you ...? How is the session...?*

****NB.** ... represents insertion of interviewees' words

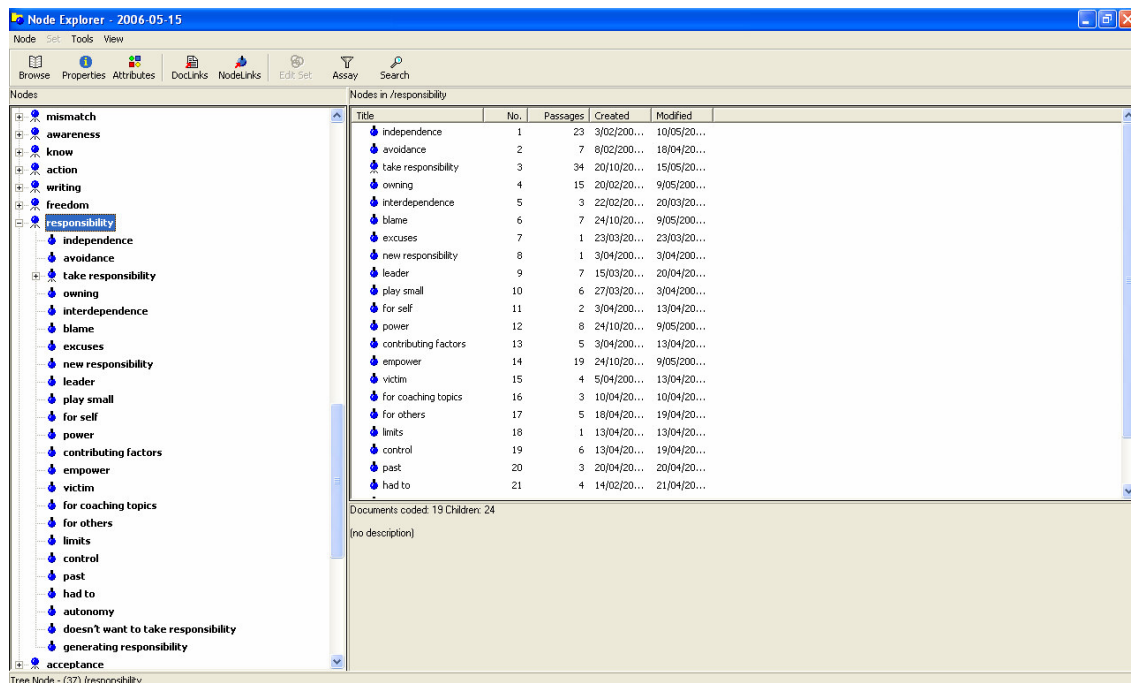
Appendix L

Examples of coding

Example of line-by-line coding in Nvivo



Example of major categories (relating, listening) and sub-categories from Nvivo



Appendix M

ICF Code of Ethics – Page 1/3

The ICF CODE OF ETHICS

Part One: The ICF Philosophy of Coaching

The International Coach Federation adheres to a form of coaching that honors the client as the expert in his/her life and work and believes that every client is creative, resourceful, and whole. Standing on this foundation, the coach's responsibility is to:

- Discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve
- Encourage client self-discovery
- Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies
- Hold the client responsible and accountable

Part Two: The ICF Definition of Coaching

Professional Coaching is an ongoing professional relationship that helps people produce extraordinary results in their lives, careers, businesses or organizations. Through the process of coaching, clients deepen their learning, improve their performance, and enhance their quality of life.

In each meeting, the client chooses the focus of conversation, while the coach listens and contributes observations and questions. This interaction creates clarity and moves the client into action. Coaching accelerates the client's progress by providing greater focus and awareness of choice. Coaching concentrates on where clients are now and what they are willing to do to get where they want to be in the future. ICF member coaches and ICF credentialed coaches recognize that results are a matter of the client's intentions, choices and actions, supported by the coach's efforts and application of the coaching process

Part Three: The ICF Standards of Ethical Conduct

Professional Conduct At Large

As a coach:

- 1) I will conduct myself in a manner that reflects positively upon the coaching profession and I will refrain from engaging in conduct or making statements that may negatively impact the public's understanding or acceptance of coaching as a profession.
- 2) I will not knowingly make any public statements that are untrue or misleading, or make false claims in any written documents relating to the coaching profession.
- 3) I will respect different approaches to coaching. I will honor the efforts and contributions of others and not misrepresent them as my own.
- 4) I will be aware of any issues that may potentially lead to the misuse of my influence by recognizing the nature of coaching and the way in which it may affect the lives of others.

Appendix M

ICF Code of Ethics – Page 2/3

- 5) I will at all times strive to recognize personal issues that may impair, conflict or interfere with my coaching performance or my professional relationships. Whenever the facts and circumstances necessitate, I will promptly seek professional assistance and determine the action to be taken, including whether it is appropriate to suspend or terminate my coaching relationship(s).
- 6) As a trainer or supervisor of current and potential coaches, I will conduct myself in accordance with the ICF Code of Ethics in all training and supervisory situations.
- 7) I will conduct and report research with competence, honesty and within recognized scientific standards. My research will be carried out with the necessary approval or consent from those involved, and with an approach that will reasonably protect participants from any potential harm. All research efforts will be performed in a manner that complies with the laws of the country in which the research is conducted.
- 8) I will accurately create, maintain, store and dispose of any records of work done in relation to the practice of coaching in a way that promotes confidentiality and complies with any applicable laws.
- 9) I will use ICF member contact information (email addresses, telephone numbers, etc.) only in the manner and to the extent authorized by the ICF.

Professional Conduct With Clients

- 10) I will be responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern any physical contact that I may have with my clients.
- 11) I will not become sexually involved with any of my clients.
- 12) I will construct clear agreements with my clients, and will honor all agreements made in the context of professional coaching relationships.
- 13) I will ensure that, prior to or at the initial session, my coaching client understands the nature of coaching, the bounds of confidentiality, financial arrangements and other terms of the coaching agreement.
- 14) I will accurately identify my qualifications, expertise and experience as a coach.
- 15) I will not intentionally mislead or make false claims about what my client will receive from the coaching process or from me as their coach.
- 16) I will not give my clients or prospective clients information or advice I know or believe to be misleading.
- 17) I will not knowingly exploit any aspect of the coach-client relationship for my personal, professional or monetary advantage or benefit.
- 18) I will respect the client's right to terminate coaching at any point during the process. I will be alert to indications that the client is no longer benefiting from our coaching relationship.
- 19) If I believe the client would be better served by another coach, or by another resource, I will encourage the client to make a change.

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ICF Code of Ethics – Page 3/3

20) I will suggest that my clients seek the services of other professionals when deemed appropriate or necessary.

21) I will take all reasonable steps to notify the appropriate authorities in the event a client discloses an intention to endanger self or others.

Confidentiality/Privacy

22) I will respect the confidentiality of my client's information, except as otherwise authorized by my client, or as required by law.

23) I will obtain agreement from my clients before releasing their names as clients or references, or any other client identifying information.

24) I will obtain agreement from the person being coached before releasing information to another person compensating me.

Conflicts of Interest

25) I will seek to avoid conflicts between my interests and the interests of my clients.

26) Whenever any actual conflict of interest or the potential for a conflict of interest arises, I will openly disclose it and fully discuss with my client how to deal with it in whatever way best serves my client.

27) I will disclose to my client all anticipated compensation from third parties that I may receive for referrals of that client.

28) I will only barter for services, goods or other non-monetary remuneration when it will not impair the coaching relationship.

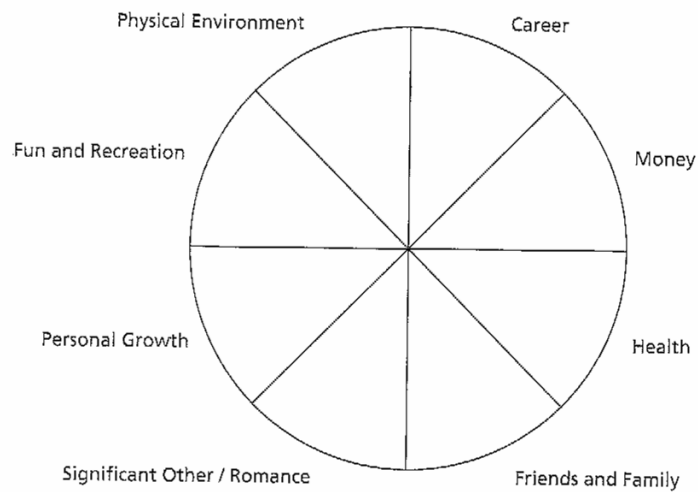
Part Four: The ICF Pledge of Ethics

As a professional coach, I acknowledge and agree to honor my ethical obligations to my coaching clients and colleagues and to the public at large. I pledge to comply with the ICF Code of Ethics, to treat people with dignity as independent and equal human beings, and to model these standards with those whom I coach. If I breach this Pledge of Ethics or any part of the ICF Code of Ethics, I agree that the ICF in its sole discretion may hold me accountable for so doing. I further agree that my accountability to the ICF for any breach may include loss of my ICF membership and/or my ICF credentials.

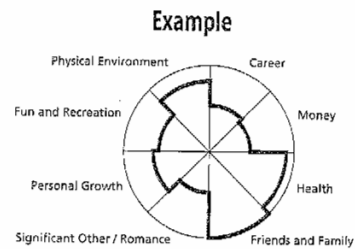
(International Coach Federation, 2004)

Appendix N

The wheel of life



Directions: The eight sections in the Wheel of Life represent balance. Regarding the center of the wheel as 0 and the outer edge as 10, rank your level of satisfaction with each life area by drawing a straight or curved line to create a new outer edge (see example). The new perimeter of the circle represent the Wheel of Life. How bumpy would the ride be if this were a real wheel?



(Whitworth et al., 1998, p.203)

Appendix O

An example of a session preparation form

COACHING CALL FOCUS FORM
Get the most out of coaching by preparing for it

Name: _____ Date: _____ Fax to: _____

1. MY THEME FOR THE MONTH:
2. WINS AND INSIGHTS:
3. WHAT I COMMITTED TO DOING BY THIS WEEK'S CALL:
4. WHAT I HAVE ACCOMPLISHED SINCE THE LAST COACHING CALL:
5. DURING THIS CALL I WANT COACHING ON:
6. CHALLENGES I face or OPPORTUNITIES available to me know:
5. BLOCKS AND BARRIERS I have become aware of
6. WHAT I COMMIT TO DOING BY THE NEXT COACHING CALL
7. SPECIAL SUPPORT I NEED FROM MY COACH:
8. THE MOST VALUE ASPECT OF THE COACHING CALL WAS:

Provided by Coach 2

Appendix P

An example of a coaching agreement

CLIENT/COACH AGREEMENT

Name:	Mutually agreed Guidelines - Client: Accountable for completing the mutually agreed fieldwork Be on time for calls Pay on time Be willing to clear up any misunderstanding Participate in an Exit interview (free of charge) if applicable
Date of Birth: _____	
Occupation: _____	Mutually agreed Guidelines - Coach: Responsible for calling the client Speak and press for the truth
Term:	Be unconditionally constructive. Manage client actions. Focus on what the client wants to achieve Expect the best of the client
Start Date:	
Evaluation Date:	
	Client's expectation: _____ _____ _____ _____
Fee:	
Call day: M T W Th F	
Time:	
Services:	Confidentiality: All interactions with you are kept strictly confidential. The only exceptions are: 1. I may occasionally consult my own coach on your behalf. If I do, you will not be identified by name. 2. The ICF Certification Process requires me to provide your name and contact details.* Above agreed to on: _____ _____ (Client signature) (Coach signature) As an active member of the International Coach Federation, I follow the Standards of Conduct of the ICF.

* This is purely to validate that I have applied my learning and skill with my clients and meet the standards for the ICF Professional Certified Coach credential. If you have any concerns about this please make a note to this effect in the client/coach agreement.

Provided by Coach 2

Appendix Q

An example of a coaching preparation questionnaire

What have been your three most fulfilling accomplishments in life, thus far?

What was the biggest thing you have had to overcome?

How strong/powerful/healthy have your past personal or business role models been?

How have you failed, and how has that affected the way you think and act today?

Have you worked with a coach before? What worked? What did not work?

How have your attitudes about people and life changed over the past 10 years?

What has made you the most successful or powerful?

Are you mostly past, present, or future oriented?

What should I know about your professional background or history?

What should I know about your personal background or family history?

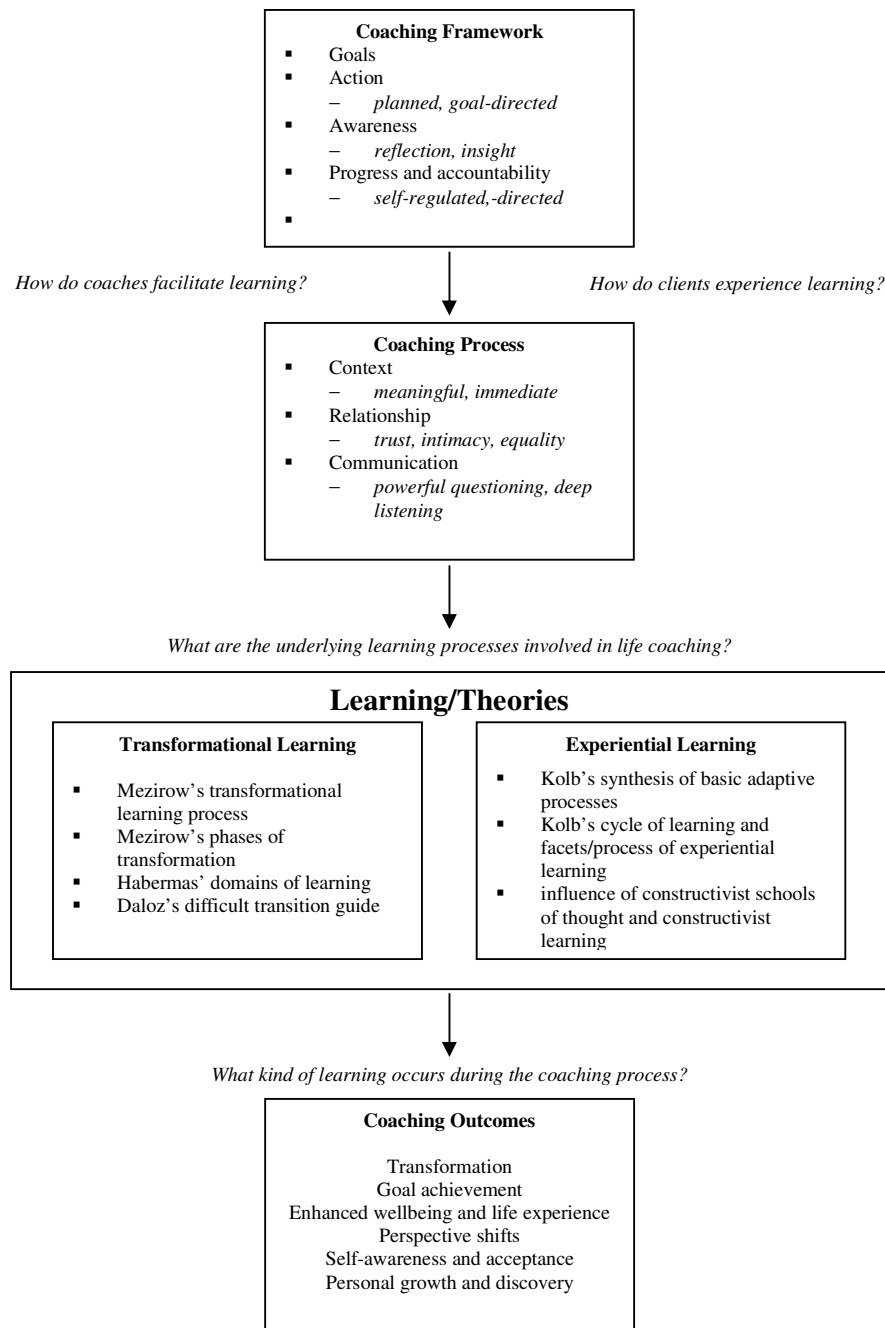
(Coach U, 2005, p.91)

Appendix R

Original theoretical framework

Original theoretical framework from initial literature review

What are the underlying learning processes involved in life coaching?



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