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## The coaching relationship - Empirical research, cases and conversations

*Is relationship one of the most important active ingredients in therapy and coaching psychology?*

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# Coaching relationship

Empirical research, cases and conversations

Ole Michael Spaten

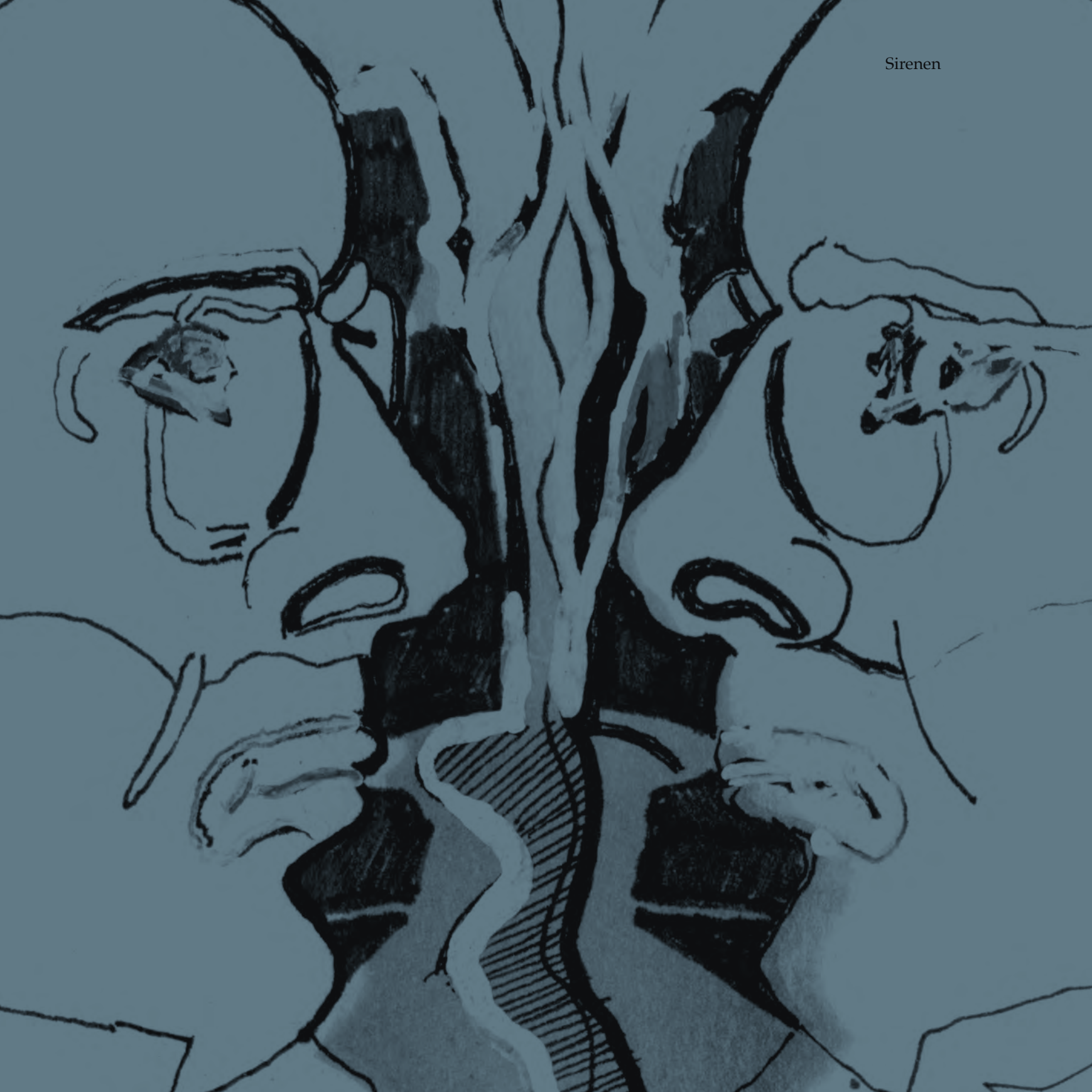


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coaching psychology



Ole Michael Spaten



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This book is an homage to

Professor Stephen Palmer  
Dr Alanna (O'Broin) Henderson  
Dr Kristina Gyllensten

Pioneers in the field of coaching relationship research. Thanks for their support during stunning interviews, which gives this book additional strength.

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# Preface

Anyone who has been involved in coaching knows that perhaps the most important thing for good sessions is the contact between coach and coachee.

*Good chemistry* you might call it, or simply the *experience* of being seen and feeling heard. In this book, it is referred to as *the relationship*

We have strong theories and concepts for numerous aspects of coaching. We write textbooks on questioning techniques, interpretive paradigms and applies different schools and approaches to coaching. However, the most basic thing about it – the relationship – is at the same time the most complex. For how do you conduct research in the experience of contact and chemistry between two people? Is it possible to conduct research about the relationship at all?

You can also ask if you can let the subject go. If, however, the relationship is the most important part of good coaching processes, then it deserves to be investigated and explored. That is precisely the purpose of this book.



“The coaching relationship – empirical research, cases and conversations” presents current research into the relationship’s significance to coaching. Ole Michael Spaten takes us into the researcher’s cave and presents a large number of scientific articles, empirical research, and their contributions to how we can understand and comprehend the coaching relationship and its complexity. Moreover, the book discusses and condenses the many findings and empirical results.

The book is recommended to the student, the academic or the research-interested practitioner. The book provides a commendable overview of the last 20 years of research in the field of coaching relationship. I believe this book will inspire all of us who deal with coaching to become even more curious about the relationship and its significance.

Mads Lindholm  
Business psychologist, PhD.

# 1 Overview of the research field on relationship

Is (the concept of) relationship one of the most important active ingredients in therapy and coaching psychology? This is one of the main questions this text will tackle. The question will be examined through a timeline introduction to the field and by exploring concepts and existing definitions from relevant research studies. Furthermore, the text will introduce case-stories as a broad practice introduction to the area of fruitful coaching relationship.

Relationship is not easy to define: From an overall point of view, Pearsall (1999) suggested that it is the ‘...way two or more people or things are connected’. Less broadly, Gelso and Carter stated that the therapeutic relationship is the “feeling and attitudes that counselling participants have toward one another and the manner in which those are expressed” (Gelso & Carter, 1985, p. 159). As stated in Graßmann, Schölmerich & Schermuly (2020) a relationship can also be assumed as a social exchange where interactions between individuals are interdependent. There is an exchange between both partners, which can give an understanding of why the alliance is so im-

portant. The client needs to feel safe and understood in order to exchange information and trust the coach. Furthermore, in a safe environment, the possibility that the client will end the coaching session prematurely is less likely.

From clinical research we know that “understanding and acceptance”, congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1975) are crucial, and clients frequently state that the most helpful aspect of therapy is feeling supported and understood. For a long time transference and countertransference, the working alliance and the real relationship have been areas of research interest (Horvath et al., 2011). Hougaard (2004) remarked that the therapeutic relationship, therapeutic alliance, and so-called non-specific factors (therapist-client relationship, client expectations and common clinical strategies) account for most of the outcome in therapy (Wampold et al., 1997). From this important research base, when did the relation between coach and coachee come to be a focus of investigation? It is surely an extended history; inquiries in coaching are based on the hundred-year-long experience and systematic research in psychology, psychotherapy and adult learning (Grant & Palmer, 2002; Spaten, 2010). Pioneer, Professor Stephen Palmer has been part of the psychotherapeutic field since the mid-1980s and assumed that the coaching alliance and relationship were important in facilitating coachees achieving their goals (Palmer, 2020). In a similar vein, and from their knowledge base and training in counselling and psychotherapy, Gyllensten and (O’Broin) Henderson also supposed that the coach/coachee relationship was vital to the process and outcomes of coaching (Gyllensten, 2020; Henderson, 2020).

## Temporal introduction

The papers and chapters presented in the following literature search address various components of the coaching relation-



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ship. Furthermore, this book contains excerpts from cases and interviews with leading scholars from this research field, namely Professor Stephen Palmer, Dr Alanna (O’Broin) Henderson, and Dr Kristina Gyllensten, as they were among the first scholars to investigate this important research area. As mentioned, the origin of this research came from a knowledge base within psychotherapy research a long time ago. However, in the early 2000s, Stephen Palmer had doctoral supervision with Gyllensten and Henderson, and their scientific curiosity subsequently led to years of research into the coaching relationship. Stephen Palmer (2020) states: “I was supervising Kristina Gyllensten for her doctorate research and in one of her studies nine participants were interviewed about their experiences of coaching, and ‘the coaching relationship’ was identified as a main theme. There was limited published research into this area so we realised it was important to publish these research findings (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007). I was also supervising and publishing articles and chapters with Alanna Henderson (formerly O’Broin) for her doctorate research, which focused on the coaching relationship”, and a portion of these investigations was also published in the same year (in O’Broin & Palmer, 2007). Later, in a 2011 study, de Haan et al. found that executive coaches appreciated their coaching relationship and skills (such as understanding, encouragement and active listening), more than specific coach interventions, as already discussed by Wampold et al. (1997). Also as early as 2001, McGovern et al. insisted that the quality of the “coaching relationship was perceived as critical to coaching success by 84 percent of coachee participants” (O’Broin & Palmer, 2019, p. 471).

At the beginning of the century, Gyllensten was focusing on coaching and occupational stress in her research, while training to become a counselling psychologist. To this temporal intro-

duction Gyllensten adds "...within the field of counselling and therapy the relationship between the client/patient and therapist has always been considered important" (Gyllensten, 2020).

As mentioned, Alanna (O'Broin) Henderson is another of the leading scholars in the Coaching Relationship research field, and a close collaborator of Stephen Palmer. The first question in my interview with Alanna was, Ole: "When and how did you realize that the working-alliance / relation between coach and coachee was an important topic?" Alanna told that it was in 1998 during retraining as a Chartered Counselling Psychologist following a career in the financial sector in Fund Management:

"Working with therapy clients showed me first-hand how important the relationship was as a common factor (...) The psychotherapy research evidence-base has long supported this premise, with a moderate yet robust significant working alliance-outcome association across theoretical approaches being shown for decades across multiple studies..." (Henderson, 2020). This hundred-year-long heritage, and strong psychotherapy research foundation, is essential to keep in mind. In the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium the interpersonal relationship between coach and coachee garnered little attention (Greensfelder, 2012). At that point in time there were little or no dedicated coaching relationship research findings supporting claims for its key importance in the coaching context. This claim to importance is robustly sustained through the broad research literature considered within this book. Anyhow, the research methods, which were prominent during this early period – qualitative self-report studies or case studies – focused more broadly on coaching variables: Whether coaching worked and how it differed from therapy.

Palmer, Henderson, Gyllensten and other scholars then brought the coaching relationship to the research field, as a timely subject of exploration. In 2006, Alanna (O'Broin) Hen-



erson was choosing a topic for her Doctorate research. Alanna chose to investigate the gap in existing inquiries, “with my mixed-method research study on *coachee and coach experiences of forming coaching relationships, and how the coach may adapt to the coachee*. This research study was one of few at the time to exclusively address the coaching relationship” (see O’Broin & Palmer, 2010a; O’Broin, 2013) (Henderson, 2020). Since this early pioneering time, inquiries around the coaching relationship, as one of the *active ingredients of coaching*, have gained momentum. Alanna explains that, “... evidence, including meta-analyses (Graßmann et al., 2020), accumulating on importance of relationship quality (usually measured as Working Alliance) to coaching effectiveness, although exploration of mediating or moderating effects requires further research (see Zimmermann & Antoni, 2020), and is arguably likely to be equally relevant (see O’Broin, 2016) given the multifactorial complexity of coaching as a process” (Henderson, 2020).

Overall, we now know that coaching is working well, it is widespread used and very effective (Spaten & Green, 2019). Since the early days of research, increasing evidence within coaching psychology supports coaching as an effective form of intervention (e.g. Graßmann, Schölmerich, & Schermuly, 2020; de Haan, Moly, & Nilsson, 2020; O’Broin, 2016; Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2016; Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen, 2014; Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh and Parker, 2010). According to O’Broin, next was an increased emphasis on the functional similarities between therapy and coaching within coaching research, to gain a better understanding of coaching practice (O’Broin, 2016). “Common factors” or non-specific factors, such as client factors, theory and techniques, and client expectations were identified (Wampold et al., 1997; O’Broin 2016; Spaten 2018). “Other overlaps between the two professions were identified, including how therapeutic ‘techniques’ can be adopted



in the coaching context both in theory and in practice.” (Henderson, 2020). There is so to speak a greater acceptance of the assumption that the coaching relationship is functionally similar (to some extent) to other helping relationships (Henderson, 2020). Most researchers assume that numerous similarities between the therapeutic and coaching relation exist and evidence is rapidly being gathered.

Following the accumulation of research documenting the effectiveness of coaching, O’Broin and Palmer mentioned that research studies are seeking to “identify the *active ingredients* of coaching” (italics in original text, 2019, p. 472). According to Henderson, this change includes both a methodological and a theoretical aspect: “The former includes an increased interest in different research methods, which examines the level of details to a higher degree than previous research does” (Henderson, 2020). Increasingly research results documented that coaching is a multifaceted and composite process. “The request for an examination of details is a result of the realisation of coaching as a complex process. With the realisation of greater complexity comes the need for development of research methods and strategies that are suitable in addressing coaching as a complex phenomenon” (O’Broin, Spaten & Olesen Løkken, 2016).

Henderson (2020) continues and points towards that the coaching relationship: “is a natural candidate for focus as a potential ‘active ingredient’.” Furthermore, it is stated that “in the early stages of the coaching relationship research, the coaching relationship was perceived as a more collaborative and egalitarian process. In recent years, a topic that has been of particular interest is how the coach can be aware of his or her own role in the relationship (Cavicchia, 2010; Lai, 2014; Horvath, 2018)”. The importance of identifying how the coach creates an effective relationship with the coachee has also been viewed as of

considerable importance in recent years (O’Broin et al., 2016). Henderson adds that research at last “...has pointed for standards and credentialing for coaches in order to become aware of their own role in the relation” (Henderson, 2020). In terms of researching the relationship details to a higher degree, Graßmann et al. dive deeper into the complexity of the coaching process with a meta-analysis of the outcomes of a strong working alliance. More specific they explore which kinds of outcomes that correlates strongest with the working alliance. The results found in the meta-analysis by Graßmann et al. supports the hypothesis that working alliance is a crucial factor in the change process. As stated in the article the question to be asked is “not *if* coaching works but *how* it works” hence the focus on specific aspects of coaching and the coaching relationship (Graßman et al, 2020, p. 36).

## Conceptual identification

An identification of this essential concept asks primarily: What is a relationship and how can it be defined in general, and specifically in the coaching setting? One accessible general definition of a relationship is ‘the way two or more people feel and behave towards each other’ or, in the same vein, it is the ‘...way two or more people or things are connected’ (Pearsall, 1999). More specifically, Gelso and Carter defined the therapeutic relationship as the “feeling and attitudes that counselling participants have toward one another and the manner in which those are expressed” (Gelso & Carter, 1985, p. 159). Furthermore there can be drawn on the understanding of Graßmann et al. (2020) where coaching is seen as a dyadic relationship between a professional coach and a client “which involves a systematic process that focuses on the collaborative goal setting, constructing solutions, and fostering clients’ self-directed learning and personal growth” (Graßmann et al., 2020, p. 37)

Delineating a relationship from a coaching perspective appears difficult because of the multiple usages of the term ‘coaching relationship’. Another conceptual identification may well be that a coaching relationship might be understood as “two people engaging in a systematic process where different issues presented by the coachee is explored in collaboration between the coach and coachee” (Spaten et al., 2016). Stephen Palmer approved multiple statements – a nonexistence of shared agreement – and emphasised that there “...is no agreement in the precise definition of the coaching relationship” (Palmer, 2020). During the interview with Alanna (O’Broin) Henderson (2020), the following was stated with respect to the lack of agreement on definition: “The lack of consensus on a definition of the coaching relationship means that multiple referents are used for the term. This means use of the term can therefore range from a proxy for the whole coaching process, to more specific usages, such as a descriptor for rapport, or a component part of the coaching relationship, for example, Working Alliance” (Henderson, 2020).

Looking broadly into the research field it is revealed that “... other component parts of the coaching relationship, such as the Real Relationship (Sun et al., 2013) have been posited as relevant markers. Recently other Common Factors, or active ingredients such as resilience and self-efficacy (de Haan et al., 2020) have tentatively been designated as putatively more important to coaching effectiveness. Working Alliance is the predominant component part of the coaching relationship that has usually been measured and found to be associated with coaching effectiveness in research studies” (Henderson, 2020). Moreover, the coaching relationship has been linked with coachees’ perceived effectiveness, self-efficacy and increased satisfaction (Graßman et al., 2020). Notwithstanding that, the complexity of the field is very important; a short and precise definition will be of value



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for this research project. Kristina Gyllensten (2020) delivers this by maintaining that “Alanna O’Broin and Stephen Palmer’s definition is noble: ‘a unique, co-created, evolving relationship comprising the coaching alliance plus additional client and coach contributions’ (O’Broin and Palmer, 2007, p. 295)”.

### The coaching alliance

The focal point here is that a coaching relationship / a working relationship / a coaching alliance definition ought to encompass the notion of a negotiated collective co-creation, client-led developing relationship; and furthermore it ought to address “...the purposive task, goal, and bond aspects salient in goal-focused coaching” (Henderson, 2020). In agreement with this approach Kristina Gyllensten (2020) leans towards this now classical explanation: “The coaching alliance reflects the quality of the coachee’s and coach’s engagement in collaborative, purposive work within the coaching relationship, and is jointly negotiated and renegotiated throughout the coaching process over time” (O’Broin and Palmer, 2010b, p. 4). As mentioned the definition of Stephen adds that an important identification should embrace “...a unique, co-created, evolving relationship comprising the coaching alliance plus additional client and coach contributions” (ibid.).

Despite the multiple usage and definitions of the term, diverse coaching backgrounds and conceptual approach variations, it is generally accepted across different forms and approaches to coaching that the working relationship between coach and coachee should be an effective working relationship based on a coaching alliance.

## The research basis of the coaching relationship

Amongst the most significant scholars in this area, a couple of crucial classifications should be pinpointed for the purpose of this chapter. For example, one of the first studies with important findings concerning the coaching relationship was conducted by Gyllensten & Palmer (2007). Their research was a qualitative study of coachees from two organisations and their experiences of coaching. Their investigation showed that the participants identified the coaching relationship as a central theme and that this relationship was highly dependent on the existence of trust and transparency. The study led to the further conclusion that the coaching relationship was an important aspect of coaching, but other aspects such as the goal-oriented focus in coaching were also consistently identified as important components (O'Broin, 2016). Read more about these constituent components later in this book.

These studies have sparked a stream of articles and book chapters throughout the past decade (e.g. Kemp, 2008; O'Broin & Palmer, 2009; 2010a; 2010b), as well as further dedicated coaching relationship research studies (e.g. de Haan, 2008; O'Broin & Palmer, 2010c). Among other things they pointed to a) the importance of the negotiation of power in the coaching alliance, b) that the coaching outcome and the relationship in general appears to depend on the coach's awareness of power issues, and c) the ability to go beyond the asymmetry between coach and coachee, in both coaching and consulting psychology (Spaten et al., 2016; Sapezinskiene et al., 2016). Some of the differences between coaching and counselling have also been emphasised (Palmer, 2010; O'Broin & Palmer, 2009; O'Broin & Palmer, 2010). This book presents rich and extensive references to scholars like Stephen Palmer, Alanna (O'Broin) Henderson, and Kristina Gyllensten and is intended as an homage to them.

Following the primary articles by Gyllensten & Palmer and O’Broin & Palmer the first book explicitly focused upon the coaching relationship was *The Coaching Relationship: Putting People First* edited by Palmer & McDowall (2010). This first, and very significant, book was followed by *Coaching Relationships: The relational coaching field book*” edited by de Haan & Sills in 2012. Later coaching research studies (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch and Jones, 2013), including a large-scale global outcome study (de Haan, Grant, Burger & Eriksson, 2016) have found significant links between the coaching relationship (working alliance) and coaching outcomes (Baron et al., 2011). Lai and McDowall (2014), de Haan and Gannon (2017), and Graßmann, Schölmerich and Schermuly (2020) have identified similar connections in their examinations of the field. The review by Lai et al. indicated that an effective coaching relationship could be associated with subsequent coaching outcomes. Another key point, which was particularly prominent in their review, was that the coaching relationship is a central focus of both coaching research and practice, influencing the effectiveness of coaching processes and outcomes. Forming a strong alliance/coaching relationship has also been a central component in a cluster of executive coaching, leadership coaching, and human development models of the mid-1990s” (Henderson, 2020). With increased confirmation of this important association of the global coaching relationship with coaching effectiveness, interest in the coaching relationship is likely to continue (O’Broin, 2018; Henderson, 2020). However, the question of *how* the coaching relationship influences coaching outcomes remains largely unexplored (Palmer, 2020). Despite the increasing amount of literature in the coaching field (both regarding the relationship in itself and the ‘active ingredients’ in the coaching relationship), it has been affirmed across multiple research contributions that coaching (and the coaching relationship) is a complex process.



We can sum up that coaching is an evolving, complex, interpersonal, multifactorial and multi-level activity. Because of its complexity it is recommended, and seems constructive, to conduct a broader investigation encompassing further systematically strict, empirical and evidence-based coaching research. In the search for the 'active ingredients' in the coaching relationship (de Haan et al., 2020), the investigations in this book aims to present findings from all existing empirical research from the last twenty years, both in general and as an overview and presentation of the single studies and chapters. The literature search is intended to stimulate further focus on the interpersonal processes involved in coaching and the coaching relationship, both for the coach and coachees. The studies will, both separately and in tandem, explore different aspects, thereby contributing to a broader picture of the coaching relationship as a multifaceted and dynamic process. Furthermore, supplementary cases and interviews with leading scholars in this field have been conducted in 2020. The following case studies add to our understanding of the coaching relationship in practice.

## 2 An excellent and fruitful coaching relationship in practice

### Two case studies

In the following four cases, we encounter how two young coaching psychologists conduct coaching sessions, which are both excellent and fruitful, and how these could go wrong.

They will briefly be commented upon before moving on to a general summary of the most important findings from the research this book is based on. In these cases, we meet Susan and Carol whose issues are in the grey-zone between coaching psychology and psychotherapy, namely rather mild forms of stress (tensions) and depression (sadness). Susan finds that she is under a lot of pressure with all of the reading that has to be done at University and have trouble sleeping. Carol is also feeling pressured but in her workplace. Carol does not think the boss likes her and Carol feels criticised all the time. Additionally, the cases displays two different approaches to how coaching can be conducted:

- 1 Where the coach creates a safe and fruitful space by being empathetic and actively listening.
- 2 Where the coach is absentminded and creates an unsafe and uncomfortable coaching session environment.

## How tensions impact Susan's life

(The beginning of the session)

Coach: Welcome Susan. Good to see you. My name is David and today we have a session for 50 minutes. Maybe you will see me look at the clock occasionally; it is because I am aware that we need to keep track of time. Everything said between the two of us will stay in this confidential room. How does that sound?

Coachee: I agree with it.

Coach: That sounds good. What would you like to talk about today?

Coachee: I am feeling a little bad right now. I experience difficulty sleeping.

Coach: Okay, hmmm, how long have you been experiencing this?

Coachee: Well it has been going on for a few months now.

Coach: Is there anything specific that happened a few months ago when it started?

Coachee: A couple of months ago I had three exams at the University, so I have felt stressed about everything I had to read. I still feel the same way often. It is a lot of reading stuff.

Coach: You say you feel stressed. Would you like to tell me more about it?

Coachee: I think about it a lot, and especially in the evenings, I get heavy.

Coach: (Hmmm) you are getting heavy. Can you tell me more about what it is like for you?

Coachee: Well I get a lump in my stomach and it hurts so much I cannot sleep, I feel bad.

Coach: Is it usually like that when you go to exams?

- Coachee: No, I do not think so. I dumped one of my exams last semester and maybe therefore I am in doubt about how I will cope with the rest in the future.
- Coach: I understand that well, it makes you feel heavy and bad. Do you want to tell more about what this arouses, and about your doubts?
- Coachee: Well, I have never doubted myself before, and it makes me kind of a little insecure about my own abilities. I tend to be good at academic stuff.
- (The session continues...)

## How sadness impacts Carol's life

(In the middle of the conversation)

- Coachee: Well I have been feeling sad lately and have been feeling a little overwhelmed and quite pressured at work.
- Coach: You felt overwhelmed and pressured?
- Coachee: Yeah... I have had it a little hard at work... I feel like my boss is after me... Moreover, it makes me feel small. As if I cannot figure out anything. In a little while he will probably think that I cannot take care of my work and perform sufficiently.
- Coach: It does not sound very pleasant to experience this. Would you like to tell me more about what it is the boss says or does, that makes you think and feel that way?
- Coachee: I never feel praised, and I only receive criticism from him. He just seems like he does not like me.
- Coach: So what do you do when your boss is criticizing you?
- Coachee: Well I get a little upset and ...
- (Client continues to talk and reflect, and the session continues)

## Comments about the first sessions with Susan and Carol

With Susan the coach begins by setting the professional framework for the coaching session. With Carol we jump into the middle of the coaching session. In both cases the coach works to create a safe and fruitful environment: The coach is being empathetic, open, congruent, and is actively listening in a clear, contracted frame. By being broad and open-minded the psychologist encourages the coachee to explore their issues in different ways and from different angles. They ask in-depth, factual questions in order to explore the topics presented by the coachee.

Additionally the coaches display open and reflective body language, which strengthens and maintains a secure base for the coachee. Both coaches help their coachee to be explorative and curious about the issues, e.g. by listening and letting the client speak out implementing unconditional positive regard.

Furthermore, the coach inquires as to the physical state, emotions and thoughts of the coachee. Likewise, the coach also uses reflective questions, such as “is it usually like that when you go to exams?”

## Another encounter with Susan

(The beginning of the session)

Coach: Hi Susan, welcome - my name is David. What would you like to talk about today? (Sitting with closed body language, arms crossed).

Coachee: Well, hey. I am walking around feeling a little bad right now. I experience difficulty sleeping.

Coach: I know that well, sometimes I only fall asleep at 2 o'clock in the morning. Tell, me, why do you walk around feeling bad?

- Coachee: Well, I do not really know. My mother says that I reach for the top academically too much, and I think that might be a little tiring...
- Coach: Hmm, yes okay, so your mom talks about it to you. How is your relationship with your mother? (Looking out of the window)
- Coachee: I talk often with my mom because she and my dad are divorced. So yes, we are often together.
- Coach: Well, are your parents divorced? It must be hard for you?
- Coachee: Yes, that is right, but I think it might have something to do with the University -
- Coach: (interrupts) - well, is it because your mother says that you are too anxious about academia?
- Coachee: Well maybe, but I do not quite know now.
- Coach: Okay, so what do you think the next step should be?
- Coachee: Uhhm, I do not quite know. Maybe talk to my student counsellor, but I do not know...
- Coach: Yeah, that sounds like a good idea, you have to try it. Our time is running out. Is there anything else you would like to talk about?
- Coachee: Well, I just dumped my exam and I am so sorry.
- Coach: Well, well though. Did that happen the same time as your sleep problems started?
- Coachee: Yeah, that is it.
- Coach: We will have to talk about that next time, because time has passed now, I am sorry.

## Another encounter with Carol

(In the middle of the conversation)

- Coachee: Well I've been feeling pretty sad lately and have been feeling a little overwhelmed and been ...
- Coach: (interrupts) have you felt overwhelmed.

Coachee: Yes... I have had a hard time at work... I feel like my boss is after me... Moreover, it makes me feel...

Coach: (interrupts, arms crossed) yes, and what does he say then?

Coachee: He says... He says that... Yes, I cannot right now remember what he said; I just remember that I have felt inadequate because I was behind with my tasks. Therefore, I am a little worried about... I want to do well at work; it is also a nice place.

(Silence for a few seconds)

(The coachee looks around the room and starts patting her leg a bit.)

Coachee (Slightly sad): So I do not remember what he said

Coach: During my studies, I was also very overwhelmed, where I also felt sad, but after a while, I managed it. I guess I just worked my way through it, and then did well anyway. Therefore, I really understand how you feel.

Coachee: Yeah okay, mmm, I see, maybe it is just me too.

(The client continues, but sounds even sadder than at the beginning of the session)

## Comments about the two other encounters with Susan and Carol

In both cases, the coach is not sufficiently present and attentive. With Susan, the coach makes a minimum of effort to initiate a relevant contract for the collaboration, and to establish the necessary professional framework.

The coaches' body language appears locked, closed, uninviting, and there was limited active listening taking place. Several times the coaches interrupted their coachee, with thoughts and feelings completed by the coaches, thereby making incorrect assumptions about the problems at stake.

Overall, the sessions were superficial and the interventions did not focus upon the most important issues, with time instead spent deflecting. With Susan, the session ended with a significant question, and suddenly the biggest problem came up, without time to unravel and resolve it. The coach asks the coachee what she will do about the problem, at a time when the coachee is not prepared and ready to take on this task. The responsibility is turned around prematurely onto the coachee without her having the skills at this point to disentangle the problem.

In general, throughout the sessions, the psychologist's "boiling" appearance and inability to listen make the coachees feel not understood and unappreciated. The coachees therefore lose the desire to explore the problems further. These two approaches show how different the outcomes can be depending on how the coach and coachee communicates. In these last cases, the coach is not able to make a deeper connection with the coachees and therefore the sessions are not fruitful. The findings in this book and these cases provide insight into the importance of a fruitful relationship, and of gaining a deeper understanding of the coaching relationship.





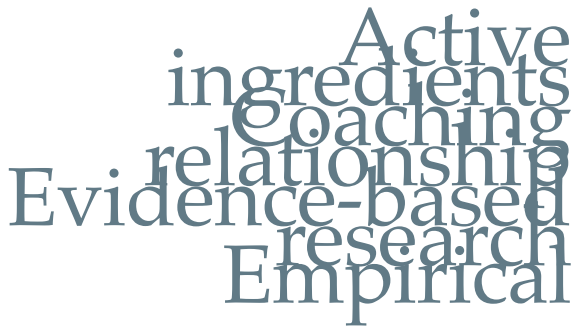
Presentation of

forty-two

empirical studies

over a twenty year period





Active ingredients  
Coaching relationship  
Evidence-based research  
Empirical

### Literature review

As demonstrated earlier, the coaching relationship is crucial for the coaching outcome. In search of a better understanding of the coaching relationship, the field of literature was explored. As previously mentioned, this publication originates from a literature search, which was followed by case study descriptions and interviews in 2020. The literature review was conducted during 2017 (and shortly into 2018) at Aalborg University, focusing on empirical research relating to coaching relationships, using the following keywords:

Active ingredients  
Coaching relationship  
Evidence-based research  
Empirical

The search was directed through the following databases:  
Business Source Premier  
Psych Info

The period was limited to twenty years of research, taking place between 1997 and 2017. The result of the search was forty-two publications during the twenty-year period. Several interesting findings emerged across these publications and will be presented in the next section as a general overview of twenty years of research.

A general outline of important research findings  
The following section will provide short one and two-liners presenting the headlines of important research findings concerning the coaching relationship.

- Commitment to process and goals from both the coach and the coachee is central to a successful coaching outcome. The goal-oriented focus is an important part of coaching. The coach and coachee should establish mutually agreed goals
- It is important for the coach to have a solid ethical foundation, and an ethical reflexive practice
- It is important for the coach to have sufficient psychological education to understand different emotional aspects of the coaching process and hence to be able to differentiate between diverse appropriate intervention forms
- The coach has to pay attention to both behaviour and emotions in the relationship, from both the coachee and the coach
- The effect of the coach's personality and ability to be empathic, trustworthy and non-judgmental in the working alliance is highlighted as an important finding
- The coach should pay attention to issues of power in the coaching process including the asymmetrical relation between coach and coachee
- It is important for the coach to have a solid theoretical foundation, but the coach's personality and the interpersonal relationship has a vital impact on the coaching relationship and outcome
- The coach should continually reflect and develop upon their practice.

These short summaries of significant research findings concerning the coaching relationship will act as a base herein, to be further expanded upon following the presentation of forty-two empirical studies. Thereafter the headlines and the review findings will be combined to provide the backbone of an immersive conversation and discussion about the outcomes.



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Bachkirova, T. (Ed), Spence, G. (Ed) & Drake, D. (Ed). (2017). *The SAGE handbook of coaching*, (pp. 195-217). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications.

## The coaching relationship

- Objectives:** This chapter presented an overview of the coaching relationship literature including summaries of recent empirical studies and identified themes.
- Design:** Chapter. It emphasises knowledge from different coaching contexts in order to create a nuanced perspective on coaching and to identify central themes.  
It draws upon three different coaching settings; employee/managerial, sports and executive coaching.
- Methods:** It applies an across coaching contexts approach and hence addresses the methodologies and research instruments which are prominent in the three different coaching contexts considered. Furthermore a range of figures and tables are presented and provides an overview of some of the newest empirical findings about the three contexts mentioned.
- Conclusions:** Rapport and bonds, trust and transparency, commitment, collaboration and co-creation were identified as some of the main themes in the coaching relationship. The chapter concludes that further research is needed in order to understand the development of the coaching relationship, as it plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of coaching.

Correia, M. C., dos Santos, N. R. & Passmore, J., (2016). *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 11(1), 6-23.

## Understanding the Coach-Coachee-Client relationship: A conceptual framework for executive coaching

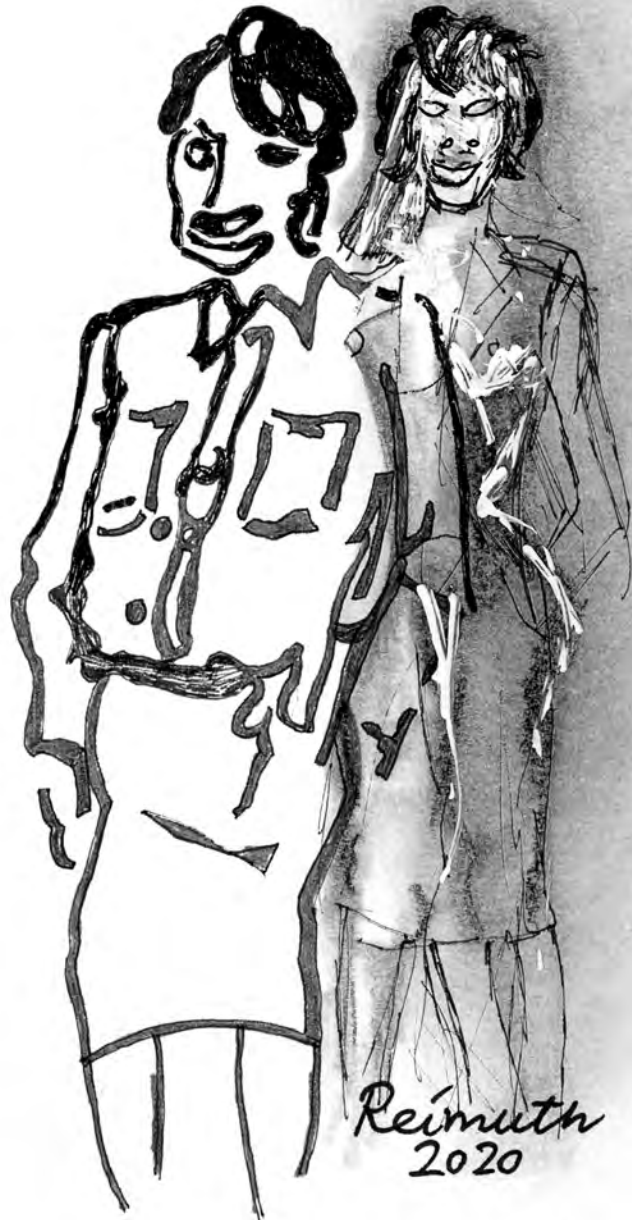
**Objectives:** The aim of this study is to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of how coaching processes operate at a psychological level. Another important aspect of the study is to characterise the coaching process experience and further identify how specific experiences contribute to coaching outcomes.

**Design:** This study operated with a qualitative design. Data was analysed by IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) (Smith, 2003). It follows the coaching process longitudinally and applies an integrative understanding of the dynamics of the coaching process.

**Methods:** A total of 30 interviews were conducted in an organisation. Three different groups (four coaches, five coachees, and one commissionaire) were interviewed three times during the coaching process.

**Results:** The results showed that coaching outcomes can be produced through three mechanisms (Projection of future self, Perspectivation of present self, and Confirmation of past/present self). Each of these mechanisms represent a different effect on the coachee's self and hence contribute differently to the coaching outcomes.

**Conclusions:** The study supports the conclusion that coaching can deliver sustainable outcomes and can be used as a developmental tool in organisations.





Robson-Kelly, L. & van Nieuwerburgh, C. (2016). *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 11(1), 75-92.

## What does coaching have to offer to young people at risk of developing mental health problems? A grounded theory study

- Objectives:** This article presents a detailed idiographic analysis of patients' experiences of first-episode depression.
- Design:** This is a qualitative interview study using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).
- Methods:** Semi-structured interviews were carried out with a purposive sample of seven patients presenting to a mental health service in London, UK with symptoms of first-episode major depression. There were four males and three females; mean age was 44 years. Interviews were audio-recorded and subjected to IPA.
- Results:** Participants described a significant loss event prior to onset of depression. The depression involved a major diminishing of the life-world with relational, corporeal, and temporal depletion. The study presents an early theoretical model to influence coaching interventions, directed precisely at young people at risk of developing mental health problems.
- This depletion was accompanied in each case by occasional extreme emotions, frenzied thoughts, confused sense of self and loss of relationship.

**Conclusions:** Depression can represent a major existential threat to the sufferer. It is discussed how the findings can illuminate the extant literature, and lay foundation for a theoretical understanding. The study suggests the value of exploring these existential features in early therapy.





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## Enhancing evidence-based coaching practice by developing a coaching relationship competency framework

**Objectives:** Arguing that a systematic review (SR) must be present before further research should proceed this chapter seeks to compare competency frameworks for coaches in search of correlation and diversity.

**Design:** This is an SR comparing competency framework for coaches, such as the International Coach Federation (ICF), the Association for Coaching (AC) and the Special Group for Coaching Psychology (BPS, UK).

**Conclusions:** The chapter presents a framework, the Coaching Relationship Competency Framework (CRCF). The systematic review concluded that the focal points of the knowledge, skills and abilities of coaching psychologists are a focus on the coaching relationship and the coaches' capabilities in facilitating this.

The framework has been tested through a pilot study, identifying what the researchers call "soft skills" and "hard skills", the first being fundamental behaviours in the coaching relationship (e.g. "listening actively"), and the second being aspects such as "establishing mutually agreed goals". The chapter argues that a behavioural focus and framework carries many opportunities.

Lai, Y-L., M. & McDowell, A. (2016). In L. E. van Zyl, M. W. Stander, & A. Odendaal (Eds.), *Coaching psychology: Meta-theoretical perspectives and applications in multicultural contexts* (p. 393–415). Springer International Publishing.

Gessnitzer, S. & Kauffeld, S. (2015). *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 51(2), 177-197.

## The working alliance in coaching: Why behavior is the key to success.

**Objectives:** Stressing the importance of the coaching relationship, whilst challenging the fact that preceding research has focused on questionnaire data, this study seeks to investigate the actual interaction between coach and coachee.

**Design:** This study analysed the working relationship of 31 coaching couplets, through the method of interaction analysis and questionnaires. Behaviours on the part of the coach or coachee that were relationship-relevant were coded, with the main focus being on indicators of the working relationship, such as their agreement on goals, and appraisal and bonding behaviours.

**Conclusions:** A correlation between behavioural and questionnaire data was not reported.

We may not be surprised to learn that client-initiated agreement on goals was positively related to a favourable coaching outcome; however, the study also concludes that coach-initiated agreement on goals had the opposite effect. Engaged clients are, by extension, more likely to achieve coaching success. Bonding behaviours did not influence the coaching outcome.





## Coaching relationship in executive coaching: A Malaysian study

**Objectives:** The aim of this Malaysian study is to investigate the coaching relationship, concerning how this relates to coaching effectiveness in executive coaching. The coaching relationship involves factors such as rapport, trust, commitment and the match between coach and coachee.

**Design:** Based on a review of the current literature, a quantitative research method was applied, and coaching effectiveness was measured using a questionnaire. The approach for measuring coaching effectiveness was an objective-driven model focused on the degree to which coaching objectives were met.

**Conclusions:** The findings point to rapport and commitment as factors greatly influencing coaching effectiveness. The authors point out that the practical implications of the study could be of interest to HCM managers wishing to enhance leadership competency through executive coaching.



Lai, Y-L. & McDowall, A. (2014). *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 9(2), 118-134.

## A systematic review (SR) of coaching psychology: Focusing on the attributes of effective coaching psychologists.

**Objectives:** This systematic review investigates coaching psychology's evidence, with the results presented through Narrative Synthesis.

**Design:** The drive of the systematic review is to discover, refine and synthesise a great amount of research findings. The replicable review initially elicited 23,611 search results in coaching papers using 58 terms.

Eight electronic databases were explored (such as PsycInfo etc.).

After combing through these, 140 studies were screened further, using seven inclusion criteria. The included papers were incorporated and analysed by the method of Narrative Synthesis.

**Conclusions:** The results of the systematic review underscore that the coaching relationship is the major focus of both coaching research and practice.

The study furthermore points out that professional psychological training is needed to understand and manage the emotional aspects of the coachee's experience. Moreover, the character of the coach seems to be of importance, as the coach's traits have a significant influence on both the coaching process, and its results.





## Stretching the coaching model.

**Objectives:** This article presents a coaching model that is used in the NIH Office of the Ombudsman, Centre for Cooperative Resolution (OO/CCR). The article describes how this general coaching model compares to other coaching approaches.

**Design:** Based on a review of the existing coaching research the study provides a toolkit of steps, which the coach can apply during the coaching process. The toolkit includes a range of general tools and techniques, which the coach can apply when met with issues or as the coaching relationship becomes more trusting. The toolkits are presented by different tables and figures. The study emphasises that each coach has their own personal style, but that there is a shared orientation in the coaching profession towards developing a comprehensive and deep analysis of the coaching setting.

**Conclusions:** The article provides an overview of actions that 'Ombudsmen' may make use of in the coaching process, as the relationship between coach and coachee develops and trust builds. It furthermore points to warning signs of potential problems that may occur during the coaching process, as well as providing directions as to how an 'Ombudsman' might address these (Wright & Armstrong, 2008). One of the potential problems which can occur during the coaching process is resistance from the coachee

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with respect to engaging in perspective taking. The coach can address the issue by taking a step back and discussing the value of other perspectives. Another potential problem could be that the coachee has concerns about the direction the coaching process is taking. It is possible that the coach can choose to address this, by commenting on the fact that the conversation appears unproductive and further asking in which direction the coachee would like to go with the conversation and coaching process in general.

Levine-Finley, S. (2014). *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 31(4), 435-446.

Brown-O'Hara, P. (2014). *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 74(10-B (E)), No Pagination Specified.

The influence of academic coaching on: Baccalaureate nursing students' academic success, perceptions of the academic coaching relationship, perceived NCLEX-RN exam readiness and success on the NCLEX-RN exam.

**Objectives:** This study was executed with the purpose of exploring relationships between students' academic successes, perceptions of the academic coaching relationship, perceived NCLEX-RN exam readiness, and NCLEX-RN exam success. The theoretical basis for the study was O'Hara's Model of Academic Coaching, based on Peplau's Theory of Interpersonal Relations.

**Design:** Data were obtained from 51 senior baccalaureate-nursing students in Pennsylvania. Four research questions were developed, and the students participated in an academic coaching process over an 8-week period.

Data were analysed using Pearson correlations, t-tests, discriminate analysis, Chi-square, and one-way analysis of variance.

The O'Hara Perception of the Coaching Relationship (PCR) was used to measure students' perceptions.

**Conclusions:** Academic coaching seeks to facilitate students' academic achievements, and it also contributes to a strong faculty-student relationship, which is reported to be of great importance to academic performance. The findings of this study were a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-coaching periods, however, two of the research questions did not show a statistically significant power, because of a low sample size. Students' total scores on their perceptions of the coaching relationship were high. The study supports the newly developed O'Hara Model of Academic Coaching.





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## A generic qualitative exploration of the lived experience of entrepreneurs coached through their business start-up

**Objectives:** This is a qualitative study touching on the field of business coaching; more specifically, it explores the experiences of entrepreneurs coached through a business start-up. It is the first study to address this.

**Design:** The theoretical framework was positive psychology and Frederickson's (2005) broaden and build theory.

Telephone interviews were conducted, and the responses to the open-ended questions were analysed using a generic qualitative thematic inductive analysis.

**Conclusions:** Analysis led to five themes, namely Accountability, Connection, Clarity, Coach's Agenda, and Cultivation.

These themes may provide a comprehensive, in-depth account of the coaching relationship. The study gives an in-depth perspective of the coaching relationship, considered from the point of view of those who have been part of it.

Shaw, S., A. (2014). *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 75, (2-B (E)), No Pagination Specified.





Cook, J. (2013). *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring, SpecIssue 7*, 115-124.

## Coaching: An expensive conversation or a return on investment?

**Objectives:** This paper is an expansion on The Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders Model (Cook, 2011), which was presented by the author in a doctoral study two years prior to the current paper. In this study the author developed a model for the transfer and sustainability of what is learned during the coaching session to other, non-coaching areas.

**Design:** As mentioned above the design is based on doctoral research carried out in 2011. The study was a longitudinal qualitative study, which originated from a social constructivist and interpretivist paradigm. The participants in this study were leaders from the following voluntary organisations in UK: Advance, Men-cap and Rethink. The study focused on leaders exploring which factors in the coaching relationship could both help and hinder learning outside of coaching sessions.

Based on this prior study the author developed a coaching model, which is presented and discussed in the current study.

**Conclusions:** The study described above resulted in findings suggesting that both the coach and the coachee have their own, as well as shared, responsibilities with regards to the transfer and sustainability of learning.

It was concluded that the leaders who participated in the study all agreed that the coaching relationship was important.





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## Review of The coaching relationship: Putting people first

**Objectives:** These pages present a review of the book *The Coaching Relationship: Putting People First*, edited by Stephen Palmer and Almuth McDowall.

**Design:** Book review

**Conclusions:** The book is based on the notion that interpersonal relationships are the most vital aspect of the coaching process.

The authors of the book argue that the coaching relationship is a somewhat neglected aspect of the coaching process.

This is unfortunate, they point out, because the coaching relationship is one of the most essential factors in coaching.

The review acclaims the book's authors for presenting a comprehensive account of the coaching relationship.

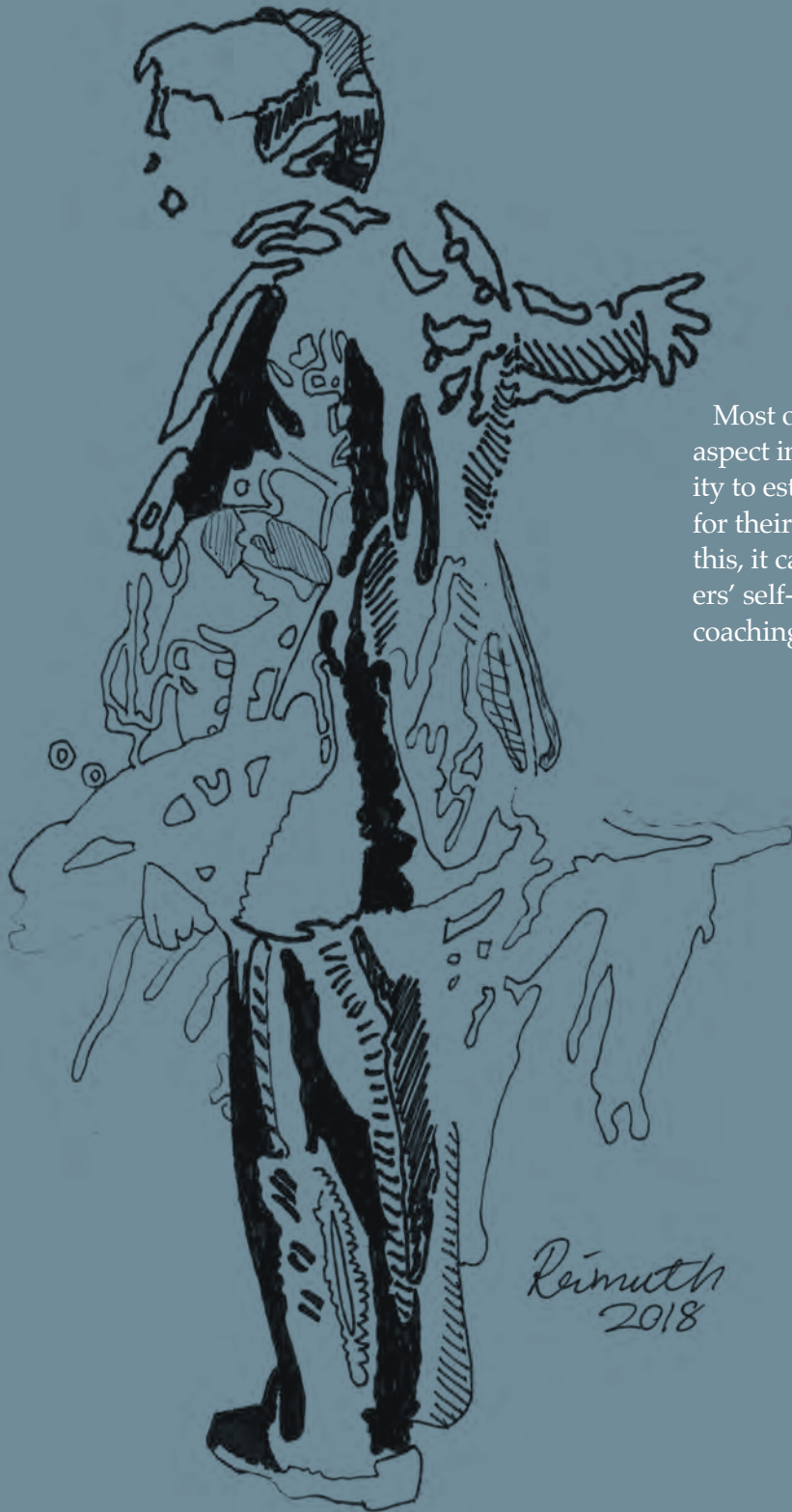
Kelsen, V., E. (2011). *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 72, (6-A), 1843.

School principals, leadership coaches, and student achievement: Enhancing self-efficacy through the coaching relationship.

**Objectives:** This dissertation investigates leadership coaching and the outcome this has on a school principal's responsibilities. It states that school principals are under pressure to improve student achievements, as well as being faced with progressively challenging demands.

**Design:** The study followed participants to see how their participation in the Coaching Educators for Student Achievement (CESA) program affected student achievement. The dissertation has an underpinning in Bolman and Deal's (2008) research about reframing organisations and uses the Four-Frame model.

**Conclusions:** The dissertation offers some highlights regarding aspects of the coaching relationship that are of importance for school principals and their students. Some of the aspects, identified by the coachees, were the coach's ability to establish trust and the coachee's level of comfort with their coach.



Most of the coachees identified the trusting aspect in the relationship and the coach's ability to establish trust as a crucial component for their professional growth. In addition to this, it can be concluded that the school leaders' self-efficacy was influenced by leadership coaching.

Machin, S. (2010). *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring, SpecIssue 4*, 37-52.

## The nature of the internal coaching relationship

**Objectives:** This paper presents the results of a study regarding the nature of the relationship between in-house coaches and their coachees.

**Design:** The study consists of three case studies of coach-coachee dyads, where the coaching takes place within a phenomenological framework.

**Conclusions:** The findings point to trust as the most vital factor in the coaching relationship. It is suggested that trust is achieved when the coach can take a non-judgmental stance, and have a certain level of empathy, listening skills and congruence.

The coachee, in turn, needs to be ready to change. These findings, alongside research from the field of counselling, with which many similarities are found, are discussed in this paper. The main difference between these fields is that coaches and coachees more often share their views on their relationship, whereas such behaviour does not often take place in counselling psychology.







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## Putting people first – Review of The coaching relationship.

**Objectives:** This is a review of the book *The Coaching Relationship—Putting People First* edited by Stephen Palmer & Almuth McDowall.

**Design:** Book review

**Conclusions:** This review congratulates the book for being comprehensive and encompassing the core components of the coaching psychology relationship.

The topic of the coaching relationship is often overlooked in the coaching literature and the author of this book review concludes that the book is an important guide to the coaching relationship.

Nangalia, L. & Nangalia, A. (2010). *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 8(1), 51-66.

## The coach in Asian society: Impact of social hierarchy on the coaching relationship

**Objectives:** The focus of this study is on how coaches in Asia alter the “conventional” (i.e. Western) understanding of coaching to tailor it to their clients.

**Design:** The study is an exploratory case study. A qualitative research methodology was conducted in order to address the study’s research questions. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews which involved ten coaches across Asia. The interviews allowed the researchers to gain an in-depth exploration of coaching practices in Asia. The interviews were recorded and followed the APA’s ethical guidelines.

**Conclusions:** The case study points to a tendency for social hierarchy to influence Asian culture, and in turn coaching practices in Asia. The findings of the study emphasise that some of the conventional coaching approaches used in Europe are not necessarily transferable to the Asian context. The deeply embedded concept of social hierarchy influences several aspects of the coach’s role and status in Asia, and hence the coaching relationship. Some of the most notable differences between the two coaching



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contexts relate to the coach's status. In Asia the coach is seen as a respected elder and the relationship between the coach and coachee is far from being an equal one. The coach is seen as a mentor and the coachee a student. Another significant difference is that the Asian coach operates with a more directive coaching style than the typical western coach does. There is a strong element of advising, teaching and giving suggestions embedded in the Asian coaching relationship. The differences between the two cultures means that when international coaches work with Asian coachees, they might be advised to tailor their coaching style so that it matches with the social context of the coachee. The study proposes a framework for this.

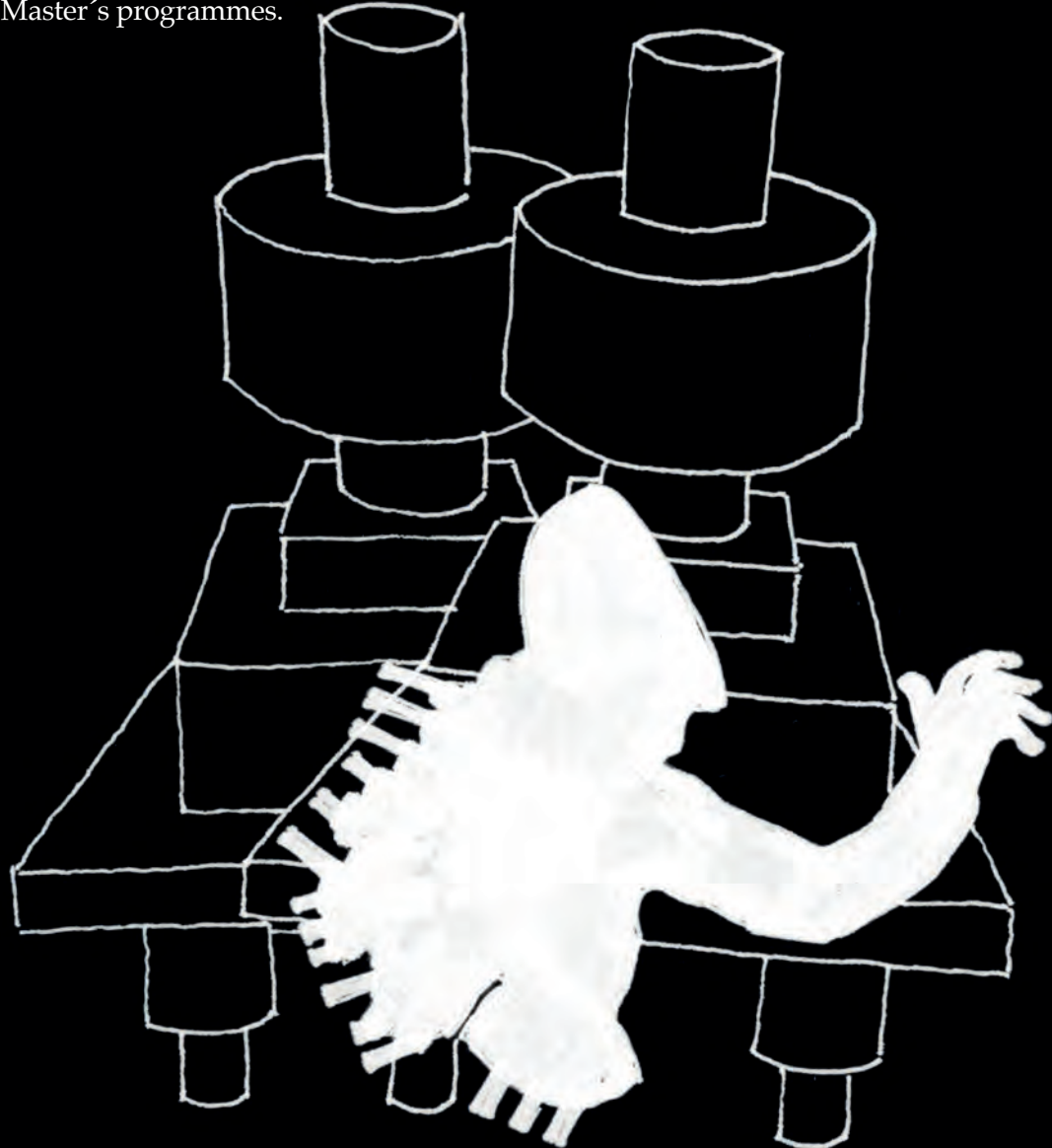
## Shame in the coaching relationship: Reflections on organisational vulnerability

**Objectives:** The main focus of this paper is shame, and how the experience of shame might manifest itself in the coaching relationship. The focal point of the paper is both how shame arises and the experience of shame, as well as the effect shame can have on organisational coaching relationships, learning and change. Reflections on self and the use of self in the research and practice are also given some attention.

**Design:** The paper takes a phenomenological stance, with the data being case material that is analysed through textural and structural analysis.

**Conclusions:** The text argues that shame can have an inhibiting effect on the spontaneity and improvisation that characterises conversations, which bring about change, which are necessary for creatively tailoring the work to the multiplicity of situations in organisational settings. Through examples, the paper illustrates how shame can arise within the coaching relationship. Furthermore, it proposes how coaches can work with a sensitivity to shame dynamics. The relational perspective proposes an expansion of coaching theory, as this perspective lets us view relational dynamics as a source of both data and of change. The author of this

paper has worked as a Gestalt therapist for seven years and as a coach for fourteen years; and hypotheses have been tested and refined with clients, supervisees and students from two Master's programmes.



Cox, E. (2010). In Palmer, S. (Ed) & McDowall, A. (Ed). *The coaching relationship: Putting people first*, (pp. 159-181). New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

## Last things first: Ending well in the coaching relationship

**Objectives:** A good ending to the coaching alliance is important for both the coach and the coachee. In order to plan for such, knowledge about stages in the process is needed. This chapter explores how a good ending can be accomplished.

**Design:** The chapter consists of four sections.

In the first, expectations of relationship endings in psychotherapy and counselling are explored. This section also presents lessons from brief therapy.

In the second section, relationship stage models are presented, such as Kram's mentoring phase model and a five-stage business-to-business relationship model. These models are from other spheres, but still have lessons that can be transferred to understand (and manage) endings in coaching.

The third section consists of three case studies concerning relationship endings, with the focal point being an illustration of the importance of planned endings.

The fourth section is centred on the importance of the contracting process

**Conclusions:** A good ending to the coaching process is advantageous for coaches as it leaves the coachee contented, and the coach can continue and repeat business.



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Hathaway, J. I. (2010). *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 71, (2-A), 534.

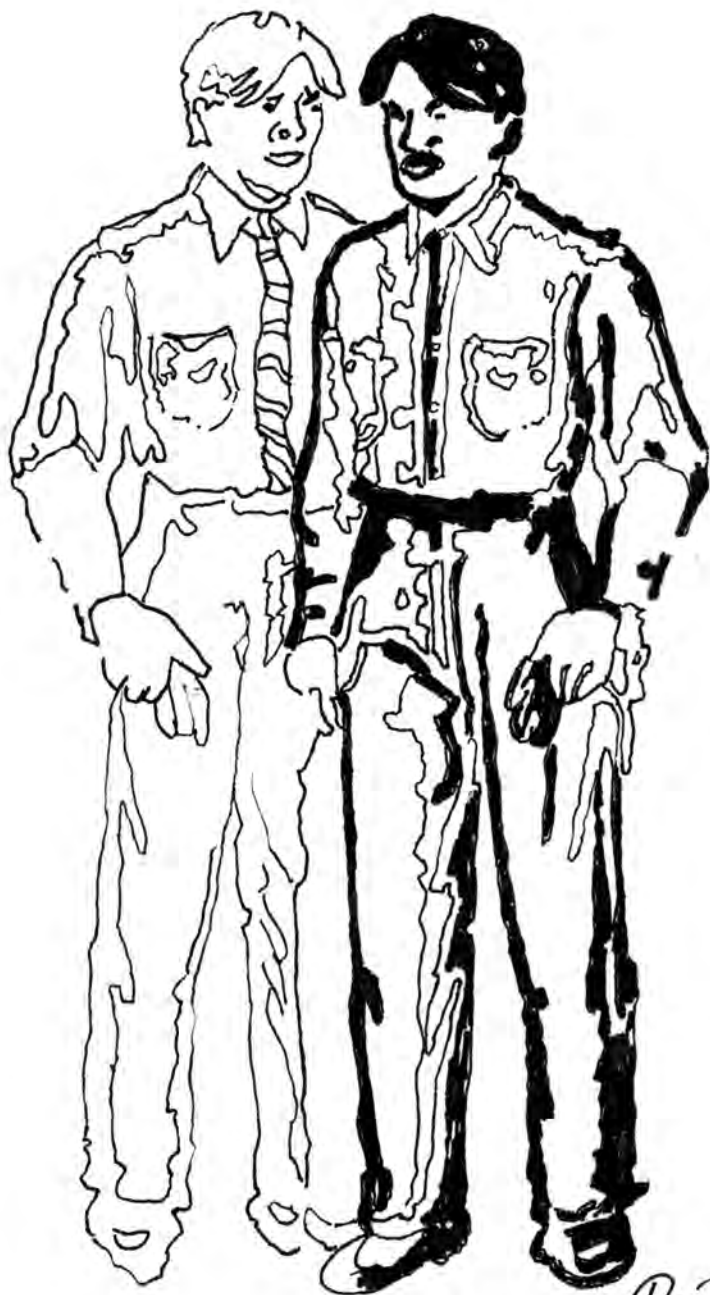
## Starting where teachers are: The influence of beliefs in the literacy coaching relationship

**Objectives:** The purpose of this study was to explore the beliefs held by a reading specialist and three teachers, who all worked in the elementary school setting. The beliefs, which were examined, were the participants' beliefs about education and literacy. The aim was to gain an understanding of how these beliefs influenced the activity of coaching and the coaching relationship.

**Design:** This study is a qualitative case study. The context of the study was considered to be of significant importance for the research question and the study was therefore conducted within a naturalistic research paradigm. The recognition of multiple realities was at the centre of the study, including how the teachers constructed their own realities, which influenced both their personal and professional development - such as coaching. Data was collected over a period of seven months. The primary methods for collecting data consisted of interviewing, observation and surveying. Data was analysed thorough a qualitative comparative method.

**Conclusions:** The study of teachers' beliefs involves much more than simply identifying what teachers

believe. As this study has shown it also involves consideration of the sources of evidence on which beliefs are established, as well as the connections that exist between beliefs. This study has also shed light on ways in which beliefs may impact upon coaching, both through the influence of the coach's beliefs on his/her work and of the teachers' beliefs on the ways they choose to participate in coaching interactions. While this study examined the specific beliefs of these participants as captured over a finite period of time, the implications of the findings for future work with respect to teachers' professional growth and development are promising. Bakhtin (1981) argued, "When someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up" (p. 345). Hopefully with a better understanding of what teachers believe, opportunities will exist for coaching to serve as a contact zone in which new possibilities for understanding and belief can emerge.



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Law, H. (2010). In Palmer, S. (Ed) & McDowall, A. (Ed). *The coaching relationship: Putting people first*, (pp. 182-202). New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

## Coaching relationships and ethical practice

**Objectives:** This chapter underscores that coaches are in need of practical information about ethics with regards to coaching, with the core argument being that there is a lack of practical coaching ethics for coaches, coachees or coaching buyers.

**Design:** Chapter.

**Conclusions:** The chapter defines what ethics are, as well as arguing for why ethics are important in coaching contexts. Difficulties that may arise during the coaching process are discussed, and the chapter offers a case study to illustrate such dilemmas and the impact they might have on the coaching relationship. Another focal point of this chapter is how an ethical approach might look concerning e-mails, web cameras and other modern technological equipment.



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## Introducing an interpersonal perspective on the coaching relationship

**Objectives:** In this chapter, it is argued that an interpersonal perspective is favourable when trying to understand the individual coachee.

**Design:** Chapter.

**Conclusions:** A focus on coaching processes, coaching relationships and interpersonal factors is currently at the forefront of relationship science.

An interpersonal perspective permits that both the coach and the coachee's interpersonal reactions can be in focus.

It is argued that environmental factors should not be overlooked when understanding the coaching relationship, for instance, physical and social environments surrounding the dyad are also of importance.

The authors furthermore argue that the coaching relationship is unique, and explain how it stands out from three other helping relationships.

O'Broin, A. & Palmer, S. (2010). In Palmer, S. (Ed) & McDowall, A. (Ed). *The coaching relationship: Putting people first*, (pp. 9-33). New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

O'Broin, A. & Palmer, S. (2010). In Palmer, S. (Ed) & McDowall, A. (Ed). *The coaching relationship: Putting people first*, (pp. 34-54). New York, NY, US: Routledge / Taylor & Francis Group.

## Building on an interpersonal perspective on the coaching relationship

**Objectives:** Interpersonal perspectives take centre stage in this chapter.

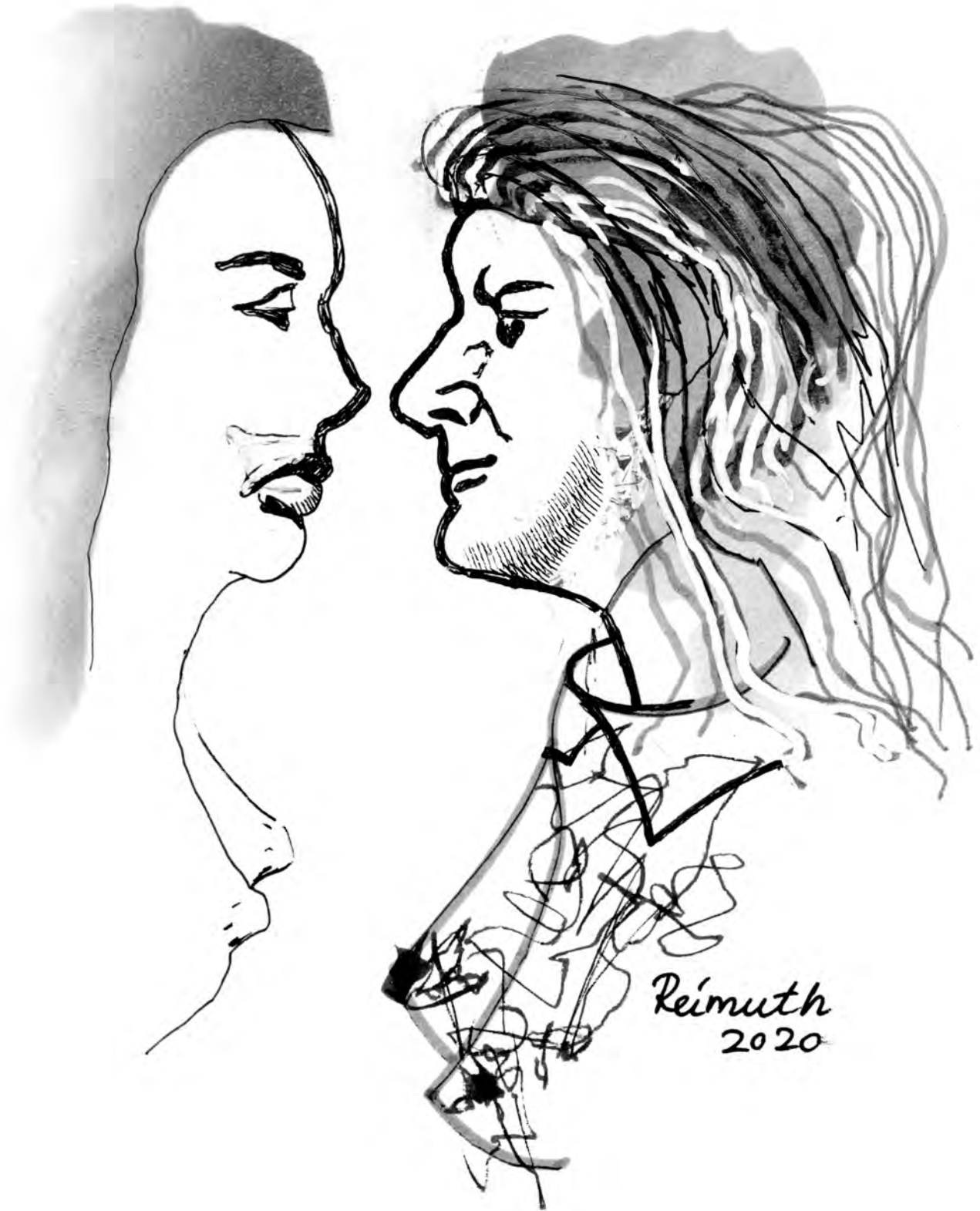
**Design:** Chapter.

**Conclusions:** Five topics especially pertinent to the coaching relationship are viewed through the conceptual lens of interpersonal perspectives.

The first two topics to be considered are the relevance and importance of the psychological contract in the coaching relationship and the role which positive affect might play within it. For instance, might positive affect be linked to the coaching alliance?

The next three topics are maximising the coachee's goal outcomes, coach-coachee matching, and game theory in relation to executive and business coaching.

These are viewed with respect to the relationship context and the use of meta-cognition and skills by the coach.



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Oliver, C. (2010). In Palmer, S. (Ed) & McDowall, A. (Ed). *The coaching relationship: Putting people first*, (pp. 101-120). New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

## Reflexive coaching: Linking meaning and action in the leadership system

**Objectives:** This chapter is written from the point of view of a systemic approach to the coaching relationship. This contrasts with other coaching theories, which emphasise theory as separate from technique. Reflexive coaching and a systemic orientation suggests and supports a depth and breadth of practice. Furthermore, it facilitates a second order approach to coaching whereby principles, assumptions and anticipations about organisational collaboration could be associated with leadership actions.

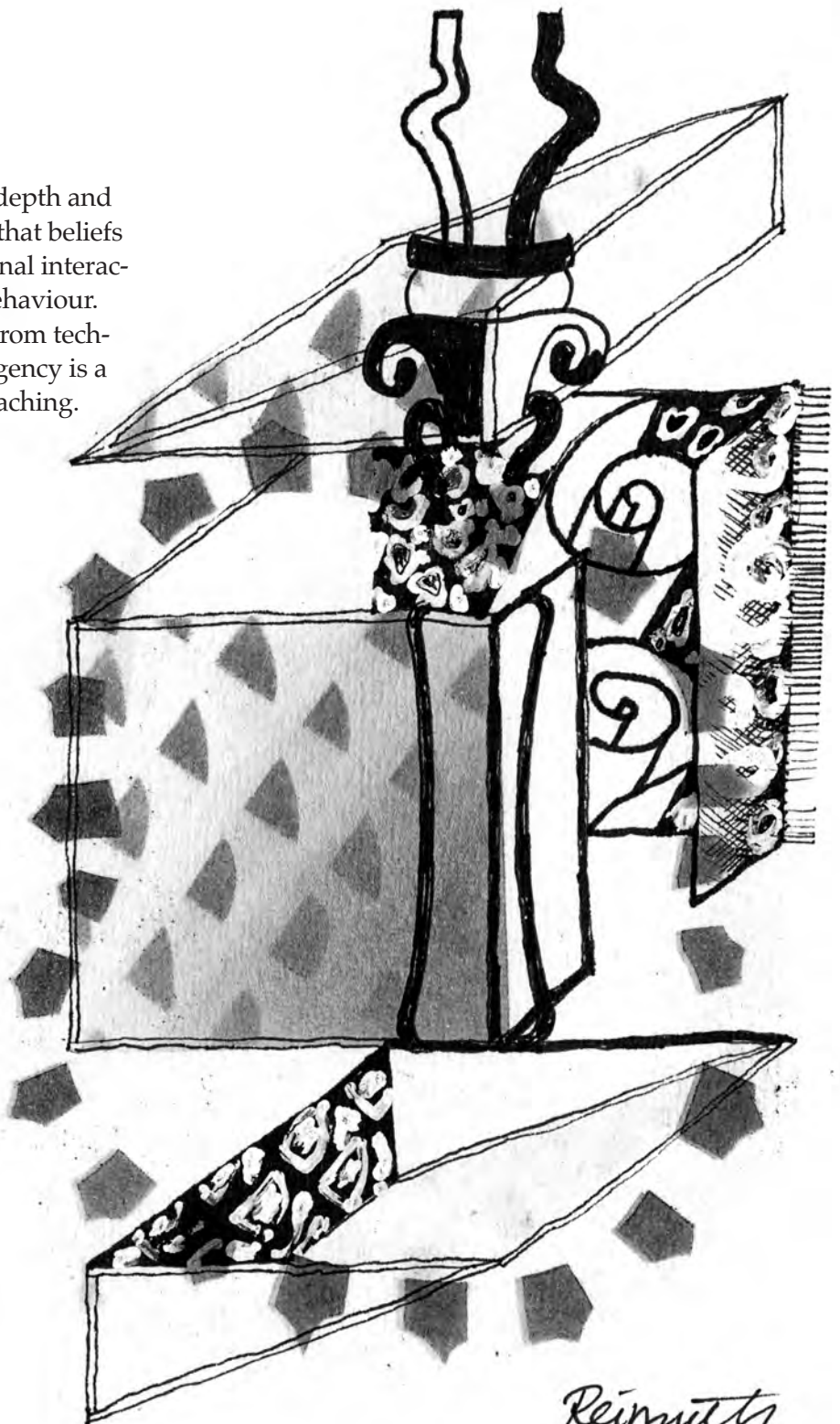
The purposes of this section are to present a different approach to coaching and to suggest how different coaching abilities can be facilitated.

**Design:** The text is, as mentioned above, focused around a systemic approach to coaching and underscores which factors are of particular importance for the coaching relationship as seen from a systematic perspective. Different theoretical perspectives and coaching models are addressed through the chapter including a case example.

**Conclusions:** A systemic approach is a framework that offers understanding and methodological tools, as can be seen in the case example. The focal argument is that an understanding of theory

is vital for gaining insight into the depth and breadth of practice. It is suggested that beliefs and expectations about organisational interactions can be linked to leadership behaviour.

Thereby, theory is not separated from technique in this approach. Reflexive agency is a vital skill, which is important to coaching.



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## The coaching relationship. An introduction

**Objectives:** This book confronts the fact that although the coaching relationship is often referred to in coaching and coaching psychology literature, knowledge about the coaching relationship has been based on limited research.

The book aims to contribute to filling this gap by focusing on different aspects of the coaching relationship.

**Design:** Edited book.

**Conclusions:** The authors offer a comparison between coaching and counselling, pointing out that the former differs from the latter in that improvement of performance is the focal point for coaching, versus elimination of problems, which characterises counselling. However, the relationship is of equal importance in both, and knowledge about this is lacking in the coaching literature.

Palmer, S. (Ed) & McDowall, A., (Ed). (2010). *The coaching relationship: Putting people first.* (pp. 8-12). New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Welman, P. & Bachkirova, T. (2010). In Palmer, S. (Ed) & McDowall, A. (Ed). *The coaching relationship: Putting people first*, (pp. 139-158). New York, NY, US: Routledge / Taylor & Francis Group.

## The issue of power in the coaching relationship

**Objectives:** This chapter criticises the lack of literature regarding power in coaching relationships.

The authors point out that this is puzzling, given that the coaching relationship has proven to be of vital importance, and power affects relationships.

**Design:** Chapter.

**Conclusions:** The chapter is written from the standpoint of helping coaches meet the challenges regarding power that might arise in the coaching process. The authors underscore that they wish to help raise the awareness of the coach, so that power related issues could be effectively dealt with.

In this chapter, the authors conceptualise power and compare it to other concepts to which the topic is related, with the phenomenon of power being discussed in such a way that the chapter can be used as a source of recommendations for coaches.



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O'Broin, A. & Palmer, S.  
(2009). *International Coaching  
Psychology Review*, 4,(2), 184-  
194.

## Co-creating an optimal coaching alliance: A cognitive Behavioural Coaching perspective

**Objectives:** This paper reviews the coaching relationship, taking a Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CBC) perspective.

**Design:** Research paper.

**Conclusions:** In this paper it is argued that the foundation of the collaborative relationship is built upon certain relationship components such as empathy, and the paper identifies how building, establishing and maintaining a good coaching alliance is based on an explicit process of negotiation and re-negotiation.

The authors suggest that a Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CBC) perspective permits the focus to be on both the individuals and the interaction between the coach and the coachee, which can be of aid when establishing and maintaining a coaching alliance.

Factors that mark the difference between a coaching alliance and a therapeutic alliance are for instance power dynamics, time constraints, and a reciprocal requirement for greater adaptability.







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## Anxiety and the coaching relationship: How to recognise the signs and what to do next (Part 2).

**Objectives:** This paper aims to explore anxiety and the coaching relationship, how to recognise the sign, and is a follow-up article to the first one which was published on coaching psychology and clinical disorders in the August 2007 issue of *The Coaching Psychologist*.

**Design:** Research paper.

**Conclusions:** With the goal being to accustom coaching psychologists with disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Acute Stress Disorder (AST), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and health anxiety, this paper focuses on the symptoms of assumed disorders and presents strategies that the coach can use when faced with these. The article presents important hands-on knowledge for the coaching psychologist. How to recognise the signs and what to do next.

Miser, A., L. & Miser, M., F. (2009). In Moral, M. (Ed) & Abbott, G. (Ed). *The Routledge companion to international business coaching*, (pp. 203-217). New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

## Couples coaching for expatriate couples: A sound investment for international businesses

**Objectives:** This paper suggests that expatriates and their spouses should be offered couples coaching, to help them adjust to living outside their native country. The expatriate's employer could assist an expatriate couple in the new residential country, which could promote their healthy adjustment.

**Design:** Research paper arguing for couples coaching relationship.

**Conclusions:** Adjustment satisfaction has traditionally been inaccessible for companies, and failed expatriate assignments are expensive.

The authors argue that an offer of coaching for multinationals can help with family adjustments, and thus be a smart investment for international businesses, and thus results in sound savings for international companies.



Kemp, T. (2008). *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 3(1), 32-42.

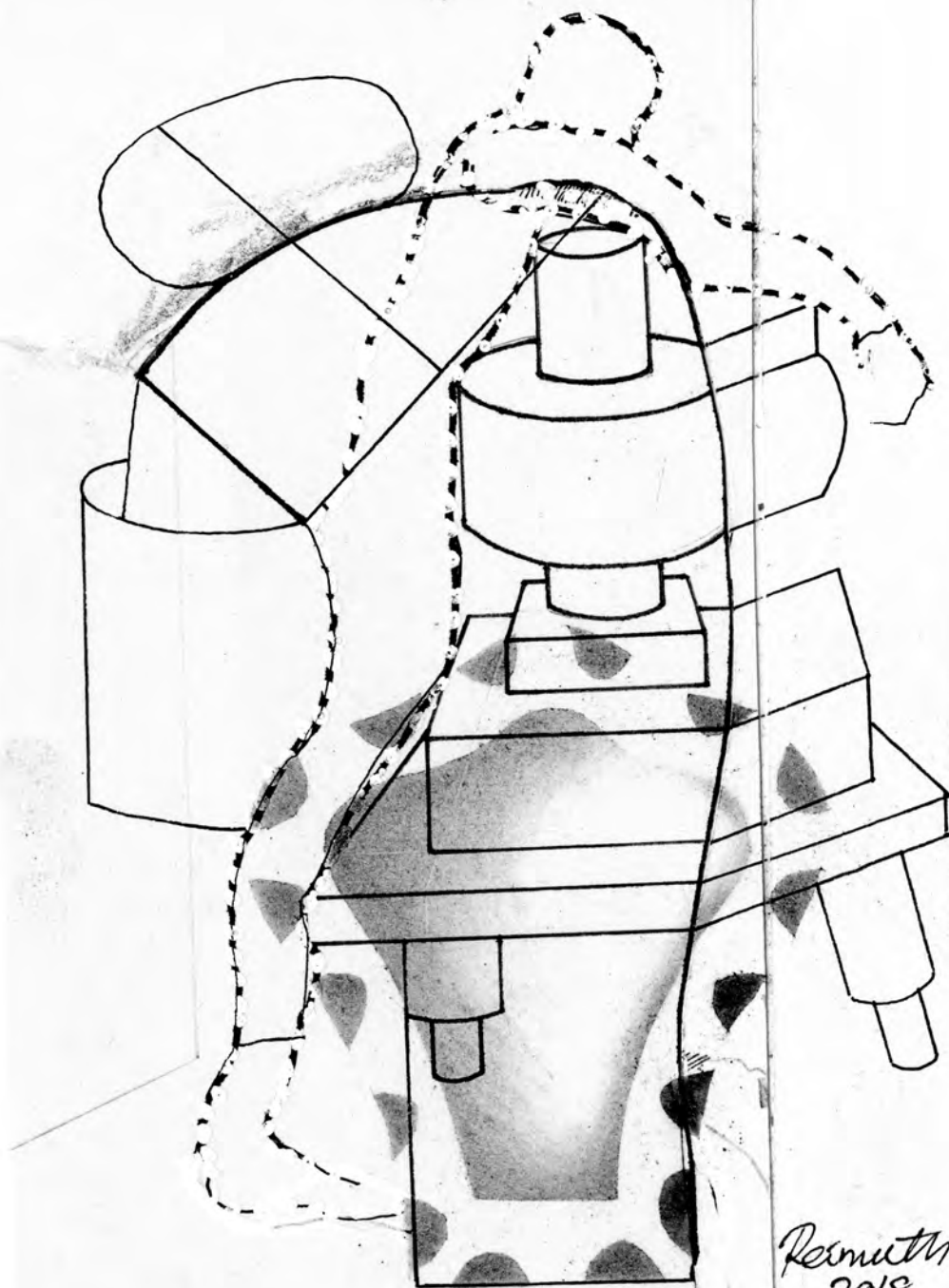
## Self-management and the coaching relationship: Exploring coaching impact beyond models and methods

**Objectives:** This paper goes straight to the core of exploring the coaching relationship in and of itself. It also suggests a theoretical framework for supervision relationships.

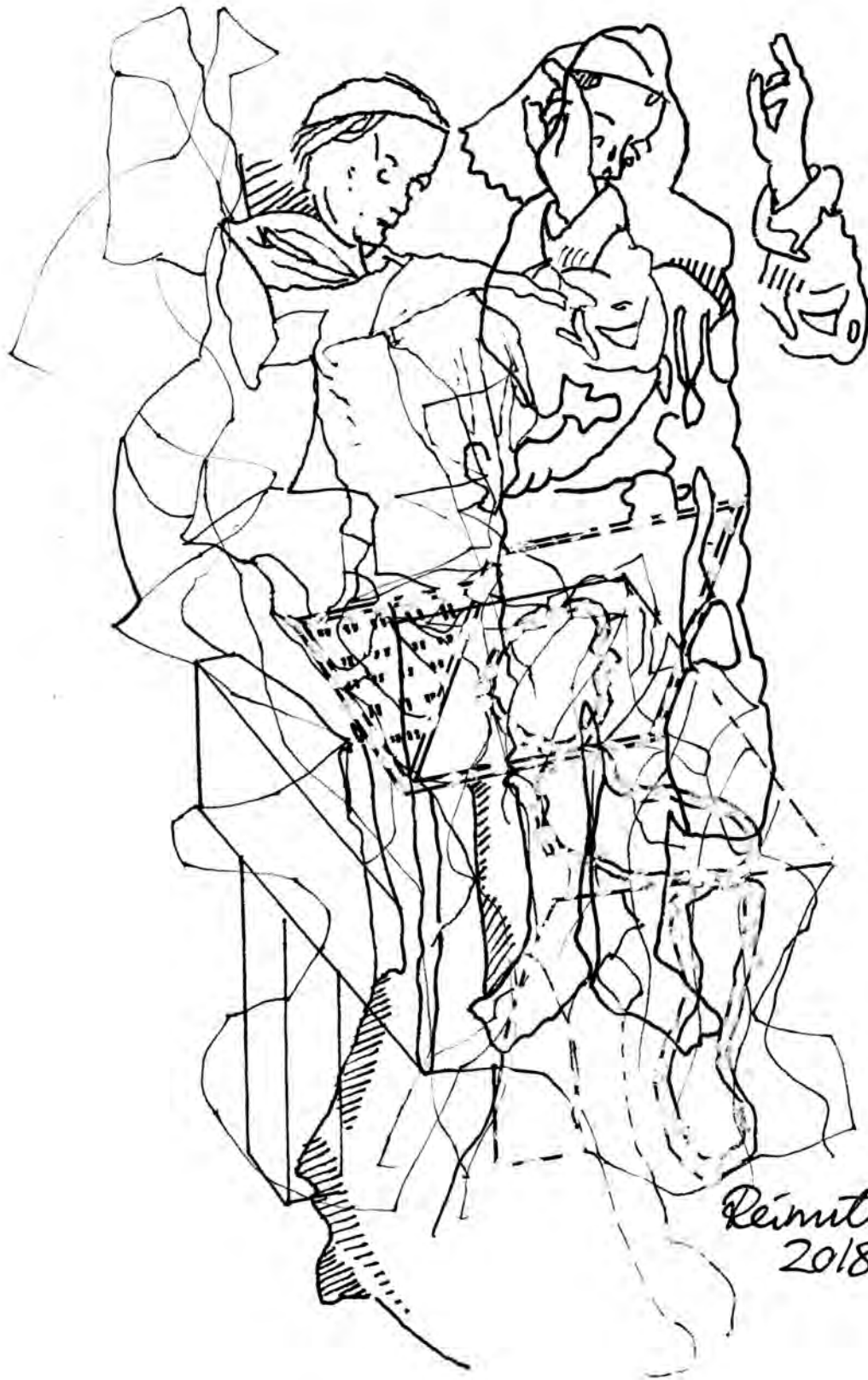
**Design:** Research paper.

**Conclusions:** The author criticises that the interest of coaching psychology literature has mainly been centred on specific coaching methods and their efficacies, thus failing to engage with questions relating to the personality, psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioural constructs of the coach. Such factors might influence, positively or negatively, the coaching relationship and the coaching process.

The author underscores the need for ethical and professional executive coaching practice, and that coaches need healthy, strong supervision relationships. The framework presented operationalises such relationships, as well as the facilitation of coaches' own introspection and continual development.



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Bourne, A. (2008). In Palmer, S. (Ed) & Whybrow, A. (Ed). (2008). *Handbook of coaching psychology: A guide for practitioners*, (pp. 385-403). New York, NY, US: Routledge / Taylor & Francis Group.

## Using psychometrics in coaching

**Objectives:** This chapter introduces the reader to psychometric measurements, and how they can be part of the coaching process. Psychometric measurements, such as tests and questionnaires, provide a means for assessing psychological attributes (e.g. personality, abilities, values or interests). Psychometrics are sometimes used in a coaching context because they are thought to provide information about psychological characteristics. When aiming to facilitate, or gain, greater self-insight, it can be useful to have knowledge about such characteristics.

**Design:** Chapter.

**Conclusions:** The chapter argues that successful use of psychometrics in coaching is dependent upon several factors.

First of all the measure should give specific insight into the intended use, and secondly feedback must be delivered in such a way that the coachee will accept it. Last, but not least, the insights accumulated through the use of psychometrics must lead to positive behavioural changes that are congruent with the coachee's goals. The chapter also explores how the coach can select the most relevant and useful measure, as well as how to give the coachee feedback in a productive way.



Hurley, T. & Staggs, J. (2008). In Passmore, J. (Ed). *Psychometrics in coaching: Using psychological and psychometric tools for development*, (pp. 224-238). London, England: Kogan Page.

## Using archetypes in coaching

**Objectives:** This chapter reviews archetypal patterns of experience and action that tend to be present in a transformative learning process, by drawing upon the archetypal practices model.

**Design:** Chapter.

**Conclusions:** To develop mastery in coaching the coach needs to reach beyond certain “tools” or the application of skill.

The coach needs to be present and trust their intuitive intelligence; this is of importance for coaches themselves.

Furthermore, attention needs to shift from the surface structure to deeper structures; this is of importance for the coaching relationship. Factors such as the supposed influence on the coaching process, and that if the coach is able to achieve these the coach can be more open towards the experiences the coaching process may offer, and will be able to work more effectively.

This chapter explains the use of the archetypal practices model (Hurley, 2003), and outlines how it may aid in the personal and professional development of coaches.



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Passmore, J. (2008). In Passmore, J. (Ed). *Psychometrics in coaching: Using psychological and psychometric tools for development*, (pp. 331-338). London, England: Kogan Page.

## An overview of psychometric questionnaires

**Objectives:** This book presents an overview of psychometric questionnaires, which can be used to assist the coachee in the important work to decide which kind of intervention would be most useful.

**Design:** Book chapter.

**Conclusions:** The authors, in line with the Association for Coaching, advise that coaches make an effort to get to know which psychometric measurements are appropriate for their clients.

Tests and questionnaires are used for assessing psychological attributes such as personality, abilities, values or interests. Psychometrics are useful in a coaching context because they often provides information about psychological characteristics.

Proper assessment of clients and coachees are essential to be knowledgeable about which intervention is feasible.



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## Anxiety and the coaching relationship: How to recognise the signs and what to do next (Part 1)

**Objectives:** This paper seeks to aid coaches in recognising and handling signs of anxiety in the coaching relationship.

**Design:** Research paper.

**Conclusions:** This paper focuses on strategies that coaching psychologists may make use of, should their coachees show signs of panic disorder, specific phobia, and social phobia or generalised anxiety disorder.

This article focuses on the symptoms of assumed disorders and presents strategies that the coach can use when faced with these.

Hence, the paper presents important hands-on knowledge for the coaching psychologist. How to recognise the signs and what to do next.

Cox, E. & Bachkirova, T.  
(2007). *International Coaching  
Psychology Review*, 2(2), 178-  
189.

## Coaching with emotion: How coaches deal with difficult emotional situations

**Objectives:** This study explores coaches' attitudes and personal beliefs regarding emotion in the coaching process, and investigates how coaches deal with difficult emotional situations.

**Design:** This study is a qualitative study, which draws upon the interpretative phenomenological approach. Data was collected through a stem-sentence questionnaire, which included answers from 39 UK coaches. The resulting data was analysed using a grounded theory approach.

**Conclusions:** Coaches have the option of working with emotions (both their own and their clients') during the coaching process. However, they also have the option of overlooking emotions to a certain degree.

The research findings from this study point out that both options are utilised and coaches seem to have diverse points of view regarding this.

The emergent themes from the analysis suggest four ways in which coaches can deal with emotions: 1) using self-reflection or supervision, 2) avoiding tackling the emotion, and instead assigning it to the client, 3) actively exploring with the client, or 4) referral of the client/termination. It was reported that coaches use their own emotions in the coaching process.



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## The coaching relationship: An interpretative phenomenological analysis

**Objectives:** This paper presents the findings of a qualitative study exploring experiences of workplace coaching.

**Design:** A qualitative design was analysed by means of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). The analytical process in an IPA study is based on the data collected, rather than on existing theoretical perspectives. However, the researcher's preconception is not seen as a bias that must be eliminated, but as a necessary circumstance to enable the meaning-creating activity through interpretation. Nine participants from two large organisations were interviewed concerning their experience of coaching.

**Conclusions:** The analysis pointed to "the coaching relationship" as a main theme, comprising of three subthemes: valuable coaching relationship, trust, and transparency.

It is argued, therefore, that the coaching relationship is of great importance for the experience of workplace coaching.

Consequently, it is vital that coaches are working towards creating a good coaching alliance. However, participants noted that this is not the only important ingredient; working towards goals and improving performance were also pointed out as germane.

Dunn, P., E. (2007). *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 67, 11-B, 6762.

## Client's perception of change as result of a professional relationship

**Objectives:** This study seeks to explore the effect that coaching has on clients. The author points out that this topic seems to be lacking in the current literature.

**Design:** A questionnaire and a survey were conducted. The former was centred on the reason for the coachee's hiring of the coach, as well as their greatest outcome and experience from the coaching process. The latter, namely the survey, consisted of thirty Likert scale items, and was used in the hope of determining whether the coachees had felt a significant change in the way they viewed their problem-solving abilities, sense of self-efficacy, and satisfaction with life as a result of being coached. Eighty participants, with the average age being forty-six, were enrolled in this study. Seventy-seven lived in the US, two in Canada, and one in the UK. Ninety-four percent of the participants were college educated, 56 percent held advanced degrees, and they had diverse occupations amongst them.

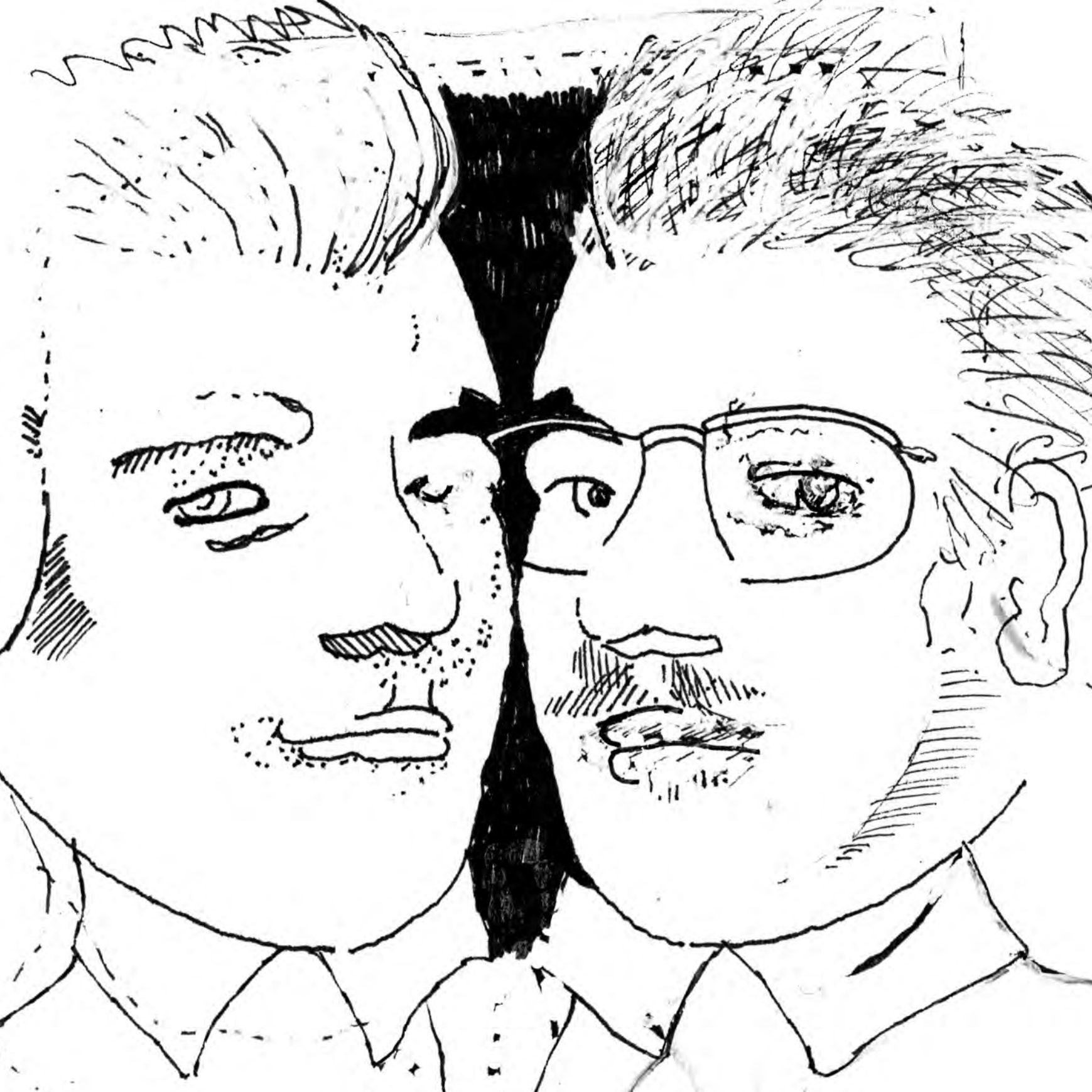
Master Certified Coaches coached all coachees for at least six months.

**Conclusions:** The study suggests that the coachees hired their coach for three primary reasons: 1) to become more effective at setting and reach-

ing career goals, 2) to create and experience a more fulfilling life, and 3) for the experience of personal growth. As to the payback, they perceived from the coaching, four common answers were given: 1) an increased ability to handle problems that occurred both in and out of work, 2) a deeper sense of self-awareness and an increased sense of self-efficacy, 3) a positive relationship that encouraged personal growth, and 4) an increased feeling of satisfaction with life.

The findings suggest that coachees who have received coaching for at least six months felt there was a meaningful change in their problem-solving abilities, their sense of self-efficacy, and satisfaction with life.





## Competence: Getting, Growing and Measuring Coaching Ability

**Objectives:** This chapter aims to inform both coaches and coachees about *what* masterful coaching competence really is.

It offers answers to questions such as: How do coaches develop and grow competence? How does one measure the success of a coaching process?

Questions such as these are relevant for both parties of the coaching dyad, as the coach wants to know if the coaching is up to par, and the coachee wants to know if a masterful coach was chosen.

**Design:** Chapter.

**Conclusions:** It is suggested that competence is a scale of growth for the coach, and competence is seen as something that can be both *needed* and *used* by the coach. The chapter discusses how this can be done, and furthermore makes suggestions as to how coaches can gain additional competence.

Krigbaum, M. (2006). In Williams, P. & Anderson, S., K. *Law & ethics in coaching: How to solve and avoid difficult problems in your practice*, (pp. 64-83). Hoboken, NJ, US: John Wiley & Sons.

Kwiatkowski, R. (2006). In Brunning, H. (Ed). *Executive coaching: Systems-psychodynamic perspective*, (pp. 153-181). London, England: Karnac Books.

## Inside-out and outside-in: The use of personality and 360 degree data in executive coaching

**Objectives:** This chapter focuses on the coaching relationship, and more specifically, on how the coach can make use of diverse tools to get to know the client.

**Design:** Chapter.

**Conclusions:** The author describes two favourable methods that are frequently used: Personality measures and 360 Degree Feedback (naming these as respectively “inside-out and outside-in” sources of data).

The author also provides a case study and considers Brunning`s recent model of coaching, (2006).

When the coach understands the personality of the coachee, the coach can use that knowledge to structure engagement and communication, and to engage with the coachee`s viewpoints.



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Pooley, J. (2006). In Brunning, H. (Ed). *Executive coaching: Systems-psychodynamic perspective*, (pp. 113-130). London, England: Karnac Books.

## Layers of meaning: A coaching journey

**Objectives:** In this chapter, we encounter an exploration of how executive coaching relationships might be developed, through the use of different lenses. “The life cycle of a coaching relationship” provides the framework for this exploration, and the chapter demonstrates how the executive coaching relationship can bring about increased leadership potential.

**Design:** Chapter.

**Conclusions:** The first lens the author uses is exploration: how do coaching relationships unfold?  
The second lens gives us insight into the theoretical paradigms, such as systemic, psychoanalytic, and attachment theories.  
This second lens offers an exploration of the dynamics that are at play when a coaching relationship is developed.  
The author suggests a framework called “the life cycle of a coaching relationship” to validate how a fruitful coaching relationship could release both leadership potential and leadership resources.



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Laske, O., E. (1997). *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 60, 5-B, Nov 1999, 2386.

## Transformative effects of coaching on executive's professional agenda

**Objectives:** This study is an exploration of how coaching might benefit the relationships of executives, from the vantage point of constructive-developmental psychology. It uses methods from clinical and neuropsychological assessment.

**Design:** The author developed an epistemological instrument for assessing, prognosticating, and monitoring coaching outcome, both of individuals and groups. This tool is called the Developmental Structure/Process Tool (DSPTTM), and it resolves dichotomies between structure and process in adult development, stage and non-stage conceptions of development, and between self and role in supporting personnel development in organisations. Six executives were interviewed in this study (through two focused interviews each) during the time of their coaching process.

**Conclusions:** This study illustrates the prerequisites for developing a coaching relationship. The analysis points to developmental change (in contrast to learning) as something that takes place in some coachees, but not all.

It is suggested that this is linked to lifespan maturity. Moreover, the study presents a critique of current theories, and suggests that neither behavioural nor psychodynamic ap-

proaches are ideal in and of themselves, needing to be supplemented by constructive-developmental approaches.



Jowett, S., Kanakoglou, K. & Passmore, J. (2012). *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 64,(3), 183-197.

## The application of the 3+1C's relationship model in executive coaching

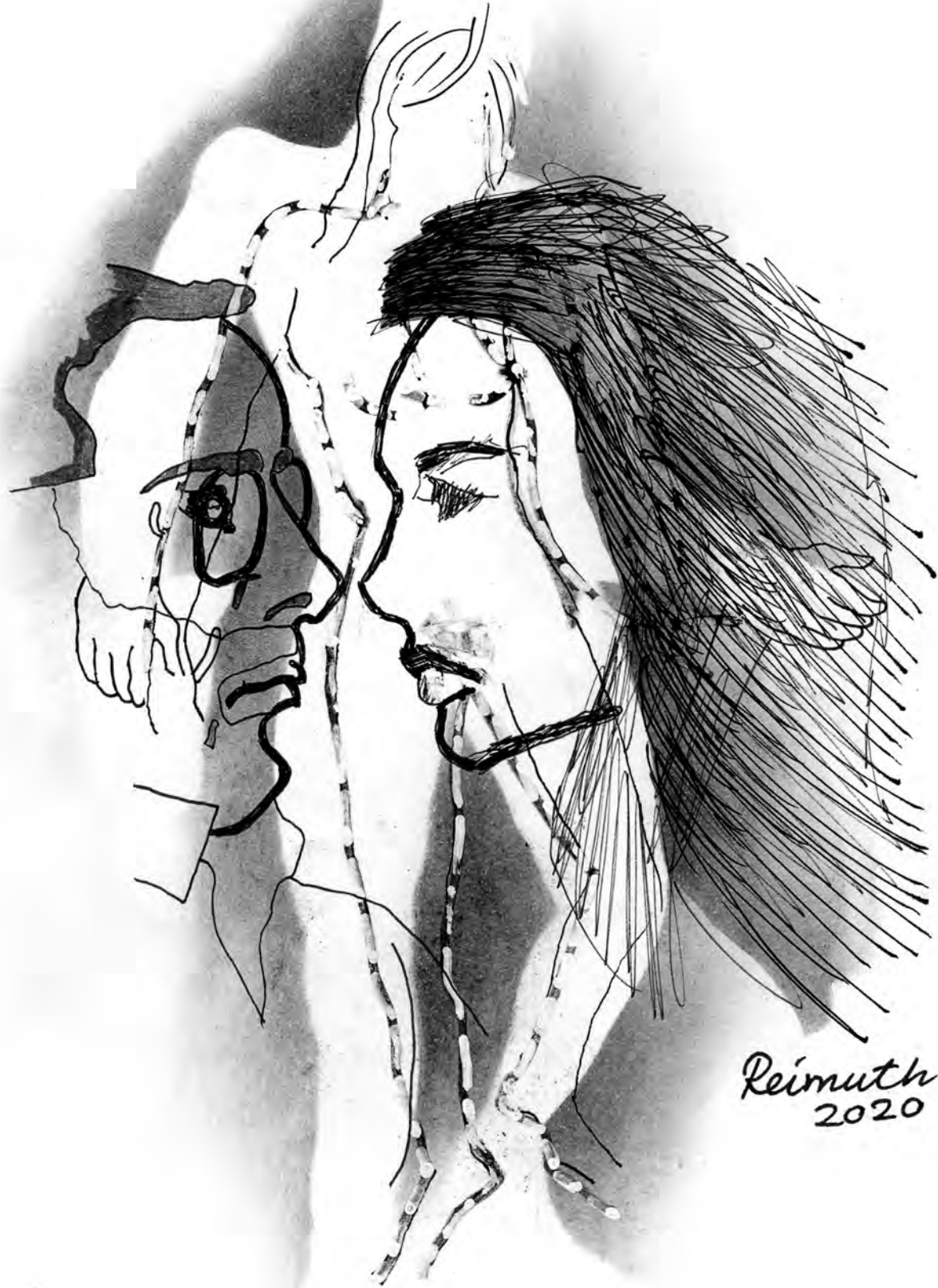
**Objectives:** This study provides an in depth exploration of the coaching relationship through the application of the 3+1C's model.

**Design:** Qualitative. Five coach-coachee dyads completed semi structured interviews, which in turn were content analysed.

**Conclusions:** The analysis points to closeness as being a crucial factor in the coaching relationship, and the present study used the 3+1C's (Closeness, Commitment, Complementarity and Co-orientation) relationship model.

Closeness was defined as “of mutual trust and respect, Commitment in terms of developing a partnership that is thought to be close and lasting, as well as willing and motivating, and Complementarity in terms of working well together while understanding the specific roles each has to take” (p. 191).

Communication where the parties had a feeling of being Co-oriented concerning the coaching relationship was also of great importance. The study endorses the coaching relationship as being an important factor, and suggests that the 3+1C's model is an effective approach.



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Gregory, J., B. & Levy, P., E. (2011). *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 63(2), 67-88.

## It's not me, it's you: A multilevel examination of variables that impact employee coaching relationships

**Objectives:** This article investigates employee-coaching relationships. Employee coaching is when a manager or supervisor coaches an employee.

**Design:** The study makes use of a multilevel modelling approach.

**Conclusions:** The results suggest that the supervisors' individual consideration, empathy, trust, and the feedback environment are all important factors that have a significant impact on employees' evaluations of their coaching relationships.

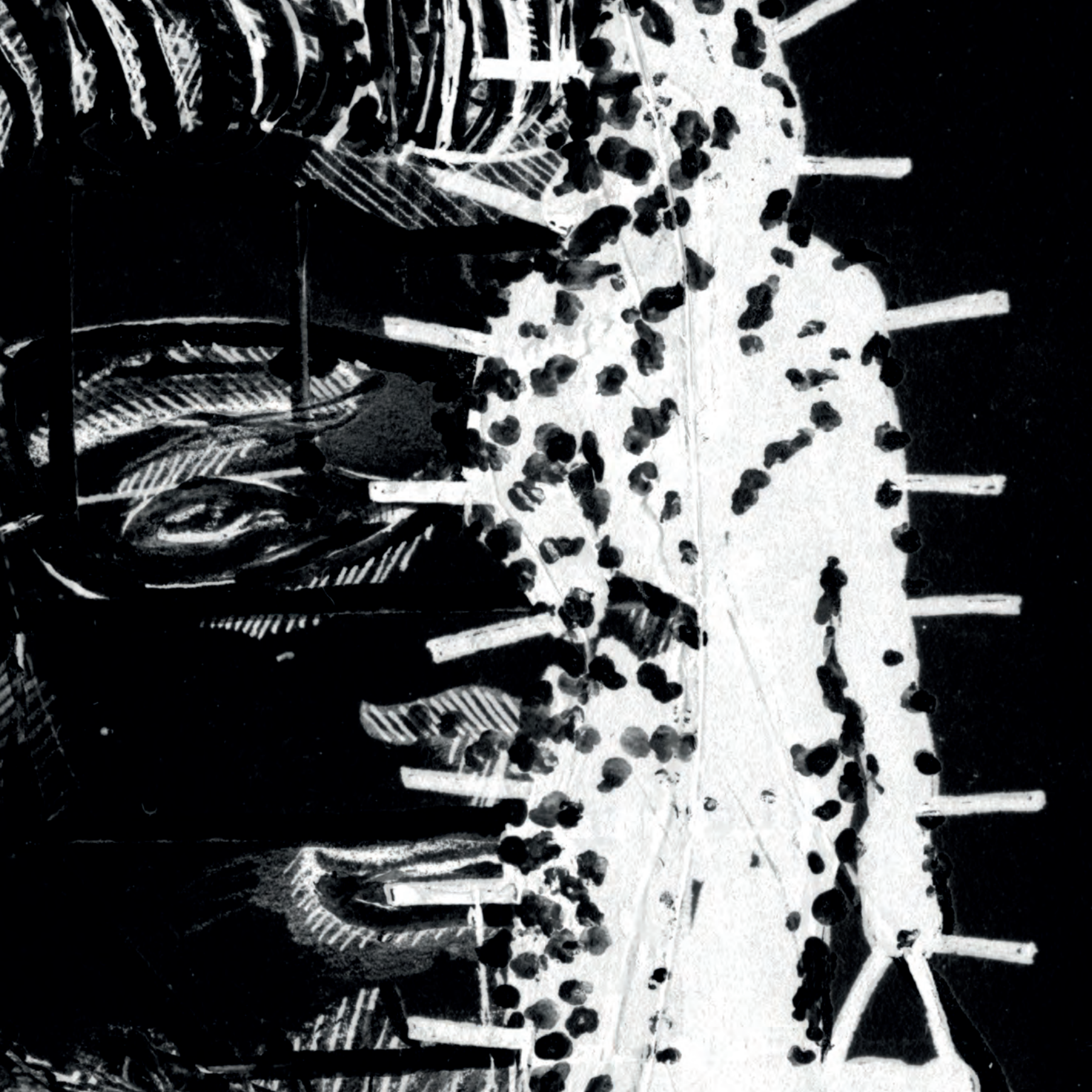
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The study makes use of a multilevel modelling approach. The results suggest that the supervisors' individual consideration, empathy, trust, and the feedback environment are all important factors that have great impact on employees' evaluations of their coaching relationships.



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# 4 Extended in-depth overview of research findings

In the following section, an overview of research findings identified from the forty-two studies will be further elaborated upon. Important points and conclusions from the studies will be addressed to back up and emphasise the importance of each bullet-point. In order to initiate a more nuanced and transparent insight into the coaching relationship other perspectives that were gathered beyond the literature search, from interviews and case stories, will be included in combination and arranged with the forty-two studies from the literature search.

- **The effect of the coach's personality and ability to be empathic, trustworthy and non-judgmental in the working alliance is highlighted as an important finding;**

Several of the forty-two studies included in the literature search support the notion that the coach's personality and personal abilities have an impact on the coaching alliance and outcome. Lai et al. (2016), as well as others, found that the coach should promote the coaching relationship through

so-called “soft skills” and “hard skills”. The “soft skills” included aspects such as the ability to listen actively. Another study found that trust was the most important factor in the coaching relationship and that trust is best achieved when the coach is able to take a non-judgmental stance, has a certain level of empathy and the ability to listen (Machin et al., 2010). In extension to this, it seems that the coach’s personality traits have an impact on the coaching process and outcome (Lai & McDowall, 2014). The coach contributes significant amounts to the effectiveness of coaching processes and outcomes (Spaten et al., 2016; Spaten, 2019). Lai & McDowall (2014, 2016) found that five key coach attributes played an especially important role in the effectiveness of both the coaching process and its outcome. The five key attributes were identified as: building trust; understanding and managing coaches’ emotional difficulties; two-way communication; facilitation and helping coachees’ learning and development; and finally putting a clear contract and transparent process in place (O’Broin, 2016).

- **Commitment to process and goals from both the coach and the coachee is central to a successful coaching outcome. The goal-oriented focus is an important part of coaching. The coach and coachee should establish mutually agreed goals**

Another point, which can be summarised from the forty-two studies, is that the goal-oriented focus of the coaching context is paramount and has an impact on the coaching outcome. Gessnitzer and Kauffeld, (2015) found that client-initiated agreement on goals was positively related to a successful coaching outcome. Then again, at the same time, coach-initiated agreement on goals had the opposite effect.

Homework assignments are a large part of the goal-oriented focus in the coaching setting and research supports the idea that homework assignments have their greatest effect if agreed upon and assessed in collaboration between coach and coachee. However, the coachee should work on his or her goals between the sessions in order to achieve the best coaching outcome, which is consistent with the client-initiated agreement on goals (Spaten, 2018). Engaged clients are in general more likely to achieve success through the coaching process, according to Gessnitzer and Kauffeld (2015). Other studies have emphasised that the goal-oriented focus is found everywhere across the major “schools” of coaching psychology (Spaten, 2018).

- **It is important for the coach to have a solid ethical foundation**

There seems to be a lack of information for coaches regarding practical coaching ethics. Law (2010) emphasises that ongoing attention and dialogue regarding ethical values during the coaching sessions can help build the interpersonal relationship between coach and coachee. Ethical coaching can also support the process of both the coach and coachee in further development of their human values, which can be understood as being at the core of a good coaching relationship. Further ethical coaching can also help the coachee in the process of his or her personal development including personal growth and goals.

- **It is important for the coach to have sufficient psychological education in order to understand the different emotional aspects of the coaching process and hence to be able to differentiate between diverse intervention forms**

A number of recent studies have identified professional psychological training as an essential factor in understanding the coachee's emotional state and other emotional aspects of the coachee's experience (Lai & McDowall, 2014). Sufficient psychological training is considered important in order for the coach to recognise the signs of a client/coachee with a more severe psychological disorder and for the coach to know which strategies to apply in this situation (Szymanska, 2009). Spaten (2018) addresses the importance of the professional being able to differentiate between different interventions, such as psychotherapy, coaching and/or coaching psychology. The professional working with a client/coachee must have the psychological education, knowledge and experience to make informed choices regarding differential diagnoses and hence to be able to refer the client to the appropriate kind of helping profession.

- **The coach has to pay attention to issues of power in the coaching context including the asymmetrical relation between coach and coachee**

In order for the coaching relationship to be a productive and trusting relationship the coach should be aware of power issues (Spaten & Flensburg, 2013). There is a lack of literature on power issues, which is a major shortcoming since the topic is of vital importance for the coaching relationship and must be effectively dealt with. In a chapter written by Welman & Bachkirova (2010) the issues of power in the coaching context and how power can affect the coaching relationship were addressed. Both studies mentioned above are directed towards raising the coach's awareness of power issues and hence educating and preparing the coach to address the asymmetry in the relationship between coach and coachee.



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Another important aspect for the coach to take into consideration is that the power dynamics in the coaching setting can vary in the way they evolve compared to how they appear in a therapeutic alliance (O'Broin & Palmer, 2009).

- **It is important for the coach to have a solid theoretical foundation, but the coach's personality and interpersonal relations play a vital role in the coaching relationship and outcome**

A common disagreement and much-discussed issue in the coaching profession is to what extent theoretical implications, techniques and methods influence the coaching relationship and its outcomes. Different theoretical paradigms such as systemic, psychoanalytic and attachment theories offer diverse explorations of the dynamics in the coaching relationship (Pooley, 2006). Some studies claim that the understanding of theory is an important aspect of coaching in practice in order to gain sufficient insight (Oliver, 2010). In an article by Spaten (2018) the similarities and differences between psychotherapy, coaching psychology and coaching are addressed, emphasising that in the field of coaching, theory and technology account for 18% of the variance in outcome, whereas the relationship between coach and coachee only accounts for 8%. These findings, originally described in Grant (2014), are supported by earlier studies done by Segers and Vloeberghs (2009), i.e. that theory and techniques are more significant in coaching than they are in therapy. In psychotherapy, the relationship seems to be of greater importance, accounting for 30% of variance. Hence, it can be recognised that theory and technology play a larger role in the coaching setting and have a greater influence on the coaching outcome when compared to psychotherapy – according

to these studies (Grant, 2014, 2019). Newer, and more, research is needed to discuss or maybe even to counter the argument of these initial findings. However, this literature search emphasised that the relationship is still an essential factor in coaching and contains 'active ingredients' which are crucial to the coaching outcome. A number of studies have found a positive correlation between the coaching relationship and the results of the coaching sessions (Spaten et al., 2016).

- **The coach should continually reflect and develop upon their experience and practice of coaching**

A feature of the early coaching relationship research was that the coaching relationship was perceived as a more egalitarian and collaborative process (O'Broin, 2016). Recent research has been centred upon the importance of the coach attending to his or her own practice. The coach should continue to facilitate his or her own introspection and continual development (Travis, 2018), e.g. during regular, frequent supervision and consistent moments of reflective practice.





# 5 Discussion and summary of important factors regarding the coaching relationship

The papers and chapters presented above as part of the literature search (and supplemented through cases and interviews) point to the coaching relationship as a fundamental, principal and essential component in successful coaching. Different components of the relationship can be understood as important, playing a supplementary role across both qualitative and quantitative studies. In addition, reflective critical discussions have been presented, e.g. about coaching psychology as a proto- or pseudo-science (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Grant, 2008) and on a more general level about how to secure the evidence base, what “so-called proper” science is (Denzin, 2009, 2010), and how quality can be improved through evidence-based practice (Lockhart, 2011). The evidence base has developed and matured considerably since then, and today there exists a significant amount of coaching and coaching relationship research (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018).

Further discussions and summaries will include the coach’s awareness of the dynamics at play in the coaching relation (Cavicchia, 2010; Pooley, 2006; O’Broin & Palmer, 2010a). The

coach needs to have sufficient professional psychological training to understand and manage the emotional aspects of the coachee's experience (Lai & McDowall, 2014). However, coaches need to pay attention not only to the coachee's emotions and behaviour but also to themselves. Some coaches report using their own emotions in the coaching process (Cox, 2007; Hurley, 2008), and a number of the studies point to the personality of the coach as a central component in the development of the relationship (Hurley, 2008; Kwiatkowski, 2006; Lai, & McDowall, 2014; Kemp, 2008).

### Being empathic, non-judgmental, congruent and trustworthy in culture

The role of the coach's empathic skills has been emphasised as one of the central aspects of the coach's personality, within reviews, interviews and case studies. Empathy and congruence have also been identified as important variables in the establishment of the coaching relationship. Findings relating to the role of trust have been discussed within several studies. Trust in the coach can be identified as a key factor for the coachee and for the coaching relationship in general (O'Broin, 2016). However, the coachee's personality must also be taken into account in the coaching setting. The coach must understand the personality of the coachee in order to structure the sessions and create a fruitful interpersonal relationship (Kwiatkowski, 2006).

In sum; when the coach is able to be empathic, non-judgmental and trustworthy (Machin, 2010; Jowett, 2012) it seems to have a positive effect on the relationship and the coaching alliance. This also implies that the coach needs to reflect upon the coaching practice and be aware of the implications different theoretical frameworks have for coaching (Oliver, 2010, Cox, 2007, Dunn, 2007). Several of the studies stress that an understanding of theory and technique plays an important role in

the coaching profession. An understanding of theory is vital to gaining insight into the depth and breadth of coaching practice (Palmer & McDowall, 2010). Another important aspect, which the coach must take into consideration, is how culture can influence the coaching relationship. In Eastern cultures, the social hierarchy influences the role of the coach and the coach must therefore be able to adapt their working style to the specific culture (Nangalia & Nangalia 2010; O’Broin 2016). One of the most important findings from the research done by Gyllensten (2020) is that the “...coaching relationship is perceived as valuable by coachees, and it is dependent on trust and improved by transparency. Therefore, it is important that coaches are aware of, and are working with, the coaching relationship. Nevertheless, the relationship is not the only factor making coaching useful. Working towards goals and improving performance are also valuable components of coaching”.

### Commitment to the process and goals of coaching

Commitment to the process and goals of coaching must come from both the coachee and the coach (Jowett, 2012; Gan 2015). Many authors have pointed to this sense of commitment as one of the core components of the coaching alliance (Machin, 2010; Gan, 2015; Kemp, 2008; Kringbaum 2006). Establishing mutually agreed goals is of significant importance to the coaching outcome, but the coachee must be the one who initiates the agreed upon goals in order to gain the most favourable outcome. The coachee must also be ready for change and improvement of performance in order to reach his or her goals (Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2015, Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007; Machin, 2010, Lai & McDowall, 2016; Palmer & Whybrow, 2019). As addressed above, reaching the goals can be seen as a collaborative effort (Cook, 2013) and this collaboration can also be extended to ne-

gotiation of the power balance in the coach/coachee relationship (O’Broin, 2009, Wellman, 2010). Several of the studies reviewed above have addressed the issue of power.

### The power relationship in a productive working alliance

One of the main conclusions that can be extracted from the forty-two studies, case studies and interviews is that the coaching relationship is best maintained as a productive working alliance through the coach paying attention to the power relationship (Sapezinskiene et al., 2016). The coach must be aware of the existence of power in order to empower the coachee and create intentional symmetry (Spaten & Flensburg, 2013). In a more recent text (Spaten, 2016) the issue of whether symmetry “as such” exists in the relationship between the coach and the coachee has been discussed, and the reasoning for this will be considered in the following. It might be useful to apply a “helix-figure” as a symbolic representation of the phenomena, especially when we take into account the occurrence of symmetry in the coach-coachee relationship. The helix object has infinite, endless, and unlimited symmetry, just like a circle, but unlike a circle, the helix will allow for moments of symmetry along the long axis of the object. Transferring this idea to the coaching relationship, symmetry within the setting of coaching is based on the fundamental notion that the coach is “on another level”, by dint of their greater experience and knowledge concerning coaching psychology. The conclusion, which can be drawn from the general coaching relationship research on the power issue, is that the most fruitful coaching alliance is created when the coachee experiences at least moments of symmetry and equality with the coach (O’Broin et al., 2016; Sapezinskiene et al., 2016).

The coach should be able to adapt to the coachee and use appropriate tools both to get to know the coachee but also in order to help them reach their goals (Kwiatkowski, 2006; Passmore, 2008; Bourne, 2008). Both Law and Kemp argue that there is a need for increased attention to the ethical implications of coaching in order to deal with both the problems that may arise in the coaching process and with respect to modern communication technologies (Law, 2010; Kemp, 2008). The increased focus on the coaching relationship, particularly within the last ten years, has pointed to the importance of research in this area, and to it being something coaches must reflect upon in their daily practice. During the interview with Dr Alanna (O’Broin) Henderson, some of the most important findings concerning the coaching relationship and the coaching alliance were discussed:

“My PhD research was conducted and written up between 2006 and 2013, and it is interesting to assess its findings in the context of today’s research on the coaching relationship. Since I began my research, there have been a succession of studies finding an association between the working alliance and outcome (e.g. Baron & Morin, 2009), including larger studies exploring the Working Alliance as a common factor contributing to coaching outcome (de Haan et al., 2013; de Haan et al., 2016). Lately, reflecting an increasing recognition of the complex association between interactive variables in the coaching process, the coaching relationship has been conceptualised in various ways. 1) As a mediating variable (for instance de Haan et al., 2016); 2) in a process-outcome model as *emotional support* (Zimmermann & Antoni, 2020); and 3) as Working Alliance – construed as a *coachee propensity* to relate rather than a relational variable (de Haan et al., 2020)”, (Henderson, 2020).

Considering this, further developments and main findings of interest are:

## How could co-operation be understood as a possible area for investigation?

- Collaboration was found to be the central salient component of the coaching relationship, (O’Broin Henderson, 2013).
- There were a variety of perspectives as to the characteristics, and degree, of collaboration sought.
- Within the component of collaboration respect (for the person of the coach), shared understanding, and support (both outside and within the coaching session) were aspects found to be particularly salient.
- Collaboration in the Principal Component Analysis conducted in the study comprised of Collaboration, Bond and Engagement, and Coach Attitude and Characteristics, which were aspects identified as sub-themes in phase 1 of the research study (O’Broin Henderson, 2013).

Bordin’s conceptualisation of Working Alliance (1979, 1994) focuses on collaboration between coach and coachee being achieved in three areas: Goals, Tasks and Bonds” (Henderson, 2020). Bordin’s idea is that co-operation leads to an alliance, or it is understood because of a shared undertaking (collaboration), and not something that happens in and of itself. The alliance works at a different theoretical level to other relationship concepts, such as warmth, authenticity, and empathy. In coaching research conducted by Fillery-Travis and Lane (2006) and Zimmermann and Antoni (2018), and in psychotherapy research literature (Horvath, 2018), it has been insisted that the development of theoretical models dealing with coaching and psychotherapy processes respectively are necessary (Henderson, 2020). Following on from this idea, Henderson (2020) continues that the questions therefore are “(i) do we need to examine the different nature of alliance and other relationship variables, and

(ii) how do these variables relate to each other? Is collaboration, in coaching, for example a generic component?" (See Horvath, 2018, p. 512). Additionally, Henderson questions whether the field should emphasis the coachee's active confident collaboration since it has been associated as the common denominator variable for working alliance (Hatcher et al., 1995).

### Commitment, non-commitment, and re-commitment openings

In the research done by Alanna O'Broin Henderson commitment and engagement have been discussed in earlier writings (O'Broin, 2016, 2019). This was followed up during my interview with Alanna in the autumn of 2020 by the following important points:

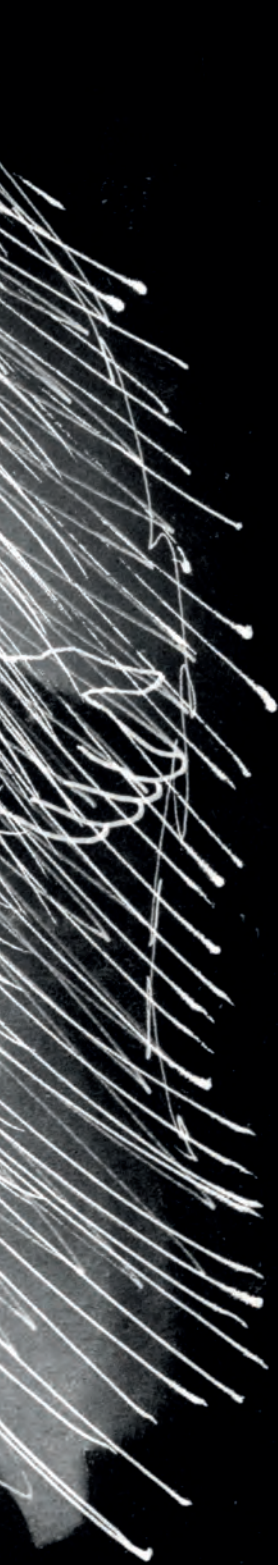
- Esteem and "respect for the coach suggested an alternative route for engagement with the coachee, as opposed to the generally discussed aspects of liking and rapport (for instance in the Bond sub-scale of the Working Alliance).
- The Bond aspect of the coaching relationship was a broader concept than liking, and was linked to other aspects of engagement (such as openness, rapport, listening) and dis-engagement.
- Openness appeared to be an important aspect for both engagement and re-engagement with respect to the identification of relational strains or disruptions to the coaching relationship.
- The Bond aspect was characterised in different ways by different participants, suggesting the relevance of adapting to the individual coachee" (Henderson, 2020).

Research studies propose a more nuanced role for the Bond in the coaching relationship. This is the case with respect to





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the Bond's relation, the Bond's composition, and the Bond's relative position to Tasks and Goals. Variables at work in the cycle of commitment, non-commitment and re-commitment or "engagement, disengagement, and re-engagement are also suggested to be worthy of further investigation in terms of the management of alliance fluctuations and critical moments (see Zimmermann & Antoni, 2018: p. 21; de Haan, 2019; p. 238)" (Henderson, 2020). This is also considered in several other studies not mentioned here.

### Adjusting to the coachee

Henderson found that adjusting or "adapting to the coachee, particularly in respect of coach style, was found to be universally applicable across coachee and coach participants."

Furthermore it was found (Henderson 2020) that both coachee and coach participants emphasised the importance of the coach adapting to the coachee (see Dryden, 2017), although how to adapt, when, and how varied (ibid.). The research community needs to conduct additional studies to validate these findings and to acquire knowledge about "how and when the coach can most beneficially do so" (ibid.).

### Is it possible to quantify and assess the coaching alliance?

Once again, a grand homage to the earlier scholars in coaching relationship research must be made. Some of the most significant research is pinpointed below:

"As part of the assessment of concurrent validity of the questionnaire developed in the second phase of the research (FCCRQ), a comparison was made of its Total scores with the WAI-S alliance which were highly significantly correlated ( $r = .67$ ) suggesting that the constructs measured by the respec-

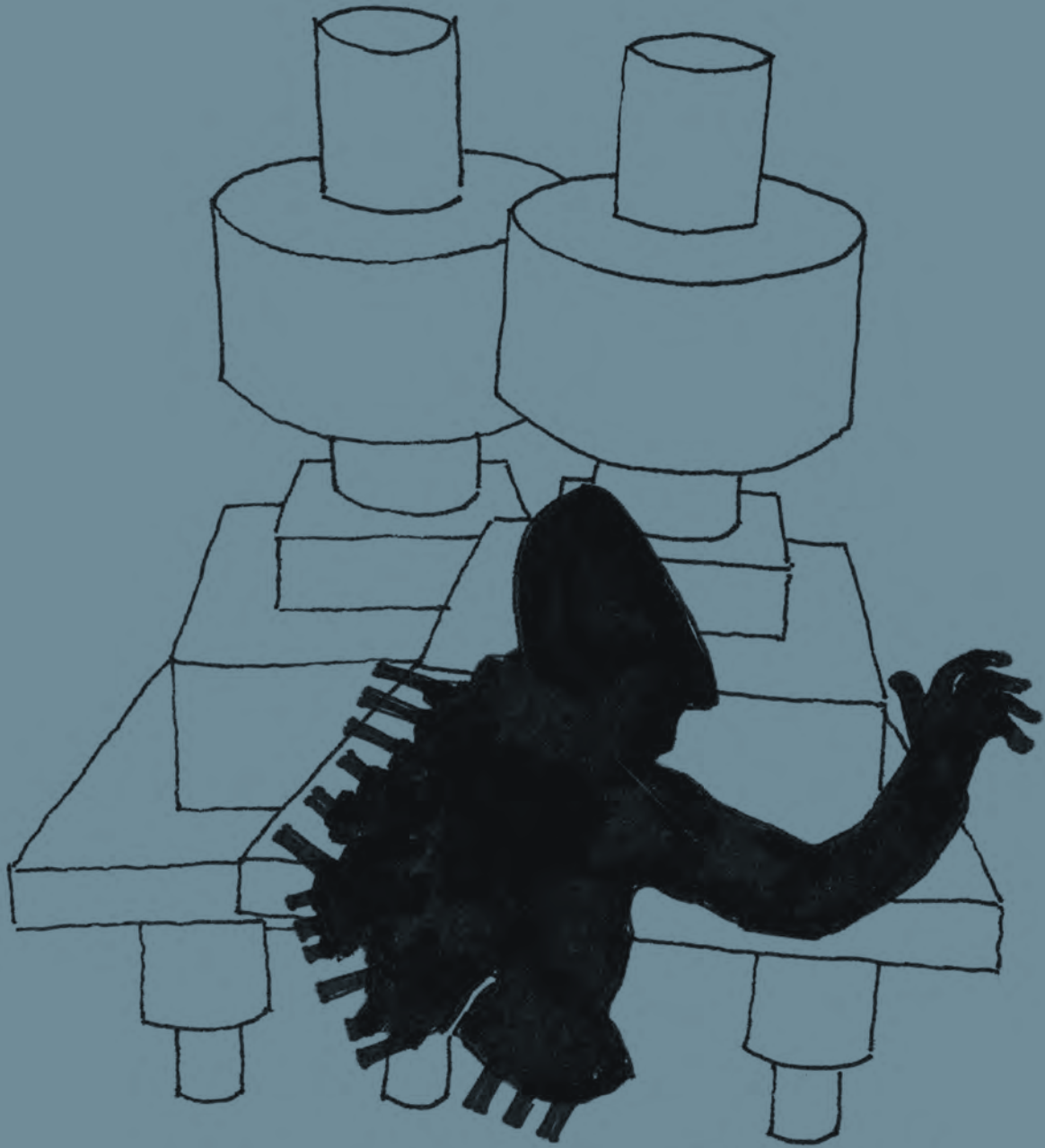
tive instruments overlapped and were measuring some of the same things.

An advantage of the concurrent validity process for the questionnaire in my research study (FCCRQ) was the opportunity to obtain a realistic estimate of the relation between it and the Working Alliance (WAI-S) i.e. by using both measures on coach participants at the same time. The individual item scores of my questionnaire had all been found to be relevant to the experience of forming the coaching relationship in my coach sample (N=368)" (Henderson, 2020). Thanks to Stephen Palmer, to Kristina Gyllensten and not least to Alanna (O'Broin) Henderson (2020) for their agreement to be interviewed and for permission to include the findings and references in this research.

### Fortifying the evidence base for research on the coaching relationship

For a long time a very important discussion about how to secure the evidence base on coaching relationship research has been taking place (e.g. Grant, 2007; Grant & Cavanagh, 2008). Grounded in Denzin's studies (2009, 2010) – usually remembered as "the elephant in the living room" – the debate has been unfruitful, garish, loud and much too often divided into proponents of a qualitative approach versus those of a quantitative (Guimón, 2004). A theoretical, critical discourse is vital to debate and to find out how the increased amount of evidence-based research within the field (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018) could be a fruitful and unifying way forward. A practitioner perspective is offered as a more concrete and specific method, such that quality can be improved through evidence-based practice (Lockhart, 2011). The reflexive practitioner often contributes to a wider and more qualified understanding of what evidence is. Qualitative research, with its focus on practitioner-based and experience-based evidence (Grossman & Walfish, 2014) may

elucidate a more reflexive approach in understanding evidence as a local, immediate and context-bound phenomenon within the global (Elsass et al., 2006). The coach and coachee are for example in dialogue exploring what was seen as especially fruitful and effective. Instead of focusing on classic data gathering (that will create so-called “final and general solutions”), this above-mentioned approach can be seen as inclusive and may open the understanding of evidence to a broader perspective.



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# 6 The future of coaching relationship research, and concluding remarks

What would be future key coaching relationship research areas is the question to be discussed and presented in this section. As mentioned earlier in the book there have been a number of articles published in the *Danish Journal of Coaching Psychology* covering future research areas (e.g. O’Broin, 2016; Spaten, 2016; O’Broin, Spaten & Olesen, 2016; O’Broin, 2018). However, Stephen Palmer adds an area below, and Alanna (O’Broin) Henderson mentioned briefly in her interview “two areas that currently need to be urgently addressed”.

## Developmental models and mediating variables

Henderson underscores that “...we have seen evidence of researchers moving beyond a simple correlational coaching relationship-coaching outcome link to development of process models that are beginning to include how variables interact with each other to influence coaching outcomes (Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2015), including explanations of causal mechanisms (Zimmermann & Antoni, 2018). We need more such models, and those proposed require further testing, as well as meas-

urement over time in longitudinal studies. Part of this process includes further examination of the coaching relationship as a mediating variable, and more precise definitions of coaching relationship constructs (Lopez, 2017; O’Broin, 2016)” (Henderson, 2020).

### Video-mediated coaching relationships

According to Palmer and Henderson video-mediated coaching is on the increase, especially relevant to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic which has moved even more coaches to this medium. Consequently, it is crucial and urgent to research the role of the coaching relationship in video-mediated coaching. Henderson stated that this is primarily due to the lack of examination on the area and mixed findings. However, there are situations where the clients prefer video-mediated coaching programs (Deniers, 2019), or where a hybrid program is most effective. Henderson pointed out that in some instances, video-mediated coaching could cause negative effects. Investigation in the negative effects could create a new understanding of the recent focus on negatives, or side effects of coaching (Schermyly & Graßmann, 2019; see also O’Broin, 2019).

Stephen Palmer’s contribution (2020) fits nicely into the idea about future development of online-mediated coaching relationships.

### Coaching in a computer-generated virtual world

Stephen noted during the interview the circumstance wherein nowadays “we undertake more coaching in a virtual world; it would (then) be useful to examine the coaching relationship” (Palmer, 2020). Research into all kinds of computer-generated and online mediated coaching, like video, Skype, Zoom or texting, are in short supply at the current historical time, and it is strongly recommended for global research programmes.



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As times go by one can imagine that there will be even more demand for virtual coaching programmes in companies. This area of practise and research will most likely grow alongside the request for virtual coaching programmes in the workplace (Hultgren et al., 2016).

Furthermore, research has found a positive correlation between the coaching relationship and the results of coaching sessions (Spaten et al., 2016). Another future research area is proposed to be the connection between coaching outcome and the coaching relationship. This research will be based upon the robust findings from psychotherapy research, but designed for coaching sessions – and then understood through the lenses of computer-generated, and virtual online coaching.

### Concluding remarks – coaching relationship, and outcomes

This book has drawn upon a variety of research within the field of the coaching relationship. A broad range of findings has been considered, including how the coaching relationship may be defined. It has been made clear that the coaching relationship is understood in a variety of ways, which has resulted in many different areas of research emerging within the purview of this relationship. However, there is generally an agreement that the coaching relationship should be based on a coaching alliance. Moreover, it seems that a short and specific definition for coaching relationship would be of great value.

The book began with a question regarding whether the coaching relationship is the most important active ingredient in coaching. The general answer is *yes* – much of the research points towards the coaching relationship being the most important ingredient with respect to coaching outcomes, such that it is associated with effectiveness. In addition to this, coaching

is an ever-evolving, complex, interpersonal, multifactorial and multi-level activity.

With that said, because of the complexity and multifactorial dimension of the relationship, it is not yet possible to say *what* specifically this ingredient is and *how* it affects the outcome of coaching. The research in the field of coaching relationship is still limited, such that systematic, strict, empirical and evidence-based coaching should be further examined.

As a final point, some short remarks on the links, variables and connection between negative coaching outcome and the coaching relationship are advanced. Explicitly, Gyllensten points to this important future key research area: “Being a therapist, as well as a coach, it is natural to look at the development of research within the therapy field, and the investigation of negative effects of therapy is growing. I think this is an important topic in coaching as well, especially considering the fact that some coaches are practicing coaching without much training. Finding out more about what happens when the coachee find the coaching unhelpful or even worse” (Gyllensten, 2020).

Lastly, I would like to express my thanks for the layout to Kirsten Bach Hansen, for the drawings to Royal artist Carl Erik Reimuth and once again, Spaten’s deep gratitude to leading scholars in this field of research ought to be expressed. To Professor Stephen Palmer (2020), Dr Alanna (O’Broin) Henderson (2020), and Dr Kristina Gyllensten (2020), for giving interviews and permission to include the findings and references as part of my ongoing research on these issues, and for strong contributions and research updates.



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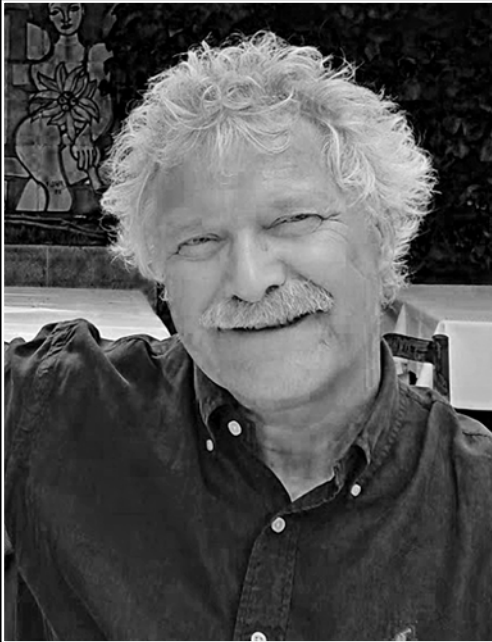
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# Ole Michael Spaten



Dr Ole Michael Spaten, Licensed psychologist, BA, MA PhD FISCPAccred, is a Hon Vice President and Fellow of the International Society of Coaching Psychology. He is an Accred Supervisor and holds a Specialist Certificate in Psychotherapy from the Danish Psychologists Association. He is Head of the Psychology Master Program, Senior Researcher and Director of Coaching Psychology Unit in the Department of Communication and Psychology, Aalborg University (see: [www.coaching.aau.dk](http://www.coaching.aau.dk)).

Award winning psychologist Ole Michael Spaten is a leading pioneer in Danish Coaching Psychology research; he conducted the first Randomized Control Trial in Scandinavia evaluating the effectiveness of brief cognitive behavioural coaching. He is the founding editor-in-chief of the Danish Journal of Coaching Psychology. Ole's research interests and publications relate to self and identity, social learning, coaching psychology-psychotherapy practice and intervention.

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# Carl Erik Reimuth

Artist Carl Erik Reimuth is educated at  
the Royal Danish Academy of the Arts  
1974-81

## Selected Exhibitions

North Tower, Copenhagen 2018-19

Hillerød Library, Vandrehallen Industrial again 2014

Carl Erik Reimuth and Kim Asbury at Skovhuset 2010

Asbury, Reimuth, Tillitz and Cramer at Gammelgaard 2008

Gutenberg Center, Bad Oldesloe Germany 2004-06

Kunsthistoriens lange Næse at Charlottenborg 2003

Konstframjandet, Orebro, Sweden 2002

Trane udstilling, Gentofte Art Library 2002

Karlskoga Konsthall, Sweden 2000

Art Copenhagen at Forum 1996

Reed Gallery 1995

Gallery In Faust, Hamburg, Germany 1988

Fyns Kunstmuseum 1989

M 59, Den Frie 1986-87

Charlottenborg Autumn Exhibition 1985

Lunds Konsthall, Group Exhibition Transit 1984

Gud og Grammatik, Charlottenborg 1984

Charlottenborg, Group Exhibition Transit 1980, 82, 86

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By Ole Michael Spaten

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## Meetings and encounters

This book is about encounters, meetings between people, it is about the relationship in coaching. The layout of the book also contains meetings, and encounters between art and science: Between 42 original line drawings by the Royal Academy artist Carl Erik Reimuth and 42 empirical studies by the author and numerous contributors.

Quoting from the preface by business psychologist PhD, Mads Lindholm: "The book presents current research into the relationship's significance for coaching. Ole Michael Spaten takes us into the researcher's cave and presents a large number of scientific articles, empirical research, and their contributions to how we can understand and comprehend the coaching relationship and its complexity". (...) "The book provides a commendable overview of the last 20 years of research in the field of coaching relationship. I believe the book will inspire all of us who deal with coaching to become even more curious about the relationship and its significance".

Ole Michael Spaten is senior-researcher at the Department of Communication and Psychology at Aalborg University. Among a number of subjects, he writes about and teaches psychological practice and intervention.