

Experiencing Coaching for the First Time: First Coaching Sessions from the Executive Client's Perspective

Amel Karboul (2014)

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Experiencing coaching for the first time:
First coaching sessions from the executive client's
perspective

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This thesis is submitted to Oxford Brookes
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Hamdillah for the good health and wellbeing that were necessary to complete this thesis.

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Peter Küspert

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Mehdi Jomaa

My husband and children:

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Abstract

Background: Executive coaching has become a mainstay of leadership development practice worldwide. Some aspects of executive coaching such as return on investment are well studied, but the client experience of coaching is underexplored. This study aims to describe how clients perceive their first coaching experience and create a conceptual model of this experience to guide coaching practice.

Methodology: 15 executives who had previously experienced their first coaching session took part in semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the interview protocols was based on Grounded Theory methodology.

Results: Reports of client experiences were used to develop a conceptual Discovering, Agency, Roles, Expectations (DARE) model. The client experience of executive coaching is saturated with discoveries. Discovering of coaching, oneself and also a view of one's potential from one's own and third party perspectives are at the heart of the executive coaching experience. Perceptions of the experience are further influenced by client expectations, the conditions surrounding coaching and the different roles taken by coach and client. A sequence of agency emerged from the analysis.

Conclusions: The thesis explores the implications of the emerging model of the first experience and how coaches can use this understanding of the coaching experience to enhance the client experience. Further research is needed into some aspects of the experience, such as the roles of coach and client and prevalence of discovering as a core experience in subsequent coaching sessions.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Looking back at our lives, we almost always remember first experiences, be it our first kiss, our first day at work or our first driving lesson. These ‘firsts’ have something seemingly magical about them and they become an important part of our autobiographical memory (Robinson, 1992). One first experience, that is not yet well understood or described, is the first time a corporate executive experiences executive coaching. Going through the process of executive coaching is described by some executives as a powerful, developmental experience with long-term effects (Turner, 2006). While Executive Coaching is reported effective (Theebom, Beersma & van Vianen, 2014), literature describing this first experience of executives seems to be largely missing. Turner (2006, p. 1) suggested that the literature on executive coaching is like ‘reading a report about an Olympic training programme that omits the athletes’ experiences.’

There has been an increase in the number of executive coaching studies published over the last decade (Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011). The growing interest nevertheless raises two issues, firstly there has been less focus on the process itself, what happens between the coach and the client (Day et al., 2008) and secondly literature on the executive coaching relationship predominantly focuses on the perspective of the coach (Feldman and Lankau, 2005). Only a few studies have investigated the client perspective on the coaching process, for example Baron, Morin and Morin (2010) looked at the effect of working alliance discrepancies between coach and client and De Haan et al. (2010a) compared coach and client descriptions of critical moments. There is conflicting evidence on whether or not client and coach perspectives are markedly different (de Haan et al., 2010a; 2010b). De Haan et al. (2010b) suggested that further research into

the language or conceptual models used to describe coaching from the client perspective would help to resolve this issue. They noted that 'The whole coaching journey is undertaken for the benefit of the clients, so it is certainly worthwhile to understand their perspectives as deeply as possible.' (p. 608).

My own experience of working as an executive coach for the last twelve years suggested that there has never been a shared understanding among coaches and researchers about what a first session consists of, how it is defined and how it is perceived by clients. In searching for a model of how coaching assignments tend to work I noticed that models in the popular coaching literature focused on a micro-process, a single coaching session, rather than on the coaching process in its entirety. The literature lacked both a process model that described the coaching process as a whole, from the outset and an understanding of how the client experiences coaching at the outset of the process.

Intrigued, I investigated what other fields, such as psychotherapy, had to say about the early experience of the client. Recently there has been more interest in psychotherapeutic and psychiatric research into the early phases of relationships, although historically there has been little research on initial therapeutic encounters (Hartzell, 2010). The first session-perhaps even the first 10 to 15 minutes of any therapeutic relationship-has been little studied, yet it is recognised as crucial to the development of a working alliance between therapist and client (Coleman, 1995; Odell and Quinn, 1998; Bachelor and Horvath, 2002). McKenna and Davis (2009; 2011) imported concepts from psychotherapy into executive coaching. They argued that the active ingredients of psychotherapy and coaching were similar, namely client and extra-therapeutic factors, the relationship, the methods, client

expectations and the placebo effect. According to Asay and Lambert (1999) the relationship factor accounts for 30% of the variance in therapy outcome. Wampold (2001) went even further, stating that the relationship accounts for 54% of variance in therapy outcomes. The character of the therapeutic relationship seems to be determined early in therapy, and measures or relationship quality taken very early in the process have been found to predict the outcome of therapy (Saltzman et al., 1976; Luborsky, 1984; 1985). In a related longitudinal pre-test/post-test study comparing coach-client dyads Baron and Morin (2009) found that relationship indicators had an effect on post-coaching client self-efficacy. If we were to extend the analogy between psychotherapy and executive coaching, it would make sense to suggest that in executive coaching the early phase is just as important as in therapy. Although one might simply assume that research in executive coaching and psychotherapy will lead to similar findings, it is more sensible to use evidence from research on therapy as the basis for research into the client perspective in coaching. Given the variability in length of coaching assignments -from just one session (Berg and Szabó, 2005) to between 6-12 months (McGovern et al., 2001)- to date there has been insufficient investigation into the experience in and importance of the first session. Although executive coaching research is informed by psychological theory and practice (Smither, 2011), a lot of executive coaching practices are not theoretically based, or are based on theories developed in completely different fields such as sports (Roberts and Jarret, 2006). It is reasonable to suggest that the nature of a first experience of executive coaching is similar to, but also different from a first experience of therapy.

Examination of literature in other fields suggests that there is a dearth of research on the client perspective on first sessions in therapy (Hartzell,

2010) and on executive coaching. Bachkirova, Sibley and Myers (2011) argued that for coaching to consolidate its position as a recognised profession it was necessary to develop a body of relevant knowledge and research. At the time of writing the majority of models of the coaching process have been developed from the coach's, rather than the client's point of view, and are intended as a guide for coaches rather than the basis for rigorous empirical research. These how-to guides do not address the gap between descriptions of what should happen and what really happens in coaching, from the client's point of view (Feldman and Lankau, 2005). The many styles and approaches described in popular and academic coaching literature on executive coaching do not give a clear picture of what a first session really is and consists of, so I decided it was necessary to conduct research into the first coaching session.

My philosophy has undergone several important changes during my professional development. I started my career as an engineer, with a positivist mindset. Throughout my subsequent consulting career my epistemological and ontological views have been influenced by an appreciation that sometimes conflicts in consulting were based in misunderstandings or different constructions of a problem. Noticing that the client perspective was underexplored in research on executive coaching, I decided to use a qualitative approach to give a voice to the executive client's experience, rather than focus on the coach. Many books and instruction manuals have been written by, for and about coaches; in this study I wanted to shine light on the client's first experience of executive coaching, to return to Turner's (2006) critique of the coaching literature, I wanted to involve the athletes in the report.

In order to develop a chronological understanding of the coaching process from the client's perspective, this research focused on the start of the coaching process, the very first session, and how the executive client experiences this first session. The aim of this research was to explore what happens in first coaching sessions from the executive client's perspective, how the client experiences the process. This information could then be used to help coaching practitioners understand their clients better and as the basis for further research into executive coaching. The research had the following objectives:

1. To conduct a review of literature on first experiences and sessions in helping relationships in the fields of coaching, mentoring, psychotherapy, counselling and relationship building
2. To explore the client's first experience of executive coaching from the client's perspective.
3. To contribute to a theoretical and practical understanding of first coaching experiences.
4. To generate theory that would enhance practical understanding within the coaching profession

1.1 Definitions of executive coaching experiences

There are some important differences between executive coaching and other forms of coaching. In therapy, life coaching and counselling the practitioner is dealing with a client and his or her concerns and wishes. In executive coaching, the individual executive is part of an organisation and the content and results of coaching are closely related to the executive's function and performance within the organisation (ThachandHeinzelmann,

1999; Feldman, 2001). In most cases the organisation employing the client pays for the coaching. Although some authors have suggested that nowadays executive coaching is a status symbol (McKenna and Davis, 2009), it is not undertaken for fun; its aim is to develop and improve the client's behaviour and, ultimately, to benefit the employing organisation. This means that the organisation and its representatives have an agenda for any coaching and one might ask who the client really is. Executives, coaches and organisations have different goals, perspectives and systems. Coaching is usually undertaken for the benefit of the client, but in executive coaching this may lead to conflicts of interest in the three-way relationship involving coach, client and sponsor. Organisational sponsors often have their own ideas about topics to be addressed in coaching, and these may differ from the executive's goals and ideas about what coaching should be about (Underhill, McAnnallyandKoriath, 2007; Underhill, 2011). The task of an executive coach is therefore to work within this system of goals, assumptions and expectations, meeting both the client's and the organisation's developmental objectives.

Executive coaching takes place within an organisation, which is part of a complex market context. Macroeconomic issues influence the choice of coaching topics just as much as the language, underlying assumptions, artefacts and unspoken rules of an organisation. Job insecurity, changes in workplace habits, technological changes and the spread of virtual teams combine to create an atmosphere of continuous change in organisations worldwide. Today executive coaching takes place in a highly dynamic and competitive economic environment within which costs have to be justified. The recent explosion in coaching (Bono et al., 2009) made return on investment a major topic, with reports of the return on investment ranging from 528% to 788% using a variety of indicators (McGovern et al., 2001;

Anderson, 2001; 2011). Others have argued that the focus monetary return on investment is placing too much emphasis on the monetary benefits of coaching and means we are probably 'asking the wrong question' (Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006, p. 23). Return on investment studies have measured tangible results of coaching, such as sales figures, productivity and improved retention- which are relatively simple to measure- and positive developments in leadership skills, teamwork and improved relationships with stakeholders- which are difficult to represent accurately in terms of monetary benefits, although their impact has been well described in research on outcomes of executive coaching (De Meuse, Dai and Lee, 2009). Executives, coaches and organisational sponsors have to navigate these interlinked, diverse goals drawing on a diverse body of executive coaching practices. Return on investment was not the focus of this study; however producing a return on investment requires changes that are experienced and recognised by the client.

As an executive coach I have noticed a great disconnect between what is taught in courses, how executive coaching is practised and the subjects of academic research. My experience of dealing with clients suggested that their expectations were often different from what executive coaching entails in practice. The 'coaching' label seemed to have been stuck on many processes and practices in addition to rigorously defined executive coaching practices. Coaching is sometimes confused with mentoring. Mentors and coaches use similar techniques (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2004). Yet coaching is a more short term, performance and skill oriented practice that focuses on immediate learning opportunities while mentoring is a career growth oriented practice that focuses on longer term personal development (Luecke, 2004). Law (2013) argues that mentoring is often misunderstood as a senior person helping a junior climb the corporate ladder. Rather than

that, Law (2013) describes that mentoring is better described as a journey walked together with the mentor using their professional experience to translate personal development into practice. A main difference to coaching is that the mentor and mentee walk this journey together. In my experience there are not only confusions between fields but also between academia and practitioners. I also experienced a considerable diversity of coaching practice among practitioners. Bono et al. (2009) found that differences in employed practices between practitioners from different disciplines in psychology were as great as differences between psychologists and non-psychologists. Some authors would say giving advice does not constitute coaching (Szabó, 2000; Whitmore, 2002) while others see coaches necessarily having and sharing a broad scientific knowledge (Knight, 2007). There seems to be no single answer to what coaching is as a practice; nor is there consensus on which practices should be regarded as executive coaching. This study uses the following definition of executive coaching:

'Psychological skills and methods are employed in a one-on-one relationship to help someone become a more effective manager or leader. These skills are typically applied to a specific present-moment work-related issues... in a way that enable this client to incorporate them into his or her permanent management or leadership repertoire.' (Peltier, 2010).

In the context of this research an 'executive' is defined as a professional charged with managerial tasks and having managerial authority. Providing a definition of what constitutes a first executive coaching session is a more complex task. The executive must have completed a one-on-one coaching session with an executive coach. Research on first impressions suggests that the coaching relationship starts to take shape during the initial contact between coach and client, this might be at a point where coach and client have not yet met, a client's first impression might be gained from a printed coach profile, a website, a first face-to-face meeting or from the voice in a

phone call. For the purposes of this research, the end of a first session is defined as the end of the first scheduled, one-on-one meeting, be it face-to-face or remote. In this research the beginning of the first session was defined by the client; the client's definition of the start of a coaching session was considered as a topic for research rather than being predefined. Because I was interested in first experiences I first considered the definition of 'experience'. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2013) defines an experience as 'the process of doing and seeing things and of having things happen to you' or 'the length of time that you have spent doing something.' A first experience is therefore the process of experiencing something novel that the individual has not yet spent any time doing.

1.2 Research methodology

Describing the first coaching session and its impact from the executive client perspective requires giving voice to the client and capturing the qualitative richness of the experience. This required the use of a method that would give voice to the executive client and also allow the data to be used for theoretical development. The Grounded Theory approach to qualitative research meets these criteria and makes pragmatic assumptions about epistemology. The original purpose of Grounded Theory was to equip sociologists with a method for developing theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) aimed to close the gap between theory and empirical research. A pragmatic, Grounded Theory approach allows the researcher to re-explore all data that might contribute to theory generation and grounding (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Bryant, 2009). Grounded Theory is based on a particular approach to data collection, data analysis and theoretical sampling of new, relevant data, characterised by concurrent processing. Data is collected, analysed and used to identify the next source of relevant

data that can be used to develop and refine a theory relevant to the field of study. Theories are developed until theoretical saturation is reached, meaning that analysing additional data does not produce new insights. Grounded Theory is neither fully inductive nor deductive. Inductive thinking uses specific data to make inferences, building theory from the bottom up, it is contrasted with deductive reasoning, in which a general statement or proposition leads to more specific observations (Schechter, 2013). Grounded Theory development is based on use of additional data in order to ground a body of theory in a new field or situation, development proceeds by switching between inductive and deductive thinking (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in what appears to be a pragmatic dance.

Fifteen executives who just had their first executive coaching sessions were recruited for this study. Nine were participants in a corporate development programme and took coaching as part of the programme, the other six were taking coaching for individual development. All the executives were interviewed; interviews were transcribed and the transcripts were analysed through several rounds of line by line coding and category development, axial coding and selective coding. The coding process was documented contemporaneously by memo writing. The emerging categories and themes were then discussed with peers and the coaching client to validate and refine the emerging theory. In follow-up interviews clients were asked additional questions relevant to the emerging categories in order to facilitate the development of a theory which would be relevant to a range of coaching clients.

1.3 Overview of literature

Some authors have argued that although it is useful, it is not necessary to conduct a literature review as part of a study based on Grounded Theory

methodology. Some authors go so far as to consider it a hindrance to the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher (McGhee, Garland and Atkinson, 2008; Dunne, 2011). Following Dunne's (2011) recommendation, a thorough literature review was carried out as a preliminary to this research, for several reasons. First of all, 'all is data' (Glaser, 2002: p. 1); literature on first coaching experiences might already exist and missing it would mean that data useful for theory development might be excluded from consideration. Evidence and theories on the first session might exist in other fields, such as therapy and counselling. Some researchers and practitioners have suggested that executive coaching is not too different from human resource development (Hamlin, Ellinger and Beattie, 2008), others that it has theoretical similarities to psychotherapy (McKenna and Davis, 2011; Smither, 2011). Literature from other fields can therefore be viewed as providing a comparative perspective on similarities and differences between coaching and other helping professions. The emerging body of theory could be used to differentiate types of coaching and contribute to development of a rigorous psychological theory of coaching. Avoidance of bias from both the academic and practitioner body of literature was another reason for conducting a literature review. Coaching is both a profession and an academic field. It is important to describe and understand both popular and academic models of coaching and recognise their respective contributions to coaching practice. Without an understanding of popular models, such as GROW – Goals, Reality, Options/Obstacles, Way Forward- (Whitmore, 2002), the academic researcher is unable to assess whether or not they describe the client experience accurately. A critical awareness of both academic and popular literature is necessary to prevent the development of two isolated bodies of

theory, one derived from academic research and one from practitioner experience.

In light of these considerations the literature review (Chapter 2 – Literature Review) focuses on three major areas. The first part deals with first sessions in coaching and other helping professions: process research, outcome research and field instruction manuals from coaching, psychotherapy, counselling, social work and psychiatry are considered and reviewed. Examples of coaching models derived from empirical evidence and those taught in popular coaching literature are considered. Because this study deals with the client experience, the second part of the review deals with first experiences: how we tend to use first experiences as a way of organising our memory and the function of first experiences in our lives and their place in autobiographical memory. The third part of the review explores critical moments in the coaching relationship from the perspective of the executive client in the context of the various stakeholders, the client, organisational sponsors, superiors and sometimes HR professionals all influence an executive coaching assignment. A third person sponsor often pays for the coaching of an employed executive; inevitably this party will have expectations and thus the coaching assignment becomes a three-way interaction. The literature review covers work that provides insight into the expectations of executive clients and also sponsoring organisations.

1.4 Overview of chapters

During the literature review certain gaps became apparent. The client perspective on executive coaching appeared to be under-investigated. Similarly, the first session and first experiences of executive coaching have so far received little research attention although research on therapy indicates that the first session is an important factor in success (Coleman,

1995). Research into the client perspective on first experiences of executive coaching will provide a better understanding of how a client experiences coaching when they have no previous experience of it. This kind of research has the potential to uncover discrepancies between the coach and client perspectives that have not so far been recognised. Understanding the client perspective can also be used to improve training for executive coaches. Use of certain behaviours, interventions or traits in the first session may influence how the client experiences coaching and subsequently affect the success of executive coaching. Being aware of such details might allow coaches to improve the service they provide or even prevent early termination of an assignment. The perspective of the client is likely to prove beneficial to coaches.

The thesis is structured as follows. The literature review follows this Introduction. The literature is followed by an overview of philosophical assumptions, methodology and research strategy. Issues relevant to data collection and analysis procedures are also explored in Chapter 3. The next chapters deal with the theory developed during the data analysis, introducing and explaining it in stages. The presentation of theoretical developments follows a two-step approach. First, the core categories that emerged during the analysis are introduced individually. Second, the interactions between these categories are explored. The four core categories that emerged are: Chapter 4 - Expectations and Conditions (Chapter 4), Chapter 5 - Roles of Coach and Client (Chapter 5), Chapter 6 - Agency and Interaction (Chapter 6) and Chapter 7 - Discovering (Chapter 7). The last chapter starts by connecting the categories and by illustrating the relationships among them in the wider context of a first coaching experience. Together these categories make up the DARE Model of first coaching sessions from the executive client's perspective. This

model is described and explained and finally the implications of the research are summarised and areas for further research are outlined.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter introduces and discusses literature relevant to the study. I used an iterative method to find and evaluate relevant theory and research on first coaching experiences in published literature, consisting of forward and backwards searches, using literature found at each step in the next step (Webster and Watson, 2002; Toracco, 2005; Levy and Ellis, 2006). These authors describe this method as a thorough approach capable of uncovering all information relevant to the subject under review. First, existing reviews of the coaching field were identified. Literature cited in these reviews was used in the next step of the forward and backward search. Articles were used in a forward search for items which had cited them using *Web of Science* and the *Publish or Perish* search software. A search for 'executive coaching' in the databases *Academic search complete*, *Business Source Premier* and *PsycINFO*, retrieved 3485 items on 29th September, 2014. The search revealed 1115 items in academic journals, 1209 in magazines, 574 in trade publications and 271 books and 90 dissertations on the topic. Adding the search terms 'first session' and 'first meeting' reduced the number of publications retrieved to zero. Adding 'first interview' retrieved four items, none of them relevant to the study. Using the term 'first coaching' retrieved one relevant paper, a case study describing a first session (Peterson and Milier, 2005). *Google Scholar* presented 398 results for search with the keyword 'first coaching session', three dealt with executive coaching: one described types of coaching (Thachand Heinzemann, 1999), another provided qualitative data on the experience from the client perspective (Turner, 2006) and the third focused on the coaching relationship (Ianiro, Schermuly and Kauffeld, 2012). The majority of items retrieved were personal case studies based on coaching

in education or nursing. A *Google Scholar* search for the term 'first executive coaching session' retrieved four items, none of which was relevant to the research question. Once this method of search was exhausted, keyword searches were performed on the aforementioned databases and relevant related journals using the EBSCO Host service. Keyword searches were performed for the keywords 'coaching review', 'coaching literature review', 'coaching phase model', 'therapy process research', 'therapy first session', 'therapy first interview' and 'coaching first interview'. The items retrieved in keyword searches were then put into the forward and backward search process described above.

A flowchart of relevant concepts was created to identify and evaluate relevant literature. It was initially developed by hand and later stored using a cloudservice; it outlined important concepts related to the research question. The relevant sources and their relationships are outlined in Figure 1. The chart shows how the review proceeded, depicting the pathways and larger topics which emerged during the literature review. Starting from a topic such as first sessions in coaching or first sessions in therapy, the review followed the process outlined by Webster and Watson (2005). The themes in the chart were found to add meaning to the review and were included in the review. During this process of forward and backward search several redundant or irrelevant concepts were merged or deleted. The resources included in the review grew to resemble a network without a fixed start or endpoint; Figure 1 represents how the data are connected rather than fixed start and end points. Concepts sharing the same colour are reviewed in the same section of the review. Only literature on first experiences; first sessions in coaching, therapy or social work; the client perspective on coaching and therapy and phase models or process models of coaching and therapy were included in the review; no criteria were set

formethodology or sample size other than that the conclusions drawn by the authors should be supported by the data provided. In its format and style, the review follows the principles of reviews in peer-reviewed journals, focusing on a narrative overview of the field and related fields (Bem, 1985; Baumeisterand Leary, 1997).

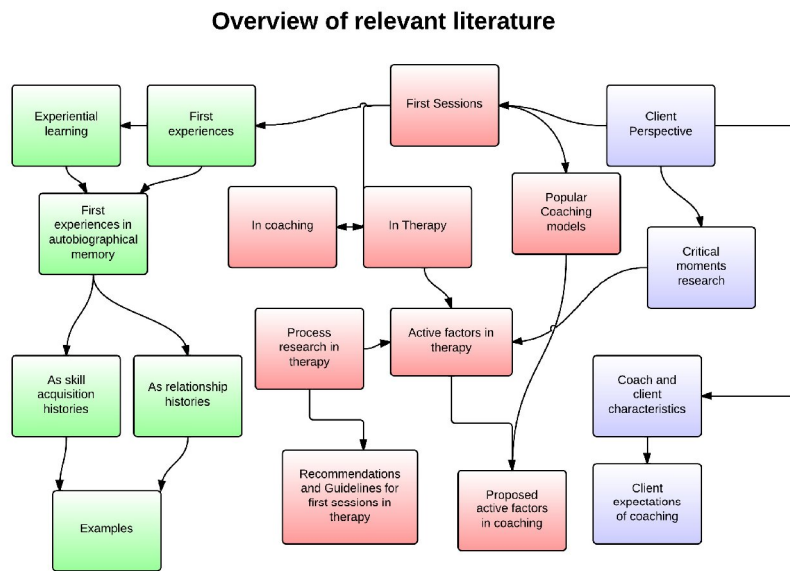


Figure 1: Relationships between themes in the literature. Arrows indicate relationships between literature themes through citation, colour shading indicates the section in which the concept is reviewed.

Executive coaching has been identified as a rapidly advancing profession, yet there are almost no empirical studies specifically of the experience of a first coaching session. Executive coaching is a diverse field, drawing on diverse philosophies and psychological theories of behavioural change (Lee and Frisch, 2011; McKenna and Davis, 2011) and the body of executive coaches is just as diverse (Jenkins et al., 2012). Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) identified several randomised controlled trials of

executive coaching and De Haan et al. (2010a, 2010b) identified critical moments in their process research, but aside from these studies there is an acute lack of empirical research into what happens in the different stages of executive coaching or what should happen at different stages of the process if executive coaching is to be successful and meaningful. Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) argued that research on executive coaching is moving out of the exploratory phase, and that theory building, qualitative research and hypothesis testing using quantitative, randomised controlled trials will become more prevalent. They described this new phase as a stage in which the boundaries of the field are more distinct, although theory and models will still be being developed and tested. Several multi-stage models of coaching have been described in secondary literature, for example the GROW model popularised by Whitmore (2002), the solution-focused model (Berg and Szabó, 2005; Meier and Szabó, 2008) and the ACHIEVE model (Dembkowski and Eldridge, 2003). Passmore (2007) introduces an integrative model, which consists of several streams. It is argued that coaching consists of outer streams of developing and maintaining a coaching partnership, which has to be developed first to achieve coaching success. The integrative model then suggests three further streams of coaching. The behavioural focus is on allowing behavioural change. The conscious cognition stream aims at an understanding of the interaction between thought and behaviour on the side of the client. The unconscious cognition stream deals with the aim of bringing unconscious cognition and behaviour to an increased awareness. Passmore's (2007) last stream is the systemic context that the coaching takes place in. A different approach to look at coaching is to look at general elements. Van Nieuwerburgh (2014) describes three different elements of coaching, a coaching process, coaching skills and a way of being. Models

like the GROW model provide the coach with a clear process. Coaching skills identified by van Nieuwerburgh include listening, asking questions, paraphrasing, summarising as well as giving and receiving feedback. The first two elements are summarized as things you can do and learn. They are skills and processes that can be formalized. The third element is a way of being. The third element is rather becoming a coach than doing coaching. This means that while there are skills to be learned, van Nieuwerburgh (2014) argues that through applying these skills coaches will over time adopt certain values and develop their self-concepts as coaches. A way of being refers to a coaches' self-concept as a coach. "A way of being" refers to the work of Rogers (1995) and the person centred approach in therapy. Rogers (1995) argued that people grow naturally towards their full potential and thus a counsellor's role is to create the conditions for such growth to happen. Knight (2007) outlines such conditions as partnership principles that should underpin every coaching interaction. The partnership principles outlined in Knight's (2007) work are equality, choice, dialogue, praxis, voice, reciprocity and reflection. Knight (2007) argues equality between coach and client is important. Equality stands for a relationship among equals, fuelled by mutual respect. A coaching partnership also includes choice on the client-side. A coach should respect his client's autonomy to make choices but also expect to learn from the client in reciprocity. Voice describes that a client should be free to honestly express their thoughts free from criticism, while dialogue refers to coaching being a conversation rather than a one sided talk by either party. Reflection refers to the creation of a space for thinking. Praxis on the other hand takes coaching to the real world. Ideas and thoughts developed during coaching should be applied and tested in the real world.

Coaching should not stay a theoretical conversation where ideas are only talked about and not applied.

Although the models discussed provide a general broader or more specific description of the coaching process, none looks at exactly what happens at the very beginning of the process, i.e. before and during the first coaching session. While Passmore (2007) argues that coaching begins by developing the coaching partnership, some approaches like the solution focused approach (Meier and Szabó, 2008) appear to forego such a stage altogether. Empirical data of what actually happens when clients experience coaching for the first time appears to be missing. The majority of research into what should happen in a first session or interview appears to have been conducted in the fields of therapy, counselling, psychiatry and social work. There is also a dearth of empirical research on the client experience of executive coaching; although some studies of executive coaching have considered the client experience (De Haan et al., 2010a; 2010b), much more data has been collected in related fields and when considering this body of evidence it is necessary to bear in mind the essential differences between therapeutic and coaching projects. Bearing this in mind, the sheer volume of secondary literature published on the topic exceeds empirical research. Grant (2011) identified 634 scholarly papers on coaching published between 2000 and the 1st January 2011 of which 234 were empirical studies. The German *Rauen* database of coaching literature lists 1592 books on coaching, including 104 published in 2012 alone (Rauen, 2013). This literature review includes both academic and popular publications.

The next part of the chapter is divided into the three sections, illustrated in Figure 1. Section 2.1 deals with first sessions in helping professions, namely coaching, therapy, psychiatry and social work. In these fields there

is already a considerable body of research on first sessions, and the review highlights differences between fields and suggests why findings from these related fields may not generalise to executive coaching. Section 2.2

First experiences discusses the nature of first experiences and how they have been characterised in research. Section 2.3 deals with the client perspective, contrasting findings from extant research on executive coaching with research into the client experience in related fields; executives' expectations of coaching and its contribution to their development are also considered here.

2.1 First sessions

Research journals and popular coaching manuals paint coaching as a diverse field. No single text covers all variants and stages of executive coaching and therefore no single text can be relevant to all first sessions and experiences. De Haan (2008) interviewed participants in the 'Coaching!' workshop run by Ashridge Centre for Coaching and asked them to identify critical moments in the coaching process. Coaches identified taking on an assignment or proposing the idea of executive coaching – events that happen before a coaching relationship develops – as critical. According to the coaches in this study first impressions and the first session were just as important as the process of relationship building with the client. There is no consensus about what is part of a first session and where the boundaries of the first experience of coaching should be placed. Some textbooks suggest that coaching should be embedded in an organisation's strategic programme and that the first step in any coaching assignment should be a three party meeting of coach, client and sponsor to align the goals of the coaching with the sponsor's goals (Stomski, Ward and Battista, 2011). In their guide to solution-focused brief coaching Szabó et

al. (2009) treat this preliminary conversation as part of coaching. In this their approach differs from others, who refer to 'pre-coaching conversations'. Even what constitutes a first coaching session and therefore a first experience of executive coaching experience is thus debatable.

Lee and Frisch (2011) argued that contracting and sponsor involvement are part of the coaching process and therefore make them important parts of their curriculum for training coaches. Given this diversity of opinion it seems fair to conclude that there is no definition of a first session and no consensus on what a first session consists of or what it should be like. According to Saporito (1996) the first phase of the executive coaching relationship typically focuses on laying the foundation for the coaching relationship and defining the executive's developmental goals. This phase consists of two main stages. The first stage is the establishment of a relationship with the executive, a process which involves sharing expectations of the coaching relationship and discussing the parameters of the relationship (e.g. confidentiality, behavioural norms for coaching sessions, etc.) (Feldman, 2001). In the second stage, the coach gathers data about the executive and the organisation. It is in this stage that the coach may obtain 360degree feedback through the use of surveys or interviews (Saporito, 1996). At this stage, coaches may also assess the executive's personality, leadership style, values and attitudes using data obtained from the executive, personnel records, members of the top management team, organisational employees, and/or board directors (Kilburg, 2000; Winum, 1995). Information gathering may encompass work issues (e.g. politics and interpersonal relationships) and non-work issues (e.g. family and personal goals) (London, 2002).

During a first session one or several steps or stages of the coaching process may be observed unfolding, depending on the length of the session. According to Palmer and McDowall (2010: p.1), ‘...[r]egardless of which techniques, frameworks or psychological underpinnings a coach might draw on, basic coaching processes all rest on interpersonal interaction in some way or another.’ Although there are now many books on coaching little attention has been paid to the relationship between coach and coachee, as Palmer and McDowall (2010: p. 1) made clear, ‘... [O]ver the past decade it has become clear that the coaching relationship so often referred to in passing in the coaching literature and also by practitioners has been based on limited research’ (Palmer and McDowall, 2010:Preface).’On the basis of interviews with clients who had had a first session of solution-focused brief coaching, Taeger (2013) reported that coaching clients’ tended to use more external attributions when describing their coaching experience when compared to situations before and after coaching.Taeger (2013) suggested that coaching could be viewed as something that is done to a client, thus enabling clients to work on their goals through the guidance of the coach. This contrasts with the textbook account of ideal solution-focused brief coaching sessions, in which the client is the more active partner in the relationship and the coach acts as a catalyst (Szabó, Meier andDierolf, 2009). There has been limited research into exactly how the coaching relationship works in a first session of executive coaching (Palmer and McDowall, 2010). It became apparent that a wider look at other helping professions was needed to gain a better understanding of first sessions in general.

The importance of the first session for the process and outcome of assignments has been discussed in therapy and psychiatry. Bachelor and Horvath (2002) argue that the climate of therapeutic relationships is crucial

and is formed early on; suggesting that early in the relationship there is a window of opportunity in which the therapist must form a working alliance with the client. According to Horvath and Luborsky (1993) the therapeutic working alliance between therapist and client forms during two critical phases, one of which is the initial relationship forming phase running from the initial meeting until the third session. Saltzman et al. (1976) found that early indicators of the quality of the therapeutic alliance were predictive of persistence with treatment and therapy outcome ratings. The same notion was echoed by Dembkowski and Eldridge (2003: p.2), who stressed that rapport building in the initial phase of coaching is a 'most critical skill'. Coleman asserted that in family therapy, 'the first interview is especially critical because it provides the creation of a therapeutic alliance, an assessment of the family and its concerns and the formation of goals and solutions.' (Coleman, 1995: p. 128).

Many professionals have written in guides and textbooks about and what to consider and how to behave when meeting psychotherapy or social work clients for the first time (Bryant 1984; Stierlin, 1980; Tomm, 1992). In resources aimed at practitioners there is a strong focus on the therapeutic relationship from the start. Studies of psychotherapy have provided evidence that general factors such as empathy, warmth and the therapeutic relationship correlate more highly with client outcomes than specialised treatment interventions (Lambert and Barley, 2002). Hartzell (2010) described the philosophical clash between treatment paradigms in the field of psychiatry. The medical model takes a naturalistic view of the treatment process, there is a standardised procedure which is followed with all patients and standardised treatments are selected after a standardised diagnostic process. Deviations from the standardised model of action are discouraged, regardless of whether the psychiatrist feels this would be

useful. Personal and organisational liability are also an issue. Treatment under the medical model thus follows a linear pattern (Sandell, 2006).

This pure, positivist approach to first encounters is unlikely to be found in the practice of executive coaching, since coaching is not, according to any of its many definitions, a medical treatment or therapy; rather it is a goal-directed process, intended to further individual development and satisfy the client (International Coach Federation, 2012; Kilburg, 2000). Wampold (2001) proposes a different model, the contextual model. The contextual model recognises the feelings of the client, client context, therapeutic context and atmosphere of treatment as important components of the therapy process. At first sight it seems unlikely that an executive coach could be in a position where standards, regulations and client needs clash. At present coaching is not regulated and executive coaching practices are diverse (Bono et al., 2009). Client needs are at the heart of the coaching assignment and currently codes of ethics for coaching require that the client and sponsor clarify their needs at the beginning of each assignment (International Coach Federation, 2008).

Hartzell (2010) described the medical model as one in which the practitioner does not have a free choice of goals or treatment methods; not all treatments are considered acceptable, regardless of the practitioner's judgement of their appropriateness. According to Hartzell (2010) these rules, whether explicitly stated in guidelines or not, limit professionals' choices about treatment and keep them obedient to the demands of their organisation or controlling body. Similar constraints may apply to coaching assignments (Desrosiers and Oliver, 2011). Desrosiers and Oliver (2011) argued that coaching should always align the goals of the organisation with those of the client, during this process boundaries should be set for the flow

of information from coach to sponsor, similarly operational boundaries should be set by the sponsor. These boundaries might include a ban on certain topics, goals set by the sponsor and restrictions on the coach's role. Thus, although the medical model cannot easily be applied to the structuring of a first session, boundaries suggested by some authors may provide a structure to the first coaching session which reflects the sponsor's requirements, rather than the coach's choice. Hartzell (2010) described what happens in Swedish psychiatric practice; the boundaries and structure which develop during first contact with an executive coaching client are likely to vary from organisation to organisation and be aligned with the sponsoring organisation's strategy, structure and philosophy of coaching.

The secondary literature contains numerous proposed phase models of the coaching process. Several of these models are described later in this chapter. Smither (2011) suggested that, differences between the two fields notwithstanding, psychotherapy research could serve as a guide for further research on coaching. Given the dearth of research on first sessions in coaching and the skills necessary for these sessions, the focus of the review is again on first sessions in therapy. It is important to note that in therapy the first session can also be considered from several perspectives. Orlinsky, Grawe and Parks (2004) pointed out that there may be considerable difference of opinion between client and therapist about what was really useful. De Haan et al. (2010a) reached similar conclusions in a study which asked clients and coaches about critical moments in the coaching process.

Coleman (1995) described the typical approach to a first interview in family therapy, providing the following list of goals for a first interview (p. 120):

joining the family, organising the interview, observing the family's interactions around the problem, emphasising a solution-oriented approach and negotiating a contract. According to Coleman 'joining the family' is the process of 'creat[ing] a supportive and therapeutic alliance and environment'(p.120)and should be the first goal in the first interview. 'Organising the interview'is the process of aligning the interview structure with the family's goals. 'Observing the family' is described as an information gathering activity and 'emphasising a solution-focused approach' is characterised as an imperative to 'quickly define and articulate goals' (Coleman, 1995, p 120). 'Negotiating a contract' ensures that the family is committed to the therapy process and to specific goals. Coleman further suggested that family therapists should begin by defining the roles and tasks of the therapist and the family. Coleman (1995: p. 127) cited Minuchin (1974) saying '[...] the first rule of therapeutic strategy is to leave the family willing to come again for the next session.'

The therapeutic relationship and the working alliance have been identified as vital contributors to therapeutic success (Cooper, 2004; Steering Committee, 2002). DeFife and Hilsenroth (2011) identified three common factors that promote a fruitful therapeutic relationship in psychotherapy in early stages in the therapeutic process: the fostering of positive expectations, role preparation and collaborative goal formation. Positive expectations have been found to be an active ingredient in therapy (Goldstein, 1960; Beckham, 1989) and coaching (McKenna and Davis, 2011), explaining about 15% of the variance in therapy outcomes (Asay and Lambert, 1999). Similar findings were reported by Dimcovic (2001), in a group of clients with initially modest expectations of therapy which became more positive. Development of more positive expectations during early therapy was a significant predictor of positive therapy outcomes, in fact in

this study it was the only significant predictor. Kirsch (1990) reviewed the role of hope or positive expectancy, concluding that of the studies reviewed, 13 showed evidence of only small differences between treatment and control variables when the control group was informed it was to receive a very powerful treatment. In one study the control group actually showed a greater 'treatment effect' than the treatment group. It is reasonable therefore to suggest that in coaching a successful first session will involve processes that generate positive expectations and a general understanding that coaching gradually lead to changes and development.

Role preparation is the second factor mentioned by DeFife and Hilsenroth (2011): clients should be educated about the process they are going to be involved in before treatment begins. This education, they say, should entail providing information about the process, the philosophy behind the process, what the client can expect from the treatment and which roles he or she and the therapist should assume to achieve optimal effects. The first session might be considered to start with the preparatory and educational steps which are part of the therapy initiation process and take place before the first meeting between therapist and client. Coleman and Kaplan (1990) presented an educational videotape to child clients entering psychotherapy and their mothers. The video was intended to explain what psychotherapy is, what it can and cannot do and what the psychotherapy process would be like. In their sample adolescents and children learned equal amounts about psychotherapy. Children who received the pre-treatment video showed significantly less problematic behaviour after four sessions of therapy than those in the control group, thus suggesting in the context of therapy, pre-therapy education is valuable. Shuman and Shapiro (2002) reported similar findings, namely that a videotape combined with a brochure increased the accuracy of parental expectations about the

treatment their children would receive. As a coach, I have often felt the need to educate clients about what coaching is and what it is not in the first session, especially when they have unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved through coaching. Pre-coaching education may be an important part of the coaching process. My personal experience is corroborated by the International Coach Federation (ICF) Client Surveys (International Coach Federation, 1998; Zackon, 2004) which asked clients to list the roles they would like the coach to play and the areas in which they wanted to see improvement. Both surveys found that a third of coaching clients wanted their coach to act as a spiritual guide and wanted to make spiritual progress. Respondents in the ICF Global Consumer study who were had no knowledge of coaching tended to associate coaching with teaching or mentoring (International Coach Federation, 2010). At present there is a lack of research on the role and impact of fulfilled and unfulfilled expectations' of executives and their education about executive coaching.

Another factor in coaching is the role of participants and what is expected of them. A wide range of methods are used in coaching (Jenkins et al., 2012), but in many assignments the clients are required to prepare material for the coaching session, especially for video or shadowing assignments or coaching assignments (c.f. Meier, 2012). In therapy, patients may be encouraged to discuss any number of themes, and the therapy may include homework and an emphasis on the importance of regular sessions (DeFife and Hilsenroth, 2011). These authors also emphasised that patients should be encouraged to discuss the difficulty of behaviour change and the possibility of setbacks. By analogy educating coaching clients about executive coaching and their role in the process before a first meeting might be considered part of a first session in coaching. The evidence that in the context of therapy, preliminary educational tools have an effect on early

outcomes suggests that it is important not to overlook the potential importance of what happens before a first meeting in executive coaching. Given that coaching takes part in complex organisational settings, setbacks are a common feature of coaching. In one study (Asay and Lambert, 1999) extra-therapeutic factors explained 40% of the variance in therapy outcomes. In executive coaching the organisational system might be considered analogous to the family system; the executive client is part of an organisational system which is outside both client and coach's control. The last function of role preparation, according to DeFife and Hilsenroth (2011), is clarification of the role of the therapist. It is the therapist's responsibility to communicate his or her role to the client and explain how they will work and where the boundaries of therapy lie. Luborsky (1984) gives the following explanation to a hypothetical client of the limits of the therapist's role: 'it's the therapist's job not to give advice but to help you find out for yourself how you are going to solve your problems' (Luborsky, 1984, p. 194).

The third common factor in first sessions is goal negotiation. Most coaching phase models endorse the practice of working towards a goal from the first session (Whitmore, 2002; Dembkowski and Eldridge, 2003; Szabo, Meier and Dierolf, 2009). In a similar vein Bordin (1994) argued that agreement on goals is one of the three main features of a therapeutic alliance. Organisational structure can sometimes determine the goals of therapy (Hartzell, 2010) or coaching (Desrosiers and Oliver, 2011), so Hartzell's claim that the structure around a process can get in the way of developing a therapeutic alliance seems valid. Structural constraints become an even bigger factor when the therapist or coach follows structurally determined goals and assignments without securing the client's agreement on these goals. Orlinsky et al. (1994) found that contractual clarity and consensus are important for clients. To reach this consensus,

they suggest objective indices shared by therapist and client should be agreed rather than factors only the therapist believes to be important for the process. Failure to appreciate the importance of goal negotiation in an initial session may result in a weaker therapeutic alliance and reduce the impact of treatment. Similar arguments may apply to coaching; clients might not feel they have a reason to be there if there is no agreed coaching goal. Unlike therapy, where clients mostly have problems they want to work on, coaching takes place in a variety of contexts, sometimes without any cause other than scheduled executive and personal development.

Russel, Shirk and Jungbluth (2008) analysed first sessions of psychotherapy for adolescent depression on videotapes using the chained p-technique to identify significant behaviours at ten minute intervals. Four factors explained most of the variance in therapeutic alliance: experiential socialisation, therapist responsiveness, therapist lapse and remoralisation. Experiential socialisation is the process by which the therapist provides information on the treatment model and actively structures the session whilst also eliciting information relevant to treatment. Therapist responsiveness encompasses factors such as humour, provision of emotional support and praise. Examples of therapist lapses are inappropriate criticism, cognitive lapses and a failure to acknowledge the adolescent appropriately. Remoralisation consists of setting positive expectations, exploring the adolescent's motivation, giving praise and challenging negativity (Russel et al., 2008).

Experiential socialisation was most prevalent in the first ten minute segment of therapy, decreasing dramatically in the second and third segment, as it was replaced by therapist responsiveness and remoralisation. Russel et al (2008) suggested that increased

responsiveness was an effective way of building a therapeutic alliance, after structuring and socialising the client. They concluded that shifts in therapist technique during the first session could be used to predict the quality of the therapeutic alliance. Sexton et al. (2005) found that client personality and client-therapist connection predicted about 50% of the variance in therapeutic alliance ratings and that the depth of the therapeutic alliance was stable after the first session. In their sample they found more instances of an increase in therapeutic alliance than decreases, and every session had at least one change. Higher connection was associated with verbal exchanges which had both cognitive and emotional content. Likewise, negative changes in therapeutic alliance were preceded by a focus on cognitive content only. Reandeu and Wampold (1991) found that client involvement in therapy was higher when the therapeutic alliance was stronger. Henry and Strupp (1994) argued that increasing client involvement is an important predictor of treatment outcome. Research by Sexton et al. (2005) illustrated an important difference in literature and practice. Silences are considered lapses which may damage a therapeutic alliance; however Szabó et al. (2009) argued that silences following questions are an important part of coaching sessions. First sessions in therapy might therefore differ considerably from first sessions in executive coaching.

Any attempt to determine the theoretical underpinning of executive coaching theory must deal with a wide range of different perspectives, psychodynamic, systemic, behaviourist and person-centred (McKenna and Davis, 2011). Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) asserted that research on executive coaching began in the 1930s and increased rapidly in the 1990s. Behavioural change and reasons for behavioural change have been widely discussed from various psychological perspectives. Psychodynamic theory,

developmental stages theory, behaviourism (Skinner, 1953, 1984), work motivation theory, cognitive theories, adult learning and person-centred theories, systems theory, constructivism (Montessori, 1946; Glaserfeld, 1989) and chaos theory (Szabó, 2000) have all been used to model the changes achieved through executive coaching methods (McKenna and Davis, 2011; Szabó, 2000). The process of coaching has rarely been the focus of empirical research. In a review of coaching models Dingman (2006) concluded that most included the same six stages- formal contracting, relationship building, assessment, getting feedback and reflecting, goal setting, implementation and evaluation - but tended to vary the ordering of the stages.

The popular GROW model (Whitmore, 2002) follows a sequence which fits Dingman's (2006) model: goal setting (contracting), reality (assessment), options and obstacles (assessment, feedback, reflecting) and way forward (implementation and evaluation). The solution-focused brief coaching model (Berg and Szabó, 2005) is a rather different model which can still be related to Dingman's common model. This model is based on processes used in solution-focused therapy, adapted for working with coaching clients. The solution-focused model is a stage model, but it is emphasised that stages are not really necessary and that goals may change during coaching, or a back and forth movement may occur. The stages of the solution-focused model are desired future (goal setting), early signs/exceptions (reflecting on past success), next steps and experimentation (implementation).

In summary, in therapy the first session is vital to the impact of therapy; several manuals have been written on how to structure a first session. Sometimes the structural context, for example treatment according to the

medical model, can affect the client experience. Also the therapist experience might differ from the experience of the client and the client perception is suggested to differ just as much from the coaches' in coaching as in therapy. The nature of first experiences in general has not yet been addressed in this review. First sessions are a client's first experience of being a coaching client or psychotherapy client, so the next section deals with first experiences.

2.2 First experiences

The focus of this study is the first experience of executive coaching. Experiencing something for the first time involves experiencing either a procedure or a situation for the first time. In this section, the nature and consistency of memories of first experiences and issues relating to recall of first experiences are discussed. Literatures dealing with first experiences in fields unrelated and related to coaching, such as for example therapy or counselling is also discussed. This analysis of how first experiences are used and conceptualised follows Robinson's (1992) model of how first experiences are stored in memory and what function first experiences have in our autobiographical memory. This chapter introduces experiences of first time educators, first time fathers and mothers, first time patients and also first time clients of psychotherapy to illustrate the diversity of first experiences.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2013) defines an experience as 'the process of doing and seeing things and of having things happen to you' or 'the length of time that you have spent doing something.' This indicates that the nature of the experience might change according to the length of time for which an individual is exposed to a given task, situation or environment. Our reaction to places changes over time, Fakeye and Crompton (1991)

discovered that people reacted differently to pictures of a travel destination they had spent time in. Reactions to a given destination varied according to whether the individual had a) never visited, b) was a first time guest or c) was a regular visitor. The first experience was different from subsequent experiences of the same destination. Baloglu and McLeary (1999) reported a similar finding, they found differences between the opinions of visitors and non-visitors to various countries. This suggests that a first experience in a certain region alters how we perceive it. Kolb (1984) suggested that humans learn through experience and that learning is a 'process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (p. 41). A first experience with something is therefore our first opportunity to transform experience into knowledge about the topic. According to Robinson (1992), a first experience can be interpreted in two ways, either as 'a first episode of many similar episodes to follow' or as 'elements of a sequence of thematically related events'- what Robinson calls a 'personal history' (p. 223). In the first scenario a first experience would be followed by similar experiences, for example riding the same roller-coaster or driving down the road. In the second scenario a first experience would be thematically related to later experiences, but the later experiences will be qualitatively different, for example a first kiss at the start of a relationship. Robinson argued that these different kinds of first experiences raise different questions. In the first scenario later episodes will only be remembered as distinct events if they are distinguished in some way from the first experience. In the second scenario 'first experiences mark changes in an on-going developmental process' (p. 224) and they are remembered because they are important for the history of this process. Robinson goes on to argue that first experiences are recorded in both kinds of memory structures, dividing personal histories into two types: skill histories and

relationship histories. Personal histories record the first experience a person has with a topic; following Robinson the interviews carried out for this study included questions designed to elicit information about the beginning of the interviewee's personal history of coaching. The acquisition of skills '[...] provides many occasions for first experiences since there are natural phases or steps in such a process which serve as benchmarks of progress' (Robinson, 1992: p. 224) and these experiences tend to be recalled vividly (Rubin and Kozin, 1984). Although first experiences tend to be remembered vividly and certain aspects of memories of first experiences seem to be stable over time, the accuracy of the memories of first experiences tends to deteriorate similarly to that of other kinds of memory (Neisser, 1982; Barclay and Wellman, 1986). The emotionality of vividness of an experience is not associated with better recall or a slower deterioration of memory, but with an increased confidence in the accuracy of the memory (Barclay and Wellman, 1986; Talarico and Rubin, 2003). Not only does the accuracy of memory deteriorate over time, memory tends to be affected by a positive bias, the older we get and the further away in time the experience, the more likely we are to remember only the positive aspects or to misattribute their importance (Walker, Skowronski and Thompson, 2003). This is also called the fading effect bias. Over time the unpleasant affect associated with a memory tends to fade. Walker et al. (2003) investigated how strong positive and negative affect fade over time, they found that in general, negative affect fades more than positive affect. Only in dysphoric, depressive people, do positive and negative affect fade at a similar rate. Over time the memory of a first experience will become more positive, as long as the individual is healthy (Mather, 2006).

Although the memory of first experiences is subject to deterioration, Robinson (1992) highlighted the importance of first experiences and

suggested they might represent sub-goals of an extended experience. Barsalou (1988) went further, suggesting that goals might act as organising units for autobiographical memory. In relation with skills goals can be 'associated with changes in self-conceptions, and in personal status' (Robinson, 1992, p 229). Such changes depend additionally on the quality of the experience and whether or not expectations meet reality. A first experience of skill acquisition or skill implementation is usually undertaken with a potential new, ideal self that succeeds in skill acquisition in mind (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Success and failure respectively reinforce and threaten this potential new self and may therefore lead to changes and adaptations to initial plans. Palm (2007) gave an autobiographical account of tutoring. Palm prepared meticulously, as a first-time tutor but ultimately realised that the original approach did not work. Palm was disappointed and began reading about structuring learning experiences. Feedback from students, particular one student who began to enjoy classes after initially failing to understand the material, gave Palm a sense of success. Another first, when the student whose positive feedback had been so important failed an examination, produced another realignment in Palm's thinking about tutoring and led to insight about the need to align learning with assessment. Palm went through several stages of imagining and preparing for success; several first experiences forced successive goal realignments, the first experience of being a tutor, the first experience of feeling unsuccessful as a tutor and the first experience of seeing a treasured student fail. These are all examples of adjustment of the possible self through first experiences (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Similar adjustments can be observed in first time blood donors; if they suffer a slight adverse event they tend to re-evaluate their stance on coming back to donate (Masser, White and Terry, 2013). Masser et al. (2013) found that only by

addressing the changes in belief resulting from an adverse first experience were they were able to dampen its impact. Although there is no skill involved, the belief of being able to pass the procedure unharmed proved important for first-time blood donors. The first experience sets a tone for later experiences to come.

Robinson's second class of first experiences was relationship histories. The importance of the first meeting to a relationship is rarely recognised, be it a romantic or professional relationship or friendship, and the significance attached to the first meeting may change over time (Robinson, 1992). Robinson stated that, especially in intimate relationships, the significance of the event is only coded in retrospect. First experiences are only experienced as distinct firsts if they are intentionally sought out. During intimate relationships there are other firsts, such as first fight or turning points within the relationship; these are just as vividly remembered as first meetings (Harvey, Flanary and Morgan, 1986).

First time parenthood is a very well-studied example of a first experience, with over 100,000 results in *Google Scholar*. The first time soon-to-be parent creates a potential self that reflects certain expectations about parenthood. Harwood, McLean and Durkitt (2007) found that in the majority of cases of first time parenthood reality more than meets expectations and first time parents tend to be happily surprised. When mothers' initial expectations were not met however, they were more likely to become depressed and did not adjust as well in their relationships with their partner and child. Interpretation of a first experience is therefore affected by expectations. Fathers' experiences are similarly diverse. Bradley, Boath and Mackenzie (2004) reported that first experiences of fatherhood and the changes it brought to relationships were very variable. Some fathers saw

parenthood as something that intruded on their life and became a new, negative as well as positive, focal point of their lives. Others saw the child coming into a world where a framework was already present and the experience of fatherhood was integrated into this experience. Bradley et al. (2004) suggested, with the caveat that further research was needed to confirm their findings, that being well prepared was an important factor in fathers' perceptions of the experience of first time parenthood. Having a purpose in life and preparing to integrate the child into an existing life were associated with a positive experience of first time fatherhood. Similarly, being involved and prepared is an important factor in parents' later relationship with the child. This suggests that an experience is not only lived as a first experience, it is also influenced by the anticipatory preparation. Similarly, an intervention during an experience may alter its effects. A study on post-partum depression in first time mothers showed that a psychotherapy intervention following the first birth experience lowered the risk of post-partum depression (Pessagno and Hunker, 2012). These examples also show that first experiences of various kinds happen throughout the course of relationships. Robinson (1992) recognised that some first experiences occur over an extended period, such as a first pregnancy or childbirth. Other episodes may be shorter, such as a first fight, a first car crash.

Robinson's (1992) framework for autobiographical experiences is useful not only in understanding how first experiences are constructed but also how we recall and explain them. Robinson argued that recall of first experiences tends to take a narrative format. This happens regardless of whether it is a first experience in skill acquisition or a relationship. First experiences can have different functions. They can have organisational functions, such as recalling the start of an event, or also evaluative functions, acting as a point

from which to evaluate. According to Neisser (1985) experiencing something familiar in a qualitatively different way for the first time can also count as a first experience, for example feeling completely opened up or sexually fulfilled for the first time. Like goals in skill acquisition, these experiences might serve as goals within the context of a relationship. In these situations it is not the act or situation itself, but the quality of the experience which is a first. For example, a study of adults over 70 undertaking psychotherapy for the first time found that they described the experience as similar to that of close friendship, but distinguished by a quality of listening they had not experienced before (Schneider, 2009). A similar qualitative first was reported by mental health patients who said they felt understood for the first time when undergoing therapy (Shattell et al., 2006).

In summary, first experiences are critical moments in our lives. They change our way of perceiving concepts, people and places and also mark important developments which are stored in autobiographical memory. They may be the beginning of a story or relationship or the beginning of a process of skill acquisition, which further influences our lives and memory. This leads us to the question of how clients experience coaching. Although there have been many accounts of coaching from the coach's perspective, the experience of being a first time client in coaching is not yet well understood. The next section explores literature dealing with the perspective of the client and sponsor in coaching and other helping professions.

2.3 The client perspective in coaching and therapy

The last section introduced the subject of first sessions and, more specifically, first sessions in coaching and related professions. Therapy

research suggests that the client and therapist may have completely different pictures of the same method and session (Orlinsky et al., 2004). If we accept that positive expectation or hope and extra-therapeutic client factors make up 55% of the variance in therapy outcomes (Asayand Lambert, 1999), it is clearly important to consider the client's perspective and its effect on outcomes. The drastic difference in client and therapist perspectives was apparent in a study by Llewelyn (1988). In a comparison of 40 therapist-client pairs over 399 sessions, Llewelyn found that clients felt that solutions to their problems and advice were the most helpful part of therapy, as long as rejecting advice was an option. Therapists, on the other hand, thought that finding the cause of the problem and allowing the client to gain insight into the problem was far more critical to success. This suggests that a more thorough look at the client perspective in coaching is warranted. The following sections review critical moments in coaching and client expectations of the coaching process.

Coaches and clients have different views about what constituted critical moments during coaching (De Haan et al., 2010a; 2010b; Day et al., 2010). Clients tend to regard moments of realisation or increased awareness and new insights as critical. Realisations included becoming aware of a new strategy or a new perspective on a situation, becoming aware of a dysfunctional pattern, achieving an insight or having an idea for a new strategy, and gaining insights into personal hang ups and one's relations with others. De Haan et al. (2010b) noticed that clients, unlike those in earlier studies (de Haan, 2010a, 2010b) tended not to mention positive coach input occurring before positive critical moments, but did mention the coach when talking about negative critical moments in their coaching. The coach tended to be mentioned if the client felt the coach's action was the cause of a negative critical moment because it was seen as eroding the

trust between coach and client. Clients used metaphors such as a light bulb coming on, or talked about having new resources, a sense of agency, being in charge of their own destiny, tackling challenges, having a sense of liberation and release when describing critical moments. When talking about the coaching journey clients talked about exploring several avenues of possibility. De Haan et al. (2010b) found that clients reported fewer critical moments than coaches and reported different phenomena from those mentioned by coaches; they were less likely to identify critical moments related to the process of coaching, reporting a more diverse range of critical moments. In a later study, looking at coach-client relationships in which there had been an average of 5.4 previous sessions the same authors found that clients' and coaches' assessments of critical moments were more closely aligned (De Haan et al., 2010a), with 46 out of 86 critical moments clearly referring to the same situation. Again, about half the critical moments cited by both coaches and clients related to a moment of realisation and sudden awareness. The authors coded the majority of critical moments as moments of learning, significant action, significant emotional experience or relational change. Comparing these data to their other datasets, the authors concluded that most disagreements about critical moments related to special cases and that disagreement was negatively correlated with the professional experience of the executive coach. These findings contrast markedly with those of Llewellyn (1988) and Orlinsky et al. (1994) in the field of therapy.

Summative evaluation of interviews with five executive clients who underwent executive coaching for the first time (Paige, 2002) uncovered three themes which were important to executive clients. These were the context of coaching, including their expectations of coaching, understanding the culture of coaching and that all parties agreed that it was more

appropriate to use an external coach than an internal coach for coaching executives. Executives expected coaching to be a pragmatic process and did not expect to have their hand held. They wanted to work with someone who would challenge them as part of a goal-driven, structured process. Organisational culture, including the attitude to use of external coaches, and the coach's familiarity with the organisation's culture were seen as important. The second theme related to the experience of being coached, the focus of coaching, the process of coaching and potential threats to executive coaching. Client participants felt that four coaching skills were particularly important, namely listening carefully and communicating effectively; keeping the coaching focused; developing trust and 'challenging the client's "comfort zone"' (Paige, 2002: p. 65). One client in the study mentioned, as a potential threat to the success of a coaching assignment that, 'you need to have broad enough shoulders to accept the potential criticism that comes from it, and some people do that better than others.' (Paige, 2002: p. 65). The third theme, reflection, related to dealing with positive and negative aspects of the coaching experience and with the potential effects of the investigations on the clients. Positive aspects of coaching reported by clients included learning about oneself, having the opportunity to think further and working with someone who had no agenda other than oneself, however clients also found that investments in coaching eliminated other training opportunities and that the homework given by a coach was often taxing. Another problem reported by clients was envy exhibited by colleagues not receiving executive coaching.

In general coaching seems to be well received by executives. 76% of executives had positive expectations about working with an executive coach before their assignment and 29% anticipated their coaching with enthusiasm, although 31% did not know what to expect from coaching

(Wasylyshyn, 2003). In Wasylyshyn's study, 82% reported that the top three factors in their choice of coach were graduate training in psychology, experience and understanding of business and the reputation of the coach. According to clients in this study the three most important personal characteristics of executive coaches were the ability to form a strong connection, professionalism, following a professional code of ethics and maintaining confidentiality and the use of clear, sound coaching methodology. The executives in the study mostly engaged in coaching in the expectation of making progress towards personal behavioural change goals, enhancing their effectiveness as a leader or learning to build stronger relationships with others.

Wasylyshyn also raised another important issue: who is the client? If we want to consider the client perspective, it is important to understand who the client is. The sponsor might consider that there is a dual client-client team consisting of the executive and internal collaborators such as his or her superior or the HR department. Wasylyshyn (2003) identified three different types of clients, with different needs and expectations. The first was successful executives and other high-potential employees; these clients need an objective sounding board, continuous feedback and want customised one on one coaching. The second client type were potential derailers who have specific performance problems, although not so bad that their job is on the line; Wasylyshyn argued that this type of client would benefit most from an internal mentor or coach. The third type of client is a derailed executive with serious performance problems; Wasylyshyn argued that no coach can salvage this situation, so a severance package including outplacement should be used, rather than coaching. This view might not resonate with everyone, given that it confines coaching to working with a very special type of person and omits methods and processes aimed at

preventing an executive from derailing or rescuing the development of someone whose progress has already been derailed. Wasylyshyn's view should not necessarily be seen as representative of the community of executive coaches.

Underhill (2011) wrote about sourcing coaches, the personality of coaches and expectations of coaching assignments from the leader and organisation perspectives. According to Underhill nearly 80% of all organisations source coaches from vendors they are already familiar with and 55% rely on recommendations from other organisations. Only about one third of coaching assignments involve a coach who is contacted directly by the leader and in 26.5% it was the coach who contacted the leader or sponsor. In 2% of coaching assignments the coach is appointed by organisational representatives who have searched the web, which indicates that organisational clients are unlikely to expect a coach to have a great website. Personal recommendations and trust in an already established vendor are much more important factors in selecting an external coach. Underhill also asked leaders and organisational representatives about the criteria they used when screening coaches; business experience, a match with organisational culture, industry experience, an advanced degree, cost and certification were identified by organisational representatives as important factors, with business experience and match with organisational culture being the most important. The executives interviewed gave a different picture. They rated business experience as the second most important factor, but all other factors were rated as much less important. For leaders the most important factor was the coach's ability to develop rapport with the client. For both organisation and executive, certification was almost a non-issue, only six percent of the organisations in Underhill's study said they would require a coach to be

certified by an awarding body such as the ICF and only 29% said they would be more likely to hire coaches if they had certification; 63% of the executives interviewed did not know whether or not their coach held certification.

This section has focused on the client perspective on coaching. In summary, the evidence on differences between coaches and clients perspectives is inconsistent. Some studies suggest that there are considerable differences, whilst others find these to be largely confined to assignments involving inexperienced coaches. Executive clients speak about critical realisations, light-bulb moments and a space to reflect with a neutral agenda. They regard rapport building and great listening skills as the most important coaching skills and their coaching goals are usually related to personal development or behavioural change. The organisational client perspective can be considered as a second client perspective. Organisations place most emphasis on finding quality coaches, and most rely on recommendations from other coaches and vendors. In view of the conflicting data and conflicting positions (De Haan et al., 2010a; 2010b), further research differentiating the executive coaching experience from experience of therapy or counselling may be needed. It is also important, when analysing coaching, to consider who the client is. The existing literature on coaching often mentions the goals of organisations and sponsors involved (Underhill, 2011). This is very different from therapy, where clients are focused on their own behavioural or psychological issues rather than the impact they have on their performance as part of an organisation. It is difficult to precisely define who the client is. Underhill's (2011) data underlines differences in organizational and executives' views. The organization is part of a triadic relationship of coach, client and organization. Some authors argue that the relationship with the

organization and goals to work on should be codified in a contract agreed upon by client, manager and HR department (Fielder & Starr, 2008). In my experience as executive coach, I found that senior executives were often more self-driven towards coaching and very rarely did a CEO involve HR. This suggests possible differences among clients when comparing top and senior executives to their direct reports or leaders situated on lower levels of the corporate hierarchy. In this study, the client's view and experience is defined as the executive's perspective.

2.4 Summary

The last sections have reviewed literature on first sessions, first experiences and the client perspective of coaching and popular models. Although research into coaching is attracting more attention there is a plethora of coaching models to be considered. These coaching models have different theoretical underpinnings and use different methods. Coaching shares a theoretical background with therapy and counselling, so the various approaches are underpinned in a similar manner to their therapeutic counterparts. Quantitative studies can only touch on what really happens in coaching sessions, looking at what tools and methodologies are applied. A theory building, qualitative approach exploring the client perspective offers a means of uncovering what happens in a first session and how it is experienced by the executive client.

This review suggests that to date there has been a lack of process research on coaching similar to that carried out in therapy. In the light of the great psychotherapy debate (Wampold, 2001) and evidence that all coaching models are effective (Kilburg, 2004), it seems clear that all

theories about what happens in first coaching sessions and their influence on subsequent coaching sessions have the potential to inform practice under all coaching models. There is a consensus in contemporary literature on the definition of a first session and what it consists of or should consist of. These components were described by Dingman (2006) as formal contracting, relationship building, goal setting, reflecting and implementation. There are however contradictory recommendations on issues such as meeting with the sponsor first before a first session and use of a pre-coaching consultation. The phase models provide us with a linear model of the coaching process, but their various authors stress the non-linearity of coaching in practice, that it is possible to move freely between stages during the process. This is in contrast to the medical model, but consistent with a contextual model of psychotherapy (Wampold, 2001). Evidence about the process of therapy and elements and factors in the first session are a major field of therapy research. There is evidence on the importance of the therapeutic alliance in a first session in therapy and how to achieve a successful alliance (Wampold, 2001; Asay and Lambert, 1999). Comparison of findings from therapy research with recommendations on executive coaching highlights the differences between the fields. Elements found to be unhelpful in therapy and counselling, such as silences, may prove advantageous in coaching. Comparative evidence on session lengths, effective elements, behaviours and the content of a first session of coaching is currently lacking and is one of the gaps addressed by this research. In therapy, the quality of the first session can have an impact on the eventual success of the treatment.

This research focused on the client perspective, reflecting the fact that coaching success tends to be measured in terms of client outcomes. In therapy there are considerable differences between the client and therapist

perspectives, highlighting the importance of recognising both perspectives. Extant evidence on the existence of a similar difference in coaching is inconsistent. It has been suggested that client and coach perspectives on a coaching relationship are more likely to coincide the more experienced the coach is (de Haan, Bertie, Day and Sills, 2010a), but this conclusion is based on the findings of one group of researchers, so more research into potential differences between client and coach perspectives seems warranted, though it is outside of the scope of this research project. The characteristics of a good coach and the aspects of coaching which really benefit a client are also unclear. Some authors have drawn parallels with the 'active ingredients' of therapy, but at present there is no clear answer to the question 'what makes a good coach?' Organisations have sidestepped this issue by largely leaving assessment of coaches to trusted consultancy vendors who source and provide coaches on request (Underhill, 2011). Developing understanding about what happens in first sessions and about coaching in general will allow us to answer questions about the active ingredients of coaching, what a coach is able to influence and, ultimately, what makes an exceptional coach.

It is important to acknowledge the theoretical background to the various coaching methods. Kilburg (2004) suggested that all coaching models were effective; however even if all of them are potentially valid, the active factors and client changes they promote may be fundamentally different. This study focuses on the elements of the first session. The relative importance of the first session is rarely mentioned in popular models. Only the solution-focused brief coaching model mentions the importance of the first session, which according to Szabó et al. (2009), is often the only session. Constructivist, psychodynamic and behaviourist models of coaching might be similarly successful, although they use fundamentally different

processes. The current lack of insight into the experience of coaching sessions- particularly first coaching experiences -and how clients experience change, underlines the need for further theoretical development. Figure 2 visualises the gap in research identified during the literature review.

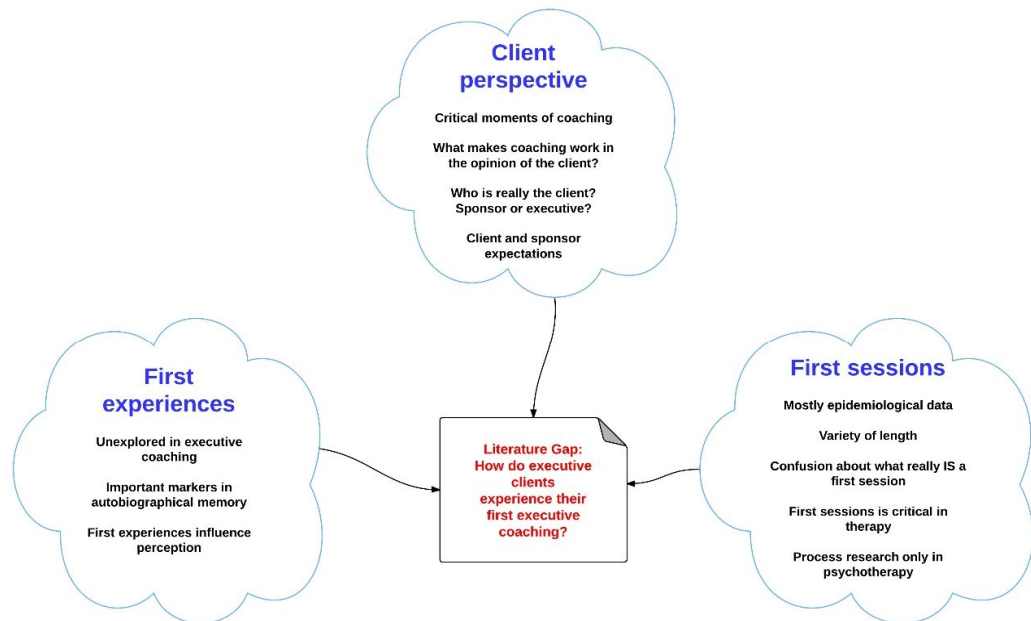


Figure 2: Gaps in literature

This chapter focused on literature on first sessions and the client perspective. The literature review has led to the identification of a gap in literature and theory and helped define the research objectives. Generation of new theory was preferred over verification of existing theory as a strategy for addressing part of this gap. Grounded Theory methodology has been used to generate relevant theory in this uncharted territory.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This chapter outlines the research paradigm and methodology used and the reasons for choosing Grounded Theory methodology. The aim of this study was to develop theory about first sessions in executive coaching from the client's perspective. The literature review revealed the need for theory in this specific area, particularly in relation to the similarities and differences between executive coaching and other helping professions and the differences between coaches' and clients' perceptions. The epistemological and ontological aspects of this pragmatic paradigm are also described in this chapter, and the rationale for Grounded Theory methodology is explained. The research design, data collection methods and data analysis methods are described in detail. The chapter closes with discussions of the limitations of the methods, the validity and generalisability of theory generated using this method and ethical considerations.

3.1 Paradigm

The choice of paradigm necessarily reflects the intention and motivation for the research as well as the researcher's assumptions about reality. Creswell (1998, p. 74) described a paradigm as a 'basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide [...] enquiries'. A paradigm influences the methods employed, the way data is collected and interpreted and how theories and hypotheses are generated and tested. The choice of research methodology reflects assumptions about the subject of investigation, since it should be capable of capturing the characteristics and relationships of relevance. To choose the right methodology a researcher must have a clear understanding of the epistemological and ontological beliefs that inform and influence the research. A scientific paradigm comes with two kinds of

assumptions about the nature and acquisition of knowledge, an epistemological stance (Jones, Torres and Arminio, 2006) and an ontological stance, which define how one views the nature of existence and structure of reality (Crotty, 1998).

In order to choose the appropriate paradigm for this research I had to explore my assumptions about reality (Jones et al., 2006; McCallin, 2009). My engineering and industry background led me to take a strongly positivist stance, assuming that there is an objective reality and an unambiguous answer to questions. During my work and training as a coach and consultant, I have come to a more constructivist stance (Radatz, 2013). My approach to coaching depended on an understanding that reality is constructed by individual clients and does not necessarily overlap with the subjective reality of their peers. I assumed that my personal stance on research would be constructivist, due to my affiliation with the constructivist approach I had experienced in the Germanic consulting world. I assumed that individual realities were subjective and relative. During the early development of this thesis I confronted this view by considering different paradigms and their meanings. When I immersed myself in constructivist literature (Charmaz, 2000, 2006, 2009) I found myself asking questions about cause and effect and looking for publications with a more objective, general and practical impact on everyday business life rather than the descriptive narrative to which I was exposed. This led to a paradigmatic conflict: I wanted to explore the individual perspectives of coaching clients, based on the assumption that their realities might be different from those of coaches or third persons; however I wanted these subjective experiences to generate data and contribute to the general understanding and practice of executive coaching. A subjectivist epistemological approach assumes that interpretation of data from subjective perspectives cannot be

generalized. A purely constructivist approach allows an interpretation of subjective realities but seemed to fail my requirement that it be capable of contributing generalisable findings relevant to the theory and practice of first coaching sessions. I realised that my stance was more positivist than I had appreciated; nevertheless an entirely positivist stance seemed too limited to permit exploration of the rich experience of executive coaching—something I had experienced myself, first as a client and later as coach. A positivist approach to theory generation would be reductionist, and given its roots in hypothetico-deductive thinking, not suited to the generation of new theory (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1997).

I was apparently stuck between two philosophical positions, both of which resonated with me. Guba and Lincoln (1994) went as far to argue that “Paradigm issues are crucial; no inquirer, we maintain, ought to go about the business of inquiry without being clear about just what paradigm informs and guides his or her approach” (p. 116). My conflict came from having a fixed research question but a conflict in what appeared to be incommensurable beliefs about epistemology and ontology. To resolve this conflict I assumed a pragmatic stance and moved towards the methodology which best suited the project. Rather than accepting an incommensurability of my beliefs towards research, I focused on what Morgan (2007) calls a shared understanding. The pragmatic approach repudiates the need for choice between dualist philosophical stances and instead puts the research question at the heart of the inquiry. Pragmatism advocates selecting the methodology most suited to answering the research question at hand (Creswell, 2009). The pragmatic paradigm places the philosophical underpinning of a study outside conflicting ontological stances, acknowledging that both have their merits. Creswell (2009) argued that this stance allows the researcher to let the research question guide the

research rather than being limited to one philosophical approach. Rather than focusing on an incommensurability of paradigms, main issues become shared meaning, joint action and workability of answers (Morgan, 2007). The pragmatic paradigm rejects a fixed answer on metaphysical questions. Morgan (2007) points out that rather than making a statement about the nature of reality, a pragmatist would rather engage with the question of “What *difference* it makes to believe one thing versus another [...]” (p. 68, my emphasis). It also fitted my personal understanding of research, as a problem-centred endeavour intended to improve understanding and real-world practice (Creswell, 1998, p. 6) whilst remembering that ‘reality is socially constructed’ (Mertens, 2005, p.12). Pragmatism rejects putting the philosophical question at the start of an inquiry. Rather it puts methodology at the centre of attention and allows the researcher to reflect on the relationship between methodology and epistemology and methodology and methods (Morgan, 2007). This relationship however could also be a drawback of the pragmatic approach. While positivism and constructivism are clearly defined in their view on the objectivity/subjectivity of data, pragmatism has to enter a grey area. Morgan (2007) calls this area intersubjectivity. A pragmatic approach to researching coaching questions needs to result in data and theory with shared meaning. To bridge the grey area of rejecting pure objectivism and subjectivism, this research aims to create knowledge that is mutually understood by researchers and practitioners in the field of coaching. It needs to use a methodology that allows for the emergence of mutually understood meaning and joint action.

3.2 Choice of research methodology

The process by which the research strategy was chosen echoed the epistemological conflicts and described above. On the basis of my initial wish to take the constructivist perspective, I considered Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and a constructivist approach to Grounded Theory before deciding to use a pragmatic approach to Grounded Theory. IPA seemed suitable for use within a constructivist paradigm, relying on immersion in the experience in context of the participant (Larkin, 2012). IPA focuses on the experience of the participant, it makes sense of individual experience, in terms of first-hand accounts of how individuals experience a phenomenon. This limits the transferability of results and the scope for generation of theory and thus would not have addressed the question of what happens in the first coaching session, generating instead an account of what happens in the client's constructed experience of a first coaching session.

Given my experience as a coach, it seemed appropriate to use a methodology that would allow me, as the researcher, to interact with the participants' data in a way that made use of my experience of executive coaching, in order to gain a better understanding of the client perspective. Grounded Theory was therefore a suitable approach to this research.

McCallin (2009) identified different approaches to Grounded Theory. The constructivist approach to Grounded Theory acknowledges the existence of multiple realities and accounts and recognises the subjective nature of experience (Charmaz, 2006, 2009). Grounded Theory aims to develop theory about issues relevant to people's lives in an inductive fashion, through comparative data analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A constructivist approach to Grounded Theory rejects the idea of an

external, objective reality and views theory development as a co-construction process involving both researcher and participant, acknowledging the researcher as contributor in the development of the theory (Charmaz, 2000; Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006). This methodology allowed the contribution of my own experience as executive in the role of co-constructing theory, but its epistemological stance brought my philosophical conflict, acknowledging individually constructed diverse realities whilst being guided by external, practical reality in my work as coach, into focus.

After revisiting Grounded Theory literature from a pragmatic perspective I chose to use the evolved Grounded Theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 2008; Mills et al., 2006). Evolved Grounded Theory approaches follow a more pragmatic approach than classical Grounded Theory methodology, thus allowing me to be as flexible as necessary in working with the data gathered but also providing a structure and distinct tools for theory development. Although the epistemological roots of this approach have been questioned (Bryant, 2009), the evolved approach to Grounded Theory is pragmatist in nature (Strübing, 2007). Mills et al. (2006) described disagreements about the epistemological stance of the evolved approach to Grounded Theory. Strauss and Corbin (1994) rejected the idea of a pre-existing reality, but Charmaz (2000) argued that the use of analytic tools, questions and hypotheses presupposes an external reality. Mills et al. (2006) identified the evolved Grounded Theory approach as relativist and pragmatic and located it on a continuum between post-positivism and constructivism, fitting neither stance perfectly. Strübing (2007) argued however that Grounded Theory is deeply rooted in the North American tradition of pragmatism. Strübing (2007, p. 565) cited Dewey (1938) 'The process of developing ideas is conceived of by Dewey as a rational,

discursive act that aims at the progressive stabilisation of ideas through the testing of their practical consequences as would-be valid solutions.'Real world applicability is thus a criterion for the quality of research. Others authors have located pragmatism outside the philosophical conflict and dichotomy between positivism and constructionism, arguing that pragmatism is an approach which allows the research to use any means which is useful in addressing the research question (Creswell, 2009; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Post-positivism is described as an approach which acknowledges that although an observer can have an influence on the results, there is an objective reality to be observed (Robson, 2002), whereas constructivism maintains that information and knowledge are socially and individually constructed and rejects the idea of a universal objective reality (Crotty, 1998). Mills et al. (2006) classified Strauss and Corbin's (2008) approach as relativist and pragmatist due to its acknowledgement of constructed reality and emphasis on researcher objectivity. Pragmatism repudiates the need for choice between philosophical stances and focuses on using a method that will enable the research questions to be addressed (Creswell, 2009). Pragmatism 'sidesteps the contentious issues of truth and reality, accepts, philosophically, that there are singular and multiple realities that are open to empirical inquiry and orients itself toward solving practical problems in the 'real world.' (Feilzer, 2009). Strauss and Corbin's (2008) approach to Grounded Theory enabled exploration of the research question without the need to take a philosophical stance, allowing the researcher to step outside the continuum between positivism and constructionism. The evolved Grounded Theory approach allowed me to focus on the client experience, develop theory from qualitative interviews and take a pragmatic approach to relating the theory to the field of executive coaching.

3.3 Research Design

The original Grounded Theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) has been subject to many alterations and amendments. McCallin (2009) claimed that three main variants were in use, the original, the Charmaz (2006, 2009) constructivist variant and the approach developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998, 2008). Following a comparison of various approaches to Grounded Theory I decided to base my approach on Strauss and Corbin's work. These authors have provided a number of tools and a multi-step guide for a researcher, which helped me to conduct methodologically rigorous research. The original publication (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) described principles that permeate all Grounded Theory approaches. I have drawn from Strauss and Corbin (1998, 2008) and the publications introducing Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Where there was disagreement between the original Grounded Theory and Strauss and Corbin's (1998; 2008) modification, my research was guided by the latter. The issue of reduction of data to a single core category rather than a number of connected core categories was one such instance. Because I took a pragmatist approach to this research, it was important for me to use a methodology that allowed me to gather and analyse data pragmatically but also gave me a stable structure to work from. Driven by the research question the study went through several cycles of data collection and analysis. This iterative process is shown in Figure 3. The research question driving this research was 'How does an executive client experience coaching for the first time?' This question was borne in mind throughout the research process.



Figure 3: The research process

This structured approach to inductive inquiry and theory generation resonated well with the pragmatist approach. It allowed me to gather data relevant to the phenomena of interest and to make an informed choice about what data might be necessary for theory generation whilst remaining flexible about the character of the emerging theory. This structured approach also guided the step by step theory development process, providing a more stable, secure foundation for theory development.

The need for preliminary literature reviews is debated among Grounded Theory researchers (Dunne, 2011). Although use of literature and the timing of its use are sources of conflict among Grounded Theory researchers (McGhee, Marland and Atkinson, 2007), immersion in literature dealing with first sessions provided an additional useful perspective on the

analysis. Visiting and later revisiting relevant literature on coaching and related fields was used to identify gaps and led to the integration of newly generated theory and a comparative analysis of theory applicable to coaching and related fields. Where appropriate, literature was used as data, to enhance the data analysis process. Categories that evolved were discussed with researchers familiar with social research but not coaching, and researchers familiar with coaching, in order to avoid being led by literature rather than data. The use of multiple perspectives reflecting on generated theory allows the researcher to add depth to the theory and improves its reliability (Foss and Ellefson, 2002). Relevant literature was treated as another form of data to guide the further coding and sampling process (Dick, 2007). Assessing the fit between the data and the popular models allowed me to develop an understanding of the similarities and differences between the view of scholars and coaches and the experience of the clients.

With the aforementioned principles in mind, the research process was designed and carried out. During the research process, there were several cycles of repetition of similar processes. With the research question always in mind, a semi-structured interview protocol was designed and subsequently amended as necessary. Then participants with the necessary characteristics were sought out and interviewed. Then data were analysed through the aforementioned different coding processes. Concepts and categories emerging from the category were constantly compared with each other and evolved through the coding. During coding and comparison, new questions, aspects and gaps were found and a new cycle started with an amendment of the interview protocol and a new round of interviews. During the research process this meant going through several cycles of collecting and comparing data. This process goes through as many cycles

as necessary until the theory is saturated, i.e. that new interviews do not lead to new concepts or all categories and all codes can be related to already existing categories and its properties. In the following the journey of this research process is described step by step.

After the initial literature review was finished and gaps identified, the first interview protocol was designed with the research question in mind. The questions in the protocol were related to concepts that had been identified as important for coaching or therapy. The questions focused on what had happened during the session, emotions during the session, contributions of the coach and the relationship between coach and client. The criteria when recruiting the first participants was that they were in an executive position and had recently experienced executive coaching for the first time i.e. had experience their first coaching session in the week before the interview. After the first interview, it was noted that the interview data were not substantive, because the answers given had been very concise and general in nature. The interview protocol was amended to include more detailed and more in-depth questions about the whole coaching experience. For example, if the interviewee gave only a structural description of the session, the protocol included prompts to talk about emotions, expectations and the purpose of the coaching session. Three interviews were carried out using this new protocol and transcribed. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested writing a memo of each interview as part of the interview process. Memos written after the interviews served as a first step in the analysis and centred on the utility of interview questions and topics that seemed interesting and should be explored more or less deeply during subsequent interviews. These experiences during the interviews with specific questions and interview process were noted in a learning journal. Individual interview recordings were listened to and initial thoughts about

codes and the interview process were also noted. After this preliminary analysis of the first three interviews, one of the questions on the effect of the first session on the whole coaching process was taken out of the interview protocol as it elicited only speculative answers about a process that had not yet concluded.

The first wave of formal analysis began with step by step coding. I analysed and evaluated the interviews line by line and coded passages that stood out as descriptions of session content, emotions, thought processes, reactions or experience. Codes were extracted as in vivo codes and collected in a spreadsheet, which included participant number and the line numbers specifying the location of the code. In order to achieve a more nuanced, in-depth analysis, I used a number of analytic tools recommended by Strauss and Corbin (2008). The analysis was guided by self-questioning. Line by line, I asked sensitising questions, such as 'What is going on here?', 'Who is involved?', or 'What does this mean for the participant?' Passages that provided answers to these questions were grouped together and analysed on the basis of theoretical questions such as 'What is the relationship between these two passages?', 'What does this mean for a model of coaching?' or 'If this is important, what do I have to look for to anchor this concept in other interviews?' I copied and numbered every single passage into a coding schema and started to look for quotes that related to a given evolving concept. After coding the first interviews line by line, I revisited the data using the category schema I had developed and once again, asked questions about relationships between the categories and looked for passages and meanings I might have missed before or that might have changed. A network of concepts and codes relating to the concept was developed from these coded passages. A visual map of the network of concepts was created and this enabled identification of several

higher order concept groups which were related to each at the level of attributes and dimensions. An excerpt from this map is shown in Figure 4.

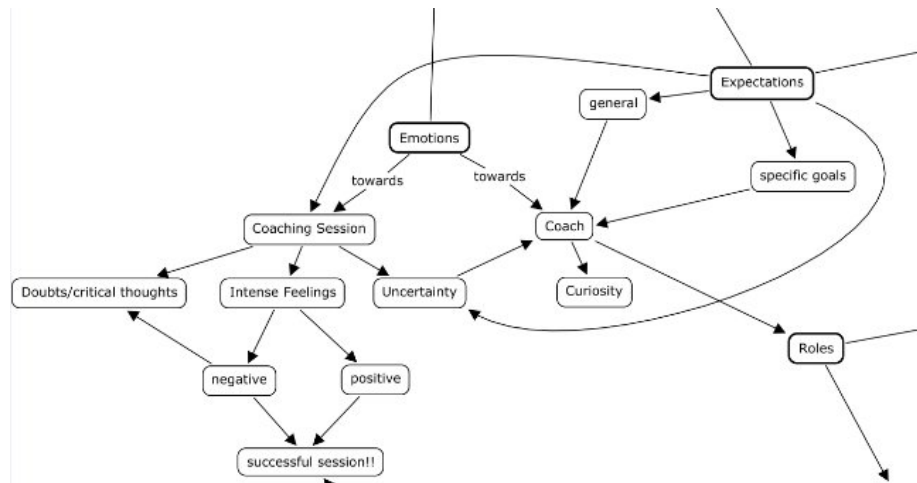


Figure 4: Excerpt from a visual map

The concepts were related to each other using axial coding and grouped according to higher order concepts, as in the earlier grouping of codes. Axial coding is the process of relating one category to other categories and defining concepts, central characteristics and dimensions of the category (Gibbs, 2010). The resulting visual map was used as a guideline when reviewing interview transcripts and using comparative analysis to ground these concepts in data and explore new, emerging concepts, comparing them to existing concepts. Relating concepts to each other and grouping them into higher order categories in this network enabled the development of first-order categories such as 'expectations about the coach'. One of these first-order categories related to the sequence of coaching and the dynamic process underlying axial coding can be illustrated using this first-order category: the category 'what happens in the first coaching session' was formed by grouping together answers to this exact question from the interview.

Initial analysis of the first four interviews showed that different stages of perception and cognition could be distinguished. The descriptive diagram shown in Figure 5 arranged the client perspective on pre-, in-, and post-session experiences in a chronological fashion. During the initial cycle of analysis it was detected that several aspects of seemed to be missing or incomplete. As an example, contrary to expectation, participants tended not to mention the relationship. Also it was found one of the female participants expressed a lot more emotion during the interview process than her male counterparts. This may have been due to her personality, gender or a difference in how the interview was conducted and the way questions about emotions were asked. Since emotions are part of the participants' experience, this was noted for further inquiry

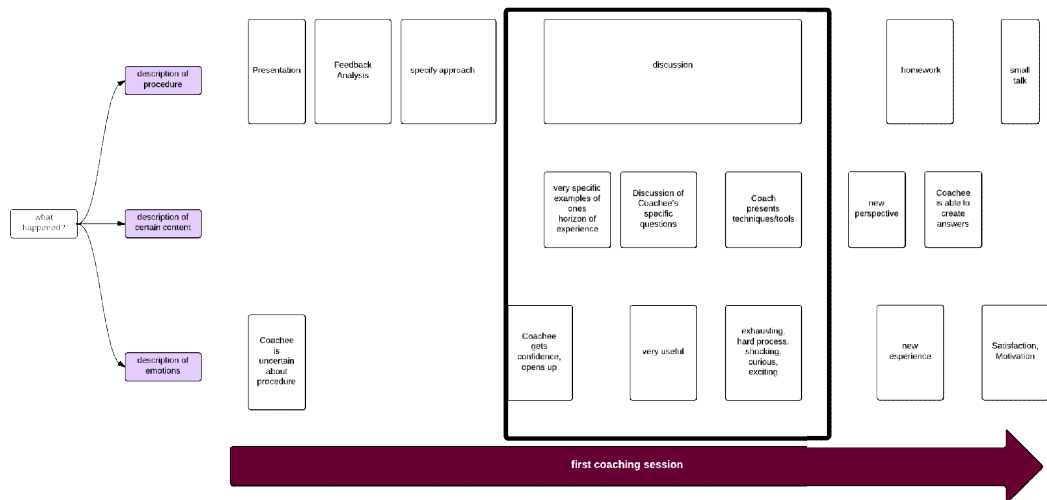


Figure 5: Preliminary model of the first coaching session

The first step in exploring this intriguing difference was to include more female participants in the next round of interviews, but it was also important to ask more specifically about emotions at certain points during the coaching session. The interview protocol was amended to include questions about emotions and six further interviews were conducted

with clients that had just experienced executive coaching for the first time. In the analysis of this second wave of data I once again began with line by line coding and axial coding, comparing newly found codes, concepts and categories with each other and with the original data. In analysis of this second wave of data, the category 'expectations and conditions' emerged more and more clearly, its concepts became more clearly defined and underpinned by codes from the data, helping to form a coherent picture of the category. Analysis of this wave of data produced a few surprises, or 'aha moments'. These were moments that defined my experience during the research, for example surprises, realisations or moments where previously emerging models or categories were discarded. These were not necessarily pleasant moments, but also moments of frustration that occurred when a previously held belief or model was challenged or made obsolete by the data. First of all, participants in the coaching programme from which I had recruited the majority of participants seemed to have different expectations from the remaining participants. Their concerns about certain conditions of the programme were completely different from the experiences of stand-alone clients who had sought coaching themselves.

I experienced an aha moment with regard to the initial focus on a universal sequence for the coaching experience. The chronological sorting of concepts into a set sequence lost its substance as more and more divergent codes which fitted a specific concept and category, but not the initial sequential order, emerged. I found, for example, that codes for events that were believed to happen at specific stages occurred in descriptions of every stage of the coaching process; it was not possible to locate certain experiences in a single, distinct stage. This led to the abandonment of the first framework, and I was forced to abandon one of my own preconceptions. I had expected to find that coaching experiences always

followed the same sequence, but although I found an apparently coherent sequence of activities, some codes were located throughout the session. Another aha-moment related to the answer to the question 'What happened in the first coaching session?' Interviewees did not give chronological accounts, giving instead a general description of outcomes and the emotions experienced during the coaching session. This led me to amend my question; at first I focused on what happened during the session, but I began to understand that it was not just about what happened, but what was experienced during the session.

Although it seemed trivial at first, it was a huge shift in how I looked at the data. I went back to old codes and interviews with a focus on 'experiencing' and I found that although my initial framework fell to pieces, a new, and large 'agency and interaction' category started to form. I found that at certain points participants were mentioning shifts in agency and that from their perspective the relationship between coach and client was best described in terms of the qualities of the interaction between them.

My scheme of categories was printed and presented to several of my peers in the DCaM programme to facilitate reflection on it. As a result of this feedback the interview protocol was revised again to focus on experience, rather than just the description of events. Reviewing the interview memos, it was apparent that I had been very neutral and had not engaged closely with the participants. In this protocol revision the way questions were asked was changed. As well as being asked 'What happened during the session?' participants were asked to 'Imagine, a colleague of yours, who has not had a single coaching session yet, is about to have his or her first session. Your colleague knows that you have already experienced coaching and is very curious about what will happen. If he or she asked you "What can I

expect?”or “What lies ahead?”what would you tell your colleague?’ This question was intended to elicit additional accounts of experience rather than simple recitations of what happened. I wanted to find out whether or not framing the question in relation to a third party allowed me to connect more deeply with the client experience than I had in previous interviews.

After revision of the interview protocol I started a new wave of interviews. My former analysis had revealed some differences between clients who took coaching as part of a formal programme and clients who sought coaching on their own initiative. Three further interviews were conducted and transcribed. During the analysis of this wave new data on the client experience led to the splitting of the ‘agency’ category into ‘agency and interaction’ and ‘roles of coach and client.’ The interviews were coded and concepts in the category schema were amended using additional codes. I used axial coding with my existing categories, relating each category to the others and comparing them. This produced 18 distinct categories. I created a model for every category that visualised the category and related concepts. During this cycle of analysis, three major findings changed my interpretation. First of all, I confirmed that agencies and stages in the coaching session followed a sequence; however, as I had found earlier, this sequence was not definitive of the first experience of coaching in any way. The quality of the interaction - openness was the central factor –in the context of an open discussion was the defining factor. Clients experienced the coach as being open to discussing all problems whilst the clients were eager to learn and open to new experience. This open process could not be related to the structural, sequential model that I had expected to emerge after the first cycle of analysis. The second finding was that agency and roles were different categories. An objective assessment of agency with respect to what was happening and the client experience of roles were

very different. The 'agency and interaction' category defined the quality of the interaction and the dominant partner in the interaction. The 'roles' category emerged as a description of how the client perceived the coach and what role the coach took. Although it emerged that the coach could take various roles, the form of interaction, namely open discussion, remained the same. During this cycle of analysis a higher order category started to form. All clients seemed to have a similar experience of discovering discrepancies between the status quo and how things should be.

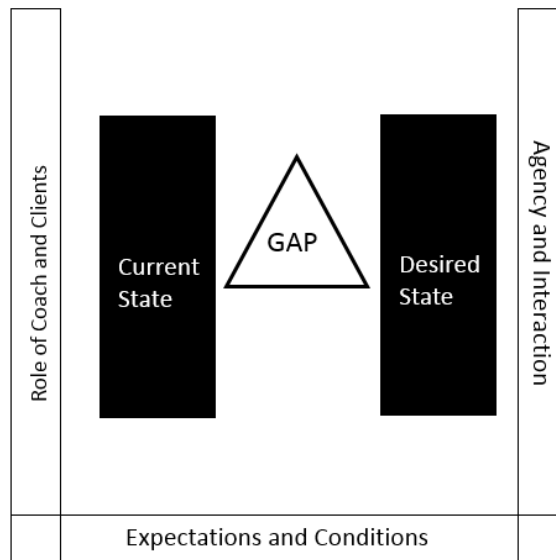


Figure 6: A late stage preliminary model, later replaced by the final DARE model. Discovering had not yet emerged as central core experience, but discovering potential was already represented by 'GAP'

The other categories seemed to influence this discovering and distinctive kinds of discovering emerged. The first type of discovering was the realisation of a gap between current and desired state, the second was a realisation of potential.

During the previous cycle it was noticed that most participants were from a Western cultural background. To adhere to a theoretical sampling strategy it was necessary to recruit more participants from other backgrounds so two additional participants, one from Tunisia, were interviewed and their interviews transcribed. No further concepts or categories emerged during the coding of these two interviews.

At this point all codes fitted the current category scheme. Bearing this in mind, all the interviews were revisited to compare their coding with the existing category scheme. Some of the later-emerging concepts were found in the early interviews and new codes added, but no new concept emerged from this exercise. As no new concepts were emerging, I proceeded with axial coding, comparing the existing categories with each other and defining their categories. Gibbs (2010) argued that selective coding should be one of the last steps in an analysis. During the comparison some categories were merged or amended and some were found to be unsubstantial. Selective coding was then used to reveal the core category. Although 'discovering' was found to be the core category, 'discovering' was influenced by three other main categories, 'expectations and conditions', 'agency and interaction' and 'roles of coach and client'. An important realisation during this last cycle of analysis was that there was an important difference between discovering and simply uncovering a gap. This category 'discovering' related to learning and becoming aware of something completely new and bringing awareness to new discoveries. Another aha moment was the realisation that the 18 categories could be reduced to four, with most of the categories being integrated into a higher order core category. Also another aspect of 'discovering', discovering of coaching, was placed in the 'discovering' core category. The final steps of analysis were the development of a model and the revisiting of every interview to assess

the fit between the theoretical DARE model and the client experience. To reach saturation, Morse (2004) argues that new data does not yield new concepts and the emerged concepts are well defined. Morse (2004) also argues that the linkages between concepts are clear and no new data is needed. The decision that theoretical saturation was reached was made due to two reasons. The last three interviews did not find any new categories or concepts. Rather, they added more examples to categories that were already there. Also, a revisiting of the interviews that had been analysed before did not show further changes to the theoretical concepts, their boundaries or interaction with each other. Data collection and analysis ended at this point and the findings written down. The description of every category was supplemented with quotes that had been coded as a given concept within the category. Table 1 below gives an overview of participant characteristics, such as gender, position and nationality. Two further characteristics were found to be important during the analysis and have thus been added, whether the coaching was part of a corporate programme and whether or not clients had had pre-coaching contact with their coach, such as a scheduled 'chemistry call' or a meeting during a corporate training event.

Participant code	Sex	Position	Program me/ Standalone	Nationality	Pre-Coaching Contact
P001	Male	Associate Director	Program me	American	no
P002	Male	Sr. Project Manager	Program me	American	no
P003	Female	CFO	Standalone	Romanian-French	yes

P004	Male	Project Manager	Program me	German	yes
P005	Male	Project Manager	Program me	Swiss	yes
P006	Male	RA/QA Business Analyst	Program me	Irish	no
P007	Male	Project Manager	Program me	German	yes
P008	Male	Project Manager	Standalon e	Swiss	yes
P009	Male	Senior Programme Manager	Standalon e	German	yes
P010	Male	Vice president	Standalon e	German	yes
P011	Female	Project Manager	Program me	German	no
P012	Male	Project Manager	Program me	German	no
P013	Female	CFO	Standalon e	German	yes
P014	Male	CEO	Standalon e	Tunisian	yes
P015	Male	President	Standalon e	German	yes

Table 1: Characteristics of clients

3.4 Ethical considerations

Every research project involving human participants must meet ethical standards. During the research process, all participants were told the purpose of the research and why they had been asked to participate. Participants were given and asked to sign a consent form and were informed that they could refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the study altogether. The participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded and it was explained how the recordings would be handled to

ensure their privacy. The consent form and information sheets(see Appendices I, II, III, IV and V) were reviewed by the Oxford Brookes Ethics Committee prior to use.

The interviews were initially kept on a computer to which only the author of this thesis had access. The computer is an eleventh generation MacBook Pro using Filevault 2 disk encryption technology. Filevault 2 uses the open Advanced Encryption Standard (AES), which has been judged secure enough to secure information regarding national security by the US National Institute of Standards and Technology (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2003). The transcriber signed a non-disclosure agreement. The interview transcripts were anonymised after transcription. It was my intention to create a secure environment for the participants and protect individual and corporate information as effectively as possible.

3.5 Scientific quality of the study

The earlier part of the chapter described the pragmatic approach and Grounded Theory methodology that was central to this; this section deals with issues relating to the quality of the research. The data collected in this study were qualitative in nature, the use of qualitative data were based on a pragmatic decision that this type of data would best address the research questions. Research conducted from a pragmatist perspective needs to be defensible to the research communities it is aimed at and used by (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006). Onwuegbuzie and Johnson stressed that multiple perspectives on the quality of research should be considered; there are well-established quantitative and qualitative measures of quality. In quantitative, positivist research measures of reliability and internal and external validity are well-accepted criteria among researchers (Payton, 1979). These measures, however, have been criticised because they

cannot easily be applied to qualitative methods and because they are rooted in a quantitative, positivist paradigm that cannot be applied directly to qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). Some authors have suggested ways of adapting these measures for use with qualitative research (Silverman, 2001); others have suggested using other quality criteria to evaluate their research (Guba, 1981). From a pragmatist perspective quality criteria that are consistent with the chosen method are the most appropriate way of evaluating the trustworthiness of the research. One aim of this study was the creation of theory relevant to the field of executive coaching; it is important that the theory developed can be trusted to be relevant, so the quality criteria applied to this study should assess the trustworthiness and applicability of the theory developed. Some researchers (Shenton, 2004) have argued that rationalist criteria do not apply to the naturalistic paradigm or to qualitative data, however Morse et al. (2002) argued that naturalistic criteria are not sufficient to guarantee rigour, or the concept of scientific robustness that Lincoln and Guba (1985) replaced with the concept of trustworthiness. Morse et al. (2002) argued that trustworthiness criteria are useful in any attempted evaluation of rigour, but do not themselves guarantee rigour (Morse et al., 2002). They argued that rigour must be part of the qualitative research process rather than being a post-hoc strategy. On the basis of this argument rationalist criteria, such as reliability and validity, will be considered in addition to the naturalist perspective (Guba, 1981). Validity and reliability were the rationalist quality criteria considered with respect to this study. The naturalistic criteria used were credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The next sections discuss how this research was evaluated using these criteria.

3.5.1 Quality criteria in detail

Strübing (2007) posited that an important element of pragmatic research is that it should have valid real life consequences. The conventional criteria of judging research quality, according to Strübing (2007), are based on 'a dualist understanding of reality and subjectivity inherent in critical rationalism' and therefore inadequate for evaluating pragmatist research (p. 569). One quality criterion for this study was therefore its implications for the practice of first executive coaching sessions. Strübing (2007, p 565) argued that the pragmatist grounded theorist uses an iterative approach, where 'nothing in existence is actually manipulated; instead the practical consequences, the likely outcomes were the idea to be realised, are determined symbolically and used as criteria for determining the appropriateness of the idea the solution or part of the solution'. Pragmatic research needs to be judged solely on practical consequences; the pragmatic approach is also manifest in the choice of method. Pragmatic research focuses on finding a practical answer to research questions rather than the practical consequence of outcomes (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Creswell, 1998). Reliability, internal and external validity and objectivity are indicators of scientific rigour. Because they were developed for use with quantitative data they are computable. Morse et al. (2002) argued that qualitative studies can meet these criteria of scientific rigour through proper use of verification strategies which are part of the methodology. Mechanisms for ensuring the rigour of qualitative research are already part of pragmatic methods (Creswell, 1998). The rigour of this study was assured because Grounded Theory methodology uses parallel coding and data collection, theoretical sampling and sets a saturation criterion. These steps allow data to be reviewed systematically whilst focusing on the research question and ensure a fit between them.

The qualitative researcher must apply these verification strategies in order to achieve reliability and validity. The quality of the study depends on the continuous application of the strategies. Theoretical or purposive sampling was used to ensure that emerging theory reported in this thesis was rigorous and would hold up to scrutiny. Morse et al. (2002) considered researcher responsiveness a crucial element of scientific rigour. At many points in analysis and data collection, the following questions were asked: 'What is missing?' 'What is different about this interview?' 'Who might have additional insight into the research topic?'. Answers to these questions led to additional interviews, for example, questions elicited the need to consider clients who had undergone different forms of executive coaching from that experienced by the first wave of interviewees, and so additional participants were recruited.

Another element essential to the rigour of this research was 'the iterative interaction between data and data analysis' since it is 'the essence of attaining reliability and validity' (Morse et al., 2002, p. 13). The purposeful sampling was led by questions provoked by the data analysis and vice versa. Categories that emerged during data analysis were applied to previous waves of data in order to verify them and pre-existing categories were tested in later waves of data.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the credibility of a qualitative study is the most important factor in its trustworthiness. Credibility relates to how well the findings of the study are reflected in reality (Merriam, 1998). According to Guba (1981), credibility is achieved by ensuring that reality is adequately captured by the data and that the findings are plausible in context. Guba (1981) contrasted this concept with the rationalist, reductive view, which holds variables must be isolated in order to ensure trustworthy

results, arguing that the whole is more than the sum of its parts and that the whole might be misunderstood if it were decomposed into parts, so credibility can be achieved by considering the whole. Shenton (2004) suggested that credibility could be achieved by following specific steps illustrated throughout this section on credibility. Credibility depends first of all on use of methodology which is well-established, and accepted as appropriate to the subject of investigation. In this study this criterion was met by the choice of Strauss and Corbin's (2008) approach to Grounded Theory, which is well established as a research strategy.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested a prolonged engagement with the organisation or culture that is researched to ensure that the subject at hand is adequately portrayed. They argued that only through this prolonged engagement, leading to familiarity with the organisation or culture, can the researcher's accounts be credible. The first wave of participants were recruited from an organisation I have been working with for an extended period of time, thus my familiarity with the organisational culture was assured. Since this familiarity might lead to bias, conjectures based on data from this sample were verified by comparing them with findings based on interviews with participants from organisations with which I was not familiar. Familiarity of the subject of coaching was a given, as I have been working as an executive coach for more than ten years. The later sampling process was driven by the requirement of theory development (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and based on theoretical sampling. As a coach and a former coaching client, I had the necessary familiarity with the situation of being a coaching client; my prolonged engagement with the coaching and coaching clients was the background to the research and a guarantee of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) kind of credibility. Shenton (2004) also mentioned random sampling. The initial sample was random, as it was made up of clients

chosen by the organisation as part of a leadership development programme. Subsequent sampling was guided by the principle of theoretical sampling. Participants were assured that data would be treated confidentially to encourage honesty.

As a further means of increasing the credibility of the research, the data and methodology were repeatedly presented and discussed with university supervisors and peers to elicit feedback and criticism. Their feedback has been used to reflect on the proper use of data and implementation of the methodology. The research process was documented in a researcher's diary that can be used as evidence of each step of the process. Excerpts from the research diary can be found at Appendix IX.

Transferability is the ability of a theoretical model accurately to represent a concept in a given limited context, it does not require that the theory or concepts be fully generalisable. From a naturalist perspective, any generalisation is 'eschewed on the grounds that virtually all truth is context-bound' (Guba, 1981, p. 86). In the context of this study transferability requires that the theory produced should describe the perspectives of the executive coaching clients on first coaching sessions. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that appropriate data were collected, in order to promote transferability. In practice this was achieved through the use of a theoretical sampling strategy. Transferability can be achieved in the context of the first executive coaching session, because this context occurs repeatedly, whenever executive coaching takes place; all coaching clients are members of a group (Stake, 1995; Denscombe, 2010). The findings of this study are thus transferable to similar situations (Basse, 1981), e.g. executives having their first experience of executive coaching. Although executive coaching is a highly dynamic and diverse activity, the theory

developed in this research is intended to describe and explain critical components of clients' first experience of coaching. To assess generalisability the categories were member checked against data from participants undertaking other types of coaching or from other organisations and participants experiencing other approaches to coaching.

The concept of dependability is closely tied to the concept of reliability. Dependability requires that a researcher should be able to depend on a repetition of the study, using similar methods and a similar volume of data, producing similar results (Shenton, 2004). In a rationalist paradigm data are regarded as static, although the context and nature of phenomena may be subject to change. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that credibility has a large impact on dependability. They suggested that in-depth documentation of the research process, in as many and as detailed steps as possible, would allow a reader to follow the process and thus enable repetition of the work and help to ensure dependability. Extensive documentation of the research process allows a reader to make an accurate assessment of whether appropriate practices were followed. It shows the reader the research process as a step by step journey, enabling him or her to understand the decisions, thoughts and actions of the researcher. This methodology chapter, together with appendices I-X is an attempt to make the research process as transparent as possible. I have documented every step of research through memos, appendices, photographs and a researcher diary. The whole research procedure is described in the methodology chapter as clearly as possible, and the account respects the chronology of the process.

Unlike the natural sciences, social sciences always deal with constructed concepts and are therefore unlikely to have access to a perfectly objective

measure, since even quantitative data analysed from a positivist perspective, such as questionnaires and similar instruments, are dependent on the researcher's conceptualisation. Confirmability is the requirement that emergent theory is grounded in data, rather than the personal opinions and perceptions of the researcher, for example Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that use of reflective commentary would allow openness and facilitate the researcher's reflection on his or her predispositions. To meet this criterion the methodology chapter discusses my perspective and philosophical choices. In the analysis and discussion chapters, surprises, confirmations and struggles with categories and emerging theory have been noted where appropriate. Shenton (2004) argued that an audit trail is the most important part of confirmability. The audit trail for this research is summarised in the diagram at Appendix VI, which provides a step by step outline of the research process. The volume of memos and diary entries makes it impractical to include them all, so examples have been included at Appendix IX Excerpts from a Research Diary; care has been taken to ensure that this material does not breach guarantees of confidentiality.

3.5.2 Limitations of the study

Although numerous precautions were taken to maximise the rigour and trustworthiness of the study several limitations must be discussed. The aim of the study was to understand the first coaching experience from the client perspective. Data were collected posthoc, after clients had experienced their first coaching session. Although clients were asked about the expectations they had of their first coaching session, their answers might have been influenced by their experience during the coaching session. The data set is predominantly made up of data from male participants. Although analysis revealed no major differences between the experiences of male

and female participants, this might have been due to the small number of female participants and so care must be taken in the interpretation of the results. Because the aim was to understand the client experience, this thesis describes and interprets experiences from the client's perspective. Recommendations for coaching practice based on these data should be tested in further research. Different coaches have coached clients in this study. There was also variance with the conditions and setting of the coaching. Some participants were part of a development programme while others were individual clients that asked for coaching themselves. Since these were real world cases, conditions such as the recruiting process of the coach or how the coach and client came into first contact could not be standardized. Bono et al.'s (2009) data on the diversity in executive coaching practice shows the wide range of methods and approaches used in executive coaching. The experience might have been different for clients of different coaches. The sample size might also be criticised, this study used qualitative, rather than quantitative data and the number of participants was therefore limited. This limitation has more importance from a positivist perspective; nonetheless it should be acknowledged that although the criteria for theoretical saturation were achieved, it remains possible that additional client data would reveal new concept and categories. This study has taken into account the definition of theoretical saturation that "Theoretical saturation is the phase of qualitative data analysis in which the researcher has continued sampling and analysing data until no new data appear and all concepts in the theory are well-developed" (Morse, 2004, p. 1123). In the last interviews and their analysis, no new data has appeared. After moving to the selective coding stage, all concepts of the theory were well developed and fitted with the core categories. The data from the last interviews and also revisiting older

interviews in light of the subsequently developed concepts and categories did not lead to any change. During the literature review, works with similar sample size were identified that focused on giving voice to the executive client (Turner, 2006). Participants were chosen via a theoretical sampling process to ensure transferability of the results to other executives. The client experience of other forms of coaching, such as life coaching, might be markedly different from the client experience of executive coaching, and not covered by the model proposed here. The same caveat applies to the experience of executive clients undergoing a form of coaching not represented in this study. Bryant (2002) cautioned that Grounded Theory's apparent flexibility is often used to cover methodological weaknesses in research. The trustworthiness of the data and analysis in this study was ensured by following the guidance of Strauss and Corbin (2008) closely, to ensure the research process was rigorous.

This chapter has discussed the methodology, ethical issues and philosophical foundations of this thesis. The next chapters introduce and discuss the results and themes emerging from the analysis. These chapters follow a two-step approach. First the core categories that emerged during the analysis are introduced individually. Second, interactions between the categories are explored. The four categories explored are Chapter 4 - Expectations and Conditions, Chapter 5 - Roles of Coach and Client, Chapter 6 - Agency and Interaction and Chapter 7- Discovering. Discovering is central to the first session, so it is described last, and connected to the other, previously described categories, whereas the other categories are described in order of their emergence in the analysis process. Chapter 8 connects the categories and shows how they interact with each other in the wider context of a first experience of coaching and how they influence coaching practice. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by

suggesting further research and with a personal reflection on the research experience. Categories and their concepts are described and illustrated with selected quotations from the data. Quotations from interviews in German have been translated.

Chapter 4 - Expectations and Conditions

The interviews yielded a wealth of data and generated many ideas worthy of attention. The first category that emerged during the analysis was related to client's experiences prior to and related to coaching. This chapter analyses the client experience before the start of coaching started and how this affected coaching. There were two kinds of concepts that affected the coaching experience prior to coaching: The client's expectations and the conditions around coaching. Client's expectations refer to specific expectations clients had towards either coaching or the person of the coach. Conditions describe the context coaching takes place in. Both concepts belong in the same category since their influence on the client's coaching experience started well before the actual coaching session was started.

Participants were asked about the expectations they had had of coaching before their first coaching session and whether or not their expectations were met. Expectations of coaching were diverse, but clients felt that they were relevant to their perception of the experience. Early on it was possible to divide client expectations into two types: expectations of the coaching session in general, and expectations about the coach. The first type includes clients' general expectations of coaching, e.g. what the process would be like, what the client could gain from coaching and in general, what coaching really is. The second type of expectations related explicitly to the person, training and background of the coach. Further analysis revealed that these two types of expectation were connected to the coaching context. Expectations and perception of coaching were influenced by the coaching context. It is interesting to note that client expectations were the only apparent difference between participants who received coaching as

part of a corporate programme and private clients. This chapter explores expectations, starting with exploration of the conditions that influence clients' expectations, continuing with expectations about the coach and closing with expectations of coaching in general.

4.1 Conditions around coaching

The first category, which emerged early in the analysis, was that many clients spoke about the context of their coaching experience. The first category covers contextual factors related to differences in clients' expectations. Most coaching session took place face-to-face. Some clients mentioned that this had a huge impact on the success of the session, however because none of the clients had experienced both a face-to-face and a virtual session, they could not compare the two formats directly in the context of coaching, only compare the coaching session to other virtual or face-to-face meetings they had experienced.

"I think it was very good, and I'm glad we were able to have a face-to-face follow-up, I think it is more meaningful, and it was better to work on it face-to-face than it is for a remote session So, I think that's a good thing. All in all, it was a great experience."(P006)

The time frame set for the coaching was a condition mentioned regularly. A number of the coaching sessions that formed the subject of interviews were part of a corporate programme, which limited the coaching sessions to one hour. This limitation was generally perceived in a negative way.

"Maybe the timeframe, which was an hour, and I first thought that suffices easily, but it was very short. There can be a bit of a hurry then, because there are questions and wishes, and then time runs short."(P008)

It was unclear whether or not the perception of the constraint on session length as a negative stemmed simply from the fact that it was a constraint,

or whether it had a negative influence on the impact of the coaching session. As well as conditions that were part of the pre-defined programme structure, such as the duration of a coaching session or the kind of pre-coaching data obtained, client context factors were also reported. One example for such a factor is the reason for taking the session, whether it was an individual initiative or because their superior had told them to do so. Having a personal reason for taking the session had an impact on expectations and preparations for the session as P009 pointed out. He participated in the programme because his superior recommended doing so and had no specific objective to for the coaching assignment:

“Additionally, my expectations were not very high, because honestly, I did not have any special goals for it.”(P009)

The context of coaching was discussed in the literature review (Jenkins et al., 2011; Stomskiet al., 2010; Underhill, 2011), which made it apparent that the client, the initiator of the coaching, can be either a private individual or an organisation and that this is a factor which influences what the client expects from coaching. In one example the client did not even know why he was taking part in the programme which included the coaching session:

“When this all started, I got an invite invitation mail, you know, a meeting invite to this meeting, and it had a headline and I think it had attached the pdf he was gonna go over. I had really no idea, what it was. Because management wanted people to be in this, but my management never told me.”(P002)

This confusion deepened when the client realised that there had been a selection process of which he was not aware:

“So, I’m going to the meeting thinking it’s just gonna be what I know, and some new processes that they’re bringing in and trying to get us all pumped up to be project managers, you know. So I come in, and you know, it’s nice to meet them and very, very professional, he starts going on about you know, you know, ‘You guys have all been

selected' and I'm like 'what? Selected?' I came in with a different perspective [...] You know I'm really excited about the project and this whole process, but I had I had no clue I was picked. And I said 'who picked me?'"(P002)

In comparison, a client who picked his coach and initiated coaching himself, said about his expectations:

"It was important for me to determine, I would say, the status quo a bit and find some weaknesses in my personality as a leader in regards of my further development."(P015)

Clients who had chosen to have coaching had more specific goals and were often more aware of specific goals they expected to work towards during coaching than clients who received coaching as part of a structured corporate programme. This suggests that coaches who work within such programmes should be aware that their clients might need to work on coaching goals more extensively.

4.2 Expectations about the coach

The second concept that surfaced during the analysis related to expectations about the coach. Once again it became clear that private and corporate clients had different expectations. This might be rooted in the fact that participants on the corporate programme took the session simply because it was part of the overall programme structure. These participants had not chosen to do the programme, consisting of two one-on-one sessions, in order to work with a specific coach, whereas clients who took individual coaching selected a specific coach because of particular characteristics of the coach. P013 explained her reasons for choosing a particular coach in a detailed way.

"Because in many places, she did not match the prototype. She was not only German, she works internationally, she is not a man, she is a woman, she is an engineer and not a psychologist [...] well those

were things that were exciting for me, and she experienced, personally, I believe, this change process in many places, or underwent this process in many places in her life and that she speaks openly about herself, that was important for me.”(P013)

Underhill (2011) asked company sponsors, clients and coaches about the most important characteristics of a coach and found that building rapport was perceived by coaches and clients as the most important quality in a coach; however organisational sponsors did not mention rapport at all. Rapport has been defined as a feeling, amongst two or more people, of being in sync (Stewart, 1998). Sponsors argued that business experience was the most important characteristic of a coach; this was also rated highly important by leaders and coaches but took second place, behind rapport. In contrast, the training and popular literature (Whitmore, 2002; Szabo et al., 2009) stress that the coach need not and perhaps should not be a subject expert with specific knowledge. Szabó et al. (2009) and Meier (2012) refer to this lack of specific expertise as the art of not knowing and argued that if the coach has no specific expertise in the subject matter, he or she is more likely to rely solely on the tools of coaching. Whitmore (2002) went so far as to argue that it can be beneficial for a good coach to have absolutely no knowledge of the skill or situation on which he or she is coaching. Whitmore described a seminar in which skiing instructors who had been previously trained in coaching were asked to aid coaches in a tennis seminar with the goal of practical improvements in their participants' technique. The skiing instructors, who had no experience of tennis, fared better than the tennis instructors, because they relied on coaching techniques rather than expert knowledge. Whitmore (2002) and Gallwey (2010) argued that a good coach should not use expert knowledge of a subject, but rely on general coaching techniques, that approaching a client and problem with a blank slate is better than being experienced in the subject matter at hand. Business

experience should, according to this school of coaching, not be a factor in coaching success, but as Underhill (2011) found previously, the clients in this study preferred coaches with vast job experience. One client stated that the experience of the coach was important, because it allowed him to open up and gave him trust in the process:

"I would say, if I had not had this trust in him, if he had not been sympathetic, I would not have been able to open up. Yes, then you do... then it won't do much. I have trust in his words and methods."(P008)

One difficulty in this study was that it was not possible to determine with confidence whether expectations had been met. Clients reported their expectations after the coaching session and it seemed that their expectations had merged with the positive aspects of the experience. Perceptions of the credibility of the coach might be influenced by whether the client feels that his or her expectations were met. In this context credibility is the extent to which the coach's expertise in the role can be trusted. It is clear from looking at research on therapy and medicine that perceived credibility is important in a wider context. If meeting expectations increases perceived credibility, then meeting expectation may increase the expectancy effect (McKenna and Davis, 2011). To clarify, the term expectancy effect is used to describe the effect of positive expectations, similar to its use to describe positive effects from expectations in therapy (Asay & Lambert, 1999; McKenna & Davis, 2011). This is a hope or placebo effect acknowledging that waiting for the intervention or expecting success from a treatment have a significant impact on treatment. The term expectations refer to specific expectations a client has had for the coaching. The positive experience of having one's expectations of the coach and the coaching process met might act as a positive force during the coaching process. Research on psychotherapy showed that ratings

of perceived treatment credibility predicted treatment success (Ametrano, 2011). A study of chronic lower back pain reported that high credibility of doctor and/or treatment as well as meeting personal prior expectations predicted a positive treatment effect (Smeets et al., 2008). P009 argued that if the coach met her expectations (that he or she should be experienced), she would find it easier to accept the process of coaching and the opinion of the coach, and that this would be beneficial to the process because it would remove her client-side resistance. All the interviews for this study were conducted after the first coaching session, and on the basis of these data it is suggested that meeting the expectations of clients is a positive factor. It is not possible however to quantify the effect or demonstrate a causal relationship. The findings of this study suggest that as in other fields, such as therapy or medicine, the client's perception of the credibility of the method or coach may have an impact on the outcome of the coaching intervention. If a client expects a coach to behave in a certain way, discovering that the coach meets these expectations might be interpreted as a positive sub-outcome.

Aside from having expectations about professional profile clients varied in their expectations of how well prepared the coach would be for the coaching session. Clients noticed whether coaches seemed well-prepared. Clients also mentioned their own preparation for the coaching session. Some had not prepared at all, either because they had no time to do so or they did not know what to expect of a coaching session; others defined questions they wanted answered in advance of the session. The different levels of preparation are illustrated by comments from two, P004 and P007:

I would say, in this first, I mean first coaching, I went in relatively naïve and inexperienced (laughs).(P004)

For this appointment, I brought a number of questions and objectives I had drafted before.(P007)

Although client preparation appears to be a context factor it is mentioned here because all participants reported that they had benefited from the session. Yet the degree of preparation was highly variable among clients. Preparation did not appear to influence how the session was experienced; however coaches were perceived more positively if they were well-prepared. Clients expected their coaches to have done some preparation and take the lead. P015 for example said he was surprised that his coach did not do this:

I had a bit the expectation maybe, when I went into it, that she would take the lead a bit.(P015)

Although this might be interpreted as negative, the same client remarked that he trusted in the expertise of the coach and had positive coaching experience:

No, I would definitely rate this as a successful start. This question, really without a single doubt.(P015)

In this case although client expectations were not met, the client still perceived the coaching to have been successful. This is interesting in the context of the expectancy effect (McKenna and Davis, 2011). It has been claimed that in psychotherapy the expectancy effect explains 15% of the variance in therapy outcomes (Asayand Lambert, 1999), whilst the therapeutic relationship, the methodology and extra-therapeutic factors explain the remaining variance. This client (P015) had expectations that were not met completely, but nevertheless his overall evaluation of the session was positive. The client learned that coaching and the coach were different from what he had expected but that he could still benefit from coaching. This leads into our discussion of expectations about coaching.

4.3 General expectations about coaching

One of the factors influence perception of coaching sessions was the expectations clients brought with them to the session. There was a wide range of expectations among the participants, some did not know what to expect at all (e.g. P008); others had well-defined learning goals for the first session (e.g. P005).

No, I did not really know what would happen. I went in there completely neutral, without any expectations.(P008)

[...] if this coaching session can help me be more efficient, but not just from a project standpoint, but also in terms of how to deal with the individuals in my team, how to let them speak enough.(P005)

There were clear differences of expectation between those who received coaching as part of a programme and those who took a stand-alone session. Most participants in the programme had no specific expectations. Private coaching clients had rather specific expectations of their first coaching assignment, as they had sought coaching to work on a specific problem or task. Clients who received coaching as part of the development programme had no content-related expectations; their expectations related to the structure of the coaching process, for example one participant expected to go through the feedback page by page:

Again my expectation was kind of we were gonna go through this print out, page by page. (P001)

The programme included reflection on a management meeting, this led participants to expect to see their own video and get some hints about working on their personal problems:

Well, I did not really have specific expectations. I thought, this is gonna be interesting, seeing you on video, and experiencing yourself in such situations. And, what I thought, what it would come

down to more, you know, visual feedback about certain body language, facial expressions, hand position, timing, where I talk, where I listen, more like feedback to the direct video and it was that, to a certain extent, I would say (P012).

The same participants were pleasantly surprised that the coaching covered more than they had expected:

Now I got a lot more out of the session than I expected. (P001)

Expectations, not really, but, I think what came out of the meeting, was more important or more significant, than the expectations I had beforehand. (P012)

4.4 Summary

The category 'expectations and conditions', introduced in this chapter, deals with clients' expectations of coaching and the coach as well as the coaching context. In this study, the context factors that proved important were whether or not the client met the coach face to face, how long the coaching session was and whether the coaching was part of a corporate programme. Clients found that face-to-face sessions were intimate and intense, which made a favourable impression. Only one client in this study experienced remotetele-coaching, so the two formats cannot be compared, but perception of atmosphere might be different in a remote coaching session. Having a time limit on the session (coaching sessions that were part of the corporate programme had a one hour limit) was perceived negatively. Clients in stand-alone coaching sessions did not report time limitations. This suggests that short time limits have a negative influence on the client experience in executive coaching and should therefore be avoided. Receiving coaching as part of a corporate programme also influenced the experience. Coaching clients in the corporate programme tended to bring fewer expectations or personal goals to the first session; if

they had goals they were either very specific or rather vague. Clients who had sought coaching of their own volition tended to have more precise objectives and expectations of their coaching. Some expectations were quite specific, such as the expectation that one would go through a video that had been recorded earlier frame by frame, or through a report based on the video page by page. These specific expectations were usually not met. Clients also expectations about how they and the coach should prepare were also diverse. Some clients went to the first session with a set of questions and had put a lot of thought into their preparation whereas others had done no preparation at all. This was not found to have a large influence on how they perceived the actual session.

Two kinds of expectations matter during the first session, expectations about the coach and expectations of the coaching process. The personal qualities of the coach are a crucial element for the choice of the client; clients reported that their choice of coach was influenced by professional expertise, gender, work experience and nationality. Clients reported that the coach built trust by meeting their expectations in appearing experienced, confident and professional. One client mentioned explicitly that the coach was dressed professionally, while others focused on the interplay between professionalism and likeability, which were both reported to be important.

Whether or not the coach appeared prepared for the session had an influence on clients' perceptions of coaches. One client specifically remarked that he felt lost at the beginning of the coaching session because the coach did not pick up where they had left off at the end of a first call in preparation for the session. When the coach was not prepared, clients felt rather confused. How well-prepared the coach appeared to be at the

beginning of a first session had an influence on how the client perceived that session later on. The specific expectation that the coach would take the lead and prepare for the session connects this category to the next, 'roles of coach and client'. The next chapter looks more closely at client perceptions of coach roles and their influence on the client.

Most clients came without a complete understanding of how executive coaching works and what techniques they could expect the coach to use. The coach was often viewed as someone who would give instructions. The session itself was often expected to centre on a previously prepared report or video and involve detailed, step by step analysis of these materials. These expectations did not match the actual coaching experience; coaches tended to centre the session rather openly on questions and the client's chosen problems or goals. Although expectations about the coaching process were not met and the session was conducted differently from how they had expected, clients unanimously described their first session as positive. These data suggest that coaches should not expect clients to have an understanding of the process of coaching; it is more likely that they will come with an expectation of instruction or consulting. The beginning of a session might therefore be confusing for the client, as in this study, and the coach should be prepared to deal with this confusion.

Chapter 5 - Roles of Coach and Client

This chapter examines the coach and client roles experienced by participants during their first coaching session. The roles of coach and client are not fixed or predefined; participants in this study reported a variety of different roles. A client's perceptions of the coach, the coach's role and personality form very early in the process and affect the coaching experience from the beginning. Clients' expectations influence their perception of the role the coach takes within the session. This interaction is discussed in chapter 6; this chapter focuses on the roles taken by coaches on the basis of client descriptions and how these influence the client's perception of their first coaching session.

Clients' descriptions of coaches and the metaphors they used to describe their role were used to explore different perceptions of the coach's role. Images of a coach start developing early on, but take shape gradually during the coaching process. To achieve an understanding of this process, this chapter starts at the very beginning, with the first impression, and goes on to analyse perceptions of roles during the session, drawing on client descriptions and metaphors that clients were asked to use. Although the metaphorical attributions of clients were quite diverse some patterns in the roles taken by coaches emerged. It is necessary to differentiate between the functions of a coach or trainer and how the role is perceived by the client. This discussion focuses on the latter. The first session is often the first time coach and client see each other face to face. Most clients will have had a phone call beforehand, talking about the reasons for and objectives of the sessions, a so-called compatibility or 'chemistry' check. Given that coaches tend to also work as trainers, some clients may have met their coach as a trainer during a corporate development programme

before the coaching session. Several of the participants in the programme had met their coach for the first time as a training facilitator. Several participants who had met their coach as a trainer mentioned that their coach was sympathetic from the beginning.

5.1 First Impressions

When focusing on the roles a coach took, a number of clients gave examples indicating that their image of the role the coach took formed early from the moment of their first meeting them. One participant remarked:

He was very likeable, he approached me, asked me who I was, he is John and so on. That was winning me over and seemed very sympathetic to me. (P008)

By analogy with therapy (Coleman, 1995) the very beginning of the first meeting might be a critical moment. Although clients' first impressions of a coach and the effects of this first impression have been little studied, participants in this study gave detailed accounts of what they noticed about their coach and how important this impression was. P011 described her first impression of her coach:

Likeable, open, and what I felt was good that, well, I did not feel such a distance. I felt that she really wanted to help me develop and it was really about the coaching. (P011)

Many clients remarked more generally that the coach looked like a professional and was professionally dressed. When asked, how important she thought her initial impression was, P011 continued:

Yes, extremely important, because I believe otherwise, I would have not been able to be so open and honest, saying, where my problems are, you know, you open up a bit, and when talking about your feelings, it is very important to develop a good relationship and trust with your coach. (P011)

The perceived importance of the first impression reflects other experiments and the wider literature on first impressions (Asch, 1946; Widmeyer and Loy, 1988; Lindgaard et al., 2006; Willis and Todorov, 2006). The first impression has been found to be crucial to one's perception of another person. The classic hot-cold experiment (Asch, 1946) showed that changing only one word in the description of a person - 'hot' to 'cold'-completely altered participants' ratings of the person described and significantly changed the way participants rated that person on a questionnaire. Widmeyer and Loy (1988) put this to a further test. University students rated a lecture after they had been given a personality description of the same lecturer. The same lecturer in the same lecture situation was seen as more pleasant, less formal and more humorous by the students when described as 'warm' than when the word 'cold' was included in his description. Willis and Todorov (2006) state that when looking at the face of another person judgements are made in a mere 100msec. In studies on the perception and rating of visual appeal of web designs, this time was shown to be even shorter, 50msec (Lindgaard et al., 2006). The first session in coaching really starts the moment someone looks at a coach's profile or website, or perhaps even earlier when the coach is encountered as a trainer. Coach and client form impressions of each other very rapidly. The speed at which a first impression is made might have an influence on the first coaching session. Several authors have argued that the generation of trust between coach and client is the basis of the working relationship (Asay and Lambert, 1999; Steering Committee, 2002; Cooper, 2004; DeFife and Hilsenroth, 2011). If the client has certain expectations, for example of specific knowledge or a certain style of professional attire, the first impression can be interpreted as an early factor in trust development. This is illustrated by P002's response, when asked

how important the first impression was, he explained that having a positive first impression helped him because it made him more relaxed and open to the session:

Well, it just helped to know that, you know, I was relaxed, and I knew I could talk about, talk about anything. (P002)

Given that the first impression has been described as important to the client experience further research into the processes by which it influences the client experience might be worthwhile. The clients interviewed in this study stressed that a good first impression made them feel comfortable, helped them to open up and, most importantly, to begin to trust in the abilities of the coach. P005, who had seen his coach during a training programme before the session, said:

We spoke outside the training session, and I found him very interesting, because he knows his stuff. And also [...], I did a Masters in Management, so I could kind of touch on some of these effects, now in depth. But for me, I quickly noticed I could benefit a lot from his expertise, and his thoughts, and he was the main guy doing the study. It was very interesting also for me to get more information about the study itself, but yeah, I mean, I had no issues regarding John, John himself because I know he knows his stuff, he's very experienced in what he was doing and I knew I could benefit from him. (P005)

Clients bring their expectations about a coach to the first meeting, as discussed in Chapter 4, and they set the background for their first impression. Participants mentioned that business experience was important and expected to be able to learn directly from the coach's experience. This runs counter to the coaching ideal in the literature, which is that both parties meet at the same level, with the coach facilitating learning rather than being the source of learning (Radatz, 2013; Laloushek, 2009). This client expectation might be based on the typical client's understanding of what coaching actually involves. In therapy, as discussed in the literature

review(Chapter 2), it is recognised that educating the client about what therapy is and what it can and cannot do is beneficial. Alternatively, the literature may reflect a popular misunderstanding about what the client expects to get from coaching. Whether a coaching process which meets the expectation that coaching will involve getting advice from an experienced facilitator would be more or less successful than current coaching practice is beyond of the scope of this thesis. The disconnect between coaching practices described in the training literature (Radatz, 2013; Whitmore, 2002; Berg and Szabó, 2005; Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2009) and what clients expect the coach's role to be might be a reflection of the diversity of coaching approaches, practitioners and methods (Bono et al., 2009). Coaching is not a protected term and so-called coaching encompasses a very wide range of techniques and practices (Bono et al., 2009). As well as wanting help or guidance with their specific problem, clients often want a coach to have specific characteristics. According to several participants the ideal coach would exude confidence, experience and knowledge:

Ideally, he should have vast job experience, and, a great experience in soft skills, and that is kind of an ideal image.(P009)

P002 explained that his expectations about his coach's qualities and experience were met, because he felt the coach was an expert on coaching and would give him access to new knowledge:

He comes with a lot of valuable knowledge that, you know, I [have] never really gotten before.(P002)

Confidence was also important. A confident coach was characterised as someone the client could talk to and be open with, but P003 remarked that it was important that this confidence was paired with professionalism and respect:

As I said, it's confidence that's important to me, trust, Lisa was able to be open and talk about my issues. Respect, she was very respectful, very professional.(P003)

There were several independent components to the perception of the coach as a professional. P003 explicitly stated that her first impression of her coach as a professional woman was based on the fact that the coach had dressed professionally. Clients expected their coach, as a professional, to take the lead and structure the session. Analysis of clients' overall impressions of the first coaching session indicated that they appreciated a structured approach to the session. This may have been important to the participants in this study because it was their first experience of coaching. Hartzell (2010), writing about therapy clients, compared new clients to newborns, confronted with a completely novel situation. Because participants did not really know what to expect from a coaching session they were grateful when the coach gave an overview of the session and structure:

It was a very structured approach, in the first line, we reviewed what happened, specific breakdown, what steps we can take, which was done in an open fashion. (P009)

Another client was surprised that there was no mention of the structure the session would have:

"It would have been good if my coach had said in the first session 'Here is a recap with the last 4-5 points we talked about in the pre-coaching call, are they still relevant? And in the next few minutes, this is going to happen.'"(P015)

This finding is consistent with Hartzell's (2010) findings in the field of therapy. Hartzell found that clients want to have a plan or know what would happen during the current meeting and the next meeting; not having an understandable plan created insecurity. The first-time coaching client is in a

situation he or she has not encountered before, so a structured overview and approach may help the client make sense of the process and contribute to him or her feeling respected and accepted; because executive coaching clients tend to have business backgrounds they may actively expect such an approach. P015 commented that the structured approach is something an executive client might expect on the basis of day-to-day business practice:

“And yes, in regard, this question was looking at executive coaching. I think, this is a general topic, that if you are an executive, you are simply used to saying the first few minutes ‘This is what we are going to cover today.’”(P015)

The tone and familiarity the coach brought to the session was another factor in creating an impression of professionalism. Underhill (2011) found that building rapport was rated one of the most important skills in coaching by coaches, sponsors and clients. The combination of being friendly and accessible yet focused on the problem at hand allowed participants to feel comfortable and created the impression of professionalism. P008 remarked that it was important that sympathy and perceived professionalism should go hand in hand:

“I believe it is this symbiosis, when somebody is really sympathetic, sometimes professional, sometimes unprofessional, and then it repels me. But when somebody is maybe professional, knows very well, what he wants, and does it, but is really unsympathetic, then I cannot open up either. Then I will do it, but just so it is done.”(P008)

Perceived expertise plays a similar role in creating an impression of professionalism. One client remarked that he was happy that the coach explained the theoretical concept behind his methodology. According to P010, when the coach explains the theory behind his or her methodology, this increases the coach’s credibility and the helps the learning experience:

“Really underpinning things with theoretical concepts.”(P010)

It should be remembered that these participants often did not have a clear or detailed understanding of coaching and their image of coaching may have been very different from their later experience. Participants tried to evaluate their coach's competence according to their ideas about what an ideal coach should look like and what they expected from a coach. This suggests that their role expectations may have been based on an image generated through a cognitive process of deciding what a coach might do and how a coach could be like. Lacking a clear understanding of coaching at the start of the process, it is inevitable that the client will learn about coaching through his or her personal experience of the coaching process. Further research could explore whether client perceptions of a coach are based on the perception of the presence of theoretical concepts underpinning the coach's methods or only an impression of having such a coaching concept. An additional question to answer is whether or not there are mediating factors- such as role expectations, discussed below- that influence perceptions of competence.

5.2 Client perceptions of the role taken by the coach

Participants interviewed for this research had recently experienced their first coaching session. Client expectations often did not match the actual coaching processes. Some participants thought the coach would be like a teacher or instructor and were surprised that this was not the case. Some participants remarked that they expected the coach to give feedback and advice on individual professional problems, P004 and P007 said:

“The idea [was] that if you come with a problem [...] that you will get advice and suggestions, what you could do. And I was not prepared to be, you know, (laughs) be instructed to find the solution myself, so [laughs] that is, why there was reorientation.”(P004)

“If I were to specify this, regarding my expectations, what I want to take with me from the tool, that it was a just a bit more personalised feedback, that somebody says ‘This is your video, at this place, in this situation it was so and so and now with some method we can get more out of it’.”(P007)

Participants were asked what the coach's role had been during the first session, three main roles or role archetypes emerged. The word archetype is used here to describe a prototypical form. It is assumed that in the constructed reality of clients there are archetypes possessing all the most characteristics properties of a certain thing, for example, the teacher archetype exemplifies ‘teacherness’. Clients are assumed to have formed and adjusted their expectations and described events relative to such archetypes. The three archetypes identified were the advisor, the mountain guide and the fairy.

5.2.1 The advisor

Some clients identified the coach as a neutral third party, an observer and advisor, who gives both theoretical advice and specific suggestions for behavioural change, which the client can accept as truthful and useful. For example P003 valued the coach's opinion precisely because she was a neutral, third party observer:

“She would be a third party, so I would value her opinion.”(P003)

“In principle [...] I have the possibility to work with someone, who is external and independent from, you know, the usual people you talk to in the company or private life.”(P015)

In an earlier study (Wasylyshyn, 2003) showed that seeing the coach as someone neutral, someone who is only there to help the client, was perceived as beneficial by clients, in this study 100% of respondents rated external coaching favourably on the ground that the coach was in a neutral

position. There were also clients who saw the coach as a friendly, close advisor, who was on equal footing with them. P009 did not see his coach as someone who was always right, but as a counsellor and advisor. He regarded the coach's advice as one possible way of dealing with a problem, but not the one and only way:

"Having the possibility to say, 'Yes, this is interesting, but I do not want to do this now'." (P009)

P009 also mentioned the importance of the coach's respect and appreciation, which was expressed by asking him which specific topic he wanted to discuss and giving him the option of choosing the direction and objectives of the coaching assignment. Respect and openness were perceived as important factors in establishing trust. The development of the coach-client relationship during the initial coaching session is based on trust, as P003 explained:

"Especially, for a first, I hoped, I would meet a person who would be compatible to me. Somebody, who would be pleasant, and with whom I would feel free to talk and be open to discuss and feel this trust, this discussion between us and, you know, so, the fact that she is obviously not involved in the cases that I presented." (P003)

This is consistent with the psychotherapeutic principle that a working relationship must be built on trust (Horvath and Luborsky, 1993; Cox, 2012). This study focused on first coaching sessions; it is possible that, as in therapy (Coleman, 1995), the first session is especially important to the development of the coach-client relationship, but this hypothesis requires further investigation, in view of the limited scope of this study. Knight (2007) similarly describes how in instructional coaching, a first meeting between instructional coach and teacher is crucial in building a trusting working relationship.

Advice given by a coach tends to be perceived as a suggestion, which the client may choose to follow, or not as he or she thinks fit. The coach as advisor is regarded as a partner on equal footing. This advisor is seen as a neutral party, but also a source of instructional information that might have merits in the daily practice of the client, similar to an expert. Of the three archetypes that emerged from the data, the advisor archetype fits best with the description of coaches in popular coaching literature (Whitmore, 2002; Knight, 2007; Szabó et al., 2009).

5.2.2 The mountain guide

The second archetype to emerge from the data was the guide. The guide is experienced in his or her territory and gives direct, factual advice which clients follow and accept. The client trusts in the guide's expertise; this distinguishes the guide from the fairy - the third archetype, see Section 5.2.3 The fairy.

The guide archetype is best explained by looking at one of the metaphors a participant used to describe the role of the coach. The client compared the coach to an alpine guide:

"Lisa, she is kind of a mountain guide, which you meet on the way and who says 'Hey, there is a route, that is a little easier and that is well doable. There is a piece of climbing involved, but you could use the ropes and this is how it works and then it gets really easy.' That is the kind of support, that you reach your goal well, that everyone arrives there well, that you meet the peak in time."(P007)

The notion of the coach as a guide implies that they lead, setting the direction in which the client follows. In this scenario the client is trusting in the expertise of the coach and assuming that the direction is right on the grounds that the guide is expert on this territory. Guidance is perceived as necessary and is the client appreciates the direct help. This kind of

guidance and leadership was mentioned explicitly only by clients who perceived the coach as a guide. In this kind of relationship the client accepts that he or she needs the coach's help and guidance to reach a specific objective. This is consistent with the metaphor of coach and client sharing the same journey, or as P011 described it:

"I don't know, friendly, somehow. It is not a real picture, but (...) in a boat. The coach and I. We are going down in a boat, down the river."(P011)

It is interesting to note that in this example, there is no mention of the expertise of the coach, only the fact that the two are together. The coach is not referred to as captain or commander, but as a companion on a shared journey. Coach and client are equals in this boat, each can benefit from the actions and knowledge of the other person during their boating trip towards a shared destination. This is very different from the mountain guide example in which the expertise of the guide was mentioned explicitly. The common factor in these metaphors is that both parties are together, in the same situation. Another element of the boating metaphor is that the boat is going downstream. This might indicate that the trip is an easy, stress-free one; it might be a wild, white water ride. The participant did not elaborate his metaphor, so it can be interpreted in several ways, but the most prominent element in all interpretations is that the coach and client are in the same boat, together on the same journey.

5.2.3 The fairy

The third archetype is the fairy. The coach as fairy is someone mysterious; one client explicitly described his coach as a fairy who took the lead in a magical process which led him towards his objectives.

"If I consider the coach she would be the fairy that opens the door. Or that opens the door, but behind, the room is still quite dark."
(P010)

This statement has two possible implications; the first is that the coach has magic capabilities the client does not understand. The coach's skills might be beyond the client's experience and therefore seem magical. The coach is an expert in something the client is not, she is on a different level from the client. The coach's abilities seem magical to this client, implying that he feels he has relatively little influence on the process that will be used to address his needs or problems. In this case, the word magical might appear ambiguous and unclear. It was taken from a quote from P10. The word magical reflects an in vivo reflection of the client who was affected by what the coach did. But did not appear to have gained a complete understanding of how it happened. P010 viewed the coaching process as a magical process in which he was unable to identify specific steps.

"Exactly, but I know there was something, something magical behind [the door], that changes, that changes will be shown."(P010).

This quotation is referring back to the previous description of the coach as a fairy. The coaching process may be viewed as magical if the client perceives that something happens during the process is not able to articulate what or how it happens. In this scenario the client brings only limited critical skills to an evaluation of the coach's actions and takes his or her ability as read. In this instance the metaphorical fairy resembles the metaphorical guide, who is trusted to know the best way up the mountain; but there is a difference. The mountain guide uses his or her expertise to navigate the mountain and may have climbed the same route several times before; the client might be able to reach the top without the guide but the journey is quicker with his or her guidance. The fairy metaphor suggests

that the coach uses a mysterious skill – comparable to magic - to open a door the client cannot open alone, but unlike the mountain guide, the fairy does not know what is behind the door, the way ahead is still dark for both coach and client. In essence, the client was saying that he did not need to understand what his coach was doing, in order to benefit from her skills. Some authors distinguish technical and process consulting (Radatz, 2013) and differentiate coaching from technical consulting and expertise (Szabó et al., 2009), with process consulting focusing on facilitating a process within an organisation. This description of facilitating the process rather than knowing its outcome and leading towards it fits the fairy role well. The fairy metaphor implies that the coach uses his or her professional skill to open doors for the client – i.e. the coach has process expertise – but cannot predict what is behind the door, which would require technical expertise or forecasting. The coach as fairy can be construed as a process expert using process facilitation skills which appear 'magical' to the non-expert.

5.3 Importance of perceived role

The perceived role of the coach has an impact on how the coach can work with the client. Boyce, Jackson and Neal (2010) found that the relationship between coach and client mediated the effects of ratings of compatibility and credibility on coaching outcome. This suggests that the coach must be perceived as credible if coaching is to be successful. This raises two questions. Which coach roles are suitable for which types of client? How can a coach modify the role he or she takes to match the client's requirements? The impact of perceived credibility on coaching success has not yet received research attention distinguishing perception from skill. It is unclear, whether or not the clients in the study by Boyce et al. (2010) might

have also benefitted similarly from a coach who only faked a military background. Also, further research might answer the question of how perceived credibility is related to whether the coach's behaviour matches the role the client expects his or her coach to play.

As it has been the first coaching session for the interviewed clients, some of them even had to get convinced of the advantages of coaching. One of the conclusions from the literature review was that education about coaching might be helpful for new clients, given that it has been shown to be beneficial in the context of therapy (Shuman and Shapiro, 2002; Coleman and Kaplan, 1990):

"How well he was able to explain it to me. Help me see what the benefit in this is."(P006)

The process of discovering coaching and learning what it involves emerged as a core experience and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. Considering discovery brings us to another aspect of the coach's role. The data collected in this study showed that coaches were linked with their tools. The client sees the coach as a bringer and repository of tools and methods. The client learns from the coach. The role taken by the coach - advisor, guide or fairy- is not important to this coaching function, the provision of necessary and fitting content and tools for the session. The expectation that the coach will provide tools once again conflicts with the recommendations of popular coaching manuals, which advocate that the use of questions to get the client to create goals and action steps to follow for him or herself. This is not to say that some clients do not develop their own solutions. One participant commented being pleased to have created a solution to their issue with the help of the coach. This perception that the coach provides tools and content for the coaching is in line with

Taeger's(2013) study of client attributions about first coaching sessions which showed that coaching clients made more external attributions when talking about their first coaching session than about pre- and post-coaching situations. From this it was concluded that coaching was perceived as an external activity or event imposed on the client. This perception may only apply to the first experience of coaching; in later coaching sessions clients may have different expectations of the coach's role. P005's comments provide evidence of this kind of change. P005 described the learning process which enabled him to develop realistic expectations and desired objectives for a future session.

"So, I think, it was the very first one, so yeah, I don't know on my side if I could be more efficient. I really tried to prepare that session as much as I can, but obviously, I didn't know what to expect or how things would go, so now maybe, the way I would prepare myself for the second session would maybe be a bit different. [...] I think my preparations would be a bit different, and since I know how the first one went, I could even gain more in the second one. I'm not sure, but I think I would even gain more in the next session, because I know how John approached this, as well, and I know what I could get from it [...] Probably the second one, I think, will even be more efficient. But it's not John, it's not the coaching stuff, it's probably me, like, not knowing how this thing would go, it was kind of a learning experience."(P005)

P004 also felt that he had learned how to prepare for the next coaching session in order to get more out of it:

"Well you do go in with one or two points [...] that you want to work on. You go into this session and maybe, before that, not only write down the points but I would say, make more bullet points, what is important for one self to work on."(P004)

Another factor regarding roles during coaching is the perception of coaching as a personalised form of training. Most of the participants had already experienced corporate group training before embarking on coaching, as P005 explained.

“However, after the session, I realised that I gained much more than I thought, especially because it's a one-on-one session and it's 100% dedicated to me, it's not like a training with many people in there, and you know, you cannot go in depths, so my expectation were not that high, but the outcome at the end was more positive than I thought.”(P005)

The prevalence of the experience of learning during the coaching session emerged gradually during the analysis. Learning is always an active process, but the ways in which coach supported learning were very varied. The client perspective of how this learning process is addressed in Chapter 6, Agency and Interaction.

5.4 Summary

This chapter dealt with the different roles taken by coaches and clients in first coaching sessions. Clients have certain expectations about the role of a coach(see Section 4.2 Expectations about the coach), which are often not met. Expectations are adjusted during the coaching session.

Clients' impressions of coaches begin to form very early in the assignment. First impressions are important and begin to develop from the point at which the client first has contact with the coach or received information about the coach. Participants in this study who received coaching as part of a corporate programme had previous contact with their coach in the role of a trainer; private clients' first impressions were based on 'chemistry calls' with the coach and on data they had gathered about the coach. Coaches should recognise that their entire professional presence - websites, CV, published profile or other roles e.g. consultant or trainer – is relevant to how they are perceived by potential clients. Coaches need to be aware that all of these factors influence first impressions.

Coaches were generally perceived as subject matter experts on coaching and thus clients trusted them to lead the coaching assignment to a successful conclusion. Another important element in the coach's role was striking a balance between professionalism and sympathy. Participants stated that neither a professional, but unlikable coach nor a likable but seemingly unprofessional coach would inspire trust, but none reported experiencing this. An important coaching role was that of a structure guide who was able to choose questions and tools and present the client with options; coaches acted as a subject matter expert in a coaching process. The coaches were trusted by participants to provide a useful structure for the session because the participants had no previous experience of executive coaching. Establishing a session structure and explaining it to the client was rated positively by participants.

Aside from their role as subject matter experts on coaching structuring the session, coaches were perceived to play three different roles. The Advisor or consultant gave advice from a neutral perspective. The Guide is assumed to have been in a similar situation before and gave direct instructions which the client followed because of the coach's apparent subject expertise. In this scenario the coach is like a mountain guide who is familiar with the best routes up a mountain he or she has climbed many times before. The Fairymetaphor was relevant when the client noticed changes or the start of a process of change, but was unaware how the coach was achieving change and where the process might lead.

In summary, perceptions about the coach's role have an influence on the working alliance between coach and client. If the coach plays a role that is compatible with the client's expectations the session is likely to be fruitful. It is important to note that in the match is usually between the

revised expectations of the client rather than those he or she brought to the session. In the first session it is not only the coach that is re-evaluated, but the whole concept of executive coaching. Before their first session most clients had a rather vague mental model of executive coaching and their expectations reflected this; in their first session clients developed a new concept of executive coaching whilst they were experiencing coaching for the first time. This new mental model of executive coaching reflected adjustments to expectations based on the client's experience. It is unclear from the data collected in this study whether clients' diverse perceptions of the role of coach reflected coaches' ability to adapt the role to suit the client needs or whether clients simply perceived a very similar coaching process in different ways.

Chapter 6 - Agency and Interaction

This chapter deals with how the client perceives the interaction between coach and client. More simply, it asks who does what, from the client's perspective. It is intended to describe how clients felt about what happened and what role the interaction played in their first experience of coaching. The previous chapter examined the roles a coach can play. Clients, their interaction with the coach and the actions of the coach are centre stage in this chapter. Agency is defined as activity directed at a goal the agent has chosen (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2012). Bandura (1989) describes three different concepts of agency. Autonomous agency describes an actor free from outside influence. Mechanical agency refers to a situation where all internal events would be a mere representation of external influences. Interactive emergent agency does not refer to either stance but describes an agency where external influences and internal processes interact. Bandura (1989) describes three different concepts of agency. Autonomous agency describes an actor free from outside influence. Mechanical agency refers to a situation where all internal events would be a mere representation of external influences. Interactive emergent agency does not refer to either stance but describes an agency where external influences and internal processes interact. Bandura (1989) adds that self-efficacy is one of the central mechanisms of personal agency. Self-efficacy can in turn influence the effects teachers have on their environment and their learners' success (Bandura, 1993). In executive coaching self-efficacy of both coach and coachee have been found to significantly influence the working relationship (Baron & Morin, 2009; 2010) but also the coaching success. Another indicator of success related to agency of coach and client is the perception of the range of coaching skills a coach is

perceived to have (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch, & Jones, 2013). The first part of the chapter sets out the pattern of the interaction - who is active and passive- during the first coaching session on the basis of client reports. A sequence of stages is described; stages are characterised by the action which takes place during the stage and the identity of the dominant actor. The second part of the chapter analyses clients' perceptions of the coach-client interaction, focusing on how clients experienced the interaction during the coaching session.

6.1 Agency during the first coaching session

When clients were asked about what happened and what was done during the session, a remarkable number of participants talked about the open nature of the discussion; the data revealed a consistent chronological pattern to the relative activity of coach and client during the session. Participants described several components of the first session, starting with an introduction, which involved coach and client getting to know each other. The next step was the definition of objectives for the session. This was followed by a 'focus stage', in which coach and client worked on the objectives they had discussed earlier. This content of the focus stage varied greatly between clients; in some cases there were discussions, in others work with pre-session data. Most clients described this stage as containing some kind of discovering whether this was as a result of being confronted with their pre-coaching data, or in discussion of the results of a test or the recording of a meeting recorded for the sake of the coaching. Sessions typically closed with personal feedback and setting of homework. It is important to note that all data included in this analysis are client reports. The coaches or a third party observer might have described the same experiences differently. Similarly we have to acknowledge the impact of

coaching models and training. The agency sequence found with the participants is found to be similar to popular coaching models, which will be discussed in chapter 6.1.6. The characteristics of this sequence might simply reflect that the participants experienced coaching in the sequence it was taught to the respective coaches. This agency sequence and what action is taken are also influenced by the conditions around coaching. A leadership development programme for example might make demands to incorporate a given tool into the coaching and thus change the sequence or what is done during a specific stage.

The dominant actor changed during the course of the sessions. The stages depicted in Figure 7 are introduction, defining objectives, focus stage, coach feedback and instruction, setting homework and post-coaching. The actual duration of these stages could not be determined from the available data.

Figure 7 shows how agency changed during the course of the typical first session. Yellow indicates periods when the coach was dominant, blue indicates when the client was dominant.

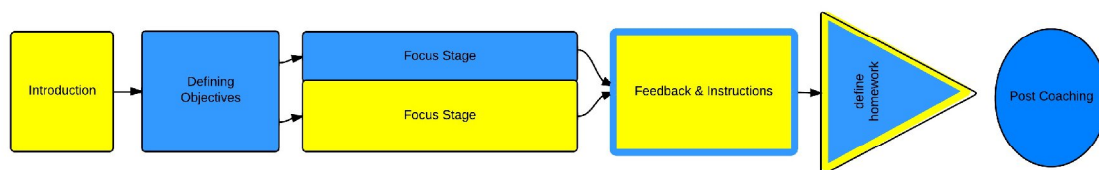


Figure 7: Changes in agency during the session

6.1.1 Introduction

When describing the introduction stage clients spoke about how the coach started the session. The coach tended to welcome the client and sometimes gave an introduction to the coaching process. The coach then moved on to give an overview of objectives for the session or asked the client what his or her objectives were; the coach was the dominant actor in this stage.

The content and conduct of the introduction stage was influenced by the coach's preparation. The way the coach started the meeting depended on what data he or she had collected before the session. Coaches in the corporate programme had gathered data from videos and started the sessions by presenting sticking points based on their analysis of these data. In other cases coaches prepared areas for work through a pre-coaching call or 360° feedback instruments. In cases where the coach had gathered data and there were several topics or options to choose from, he or she would present the client with options for how to use the session:

He gave me several options about how we could proceed through the meeting together and let me pick the elements that I thought would be most valuable for me. (P001)

6.1.2 Defining objectives

The introduction stage was usually followed by a period in which the client described his or her situation and what they perceived the 'sticking points' to be; this was the defining objectives stage and is coloured blue in Figure 7 to indicate that during this time, the client took the dominant, active role and the coach took a more passive, listening role. The length and structure of this part varied considerably. Differences were attributable to the issues raised and the type of preparation. Some clients had already been given

the opportunity to outline their situation and reasons for seeking coaching during a pre-coaching call, called a 'compatibility call' or 'chemistry check' by some coaches. In some cases the coach had prepared a number of possible topics on the basis of video analysis and the client was given the opportunity to choose whether or not the topics were a matter of importance for the session. The objectives for the session were then defined and chosen by the client.

6.1.3 Focus stage

In the next stage coach and client worked on achieving the objectives that had been defined. This has been termed the 'focus stage' because clients perceived the interaction was focused on these specific objectives. This stage is shown in blue and yellow in Figure 7 because the perceptions of dominance varied over the course of the stage and between coach-client pairs. The content of this stage was also variable. For some clients it included detailed discussions of the chosen topic, in some sessions the meaning, interpretation and use of test results were the focus and in others there was more emphasis on critical questioning by the coach. In some cases the coach initiated the activities of this stage:

"I guess I just gave sort of the high idea of what I need to work on, how I need to get a lot better control of a meeting, and he came up with more specific topics on what to do. So, it came, I guess, more from him, more from John."(P002)

Once the parties had agreed on objectives and a direction, both coach and client took an active part in the session, with agency shifting between them. P003 described the shifts in agency from the beginning of the session through to the end of the focus stage:

"Well, we met, we introduced ourselves and we discussed, what would be the objective of this session. And then based on that, we

tried to get some precise examples. I had some cases which actually happened to me recently. So, we did discuss those in detail with some very specific examples, so that was very good, and [in] the following [...] discussion, she presented to me a number of techniques [...] or challenge[s] that would kind of make me [see] things from a different perspective, which I really appreciated a lot.”(P003)

Clients' perceptions of dominance during this part of the session were varied. Some clients, such as P012, felt that they had been directing this part of the session:

“I had the impression that I was shaping it, yes, and [she was] basically forcing me to think, through asking critical questions and leading me in certain directions and, of course, contributing her own knowledge.”(P012)

This quotation describes a coach taking a facilitating role, asking critical questions and using the content of questions to guide the client only when necessary. P012 also mentioned that when it was appropriate, the coach did offer her knowledge, although he did not specify what form this took. The combination of critical questions and reflection appears to be the key here. The client drives the session, but the coach uses critical questions to stimulate reflection and contemplation. P002 and P014 had a rather different experience, and described how their coaches had been active in driving the session:

“So, it came I guess more from him, more from John.”(P002)

“Lisa is really driving this process and pushing me and giving me the organisation to do it.”(P014)

6.1.4 Feedback and instructions

The focus stage was followed by a phase in which the coach is the dominant actor, the feedback and instructions phase. In this phase coaches were perceived to be providing feedback, instructions or suggestions

tailored to the client's situation. P008 described the provision of personalised feedback and instructions:

“Yes, he asked me to note certain things, which I could improve.”(P008)

Other clients, such as P004, felt they had developed solutions on their own:

“I did not get any input, but rather created a solution on my own.”(P004)

Some popular coaching approaches recognise provision of feedback as a distinct stage. In solution-focused brief coaching, for example, coaches take a timeout towards the end of the session during which they think about what positive feedback they can give the client (Berg and Szabó, 2005). Berg and Szabó suggested that by giving feedback on what had particularly impressed them, coaches can convey to clients their impression of the client's resources or strengths. Whitmore (2002) took a slightly different approach, recommending that coaches should make suggestions about changes. Whitmore suggested coaches should offer suggestions based on their personal knowledge, which clients are free to accept, discuss or reject.

6.1.5 Setting homework

The provision of suggestions, instructions or solutions tended to be followed by suggested homework, things for the client to work on. The last phase of the coaching was agreeing and defining homework for the client. Clients' comments suggested that homework was perceived positively, as a developmental exercise:

“I'm happy I have to do that [homework], it's not as much time of doing, it's a lot of thinking, so I like that I have to sit down and think of certain situations.”(P003)

In P003's account it is unclear who set the homework, P003 does not explain how she and her coach agreed on the type and amount of homework, although she feels an obligation to do it:

"Another good thing [is], I have some homework [...]. So, it's an exercise again, which is structured with categories and so on, so I do have to work on that. I'm happy I have to do that, it's not as much time of doing, it's a lot of thinking, so I like that I have to sit down and think of certain situations."(P003)

It was clear that after the end of the session it was up to the client to do the homework and apply what he or she had learned:

"This depends on me now, how consistently I use and implement, what we have agreed on, so I think my own effort is now simply called on."(P007)

The popular literature also mentions the concept of a homework stage. Meier and Szabó (2008) suggested that giving experiments to the client was an essential part of coaching. They claimed that setting homework as part of solution-focused brief therapy reduced the number of sessions required from 4.2 to 2.9. Similarly, research on the effects of homework in solution-focused brief therapy by Jordan and Quinn (1994) showed that clients who were given a homework task after the first session reported more improvement, were more optimistic about the likely success of therapy and rated their therapy more productive overall than clients who did not receive homework. Such an effect might be explained by self-efficacy as a means of personal agency. It is generally agreed upon by researchers that an expectation of attaining a goal characterises hope (Farran, Herth & Popovich, 1995; McGeer, 2004; Pettit, 2004). In addition Snyder's (1994) theory on pathways thinking describes that a person will remain hopeful to achieve a goal under certain conditions. It happens either when that person is capable of achieving the means to reach their goal or

capable of generating those means. The homework might be a way of producing either the capability of means or providing another opportunity to generate such means.

6.1.6 Comparison with popular coaching models

It is worthwhile to compare the client's perception of the structure of a first session with the stage models mentioned in the literature review, particularly those of Dingman (2006) and Whitmore (2002). Like these two models, clients described an initial phase of introduction and a phase involving assessment of the situation as a preliminary to agreeing on the direction and objectives of coaching. Whitmore (2002) called this stage 'goals', Dingman (2006) called it 'goal setting' and in this thesis it has been termed 'defining objectives'. Participants from the corporate programme got video feedback, an activity which seems to correspond to Dingman's (2006) 'getting feedback and reflection' stage. Participants reported making choices about where the coaching session should lead in the 'defining objectives' stage, which seems to correspond to Whitmore's (2002) 'goals' stage. At least one private client participant received feedback based on psychometric instruments and talked about reflecting on the results:

"She went through the Hogan analysis with me and explained its elements. And at a certain point, she said: 'So, what do you think about that?'"(P015)

This happened during the early focus stage, which also bears a resemblance to the by Dingman's (2006) 'getting feedback and reflecting stage and Whitmore's (2002) 'reality' and 'options' stage. The 'setting homework' and 'post coaching' stages described here resemble the 'way forward' and 'implementation and evaluation' stages in Dingman's and Whitmore's models respectively. Although clients' perceptions of session

structure do not perfectly match the stages described in popular coaching models there are important similarities. The next part of the chapter explores the characteristics of the interaction during the coaching session.

6.2 Interaction

In this study a first coaching session is defined as the first time a client experiences coaching and what constitutes coaching. This section focuses on the client's perspective on the coach-client interaction. Broadly speaking interactions were characterised by two features, open discussion and dialogue and handing control to the client, co-creating the session together with the client.

6.2.1 Open communication

Open discussion was a shared common feature of interactions for the participants in this study. P006 and P012 described this:

“An open dialogue, she did not have a predetermined programme, she was reeling off, so to speak. I more or less specified a topic and she then intervened at times and I thought this was somehow very good.”(P012)

“Additionally, and that's what I expected, and reality was exactly that, there was some good open communication between us.”(P006)

P012's description illustrates what is referred to in this chapter as open communication: a conversation does not appear bound by a fixed or predetermined structure or goal, one in which the coach responds flexibly to the client and is prepared to work on goals specified by the client. P012 felt that his coach was focused solely on him, the client. This does imply that the coach comes to the first session without an agenda, simply that the client feelshis or her view, goals and position are respected. The phrase'did

not have a predetermined programme that she was reeling off' is important; it indicates that rather than focusing on a static and automatic sequence, the coach reacted flexibly to the needs of her client. The coach appeared human and was implicitly compared with a machine or automaton 'reeling off' a programme. Van Nieuwerburgh (2014, p 149) argues that "being human" is a part of being a coach. As part of this way of being human it is argued that treating the other person with respect and caring about people is a necessary attribute of coaches. Adapting to the client instead of 'reeling of a program' could be considered as a representation of caring and respecting the other person and connection with the client. This connection did from actively engaging with the client in dialogue and co-creation of the session. Dialogue was one of the characteristics of the open communication described by participants. They referred to communication during the coaching session as an open dialogue between the two parties:

"Well, and then [we were] discussing together, accompanied by various exercises."(P010)

"Well, at first, my answer would likely be that there was a dialogue. I have experienced the conversation as a dialogue in the end."(P015)

P010 used the word 'together' and P015 used the word 'dialogue'. Both words indicate that the interaction being described was not one-way; clients felt their contributions to the dialogue mattered. Clients described prerequisites for open dialogue, but as these were reported post-hoc they cannot be used to support a causal analysis. Some clients argued that the coach needed to be open and confident in dealing with the client's problems:

"As I said it's confidence that's important to me, trust, Lisa was able to be open and talk about my issues."(P003)

Clients also felt that having a coach who was non-judgmental was critical to an open dialogue. Clients needed to feel secure and to feel that they could speak openly without worrying about being wrong or feeling uncomfortable:

“And there wasn’t [...] a feeling that I might say something [was] wrong or that I would be uncomfortable somehow. I find it is very important for such situations, that you are not only open to yourself, but [one is] [...] able to openly say how one saw it and that it is going be evaluated properly, on a professional not a personal level.”(P009).

P009 differentiated between personal and professional levels. If the client is to be open it is important that he or she trusts the coach is able to handle the content of a session on a professional level and avoid being personally judgmental. Marx (2009) interviewed learners in dyadic mentoring and coaching relationships and reported that openness was facilitated by the coach’s acceptance of anything the learner brought to the session and by empowering the client. Empowerment was defined as acceptance of the client’s perspective and an assumption that ‘every perspective is correct’ (Marx, 2009, p. 105). Marx (2009) also found that openness – the coach’s acceptance of the client’s perspective – facilitated development of trust.

The participants in this study placed a similar emphasis on the importance of building trust. According to P003 coach-client compatibility was important in this:

“I hoped, I would meet a person who would be compatible to me, you know. Somebody who would be pleasant, and with whom I would feel free to talk and [be] open to discuss and feel this trust, this discussion between us.”(P003)

Although none of the participants commented in detail on compatibility, a previous study of matching (Boyce, Jackson and Neal, 2010) may be relevant. Boyce et al. investigated how various indicators of match influenced ratings of a military leadership coaching programme. They found

that measures of rapport, trust and commitment predicted the outcome of the coaching programme and that the effect of these factors was completely mediated by compatibility and credibility. Compatibility was defined as ‘appropriate combination of client and coach behavioural preferences or the characteristics the client and coach possess that influence their cognitions and behaviours in various situations’ (Boyce et al., 2010, p. 7). Credibility was defined as: ‘a coach possessing the necessary credentials to meet client needs and include coaching competence and experience’ (Boyce et al., 2010, p. 8). Compatibility was assessed using Managerial style and Learning style questionnaires; credibility was assessed by comparing a checklist of skills the coach was ready to coach with a checklist of areas the client reported needing help with. A second part of credibility matching criteria was military expertise, this may correspond to business experience in the business context. Although popular literature often suggests that coaching competence is dependent on coaching skills rather than experience and subject expertise (Whitmore, 2002; Berg and Szabó, 2005; Meier and Szabó, 2008), Sue-Chan and Latham (2004) found that lack of credibility had a negative effect on client performance and satisfaction with coaching.

Compatibility in the context of a coaching relationship implies compatibility at the personality level (Boyce et al., 2010). The data from participants in this study were consistent with this. P008 argued that to achieve trust, the coach must be likeable as well as professional, suggesting that it would be impossible to open up to a coach and trust him or her and his or her methodology if this were not the case:

“I would say, if I had not had this trust in him, if he had not been sympathetic, I would not have been able to open up. Yes, then you do... then it won’t do much. I have trust in his words and methods.” (P008).

Baron and Morin (2009) found that the coach's ability to relate to the client, communicate well and facilitate learning is connected to improvements in the client's self-efficacy. Perceived compatibility and credibility of a coach appear to have an importance that extends beyond the professional level. P014 argued that beyond the merely professional level, the impression the coach makes and how the coach makes the client feel are important factors in whether the client develops confidence in the coach:

"I think it's very important how you feel and what's the impression you have.[...]Because it will help you to trust the person you need to be obviously convinced with this person you communicate with to [...] understand what you are looking for. So I think it's very important for this coaching process [...] confidence in your coach, and I think with Lisa it was very positive in these aspects."(P014)

Marx (2009) considered confidentiality an important factor in development of trust. If the client feels that the other person is working primarily in his or her interest it allows him or her to be more open. Opening up during the conversation-self-disclosure- is another indicator of trust. Several participants commented that during coaching, they experienced moments of self-revelation:

"Well, maybe, too, that you [are] just a bit courageous, [to] expose yourself."(P008)

Having the courage to expose oneself is important; although the coach should behave so as to facilitate a relationship of trust, it is the client who must take the initiative in speaking openly about his or her problems, situation and feelings. According to Swinth (1967) the building of trust is followed by increased reciprocal self-disclosure. Self-revelation is an action which invites a response from the other party. If self-revelation is followed by disapproval, the relationship freezes or goes into a retesting phase. The facilitative effect of an atmosphere of open communication on

disclosure was experienced by P003 in relation to their own negative behaviour:

“There’s been some [...] frustration or deception in terms of actually my own behaviour. I realised, I have in some cases maybe not the most appropriate [behaviour].”(P003)

6.2.2 Giving control to the client

According to participants in this study interactions between coach and client were characterised by trust in the coach and their methodology. The building of trust can be viewed as a reciprocal process, facilitated by the coach’s promotion of an atmosphere of openness. As well as being perceived as open and professional, in several situations coaches were perceived to have handed control of the session to the client. For P001 it was being given a choice of options for the session that provided a sense of control:

“He gave me several options about how we could proceed through the meeting together and let me pick the elements that I thought would be most valuable for me.”(P001)

Allowing clients to choose the topic which is most important to them facilitates goal agreement, something also reported in research on therapy (DeFife and Hilsenroth, 2011). Conversely, a failure to reach contractual clarity early in psychotherapy weakens the therapeutic alliance (Orlinsky et al., 1994). P001 mentioned being asked to pick the elements he thought would be most valuable; but in other instances the coach expressed his or her opinion about the best way to proceed as well as soliciting the client’s opinion:

“So, the way he approached things during discussions, he let me discuss and let me come with things and he was listening what I was saying and expressing what I wanted to work on or maybe what I didn’t want to work on. He had information about videos, he already

had his own opinion on what I should do and what I should not do [...] So, he explained what he wants to do and then based on his thoughts, his perspective and my thoughts, we were able to focus on the things that were of importance. So, I appreciated that the fact that I could really go first and then also have his opinion.”(P005)

P005 also commented that it was important for the coach to be active and provide input, whilst appreciating the opportunity to express his own ideas first:

“But actually at the beginning I was talking more and then you know, I want a coach to give me input so, then, he starts, after my first expression and thoughts, then he starts to guide me where it's good to go.”(P005).

Allowing the client to manage the session and choose how to proceed also served the function of taking responsibility for the coaching's direction. If the client chose the topics he or she wanted to work on, the coach and client would negotiate and agree on the direction of the session; sometimes this meant the coach presenting the client with a set of options. Being presented with options, but keeping the control of choice was appreciated by clients:

“That was something I really appreciated from John. That he asked or showed directly in the beginning what he wants to show me and whether or not I agree at what point.”(P009)

P012 felt that he had been allowed to control the session, although the coach used critical questions to provide direction:

“I had the impression that I was shaping it, and [she was] basically forcing me to think, through asking critical questions and leading me in certain directions and, of course, contributing her own knowledge.”(P012)

P004 also described how critical feedback and questioning led to reflection:

“Well, actually, it was about asking questions about feedback, like, how can I get honest feedback in my project, well, for example, if one has worked in a project or as project manager oneself, she

asked very good questions, so she really got me thinking about how to get this going.”(P004)

Although both clients felt that they had been in control of the process, they also reported being guided by their coaches’ critical questions. Whilst the client felt in control, the coach was leading the process using targeted questions and interventions. These questions and interventions seemed to play a critical role in enabling reflection. This recalls Whitmore’s (2002, p.8) description of coaching as ‘helping them to learn rather than teaching them.’ Whitmore asserted that effective coaching questions elicit descriptive, rather than judgmental answers and compel the client to ‘focus to a higher order’ (2002, p. 45).

This chapter has explored agency and interaction during the first coaching session. In summary, agency changed during the course of the session and a number of broadly defined stages could be identified on the basis of content, although the length and chronology of stages were not consistent. These stages resemble the stages described in popular coaching models although they are not exactly the same. Interaction in the first coaching session consisted of building mutual trust. Having confidence in the coach and being compatible with the coach were seen as important. The interaction was described as open communication, and was facilitated by the coach’s professional, non-judgmental acceptance of the client. By handing a measure of control to the client – allowing the client to choose the areas to work on during the session – coaches enabled the client to feel that he or she was directing the session and feedback and critical questions were perceived to be useful in facilitating reflection. This experienced non-directive approach is different from a possibly more directive approach, where the coach (or mentor) decides what area should be best focused on. In general learners are more motivated to work on goals of their own choice

(Hom& Murphy, 1983). Overall the process was felt to have enabled change, this feeling is illustrated by P010's comment:

“Exactly, but I know there is something magical behind it, that something will change, changes will show themselves.”(P010)

6.3 Summary

The category covered in this chapter relates to two issues, the timing and pattern of inputs to the session and how the interaction was perceived overall by clients.

Interaction in first session consisted mainly of the coach giving feedback through reports, such as video feedback, analyses of strengths and weaknesses or personality tests such as the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI; Hogan, 2009). Clients were actively involved in the session most of the time and asked questions, defined their own objectives and responded to the coaches' assessments. Clients viewed the interaction as open communication and open dialogue, characterised by feeling able to talk about anything. The coaches provided structure, but were not bound by an inflexible programme which was simply 'reeled off' and there were no taboo topics. The coaches picked up on the client's activity, suggesting models or tools for the client to investigate or try to use. Coaches asked questions that prompted clients to reflect on their situation. The development of a relationship of trust was an important aspect of the session. Clients in their first coaching session felt they had control over the direction of the session; although the coach provided structure, the clients noted that the coach asked them to choose the most important topic or issue and asked them whether or not a certain topic should be explored. In this way coaches handed control to their clients; this elicited greater trust. To conclude: the goal of the interaction in these first session was to build a working alliance

by fostering a professional, trusting and non-judgemental relationship that enables the client to disclose problems to the coach.

Sessions followed a similar sequence and although the data did not provide information on the length of particular segments, the characteristics and general order of segments were similar. The segments identified were: introduction, defining objectives, focus stage, coach feedback and instruction, defining homework and post coaching stage. These segments were resembled those specified in a number of popular stage models of coaching. The sequence was present and described in every coaching session, although the length and perceived intensity of activities in each session varied. All segments were characterised by open dialogue.

The main characteristic of coaching sessions was open dialogue, conducive to a relationship of trust; sessions shared a similar structure although the elements varied in length. The next chapter, Discovering, deals with how clients experienced the 'magic' of coaching; it examines what discovery means in this context, what kinds of discoveries were made by clients during their first coaching session and how they characterised the process of discovering.

Chapter 7- Discovering

This chapter introduces the core category influenced by all the other categories. All participants in this study shared an experience they referred to as ‘discovering’. In order to elucidate this experience it is defined here from the client’s perspective.

The word ‘discovery’ was noted in the first interview, but its significance only later became apparent. Discovery was described as an active process rather than a static event. The category was hence named *Discovering*, describing the process during which a client makes the experience of discovery. The metaphor used by one client illustrates this process:

“I might draw [...] like an explorer ship, like Magellan or something like that. I didn’t really know what to expect going into it, but, but there was this kind of period of discovery, as we talked about it, talked about the scores, and then each of those, you know, it led to a lot of discussion about, what’s different about my project compared to the other people is that the project I did the first assessment on, finished, I’m on a different project now. I’m actually at an earlier stage of this project than I was, when I did the first assessment on the first project.”(P001)

P001 provides a detailed description of the process of discovering, mentioning an exploration vessel and a “period of discovery”, which he likened to his own experience in coaching. ‘Magellan’ is a reference to Ferdinand Magellan, whose expedition was the first to circumnavigate the entire globe (Guillemard, 1890). Guillemard (1890) described the dangers of these long expeditions: Magellan did not survive the circumnavigation of the globe - he was killed in the Philippines; only one out of five ships and 18 of 237 expedition members returned home. The reference to a “period of discovery”, like the metaphor “explorer ship”, seems to relate to the age of discovery. The age of discovery, often considered to have lasted from the

15th to the 17th century, started after the fall of Constantinople when trade between Europe and Asia was severely inhibited (Parry, 1981a, 1981b; Mancall, 1999). Sailors searching for a new route to India to secure a supply of gold and spices. The age of discovery was an age of change which saw the rise to power of the European states. The explorers set out on voyages not knowing their destination, just as many coaching clients had only a vague goal before their coaching began and were unaware of where exactly their 'journey' would take them or what would happen (see Chapter 4 - Expectations and Conditions). Many clients in the study did not know exactly what they expected to gain from coaching; some wanted to discover their potential, some were looking for change and some had no expectations at all before their first coaching session. P001 described how his coach had helped him discover meaning in data on his performance. P001 did not know beforehand where the coaching would take him and likened his experience of discovering meaning to being on an exploring sailing ship that sailed into the unknown without a known destination.

"So, my scores were lower than a lot of the others, because the team doesn't have all the information they need yet. [...] We haven't developed the structure, because we're in that waiting phase of data lines to come in. So, looking at the scores, and walking through with John 'what does this mean, what scores are significant [...], John was quite helpful in helping understand that area, which of those scores are maybe more meaningful than others.'" (P001)

P001 also described discovering differences between his current project and previous projects and talked about becoming more aware what stage the project was at and discovering how to communicate with the team. Coach and the client collaborated in this discovery process.

"Because depending on the stage of the project and its different people and all this stuff, [...] I would probably go with the exploring sailing ship, because it was very much of discovery for me, and now I have these other scores that are different from my other scores

from a different project. What does it mean? And some of that led to that discussion of, let's talk about this score. What does this mean with this team? What are the risks? And again leading to the discussion about the people who haven't been on the team before, and how to communicate with them, and engage them, and how to keep the larger team engaged.”(P001)

A quotation from Chapter 5 - Roles of Coach and Client, illustrates another aspect of discovering:

“I don't know, friendly, somehow. It is not a real picture, but (...) in a boat. The coach and I. We are going down in a boat, down the river.”(P011)

Discovery can happen on many levels. Because the coach and client are on a similar level, they are both involved in the discovery process. The client may make discoveries on various levels, and these various levels provide the structure for the rest of this chapter. The scope of discovery varied between clients, with some clients making fewer or no discoveries on some levels. Section 7.1 Discovering coaching, deals with the client's experience of learning and experiencing coaching for the first time; Section 7.2 Discovering self, explores the discoveries about one's own strengths, limitations, position and opportunities for change and Section 7.3

Discovering one's potential, describes how clients discovered how to translate lessons from coaching into solutions to everyday problems.

7.1 Discovering coaching

The participants in this study had recently experienced executive coaching for the first time. Robinson (1992) argued that first experiences can be understood as personal histories, either skill histories or relationship histories. The experiences reported by participants in this study shared features of both types of personal history. Clients discovered a skill, the

ability to have and use coaching, and how to work within a new type of relationship, the coach-client relationship. The experience of coaching allowed them to discover what coaching was and how it could help them; because they came to coaching with no previous experience their understanding was developed through this initial experience of the process. P011 described her first experience of coaching as moving, emotional experience:

“At first, it is such a moving thing, because, well, one has the opportunity to talk about feelings that one has during such a coaching session, and not only on a rational, but an emotional level.”(P011)

Not all participants found the process of coaching pleasant at this first session, although they were all very positive about the results and the overall experience. P013 likened the experience of being confronted with personal feedback to going to the dentist:

“No, that was not pleasant. That was like going to the dentist. Afterwards, the pain is gone and things are great. But right in the moment, it was not so nice.”(P013)

Discovering coaching involved comparing expectations about coaching with the reality of the experience. Chapters 4 and 5 examined the various expectations clients to the session and the roles played by coaches during the session. In Chapter 4 we saw that P015 was surprised because his expectation that the coach would take a strong leading role was not met and had to adapt to this; nevertheless found coaching a strongly positive experience. Discovering what coaching was actually like and the opportunities it presented was a surprise for several participants. P007 had generally positive expectations of her first coaching session owing to her previous experience:

“I can say I went into the meeting with positive expectations. I had the following reason: We had previously had a kind of meeting, where Lisa and John were present. And I found we had really been introduced to very useful tools at that time.”(P007)

Her experience during the first session exceeded her expectations, as she left the meeting with practical tools; she had thought that it would take longer to achieve results and was surprised by how quickly she was able to realise the benefits:

“I was rather surprised that there were tools that were relatively tangible. That, I had not expected necessarily. It didn't inevitably have to be like that. I really wouldn't have imagined that there would be tools that might require working on topics long term, and where you would see results middle to long term. In this regard, I was quite positively surprised.”(P007)

P012 described discovering that coaching could have a significant impact. Some participants had entered coaching with neutral or no expectations. P012 discovered that the benefits were more substantial than he had anticipated:

“Maybe expectations, maybe not so much, but [...] I think what came out of the meeting was more important or more significant than the expectations I had had before, which were a bit vague.”(P012)

P003 experienced a similar discovery and commented that after the first session she was only beginning to appreciate the potential impact of coaching.

“I had an idea of what coaching could be [...] but it was really the top of the iceberg and I felt like, during the discussions, we were going down and [I was] understanding better and more, so I do feel like now, after only one session, but still, I do see a little bit more than the top of the iceberg.”(P003)

These accounts can be related to evidence that viewing an educational videotape about the psychotherapy process affected the expectations and

had a positive impact on treatment outcomes (Coleman and Kaplan, 1990; Shuman and Shapiro, 2002; see Chapter 2 for detailed discussion). Executive clients appeared to learn about coaching through experiencing it. Discovering coaching involved discovering what coaching is and is not, what roles coach and client can take and what impact it can have. Learning, or being educated, about coaching was central to clients' first experiences to coaching.

7.2 Discovering self

The Greek philosopher Aristotle said that 'Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom' (Stavropoulos, 2008). Participants reported discovering new aspects of themselves, being confronted with who they were, gaining insight into the self and becoming aware of gaps in their understanding and self-perception. Self-discovery was central to the first experience of coaching for these participants.

Self-discovery was mediated in a variety of ways, for example P015 made a discovery about himself during discussion of his psychometric test results:

"In this first session, and I don't want to appear boastful, I realised there that I am a somewhat exceptional person. Because at some places she said, 'Ok I will tell you something about your resulting values and so on, you have a higher score at this place than reference.' And then I thought 'Oh, this is interesting.' That was one signal."(P015)

For other clients, such as P005, it was watching themselves on video which led to new insight:

"It was pretty intense. To see myself on a video with somebody next to me, I wouldn't say I was shy, because it's not really my nature, but it was something, I was like 'wow, it's me' and the session is about me and I'm not used to this, to be honest."(P005)

P011 described the impact of being encouraged to think differently, discovering the ability to think in a different way:

“But also being, quite excited or being able to think about things with the coaches, you never thought about before. And yeah, that I got some suggestions, maybe in another direction than before or than it seemed before.”(P011)

All these quotations demonstrate that self-discoveries did not occur unprompted; they were provoked by an external stimulus, either a video of oneself or by psychometric data. These self-discoveries were also unexpected, perhaps because they were neither spontaneous nor the result of a process controlled or initiated by the client. P006 was surprised to realise how he might be affecting his team:

“Those types of things which were higher level, they kind of surprised me, because that made me kind of understand ‘okay, now I see where this is going, now I see how my attitude[...] may be affecting the team’. I wasn’t expecting that either, so that was a surprise.”(P006)

Taking part in this process of self-discovery provoked conflicting emotions, the next section examines these emotions and how they affected clients during and after the process of discovery.

7.2.1 Emotions

Being confronted with a different perspective on oneself was perceived both positively and negatively and invariably elicited an emotional response. Some clients found the moments of self-revelation positive, such as P015 (p. 114) others found the immediate experience more painful, for example P013 likened it to undergoing dental treatment (p. 114). Sometimes discovery was preceded by a feeling of curiosity or insecurity:

"Well, since it was my first coaching session, for feedback about my project leader skills, I was initially a bit curious, uncertain what I should expect."(P009)

P010 described a similar combination of curiosity and uncertainty:

"A big empty wasteland and a large tower. One side was curiosity, but you do not really know yet, what is waiting for you in the tower. Not anxiety inducing, more with curiosity, you try to explore, where you have not yet been. Maybe like having your eyes blinded. And I am standing in front and it is a bit dark inside, the door is opened I do not know what is behind that door."(P010)

P010 likens the potential discoveries available through coaching to a large tower, a structure that is visually impenetrable. He did not know what was inside and had to choose to open the door and find out: he took an active role in the discovery process rather than being led, passively through the door.

The new sense of self-awareness was experienced differently by participants. P002 described a positive reaction,

"Excitement, confidence, you know, pride."(P002)

"Enthusiasm."(P002)

whereas P003 had mixed feelings about self-discovery:

"So, it was a mix of being happy to discover, but being not happy about what I discovered in some cases, in some cases of course, I wouldn't want to exaggerate in some of the situations."(P003)

Self-discoveries resulted from being confronted with new information about oneself, sometimes this included information about negative traits and weaknesses. These new personal data represented a challenge to the self-image and required clients to change how they viewed themselves. This was sometimes a powerful experience:

"It was pretty, it was pretty intense. To see myself on a video with somebody next to me, I wouldn't say I was shy, because it's not really my nature, but it was something, I was like 'wow, it's me' and the session is about me and I'm not used to this, to be honest."(P005)

P013 continued describing her reaction to new information:

"The mix comes from the fact that what we discussed, some points really touched me. So, there were situations which I had a completely different opinion about them before discussing with Lisa, and it truly struck me."(P003)

P013 changed her opinion on certain situations after being presented with a completely different perspective by her coach. First experiences in skill acquisition histories are often undertaken with the image of a successful new self in mind (Markus and Nurius, 1986); this new self-image is either reinforced or threatened by the experience. P013 described self-discovery as a sudden experience, a shock: "it truly struck me"; P005 described it as an "intense" experience. For some participants this meant the first coaching session was exhausting and draining.

"Yeah, well, directly after I left, I felt pretty worn."(P013)

"When I left the room, I was feeling a bit exhausted, because I really wanted to cover a lot and took advantage of that session."(P005)

In summary, during their first executive coaching session clients experience a range of emotions. Some clients feel curiosity and make discoveries about themselves; these discoveries are often experienced as sudden or striking and are accompanied by intense emotion. Moments of discovering may involve seeing a situation more clearly, or from a different perspective or they may involve gaining new insight into oneself, realising that there were gaps in one's self-knowledge.

7.2.2 Discovering personal weaknesses

Simons said ‘We pay attention to what we are told to attend to, or what we’re looking for, or what we already know...what we see is amazingly limited’ (cited in Heffernan, 2011, p. 1453). Sometimes we are blind to things that are directly in front of us, because we are focusing on something completely different (Chabris and Simons, 2011); in their first coaching session participants often became aware of gaps in their self-knowledge. P003 realised that she had been unaware of certain aspects of her own behaviour:

“There’s been some [...] frustration or deception in terms of my own behaviour. I realised I have some cases that are maybe not the most appropriate.”(P003)

In this example coaching prompted P003 to re-evaluate her behaviour which led to the realisation that it was sometimes inappropriate. Unlike P003, P006 came to coaching with awareness that there were gaps in his understanding and looked to coaching to help him address them:

“To identify what I feel or what he feels we need to [know] which directions we need to move towards in order to help me become a more effective communicator and project manager.”(P006)

For P004 being encouraged to reflect on how to respond constructively to discovering personal weaknesses was an important part of the discovery process:

“But what I thought was really good, was that I was brought to think about what I could change practically about my style and how I could become a bit more effective.”(P004)

Becoming aware of a gap in one’s self-knowledge was only the first part of the self-discovery process; self-discovery also entailed the realisation that there was a better way of doing things, or that one could change one’s style

and behaviours. Discovering one's potential was the final stage in the discovery process.

7.3 Discovering one's potential

Discovering one's potential was the final aspect of discovery for participants in this study. Participants learnt about themselves and discovered how they could use this knowledge for personal development. This happened on many levels. The motivational speaker Tracy stated: 'The potential of the average person is like a huge ocean unsailed, a new continent unexplored, a world of possibilities waiting to be released and channelled toward some great good.' (Tracy, 2003).

Self-discoveries allowed clients to look further ahead. P015 realised that self-knowledge could be used for self-improvement:

"And the third element, hey, there were things, I can do better and they will help me and lead to me becoming a better executive and leader personality." (P015)

P015 realised that discovering things he could do better was a step on the way to becoming a better executive. Gaining new self-knowledge often allowed clients to discover potential for improvement and change. Some coaching sessions gave the client specific guidance about how to achieve their potential.

"Definitely a successful session, because I left it with precise pointers, pointers that I am convinced are going to help me and that I can implement. And I had one project meeting since then, and I implemented the first things, and I felt as if the session went better already." (P011)

P011 left his first coaching session with plans to implement specific changes at his next project session and the effects of following this plan

reinforced his belief that his new approach would prove beneficial. Sometimes clients planned to work further on the tools they were given during their first coaching session:

“And that is also kind of a result of coaching, that is, that you keep working on what you have been given, so to speak.”(P007)

These tools could be exercises, models, mindset or thought patterns clients learned during coaching or more concrete advice about procedures. Coaching prompted participants to reflect and learn; reflection did not necessarily produce a solution to a problem during the session, but they were motivated and able to continue to work on the problem afterwards, using their new skills:

“I thought it was very motivating, it occupied my mind the whole day. And yes, this is very positive, when there is this effect. If nothing would have come out of it for me, I would have gone over to everyday work again quite quickly, but this was something, that really kept playing in my mind.”(P012)

Meier and Szabó (2008) argued that coaching is related to other forms of development. They describe seeing the client metaphorically either as a glass or an acorn. One has to fill the glass, but the acorn already has everything it needs to grow and only needs watering. P015 used a similar metaphor to describe how coaching worked:

“Maybe this is a bit of an unexpected picture. But a bit, like a farmer, who sows seeds a bit on the land. That is how it appears to me. The first seeds are falling and you do not yet know what might result from it.”(P015)

Participants felt there was more to coaching than being given specific tools or advice about steps to take in their working practice; they felt coaching had provided them with an opportunity to continue growth. The first coaching session sowed the seed of future development and its impact

extended beyond that first coaching session. Meier and Szabó (2008) argued coaching can only ever be a beginning, the start of positive changes in the client's situation; the coach does not know and cannot control what will happen to clients after they leave the office.

Whitmore (2002) described the essence of good coaching as 'building awareness and responsibility' (p. 32). To summarise, participants in this study gained awareness about coaching, themselves and their own potential from their first coaching session. These discoveries led to positive and negative insights. Discovery was the core of their coaching experience and they were encouraged to continue discovering:

"Lisa also gave me some homework and this, this is also occupying me right now a bit. And I feel that this initiates a thought process and I am looking forward to continue working with her in this process."(P013)

Participants looked forward to continuing the discovery process. They felt that there were more discoveries to be made and that coaching would facilitate the process. Coaching led to greater curiosity as well as greater self-awareness. Participants became curious about what else they might discover were interested in discovering more about coaching and themselves:

"The fact that what I started seeing and what I started thinking of now, I'm really looking forward to my next session to see what else [...] will I discover and how can I address some of these things. So it's also about curiosity and being eager to do some more of this (laughs briefly)."(P003)

7.4 Summary

The process of discovering was the key to the first experience of coaching. The first coaching session was compared to the age of discovery, to a

journey with an unknown destination. Coaching is experienced by clients as both a means and an end. For clients coaching is a journey during which they make discoveries which lead them towards their goals. The client plays an active part in the discovery process.

Discovery can take place on three levels. Discoveries on the first level relate to the coaching process. The client's expectations are modified as a result of his or her experience; during the first session the client learns what coaching is, discovers its emotional impact and the opportunity for growth that it can represent. The second level is concerned with self-discovery. Coaching clients are confronted with information about themselves, they gain new insights into who they are and how they are perceived by others, which promotes reflection on personal strengths, weaknesses and gaps in self-knowledge that limit development. Third level discoveries are discoveries about one's potential. New understanding of strengths and weaknesses was accompanied by the realisation that it was possible to develop solutions to problems and alter maladaptive behaviours. This prompted further reflection and action after the end of the first coaching session.

In conclusion, the client leaves his or her first coaching session with specific tools, models or action plans that will enable him or her to make progress. These outputs are tailored to the individual client and the problems he or she brought to the coaching session. The process of self-discovering and discovering of potential enables the client to continue the development process. Not every client experiences discovering at all levels during the first session; some discover a gap in their understanding, some gain new insight into themselves and coaching, some only discover their potential. But every client experiences some sort of discovery. Discovery

may be mediated by homework, or reflection which results in implementation of changes. The client's discoveries enable further, post-coaching development.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore what happens in first coaching sessions from the executive client's perspective.

A comprehensive review of literature on first experiences and first sessions in coaching and related fields revealed a lack of theory and data on first experiences of coaching. Grounded Theory methodology was used in order to explore the client's perspective on first executive coaching sessions. Analysis uncovered a number of categories which could be used to characterise the client experience: Discovering, Agency and Interaction, Roles of Coach and Client and Expectations and Conditions. Discovery emerged as the core experience in a first coaching session. The other three categories were inter-related and influenced the client's discovery experience.

The research raised several questions for future research; however some conclusions relevant to the practice of coaching can be drawn. This final chapter synthesises evidence on the emerging categories and their relationships to develop a descriptive model of the client's first experience of executive coaching, the DARE model of first coaching sessions. The acronym DARE is a fitting reflection of the important role that discovery – which sometimes requires daring – plays in the coaching process.

8.1 The DARE model

The DARE model was developed from client reports of first experiences of executive coaching. Active discovery is at the core of the experience, but taking interactions between the various aspects of the experience – including those which influence the nature of the discovering process -into

account provides a more complete picture of the client experience. The interactions between categories are depicted in Figure 8: Interactions among the core categories of the DARE model:

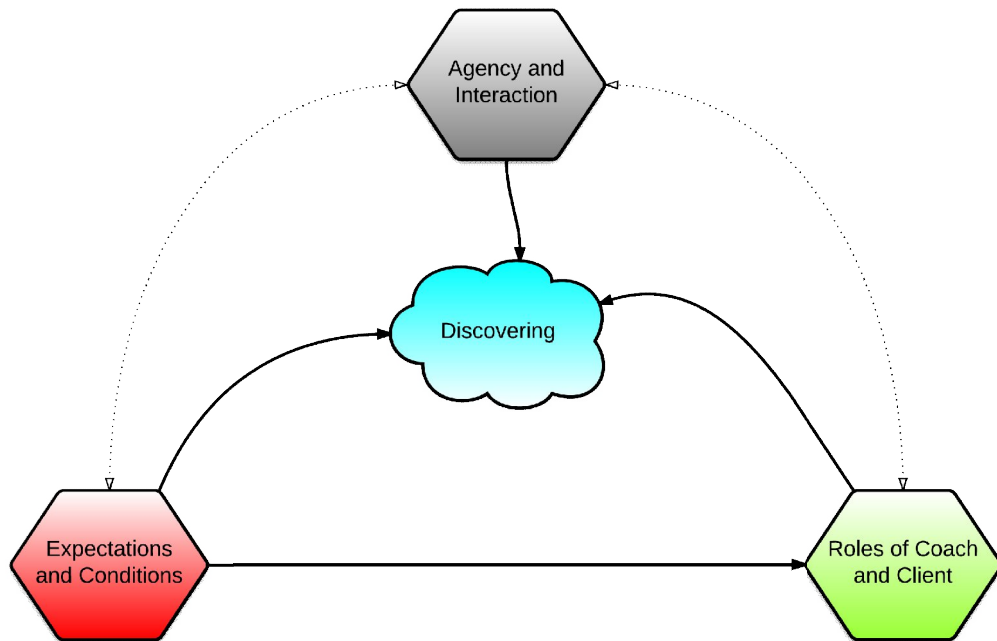


Figure 8: Interactions among the core categories of the DARE model

The 'expectations and conditions' category precedes the actual coaching process and consists of factors that set the context for coaching such as the room in which coaching takes place, the planned length of the coaching session, how the room is set up, what data the coach has acquired beforehand and the client's first impression of the coach. They are grouped as one single category due to their influence from a point prior to coaching. Expectations of the client and also the conditions that a coaching take place in are often determined before the coach takes action. Sometimes, in the case of leadership development programmes, the conditions might be set before either client or coach know that coaching will take place.

The expectations clients bring to coaching include reasons for working with a coach and expectations about what can be achieved through coaching as well as expectations about the coach and the coaching process. Expectations appear to be based on needs of which the client may not be aware. The client's needs may be reflected in specific expectations. Maslow (1943) described needs as being similar to instincts in their capacity to drive and motivate behaviour. We are not always conscious of our motivations. Clients entering coaching have expectations based on a mixture of conscious and unconscious needs. This study has shown that the expectations brought to a first session usually go unmet as first-time clients have only a vague understanding of what might be achieved and usually lack the experience required to formulate appropriate expectations. Clients may not understand the basis of their needs. A common expectation of participants in this study was that coaches would deliver answers and act as a consultant. This study suggests that such expectations are based on an unconscious need for clarity and concrete solutions. Initial expectations are often not met, as coaches do not provide direct answers. The finding that clients new to the coaching process need clarity and security could be used to inform development of training programmes for executive coaches. Coaches should be taught to provide clients with a sense of structure at the outset of the coaching assignment, even if they are likely to deviate from it later on. Clients may be extremely irritated by a lack of structure, even when they later feel that the coaching was successful; this was the case for one of the participants in this study. Coaches approach clients with confidence, which gives clients a measure of trust in the process which enables them to proceed in spite of the mismatch between their expectations and reality. Once a relationship of trust has been established clients are encouraged to examine and reflect

on their own strengths and weaknesses using psychometrics or other tools and models. At this stage the outputs of coaching met clients' subconscious need for clarity and security, but their expectations about the process were not fulfilled.

Clients reported that their coach took a role they found appropriate to their needs and style. This study did not explore whether the match between client expectations and coach behaviour was based on adaptive behaviour by coaches or different perceptions of the same coaching style. Coaches facilitated the open dialogue that is part of the agency and interaction category, balancing closeness with professional distance. This gave clients an understanding of the coach's role and enabled them to view their coach as a compatible partner in the coaching process. When the coach takes a role that enables the client's needs to be met, the coach-client interaction is experienced by the client as a fruitful working alliance. This open, productive interaction facilitates adjustments to the client's concept of executive coaching.

The client's perception of the coach's role influences his or her perception of agency and interaction during the first session. Coach and client roles are mutually dependent; clients describe their role relative to the coach's role. There are changes in the relative contributions of coach and client, and thus agency, during the course of the session. These changes reflect changes in role. The data suggest that whilst the client starts the session as a recipient of information, the coach gradually hands more control and decisions to the client who thus assumes a more active role in directing the coaching process. The main form of interaction during this stage of the session is open dialogue; the clearly demarcated roles become more blurred and coach and client interact as equals. At this point the client feels

able to trust the coach, open up and make him or herself vulnerable. This vulnerability and openness, facilitated by mutual trust is what facilitates the development of a working alliance; in this context the initiation of a process of discovery appears a natural development. The client's willingness to be open about problems is predicated both on trust in the coach's professionalism and the perception of being treated as an individual and receiving personalised advice. It is important to clients that the coach is not delivering a predetermined programme and comes to the session without knowing exactly how the discussion will progress or what the results will be. Coaches focused on facilitating discovery; using questions about various forms of performance data – psychometric test results or analysis of videotaped behaviour – to lead clients towards individual discoveries. Rather than providing information directly coaches encouraged clients to reflect on the data, thus making the client the agent of discovery. This process is captured by the arrow connecting 'Agency and Interaction' with 'Discovering' in Figure 8.

Discovery, the core experience in a first coaching session, is a process rather than a goal. The term 'discovering' describes the journey taken a client during his or her first experience of coaching. Discoveries happen on multiple, inter-related levels. The clash between expectations about coaching and the experience of coaching during the first session results in discoveries about the coaching process. Clients make discoveries about the opportunities coaching provides i.e. they discover the potential of the coaching process. As they start to explore the coaching process they start making discoveries about themselves. The atmosphere of trust and openness which characterised coaching sessions promotes self-discovery, but as clients start to discover weaknesses and become more self-aware they are also to discover their potential. The final phase of discovery

includes achieving a clear understanding of a situation or problem, an appreciation of one's personal resources or discovering tools that will enable one to develop new solution or implement solutions in a novel way.

It is fundamental to coaching that this process of discovery is a collaborative one. The coach creates a secure space in which the client feels supported and is able to confront negative information about his or her performance and professional style. The role taken by the coach varies according to implicit and explicit needs the client brings to the session. In a successful coaching session the discovery process, although it might be somewhat painful, will also be exciting and ultimately productive and leave the client feeling pleased with the outcome of the session. The first experience of coaching typically elicited curiosity and desire to continue the process:

“Maybe just to say, I really really enjoyed the session, I mean, after the session I'm looking forward to my next one and I hope that all the others will be more and more, you know, interesting and challenging.”(P003)

In summary, a first experience of executive coaching can be characterised in terms of four categories: Expectations and Conditions, Roles of Coach and Client, Agency and Interaction and Discovery. Clients' advance expectations of coaching are based on unconscious and subconscious needs; perceptions of coaching are influenced by contextual factors. Coaches appear to respond flexibly to clients, assuming a role, which will enable them to meet the client's needs. But they might also just be perceived this way and have similar behaviour in all coaching sessions perceived differently by different clients. As the session progresses the client takes a more active, decisive role and the respective roles of coach and client become less clearly defined. Clients are discovering throughout the session. First of all they discover what coaching is, how it works and what it can achieve. The mismatch between their expectations and experience leads to a new understanding of coaching. The open dialogue facilitated by the coach creates a secure space in which the client is encouraged to discover him or herself and his or her potential; the coach uses questions to prompt reflection and elicit self-discoveries. These discoveries are at the heart of the coaching experience. The DARE model, illustrated in

Figure 9,captures the interactions which characterise a first coaching session.

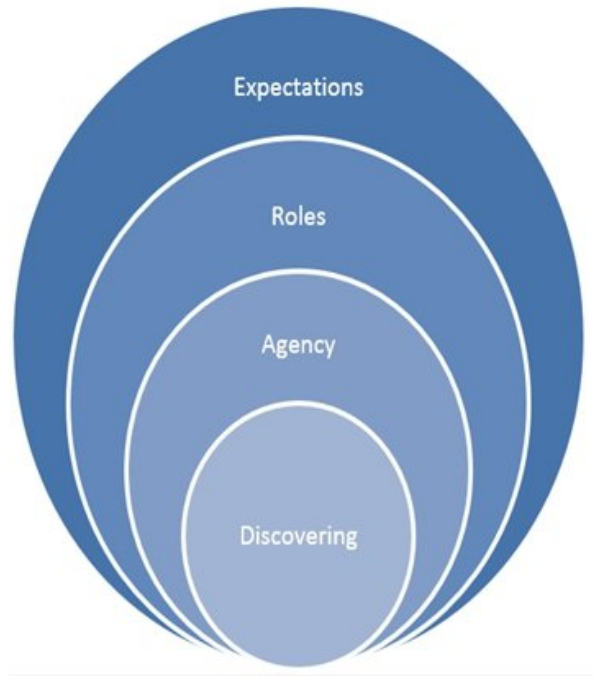


Figure 9: The DARE model

8.2 Implications for coaching practice

During data analysis it became apparent that the context in which coaching takes place has an effect on how clients perceive coaching. Coaching that takes place within the confines of an executive education or personnel development programme is subject to different expectations from coaching sessions booked on an individual basis. Advance expectations of executive coaching are diverse, but are almost always adjusted by experience during the first session. Clients are typically somewhat insecure about exposing themselves to the process or ignorant about what coaching involves. Many of the participants in this study expected that their coach would provide

expert instruction or readymade solutions to problems. This suggests that executive coaches could build a better working alliance by structuring the session at the outset and educating the client about the coaching process. Clients tended to adjust their expectations to their experience of coaching fairly rapidly. Some clients found it confusing if the coach did not indicate the structure of the session at the outset. Providing an overview at the beginning of the session might prevent early problems in the working alliance and facilitate adaptation to the coaching process. Pre-session education about psychotherapy has been shown to have a significant effect on treatment success (Coleman and Kaplan, 1990) and dropout rate (Reis and Brown, 2006). By analogy one might expect that in executive coaching providing an overview of the first session and educating the client about coaching processes and techniques would have a positive effect on the outcome of the session. Evaluation of a first coaching session was not affected by the degree of mismatch between expectations and experience. Clients' initial expectations seem to be influenced by an acquired image of executive coaching or by unconscious needs. An expectation that the coach will provide expert instruction and take responsibility for finding a solution to the client's problem may reflect a need for security or simply previous experiences of consultants. Coaches structure sessions according to the needs of the clients and the availability of performance or psychometric data, but rather than giving direct instructions or providing a solution they stimulate clients to find their own solutions.

The study provided interesting evidence on coach-client compatibility. Some participants had selected a specific coach; others had worked with a coach assigned through a corporate programme. Many clients reported good compatibility between themselves and their coach and considered this compatibility crucial to the success of the session. Client reports suggested

that individual coaches assumed different roles with different clients; however it was not clear whether the coach's behaviour varied across clients or whether different clients simply perceived the same coaching style differently. The compatibility perceived by clients might be due to coaches' adapting their coaching style to the expectations and personality of the client. Some of the coaches used 'chemistry calls', during which they discussed goals and coaching approach, as a preliminary to the first session. Surprisingly, and in contrast to findings from therapy research (Coleman and Kaplan, 1990), client evaluations of the first session were unaffected by previous meetings or use of a pre-coaching chemistry call to build rapport; this may be related to personality characteristics of executives. My personal experience as an executive coach suggests that the higher up the chain an executive is, the more quickly he or she expects to start work on the important issues. This finding suggests that pre-coaching rapport building techniques are not necessary in the executive context, but it may not generalise to life coaching or academic coaching. Reported compatibility and credibility might be artificially inflated because chemistry calls are used for selection purposes. There is currently no evidence on whether chemistry calls affect long-term success of coaching in terms of either client perceptions or objective indicators; additional research on the effects of pre-coaching chemistry calls is needed to address this issue.

Executive clients are differentiated from other clients by the nature of their day to day work. An executive is used to taking decisions frequently and making decisions with wide-ranging consequences. This is different from the kind of work done by someone who is in a leadership role, but at an intermediate position in the corporate hierarchy. Clients in middle or

junior management positions and life-coaching clients might experience coaching differently. This is a subject for future research.

Much has been written about the importance of the working relationship to coaching and therapy (Asay and Lambert, 1999; McKenna and Davis, 2011), but at present it is unclear whether a client's perception of a good working relationship depends on inherent compatibility or the coach or therapist's skill in adapting to the client's needs and personality. It is possible the coach's ability to adapt to the client's implicit needs allows the client to feel valued and thus enhances perceived compatibility. Boyce et al. (2010) matched coaches and clients on the basis of their military expertise, although the coaching did not involve any specifically military skills and this was reported to being met favourably by coaching clients. Compatibility may be an illusion created by the coach's ability to adapt his or her style to meet the needs of the client.

An interesting issue raised by the data presented here is the extent to which coaches are able to adapt their style to the client. It was unclear from the data whether coaches' apparent ability to assume a variety of roles was due to the various constructions clients placed on behaviour; this is a topic for future research. A client's perception of coaching and roles during coaching is affected by his or her needs; coaches may be able to exploit this to enhance the working alliance. It should be remembered that the term 'executive coaching' covers a diverse range of approaches; there is just as much variance between different schools of psychologists as between psychologists and non-psychologists (Bono et al., 2009) and thus there is a high variability among practices. Thus, it seems advisable that the issue of role perception in particular should be investigated further. By controlling for a similarity in coaching approach or even by investigating among clients of

the same coach we might find further evidence whether coach roles are based in client perception or coach actions.

The personal nature of coaching was an important factor in the participants' perception of coaching. Participants were surprised and pleased to discover that their coaching session was tailored to their personal needs and goals. Although clients described the use of a range of tools and methods, such as psychometrics, video analysis and coaching questions, they felt these tools were used because they were appropriate to their case. Clients reacted favourably to being given a measure of control over the session, such as being invited to choose the topic they wanted to work on. Given that almost all clients felt they had been given control it seems likely that the coaching experience was less personalised than they realised. The data suggest that the methods used were designed to give clients a feeling of being in control and receiving personalised guidance. Psychometric tools are standardised to meet classical test theory criteria (Novick, 1966) and although the results are personal the testing procedure and structure of results is standardised. The clients' perception that their coaching was personalised might have been due to coaches' emphasis on the client's control over the content of the session or to the use of personal performance data. A process which feels individual to clients may be business as usual for the coaches. Other studies have reported discrepancies between coach and client perceptions of coaching, namely discrepancies in judgements about critical moments (Day et al., 2008; De Haan et al., 2010a, 2010b). Comparing coach and client perceptions of first coaching sessions might prove interesting.

Discovering was an experience common to all participants in this study. It is important to note that the discovering process did not have a start or end

point. Coaches should be aware that clients may make important discoveries at any point during a coaching session. During their first coaching sessions clients made discoveries about coaching, themselves and their potential. Clients reported that coaching had increased their self-awareness, because they had been shown new and different perspectives which had helped them gain insights into themselves or particular situations. For some clients discovering was a process of self-disillusionment and self-discovery. Clients were encouraged to compare their self-image to their public image and this brought the realisation that there were discrepancies between their self-image and their public image, discrepancies between their actual behaviour and their ideal behaviour and gaps in their understanding. The discovering process was facilitated by the quality of the interaction between coach and client. Clients characterised their interactions with their coach as open, friendly and trusting. The working relationship has been reported to be the main determinant of coaching success (McKenna and Davis, 2011); in this study a good coach-client relationship appeared to be the foundation for the discovering process which was at the heart of the client experience. The open relationship allowed the client to experience their Discovering, the relationship facilitated them. Trusting in the coach and the process clients experienced the discoveries that were found to be the core of the first coaching experience.

Being coached was a novel experience for all the participants in this study. Their expectations were not realistic and their first discoveries related to the concept of coaching. Clients felt that it was important to understand what could be achieved through coaching; which suggests that it would be worthwhile for coaches to take time to educate first-time clients about the coaching process and their personal approach to coaching. This might

promote discovery of the opportunities coaching can offer. Discovering the opportunities and limitations of the coaching process early in the first session might increase the probability that the client will subsequently perceive the session to have been successful. No quantitative data on coaching outcomes were collected in this study so this should be the subject of further research.

Does the general lack of awareness about the potential of coaching among executives extend to the organisations they work for? A survey of executive coaches in Germany showed that two thirds of coaching assignments are paid for by companies and only one third by clients themselves (Büro für Coaching und Organisationsberatung, 2012). Executive coaches must consider the impact of coaching on the peers of the client, workers under him or her and the employing organisation as well as the impact on the individual client. Organisational procurers of coaching might benefit from a better understanding of what coaching is and how it may benefit the organisation; education about coaching might help organisational sponsors and use coaching strategically, rather than as an employee benefit or as an automatic part of training. Better understanding of coaching might also help organisations deal with coaching failures and prevent individual negative experiences from affecting the reputation of coaching as a profession. These are questions which can only be answered by collecting relevant empirical data. Because organisations sponsor more than 60% of executive coaching (Büro für Coaching und Organisationsberatung, 2012) and invest in the practice it is reasonable to expect that the needs of the organisational client should be addressed.

Theory development using these research data went through several phases. At first it appeared that all categories would fit in a timeline, a

sequential process. This model was abandoned when new data indicated that this was not the case. A process model of coaching was developed during data analysis, encompassing the content and chronology of the typical first session from the client perspective. The length of particular segments or phases varied across clients and in some cases particular phases were completely absent. The model is centred on the process of discovery, which occurred throughout the session rather than being restricted to specific segments or stages. This means that for any given client the critical moment in a coaching session may occur during the introductory phase, as part of reflection on a coach's question or whilst doing homework after the session. Discovery is not a single event during the coaching session; discoveries can happen at any time during or after the session. No one component of executive coaching was responsible for more discoveries than another; discovery was a ubiquitous process common to all stages of the first session and all first-time clients.

This study is not without flaws. Every client gave a positive account of the coaching experience so we have no evidence on what makes a session unsuccessful and no evidence on whether the model generalises to unsuccessful first experiences of coaching. Another limitation relates to the small number of coaches involved in the sessions which formed the basis of this study. Bono et al. (2009) have catalogued the wide range of methods used in coaching and McKenna and Davis (2011) argued that just as in therapy, there are a multitude of theoretical frameworks and concepts which can be used to underpin coaching practice. This model may not reflect the experiences of clients who work with coaches whose methods were not represented in this investigation. The participants in this study were executives, including CEOs and less senior leaders such as project leaders with responsibility for a project; the experience of this group might

differ from that of clients who do not have the same freedom to make decisions in their working life. The average executive has more freedom to change his or her working behaviours than someone less senior; similarly there is more scope for the coach to challenge an executive to develop solutions because an executive client has more freedom of manoeuvre than a less senior worker.

8.3 Reflections on the research process

During the research and writing of this thesis I have gone through a challenging yet satisfying learning journey. I felt challenged by the imperative to use a methodology I had not used before and by the iterative process of creating, writing and amending my work. These challenges, which I now know are a normal part of the research process, forced me to grow as a researcher. The interviewing process was the first big challenge I faced. Because I was used to using a more open style of communication in my work, I found it difficult to adopt a researcher's perspective on the interview process. The role of interviewer and inquirer was something I had to learn; I often asked myself if a question had been leading or artificial, reflecting that in the next interview, I needed to be more neutral, more reflective. The format of a research interview is very different from that I was used to using. I was confronted with my next challenge when I was submitted the first draft of this thesis. The extent of the recommended edits and supervisor suggestions surprised me and immediately I tried to comply. This critique forced me to question the logic of my writing, taught me how to think about an introduction, about a literature review and how to introduce the methodology I had used. The criticism made me feel uneasy about whether or not I was doing things correctly. I have learned whilst writing my thesis that Grounded Theory research is an organic, almost living process

that requires considerable adaptability on the part of the researcher. I also learned that it was necessary to defend decisions I had made during the research. The process of constructing this defence and the ensuing debate among my inner critic, my supervisors and my researcher-self made me realise that research can only be planned so far and that a researcher's most important skill is the ability logically to analyse and defend one's decisions when challenged. Why something was done is more important than what was done. At first I found it a challenge to adopt this mindset, which is very different from that required in my everyday work; I had to grow into the role of researcher.

My third challenge was the analysis. The open, flexible nature of the research process and data left me puzzled and lost during the research process. I now know that being lost is completely normal and that it is important to trust one's methodology. But whilst I was analysing the data it was a challenge to organise the data and establish relationships among the large numbers of codes and categories extracted. I found myself questioning whether or not the categories created were in fact grounded in the data. Once I had come to trust the process I went back to the data and looked more deeply at it, searching for evidence that would support or disprove an idea. And this process was both frustrating and satisfying because ultimately either I found that the data supported me, or I had to discard a thought or concept I had worked on before. The fourth challenge was reducing what I had found to a coherent narrative and a conceptual model that could be understood by a reader. During the analysis my thoughts, codes and maps had been very complex and when the initial analysis was complete I had to reduce them to themes that lent themselves to interpretation and organise my findings on a more abstract level. I found myself going back to the original data frequently, questioning whether or

not I had over- or under-interpreted. I also worried about whether or not what I had just written and reduced was an accurate representation of the richer interviews data or based on my experience as executive coach. Trusting in the method, I tested my interpretation against the data to resolve this question. The process of constantly comparing concepts, categories and my interpretation of the client's experience was an important, but challenging experience for me. I learned ultimately that the research process changes the researcher. I did not come to the research a blank slate and did not leave it unchanged. This research forced me to grow and led me to unexpected answers; I frequently questioned myself and the methodology I had chosen. To conclude, this research has had an impact on me professionally and personally; during the course of the work I have grown in a way I couldn't have imagined before I embarked on this journey. Perhaps it is a coincidence, but I found myself discovering, just like my participants.

8.4 Implications for future research

This study has answered many questions about executive clients' first experience of coaching, but has also raised issues for future research. Some of these have already been mentioned: role perception and adaptation and the impact of pre-coaching chemistry calls. Compatibility is another issue, which remains poorly understood. Boyce et al. (2010) found that military experience and a military leadership style were useful in coaching military leaders and attributed this to the need for a coach to be credible to the client. A number of authors have argued for rigorous matching of client and coach characteristics (Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006; Sue-Chan and Latham, 2004); but if discovering, facilitated by a good working relationship, is the key experience in coaching it is reasonable to

question whether credibility really depends on credentials and specific experience. This study suggests that perception of credibility is either a feature of the coach-client interaction or an artefact of the client's construction of the experience. It is unclear whether leadership experience really enhances coaching skills or whether its impact is entirely attributable to the effect it has on client perceptions of credibility. It is plausible that clients' coaching experience is improved if they feel at ease with a coach because the coach's leadership credentials give them confidence in his or her professional ability, even if there is in fact no association between leadership credentials and coaching ability. It is also worth asking what other factors influence coach-client compatibility and how the interactions of compatible and incompatible pairing differ.

This study showed that first-time clients' expectations of coaching were rarely met and typically altered during the course of a first session; nevertheless all the participants in this study regarded their coaching as successful. Further research is needed to investigate the relationship between met, unmet or adjusted expectations and quantifiable measures of success. In this study, there was no difference whether or not expectations of coaching were not met in terms of client satisfaction. A study focusing on analysing the effect of expectations over a longer coaching process might lead to different results. There is debate amongst coaches about the importance of leadership expertise to coaching skill and organisations view specific expertise and experience as important criteria for hiring coaches (Underhill, 2011) but there has been no direct comparison of the outcomes of coaching in which the coach acts as a subject expert and coaching in which the coach relies solely on coaching skills – guiding the client through use of questions and providing problem-solving or analytical tools – rather than providing detailed, specific advice. At present experience is used as a

marker of quality in a coach but there is no data on whether it is related to coaching outcomes. In this study adjustments of initial expectations did not influence the client's perception of the success of coaching. The same might be true for the perception of initial criteria of credibility. We do not know whether perceived credibility affects the coaching outcomes; neither do we know whether leadership experience has a directly beneficial effect on coaching outcomes. It is worth noting that none of the participants in this study commented on the leadership experience of their coach, although remarks were made about coaches' style of dress and air of professionalism. One participant assumed the coach was an expert. This study provided no evidence on the relationship between leadership experience and coaching outcomes, but it is possible that even if executive clients do expect their coaches to have leadership experience, the failure to meet this criterion may not have any effect on the outcome of coaching. Before any practical recommendations about training and credentials for entry to the coaching profession can be made it is necessary to understand what abilities really make a good coach and how important the client perception of experience is in terms of coaching outcomes.

The model presented in this thesis was based on qualitative data from interviews with top executives and further research is needed to confirm that the roles identified have a broader relevance. It would also be interesting to investigate whether roles change during the course of a coaching assignment and whether coaches are 'role chameleons', adapting their coaching style to the client.

Analysis of agency and interaction category data showed that many of the clients were given homework by their coach; specific homework was shown to have a significant effect on the success of problem- and solution-focused

psychotherapy (Jordan and Quinn, 1994) so it would be interesting to explore the role and effects of such homework in the context of executive coaching. It would also be interesting to explore the persistence of the adjusted expectations of coaching and the associated new understanding of coaching reported by participants in this study; do veteran coaching clients react differently to tasks and tools from novice clients? Given the ubiquity of discovery in the first coaching session it would be interesting to investigate potential triggers for discovery and establish which interventions are most successful in promoting discovery.

This study has focused on the experience of the client. Thus it cannot make implications or indications whether or not the experience of the client is similar to that of the coach. Further research might focus on the first session from either the perspective of the coach or compare the experiences of coach-client dyads of the same coaching session. These experiences might in fact differ. Their comparison could potentially lead to a better understanding of the relationship between coach and client.

And finally, a longer-term study might lead to potentially new findings about discovering. Since discovering was found to be at the heart of the coaching experience, a longer term observation of multiple sessions might lead to deeper insight into how discovering affects the client. It might also lead to a more refined understanding of discovering's role and characteristics in a longer-term process.

This research has focused on first experiences of executive coaching. It has produced a qualitative account of how novice clients perceive executive coaching and how they adapt to the coaching situation; it has also revealed the richness and diversity of perception of the coaching experience. Discovery was found to be at the heart of the experience,

particularly self-discoveries and discoveries that gave the client a new understanding. Clients discovered the opportunities and limitations of coaching and of themselves. Coaching was likened to a journey; a journey on which experience leads to adjustment of expectations. No two coaching journeys are the same, but all the participants in this study regarded coaching as a success and felt that it would support them in their working lives.

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Appendices

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I Participant Information for Coaches



Amel Karboul
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+447901YYYYYY

Participant Information for Coaches

Study title: First coaching sessions from the executive client's perspective and its influence on the coaching process.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to close a literature and research gap. The first session itself has been described as pivotal to the success of the coaching process. However, there is still a limited amount of research and existing studies seldom focus on what happens between the coach and the client, particularly in the first session.

I am conducting this study as part of my Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring (DCaM) and I would like to stress that the data collection is for research and not for business purposes. I therefore also offer you reassurance that I would not engage in any professional coaching with your clients.

Why have I been invited to participate?

I am asking you because I feel you might be interested in the results of this research and also because I believe you may want to contribute to the improvement and professionalisation of coaching practice through contributing to research.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part after reading this information sheet you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Your data will be deleted.

What will happen to me if I take part?

Following the first session, your coaching client will be interviewed over the phone. The interview is to explore what happened in the first coaching session. We will focus on the executive client perspective. The interview with the client will be half an hour semi-structured interview after the session (within two weeks).

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You use coaching skills to support your clients develop their leadership and managerial capabilities. So you may benefit from this research since its results will allow you to understand how your clients may experience first coaching sessions and what can make them successful.

Exploring the clients' perspective in first coaching sessions will create twofold value for the field of coaching. Literature and research in coaching relationships is still limited and often research is borrowed from other disciplines, such as therapy or counselling due to lack of specific theorisation. Also, the study will contribute to developing the practice of first sessions in coaching, which is grounded in data acquired through research as opposed to ideas borrowed from other disciplines or secondary literature. Essentially, since there is a lack of research solely from the clients' perspective, this research aims to open the black box of client experience and shed light on what happens inside.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about individuals will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations) and confidentiality will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material. Participants will be de-identified and replaced with a code. Data and codes and all identifying information will be kept in separate locked filing cabinets and data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity. The data generated in the course of the research will be kept securely in electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project. The research data will be transferred to Oxford Brookes University for long-term storage, in accordance with the Oxford Brookes University data management policy. As the data may be collected outside the UK, data security is important during transfer and an encrypted USB memory stick will be used.

What should I do if I want to take part?

Read this information sheet and contact Amel Karboul via email or phone. You will be asked to sign a consent form.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be used in the researcher's thesis for the Doctor of Coaching and Mentoring degree. An executive summary will be sent to the participants. The research results may also be published in academic papers.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting the research as a doctoral student at Oxford Brookes University, Faculty of Business.

Who has reviewed the study?

The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Contact for Further Information

Amel Karboul, Email: 11046441@brookes.ac.uk , Phone: +491636272625 or +447901124361.

If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, you should contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Here are the contact details of my supervisors:

TITLE and NAME	POST	DEPT and FACULTY	PHONE	EMAIL
Dr. Elaine Cox	First Supervisor	Faculty of Business	+44-1865 488350	ecox@brookes.ac.uk
Dr. Louise Grisoni	Second Supervisor	Faculty of Business	+44-1865 482816	lgrisoni@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet.

16th June 2013

II Participant Information Sheet - Executives



Amel Karboul
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Participant Information Sheet - Executives

Study title: First coaching sessions from the executive client's perspective and its influence on the coaching process.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to close a literature and research gap. The first session itself has been described as pivotal to the success of the coaching process. However, there is still a limited amount of research and existing studies seldom focus on what happens between the coach and the client, particularly in the first session. I am conducting this study as part of my Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring (DCM). I would like to stress that the data collection is for research and not for business purposes.

Why have I been invited to participate?

Ten executives have been invited to participate. Your coach has invited you because he/she thought you may be interested in taking part and also because they believed you may want to contribute to the improvement and professionalisation of coaching practice through contributing to research.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Your data will be deleted. Your decision to participate or not will have no impact on the quality and nature of your coaching session. Taking part, or declining to do so, will have no effect on your relationship with your coach.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be interviewed over the phone within two weeks of your first coaching session. Its purpose is to explore what happened in your first coaching sessions. We will focus on your (the executive client) perspective. Total time involvement will be approximately half an hour.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You may benefit by reflecting what happened in the coaching meeting and what made the session successful for you and thus may be able to increase your understanding of the coaching process.

Exploring the clients' perspective in first coaching sessions will create twofold value for the field of coaching. Literature and research in coaching relationships is still limited and often research is borrowed from other disciplines, such as therapy or counselling due to lack of specific theorisation. Also, the study will contribute to developing the practice of first sessions in coaching, which is

grounded in data acquired through research as opposed to ideas borrowed from other disciplines or secondary literature. Essentially, since there is a lack of research solely from the clients' perspective, this research aims to open the black box of client experience and shed light on what happens inside.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

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What should I do if I want to take part?

Read this information sheet and contact Amel Karboul via email or phone. You will be asked to sign a consent form, although you will still be free to withdraw at any time.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be used in the researcher thesis for the Doctor of Coaching and Mentoring degree. An executive summary will be sent to the participants. The research results may also be published in academic papers.

Who is organizing and funding the research?

I am conducting the research as a doctoral student at Oxford Brookes University, Faculty of Business. I am self-funded.

Who has reviewed the study?

The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Contact for Further Information

Amel Karboul, Email: 11046441@brookes.ac.uk , +491636272625 or +447901124361.

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Here are the contact details of my supervisors:

TITLE and NAME	POST	DEPT and FACULTY	PHONE	EMAIL
Dr. Elaine Cox	First Supervisor	Faculty of Business	+44-1865 488350	ecox@brookes.ac.uk
Dr. Louise Grisoni	Second Supervisor	Faculty of Business	+44-1865 482816	lgrisoni@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet.

16th June 2013

III Consent Form for Coaches

Amel Karboul
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Phone: +49163XXXXXX or
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CONSENT FORM FOR COACHES

Study title: First coaching sessions from the executive client's perspective and its influence on the coaching process.

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

☐

I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

Please tick box

I agree to the coaching session with my client being video recorded (I agree that my client can keep the recording to be able to watch it before the second interview and I am aware that all recordings will be destroyed after the doctorate has been awarded.)

Yes

☐

No

☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Amel Karboul

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

IV Consent Form for Clients

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CONSENT FORM

Study title: First coaching sessions from the executive client's perspective and its influence on the coaching process.

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

☐

I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a secured data centre and may be used for future research.

☐

Please tick box

I agree to my coaching session being video recorded (all recordings will be destroyed after the doctorate has been awarded)

Yes

☐

No

☐

I agree to the interview being audio recorded

☐☐

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

☐☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Amel Karboul

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

V Letter for Organisations



Date:

Dear [Organisation]

Permission to participate in research

A member of your organisation has agreed to take part in some coaching research. The details of the research are given in the Participant Information Sheet attached.

Essentially I wish to explore first coaching sessions from the executive client's perspective and their influence on the coaching process.

Please confirm in writing that you agree to two one-hour telephone interviews with your employee.

I am of course more than happy to discuss this in more detail; my contact information is given below.

Yours sincerely

Amel Karboul

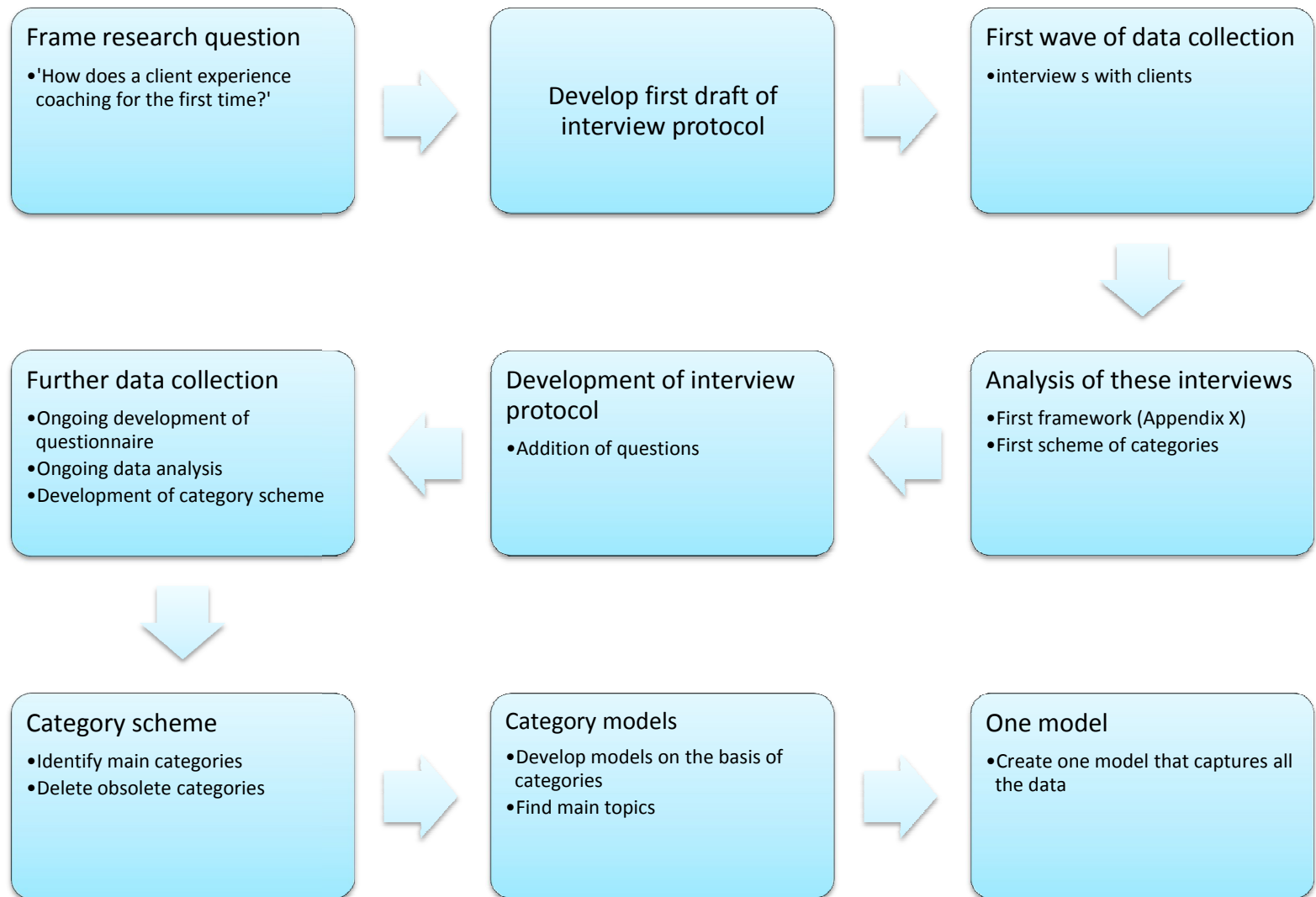
Doctoral Student, Business School, Oxford Brookes University

Email: 11046441@brookes.ac.uk

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Attachement: Participant information sheet

VI Research Steps



VII Interview Protocol

Formalities

1. First of all, thank you very much for agreeing on doing this interview today.
2. In my research, I am interested in the following question: How do executive clients experience being coached for the first time?
3. Thus, it involves you as a client, your first coaching session, and your experience. I am interested in your perspective. Most studies in this area focus on the perspective of the coach or the overall organisation, but not on the coachee as primary client. I want to close that gap by the looking at important aspects from the client's point of view in order to improve future coaching (sessions) for all participants.
4. I want to record this interview, if you agree. Your personal data and information will be made anonymous, so you cannot be identified later on
5. Before I start, are there any more questions?

Content: What happens in the first coaching session?

6. Well, let's get started. You had your first coaching session a few days ago, so this question should be easy to answer: From your perspective, what happened in the first coaching session?
7. *Only, if structural description was given:* You gave a structural overview of your first session. So please let me put this question in other words: How did you experience your first coaching session?
8. Imagine, a colleague of yours, who has not had a single coaching session yet, is about to have his or her first session. Your colleague knows that you have already experienced coaching and is very curious about what will happen. If he or she asked you 'what can I expect?', or 'what lies ahead?' what would you tell your colleague?
9. [Explore client's response]
10. Is there anything that I haven't asked or you haven't told me yet that is worth being mentioned referring to your personal experience with your first session?
11. Let's take a step back in time: Please describe your expectations regarding your first coaching session BEFORE your session. These expectations refer to the coaching session itself as well as the coaching process overall.
12. (From your point of view,) What was the purpose of your coaching session?
13. In how far did the coaching session match your expectations?
14. Okay, I repeat it, to make sure that I didn't miss anything important: Your expectations were ... and the coaching reality showed that....

Is this an accurate description of your personal experience?

15. Thanks, now let us move on to your personal coaching session:

Before starting working with your coach in your first session:

What was your first impression of your coach?

16. Is or was this first impression important for the first coaching session or even the overall coaching process? If so, please state reasons, why.

17. Did your impression of your coach change within the coaching session?

18. Looking at your coaching session:

Where there any especially helpful contributions from your coach?

In other words: From all of the things your coach said or did, what would you consider as very helpful and why?

19. How did these contributions help you? For example, foster your problem-solving skills, provide you with new perspectives....

20. Coaching itself is often described as being more than a mere rational experience: Are there any specific emotions or emotional states you connect with your first coaching session? (Thinking back, do you remember emotions that you experienced within your first coaching session?)

Metaphor

21. Right now, I'd like to ask you an interesting question that's more creative:

If I'd ask you to paint – I do not ask you to – your first session in a painting or picture it in a way, either visually, metaphorically, verbally. What would it be, this picture, painting or metaphor?

[Explore the response in more detail]

Preliminary conclusion and further plans

22. The first session overall, would you describe it as a rather successful or not successful one?

23. What are your reasons for seeing this session as a successful one? Are there any specific reasons?

24. In a more general approach, apart from your personal experience: What is the purpose of coaching (in general)?

25. Thank you so far! After your first session, your coaching process continues through the next weeks and your next sessions. Keeping the process in mind, are there any ways in which the first session influences the overall process? Do you see any concrete connections between your first session and the future process?

26. Are there any other areas (of work or life) your first coaching session has an impact on?

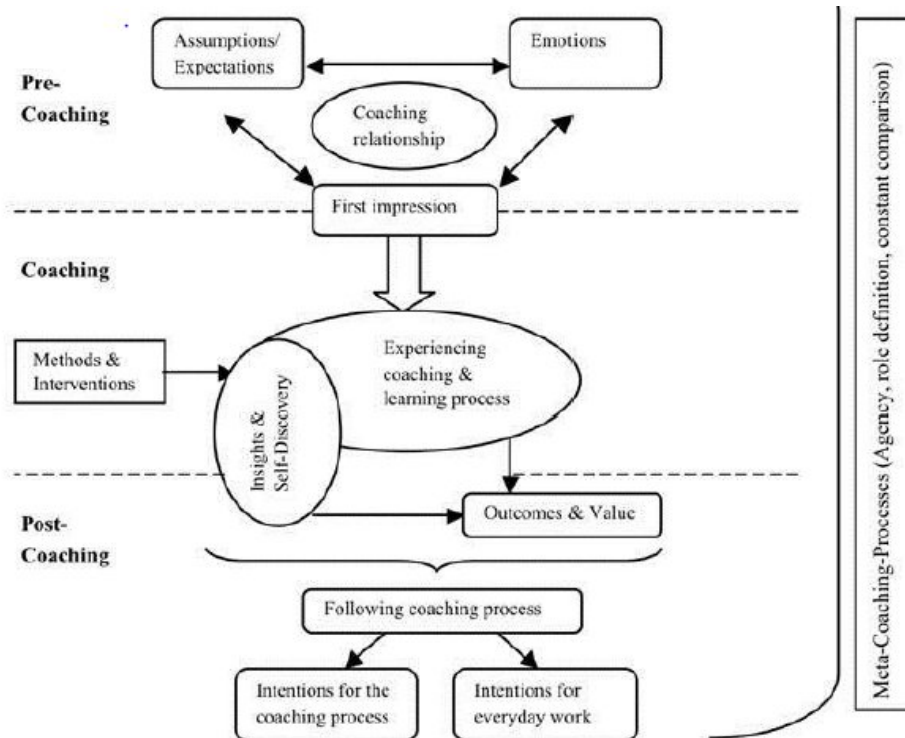
27. Great. Is there anything you'd like to add? Anything I have not asked yet or we haven't talked about? Any important aspects missing?

28. Okay, thanks. There is nothing more you would like to add, then?

Conclusion

29. Thank you very much! That's it. I have asked all of my questions. If you are interested in the results of our study, you may contact me and let me know, so I can inform you, as soon as I am finished and able to present the results.
30. Thanks again and have a nice day!

VIII First Framework



First descriptive framework for first coaching sessions.

IX Excerpts from a Research Diary

14.03.2013

Excerpt from a memo of an interview with P001

This Client describes the procedure of his first coaching session in a very structured way. He describes well what happened in which part of the session. It is remarkable, that he makes many pauses during his explanations. Moreover, he often does not explain which person (coach or client) acted in a certain situation. I suggest that the client has some difficulties in describing what really happened in this session. Alternatively, can't he remember what happened in his first session? What kind of memory does he have of the session? Did he gain positive feelings? Or, did he get concrete next steps for his project?

It is remarkable, that the client first describes the manner of his session and that he underlines the 'interactive' session. The client often qualifies his statements and he has problems in expressing himself in a way he is satisfied with. I come to this statement because of his many pauses and unexpected ends of sentences – in further interviews I have to look at the 'manner of speaking'!

This client thinks that the session was very successful because of the work of the coach. But he does not speak about his input for the success of the session. Which role has the client in his opinion? Does he have any influence on the success of the session?

Tools: What means 'high-level' and what 'concrete'? Is going through the report page-by-page high-level? Are concrete tools only tools, which have a practicable usage? Are they anything which is concrete but you cannot do it?

Expectations: It gets more and more obvious which expectations towards the coaching the client had and which he had not. Individual and practical coaching seems to be one aspect for successful coaching.

Now, the client seems to be very oriented in themes from daily work life in contrast to his structural report in the beginning. He has difficulties in describing his 'Insights' (Emotions...) because of that he describes the themes he discussed with the coach. He often uses the expression 'talking about'. He speaks about concrete themes/examples/cases he talked about with the coach.

The client is surprised, that the coach was very helpful by listening actively and asking specific questions. The client describes, that he was sceptic at first because the coach has had no knowledge and information about the project of the client. The client thought that this would be a limitation for the success of the coaching session. The success of the coaching session is not described as an 'AHA- effect' but by an interactive communication process. Also in this description the client uses the term 'high-level' but now applying it to the knowledge of the coach.

Open questions:

- How is the relationship between client and coach?
- What would the client say which role the coach takes?

First impression has an impact on expectations and first emotions. What is the reason for this coaching, why does the client participate? In further analyses I should look at the term 'value' what do the clients mean by saying this?

Metaphor Discovery Ship: huge appreciation? Unknown risk / ending, depending on surroundings, circumstances, task is clear, explore and find sth but does not know what exactly.

Does the usage of questionnaire, Separation in Self- and Public-Image etc. the client' image of his leadership? Do clients give away the responsibility for the assessment of their own style of leadership?

The client not only learned something about himself and tools, but also how coaching works. For example, what are the advantages of it and what results can be achieved by coaching.

Note for further interviews:

- Difficulties in expressing the emotions (ambivalent emotions e.g. not happy, but positive)
➔ Adding questions asking more about emotions!

28.04.2013

Excerpt from a memo of an interview with P009

- *Coaching = confronting one's self-concept!*
- Unspecific description. 'Das hat ihnweitergebracht' 'it helped on'. What does 'it' mean? What does 'weiterbringen' 'to help on' mean? To go on as a kind of motion, keep on moving in contrast to standing still? But it is also connected to a personal focus... 'It helped me', to reach a certain route to success? ... Go on a journey (of self-discovery)?
- There does not seem to be an obvious relation but rather an unconscious one between 'it' and its consequences. The client only talks about going somewhere. But the client does not say, where and how 'it' helps him on the way...
- Positive experience: rediscovering personal concepts and precognitions and affirming personal assumptions throughout the session
- What does the coach do?
 - Structure (overall)
 - Laying out different options on how to proceed
 - client decides (guides the process thematically)

- Hint of agency and role dynamics throughout → who is determining the session, content and progress (at which point)? Check with other interviews!!!
- Reflection: The client's experience is comparable to feedback from coaches (own experience and coaching literature)
 - Comparison of 'capabilities' of coach and client. It becomes clear that a coach is likely to be successful if he/she holds similar views or interpretations regarding the current situation. The coach is described as being competent because he/she evokes a noticeable congruency between both impressions. In this case, the client talks about emphatic congruency.
- What does 'hoheErwartungen' 'having high expectations' mean? Is it comparable to 'high hopes'? Thinking of high expectations, I refer to assumptions based on prior experience. For example, having experienced an amazing summer in Tuscany, my expectations regarding the next trip may be extremely difficult to match. Mostly because a lot of things have to be great, even though I am not able to influence them – will the sun be shining? Will the people I meet be as friendly as before? And so on.
- Consequently, my question is: How does the client develop expectations and in how far do these expectations diverge from reality? The client probably defines expectations based on goals and prior experience that may not be accessed here
- In this case, the client mentions 'low expectations'. Together with his lack of preparation of the session, he seems to anticipate frustration. Although, at this point, the client has not yet experienced coaching, a disappointment seems to be more likely than a success.

Evidently, another determinant of coaching becomes clear:

Point in time:

- Has the session been planned for a long time?
- Is it part of a bigger programme or standalone?
- Solution-oriented approach?
- Are there any goals defined prior to the session?

- Does the client have enough time to prepare the session?

- The client experiences his meeting again when seeing his video recordings!

The coach structures the session by suggesting options and using methods like work sheets, the client on the other hand provides structure in content, but not in method. The client's perceptions are important and are leading the session.

[...]

- Focus on one's perception – the coach is seen as someone professional
- Role expectation (professional coach):
 - Work experience, soft skills
 - Background of the coach
- Very important: personal feedback! Each client feels respected and his or her concerns are taken seriously. The client feels understood, which enables him/her to establish a connection with his or her coach. Connecting with someone does not only include working together, but also being in contact on a more personal level.
- It is striking that the client speaks matter-of-factly, instead of focusing on his experience and being more personal, he describes the events without his participation. It sounds like a neutral summary of events rather than a personal journey. Thus, agency remains unclear.
- Coaching as 'position-fixing' – Where do I stand? / Defining concrete criteria for successful leadership (my success!)

X Data-derived Categories

Categories which emerged from the data before the meta-categories (Discovering, Agency, Roles, Expectations) were developed.

1. Coaching Session
 - a. Conditions for a successful Coaching Session Who defines success? Clients' or Raters' Criteria? Better: Helpful Conditions (according to question)
 - i. Preparation of the client
 - b. What happened in the first session?
 - i. Clarification of Current-state and Desired-State (Realisation of a gap)
 - ii. First steps towards closing the gap
 - c. GENERAL Expectations regarding the first coaching session
 - d. SPECIFIC Goals or expected Lessons from Coaching session
 - e. Tailored and individual approach
 - f. Coaching/Learning as duty
2. Coach
 - a. Criteria for Credibility of the coach
 - i. coaching experienced as a bondage client has to participate because his chef told so or because the coach agitates very supercilious
 - b. Role expectations towards the coach (Somebody with whom I would feel free to talk; I could talk about, talk about anything)
3. First Impression
 - a. general expectations, non-related to a particular person
 - b. First impression (Professionalism, Inspiring confidence through talking and presentation; in vivo: it gave me confidence)
4. Emotions
 - a. Coaching session
 - i. Doubts (regarding the purpose of the coaching) and critical thoughts
 - ii. Uncertainty (I wasn't sure what it was gonna be)
 - iii. Intense Feelings (e.g. reaction to seeing oneself in a video)
 - b. Coach
 - i. Curiosity (I was curious to see how that will happen)
5. Methods/ Interventions
 - a. Emotions towards the coach
 - b. Helpful Interventions within the first coaching session understood as the session itself plus surrounding (call before - shortly after the session...)
 - c. Teaching Methods that have been taught ('PädagogischerDoppeldecker')
 - d. Overcome the Competence-Performance-Gap (action-oriented solutions)

- e. Giving control to the client, leeway for process and/or content
 - f. Individualisation, concrete cases
 - g. Defining the purpose of coaching
 - h. Discussion/ Talking about
 - i. Self-Disclosure (within the coaching session)
 - j. Coaching as self-revelation (e.g. being vulnerable)-->trust
6. Consequences
- a. Insights and Self-Discovery
 - i. Lessons
 - ii. (Generate new ideas and foster development of alternative solutions for problems)
 - iii. Agreement on direction, or lack of thereof
 - iv. Unspecific outcome (what does 'it' or 'that' mean?)
 - v. Insights and Awareness (different perspectives on problems, reframing, discovering own self-efficacy)
 - vi. Process of Insight (passive or active)
7. High-level/ meta-Coaching-Process
- a. Learning about my concept of leadership
 - b. Level of Discussion (high- vs. Low-level, practical vs. Theoretical implications, doing vs. Thinking)
 - c. Passive-Active/ Agency
 - d. Explicit Comparison of skills and capabilities between client and coach
 - e. Relationship Coach-Coachee as match, fit, compatibility
8. Time perspectives from coachee's view (which time points are pointed out by the client?)
9. interconnection of coaching and programme or interconnection of meetings with the coach before the coaching session and the coaching session itself
10. Duration of the coaching session