

**The Process of Transformative Learning in Executive Coaching:  
A Realist Evaluation**

by

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## **Abstract**

The utilisation of executive coaching in organisations as a leader development strategy has increased in popularity over the last three decades. Its success as a practice is a result of positive outcomes. How these outcomes are realised in a coaching process is still an area that requires further research, as coaching theory advancement is lagging behind practice. There is agreement amongst most scholars that coaching facilitates learning, and some suggest that learning in a coaching context is transformative. However, the limited studies that have investigated the relationship between executive coaching and transformative learning remain unsubstantiated.

A multiple case study merged with a realist evaluation design was adopted to assess how, under what contexts, and for whom does an executive coaching programme foster transformative learning amongst individual executives. A purposive sample of executives in public-sector organisations in South Africa participated in a longitudinal coaching intervention. This intervention occurred during extreme socio-political and economic turbulence, presenting a peculiar contextual environment for the study.

The study makes four main contributions to the field of executive coaching and adult learning. Firstly, it proposes a theoretical model of how transformative learning occurs in executive coaching based on empirical evidence. Secondly, it extends the utilisation of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning to executive coaching. Thirdly, it serves as a methodological contribution on how to evaluate transformative learning in an executive coaching programme. At a practice level, the study provides a framework for transformative executive coaching and proposes the requisite coaching competencies for transformative learning.

**Keywords:** *Executive coaching, coaching theory, adult learning theory, transformative learning, coach competencies.*

## **Declaration**

I, Gloria Mbokota, declare that this thesis is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university

**GLORIA MBOKOTA**

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction

This section provides background to the research. It includes the definition of the research problem, research purpose, research questions, and related objectives. Moreover, it defines the scope of the proposed research, as well as the key constructs for the study. Lastly, it explains the significance of the proposed study, providing an outline of this thesis.

## 1.2. Background

In the last three decades, executive coaching as a practice has grown significantly. It has become one of the key strategies for leadership and personal development (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Campone, 2015; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). The success of executive coaching as a practice has impacted positively on improved individual performance and increased meaning of work, which results in greater work satisfaction and work-life balance (Blackman, Moscardo, & Gray, 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Grant, 2014; Jones, Woods, & Guillaume, 2016; Theeboom, Beersma, & Van Vianen, 2014).

In addition to the positive impact of executive coaching on individual level outcomes, it has also been established that, during periods of change, managers who go through coaching are equipped with skills to lead change more effectively (Britton, 2008; Sonesh et al., 2015; Stober, 2008). There have also been studies to assess return on investment (ROI) as a result of coaching, but the results therefrom are still in dispute. However, it has been found that managers who work with an executive coach are more likely to set specific goals, improve organisational outputs, solicit ideas for improvements from others, and often obtain higher ratings from their staff and colleagues (De Haan, Culpin, & Curd, 2011). More importantly, it has been asserted that the skills required by leaders for transforming organisations can mainly be achieved through coaching (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Ely et al., 2010; Stout-Rostron, 2014). These skills include both affective and cognitive skills that enable leaders to lead and manage change as well as manage people issues (Ely et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2016).

Scholars also argue that the expansion and application of executive coaching has exceeded the advancement of its theoretical base. The volume of existing literature on executive coaching research has largely taken a practitioner bias, with academic research lagging behind (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Ely et al., 2010; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). Most research has been summative, focusing on the outcomes or effectiveness of coaching, rather than on the process (Blackman et al., 2016, Bozer & Jones,

2016; Grant & O'Connor, 2019; Rekalde, Landeta, & Albizu, 2015). Scholars argue that what is absent are studies investigating how coaching works (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Ely et al., 2010; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). Such formative studies would assess the process of coaching and provide insight into why and how coaching interventions have yielded positive results for individuals and organisations (Ely et al., 2010; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014).

A common argument amongst scholars and practitioners is that coaching is successful because it facilitates learning and development (Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck, 2014; Fazel, 2013; Griffiths, 2015; Skiffington & Zeus, 2003; Zeus & Skiffington, 2002). Scholars have linked the coaching process to multiple learning theories, but the three that are mainly cited are the andragogy theory of adult learning (Knowles, 1968), experiential learning theory (ELT) (Kolb, 1984), and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990).

In this study, the researcher chose to explore transformative learning theory. This is because transformative learning theory is often cited as a prominent form of learning that occurs in executive coaching, yet there is a paucity of empirical evidence to substantiate this claim. Furthermore, transformative learning theory has had an opportunity to develop fully as a theory, meeting all the requirements as described by Corley and Gioia (2011) – that is, defining the premise, the what, the how, and the context. A significant body of knowledge has developed over the years to test and extend the theory in studies conducted by Hoggan (2016), Kegan and Lahey (2001), and Taylor (1997, 2007). These studies suggest that transformative learning theory has overtaken and even replaced some of the earlier learning theories, such as andragogy (Hoggan, 2016). Therefore, this study intends to utilise a fully developed theory, transformative learning theory, to develop a theory of how executive coaching functions to achieve known outcomes.

At the time of the intervention (July 2017 to February 2018), South Africa was undergoing political turbulence due to ruling party infights that came as a result of dissatisfaction echoed by citizens about the then president's performance, which led to extreme levels of corruption and maladministration as well as frequent cabinet reshuffles (Verasamy, 2017). This exposed the country to economic challenges that led to economic downgrades for the first time since democracy (Verasamy, 2017). The political contestations leading to the elective conference in December 2017 created more turbulence in the country but, more importantly, it had a huge impact on public-sector officials, including the ones who participated in this study. Thus, the coaching intervention occurred under extreme socio-political and economic turbulence,

presenting a peculiar contextual environment for the study. However, this environment provided favourable conditions for understanding the role of context as a trigger for disorienting dilemma amongst executives, which is regarded as a prerequisite for transformative learning.

### **1.3. Executive coaching as a form of adult learning**

While there are a number of definitions for executive coaching, the one that sums it up adequately is: “Executive coaching is a developmental process that builds a leader’s capabilities to achieve professional and organizational goals” (Maltbia, Marsick, & Ghosh, 2014, p. 166). These capabilities include the development of specific skills that an executive may need – for example, performance improvement, long-term personal development, and addressing a particular executive agenda like dealing with change and restructuring (Campone, 2015; Cerni, Curtis, & Colmar, 2010; Ely et al., 2010). Through personal development, executives learn to facilitate goal setting as well as cultivate self-awareness and self-management, and ultimately individual behaviour change (Campone, 2015; Maltbia et al., 2014).

Some coaching literature suggests that executives, due to their experience and senior position in organisations, are often not candidates for skills and performance coaching (Hawkins & Smith, 2010). While this statement does not exclude the notion that they may still require some skills, these would not be technical skills to perform their jobs, rather more relational and process skills. Scholars who argue this suggest that executives may need more development and transformative coaching (Cox, 2015; Hawkins & Smith, 2010). Coaching informed by transformative learning is “aimed at helping coachees gain an awareness of their current meaning perspectives or habits of mind and can provide a safe environment where coachees can be challenged to critique the hitherto unexplored assumptions, beliefs, preconceptions, and premises that make up their meaning perspectives and have an opportunity to assess and synthesize alternative views” (Cox, 2015, p. 35).

In this study, the researcher explored the mechanisms and context under which transformative learning could be facilitated through an executive coaching process. To do this, the study assessed the mechanisms involved in the executive coaching process as well as those in the transformative learning process to understand how both intertwine to facilitate transformative learning outcomes.

#### **1.4. Theoretical base of coaching**

To this point, theoretical approaches to coaching have relied on psychological counselling and therapeutic theories and models (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017; Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Passmore & Theeboom, 2016). The humanistic philosophical assumptions that drive coaching are that human beings are “autonomous, goal oriented individuals, able to and responsible for creating the meaning and essence of their lives” (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017, p. 28). Most scholars agree that both coaching research and practice draw on concepts from humanistic psychology (Blackman et al., 2016; Cilliers, 2005; Gregory & Levy, 2013). These are primarily based on Rogers’s (1959) client-centred approach theory, Maslow’s (1968) self-actualisation theory, and Seligman’s (2002) positive psychological approach (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017).

This psychology invariably drives the coaching approaches that have emerged in the last two decades (Cox, Bachkirova, & Clutterbuck, 2014). These approaches include: person-centred, psychodynamic, gestalt, existential, ontological, narrative, solution-focused, cognitive behavioural, positive psychological, and neuro-linguistic programming coaching (Cox et al., 2014). A common theme arising from these approaches is learning, which is aligned with the definition of executive coaching as a capacity building strategy, as well as the humanist approach that promotes human development and growth. From the approaches above, it is evident that learning occurs in different ways.

#### **1.5. The executive coaching process**

“A process is a sequence of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context” (Pettigrew, 1997, p. 338) or a sequence of events describing how things change over time (Van de Ven, 1992, p. 173). In an executive coaching context, what is the sequence of events or actions describing how coaching outcomes get realised over time?

The coaching engagement firstly involves an interaction between the coach and the executive coachee. For coaching to be effective, coaching literature suggests that some of the activities that must occur are: contracting; creating an environment in which the coachee is able to explore, reflect and experiment with their experience; supporting the client through the coaching engagement; and challenging the client (Bozer, Joo, & Santora, 2015; Campone, 2015; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Sonesh et al., 2015). This study’s focus was on the process of change in understanding what mechanisms facilitate transformative learning outcomes. Below is a brief description of the components of the executive coaching process.

*Creating a conducive environment for coaching:* This involves establishing a good working relationship with the client, and building rapport and trust to the extent that clients feel comfortable to relate their experiences or challenges (Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Bozer et al., 2015; Campone, 2015; Sonesh et al., 2015).

*Supporting the client:* This involves active listening, understanding and encouraging the client (Bozer & Jones, 2018; De Haan et al., 2011; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Rekalde et al., 2015; Woodcock, 2010). Active listening is an intense focus on what the clients are verbalising and what they are not through close observation of gestures and emotions that may emerge during the conversation (Cremona, 2010; Woodcock, 2010). Listening also means the coach needs to be comfortable with silence (Woodcock, 2010).

*Challenging the client:* This involves engaging the client through reflective questioning (Romme & Van Seggelen-Damen, 2015). Reflective questioning fosters critical reflection and encourages dialogue with the self and the coach (De Haan et al., 2011; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Romme & Van Seggelen-Damen, 2015). Griffiths (2015) and Griffiths and Campbell (2009) also argued that holding the clients accountable by offering feedback on their thinking and behaviour motivates them to take accountability for actions that occur as a result of the coaching sessions.

## **1.6. Transformative learning process**

Mezirow's (1990) transformative learning theory builds on the work of earlier scholars, such as Kuhn's (1962) concept of paradigm shift, Freire's (1970) conscientisation and critical consciousness theory, and Habermas's (1981) theory of communicative action (Mezirow, 1990). Mezirow (1997, p. 5) defined transformative learning as "the process of effecting change in a frame of reference".

The premise of adult learning theories in general and transformative learning theory in particular is that adults have acquired a considerable amount of experience throughout their lives. This experience has become a "coherent *body of experience*" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). This body of experience that has developed from early childhood into adulthood encompasses a wide range of factors that determine the meanings individuals give to certain *concepts, thoughts, feelings and actions*. These meanings set preconditions for how individuals respond to certain events and situations in their lives. At times, these preconditions prevent people from dealing with problems in a different way when required (Mezirow, 1990, 1997).

The meaning-making process created through making sense of people's experience is regarded as learning (Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow identified two types of meaning: "meaning schemes" and "meaning perspectives". The former refers to a set of "related habitual expectations governing the 'if-then'" cause-effect relationships (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1). The latter refers "to higher-order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, prototypes, goal orientations and evaluations" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1). Mezirow (1997) added that most of the meaning perspectives are developed through cultural assimilation. They become frames of mind through which the world is viewed (Kayes, 2002; Mezirow, 1990, 1997). Mezirow (1997) argued that these meaning perspectives could create distortions later in life when they become obsolete in solving current problems.

According to Mezirow (1990), transformative learning is a process of elaborating on existing frames that do not serve the individual anymore. This helps them to acquire new frames, acquire new habits of mind, and develop new points of view, which will result in a new meaning structure. The main prerequisite for transformative learning as identified by Mezirow (1991) is a *disorienting dilemma*, which refers to a significant disruption or disturbance of a person's meaning perspective. This could happen as a result of a major event, such as the death of a loved one, or an ordinary event like participating in a personal development programme. This predisposes people to be open to examine some of their assumptions and/or beliefs. The other critical parts of the transformative learning process are: *critical reflection*, the means by which individuals intentionally examine their own beliefs and assumptions to bring about new meaning; and *rational dialogue*, a way of discussing personally and socially held beliefs and assumptions with other people in a logical and objective manner (Mezirow, 1997).

This study investigated how transformative learning occurs during an executive coaching engagement. As indicated earlier, there is sufficient agreement amongst scholars that learning is inherent in coaching. However, exactly how executive coaching contributes to learning in general, and transformative learning in particular, is an area that still requires empirical study (Fazel, 2013; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014; Sammut, 2014).

### **1.7. Prior research**

Some research has been conducted on the transformative learning process in coaching (Fazel, 2013; Gray, 2006; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Sammut, 2014; Tosey, Mathison, & Michelli, 2005). However, there are serious limitations with most of these studies. For example, some have theoretically mapped the coaching process along Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning steps without any empirical evidence, namely, the Gray (2006), Fazel (2013), and



Cox (2015) studies. Others have conducted empirical studies, although these studies remain “unsubstantiated” or “not verified” (Griffiths, 2015; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009). Others (Sammut, 2014; Tosey et al., 2005) had methodological weaknesses.

The study conducted by Griffiths and Campbell (2009) contributed by describing how learning happens during a coaching process. The three stages of learning in a coaching process are: the discovery of new knowledge, the application of new knowledge, and the integration of new knowledge (Griffiths & Campbell, 2009). This model also describes the roles that both the coach and the coachee need to play to facilitate learning in each stage. The study went further to link the coaching process to multiple learning theories, such as andragogy (Knowles, 1968), and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984)- (Griffiths & Campbell, 2009). However, this study centred on personal rather than executive coaching, and did not specifically focus on transformative learning, except to refer to “deep and powerful learning” without clearly defining what it entails. Moreover, data was only collected from coaches, with no apparent data being collected from the beneficiaries of coaching to verify the findings. Griffiths and Campbell (2009) conceded that the results were unsubstantiated.

The study conducted by Sammut (2014) was designed to explore the extent to which selected coaches understood what transformative learning was, and whether it was applied in their coaching practice. No clients were interviewed, so claims that transformative learning occurred could not be triangulated. Cox (2015) mapped out the 10 steps of Mezirow’s transformative learning process and linked them to a coaching process. However, this was also from a theoretical perspective, with no significant empirical data collection to verify the model.

Another recent study conducted by Corrie and Lawson (2017) also drew from coaching literature and Mezirow’s 10-step process of transformative learning and proposed a five-step transformative learning coaching model. However, they acknowledge that “the design and development of the transformative executive coaching model was created pragmatically to resolve a practical coaching challenge faced by the authors and, acknowledging early successes, it has not been fully tested to a significant level (Corrie & Lawson, 2017, p. 56).

The main limitation of these studies is that, while they mention transformative learning theory and claim that some form of transformative learning did occur, the key processes of transformative learning were not adequately explored empirically (Hoggan, 2016; Kegan, 2009; Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2007). The key processes include creating a disorienting

dilemma, critical reflection and rational dialogue. This study sought to further investigate and provide empirical evidence-based research on how the executive coaching process interconnects with the transformative learning process to produce transformative learning outcomes. This was done by investigating how the three key transformative learning processes are experienced by a client during an executive coaching process.

### **1.8. Problem statement**

While executive coaching has increased in popularity and is considered amongst the top five leadership development strategies, its application in practice has overtaken the development of its theoretical base (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Blackman et al., 2016; Ely et al., 2010; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). From a practical perspective, a wide range of approaches to coaching have emerged (Blackman et al., 2016; Cox et al., 2014). However, most of the research has focused on the outcomes or effectiveness of coaching, with very little investigation on the process of coaching (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Ely et al., 2010; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014).

From a learning and development perspective, theoretical frameworks describing executive coaching are also limited (Ellinger & Kim, 2014; Hamlin, Ellinger, & Beattie, 2008; Percival, Cozzarin, & Formanek, 2013). Extant literature says that coaching facilitates learning (Fazel, 2013; Griffiths, 2015; Skiffington & Zeus, 2003; Zeus & Skiffington, 2002). In addition, some scholars argue that coaching facilitates transformative learning (Cerni et al., 2010; Gray, 2006; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Hargrove, 2003). However, based on these studies, the actual process of how coaching enables transformative learning has not been sufficiently explored (Fazel, 2013; Griffiths, 2015; Sammut, 2014). Therefore, the problem that this study addresses is the lack of empirical research to confirm claims that executive coaching fosters transformative learning.

### **1.9. Purpose statement**

The purpose of this study was to examine how executive coaching facilitates transformative learning amongst executives. A realist evaluation was conducted by developing, testing and refining a programme theory on how, why, when and for whom transformative learning occurs during the executive coaching process.

## **1.10. Research questions**

### **Main research question:**

How, under what contexts, and for whom does an executive coaching process foster transformative learning?

### **Research sub-questions:**

- Q1 Under what context does transformative learning occur?
- Q2 What coach mechanisms facilitate transformative learning?
- Q3 What client mechanisms facilitate transformative learning?
- Q4 How does the transformative learning process occur?

## **1.11. Scope and definitions**

### ***1.11.1. The scope***

This study was conducted amongst purposively selected senior executives from public-sector organisations in Gauteng, South Africa. A coaching programme was developed and implemented using a realist evaluation approach (Pawson & Tilley, 1997), based on the realist paradigm. The premise of realism is that individuals' knowledge of reality is as a result of social conditioning, or the context people find themselves in, thus knowledge cannot be understood in isolation to social contexts (Krauss, 2005). Hence, the goal of realism is to discover the observable and non-observable mechanisms that generate knowledge (Krauss, 2005). A realist researcher employs a mixture of theoretical reasoning and practical experimentation to understand the mechanisms that produce particular outcomes (Krauss, 2005).

A realist evaluation was more suited for this study as context played a critical role. The coaching intervention occurred under extreme socio-political and economic turbulence, presenting a peculiar contextual environment for the study. This environment provided favourable conditions for understanding the role of context as a trigger for disorienting dilemma amongst executives, which is regarded as a prerequisite for transformative learning.

### ***1.11.2. Definition of key constructs***

This section provides a short definition of constructs that are central to the research topic. These definitions will be adopted for the purposes of this study.

Table 1.1: Definition of constructs

Construct	Definition	Reference
Executive coaching	Executive coaching or leadership coaching is defined as “a developmental process that builds a leader’s capabilities to achieve professional and organizational goals”.	Maltbia et al. (2014, p.166)
Learning	Learning is described as “the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation and action”.	Mezirow (1990)
Transformative learning	Transformative learning is defined as “the process of effecting change in a frame of reference. Frame of reference refers to cognitive, conative, and emotional components, and is composed of two dimensions: habits of mind and point of view”.	Mezirow (1997, p. 5)
Realist evaluation	Realist evaluation answers the questions: what works, how does it work, under which conditions and for whom does it work?	Pawson and Tilley (1997)

### 1.12. Study contributions

This study has contributed to the theory, methodology and practice in the fields of executive coaching and transformative learning. The main theoretical contribution of this study is a proposed theoretical model of how transformative learning occurs in an executive coaching process. This is a new contribution to the field of executive coaching. The study has advanced the utility of transformative learning theory into the field of executive coaching.

Methodologically, this study has provided empirical evidence on the mechanism for evaluating executive coaching interventions that are geared for transformative learning. It has also developed and shared a rigorous methodology of the researching process in executive coaching that could be used by other researchers.

Practically, based on the theoretical model, this study has proposed a framework for facilitating transformative executive coaching. It has also extended literature on coach competencies by providing insight as to which core competencies are required by coaches to facilitate transformative learning. This could contribute to coach education training.

### 1.13. Document contents

This thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 2 presents a literature review that forms the foundation of the study. Firstly, it presents the background on the evolution of executive coaching and coaching research. Secondly, it presents literature on the executive coaching process informed by process theory. Thirdly, it presents literature on transformative learning theory and its process as well as how this could be useful for facilitating learning in an

executive coaching context. Finally, a conceptual framework, called programme theory for executive coaching, that could potentially facilitate transformative learning is presented.

Chapter 3 describes the research design, strategy of enquiry and research methods. While Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study in a form of a within-case analysis. Each of the four cases selected are described and analysed.

Chapter 5 presents themes that emerge from the cross-case analysis and a synthesis of the findings across the four cases selected. Chapter 6 contains the theoretical, methodological and practical contributions made by this study to the field of executive coaching and transformative learning. Finally, Chapter 7 draws conclusions and suggestions for further research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents a literature review that forms the foundation of the study. Firstly, the chapter provides the background to and evolution of executive coaching and coaching research, as well as literature pertaining to executive coaching as a learning and development strategy. Secondly, it discusses the philosophy and theory base underpinning coaching practice. Thirdly, this section outlines and discusses the executive coaching process. Fourthly, it presents transformative learning theory and details the transformative learning processes. Thus, this chapter dwells on the processes and mechanisms of executive coaching and transformative learning, and how these interact to facilitate transformative learning in an executive coaching programme. Finally, it consolidates realist evaluation literature to present a programme theory and conceptual framework that was adopted for the research project.

### **2.2. The evolution of executive coaching research**

Although coaching research within organisations dates back to Gorby's 1937 study on the impact of coaching on manufacturing, very few subsequent studies were conducted until the 1990s (Grant, 2006; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; Passmore & Theeboom, 2016). Only 62 PhDs and empirical research studies were recorded between 1937 and 1999, the majority of which were published in the 1990s. Organisational practitioners, such as Kilburg (1996) and Dietrich (1996), were among the first to investigate the theme of coaching as a force for organisational change in the 1990s (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011, p. 70). However, Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) suggested that most of these earlier studies were methodologically weak. This argument was confirmed by other meta-analytic research (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Jones et al., 2016).

Literature reveals that over the last 25 years there has been an explosion of coaching research interest (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; Stern & Stout-Rostron, 2013). One such initiative was the 2008 Global Convention on Coaching that brought new energy to the field of coaching with the establishment of the International Coaching Research Forum – a body whose intention was to build organisational coaching as a profession by encouraging empirical research by practitioners and academics (Stern & Stout-Rostron, 2013). This led to an exponential increase in coaching research, with 263 peer-reviewed research articles being published between 2008 and 2012 (Stern & Stout-Rostron, 2013).

Passmore and Theeboom (2016) posited that coaching research has gone through five phases. The first was a phase of practitioners and researchers sharing experiences and debating the boundaries of the coaching field. The second phase was an exploration of the phenomenon of coaching using case studies and survey methods. The third and fourth phases were characterised by qualitative studies and small quantitative studies aimed at building the theoretical knowledge of coaching. While still in the third phase, Passmore & Theeboom (2016, p. 3) argued that coaching research has now entered a fifth phase where larger quantitative studies as well as meta-analyses are done to provide insight into a range of studies.

While the last two decades have provided some insight into coaching as a field of study, it is also argued that there are some questions that still need “adequate answers” (Passmore & Theeboom, 2016). Some of these key questions – most of which have to do with the how and process of coaching – include:

- Do open questions make a difference in coaching and if so, how?
- Are listening and empathy enough to provide a space for reflection, learning and change?
- Do support and empathy need to be matched by challenge?
- Is there a difference in coaching based on different approaches to coaching (Passmore & Theeboom, 2016, p. 3)?

In addition, other scholars like Ladegard and Gjerde (2014) have previously addressed similar questions. They argued that the growth of coaching as an industry has taken more of a practitioner perspective, thus academic research is lagging behind (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). The focus of research has been largely on its effectiveness and its impact on individual and organisational outcomes, such as ROI (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Bozer et al., 2015; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014; Percival et al., 2013; Rekalde et al., 2015). Ely et al. (2010) argued that research on coaching has taken a summative turn, focusing on the effectiveness of coaching, rather than a formative evaluation approach that centres on what makes coaching effective. Formative evaluation is concerned with assessing the processes and mechanisms of how a particular programme, intervention or theory impacts specific outcomes (Braveman, Suarez-Balcazar, Kielhofner, & Taylor, 2017; Nieveen & Folmer, 2013; Venable, Pries-Heje, & Baskerville, 2016). Therefore, this study took a formative evaluation approach to executive coaching.

### 2.2.1. Delineating the boundaries for executive coaching

Why has executive coaching become so popular? A related question is: what does executive coaching offer that the other learning and development professions do not, even though such approaches have been used for many years? In delineating the boundaries of coaching, the comparison is drawn between coaching and training, consulting, mentoring, psychotherapy and counselling (Grant, 2006). While there seems to be more clarity in the difference between coaching and training, and consulting and mentoring, the distinction between coaching and counselling or therapy is blurry (Grant, 2006; Passmore & Theeboom, 2016).

*Defining executive coaching:* There are many definitions of executive coaching, which have evolved as the coaching research has developed, yet there is no universally accepted one (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Bozer et al., 2015; Smither, 2011). For example, executive coaching is also referred to as leadership coaching and business coaching (Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Ely et al., 2010; Theeboom et al., 2014), and it falls under the ambit of workplace coaching (Bozer & Jones, 2018). The common theme is that the first three constructs are all related to a senior person in an organisation who received the training, while workplace coaching is more generic and includes lower-level staff, team and group coaching (Bozer & Jones, 2018). The most commonly used executive coaching definitions are cited in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Definitions of executive coaching

Definition	Author
Executive coaching is “a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organisation and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to assist the client to achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and consequently to improve the effectiveness of the client’s organisation within a formally defined coaching agreement”.	Kilburg (2000, p. 65)
A personalised, goal-focused, developmental form of one-on-one intensive learning aimed at enhancing self-knowledge, promoting behavioural change, and contributing to career development.	Day (2000)
“Executive coaching is a targeted, purposeful intervention that helps executives develop and maintain positive change in their personal development and leadership behavior.”	Grant (2012, p. 149)
“A process that builds a leader’s capabilities to achieve professional and organizational goals.”	Maltbia et al. (2014, p. 166)
“A one-on-one relationship between a professional coach and an executive for the purpose of enhancing the latter’s behavioural change through self-awareness and learning, thereby, ultimately contributing to individual and organisational success”	Bozer et al. (2015, p. 219)



The scholars who have explored the definition of executive coaching seem to agree and conclude on some key similarities in these definitions. Firstly, that executive coaching involves a senior member of an organisation and there is a formal coaching agreement. Secondly, that it involves a one-on-one learning process between a professional and an external coach. Thirdly, it is about developing the managers' capabilities professionally and personally, focusing on interpersonal and intrapersonal issues, while equipping the executive with the knowledge, tools and skills to develop them to be more effective. Finally, that while the learning is targeted at individuals, it should also benefit the executives executing their professional roles in the organisation (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Smither, 2011). A definition that concisely sums up this explanation is, "A process that builds a leader's capabilities to achieve professional and organizational goals" (Maltbia et al., 2014, p.166). Thus, this definition will be adopted for the purposes of this study.

*Coaching compared with training:* Training is the oldest learning and development method that is intended to impart knowledge and skill, and it continues to be used to improve employee skills, performance and motivation (Muhammad, 2012). However, recent research shows that the ROI of training programmes that are not augmented by other in-service programmes averages just 24% (De Haan & Duckworth, 2013; Fleissig, 2014; Percival et al., 2013). Consequently, coaching is seen as an effective strategy to supplement such training programmes, and it has been suggested that training combined with coaching is more effective than training alone (Blackman et al., 2016; Bright & Crockett, 2012; De Haan et al., 2011). In some instances, coaching can also replace training, as it can respond to individual needs with more flexibility (Blackman et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2016).

*Coaching compared with mentoring:* "A mentoring relationship is a unique work relationship through which protégés receive career and psychosocial support from mentors, expediting their progression and the development within a particular job, organization or career path" (Humberd & Rouse, 2016, p. 435). Coaching can enhance a mentoring relationship, where a mentor uses coaching skills to facilitate his or her guidance (Jones et al., 2016).

*Coaching compared with consulting:* Consulting has played a major role in assisting organisations to facilitate change processes for more than 100 years (Christensen, Wang, & Van Bever, 2013). Consultants give advice based on their expertise and experience, but in the last 30 years, the utilisation of consultants in organisations has fallen from 60% to about 20%. It has been suggested that clients often fail to recognise the value that consultants add to performance (Christensen et al., 2013).

However, *process consulting* – as endorsed by organisational development experts like Schein (1995) – is closer in approach to group coaching than to conventional forms of consulting, which are often seen in terms of “*purchase the expert*” or “*doctor patient*” dynamics. In *process consulting*, the consultant’s role is to facilitate the client engagement process and not necessarily act as a content expert. This encourages the client to find his or her own solutions to problems, and not to become overly reliant on expert advice from the consultant (Schein, 1990, 1995).

*Coaching compared with counselling and psychotherapy:* In recent years, the growing recognition of the hazardous effects of workplace stress has led to the increased use of *counselling and therapy* as an employee support intervention. Studies have shown that stress negatively impacts individuals’ well-being and performance, and is detrimental to organisational outcomes (Ladegård, 2011; Zhang, Kandampully, & Choi, 2014). However, some scholars have questioned the effectiveness of counselling in stress management (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2005), and others have posited that employee assistance programmes are unpopular among employees (Taranowski & Mahieu, 2013). Therefore, coaching is seen as a more effective way to deal with workplace stress (Ladegård, 2011).

Based on the description above, coaching seems to address the limitations of the other learning and development professions. While there are similarities in terms of the outcome, the mechanism through which learning, and development occurs differs. Thus, executive coaching has become a key driver in leader development, performance improvement, skills building, human resources acquisition and retention, as well as individual and organisational change (Bartlett, Boylan, & Hale, 2014; Theeboom et al., 2014).

Regarding the distinction between coaching and therapy, Grant (2001) postulated that coaching is a form of therapy as it intends to “enhance the individual performance and life experience”. However, some of the key differences are that while therapy works with people with “high psychopathology” and “low functionality”, the coaching population has “high functionality” and “low psychopathology” (Grant, 2001, p. 6). Consequently, coaching is seen as an approach that can benefit non-clinical clients who are relatively psychologically healthy (Grant, 2001; Greene & Grant, 2003). Moreover, coaching is not remedial, but focuses on learning and growth (Grant, 2001; Greene & Grant, 2003; Maxwell, 2009; Price, 2009), while therapy involves a treatment plan to solve client problems (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017). Executive coaching fits into this category as it deals with executives within a work context.

Grant (2001) also acknowledged that this boundary is not firmly clear, as there may be overlaps of a population that is moderately functional and could benefit from coaching. This debate came up in recent literature, which shows that coaching is increasingly being utilised with clinical patients in medical and therapeutic fields (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017; Passmore & Theeboom, 2016).

In addition, it is argued that there is a non-hierarchical relationship between the coach and coachee. In each of the other four approaches, there is an expert (the trainer, consultant, mentor, therapist/counsellor) and a client – who is assumed to have less knowledge about content and process (Greene & Grant, 2003). However, in coaching, both the client and coach are seen as experts. The client is an expert in content and the coach is an expert in the process (Greene & Grant, 2003). Table 2.2 summarises the key differences between executive coaching and the other learning and development approaches.

**Table 2.2: Distinctions between executive coaching and other learning and development professions**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Definition of work</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Emotions</b>	<b>Process</b>
Executive and organisational coach	A developmental process that builds a leader's capabilities to achieve professional and organisational goals.	Primarily on an executive's present state and seeking to realise a more desirable future.	Co-creates partnership (coach helps executive discover own answers).	Assumes emotions are natural and normalises them.	The coach stands with the client, helps clarify the situation; then, together with the client, transforms challenges into victories; client is held accountable for reaching his or her desired goals.
Traditional therapist/counsellor	Treatment of disease or disorders by some remedial, rehabilitative or curative psychological process.	Mostly on a person's past and the trauma within it, which requires help.	Doctor-patient relationship (therapist provides the answers/treatment based on specialised knowledge).	Assumes emotions are a symptom of some buried or subconscious, often unresolved, issue.	The therapist diagnoses and then provides professional expertise and guidelines to give the patient a path to healing.
Consultant	Gives advice to other professionals, typically on financial and business matters (based on acquired expertise).	Business problems and seeks to provide information (via strategy, structures, methodologies) to solve these.	Functional expert/client expected to solve employer's business problems by recommending solutions.	Does not normally address or deal with emotions directly (information-focused).	The consultant stands back, evaluates a situation, identifies a problem facing the client, and provides a plan for solutions.
Informal mentor	Voluntary relationship that exists between an individual and one with less experience. It is characterised by mutual trust and respect.	Careers and succession; seeks to help the mentee do as the mentor does.	Older/wiser mentor (with more experience) and younger/less experienced mentee (mentor has knowledge to transfer).	Limited to responses within the mentoring parameters (mainly focusing on professional success).	Mentor provides guidance and wisdom: focus is on knowledge and skills transfer, mentee to observe his or her behaviour, gaining expertise and answering questions.
Instructor/teacher/trainer	Imparts knowledge or skills.	To inform, enlighten, and/or share meaning.	Content expert helping less experienced learner.	Blend of support and challenge.	Starts where the learners are and developmentally builds/expands capability.

Source: Maltbia et al. (2014)

### **2.2.2. *Executive coaching as a leader development strategy***

Leader development has been a focus of many organisations that have the intention of building the capacity of individual leaders to ensure longer-term organisational effectiveness (Kaye Hart, Conklin, & Allen, 2008). In the last three decades, executive coaching has become one such strategy, with organisations using it for organisational and human resources development (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Jones et al., 2016; MacKie, 2014; Maltbia et al., 2014). Executive coaching is now ranked among the top five leadership development approaches (Ely et al., 2010; Maltbia et al., 2014). Extant literature shows that more than 70% of organisations incorporate executive coaching into their leadership development programmes (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014; Smith & Brummel, 2013). In South Africa, a few studies have been conducted that indicate the increase in executive coaching use as a leader development strategy (Cilliers, 2005; Motsoaledi & Cilliers, 2012).

The distinction between leadership and leader development has been researched and debated amongst many scholars and the key difference is that leadership development has a systemic focus, while leader development focuses on developing the individual leader (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014; Kaye Hart et al., 2008). The areas of development for an individual leader include, amongst others: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, the conceptual understanding of leadership development, programmes that involve giving feedback on leader behaviour, and programmes designed to build leaders' skills (Kaye Hart et al., 2008). According to Cox (2015), coaching has been used to facilitate all of these forms of leader development.

The goal of executive coaching is to enhance the effectiveness and performance of leaders in organisations by building leaders' capabilities and connecting these to organisational strategies (Cerni et al., 2010; Ely et al., 2010; Maltbia et al., 2014). Therefore, the role of coaching is to develop skills, improve performance, help executives in their long-term professional development plans, and assist them in dealing with executive agendas that may emerge – for instance, in developing a change agenda, in a strategy redesign, in re-structuring, or in systems realignment in an organisation (Maltbia et al., 2014).

Over the last two decades, executive coaching has been found to improve individual performance, provide guidance in human resource acquisition and retention of key

staff, groom individuals for critical positions, and act as a key driver and methodology for change (Bartlett et al., 2014; Walston, 2014). Executive coaching has also been found to embed key leadership competencies, such as organisational values, and strategic direction that enhances leadership development (Walston, 2014). Moreover, it has been found that coaching in the workplace positively impacts affective skills (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Jones et al., 2016) and enhances change leadership competencies (Corrie & Lawson, 2017).

Even though mechanisms to measure ROI are still debatable (Grant, 2012; Lawrence & Whyte, 2014; Percival et al., 2013), managers who work with an executive coach have been found to be more likely to set specific goals, improve organisational outputs, solicit ideas for improvements from others, and often obtain higher ratings from their staff and colleagues (Blackman et al., 2016; De Haan et al., 2011). Executive coaching has also been found to boost clients' well-being (Grant, 2012; Theeboom et al., 2014), and improve job satisfaction (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Campone, 2015; Jones et al., 2016; Rekalde et al., 2015; Sonesh et al., 2015).

Although executive coaching has increased in popularity due to its success in achieving individual outcomes, studies on the process of coaching (Ely et al., 2010; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014; Passmore & Theeboom, 2016) – specifically understanding the intricacies that occur between the coaching dyad – have been limited (Bozer et al., 2015; Sonesh et al., 2015). Furthermore, in recent meta-analytic studies, it has been found that most of the outcome studies on executive coaching had significant methodological weaknesses where single method data collection and self-reporting were predominant (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Grant & O'Connor, 2019; Grover & Furnham, 2016). This creates questions about the credibility of some of these studies. Therefore, this study will add to credible literature in the executive coaching field, as it followed a robust and rigorous methodology.

### **2.3. The theoretical base of executive coaching**

To understand what makes executive coaching successful, it is essential to consider the theory or paradigm that underlies the executive coaching process. Consequently, this section will discuss the philosophy that drives executive coaching. It will also provide an overview of the commonly used approaches in coaching- and assess how these are aligned to the philosophy and theory driving executive coaching.

### **2.3.1. Theory base**

Executive coaching, or coaching in general, has evolved from the fields of counselling and psychotherapy and shares various common elements with these fields (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017; Blackman et al., 2016). The philosophical assumptions driving coaching are that human beings are “autonomous, goal oriented individuals, able to and responsible for creating the meaning and essence of their lives” (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017, p. 28). This assumption stems from humanistic psychology, which is based on a person-centred approach operating on a premise of helping individuals realise their fullest potential (Gregory & Levy, 2013). Some scholars postulate that both coaching and practice draw on concepts from humanistic psychology (Cilliers, 2005; Gregory & Levy, 2013). These are primarily based on the works of Rogers’s (1959) client-centred approach theory, Maslow’s (1968) self-actualisation theory, and Seligman’s (2002) positive psychological approach (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017; Blackman et al., 2016).

The philosophy that underpins humanistic psychology suggests that: (i) the client is the driving force for positive change (Rogers, 1961); (ii) the intention is to focus on enhancing growth rather than modifying a dysfunction (Maslow, 1968); and (iii) individuals are naturally inclined to develop their untapped potential (Maslow, 1968; Seligman, 2002)- (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017; Blackman et al., 2016). This philosophy can also be traced in the premise of the most commonly used coaching approaches that have emerged in the last two decades (Cox et al., 2014). Coaching approaches have been found to include concepts and theories of leadership development and adult learning (Blackman et al., 2016).

Table 2.3 summarises the commonly used approaches as well as their origins and premises (Cox et al., 2014). The origins of the approaches are from the psychology field, while the premises are from the cognitive behavioural and humanistic fields. Furthermore, Blackman et al. (2016) argued that the psychotherapy, counselling background of these approaches result in a problem-focused view of coaching with approaches that are informed by psychodynamic, person-centred and cognitive behavioural therapy. However, there is a significant amount of solution-focused methods from some of these coaching approaches, such as the solution-focused, neuro-linguistic programming and positive psychological coaching (Blackman et al., 2016; Cox et al., 2014).

Table 2.3: Common approaches to coaching

	<b>Approaches to coaching</b>	<b>The premise of the approach</b>
1	Psychodynamic (Freud, 1922; Jung, 1956)	Current behaviours and feelings are powerfully affected by unconscious motives rooted in earlier experiences. Coaches use <i>awareness</i> about the working of the unconscious for deepening their practice.
2	Person-centred (Rogers, 1961)	The actualising tendency – people’s tendency to develop in positive and constructive ways when the appropriate conditions are present. The purpose is to <i>provide such conditions</i> , including <i>positive regard</i> and <i>quality listening</i> .
3	Gestalt approach (Peltz & Goodman, 1950s; Wertheimer, 1924)	Creative adjustment to a changing environment that emphasises the need for clients’ <i>moment-to-moment awareness</i> in relation to their experience, external world and blocks to awareness. Gestalt coaches use their own subjective experience when appropriate as part of an <i>authentic dialogue</i> .
4	Cognitive behavioural (Beck, 1960)	Facilitates <i>self-awareness</i> of underlying cognitive and emotional barriers to goal attainment and aims to equip the client with more effective thinking and behavioural skills.
5	Solution-focused (Bateson & Wicklund, 1960s and 1970s)	Knowing how a problem arose does not necessarily indicate how it can be fixed. The aim is to <i>assist the client to define a desired future state</i> and to construct a pathway in both thinking and action that assists them in achieving that state.
6	Neuro-linguistic programming (Grinder & Bandler, 1975)	Attempts to <i>identify patterns that represent the way individuals construct their realities</i> to control their inner experiences in various environmental contexts.
7	Positive psychological coaching (Maslow, 1968; Seligman, 2000)	The focus is on a <i>positive spectrum of people’s experiences</i> . It involves consistent shifting of attention away from problems and weaknesses to opportunities and strengths.
8	Existential coaching (Spinelli, 2005; Yalom, 1980)	Existential coaching is based on three principles that describe the human condition: relatedness, uncertainty, and existential anxiety. It involves <i>descriptive exploration of the clients’ worldviews</i> from the context of their presenting concerns.
9	Ontological coaching (Honderich, 1995)	Ontological coaching implies working with individuals with a focus on their language, emotions, and physiology (body posture). The coach attempts to be a <i>catalyst for change by triggering a shift in the client’s “way of being”</i> .
10	Narrative coaching (Drake, 2003)	Clients are seen as narrators and the coach helps them identify new connections between their stories, identities and behaviours using the narrative material in the session. The coach enables clients <i>to generate new options and create new stories of their lives in action</i> .

Source: Cox et al. (2014)

While there may be some problem-focused approaches, these seem to have the common themes of change and learning, which align with the definition of executive



coaching as a capacity building strategy as well as with the humanist approach that promotes human development and growth. Looking at the approaches above, learning occurs in different ways when utilising the various approaches.

Firstly, learning occurs through self-awareness by reflecting on experience (gestalt and psychodynamic) and reflective listening (person-centred) as well as making the unconscious conscious (psychodynamic) (Cox et al., 2014). Secondly, learning occurs through *self-awareness* of underlying cognitive and emotional barriers (cognitive behavioural coaching) to goal attainment (solution-focused) with the aim of equipping the client with more effective thinking and behavioural skills, and focusing on the positive spectrum of people's experiences (positive psychological coaching) (Cox et al., 2014). Thirdly, learning is facilitated through self-awareness in exploring an individual's worldview. This includes the exploration of values, beliefs, and meanings (existential coaching and neuro-linguistic programming), by triggering a shift in a client's way of being (ontological coaching); and self-awareness comes through storytelling (narrative coaching) (Cox et al., 2014).

While these approaches indicate that coaching facilitates learning through self-awareness and potentially transformative learning in the process of exploring values, beliefs and meaning, they do not tell us how the process of shifting values, beliefs and meanings (transformative learning) happens. This serves as the rationale for the study.

### **2.3.2. Learning and executive coaching**

Learning is the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation and action (Mezirow, 1990). The humanistic paradigm assumes learning and growth. A common element that has arisen from many coaching scholars is that "*learning*" lies at the centre of every coaching intervention (Gray, 2006). Olivero, Bane, and Kopelman (1997) were the first to establish a link between coaching and learning. Subsequently, more studies were conducted to confirm this connection (Griffiths et al., 2005; Hurd, 2002; Jones et al., 2016; Skiffington & Zeus 2003; Swart & Harcup, 2013; Zeus & Skiffington, 2002).

Griffiths (2015) and Griffiths and Campbell (2009) proposed a model of learning in a coaching process with three stages: *discovery*, *application*, and *integration* of new knowledge.

*Discovery of new knowledge:* The process of discovering new knowledge in a coaching process comes as a result of an iterative cycle that includes four processes: *relating*, *questioning*, *reflecting*, and *listening* (Griffiths, 2015). The client relates and reflects on his or her experience as the coach listens and asks questions of reflection.

*Application of new knowledge:* Griffiths (2015, p. 21) stated that, “applying new knowledge is a process of extended, consolidated, and deepened learning through holding clients accountable and by clients taking action”. Questioning also facilitates the process of holding a client accountable in a coaching relationship. Holding the client accountable involves giving the client feedback on what the coach has observed in terms of behaviour (Griffiths, 2015).

*Integration of new knowledge:* This phase results when clients have embodied new knowledge that they have discovered and applied during the coaching process. The coach’s ability to continuously use powerful questions that create awareness and explore meanings and assumptions enables the clients to take responsibility for their learning. In doing so, the clients make choices that enable continual application and integration of new knowledge. The ability to integrate confirms that coaching facilitates “deep learning”, which involves discovery of meaning and a worldview level (e.g., beliefs, values, assumptions) (Griffiths, 2015).

Griffiths (2015) and Griffiths and Campbell (2009) provided a process of learning in a coaching context, thereby contributing to a generic understanding how learning happens in coaching. On the part of the coachee, these authors’ studies identified the mechanisms of *relating and reflecting*, which create awareness to facilitate learning; while for the coach they identified mechanisms like *listening and questioning* to facilitate learning, as well as *holding the client accountable* to ensure integration and internalisation of learning.

However, the limitations of this research were that they do not unpack the components of listening, questioning, giving feedback or relating and reflecting that actually facilitate the learning. More importantly, the studies did not focus on transformative learning per se. Nevertheless, they mention that coaching facilitates “deep and powerful learning”, without indicating how this occurs. The second and most significant limitation was that the studies were conducted with coaches only, with no observable data from coachees to verify the findings. Griffiths and Campbell (2009) also conceded that the results were not verified. The third limitation of these studies was that they

were done in the personal coaching context; while later in a literature review, Griffiths (2015) proposed to extend it to the education context, without any empirical study to substantiate or confirm that the model also works in that context.

Another study conducted by Sammut (2014) was more exploratory to get an understanding amongst selected coaches of whether they understood what transformative learning was and whether it was applied in their coaching practice. It only focused on coaches, thus clients did not substantiate claims that transformative learning did occur in their coaching, as no clients were interviewed.

Swart and Harcup (2013) studied how individual learning through coaching can be translated into collective learning in an organisation. Nonetheless, their study did not assess the process of learning and they concluded with a call for a further investigation of the mechanisms of learning in the coaching context.

Cox (2015) has mapped out the 10 steps of Mezirow's transformative learning process and linked them to a coaching process. However, this was also from a theoretical perspective, with no significant empirical data collection to verify the model.

A meta-analysis conducted by Jones et al. (2016) focused on workplace coaching and supported the view that coaching enables learning and development in an organisation. This study did not address the process of how learning occurs.

Finally, a recent study by Corrie and Lawson (2017) also drew from coaching literature (Dingman's six generic stages of the coaching process) and, like Cox (2015), mapped these alongside Mezirow's 10-step process of transformative learning. Corrie and Lawson (2017) proposed a five-step transformative learning coaching model: (1) rapport building and listening; (2) critical reflection; (3) making meaning from the story; (4) working with meaning; and (5) integration and investiture. However, it was acknowledged that, "the design and development of the transformative executive coaching model was created pragmatically to resolve a coaching practice problem faced by the authors, and acknowledging early successes, but it has not been fully tested to a significant level" (Corrie & Lawson, 2017, p. 56).

In summary, while there is enough evidence to suggest that coaching facilitates learning, there is still insufficient empirical evidence demonstrating how the process of transformative learning unfolds or occurs in a coaching conversation. All of these

studies fall short of just identifying process steps mainly from a coach perspective, and most did not get the coachee's perspective, thus the learning claims remain weak as there is no substantive evidence from clients. This was the main motivation for conducting this study.

### **2.3.3. *Transformative learning and executive coaching***

Transformative learning is defined as “the process of effecting change in a frame of reference. Frame of reference refers to cognitive, conative, and emotional components, and is composed of two dimensions: habits of mind and point of view” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5).

Hargrove (2003) proposed that the learning that occurs in coaching is transformative and not transactional. The literature reviewed so far references transformative learning theory to some extent, but no studies provide convincing empirical research on how transformative learning occurs in an executive coaching setting.

In their outline of the commonly used coaching approaches, Cox et al. (2014) linked adult learning theory to coaching as a learning methodology but did not indicate which approaches facilitate which type of learning. There is no explication as to whether all approaches can facilitate transformative learning. However, recently Cox (2015) mapped out Mezirow's 10-step transformative learning process and linked them to a coaching process. She illustrated it more theoretically, with no significant empirical study to support transformative learning, except for a few theoretical case examples.

The conclusion is that the scant empirical research on learning and executive coaching conducted thus far has not conclusively confirmed how the transformative learning process occurs in a coaching intervention. It is still not known how transformative learning occurred in the executive coaching process.

Therefore, this paper investigated these claims by exploring how transformative learning actually occurs in an executive coaching process. This was done through the assessment of the mechanisms that enable transformative learning in an executive coaching intervention. The study explored under what context transformative learning happens, and for whom it will occur. A realist evaluation approach was adopted to understand the contexts and mechanisms that produce transformative learning through executive coaching.

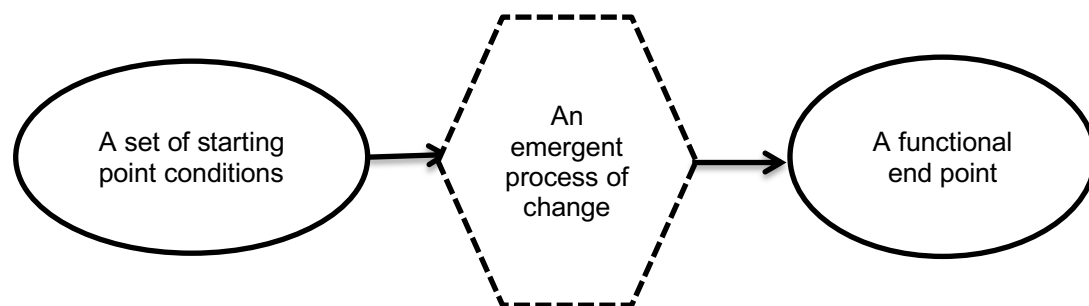
Given that the study was about investigating a process of how things evolve or emerge in a coaching setup to effect transformative learning outcomes, process theory literature was used. Process theory focuses on how and why things emerge, develop, grow and terminate over time (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013).

## 2.4. The executive coaching process

This section will firstly define “process” using process theory to locate the discussion on the process of coaching. Thereafter, it will discuss the process of executive coaching using literature from psychotherapy and executive coaching. Lastly, it will define and discuss the components that make up the executive coaching process.

### 2.4.1. What is a process

Van de Ven (1992) defined a process as a developmental sequence of events describing how things change over time. Pettigrew (1997, p. 338) explained that a process describes, analyses, and explains the what, why and how of some sequence of individual or collective action. According to these definitions, change is a continuous evolutionary process (Van de Ven, 1992). As an evolutionary process, it has a starting point and a functional end, as illustrated in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1:** An Illustration of process theory (Van de Ven, 1992)

Hence, a process explains the emergent change as a result of a predetermined set of conditions to achieve a particular result over a period of time (Pettigrew, 1997; Van de Ven, 1992). To understand how the change emerges, Pettigrew (1997) explained that there must be an action driving the process and that there are also embedded contexts and mechanisms shaping or influencing the observed phenomena. Time is at the centre of the process as it sets a frame of reference for the unfolding process (Pettigrew, 1997; Van de Ven, 1992).

Therefore, in this study, it is necessary to understand what actions drove the coaching process and what embedded context and mechanisms influenced transformative learning in the executive coaching intervention.

### *Process in psychotherapy*

The literature review thus far reveals that coaching is rooted in the theory and practice of counselling and psychotherapy (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017; Blackman et al., 2016; Passmore & Theeboom, 2016). Invariably, coaching techniques and processes are also similar to those of psychotherapy in many ways (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017). For example, in Rogers's (1959) classical theory of the "process of therapy", he argues that there are preconditions that must exist for effective therapy to happen, including the clients feeling and thinking about themselves and the situation (client readiness), and the therapist's attitude towards a client being positive. Rogers (1959) stated that based on this client readiness, some explanatory mechanisms must occur for the individual to move from a state of incongruence and a distorted view of self to a desired state or outcome of a fully functioning human being.

There are similarities between the therapy process and process theory as described above. The "pre-existing conditions" can be equated to the "set of starting point conditions". The emergent process of change can be equated to what Rogers (1959) described as a "process" or "explanatory mechanisms" that must occur for the outcome to be achieved. The "functional end point" is the "outcome" in the theory of psychotherapy.

One of the core elements of the psychotherapy process associated with therapeutic success is the quality of the relationship between the therapist and the client, which is expressed by empathetic understanding, an unconditional positive regard for the client (Rogers, 1959). This factor has evolved to be referred to as rapport in today's language (Gremier & Gwinner, 2008; Leach, 2005; Vallano & Compo, 2011). Active listening and questioning are other key factors that facilitate the success of any psychotherapy intervention (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017; Drollinger, Comer, & Warrington, 2006; Manzano, Swift, Closs, & Briggs, 2015).

### *Process in executive coaching*

Sonesh et al. (2015) identified factors that lead to success in executive coaching and proposed a similar model as described in process theory and the therapy process: an

“input-process-output” model. The “inputs” could be assumed to be the “pre-existing conditions” or “set of starting point conditions”. The “process” or the emergent process of change is defined in process theory as explanatory mechanisms (Rogers, 1959). In this study, the inputs were defined as *coachee motivation and coach behaviour*. The process was described as the *working alliance and information sharing* between the coach and coachee. The output was defined as goal attainment and coachee insight. The study found that working alliance and information sharing was significantly related to goal attainment and client insight (Sonesh et al., 2015).

In extant meta-analytic literature, several authors have identified factors that contribute to successful coaching outcomes, which can be divided into five categories:

- 1) *coach factors*, which include the characteristics and competencies of the coach (Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Rekalde et al., 2015);
- 2) *coachee factors*, including the personality attributes, motivation and commitment of the coachee (Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Graßmann, Schölmerich, & Schermuly, 2019; Rekalde et al., 2015);
- 3) *coach-coachee relationship factors* – that is, the interpersonal relational factors between the coach and coachee (Blackman et al., 2016; Graßmann et al., 2019; Grant & O'Connor, 2019; Rekalde et al., 2015);
- 4) *organisational contextual factors*, including supporting or restraining factors that impact the coach-coachee process (Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Rekalde et al., 2015); and
- 5) the *coaching process* (Rekalde et al., 2015; Sonesh et al., 2015).

Whilst the first four factors have been extensively discussed, the coaching process has been poorly defined and understood as comprising a working alliance and information sharing between the coach and coachee (Sonesh et al., 2015). Rekalde et al. (2015) included the importance of feedback in the coaching process, focusing on objectives and continuous challenges by the coach. However, these factors have been described as coach factors by other scholars, rather than a process (Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Rekalde et al., 2015).

In other literature, the coaching process is defined in the context of the stages or phases of the coaching engagement, which includes contracting, building trust, goal setting (Bennett & Bush, 2011; Campone, 2015; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Van Oosten & Kram, 2014), understanding and managing emotions, communication and facilitating

learning (Lai & McDowall, 2014; Rekalde et al., 2015). The goals or outcomes of coaching have been found to be gaining affective, cognitive and skill-based knowledge and attitudes (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Bozer et al., 2015; Graßmann et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2016; Rekalde et al., 2015) to improve performance, to embark on a development process, or to deal with an executive or organisational agenda (De Haan et al., 2011; De Haan & Duckworth, 2013; Maltbia et al., 2014). This means that while there have been many studies to determine the factors that make coaching effective, none have examined the actual process in the coach-coachee interaction that results in positive coaching outcomes and this remains an understudied area.

In this paper, the researcher undertook to understand the process of moving an executive coachee from a starting point to a “desired outcome” or “functional end goal” (transformative learning). In doing so, the researcher sought to firstly understand the “starting points” or “preconditions” for each of the executives at the start of the process. Most importantly, the question that needed to be answered was: how did the emergent process of change occur amongst the participating executives to arrive at their desired outcome? The emergent process in this study was characterised by the executive client and coach interaction. This is illustrated in Figure 2.2.

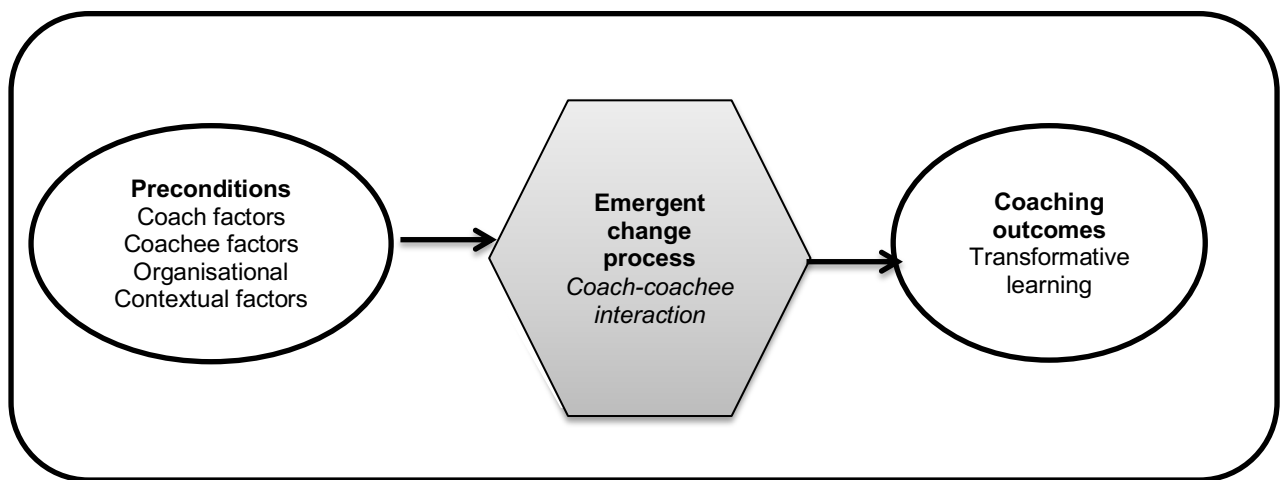


Figure 2.2: The executive coaching process

The section that follows details descriptions of the preconditions or input factors in the coaching process.

#### 2.4.2. Coach factors

Based on the literature review above, the coach factors that have been considered to contribute to effective coaching include: the coach’s ability to *build a trusting*



*relationship* with the coachee, *communication skills* that comprise of *active listening*, *asking questions* and *giving useful feedback* to the client, *understanding and managing emotions*, ability to *facilitate a conversation* and *challenge the client* to achieve goals that were set as well as the *coach's experience and competence* in executive coaching and business (Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Campone, 2015; De Haan et al., 2011; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Passmore & Theeboom, 2016; Rekalde et al., 2015). In addition, some scholars have added the *personal attributes* required by the coach to ensure effectiveness of coaching, including *commitment to the client*, *authenticity*, *integrity*, *credibility*, *confidentiality* and *being non-judgemental* (Blackman et al., 2016; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Rekalde et al., 2015).

In consolidating these coach factors, they can be classified under three categories: *creating a conducive environment for coaching* through establishing rapport and a trusting relationship; *supporting the client* through active listening and giving useful feedback; and *challenging the client* through reflective questioning and holding the client accountable. These components, which largely form part of the competencies of a coach and of the inputs into the process, are discussed in the following sections.

#### 2.4.2.1. *Creating a conducive environment for coaching*

The basis of any effective coaching conversation stems from establishing a relationship of trust, openness and a safe environment wherein learning can occur (Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Rekalde et al., 2015). This involves establishing a rapport where a client feels comfortable to relate and share their experiences or challenges (Campone, 2015; Cremona, 2010; Stein, 2009). *Rapport* is defined as a “harmonious relationship or interaction” between two people (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Leach, 2005; Vallano & Compo, 2011), or a “perceived quality of a relationship between two parties” (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008, p. 309).

In therapeutic contexts, studies have found that a good rapport between a therapist and patient accounts for improved treatment outcomes as well as improved patient satisfaction (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Leach, 2005; Vallano & Compo, 2011). In business settings, rapport has also been found to be a determinant of long-term success of a business relationship (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008).

The techniques through which rapport is built include verbal and non-verbal behaviour (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008). According to Leach (2005) and Gremler and Gwinner

(2008), *non-verbal behaviour* includes attentive behaviour (active listening), such as eye contact, open posture, and “back-channel” responses like nodding and “mm” exclamations. Moreover, it involves imitative behaviour like matching the client’s body posture and gestures, facial expressions and breathing patterns (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Leach, 2005).

*Verbal rapport building* behaviour includes ensuring confidentiality; a collaborative relationship; showing interest in the client’s concerns; objectivity and non-judgement; courteous behaviour like smiling; engaging in polite behaviour, finding common ground with the client and engaging them in meaningful interactions (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Leach, 2005); as well as self-disclosure on the part of the counsellor or therapist (Vallano & Compo, 2011). These behaviours are set to inculcate a trusting relationship between both parties, which would enable the client to feel comfortable and safe enough to engage and/or disclose issues they would not normally disclose if there was no rapport (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Leach, 2005; Vallano & Compo, 2011).

Rapport in a coaching relationship has been found to produce similar results as it is regarded as a skill that improves the quality of the coach-coachee relationship. It is also viewed as contributing to the success of coaching outcomes (Bennett & Bush, 2011; Boyce, Jackson, & Neal, 2004; Gan & Chong, 2015; Sonesh et al., 2015).

Rapport building in coaching is regarded as an act of creating mutual understanding between the coach and coachee. The intention is to reduce the differences between the two parties and allow a trusting relationship to emerge. Achieving this creates an open and safe environment that is conducive for learning (Bennett & Bush, 2011; Boyce et al., 2004; Gan & Chong, 2015; Sonesh et al., 2015).

In the coaching industry, scholars and practitioners refer to this competency differently, yet the descriptions are the same. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) identifies rapport as one of the coach’s key competencies and is referred to as *co-creating the relationship* (establishing client trust and intimacy and coaching presence). Maltbia et al. (2014) referred to this competency as *social competence* (SQ), “Building relationships to establish a personal bond with a client by creating a safe, supportive environment characterized by a trusted partnership, mutual respect, and freedom of expression (e.g., encouraging engagement and establishing trust)”. It can be concluded then, that rapport and trust building in a coaching relationship are a foundation without which effective coaching cannot happen (Blackman et al., 2016;

Bozer & Jones, 2018; Campone, 2015; Lai & McDowall, 2014).

#### 2.4.2.2. *Supporting the client*

Supporting the client in a coaching context involves providing a space for the client to relate their experiences through listening, understanding and encouraging the client (De Haan et al., 2011; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Woodcock, 2010). Supporting the client has two major components: active listening and giving feedback.

In counselling and therapy literature, the type of listening that is encouraged is active or attentive. Rogers (1959, p. 210) coined the term active listening to refer to “the ability to perceive the internal frame of reference another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings ... as if one were the other person”. Active listening in coaching is defined as paying attention to someone on what is and what is not being said to understand the meaning in the context of the client’s desired results (Maltbia et al., 2014; Snorrason, 2014). This type of listening has been found to promote empathy and support the client (Drollinger et al., 2006); induce feelings of trust from the client (Fischer-Lokou, Lamy, Guéguen, & Dubarry, 2016); and create a stronger relationship between the two parties (Snorrason, 2014). Based on this description, there is a clear link between active listening and rapport building, as discussed in the previous section.

Active listening involves three processes: sensing or hearing, processing or evaluating, and responding (Drollinger et al., 2006; Manzano et al., 2015). Sensing or hearing includes listening to the actual words the client utters by reformulating or paraphrasing what the listener understands as well as repeating the exact words the client has used (Fischer-Lokou et al., 2016). However, sensing and hearing goes beyond hearing the actual words to also observing the non-verbal gestures and emotions that come with the verbal language (Drollinger et al., 2006; Fischer-Lokou et al., 2016; Manzano et al., 2015).

The second phase of listening is processing the words that are heard by “remembering” the message as expressed, thus “interpreting”, “evaluating”, and “making meaning” of what the client has said (Fischer-Lokou et al., 2016; Manzano et al., 2015). The final phase is that of responding to the client or giving feedback verbally and non-verbally.

Coaching literature uses the same concept of active or attentive listening as one of the key components that facilitates effective coaching conversations (Cremona, 2010; De Haan et al., 2011; Woodcock, 2010). Active listening is regarded as one of the key competencies a coach needs to possess to facilitate effective coaching conversation (Ciporen, 2015; Maltbia et al., 2014).

In addition, active listening is seen as involving giving feedback to the client on what they have said and bringing awareness of significant moments in the conversation (Griffiths & Campbell, 2009). It also involves hearing the client without judging them. Active listening enables the coach to pick up themes that emerge for the client through the conversation. The client's beliefs, values and assumptions are expressed in these themes (Woodcock, 2010). In listening carefully to the themes, the coach is able to give feedback to the client and highlight these. When clients are listened to, they feel understood and like they are being taken seriously (Cremona, 2010; Woodcock, 2010).

#### 2.4.2.3. *Challenging the client*

At the core of the transformative learning process is encouraging or challenging individuals to critically reflect on their assumptions and beliefs as well as to engage in a rational dialogue. Questioning is the mechanism that facilitates this process (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Lai & McDowall, 2014). The key questions on transformative learning revolve around the what (content), the how (process) and the why (premise). "At the heart of reflection is reflective questioning", which is defined as "raising tentative non-rhetorical questions", and it involves a "cognitive act of sense making" (Romme & Van Seggelen-Damen, 2015).

According to Romme and Van Seggelen-Damen (2015), non-rhetorical questions assist in exploring individuals' thinking and expand their knowledge base. This type of questioning also helps to understand a person's deeper frame of mind. Hence, reflective questions enable a "deconstruction" and/or "reconstruction" of meaning, as they can also infuse "doubt" – which could be regarded as disorienting dilemma in the transformative learning process – in individuals that can give rise to exploring their values, beliefs and assumptions (Giapponi & Ritter, 2015; Romme & Van Seggelen-Damen, 2015). The benefits of these types of questions are that they facilitate critical thinking and self-reflection, and enhance cognitive complexity (Giapponi & Ritter, 2015; Romme & Van Seggelen-Damen, 2015).

In the coaching context, questioning is defined as an inquiry to reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client, capturing the learning embedded in experience (Maltbia et al., 2014). It is often referred to as powerful questioning or Socratic questioning. Questioning in a coaching context fosters the same level of critical reflection and encourages dialogue with the self and the coach (De Haan et al., 2011; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009). Since coaching assumes that the client has all the answers, the clients need to solve whatever problems they have and asking questions allows them the opportunity to generate solutions to their challenges (Griffiths & Campbell, 2009).

Furthermore, Griffiths (2015) argued that giving clients feedback on their behaviour motivates them to take accountability for actions that result from the coaching sessions. In doing so, the potential for learning and change in behaviour is increased.

In this study, the researcher undertook to understand how reflective questioning can facilitate transformative learning. However, it should be noted that this process does not occur in isolation from the other two processes. This is enabled by the support provided by the coach through active listening and giving feedback in an environment that is conducive to creating trust. It is a combination of the various elements that would produce a transformative learning outcome. As process theory suggests, this process, although evolutionary, is not linear, but reiterative (Langley et al., 2013; Pettigrew, 1997; Van de Ven, 1992).

### **2.4.3. *Coachee factors***

Research conducted by McKenna and Davis (2009) and Smith and Brummel (2013) indicates that client readiness is a core ingredient of a successful coaching engagement. This core ingredient includes the executive's active involvement in the coaching process. This includes their willingness to invest time and energy into the process, to do the work or put into practice the development work that is required even if it is difficult, and their ability to take responsibility for transferring what they have learnt into action for change in their roles (Smith & Brummel, 2013).

Using their experience in psychotherapy, McKenna and Davis (2009) argued that client readiness is likely to account for up to 40% of the success of a coaching engagement. Moreover, they stated that other factors in the environment of the executive coaching process play a major role in client readiness. Extant executive coaching literature supports this argument by adding some factors that contribute to the effectiveness of

coaching outcomes. These factors include coachee motivation and need for learning, coachee self-efficacy and goal orientation, coachee's interest in self-development and taking ownership of the process, as well as personality and values (Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Bozer et al., 2015; Graßmann et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2016; Rekalde et al., 2015).

#### **2.4.4. Contextual factors**

Johns (2006, p. 386) defined context in organisational behaviour and research as the surrounding factors associated with the phenomena or unit of analysis; it consists of constraints and opportunities that affect the occurrence and meaning of organisational behaviour and functional relationships between variables. Johns (2006) distinguishes between *omnibus context*, which answers questions of who, when, where and why; *discrete context*, which has to do with the autonomy, uncertainty, accountability and resources of a *task*; *social context* (social density, structure and influences); and *physical context*, including elements like temperature, light, built environment, all of which have a major impact on research and organisation behaviour. From an executive coaching perspective, context involves the broader organisation factors that include economic, political, social, technical and legal factors (Fatien Diochon, Otter, Stokes, & Van Hove, 2019; Pawson, 2013).

A number of scholars have indicated that the role of context has been undervalued in organisational behaviour research, including executive coaching research; yet it plays a major role in impacting and determining the success or failure of an executive coaching intervention (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Bozer & Delegach, 2019; Fatien Diochon & Nizet, 2019; Fatien Diochon et al., 2019; Johns, 2006). They argue that context needs to be “systematically” and “mindfully” incorporated in research as it has the ability to change causal relationships, affect the results and even threaten the validity of the study, and that it is not often easy to control context in research (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Fatien Diochon & Nizet, 2019; Johns, 2018).

In this study, context was systematically and mindfully integrated into the conception, design, interpretation and reporting of research results (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Johns, 2006, 2018). The researcher undertook to understand the role and impact of the coachee context (socio-political and organisational) in the transformative learning process during the coaching intervention

#### **2.4.5. The outcomes of executive coaching**

The outcomes of executive coaching have been categorised into affective (*emotional aspects, such as self-efficacy*), cognitive (*change in thinking patterns*), and skill-based outcomes (*such as goal attainment*) (Bozer & Jones 2018; Graßmann et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2016; Rekalde et al., 2015). As indicated earlier, executive coaching has been found to improve individual performance and increase meaning of work, which results in increased work satisfaction and work-life balance (Grant, 2014; Theeboom et al., 2014). It has also been found that, during periods of change, managers who go through coaching are equipped with the skills to lead change more effectively (Sonesh et al., 2015; Stober, 2008); and that managers who work with an executive coach are more likely to set specific goals, improve organisational outputs, solicit ideas for improvements from others, and often obtain higher ratings from their staff and colleagues (De Haan et al., 2011). More importantly, it has been asserted that the skills required by leaders for transforming organisations can mainly be achieved through coaching (Ely et al., 2010; Stout-Rostron, 2014). These skills include affective and cognitive skills that enable leaders to lead and manage change as well as manage people issues (Ely et al., 2010).

#### **2.5. Transformative learning process**

This section presents a critical review of Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning. It looks at the relevance of transformative learning for adult learning and development, and its potential application to executive coaching.

##### **2.5.1. The development of transformative learning theory**

Over the last 30 years, transformative learning theory has become accepted as one of the notable theories of adult learning (Dix, 2016; Hoggan, 2016; Mälkki, 2010). Transformative learning theory's popularity has resulted in its increased usage in fields like psychology, sociology, and transpersonal and religious studies (Hoggan, 2016; Merriam, 2004), and recently coaching (Gray, 2006; Corrie & Lawson, 2017). Over the years, through research and dialogue on transformative learning theory, the theory has evolved with some modification included by other scholars (Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2009; Mezirow, 2000).

Mezirow's work on transformative learning theory dates back to the late 1970s, when he conducted a study on women who were returning to post-high school studies or work after an extended absence from school and the workplace (Kitchenham, 2008).

In his studies, Mezirow drew from the work of three scholars. Firstly, Kuhn's (1962) concept of paradigms – a set of concepts, beliefs, methods of enquiry and values that are held by a particular scientific discipline – which tend towards particular forms of enquiry and research that reinforce these same concepts (Kuhn, 1970). Mezirow (1990) described a paradigm as a collectively held meaning perspective. However, in developing transformative learning theory, Mezirow (1991) applied the paradigm to the individual, proposing that an individual who experiences transformative learning would have a shift in his or her meaning perspective.

Secondly, he built on the work of Freire's (1970) conscientisation and critical consciousness theory. Critical consciousness refers to "a process in which learners develop the ability to analyse, pose questions, and take action on social, political, cultural, and economic contexts that influence and shape their lives" (Dirkx, 1998, p. 3). According to Freire, as cited in Dirkx, (1998) it is through reflection and dialogue that learners develop awareness and "deeper understanding" of the ways in which social structures determine and influence their lives.

Thirdly, Mezirow built his theory on Habermas's (1981) theory of communicative domains. Habermas (1981) described two levels of communicative domains: instrumental and communicative. The instrumental domain refers to an understanding of how things work and involves learning about cause-effect relationships where meaning is created deductively (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1991). The communicative domain includes the understanding of beliefs, values, intentions and assumptions of the self and of others. It is at the communicative domain level where people learn about social and cultural norms and behaviour (Mezirow, 1991).

Building on the work of these scholars, Mezirow (1997, p. 5) defined transformative learning as "the process of effecting change in a frame of reference". He added that, "A frame of reference is a set of criteria or values that an individual use to judge or view the world". Other terms for frame of reference that have been used interchangeably in transformative learning literature by Mezirow and other transformative learning scholars are "meaning perspective" and "perspective transformation".

### ***2.5.2. The premise of transformative learning theory***

A major premise of transformative learning theory is that adults have acquired a considerable amount of experience throughout their lives, an experience that has



become a “coherent *body of experience*” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). This body of experience has developed from early childhood into adulthood and encompasses a wide range of factors that determine the meanings individuals give to certain concepts, thoughts, feelings and actions. This body of experience forms “paradigmatic assumptions” (Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Grainger, 2015), which determine some of the conditioned responses individuals portray and may prevent them from dealing with problems differently when required (Mezirow, 1990, 1997). These meanings are created through a process of social and cultural integration, which includes social-linguistic, epistemic, moral-ethical, philosophical, psychological, and aesthetic schemes (Kayes, 2002; Mezirow, 1990, 1997). Over the years of individual development, these schemes become solidified ways of thinking, feeling and perceiving the world (Mezirow, 1990, 1997). In effect, the meaning-making process created through making sense of experiences is learning (Mezirow, 1997). In other words, people learn through a process of making meaning from their experiences.

Two types of meaning are identifiable: “meaning schemes” and “meaning perspectives”. The meaning schemes refer to a set of “related habitual expectations governing the ‘if-then’”, cause-effect relationships (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1). Meaning schemes are comparable to Habermas’s (1981) instrumental domain, which involves learning “how things work”. According to Habermas (1981), this type of learning is created deductively by experimenting with the environment. In doing so, individuals learn to become more effective in controlling certain situations or when confronted with certain problems; they learn the “correct” way to behave under circumstances (Mezirow, 1991). For example, individuals conform to rules of engagement in a community or an organisation and learn that this is how things should be or work. When a member of a particular social group does not behave in the expected way, he or she would be regarded as being “wrong” for not complying with the rules of engagement. According to Mezirow (1991), meaning schemes create “habits of mind” – habitual behaviour that people learn to respond to in a particular way without questioning.

The second type of meaning, “meaning perspective”, is more critical for transformative learning. This is described as “higher-order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, prototypes, goal orientation and evaluations” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1). Meaning perspectives are more fundamental than meaning schemes, as they form a structure for the assumptions that have been assimilated from past experiences. They become “perceptual filters”, “conceptual maps”, “personal ideologies”, or “personal constructs”

through which individuals live their lives (Mezirow, 1991). Meaning perspectives are also developed through social and cultural integration and are equivalent to Habermas's (1981) communicative domain, which includes the understanding of beliefs, values, intentions and assumptions of the self and others. It is at the communicative domain level where people learn about social and cultural norms and behaviour (Mezirow, 1991). Examples of meaning perspective are beliefs about a person's identity or beliefs about roles people must play in society. Mälkki (2010) posited that the positive aspect of meaning perspectives is that it enables people to maintain worldviews and it creates a sense of stability, community, and identity for individuals.

Alternatively, meaning perspectives can create distortions later in life when they become obsolete in solving current problems. They can act as a limitation to people's attentions, perceptions and interpretations (Mälkki, 2010; Mezirow, 1997). When these meaning perspectives become obsolete, transformation is required (Mezirow, 1990). Thus, it is the meaning perspectives that need to shift or change for transformative learning to occur. Transforming meaning perspectives could have a huge impact on individuals' lives given their deep-seated nature (Mezirow, 1997). Shifting meaning perspective means seeing the world differently by modifying and adjusting "problematic", "fixed" and "static" assumptions and expectations (Mezirow, 1997, 2000).

There are two fundamental processes in transformative learning, the first of which allows individuals to expand their worldviews, and the second to see the world differently (Mezirow, 1991). Furthermore, two types of transformative learning processes have been described – namely, epochal and incremental transformation (Mezirow, 1991). Epochal transformation occurs speedily within a few minutes or hours of an individual experiencing a "eureka" moment, and incremental transformation is when an individual experiences small slow shifts over a longer period of time (Mezirow, 1991). Invariably small shifts in meaning schemes are a foundation for a change in meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1997, 2000).

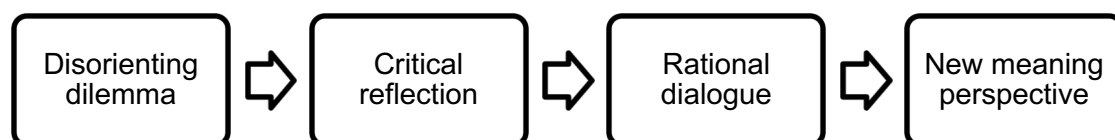
### ***2.5.3. Steps in the transformative learning process***

Firstly, this section will summarise the transformative learning process as originally envisaged by Mezirow. Secondly, it will provide a critical analysis of what Mezirow considers the three main mechanisms of transformative learning – namely disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, and rational dialogue.

Originally, Mezirow mapped out a 10-step process of transformative learning as outlined below:

- i. Experiencing a disorienting dilemma;
- ii. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame;
- iii. Critical assessment of assumptions;
- iv. Recognising that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared;
- v. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions;
- vi. Planning a course of action;
- vii. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans;
- viii. Provisionally trying out new roles;
- ix. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and
- x. Reintegrating one's life on the basis of a new perspective.

As the discourse on transformative learning evolved, the following three core elements summarising the 10 steps emerged: “disorienting dilemma”, “critical reflection”, and “rational dialogue”. Considering the 10 steps, it can be seen that the first two relate to disorienting dilemma. The next two have to do with critical reflection. Steps five and six relate to rational dialogue, while steps seven, eight and nine refer to a learning process that has occurred. Finally, step 10 states the outcome – new perspective. Mezirow's (1997) argument is that the application or experience of a combination of these three core elements may lead to transformative learning amongst individuals. However, this process is not linear, as it differs for every individual who experiences it (Taylor, 2008). The figure below is a simplified illustration of the mechanisms in the transformative learning process.



*Figure 2.3: Transformative learning components*

### 2.5.3.1. *Disorienting dilemma*

A disorienting dilemma refers to a significant disruption or disturbance of a person's meaning perspective. This could include extreme events, such as the death of a loved one, a life-threatening illness or divorce, or more ordinary events like a career change or engaging in a personal development programme (Mezirow, 1991). Hoggan, Mälkki, and Finnegan (2017) described it as a momentary breakdown of continuity. Since meaning perspectives are formed through people's past experiences and they learn to respond to the present and future using these past frames, when they cannot make sense of the present utilising the past frames, it results in a disorienting dilemma (Hoggan et al., 2017).

Therefore, a disorienting dilemma is considered a prerequisite for transformation because, when it happens, the person is more likely to begin to critically reflect on their frames of mind (Mezirow, 1997; Mezirow & Taylor, 2011). Hoggan (2017) added that this breakdown of continuity is so significant it cannot be ignored, as it then forces the individual to re-examine his or her values, beliefs, intentions and/or assumptions. This can happen as a result of a major event or a learning programme that an individual has undertaken (Christie et al., 2015).

### 2.5.3.2. *Critical reflection*

A disorienting dilemma presents a prerequisite for the next phase of transformative learning, critical reflection. Critical reflection is a process by which individuals intentionally examine their own beliefs and assumptions to bring about new meanings (Mezirow, 1997). According to Mezirow (1997), there are three layers of critical reflection: reflecting on content (what people perceive, feel, think and act on); reflecting on process (how people perform the functions of perceiving the way they do); and reflecting on premise (why people do *what they do*). Transformative learning occurs by challenging through critical reflection, meaning on all three layers (Mezirow & Taylor, 2011).

Critical reflection is perhaps the most criticised phase of the transformative learning process. Scholars like Kegan (2009) and Dix (2016) have elaborated on the cognitive aspects of the process, highlighting some limitations on the way Mezirow has framed this process and proposing ways to strengthen the theory with respect to the cognitive aspects.

Other scholars (Christie et al., 2015; Gunnlaugson, 2007; Mälkki, 2010) have criticised transformative learning theory for overemphasising critical reflection as a way of learning, while undermining other ways of knowing, such as intuition and kinaesthetic knowledge. In addition, Clark and Wilson (1991), Mälkki, (2010), and Taylor (2007) have recognised that Mezirow underplayed the role of context and relationships in the critical reflection process. Lastly, Hoggan (2016) has sought to clarify the definition and meaning of “perspective transformation” as an outcome of transformative learning.

Mezirow simply defined critical reflection as elaborating on existing frames of reference (fostering critical self-examination and self-awareness); acquiring new frames (learning to accommodate new frames); transforming habits of mind (learning to adopt new habits); and transforming points of view (having a new worldview) (Kayes, 2002; Mezirow, 1990, 1997).

#### *The cognitive aspects of critical reflection*

Kegan (2009) postulated that not all types of reflection and learning result in transformation. For example, the type of learning that increases people’s awareness, knowledge, range of skills and attitude, and even extends already established cognitive structure is called informative learning. Such learning can bring about change, such as improved confidence in a learner, improved self-perception, or improved self-esteem. While these are important, they cannot be said to be transformative learning (Kegan, 2009).

The key to transformation is a shift in a frame of reference. According to Kegan (2009), this is a way of knowing “epistemology”, which is reflected in meaning structure or the meaning people have created or that has formed over the years of socialisation. For transformative learning to occur, meaning must already be formed. If this meaning structure has become obsolete in solving current individual or even organisational challenges and problems, the process of reforming this meaning is the transformation process (Kegan & Lahey, 2001; Kegan, 2009).

For transformative learning to happen, the already existing meaning perspective that has been formed as a result of social and cultural integration has to be transformed to “self-authored meanings”. This process of “self-authoring” a new frame of reference accounts for transformative learning and occurs over a long period of time (Kegan, 2009).

Dix (2016) challenged Mezirow's explanation of critical reflection as a cognitive process for appearing to be linear and narrow. He suggested that the cognitive process that occurs during critical reflection is also enactive and non-discursive as guided by the meta-cognitive process. In this argument, there is support for Kegan's subject-object model, where the argument is that for adequate critical reflection to occur, individuals need to subject their assumptions as an "object" of scrutiny in a rational and objective manner (Kegan, 2009). In doing so, individuals are able to critically reflect on their own assumptions as well as those of others and, more importantly, they are able to move away from socially authored assumptions to self-authored assumptions (Kegan, 2009). This is seen as being critically important as humans mostly live on assumptions authored by society and other significant people in their lives (Kegan, 2009). Achieving this level of independence allows individuals to transform their worldviews.

#### *The conative/emotional aspect of critical reflection*

In his article on shedding light on the underlying forms of transformative learning theory, Gunnlaugson (2007) supports the idea that critical reflection is a rational, meta-cognitive process, but suggests that there are "multiple ways of knowing" what includes feelings, emotions, intuitive promptings, and kinaesthetic shifts.

In addition, scholars like Dirkx, Espinoza, and Schlegel (2018), Hoggan et al. (2017), and Mälkki, (2010) argued that transformative learning theory's cognitive and rational elements of reflection have been overemphasised at the expense of the emotional and social aspects of the process. Their argument is that reflection is more than just a rational process and that emotions play a major role. There is a significant "tension" between critical reflection and meaning perspective, as individuals make decisions not only based on rationality, but their emotions as well (Mälkki, 2010). Mezirow suggested that when people go through a critical reflection process, it could be a painful experience, suggesting that emotions play a major role. The cognitive process of critical reflection cannot be separated from the emotive side (Dirkx et al., 2018), as it is impossible to separate cognition from emotions (Hoggan et al., 2017). Consequently, this suggests that transformative learning involves both a cognitive and an emotional process.

#### *Contextual and social aspects of critical reflection*

Clark and Wilson (1991) elaborated on the role of context and social relations in the critical reflection process, arguing that the elements of meaning perspective could not

be debated outside of the consideration of the context within which they were formed. For example, in Mezirow's study, the context of a patriarchy in the period that his study was conducted informed the process of transformative learning for the women who were studied. Thus, the contextual dimensions are not only a part of the meaning structure for individuals and/or groups, but can also be a source of heightening awareness to begin the critical reflection process (Clark & Wilson, 1991).

Moreover, other scholars – for instance, Mälkki (2010) – argued that the role of social relationships is crucial in the reflection process. Meaning perspectives can be seen as an accumulation of shared social relations (Mälkki & Green, 2014), thus individuals do not exist in isolation of their social context (Hoggan et al., 2017). Both Mälkki & Green, (2014) and Hoggan et al., (2017) argue that the disorienting dilemma fundamentally occurs as a result of the tension between social norms and expectations from a community, family or organisation and the individuals need to change. Depending on how the person values the relationships in that context, they may prevent themselves from shifting their perspective as the desired results could compromise social relationships (Mälkki, 2010; Mälkki & Green, 2014). This is why Mezirow says people can go through a period of fear, anger, guilt, or shame in the critical reflection process. Based on how they process this phase, people may proceed to the next phase of transformative learning or they may get stuck and remain in the same place.

#### 2.5.3.3. *Rational dialogue*

The third component in transformative learning theory is rational dialogue. This is defined as a way of discussing personal and social beliefs, values and assumptions with other people in a logical and objective manner (Mezirow, 1997). For rational dialogue to occur, people must be open and unbiased in presenting their own assumptions while suspending judgement on assumptions of others (Mezirow, 1990, 1997). Kegan (2009) supported this view, saying that assumptions need to be presented as an “object” for rational scrutiny.

However, the issue of rationality of discourse as discussed in the previous section should also be informed by other ways of knowing, including intuition, feelings, emotions, and kinaesthetic knowledge (Dix, 2016; Gunnlaugson, 2007; Mälkki, 2010), as emotions anchor learning (Dirkx et al., 2018). Rational discourse will also be informed by the context and social relationships within which critical reflection and dialogue occur (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Dix, 2016; Gunnlaugson, 2007; Mälkki, 2010).

#### **2.5.4. *The outcomes of transformative learning***

To know if transformative learning has occurred, one needs to be clear about what the outcomes of the process might be. Hoggan (2016) and Taylor (2007) indicated this is another area of transformative learning theory that has received major criticism.

According to transformative learning theory, the outcome of transformative learning is perspective transformation (meaning perspective). Perspective transformation can be paraphrased as the process of becoming critically aware of how and why assumptions have come to constrain the way people perceive, understand, and feel about the world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and making choices or acting on these new understandings (Taylor, 1997). In doing this, the individual develops a new meaning structure. The specific outcomes have been defined in the theory as having a deeper self-awareness, having more perspective, experiencing a deep shift in worldview, and acting differently (Mezirow, 1990). Mezirow (1997) also cautioned that to sustain the new learning, transformed meanings need to be incorporated into the new meaning structure through action.

However, these outcomes have been found to be ambiguous by other scholars, as they do not provide specificity on the nature of perspective transformation. They do not state what the related outcomes for having revised one's meaning structure are, and they do not give specific behavioural evidence as a result of a new meaning structure (Taylor, 1997, 2007).

Hoggan's (2016) argument is that due to the lack of clarity around perspective transformation, scholars have provided their own definitions of what transformative learning is, to the extent of risking naming all forms of learning as transformative. Based on a literature review by Hoggan (2016) of 206 peer-reviewed empirical studies conducted between 2003 and 2014, he created criteria and a typology for transformative learning outcomes. He came up with six categories of outcomes, four of which link directly to Mezirow's definition of outcomes.



Table 2.4: Transformative learning outcomes

Outcome category	Definition	Sub-categories
A change in worldview	This refers to significant changes in the way the learner understands the world and how it works.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and/or expectations</li> <li>• Ways of interpreting experience</li> <li>• More comprehensive or complex worldview</li> <li>• New awareness/understandings</li> </ul>
Significant shift in sense of self	Any of a number of ways that learners experience a significant shift in their sense of self.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-in-relation (to the world)</li> <li>• Empowerment/responsibility (personal mastery/personal)</li> <li>• Identity/view of self</li> <li>• Self-knowledge</li> <li>• Personal narratives (stories people tell themselves)</li> <li>• Meaning/purpose</li> <li>• Personality change</li> </ul>
Epistemology	The way people construct and evaluate knowledge in their day-to-day living, their ways of knowing, rather than how they explicitly define it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More discriminating and critical not accepting knowledge passively</li> <li>• Utilising extra-rational ways and or multiple of knowing</li> <li>• Being more open</li> </ul>
Ontology	Refers to the way a person exists in the world. It concerns the deeply established mental and emotional inclinations that affect the overall quality and tone of one's existence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affective experience of life</li> <li>• Ways of being</li> <li>• Attributes</li> </ul>
Behaviour	Change in behaviour means the emphasis on action, such as planning a course of action, implementing one's plans, and building competence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions consistent with new perspective</li> <li>• Social action</li> <li>• Professional practices</li> </ul>

Outcome category	Definition	Sub-categories
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills</li> </ul>
Capacity	Capacity refers to developmental outcomes whereby learners experience systematic, qualitative changes in their ability that allow for greater complexity in the way they see, interpret, and function.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive development</li> <li>• A shift, expansion, or cultivation of consciousness</li> <li>• Spiritual development</li> </ul>

Source: Hoggan (2016)

The four learning outcomes linked to Mezirow's original outcomes are: worldview (change in assumptions, beliefs and values), epistemology (more open, more reflective), ontology (more self-directed, emotionally capable of change), and behaviour (acting differently). The additional two outcomes – a significant shift in sense of self and capacity – also provide useful criteria, which researchers could use for transformative learning outcomes.

Furthermore, Hoggan (2016) provided three additional criteria that could be considered in assessing transformative learning outcomes – that is, depth, breadth and relative stability. Depth refers to the extent or degree of the impact on the change that has occurred (quality of impact); breadth relates to the number (quantity) of contexts that the change will manifest; and relative stability refers to the permanency or sustainability of the change that has occurred (Hoggan, 2016, p. 15). This last point also relates to Mezirow's argument that implementation of the new change may not be immediate, as the reflective process may occur over a long period of time.

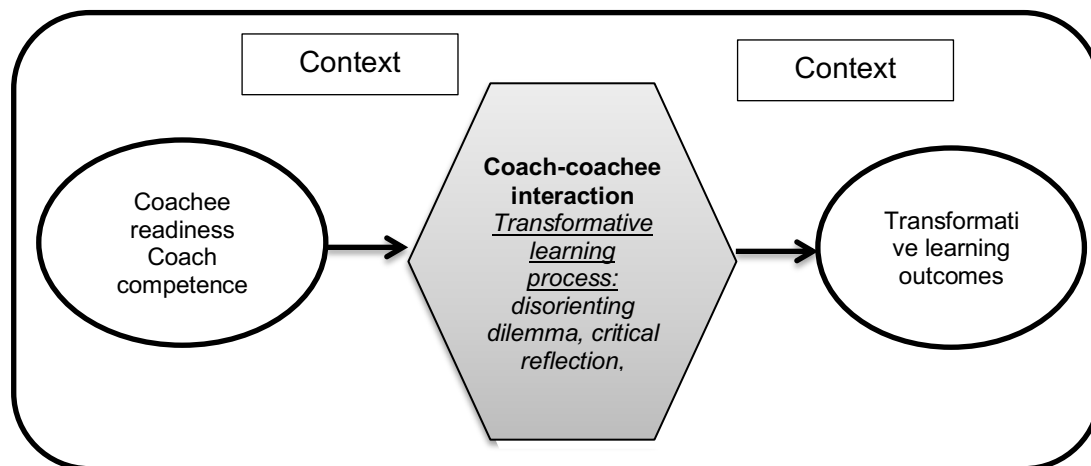
#### *Relevance of the transformative learning outcomes in the study*

This research focused on the process of transformative learning in an executive coaching process and looked specifically at how, under what context, and for whom transformative learning occurs in an executive coaching programme. A programme theory was developed, and the mechanisms of both the transformative learning and the executive coaching processes were assessed to see how they interact to produce transformative learning outcomes. The researcher also assessed the context(s) under which the transformative learning process occurred. The transformative learning outcomes were used as a measure of knowing when, with whom and under what context transformative learning had or had not occurred amongst executives who participated in the coaching programme.

## **2.6. Executive coaching and transformative learning**

This section discusses the relationship between the transformative learning process and the executive coaching process. It evaluates the potential relationship between executive coaching and the three mechanisms of transformative learning – disorienting dilemma, critical reflection and rational dialogue – and how the interaction between the two could facilitate transformative learning outcomes.

The figure below illustrates how the two processes interlink. The coachee readiness (which includes all the coachee factors described under 2.4.3) and coach competence (which also includes all the coach factors described under 2.4.2) are preconditions that enable the engagement to occur. The transformative learning mechanisms are embedded in the emergent change process, which is the coach-coachee interaction. The context and its impact on the coaching interaction and throughout the coaching intervention are taken into consideration.



**Figure 2.4:** Conceptual model of the process of transformative learning in executive coaching

### **2.6.1. Disorienting dilemma in the context of executive coaching**

Cox (2015) argued that when executives come to a coaching programme, they are already experiencing a disorienting dilemma. While this might be true for some executives, it only answers the first part of Christie et al.'s (2015) arguments. For example, a major event has occurred in the life of an executive, a company has suffered losses for the year, or shareholders have sanctioned a major restructuring process. However, Christie et al. (2015) suggest that a learning programme could facilitate a disorienting dilemma. Looking at the first step of Mezirow's transformation process, Cox (2015) did not see coaching as facilitating a disorienting dilemma and argued that clients come to a coaching session as a result of experiencing a disorienting dilemma. If learning programmes could trigger a disorienting dilemma as Christie et al. (2015) suggested, executive coaching as a learning process can facilitate a disorienting dilemma.

The question is: how would executive coaching facilitate disorienting dilemma? This study explored how the mechanisms in an executive coaching process could support

a client who is already experiencing disorienting dilemma or facilitate a disorienting dilemma process in order to stimulate transformative learning.

### **2.6.2. *Critical reflection in the context of executive coaching***

As indicated earlier, critical reflection in the transformative learning process occurs by challenging individuals' worldviews through examining their beliefs, values, intentions and assumptions (Mezirow & Taylor, 2011). This reflection is on the what, how and why, which are the key questions individuals need to answer in this process. This questioning triggers critical reflection. The same applies in the coaching process. It is imperative that the questions target all three levels of critical reflection as per Mezirow's theory – namely, questions that require the client to reflect on the what (content), how (process) and why (premise) of their experiences, assumptions, values intentions, and beliefs. Reflective questioning in the executive coaching process, as discussed in section 2.4, could assist in facilitating the process of critical reflection. However, it is imperative to consider the context, such as readiness of the client, impact of social relations and other factors that may constrain or enable the process.

Hence, in this study, the researcher explored how creating a conducive environment, supporting the client and using reflective questioning in an executive coaching context facilitated the process of critical reflection.

### **2.6.3. *Rational dialogue in the context of executive coaching***

Executive coaching is a dialogue between the executive client and coach. It presents an opportunity for executive clients to relate their experiences, challenge and subject their values, beliefs and assumptions objectively to scrutiny with someone they trust. In this study, the researcher explored how the three components of executive coaching – a conducive environment, active listening, and reflective questioning – allow for an effective dialogue where the clients can present their beliefs, values and assumptions to scrutiny in an objective manner.

## **2.7. Programme theory development**

This section defines the constructs related to the realist evaluation approach. Thereafter, a programme theory is proposed for the study that was tested.

### **2.7.1. The realist evaluation approach**

Evaluation is “a systematic assessment of the worth or merit of a programme or intervention” (Nieveen & Folmer, 2013). The purpose of evaluation is to determine how well the programme or intervention has been implemented or designed, to validate or test a theory, and to draw comparisons between two or more programmes, interventions or theories (Venable et al., 2016). In the research context, summative evaluation focuses on assessing whether the programme, intervention, or theory do what they were intended to do. Thus, summative evaluation measures the extent to which outputs and outcomes of a programme or intervention have been achieved, as determined by the goals of the programme (Braveman et al., 2017). Contrarily, formative evaluation is concerned with assessing the processes and mechanisms of how a particular programme, intervention or theory impacts specific outcomes (Braveman et al., 2017; Nieveen & Folmer, 2013; Venable et al., 2016).

Within the ambit of formative evaluation, *realist evaluation* is becoming a methodology that scholars are beginning to use to assess programmes or interventions as well as hypothesised theories. A realist evaluation, as defined by Pawson and Tilley (1997), is not concerned with assessing whether a programme works or not, but with investigating the contexts and mechanisms that produce specific outcomes. It assesses how, for whom, and under what context an intervention will work (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Invariably, the unit of analysis in realist evaluation is an individual, as the intention is also to observe “*for whom*” the mechanism employed or activated in a specific programme will have an effect or no effect, and the context in which the *specific individual* is affected by the intervention.

A realist evaluation approach assumes theories are embedded in social programmes. The process involves first understanding what theory is embedded in the programme, testing this by conducting an empirical study, and then refining the theory based on findings of the study (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). A programme theory is developed before the empirical study, and then it is tested.

A **programme theory** defines the underlying assumptions about how a programme or an intervention is expected to work (Pawson, 2013; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Its purpose is to explain the relationship between the *context* in which the programme is implemented, and the *mechanisms* by which it works (Pawson, 2013; Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

Realist evaluation starts with a hypothesised theory and concludes with a refined theory. The *hypothesis*, which is referred to as a *programme theory* or *middle range theory* in realist evaluation language, can be formulated on the basis of an existing theory, past experience and previous evaluations or research studies (Marchal, Van Belle, Van Olmen, Hoérée, & Kegels, 2012). In this case, the existing theory from which a hypothesised theory will be built is transformative learning literature. The intention of a realist evaluation is not to establish a cause-effect relationship nor to determine if a programme works or not, but to understand under which contexts it works, for whom it works, and by what mechanisms it produces resulting outcomes (Pawson, 2013; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). A realist evaluation process is an explanatory rather than a judgemental process.

While the use of realist evaluation started with social programmes that have large policy impact, the approach is now used in various fields, including psychology and management studies (Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2000; Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2013; Nielsen & Randall, 2013; Pawson, Greenhalgh, Harvey, & Walshe, 2005), executive coaching (Kovacs & Corrie, 2016), as well as organisational development (Maxton, 2016). According to Pawson and Tilley (1997), programmes have key characteristics that researchers need to consider when developing the programme theory, collecting data on the implementation of the programme, and refining the theory. The key characteristics are outlined below.

*Programmes are embedded in social systems:* Changes in behavioural events and social conditions will affect the programme. Thus, a realist researcher should consider the wider social system (context) within which the programme is implemented. In this research, the social systems that were considered include the coaching relationship, interpersonal relations, organisational context, and social-political and economic context under which the executives operated in the country at the time of the intervention.

*Active implementation:* In any social system, change is triggered by the active implementation of a programme. The mechanism of how it works as well as its effects are central to this research. This study's active implementation was a coaching intervention for individual executives. The sample executives received six face-to-face coaching sessions, which were implemented over six months.

*Open systems:* It is unlikely that a programme that is implemented over a time period is kept constant. Social programmes are impacted upon by any unanticipated environmental change, external or internal to the intervention. Thus, in a realist evaluation, both the intended and unintended results need to be noted. The coaching programme in this study was profoundly impacted by a turbulent economic climate and socio-political circumstances that had a direct and negative impact on the organisational climate within which the executives worked. These included political instability, economic downgrades, frequent change of cabinet ministers that resulted in unstable public-sector institutions, and a negative organisational climate.

There are four basic concepts in the explanation and understanding of programmes under a realist evaluation: mechanisms, context, outcome patterns and context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) pattern configuration (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). These are briefly described below.

#### *Mechanisms*

“Mechanisms describe what it is about the programme or intervention that bring about any effects” (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Mechanisms explain the successes and failure of programmes. Mechanisms can work as individual components or a set or series of them, and/or in stages. They explicate the logic of the programme, trace the destiny of programme theory and take the characteristics of a process (Dalkin, Greenhalgh, Jones, Cunningham, & Lhussier, 2015; Jagosh et al., 2015; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). For example, in implementing the coaching programme, this study sought to understand if the mechanism of active listening, rapport building or questioning, or a combination of these, led to a transformative learning process and how it occurred. From a client perspective, how did the mechanisms of disorienting dilemma, critical reflection and rational dialogue facilitate transformative learning?

#### *Context*

Context defines the conditions or features under which the programme will work (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Therefore, context can enable or constrain a programme to succeed or fail (Bozer & Delegach, 2019; Fatien Diochon & Nizet, 2019; Fatien Diochon et al., 2019; Johns, 2017). For every mechanism, there are likely to be constraining factors and enabling factors (Greenhalgh et al., 2009). Pawson (2013) identified four types of contexts that could impact the implementation of programmes, these are:



- 1) the characteristics and capabilities of the *individual* concerned in the programme, which in this study was characterised by the client readiness and the coach competencies;
- 2) the *interpersonal relations* that govern how the programme is carried out, which was characterised by the relationship between the coach and coachee;
- 3) the *institutional setting* that has to do with the rules, norms and customs that govern the programme, and this was characterised by the organisational climate that existed in the client organisation during the implementation of the coaching programme; and
- 4) the *infrastructure*, which was characterised by the wider economic and socio-political factors at the time of the intervention.

### *Outcome patterns*

Realist evaluation does not rely on a single outcome, but a set of outcome patterns. These consist of the intended and unintended consequences of the programme, resulting in the activation of the deferent mechanisms under different contexts (Pawson, 2013; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Outcome patterns can take many forms. For each client or case, there will be a different CMO pattern.

### *Context-mechanism-outcome pattern configuration*

All programmes involve multiple permutations of pre-existing social conditions, behaviour and events, and are impacted by multiple mechanisms, which would lead to the creation of multiple outputs and outcomes. This clarifies that the realist evaluation is not concerned with simple cause-effect relations, but with a *pattern of outcomes, which can be connected to context and mechanisms*. For example, in this study, each individual was impacted differently by the intervention as a result of the different contextual factors, and in some cases the individuals responded differently, even under the same socio-political and economic factors (Pawson, 2013; Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

## **2.7.2. Executive coaching programme theory development**

### **Main research question**

How, under what contexts, and for whom does an executive coaching process foster transformative learning?

**Research sub-questions:**

- Q1 Under what context does transformative learning occur?
- Q2 What coach mechanisms facilitate transformative learning?
- Q3 What client mechanisms facilitate transformative learning?
- Q4 How does the transformative learning process occur?

**Programme theory:** An executive coaching intervention provided by a competent coach to a willing client (*context*) will provide an environment that is conducive and supportive, and challenges the client (*mechanism 1*) to experience a disorienting dilemma, which facilitates critical reflection and rational dialogue (*mechanisms 2*), producing a new meaning perspective resulting in behavioural change (*outcome*).

The quality of the relationship as determined by the ability and credibility of the coach and the readiness and personal characteristics of the client will define the success or failure of the process. However, this will be influenced by the organisational context. There is an intertwining relationship between the transformative learning and the executive process that will produce transformative learning outcomes. The figure below illustrates this process.

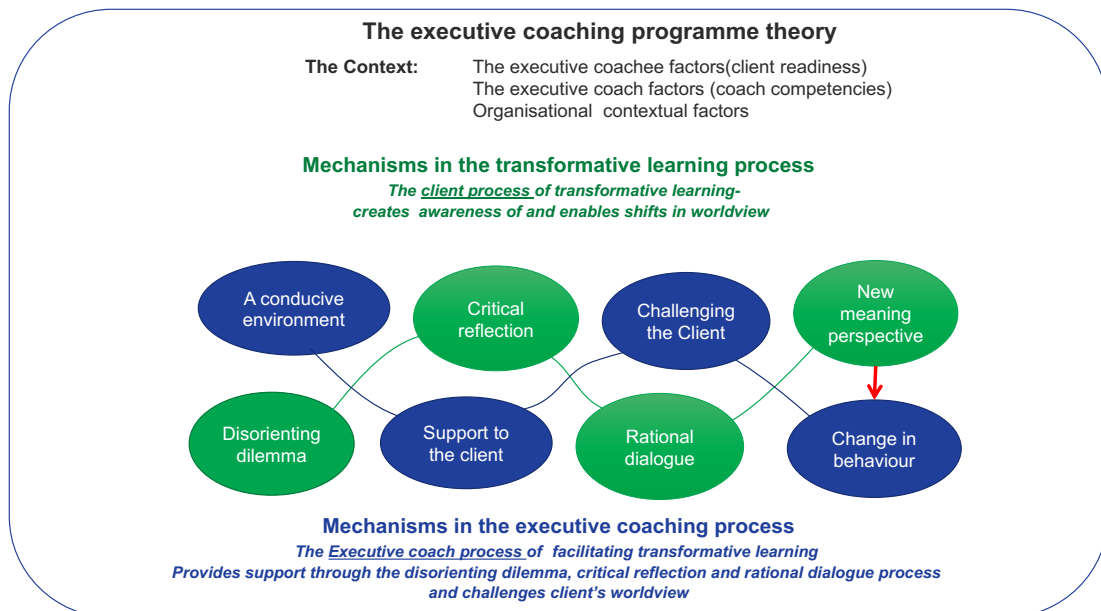


Figure 2.5: Executive coaching programme theory

An executive coaching Intervention was developed and implemented amongst executives in the public finance and health sector in South Africa. The original input

elements identified were: coachee factors, which included client motivation and readiness; coach factors, including coach competencies and coach credibility; and contextual factors, both socio-political and organisational.

The identified mechanisms for the executive coaching process included but were not limited to: creating a conducive environment, supporting the client through active listening and providing feedback, challenging the client through reflective questioning, and holding the client accountable.

The identified mechanisms for the transformative learning process included, but were not limited to disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, and rational dialogue. The outcome pattern for the transformative executive coaching programme was expected to be any of the following: a change in worldview, a significant shift in sense of self, a shift in epistemology, a shift in ontology, a change in behaviour, and a change in capacity.

## **2.8. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented literature on the background to executive coaching and coaching research. This literature has revealed that executive coaching has increased in popularity and is amongst the top five leadership development strategies. Despite its increased usage in practice, the development of executive coaching's theoretical base has lagged behind. While scholars and practitioners have conducted a significant amount of summative research, very little formative evaluative studies have been carried out to assess what makes executive coaching so successful.

The literature review also revealed that learning is at the core of coaching interventions. Some scholars suggest the learning that occurs in a coaching context is transformative, but there is a paucity of empirical evidence on the link between executive coaching and transformative learning. The limited studies that have been conducted do not explicitly indicate how the executive coaching process facilitates the transformative learning process.

The researcher proposed a realist evaluation to assess the context, mechanisms and outcomes of transformative learning in an executive coaching engagement. This approach is not concerned with how effective the coaching programme will be, but with understanding the mechanisms and context that will drive or determine any change for different individual executives.

The initial context identified was client readiness, coach competence and organisational contextual factors. Two sets of mechanisms were identified. The first set of mechanisms relates to the transformative learning process – i.e., disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, and rational dialogue. The second set of mechanisms relates to the executive coach as a facilitator of the coaching and transformative learning process – i.e., creating a conducive environment for coaching, supporting the client through active listening and providing feedback, challenging the client using questions, and holding the client accountable.

The researcher proposed a programme theory that the interaction between the two mechanisms in the coach-coachee relationship would result in transformative learning outcomes amongst executives who undergo a coaching intervention. This programme theory was empirically tested using a realist evaluation design and methodology, and a refined programme theory was developed.

## **Chapter 3: Research design and methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the development of the theory of executive coaching, which intends to facilitate transformative learning amongst executives. The main research question is: how, under what contexts and for whom does the executive coaching process foster transformative learning? While the research design was informed by process theory, it assumed a multiple case study design merged with a realist evaluation method. This chapter details the research design and methodology that was followed in conducting the research.

Yin (2014, p. 28) stated that a research design is “a logical plan of getting from here to there”. The “here” refers to the research question that needs to be answered by the study, while the “there” refers to the conclusions or results of the study. Research design defines what comes in between the “here and there” (Yin, 2014, p. 28). Thus, Yin (2014, p. 26) asserted that a research design is “the logic that links data to be collected (and the conclusion to be drawn) to the initial question of the study”.

Firstly, this chapter describes the research paradigm adopted and explains the rationale for its choice. Secondly, the chapter discusses the strategy of enquiry adopted and the research type as well as the rationale for the chosen approaches. Thirdly, the population and sampling process are described, including case selection criteria as well as the unit and level of analysis for the study. Fourthly, the data collection and data analysis methods followed are outlined. Finally, this chapter presents and discusses quality assurance measures and ethical considerations.

### **3.2. Research paradigm/philosophy**

A research paradigm is a set of philosophical assumptions that underlie the researcher’s choices of the research problem, questions and design (Creswell, 2013). The philosophical paradigm shapes how researchers define their research problem and what questions they should ask in relation to the problem. It also determines how to go about seeking information to answer these questions (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Creswell, 2013).

There are four dimensions that inform the various research paradigms: (1) the beliefs about the nature of reality (*ontology*); (2) what counts as knowledge and how

knowledge claims in research are justified (*epistemology*); (3) what the role of values in research is (*axiology*); and (4) the process of research (*methodology*) (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Wahyuni, 2012).

These philosophical assumptions are linked to some interpretive frameworks about how to interpret reality in a research context. Therefore, the assumptions about reality determine the kind of data that needs to be collected and the type of methods that are to be used to collect the data (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Wahyuni, 2012).

The most common interpretive frameworks define reality as follows:

- 1) *Post-positivism* claims that there is a single reality, although this can only be approximated as there are no absolutes.
- 2) *Social constructivism* argues that there are multiple realities constructed through participants' lived experiences. Hence, reality is constructed between the researcher and the researched.
- 3) *Postmodernism* argues that subjective and objective realities emerge from the researcher and the communities or individuals studied.
- 4) *Pragmatism* states that reality is what works.
- 5) *Realism* postulates that there are multiple perspectives to a single reality.

Therefore, just like in pragmatism, reality is known by using a variety of tools, deductive and inductive, subjective and objective approaches (Creswell, 2013; Krauss, 2005; Wahyuni, 2012).

Based on this study's research question, the researcher chose a realist paradigm, which aligns to the ontology of the researcher and is a combination of the realism and pragmatism approaches. More importantly, the rationale for choosing this paradigm rests on its premise and epistemology that people's knowledge of reality is as a result of social conditioning or the context within which people find themselves (Krauss, 2005). In trying to understand how an executive coaching process facilitates transformative learning, it was important to understand the contexts that influenced both the executive coaching and transformative learning processes.

The application of realism in realist evaluation subscribes to the generative theory of change by arguing that "change occurs when interventions, combined with the right contextual factors, release the generative mechanism", which would produce specific outcomes (Marchal et al., 2012, p. 202). Therefore, adopting this approach allowed the

researcher to explore how the mechanisms and context influenced the outcomes of the executive coaching programme (Marchal et al., 2012; Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

### **3.3. Research design**

#### **3.3.1. Introduction**

The research design comprises two main components: the *strategy of enquiry* and the *research type*. The strategy of enquiry has to do with a choice between adopting a qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods study (Creswell, 2013; Tuli, 2011). In addition to the strategy of enquiry, the researcher also needs to decide whether the study is descriptive, exploratory, theory building, explanatory, or evaluation research (Creswell, 2013; Tuli, 2011). The research types allow the researcher to choose from various types of research, such as experimental and quasi-experimental in the case of a quantitative enquiry, and phenomenological, grounded theory, narrative, ethnography and case study design in the case of a qualitative enquiry (Creswell, 2013; Tuli, 2011). These decisions are made by considering the research question to be answered, as well as the research paradigm the researcher adopts.

#### **3.3.2. Strategy of enquiry**

The research at hand was concerned with evaluating an executive coaching process to understand the nuances or mechanisms triggered in specific contexts to produce transformative learning outcomes. Therefore, the focus of this study was on the executive coaching process and how it facilitates transformative learning, taking into consideration the context within which the executives and the coaches found themselves. Pettigrew (1997, p. 341) emphasised that the actions and mechanisms in any process are embedded in context, capturing it in this metaphor: “the terrain around the steam shapes the flow of events”.

Hence, this study adopted a multiple case study design as a primary evaluation method (Yin, 2014), underpinned by process theory (Van de Ven, 1992). The case study design was conducted in the tradition of evaluation research.

#### *Evaluation research*

Evaluation is “a systematic assessment of the worth or merit of a programme or intervention” (Nieveen & Folmer, 2013). The purpose of evaluation is to determine how well the programme or intervention has been implemented or designed; to validate or test a theory; and to draw comparisons between two or more programmes,

interventions or theories (Venable et al., 2016). In the research context, summative evaluations focus on assessing whether the programme, intervention, or theory does what it was intended to do. Thus, summative evaluation measures the extent to which outputs and outcomes of a programme or intervention have been achieved as determined by the goals of the programme (Braveman et al., 2017).

Contrarily, formative evaluation is concerned with assessing the processes and mechanisms of how a particular programme, intervention or theory impacts specific outcomes (Braveman et al., 2017; Nieveen & Folmer, 2013; Venable et al., 2016). Literature has indicated that coaching evaluation research has predominately been summative and that more formative studies are required to understand how and why executive coaching has been successful (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Ely et al., 2010; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014).

As a result, this study assumed a formative evaluation format. For this reason, to enhance the research design and methodology of this study, the researcher drew on the ontology and epistemology of *process theory*.

#### *Process theory*

Literature on process theory defines it as “a sequence of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context” (Pettigrew, 1997, p. 338), or simply as a sequence of events describing how things change over time (Van de Ven, 1992, p. 173). Process studies focus on how and why things emerge, develop, grow or terminate over time (Langley et al., 2013, p. 1). The ontology that drives process theory is the belief that the world is fundamentally made up of “processes” and not “things”, thus it is important to focus on the “know how” instead of just focusing on “knowing what” (Langley et al., 2013, p. 4). Unlike variance theory, which studies the causal relationships between the dependent and independent variable, process theory focuses on studying the “emerging process of change” by identifying the interconnections between the intervention or action, mechanisms and outcome (Langley et al., 2013; Pettigrew, 1997; Van de Ven, 1992). Embedded in process theory are the dialectical and evolution processes said to coexist in the explanation of the “emergent process of change” (Van de Ven, 1992, p. 181). This philosophy is in line with the thinking embedded in the research question for this study. Process theory literature has influenced the design and methodology of this research.



### *Case study research as an evaluation method*

According to Yin (2014), there are three ways in which case studies can be used in evaluation research. Firstly, a case study can be used as part of a larger evaluation design, where a case study or multiple cases are used as a supplement to an overall evaluation, summative or formative (Yin, 2014, pp. 222–223). Secondly, a case study design can become the primary design for the evaluation, focusing on analysing the initiative or the programme, the outcomes and/or the focus could be on explaining the links between the initiative and outcomes (Yin, 2014, pp. 223–225). This second type aligns with process theory's thinking of assessing the emerging changes in between the intervention and outcome (Langley et al., 2013). Thirdly, case study research can be used as part of a "dual-level evaluation arrangement", where there multiple evaluation projects operate within one programme (Yin, 2014, p. 226).

A *multiple case study approach* was used as a primary method of evaluation. Aligning with Yin's (2014) second type, case study evaluation research design, this research focused on explaining the connection between the coaching programme's initiative and outcomes. Due to the complexity associated with process studies, process theory scholars recommend a multiple case study approach as they argue that it provides an opportunity for the researcher to develop in-depth insight for cross-case comparison as well as dealing with the complexities presented by context (Bizzi & Langley, 2012; Langley et al., 2013; Pettigrew, 1997; Van de Ven, 1992). A realist evaluation merged with a multiple case study approach, providing a structured way to understand the nuances of how the mechanism and context interact to produce outcomes.

### *Realist evaluation*

Within the ambit of formative evaluation, *realist evaluation* is becoming a methodology that scholars are beginning to use to assess programmes or interventions as well as hypothesised theories. Pawson and Tilley (1997) stated that realist evaluation "emerged to fill a deficit in policy and programme evaluations". However, it did not consider the context of implementation (Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007, p. 440). This is multifaceted, as it includes a wide range of elements – including political, social, organisational, and individual – that affect the implementation of public policy and programmes (Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007; Pawson, 2013). Policy outcomes cannot be easily attributed to the implementation of the programme without understanding the context in which they have occurred and the relationship between the context and the mechanism that have potentially driven the outcomes (Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007; Pawson, 2013).

A realist evaluation is defined as a theory-driven evaluation that asks the questions: “what is it in a programme that works for whom, in what circumstances, over what duration and why” (Pawson, 2013, p. 15). Realist evaluation is not concerned with assessing whether a programme works or not (Pawson, 2013; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). With a theory-driven approach, realist researchers should explore the full range of these questions and not only provide descriptions of processes and evade the core of what realist evaluation is, which is the explanatory component (Pawson, 2013).

Other scholars, such as Blamey and Mackenzie (2007) and Marchal et al. (2012), have argued that the realist evaluation approach offers a sound framework to examine how context and mechanisms influence outcomes of an intervention. They stated that it is well-suited for investigating complex phenomena, such as evaluating a process. It offers an opportunity to develop an integrated outcome and process evaluation, and advances theoretical understanding of the best circumstances for implementing a particular programme (Marchal et al., 2012). However, these researchers have also noted that Pawson and Tilley (1997) have overlooked some aspects in their original definition, such as the feedback loop between the outcomes, context and mechanism as well as how to deal with multiplicity of mechanism in one programme (Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007). This was particularly evident in this study, where there was multiplicity of mechanisms (coach and coachee mechanisms).

A realist approach assumes that theories are embedded in social programmes. Therefore, a *programme theory* is developed before the empirical study, and then tested. A programme theory defines the underlying assumptions on how a programme or an intervention might work (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Its purpose is to explain the relationship between the *context* in which the programme is implemented, the *mechanisms* by which it works, and the *outcomes* produced by the intervention (Pawson et al., 2005; Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

The process starts with the following question: what is the theory that is embedded in the programme? The second step is to explicate the proposed theory. By doing this, the researcher designs a tentative CMO configuration. The CMO is a testable proposition or hypothesised theory presented as an equation to emphasise that the theory should be cast in the “if-then” proposition. For example, if context A is present, then mechanism B will be triggered to produce outcome C. This is what differentiates realist evaluation from other forms of process evaluation research (Pawson, 2013).

The third step is to test the theory by conducting an empirical study utilising a variety of suitable methods and techniques, and finally refining the theory based on the study's findings (Pawson et al., 2005; Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

As a further motivation for the choice of this approach, Yin (2014, p. 220) confirmed that in using case studies as an evaluation method, it will be beneficial for the researcher to have an "initial, though tentative theory about the case". Moreover, process theory acknowledges that in process research, the intention is also to build theory by understanding how things work under certain circumstances, identifying specific theoretical mechanisms that recur over a period (Langley et al., 2013).

#### *A qualitative approach*

While a realist evaluation allows for quantitative and qualitative enquiry (Pawson, 2013), this study adopted a qualitative enquiry. There are multiple reasons for this choice.

In business and management studies, scholars are calling for more qualitative research studies as they see the need to break away from researching an existing theory and to create more theories that can assist in resolving business problems (Bansal, 2013; McNulty, Zattoni, & Douglas, 2013; Pettigrew, 2013; Van Rijnsoever, 2017). These scholars have argued that business has not generated enough new theories in recent years to help organisations with new ways of thinking and business development, thus there is a call for more qualitative research in the business environment. In executive coaching research, qualitative theory building research is especially significant, as scholars call for more formative studies (Ely et al., 2010; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014).

The importance of qualitative research in business is that it also plays a critical role in understanding the complexity and plurality of contexts, such as learning, self-awareness, self-efficacy, meaning, values and beliefs. Qualitative research's major strength is that it provides direct and first-hand engagement with research participants, allowing for deeper analysis of a phenomenon (McNulty et al., 2013).

Kovacs and Corrie (2016) recently argued that realist evaluation can benefit the executive coaching environment by offering a qualitative method of understanding how coaching outcomes are realised and why coaching has been successful. Their argument for a more qualitative approach is that executive coaching interventions

occur in a volatile, uncertain and complex business environment; and to understand these contexts, a realist evaluation approach is a viable option (Kovacs & Corrie, 2016).

In summary, the main argument for a qualitative enquiry in this study is that, firstly, the research is explanatory and was intended to develop a theory of executive coaching (Pettigrew, 2013; Yin, 2014). Secondly, the research was exploring a complex phenomenon – *transformative learning* – that involves cognitive and affective processes. These concepts cannot be easily understood using quantitative methods (McNulty et al., 2013). Thirdly, the business environment under which this study was conducted was characterised as complex and had multiple contextual factors that were likely to impact the participating executives (Braud, 2011; McNulty et al., 2013). These included economic downturn, a turbulent socio-political and poor organisational climate. A qualitative study enabled the researcher to consider these contexts (Kovacs & Corrie, 2016; Yin, 2014). Lastly, from a realist perspective, it is argued that “mining mechanism” requires a qualitative lens (Pawson, 2013, p. 19).

### **3.3.3. Research type: multiple case study**

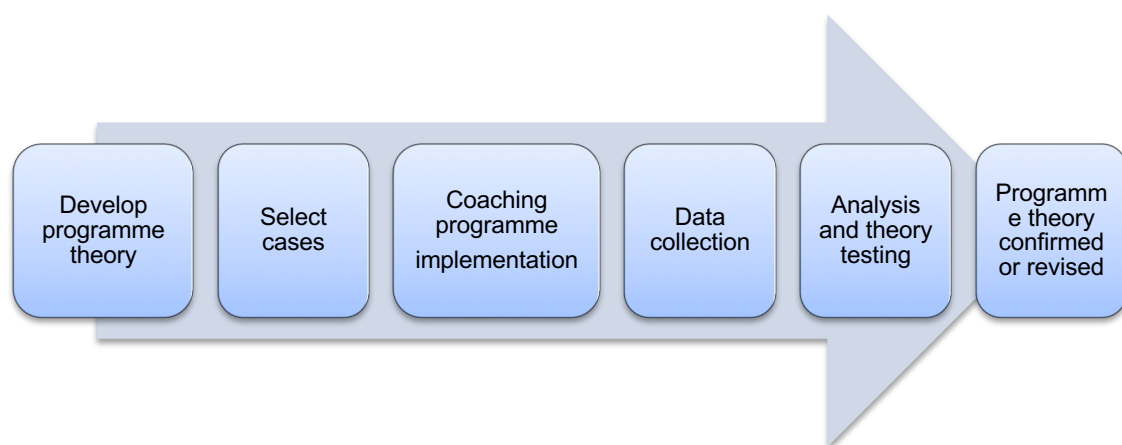
The chosen research type is a multiple case study design merged with realist evaluation. Creswell (2013) defined case study research as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary, bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes.” Case study research is relevant under the following conditions: when the research question asks “how” or “why” to examine a phenomenon in detail; when the researcher has little or no control over the context or behaviour of the respondents; when the phenomenon under study is contemporary and not historical; and when boundaries between the phenomenon and context are unclear (Yin, 2014, p. 2).

Case study research is suitable for explanatory research (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 1981) and building theory (Bruton et al., 2011). This study sought to build coaching theory by explaining how the executive coaching process facilitates transformative learning, thus a case study design was found to be suitable. Scholars in both case study design and process theory argue that a multiple case study design offers more breadth and there are ways in which it can also offer depth through in-depth analysis of each case and cross-case comparisons (Bizzi & Langley, 2012; Langley et al., 2013; Pettigrew, 2013;

Van de Ven & Poole, 2005). In line with this argument, the researcher opted for a multiple case design for this study.

Due to its qualitative nature, the variables in a bounded system become part of the study and get incorporated as the research evolves (Yin, 1999). The unit of analysis in a case study can be a single case (*within-case study*) or multiple cases (*multi-case study*) (Creswell, 2013). Whether the case study is a *within-case or multi-case study*, there are complexities of context that will often present other multiple variables that are not being studied but may influence the research. The advantage of a case study method is that the researcher can integrate these contextual issues in the study (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

The intention of the study was to look at both the context and mechanism that facilitate transformative learning. As a result, a case study approach became relevant as the contextual issues raised in the previous paragraphs became the focus of the study. The mechanisms that produce outcomes were assessed in relation to the context under which they occurred. Following a realist evaluation process, the case study process was followed.



**Figure 3.1:** The case study process (Source: synthesis from literature)

#### **3.3.4. The executive coaching programme theory**

Pawson (2013) posited that no programme comes with predetermined context, mechanism and outcomes, although the researcher theorises these using the CMO formula as proposed. The basic formula for a programme theory is summarised as context + mechanism = outcomes pattern.

**Programme theory:** An executive coaching intervention provided by a competent coach to a willing client (*context*) will provide a conducive environment that is conducive and supportive, and challenges the client (*mechanism 1*) to experience a disorienting dilemma, which facilitates critical reflection and rational dialogue (*mechanisms 2*), producing a new meaning perspective resulting in to behavioural change (*outcome*).

According to Pawson (2013), the context could be anything that the subject of the study finds himself or herself in, including an individual state or condition and/or the institutional environment that may affect the way the individual responds to the intervention. In this study, based on the literature reviewed, the initial contextual factors identified were *coachee factors* and *coach factors*, as discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, the economic, socio-political, organisational and interpersonal factors became key factors that impacted the executive coachees.

Pawson (2013, p. 20) added that the mechanisms are “embodied in the subjects” and are best investigated through the eyes of the subjects. The subject of this study was the interaction between the coach and coachee. Hence, the mechanisms investigated were those embodied in both the *coach* and *coachee*. Based on the literature reviewed, two sets of mechanisms were identified: for the client, disorienting dilemma, critical reflection and rational dialogue processes (M1); and for the coach, creating an environment that is conducive as well as supporting and challenging processes (M2).

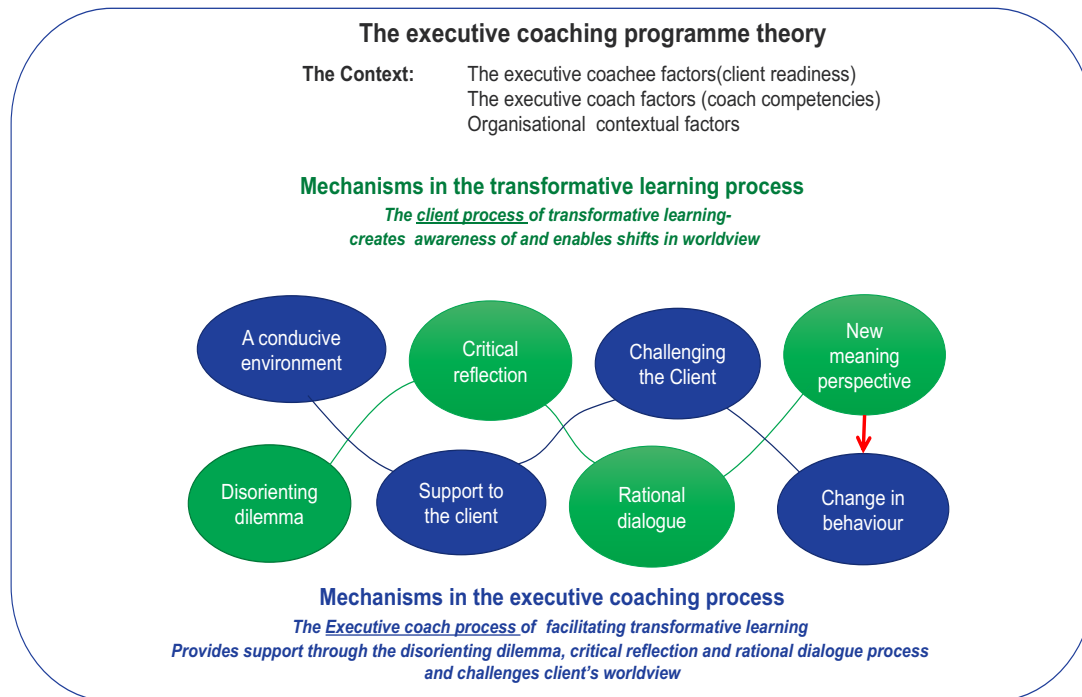
Furthermore, Pawson (2013) stated that the outcomes should be carefully thought out, the indicators identified and a base line against which the results will be evaluated set. For this study, Hoggan’s (2016) definition and categorisation of transformative learning outcomes were used. He described six outcomes: a change in worldview, a significant shift in sense of self, a shift in epistemology, a shift in ontology, a change in behaviour, and a change in capacity. These have specific behavioural indicators linked to them, as indicated in Table 3.1. The outcomes and indicators allowed the researcher to measure results at the end.

The table below summarises possible contexts, mechanism and outcomes as derived from the literature. These are not yet configured, as they were merely a proposition at this stage. After testing the model, configured CMOs will emerge for each unit of analysis.

**Table 3.1: Unconfigured context-mechanism-outcome**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Mechanisms</b>	<b>Transformative learning outcomes</b>
<p><b>C1 – Coachee factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coachee is open and willing to voluntarily participate in the coaching programme</li> <li>• Coachee is motivated and committed to learn and grow</li> <li>• Coachee is willing to engage in a dialogue to challenge his or her own assumptions and those of others</li> <li>• The organisational context is enabling and supportive</li> </ul> <p><b>C2 – Coach factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualified coach who has the capability to facilitate a coaching conversation</li> <li>• Credibility of the coach based on experience in business or executive coaching fields</li> <li>• Authenticity, integrity and empathy of the coach</li> </ul>	<p><b>M1 – Mechanisms</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Disorienting dilemma</i> (disruption of a person’s meaning perspective)</li> <li>• <i>Critical reflection</i> will facilitate awareness of behaviour, emotions, thinking patterns, and worldviews that do not serve the client any more, and individual strengths that could work in the individual’s favour</li> <li>• <i>A rational dialogue</i> that will facilitate and challenge those undesirable factors, learning new and more resourceful ways of solving problems or actualising self, integrating and applying the new knowledge</li> </ul> <p><b>M2 – Mechanisms</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Creating a conducive environment for coaching</i> (rapport and trust building)</li> <li>• <i>Supporting the client</i> through active listening and giving feedback to client</li> <li>• <i>Challenging the client</i> through reflective questioning and holding the client accountable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Change in worldviews</i> (e.g., beliefs, values, assumptions and frames of mind)</li> <li>• <i>A significant shift in sense of self</i> (e.g., identity, self-knowledge, meaning and purpose)</li> <li>• <i>Shift in epistemology</i> (e.g., being more discriminating, critical and open)</li> <li>• <i>Shift in ontology</i> (more embracing of the affective experience of life)</li> <li>• <i>Change in behaviour</i> (acting consistently with the new perspective, acting professionally or socially using the new skills)</li> <li>• <i>Change in capacity</i> (improved cognitive and/or spiritual development, a shift or expansion of consciousness)</li> </ul>

The conceptual model depicting the programme theory is illustrated in Figure 3.2



**Figure 3.2:** Executive coaching programme theory conceptual model

An executive coaching intervention provided by a competent coach to a willing client (*context*) will provide a conducive environment that is conducive and supportive, and challenges the client (*mechanism 1*) to experience a disorienting dilemma, which facilitates critical reflection and rational dialogue (*mechanisms 2*), producing a new meaning perspective resulting in to behavioural change (*outcome*).

### *Coaching programme implementation*

All participants of this coaching programme were volunteers and chose to participate for personal and professional development, although permission was sought from their organisations to allow them to partake in the study. Each coachee received six face-to-face coaching sessions over six months. The coaching sessions took place in intervals of about three to four weeks and each session lasted approximately 90 minutes. The role of the researcher was that of project manager during the coaching intervention.

In therapy and counselling, an average number of six to 12 sessions is regarded as adequate to achieve outcomes, but coaching research shows that as minimal as three coaching sessions can make a difference towards achieving outcomes (Sonesh et al., 2015). In an intervention study conducted by Grant (2014), four coaching sessions were provided to executives and there was evidence of change over a period of four



months. In this study, six sessions were chosen to allow for integration and application of new knowledge as proposed in the conceptual framework.

### **3.4. Population and sampling**

Eisenhardt (1989, p. 537) said that the “population defines the set of entities from which the research sample is to be drawn. Also, the selection of an appropriate population controls extraneous variation, and helps to define the limits for generalizing the findings”. For this research, the population was executives in the public sector in South Africa.

The rationale for the choice of this population sample was that, in 2014, the cabinet of the Republic of South Africa issued a directive through a memorandum that all departments should implement structured coaching programmes for all senior managers in government as part of a compulsory capacity building process (NSG, 2016). The rationale for this directive is based on the recognition of the importance of coaching in enabling transformative learning (NSG, 2016).

Therefore, it was assumed that the directive provides not only some level of readiness amongst executives in government departments, but also some interest and curiosity on the implementation of executive coaching as a capacity building process, specifically for transformative learning. This presented an opportunity for the researcher and those government departments or state entities that were willing to explore how executive coaching could facilitate transformative learning. It is for this reason that the target population was chosen.

Senior managers in the government of South Africa are categorised into four levels (Sing, 2012): the director general (DG), who is the head of a government department; the deputy director generals (DDGs), who report to the DG and head divisions or branches; chief directors (CDs), who head a cluster of programmes; and directors, who are often heads of specific programmes. All of these were the targeted population from which the sample was drawn.

#### **3.4.1. Case selection**

The choice of a population and sampling strategy defines and limits the boundaries of the study. Nevertheless, Eisenhardt (1989) argued that in building theory from case studies, the case selection is not intended to get some statistical representation, but a

theoretical sampling process could provide data that contributes to building theory as proposed in this study. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) asserted that a careful selection of eight to 10 cases provides the necessary depth and breadth for a multiple case study. However, for theoretical sampling, fewer cases can also be selected, where very detailed in-depth data for individual cases is gathered (Yin, 2014). This study was longitudinal in nature with multiple data collection points, thus meeting the requirements of being detailed and in-depth.

Twelve cases (senior managers) from four sectors (public finance, administration, health, and education) were identified and invited to participate, with 11 enrolling and nine of these finishing the coaching programme. Of these nine cases, four were from the public finance sector and three from the public health sector.

At the time of the implementation of the coaching programme – July to December 2017 – the public finance and health sectors experienced extreme socio-political and economic turbulence, which resulted in an unstable organisational climate. These conditions presented a unique environment that the researcher chose to take advantage of, given the importance of context to the nature of the study. As a result, respondents from these two sectors were selected for the study. While the intention was to select six from the nine, in the coding process, saturation of codes and categories was reached at four cases, so only four are reported on.

Saturation in qualitative studies is used as a measure to determine sample size and is defined as the point at which the researcher has collected sufficient data to allow theorising (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017; Nelson, 2017; Van Rijnsoever, 2017; Saunders et al., 2018). Depending on the type of method used for generating theory – that is, deductive or inductive – this can be done earlier in the data collection phase or later in the analysis phase (Hennink et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2018). In this study, the type that was used was *inductive thematic saturation*, where the researcher tracked the emergence of new codes and themes from each data source until there were no new codes emerging (Saunders et al., 2018). Other criteria that was used was the quality and quantity of data collected and in the four cases there was thick and rich data collected in the 74 data points (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Van Rijnsoever, 2017). The researcher then determined that with the four cases and 74 documents there was sufficient information to start theorising (see coding saturation graph below).

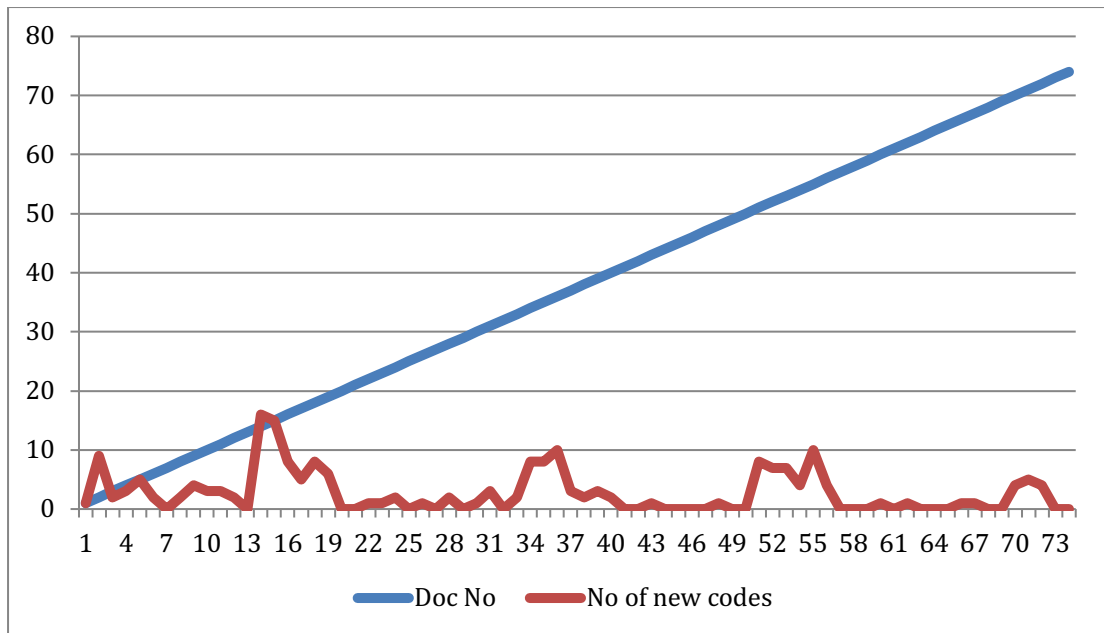


Figure 3.3: Coding saturation graph

For maximum variation and to ensure diversity of cases (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), the criteria used for the selection of the four executives is outlined below.

- i. Executives were selected from public finance and health sectors as the majority of the participants (seven of the nine who finished the coaching programme) came from these sectors.
- ii. Two from each of the selected sectors were chosen to ensure balance between sectors.
- iii. A diversity of management levels was represented in these selections (one DDG, one CD, one director, and a CEO of a hospital).
- iv. In terms of levels of government, most of the executives who finished the coaching programme were at the national level (seven) and two were at the provincial level. Of the nominated cases, three were from national government and one from provincial government.
- v. For ease of access to the researcher (Yin, 2014), only executives located in departments within the Gauteng province were targeted. An advantage of selecting this province is that it hosts departments at all levels of government. The study was specifically conducted in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

### **3.5. Units of analysis**

In realist evaluation, the unit of analysis is often the individual as the intention is also to observe “for whom” the mechanism employed in a specific programme will or will not have an effect on. In process studies, Bizzi and Langley (2012) have shown that the unit of analysis can also be a dyad/pair or a relationship. In the case of this study, the unit of analysis was the dyad – the *coach-coachee interaction*.

### **3.6. Data collection**

Data collection in a realist evaluation is guided by the CMO configuration and it allows for multiple sources of data (Marchal et al., 2012). The advantage of a case study design is that it provides for multiple sources of data gathering, such as observation, in-depth face-to-face interviews, archives, and field notes that contribute to rich data triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

As opposed to variance studies, case study and process study data collection processes are intense and complex (Bizzi & Langley, 2012; Yin, 2014) and require a significant amount of preparation (Yin, 2014). Moreover, data in case studies is not routinised, and does not only involve collecting in-depth data, but also includes emotions and can be energetically draining for the researcher and participants (Yin, 2014, p. 74). As a result, Yin (2014) argued that the researcher needs to be equipped with specific skills and advocates training of these skills to the research team.

These research skills include the ability to ask good questions that can consistently uncover the “how” and “why” things work the way they work in the world. Listening skills include receiving information using multiple modalities – namely, “observation and making sense of what might be going on beyond what is being said”, “assimilating information without bias and using the respondent’s exact words”, “capturing the mood and emotions of the client”, “understanding the context from which the respondent is perceiving the world”, and “inferring meaning as intended by the respondent” (Yin, 2014, p. 74).

In addition, the researcher needs to adapt to the case situation as it unfolds, while remaining focused on the purpose of the study and staying unbiased to contradictory evidence (Yin, 2014). Finally, as part of the preparation, before the coaching intervention begins, the researcher collects biographical and some context data from the executive coachees and coaches.

### **3.6.1. Development of case study protocols**

Yin (2014) advocated that a case study protocol needs to be developed before the data collection process, as it increases the reliability of the study. A case study protocol includes an overview of the case study, data collection procedure, and data collection questions to guide the data collection process (Yin, 2014, pp. 84–85).

Four sets of case study protocols were developed or prepared for the participants, as well as the coach and coachee. The first protocol was used to collect biographical and context data before the coaching intervention started. These were structured questionnaires, one for the coach and the other for the executive (see Annexures A). They were used as an enrolment form for the coaching programme and the data was collected via the SurveyMonkey system. Once the client had enrolled, a coach was allocated, and a date set for an introductory session.

The second data-gathering tool was an observation tool. Direct observation was done by video recording coaching sessions two to five. Three video recorders were secured and a research assistant competent in operating the video recorder was employed. The research assistant's role was to set up and position the video recorder to capture the coaching dyad. They did not stay in the session for the coaching process but returned after the session to download the video footage.

The data collection procedure included keeping diaries by both the coaches and the executives. A semi-structured reflection questionnaire (post-coaching reflection) was developed and loaded on SurveyMonkey. This was sent to the pair after each coaching session (see Annexures A). Moreover, the participants were given diaries at the beginning of the coaching programme to journal their experiences throughout the coaching journey. These were captured as part of the post-coaching reflection (PCR).

The benefit of the PCR was that the researcher could track how clients were progressing without interfering with the coaching process. Also, since most of the clients were operating in an extremely turbulent context, the researcher could track if any further intervention was required to support the client and inform the coach if he or she was not already aware. For example, one client was directly affected by the Life Esidimeni Arbitration process as he had to testify. As a result, he could not do his PCR as he required psychological counselling/therapy; the researcher informed his coach hereof and the coaching session was postponed. In two other cases, the researcher

picked up from the PCR that the clients had been sick and alerted the coaches. These events were also communicated to the coach supervisor who was allocated to support the coaches.

The final set was a tool to collect data on the process and mechanisms that impacted on outcomes as a result of the coaching programme. Two sets on a semi-structured in-depth interview protocol for both the coach and coachee (see Annexures A).

The case study protocols were informed, firstly, by the literature review pertaining to the context, mechanism and outcomes that informed the basis of this study. Secondly, they were informed by the research design chosen. In designing an interview protocol, guidelines provided by Jacob and Furgerson (2012) were adopted. These guidelines include that the protocols should be informed by the research questions and some of the critical considerations should be:

- i. developing a script that will be used at the beginning and end of the interview to ensure consistency;
- ii. using open-ended questions, especially for the PCR and interviews;
- iii. starting with simple and basic information, and building up to more complex questions;
- iv. using prompts to explore and expand the question and answers; and
- v. pilot testing the questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, pp. 2–6).

### **3.6.2. Data collection methods**

For this research, the primary sources of data collection were a combination of *direct observation*, documentation using *diaries for participants* (PCRs), and *in-depth interviews* at the end of the coaching programme. The table below summarises data points and quantities, and also indicates that adequate and extensively rich data was collected from various sources that would allow for triangulation by type source of data (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014).

Table 3.2: Summary of data collection points

Type of data	Total average number of hours	Total number of documents	Number of pages per transcript
Coach and client profiles	NA	8	8
Video footage for coaching sessions three to five	18	12	386
Post-coaching reflections (client and coach)	NA	46	46
Post-coaching interviews (client and coach)	8	8	190
<b>Total number of data points</b>		<b>74</b>	<b>630</b>

#### *Data collection through observation*

Given the nature of this study – that is, to understand how the mechanism of the executive coaching process and transformative learning interact to produce transformative learning outcomes – unstructured observation was the best fit as the main source of collecting primary data. In an unstructured observation, the researcher observes the phenomena of study from a “naturalistic paradigm” (Mulhall, 2003). The observation was done directly through electronic media (video recording), as direct observation would have meant the researcher’s presence in the coaching session and would have been intrusive (Yin, 2014). While video recording is also regarded as having some intrusive effects, research on its usage shows that participants are only influenced for the first 20 minutes and thereafter the recorder slips into the background and respondents begin to function normally (Murthy, 2008). Video recording coaching sessions is also familiar in the coaching sector as accrediting institutions, such as ICF and Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (COMENSA), use video recordings to assess the coaching skills of those seeking accreditation.

The main advantages of using unstructured observation as a data collection method were that:

- i. it provided insight into interaction between the dyads;
- ii. it provided the whole picture as the entire coaching session was recorded;
- iii. in observation, the researcher had an opportunity to pick up various contextual issues that were impacting the client, some of which were external and others internal to their organisation; and
- iv. the researcher was also able to observe the process of coaching (Mulhall, 2003, p. 307) and, more importantly, capture the emotional content of the process (Yin, 2014).

Perhaps most significant for this study, using video for data collection had the major benefit of the ability to capture “interactional detail” between two people (Derry et al., 2010; Rosenstein, 2002). Another advantage is that videotaping captured stages or phases of a process, including observing cognitive and emotional shifts that occurred over time (Derry et al., 2010). This was beneficial to the study in capturing how the process of transformative learning emerged over six months. Lastly, it had the advantage that the data could be revisited multiple times by the researcher during the analysis and writing phase (Derry et al., 2010; Rosenstein, 2002).

Video-recording was done between the second and fifth sessions. The rationale was that it would not be advisable to record the first session as this is a session when the coach and coachee would still be establishing rapport and trust. The second session was still early enough to observe the coaching before any expected changes took place. This session also became a session of testing out and familiarising the dyad with the recording process. The fifth session is almost at the end and it is expected that there should be some discernible shift by this time. While four of the middle sessions were video recorded, after the second coaching session, some clients and coaches reported in the PCR how they were distracted by the recorder for the first part of the session. No reports came in the subsequent sessions and the recording became part of the expected routine. For this reason, the researcher decided to exclude session two from the analysis. Even with this exclusion, 50% of the core/middle coaching sessions (three to five) were still recorded. The data collection points using video capturing was  $3 \times 4 = 12$ .

#### *Data collection by means of diaries*

The use of diaries as a form of gathering primary data is not common in management studies. However, a few studies that have used this method successfully – for example, Balogun, Huff, and Johnson (2003), Balogun and Johnson (2004), and Maxton (2016) – have found that diaries are useful in providing an “insider’s view of the situation” and that their strengths lie in providing real-time information that can be tracked over time by the individual who is participating in a programme. Diaries offer an opportunity for participants to trigger a thought process of reflecting on what is going on, and how and why things have changed or shifted for them (Balogun et al., 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004).



This study also benefited from coaches and executives reflecting after each coaching session, as they documented either in their diaries and/or through the PCRs conducted via SurveyMonkey. This method was used to corroborate findings gathered from observations and interviews.

The main challenge cited by Balogun et al. (2003) in using this method is the lack of depth and detail in documenting, although this was mitigated by providing semi-structured open-ended questions to guide the reflections and the other methods used for triangulation purposes. Another potential risk is the participants' discipline to document consistently. The researcher mitigated this by sending out a SurveyMonkey link to both the client and coach after each session and sending reminders if these surveys were not completed. Therefore, reflections were not only collected in between the coaching sessions, but also captured accurately by the participant as they were done online. This strategy worked very well as out of the nine participants who completed the coaching programme, only one failed to submit the PCR. This case was excluded from the final selection of cases for analysis. For each case there were 12 sets of PCRs, except in one case (Rob), where PCR number six was not done as the post-coaching in-depth interview occurred shortly after the last coaching session. In total, the researcher collected 46 one-page sets of PCRs.

#### *Data collection by in-depth interviews*

In-depth interviews with the coaches and executives were used as one of the main sources of data collection to understand the participants' experiences over the implementation of the coaching programme and to record how the coaching programme has impacted transformative learning. There were several reasons for choosing the interview as one of the main data collection methods – for starters, it is one of the most commonly used data collection methods in qualitative and case study research (Alvesson, 2003; Roulston, 2010; Yin, 2014). In case studies, interviews are used to guide a conversation with the key informants in a semi-structured way, rather than a rigid structured conversation to answer research questions (Yin, 2014). Their strengths are that they are considered to be the best way of accessing the “interviewee’s knowledge, ideas, experience and impressions” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 14). Interviews are versatile as respondents can access their internal lives and draw on memories that link temporal phenomena over time, as well as draw on people’s interpretations, feeling and beliefs (Bizzi & Langley, 2012). Interviews also provide explanations and personal views, such as perceptions, attitudes and meanings (Yin, 2014, p. 106).

Interviewing is not immune to influences of research paradigm (Alvesson, 2003; Roulston, 2010). Hence, it is paramount that the researcher is aware of the paradigm adopted, as this could affect the quality of the interviewing (Roulston, 2010). Alvesson (2003) presented three positions to interviewing, with the first being *neopositivist*, which aligns itself with a positivist paradigm that there is a single reality out there and therefore would follow a highly structured research protocol to minimise researcher influence. The second position is *romanticist*, which supports an authentic human interaction and a belief that there is a need to establish rapport and trust between the interviewer and interviewee for quality data to occur. The third position is the *localist position*, which views an interview as an “empirical situation” that occurs within a particular context, thus highlighting the importance of the role of context in interviews.

Given the nature of this study also having adopted a realist paradigm supported by process research, it was fitting to adopt a combination of *romanticist and localist positions*. The researcher adopts the view that an interview is a social setting where a respondent is given an opportunity to speak openly, authentically and truthfully about their processes and experiences (Alvesson, 2003, p. 19). The purpose of this setting was to explore complex and personal transformative learning processes and experiences within a particular context in order to assess under what context and for whom transformative learning will occur in an executive coaching intervention (Alvesson, 2003). Roulston (2010) also spoke about transformative conception interviewing, which she described as interviewing that aims at challenging worldviews.

The data collection by interview was conducted at the end of the coaching programme. As indicated in the case selection section, four executives and four coaches were chosen for the study and were all interviewed. Each interview was an average of an hour long. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and made up 190 pages of primary source material.

### **3.6.3. Data storage**

Data capturing and storage are critical components of research. In a case study design, Yin (2014) advised that a database for each case be created. The case in this study consists of the coach-coachee dyad and the database is made up of interview audiotapes and transcripts, video footage and transcripts, and PCRs. This database was stored electronically on the computer and on the cloud (Dropbox) with backup files

on an external hard drive as well as physical files. The data was also submitted to the university for storage and examination, as required by university doctoral rules.

### **3.7. Data analysis methods**

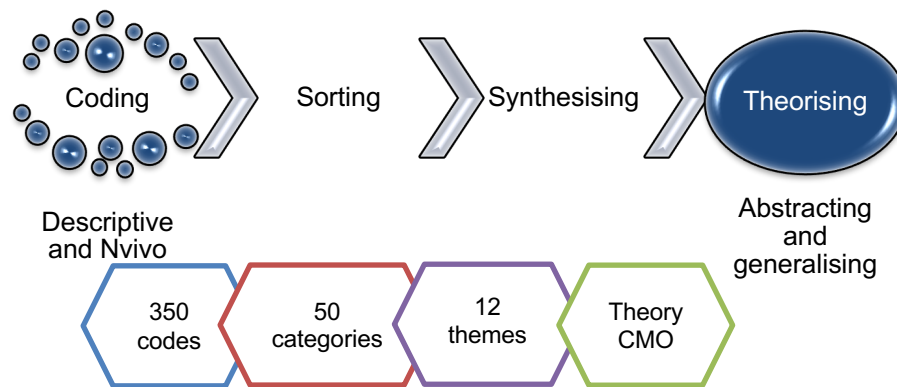
Data analysis in realist evaluation includes description of *actual intervention*, *observed outcomes*, *context conditions*, and *underlying mechanisms* (Marchal et al., 2012), and the results are formulated in a form of a CMO configuration and can be presented in narrative summaries, tables and diagrams. Through triangulation, possible patterns that explain how the intervention led to the results are confirmed. The hypothesised theory is then refined.

Data analysis for multiple case studies can be a complex process because of the amount of data available for each case. Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (2014) suggested a process that begins with a case analysis for each case and a cross-case analysis for all of the cases. The within-case analysis involves a detailed description of each case, wherein a researcher is able to identify emerging themes per case (Eisenhardt, 1989). While the cross-case analysis allows for the identification of emerging patterns (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2014), the researcher needs to look for similarities and differences in the emerging themes and patterns identified (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The first phase of data analysis involved the organisation of data by creating electronic and physical files. Seventy-four electronic files, which accounted for 630 pages of data from the four cases, were loaded on qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti for coding purposes.

The second phase of data analysis was to read the transcripts and listen to the video recordings for content analysis. "Qualitative content analysis is a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). There are three types of content analysis: *conventional content analysis*, an inductive process whereby codes are generated inductively from textual data; *direct content analysis*, a deductive process where codes are initially generated and guided by theory or hypotheses; and *summative content*, which focuses on understanding the contextual usage of words or content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The researcher adopted a combination of conventional and summative content analysis for this study.

The figure below outlines the coding process that was followed in data analysis.



**Figure 3.4:** Illustration of the coding process (Source: adapted from Saldaña, 2016)

Initial codes were generated inductively using descriptive and Nvivo coding (Saldaña, 2013). Several iterations were done in the coding process to arrive at an average of 350 relevant and meaningful codes (Saldaña, 2016). The second iteration generated about 50 categories from the 350 codes. Finally, about 12 thematic areas were deduced from both the categories and from the literature review. (See Annexures C: Code lists.)

Reports for each case were drawn from Atlas.ti, case descriptions were written, and a within-case analysis was conducted. In writing the within-case analysis, the video transcripts of the coaching sessions were used as the core basis for analysing the processes of coaching and transformative learning, while the PCRs and interviews were used for corroborating and triangulating the findings. For each case, an individual case CMO pattern or configuration was developed.

Using categorical aggregation, themes and patterns were established across cases and theme analysis was conducted (Saldaña, 2016). A cross-case analysis was conducted, and an overall CMO pattern configuration was developed. Based on the cross-case analysis and CMO patterns, a theoretical model for the process of transformative learning in executive coaching is proposed as the main contribution for this study.

### **3.8. Quality and ethics**

This section describes how quality was ensured in this study as well as addressing ethical considerations for this research.

### **3.8.1. Quality assurance**

Quality assurance involves validity and reliability of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013). Since the 1980s, qualitative scholars have argued that validity and reliability as described in quantitative studies do not often provide an adequate description of what counts as quality in qualitative inquiry (Morse, 2015; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Reliability and validity in qualitative research were replaced by the concept “trustworthiness” by Lincoln and Guba (Cypress, 2017; Morse, 2015). The concept of trustworthiness was referred to as the quality, authenticity and truthfulness of the findings in qualitative studies (Cypress, 2017; Morse, 2015).

According to qualitative scholars, the concept of trustworthiness questions the extent to which rigour was followed in data collection and analysis (Cypress, 2017; Morse, 2015; Morse et al., 2002; Reynolds et al., 2011). Rigour is defined as “the quality or state of being very exact, careful, with strict precision or the quality of being thorough and accurate” (Cypress, 2017, p. 254). Over the years, features like “credibility”, “transferability”, dependability” and “confirmability” of data collection and analysis methods have been added (Cypress, 2017; Morse, 2015; Reynolds et al., 2011).

Some scholars argue that quality in qualitative research should be reflected in the credibility, transferability, and dependability of *research outputs*. However, mostly it is agreed that quality should be measured in the rigour of *process of data collections and analysis* (Reynolds et al., 2011).

In addition, Morse (2015) argued that even though these concepts have been used since the 1980s, the debates have not evolved to analyse how these are measured to confirm “rigour” in data collection and analysis process. He unpacks four concepts of “trustworthiness/rigour” and aligns them with the original concepts of *validity* and *reliability* but provides qualitative definitions to clarify what needs to happen to ensure rigour in qualitative research. These are described in the next section.

#### **3.8.1.1. Validity**

Validity refers to the extent to which the results of the study are accurate and well founded (Morse, 2015). In qualitative research, this concept is represented by the credibility of the study. In qualitative studies, validity (transferability) should allow for qualitative theories to be generalisable and useful when applied to other contexts – in other words, they should have external validity (Morse, 2015).

Moreover, Morse (2015) identified features that account for *credibility* (internal validity) in qualitative research, including, but not limited to: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks. The features that describe transferability (external validity, or generalisability) are thick descriptions that will allow original results to be transferred to another context.

#### 3.8.1.2. *Reliability*

Reliability describes the ability to obtain the same results if the study was to be repeated (Morse, 2015). This construct is represented by the concept of *dependability* in qualitative research. replicability is a challenge in qualitative studies as it impacts negatively on the induction processes often followed by qualitative researchers; thus, the main strategy for assessing reliability primarily occurs during the coding process (Morse, 2015). Inter-rater reliability is one determinant to this effect where the results of a first coder are compared with those of a second coder (Morse, 2015). Therefore, the key features of reliability in qualitative inquiry should include development of a coding system and inter-rater reliability, member checks, thick description, peer debriefing and external audits (Morse, 2015).

#### 3.8.1.3. *Confirmability*

The fourth concept of trustworthiness or rigour that accounts for validity and reliability is confirmability (Morse, 2015), which is often referred to as objectivity in quantitative studies. Triangulation is a major feature of confirmability in qualitative inquiry (Carter et al., 2014; Morse, 2015). Carter et al. (2014) identified four types of triangulations:

- a) method triangulation, which describes the number and types of methods that the researcher uses;
- b) investigator triangulation, which entails using more than one researcher to verify data;
- c) theory triangulation, in reference to using more than one theory to assess a phenomenon; and
- d) data source triangulation, which means variability in terms of the data sources used.

#### 3.8.1.4. *Quality assurance strategies applied in this study*

Table 3.3 summarises the measures taken in this study to ensure quality and rigour (validity, reliability, and confirmability) as prescribed by the qualitative scholars

mentioned above. It indicates that this research followed an extensively rigorous process in the data collection and analysis processes, and thus can be said to meet the majority of the standards set for quality in qualitative inquiry.

**Table 3.3:** Summary of quality assurance strategies

Strategy	Validity	Reliability
Prolonged engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A longitudinal study over six months, with each respondent receiving six coaching sessions of an average of 90 minutes each</li> <li>• Diary entries in a form of PCRs were documented progressively after each coaching session over the six-month period, thus recording and tracking the process of learning over this period</li> </ul>	The methods can be repeated, but the results could be different as the context plays a major role in the results of study
Thick description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed case descriptions were developed for each of the selected cases using unstructured data from the coaching conversation transcripts and observing video footage as well as PCRs and interview data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The video footage was revisited multiple times (at least three times) to:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Screen videos to check completeness of sessions;</i></li> <li>2. <i>Listen and view footage to check accuracy of transcripts; and</i></li> <li>3. <i>Listen and view during the first-order coding process</i></li> </ol> </li> <li>• Potentially a different researcher could reach the same conclusions</li> </ul>
Triangulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Method triangulation:</i> Direct observation, PCRs and interviews were used</li> <li>• <i>Investigator triangulation:</i> This was not possible for this PhD study; only a research assistant for data collection was used</li> <li>• <i>Theory triangulation:</i> Three theory streams were used in analysis and theory</li> </ul>	Ditto

Strategy	Validity	Reliability
	<p>development, (transformative learning, executive coaching, and realist evaluations)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Data source triangulation:</i> Variability of levels of leadership, levels of governance, sector, and gender were applied in case selection. Data was also collected from coachees and coaches</li> </ul>	
Development of a coding system and inter-rater reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coding was done primarily inductively for interview transcripts, PCRs and coaching conversation transcripts, and theme generation was done inductively and deductively</li> </ul>	<p>Three levels of coding were done reiteratively:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>First-order coding, which included Nvivo codes;</i></li> <li>2. <i>Second-order categorisation; and</i></li> <li>3. <i>Third-order theme generation done inductively and deductively</i></li> </ol>
Researcher bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primarily Inductive coding was used to avoid researcher bias</li> </ul>	Not a reliability concern
Negative case analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not used, as case selection was purposively drawn from two sectors experiencing extreme socio-political turbulence</li> </ul>	Not used as a reliability measure
Peer review/debriefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two international conference paper presentations were done during the writing phase in the US in September and November 2018 (at the Harvard Institute of Coaching and the International Transformative Learning Conference)</li> <li>• Feedback was received from experts in the transformative learning and executive coaching fields, who assisted in the conceptualisation of the findings better</li> </ul>	Not relevant for reliability
Member checking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not used, as researcher could go back to audio and video tapes to</li> </ul>	N/A



Strategy	Validity	Reliability
	verify data. PCRs were captured electronically by the respondents, so no need to check for accuracy	
Audit trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The code book has been developed</li> </ul>	The code book has been developed

#### *Ensuring quality pre-data collection*

After the case study protocols were developed, the researcher pilot tested these with two executives from public-sector organisations and two coaches. The intention was to pilot test the validity and reliability of the instruments (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Yin, 2014), and to test the video-recording equipment. A research assistant who was competent with the operation of the video-recording equipment was employed. Each of the coaching dyads enrolled online via the SurveyMonkey system and had two coaching sessions. Session one was not video-recorded, while session two was video-recorded. They both had to complete PCRs after each coaching session and an in-depth interview was conducted for each after the second coaching session. The case study protocols were revised based on the pilot.

#### *Ensuring quality in data collection and analysis*

Firstly, the data collection process was longitudinal, allowing the researcher to track changes in transformative learning over a six-month period. Secondly, in the data collection process, the researcher utilised multiple sources of data and methods to corroborate evidence from these different sources (Creswell, 2013). These included direct observation (video recording), data collection using diaries (PCRs), and the post-coaching in-depth interviews. This allowed for thick descriptions of the cases and within-case analysis (Morse, 2015).

Thirdly, credibility of data was ensured in this study through audiotaping the interviews with coaches and participating executives and video-recording the coaching sessions. The researcher ensured the use of good-quality audio and video-recording instruments, as well as utilising a professional to transcribe all the data. In addition, to ensure reliability and integrity of the data, the researcher verified the transcripts by listening to the audio and videotapes to check accuracy of transcriptions before loading these into the data analysis software.

Regarding data analysis, a strict regime of reiterative first-order coding, second-order categorisation and third-order coding (generating) of themes was followed (Saldaña,

2016). The details are described in section 3.7. The transcript data was verified by reading the transcripts while listening to and viewing the video recording to check for accuracy of transcription.

### *Ensuring quality of the coaching intervention*

#### *Coach qualifications and experience*

The table below summarises a comparison of coaches' professional backgrounds and experience in coaching. It outlines the types of coaching approaches they were trained in.

*Table 3.4: Coach qualifications and experience*

<b>Coach profiles</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>Kate</b>	<b>Sarah</b>	<b>Eva</b>
<b>Professional qualifications</b>	Diploma in health and wellness	Master's in clinical psychology	Honours in law	Master's in social science
<b>Corporate background</b>	Business owner for over 20 years	Worked in corporate as industrial psychologist, and organisational practitioner	Worked in corporate as a senior manager	Worked in public sector for over 20 years as a manager and executive
<b>Years of experience and hours as a coach</b>	10 years and above More than 1 000 hours	5–10 years Average of 700 hours	1–3 years Below 500 hours	1–3 years Below 500 hours
<b>Age group</b>	Above 55	35–45	35–45	Above 55
<b>Professional membership and accreditation</b>	COMENSA and International Society of Neuro-Semantics (ISNS)	COMENSA and ISNS	COMENSA and ISNS	COMENSA and ISNS
<b>Coaching approaches used</b>				
<b>Cognitive behavioural coaching</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Neuro-linguistic programming</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Positive psychological coaching (PPC)</b>	<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>	

Coach profiles	Mary	Kate	Sarah	Eva
Psychodynamic		x		
Person-centred	x	x		
Gestalt approach				x
Solution-focused/results			x	
Narrative coaching		x		
Systemic coaching	x			

Source: Coach profiles and interview data

Table 3.4 indicates that the coaches who participated in the study had a formal education, ranging from a diploma to a master's degree. The coach with the lowest formal qualification had the highest experience in practice as a coach. They are all accredited coaches with an international institution (ISNS) and subscribed to a code of conduct with a South African professional coaching body (COMENSA). Based on their average coaching hours, Mary would be at an ICF Master Coach Certificate level, Kate a Professional Coach Certificate level, and Sarah and Eva at an Associate Coach Certificate level.

The coaches utilised a mixture of eight different coaching approaches. Eva used three approaches, while Sarah used four, and both Mary and Kate used five approaches. Three of the approaches were used by all the coaches, of which two were cognitive behavioural coaching and neuro-linguistic programming coaching approaches. Mary and Sarah had PPC in common, while Kate and Mary had person-centred approach in common.

The differences were in the additional four approaches, where Mary had systemic coaching, Eva had the gestalt approach, Sarah had solution-focused/results coaching approach, and Kate had the psychodynamic and narrative approaches at her disposal.

This data implies that, while the coaches had diverse backgrounds, educational qualifications and coaching experience, they were all suitably qualified for the coaching assignment. This was also confirmed by their clients, as mentioned in the within-case analysis where the clients felt confident that the coaches knew what they were doing and understood their roles. A notable difference from this data is that, although the coaches utilised various approaches to coaching, the most experienced coaches – that is, Mary and Kate – were trained and used more approaches than the less experienced

coaches. It could be argued that, given their experience and diversity of coaching approaches, their skill level based on experience and training would be slightly more advanced, with their techniques being more elegant (Clutterbuck, 2010).

Additionally, the coaches had access to a volunteer supervisor who they could consult with as and when they needed support. The researcher became aware that some of the coaches preferred to see their personal coaches for debriefing rather than the supervisor. All coaches were inducted, and expectations of the coaching programme and the research project were clarified.

### *Ensuring quality of outputs*

Two international conference paper presentations were done during the writing phase. The first was at the Harvard Institute of Coaching in Boston in the US, in September 2018. The second was at the International Transformative Learning Conference at New York's Columbia University in the US in November 2018. Feedback was received from experts in the transformative learning and executive coaching fields, which assisted in improving the conceptualisation of the findings. The conference presentations and feedback confirmed the main contributions of this study as filling in an evident gap of lack of credible process studies in executive coaching and more specifically how transformative learning occurs in an executive coaching process.

### **3.8.2. Ethical considerations**

When conducting research, numerous ethical issues arise that need to be considered – namely, the preparation, data collection, data analysis and report writing phases of the research (Creswell, 2013). Possible ethical issues that could affect this study as well as measures to address these are detailed in Table 3.5.

*Table 3.5: Ethical considerations*

<b>Ethical issue</b>	<b>Measures to address issue in the research</b>
Permission from volunteer individuals and their organisations	Permission letters were written to the participating department to officially request for the client to partake in the study and this was granted.
Participation in interviews	Letters of consent were sent to all participants and signed by all volunteer executives and coaches at the beginning of the coaching programme. See Annexure B.
Participation in the coaching programme as well the video-recording of the coaching sessions (video-recording the	A letter of consent for those who participated in the coaching programme was signed by all participating executives and coaches. In addition, a confidentiality

<b>Ethical issue</b>	<b>Measures to address issue in the research</b>
sessions may breach confidentiality between the coach and coachee)	agreement between the coach, coachee and researcher was entered into and consent requested in relation to the video-recording of the coaching sessions (see Annexure B).
Confidentiality and anonymity of participants in analysis and reporting results	Confidentiality and anonymity were declared in the consent letters as well as guaranteed in written reports/theses (see Annexure B).
Code of professional conduct and ethics for coaches	Only coaches who are fully qualified and subscribe to the ICF or COMENSA code of conduct were invited to provide their coaching services.
Objectivity of the researchers (including participating coaches)	To ensure the researcher's objectivity, the researcher did not take part in the coaching process. The participating coaches took part voluntarily, and thus were not motivated by financial gain.
Financial gain/incentives	No incentives, financial or other gains, were used to solicit participation in the study. The volunteering individuals did not pay for the coaching services, thus there was no financial gain for the researcher either. The coaches were also not paid for their services.
Physical or psychological harm	No physical or psychological harm was caused during the process of this study.

### *Video-recording*

The main ethical risk posed by this research in data collection, analysis and reporting was the video-recording of the coaching sessions – specifically in dealing with anonymity and confidentiality of respondents in analysis and reporting. In addition to getting permission from the participants to record the coaching sessions, transcripts of the video footage were made and used as a main source of data for analysis. Video images were only used by the researcher for data extraction and were not used on the research report (Derry et al., 2010). Having followed the ethical clearance process, the university ethics committee granted ethical clearance for the research to continue.

### **3.9. Conclusion on research design**

This chapter has presented the research design for the study. It has defined the paradigm or philosophy that the researcher has opted to choose, which is realism, and specifically realist evaluation underlined by process theory. This chapter has argued for the relevance of the adoption of realist evaluation based on the research question at hand. The strategy of enquiry was qualitative, given that the research focused on building a new theory of executive coaching, whose intention is transformative learning. A multiple case study design was adopted, where a coaching intervention

was designed and implemented for selected volunteer executives in the South African public-service sector.

The main data collection method was direct observation via video-recording, in-depth interviews, and collecting data using PCRs. The analysis of data followed a combination of the realist evaluation and case study analysis processes. To ensure quality, a rigorous regime was followed in data collection and analysis. Furthermore, this chapter has highlighted ethical considerations that were observed in the execution of the study.

## Chapter 4: Within-case analyses

### 4.1. Introduction to cases

This chapter provides a within-case analysis for each of the four case studies selected. It presents descriptions and analyses for all cases. In line with formative evaluation design (Yin, 2014) and process theory (Van de Ven, 1992), the case descriptions and analyses seek to explain the emergent change process brought about by the coaching intervention to the client. From a realistic evaluation perspective, these also provide a structured way to understand the nuances of how the context and mechanisms in the coaching engagement interacted to produce transformative learning.

The coaching and learning processes are described and analysed using the video transcripts (when referenced, these are abbreviated as “VTS”) as the core source of data. These are triangulated by the PCRs and interviews (when referenced, these are abbreviated as “IT” and preceded by the participant’s initial).

For each of the four cases, a summary table of three coaching sessions outlining the key features of each conversation is presented, followed by an illustration of the client’s reflection and emotional experience process. This is demonstrated in the form of a process graph.

#### *The coaching intervention*

All of the coachees volunteered to participate in the study, but permission was sought from their organisations. They each received six face-to-face coaching sessions. The coaching intervals were an average of three to four weeks, with each coaching session averaging 90 minutes. The coaching was conducted over six months from July to December 2017. Four of the middle sessions (two to five) were video recorded, but only three are used for the case descriptions and analysis. The research design was planned to use half (three) of the coaching sessions. However, since at the time of design it was unclear as to which of the middle four was to be excluded, all four were recorded. After the second coaching session, which was the first to be recorded, some clients indicated in the PCRs that they felt slightly uncomfortable with the first video-recording. Consequently, the researcher decided to exclude session two from the analysis. The video footage from the sessions was transcribed into textual data for coding, case description and analysis.

## **4.2. Simon's case**

This section provides a narrative description of Simon's coaching process as it occurred over three sessions based on video transcripts and PCR data. For each of the three sessions, a summary of the key features of the conversation is presented in a table format, while the client's reflection and emotional experience are presented in the form of a process graph. Having analysed the context, coach and client mechanisms, the analysis concludes by describing Simon's process of learning.

### **4.2.1. Participant's profile and context**

#### *Simon's profile*

At the time of the study, Simon (male) was in the 45–55 age category. Upon observation, Simon seemed to be a calm, focused, committed and dedicated manager who cared about his work, his team and the contribution he believed he was making to the country. He had worked for the finance ministry as a senior manager responsible for budget policy analysis for over 11 years. For the period of the coaching intervention, he was acting in a senior role on behalf of his manager, who was also acting in a senior role.

Simon was planning on applying for a new position that would become vacant if his manager was to be appointed in the role she was acting in. His department had recently experienced multiple political head changes as a result of frequent cabinet reshuffles. The main predicament was the unusual interference by the presidency in the running of the ministry. These changes had impacted negatively on the morale of Simon's staff and the organisation in general. He hoped that his participation in the coaching programme would assist him to improve his strategic decision-making, improve his ability to motivate and manage his staff, and prepare him for his potential new role (CLP, 1.1docx.- CLP refers to client profile document).

Simon had no prior coaching experience but was committed to the process and approached it with an "open mind", as he felt it was a "gift" given the context he was operating under (SIT, 18:51docx). According to his coach, Mary, Simon was a "willing client", which contributed to the success of the coaching intervention (MIT, 19:38docx).



### *Mary's profile (Simon's coach)*

Mary was Simon's allocated coach. Mary is a certified coach with over 10 years of experience. Her approach to coaching was primarily neuro-linguistic programming, which includes cognitive behavioural coaching. She is qualified as a neuro-linguistic programming master practitioner and as an executive coach. In addition, she also integrates person-centred and positive psychological coaching approaches in her coaching and was recently trained in systemic coaching (CP, 20:1docx- CP refers to coach profile document). Her motivation for volunteering to coach for this research project was to contribute to research in the coaching profession (M.IT, 19:1docx).

Mary's extensive experience as a coach was felt and experienced by the client, who acknowledged that her style of coaching made it easy for him to sustain the process. Simon indicated that Mary was also clear about her role as a facilitator (SIT, 18:54docx).

### *Simon's work context*

Simon's coaching occurred in the context of extreme economic, socio-political and organisational turbulence. When Simon started his coaching journey, the South African Economic Progress Index had been on a downward spiral and was at its worst, with the country having experienced two downgrades from international ratings agencies, leading to a junk status grading by November 2017 (Donnelley, 2017). This resulted in a huge budget deficit, with less money available to fund development programmes. When the coaching started, the finance ministry was in the middle of the budget policy process for the 2018/2019 financial year, which was central to Simon's role as a budget policy analyst. For him, this context meant that his role had to shift from allocating money to new development programmes to recommending budget cuts for much-needed development programmes – a task that he had not previously been required to perform during his many years as a budget analyst when the economy was doing well.

The poor economic situation was exacerbated by the fact that some of the state-owned enterprises that typically generate and contribute income into the fiscus needed to be bailed out of liquidation, at least partly due to maladministration, fraud and corruption. This came as a result of a mismanagement and inappropriate implementation of a policy on radical economic transformation adopted by the ruling party and government (Donnelley, 2017). This situation caused devastation and distress for most public-sector officials.

Furthermore, the finance ministry was particularly impacted by frequent cabinet reshuffles, resulting in changes in leadership three times within a five-year period (Donnelley, 2017). The ministry became politically and administratively unstable, as some key personnel had resigned, including the head of the department. Throughout the coaching intervention, various other changes impacted the organisation, including the resignation of the head of budget coordination and further economic downgrades. As key people resigned, many senior level employees were in “acting” positions, rendering the organisation even more unstable.

#### **4.2.2. Description of Simon’s coaching and learning process**

Simon’s coaching sessions occurred in Mary’s office in a demarcated coaching room, which was about a 15-minute drive from Simon’s office. Most of the sessions happened in the mornings (7:30–9:00), before he went to work.

The first coaching session intended to build rapport between the coach and coachee, and to frame the coaching programme by setting coaching outcomes for the entire programme and clarifying expectations. Although this session was not video-recorded, data drawn from the Simon’s and Mary’s PCRs indicated that this goal was achieved (PCR1, 8:1docx).

The conversation in the second session was centred on narrating and discussing other people, organisational systems and policies, and how these impacted the client’s quality of life at work – for example, staff development and the complications related to staff development policies, rather than focusing on Simon. The coach assisted the client to gently shift the focus from others to himself. Therefore, sessions one and two laid a good foundation for the rest of the coaching intervention.

##### *4.2.2.1. Simon’s coaching and learning process in session three (VTS3)*

The table below is an overview of the coaching process extracted from session three of the video transcript. It sequentially summarises the key features of the interaction between the coach’s process and the client’s reflection process.

**Table 4.1: Key features of Simon's third coaching session**

<b>The coach's process</b>	<b>The client's reflection process</b>
1. Checks in and asks about task agreed upon in the last session	1. Expresses frustration and inner turmoil with contradictions inherent in the budget process as a result of political influence and interference in the organisation 2. Expresses awareness of clash between his value system and what is happening in the organisation
2. Focuses the client to the coaching outcome for the session	3. Experiences disappointment due to not getting the job he hoped to get, and he struggles to deal with it as he sees it as an "opportunity lost"
3. Coach recognises feelings of disappointment in Simon and challenges him to feel comfortable to express his feelings	4. Gains awareness of an opportunity to explore other options of work, but is aware of fear of the unknown in exploring, having been in the department for more than 11 years
4. Asks about the meaning he holds about what happened (lost job opportunity)	5. Expresses feelings of hesitation, self-doubt and indecisiveness to explore new opportunities outside of the department
5. Challenges the fear and self-doubt by helping the client to look at the advantages and disadvantages of keeping things as are or exploring new opportunities	6. Gains awareness and acknowledges a shift in the role of organisation – once "powerful", "big brother" and "influential", now under threat of being taken over by the presidency
6. Encourages the client to explore what he wants to do as a person, recognising that he has no control of the political aspects of his work 7. Tracks from previous conversation and reminds him of his main intention – that is, "making a difference"	7. Gains awareness of an assumption he holds about his current job, which he believes provides him an opportunity to make a contribution "on a big scale" that is "difficult" to find elsewhere
8. Asks probing question around this assumption of making a "big" contribution in the current role	8. Reaffirms awareness of his own value system. 9. Confirms disconnect between his values and current organisational climate
9. Asks exploration question to assist in exploring other options	10. Decides to explore other work options, as he feels he cannot stay in a system that clashes with his values
10. Asks about criteria he will use to make choices of what to do and what not to do in exploring new options	11. Develops criteria for decision-making 12. Engages in a dialogue about his beliefs and assumptions about working in the department and the perception of "big influence"
11. Reinforces by asking question about his highest intention for work	13. Defines his highest intention and purpose, reverting to the values he upholds – that is, "freedom to work and worthwhileness"
12. Checks if the client has made a decision	14. Commits to action to explore other opportunities

The coach's process	The client's reflection process
13. Summarises and asks the client to reflect on the learning from the session	15. Expresses appreciation of having committed to participate in the coaching programme

There were two sets of conversations in this coaching session. The first part of the conversation centred on the political role or influence in the budgetary process. Simon expressed his frustration of how the process is full of contradictions and conflicting interests. The main frustration he expressed was with how politicians give instructions, but almost always abdicate responsibility to officials:

“...political decisions that are causing disruption in the way we do the work” (VTS3, 15:32docx).

“But at the same time the politicians never take that decision, they just never, they abdicate completely” (VTS3, 15:7docx).

This frustration was exacerbated by the economic situation in that there was not enough money to allocate for inflation increases and for new development programmes. The client found this process extremely taxing, especially when it involved taking money from developmental programmes designed for the poor to bail out ailing state enterprises that had been rife with fraud, poor governance and leadership, resulting in corruption. It became apparent that the frustration was creating an inner conflict for Simon when he realised that there was a clash between his personal value system and what was happening in the organisation.

The coach redirected the conversation by asking the client a coaching outcome question that moved the client from distress. As the client continued to express his frustration about what was happening in his organisation, she made him aware of his feelings and asked meaning questions around the events that had impacted him. She challenged his unfounded fears, beliefs and assumptions, and asked probing questions about his perception of the experience. With a new awareness that he could avail of other options, the client was encouraged by the coach to explore other employment opportunities. She pulled Simon out of an emotionally distressing situation by asking him questions that shifted his focus to what he was able to control.

In the second part of the conversation, the coach guided the client to shift from the political and organisation factors to his personal context, where he focused on how he would be impacted if his manager did not get the job that she had applied for. He expressed disappointment and was struggling to deal with the reality of what he termed “an opportunity closed”.

“...and personally, that had an impact on me, because it means if my boss comes back to her position ... so that option for me and my advancement is no longer an option” (VTS3, 15:20docx).

Moreover, Simon felt that he was making a “big contribution” in this new acting role and that he would no longer be able to do so when he returned to his old position. With the coach’s probing, he continued to explore what else he could do in the sector that he had worked in for so many years. He voiced his hesitation and reluctance from a fear of the unknown and expressed a sense of self-doubt and indecisiveness.

“*Ja* possibly... I don’t know maybe not today, or do you think that’s something I can do...?” (VTS3, 15:29docx).

“...I know this work, I know the terrain, I know the area that we work in ... as I told you before I’m not an economist, but I know the economics of education and even about some other economics thing that is related very narrowly to my work, so stepping out of that is ... you know difficult...” (VTS3, 15:31docx).

The coach encouraged Simon to take action by asking questions that set him up to be more specific about what he needed to do. After reflecting on what he thought he knew and did not know, Simon committed to the task of formally looking at other potential options in preparation for the next session (VTS3, 15:73docx).

Throughout the coaching conversation, Simon experienced cognitive and emotional dissonance expressed by feelings of frustration, disappointment, self-doubt, hesitation and indecisiveness. This experience assisted him to gain awareness on what was happening in his context and the effect it was having on him. He also became aware of the shifting role of his department within the negative economic context and found an opportunity to explore other work options. Most importantly, Simon gained awareness of his values and beliefs and the extent of the disconnection between his values and the organisational climate.

This awareness facilitated a dialogue on his values, beliefs and assumptions about his contribution to the country, which led to him making a decision to explore options outside his organisation. He anchored this decision in his highest intention and purpose, linking it with his values and committed to an action plan. The conversation concluded on a positive note, with Simon showing appreciation to the coach for the process she had facilitated, which resulted in a resolution of his dilemma.

From this session's PCR, Simon indicated that with the new awareness that the personal values driving him were being violated, he was more comfortable with the idea of finding employment elsewhere where he would be able to deliver the same contribution without compromise.

"I have a value system which is grounded in the need to do good work that will have a positive impact on people's lives. I feel that slipping, and this has brought an awareness that it is okay to consider looking elsewhere to make this contribution" (PCR3, 10:1docx).

"I was again reminded of the need to consider 'me' in thinking through issues, that is, what do I think, how will things affect me, and that there is nothing wrong in doing so" (PCR3, 10:4docx).

Simon also acknowledged that the coach's "probing questions" helped him to think through and reflect on his situation, which led him to decide to make changes (PCR3, 10:6docx). In the PCR, the coach indicated that she recognised frustration, demotivation, and indecisiveness about the future due to politics interfering with the client's work and his personal values of making a contributing to the country (PCR3, 4:2docx).

In summary, this coaching conversation started off with negative emotional experiences that the client brought into the session as a result of the political context that impacted negatively on the organisation and its employees. The coaching session provided Simon with the opportunity to gain awareness and an appreciation of how things have shifted in the organisation, and the impact this had on him. Most importantly, Simon gained an appreciation of what he did and did not have control over. With the assistance of his coach, he was able to reconnect with his value system, realising that there was a major disconnect between his personal values and what was

expected of him in his work context. Moreover, Simon gained awareness of the assumptions and beliefs he held about his situation. Through this awareness, the client was able to decide on his next move – that is, exploring other work options.

#### 4.2.2.2. *Summary of Simon’s coaching process in session four (VTS4)*

Table 4.2 is an overview of the coaching process extracted from the video transcript for coaching session four. It sequentially summarises the key features of the interaction between the coach’s process and the client’s reflection process.

**Table 4.2:** *Key features of Simon’s fourth coaching session*

<b>The coach’s process</b>	<b>The client’s reflection process</b>
1. Checks in with the client on task from previous session	1. Is positive about possible opportunities outside the department, based on recent experience of presenting in a private company 2. Feels confident in his capabilities, given recent experience
2. Listens and gives feedback	3. Shows reluctance and hesitates to make a decisive move about his unhappy situation at work
3. Checks what the reluctance is about	4. Gains awareness that reluctance is based on fear of financial loss if he leaves public service and a “big pension”
4. Asks questions to help the client explore and narrow options that would work for him	5. Feels comfortable to only explore options, however limited these options may be, within the public service
5. Listens and asks further clarity question for each option mentioned	6. Realises that there are limited options inside public service where the presidency will not have influence and negative impact
6. Listens and validates the client’s feelings using his words	7. Accepts that politics will play a role in budget process and in government in general
7. Listens and acknowledges the client’s feelings	8. Realises that it will be difficult for him to deal with disengaged departments if he decides to stay in the department, but he feels it necessary to “protect” the poor from corrupt practices
8. Checks the meaning and importance of protection – also goes further to challenge generalisations and distortions she picks up from the client’s frustration	9. Feels helpless that the department has lost power of influence due to being undermined by the presidency
9. Asks a series of questions relating to meaning and importance for the client and checks what is within his control	10. Acknowledges what is within his control

The coach's process	The client's reflection process
10. Reminds the client of his higher intentions and values	11. Reaffirms that there is a values clash
11. Reaffirms his values and intended purpose for his life/work	12. Gains awareness of the bigger value he believes he should contribute to society and that he can do this anywhere
13. Assists in co-creating a task to explore new options	14. Commits to action to explore where else he can make a contribution

The coach started this conversation by checking on the task that was agreed upon from the previous session. The client recounts an experience of doing a presentation about his work in a private-sector company. This experience generated a positive mood for the client, as it had created an awareness that work outside of the public sector is possible and gave the client some confidence in his skills and competencies.

Despite the awareness of the clash of values in continuing to work in the current environment as well his willingness to explore other work options outside the public service, Simon still expressed hesitation and reluctance about leaving the public sector. As the coach listened attentively, she picked up on Simon's sudden change in mood and his reluctance to make a decisive move to explore other options for work. She listened, validated and acknowledged his feelings of frustration. She challenged the generalisations and distortions that she detected from his frustration and the language he used.

Challenged by the coach, Simon continued to explore the reasons behind his reluctance, and realised that this is based on the fear of losing a "big pension". This motivated him to limit his options for work in the public sector, where he will not lose out. The coach assisted him to narrow down options by asking specific clarity- and action-related questions. However, as he continued to explore, he realised that there were limited possibilities where the presidency could not interfere in any other department he may potentially want to work in.

Simon found himself stuck, as he felt responsible to "protect the poor" (driven by his value system) from corrupt politicians and department officials who are disengaged. At that moment, he became aware of a belief he holds about politicians and an expectation of how they should behave, and this adds to his frustration. The coach helped him by redirecting his thinking, reminding him of his higher intentions and value system. This helped Simon to shift his awareness to the larger contribution he can



make to society. He realised his lack of control over politicians' behaviour and their "self-serving" actions, which he felt were not in accordance with the ruling party's ideals.

This reaffirmed the values clash. Realising that he has no control over others' behaviour and that he may not be able to protect the poor, Simon chose to focus on what he could control. The coach validated and reaffirmed Simon's values, work ethics and life purpose, and helped him co-create an action plan to explore other work options where he could make the same type of contribution.

Simon's emotional experience at the beginning of the session was positive because of having had an opportunity to do a presentation about his work in a private-sector company he was invited to. He felt confident about his skills and competencies.

However, his mood changed as he continued to reflect and started to think about the future. He began to experience negative emotions that he expressed in the form of uncertainty and reluctance to pursue new options. Digging deeper, Simon realised that the reluctance is informed by the fear of losing a "big pension". This limited his search options to those found within public service. This option brought about an experience of inner conflict as he realised that if he stayed within the public sector, he would not be able to escape the perceived corrupt practices that were being orchestrated. He felt helpless that he had no control over protecting the poor.

His main realisation was that there will always be political interference in the public service. Instead, Simon decided to accept what he could control and reaffirmed his value system. This gave him the confidence that he could contribute to the larger society outside of his current department, and he committed to action by exploring more suitable work options.

From this session's PCR, the client confirmed that the session re-emphasised his awareness of his personal value and fundamental values, and that he gained more confidence in his ability to "own" his point of view without fear.

"I am important too, and that what I say/do/feel is important" (PCR4, 11:1docx).

"...the coach has helped me recognise my value, to the organisation and in general" (PCR4, 11:8docx).

“...there are certain values that are fundamental to me and through my work it is important to me that I am able to ‘live’ those values, e.g. adding value, upliftment of others, development” (PCR4, 11:2docx).

“I am more confident and not afraid to ‘own’ a position, i.e. ‘this is my view” (PCR4, 11:4docx).

“I am not bound to the civil service – I can serve the above values in other places as well” (PCR4, 11:3docx).

He acknowledged the coach’s assistance in helping him to make shifts and learn more about himself.

“The coach has helped me realise that what I need to do that (take my development forward) is intrinsic and with her help I am beginning to recognise this” (PCR4, 11:7docx); “I am learning a lot about myself” (PCR4, 11:9docx).

In the session’s PCR, Mary confirmed that what assisted her to move the client to a resolution in this session were the skills relating to attentive listening, summarising, observing non-verbal gestures, giving feedback and asking meaning questions (PCR4, 5:2docx).

In summary, Simon came to the session in high spirits as a result of his exposure to the private sector, which confirmed the decision he made in session three that he can make the contribution he wants elsewhere. This positive experience was interrupted by the thought of losing out financially if he were to exit the public service before retirement age. The alternative was to look for work within public services. However, this option had no guarantees that he would have the freedom to do the work and to contribute in the way he wanted without any political interference. This awareness made him revert to his decision to be open to explore job opportunities outside of the public sector, even though he put a condition that if the political situation changed, he would rather stay.

#### *4.2.2.3. Summary of Simon’s coaching process in session five (VTS5)*

This session took place after the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) had been tabled in parliament in October 2017. In the previous session, Simon left with

clarity around the fact that if he left the department, he would still like to contribute to the public sector, especially in “growing young minds”. However, his decision was to be determined by the outcomes of the ruling party’s imminent elective conference. If the political scenario changed for the positive, he would still stay, but having clarity about what his values are and what his value-add is. This was disrupted by another organisational context issue, which was that the head of budget coordination had resigned.

This resignation caused a huge impact in the country showing no confidence in the MTBPS and questions about whether the country will get another downgrade. The result was further turbulence in the organisation. Once again, Simon experienced tension of value clashes, especially in how the resignation of this executive manager had been communicated to the public, that is, “the real reasons for resignation are not communicated”.

The table below is an overview of the coaching process extracted from the video transcript for the fifth coaching session, which took place after these events.

**Table 4.3:** Key features of Simon’s fifth coaching session

<b>The coach’s process</b>	<b>The client’s reflection process</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Checks how the client has been since the last session</li> <li>2. Holds the client accountable for task not completed</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expresses concerns and is distressed about the negative MTBPS recently tabled in parliament and the resignation of the head of the budget office</li> <li>2. Expresses dissatisfaction about lack of honesty and integrity in communicating this event to the public</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Listens and acknowledges the client’s feelings and emotions</li> <li>4. Gives feedback on language usage (use of “but”) that she has traced from the past coaching sessions</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Expresses dissatisfaction regarding the subversion of the budget process by the presidency</li> <li>4. Reconfirms a value clash more decisively</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Asks a question about what the client’s intended outcome is for this session</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Begins to distance himself from the system, referring to “them”</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Listens attentively</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Reflects on the negative economic and political context from an observer position</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Listens attentively</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Confirms for himself that he cannot stay if the political context remains the same</li> </ol>

<b>The coach's process</b>	<b>The client's reflection process</b>
8. Refocuses the client to himself – away from the context	8. Expresses self-doubt about lack of possible future opportunities – based on assumptions
9. Challenges the client on assumptions, feelings of inadequacy and fear of putting himself out there	9. Doubts his skill set as skills that can “only” be used in the current context
10. Feedback on what she hears and recognises as a unique set of skills that the client possesses (a combination of budget policy analysis-economics and understanding his sector policies very well)	10. Recognises that he has a unique set of skills, which is a strength
11. Reaffirms the unique set of skills the client has and challenges him to think about what he can do about these	11. Gains confidence in the uniqueness of his skill set and feels ready to explore
12. Reconnects this new awareness to the client's vision of “contributing to young minds” in society	12. Commits to action to review his CV and send it out

This turn of events resulted in Simon not being able to complete the task that had been agreed upon in the previous session. The coaching conversation was characterised by the client airing his frustrations again due to the political interference with work. This reaffirmed a values clash for Simon, although this time he was more decisive about the fact that he could not stay in such a system. This event seemed to have pushed him to the realisation that he needed to make a decision about his future sooner.

“The presidency won't say that he's leaving because the budget process has been subverted” (VTS5, 17:11docx).

“The more immediate dilemma that I have right now and I've had this week ... is do I go at the end of November as planned, is it logical even financially or should I just go at the end of January...” (VTS5, 17:17docx).

The coach spent most of the time listening attentively to his frustrations about the recent work events and political scenarios impacting the department. She gave him feedback on his language use and acknowledged his frustration.

While it was clearer in his mind that he could not stay in the department anymore, Simon was now faced with the reality of having to look for work elsewhere. He then

experienced a state of self-doubt by making assumptions that there were no opportunities available.

“I guess I know that there’s limited opportunity at the moment ... certainly, within the public sector, but even beyond the public sector. It’s a difficult time I think, and the areas that I’d be interested in, outside of the public sector are areas that I try when things are good, and those are the areas where the people who work in that space anyway cut back on, when things are difficult...” (VTS5, 17:25docx).

The coach challenged the client on his assumptions, and he realised that these may be driven by fear. As Mary continued to challenge Simon and brought more awareness to what he was experiencing, he was then ready to begin exploring by “putting out feelers out there and see what comes” (VTS5, 17:28docx).

In the process of reflecting on what he might or might not do, which was accompanied by doubt, the coach gave feedback to the client about what she heard as a unique set of skills that he possesses. She pointed out that he had “a combination of policy and budget analysis” skills, and hearing this gave him confidence. Simon acknowledged that with these unique set of skills he can add value and contribute on a larger scale. Considering this, the coach refocused Simon’s attention to him and to what he could do with his unique competencies by reconnecting him with his vision of making a “contribution to young minds”.

Simon’s emotional experience in this session vacillated between negative and positive cognitive and emotional shifts. The negative emotional experiences were expressed in the form of distress, frustration, dissatisfaction and a reconfirmation of the value clashes as a result of the recent events in the organisation, in addition to his expression of self-doubt and fear about his skill set. The positive emotional shifts were experienced when he began to distance himself from the organisation in his language, taking on more of an observer position as he spoke. His final shift was when he embraced his unique set of skills and began to speak about making a bigger contribution to “young minds” in society outside of the organisation. This helped him take the leap of exploring options outside of the organisation.

In the PCR, Simon described the learning that had emerged for him in the last three sessions to be awareness of his personal value, awareness of his value system, and learning about the self (PCR5, 12:1docx):

“For my work to be meaningful, what I do must be of value and make a difference to others, especially the poor. I have unique skills – bringing together issues of policy on the one hand, and financing and budgeting on the other” (PCR5, 12:2docx); “to incorporate some of the key learnings about myself” (PCR5, 12:9docx).

“That it is okay to consider options in relation to how they affect me ... I am able and willing to take on and internalise key learnings ... I have to continually apply it to make the mind shift ‘stick’” (PCR5, 12:3docx).

In the coach’s PCR, she indicated that the coaching session was effective because of her employment of the following skills: attentive listening, tracking non-verbal gestures, tracking the conversation and making links from previous sessions, framing and holding the client accountable (PCR5, 6:1docx).

The client confirmed this in his PCR, indicating that the coach had assisted him by reminding him of his own words.

“The way the coach reflects what I have said, e.g. by saying something like “I hear you saying X, Y and Z. Is that correct?” This helps to pull out the key elements of what I am thinking and saying. This “reflection’ of what I am saying in simple words has helped me understand what’s important to me” (PCR5, 12:6docx).

In summary, the cumulative events happening in Simon’s organisational context from session one contributed to him making a final decision about what he needs to do with his unhappy situation at work. The events prior to session five became a catalyst for him to make both a cognitive and an emotional shift, contributing to firming up his decisions.

### **4.2.3. Analysis of Simon's coaching and learning process**

This section provides an analysis of Simon's coaching and learning process across all coaching sessions. In addition to data used in the case description, data from interview transcripts is integrated for corroboration and triangulation. It analyses the role and impact of context in Simon's coaching and learning process, as well as assesses how the mechanisms employed by the coach facilitated learning and how the mechanisms on the part of the client enabled learning. Based on the analysis, Simon's learning process is mapped out.

#### *4.2.3.1. The impact of context in Simon's coaching journey*

Data collected shows that Simon's coaching intervention occurred under extreme *economic, political and organisational* turbulence, which continued throughout the coaching intervention. This context presented multiple disorienting dilemmas for Simon, as in each session he expressed emotional and cognitive dissonance due to events in the political and organisational system. Nevertheless, this facilitated the basis of interrogation of his values, beliefs and assumptions about himself and his work environment, which led to his rediscovering the core values he stood for, thereby regaining his sense of self-identity.

#### *4.2.3.2. Mary's coaching mechanisms*

Based on the data reflected in the case description and post-coaching interview, the mechanisms or coaching skills deployed by the coach to enable learning were: rapport building skills, active listening, giving feedback, questioning skills, and holding the client accountable. Table 4.4 summarises the sub-skills under each category and a few examples of specific questions are offered.

*Table 4.4: Mary's coaching mechanisms*

<b>Core skills</b>	<b>Sub-skills</b>	<b>Examples of quotations from the coach</b>
Rapport building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creating a safe space</li><li>• Ensuring confidentiality</li><li>• Building a trusting relationship</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coaching in a designated coaching space away from the office</li><li>• Engaging in ice-breaking conversation at the beginning of each session – e.g., talking about crystals on the table, a previous hockey game etc.</li><li>• "...I don't think I ever got a push back from him"</li></ul>

Core skills	Sub-skills	Examples of quotations from the coach
Active listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inviting awareness</li> <li>• Tracking client's use of language – especially limiting language</li>   <li>• Tracking non-verbal gestures</li>   <li>• Tracking and linking key aspects of the conversation from previous sessions or earlier in the same session</li>   <li>• Listening to and noticing the values, beliefs and assumptions inherent in the client's language</li>   <li>• Summarising and giving feedback to the client</li>   <li>• Acknowledging the client's feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I noticed how you use the word 'but' every time you say something positive"</li> <li>• "Where are you feeling the disappointment in your body?"</li>   <li>• "Last time we talked about ... it was about things being worthwhile for you."</li> <li>• "So for you, knowing that you want to make a difference ... how is that working with your value system?"</li> <li>• "I am hearing you say that is not within your control"</li>   <li>• "Is that your belief or part of the organisational culture?"</li>   <li>• "So, I am hearing that you have your mind made up that if this all happens you will leave the organisation?"</li> <li>• What I am hearing is that it is important for you to have freedom to do your work and not being undermined? It's important to you to have a job that is worthwhile"</li>   <li>• "So, it's been a disappointing time, it's been difficult, it's been a pressured time ... where are you feeling the disappointment?"</li> </ul>
Questioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcome-focused questions</li>   <li>• Framing and reframing</li>   <li>• Probing questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "What is it that you would like to work on today?"</li> <li>• "What would be the most impactful thing for us to co-create today?"</li> <li>• "So that is the drama happening in the organisation, what do you want to get for yourself in this session?"</li> </ul>



Core skills	Sub-skills	Examples of quotations from the coach
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflective questions that explore meaning and frames of mind</li> <li>• Intention questions</li> <li>• Asking decision, application and task completion questions</li> <li>• Challenging generalisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “How would you be able to find out whether it is good enough ... to take action? What would you need to be able to make the decision?”</li> <li>• “What does it mean for you if people do that?” “What would it mean to you to be significant?”</li> <li>• “If you had a magic wand, what would your ideal future look like?”</li> <li>• “What change would you be looking for?”</li> <li>• “What is your highest intention for your work?”</li> <li>• “At what point will you know that it is time to leave? What is the decision that needs to be taken? What’s stopping you from making the decision?”</li> <li>• “How would you measure significance?”</li> <li>• “I hear you say all the time, so it is every single day that it happens?”</li> </ul>
Holding the client accountable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assigning task to client to do after each coaching session. Checking if task given has been completed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “So, you had a bit of tasking, I am not sure if you had time to do it?”</li> </ul>

Source: VTS3–5

*Building rapport:* The coaching sessions occurred in a designated coaching room away from the client’s office. Looking at the video footage, this room was a quiet and comfortable space with an appropriate seating arrangement. The PCRs and interview data from the client and coach indicated that this was a safe environment that allowed for the building of a trusting relationship as well as confidentiality. According to Simon, the coaching environment “was not just comfortable but a safe space...” (SIT, 18:43docx). Simon also trusted the coach’s coaching skills, as demonstrated from the first session, which contributed to ensuring rapport throughout the coaching programme.

In addition, the coach felt that confidentiality and rapport assisted the client to feel safe and to trust her to facilitate the conversation (M.IT, 19:31docx). Another indication of rapport was that the client was able to deal with an extremely difficult situation raised by the organisational context without fear.

*Active listening:* Evidence of active listening on the part of the coach was shown in the coaching conversation through various behaviours. Firstly, the coach reflected back to the client the behaviour, emotions and frames of mind (values, assumption and beliefs) he expressed and articulated. Secondly, another sub-skill demonstrated was tracking the client's use of language – especially limiting language, tracking non-verbal gestures and commenting in them, and tracking and linking key aspects of the conversation from previous sessions or earlier in the same session. Thirdly, summarising the conversation or aspects of it and giving feedback to the client when necessary. Lastly, acknowledging the client's feelings and validating them. Examples of these are listed in Table 4.4.

These coach behaviours brought to the surface Simon's emotions of frustration and anger about his work situation, his value system that he felt was violated, his limiting beliefs and assumptions about his work environment, and self-doubt in his personal value-add. In summary, active listening contributed to self-awareness for the client at various levels.

*Questioning:* Based on the three sources of data, two types of questioning were employed by the coach. The first type comprised simple questions that were mainly open-ended questions that sought to set outcomes for the coaching session, and clarify and probe for more information, as well as questions that sought to assist the client to take action and identify resources needed for the task. With these types of questions, as illustrated in the example in Table 4.4, the coach engaged the client on both content (what) and processes (how).

The second types of questions were more complex, or high order and reflective questions. These questions sought to explore meaning, intentions and purpose, while challenging the client's identified assumptions, limiting beliefs and generalisations. Within this category, there were also questions that sought to create boundaries (frame) within which the conversation would take place, where focus could be directed

on the desired outcome and where, if required, the client could be redirected (reframed) to think differently about a situation or event.

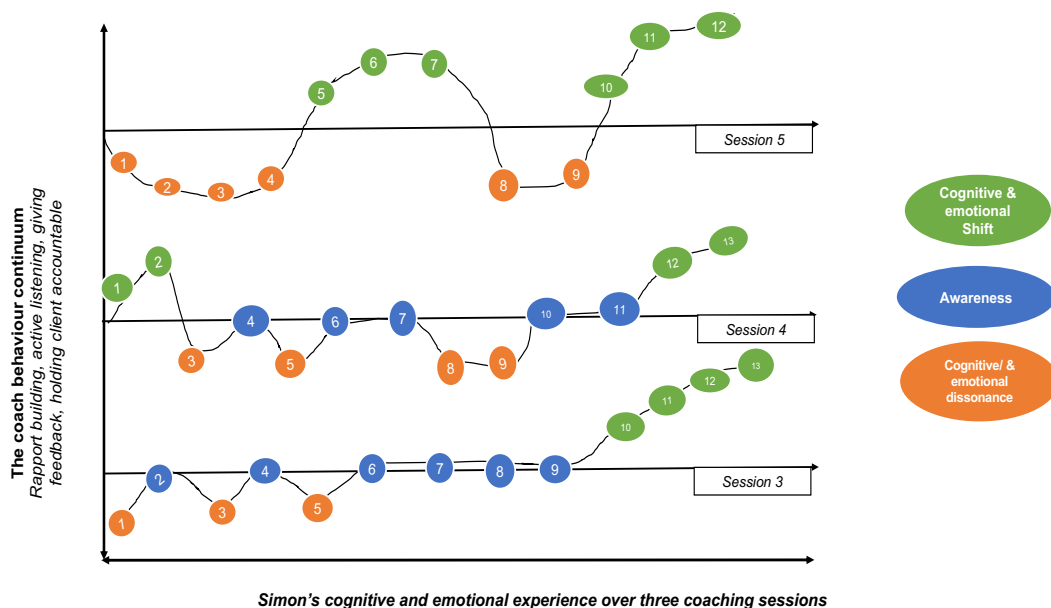
*Holding the client accountable:* At the end of each coaching session, the coach ensured that there was always a task for the client to integrate and apply the new learning. At the beginning of each session, the coach checked if the task had been completed. The client showed commitment to this process by ensuring that almost all of the tasks were completed. The client also committed to taking responsibility for these tasks.

In summary, the mechanisms deployed by the coach throughout the coaching programme were consistent with established coaching practice. Moreover, the study allowed for the observation of the detailed coach behaviours in all phases of the coaching process.

#### 4.2.3.3. *Simon's reflection and learning mechanisms*

Simon's process involved experiencing a disorienting dilemma; reflecting on content, processes and premise; and having a rational dialogue on his frames of mind.

*Disorienting dilemma:* The context within which Simon operated created a disorienting dilemma. Consequently, Simon came to the coaching session already experiencing a cognitive and affective disruption. The coaching sessions became a platform for Simon to process and grapple with these issues until he reached a resolution. In this process, he vacillated between mainly negative emotions (as illustrated in Figure 4.1) and moments of positive emotions, especially in the later coaching sessions. The orange circles represent cognitive and emotional dissonance, which were primarily negative, while the green circles represent positive cognitive and emotional shifts. The blue circles represent different types of awareness.



**Figure 4.1:** A summary of Simon's cognitive and emotional experience

As reflected in the figure above, in session three, Simon experienced about three key moments of dissonance and a significant amount of self-awareness, which led to positive shifts in thinking and emotions. In session four, he arrived in a positive state, with confidence that he can work outside of the public service. However, he immediately dropped into a negative state as he realised, he might lose his pension fund if he were to leave the public service. Fear and self-doubt crept in, but with the assistance of the coach, Simon was able to look at a bigger picture and was prepared to explore more options. Session five is characterised by leaps between negative and positive emotions, as he became more decisive about his future. The coach ensured that Simon concluded each session with a positive mood and a commitment to action.

*Reflection on content:* In each session, the client reflected on events occurring in the organisation – for example, the resignation of key people, low staff morale and the department's changed relationship with client departments. He also reflected on the political influence and economic situation (budget deficit) and how these factors had an impact on work and individuals within his organisation. Relating these events and situations led Simon to experience a triggering of cognitive and emotional dissonance.

*Reflection on process:* In relating the content, Simon also reflected on how things were happening – for example, how the budget process traditionally worked and how things

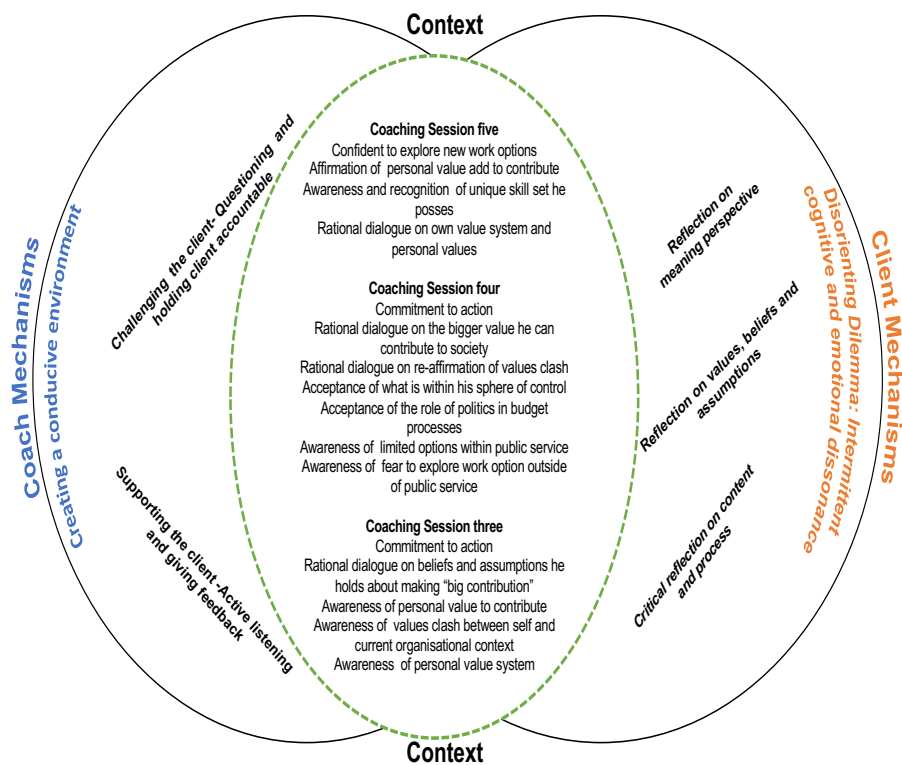
were changing given the political interferences and economic climate. He also reflected on how he was engaging with all the changes that were occurring, “learning a lot about himself”, how he was doing things, and becoming aware that he can change the way he does some things. The process of reflecting on content and process generated some awareness on Simon’s part, namely regarding him changing context as well as relating to his value systems, beliefs and assumptions.

*Critical reflection on premise:* As Simon was reflecting on the content and processes of work, the coach often picked up on the values, beliefs, and assumptions coming across in his language, and she engaged and challenged him on them. For example, he reflected on his beliefs about himself and about the budget process; and on beliefs about decisions made by politicians and his own beliefs about them. He also reflected on his personal value system and became aware that there was a clash between them and the organisational/political climate he operated in. Simon was challenged by the coach on assumptions about the political processes, his self-worth and his higher meanings about work. Awareness at this level of engagement enabled Simon to accept what in his environment was and was not under his control. This prepared him to shift from negative cognitive dissonance and emotions to more positive thinking and feelings.

*Rational dialogue:* In the process of reflecting and accepting his personal values, beliefs and assumptions, Simon was able to have a rational dialogue on these subjects. This assisted him to experience some shifts in meaning perspective, for instance, in how he viewed himself and others as well as distinguishing between things that were in his control and those that were not so that he could take action where he needed to change behaviour.

#### 4.2.3.4. *The learning process over the three sessions*

The figure below illustrates the interaction between the coach and client mechanism, and how these facilitated learning throughout the three coaching sessions. The coaching mechanisms are reflected in the first circle, while the client mechanisms are in the second circle. The items within the dotted-line centre circle indicate the learning process for each of the coaching sessions in which there is an interaction between the coach and client mechanisms.



Simon's Learning Process

Figure 4.2: A summary of Simon's learning process

Simon brought a disorienting dilemma into the coaching session that was triggered by the context he operates in. He expressed this dilemma in the coaching session through emotional and cognitive dissonance. The coach provided a conducive environment that was safe and elicited trust, where Simon was able to express the negative emotions he was experiencing. This conducive environment was maintained by the coach throughout the coaching sessions.

Moreover, the coach encouraged dialogue and reflection by supporting the client through active listening in the coaching sessions, and by tracking the conversation with appropriate intervals of summarising, giving feedback and inviting awareness. In asking simple questions, Simon was encouraged to reflect on the content (what) and process (how) of their situation. This brought to awareness: his desirable and non-desirable behaviour, the impact of other people's behaviour as well as his personal values, assumptions, and beliefs.

As Simon reflected on content and process, he also brought up the beliefs, assumptions and values he held about events and situations, which were expressed in the language he used. To challenge Simon and ensure cognitive and emotional

shifts, Mary picked up on these assumptions, values and beliefs from his language and behaviour and reflected them back to the client. To shift the client from limiting frames of mind, Mary challenged Simon on these limiting beliefs, and untested assumptions and facilitated a rational dialogue. This was done by asking reflective questions that engaged Simon at a meaning perspective level so that a rational dialogue could occur.

The coach supported the client to critically reflect, experience emotions and cognitive dissonance, and challenged him to reflect at a higher, meaning perspective level. It was through acceptance and rational dialogue that Simon found a resolution for his dilemma, shifting his meaning perspectives so that he could change the behaviour.

#### 4.2.3.5. *Summary of learning outcomes*

From the data gathered from the last PCR and the interviews with the client and coach, seven main themes emerged relating to the coaching programme’s learning outcomes. These are summarised in the table below.

**Table 4.5:** *A summary of Simon’s learning outcomes*

<b>Learning outcome</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
Learning about self and awareness of personal value	“That I matter, that I have particular value to add, that I can make this contribution in a variety of contexts” (PCR6, 13:3docx) “...for me it was a realisation that I’m important” (SIT, 18:23 docx)
An awareness of own skills, abilities and competencies	“...a much clearer sense of what it is that I have to offer, i.e. what my special characteristics and skills are and why these are valuable” (PCR6, 13:2docx)
Learning about own value system	“...one of his high values is to make a difference, especially in the young minds of South Africa” (M.IT, 19:6docx)
Learning through expanding one’s worldview	“...so that was quite for me like a profound realisation of my new way of looking at things if you like ... the way the coaching is set up was useful in that respect in particular, was to reflect and come back...” (SIT, 18:24docx)
Learning through integration of a variety of views and insights and internalisation of new knowledge	“So, because of that space in between the sessions, I think that that helped internalise stuff and knowing that I’m going back also, that there’s another session ... it also reinforces it, it almost forces one to, in my case it did force me to reflect...” (SIT, 18:39docx)
Learning the value of reflection	“I was able to reflect on our discussions and internalise some of the things that struck home” (PCR6, 13:4docx) “I feel that it has helped me think through important issues during a very difficult time at work. In this way it has helped me deal with these very difficult issues and see a way through them” (PCR6, 13:8docx)

Learning outcome	Evidence
Learning about use of limiting language	“...so at one point she picked up on my use of the word ‘but’ ... and in one of the sessions in fact she says every time you use the word ‘but’ she’s going to stop me...” (S.T, 18:24docx)

The table above indicates that, in addition to Simon having learnt to shift his sense of self-value and expanding his worldview, there were other operational and process learnings, such as learning the value of reflection and about the use of language.

### 4.3. Janine’s case

This section provides a narrative description of Janine’s coaching process as it occurred over three sessions based on video transcripts and PCR data. For each of the three sessions, a summary of the key features of the conversation is presented in a table format. Having analysed the context, the coach and client mechanisms, the analysis concludes by describing Janine’s process of learning.

#### 4.3.1. Participant’s profile and context

##### *Janine’s profile*

At the time of the study, Janine (female) was in the 55–65 age category. She had worked for the finance ministry for 17 years as a senior manager responsible for budget policy analysis (JIT, 39:2docx). Janine had high energy, extreme work ethic, and often worked long hours, including weekends (JIT, 39docx). She was a forthright person and did not shy away from speaking out on issues. For the period of the coaching intervention, she was acting in a senior role as DDG and was responsible for budget policy analysis of multiple national government departments. She had applied for this position and, based on her experience in the ministry, had expected to easily be awarded the job as the department had a tradition of growing talent from within.

Her participation in the coaching programme was motivated by her desire to adapt more easily to the recent changes in the organisation as well as a health challenge she had.

“The environment at work has changed and I need to adapt but am struggling to do so effectively, I hope to get some ‘tools’ to help me” (CLP, 21:1docx).

“I could feel that my internal problems were starting to manifest themselves physically... and then I fainted in a shopping centre” (JIT, 39:42docx).



Janine had prior experience of being coached and was ready and willing to go through the coaching process again, which contributed to a smooth coaching process. Her coach indicated that she showed readiness for coaching... (KIT, 40:14docx).

#### *Janine's work context*

Janine's overall work context was similar to Simon's, as they worked for the same department. The resignation of the head of the department had opened up a vacancy that her manager was assigned to assume, and she was asked to act in the DDG role. She indicated that she had a "fantastic relationship" with her manager until the minister change had occurred. Janine's new role exposed her to new challenges and responsibilities that she had not faced for 17 years (JIT, 39:7docx). She now had to interact with a number of stakeholders, including heads of other national departments, state public entities and parliamentarians (JIT, 39:2docx). To do this work well, Janine believed that support was needed "all the way to the top and to the minister", and this was not the case now with the new minister as she described him as being "disengaged" (JIT, 39:2docx). Given this context, Janine felt that she would need external professional support (JIT, 39:7docx).

Having held the same role in the organisation for over 17 years, Janine had expected to take over the DDG role. However, political interference in the recruitment and selection process disqualified her. Instead, a junior, less experienced incumbent was awarded the post. This devastated her and resulted in massive interpersonal turmoil and conflict between her and the head of the department, the minister, the incumbent and some of her colleagues. Thus, Janine's coaching intervention occurred under extreme interpersonal tension and organisational turbulence as a result of political interference and economic challenges being experienced more widely in the country.

#### *Kate's profile (Janine's coach)*

Kate is professionally trained as a clinical psychologist and practised within a clinical setting for five years before migrating to the corporate sector. She has experience in working more as an industrial psychologist than a clinical psychologist, having done work in organisational development, organisational design and leadership development (KIT, 40:1docx). Kate is an accredited executive coach and has been coaching for the last seven years (KIT, 40:2docx). As a coach, Kate was trained in multiple approaches to coaching, including narrative, neuro-linguistic programming,

cognitive behavioural, psychodynamic and person-centred approaches (CP, 22:1docx).

Kate's motivation for volunteering to participate in the study was to take an opportunity to contribute to a body of knowledge of coaching in an industry that she quite passionate about.

“So, even though I've worked a lot in the private sector, my heart and soul is still in the public sector ... I also saw it as an opportunity to stretch my own coaching skills to another level” (KIT, 40:1docx).

#### **4.3.2. Description of Janine's coaching and learning journey**

Janine's coaching occurred in a designated coaching room that was used by her department for internal coaching. This room was outside her office building in another building owned by the department. The sessions took place first thing in the morning, before she started work.

The first coaching session was intended to build rapport between the coach and coachee, and to frame the coaching programme by setting coaching outcomes for the entire programme and clarifying what is to be expected. Kate indicated that she struggled with rapport in the first half of the session, as she came slightly late due to security procedures in the building that she had not anticipated. Janine was quite upset about this and made it clear to her. Kate indicated that she had to make extra effort to deliberately build rapport.

“I noticed the client being more open and relaxed towards the end of the session. Initially client she was deeply upset by my being late” (PCR1, 29:3docx).

The second coaching session focused on Janine's preparation for her upcoming interview for the job that she was acting in. She was very apprehensive about the interview as she had not been interviewed for over 17 years. Her main doubts were around the fact that she did not know whether the new minister (who seemed disengaged) and her manager (who now behaved differently) would support her in the application for the new role. The core of the conversation was around asking some key questions about the fairness of the process and whether she would be able to speak “truth to power” without compromising her chances of getting the job, or would she

have to compromise her values and ethical behaviour to ensure she gets the job? The coach assisted her to work through her doubts and fears about the interview and to become comfortable and confident about what she could and could not do.

4.3.2.1. *Janine's coaching and learning process in session three (VTS3)*

Session two ended with Janine being ready for the interview for the role she was acting in. Session three occurs after the interview. The table below describes the key features of the interaction between the coach and client in this session.

**Table 4.6:** Key features of Janine's third coaching session

<b>The coaching process</b>	<b>The client's reflection process</b>
1. Checks in with the client	1. Expresses awareness of her learning style
2. Asks what the client wants to work on during this session	2. Expresses frustration about the interview process
3. Asks meaning question about her experience	3. Expresses her feelings of being disrespected by the interview panel, specifically the minister
4. Gives feedback on her awareness of how this experience has affected the client	4. Expresses disappointment about a realisation that it was just a formality – she was distressed and got sick after the interview 5. Conveys disappointment and frustration about the lack of support from her managers (DG) 6. Expresses anger that the organisation does not value her – “am just a cog in a big machine”
5. Listens attentively and gives feedback to the client about a decision she hears has possibly been made	7. Acknowledges that she is demotivated, and expresses anger at what she perceives as an unfair process 8. Expresses discontent about the organisation's lack of support or recognition of her sacrifices to the organisation – “I have given my life to the organisation”
6. Focuses the client on her awareness and asks what she wants to do with this awareness	9. Awareness that her work ethic has overridden her ability to care for herself
7. Asks a decision question: what is she going to do with the awareness?	10. Decides to reduce time spent at work 11. Concretises the decision with an action plan
8. Asks permission question to check if there are no blockages to this decision	12. Identifies potential blockage – awareness of an inner voice (mother) that might foster her to put more hours of work

The coaching process	The client's reflection process
9. Helps her to amplify a voice that would ensure the implementation of the decision made	13. Finds her own voice and gives herself permission to exercise this voice
10. Summarises conversation by highlighting key aspects of the conversation	14. Commits to action

For the main part of this conversation, Janine related her unpleasant experience of the interview. She expressed frustration and anger on what she believed was an unprofessional conduct by the interview panel. She felt disrespected by the minister and unsupported by her manager.

“...as I start to speak ... the Minister got his iPad in front, and all I can see is his hand flicking ... and he did that for the entire interview” (VTS3, 36:11docx).

“I thought to myself, these people are so disrespectful” (VTS3, 36:12docx).

“...the DG said nothing, he didn't even smile, which is what he normally does” (VTS3, 36:16docx).

As Janine started to narrate her experience, the coach supported her by listening attentively. She asked meaning questions about her experience to try to understand how Janine was framing this experience.

In reflecting on the events of the interview, Janine gained awareness that this was possibly a formality and she was unlikely to get the job despite her experience and competence because the panel seemed to have no interest in her. It appeared to her that the decision had already been made. Moreover, she became aware that despite having “given her life” to the organisation, the organisation did not value her and she was just “a cog in a big machine”.

“...so I give basically my life over to this organisation, I always put them first and now I see how they feel about me ... and I really can't keep going for putting the organisation first, I've got to put myself first” (VTS3, 36:38docx).

As Janine expressed her feelings and emotions about the situation, Kate reflected them back to the client so that she could be cognisant of how this experience had affected her. Janine was extremely angry and felt demotivated; and in realising that

the organisation did not put her interest first, she decided to take care of herself by reducing the number of hours she works from more than 12 hours a day to the normal eight hours.

“...to be treated like this is very disconcerting, and so it’s been a little bit difficult to really motivate myself to go the extra mile...” (VTS3, 36:25docx).

Kate continued to listen attentively, giving feedback to Janine and acknowledging the emotions, feelings and decisions she heard being articulated by the client. Once the awareness had been reached and a decision was made, Kate assisted Janine to concretise the decision into action and checked if she had resources to implement it.

For the bulk of the coaching session, Janine was in emotional and cognitive distress. However, she gained some awareness that facilitated shifts in how she viewed her work and herself. She experienced frustration and felt disrespected, disappointed, angry, demotivated and discontent.

She became aware of how her work ethic has overridden her self-care and how the organisation possibly did not value her. She also became aware that the perceived “attack” on her is not only directed at her, it was also directed at the whole organisation; “...as a collective we are feeling attacked and unsupported” (VTS3, 36:30docx). She made a cognitive shift, evidenced by a decision to change her work behaviour to start caring for herself more. She identified an “inner voice” that could potentially block her and found her own voice, which would be supportive to her commitment to action and change in behaviour.

In Janine’s PCRs, she acknowledged that she turned the session into a debriefing session of her horrible experience of the interview (PCR3, 25:8docx). She highlighted how she had developed a strong inner voice over the years that had reinforced prioritising work over taking care of herself, thus making it difficult to change. While she felt that the journey to change was “hard work” and required that she kept working on it, she appreciated the practical exercises and “small steps” that the coach had encouraged her to take to begin to move her towards change (PCR3, 25:5docx).

The coach acknowledged the impact of the organisational context on the client and how she has had to work within that to help the client “navigate her leadership”.

“The system within which the client operates is complex, and trying, making it particularly challenging and stressful to navigate the leadership challenges” (PCR3, 31:1docx).

To do this, Kate had to be more relaxed as a coach, challenge the client’s cognitive distortions (PCR3, 31:5docx), keep the client focused, and apply techniques in the session that would facilitate the change required (PCR3, 31:6docx). In this session, Kate also recognised the client’s awareness of her own limiting behaviours (PCR3, 31:2docx), and that “her quality of life and well-being” is directly related to her need to excel in everything she does at work – “perfectionist tendencies and negative self-talk” (PCR3, 31:3docx).

Kate also confirmed that Janine had decided to make practical changes in how she worked, how she perceived her contribution at work, how she lived outside of work, how she cared for herself (PCR3, 31:3docx), and how she would continue to experiment with small changes in her business and personal life to achieve her goal of improved flexibility (PCR3, 31:7docx).

In summary, this session was more like a debriefing session for a traumatic experience. Janine had to apply multiple skills that Kate had taught her to maintain her composure while still expressing herself. The main learning was Janine’s awareness about her assumption that, because she is the most qualified and experienced, she would automatically get the job. This facilitated a shift in her view of the organisation’s leadership and of her own role, which led her to making a favourable decision.

4.3.2.2. *Janine’s coaching and learning process in session four (VTS4)*

From the previous session, the client reflected on her disappointing interview experience. Even though she knew at that time that she might not get the job, she had not been formally informed about management’s decision. Session four took place on the day the formal announcement was to be made. The table below is an account of key aspects of the coaching conversation under this context.

**Table 4.7:** Key features of Janine’s fourth coaching session

The coach’s process	The client’s reflection process
1. Checks in with the client	1. Expresses disappointment over not getting the job and the fact that the person appointed is less experienced than her

The coach's process	The client's reflection process
2. Listens attentively and acknowledges the client's feelings, her contribution to the department and her commitment to work	2. Expresses anger that she still has to act in the role for a month before the new person takes over, having to deal with demotivated colleagues to meet the deadlines for the MTBPS and dealing difficult parliamentarians
3. Listens and validates her feelings and emotions	3. Disappointed that the DG (her boss) has not engaged with her about the turn of events 4. Expresses feelings of betrayal about the recruitment process 5. Feels guilty that she legitimised a flawed process
4. Listens and gives feedback by acknowledging her contribution, integrity, and passion for work	6. Awareness that she has not applied for a job in more than 17 years, and sees opportunity to look elsewhere
5. Invites the client to create a desired future for herself, given context she finds herself in 6. Summarises what she hears using the client's own words – "I see a silver lining" – to encourage her to design a future she wants 7. Invites the client to do a vision board in crafting the new future she desires	7. Awareness that the role of the finance ministry has shifted in "power position" and in how it engages with other departments
8. Reminds her that she still has a month of being in the same role – how will she manage during that month?	8. Creates a clear picture of how she will behave during the month that she will still be in the acting role
9. Focuses the client's attention on the day when she has to return to her old role – how will your life be like?	9. Commits to doing the vision board
10. Summarises key aspects of the conversation and confirms for the client her need to explore other opportunities	

In this session, the core conversation was about dealing with the reality of not getting the job that Janine had expected. The tradition in this organisation had been to grow talent from within – as people left the organisation, appointments would be made internally to fill these positions. This had been the case for at least the previous 20 years, but now the tradition was apparently discarded, and this created a huge dissonance for Janine.

It was an extremely difficult conversation, full of emotional flare-ups. Having been in the organisation for over 17 years, Janine assumed that she would be rewarded for her passion and commitment to the organisation by being appointed to the senior role

of the DDG. She also assumed that she would retire in the organisation as one of her frustrations was that she could not go out to look for another job. She felt guilty and started to blame herself for having “not seen this coming”.

“I was disappointed, I cried, I screamed, I swore and now I must move forward” (VTS4, 37:1docx).

However, what made it more difficult for her to move forward was that the new appointee had not resumed her duties yet and there were critical activities that the acting DDG needed to perform for the MTBPS period. Hence, Janine was still required to engage with “disengaged departments” and “demotivated colleagues”, and face “unkind parliamentarians”.

Janine’s emotional experience in this session moved from expressing disappointment at her manager and the process of recruitment, to anger that she still had to do the work for a month and feelings of betrayal and guilt that she legitimised a flawed process.

“Because initially I thought somebody had got the job was better than me, but it’s not the case ... so, it’s a lot harder to swallow” (VTS4, 37:14docx).

She gained two major insights that helped her shift out of a distressed state. The first one was the awareness that the shift in the role of the finance ministry resulting from the political and economic context had created “a shift of power”. The second insight was that she had not applied for a job in over 17 years and that there were possibly other suitable opportunities that existed where she could also make a contribution; “maybe there’s some silver linings here” (VTS4, 37:15docx). She committed to charting a future path for herself using the vision board suggested by the coach.

For the bulk of this session, Kate took a supportive position and listened attentively as the client expressed her feelings, which at times were intense. Kate acknowledged Janine’s emotions, validated her contribution to the department and the country, while acknowledging her passion for her work and her continued way of behaving with integrity given the circumstances.

The coach helped her to become less distressed by shifting the focus to her well-being, with a theme of “taking care of self” as she articulated in the previous session. Given



that it had become clear that she had no intention of staying in the organisation if the political situation did not change, the coach suggested that she develop a vision board for her future.

In Janine's PCR, she acknowledged that she had a "meltdown", indicating her discomfort with experiencing the emotions she expressed. However, she acknowledged that there were still unresolved issues to face, as she had not been given a job that she knew she was well qualified for. The main lesson from this session was that Janine had linked her sense of self-identity with work, which was "overidentification with work". She also indicated that her overconfidence in herself, which she called "an overdeveloped sense of self", had been a barrier to change.

"I realised that there are unresolved matters about how I 'see myself' that I would need to deal with the fact that a large part of who I am revolves around my work and hence when work doesn't work; neither do I. While I understand that I am more than my work, in my head, my 'heart' doesn't quite believe that. I think that my overdeveloped rational sense of myself, really 'gets in the way' of making that leap" (PCR4, 26:2docx).

"I know what my problem is and I have some sense of why it works like that. In the sessions, I can see the way forward, but I seem not to make sufficient 'progress' between sessions" (PCR4, 26:4docx).

"...realising that the department may really not be the best working environment for me at this stage and that in order for me to progress I may need to leave... a very hard thing to take on board, given that I have been here for 17 years and have generally been happy and stimulated and my contributions have been valued" (PCR4, 26:6docx).

In summary, this session focused on dealing with Janine's reality of going back to her old role in which she had to act for another month before handing over the work to the new appointee. While she had made a decision in session three to limit her work hours, her main learning in this session was the acknowledgement of her overconfidence and pride in her work – something that she felt was blocking her from acting on the decision she made – and most importantly her overidentification with work.

#### 4.3.2.3. *Janine's coaching and learning in session five (VTS5)*

Six weeks elapsed between Janine's fourth and fifth sessions, by which time she was back in her old role as chief director. The MTBPS that was delivered in parliament was not received well by many key stakeholders as it presented a bleak economic outlook. The new DDG assumed her new role at the beginning of November. Janine's expectation was that she would be back doing her old job and not spend a lot of her time assisting the new DDG. She had done a handover report to ensure that her role would be minimal in assisting the new DDG. However, her expectation was not met and she found that she still had to assist her to a large extent. The table below relates the coaching process that occurred under this context.

**Table 4.8:** *Key features of Janine's fifth coaching session*

<b>The coach's process</b>	<b>The client's reflection process</b>
1. Checks in with the client on the task – i.e., the vision board – and asks the client to reflect on learning on the process	1. Awareness of being comfortable with how she looks
2. Gives feedback on how she picks up what is not right	2. Awareness that most images she picked are of work 3. Awareness of preferred learning style, which is experiential
3. Checks in on how returning to old role has been for the client	4. Expresses feelings of being stuck and expresses anger that she still has to help the new DDG and DG, without acknowledgement of her contribution
4. Interrupts her to stop her from going on a negative path again, framing that this is her session and not about others	5. Awareness of her overidentification with work, thus her feelings of being stuck
5. Listens and acknowledges the client's feelings	6. Continues to have self-dialogue about her dissatisfaction and frustration about her current work situation
6. Invites the client to look at the situation differently	7. Awareness that she is angry at herself for feeling stuck 8. Expresses belief that she is stuck because she has no political contacts to get another job as well as a fear that she won't get a job because of her age 9. Feels angry that she has no support and resentful that she has helped others, but is not getting help herself
7. Redirects the client to focus on a positive outlook of herself	10. Awareness that she is too overwhelmed and that she can't think about this in an objective manner

The coach's process	The client's reflection process
8. Invites the client to take an observer position to dissociate from the extreme emotions by moving her to another chair 9. Acknowledges and validates the client's hurt, anger and self-blame	11. Acknowledges that she needs a holiday to deal with the situation
10. Asks meaning question about taking a holiday	12. She confirms that she needs a detailed exit plan for herself
11. Invites her back to the original chair and checks if she has resources for the plan of action	13. Confirms that she has the necessary resources
12. Summarises by encouraging her to look at multiple options in her exit plan and summarises the key aspects of the conversation	

Kate started the conversation by asking for feedback on the vision board task given in the previous session. Janine reflected on what she learnt from this exercise. A major realisation from the vision board exercise was the confirmation of her overidentification with work, as most of the pictures used were work-related. However, Janine immediately defaulted to relating and reflecting on the work situation that had become unbearable for her. The focus of the session shifted to her inner conflict and feelings of being stuck in an organisation that does not care for her. Her dissatisfaction and frustration about the current work environment created resentment about the way she continued to be treated while being expected to help the new DDG with work.

The coach tried to interrupt her to refocus the attention on herself, but she was uncontrollably distressed. The coach allowed her the space to express herself, taking a position of attentive listening and giving feedback, while acknowledging her feelings and inviting awareness.

In exploring her feelings of being stuck, Janine became aware of her belief, or assumption, that she was stuck because she lacked political connections to set her up in another job. She also became aware that she was overwhelmed by the situation and could not deal with it effectively at the moment, and that she would benefit from a break from work.

When Kate realised that Janine was getting into an emotional state that disabled her to think productively, she invited her to step out and take an observer position by

having her physically change seats. Kate invited Janine to start a dialogue with herself in the second person. This helped to dilute the extreme emotion being expressed by Janine. In this more resourceful state, Janine was able to gain more awareness and make decisions.

Janine acknowledged that the work situation was too overwhelming for her and decided that it would be a good idea to take a holiday. The coach asked meaning questions about the holiday – i.e., how important it is and what would it enable her to change – and then invited Janine back to her original seat to concretise her plan of action.

Janine's emotional experience in this session started on a positive note with her reflecting on the learning she got from developing her vision board. Her awareness of how she overidentified with work triggered her to revert to narrating the frustrating events in her work environment. She expressed feelings of being stuck and dissatisfied and frustrated about work; she also felt anger at herself and was afraid that she would be unable to find another job. She was resentful of having to help others while being left unsupported

She became aware and acknowledged that she was overwhelmed and was in a non-resourceful state and that she needed a break. She then committed to developing an exit plan for herself.

In her PCR, Janine indicated that she learnt that she can be her own worst enemy by setting impossibly high standards that can lead to disappointment, but also that she has it within herself to make the necessary changes (PCR5, 27:1docx). She also became aware of her limiting behaviour now that she was able recognise it when it happens.

*"I can sometimes see my 'inflexibility' in a situation and then be able to work around that and that if I have concrete actions (like physically moving), that seems to work better than just thinking about things" (PCR5, 27:2docx).*

Moreover, Janine indicated that she was willing to try a new approach to dealing with things and that she would encourage herself to take the steps, despite her reluctance to do so in some instances (PCR5, 27:3docx). She committed to focusing on

expanding her vision board and to investigating the possibility of a new area of work (PCR5, 27:5docx).

Kate indicated in her PCR that Janine was more in touch with her emotions, expressed herself openly (PCR5, 33:2docx), and was willing to explore new options while considering her vision board (PCR5, 33:6docx). According to Kate, Janine had made positive overall progress to achieve her goal of being more flexible and allowing herself new experiences in life. The decision to move on was one example of how she was embracing new life experiences (PCR5, 33:7docx).

In summary, this session focused on dealing with Janine's experience of returning to her old role fully. It was characterised by an emotional upsurge. The main learning in this session was Janine's acknowledgement of setting too high standards for herself and others and confirmation that her self-identity is linked to work. She made a shift in realising that she needed distance (holiday) from the organisation to think through an exit plan.

#### **4.3.3. *Analysis of Janine's coaching and learning process***

This section provides an analysis of Janine's coaching and learning process aggregated across the three coaching sessions observed. All three sources of data have been utilised. This section analyses the role and impact of context in Janine's coaching process. Furthermore, this section assesses how the mechanisms employed by the coach facilitated as well as how mechanisms on the part of the client facilitated and enabled learning. It also maps out the learning process as it emerges through the interaction between the context and the two mechanisms.

##### *4.3.3.1. The impact of context on Janine's coaching process*

Data from all three primary sources reveals that central to Janine's coaching context was the interpersonal tension and conflict she had with key people in the organisation. This was motivated by the change in political heads, which impacted on the organisation. Key officials had resigned as a result of political interference in the budget policy process. The organisation had about five vacancies at DDG level, meaning that there were five people acting in these roles. This led to an unstable organisation.

For Janine, this changed a good relationship she used to enjoy with her manager to an estranged one. Subsequent to Janine not getting the job she had expected, she struggled to have a normal relationship with her manager, the minister, the new DDG who is her new boss, and some of her colleagues. It seemed that the relationships had been broken as a result of how she was treated during the recruitment process, thus she could not imagine herself working under such conditions.

The cognitive and emotional dissonance that she experienced as a result of these contextual issues enabled her to interrogate and engage with her sense of self-identity. These events allowed her to deal with how she viewed herself and make decisions to realign her identity and not limit it to work.

#### 4.3.3.2. *Kate's coaching mechanisms*

Data reflected in the findings or description of Janine's case indicate that the following mechanisms or sub-skills were deployed by the coach to enable learning: rapport building skills, active listening, questioning skills, and holding the client accountable.

*Table 4.9: Kate's coaching mechanisms*

<b>Core skills (second-order codes)</b>	<b>Sub-skills (first-order codes)</b>	<b>Examples of quotations from the coach</b>
Rapport building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Showing up fully", and "being present"</li> <li>• Creating a trusting relationship</li> <li>• Creating a safe space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I believe the shifts happened due to the safe space I have created for her"</li> </ul>
Active listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening without judging the client</li> <li>• Giving feedback on what she notices or what she hears the client say</li> <li>• Tracking non-verbal gestures and commenting on them, and tracking and linking conversation from earlier or previous conversation</li> <li>• Listening to values, beliefs and assumptions inherent in the client's language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I attentively listened by letting her express herself, without interruptions or judgement"</li> <li>• "It sounds like you just made a big decision there around how you show up at work, what you bring"</li> <li>• "So, you didn't feel supported at all?"</li> <li>• "It's interesting that you use the word stuck. I was wondering if you are aware that we have had this conversation in the last session"</li> <li>• "What is the higher meaning for you?"</li> </ul>

Core skills (second-order codes)	Sub-skills (first-order codes)	Examples of quotations from the coach
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inviting awareness of behaviour, emotions and frames of mind</li> <li>• Acknowledging the client's feelings and emotions</li> <li>• Managing extreme emotional outburst effectively</li> <li>• Validating the client's behaviour, feelings and emotions</li> <li>• Interrupting when necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "It sounds like you have experienced a lot of wrongs going through the collage – what did you learn about yourself in that process?"</li> <li>• "I need you to hear yourself"</li> <li>• "How are you applying this insight to the rest of your life?"</li> <li>• "Is this really how you feel or are you doing the best to deal with the situation?"</li> <li>• "So, despite the pain you are having, you still have that sense of accountability of wanting to do things properly, wanting to contribute to the integrity for the department"</li> <li>• "Do you hear what you offer to them, can you hear what this says about you? There is something they get from you that they don't get form others"</li> <li>• "Let me interrupt you deliberately"</li> </ul>
Questioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting coaching outcome</li> <li>• Framing and reframing</li> <li>• Probing questions</li> <li>• Reflective questions and questions that explore meaning</li> <li>• Challenging assumptions</li> <li>• Asking decision questions</li> <li>• Asking permission question</li> <li>• Asking resource questions</li> <li>• Using metaphors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "What are we working on today?"</li> <li>• "What did you make of that thought?"</li> <li>• "How else can we look at this situation?"</li> <li>• "What meaning do you attach to the whole experience?"</li> <li>• "What does all of this to do Janine?"</li> <li>• "Is it a must that it's done that way?"</li> <li>• "Is it what is going on at the moment or just your thinking about it?"</li> <li>• "What decision do you want to make around this situation?"</li> <li>• "Do you have permission to have your own voice?"</li> <li>• "What resources (internally) would you need to go on leave?"</li> <li>• "Imagine it's a painting – you can put any colours you want"</li> </ul>

Core skills (second-order codes)	Sub-skills (first-order codes)	Examples of quotations from the coach
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inviting to second or observer position</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“What is the higher voice that possibly needs to be amplified?”</li> <li>“What would Janine say to herself? What resource do you need to give Janine?”</li> </ul>
Holding the client accountable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assigning tasks to client and following up in the next session</li> <li>Engaging the client in practical exercises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I want you to do a vision board”</li> <li>“Let’s see if we can create an action around that?”</li> </ul>

*Rapport building:* With regard to this core skill, the findings show that the coach succeeded in building rapport with the client, even though she struggled in the first session. A few factors contributed to the success of building the rapport. Firstly, the coaching occurred in a conducive environment, designated for coaching, away from Janine’s office. Secondly, Janine was willing and committed, since she volunteered for this programme and she felt that she needed the professional intervention.

Kate’s coach confirmed that “showing up fully” and “being present” to the client with no agenda assisted in the success of building rapport (KIT, 40:7docx). Kate also believed that a trusting relationship was developed within the first few sessions. Building rapport contributed to building the foundation for a conducive environment that enabled a successful coaching engagement to occur under very difficult contextual factors.

*Active listening:* The data above also shows that Kate demonstrated this core skill extensively throughout the coaching conversations. The key sub-skills demonstrated can be categorised into the following: recognising key behaviours and making the client aware of these behaviours, engaging with emotions and frame of mind, tracking non-verbal gestures and commenting on them as well the use of language by client, tracking and linking conversation from earlier or previous conversation, acknowledging the client’s feelings and validating the client, and interrupting the client when necessary.

In addition, Kate was able to manage the extreme emotional outbreaks that Janine experienced, especially in sessions three and four, by inviting her to step in to a secondary scenario by moving her to another chair or by interrupting her in order to



deflate the emotions and bring her back to a state where she could engage productively in the conversation. Therefore, active listening assisted in bringing about self-awareness for Janine at many levels – including awareness of her assumptions about her organisation and her manager, her behaviour and the beliefs, values and assumptions that drove them. Moreover, active listening helped manage the client's emotional states at various stages of the coaching conversation.

*Questioning:* Two types of questioning techniques were identified in Kate's process of questioning. The first type is simple questions, which assist the client to set coaching outcomes; these include probing and action- and resourcerelated questions. The second type, reflective questioning, was highly demonstrated by Kate as she seemed to spend more time on these types of questions, which explored how Janine was making meaning of her situation, engaged her on her assumptions and beliefs, and asked the client to give herself permission to think and act in particular ways and encouraged her to make decisions.

In addition, on numerous occasions, Kate used metaphors, inviting Janine to step into a secondary scenario by changing her physical location and moving into an observer position to distance her from extreme emotional distress. This involved flexibility around meeting the client where she was and being flexible with the techniques she used. In addition to her strength in rapport building and active listening, Kate demonstrated elegance in her questioning techniques, as demonstrated by her ability to manage and confront extremely emotional situations with her client.

*Holding the client accountable:* Assigning tasks to the client, where Janine was held accountable for her actions, allowed her to integrate and apply the learnings she had gained from coaching sessions.

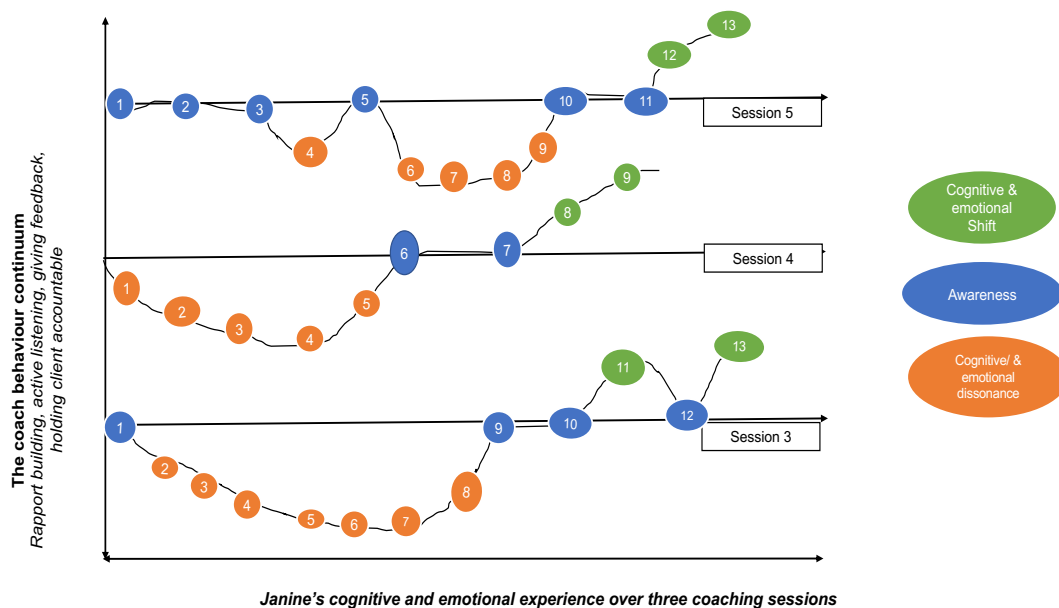
#### 4.3.3.3. *Janine's reflection and learning mechanisms*

The mechanisms employed by Janine were characterised by a disorienting dilemma that triggered extreme emotions and cognitive dissonance; a multifaceted reflection process; and a rational dialogue process stemming from the reflection process.

#### *Disorienting dilemma*

The political changes and interference in the organisation disrupted Janine's state of being. Janine was used to routine operations that she had performed for 17 years and

the changes were very challenging for her, particularly because these were not viewed as positive and thus created inner conflict. The specific disruption was created as a result of her not getting the job she expected. Not getting the job as a result of political interference in the recruitment process led to extreme disorientation. Nevertheless, this facilitated a process where Janine was able to see things in a new perspective by engaging in critical reflection on her sense of self-identity. The figure below illustrates Janine's disorienting dilemma processes over the three coaching sessions.



**Figure 4.3:** A summary of Janine's cognitive and emotional experience

This figure indicates that Janine went through extreme negative emotional experiences throughout the coaching sessions. However, in each session, with the coach's assistance, Janine was able to reach significant awareness that resulted in positive shifts. This was possible because Kate was able to manage Janine's emotional outbursts. In sessions three and four, Kate allowed Janine to experience the dissonance for a little longer while supporting her in that moment. However, Kate was also skilled enough to take Janine out of the emotions by asking her to shift into an observer position when she felt that Janine was spiralling down into an unresourceful state. This enabled Janine to finish each session with some key awareness and positive cognitive and emotional shifts.

*Critical reflection on content:* In each session, Janine reflected on work events, such as her experience of the unpleasant interview, her experience of working as an acting DDG while she knew she did not get the job, and her experience of work after she returned to her role. She also reflected on her work in the DDG acting role. It was through this reflection process that she gained awareness of how things have changed in the organisation as well as how her expectations were far from reality, especially in relation to getting support from her manager.

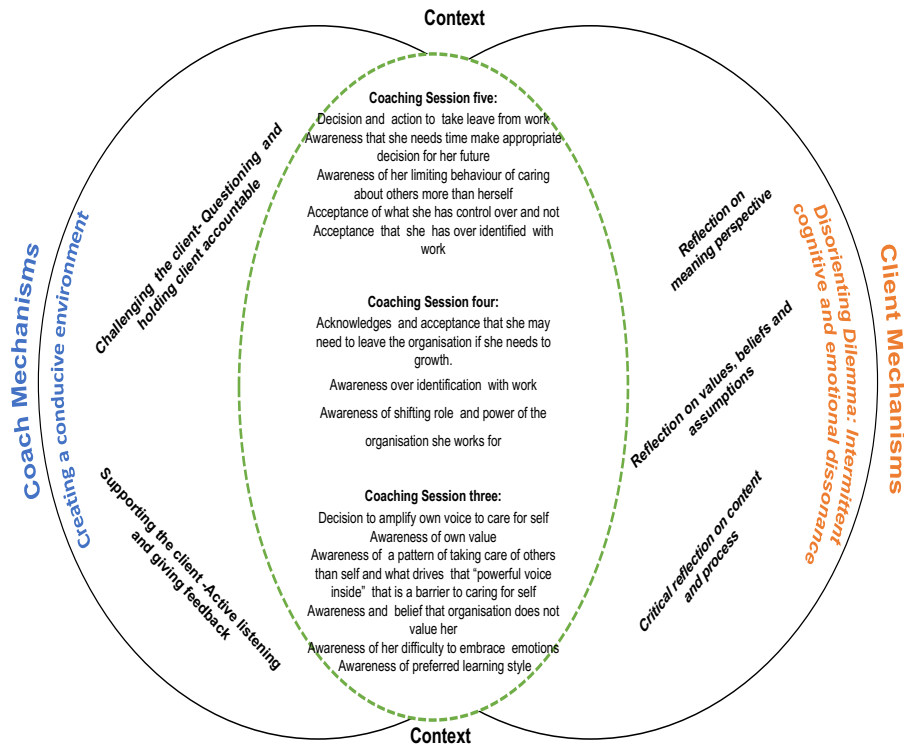
*Critical reflection on process:* In reflecting on content, the client also related how things were done, how work processes occurred, how she responded to them, and how she was treated. Moreover, she reflected on her own learning process and became aware of her assumptions about the organisation and its recruitment and selection processes, and how these did not conform to the reality of how she was treated as an incumbent.

*Critical reflection on premise:* In Janine's difficult reflection process, she gained awareness of her assumptions about her job, her manager, the interview panel, and some of her colleagues. She became aware of her beliefs about herself and was able to critically reflect on them while questioning her sense of self-identity. This experience freed her from limiting her identity to the work context, and she began to shift into embracing her identity beyond the work environment.

*Rational dialogue:* Once Janine had accepted and acknowledged the state of events in her work and personal life, she was able to engage in a rational dialogue about her assumptions and beliefs that she held about herself and her work environment.

#### 4.3.3.4. *Janine's learning process*

Figure 4.4 illustrates Janine's learning journey, demonstrating the interaction between the coach and the client mechanisms throughout the three coaching sessions. The coaching mechanisms are reflected in the first circle while the client mechanisms are reflected in the second circle. The inner dotted-line circle indicates the learning process for each of the coaching sessions, which is an interaction between the coach and client mechanisms.



Janine's Learning Process

**Figure 4.4:** A summary of Janine's learning process

In Janine's case, the disorienting dilemma was brought about by the context of her failure to get the job she had expected to get and how she was treated by the interview panel, the minister, her boss and some of her colleagues. The coach provided a conducive environment of safety by being fully present for the client. Janine's journey was extremely traumatic for her; fortunately, the coach was highly skilled to draw the balance between allowing her to express herself, while ensuring that she does not get into a complete state of unresourcefulness.

Furthermore, the coach encouraged dialogue and reflection, supporting the client by being fully present to her without judgement. She listened attentively throughout the coaching sessions with appropriate intervals of giving feedback and inviting awareness. She also supported Janine by asking her to step in and out of the first and second positions to defuse emotions.

With the coach asking simple questions, the client was encouraged to reflect on the content (what) and process (how) of her situation. This brought awareness of the client's behaviour, desirable and non-desirable, and her thinking pattern. In the coach utilising reflective questions, the client was able to engage with her frames of reference

and dialogue with these, resulting in cognitive shifts and in a shift in sense of self-identity.

In summary, Janine went through a process of self-awareness of her own behaviour, the behaviour of others, and her limiting assumptions and beliefs. Most importantly, she became aware of her limited sense of self-identity. She regained her self-identity by accepting that she had overidentified with work, thus limiting her sense of self. In accepting her limiting frames of reference, Janine was able to engage in a rational dialogue around these. This enabled her to make a shift and decide to take care of herself by taking time off work so that she could create a detailed exit plan for her future.

#### 4.3.3.5. *Summary of learning outcomes that emerged for Janine*

Regarding this aspect of the coaching programme, Janine indicated five areas of learning. The table below summarises the learnings.

**Table 4.10:** *A summary of Janine’s learning outcomes*

<b>Learnings</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
1. Learning about herself	“...if I see myself doing something that is not resourceful, I can stop myself now” (JIT, 39:18docx)
2. Learning about her preferred mode of learning	“...because then I can be thinking, and I can try to be thinking but I’ve got to do it, I could either write it down like she made me ... I brought her my vision board. She made me get up, she made me say if I want you to position yourself from that corner to this corner where would you put yourself” (JIT, 39:19docx)
3. Learning that the process of self-reflection is a problem-solving strategy	Janine acknowledged that she can solve her problems (JIT, 39:17docx)
4. Awareness of limiting behaviour, beliefs, and assumptions	She became aware in the coaching process of limiting and unresourceful behaviour as well as the beliefs and frames of mind that drive this kind of behaviour and that some of these came from her childhood. For example, that asking for help at work is a sign of weakness (JIT, 39:docx)
5. Learning to be aware of her own identity and redefining her sense of self identity	“Because work defines me” (JIT, 39:9docx); “I am largely conceptualised around my work” (JIT, 39:30docx)

Table 4.10 indicates that Janine had a significant amount of awareness about herself and her preferred mode of learning. Awareness of limiting frames of mind and learning

that reflection process can assist in solving problems. Most importantly, Janine not only became aware of her sense of identity but, in this process, she experienced a shift in the sense of self.

Additionally, Janine believed that because of the six months on the coaching programme, she did not need to take the medication she had been prescribed for depression. “I’m not taking those tablets. Now I’m having long conversations with myself, it happens, and I never took a single one ... I just take out that container ... was 30 and I took one while I was there, there’s 29 tablets” (JIT, 39:43docx).

#### **4.4. Rob’s case**

This section provides a narrative description of Rob’s coaching process as it occurred over three sessions based on video transcripts, PCR and interview data. For each of the three sessions, a summary of the key features of the conversation is presented in a table format and the interaction between the client and the coach’s process is described.

##### **4.4.1. Participant’s profile and context**

###### *Rob’s profile*

At the time of the coaching intervention, Rob (male) was above the age of 55 and was a CEO of a provincial tertiary hospital in Gauteng. He has over 20 years of experience in leadership and management roles in the health sector, including serving as a CEO of two other hospitals prior to his current role. Rob managed approximately 12 senior clinical and non-clinical managers, with a total staff complement of about 1 900 (RIT, 55:1docx). The hospital accommodated over 1 000 beds and catered to a population of over one million in its demarcated area, although it also received patients from other regions, resulting in the hospital being overburdened.

Rob’s motivation for volunteering for the coaching was to enhance his leadership capacity, to build a cohesive team and to achieve a clean audit for the hospital (CLP, 57:1docx). As a medical officer, despite his previous experience as a CEO, Rob had no formal management training until recently, when he enrolled for a long-distance course. However, Rob was very confident about his leadership and management capabilities. Alongside the executive coaching programme, his team was undergoing team coaching provided by another service provider (RIT, 55:2docx). He saw these

two initiatives as complementary in his effort to improve team cohesiveness and build a highly performing team.

Rob's coach, Sarah, experienced him as being ready and committed to the coaching process.

“...it was an absolute pleasure to coach him. He applied himself to what happened in the coaching sessions, he took notes, he presented self-awareness and all those kinds of aspects, so that for me was the kind of feedback that motivated me to want to work with him” (SIT, 56:3docx).

#### *Rob's work context*

At the time of this study, the health sector had been confronted with financial problems due to economic factors in the country, including mismanagement. In 2016, the provincial political head of health and her senior officials decided to transfer 1 700 mentally ill patients from a private facility (Life Esidimeni), which hosted services for the department, to facilities that were mostly unsuitable and some even unlicensed to provide mental healthcare services. Financial constraints were cited as a reason for relocating these patients. However, the provincial finance department disagreed with this reasoning, citing maladministration and corruption as the real causes. In this process, 144 mentally ill patients died, while 1 418 were exposed to trauma and morbidity, but survived (Arbitration Report, Judge Moseneke, March 2018). The arbitration hearing, which sought to investigate what happened and deliver justice to the victims, occurred between October 2017 and February 2018 and was broadcast live on electronic media. The coaching intervention in the health sector occurred against this backdrop.

Firstly, Rob indicated that the Life Esidimeni tragedy had significantly impacted on how health professionals' function. For Rob and his team, it triggered questions about the role of political authority and the purpose of administrators and, most importantly, it reminded them of their core responsibilities, which were patient care and safety (RIT, 55:3docx). As a result of this context, one nursing manager resigned, as she felt that her team was compromising patient care and safety. Rob then put these nurses, five of them, on precautionary leave, which was a radical action that he would not have taken under normal circumstances (RIT, 55:4docx).

Secondly, Rob was also confronted with a very vocal community who often posted negative comments on social media about their experience of services rendered by the hospital. However, Rob claims some of these experiences were untrue (SIT, 56:docx).

Thirdly, during this period, there were other interventions in the hospital. One was to assist the hospital with addressing the negative audit outcomes it had received in the previous year, and the other was to improve human resource systems. The provincial health department had placed technical advisory teams in the hospital to assist in this regard. These consultants would occasionally sit in the management team meetings, which Rob said brought a new dynamic to the team. The team became “dysfunctional” as there was no trust amongst them, thus Rob decided to get assistance with team coaching for his team and they had just started when he began his executive coaching session.

“...some of the team members were very suspicious of the new members and they were also suspicious of me” (RIT, 55:7docx).

In summary, influenced by socio-political factors, Rob’s coaching occurred under organisational change characterised by team conflict and interpersonal tensions. The Life Esidimeni tragedy was a hanging cloud that reminded him to be an effective leader who makes decisions that are in the interest of the patients.

#### *Sarah’s profile (Rob’s coach)*

Sarah, who was Rob’s allocated coach, had about three years of coaching experience at the time of this study. Her approaches to coaching included: solution-focused or results coaching, cognitive behavioural, positive psychological, and neuro-linguistic programming coaching approaches (CP, 58:1docx). Sarah’s initial training was in the legal field, but she had experience in working as an executive in the corporate sector where, as a manager, she used a blended approach of coaching, mentoring and training to mentor her staff. Her last experience was in the banking sector. Her motivation for participating in the coaching was to get more exposure to coaching working in a different context (SIT, 56:2docx).



#### **4.4.2. Description of Rob's coaching and learning process**

Rob's coaching took place in his office, as the hospital regulations and protocol did not allow him to leave the office while on duty since he is the final decision-maker in the case of emergencies. Thus, there was a chance that he could be interrupted during a coaching session if any emergency arose. Sarah indicated that at the beginning she was worried this would disrupt their sessions, but in the interview stated that on the few occasions where Rob was interrupted, he was able to deal with the emergencies swiftly and come back fully to the session (SIT, 56:docx). To accommodate Rob's hospital routine, the coaching sessions took place in the afternoons.

The first coaching session was intended to build rapport between the coach and client, to establish a conducive environment for effective coaching, and to begin to set coaching outcomes for the entire programme. This was achieved as Rob indicated that in setting outcomes for his coaching session, he also learnt to set outcomes for each of his team meetings and was able to put this into practice after this coaching session.

"I have outlined in much clearer terms what the outcome of each meeting shall be. Meetings are now kept more focused" (PCR1, 41:2docx).

The second coaching session's conversation focused on team dynamics and the extent to which Rob's team was "dysfunctional" and the interpersonal conflict between Rob and his clinical manager. The key moment in this session was Rob's recognition that he had, what he called, a "dysfunctional" team with certain key members contributing largely to this.

Nevertheless, Rob acknowledged his own contribution to the dysfunctionality of the team. He became aware of his beliefs around leadership and his values system (openness, honesty and integrity) that he was not willing to compromise. He decided to communicate more as a way of minimising conflict between him and the team. His awareness that his team may view him as not living up to his values distressed him and he experienced inner conflict as to how he would deal with this issue. While he wanted to be perceived as living according to these values, Rob was still resistant to change, believing that the way he had been conducting himself as a leader was the correct way. The session concluded with him accepting that he could sometime be wrong, and, in those cases, he would be willing acknowledge that (PCR2).

4.4.2.1. *Rob's coaching and learning process in session three (VTS3)*

Rob's team had been going through a team coaching process alongside his executive coaching. His team seemed to have found a voice as they were beginning to challenge him on his leadership behaviour, which they never did before. He used this coaching session as a place of reflection on how the team is shifting and how this has impacted his leadership. Table 4.11 outlines the key features of the coaching process for session three.

**Table 4.11:** *Key features of Rob's third coaching session*

<b>The coach's process</b>	<b>The client's reflection process</b>
1. Checks progress on audit outcomes and action steps	1. Expresses satisfaction about the improvements noticed in the team meetings as a result of changes he has implemented
2. Provides information and advice on facilitating effective conversations	2. Awareness of team members' strengths and weaknesses as a result of team members being open and expressing themselves at meetings
3. Asks outcome question	3. Expresses doubt and fear in relation to his conflict with the clinical manager, which may compromise the team's strengths
4. Challenges assumptions about the clinical manager	4. Awareness that the tension between him and the clinical manager preoccupies him a lot, thus expresses untested assumptions about her
5. Affirms the client and gives feedback	5. Awareness that the team is now open and free to challenge his leadership, but he is not ready to receive unpopular feedback
6. Gives feedback to the client to create awareness of behaviour	6. Awareness that the tension between him and the clinical manager is created by what he perceives and that he is not on the same page regarding transformation in the organisation
7. Gives feedback to the client on emotions observed	7. Awareness of perceived weaknesses on his leadership capabilities style
8. Engages the client on emotions and checks permission to experience emotions	8. Feels undermined by the perceived weaknesses by some of his team members, who perceive him as arrogant, authoritative and incompetent
9. Checks with the client what he has control over	9. Expresses that he is frustrated and angry that he is viewed in this manner, but refuses to express emotions with his staff
10. Focuses the client on the outcome of the session	10. Struggles to receive this feedback, thus responds in a resistant and defensive way and decides that he will have to force people to compliance, but he remains with a nagging feeling

<b>The coach's process</b>	<b>The client's reflection process</b>
11. Asks decision question	11. Awareness of core vision and values around work, and that he has lost focus of these
12. Summarises and gives feedback	12. Acceptance that the new team members have brought a disruption into the system and his leadership style
13. Redirects the client to think differently about the situation by asking intention questions (meaning and why)	13. Awareness that he needs to adjust and use a different style to manage this diversity
14. Summarises the session by asking meaning question on work core vision and values and helps co-creation of action plan	14. Agrees that maybe he needs to adjust his leadership style to accommodate others

The conversation started on a positive note, with Rob giving feedback on the improvement he had noticed in the team's participation in meetings. He reported that he had been more open to the team giving him feedback on his leadership. This turn of events also highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of each team member, especially managers who are struggling with their duties and everyone is able to see it (VTS3, 52:3docx). However, his strained relationship with the clinical manager prevented him from utilising the strengths of the team optimally to the benefit of the team, as he was avoiding conflict with her (VTS3, 52:15docx).

For most of the first part of the session, Sarah supported Rob by attentively listening, summarising and giving affirmative feedback to Rob. In his process of reflection, Rob gained awareness that his shift to being more open to receiving feedback from his team encouraged team members to start challenging him on his leadership. However, he did not seem ready for this as he was uncomfortable and shocked at their feedback that he is authoritative, arrogant and incompetent.

"...they are quite vocal ... they tend to think that things can be done in a different way" (VTS3, 52:21docx).

"I've never been described as being arrogant before ... in the last few days or weeks I've had many descriptions made about me, I'm arrogant, authoritative ... and I said the only one that is left is racist" (VTS3, 52:38docx).

He was resistant and defensive to receiving this feedback as he did not perceive himself in that way and he felt undermined by this. In Rob's resistance to deal with this

feedback, he turned to using his power base as a CEO as a way of dealing with the team and opted to use compliance to get people to do what he wanted. However, he was aware that if he were to use compliance on the clinical managers, the situation may worsen. As Rob experienced this inner conflict and went on the defensive, Sarah challenged him by asking meaning questions. She challenged his assumptions, beliefs and values about his leadership, and engaged him on his reluctance to show emotions. With the coach's feedback and advice, Rob was willing to consider his team's views, but he was still convinced that he was right.

Rob's emotional journey in this session was characterised by his expression of doubt and fear of utilising the team's strengths, as he assumed that the clinical manager may challenge them. At times, he was reluctant to express his emotions until he was challenged by the coach. The most intense emotion was his frustration and anger that his team perceived him negatively, while his not agreeing with them made him defensive.

The client became aware of many things, including: the identification of the team's strengths and weakness; his conflicting relationship with the clinical manager and the teams; and the team's newly acquired courage and openness to give him feedback on his leadership capabilities and pinpoint his weaknesses. He accepted that the new team members brought disruption in the team dynamics and that he needed to find new ways of leading and managing this diverse group. Rob agreed that he may need to change his leadership style but did not commit to action.

In his PCR, Rob confirmed that the coach made him reflect critically and "think deeply" about his behaviour, his aspirations as a leader, and the need for others to know what his thoughts are and what drives his actions (PCR3, 43:3docx). In this process, he became aware of his inner tension. Rob also indicated that he had learnt the importance of co-creation and collaboration, rather than just cooperation with his managers (PCR3, 43:1docx).

In summary, in this session, Rob gained awareness of how his team has become more vocal and are able to challenge his leadership style. While he appreciated the improvement in the team dynamics, he was not ready to accept the perceived negative feedback he received from them. Even though Rob understood that his leadership and management style could be impacting them negatively, the session ended with him not ready to make a shift about his leadership style.

#### 4.4.2.2. Summary of Rob's coaching session four (VTS4)

The previous session ended with Rob acknowledging that he might need to change his leadership style given the feedback he received from his team members. He was not totally convinced, though, and became defensive saying that the team does not understand him. Prior to this session, Rob had a hospital board meeting in which the board gave him feedback about their observation of the dysfunction of his management team and it "shocked" him. Below is an account of the coaching conversation that transpired after this revelation.

**Table 4.12:** Key features of Rob's fourth coaching session

<b>The coach's process</b>	<b>The client's reflection process</b>
1. Checks in with client	1. Expresses shock because of the feedback he received from the hospital board in a recent board meeting about their observation on the dysfunctionality of the management team
2. Gives feedback and creates awareness of his denial	2. Awareness and acceptance that he has been in denial and defensive about his leadership style
3. Asks outcome questions	3. Feels disappointed that his efforts to bring about change in the team have not yielded positive results
4. Asks clarity questions around outcome	
5. Asks meaning questions around the outcome	4. Gains acceptance that he has limitations as a leader
6. Refocuses client on the outcomes, asking significance-related questions	5. Feels discouraged and stuck on the belief that he has been trying, but that his team fails to see his point of view
7. Provides feedback on the client's awareness of the belief he holds	6. Awareness of his belief that people have no ability to change (implying his team – but ignoring his contribution to this)
	7. Recognises that if he needs change, he should embrace change himself first, which includes belief and trust in his team's capabilities
8. Challenges the client's beliefs	8. Awareness of how he gives feedback to the team as a whole and how he is uncomfortable giving feedback to individual team members
	9. Resolves that it would be better to develop team cohesion measures that the team can use to measure themselves or he can use to measure the team
9. Asks action step question, tasking the client	10. Commits to action that will help measure team performance

In this session, Rob starts the conversation by narrating his recent experience with the hospital board, who gave him feedback about the dysfunction of his management team. Despite his awareness in the previous session that he needed to start working with his team in a collaborative manner, the feedback from the board seemed to have shaken him immensely.

“...but they just said that the team that I’m leading is, I think almost dysfunctional and working in silos ... I was shocked, when the board said that” (VTS4, 53:5docx).

This session became a breakthrough for Rob. He gained awareness that he was in denial and defensive about how his leadership style was impacting negatively on his team. He unearthed a belief that seemed to free him – that is, that some people can’t change and/or can only go so far. He accepted that he needed to “gain confidence in others”, “believe in their abilities”, and “give individual feedback” (VTS4, 53:27docx). Rob embraced his weaknesses as a leader and resolved to change his behaviour by engaging with his team differently.

Rob’s emotional experience in this session was characterised by feelings of distress due to the feedback he received from the hospital board. He expressed shock, disappointment and discouragement, as he felt that he had been putting effort to move the team to be cohesive and the feedback is an indication that he is not making significant progress.

As Rob gained awareness and acceptance that he had limitations in his leadership style – i.e., that he was defensive and may have been in denial – he was able to have a rational dialogue about his beliefs of others’ ability to change. In hearing himself say that, he realised that for others to change, he needed to embrace change himself.

Moreover, Rob became aware of his tendency to treat the team as a whole and how he avoids dealing with individuals, especially in cases where he has to give negative feedback on performance. This highlighted another area of his weakness and he resolved to set team measures that would allow him to address both areas.

In Rob’s PCRs, he confirmed the awareness of his limitations as a leader and that he needed to accept them. He also acknowledged his need to deal with his own emotions.

“I need to accept that some team members have difficulty with my leadership style” (PCR 4, 44:1docx).

“...I have to acknowledge my feelings but at the same time have the confidence to confront the situation no matter how I feel or dread the situation” (PCR4, 44:2docx).

“...dealing with my own feelings and how to react appropriately when going through such experiences” (PCR4, 44:2docx).

The shock expressed by Rob put him in an emotional state that Sarah needed to support without judgement. She did this by attentively listening, summarising and giving feedback, and making him aware of his beliefs about others. Sarah challenged the beliefs that do not serve Rob, asked meaning questions and framed his focus to the outcomes of the coaching. She assisted him in putting together an action plan that would move the team to being more cohesive.

In her PCR, Sarah confirmed that she learnt how important it is to listen without judgement:

“...this is the first time that I have been challenged to this extent to restrain my own judgement and opinions” (PCR4, 49:1docx).

Sarah spent a lot of time asking clarity questions to help the client clarify his aspirations going forward and getting him to plan for the action (PCR4, 49:3docx). In summary, the disruption caused by the board’s feedback assisted Rob in reaching a tipping point about his beliefs of his leadership and his team’s ability to change. He ended the session with a very clear shift in thinking and commitment to meaningful action.

#### 4.4.2.3. *Rob’s coaching and learning in session five (VTS5)*

In the previous session, Rob gained a huge awareness regarding his leadership and reached an acceptance of his limitations as a leader. He began to allow others to make contributions to build a cohesive team. This session marked the celebration of the improvements made by his team, which were as a result of the shifts he had made. The team gave him positive feedback about his changed leaderships. The table below contains the key features of the conversation.

**Table 4.13:** Key features of Rob's fifth coaching session

<b>The coach's process</b>	<b>The client's reflection process</b>
1. Checks in and celebrates the client's success	1. Satisfied with his and the team's progress
2. Gives feedback on efforts that have delivered desirable results	2. Satisfied about having received positive feedback from team members about his leadership
3. Asks outcomes question	3. Relieved that the clinical manager has resigned
4. Asks resources question	4. Feeling positive that he can move the team to perform at optimal levels
5. Challenges the client about intended action	5. Has clarity on what needs to happen
6. Facilitates action planning, guiding client for the sub-groups identified	6. Acknowledges that he needs to believe and trust in his team more for change to happen
7. Frames for future action	7. Recognises that team is not at the same level in terms of experience, skill and attitude, and he needs different strategies to support, mentor, coach and manage different members of the team
8. Assists in co-creating action plan	8. Divides team into sub-groups
9. Celebrates achievements made	9. Commits to action for the different sub-groups

The disruption caused by the board's feedback to Rob and his decision from the previous coaching session seemed to have yielded positive results. Rob came to the session in a positive mood and the coach opened up the conversation by affirming and celebrating his successes. She gave him feedback on the great work and the resilience that he had shown throughout the difficult process.

Rob had more clarity about what needed to happen and how he needed to behave as a leader to get desirable results. He was aware that his team was at different stages of competency and development, and he thus needed to provide different leadership support to each team member and began to work on an action plan to do that. Sarah assisted him in formulating the sub-groups as well as a clear action plan for each group identified.

The positive emotions exhibited by Rob in this session were: his satisfaction over the progress made by his team, as well as the positive feedback he received from team members about his improved leadership. Another positive factor was the resignation of the clinical manager, which meant that there would be less team conflict.

With these new developments, Rob was confident in his ability to make the team more cohesive and having them perform optimally. He had clarity as to what actions he



needed to take. His key awareness was that he needed to believe in his team members more, but he appreciated that they were not all at the same level of skill, experience and attitude. He sub-categorised the team and worked on an action plan relevant for each sub-group.

In his PCR, Rob confirmed that he was more comfortable with his new leadership style. He committed to finalising the strategies on how to handle the team members who consistently make the same mistakes (PCR5, 45:2docx).

“Somehow one feels a sense of fulfilment as one by one some of the challenges in management were being resolved. I realised that managers are categorised differently in terms of their performance and need to be treated accordingly” (PCR5, 45:1docx).

“I could not have asked for a better way of ending the year” (PCR5, 45:3docx).

In summary, this session was characterised by a sense of accomplishment and confidence in the client’s newly found leadership style. Rob had made a clear plan of how to support his team members as individuals and as a team moving forward to build the team cohesion he had hoped for.

#### **4.4.3. Analysis of Rob’s coaching and learning process**

This section provides an analysis of Rob’s coaching and learning process across all coaching sessions. In addition to the data used in the case description, this section integrates data collected from post-coaching interviews with the client and the coach to ensure triangulation. It analyses the role and impact of context in Rob’s coaching process. Furthermore, this section assesses how the mechanisms employed by the coach facilitated learning as well how the client’s mechanisms enabled learning. Moreover, it maps out the learning process that emerged through the interaction between the two mechanisms.

##### **4.4.3.1. Role and impact of context in Rob’s coaching journey**

At the core of Rob’s context were team dynamics characterised by team conflict and more specifically tension between Rob and his team members and the clinical manager. This was facilitated, firstly, by the organisational interventions that were implemented to bring about improvements in the hospital. These included the inputs

of key stakeholders that had an interest in the organisation, such as the finance and HR intervention teams as well as the hospital board.

Secondly, the team dynamics resulted from the impact of socio-political factors. This involved the Life Esidimeni tragedy, which became a guiding principle for Rob in ensuring that his team was completely focused on living up to the values of patient care and safety. In addition, the vocal community served by the hospital also kept them in check about their services.

In summary, Rob’s coaching intervention occurred under the following conditions: a socio-political environment that threatened healthcare services; a community that was engaging (at times negatively); an organisational climate that was characterised by team conflict; and a climate of inefficiencies and strained interpersonal relations. This context provided disruption to Rob’s leadership and management routine, and he was willing to challenge his leadership style to find resolutions to ensure effective and efficient health service delivery.

#### 4.4.3.2. Sarah’s coaching mechanisms

Data from the video transcripts and PCR indicates that the mechanisms employed by the coach in the coaching process can be categorised into the following themes: rapport building, active listening, giving feedback, giving information and advice, questioning, and holding the client accountable. Codes identified under each theme over the three coaching sessions, PCR and post-coaching interviews are summarised in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14: Sara’s coaching mechanisms

Core skills	Sub-skills	Examples of quotations from the coach
Rapport building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing rapport</li> <li>• Being fully present</li> <li>• Client readiness</li> <li>• Trusting in coach competence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I think when there’s a willingness, rapport is established rapidly, so this was one of those occasions in which I had someone who was interested ... even when he was irritated, I could see his irritation and I could tease him about it, even then he wouldn’t break rapport, he’s a very easy person to work with”</li> </ul>
Attentive listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarising and giving feedback to the client</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It sounds like you really respect ... you have high regards for the, you value?”</li> </ul>

Core skills	Sub-skills	Examples of quotations from the coach
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inviting awareness</li> <li>• Affirming client</li> <li>• Inviting awareness of feelings and emotions</li> <li>• Noticing non-verbal gestures</li> <li>• Tracking conversation and linking from previous session</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “So, you reflected on how challenging your system of leadership has been; what are you becoming aware of in that?”</li> <li>• “You have done so much work, and you have achieved a lot”</li> <li>• “I can see in the expression in your eyes”</li> <li>• “We spoke about this last time ... can we go deeper to see what it means?”</li> </ul>
Questioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcome questions</li> <li>• Intention/importance questions</li> <li>• Meaning questions</li> <li>• Clarity questions</li> <li>• Framing and reframing</li> <li>• Reflective questions that challenged the client’s values, beliefs and assumptions</li> <li>• Probing questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What do you want to get out of today’s session? What would be the most useful thing to talk about today?”</li> <li>• “How will you know that you have achieved this goal, what will you see, feel and hear?”</li> <li>• “How important is achieving team cohesion for you?”</li> <li>• “What does patient experience and safety mean to your team?”</li> <li>• “What meaning are you making of defined leadership?”</li> <li>• “I don’t understand that, can you clarify?”</li> <li>• “How can you frame this differently, how can you go about making peace with this?”</li> <li>• “What is the basis of your belief?”</li> <li>• “If you were to believe that people can change do you believe it would create an inspirational space for people to grow...?”</li> <li>• “If you were to believe, what would be different...?”</li> <li>• “What holds you back; what stops you from doing that?”</li> <li>• “How does this contribute to a cohesive team?”</li> </ul>

Core skills	Sub-skills	Examples of quotations from the coach
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging the client on emotions</li> <li>Permission question</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“How do you know she is resisting? How do you know you are making the right meaning?”</li> <li>“What is it that triggers the feeling of being undermined? What happens for you when you are feeling undermined – what actually happens physically?”</li> <li>“Do you have permission to feel your emotions?”</li> </ul>
Giving information and advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sharing information with client</li> <li>Advising on some aspects of leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I brought a document that I thought would help you with your meetings or just handling conversations”</li> <li>“So, these are the co-creation strategies that you can use in your meetings ... I will give you an example”</li> </ul>
Holding the client accountable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assigning tasks</li> <li>Asking about task given</li> <li>Following up on tasks given</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“What is the one thing you can shift tomorrow to create a compounding effect in people’s abilities?”</li> <li>“How has it been since the last session? Were you able to speak to the person you were going to?”</li> <li>“How are you doing with your audit outcomes?”</li> </ul>

*Rapport building:* Based on the data presented, Sarah exhibited presence and an ability to build rapport. From the data, rapport building was present from the beginning of the session. This was facilitated by the client’s readiness and willingness to be coached and presented a conducive environment for effective coaching conversation.

*Active listening:* This core skill was evident throughout the coaching sessions and was demonstrated by the coach’s ability to summarise and give feedback to the client, invite awareness of behaviour, feelings and emotions, affirming and validating the client, tracking non-verbal gestures, as well as tracking conversation from previous sessions and linking them with the current session. A few examples of these are indicated in Table 4.14. The demonstration of these skills was a trigger for self-awareness on the client’s part, which was required as a foundation for learning.

*Questioning skills:* The types of questions that were evident throughout the coaching sessions included those that sought to establish coaching outcomes and probed for

further information or depth. These types of questions can be categorised as simple questions, as they ask about the what, when, how and where.

The second type of questions were reflective, which sought to clarify meaning; check the client's intention, meaning and/or level of importance on issues; and involved framing to keep the client focused or reframing to help the client think in a different manner about the same issue. These questions also allowed the coach to challenge the client's values, beliefs and assumptions. Moreover, when the client was struggling to deal with his emotions, the coach engaged him on these and asked if he had permission to experience emotions.

*Giving advice and information giving:* In addition to the above mechanisms, Sarah also provided information and gave advice in some instances where she felt Rob needed it. The client seemed to have appreciated these moments when he got stuck. From the video transcript data, it appears that this happened mainly in the first sessions of the coaching programme and seemed to have occurred less often in the later coaching conversations. The client confirmed in his post-coaching interview that while the information and advice were useful, they stopped coming at some point.

*Holding the client accountable:* All of the coaching sessions started with the coach checking in with the client on a task agreed upon in the previous session and ended with a task. This facilitated internalisation, integration and application of learning. Judging from the PCRs, Rob was very meticulous in his action items, as he always had bullet points specifying his next steps.

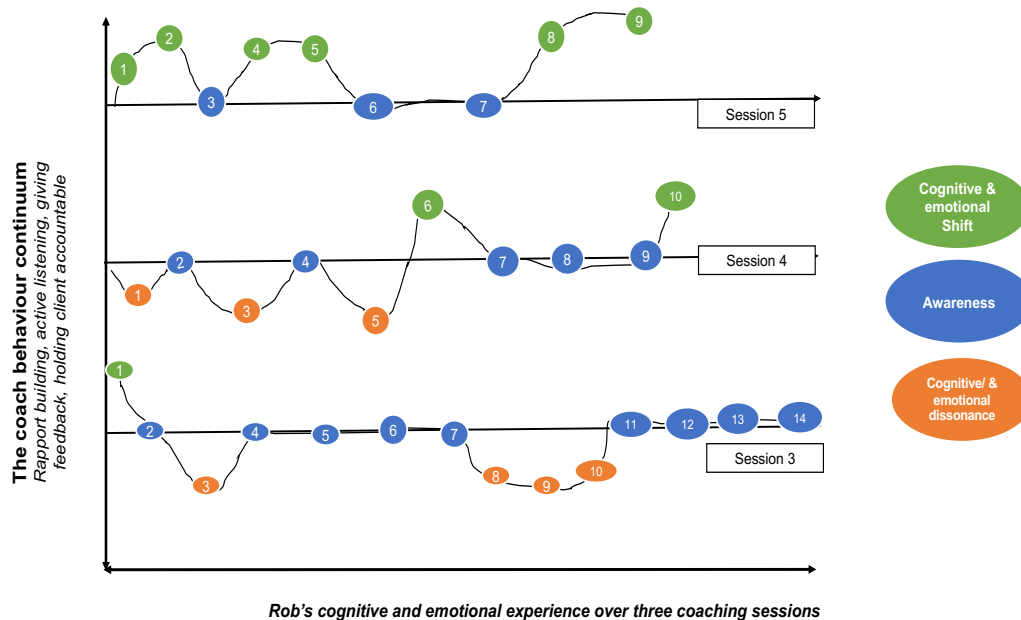
#### 4.4.3.3. *Rob's reflection mechanisms*

##### *Disorienting dilemma*

With the backdrop of the Life Esidimeni tragedy, there were three key moments that defined Rob's experience of a disruption of the status quo and his experience of cognitive and emotional dissonance. The first key moment was when he had to put five nurses on precautionary leave to ensure patient safety, which was something he had not have done before. The second moment was the new management team that challenged his leadership style. The third was when the hospital board gave him feedback on the dysfunction of his management team.

These events facilitated a process of Rob's examination of his leadership style and cumulatively created a tipping point for him to accept his limitations as a leader and

make some changes. Figure 4.5 illustrates Rob's experience and resolution of disorienting dilemmas over the three coaching sessions.



**Figure 4.5:** A summary of Rob's cognitive and emotional experience

The figure above shows that Rob entered session three with a positive frame of mind, having experienced disorienting dilemmas and gained a significant amount of awareness. However, he did not experience a cognitive or emotional shift in this session. While the coach facilitated awareness, it seems like she did not push him enough to make the shift, and the session ends with no commitment from Rob to make any cognitive shift as he remains in denial. In session four, it was the contextual factors (the board feedback about his dysfunctional team) that pushed him to extreme dissonance (shocked) and the realisation that he had been in denial about his leadership limitations, thus he was more ready to accept his limitations to shift his mindset about himself and others. This resulted in a very positive experience in session five.

#### Critical reflection

*Reflection on content:* Reflection at this level included Rob's reflection on the events that were happening in his management team, the tensions and conflict, and his relationship with the clinical team (specifically the clinical manager). He also reflected on what was happening in relation to other stakeholders – for example, the hospital

board, the community around the hospital, and the political context that was impacting their work, such as the Life Esidimeni tragedy. In addition to reflecting on his context of work, Rob also critically reflected on his own behaviour in relation to his team. In reflecting on content, he gained awareness of his leadership attributes, capabilities and limitations. He also gained awareness of his team's strengths and weaknesses, as well as identifying areas of development with gaps that needed to be closed to improve team cohesion and performance.

*Reflection on process:* Rob's reflection on process was intertwined with his reflection of how he interacted with the team, how the team interacted with each other, and how work processes were facilitated. In this process, he gained awareness of his value system, beliefs and assumptions about his leadership and other people's ability to change.

*Critical reflection on premise:* Once this awareness was raised, Rob could critically reflect on the values, assumptions and beliefs about his team; the specific members of his team; and his leadership. He reflected on and explored his values and his identity as a leader and battled with these in sessions three and four but was ready to engage in a dialogue on these.

*Rational dialogue:* In critically reflecting on the above, Rob came to an acceptance of his limitations as a leader, at which point he was willing to engage in a rational dialogue about these beliefs and assumptions so that he could live up to his values as a leader.

#### 4.4.3.4. *Rob's process of learning*

The foundation of a coaching conversation was a conducive environment that Sarah created, which it is assumed already existed in session three. The coach provided this environment throughout the session to allow the client to express himself freely.

In session three, the client had already experienced a disorienting dilemma caused by his empowered team who were beginning to challenge his leadership style. The coach supported the client through attentive listening as he expressed his frustrations and dissatisfaction about events in his management team. As Rob spoke, Sarah summarised, gave feedback and invited awareness of behaviour, feelings and emotions. He became aware of his empowered team, what caused the conflict between him and some of the team members, and his team's perception of his limitations as a leader. However, Rob was in denial and defensive about being

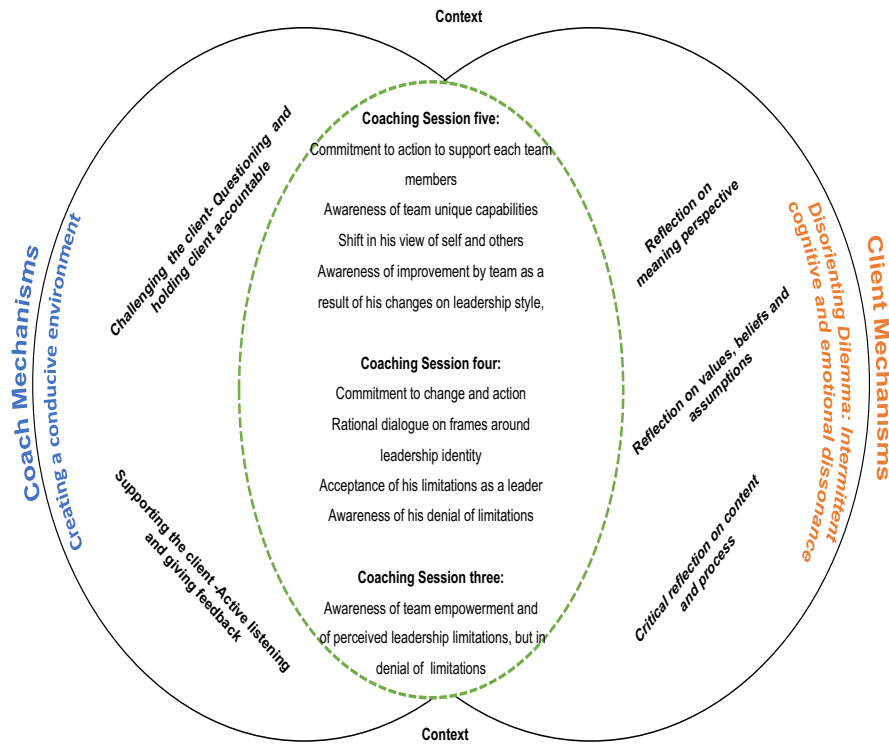
perceived as arrogant, authoritative and incompetent. The coach raised awareness and challenged some of his assumptions about that, but this did not lead to acceptance at first. The coach helped Rob to look at the bigger vision and intention of his leadership, and shifted his focus to why it was important for him to have a functional relationship with his team.

In session four, another disruption had occurred triggered by the hospital board who gave Rob the same feedback as his team had. The coach invited awareness of his frustration and denial and gave him feedback on the beliefs she heard echoed by him. He was more ready to look at himself now that the board had spoken. The coach helped Rob unpack the beliefs and assumptions he had about his team and his own leadership and came to an acceptance that he was in denial. He engaged in a rational dialogue on these issues and this changed his view and perception of others and himself. The coach helped him co-create an action plan for changing his leadership engagements with his team.

In session five, Rob had already started behaving differently and was aware of the improvements in the team as a result of his changed behaviour. The coach celebrated his success and helped him recognise and count what he had done. She then assisted him to look at how he wanted to move on with this new behaviour and team. He clearly had a shift in how he viewed himself as a leader and how he viewed his team. The coach helped him create an action plan on how he can support individual members of his team based on their unique strengths, capabilities and limitations.

The figure below illustrates the interaction between the coach's behaviour and the client's learning process over the three coaching sessions. The coaching mechanisms are reflected in the first circle, while the client mechanisms are in the second circle. The middle dotted-line circle indicates the learning process for each of the coaching sessions, which is an interaction between the coach and client mechanisms.





Rob's Learning Process

Figure 4.6: A summary of Rob's learning process

In summary, Rob's learning process followed about six reiterative phases of awareness of behaviour of others and the self (strengths and limitations), awareness of assumptions, values and beliefs about others and the self through significant disruption, acceptance of own limitations, assumptions, values and beliefs about others and the self, rational dialogue on these, shift in view of the self and others (beliefs and assumptions about others) and a change in behaviour in how he will support and engage with the various members of his management team.

#### Summary of Rob's learning outcomes

Rob's initial outcome was to improve his management of performance amongst his team members. However, the new team dynamics shifted the outcome to a goal of achieving team unity and team cohesion (RIT, 55:5docx).

The first thing that Rob said he gained from the coaching was the courage to deal with difficult staff members and to act on non-performance. He became aware that failure to manage non-performing individuals was putting his credibility at risk. By the end of the year, Rob had put more staff members on precautionary transfer (RIT, 55:8docx).

He mentioned that the coaching assisted him to identify problems and deal with them instantly.

The second learning for Rob was an improvement in conducting and managing the regular weekly management meetings effectively. He did this by ensuring that the purpose of each meeting was clear and had a set outcome; in doing so he indicated that the meeting moved from being a “dread” for most managers to “becoming meaningful” (RIT, 55:10docx). This is confirmed by the coach, Sarah, who identified that he learnt effective meeting techniques, developed the skills required to handle difficult conversations with team members (SIT, 56:10docx), and learnt that management and leadership skills and style may not work for different people (SIT, 56:11docx).

The third learning for Rob was that he was able to come up with a categorisation of his team into sub-groups and then developed a strategy and specific performance measures for each one. “I think the question was what performance is and how do you measure it? It made me think what if I say, ‘he moved from 6 to 9’, what the yardstick would be. So, then I developed priorities” (RIT, 55:19docx).

The fourth learning was the value of coaching and reflection using questions, both in the coaching session and PCRs. Rob’s initial perception of coaching was “that someone is going to come here and tell you how to do things ... it doesn’t happen that way” (RIT, 55:14docx).

His fifth learning was the value of application of what has been learnt in the coaching sessions. “What we discussed, what is the learning from the coaching, and how would one implement that and I would also at meetings talk about it and say ‘that this is what I’ve learnt from coaching and this what we need to do’” (RIT, 55:18docx).

Rob’s sixth learning was to “move from cooperation to collaboration and cohesion to prove communication with his team to improve performance” (RIT, 55:31docx). Finally, the team coaching that occurred parallel to Rob’s coaching brought forth issues that he was able to bring to the executive coaching session to deal with; this also impacted the team (RIT, 55:36docx).

## **4.5. Mabel's case**

This section provides a narrative description of Mabel's coaching process as it occurred over three sessions, based on video transcripts and PCR data. For each of the three sessions, a summary of the key features of the conversation is presented in table format. Having analysed the context, the coach and client mechanisms, the analysis concludes by describing Mabel's learning process.

### **4.5.1. Participant's profile and context**

#### *Mabel's profile*

At the time of the study Mabel (female) was in the 35–40 age category. She had worked in the public health sector for over 11 years, and in the ministry of health for over seven years as a director (CP, 92:1docx). Her role included the coordination and oversight governance of health-sector public entities and statutory councils that are the responsibility of the Minister of Health (MIT, 90:2docx). Amongst these public entities is the Office of Health Standards Compliance – the entity that investigated and reported on the Life Esidimeni tragedy in which 144 mentally ill patients died in 2016. Mabel's responsibilities entailed facilitating the development of enabling legislation and supporting the boards of these entities, as well as monitoring performance (MIT, 90:4docx). Her job was to support the Minister of Health in his oversight and monitoring role of public-health entities and statutory councils.

Mabel's motivation for participating in the study was primarily for her personal and professional growth. While she had never been coached before, she hoped that the coaching process would assist her in identifying areas of strength and those that require development to improve her performance as well as that of her team (CP, 92:1docx). She was going through a difficult phase at work given the context and said, "I felt like I was drowning, I felt like I needed to do things differently, but I did not know how" (MIT, 90:5docx).

Mabel's coach, Eva, indicated that her readiness to go through with the process assisted in the success of the coaching programme:

"The fact that the client volunteered to participate, made it easier as she committed to the programme to the end even when there were challenges in the organisation that would have made it easy for her to pull out" (EIT, 91:23docx).

### *Mabel's work context*

At the time of the coaching intervention, the Life Esidimeni Arbitration was underway. The Minister of Health as well as the head of the department (DG) had to testify at the arbitration hearings. Therefore, the organisational context with the ministry was extremely stressful, as the country was looking at the Minister and the Department of Health to provide answers as to why such a tragedy had been allowed to happen. Some of the reasons were that the health legislation gives powers to the provincial level of government to make decisions about some key aspects of the provision of health, thus the national government had no say in the decision to transfer these patients. As a result, the minister had to look at reviewing the legislation of that governmental health and other related legislation that he felt was failing the health system in general.

Hence, Mabel and her team were involved in supporting the minister in dealing with the challenges and changes that needed to happen regarding the legislation. Her participation in the coaching programme occurred under an extremely turbulent environment in the health sector.

### *Eva's coach profile – Mabel's coach*

Eva was Mabel's allocated coach. She had worked for almost 20 years as a public-sector executive in different senior roles, including CEO of a public entity in the finance sector. Eva was initially trained in education and psychology but moved into public administration and governance in the last 15 years (COP, 93:1docx). As a certified coach, Eva's approach to coaching included gestalt and neuro-linguistic programming (COP, 93:2docx). At the time of the coaching intervention, Eva was working as an internal coach (EIT, 91:2docx).

Her motivation for participating in the coaching programme was to support research in this field, which she felt was very important for transforming the public sector. Moreover, Eva was curious to participate in this kind of research (EIT, 91:3docx).

### **4.5.2. Description of Mabel's coaching and learning process**

Mabel's coaching sessions occurred in a designated coaching room in Eva's office. This was outside of Mabel's offices and within walking distance to Eva's offices.

Like in all other cases, the first session was intended to build rapport and set coaching outcomes. Moreover, the goals that Mabel wanted to achieve were having an awareness of her behaviour at work regarding her management of operational work as well as her staff (PCR1, 74:4docx). This provided her the opportunity to reflect on the current situation at work, including her role of being a manager and the relationship she has with people at work, especially her supervisor (PCR1, 74:1docx). The session also gave her the chance to reflect on her own skills and competencies as a manager. For example, Mabel discovered that she needed time to develop herself as well as her staff. She shared:

“...at times we tend to spend a lot of time worried about completing tasks, producing certain quality of work and not taking care of the very things that will ensure good outcomes i.e. training” (PCR1, 74:2docx).

The second coaching session focused on Mabel’s new management style for her work schedule and team. Mabel indicated that the session brought awareness of what causes her to procrastinate, and that now she does more than she used to as a result of being able to reflect on her work daily.

“I was able to focus better and do more submissions ... and less procrastination because I had talked about it; so now I’m much more aware of it” (VTS2, 86:5docx).

This learning experience has brought her a great feeling accomplishment as opposed to feeling extremely tired and exhausted at the end of each day (VTS2, 86:8docx).

“So, that’s what the past week has been. It was about consciously thinking about the things that I needed to do and how I needed to do them, and what would be what would work better for me” (VTS2, 86:9docx).

In her PCR, Mabel indicated that the session created some personal awareness, which helped her think differently about work. Thus, she was able to plan and manage her work better.

“I have been working more efficiently due to implementing some changes in my work environment ... things have improved in terms of planning and managing my work” (PCR2, 75:1docx).

The next section describes the coaching and learning process for sessions three through to five. These are presented in a table format.

*4.5.2.1. Mabel's coaching and learning process in session three (VTS3)*

In session two, Mabel reflected on her work habits and began to show some improvements on how she manages work activities and her team. In session three, she continued to reflect on her leadership and management style with an intention of improving team outputs for her unit. Key to this conversation was her strenuous relationship with her manager. The table below summarises the key features of the coaching conversation.

**Table 4.15:** Key features of Mabel's third coaching session

<b>The coach's process</b>	<b>The client's reflection process</b>
1. Checks in with the client on how things have been since the last session	1. Gives feedback and acknowledges some changes that she has implemented in her management style
2. Listens and gives feedback	2. Awareness of her limitation as a manager
3. Listens and asks for clarity	3. Expresses frustration and impatience with staff who do not seem to take professional development seriously
4. Poses questions about team values	4. Awareness of need for team vision and values
5. Questions the client about her beliefs of her team	5. Awareness of her beliefs about her team 6. Expresses feelings of disrespect by staff members who resist change
6. Challenges the client about what she could do given her awareness	7. Awareness that her change in behaviour as a manager has brought disruption to the team 8. Anxious and distressed about how the team is exhibiting blaming behaviour
7. Acknowledges the client's feelings and asks questions about them	9. Awareness that the team has capacity problems, but also lacks teamwork/spirit 10. Awareness that the team behaviour is a reflection of organisational culture – blaming, defensiveness, dishonest, non-accountable culture
8. Recognises an organisational culture pattern and makes the client aware of it	11. Awareness that her manager (DDG) and his manager (DG) also exhibit similar behaviour towards her
9. Invites awareness of client capability based on action in another context	12. Expresses feelings of betrayal and helplessness towards the situation

The coach's process	The client's reflection process
10. Makes the client aware of denial and non-action behaviours 11. Challenges the client's assumptions	13. Awareness that her beliefs about seniority ("manager should know [that they] should not behave in this way") stop her from challenging her managers about their behaviour
12. Questions the client to facilitate action	14. Feeling stuck and helpless – questioning her identity "Who am I?"
13. Offers information and options to help the client move forward with action	15. Experiences somatic reaction – headache
14. Acknowledges the headache and wraps up session	

The core content of this conversation was around Mabel's reflection on her managerial and leadership capabilities in relation to her team and her relationship with her supervisor. The conversation started with the client giving feedback on the progress that was made as a result of the awareness she gained from session two. The main theme in her feedback was that her team performance was improving as a result of the changes she had started implementing in the team (VTS3, 87:5docx). Mabel realised that she needed to trust her staff more and be more supportive of them rather than being critical, even though some of them were still reluctant to change (VTS3, 87:6docx). In this conversation, she gained more awareness of her limitations as a manager (VTS3, 87:3docx) and of the limitations of her team's capabilities.

“...it's not only about pushing the submission, but you have to see the bigger picture in the public service as to the role that you are playing ... but now we are not there” (VTS3, 87:9docx).

In reflecting on her work and how she goes about it, she also became aware of the impact the organisational culture (culture of shifting blame, non-accountability and defensiveness) had on her behaviour in relation to her team, her supervisor and the entire organisation. This reminded her of the Life Esidimeni tragedy, where senior officials had also been shifting blame. It created anxiety and discomfort for Mabel, as she would not like such a thing to happen to her (VTS3, 87:19docx).

The coach facilitated the conversation, firstly, by listening attentively to the client, asking for clarity and giving feedback. In listening attentively, Eva was able to highlight to the client the key aspects of the conversation and key moments of the client's state

of mind and emotions. She also questioned the client on team values and her beliefs about her staff's capabilities. This reflection opened up a discussion about the culture of blame, defensiveness, not taking responsibility and accountability as well as dishonesty that seem to prevail in the organisation as a whole, and how this all impacts on everyone to behave in a defensive and counterproductive way. Mabel related several incidences where people had behaved in this way and more disturbing are senior officials who promote and reinforce this kind of behaviour as they conduct themselves this way, too (VTS3, 87:29docx).

Mabel also gained awareness of events that created a strained relationship between her supervisor and herself. At this point, the coach challenged the client on her beliefs and assumptions about seniority and a culture of not challenging people in authority. When the client got stuck, Eva assisted her by providing information to help her move on. This reflection unearthed unpleasant memories from past events where she was blamed for something that her supervisors should have taken responsibility for. Mabel almost relived the unpleasant memory and her realisation of her inability to challenge authority affected her physically, with her experiencing a headache. Eva recognised Mabel's emotional state and was able to see that she was overwhelmed and could not continue with the coaching session. She then summarised and concluded the conversation.

In her PCR of this session, Eva confirmed that what made this session work was her ability to listen attentively (PCR3, 82:2docx); ask probing and provoking questions; and challenge her assumptions and beliefs about others (PCR3, 82:4docx).

"I started interrupting so that I could ask more provoking questions. At some point, the provocation unblocked deeper underlying issues to what was up to now the central issue" (PCR3, 82:3docx).

Mabel's emotional experience in this coaching session started on a positive note as she related positive steps that her team had taken. However, she also gained a significant amount of awareness in this process. This includes awareness of limitations as a manager and the impact on her recent changes in her management style, awareness of team needs, awareness of organisational culture and how this impacts her and her team, and most importantly awareness of her limiting beliefs around her inability to challenge authority.



This awareness brought about cognitive and emotional dissonance, which was experienced in the form of emotions of frustration, anxiety and distress; feelings of betrayal and helplessness; and experiencing a somatic reaction. This session ended abruptly as a result of a headache triggered by a reflection on events that had occurred two years prior.

Data collected from this session's PCR corroborates the above-mentioned findings. Mabel indicated that the process of reflection in this session had assisted her in learning about herself, her behaviour, as well as her action and inaction, including her inability to confront matters she should confront (PCR3, 76:1docx). She argued that she had begun to understand the impact her supervisor's behaviour had on her own behaviour, which included the nature of engagement they had, the type of feedback that was given and whether it could be controlled or not. In reflecting on these questions, Mabel said she learnt that matters that stay unresolved for long periods of time will keep resurfacing and being triggered by similar experiences if not dealt with (PCR3, 76:1docx).

The PCR seemed to have shifted Mabel's behaviour, as she indicated that she was now aware of how she contributed to the challenges at work (PCR3, 76:3docx). Therefore, she had learnt to communicate better and delegate more functions to her staff (PCR3, 76:2docx). She committed to engaging her staff through a formal session facilitated by an independent party to ensure objectivity (PCR3, 76:4docx).

Eva confirmed the client's progress, observing that the client had made a "bigger shift than I had hoped for". She also stated that the reflection process continued beyond the coaching session, which facilitated more learning and the application of the learnings (PCR3, 82:1docx).

In summary, the client gained awareness of her own limitations as a manager, of others' limiting behaviour (her team and supervisor), of absence of team values, of beliefs about others (her team), and of her reluctance to challenge power. The session ended with her in a distressed state as a result of awakening buried emotions from the past.

#### 4.5.2.2. *Mabel's coaching and learning process in session four (VTS4)*

In the previous session, the client left the coaching session in distress, but took some time to reflect on what had happened. In session four, she related the awareness and

learning she had gained from her experience. Table 4.16 summarises the key features of this conversation.

**Table 4.16:** Key features of Mabel's fourth coaching session

<b>The coach's process</b>	<b>The client's reflection process</b>
1. Checks in with the client and how she has handled outcomes after the previous session – headache	1. Awareness that the past incidences experienced with her managers have had a huge impact, resulting in a somatic response in the previous session 2. Speaks of her feelings of depression and about not being able to confront her manager
2. Challenges the client on the non-confrontational stance she had taken	3. Awareness of difficulty of dealing with conflict in relation to superiors 4. Awareness of her belief about not confronting people in authority or "power"
3. Challenges the client's beliefs about not confronting "power" figures	5. Expresses feeling of powerlessness and disempowerment by manager
4. Gives feedback on organisational structure and culture that enables and promotes the abuse of power	6. Expresses frustration about lack of power and support from her manager
5. Asks meaning question around powerlessness	7. Expresses fear of losing motivation for her work due to the organisation's climate
6. Invites awareness of victim behaviour on the part of the client and organisation	8. Accepts that she may be in denial over what is happening, thus not dealing with it
7. Encourages exploration of options for action	9. Awareness that her manager may be dealing with the same issues as her from his managers – thus projecting to her (bigger systemic problems)
8. Asks purpose question and reframes for better outcomes	10. Awareness of entrenched organisational culture of no challenge to "power"
9. Challenges for action and asks specific action questions	11. Sympathises with her manager and is ready to have a conversation and give him feedback (shift in thinking about supervisor behaviour)
10. Offers information to assist with conversation with manager	12. Committed to meeting with supervisor to give feedback
11. Summarises and invites awareness of key aspects of the conversation	

Session four's coaching conversation was a continuation of the previous session, which ended abruptly as a result of the client experiencing a headache. The core

content of this conversation is around Mabel's heightened awareness of the impact the strained relationship with her supervisor was having on her. She dealt with her inability to confront her manager and to reflect on the reasons behind it.

"I felt depressed the fact that this thing has been there, and I have not been able to confront it, I have not been able to deal with it, and it continues you know ... it hurts" (VTS4, 88:3docx).

As Mabel gave feedback on her new awareness, Eva challenged her nonconfrontational stance and her beliefs about not confronting power or people in authority. In reflecting on the reasons for her reluctance to confront her manager's unsupportive behaviour, she expressed frustration about her perceived powerlessness. The conversation revealed that her reluctance to challenge is based on the belief that people in power cannot be confronted.

"...though I don't accept it, but in that situation you kind of packed up because the person has more power. So, I don't want those kinds of confrontations, I avoid them" (VTS4, 88:6docx).

Eva raised awareness that the organisational climate promotes a culture of silence around issues they should talk about. She also raised awareness of how that can generate victim behaviour amongst employees who believe they can't confront people in authority. Another major awareness that resulted from this conversation was how the organisational environment has promoted a culture of nonconfrontation to those in positions of authority. This could mean that her unsupportive manager is possibly experiencing the same thing from his managers and just passing it on to her.

"I think he probably does the same thing as me, I'm 110% sure that he's not happy with his supervisor or supervisors ... he's also adopted a way to not confront because I'm told that apparently when you do that, that's when the situation gets worse" (VTS4, 88:30docx).

Eva also engaged the client on the meaning of power and powerlessness. She redirected the conversation by asking the client to look at the bigger context and challenged the client to act. With this new awareness Mabel began to sympathise with her supervisor and shifted her perception about his unsupportive behaviour. She felt

ready to have a conversation with him, as she realised that he may have the same problem with his supervisors as she has with him.

The coach provided information and advice to the client to assist with the conversation with her manager and summarises key aspects of the conversation. The session concluded with an action for Mabel to approach her supervisor to give him feedback on how she feels about their relationship.

Mabel's emotional experience in this session was characterised by a few key things she became aware of. This includes an awareness of what caused her distress, which resulted in the somatic reaction, awareness about her reluctance to confront her manager, the reasons behind that and her beliefs about confronting authority. She expressed feelings of powerlessness and emotions of frustration for feeling powerless, as well as her fear of losing interest in her work (VTS4, 88:11docx).

In this reflection, she also becomes aware that she may be in denial about what is happening in the organisation. Furthermore, she reconfirmed that the organisational culture promoted a culture of silence, when people should be speaking up. Mabel was more sympathetic with her supervisor as she became aware that he may also be experiencing the same suppression from his managers. This made her more ready to have a conversation with the supervisor to give him feedback in light of this new awareness.

In the session's PCR, the client mentioned that she explored the meaning of powerlessness in her context and became aware of her limitations, what she had control over and what she did not have control over (PCR4, 77:1docx). She also learnt that "avoiding certain conversations does not necessarily mean the issues would disappear", and that she needed to confront these issues (PCR4, 77:2docx). Mabel confirmed that she committed to engaging with her supervisor to have a conversation about the issues that were bothering her in their relationship (PCR4, 77:3docx).

The coach agreed with the client about her learning and the awareness that she cannot put things aside forever but needs to confront them. "She had the realisation that she could continue putting the matter away, but that it would invariably resurface when the appropriate trigger was activated" (PCR4, 83:2docx). Eva confirmed that the client committed to making an appointment to have a conversation with her line manager (PCR4, 83:4docx).

In summary, this session was characterised by a significant amount of awareness and some level of cognitive and emotional dissonance. She engaged in rational dialogue about her beliefs of power, denial and the impact of the bigger organisational systemic culture of silence on her, her team and the entire organisation. This awareness brought about a shift in thinking about how the client perceived her supervisor's behaviour.

#### 4.5.2.3. *Mabel's coaching and learning process in session five (VTS5)*

After resolving the dilemma Mabel had in session four, in the following meeting she was in a different frame of mind about her work environment and about how she should respond to issues at work. The table below is an account of how she shifted her meaning perspectives about herself, her supervisor and the organisation.

**Table 4.17:** Key features of Mabel's fifth coaching session

<b>The coach's process</b>	<b>The client's reflection process</b>
1. Checks on task agreed upon in last session	1. Expresses acceptance of things that she cannot change and satisfaction with learning so far 2. However, doubts if her recent engagement with DG was adequate based on what she learnt
2. Challenges the client about her doubts	3. Awareness that organisational environment impacts negatively on her and team, and the reality that she has no control of it, elicits thoughts of leaving the organisation 4. Frustration about lack of support from her manager in recent incident
3. Invites awareness of how the client is contributing to the organisational culture	5. Awareness that her acceptance of the organisational culture and her reluctance to confront it contributes to a lack of change on manager's behaviour
4. Questions the client about the meanings she has about being in the organisation	6. Awareness that even if she decided to leave, it would not be soon due to the economic climate; thus, the current reality still had to be dealt with
5. Invites the client to explore options	7. Acknowledges that change will happen if she changes how she relates to others (team and managers) and that she has the power to do so
6. Reaffirms the client's abilities	8. Commits to changing her behaviour in relation to her team
7. Gives advice and information	9. Commits to changing her behaviour in relation to her manager – showed confidence and was looking forward to having a conversation with him
8. Summarises and gives feedback	

This conversation was characterised by the client's shift towards acceptance of things she cannot control, such as the organisational culture and how other people respond to it. Mabel was also aware of and accepted the things she had control over, such as her own behaviour and relations with others.

“...but I've also come to realise or to accept that there's certain things that I can do, there's certain things that I can't do but what is important for me now is to identify exactly what those things are that I will have in control and then also identify if there's a possible way of dealing with whatever” (VTS5, 89:7docx).

While she still voiced doubt about her recent engagement with the head of the department and frustration about his lack of support, Mabel expressed awareness of her unchanging work environment and that the idea of leaving the organisation had crossed her mind.

“In as much as I can say I love my job, but it is not changing. I think it's becoming worse, especially because this is a ministerial function, so the minister will be involved at all times” (VTS5, 89:17docx).

“So, currently I am finding the environment very uneasy to work in” (VTS5, 89:21docx).

The coach acknowledged the doubt and frustration Mabel expressed, but also challenged her on these by raising awareness to reflect on her contribution to the problems she was experiencing. Eva lifted the conversation higher by refocusing Mabel to her highest intentions of being in the organisation in relation to her future career aspirations. The coach then invited her to explore options while reaffirming her abilities.

Since Mabel was aware that even if she chose to leave it would not be soon – given that the economic climate was not conducive to finding a similar job elsewhere, Mabel resolved that while she is still in the department, she would commit to changing the things within her control. This included how she related with the team and her supervisors. She committed to change what she could. Her commitment was also linked to what she viewed as her own identity in terms of how people would view her.

“...but I must still ... I’m here now, so I need to make sure that the environment is actually good for me to continue to perform ... I want to be viewed as a person that is driven continuously, a person who’s ... given to all their best, no matter what the situation” (VTS5, 89:42docx).

In addition to changing the environment, she made changes in working with her team to pull together.

“...remember now, part of changing the environment, yes it’s me, it’s my supervisor but there’s also the people that I work with, making sure that they also pull their weight because if they do that, then there will be less pressure for me which they have ... they have started to do that ... and I’ve given them more responsibility. I’ve trusted them with more responsibility, and I’ve changed the way that I approach assessing their work” (VTS5, 89:44docx).

The coach provided some information and advice to assist Mabel in her future action. Mabel seemed to appreciate the guidance she was receiving from Eva.

Mabel’s emotional experience in this session was characterised by an acceptance of how things were and what the client had and had no control over. While she was accepting, she still expressed doubt of how she handled her recent engagement with her DG. She felt frustrated about the lack of support and protection from her manager, and began to think about her career outside of the department as she acknowledged that there are things she can’t change.

In recognising the current reality about the fact that she may still need to be in the department for a while due to the economic climate, and her awareness of her contribution to the lack of change, Mabel acknowledged that the only thing she can do is to commit to changing herself in the way she relates to power and authority. Mabel agreed to change her behaviour in relation to her team, her supervisor and his managers.

In her PCR, Mabel indicated that she had learnt to better manage her day-to-day office work as well as the management of her engagements with her supervisor. She also learnt a technique to follow up on confirmations after verbal discussions with people in the organisation. Moreover, she learnt to trust her staff more and to delegate more work to them and to follow up on what she has delegated (PCR5, 78:1docx). She

committed to a task of forward-planning for change and developed a strategy that would include her personal and professional life as well as educational plans. “Make time for training and communicate through my sphere of influence” (PCR5, 78:2docx).

The coach confirmed in her PCR that she had also observed a shift in the language Mabel was using and noted that she had learnt to accept things that are not within her control and to focus on what is within her control (PCR5, 84:2docx). In her final reflection of the day’s session, Mabel acknowledged that her main learning had been the realisation that she needed to “initiate change”, starting with changing herself; and that she needed to plan for this change with two things in mind – “I am at the centre” and “nothing is impossible” (VTS5, 89:49docx).

From the PCR, Eva indicated that sharing some information about how people process information differently was useful in assisting Mabel to understand how she processes information (PCR5, 84:1docx). Eva concluded by summarising and giving feedback to the client on key aspects of the conversation.

In summary, the conversation in this session was characterised by acceptance and acknowledgement of things Mabel has no control over, as well as creating a firm plan of action as to what she needs to do in engaging her team and her managers.

#### **4.5.3. *Analysis of Mabel’s coaching and learning process***

This section analyses Mabel’s coaching and learning process across all coaching sessions. In addition to the data used in the case description, this section integrates data collected from post-coaching interviews with the client and coach to ensure triangulation. It analyses the role and impact of context in Mabel’s coaching process, assesses how the mechanisms employed by the coach facilitated learning, as well as looks at how the client’s mechanisms enabled learning. Furthermore, this section describes the learning process that emerged as a result of the interaction between the two mechanisms.

##### **4.5.3.1. *Role and impact of context in Mabel’s coaching journey***

Data gathered from the three primary sources indicates that there were three types of contexts that impacted Mabel throughout the coaching intervention. These contexts are: a turbulent socio-political environment, an unhealthy organisational climate, and a climate of strained and stressful interpersonal relations.



Central to Mabel’s dilemmas was the interpersonal tension and conflict with her unsupportive manager and her team. This was as a result of an unhealthy organisational culture. The socio-political context (Life Esidimeni tragedy) served as a reminder to Mabel of what not to do as a public servant and remained a guiding framework for her on what is at stake if she succumbs to power and declares herself powerless. This context gave Mabel the opportunity to consider change, as she was very uncomfortable in the current conditions. It provided disruption to her day-to-day life and she began to question things she would normally not have questioned.

#### 4.5.3.2. *Eva’s coaching mechanisms*

The mechanisms employed by the coach in the coaching process can be categorised into the following core skills: rapport building, active listening, giving feedback, questioning, holding the client accountable, and sharing information and giving advice. T-table 4.18 summarises the core skills and sub-skills as identified in the data.

*Table 4.18: Eva’s coaching mechanisms*

<b>Core skills</b>	<b>Sub-skills</b>	<b>Examples of quotations from the coach</b>
Rapport building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring confidentiality</li> <li>• Obtaining confidence in competencies</li> <li>• Creating a safe space</li> <li>• Building a trusting relationship</li> <li>• Being fully present to the client</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “...at the beginning was the whole issue around confidentiality because of the nature of work that I do, so I needed to feel that I was free to talk about that and know that the information would be treated as confidential as possible”</li> </ul>
Active listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarising and giving feedback to the client</li> <li>• Tracking key aspects of the conversation in one session or from previous sessions and creating linkages</li> <li>• Inviting awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “From what you are saying, it sounds like there is a culture in the organisation of not...”</li> <li>• “You have repeated several times that you know about this ... so what do you want to do about it?”</li> <li>• “Do you remember at the beginning of the session, you spoke a lot about...?”</li> <li>• “That’s good insight knowing what your strengths and weakness are?”</li> <li>• “So, you are aware that something needs to happen or shift?”</li> </ul>

Core skills	Sub-skills	Examples of quotations from the coach
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noticing non-verbal gestures</li> <li>• Acknowledging feelings and emotions</li> <li>• Validating the client</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I can see that you are so much calmer and relaxed”</li> <li>• “How are you feeling, is it okay to stop now that you have a headache?”</li> <li>• “This is one of the most horrible things to happen to anyone, I can understand how you feel”</li> <li>• “I am quite impressed with your progress”</li> </ul>
Telling and giving advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “You should make sure that there is written confirmation on the minutes of meetings so that he does not go back on his commitments. This is good bureaucratic practice – so you cover your back”</li> </ul>
Questioning skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcome questions</li> <li>• Leading questions</li> <li>• Probing, provoking</li> <li>• Clarity questions</li> <li>• High-order or reflective questions – asking about beliefs, assumptions and values, identity</li> <li>• Questions of importance/significance</li> <li>• Challenging assumptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What do you want us to talk about today?”</li> <li>• “What is the most important thing that you want to focus in this session?”</li> <li>• “Do you think that the team understands? Do you think that they see the link between their jobs and the bigger picture?”</li> <li>• “Who are you going to protect, him or you?”</li> <li>• “How long are you just going to sit there and allow this to happen?”</li> <li>• “When you say you were not able to do that what do you mean by that?”</li> <li>• “How do you see yourself?”</li> <li>• “What is your belief about your staff members?”</li> <li>• “So, what is stopping you from breaking the culture of silence?”</li> <li>• “How important is it for you that you continue in your area of interest?”</li> <li>• “Why do you think you can’t confront it?”</li> </ul>

Core skills	Sub-skills	Examples of quotations from the coach
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Framing and reframing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Somewhere you said you all have an understanding- how do you know you all have the same understanding?”</li> <li>“In hindsight, is there any other way you could think differently about the situation?”</li> </ul>
Holding the client accountable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tasking the client</li> <li>Following up on tasks given</li> <li>Helping in co-creating tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“In our last session, you spoke about a workshop on team values, how is that coming along?”</li> </ul>

*Rapport building:* As listed in the table above, the coach exhibited the following skills: ensuring confidentiality so that the client feels safe to express herself, building a trusting relationship, and being fully present to the client. This provided a conducive environment for effective coaching as the client felt safe, respected, and not judged by the coach (PCR6, 85:4docx).

*Active listening:* Data from all sources indicates that the coach exhibited certain skills to ensure she is attentively listening. Firstly, listening to the content, summarising it, and then giving feedback to the client. Secondly, tracking key aspects of the conversation in one session or from previous sessions and creating links. Thirdly, raising awareness of what she hears or sees from the client or raising awareness of client behaviour. Fourthly, noticing non-verbal gestures and commenting on them. Finally, identifying emotions, asking or commenting on them and validating the client. Examples are listed above in Table 4.18. The demonstration of these behaviours from the coach assisted in raising self-awareness of the client’s limiting behaviour. These included feelings and emotions, as well as the client’s values, assumptions, and beliefs.

*Questioning skills:* Concerning the questioning, the coach employed questioning techniques that included simple questions geared to set coaching outcomes and clarify concepts and information, and probe to get deeper information. Through these questions, the coach was able to elicit clarity and facilitate reflection around the content (what) and process (how) of the context or situation. There was also a fair amount of closed and leading questions, especially in session three.

Eva also asked high-order or reflective questions that facilitated a deeper engagement and an exploration of meanings around assumptions, values, and limiting beliefs held by the client. She asked questions that challenged these meanings and frames of mind and facilitated the exploration of options. However, these were more prevalent in session four and, to some extent, in session five.

In session three, there were fewer reflective questions, such as questions about her belief of her staff, team values and assumptions about an understanding of how they should support one another. In session four, there were more of these questions, as Eva engaged Mabel about the reasons behind her reluctance to confront or challenge authority, her feelings of powerlessness and the culture of the organisation. Asking reflective questions resulted in greater awareness for the client in terms of what she could do or not do.

*Framing:* Keeping the client geared on the outcome of the coaching was another skill portrayed by the coach. This enabled the client to keep focus amid a lot of content that she was sharing in the sessions.

*Holding the client accountable:* Every session ended with an action to be undertaken by the client – the coach followed up on this in the next session to ensure that the client had done what was agreed upon. The beginning of the session was also a place where the client could reflect on how she managed to integrate and internalise the learning she gained from the previous sessions and from the PCRs.

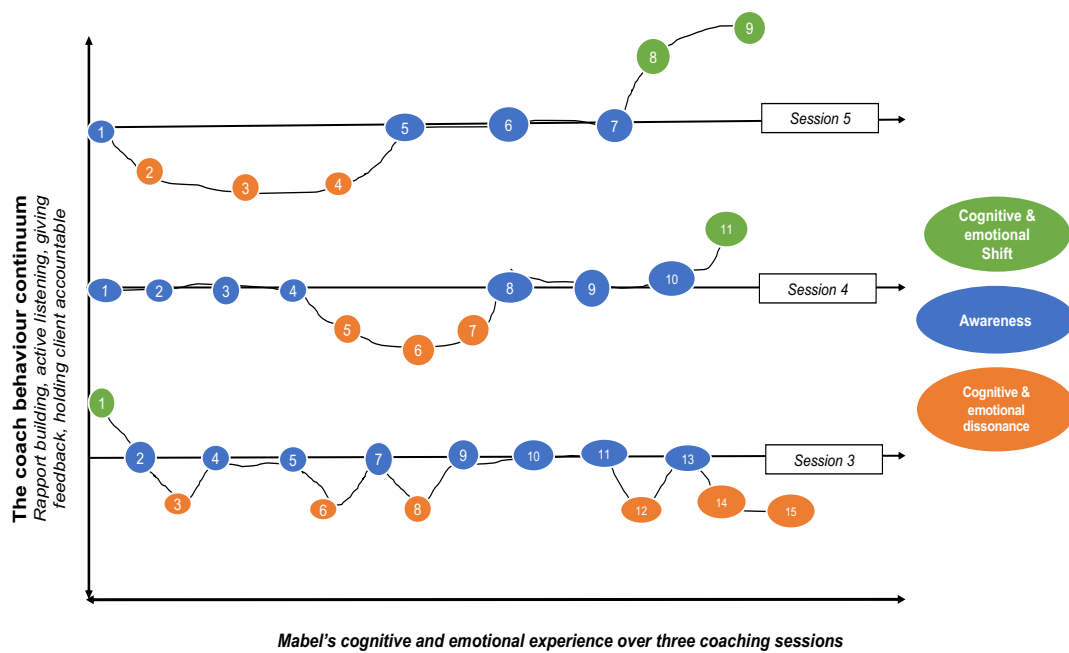
*Flexibility:* This was also required on the part of the coach to accommodate the client's context. This meant sometimes changing time slots and using other techniques, such as sharing information and giving advice when the client needed it.

#### 4.5.3.3. *Mabel's reflection mechanisms*

All the data sets indicate that Mabel experienced disorienting dilemmas. Furthermore, she went through a critical reflection process as well as rational dialogue.

*Disorienting dilemma:* The main trigger for the disorienting dilemma was the Life Esidimeni tragedy, which hung over the client's head throughout the coaching sessions. The arbitration process was underway during the coaching intervention and the client referred to it many times during the sessions. While Mabel brought this to the coaching session, the reflection on what was happening in the organisation and how

things were happening triggered other cognitive and emotional dissonances. The coaching sessions were a place where Mabel was able to express her emotions safely. These opened up an opportunity for her to change as she could clarify what she did not want. Figure 4.7 illustrates Mabel's disorienting dilemma process and its resolution throughout the three coaching sessions.



**Figure 4.7:** A summary of Mabel's cognitive and emotional experience

The graph above illustrates that Mabel went into session three with a positive frame of mind, having successfully implemented some of her learning from sessions one and two. She went through a process of self-awareness regarding her work environment and how this impacted negatively on her, her team and the organisation. This led to her experiencing a state of cognitive and emotional dissonance. In session three, it appeared that the coach was unable to deal with the extreme emotions that were expressed abruptly when the client indicated that she had a headache.

From session four, it shows that Mabel was able to deal with what came out of session three by reflecting on her own in between the coaching sessions as she came to session four with new awareness in many areas. While she still experienced some dissonance in the session, the awareness she gained contributed to her experiencing some positive shifts at the end of the session. Session five started with her having gained even more awareness, which took her through negative emotions again, but

she quickly bounced back with more awareness that helped her decide on more positive shifts.

*Reflection on content:* This included reflection on work events (past and present); reflection on work context, the socio-political, organisational and interpersonal context impacting on the client; and reflection of behaviour of the self and others. It helped her to gain awareness of what was going on in her context and her limiting behaviours.

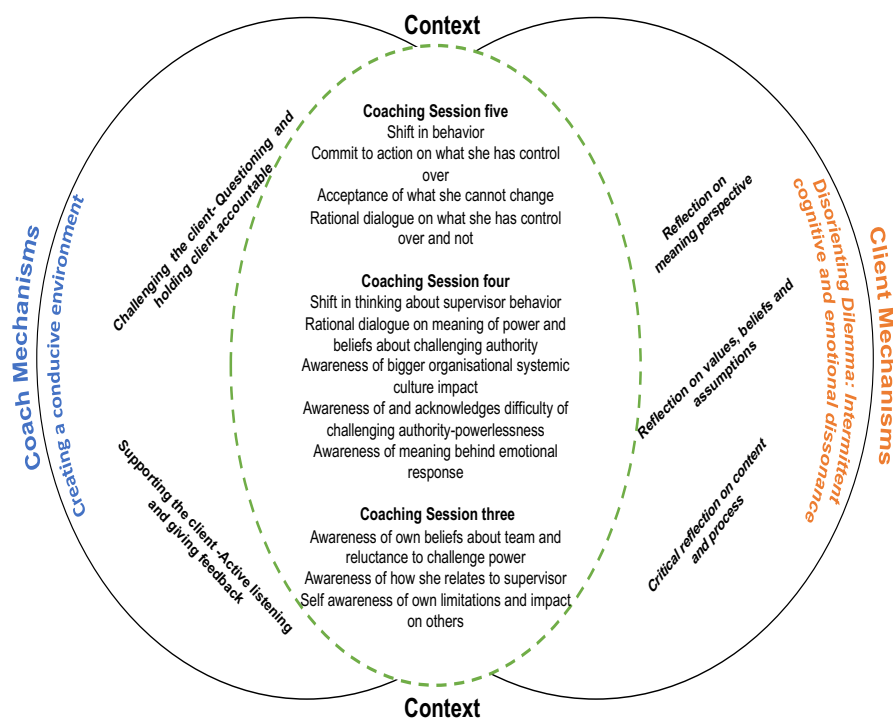
*Reflection on process:* Included reflection on processes and systems in organisations, how things get done by the self and others and reflecting on the learning process. Together with reflecting on content, this process revealed what was behind behaviours, as it unearthed the values, beliefs and assumptions behind her behaviour and what drove and/or influenced the organisational climate.

*Critical reflection on premise:* With awareness of the premise of her behaviour and the actions, Mabel was able to critically reflect on these assumptions, values and limiting beliefs. This led her to a process of accepting her limitations in how she viewed herself – for example, being powerless and recognising that she has personal power she can exercise on issues she has control over.

*Rational dialogue:* Once she accepted her limitations of how she had viewed herself and that there were things she had no control over, Mabel was ready to engage objectively on these assumptions, values and limiting beliefs. This resulted in her being ready to explore new ways of being and doing things.

#### 4.5.3.4. Mabel's learning process

The figure below illustrates the interaction between the coach and the client mechanism, and how these facilitated learning throughout the three coaching sessions. The coaching mechanisms are reflected in the first circle, while the client mechanisms are in the second circle. The middle dotted-line circle indicates the learning process for each of the coaching sessions, which is an interaction between the coach and client mechanisms.



Mabel's Learning Process

Figure 4.8: A summary of Mabel's learning process

Firstly, the client brings a disorienting dilemma into the coaching session that is triggered by the context she operated in. As described earlier, in Mabel's case, these are the socio-political factors, organisational culture and climate and interpersonal contexts. The coach provided a conducive environment of safety and trust so that the client was able to reflect freely.

Secondly, the coach encouraged dialogue and reflection by supporting the client through active listening throughout the coaching sessions, with appropriate intervals of giving feedback and inviting awareness. This facilitated awareness at various levels for the client.

In asking simple, outcome-related and clarity questions, the client was encouraged to reflect on the content (what) and process (how) of her situation. This brought out awareness of the client's behaviour, desirable and non-desirable, the behaviour of others and the impact on them, and to some extent their thinking patterns.

The process of critical reflection involves the client's experiences of emotional and cognitive dissonance. This is triggered by reflection on content, context, and past memories. As the client reflected on content and process, she brought up beliefs, assumptions and values that she holds about events and situations, expressing them in her use of language.

To prepare the client for change, the coach identified these meaning perspectives from the client's language and behaviour and raised awareness of them, then checked if they are limiting the client from moving to positive change. To shift the client from limiting frames of mind, the coach challenged the client's limiting beliefs and untested assumptions and facilitated rational dialogue on these frames. This was done by the coach asking reflective questions that engaged the client at the meaning perspective level, as they opened her up for rational dialogue on these.

The coach maintained a conducive environment for the client to critically reflect, experience emotions and cognitive dissonance, and challenged the client to reflect at a higher level (meaning perspective level). It was through rational dialogue that the client found resolutions to her dilemma. In summary, the learning process based on this case can be expressed in the following processes: awareness of limiting behaviour; awareness of limiting assumptions, values and limiting beliefs; acceptance of the need for change; rational dialogue on limiting beliefs and assumptions; a cognitive shift in frames of mind; and a change in behaviour through action.

#### 4.5.3.5. *Summary of learning outcomes*

Mabel's motivation for participating in the coaching programme was prompted by feeling overwhelmed at work. She hoped that the coaching process would assist her in identifying areas of strength and those that require development, resulting in improved performance (CP, 92:1docx). Data from all three sources shows that Mabel's outcomes were in the areas of self-awareness. This is divided into awareness of own limiting behaviour; of behaviour of others and its impact; of own skills and competencies; of inner potentials; of context and its impact on the self; and of own values, beliefs and assumptions and its limitations.



The second set of outcomes has to do with an awareness of the learning process. It includes her awareness of her preferred learning style, learning through integration of new knowledge, learning through application, learning through reflection and learning by exploring new ways of doing.

Lastly, the data shows that Mabel achieved the following outcomes: understanding herself better, alignment of personal values, improved quality of work, improved team performance, expanded perception on the supervisor's behaviour, having a broader perspective work context, more intentional in her perspective, and a change in behaviour in relation to her team and supervisor. While Mabel achieved a range of managerial performance-related outcomes, more importantly she had a shift in a sense of self regarding her personal powers.

#### **4.6. Chapter conclusion**

This chapter presented a within-case analysis for each of the four case studies selected. A description and analysis for each case was conducted based on three sources of data. The processes of learning were identified in the coaching process.

The main conclusions across all of the cases are, firstly, that there were multiple contextual factors that impacted the client's experience of disorientation – that is, the economic, socio-political, organisational climate/culture and interpersonal relations factors. These factors acted together – in some cases with spillover effects – to influence the experience of the disorienting dilemmas amongst the executives.

Secondly, the coaching mechanisms that were displayed across all coaches included rapport building to create a conducive environment for coaching; active listening that facilitated self-awareness; questioning skills that facilitated critical reflection; and holding the client accountable, which assisted the client in integrating and applying what she had learnt. While the mechanism that facilitated learning for the client included the experience of disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, and rational dialogue.

Finally, the process of learning across all cases followed a pattern of moving from self-awareness of behaviour and frames of mind, critical reflection on frames of mind, acceptance of the need of change, a shift in frames of mind and a change in behaviour.

## Chapter 5: Cross-case analysis

### 5.1. Introduction to cross-case analysis

The cross-case analysis identifies emerging themes (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2014). Each theme will be presented through the summary of findings across all cases using comparison tables, which identify similarities and differences between the cases (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2014). The themes are derived from the categorisation and synthesis of codes that were generated inductively and deductively from literature (Saldaña, 2013, 2016). In line with the findings, key literature and current debates in the fields of executive coaching and transformative learning will be discussed and compared.

From a realist evaluation perspective, this analysis will be used to substantiate the outcome patterns that emerge from the interaction of the context and mechanisms of each case (Marchal et al., 2012). Based on this, a CMO pattern for each case will be developed.

### 5.2. Contextual factors

Contextual factors are the surrounding factors associated with the unit of analysis that present constraints and/or opportunities affecting the occurrence and meaning of behaviour and functional relationships between variables (Johns, 2006, p. 386). These factors can be divided into *omnibus context*, which has to do with people, location, time and meaning; and *discrete context*, which is related to task, social context and physical context (Johns, 2006, 2017). From an executive coaching perspective, context involves the broader organisation factors, including economic, political, social, technical and legal factors (Fatien Diochon et al., 2019; Pawson, 2013).

This section presents the themes that arose from first- and second-order codes from the cross-case analysis regarding contextual factors that played a critical role in the coaching intervention. Specifically, these factors triggered the *mechanism of disorienting dilemmas* amongst the participating executive coachees.

**5.2.1. Theme one: The multiplicity of contextual spillover effects compounded the mechanism of a disorienting dilemma amongst executives**

Based on the cross-case analysis, four types of contextual factors were identified: economic, socio-political, organisational climate, and interpersonal relations factors. Table 5.1 lists these factors per case.

*Table 5.1: Cross-case context comparison*

<b>Second-order order categories of context</b>	<b>First-order codes (Simon)</b>	<b>First-order codes (Janine)</b>	<b>First-order codes (Rob)</b>	<b>First-order codes (Mabel)</b>
<b>Economic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic downgrades</li> <li>• Budget deficit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic downgrades</li> <li>• Budget deficit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited potential of getting a job</li> </ul>
<b>Socio-political</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extreme political interference in the budget policy process</li> <li>• Political interference in the recruitment process</li> <li>• Disengaged client departments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extreme political interference in the budget policy process</li> <li>• Political interference in the recruitment process</li> <li>• Disengaged client departments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life Esidimeni tragedy</li> <li>• Negative social media posts by community</li> <li>• Hospital board feedback to Rob</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life Esidimeni tragedy</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational climate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resignation of key personnel</li> <li>• Unstable organisation environment</li> <li>• Low staff morale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resignation of key personnel</li> <li>• Unstable organisation environment</li> <li>• Low staff morale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple interventions in the organisation – HR, finance, team coaching leading to team dynamics “dysfunctional team”</li> <li>• Rob’s decision to put some</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team performance issues</li> <li>• Culture of silence and not challenging or questioning authority</li> </ul>

Second-order order categories of context	First-order codes (Simon)	First-order codes (Janine)	First-order codes (Rob)	First-order codes (Mabel)
			staff members on precautionary leave	
<b>Interpersonal relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpersonal tensions between the client and her manager and the minister</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team conflict and tension between the client and some key members of the team – clinical manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strained relationship with superiors, including the minister</li> </ul>

Source: Codes generated inductively from primary data

Although there are numerous similarities across all cases, there are differences in terms of their impact on the individual executives.

The *economic factors* impacted mainly the executives from the public finance sector – Simon and Janine. However, while Simon was affected directly as a budget policy analyst, Janine’s disorienting dilemma was more impacted by her preoccupation with the shock of not getting a job that she thought she was qualified for. The health sector clients – Rob and Mabel – were less directly affected by the economic situation.

In the same manner, the *socio-political factors* impacted everyone in the sample. The notable differences were the types of socio-political factors. For the public-finance sector executives, the political factors were in the form of political interference in the budget policy and recruitment processes, whereas the health sector executives were both affected by the Life Esidimeni tragedy. Rob had the additional context issue of having to deal with negative social media posts by the community serviced by the hospital as well as the hospital board feedback.

The *organisational climate factors* were similar for the finance sector executives, as they both had to deal with an unstable organisational climate stemming from the resignation of some of the key personnel. This was followed by low staff morale, which these executives had to deal with daily. The health sector executives were impacted

by different factors at an organisational level. For Rob, the main challenge he faced was team dynamics, while Mabel was mainly affected by an organisational climate characterised by a culture of silence and non-confrontation of people in authority.

The fourth contextual factor was *interpersonal tension and conflict*. Janine and Mabel had similar challenges in that their interpersonal issues had to do with the strenuous relationship between themselves and their immediate superiors, and a perceived lack of support from them, even though the actual issues generating the conflict were different. However, Rob's interpersonal issues were with his subordinates. Simon did not experience any direct interpersonal conflict with a specific person.

The findings indicate that there were multiple contextual factors that resulted in a disorienting dilemma for the executives. These factors were: external factors, economic and socio-political factors, internal factors, organisational factors, and interpersonal factors. Based on the descriptions above, none of the coachees were affected by one factor alone; they all had to deal with a combination of contextual factors at any point in time. The complexity of these factors was more pronounced since they had no control over the external factors.

What compounded the dilemmas was that, while political factors would be regarded as external in an average or normal corporate sector; in the public sector, these were an integral part of the organisational operations and were central to the organisational turbulence. The data reveals that socio-political factors seemed to permeate and almost supersede all other factors in terms of the gravity of their impact.

There were various implications of this reality. Firstly, the public-sector executives had to manage multiple factors, including managing politics and politicians; ensuring that the teams and/or organisations they manage remain stable in the mist of turbulence; and managing the impact, responses and reaction of the communities or stakeholders they serve.

Secondly, the data indicates that there was a spillover effect stemming from the external factors that directly influenced internal organisational factors, which then impacted on the teams, groups and individual executives. For example, the political instability in the country led to the economic downturn. The economic situation put pressure on politicians as they could not guarantee funding of development

programmes, and they started interfering in public administration issues that they were not meant to get involved in, at least not to the extent that they did.

This presented extreme challenges to senior officials and impacted negatively on the organisation as a whole. The extreme pressure felt by senior executive officials had a spillover on the people they worked with. In all of the cases, Simon, Janine, Rob, and Mabel felt the impact of socio-political influence in their work on a day-to-day basis. In turn, they either had or developed conflicting relations with their superiors, colleagues or subordinates as a result of the decisions they or their superiors made in response to socio-political pressures.

The complexity of the spillover effects was that the executives had no control on the external contextual factors that impacted them. The compounding effects of these spillovers generated a desire in the executives to seek help, making them more receptive to the coaching engagement. Therefore, the coaching sessions assisted them to navigate through these contextual factors and find a way of gaining control of their personal power to deal with the situation more effectively.

#### *Comparison with literature*

While these findings are consistent with transformative learning literature proposing that a disorienting dilemma is context-driven (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Hoggan et al., 2017; Mälkki, 2010; Mälkki & Green, 2014; Shor et al., 2017), transformative learning literature seems to have explained the influence or impact of context as a singular effect, rather than looking at the multiplicity of contextual factors. Initially, things like death, divorce and loss of employment were identified as events that cause a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1990). Later, other scholars added social relations (Clark & Wilson, 1991), relational conflict (Green & Mälkki, 2014), learning programmes (Christie et al., 2015), and socio-cultural differences (Shor et al., 2017).

These studies have not highlighted, at least not explicitly, the interconnectedness of social or relational factors and how these combine to produce a disorienting dilemma amongst individuals. In addition, these studies were conducted in social and educational contexts and not in organisations per se. However, realist evaluation literature does acknowledge the multifaceted nature of context, which includes a wide variety of factors, such as socio-political, organisational, and interpersonal aspects (Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007; Pawson, 2013).

The literature on executive coaching is still in its infancy in relation to studies that have researched the role and impact of context in the coaching process (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Maltbia et al., 2014). Many scholars have indicated that the role of context has been undervalued in organisational behaviour research, including executive coaching, yet it plays a major role in determining the success or failure of an executive coaching intervention (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Bozer & Delegach, 2019; Fatien Diochon & Nizet, 2019; Fatien Diochon et al., 2019; Johns, 2016). They argue that context needs to be “systematically” and “mindfully” incorporated in research as it has the ability to change causal relationships, affect the results and even threaten the validity of the study (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Fatien Diochon & Nizet, 2019; Johns, 2018). Moreover, it is not often easy to control context, as it is “omnipresent”; thus, researchers and coaches need to understand the role it plays and work with it (Johns, 2018; Shoukry & Cox, 2018). Moreover, power dynamics in organisations are a critical contextual factor (Fatien Diochon & Nizet, 2019).

The study confirms the literature in organisation behaviour and executive coaching that indicates that context plays a major role in determining and/or shaping not only the outcomes, but the process of the intervention. In this case, the contextual factors played a major role in triggering disorienting dilemmas amongst the executives. This facilitated readiness of these executives to engage in critical reflection and thus readiness for transformative learning. The coaches also worked with the context – in every coaching session, they worked with what the coachees presented to them as influenced by the context. In working effectively with the context, it ensured that the desired outcomes were achieved.

Reflecting on executive coaching in the public sector as a specific context, while there is an increasing appetite for coaching in public-sector organisations due to growing pressure on government to deliver value for money, research on executive coaching in public-sector organisations is also still in a nascent phase (Edwards, Snowden, & Halsall, 2016, 2017). Despite its infancy, the limited research that has been conducted on public service indicates that coaching in the public sector does improve leadership performance (Seidle, Fernandez, & Perry, 2016), psychological empowerment and job satisfaction amongst employees (Edwards et al., 2016, 2017). This literature is consistent with the findings of this study in relation to executive coaching playing a role in assisting clients in gaining personal power. Hence, the study contributes to empirical literature on executive coaching in the public sector.

### **5.2.2. Conclusion on context and the mechanism of disorienting dilemma**

The section on context found that there are similarities in the factors that impacted the different executives, namely economic, socio-political, organisational climate, and interpersonal relations factors. While there were similarities, these factors impacted differently on the executives, depending on their internal organisational factors.

The conclusions around the role of context in a client's experience of a disorienting dilemma in executive coaching are, firstly, that the study confirms the literature that argues that a disorienting dilemma is context-driven and contributes to client readiness. It can be argued that although the executives who participated in this study came into the coaching programme voluntarily, they felt that they needed the support the coaching provided, given their turbulent work conditions.

Secondly, the study found that there are multiple contextual factors that act together to impact an individual's experience of a disorienting dilemma. Thirdly, the multiplicities of factors create a spillover effect from external factors that impact internal organisational factors and contribute to the executive client's experience of a disorienting dilemma. This study's findings differ from most transformative learning literature, which often addresses context in a singular manner; but support realistic evaluation literature, which recognises the multiplicity of contextual factors that can impact programme implementation.

Finally, public-sector executives are faced with the challenge of participating in multiple roles, including managing politics and power dynamics, the organisation as well as the communities they serve. Therefore, the findings of this study confirm the limited literature in public-sector coaching, that coaching can be an appropriate learning and development strategy that helps executives gain social capital and psychological empowerment so they can navigate their context more effectively.

### **5.3. Coach mechanisms**

Pawson and Tilley (1997) described mechanisms as the elements in a programme or intervention that bring about any positive or negative effects or change. These elements can work as individual components or a set or series of them and/or in stages, and explain the logic of why and how a change occurs (Dalkin et al., 2015; Jagosh et al., 2015; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Mechanisms differ from a process, as



process is a developmental sequence of events describing how things change over time (Van de Ven, 1992). Therefore, a process explains the emergent change that comes as a result of a *predetermined set of conditions* to achieve a particular result over a period of time (Pettigrew, 1997; Van de Ven, 1992). Consequently, mechanisms are the predetermined set of conditions required in a process to achieve particular results

This section presents themes that emerge from the comparison of coach mechanisms across the four sample cases. These are that:

- i. coach competencies are an aggregate of specific observable coach behaviours;
- ii. creating a conducive environment is a foundation for a successful coaching conversation;
- iii. active listening is a key mechanism for self-awareness;
- iv. reflective questioning is a tipping point for transformation; and
- v. holding the client accountable reinforces learning.

These themes are described in detail in the sub-sections below.

### **5.3.1. Theme two: Coach competencies are an aggregate of specific observable coach behaviours**

Table 5.2. provides a consolidated list of the coaching behaviours and techniques demonstrated by the coaches throughout the coaching sessions. The data shows that all of the coaches showed a similar skill set with regard to rapport building, attentive listening and giving feedback, questioning, and holding the client accountable. The similarities could be attributed to the common approaches that they shared. The differences in their backgrounds did not seem to yield major differences in coach behaviour or technique. However, there were some nuances in the manner in which certain skills or techniques around active listening, giving feedback and questioning were demonstrated between the more experienced (Mary and Kate) and the less experienced (Sarah and Eva) coaches. See 5.3.2.2 and 5.3.2.3 for these peculiarities.

**Table 5.2:** A cross-case comparison of observed coach behaviours

Second-order categories	First-order codes	Mary	Kate	Sarah	Eva
<b>Rapport building</b>	Ensures confidentiality	X	X	X	X
	Creates a safe space	X	X	X	X
	Builds a trusting relationship	X	X	X	X

<b>Second-order categories</b>	<b>First-order codes</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>Kate</b>	<b>Sarah</b>	<b>Eva</b>
	Respects the client	X	X	X	X
	Is fully present	X	X	X	X
	Matches gestures/body language	X	X	X	X
	Demonstrates encouragement	X	X	X	X
	Is flexible and accommodates the client's needs	X	X	X	X
	Client readiness, commitment and motivation	X	X	X	X
<b>Active listening and giving feedback</b>	Invites awareness	X	X	X	X
	Tracks the client's use of language	X	X	X	X
	Tracks and comments on the client's non-verbal gestures	X	X	X	X
	Tracks the client's conversation and creates links during and in between sessions	X	X	X	X
	Acknowledges the client's feelings and emotions	X	X	X	X
	Summarises key aspects of the conversation	X	X	X	X
	Gives feedback using the client's language	X	X	X	X
	Listens without being judgemental of the client	X	X	X	X
	Validates and affirms the client's values, intentions, purpose, skills and other positive behaviours	X	X	X	X
	Manages extreme emotional outburst		X		
<b>Information giving</b>	Shares information with the client	X		X	X
	Makes suggestions and gives advice			X	X
<b>Simple and open questions</b>	Asks outcome-related/focused questions	X	X	X	X
	Asks clarity questions	X	X	X	X
	Encourages the client to explore options	X	X	X	X
	Asks closed questions	X	X	X	X
	Asks probing questions	X	X	X	X
	Asks action/application-related questions	X	X	X	X
<b>Reflective questions</b>	Asks meaning questions	X	X	X	X
	Asks intention/purpose-related questions	X	X	X	X
	Asks decision-related questions	X	X	X	X
	Asks permission-related questions		X	X	X
	Challenges assumptions, generalisations and distortions	X	X	X	X
	Challenges beliefs and values	X	X	X	X
	Frames the client to focus on outcome	X	X	X	X
	Reframes in line with outcome	X	X	X	X

Second-order categories	First-order codes	Mary	Kate	Sarah	Eva
	Manages the client's mind and emotional states by shifting them to second/observer position to induce a different state		X		
	Uses metaphors to engage the client		X		
<b><i>Holding the client accountable</i></b>	Engages the client in practical experience during the session		X		
	Assigns the client task(s) at the end of a session	X	X	X	X
	Co-creates task with the client	X	X	X	X
	Follows up on task(s) given	X	X	X	X

Source: Video footage and transcripts

Three coaches shared some information and gave advice to their clients when they thought it necessary. However, based on data from the within-case analysis, Eva and Sarah did more of this – almost in every coaching session – while Mary only did it once, where she went into what she called “a training state” on personal power. Kate did not offer advice or information to the client, which seems to be another distinguishing factor between the less experienced and more experienced coaches. It could be argued that the less experienced coaches were tempted to give advice and information when they felt that the client needed it as their skill level was less refined, while the more experienced coaches were more confident in the clients’ ability to generate their own solutions.

Kate displayed additional skills that none of the coaches demonstrated. These included engaging the client in second position to manage extreme emotional outburst, the use of metaphors, and engaging the client in a practical experience in the coaching session. This difference could be attributed to her experience and training as a clinical psychologist and to the opportunity she had, given that her client, Janine, experienced extreme emotional outbursts more than the other clients.

### *Comparison with literature*

The literature on coaching competencies is scanty (Blumberg, 2014, Blumberg et al., 2016; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Maltbia, et al., 2014). The debates around this issue are that executive coaching as a profession has not yet defined competencies in the strictest sense of what a competency is (Blumberg, 2014; Blumberg et al, 2016; Maltbia, et al., 2014). Boyatzis (2007, p. 5) defined a competency, capability or ability as “a set of related but different sets of behavior organized around an underlying construct, which we call the ‘intent’”. The key to this definition is the “action”, which denotes a set of alternative behaviours and the “intention” of the outcome of the behaviour.

Maltbia et al. (2014) found that some of the ICF competencies do not meet the standards of what a competency should be. In their review of empirical and published research-based articles, they reviewed ICF’s 10 core coaching competencies and generated the six following executive core coaching competencies: social competence (SQ), emotional competence (EQ), listening, questioning, framing and reframing, and contributing. While they provide a set of definitions of these competencies, they do not detail measurable sub-skills that make them up.

Extant literature on executive coaching outlines coach factors (not necessarily presented as competencies) that contribute to the effectiveness of coaching, and these include: the coach’s ability to *build a trusting relationship*, *communication skills* that comprise of *active listening*, *asking questions* and *giving useful feedback*, *understanding and managing emotions*, ability to *facilitate a conversation* and *challenging the client* to achieve goals as well as the *coach’s experience and competence* in executive coaching and business (Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Campone, 2015; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Passmore & Theeboom, 2016 Rekalde et al., 2015). Moreover, some scholars have added the *personal attributes* required by the coach to ensure effectiveness of coaching, including *commitment to the client*, *authenticity*, *integrity*, *credibility*, *confidentiality* and *being non-judgemental* (Blackman et al., 2016; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Rekalde et al., 2015).

However, in recent meta-analytic studies by Blackman et al. (2016), Bozer and Jones (2018), and Rekalde et al. (2015), there is still confusion between coach factors, coach competencies and the coaching process. For example, Bozer and Jones (2018) and Blackman et al. (2016) regarded giving feedback as a coach factor, while Rekalde et al. (2015) regarded feedback and challenges as a coaching process.

In addition, in his review of research on coaching competencies, Blumberg (2014) argued that most of the lists generated as coaching competencies so far have not been drawn from credible empirical research. Some coaching competencies, such as rapport building and listening and questioning, have been drawn from psychological counselling and therapy and have been studied in that context (Gremier & Gwinner, 2008; Leach, 2005; Vallano & Compo, 2011). Executive coaching scholars argue that more empirical research should be conducted to contribute to the building of these competencies, specifically for coaching (Blumberg, 2014; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Maltbia et al., 2014).

This study has identified core skills as well as sub-skills or different but related coach behaviours that are both observable and measurable. By breaking these skills down to measurable components, it becomes possible for coaches to integrate them into their practice deliberately. Therefore, this study extends literature on the development of coach competencies (Blumberg, 2014; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Maltbia et al., 2014; Rekalde et al., 2015).

### **5.3.2. *Theme three: Creating a conducive environment is the foundation of a successful coaching conversation***

The sample clients in this study operated under extreme socio-political and organisational turbulence, as described in section 5.2. This meant that the clients came into the coaching session with disorientation and often in a state of distress and frustration. The emotional intensity contributed to the readiness of the clients to be coached. Consequently, it was critical that the coaching environment was a place in which they could feel safe and comfortable to explore their thoughts and feelings to resolve the dilemmas they were facing.

The data in this study, as indicated in Table 5.3, shows that all clients confirmed that the coaches managed to create a safe space and ensure confidentiality, the clients felt respected by the coaches and trusted the coach's competence, and the clients felt that the coaches were present for them. This presence was also seen by the researcher from the video in which the coaches were observed matching and pacing client gestures and body language, as well as demonstrating encouraging behaviour, such as head nods, "mm" exclamations, and "okays".

Furthermore, all of the coaches indicated how they needed to be flexible to accommodate the clients' needs. Sometimes, this included being flexible on issues like rescheduling sessions and/or addressing the clients' needs in the moment without sticking to a preset agenda that might have been planned for in the previous session.

Moreover, all of the coaches indicated that client readiness played a crucial part in building rapport and commitment to the coaching programme over the six-month period.

#### *Comparison with literature*

Rapport building in coaching indicates that this is a fundamental element that reduces the differences between two parties and allows for a trusting relationship to emerge. Achieving this creates an open and safe environment that is conducive for learning (Bennett & Bush, 2011; Boyce et al., 2004; Gan & Chong, 2015; Sonesh et al., 2015; Van Oosten & Kram, 2014).

The findings of the study confirm that the techniques through which rapport was built included verbal and non-verbal behaviour (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008). According to Leach (2005) and Gremler and Gwinner (2008), non-verbal behaviour includes attentive behaviour, such as eye contact, open posture and "back-channel" responses like nodding and "mm" exclamations. It also includes imitative behaviour, such as matching the client's body posture and gestures, facial expressions and breathing patterns (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Leach, 2005). These behaviours were observed in all four cases.

Verbal rapport building behaviour includes ensuring confidentiality (Blackman et al., 2016; Graßmann et al., 2019; Grant & O'Connor, 2019; Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Leach, 2005; Rekalde et al., 2015). Other factors that contributed to a conducive environment were the ability to build a relationship of trust, respect for the client, and flexibility in accommodating the client's needs (Blackman et al., 2016; Graßmann et al., 2019; Grant & O'Connor, 2019; Rekalde et al., 2015).

The study confirms that other additional coachee factors contributed to client readiness and a successful coaching engagement (Blackman et al., 2016; Graßmann et al., 2019; McKenna & Davis, 2009; Rekalde et al., 2015; Smith & Brummel, 2013). The core ingredients that were evident were active involvement of the executives in the coaching process and their willingness to stick to the programme to the end; their

willingness and motivation to invest time and energy into the process; their willingness to learn by implementing tasks that were given to them from each session; and their ability to take responsibility for transferring what they have learnt into action (Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Bozer et al., 2015; Graßmann et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2016; Rekalde et al., 2015).

### **5.3.3. Theme four: Active listening is a key mechanism for self-awareness**

While the creation of an environment that is conducive serves as a foundation for successful and effective coaching conversations, active listening seemed to facilitate various forms of self-awareness amongst the clients. Within this category, four prevalent sub-skills were identified: inviting or raising awareness, giving feedback, tracking verbal (use of language) and non-verbal gestures, and acknowledging and managing emotions. Table 5.3 lists a synthesis of these coach behaviours, with a few examples of how this was demonstrated by the coaches throughout the three coaching sessions that were observed.

**Table 5.3:** A synthesis list of coaches' active listening behaviours

<b>Sub-skills Second-order codes</b>	<b>Coach behaviour/action First-order codes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Inviting/raising awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating an awareness of the client's behaviour, their thinking patterns, frames of mind and/or emotions or feelings</li> </ul>	<p>Sarah: "So, you reflected on how challenging your leadership behaviour has been; what are you becoming aware of in that?"</p> <p>Mary: "So, I am hearing that you have your mind made up that if this all happens you will leave the organisation?"</p> <p>Eva: "So, you are aware that something needs to shift?"</p> <p>Kate: "Is this really how you feel or are you doing the best to deal with the situation?"</p>
Giving feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarising the conversation or aspects of it and feeding back to client</li> <li>• Validating or affirming the client</li> </ul>	<p>Mary: "So, I am hearing that you have your mind made up, that if this all happens you will leave the organisation?"</p>

<b>Sub-skills Second-order codes</b>	<b>Coach behaviour/action First-order codes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
		<p>Kate: "It sounds like you just made a big decision there around how you show up at work, what you bring to the work environment"</p> <p>Kate: "Do you hear what you offer to them; can you hear what this says about you? There is something they get from you that they don't get from others"</p>
Tracking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tracking language usage</li> <li>• Tracking non-verbal gestures</li> <li>• Tracking content of the conversation and creating linkages</li> </ul>	<p>Mary "I noticed how you use the word 'but' every time you say something positive"</p> <p>Sarah: "I can see in the expression of your eyes..."</p> <p>Eva: "I can see that you are so much calmer and relaxed"</p> <p>Kate: "It's interesting that you use the word stuck... was wondering if you are aware, we have had this conversation in the last session"</p>
Managing emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledging feelings and emotions</li> <li>• Raising awareness and giving feedback or commenting on emotions that are observed</li> <li>• Managing extreme emotions – using second position</li> </ul>	<p>Eva: "This is one of the most horrible things to happen to anyone, I can understand how you feel"</p> <p>Kate: "But if you were to grant yourself some compassion, if you were to step out of your seat, and I actually want to invite you to do that, I'm going to give you another chair right, I need you to sit here, and imagine that Janine is sitting here right, with all that you carrying, she's hurt, she's pissed off, she's angry with herself, yet on top of that she's telling herself you should have seen that, what did you think ... – so looking at her, knowing all of her that she's going through, and you were to show her compassion, what would you offer her?"</p>

Looking at the core skills and sub-skills in the examples above, the interconnectedness of the skills is apparent. For example, in raising awareness, the coach would also be giving feedback ("So, you reflected on how challenging your leadership behaviour has been; what are you becoming aware of in that?"). It also suggests that the coach is tracking the conversation. However, giving feedback also entailed summarising the conversation or parts of it, acknowledging feelings and emotions as well as validating and/or affirming the client. Furthermore, tracking involved tracing specific behaviours



of a client, such as use of words or language, especially limiting language (“you use the word ‘but’ every time you say something positive”) or semantically loaded words (using the word “stuck” in Janine’s case).

All coaches dealt with emotions to the extent of acknowledging and giving feedback on observed emotions. However, not all of them engaged directly with the emotions as they occurred. Kate demonstrated advanced skills of engaging and managing extreme emotional outbursts by shifting the client to the second position where she was able to be in an observer role, helping her minimise emotions.

All of these sub-skills under active listening contributed to raising self-awareness of the clients’ behaviour, their thinking patterns, their frames of mind and their emotions. Based on this awareness, the next phase of learning could occur.

#### *Comparison with literature*

Executive coaching and therapy/counselling literature argue that supporting clients involves providing a space for the clients to relate their experiences by listening, understanding and encouraging them (De Haan et al., 2011; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Rekalde et al., 2015; Woodcock, 2010). The literature identifies two major components: active listening and giving feedback.

Giving feedback is defined more clearly as listening and processing the words that are being heard by “remembering” the message as expressed; as well as “interpreting”, “evaluating”, and “making meaning” from what the client has expressed; and responding to the client both verbally and non-verbally (Fischer-Lokou et al., 2016; Manzano et al., 2015).

Drollinger et al. (2006) and Manzano et al. (2015) described active listening as being characterised by sensing or hearing. This includes listening to the actual words that the client utters by reformulating or paraphrasing what the listener understands, repeating the exact words that the client has used (Fischer-Lokou et al., 2016), as well as observing non-verbal gestures and emotions that come with the verbal language (Drollinger et al., 2006; Fischer-Lokou et al., 2016; Maltbia et al., 2014; Manzano et al., 2015). The description here fits with the descriptions for that data on summarising; tracking use of language and non-verbal gestures; and acknowledging emotions.

Active listening enables the coach to pick up frames of mind that emerge for the client through the conversation. In these frames, the client's beliefs, values and assumptions are expressed (Woodcock, 2010). In listening carefully to these values, the coach is able to give the client feedback to raise self-awareness (Cremona, 2010; Woodcock, 2010).

Concerning managing emotions, executive coaching literature indicates that dealing with emotions depends on the coach's attitude and premise about them (Bachkirova & Cox, 2007; Cox, 2015; Cremona, 2010). These studies found that coaches will deal with emotions based on whether they see these as obstructions to rationality, as support to the reasoning process or as part of the cognitive process. However, in the study by Cremona (2010), it was found that coaches seemed to value the role of emotions as a source of authentic information. Despite this, coaches' ability to deal with emotions would still be determined by their notion about them. Based on these notions, some coaches would encourage the client to emote, while others might attempt to minimise or not deal with emotions when they occur them in a coaching session (Bachkirova & Cox, 2007; Cox, 2015; Cremona, 2010).

This study did not collect data on coaches' attitudes in dealing with emotions, and thus cannot speculate what drove their engagement or non-engagement regarding emotions. However, it can be extrapolated from the findings that all of the coaches were faced with client emotions at different points of the coaching engagement, and that the less experienced coaches were more likely to shy away from engaging with the emotions explicitly. The findings suggest that: (a) the ability to deal with emotions is a critical competence for coaches seeking transformational learning as an outcome; and (b) coach training does not always adequately equip coaches to deal with extreme emotions. Therefore, coaches who cannot deal with emotions should not be placed in contexts that are highly turbulent and likely to produce disorienting dilemmas.

#### ***5.3.4. Theme five: Reflective questioning is a tipping point for transformation***

The sections above indicated that creating a conducive environment provides the basis for an effective coaching conversation and that active listening gives rise to self-awareness. The cross-case analysis shows that reflective questioning facilitates critical reflection. The data, as depicted under Tables 5.2 and 5.3, divided questioning

into two types – simple and reflective. Tables 5.4 and 5.5) detail the sub-questions in each category.

### **Simple questions**

Simple questions are those that answer the what, when, where and how. They would include both open-ended and closed questions.

**Table 5.4:** *Examples of simple questions displayed by coaches*

Type of questions: simple questions (first-order codes)	Mary	Kate	Sarah	Eva
1. Outcome-related questions	<p>“What is it that you would like to work on today?”</p> <p>“What would be the most impactful thing for us to co-create today?”</p>	<p>“What are we working on today?”</p>	<p>“What do you want to get out of today’s session? What would be the most useful thing to talk about today?”</p>	<p>“What do you want us to talk about today?”</p> <p>“What is the most important thing that you want to focus in this session?”</p>
2. Clarity and probing questions	<p>“So, that is the drama happening in the organisation, what do you want to get for yourself in this session?”</p>	<p>“Okay so what are the boxes we are ticking”</p> <p>“So, what made you taken aback? What was the impact that it had on you?”</p> <p>“So, for example, what are you going to do about not having any feedback from your boss about what has transpired, where things are?”</p>	<p>“I don’t understand that, can you clarify?”</p> <p>“How does this contribute to a cohesive team?”</p>	<p>“When you say you were not able to do that what do you mean by that?”</p> <p>“Why do you think you can’t confront it?”</p>
3. Action-related questions	<p>“How would you be able to find out whether it is good enough ... to take action?”</p>	<p>“So how are you applying that insight to the rest of your life then, knowing that</p>	<p>“How will you know that you have achieved this goal, what will you see, feel, hear?”</p>	<p>“So, what is stopping you from breaking the culture of silence?”</p>

Type of questions: simple questions (first-order codes)	Mary	Kate	Sarah	Eva
	“How would you measure significance?”	about yourself, that you...?”  ‘So, the way you bring it back to yourself is ask yourself, what is it that’s within your control, that you can do to help you move on from that?’		
4. Resource questions	“What internal state of mind do you need, what resources would you need to be able to do this thinking and then eventually writing ... does that ...?”  “What do you need in place for you to feel that you can do it for yourself?”	“What resources would you need to go on leave?”  “What resource do you need to give Janine?”		“What would you need to get the workshop to happen?”

*Outcome-related questions:* These questions seek to help the client set coaching outcomes to focus the client. They also help refocus the client on an outcome that has already been set.

*Clarity questions:* These are questions that seek to gain clarity about events and concepts. They also look to get more information from the client about the content of the discussion.

*Probing questions:* They explore or enquire further to get a deeper understanding of issues. These questions often dig deeper on one issue to get to the core of the matter being discussed.

*Action-related questions:* These questions direct the client to take action. They ensure that the client has a specific task or action plan to be executed in between coaching sessions.

*Resource-related questions:* These are questions that determine if the client has material and non-material resources to perform a task. They basically gauge the client’s ability to implement the task they are committing themselves to.

**Reflective questions**

These are high-order questions that facilitate critical reflection at a meaning level (Romme & Van Seggelen-Damen, 2015). They ask questions about the meaning, intention, purpose and importance, and challenge frames of mind (values, assumptions, beliefs, generalisations and cognitive distortions) (Romme & Van Seggelen-Damen, 2015). These questions seek to frame and reframe the client’s point of view, and ask permission and decision questions. The table below illustrates the types of reflective questions that the coaches exhibited throughout the coaching sessions. The table is followed by a brief description of what each category of questions seeks to achieve based on the data from the four cases.

**Table 5.5:** Examples of reflective questions displayed by coaches

Type of questions complex/reflective questions	Mary	Kate	Sarah	Eva
1. Meaning questions	<p>“What does it mean for you if people do that?”</p> <p>“What would it mean to you to be significant?”</p>	<p>“What meaning do you attach to the whole experience?”</p> <p>“What does all of this to do Janine?”</p>	<p>“What does patient experience and safety mean to your team?”</p> <p>“What meaning are you making of the defined leadership?”</p>	<p>“What does that mean to you?”</p>
2. Questions of intention/purpose and importance	<p>“What is your highest intention for your work?”</p> <p>“If you had a magic wand, what</p>	<p>“Imagine it’s a painting – you can put any colours you want”</p> <p>“What is the higher voice that possibly</p>	<p>“How important is achieving team cohesion for you?”</p>	<p>“How important is it for you that you continue in your area of interest?”</p>

Type of questions complex/reflective questions	Mary	Kate	Sarah	Eva
	would your ideal future look like?"	needs to be amplified?"		
3. Reflective questions – asking about or challenging frames (beliefs, assumptions, values, generalisation and distortions)	<p>"I hear you say all the time, so it is every single day that it happens?"</p> <p>"What's stopping you from making the decision?"</p>	<p>"Is it what is going on at the moment or just your thinking about it?"</p> <p>"Is it a must that it's done that way?"</p>	<p>"What is the basis of your belief?"</p> <p>"How do you know she is resisting? How do you know you are making the right meaning?"</p>	<p>"What is your belief about your staff members?"</p> <p>"Somewhere you said you all have an understanding – how do you know you all have the same understanding?"</p>
4. Framing and reframing	<p>"Okay, so this is all the stuff, the drama in a way it's happening. So, what's happening for you in this, what is it you would like to work on today? Because that's work it has to be done, but for you?"</p>	<p>"What did you make of that thought? How else can we look at this situation?"</p> <p>"So, think about those boundaries for yourself, which boundaries do you need for yourself, and how are you looking after yourself holistically?"</p>	<p>"How can you frame this differently, how can you go about making peace with this?"</p>	<p>"Is there any other way you could think differently about the situation?"</p>
5. Permission questions		"Do you have permission to have your own voice?"	"Do you have permission to feel your emotions?"	
6. Decision questions	"What would you need to be able to make the decision?"	"What decision do you want to make around this situation?"	"What decision do you want to make about that?"	

*Meaning questions:* With these questions, the coaches seek to assist the clients to reflect on the meaning they have given to situations, events and/or concepts. This is to unpack values, beliefs and assumptions that the clients hold that could be blocking their transformation.

Questions that ask about *intention/purpose and/or importance* seek to answer why an individual does or would want to do something. Based on the cases data, this was intended to create a motivation for the client or move them out of a distressful situation by helping them think about the future or the bigger picture.

*Reflective questions:* These types of questions ask about and/or challenge the individual's values, beliefs, assumptions generalisations and distortions with the intention of helping clients identify limitations that could be preventing them from realising their goal. These questions also seek to assist the clients in engaging in rational dialogue so they can evaluate whether they would benefit from shifting their frame of mind.

*Framing:* A reflective conversation has the potential of making a client reflect on several issues simultaneously. Sometimes, this can derail the client from focusing on what matters at a point in time. The coaches used *framing* to set boundaries so that the conversation with the client could remain focused on the outcome or what was important in relation to the goal they had set out to achieve. All of the coaches were able to demonstrate this skill as indicated in Table 5.5.

*Reframing* is the process of helping clients think differently or assume a different point of view about an issue or situation to help them move forward. This process was useful in liberating the clients whenever they got stuck on a particular meaning – be it a thought process, assumption, value, or belief.

*Decision questions:* It was apparent in the conversation that the coaches assisted clients to make a specific decision(s) before they took action. This assisted the clients by clarifying the actions they needed to take to achieve their goals.

#### *Comparison with literature*

Executive coaching literature talks about questioning as a mechanism to facilitate reflection and learning (De Haan et al., 2011; Griffiths, 2015; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Maltabia et al., 2014). However, it does not distinguish between the types of questioning and their role in facilitating critical reflection. The ICF competency in question is referred to as “powerful questioning”, which is defined as “asking questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client” (ICF, n.d.).

In this definition, there is no specification of which questions those would be. In their definition of executive coaching competencies, Maltbia et al. (2014) argued that questioning needs to include both open-ended and closed questions and suggested a variety of levels of questioning using Bloom's taxonomy. These are questions that help the client to remember, understand, apply, analyse, evaluate and create new information. However, in the field of education and management education, in particular, the debates around reflective questioning are getting traction. Romme and Van Seggelen-Damen (2015) argued that "at the heart of reflection is reflective questioning", which is defined as "raising tentative non-rhetorical questions" and involves a "cognitive act of sense-making". These types of questions are often referred to as critical questioning in transformative learning literature (Cranton, 2016).

According to Romme and Van Seggelen-Damen (2015), non-rhetorical questions are those that assist in exploring individuals' thinking and expand their knowledge base. This type of questioning also helps to understand a person's deeper frame of mind. Hence, reflective questions enable a "deconstruction" and/or "reconstruction" of meaning, as they can also infuse "doubt" in an individual, which can give rise to exploring an individual's values, beliefs and assumptions (Giapponi & Ritter, 2015; Romme & Van Seggelen-Damen, 2015). This meets the criteria for the critical reflection process required for transformative learning.

The types of questions asked, specifically those listed under Table 5.5, support the literature on reflective or critical questioning as they facilitated critical reflection and rational dialogue amongst the executive clients. In addition, the cross-case analysis suggests sub-sets of these questions that would be easy to observe in a coaching session as well as to use to train coaches.

### **5.3.5. Theme six: Holding the client accountable reinforces learning**

Table 5.6 presents first-order codes generated from data analysis on holding the client accountable and illustrates some examples of how the coaches demonstrated this to ensure learning. The table also shows how the clients took responsibility and committed to their learning.



**Table 5.6: Examples of coaches holding the client accountable**

<b>First-order codes</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>Kate</b>	<b>Sarah</b>	<b>Eva</b>
<b>Coach assigning task to client</b>	Mary: "So okay, so for next time ... what is it that you need to do to take hold of your future of where you're going?"	Kate: "I would like you to do a vision board"	Sarah: "So, what's one thing that you can shift tomorrow so that you can create this compounding effect in people's ability?"	Eva: "Do you think that that would help because I've got a feeling you've got two things ... that stuff and you feel stuck in the middle, and that's the reality ... of the position you're in, is just how do you manage it better?"
<b>Coach ensuring accountability</b>	Mary: "Have you decided to do it? You said I think, so I want to check if you have decided to do it?" Simon: "Yes, ya, I will do it"	Kate: "There's still that fear that 'what if', so you need to ... what are you going to do, an exit plan, a detailed plan?"	Sarah: "So, is that something you will give a shot?" Rob: "Ya because then I think if we achieve that we can achieve a lot..."	Eva: "Exactly ... so when is going to be your next meeting, how quickly do you want to ... how much is the shoe actually pressing you?"
<b>Co-creating tasks for client</b>	Mary: "Okay so let's set up the tasks of what you can do, have you got it there. So, is within this key connection of being a connector or an engagement man, or an engager, your unique offering, okay...?"	Kate: "So, if you can use a metaphor from your world that you know very well, this is a high stakes preparation right...? What is it similar to? Is it similar to going to parliament, is it similar to...?"	Sarah: "If I could just interrupt you quickly, the core creation thing that you want to try; is there any particular space in which you want to try it or is it just a general thing that you want to do?"	Eva: "So, what do you think will work for you because it sounds like it maybe that you don't have a meeting at all this year?"
<b>Coach engages client in practical experience in a session</b>		Kate: "So, let's take back a few steps, we will get there, we will get to what next, what you can look at. I am inviting you to stay here a little bit, and deal with what's going on for you really and name it; because once we've acknowledged it, you can then look at the practical		

First-order codes	Mary	Kate	Sarah	Eva
		<p>steps. So let's use that part of your chair ...</p> <p>I want to ask you the same thing I asked you when I walked you out of that chair, so knowing all of this about imaginary Janine ... she is hurting, she's angry, she's blaming herself, what does she need now?"</p>		
<p><b>Client committing to action/taking responsibility for tasks</b></p>	<p>Simon: "Now I think I need to do a ... I think I need to do it, as I said earlier, I'm getting to the point where I think I need to, I need to explore this"</p>	<p>Janine: "I was quite taken aback by the images in the magazines ... So the best thing I could use was – I used a newspaper..."</p> <p>Janine: "...so the one thing that I'm definitely going to do is work on putting down all the things that I need for me to make an exit, and all the possibilities..."</p>	<p>Rob: "I think you can set a team objective at the right moment to say next year we've gone through, from the beginning of the year this is what we have done, what is it that you want to do as a team collectively ... and that we can achieve and you can begin to say this is how we going to rate ourselves"</p>	<p>Mabel: No definitely yes, I want to move but yes, but the current situation must change ... I've made that decision and I'm doing whatever to make that happen ... am dedicated to doing the workshop."</p>
<p><b>Coach holding the client accountable for task agreed upon</b></p>	<p>Mary: "Okay, alright. So you had a bit of tasking, I don't know if you've had time to do anything?"</p> <p>Simon: "I wrote down some ideas and stuff. But what I was supposed to do was to start putting together some ... a workshop"</p>	<p>Kate: "How did the vision board exercise go?"</p>	<p>Sarah: "How's it been since the last session?"</p>	<p>Eva: "Did you have an opportunity at all to engage with your line manager?"</p>

<b>First-order codes</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>Kate</b>	<b>Sarah</b>	<b>Eva</b>
<b>Accountability through feedback</b>	Mary: "So part of what I'm ... what excited me about your talk at in the private sector is that, that was already doing some networking outside of the public sector"	Kate: "You see there's lots to think about. What are you taking from today's session?"	Sarah: "It's also very important to also remember Rob, that we all get the opportunity to learn, and mistakes are very often our best teachers. And when you share something that's gone wrong with someone, it's a learning moment, it really is a learning opportunity, you getting to know how you frame it"	Eva: "You've been very diligent writing down your learnings and following through"
<b>Application of learning</b>	Simon "...I want to do some of the things we spoke about ... is still a little bit broad, so to narrow that down a little bit more if I can ... I need to speak to people ... beef up my CV ... write down and report back"	Kate: "It's interesting, what did you learn about how you look at the world, when you saw the different demographic groups in the magazines and couldn't identify with either, what did you learn about this?"	Rob: "Ya we're managing to, and I think the team is also getting used to it ... we started 8 and 9 today we can report ... the issue that needs attention; things that happened over the weekends, then we go through the minutes..."	Mabel: "I know I need to plan things, before I do them. I can do them, but not do them very well I have to 'plan' properly to do ... but if I do"

The table above indicates that all of the coaches demonstrated the ability to hold the clients accountable through the assignment of tasks; helping to co-create some of the tasks, ensuring that they have made a decision to take action, giving clients feedback on their learning and checking if the tasks assigned have been completed. The clients also showed commitment and took responsibility for their learning. Through these

activities, the clients' learnings were reinforced. Furthermore, Kate engaged her client in practical experience during some sessions.

#### *Comparison with literature*

A significant amount of literature on executive coaching has created a link between learning and coaching, and postulates that the ultimate intention of executive coaching is to facilitate learning (Gray, 2006; Hurd, 2002; Jones et al., 2016; Olivero et al., 1997; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; Skiffington & Zeus, 2003; Swart & Harcup, 2013; Zeus & Skiffington, 2002). These studies have investigated the connection between coaching and learning in general. A few studies proposed a link between coaching and transformative learning (Corrie & Lawson, 2017; Cox, 2015). However, very few have actually tracked the process of the learnings in a coaching context, arguing that it follows internalisation, integration and application of learning through assigning tasks to the client and holding the client accountable for implementing these through follow-up (Griffiths, 2015).

Amongst this literature, Griffiths (2015, p. 21) postulated that the "application of new knowledge is a process of extended, consolidated, and deepened learning through holding clients accountable and by clients taking action". In addition, Griffiths (2015) and Griffiths and Campbell (2009) argued that the integration of new knowledge comes about when a client has embodied new knowledge that they have discovered and applied during the coaching process. This study has shown ways in which accountability and integration of learning can be created, thus adding to the executive coaching literature on holding a client accountable, ensuring integration, internalisation and application of learning.

#### **5.3.6. Conclusions on coach mechanisms**

This section has provided a comparative analysis of coach mechanisms that were evident in the coaching programme. To a large extent, it was found that the coaches exhibited similar skills in building rapport, active listening, questioning and holding the client accountable. The difference that was observed in less experienced coaches was that they had a tendency to give more information and advice to the client, while the more experienced coaches were less likely to do so. In addition, one coach demonstrated advanced skills of engaging the client with their emotions as well as implementing practical exercises during sessions.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge in building coaching competencies, firstly, by extending literature from an empirical source on the details of coach competencies developed by Maltbia et al. (2014) and Griffiths (2015) by outlining the sub-skills under each category of the core skills. Secondly, by outlining the processes that coaches follow to facilitate transformative learning. Thirdly, by explicating ways in which clients can be held accountable to integrate and internalise learning. Finally, it has also shown the critical role that coaches should play in handling emotions when coaching in turbulent environments.

#### **5.4. Coachee mechanisms**

This section deals with client or coachee mechanisms – that is, the predetermined set of conditions required in a process to achieve results. It provides a cross-case analysis of the coachee mechanisms of *critical reflection and rational dialogue* as a basis for transformative learning. There are three themes that emerged from the findings: (i) critical reflection is a cognitive process; (ii) critical reflection is an emotional process; and (iii) rational dialogue is preceded by acceptance.

##### **5.4.1. Theme seven: Critical reflection as a cognitive process can be facilitated by the coach**

Critical reflection is defined as a process by which individuals intentionally examine their own values, beliefs and assumptions to bring about new meanings (Mezirow, 1997). Its distinctive characteristic is “the process of correcting distortions in our reasoning and attitudes” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 2). Critical reflection differs from *thoughtful action*, which has to do with reflecting on the what or content, and *habitual action* that is related to the reflection on the process or the how (Mezirow, 1990).

The findings of this study indicate that the executives critically reflected on their values, beliefs, assumptions, self-identity and other meaning and intention frames throughout the three coaching sessions observed. Table 5.7 below illustrates the types of meaning perspectives and examples of critical reflection from the four sample clients over the three coaching sessions. These are accompanied by the coach’s inputs (mechanisms used by the coach) into the process. They were generated from first-order codes accompanied by extract from the coaching conversation. A description follows in the table below.

**Table 5.7:** A cross-case comparison of the critical reflection process

<b>Critical reflection dimensions (first-order codes)</b>	<b>Simon</b>	<b>Janine</b>	<b>Rob</b>	<b>Mabel</b>
<b>Values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client awareness of clash of values</li> <li>▪ Client awareness of his value system</li> <li>▪ Coach clarified the client's values</li> <li>▪ Client confirmed his values clash with current organisational events</li> <li>▪ Coach reaffirmed the client's values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client expressed how she values work ethic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client gained awareness of his values around work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client became aware of the lack of team values to bind the team</li> <li>▪ Coach asks about the meaning of values</li> </ul>
<b>Beliefs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client expressed awareness of the belief and assumption he held about his current job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client expressed a belief and expectation of how her manager should behave</li> <li>▪ Client expressed her belief about the reason she was "stuck" in the organisation</li> <li>▪ Coach challenged the beliefs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client expressed awareness of beliefs about his team</li> <li>▪ Client expressed beliefs about public displays of emotions</li> <li>▪ Coach challenged beliefs</li> <li>▪ Client acknowledged need to change his beliefs about others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client became aware of her beliefs and assumptions about challenging authority</li> <li>▪ Coach challenged beliefs about power and authority</li> </ul>

Critical reflection dimensions (first-order codes)	Simon	Janine	Rob	Mabel
<b>Assumptions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client expressed assumption about limitation of work options</li> <li>▪ Coach challenged client assumptions about self-doubt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Client expressed assumptions of how she should be treated as the most experienced person in the job</li> <li>• Client expressed assumptions and expectations that were created by the traditions of how things have happened in the organisation for many years</li> <li>• Client assumed that she would be unable to get a job because she lacked political connections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client expressed assumption about his clinical manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coach challenged assumptions about belief</li> <li>▪ Client expressed assumption about the economy and work</li> </ul>
<b>Self-identity and self-value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client expressed awareness of and belief in his personal value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client awareness of her own overidentification with work</li> <li>▪ Coach engaged the client on identity and challenges her to reevaluate it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client gained awareness of his identity as a leader</li> <li>▪ Coach engaged client on his identity as a leader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client awareness of her personal power</li> </ul>

<b>Critical reflection dimensions (first-order codes)</b>	<b>Simon</b>	<b>Janine</b>	<b>Rob</b>	<b>Mabel</b>
<b>Meaning and intention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coach asked meaning question about client experience</li> <li>▪ Coach checked for perceived meanings about current job and destabilising events in the organisation</li> <li>▪ Coach asked about higher individual intentions beyond organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coach asked meaning question about client experience</li> <li>▪ Client awareness of meaning from the past “mother inner voice”</li> <li>▪ Coach checked permission to create and amplify “own inner voice”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coach engaged client on permission to express his emotion</li> <li>▪ Coach asked meaning questions around work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coach asked meanings related to power</li> <li>▪ Coach asked meanings about work environment</li> </ul>



Critical reflection dimensions (first-order codes)	Simon	Janine	Rob	Mabel
<b>Learning outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness and acceptance of unique skills</li> <li>▪ Awareness of personal value</li> <li>▪ Awareness of value system</li> <li>▪ Learnt to integrate, internalise and apply learnings in between coaching sessions</li> <li>▪ Experienced a shift in view of self</li> <li>▪ Expanded his worldview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Learnt about the self</li> <li>▪ Awareness of limiting assumptions and beliefs</li> <li>▪ Awareness of her own identity</li> <li>▪ Learnt about her preferred mode of learning</li> <li>▪ Shift in a sense of self (broadening identity)</li> <li>▪ Gained health benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness of own beliefs about others and self</li> <li>▪ Awareness and acceptance of limitation as a leader</li> <li>▪ Awareness of own identity as leader and values that drive that</li> <li>▪ Improved management capability</li> <li>▪ Shift in sense of self</li> <li>▪ Shift in view of others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of own limiting behaviour, values, beliefs and assumptions</li> <li>• Awareness of own skills and competencies</li> <li>• Awareness of organisational context and its impact on the self</li> <li>• Alignment of personal values</li> <li>• Improved quality of work and team performance</li> <li>• Expanded perception on supervisor behaviour</li> <li>• Gained a broader perspective work context</li> <li>• Changed behaviour in relation to team and supervisor</li> </ul>

Source: Video transcripts

Simon's journey of critical reflection was around a reawakening of his value system, which he realised was conflicting with the events that were occurring in the political sphere and in his organisation. The coaching provided an opportunity for him to engage with his meanings, beliefs and assumptions around these value systems. From this engagement, Simon realised a values clash was the source of frustration that he was feeling regarding the events in the organisation. He firmed up his values and became confident about his personal value. Based on this awareness and critical reflection, Simon decided to stick by his values and continue his contribution elsewhere should the political situation not change.

Janine's journey of critical reflection was one of self-discovery, specifically around self-identity. In the process of unearthing her overidentification with work, she went through a reflection of her beliefs and assumptions about work and herself as well others in the work context. Her conclusion was the acceptance of her overidentification with work and how this was not serving her well-being. Ultimately, Janine decided to find her identity outside of work.

Rob's journey of critical reflection was around his identity as a leader. While he had a particular perception and/or belief about his leadership style, the coaching gave him the opportunity to interrogate this belief and his assumptions about his leadership style as well as about others in light of the feedback he had received from his team and board. In addition to this leadership identity shift, Rob had an improvement of capacity to manage his team.

Mabel's journey of critical reflection was about gaining her personal power and self-confidence. The coaching provided her with an opportunity to critically reflect on her perception about herself (powerlessness, not worthy to challenge authority) and unearthed the beliefs and assumptions behind her frame of mind around power and authority. She regained her personal power and was more confident in her abilities to act on what was within her control. There was also evidence of improvement in Mabel's capacity to manage as a result of changes she had made in her behaviour to implement some of her critical decisions.

Based on the table and description above, it appears that the similarities amongst the four cases was that the critical reflection was geared to self-discovery through a process of interrogating the meaning perspectives that had developed over the years regarding themselves and the organisations they had worked for. The differences were in how the clients got to this outcome – for Simon, it was an interrogation of his personal value; for Janine, it was self-identity; for Rob, it

was leadership identity; and for Mabel, it was personal power. These differences were determined by their varying organisational and interpersonal contexts. The results of critical reflection in these cases were a shift in a sense of self, self-identity and an expanded worldview. In addition, there was greater self-awareness and improvement in some managerial and leadership skills in all of the cases, which was also as a result of critical reflection.

### *Comparison with literature*

Transformative learning literature argues that the key to transformative learning is a shift in a frame of reference (Dirkx, 2012; Kayes, 2002; Kegan, 2009; Mezirow, 1990, 1997). Mezirow defined the process of critical reflection as elaborating on existing frames of reference through critical self-examination and self-awareness; acquiring new frames, which is a process of learning to accommodate new frames; transforming habits of mind, which is a process of learning to adopting new habits; and transforming points of view or having a new worldview (Kayes, 2002; Mälkki, 2010; Mezirow, 1990, 1997).

This is done through a process of subjecting individual assumptions as an “object” of scrutiny in a rational and objective manner (Kegan & Lahey, 2001; Kegan, 2009). In doing so, individuals are able to critically reflect not only on their own assumptions, but also on others’ assumptions, and more importantly they are able to move away from socially authored assumptions – for example, from Janine’s mother’s voice or Mabel’s organisational culture to self-authored assumptions (Kegan, 2009).

This study’s findings support this literature and explain how exactly this process occurred as facilitated by the coach. Specifically, in this study, the following was observed: “a change in worldview” and “a significant shift in a sense of self”, accompanied by a “change in capacity” and a “change in behaviour”, which are regarded transformative learning outcomes (Hoggan, 2016).

The findings also support the transformative learning literature that argues that critical reflection was not linear, but rather enactive and non-discursive, and different for every individual who experienced it (Dirkx, 2012). However, the difference with this study is that the coach played a significant role in the reiterative process through the supporting and questioning techniques employed.

According to Mezirow (1997), there are three layers of critical reflection: reflecting on content (what people perceive, feel, think and act on); reflecting on process (how people perform the functions of perceiving the way they do); and reflecting on premise (why people do what they do). Transformative learning occurs by challenging, through critical reflection, meaning on all three layers (Mezirow & Taylor, 2011). The findings from this study also support existing literature on this. In the case of executive coaching, the coach played an integral role in the critical reflection process and helped the client move from one layer of reflection to the next during a coaching session, while in transformative learning literature, the studies were mainly done retrospectively (Taylor, 2007).

In summary, while this study's findings are in line with transformative learning literature on critical reflection, they differ from it in that in executive coaching the coach is an active participant in the learning process ( Corrie & Lawson, 2017; Cox, 2015). The uniqueness that the coaching conversation brings to the transformative learning process is that the coach can identify frames and immediately engage or challenge the client to critically reflect on them. This could arguably make the process faster and easier.

**5.4.2. Theme eight: The emotional experience of a client is crucial for the critical reflection process**

The second finding in this sub-section shows that the critical reflection process was an emotional experience characterised by intermittent emotional and cognitive dissonance. Frustration was the most common emotion experienced by all clients, followed by fear, disappointment, acceptance, self-doubt, and interpersonal tensions.

**Table 5.8:** A cross-case comparison of types of emotional dissonance experienced

Frequency	First-order codes				
	Types of emotions experienced	Simon	Janine	Rob	Mabel
28	Frustration	X	X	X	X
20	Fear	X	X	X	X
19	Disappointment	X	X	X	X
16	Acceptance	X	X	X	X
14	Self-doubt	X	X	X	X
13	Interpersonal tension	X	X	X	X
8	Hesitation and indecisiveness – anxiety	X			X
7	Helplessness and powerlessness				X

First-order codes					
6	Stuck and in a state of denial			X	X
5	Discouragement and demotivation	X	X		
4	Dissatisfied/discontent	X	X		
4	Anger		X		
4	Sad (depressed)	X	X	X	X
4	Feeling of betrayal, resentment		X		X
3	Humiliation/shame/guilt		X		
2	Distress	X			X
2	Defensiveness			X	
1	Shock			X	

Source: codes generated from primary data

While most of these emotions were negative, as the clients engaged with the coaches on their dilemmas and/or successfully applied some of the learnings derived from the coaching session, there were also moments where positive emotions were experienced. To illustrate this, Table 5.9 disaggregates the emotional experience per coaching session.

**Table 5.9:** A cross-case comparison of emotional experience of clients

<b>Client</b>	<b>Session three (first-order codes)</b>	<b>Session four (first-order codes)</b>	<b>Session five (first-order codes)</b>
<b>Simon</b>	<b>Negative emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Disappointment</li> <li>• Hesitation</li> <li>• Self-doubt</li> <li>• Apprehension/anxiety</li> </ul>	<b>Negative emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Hesitation</li> <li>• Reluctance</li> <li>• Fear</li> <li>• Self-doubt</li> <li>• Helpless</li> </ul>	<b>Negative emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Distress</li> <li>• Dissatisfaction</li> <li>• Self-doubt</li> <li>• Low confidence in own competencies</li> </ul>
	<b>Positive emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contentment on affirmation of value system</li> <li>• Appreciation of the space for reflection</li> </ul>	<b>Positive emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling positive about opportunities presented</li> <li>• Feeling confident of possibilities to make a contribution elsewhere</li> <li>• Feeling confidence in skills and competencies</li> </ul>	<b>Positive emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling confident of own values</li> <li>• Feeling confident in possessed unique skills</li> <li>• Confidence in self</li> </ul>

<b>Client</b>	<b>Session three (first-order codes)</b>	<b>Session four (first-order codes)</b>	<b>Session five (first-order codes)</b>
<b>Janine</b>	<b>Negative emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Feeling of being disrespected</li> <li>• Disappointment</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Demotivation</li> <li>• Discontentment</li> </ul>	<b>Negative emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disappointment</li> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Feeling of betrayal</li> <li>• Feeling of guilt</li> </ul>	<b>Negative emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling of being stuck</li> <li>• Dissatisfaction</li> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Fear</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Resentment</li> </ul>
	<b>Positive emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Happy about identifying own voice</li> <li>• Comfortable with idea of taking care of the self</li> </ul>	<b>Positive emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimistic about potential new opportunities</li> </ul>	<b>Positive emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence in resources she has to deal with the situation</li> </ul>
<b>Rob</b>	<b>Negative emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doubt, fear</li> <li>• Feeling of being undermined</li> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Resistant/defensive/denial</li> </ul>	<b>Negative emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shock</li> <li>• Disappointment</li> <li>• Discouragement</li> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Stuck</li> </ul>	<b>Negative emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>
	<b>Positive emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satisfaction of improvement <i>(at the beginning of the session)</i></li> </ul>	<b>Positive emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance</li> <li>• Embracing need for change</li> </ul>	<b>Positive emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satisfied about progress</li> <li>• Relieved</li> <li>• Positive about team performance</li> <li>• Committing to supporting the team</li> </ul>
<b>Mabel</b>	<b>Negative emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Impatience</li> <li>• Feeling of being disrespected</li> <li>• Anxiety and distress</li> <li>• Feeling of betrayal</li> <li>• Helplessness</li> <li>• Stuck</li> </ul>	<b>Negative emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling of powerlessness</li> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Fear of confrontation</li> <li>• Fear of loss of motivation</li> </ul>	<b>Negative emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-doubt</li> <li>• Frustration</li> </ul>

<b>Client</b>	<b>Session three (first-order codes)</b>	<b>Session four (first-order codes)</b>	<b>Session five (first-order codes)</b>
	<b>Positive emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Happy about improvement in her management skills (<i>at the beginning of the session</i>)</li> </ul>	<b>Positive emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sympathy for others</li> </ul>	<b>Positive emotions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confident of own power and ability to change self</li> </ul>

Simon’s negative emotional experiences on the whole were characterised by moments of deep frustration, disappointment and dissatisfaction with the status quo, which were followed by instances of fear and self-doubt that resulted in moments of hesitation and anxiety. Self-doubt was prevalent in all of the sessions, leading to low confidence in Rob’s competencies in session five. However, in all of the sessions, there was a swing towards positive emotions. These included being content with the affirmation of his values by the coach; appreciation for having the space for reflection; being positive and confident that he can make a contribution elsewhere; and being confident about his value system and his unique set of skills that contributed to the acknowledgement of his personal value.

In Janine’s case, her experience was characterised by extreme emotional outbursts dominated by frustration, anger, feelings of betrayal, and feelings of resentment and guilt. There were fewer positive emotions in her case. These included her being happy with identifying her own voice in terms of what defines work ethic; and, based on this, being comfortable to take a decision to care for herself with the realisation that there are other opportunities to explore, and that she has the inner resources to make a decision to change her work and life situation. Like Simon, Janine ended all of her sessions with some positivity.

Rob’s negative emotional experience was different, as it was concentrated in the second and third sessions. It was characterised largely by frustration and anger of not being understood and being undermined as a leader. He also expressed doubt and fear of being misunderstood. This made him defensive and resistant to change, and session three ended on a non-committal note. In session four, based on negative feedback that he received from the hospital board about his “dysfunctional” management team, which implied inadequacies in his leadership capabilities, Rob felt shocked, frustrated, disappointed, discouraged and stuck. This turn of events swayed him to positive emotions of acceptance that he was, in fact, in denial and he embraced the need for

change in his leadership. This positivity continued in session five, where he focused on action planning to implement changes in his leadership style.

Mabel's emotional experience was dominated by frustration, and feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and fear, leading to self-doubt. She developed a headache and like Rob, ended session three in an inconclusive negative state. Similar to Janine, Mabel had a few moments of positive emotions, with the significant one only coming in session five, where she felt confident in her own personal power to change things she can control.

These findings show that the clients' emotional experiences seemed to move from milder forms like disappointment, discontentment, demotivation, and fear to stronger feelings, such as shock, anger, anxiety, betrayal, and helplessness. These emotions emerged as the clients became aware that their values were being violated and they gained awareness of their limiting beliefs and assumptions. As clients gained awareness and realised the need for change, some of them experienced defensiveness, denial, and hesitation, and all of them went through feelings of fear. This could suggest that the emotions need to intensify before there is enough emotional push to question underlying assumptions.

The emotions and feelings were intertwined with the cognitive process, such as indecisiveness, inner conflict, dilemma, and self-doubt. On a few occasions, it resulted in physical reaction, such as a headache (Mabel's case). This means that the emotional experience cannot be separated from the cognitive process as they impact one another.

#### *Comparison with literature*

Ekman (1992) classified basic emotions as anger, fear, surprise, sadness, disgust and happiness. He argued that these are discrete and have a fixed set of neural and bodily expression as well as a fixed feeling in responding to a stimulus (Ekman & Cordaro, 2011). However, some emotions, such as shame, guilt and anxiety, have a cognitive base (Ekman & Cordaro, 2011; Tracy & Randles, 2011). Most of the emotions experienced by the clients in the coaching session were largely triggered by a cognitive process and only a few could be regarded as basic as defined by Ekman (1992) – these are fear and anger. Therefore, there was an interactive process between cognitive dissonance (expressed, for example, through inner conflict, frustration, indecisiveness, and self-doubt) and emotional dissonance (expressed through fear and anger). Hence, the critical reflection process was an emotional process (Dirkx et al., 2018).



These findings support literature on the emotional nature of critical reflection as postulated by scholars (Dirkx, 2012; Dirkx et al., 2018; Green & Mälkki, 2017; Hoggan et al., 2017; Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2016; Van Zyl et al., 2011). A disorienting dilemma is a result of the break in “continuity”; “normativity” of past, present and future connections (Hoggan et al., 2017); and “ontological security” (Green & Mälkki, 2017). When people cannot use their previous experiences to solve current problems, they get into a state of insecurity that is experienced as “edge emotions” or unpleasant emotions (Green & Mälkki, 2017). According to these authors, from a biological perspective, emotions are a survival mechanism; they inform people that the environment they operate in is not safe and activate action to return to safety. As a result, at a psychological level, emotions can trigger resistance (denial, defensiveness, hesitation) to change and an individual may experience anxiety, fear, uncertainty, and self-doubt (Dirkx et al., 2018; Green & Mälkki, 2017). These authors imply that negative emotions can be cognitive inhibitors that get in the way of new insights and solutions. This supports the notion that it is important to move away from negative emotions for transformation to occur.

The findings in this study support this literature, as it was observed that when continuity and normativity were broken, clients went into a state of ontological insecurity and experienced all the emotions described above (Hoggan et al., 2017). In almost every observed session, there was a similar cycle of negative emotion, which was converted to positive emotion through the coach intervention, once it intensified. This suggests that the negative emotion can take some time before it subsides.

This supports literature on the role of positive and negative emotion in motivation, specifically Fredrickson’s (2013) 3:1 ratio theory of positive and negative emotions, which argues that the ratio of positive emotions needs to supersede negative emotions to shift an individual to motivation. Recent studies have confirmed that while the ratio of 3:1 may not be accurate, the theory still holds (Nickerson, 2018; Rosenbaum, Ronen, Abuelaish, Orkibi, & Hamama, 2018). Other scholars have also gone further to support the claim that, firstly, positive emotions produce motivation to learn (Boyatzis, 2016; MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017); secondly, that positive thinking assists in reappraising or reframing negative events and facilitates learning and development (Garland, Farb, Goldin, & Fredrickson, 2017); and thirdly, that positivity has a high value in humanistic psychology as it impacts on positive emotions and is linked to the individual’s need to thrive or flourish (Held, 2018).

The discussion above indicates that while a disorienting dilemma, which is often expressed by negative emotions, is a prerequisite for critical reflection, the individual needs to shift to positive emotions for learning to occur. The uniqueness of this study is that it presents a scenario where the coaches act as catalysts in assisting the clients to navigate negative emotions and produce positive emotions, thereby reaching a resolution faster than if they had to do this on their own. The coach achieves this by supporting the client throughout the process of critical reflection, and most importantly asking relevant reflective questions that facilitate a process of acceptance and rational dialogue of the client's frames of mind.

### **5.4.3. Theme nine: Rational dialogue is preceded by acceptance**

Rational dialogue is defined as a way of discussing personally and socially held beliefs, values and assumptions with other people in a logical and objective manner (Mezirow, 1997). For rational dialogue to occur, a person must be open and unbiased in presenting his or her own assumptions, while suspending judgement on the assumptions of others (Mezirow, 1990, 1997).

While the process of reaching a resolution to a disorienting dilemma is achieved through rational dialogue, this study demonstrates that rational dialogue does not occur unless a client reaches some level of acceptance first. The study also shows that rational dialogue cannot occur when a client is in a state of a disorienting dilemma or experiencing negative emotions. Table 5.10 illustrates the process of acceptance and rational dialogue over the three coaching sessions observed.

**Table 5.10:** A cross-case comparison of acceptance preceding rational dialogue

<b>Client</b>	<b>Session three</b>	<b>Session four</b>	<b>Session five</b>
<b>Simon</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of value system</li> <li>• Rational dialogue on beliefs and assumptions about making a “big contribution”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of the role of politics in budget processes</li> <li>• Acceptance of what is within his sphere of control</li> <li>• Rational dialogue on reaffirmation of values clash</li> <li>• Rational dialogue on the bigger value he now believes he can contribute to society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance that things are getting worse in the organisation</li> <li>• Acceptance of the need to preserve personal value</li> <li>• Rational dialogue on own value system and personal values</li> </ul>

<b>Client</b>	<b>Session three</b>	<b>Session four</b>	<b>Session five</b>
<b>Janine</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness only</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledgement and acceptance of how the organisation views her and that she may need to leave the organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance that she has overidentified with work</li> <li>• Acceptance of self-worth</li> <li>• Rational dialogue on what she does and does not have control over and the action she needs to take</li> </ul>
<b>Rob</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness that team has brought disruption to status quo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of his limitations</li> <li>• Acceptance of his beliefs and assumptions about his leadership and others' ability to change</li> <li>• Rational dialogue on assumptions and beliefs about others and his leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on action of changed perspective</li> </ul>
<b>Mabel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness only</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledgement and acceptance of the difficulty of challenging authority – powerlessness</li> <li>• Rational dialogue on meaning of power and beliefs about challenging authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of what she cannot change or control</li> <li>• Rational dialogue on what she does and does not have control over</li> </ul>

The table above illustrates that in session three, only one client – that is, Simon – reached a state of acceptance of his values clashing with the organisational system and thus was able to enter a rational dialogue about his value system. The other three clients only came to an awareness, which did not result in them engaging in a rational dialogue about their frames. However, in session four, it can be seen that all of the executives reached some form of acceptance of their frames and a significant number of rational dialogues occurred, which continued in session five.

Another noteworthy point is that self-awareness at the meaning perspective level can potentially create more cognitive and emotional dissonance as indicated in section 5.4.1 and Table 5.8. To achieve a resolution, all of the clients had to go through phases of acceptance. This was often preceded by denial, hesitation, fear and self-doubt, as indicated in section 5.4.2 and Table 5.10. Data from Table 5.11 indicates that the clients had to go through various forms of acceptance,

depending on what they were dealing with. For example, acceptance of the role of politics in the organisation (Simon), acceptance of the status quo in the organisation (Janine), acceptance of the organisational culture (Mabel), and acceptance of own limitations as a leader (Rob). More importantly, acceptance of how they have framed their meaning perspectives, acceptance of things they do or do not have control over, and acceptance of the need for change. The most important acceptance was the of the self, which led to confidence in the application of newly gained knowledge required for behavioural change. The state of acceptance opened the clients up for engaging in a rational dialogue about their meaning perspective as well as willingness to shift meaning perspectives and change their behaviour.

### *Comparison with literature*

While transformative learning literature is not completely silent regarding the role of acceptance in self-awareness and rational dialogue, it is not explicit either, as it is not indicated even in Mezirow's initial 10-step process of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). The literature argues that assumptions need to be presented as an "object" for rational scrutiny or that socially held frames need to be subjected to scrutiny, or individuals need to let go of frames that do not serve them any more (Green & Mälkki, 2017; Hoggan et al. 2017; Kegan, 2000; Mezirow, 1998). In this literature, acceptance is not discussed as a construct that explicitly facilitates rational dialogue. This suggests a significant oversight as the literature only recognises critical self-reflection and awareness as well as rational dialogue. Moreover, in executive coaching literature, as discussed in earlier sections, transformative learning is an area that has not been well researched empirically, thus there is no significant literature that talks to this construct in a coaching environment.

However, acceptance is a well-researched phenomenon in humanistic psychology (Williams & Lynn, 2010) as well as in the clinical psychological settings (McCracken & Vowles, 2014; Öst, 2014). Acceptance has been used in cognitive behavioural therapy as a way to facilitate clients to welcome disturbing thoughts and uncomfortable emotions so these can help them focus on what they want for their lives (Hayes, 1982; Wild et al., 2017). It is defined as the ability to willingly receive and embrace inner experiences while they are occurring (McCracken & Vowles, 2014; Williams & Lynn, 2010). Some of the key characteristics that make up acceptance include: awareness, non-attachment or releasing attachment to stimuli that is creating displeasure, being non-judgemental to release one from negativity, tolerance and willingness (Williams & Lynn, 2010).

The construct is often divided into accepting oneself and accepting others (McCracken & Vowles, 2014; Öst, 2014; Williams & Lynn, 2010). In addition, from a humanistic point of view, Carl Rogers found that acceptance is a mechanism for self-actualisation and personal change (Williams & Lynn, 2010). Some of the benefits of acceptance are: increased potential for action, less blaming of others, being compassionate, being judicious, a decrease in negative emotions (Bond & Bunce, 2003), unconditional self-acceptance as well as emotional and behavioural health (Ellis & Robb, 1994).

This study supports the findings of the literature, as all the clients in this study went through a process of awareness. In the clients' process of reaching acceptance, they stopped blaming others, they were more understanding of the situation they found themselves in, and they accepted their limitations and what they had no control over. At this phase of acceptance, the clients experienced less or no negative emotions. As a result, there was an emergence of willingness and readiness to engage in a rational dialogue of their frames of mind and take action to change their behaviour. Once more, the role of the coach was significant in assisting the client to make these shifts, because the rational dialogue process in executive coaching is a conversation that is facilitated by the coach.

Therefore, this study foregrounds an area that has not received attention in both transformative learning and executive coaching literature. The study extends the literature by revealing that rational dialogue in a coaching conversation evolves from clients embracing their limiting assumptions and beliefs as challenged by their coaches, and this brings forth a willingness to review these frames.

#### **5.4.4. *Conclusion on client mechanisms***

Three themes have emerged from this section on critical reflection: critical reflection as a cognitive process, critical reflection as an emotional process, and rational dialogue is preceded by a state of acceptance. These findings have highlighted similarities and differences amongst the sample clients. Although the executives had varying organisational contexts that presented differences in their reflection on content and process, the key similarity around critical reflection as a cognitive process was that in all four cases, the critical reflection process was geared to self-discovery by interrogating their meaning perspectives that had developed over the years about themselves

and the organisations they had worked for. The results of critical reflection in these cases were a shift in a sense of self-identity and an expanded worldview.

Regarding critical reflection as an emotional process, the study's findings are that while all clients experienced positive and negative emotional experiences during the coaching process, the negative emotions were more predominant – especially in the earlier stages of the coaching process. However, in the later coaching stages, more positive emotions were experienced by the clients. For rational dialogue to occur, the clients had to reach a state of acceptance of their current states and/or contexts, as well as their limiting frames of mind. The three above-mentioned processes are intertwined and operate in a reiterative way.

The presence of the coach seemed to act as a catalyst to the transformative learning process, as in all the processes the coach: was instrumental in identifying frames of mind and engaging or challenging the client on them; played a role in assisting to sway the client to move from negative to positive emotions; and facilitated acceptance so that the client could engage in rational dialogue. All of these behaviours could occur over one or more sessions.

## **5.5. The process of transformative learning**

This section consolidates the findings of this study on the transformative learning process in executive coaching by mapping out the process of learning as it emerged from the themes generated from the cross-case analysis. Based on the findings in this study, the process of learning can be summarised in the following themes:

- i. Self-awareness is the foundation of learning
- ii. Acceptance is the gateway to rational dialogue

### **5.5.1. Theme 10: Self-awareness is the foundation for learning**

The foundation for learning in these cases was self-awareness, which then led to critical reflection, acceptance and rational dialogue, resulting in a shift in meaning perspectives. The table below shows evidence of the learning process that each client followed over the three coaching sessions analysed.

**Table 5.11:** A cross-case comparison of the learning process

Name	Coaching session three	Coaching session four	Coaching session five
<b>Simon</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness of personal value system</li> <li>▪ Awareness of values clash between himself and current organisational context</li> <li>▪ Awareness of the shifting role of the department</li> <li>▪ Awareness of personal value to contribute</li> <li>▪ Rational dialogue on his beliefs and assumptions about making a “big contribution”</li> <li>▪ Commitment to action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness of fear to explore work options outside of public service</li> <li>▪ Awareness of limited options within public service</li> <li>▪ Acceptance of the role of politics in budget processes</li> <li>▪ Acceptance of what is within his sphere of control</li> <li>▪ Rational dialogue on reaffirmation of values clash</li> <li>▪ Rational dialogue on the bigger value he now believes he can contribute to society</li> <li>▪ Commitment to action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rational dialogue on own value system and personal values</li> <li>▪ Awareness (recognition) of unique skill set he possesses</li> <li>▪ Affirmation of personal value-add to contribute</li> <li>▪ Confidence to explore new work options</li> </ul>
<b>Janine</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of preferred learning style</li> <li>• Awareness of difficulty to embrace emotions</li> <li>• Awareness and belief that her organisation does not value her</li> <li>• Awareness of taking care of others rather than herself, and how the “powerful voice inside” is a barrier to caring for the self</li> <li>• Awareness of own value</li> <li>• Decision to amplify own voice to care for herself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of shifting role and power of the ministry</li> <li>• Awareness of overidentification with work</li> <li>• Awareness of being in the same organisation for too long and recognising that there may be other opportunities out there</li> <li>• Acknowledgement and acceptance of the fact that she may need to leave the organisation</li> <li>• Commitment to put herself first.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance that she has overidentified with work</li> <li>• Acceptance of what she does and does not have control over</li> <li>• Awareness of her limiting behaviours – of caring about others more than herself</li> <li>• Awareness that she needs time (resources) to make the appropriate decision for her future</li> <li>• Action to take leave and care for herself</li> </ul>

Name	Coaching session three	Coaching session four	Coaching session five
<b>Rob</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness of team strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>▪ Awareness that his team has been empowered by team coaching</li> <li>▪ Awareness of reasons for interpersonal relations conflict</li> <li>▪ Awareness of perceived leadership weaknesses by team</li> <li>▪ Awareness that he needs to provide vision and motivation for the team</li> <li>▪ Acceptance that the team has brought disruption to the status quo</li> <li>▪ Awareness that he needs to adjust leadership style</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness and acceptance that he is in denial about his leadership limitations</li> <li>▪ Acceptance of his limitations</li> <li>▪ Awareness and acceptance of his beliefs and assumptions about his leadership and others' ability to change</li> <li>▪ Rational dialogue on assumptions and beliefs about others and his leadership</li> <li>▪ Commitment to action change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness of changes made as a result of his change in leadership style</li> <li>▪ Shift in how he views his team members and himself</li> <li>▪ Awareness of team's different and unique capabilities and areas of support needed</li> <li>▪ Commitment to action to support individual team members differently</li> </ul>
<b>Mabel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self-awareness of own limitations and impact on others</li> <li>▪ Awareness of how she relates to supervisor</li> <li>▪ Awareness of own beliefs about team and reluctance to challenge power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness of meaning behind emotional response</li> <li>▪ Acknowledges acceptance of difficulty of challenging authority – powerlessness</li> <li>▪ Awareness of bigger organisational systemic culture impact</li> <li>▪ Rational dialogue on meaning of power and beliefs about challenging authority</li> <li>▪ Shift in thinking and beliefs about supervisor's behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rational dialogue on what she does and does not have control</li> <li>▪ Acceptance of what she cannot change</li> <li>▪ Commitment to action on what she has control over</li> <li>▪ Shift in behaviour</li> </ul>

The findings in the table above show that there were three levels of self-awareness that the clients experienced. These can be categorised as: awareness of behaviour of self and others; awareness of processes of how things occur, either in the organisations or how the clients think and act; and awareness of what drives the behaviour and the processes (the why). Even though these were not necessarily sequential as the process of reflection was iterative, self-awareness was the first step to their learning. The other processes of acceptance and rational dialogue came later, as the



process of self-awareness continued. Also evident from Table 5.11 is that session three was dominated by self-awareness – with the exception of Simon, none of the clients reached a stage of rational dialogue. Rob did reach a stage of acceptance, but not dialogue.

In session four, it can be seen that there is an increase in the number of acceptances in which awareness is accompanied by a state of acceptance and is followed by an engagement of rational dialogue on meaning perspectives. Moreover, it can be seen in session four that some shifts in meaning perspectives begin to happen, which are also accompanied by commitment to action resulting from the shifts made. Session five is characterised predominantly by acceptance and rational dialogue, with a limited number of new awareness. More cognitive shifts and decisive moves to take action are observed.

In summary, these findings show that there was an incremental process of learning starting with critical self-reflection that brought in self-awareness of behaviour and frames of mind. This led to the process of acceptance, which was followed by rational dialogue of clients' frames of mind. The rational dialogue ushered in cognitive and emotional shifts that led to a change in behaviour and a significant shift in a sense of self.

#### *Comparison with literature*

These findings support the coaching literature, which postulates that learning in coaching occurs through self-awareness at various levels. Firstly, learning in coaching occurs by reflecting on experience and reflective listening as well as by making the unconscious conscious (Cox et al., 2014). Secondly, learning is facilitated through self-awareness by exploring an individual's worldview. This includes the exploration of values, beliefs, and meanings, which trigger a shift in the client's way of being; and self-awareness comes through storytelling (Cox et al., 2014). Thirdly, learning is facilitated through the development of self-awareness of underlying cognitive and emotional barriers to goal attainment and aims to equip the client with more effective thinking and behavioural skills (Williams, Edgerton, & Palmer, 2010).

In the leadership context, self-awareness has been regarded as central to reflective leadership. It has been shown to increase leadership effectiveness. Self-awareness is also seen as a necessary attribute to authentic and transformational leadership and contributes to emotional intelligence (Castelli, 2015).

The process of critical reflection is defined as elaborating on existing frames of reference, which foster critical self-examination and self-awareness, learning to accommodate new frames, learning to adopting new habits, and having a new worldview (Kayes, 2002; Mezirow, 1990, 1997). Kegan (2009) postulated that not all types of reflection and learning result in transformation. For example, informative learning increases individuals' awareness, knowledge, range of skills and attitude, and even extends already established cognitive structure. Such learning can bring about improved confidence in a learner, improved self-perception, or improved self-esteem. While these are important, they cannot be said to be transformative learning (Kegan, 2009).

The findings of this study also confirm that informative learning occurred. This was in the form of high levels of self-awareness, and improved management and leadership capabilities. Transformative learning also occurred, which was in a form of a shift in sense of self and an expanded worldview.

### **5.5.2. *Theme 11: Acceptance is the gateway to rational dialogue***

As indicated in earlier sections, the clients entered the coaching session already experiencing a disorienting dilemma. In addition, the process of self-awareness – especially self-awareness at a meaning perspective level – created more emotional and cognitive dissonance. The critical reflection process described under 5.4.1 brought about an emotional experience as outlined in 5.4.2, which was largely negative. It was this process that created feelings of anxiety, fear and sense of self-doubt, which resulted in states of denial, hesitation and defensiveness amongst the clients. When individuals are in this state of ontological insecurity (Green & Mälkki, 2017), it is difficult for them to decide to do something new until they return to a “safe” space.

The intervention provided by the coaches supported the clients, allowing them to acknowledge their feelings and emotions, raising awareness of issues and then reframing their points of view, which assisted the clients to move to a place of cognitive and emotional safety, and thus acceptance. The data above and the discussion in section 5.4.3 suggest that the clients had to go through a process of acceptance at different levels before they could engage in rational dialogue on their meaning perspectives.

### *Comparison with literature*

The literature on transformative learning does not explicitly discuss the process of acceptance in the transformative learning process. As indicated earlier, acceptance in psychology and therapy literature opens the individual up for embracing change and readiness to explore and learn new ways of doing (Hayes, 1982; Wild et al., 2017). This study has found that acceptance precedes rational dialogue and invariably becomes an additional mechanism for transformative learning.

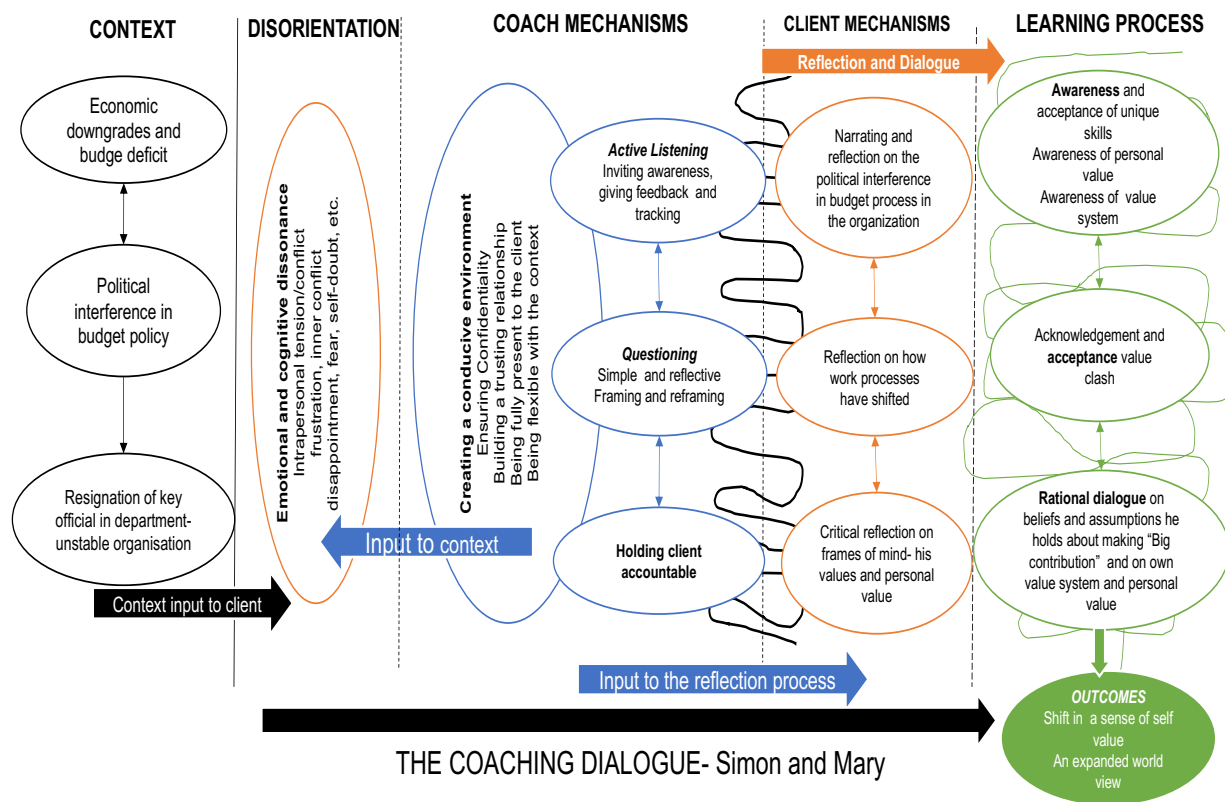
### **5.5.3. Theme 12: Transformative learning process is uniquely individualised**

This section deduces a programme theory for each of the cases based on the findings discussed in this chapter. A programme theory is a realistic evaluation concept that defines the underlying assumptions about how a programme, or an intervention is expected to work. Its purpose is to explain the relationship between the *context* in which the programme is implemented, the *mechanisms* by which it works, and the outcomes it produces (Marchal et al., 2012; Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

The intention of a realist evaluation is not to establish a cause-effect relationship, nor to determine if a programme works or not, but to understand under what contexts it works, for whom it works, and what mechanisms produce what outcomes (Marchal et al., 2012; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Therefore, it is an explanatory process rather than a judgemental process. Using this framework, the CMO for each of the cases is illustrated below. Figure 5.1 summarises the core data derived from all sources of data used in the four cases. The black circles represent the context, the orange circles represent the client mechanisms, the blue circles represent the coach mechanisms, and the green circles represent the outcomes.

#### **5.5.3.1. Simon's context-mechanism-outcome configuration**

The main source of a disorienting dilemma for Simon was intrapersonal conflict resulting from his context of economic downturn, budget deficit and organisational instability. The coach mechanisms were an input to Simon's context, enabling him to deal with the dilemmas he was faced with. This was done through the provision of a conducive environment for reflection using the competencies presence, confidentiality, rapport and trust building.



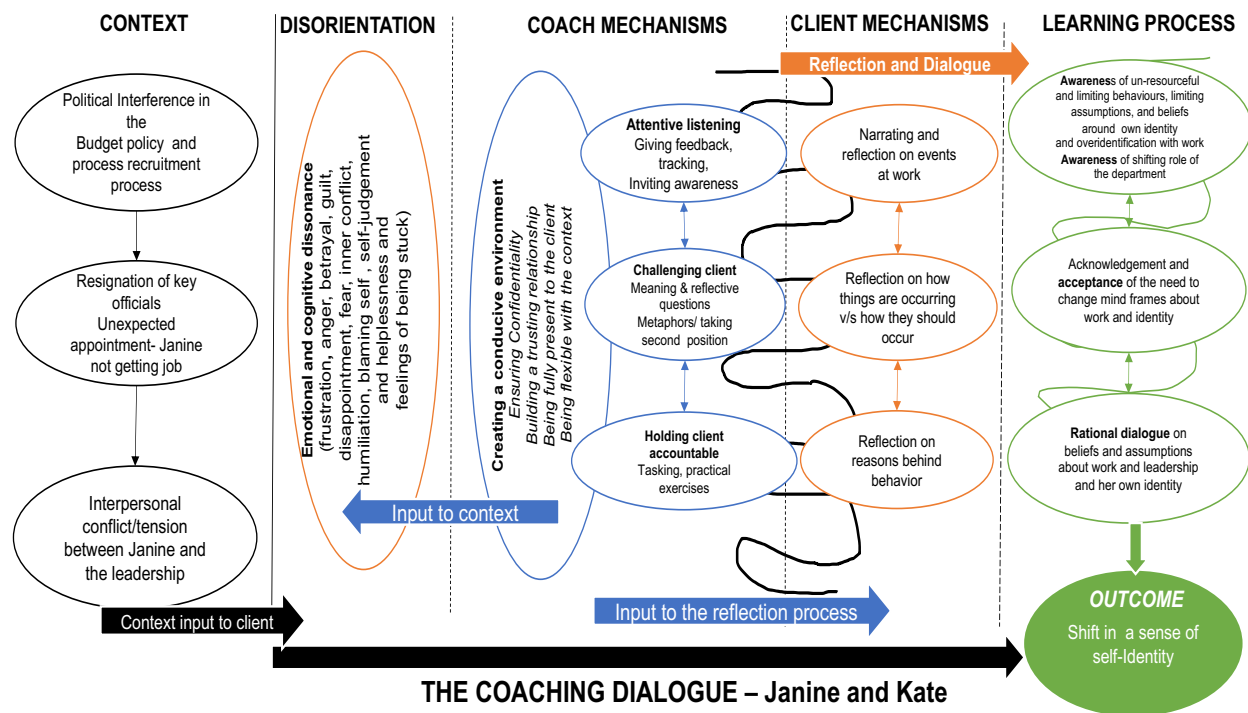
**Figure 5.1:** Simon’s context-mechanism-outcome configuration

In listening, questioning and holding Simon accountable for tasks he had committed to do, the coaching skills became a resource that enabled him to reflect at multiple levels – that is, on the what, how and why of events and situations. He was then able to make choices and decisions that were in line with his value system and his bigger purpose of contributing to society. This outcome was a result of self-awareness, his acceptance of a clash in values, his ability to embrace personal value, and his ability to recognise that he can contribute elsewhere if need be. Besides self-awareness and acceptance, Simon achieved two main transformative learning outcomes: a shift in sense of self-value and an expanded worldview.

### 5.5.3.2. Janine’s context-mechanism-outcome configuration

Janine’s main source of a disorienting dilemma was the political interference in the recruitment process that led to her losing a job opportunity she felt she deserved. Her coach demonstrated

coaching behaviours of providing a conducive environment that became a resource and input to Janine’s context, which assisted her in dealing with her dilemmas as illustrated in the figure below.



**Figure 5.2:** Janine’s context-mechanism-outcome configuration

Kate’s ability to actively listen and use advanced questioning and state management skills enabled Janine to reflect critically, facilitate a process of acceptance and have a rational dialogue at multiple levels – especially regarding her overidentification with work. This allowed Janine to begin seeking an identity for herself that was not only attached to work. She was then able to make a shift in her sense of self-identity.

### 5.5.3.3. Rob’s context-mechanism-outcome configuration

Rob’s main source of a disorienting dilemma was interpersonal conflict that stemmed from team dynamics. Over and above active listening and questioning, Rob’s coach’s input to the context and his reflection included advising and giving information. A conducive environment enabled Rob to deal with the dilemmas he was faced with.

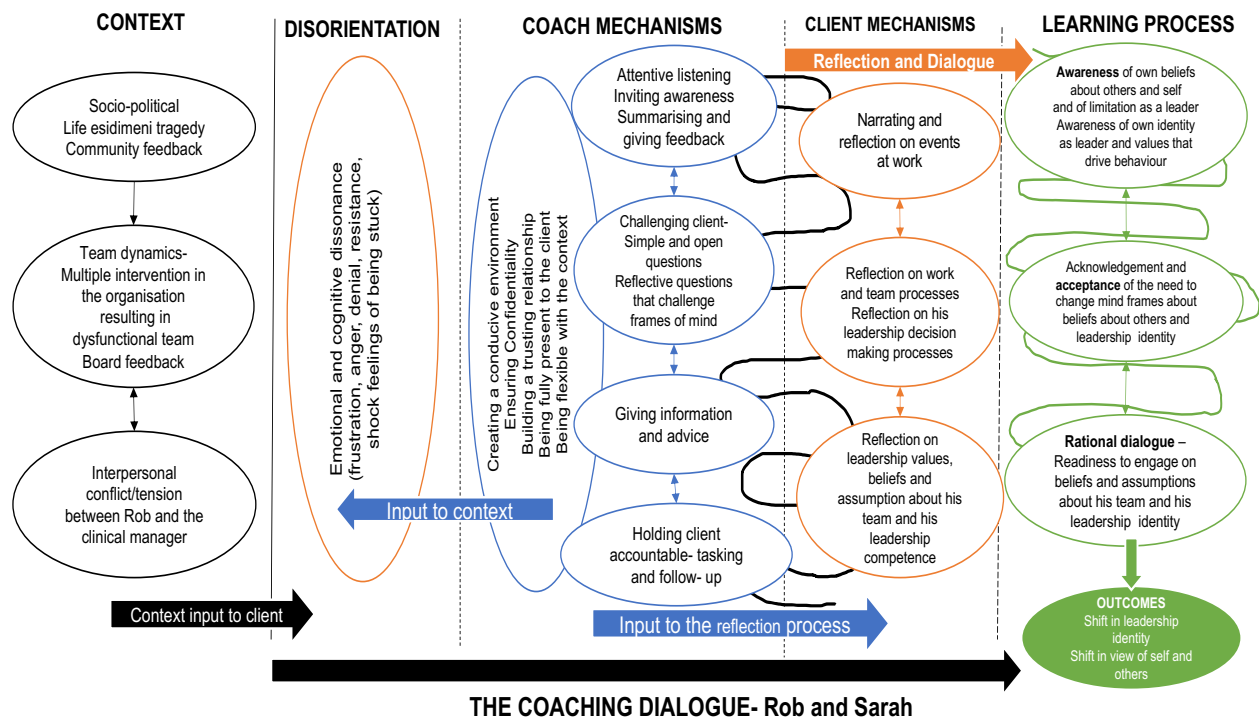
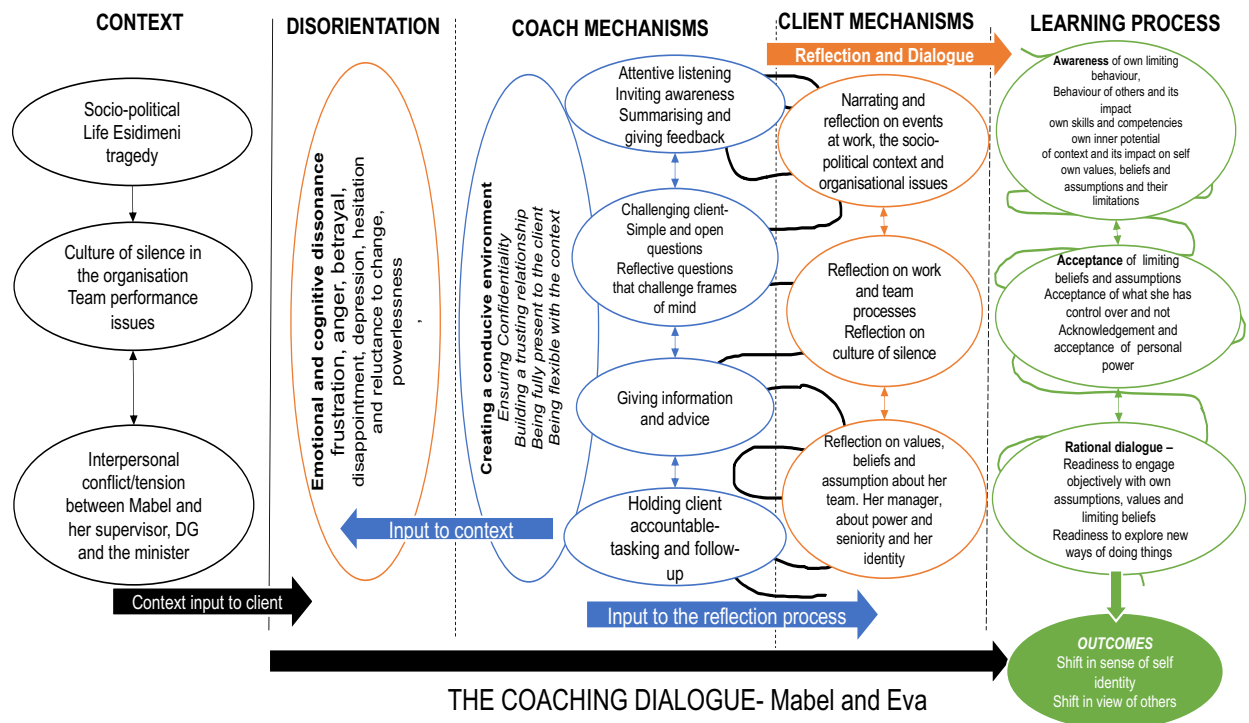


Figure 5.3: Rob’s context-mechanism-outcome configuration

The coach behaviour of active listening and questioning supported and challenged Rob to face the realities he was refusing to deal with. The presence of the coach as a resource allowed the client to reflect at multiple levels – looking at what he does, how he does it and, most importantly, why he does it. This enabled him to make choices and decisions that were in line with his coaching outcome of building a cohesive team. This outcome is as a result of both the shift in his view of his leadership and the shift in his view of others, which are both transformative in nature.

#### 5.5.3.4. Mabel’s context-mechanism-outcome configuration

While the main source of disorientation for Mabel was interpersonal tension between her and her supervisor, it was fuelled by the organisational climate and culture. The culture of silence around not confronting authority served as a source of a belief of lack of power in the organisation.



**Figure 5.4:** Mabel's context-mechanism-outcome configuration

The coach mechanism became a resource or input to Mabel's context, enabling her to deal with dilemmas she was facing through the provision of an environment that was conducive for reflection; and supporting and challenging her to deal with the realities she was afraid of (that is, confronting power and breaking the culture of silence). The presence of the coaching as a resource enabled her to reflect at multiple levels, looking at what she does, how she does it and why she does it, as well as to accept what she had no control over. This allowed her to make choices and decisions that assisted her to be at peace with situations she had no control over, but challenge where she could. The outcome that resulted was a shift in her view of herself as being powerless as well as a shift in her view of others.

In summary, one of the key features that cut across all of the cases is that the coach mechanisms were both an input and a resource to the client's context that triggered a disorienting dilemma as well as input to the critical reflection process. Furthermore, the interaction between the client and coach mechanism facilitated the learning process or triggered some learning mechanisms (self-

awareness, acceptance and rational dialogue), thereby producing informative and transformative learning outcomes.

#### *Comparison with literature*

The CMO configuration, as defined by Pawson and Tilley (1997), has mainly referred to one set of mechanisms. However, in this study there were two sets of mechanisms: coach and client. The complexity of the CMO configuration has been debated by realist evaluation scholars like Dalkin et al. (2015) and Jagosh et al. (2015), who warned of the temptation to simplify this complex configuration. In particular, the relationship between context and mechanisms has been expanded by these scholars to find different ways in which the CMO can be configured for different social programme interventions where there are multiple sets of mechanisms. The best way, they argue, is that mechanisms need to be explicitly defined as *resources* provided by the intervention as well as the *reasoning responses* of the participants (Dalkin et al., 2015; Jagosh et al., 2015; Wong et al., 2016).

Based on this study, the resource mechanisms that were provided by the coach elicited the reasoning responses inherent in the clients through the reflection process. Therefore, this amends the formula of  $C+M=O$  to  $C+M1+M2=O$  – with M1 representing the coach mechanisms as inputs or resources, and M2 representing the client mechanisms as reasoning responses and learning process. The main contribution of this configuration is that it provides a possibility of dealing with more than one set of mechanisms in one study, while most CMO configurations often deal with just one.

#### **5.5.4. Conclusions on the process of transformative learning**

From the findings of these case studies, it can be concluded that transformative learning involves a process of self-awareness, which is divided into the awareness of the what, the how and the why the behaviour occurs. Although the client may have come into the coaching with a disorientation, the new awareness helps the client to trigger further experiences of cognitive and emotional dissonance. This could lead to anxiety, fear, and self-doubt that may result in the clients being resistant to change. However, through the skilful facilitation of the coach, the clients may progress to a state of acceptance and begin to rationally engage with their meaning perspectives. This will then move them to a phase of confidence in their ability to shift in meaning perspectives. Finally, the client is confident to implement new thinking patterns and behaviour(s).



Cox et al. (2014) indicated that transformative learning in executive coaching is a difficult process. According to this study's results, transformative learning will not occur in the first session or even the first three sessions. The coaching intervention provides a unique opportunity for executives to revisit their frames of reference regularly over a time period (four to six months in this case), until they get to the core of the frames that drive their behaviour. The clients do this in a structured environment where the coaches intentionally bring a balance between challenging and supporting the clients with this process, thus making transformative learning possible. Transformative learning literature does not have a significant amount of executive coaching studies that have followed this process as indicated earlier in this chapter.

## **5.6. Conclusion on the cross-case analysis**

This chapter has analysed data across the four case studies. The cross-case analysis reveals the following key findings in relation to the literature. Firstly, that context drives a disorienting dilemma. Four types of context were identified that impacted the client's experience of a disorienting dilemma: economic, socio-political, organisational climate, and culture and interpersonal relations factors. While all of the clients were impacted by all four categories of context, the effects were different based on the organisational context and the individual's position in the organisation. In addition, the study found that in public-sector organisations, the socio-political factors seem to have more impact, as the executives are closer to politics than they would be in private-sector organisations. This context presented a fertile ground for executives to be ready for critical reflection.

Consequently, this study extends the literature by presenting a typology of contextual factors as well as the nature of interaction between contextual factors and how these impact on a disorienting dilemma amongst executives in public-sector organisations. It has also indicated that executive coaching can assist public-sector senior managers going through these types of dilemmas to centre themselves, so that they can play their multiple roles of managing the politics, the organisations and communities simultaneously.

Secondly, the study found that executive coaching does facilitate critical reflection. Most importantly, it found that the critical reflection process is both a cognitive and an emotional process. All of the clients were able to reach a level of critical reflection of their frame of reference as facilitated by the coach. They all experienced various types of emotions in the critical reflection process and although they mainly experienced negative emotions, the encouragement and

probing offered by the coaches brought out some positive emotions. The coaches provided a safe environment for the clients to experience cognitive and emotional dissonance as well as helping them to shift from experiencing negative to positive emotions. This enabled a shift in their meaning perspective that translated into changed behaviour and a shift in the sense of self.

Thirdly, the study confirmed key competencies of executive coaching as described in the literature review. In addition, a detailed set of sub-skills or behaviours requisite for coaching were identified, which could contribute to building competencies of executive coaching in growing this field as a profession. Another factor around competencies was that, while providing an environment that was conducive and supporting the client provides a great opportunity for engaging with the client, it is the reflective questioning that holds potential for facilitating transformative learning.

Finally, the findings have illuminated the process of transformative learning in executive coaching. This can be described in three phases: (1) the phase of cognitive and emotional dissonance; (2) the phase of uncertainty and rational dialogue; and (3) the phase of self-confidence and exploration, which resulted in a shift in meaning perspective and change in behaviour.

This can also be mapped out in a programme theory for each case as Context + Mechanism 1 + Mechanisms 2 = Outcome. The revised formula is a C+M1+M2=O configuration for each case. The significance of this is that the traditional CMO configuration has one mechanism, and these findings reveal how a CMO can be configured using two mechanisms.

## **Chapter 6: Study contributions**

### **6.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the contributions made by this study on the process of transformative learning in executive coaching. Firstly, the chapter presents and discusses the theoretical contributions. The main contribution is the theoretical model on the process of transformative learning in executive coaching that is derived from the findings and themes generated and discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. In addition, the chapter presents and discusses the methodological and practical contributions made by this study.

### **6.2. The theory building process**

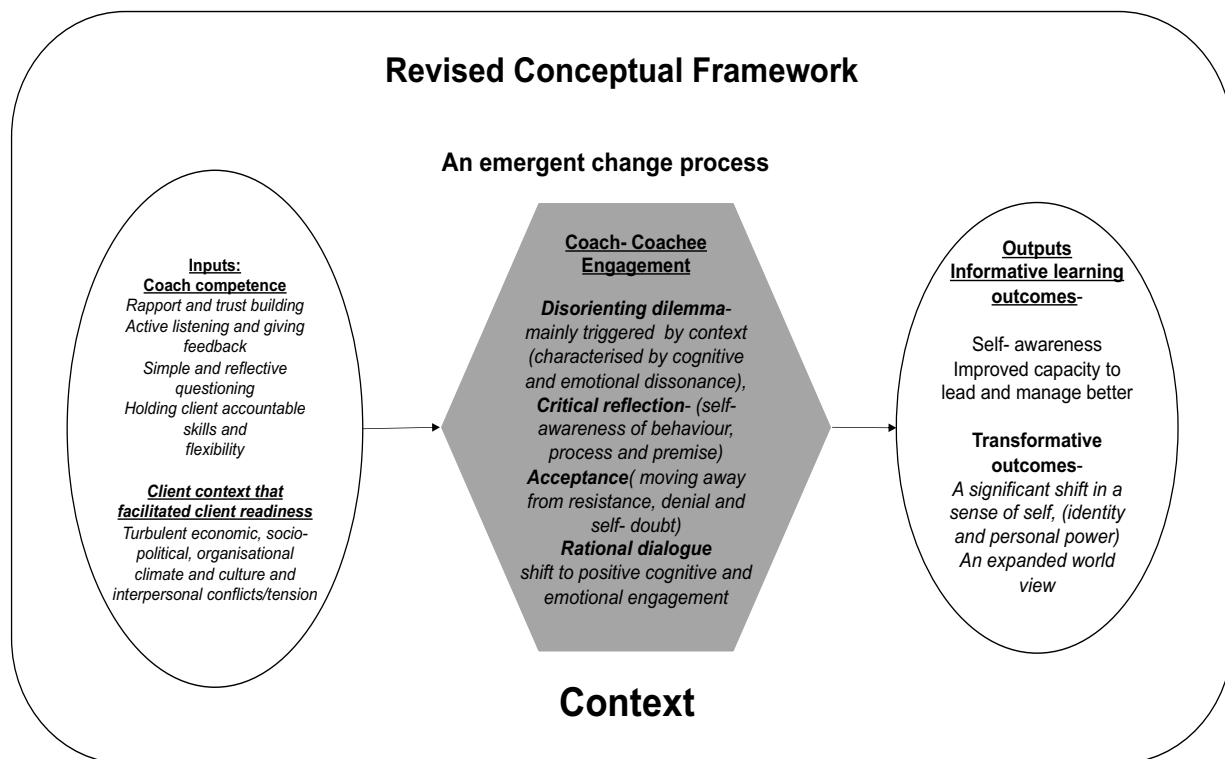
Theory building is about explaining how and why a phenomenon occurs (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Whetten, 1989). Contribution to theory can be divided into two elements: incrementally advancing current theory and generating a new theory (Corley & Gioia, 2011). This research straddled between two fields of study – the adult learning and the executive coaching fields. In the adult learning field, this study has advanced Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory and expanded its utilisation to the executive coaching field. However, in the executive coaching field, this research has made a new contribution on the process of transformative learning in an executive coaching intervention.

The main problem that this research sought to address was the lack of process evaluation studies that explain how and why coaching is successful, and thus become popular as a leadership development strategy (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Ely et al., 2010; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). In particular, this study contributes to the claims made by other scholars that coaching facilitates transformative learning (Corrie & Lawson, 2017; Cox, 2015). A third contribution to the theory of coaching is the identification of the limitation that the many outcome studies that have been conducted in coaching have not been context sensitive (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Bozer & Delegach, 2019; Fatien Diochon & Nizet, 2019; Fatien Diochon et al., 2019).

To address these theoretical problems in the field of executive coaching, the study's main research question was: How, under what contexts, and for whom does an executive coaching process foster transformative learning?

The key phenomena of executive coaching and transformative learning were described in detail in the literature review in Chapter 2; this was done by isolating the factors that make up the phenomena. Borrowing from process theory (Van de Ven, 1992), a conceptual framework was developed that proposed that context, coachee readiness and coach competence were the key preconditions (inputs and mechanisms) that would enable or facilitate the emergent change process, which was characterised by the coach-coachee interaction to produce transformative learning outcomes. The original conceptual framework indicated that the transformative learning mechanisms (a disorienting dilemma, critical reflection and rational dialogue) are embedded in the emergent change process, which is the coach-coachee interaction.

Using the within-case (Chapter 4) and cross-case analyses (Chapter five), the emergent process of how transformative learning occurs in executive coaching was elucidated. Based on this empirical research, the specific details that make up the inputs, the emergent change processes and the transformative learning outcomes are known, as listed in Figure 6.1.



**Figure 6.1:** Revised conceptual framework

The revised conceptual framework based on the findings of the study indicate that the preconditions on the coach competence side included rapport and trust building; active listening and giving feedback; simple and reflective questioning; skills for holding the client accountable; and flexibility. The client context that facilitated client readiness included the turbulent economic, socio-political, and organisational climates and culture, interpersonal conflicts/tension that the client experienced during the coaching intervention as well as client characteristics. The coach competence and client context are more explicit after the empirical study.

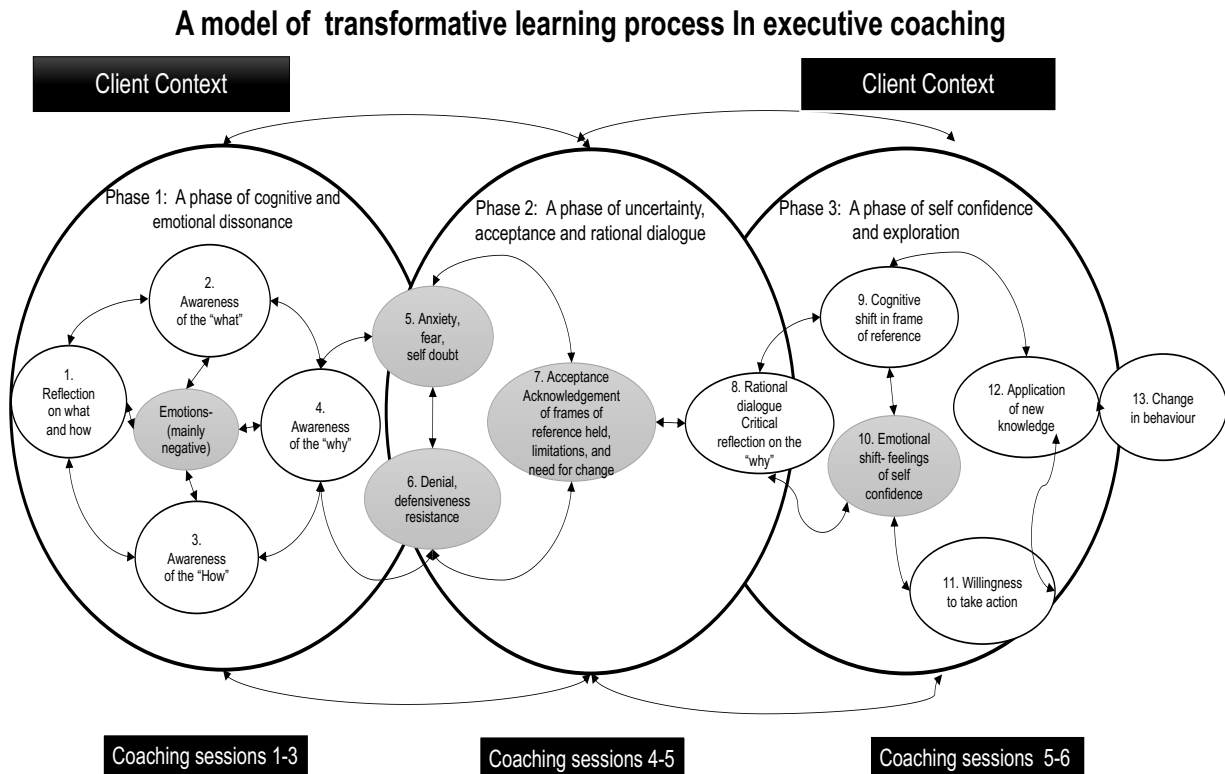
The emergent change process was characterised by a disorienting dilemma expressed in the form of cognitive and emotional dissonance, which was mainly triggered by context. The second component was the process of critical reflection that facilitated self-awareness. The third component was the process of acceptance, which helped the executives move away from a state of anxiety, resistance and denial to accepting their limiting frames of reference. The final component was a process of rational dialogue, whereby executives were able to engage objectively with the frames of reference, facilitating a shift in meaning perspectives that resulted in them gaining self-confidence to apply new knowledge, thus precipitating a change in behaviour. The main difference from the original framework is the process of acceptance.

Two sets of outcomes were realised amongst the executive clients. Transformative learning outcomes were in the form of a significant shift in a sense of self (identity and personal power) and an expanded or changed worldview. The informative learning (Kegan, 2009) outcomes were in the form of a deeper sense of self-awareness, as well as improved capacity to lead and manage.

### **6.2.1. *A theoretical model of the process of transformative learning in executive coaching***

The emergent change process was the focus of this research in order to determine how the transformative learning process unfolds in an executive coaching engagement. In tracking how the mechanisms of both the clients and the coaches interacted to produce outcomes, this study reveals that there were three main phases of learning, each with four sub-phases or stages. The three main phases are: a phase of cognitive and emotional dissonance, a phase of uncertainty, acceptance and rational dialogue, and a phase of self-confidence and exploration. These phases illustrate that transformative learning is an intertwined process of cognitive and emotional

engagement. Figure 6.2 illustrates and summarises the process of transformative learning as per the findings based on the 12 coaching sessions of the four cases.



**Figure 6.2:** A model of transformative learning process in executive coaching

*Phase 1: The phase of cognitive and emotional dissonance*

At the beginning of this phase (stage 1), the clients start with reflection on content and process as they narrate their story informed by their context. As they narrate and reflect on their story, the clients gain awareness of what they do, or what is happening (stage 2) in their context. They also gain awareness of how things occur or how they do certain things (stage 3), as well as gain awareness of why (stage 4) – that is, what drives or informs their thinking patterns or behaviour. This process generates cognitive and emotional dissonance for the client. The emotions at this phase are mainly negative, as they are initially triggered by the context and later prompted by the self-awareness process.

The awareness process was accompanied by an incremental process of emotional turbulence. At the early stage of the coaching process, this would include feelings of disappointment, frustration, anger, shock, betrayal, resentment, shame and humiliation. In the later stage of this phase, when the clients gain awareness of the “why” – that is, what informs their behaviour – and they are confronted with their frames of reference that may not be serving them at this point, the emotions loop into phase two, a state of anxiety, fear and self-doubt.

Based on the above description of this phase, the following is proposed:

***Proposition 1:*** *In a coaching conversation, self-awareness increases the probability of the client experiencing cognitive and emotional dissonance, and self-awareness at the premise level increases the probability of the client experiencing a state of uncertainty.*

*Phase 2: The phase of uncertainty, acceptance and rational dialogue*

In this phase, awareness at the premise (why) level has been reached through the coach’s support and questioning techniques. The clients have gone deeper to understand the reasons behind their thinking patterns, emotions and/or behaviour. However, they are still uncertain (stage 5) of the change(s) they need to make and may still feel ontologically insecure (Green & Mälkki, 2017). Consequently, clients may display feelings of anxiety, fear and self-doubt. As demonstrated in this study, emotions at this stage are not as a result of not knowing what is creating the dissonance, as the client does know; instead, fear and anxiety set in because the clients feel that they may not have the skills and/or resources to change, thus creating self-doubt. They may also fear that in shifting their frames, they may be losing something; or they do not necessarily see the benefit of thinking or doing things differently, making them resistant in the form of denial or defensiveness (stage 6).

At the early stage of this phase of uncertainty, the clients have not as yet fully engaged rationally with their assumptions, beliefs and values that have been uncovered and may not be serving them in the current context. Although they are aware of these, they may not have reached a state of acceptance of the negative impact on their experience of life in their context. The continued facilitation by the coaches would assist the clients to deal with the state of uncertainty and unravel what else is holding the clients back and bring more awareness of what is at stake if they do not alter their thinking about these frames. The continued process of the coach challenging the client on these frames of reference ultimately leads to a state (stage 7) of acknowledgement and

acceptance of their limiting frames and the need for, or benefit of, change. Acceptance is a process of facilitating clients to embrace dissonance, so as to focus on what they want for their lives (Hayes et al., 2009; Wild et al., 2017). As demonstrated in this study, once the clients reached a stage of acceptance, they were more willing to engage rationally (stage 8) on their limiting beliefs, values and assumptions.

Based on the above description of this phase, the following is proposed:

***Proposition 2:*** *In a coaching conversation, the more a client reaches significant levels of acceptance, the more they are ready to engage in a rational dialogue about their frames of reference, thereby swinging from negative to positive emotions.*

#### *Phase 3: The phase of self-confidence and exploration*

This is the final phase in which the client moves towards resolving the disorienting dilemma. In this phase, the clients continue with rational dialogue and begin to make cognitive shifts in their frames of reference (stage 9). This enables them to move away from socially authored meanings to re-authoring their own meanings (Kegan, 2009). The emotional experiences also begin to swing from negative and uncertain to positive emotions as they gain self-confidence in their abilities to transform themselves (stage 10). This phase is also characterised by explicitly accepting and adopting new ways of being and behaving (stage 11). The clients confidently commit to taking action (stage 12), thus behaviour change becomes evident (stage 13). At this point, the coaches need to confirm, verify and affirm the decisions made by the clients, as well as assist them in co-creating an action plan for implementation. Based on the above description of this phase, the below is proposed.

***Proposition 3:*** *A cognitive shift in frames of mind facilitates a sense of self-confidence and exploration, which results in the application of new learnings.*

### **6.2.2. Comparison of the new theoretical model with transformative learning and executive coaching theories**

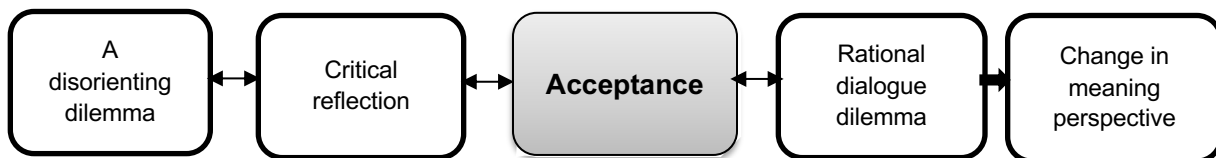
As described earlier in this chapter, for a theory to be regarded as a contribution, it has to advance an existing theory or has to be a completely new theory (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Whetten, 1989). This section, firstly, compares the theoretical model derived in this study with the transformative



learning theory. Secondly, it compares the theoretical model with current theories or frameworks in executive coaching that are intended for transformative learning.

### *Comparison with Mezirow's transformative learning theory*

In Chapter 2, it was discussed that while Mezirow started with the initial 10 steps of transformative learning, over time as the discourse on transformative learning evolved, three core elements that summarise the 10 steps were elucidated as: “a disorienting dilemma”, “critical reflection”, and “rational dialogue”. Mezirow’s (1997) argument was that the application or experience of a combination of these three elements may lead to transformative learning amongst individuals. The findings of this research highlighted a fourth component, “acceptance”, as a critical element that comes before rational dialogue. See Figure 6.3 below.



**Figure 6.3:** Updated components of the transformative learning process in executive coaching

### *A disorienting dilemma in executive coaching*

In addition to confirming that dilemma is context-driven, this study has gone further to show that there is a spillover effect of the multiplicity of contexts that compound the disorienting dilemma experienced by executives. Executives in the public sector are confronted with the task of managing politics, societal impact and/or influencing citizens, who are their main customers, as well as having to manage the organisations and team dynamics. All of these contextual factors contributed to the disruption of “normality”. Unlike in adult education, where most transformative learning studies were done retrospectively (Taylor, 2007), it was found that disorientation can also be triggered proactively in executive coaching. This is possible because of the coaches’ questioning and feedback to the client. As a result, the presence of a coach makes it possible to catalyse the process of disorientation, which is a prerequisite for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990).

### *Critical reflection in executive coaching*

Scholars in transformative learning (Dirkx, 2012; Dirkx et al., 2018; Green & Mälkki, 2017; Hoggan et al., 2017; Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2016; Van Zyl et al., 2011) have criticised the transformative

learning theory on the basis that it overemphasises critical reflection as a cognitive process, while undermining other ways of knowing, such as intuition and emotions. The coaching intervention has shown that critical reflection is both a cognitive and emotional process, and that the emotional experiences in a coaching conversation are incremental as facilitated by the coach. Furthermore, while the client will experience negative emotions as triggered by context, self-awareness (especially at premise level) contributes to experiencing additional emotions of anxiety, self-doubt, and/or resistance to change.

In addition, the coach can facilitate the transition from negative to positive emotions, which is required as a motivation to learn (Boyatzis, 2016; MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017). This positive thinking can also assist the client in reappraising or reframing negative events to facilitate learning and development (Garland et al., 2017). Finally, positive emotional states have been found to have high value in humanistic psychology as they are linked to the individual need to thrive or flourish (Held, 2018). In this study, the presence of a highly skilled and experienced coach has been found to facilitate the client's transition from negative to positive thinking and emotions, even in one coaching session.

#### *Acceptance in executive coaching*

The literature on transformative learning does not explicitly talk about the process of acceptance in the transformative learning process. This study has found that acceptance is preceded by rational dialogue, as illustrated in the theoretical model. This is a significant extension of literature and contribution to transformative learning theory in relation to its application, not only to executive coaching, but also to adult learning in general. Acknowledgement and acceptance of own limitations or of things that are outside of the individual's control minimise "ontological insecurity" (Green & Mällki, 2014) and open the individual to embracing change and readiness to explore and learn new ways of doing (Hayes, 2009; Wild et al., 2017).

#### *Rational dialogue in executive coaching*

Having acceptance as a building block, an objective engagement on frames of reference with the client becomes easier. The coach can facilitate by challenging these frames to bring about shifts in whatever values, beliefs and assumptions have been a source of stagnation or problem for the client. In this process, the client will make cognitive and emotional shifts. Therefore, this study has advanced transformative learning theory by expanding its utilisation in executive coaching.

### 6.2.2.1. *Comparison with executive coaching theories/frameworks that claim to facilitate transformative learning*

Studies on the transformative learning process in coaching have largely had serious limitations (Corrie & Lawson, 2017; Cox, 2015; Fazel, 2013; Gray, 2006; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Sammut, 2014). For example, some research studies have theoretically mapped the coaching process along Mezirow's transformative learning steps without any empirical evidence – namely the Cox (2015), Fazel (2013), and Gray (2006) studies. Other studies have been empirical, although these remain “unsubstantiated” or “not verified” (Corrie & Lawson, 2017; Griffiths, 2015; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009). Others had methodological weaknesses (Corrie & Lawson, 2017; Sammut, 2014).

The study conducted by Griffiths and Campbell (2009) contributed by describing how learning happens during a coaching process. They describe the three stages of learning in a coaching process as the discovery of new knowledge, the application of new knowledge, and the integration of new knowledge. Griffiths' model also describes the roles that both the coach and coachee need to play to facilitate learning in each stage. The study went further to link the coaching process to multiple learning theories, such as andragogy (Knowles, 1968) and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). However, this study centred on personal rather than executive coaching and did not specifically focus on transformative learning, except to refer to “deep and powerful learning” without clearly defining what this entails. Moreover, data was only collected from coaches, with no apparent data being collected from the beneficiaries of coaching to verify the findings. Griffiths and Campbell (2009) conceded that the results were unsubstantiated.

The study conducted by Sammut (2014) was designed to explore the extent to which selected coaches understood what transformative learning was and whether it was applied in their coaching practice. No clients were interviewed, so claims that transformative learning occurred could not be triangulated.

Cox (2015) has mapped out the 10 steps of Mezirow's transformative learning process and linked them to a coaching process. However, this was also from a theoretical perspective, with no significant empirical data collection to verify the model.

Another recent study conducted by Corrie and Lawson (2017) drew from coaching literature as well as Mezirow's 10-step process of transformative learning and proposed a five-stage

transformative learning coaching model. However, they acknowledged that “the design and development of the transformative executive coaching model was created pragmatically to resolve a practical coaching challenge faced by the authors, and while acknowledging early successes, it has not been fully tested to a significant level (Corrie & Lawson, 2017, p. 56).

One of the main limitations of these studies is that, while they mention transformative learning theory and claim that some form of transformative learning occurred, the key processes of transformative learning – as outlined by transformative learning theory scholars, such as Hoggan (2016), Kegan (2000), Mezirow (1997), and Taylor (2007) – were not adequately explored empirically. The key processes include creating a disorienting dilemma, critical reflection and rational dialogue.

This research sought to further investigate and provide empirical evidence-based research on how the executive coaching process interconnects with the transformative learning process to produce transformative learning outcomes. This was done by investigating how the three key transformative learning processes are experienced by a client during an executive coaching process. A fourth component, acceptance, was added. The study also tracked the client’s cognitive and the emotional experiences throughout the process. It illuminated the role of emotions and the role of the coach in contributing to a swinging of client emotions from negative to positive to ensure that learning occurs. Consequently, this study empirically filled a significant gap in executive coaching theory on how transformative learning occurs in an executive coaching intervention.

### ***6.2.3. Programme theory for transformative learning in executive coaching***

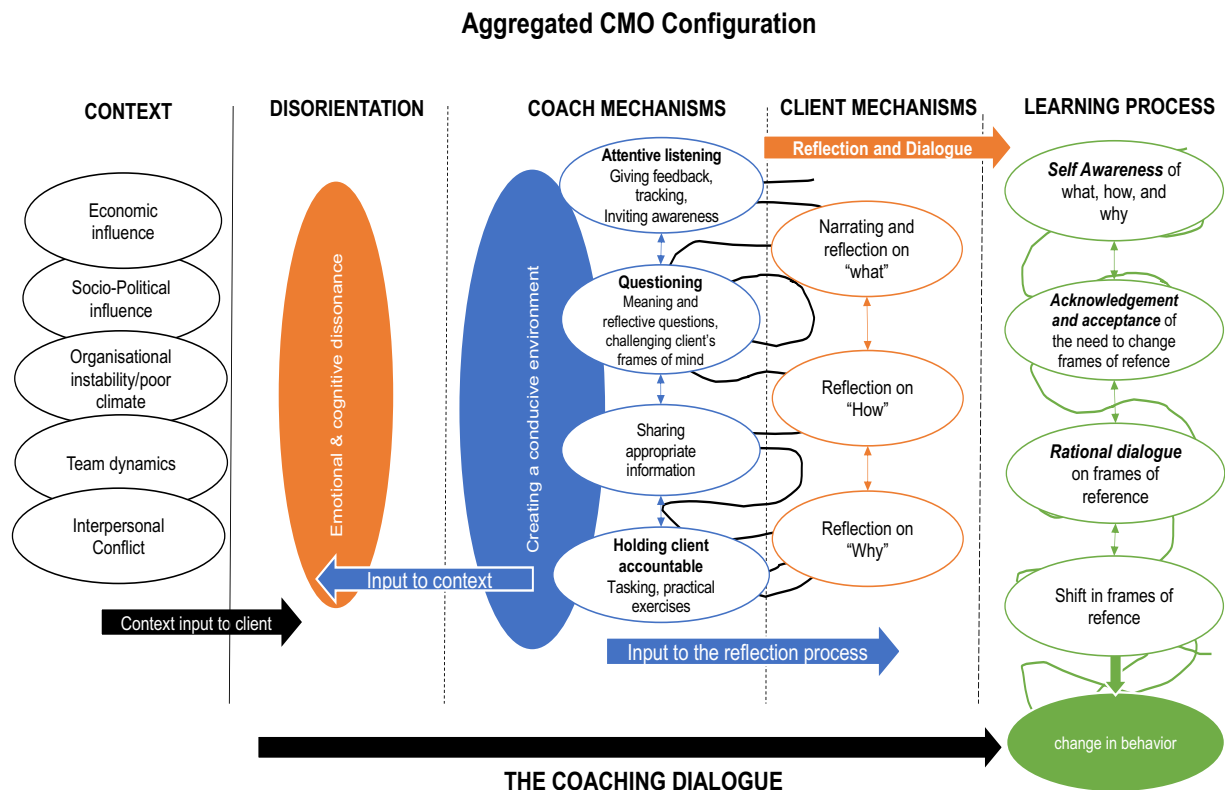
Having mapped out the process of transformative learning in executive coaching, a second theoretical contribution of this study is a revised programme theory for transformative learning in executive coaching. The programme theory could be used to evaluate executive coaching interventions that are aimed at transformative learning. In developing the programme theory, it was important to note that coaching intervention occurred under extreme organisational turbulence for the four sample cases in this study. Therefore, the programme theory would be limited to similar contexts.

The original programme theory developed as a design phase was as follows:

*An executive coaching intervention provided by a competent coach to a willing client (context) will provide an environment that is conducive and supportive, and challenges the client (mechanism 1) to experience a disorienting dilemma, which facilitates critical reflection and rational dialogue (mechanisms 2), producing a new meaning perspective resulting in behavioural change (outcome).*

The figure below illustrates an aggregated CMO configuration drawn from the individual CMOs described in Chapter 5. This was drawn from similarities observed in the contexts, the mechanisms of both the client and coach, as well as the outcomes of the intervention.

To illustrate the coach's inputs, the aggregated CMO configuration below models how the coach's process interacted with the client's process across all of the four cases over the three sessions to produce transformative learning outcomes. The black circles represent the context, the orange circles represent the client's process (mechanisms), the blue circles represent the coach's process (mechanisms), while the green circles represent the learning process and outcomes.



**Figure 6.4:** *An aggregated context-mechanism-outcome configuration across all cases*

Based on Figure 6.4 above, it can be aggregated that the learning process is a function of a combination of the coach's input as a facilitator or a resource (M1), the client's reflection process (M2), which comprises a cognitive and emotional experience, the process of acceptance and a rational dialogue process. All of these processes happen within a specific client context with the client's critical reflection process operating iteratively.

The clients' context presented a disorienting dilemma, which they brought into the coaching sessions. The coach mechanism of creating a conducive environment became a resource or input to the client's context, enabling them to deal with the dilemmas they had brought into the session as well as the dilemmas that were triggered within the session. The mechanisms of active listening, questioning, holding the client accountable and sharing information became a resource or input into the client's reflection process. The presence of the coach as a resource enabled the client to reflect at multiple levels – that is, reflection on the what, the how and the why of their behaviour and the behaviour of others. At the realisation that their frames of reference were proving to be obsolete in solving their current problems, the clients had to go through a process of accepting their limitations. With this acceptance, they could engage rationally or objectively with these frames and alter their meaning perspectives. This enabled the clients to make choices and decisions that produced transformative learning outcomes.

The learning process started with self-awareness of the what, how and why. It moved to acceptance before rational dialogue. A shift in frames of reference resulted in a change in behaviour.

In addition to the aggregated programme theory above, it was also noticed in the study that the client context changed depending on the outcome of the previous stage or phase of coaching. This is also reflected in the theoretical model presented in Figure 6.3. The outcome becomes a new context for the client requiring different resources from the coach to produce the next outcome (Dalkin et al., 2015; Jagosh et al., 2015). The table below presents this in a realist evaluation framework and illustrates the interaction between the various contexts and the two mechanisms.

**Table 6.1:** A configured context-mechanism-outcome matrix

	<b>Context</b>	<b>Coach resource mechanism</b>	<b>Client response mechanism</b>	<b>Learning outcome</b>
1	Public-sector executives experiencing a disorienting dilemma	Provides a safe and confidential space and a trusting relationship	Begins to narrate the story and sets outcomes or intentions of the coaching	Feels safe to relate story and to explore disorientation
2	Executives feel safe and trust the coaching process	Supports the client through active listening (inviting awareness, summarising and giving feedback, tracking) and simple questioning	Continues to reflect on events and situations in the work context and how these occur	Gains awareness behaviour and frames that drive the behaviour
3	Clients are aware of limiting behaviours and the frames behind behaviour	Supports the client through active listening Asks a combination of simple and reflective questions	Begins the critical reflection process	State of anxiety, fear and self-doubt
4	Anxious and/or defensive client	Supports the client by acknowledging feelings, validating, and managing emotions Continues to ask reflective questions, challenging the client	Critical reflection on the frames of mind	Awareness, acknowledgement and acceptance of limiting frames
5	Client readiness to change	Supports the client through active listening and challenges the client through reflective questions	Critical reflection and rational dialogue on frames of reference	Shift in meaning perspective – e.g., shift in sense of self, expanded worldview
6	Readiness to explore new meaning perspectives	Supports and challenges the client to explore new meanings Holds the client accountable	Explores options and tries out new meanings	Confidence to apply newly acquired knowledge
7	Confidence to apply new learning	Supports the client in crafting action plan and holds the client accountable	Implements action plan	Change in behaviour

In summary, the new programme theory reads as follows:

*In an executive coaching intervention, the coach provides resources (M1) in a form of different coach competencies in the different client contexts (C) throughout the phases of the coaching intervention. The coach's resources influence the client's reasoning ability or responses and emotional states (M2) through critical reflection, acceptance and rational dialogue to produce informative and transformative learning outcomes (O). The formula is amended as follows  $C+M1+M2=O$ .*

### **6.3. Methodological contributions**

Theory development has to also contribute to *science* concerning methodology that other researchers can use to further research (Corley & Gioia, 2011, p. 12). Executive coaching as a field of practice has advanced in the last three decades, although the research has focused on outcomes (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Ely et al., 2010; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). The main criticism of the studies conducted is that, firstly, there was a lack of adequate empirical evidence on the process of coaching; and secondly, most of these studies as discussed under section 6.2.2.2 had limitations, which were mainly methodological (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Ely et al., 2010; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014).

This study followed a robust methodology that ensured triangulation by theory, methodology and data source (Carter et al., 2014; Morse, 2015). Three theory streams were used in analysis and theory development – namely transformative learning, executive coaching, and realist evaluations.

Regarding methodological triangulation, this study was amongst the first to use direct observation of actual coaching sessions (via video recording) as the core primary source of data. Moreover, a variation of diary entries in which the researcher designed a PCR guide after each session for the coach and coachee was a useful technique to track progress over a longitudinal study. Collecting this data for the PCR via SurveyMonkey was also another useful technique, as the data was captured accurately early enough after each session before the following one. This could benefit future researchers in this field who are looking to track participants' progress over a long period and evaluate the impact of executive coaching interventions. This was used to corroborate the video transcripts. In addition, post-coaching interviews were conducted to triangulate the other two data collection methods.



Data source triangulation was ensured by the variability of levels of leadership of the executives selected – levels of government departments, sectors, and gender were applied in case selection. Data was also collected from coachees and coaches.

#### 6.4. Contributions to practice

The final contribution to theory is that it should be useful for practice (Corley & Gioia, 2011, p. 12). While this study did not come up with a new skill set required by the coach, it has delineated coach behaviours required at each phase of the transformative learning process in an executive coaching intervention. Table 6.2 summarises the coach behaviours that would be required in a coaching session to facilitate each phase of transformative learning. This provides an opportunity for practitioners to have a specific way of targeting transformation of executives using the phases of transformative learning in executive coaching as outlined in Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2:** Coach competencies required at each phase of the transformative learning process

Phases/coach mechanisms	Conducive environment	Supporting the client	Challenging the client
Phase 1: Cognitive and emotional dissonance phase	Rapport building, safe space, trusting relationship, confidentiality, and flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invites awareness of behaviour and emotions</li> <li>Tracks conversation, language and non-verbal gestures, and summarises and gives feedback</li> <li>Acknowledges the client's feelings and emotions, and manages extreme emotional outbursts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asks simple questions (clarity, probing, provoking, exploration and outcome-related)</li> <li>Asks some reflective questions – to trigger disorientation</li> <li>Asks some framing questions</li> </ul>
Phase 2: Phase of uncertainty		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledges the client's feelings</li> <li>Validates and affirms the client's values, intentions, purpose, skills and other positive behaviours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asks reflective questions – meaning, intention</li> <li>Checks values, beliefs and assumptions</li> <li>Challenges limiting values, beliefs, and assumptions</li> <li>Challenges generalisation and distortions</li> <li>Manages mind – emotional states</li> </ul>

Phases/coach mechanisms	Conducive environment	Supporting the client	Challenging the client
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frames and reframes in line with outcome and intention</li> </ul>
Phase 3: Phase of self-confidence and exploration		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledges and validates shifts in mind frames and behaviours</li> <li>• Gives information where necessary</li> <li>• Celebrates achievements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Checks for permission and decision for action</li> <li>• Asks action and application of learning-related questions</li> <li>• Co-creates tasks</li> <li>• Engages the client in practical exercises</li> <li>• Holds the client accountable for application of learning</li> </ul>

This suggests that while an environment that is conducive is required in the beginning to build rapport, it needs to be maintained throughout the coaching conversation. Regarding active listening and giving feedback, in phases one and two the coaches are required to invite awareness of behaviour and emotions; track conversation, language and non-verbal gestures; summarise and give feedback; acknowledge client feelings and emotions and manage extreme emotions. In phases two and three, the coaches are required to validate and affirm the clients' values, intentions, purpose, skills and other positive behaviours as the clients go through stages of anxiety fear and self-doubt. As the clients enter the stages of cognitive shifts in meaning perspective, the coaches should acknowledge and validate shifts in mind frames and behaviours, give information where necessary and celebrate achievements observed.

Regarding questioning and challenging skills, it is crucial to ask simple, clarification questions in phase one that will help the clients to begin narrating their story and to set coaching outcomes. There may be reflective questions, but these would be mainly to clarify outcomes at this stage. As the coaching progresses, a different set of questions would be required and would mainly include reflective questions that ask for meanings and intentions; that check and challenge values, beliefs and assumptions; that challenge generalisations and distortions; and that continue to manage emotions. The intention in managing emotions is to allow the client to experience and

derive learnings from the emotions, and to help swing negative emotions to positive emotions (Bachkirova & Cox, 2007; Cox, 2015; Cremona, 2010). In the last phase, questioning is geared towards checking for permission, asking clients to make explicit decisions for action, and asking application of learning and action-related questions.

Thus, this research has contributed to the body of knowledge in building coaching competencies by extending literature from an empirical source on the details of coach competencies developed by Maltbia et al. (2014) and Griffiths (2015). Firstly, it outlines the sub-skills under each category of the core skills, and secondly, it identifies specific skills or coach behaviours required at each of the transformative learning phases.

### **6.5. Conclusion on contributions**

The study makes four main contributions. To the field of executive coaching, it has contributed a theoretical model and process outline of how transformative learning occurs in an executive coaching context. To the field of adult learning, it has advanced the theory of transformative learning for application in executive coaching. The methodological contribution comprises a robust design that other researchers can use. To the practice of executive coaching, it offers the coaching competencies required at different phases of the client's transformative learning process.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions, limitations and future directions

### 7.1. Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis by summarising the key findings of the study. Firstly, this section answers the research questions and draws conclusions therefrom. Secondly, it presents the limitations of this study and makes recommendations for future research.

#### *Background to the study*

This study investigated the process of transformative learning in executive coaching. The main research problem was to address the paucity of empirical studies that contribute to building theory in the field of executive coaching. In the advent of claims that executive coaching facilitates transformative learning, there has been no convincing enquiry to confirm these claims. The literature review has shown that despite the increased and successful utilisation of executive coaching as a leadership development strategy in organisations (Grant, 2014; Jones et al., 2016; Theeboom et al., 2014), its application has overtaken the development of its theoretical base (Corrie & Lawson, 2017; Ely et al., 2010; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to contribute to the development of executive coaching theory.

The literature that was reviewed revealed that most of the coaching research conducted had centred on the outcomes of coaching, with a minimal number of studies focusing on the process of coaching (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Ely et al., 2010; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). In addition, while coaching has been found to facilitate learning (Fazel, 2013; Griffiths, 2015) and other scholars propose that it facilitates transformative learning (Cerni et al., 2010; Corrie & Lawson, 2017; Van Zyl et al., 2011), most of these studies have been found to be methodologically weak, as they relied on single method and self-report data, and in some cases had no researcher independence and insufficient triangulation of data sources (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Grover & Furnham, 2016). These scholars also argued that the nature of most of these studies were short-term interventions and that longitudinal studies needed to be considered for credibility and validity. Moreover, none of these studies have sufficiently investigated the actual process of how coaching facilitates transformative learning. The role of context, which is key to leadership development, has been excluded in most of these studies (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Ely et al., 2010; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014).

This study sought to address these problems by conducting empirical research that focused specifically on the process of transformative learning in executive coaching. The main research question was: How, under what contexts, and for whom does an executive coaching process foster transformative learning? The research sub-questions asked were:

- Q1 Under what context did transformative learning occur?
- Q2 What coach mechanisms facilitate transformative learning?
- Q3 What client mechanisms facilitate transformative learning?
- Q4 How does the transformative learning process occur?

In conceptualising the study, process theory (Van de Ven, 1992), and realist evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) were applied. Using a realist evaluation framework, a programme theory (hypothesised theory) was developed and tested with empirical evidence, resulting in a refined programme theory.

The literature review presented in Chapter 2 was anchored in transformative learning theory, coaching theory and practice and process theory. Transformative learning theory was used to assess whether transformative learning occurs during an executive coaching process.

The study used a multiple case study design, merged with realistic evaluation. This was done to allow for data collection from multiple sources and to get in-depth analysis of the processes to be studied. While a purposive sample of nine cases underwent a coaching intervention, using inductive thematic saturation (Saunders et al., 2018), four cases were selected for the purposes of this research. These cases were from the public health and finance sectors in South Africa. The rationale for the selection of these two sectors was that they both were going through extreme socio-political upheavals at the time of the intervention, creating a unique opportunity for coaching within a peculiar environment.

Four professional executive coaches volunteered their coaching services. Each coachee received six face-to-face coaching sessions over six months. The three primary sources of data collection were: direct observation in the form of video-recorded coaching sessions (transcribed into text data), PCRs collected after each coaching session from each pair over the six-month period, and an in-depth interview was conducted for both the client and coach at the end of the coaching programme.

The analysis process also followed a rigorous regime of coding. Inductive coding was mainly used to generate first- and second-level codes and categories, while deductive coding was used at the end to generate themes in line with literature (Saldaña, 2016). This was done using the Atlas.ti software. The coding approach and terminology used were taken from Saldaña (2013, 2016). About 350 first-level codes, just over 50 categories and about 12 themes were generated. Reports were drawn from Atlas.ti software to write the within- and cross-case analyses.

The next section summarises the key findings of the research, implications and conclusions for scholarship and practice, as well as the proposals for future research. The section is organised according to the four research sub-questions.

## **7.2. Summary of findings and conclusions**

### ***7.2.1. Research sub-question 1: Under what context did transformative learning occur?***

At the programme design phase, it was postulated that the key inputs that would form part of the context were the readiness of the client and coach competency. Based on the research paradigm chosen – that is, realism – it was also assumed other contextual factors would impact the executive clients during the implementation of the coaching intention (Krausse, 2005). The realist evaluation approach as well as the case study design allowed the researcher to explore how context influenced the coachee and coach mechanisms, and how these resulted in transformative learning outcomes for the executive (Marchal et al., 2012; Pawson, 2013, Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Yin, 2014). The cross-case comparison analysis allowed the researcher to deal with the complexities presented by context (Bizzi & Langley, 2012; Langley et al., 2013; Pettigrew, 1997; Van de Ven, 1992).

While the research paradigm and approach prepared the researcher for any eventuality in the context, it did not anticipate the extreme turbulence in the clients' context that would be experienced. The study found that, throughout the coaching intervention, the clients operated under extreme economic and socio-political turbulence that impacted negatively on their organisational climate, which resulted in interpersonal relationship challenges and intrapersonal conflict. These were the main sources of disorienting dilemma amongst the executives. Thus, what is now known is that it was the multiplicity of the context and the resultant spillover effects that compounded the experience of disorienting dilemma amongst the executive clients. This facilitated a fertile ground for transformation to occur amongst the sample executives.

Also evident in the findings relating to context was that socio-political factors seemed to play a major role in impacting on organisational and interpersonal relational factors. This is as a result of politics in public-sector organisations being closer or, in some instances, being part of the administration.

Literature in transformative learning indicates that the first step in transformative learning is an experience of a disorienting dilemma by the learner and that context plays a major role in this (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Hoggan et al., 2017; Mälkki, 2010; Mälkki & Green, 2014; Mezirow, 1990). This study supports this, although the literature on transformative learning seems to have dealt with the issue of context in a singular manner, not necessarily illuminating the multiplicity and interconnectedness of these factors. However, the realist evaluation literature does acknowledge the multifaceted nature of context, which includes a wide variety of factors, such as socio-political, organisational, and interpersonal aspects (Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007; Pawson, 2013).

In summary, the study's findings confirm that the disorienting dilemma is context-driven and that disorienting dilemma is the result of a multiplicity of factors that act together in a hierarchy of spillover effects. The research also indicated that executive coaching can assist public-sector executives who are going through this type of dilemmas to centre themselves, so they can play their multiple roles of managing the politics, organisations and communities simultaneously.

#### *7.2.1.1. Conclusion on context and implications for executive coaching*

Organisations function within a socio-economic and socio-political environment that impacts organisational climate and interpersonal factors. These contextual factors potentially elicit disorienting dilemmas for executives in organisations. In this study, the coaching intervention occurred under extreme socio-political and organisational turbulence with a negative economic climate.

There are two main implications for executive coaching based on the findings. Coaching in a turbulent environment requires the coach to be flexible enough to accommodate contextual turbulence while having a systemic view of the client's context, instead of viewing the client in isolation of their organisation and broader external environment. This seemed to reinforce rapport between the client and coach in all four cases and contributed to effective coaching. From these

findings, it can be deduced that coaching cannot be isolated from the systemic issues of the client's context.

The second implication for executive coaching is that, while the coaches work with the clients to assist them in dealing with the intrapersonal tension, the intention is to help them gain control over the intrapersonal and interpersonal issues so that they can contribute to a better organisational climate. While they have no control over the economic and socio-political aspects, the clients can learn to shift their frames of reference in how they respond to the situation they find themselves in.

### **7.2.2. Research sub-question 2: What coach mechanisms facilitate transformative learning?**

The initial conceptual design proposed that the coach mechanisms or competencies that would be part of the input into the coaching process would include: creating a conducive environment (Bennett & Bush, 2011; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Blackman et al., 2016; Gan & Chong, 2015; Graßmann, 2019; Rekalde et al., 2015; Sonesh et al., 2015), supporting the client through active listening and giving feedback (Bozer & Jones, 2018, Cremona, 2010; De Haan et al., 2011; Drollinger et al., 2006; Fischer-Lokou et al., 2016; Manzano et al., 2015; Rekalde et al., 2015; Woodcock, 2010), challenging the client by asking questions (Giapponi & Ritter, 2015; Romme & Van Seggelen-Damen, 2015), and holding the client accountable (Griffiths, 2015).

The research's findings have revealed the specific role that each of these categories play in the process of transformative learning. The findings have also disaggregated specific coach behaviours that are involved in the performance of each mechanism and these are described below.

*Creating a conducive environment forms the foundation for facilitating an effective coaching conversation* (Bennett & Bush, 2011; Boyce et al., 2004; Gan & Chong, 2015; Graßmann, 2019; Sonesh et al., 2015). The coach behaviours that enable the creation of a conducive environment were found to be: ensuring confidentiality, building rapport, building a trusting relationship, being fully present, and the flexibility of the coach to the client's context. These core skills were demonstrated by all of the coaches, who assisted the clients in participating in the coaching intervention over the six-month period.



*Supporting the client through active listening and giving feedback facilitates self-awareness* (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Cremona, 2010; De Haan et al., 2011; Drollinger et al., 2006; Fischer-Lokou et al., 2016; Manzano et al., 2015; Woodcock, 2010). The skills demonstrated by the coaches in this category included raising awareness; tracking the client's use of language; tracking non-verbal gestures; integrating themes from a previous session or earlier in the conversation; summarising and giving feedback to client; acknowledging the client's values, beliefs, assumptions and emotions; validating and affirming the client values, beliefs and behaviour; and managing emotions. This enabled the clients to generate awareness of their behaviours, cognition and affective experiences.

*Challenging the client by asking reflective questions facilitates critical reflection and rational dialogue* (Giapponi & Ritter, 2015; Rekalde et al., 2015; Romme & Van Seggelen-Damen, 2015), thus presenting an opportunity for transformative learning. The specific coach behaviours in this category included simple and reflective questions. The study found that asking simple questions that centred on helping the clients to set coaching outcomes, questions that sought to clarify concepts and get more information helped the client to narrate and reflect on the content and process of the events and situations in their context. Depending on how the clients related to the content and processes narrated, this would trigger cognitive and/or emotional dissonance or would just result in self-awareness. The simple questions also helped the client to set action plans and identify resources required to implement them.

Reflective questions included questions about meaning, purpose, intention, decisions, and challenging assumptions, beliefs, values, generalisations and distortions. Asking reflective questions assisted the clients to dig deeper into their frames of reference, challenged their points of view, and assisted with shifting and/or expanding their viewpoints. These were the critical coach behaviours that facilitated transformation amongst the clients.

*Holding the client accountable ensures that learning is integrated, internalised and applied* (Griffiths, 2015; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009). The coach behaviours that formed part of this category were: assigning clear and specific tasks to client, ensuring that the client performs the tasks, and following up on these in each coaching session. The client behaviours included clients taking responsibility and committing to these tasks. The finding reveals that this was made possible because of clients' readiness and their commitment to the coaching programme. They were all volunteers and, given the context they operated in, they needed the coaching sessions.

In summary, the study's contribution to the coaching mechanism was in determining the role of each competency in the transformative learning process and contributing to a detailed set of sub-skills or behaviours required for coaching for the various competencies. In doing so, the study has gone further to contribute to the body of knowledge in building coaching competencies by extending literature from an empirical source on the details of coach competencies developed by Maltbia et al. (2014) and Griffiths (2015).

#### *7.2.2.1. Conclusion on coach mechanisms and implications for executive coaching*

The conclusions that can be drawn under this research question are, firstly, that a conducive environment is a foundation for an effective coaching environment. Secondly, active listening generates self-awareness, which is a foundation of learning in executive coaching. Thirdly, that simple questioning facilitates reflection of content and process, while reflective questioning facilitates critical reflection and rational dialogue. Lastly, holding the client accountable enables integration, internalisation and application of new knowledge.

Due to the critical role that the coach plays in the transformative learning process, executive coaching could act as catalyst to transformative learning. This happens because the coach as a facilitator is able to support and challenge the client to move towards achieving an outcome within a single coaching session or multiple coaching sessions. In doing so, the clients incrementally engage on the core frames that do not serve them and build on them, which leads to transformative learning in a few sessions. This deviates from most transformative learning research in which, traditionally, the studies are conducted retrospectively.

Finally, building on extant literature, the study has contributed to a set of skills and competencies that could be used to develop executive coach education. More specifically, these competencies contribute to transformative learning in addition to instrumental or informative learning (Kegan, 2009). This includes the skills that are required at the various stages in the process of transformation.

#### ***7.2.3. Research sub-question 3: What client mechanisms facilitate transformative learning?***

The research design proposed three mechanisms based on transformative learning theory that would facilitate transformative learning amongst the client. These were disorienting dilemma,

critical reflection and rational dialogue (Mezirow, 1997, 2000; Taylor, 2007). The study revealed and added a fourth component, *the process acceptance*. Three themes have emerged from this study regarding the client mechanism:

*Critical reflection is a cognitive process.* The findings indicate that the reflection process involved reflection on the content and processes of the events and situations in the client's environment (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2007). As they were reflecting on them, the clients developed an awareness of their own behaviours, values, beliefs and assumptions. In most cases, these would be highlighted by the coach as they raised awareness and offered feedback. Once these were brought to cognition, the client would then be able to move to the next phase.

*Critical reflection is an emotional process* (Dirkx et al., 2018; Green & Mälkki, 2017; Hoggan et al., 2017; Mälkki, 2012; Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2016; Van Zyl et al., 2011). The disorienting dilemma is expressed in the form of emotions. The study's findings indicate that while the clients predominantly experienced negative emotions in the early phases of the coaching process, there were also a lot of positive emotional experiences during or preceding the critical reflection process. The findings show that the shift to positive emotions can be attributed to the presence of a coach. The coach was instrumental in identifying the emotions as well as facilitating the process of acceptance to move the clients to a positive emotional state.

*Rational dialogue is preceded by a state of acceptance.* The self-awareness process that resulted in the clients' awareness of their frames also highlighted their limitations, which gave rise to anxiety, fear and self-doubt, and in some cases resistance to change expressed in the form of denial and defensive behaviours. At this point, clients could not objectively subject their frames to scrutiny (Kegan, 2009; Green & Mälkki, 2017; Mezirow, 1999). As the coaches challenged and supported the clients, they were able to come to an acknowledgement and acceptance of their limiting frames and the need for change. At this point, the clients were able to engage rationally with their meaning frames and began to experience both cognitive and emotional shifts (Dirkx & Mälkki, 2014; Green & Mälkki, 2017).

Finally, *these processes are intertwined and operate in a reiterative way* as each triggers the presence of the other. The cognitive process does trigger emotions, and emotions trigger a different way of cognition. Thus, both cognition and affective behaviour are equally instrumental for transformation (Dirkx, 2012; Dirkx & Espinoza, 2017; Dirkx et al., 2018).

#### **7.2.3.1. Conclusion on client mechanisms and implications for executive coaching**

Concerning the client mechanism, this study concludes, firstly, that narrating and reflecting on content and process facilitates self-awareness. Secondly, critical reflection is both a cognitive and emotional process. Thirdly, that rational dialogue is preceded by acceptance and that rational dialogue leads to a shift in cognitive and affective behaviour leading to transformative outcomes

The implication of these findings is that if clients come to a coaching session with some form of disorienting dilemma, and if coaching contributes to the triggering of more dilemmas, it means that the coaching space needs to be safe enough to allow the client to experience the disorienting dilemma without inhibition. Hence, it requires a high level of rapport between the client and coach. In addition, the coach needs to be skilled enough to manage or contain the emotional experience, including any emotional outbursts experienced by the client without repressing them. The coach also needs to be skilled enough to move the client through the incremental process of disorienting dilemma towards a resolution to get to a place where a client is confident enough to make cognitive and behavioural shifts.

#### **7.2.4. Research sub-question 4: How does the learning process occur?**

The learning process has been depicted theoretically in two ways. Firstly, through the development of the theoretical model for transformative learning in executive coaching; and, secondly, through the evaluation and revision of the original programme theory.

The conceptual model developed at a design phase on the basis of the literature postulated that client readiness and coach competencies are inputs into the coaching engagement that would facilitate a change process resulting in transformative learning outcomes. The findings of this study have revealed the specific components that made up the coach competencies (rapport and trust building, active listening and giving feedback, simple and reflective questioning, holding the client accountable skills, and flexibility) and the client context that facilitated client readiness (turbulent economic, socio-political, organisational climate and culture, and interpersonal conflicts/tension).

The emergent change was postulated to be composed on the following three components of transformative learning: “disorienting dilemma”, “critical reflection”, and “rational dialogue”. The findings of the study revealed an additional component, “acceptance”, which was found to

precede the rational dialogue process. Both informative and transformative learning outcomes were established in the research through the coaching process.

Based on the tracking of the process during the coaching intervention over the six-month period, a theoretical model of transformative learning was developed. This model identifies three main phases of transformative learning: (1) the phase of cognitive and emotional dissonance, (2) the phase of uncertainty, acceptance and rational dialogue, and (3) the phase of self-confidence and exploration. Within each of the phases, there are about four reiterative sub-phases or stages.

The first phase is mainly characterised by self-awareness at three levels (the what, the how, and the why) with largely negative emotions. The second phase is characterised by emotions of anxiety, fear and self-doubt that may lead to resistance and, through the skilful facilitation of the coach transitions, to a state acceptance. The third phase is characterised by a state of self-confidence and readiness to explore and apply learnings. The emotions in this phase are predominantly positive, providing motivation for learning to the client (Boyatzis, 2016; MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017).

The initial programme theory was hypothesised as follows:

*An executive coaching intervention provided by a competent coach to a willing client (context) will provide an environment that is conducive and supportive, and challenges the client (mechanism 1) to experience a disorienting dilemma, which facilitates critical reflection and rational dialogue (mechanisms 2), producing a new meaning perspective, resulting in behavioural change (outcome).*

The findings of this study suggest that the coach mechanisms were an input into the client's context as well as the client's reflection and rational dialogue processes. The coach mechanisms of creating a conducive environment provided a safe space for the clients to deal with their disorienting dilemmas. The mechanisms of active listening supported the clients to gain self-awareness. The mechanisms of questioning supported and challenged the client to critically reflect and move into a state of acceptance. The mechanisms that were used to hold the clients accountable were facilitated integration, internalisation and application of learning. This produced informative learning (Kegan, 2002), which was characterised by high levels of self-awareness, improved managerial capabilities, and transformative learning outcomes, such as a significant shift in a sense of self and expanded worldview (Hoggan, 2016).

The revised programme theory is now as follows:

*In an executive coaching intervention, the coach provides resources (M1) in a form of different coach competencies in the different client contexts (C) throughout the phases of the coaching intervention. The coach's resources influence the client's reasoning ability or responses and emotional states (M2) through critical reflection, acceptance and rational dialogue to produce informative and transformative learning outcomes (O). The formula is amended as follows  $C+M1+M2=O$ .*

#### *7.2.4.1. Conclusion on the process of transformative learning and implications for executive coaching*

Concerning the process of learning, the study concludes that transformative learning occurs in an iterative, incremental process in each coaching session over a number of sessions. It occurs in three main phases: the phase of cognitive and emotional dissonance, the phase of uncertainty and rational dialogue, and the phase of self-confidence and exploration.

The implications for executive coaching are that, although self-awareness is primarily the foundation of learning in an executive coaching intervention, on its own it does not lead to transformative learning. Hence, any coaching that is geared for transformative learning needs to view self-awareness as a platform to engage the clients further on their meaning perspectives to reach the depth of the frames that may be blocking them to transform.

Secondly, there is a need for coaches to comprehend and appreciate the fact that there are multiple layers of self-awareness as described earlier. For this reason, coaches who intend to work with clients so that they may transform need to, firstly, be able to distinguish between informational learning and transformative learning. Secondly, the coaches need to be skilled with competencies that will allow them to engage the clients to move from socially authored frames of mind to self-authored frames to achieve transformation. These are mainly reflective questioning skills and the ability to manage emotional states that would enable the clients to shift their frames of reference, and shift from a negative to a positive emotional state that facilitates the motivation to learn as well as to self-actualise or flourish (Boyatzis, 2016; Garland et al., 2017; Held, 2018; MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017).

The final note is that this study departs from earlier studies (Corrie & Lawson, 2017; Cox, 2015) that have plotted out Mezirow's 10 steps of transformative learning against the coaching process. In doing this, these studies have limited the learning process as mainly cognitive. Therefore, this research contributes to the executive theory by proposing a model that describes the process of transformative learning in executive coaching, which has as its core premise that transformative learning is both a cognitive and an emotive process.

### **7.3. Limitations of the study**

The purpose of explicating limitations in research is that they raise awareness of the shortcomings of the research, which are often are as a result of the methodological limitations and the research setting (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013; Johns, 2016, 2018). This helps to guide future research to find solutions for the shortcomings (Brutus et al., 2013). Given that the limitations stem from the methodology chosen, in a qualitative study, limitations should be reported in internal, external and construct validity (Brutus et al., 2013). Validity refers to the extent to which the results of the study are accurate and well-founded, or can be regarded as credible (Brutus et al., 2013; Morse, 2015). *Internal validity* has to do with cause-effect relationships; *external validity* refers to generalisability (transferability in qualitative studies); while *construct validity* is concerned with the appropriateness of the measures used in the study to measure the constructs being studied (Brutus et al., 2013; Morse, 2015). In Chapter 3, internal and external validity measures have been detailed under section 3.8.1.

Therefore, the study's main limitations lie in external validity or transferability. The first limitation that relates threat of external validity is the sampling frame and the sampling size. A theoretical sample was used and while this has strengths and advantages in that it allows for rigour and in-depth analysis of a phenomena and is recommended for theory development, its disadvantages are that the findings cannot be generalised (Brutus et al., 2013; Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). The sample was drawn from two sub-sectors of organisations in the public sector in South Africa (public health and public finance). The implication of this is that the result cannot be transferable to other public sub-sectors, private and non-profit sectors.

The second external validity limitation relates to the context of the research setting. Johns (2006, 2017) argued that context is responsible for extensively impacting on research findings and needs to be systematically integrated into the research design and implementation (Johns, 2006, 2017). In this study, the research context at the time of the fieldwork was characterised by extremely

socio-political and economic turbulence that impacted directly on the organisational climate, thereby impacting on this study's executive coaches. The implication is that this study is not transferable to non-turbulent environments or other contexts, such as countries outside of South Africa.

#### **7.4. Recommendations for further research**

For recommendations of future research to be useful, they need to focus on "immediate and incremental opportunities" as well as on "theoretical advancement" (Brutus et al., 2013; Corley & Gioia, 2011). Regarding this study, the immediate and incremental opportunities for further research are: firstly, to test the validity of the model developed in other turbulent environments or contexts in Africa or outside of the continent; and secondly, to conduct the study in non-turbulent settings and non-public-sector organisations.

Concerning advancing theory (Brutus et al., 2013; Corley & Gioia, 2011), the proposition generated based on the model of transformative learning process in executive coaching could be tested as listed below.

- i. In a coaching conversation, self-awareness increases the probability of the client experiencing cognitive and emotional dissonance, and self-awareness at the premise level increases the probability of the client experiencing a state of uncertainty.
- ii. In a coaching conversation, the more clients reach significant levels of acceptance, the more they are ready to engage in a rational dialogue about their frames of reference, thereby swinging from negative to positive emotions.
- iii. A cognitive shift in frames of mind facilitates a sense of self-confidence and exploration, which results in the application of new learnings.
- iv. To contribute to the building of executive coaching competency, the field would benefit from research that seeks to test the identified sets of coach behaviours linked to competencies derived from this study.

#### **7.5. Overall conclusion**

To conclude, this study had set out to investigate the process of transformative learning in executive coaching. The main research question was to understand how, under what contexts, and for whom an executive coaching process fosters transformative learning.



A multiple case study design merged with realistic evaluation was used for data collection and analysis. This allowed for the collection of data from multiple sources and to get in-depth analysis of the processes to be studied. Four cases were purposively selected from public-health and public-finance sectors in South Africa. The analysis took a primarily inductive approach, supplemented by a deductive approach. The results of this study allowed the researcher to make at least four main contributions to the theory, methodology and practice of executive coaching.

At a theoretical level, the study has firstly proposed a theoretical model of how transformative learning occurs in an executive coaching process. Secondly, it has advanced the utility of transformative learning theory into the field of executive coaching and transformative learning. This fills in a significant gap in coaching theory development, which now has a basis to build on coaching theory that is targeted at transformative learning in future studies.

At a methodological level, this study has provided empirical evidence on the mechanisms for evaluating executive coaching interventions that are geared for transformative learning. It has also developed a rigorous methodology of researching process in executive coaching that could be used by future researchers in the field of executive coaching.

At a practical level, this study has proposed a framework for facilitating transformative executive coaching. It has also extended literature on coach competencies by providing insight into which core competencies are required by coaches to facilitate transformative learning. This could contribute to coach education training – specifically, to train trainee coaches on the specific skills required for transformation.

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## Annexures

### Annexure A: Research protocol instruments

#### *Annexure A1: Client enrolment form*

Q1: What is your name?
Q2: Gender
Q3: What is your age?
Q4: Which sector do you work in?
Q5: Is your organisation ... National government Provincial government Local government State entity
Q6: What is your role in your organisation?
Q7: How long have you been in a managerial or leadership role? Below 5 years Between 6 and 10 years Between 11 and 15 years Above 16 years
Q8: Have you participated in a coaching programme before? YES/NO
Q9: Are you planning to participate in any executive coaching, including team coaching or leadership development programme, in the next six months? YES/NO
Q10: If you have participated in a coaching programme before, how long ago was that?
Q11: What is your motivation for participating in this study?
Q12: How do you think participating in this study will benefit you?
Q13: Is there be anything that could potentially prevent you from completing the coaching programme in the next six months?

**Annexure A2: Coach enrolment form**

Q1: Name and surname
Q2: How do you practice as an executive coach? Practice part-time Practice full time
Q3: Which sector do you mainly work in? (more than 60%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public sector</li><li>• Private sector</li><li>• A combination of the two</li></ul>
Q4: Age
Q5: Gender
Q6: What are your coaching qualifications?
Q7: Which coaching approaches are you trained in? (you can check more than one answer) <i>Person-centred, approach cognitive behavioural coaching, positive psychological coaching, neuro-linguistic programming approach, narrative, gestalt, psychodynamic</i>
Q8: Which professional association do you belong to?
Q9: Your highest academic qualifications
Q10: How long have you been an executive coach
Q11: How many professional coaching hours have you accumulated?
Q12: What is your motivation for participating in this study?
Q13: Is there anything that could potentially stop you from participating in the coaching programme in the next six months?

***Annexure A3: Post-coaching reflections for clients***

1. What personal insights have I gained so far in this coaching experience?
2. What specific shifts or changes, if any, have I noticed in myself since the start of the coaching programme?
3. What led or contributed to these shifts or changes, if any?
  - a. On my part as a coachee?
  - b. Behaviour/actions on the part of the coach?
4. What challenges have I experienced, if any, pertaining to the coaching process so far?
5. What action steps have I agreed to undertake between now and the next coaching session?
6. What other general comments do I have about my coaching experience?

***Annexure A4: post-coaching reflections for coaches***

1. What personal insights have you gained so far as a coach regarding the coaching session?
2. What are the specific shifts or changes, if any, that you have noticed about the coachee since the start of the coaching sessions?
3. If you noticed any shifts, what are the specific actions, process, and/or behaviour on your part as a coach that has facilitated the change(s)?
4. What challenges have you experienced, if any, about coaching the client?
5. What action steps have you agreed to with the client between now and the next coaching session?
6. General comment

## **Annexure A5: Client in-depth interview guide**

### **A: Context** (*personal, interpersonal, institutional, socio-political and economic*)

1. What was the reason for your participation in the coaching programme? (*Client readiness*)
2. Describe the *organisational context* that you operated in when you began the coaching programme.
3. Were there any changes in your context during the coaching programme? If so, how did it affect your participation in the coaching programme? Positively or negatively?
4. What *other contextual factors* (organisation, personal, social etc.) contributed to the success or failure of the process?

### **B: Outcome: Tell me about your experience**

5. What has your experience been as a participant in this coaching programme?
6. What was your original outcome for participation in the coaching programme?
7. Did the outcome change or shift over the period of coaching? Give examples.
8. To what extent do you think your outcomes were achieved? Give examples.

### **C: Mechanisms (client behaviour)**

9. If you reflect on the process itself, what process did you go through in realising your outcome?
10. Were there any disruptions of patterns of thinking? **EXPLAIN**
11. Can you think of assumptions, beliefs, and values that were disrupted that you had to grapple with during the coaching sessions? if so, how did you experience that? Give an example of a disruption of thinking pattern.
12. How did you experience the process of engaging with these frames of mind
  - a. As a thought process?
  - b. As a dialogue process? How did you overcome it?
13. What insights have you gained about yourself in relation to your **worldview** about issues you dealt with in the coaching sessions?
14. What learning, if any, have you derived from the coaching programme?
15. Have you been able to integrate these into your day-to-day behaviour or your new way of being?

16. What **dialogue(s)** (conversations) in and outside of the coaching sessions did you have with **yourself and with others**? How rational was the dialogue? Were you able to suspend judgement on self and others?
17. What major shifts have you experienced, if any? What contributed to these shifts?
18. What did not work for you in this programme?
19. In what other context are you or will you be able to apply the knowledge/learnings you have gained through this coaching programme?

#### **D: Mechanisms (coach behaviour)**

##### **Coaching environment**

20. How did the coach create a *conducive environment* for both of you to operate?
21. At what point in the coaching process did you feel that you could trust the coach and were willing to be open and honest with her?
22. Did you feel that you are in a safe environment in the coaching session? What created that safety and trust? What did the coach do to create a safe space for you?

##### **Coaching skills**

23. What did the coach do that enabled you to grapple with these frames? (*Coach behaviour*)
  - a. Did you feel like you were listened to? What made you feel listened to?
  - b. What type of questions?
  - c. How about feedback given by coach
  - d. How did the coach hold you accountable? For example, tasking, reflections?

#### **24. Logistical questions**

- a. How did you find the post-coaching reflections?
- b. How did you find the coaching session intervals?
- c. Was the number and length of coaching sessions adequate for the outcome you had?



## ***Annexure A6: Coach in-depth interview guide***

### **General**

1. Please state your name, your training as a coach and experience in coaching.
2. Why did you volunteer to coach on this programme?
3. What has been your experience as a coach on the coaching programme?

### **Transformative learning experience/observation**

1. Did transformative learning occur for any of the clients you had?
2. Describe what you observed happening over the coaching programme.
3. What shifts in values, beliefs and assumptions did you notice? How did that show itself in behaviour?

### **Coach competencies**

1. What key aspects of your coaching competencies do you believe facilitated transformative learning for the client?
2. How did you create a conducive environment for coaching?
  - a. How did you create rapport/ trust/ safe space etc.?
  - b. Did you feel that the client trusted the coaching space to open up?
  - c. How long did it take you to do this?
3. How did you support the client through the process of reflecting on their experience in the coaching session? Specifically, comment on you:
  - a. attentive listening skills; and
  - o feedback giving skills.
4. How did you challenge the client? Transformative learning has to do with challenging the client at different levels
  - a. What type of questions worked for the client and when?
  - b. To what extent did your questions challenge content, process and/or premise?

### **Outcome**

1. To what extent do you think the clients have achieved their outcome?
  - a. Client one
  - b. Client two

2. What specific coaching skills/competencies do you think enabled the client to reach their outcome if any?

**The role of context**

1. In your view, what client and/or coach contexts/conditions enabled outcome achievement?
  - a. Individual context, interpersonal, institutional, socio-political and economic conditions

**Logistics**

1. How did you find the post-coaching reflections?
2. How did the coaching intervals work for the client?
3. What number of coaching sessions do you think was adequate?
4. Do you think the 90-minute duration of the coaching was adequate?

## **Annexure B: Master consent forms**

### ***Annexure B1: Client informed consent form***

Dear participant and respondent

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Ms Gloria Mbokota (student number: 14460972), a doctoral student from the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) at the University of Pretoria.

The purpose of the research is to provide an explanation of how executive coaching can facilitate transformative learning amongst senior managers/executives in the organisations.

Please note the following:

- a) Firstly, this study involves participation in an executive coaching programme for a period of an average of six months. You will be allocated a professional coach who will provide six coaching sessions during this period, with one session every three to four weeks on average. On average, each coaching session will be 90 minutes in duration.
- b) Secondly, the study involves three methods of data gathering on which the researcher requires consent for in-depth interviews, direct observation through video recording, and data collection by documenting diaries.
  - With regard to the interviews, the first interview will be conducted before the coaching intervention starts so as to gather biographical and context data. The second in-depth interview will be conducted at the end of the coaching programme to gather data about how you have experienced the coaching programme.
  - Direct observation will involve video-recording coaching sessions two to five. This is necessary, as the data required to assess the process of transformative learning requires visual aspects as well. The video images will not be used in the report, only text data without identifiers will be used in analysing the data and reporting.
  - As a participant, you will also be requested to keep a diary where you document your experience throughout the coaching programme. The researcher will collect these at the end of the coaching programme.

- c) **Confidentiality:** no information discussed during the coaching sessions will be shared with your managers or colleagues. The allocated coaches subscribe to a professional code of ethical conduct prescribed by COMENSA and/or the International Coaching Federation.
- d) **Anonymity:** No identifiers will be used in the research report.
- e) Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequence.
- f) The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. We will provide you with a summary of our results on request.
- g) Please contact my study leader (**Dr Sunny Stout-Rostron at sunny@ssra.biz**) if you have any questions or comments regarding the study.

---

Name of participant/respondent

---

Respondent's signature

---

Date

## ***Annexure B2: Informed coach consent form***

Dear participant and respondent

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Ms Gloria Mbokota (student number: 14460972), a doctoral student from the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) at the University of Pretoria.

The purpose of the research is to provide an explanation of how executive coaching can facilitate transformative learning amongst senior managers or executives in public sector South Africa. Please note the following:

- a) Firstly, this study involves participation in an executive coaching programme for a period of an average of six months. You will be allocated an executive client/coachee whom you will provide six coaching sessions to during this period, with one session every three to four weeks on average. On average, each coaching session will be 90 minutes in duration.
- b) Secondly, the study involves three methods of data gathering on which the researcher requires consent for in-depth interviews, direct observation through video recording, and data collection by documenting diaries.
  - Direct observation will involve video-recording coaching sessions two to five. This is necessary as the data required to assess the process of transformative learning requires visual aspects as well. The video images will not be used in the report, only text data without identifiers will be used in analysing the data and reporting.
  - As a participant, you will also be requested to keep a diary where you document your experience throughout the coaching programme. The researcher will collect these at the end of the coaching programme.
  - Regarding the interviews, an in-depth interview will be conducted at the end of the coaching programme to gather data about how you have experienced the coaching programme.

- c) **Confidentiality:** As a professional coach subscribing to a professional code of ethical conduct prescribed by COMENSA and/or the International Coaching Federation, it is expected that you will comply with these codes. In addition, no information will be shared with anyone by the researcher, except for utilising the information for the purposes of the academic study.
  
- d) **Anonymity:** No identifiers will be used in the research report.
  
- e) Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequence.
  
- f) The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. We will provide you with a summary of our results on request.
  
- g) Please contact my study leader (**Dr Sunny Stout-Rostron at sunny@ssra.biz**) if you have any questions or comments regarding the study.

---

Name of participant/respondent

---

Respondent's signature

---

Date

## **Annexure C: Code lists**

**Annexure C1: First order code list- generated using Atlas ti.**

<b>1st Order code list</b>
ACC- Action: Need time to try it out
ACC- Client gives feedback on task
ACC- Client taking responsibility for task
ACC- Coach tasking client
ACC-Client committing to action
ACC-Co-creating tasks for client
ACC-Coach holding client accountable for task agreed upon
AOT-Awareness of source of tension within the team
BOC-Benefits of coaching:
CCOM- Coach giving advice to client
CCOM- Coach reluctance to ask reflective question
CCOM- Coach sharing information with client
CCOM- Encourages client to explore
CCOM-Coach acknowledges client showing vulnerability and connecting with emotions in the session
CCOM-Coach acknowledges the power of methodology used
CCOM-Coach as a sounding board
CCOM-Coach awareness of client emotions
CCOM-Coach celebrating a shift recognised in a client
CCOM-Coach clear about her role
CCOM-Coach competence
CCOM-Coach Flexibility
CCOM-Coach has ability to convey messages
CCOM-Coach reflecting on her process of coaching
CCOM-Coaching approach
CCOM-Coaching is not only about asking question, but also about checking what the client needs at that time.
CCOM-Coaching style assisted with the reflection and dialogue process
CCOM-Knowledge of the coach about the coaching process
CCOM-Meeting the client where they were
CCOM- Coach expressing her own limitations
CCOM- Coach expressing her own opinion
CCOM- Extending and integrating other coaching skills over and above what is prescribed for coaching
CL-Adequacy of number of coaching session
CL-Coaching intervals effectiveness
CL-Coaching structure offered internalisation and integrating the learning
CL-In a turbulence clients could need coaching once week
CL-Need for wellbeing assessment at the beginning of coaching
CL-Suggestion for future
CL-Team coaching need to go along with executive coaching
CL-The timing of coaching for the executive is important
CL-Value of the PCR
CLP-Client profile
CLRN- coach awareness of own skill limitations
CLRN-Being relaxed as a coach, keeping client focused and applying practical techniques helps the client in facilitating change required



**1st Order code list**

CLRN-Coach Learning :-learn something practical like not taking notes

CLRN-Learning about the need for and importance of interrupting the client who talks a lot

CLRN-Learning about the need for and importance of structure for the coach to facilitate an effective session

CLRN- Learning that content provides context for the coaching

CLRN-Learnt to interact with the client at multiple levels, personal and systemic level

CON-Description of the context

CON-ECO-Big picture as it relates to finance, economics and public sector

CON-IPR- Change of organisational context in terms of interpersonal relations for the client due to not getting the job

CON-IPR- Change of organisational context in terms of interpersonal relations for the client due to not getting the job

CON-ORG- Attraction or positives of being in the treasury

CON-ORG- Clarifying his role and role of treasury in relation to government departments

CON-ORG- Importance of context: Content gave the context of thinking about what was happening

CON-ORG- New team with complex dynamics

CON-ORG- The culture in the work environment

CON-ORG- This is a bigger problem for most of public sector senior managers

CON-ORG- Working with the context

CON-ORG- Dysfunctional team

CON-ORG- Support means that his boss has his back

CON-ORG- Client reflects on the changing role of the NT and how that impacts on her role

CON-ORG- *"so that instead the drama in the system was offered as real life opportunities to then say okay,"*

CON-ORG- Coaching in a complex and demanding system

CON-ORG- Reflect on how the budget process has changed in the last 10 years

CON-PER- Client specific context

CON-PER- Impact of context on the client

CON-POL- Awareness of impact of external political environment on client behaviour

CON-POL- Budget process being undermined

CON-POL- Change in leadership at a political level will be the main contributor to staying in the public sector

CON-POL- Context amplified in the public sector

CON-POL- Drastic change in the context

CON-POL- Impact of external organisational context

CON-POL- Structured approach to undermine the department

CON-POL- Threat to takeover certain part of the department

CON-POL- Work is unpleasant due to what is being instructed by politicians

CON-POL- Landscape is a big determinant of what options she chooses

CON-POL- Irrational political decisions

CON-POL- Reflecting of the impact of political instability and lack of economic growth on the work of the organisation

CON-POL- The job has been overcrowded by the politics and people issues

CON-POL- The department has no support from the presidency

CON-POL- The department influence under attack contributes to reluctant to say in the sector

CON-Role of executive coaching in a turbulent environment

CON-POL- A result of undermining the budget process and how its impacted on key personnel in the organisation

COP-Coach Profile

COT- benefit: Realising the value of coaching in a crisis environment

**1st Order code list**

COT- benefits- Explaining the coaching approach and benefits
COT-Breakthrough on flexibility
COT-Client motivation for coaching
COT-Client Motive or reason for participation in the study
COT-Coach motivation for participation in the coaching programme
COT-Coaching helped with the health challenges she had
COT-Coaching is about working with the inner game
COT-Coaching outcome
COT-Coaching outcome did not change throughout the coaching programme
COT-coaching outcome was achieved
COT-Common theme around health and well-being amongst all clients
COT-Main value for the client to make a difference
COT-Making a significant difference in a different context outside of the organisation
COT-Meaningful work
COT-Setting an outcome for the coaching session
COT- Outcome: Client moving towards her outcome
CP- Coach motivation for participation in the coaching programme
CR- Content- Reflecting in the type of support he needs or expects in a work situation
CR- Content- Reflecting on a bad experience can bring about positives awareness
CR- Content- Reflecting on fairness of the recruitment process
CR- Content- Reflecting on how the budget process is being undermined by the presidency
CR- Content- Reflecting on how the lack of engagement with the presidency on critical aspect of work
CR- content- Reflecting on how the sectors are withdrawing from the budget process
CR- Content- Reflecting on what is going on in the organisation in general
CR- Content- Reflecting on what is going on with his management team
CR- Content- Client is reflecting on challenges of the budget shortfall
CR- Content- Client reflect of the budget process and its inherent conflicting demands.
CR- Content- Reflecting on how the lack of engagement of key stakeholders in the budget process
CR- Content- Reflecting on the challenge of having to return to her old job in two week's time.
CR- Content- Client reflecting on what she thinks the NT operates like a machine
CR- Meaning- Ability to influence means having impact
CR- Meaning- Reflecting on the beliefs
CR- Meaning- Reflecting on the beliefs that does not serve client well
CR- Meaning- Reflection on meaning
CR- Meaning- Client reflecting on her view of the world
CR- Process- Reflecting on how she resolved the dilemma around helping the new boss or not
CR- Process- Reflecting on the content and process of work
CR- Process- Reflecting on the process of work regarding feedback
CR- Process- Reflection on the approval process for staff development
CR- Process- Client reflecting on how she manages her behaviour in difficult meetings with clients
CR- Reflections were useful for learning
CR-Assumption- Assumptions about other people
CR-Beliefs- Reflection on beliefs
CR-Client expressing relief of having found a resolution for the dilemma
CR-Client reflecting on content- regarding her retreat
CR-Content of how work gets done in the organisation
CR-Content- Client explains how she practically applied awareness and learnings

**1st Order code list**

CR-Content- Client reflecting on what could stop her from shifting her thinking and behaviour around flexibility

CR-Content- Reflection on current situation

CR-Content- Client sharing her experience of acting in the DDG position

CR-Content- Exploring other options for work

CR-Content- Reflecting on benefits of getting clarity of what she can do

CR-Content- Team conflict/tension

CR-Critical reflection is a continuous process

CR-Critical Self Reflection

CR-Emotions- Any other day I want to run away ...

CR-Emotions- Client reflecting on feeling of fear

CR-Emotions- Client reflecting on her body language

CR-Exploring identity of leadership

CR-Meaning- Client expresses an assumption about how she expects people to deal with the type of situation she is in

CR-Process- Client reflecting on the process of recruitment and interviews at the organisation

CR-Process: Client reflecting on the process of work

CR-Process: Reflecting on how she would or could treat the new boss

CR-Value of reflection

CR: Process of coaching- Reflecting on how the coaching process enabled him to engage with this awareness and his work input

CRN-Client not ready for coaching

CRN-Client readiness and willingness to go through the process contributed to smooth coaching process

DD- Battles

DD- Client resolving the dilemma

DD- Decision making- *"Okay it is that, the more immediate dilemma that I have right now and I've had this week, and that I've been thinking and I want to speak to my son about etc., is do I go at the end of November as planned, is it logical even financially or should I just go at the end of January so I give"*

DD- disruption not seen as positive

DD-Anger- *"if I'm a B-minus, then let me tell you about the five other colleagues, I think there's a C, maybe two more C's, and then there are two people who did not qualify and I'm the B-minus, so let's just be very clear about who is the best performing chief director here, it is me".*

DD- Anxiety- Client concerned about the upcoming interview

DD-Avoiding confrontation

DD-Betrayal- Feels betrayed by the recruitment process

DD-Client battling with action to take

DD-Conflict: of thought around cutting budget for much needed programmes

DD-Contradictions: on the budget process

DD-Demotivation due to political interference with work

DD-Difficulty in dealing with difficult team members

DD-Dilemma- Client expresses dilemma about whether she can speak *the "truth to power"* as it may have negative impact

DD-Disappointment

DD-Discomfort

DD-Disconcerting- *"it was very very disconcerting, I mean I thought to myself, "these people are so disrespectful"*

DD-dissonance

**1st Order code list**

DD-Doubt- Client struggling with dealing with whether the org. is still adding value to the community

DD-Fear of retirement

DD-Fear: Client expresses the fear of not being easy to find another job

DD-Fear: Client expresses the fear of things going wrong

DD-Frustration about lack of support from her boss

DD-Frustration due to political interference at work

DD-Frustration: Client expresses frustration about the process and quality of interview

DD-Frustration- Impact of the frustration getting sick

DD-Helpless- *"then I'm just a cog, I'm not seen as somebody special, I'm not seen as somebody valuable, I should get the message ..."*

DD-Hesitation- Client hesitant to explore

DD-Inner conflict- Client experiences conflict between what she knows and what she should do

DD-Inter-personal conflict

DD-*"is it like ..., tick, tick, or is it are you really interviewing me, is it just a play play interview?"*

DD-Pressure to make a decision

DD-Procrastination

DD-Reflecting on things that she did not change during the acting period that would help her adjust back to her old role

DD-Reflection took him out of his comfort zone

DD-Reluctance to change leadership behaviour

DD-Resentment- Expressing resentment about the fact that she will have to help the new incumbent wh seems ill qualified

DD-Resolving the dilemma- Recognition that this could benefit the broader public service

DD-Self Doubt- Client expressing doubt about her readiness for the interview

DD-Shocked- client expresses shock on negative feedback he received d rom board

DD-Stressed

DD-Stuck- Client feeling stuck to think about other options

DD-Tension about how the staff development policy is implemented

DD-*"they just stared at me, even the DG. He didn't even smile, which is what we normally do, let's say there's a ..."*

DD-this year was the first time I realized the absolute truth, is that Treasury is just a big machine

DD-Uncertainty Client uncertain about the unknown

DD-Unhappiness- *"With bad decisions made at higher level of government that erodes the value of work and undermines the development agenda of the state"*

FDB- Feedback- Coach invites self-awareness

FDB-Coach re-enforces awareness

FDB-Coach recognises openness of the client to engage with her inflexibility

FDB-Coach reflects back to client what she hears and checks understanding

FDB-Coach reinforces meaning and importance

FDB-Coach validating client

FDB-Creating an awareness of strengths and how that can be used in other settings

FDB-Holding a mirror for the client

FDB-Invites client to connect with her highest meaning or intent for being flexible

FDB-Inviting awareness of connection between client actions

FDB-Inviting client to reflect on her view of the world

FDB-Inviting client to reflect on own behaviour

FDB-Inviting client to think about her identity outside of work

**1st Order code list**

FDB-Reflecting back to client his own words

FDB-Reflecting back to client his/her awareness

FDB-Reflecting back to client on recognised shifts

FDB-Reflecting back to client on the use of language

FDB-Reflecting back to client his/her awareness

FLX-Flexibility on the part on the part of the coach allowed growth.

FLX-Focusing on the principles around the techniques and not the techniques themselves

FLX- Context required flexibility

FRM-Boundary setting

FRM-Coach focuses client on the outcome of the coaching session

FRM-Coach focuses client on what they have control over

LRN- Accepting to learn from mistakes

LRN- Benefit of executive and team coaching happening parallel to each other

LRN- Client learned to ask question

LRN-Being clear about goals

LRN-Exploring new ways of managing team

LRN-Inviting client to celebrate achievement of goal

LRN-Inviting client to integrate learning

LRN-Learning about self

LRN-Learning about self-value

LRN-Learning about use of language

LRN-Learning through accept own limitations

LRN-Learning through aligning personal values to organisational Context

LRN-Learning through application of knowledge

LRN-Learning through expanding ones world view

LRN-Learning through exploring new options

LRN-Learning through integration of a variety of views and insights

LRN-Learning through Internalising new knowledge

LRN-learning through managing mind-body-emotion states

LRN-Learning through recognising own abilities, Internal resources

LRN-Learning through writing

LRN-Reflecting on learning for the day

LRN-Skills to run a meeting effectively

LRN-Value of coach sharing her experiences

LRN: Learning to be focussed

LSN- Summarising- Summarising and confirming with client on what he said

LSN-Coach noticing non-verbal behaviour- Smile and asks about it

LSN-Coach recognises that attentive listening to client brings out the best of the coach

LSN-Listening to content

LSN-Listening to the structure

LSN-Listening without judgement

LSN-Tracking clients language

LSN-Tracking conversation and making connections from

LSN-Tracking non-verbal gestures

LSN-Tracking-Repeating clients words

QUE-Asking open ended questions

**1st Order code list**

QUE-Asking questions that probe action

QUE-Challenging assumption

QUE-Challenging behaviour observed

QUE-Challenging client about the situation

QUE-Challenging client to be specific on action plan

QUE-Challenging client to explore other options

QUE-Challenging generalisation

QUE-choice question

QUE-Clarity questions

QUE-Intention /Importance question

QUE-Internal resources question

QUE-Meaning question

QUE-Outcome Question

QUE-Probing question

QUE-Question about beliefs

QUE-Question about decision

QUE-Question about values

QUE-Question that expand thinking &amp; knowledge

QUE-Question to narrow options down

QUE-Questions about content

QUE-Questions about feelings

QUE-Reflective questions

QUE-Resource question

QUE-Testing-Coach testing motivation for flexibility

QUE- permission question

RAP-Coaching space- Creating a conducive environment for coaching

RAP-Confidentiality

RAP-Connecting with the client on common areas of interest

RAP-Good understanding- Client feels that they are in rapport with the coach

RAP-Presence- Being fully present to the client

RAP-Safe Space- Coach created a safe space

RAP-Trusting relationship

RD- readiness to engage in dialogue

RD- readiness to explore other opportunities

RD-Client engaging in a dialogue with the inner voice that is in conflict with what she wants to do

RD-Client exploring options

RD-Self Dialogue

RD-Self Dialogue about relationship with God

RFM-Reframing

SA- acknowledgement that the new team members have brought disruption of the status quo in the team

SA- awareness of impact on unresourceful behaviour

SA- awareness about his limiting belief on staff

SA- awareness discomfort to tell people bad news

SA- Awareness of assumptions- Client realises that the doubt is informed by an assumption

SA- Awareness of beliefs client holds

SA- Awareness of control span of roles- client recognises where her responsibility starts and stops with her colleagues and shared some light into the boundaries she need to draw.

**1st Order code list**

SA- Awareness of DD-Client acknowledges that doubt can be as a result of fear he is experiencing

SA- Awareness of inner potential- Recognising that solutions lie within self.

SA- Awareness of learning style- Recognising learning style

SA- Awareness of limitations as a leader

SA- Awareness of limitations:

SA- Awareness of need for recognition & acknowledgement

SA- Awareness of options- *"So I see the silver lining in another opportunity to do something different. I get the chance to do that, and maybe that's not a bad thing if I take a hard look at what I'm doing, I've been doing this for a long time. So ja"*

SA- Awareness of Org Context- Client becomes aware that this is the first time she has applied for a job and not gotten it

SA- Awareness of own behaviour

SA- Awareness of own emotions

SA- awareness of own potential-Internal resources: recognition of intrinsic resources

SA- Awareness of own skills & competencies

SA- Awareness of own values

SA- Awareness of personal value

SA- Awareness of process of CR: Client acknowledges the reflection or thought process he has gone through in the session.

SA- Awareness of self-bondage- *"that I'm not bound to this spot and space forever..."*

SA- Awareness of Self-doubt-Client doubts whether he can confidently go out and look for a job

SA- Awareness of self-Identity

SA- awareness of the source of the limiting belief

SA- awareness of the type of team he needs

SA- Awareness of Time as a resource- Recognises that the resource she needs is time to reflect away from work

SA- awareness of triggers for fear

SA- Awareness of use of limiting language:

SA- client awareness of being defensive

SA- decision does not have to be made today

SA-acknowledges that there has been progress in his leadership

SA-acknowledging source of tension

SA-Awareness of comfort zone

SA-Awareness of frame of mind- reasoning process

SA-Awareness of indecisiveness

SA-Awareness of limiting behaviour- *"as opposed to and you're right, because if one is not open, you ..., that is, you look for people like yourself, because then there's less that takes you out of your comfort zone because you both will be saying yes no, no this is what we must do"*

SA-Awareness of not valuing self

SA-Awareness of own quality of life

SA-Awareness of the difficulty to change

SA-Awareness of the need to inspire staff

SA-Awareness of unresourceful behaviour- *"Because I see what happened to me and now I talk, I talk to everybody, and I say to them you saw what happened to me, don't get yourself into that situation, but I know ..., I can see myself and I know them they don't believe me, because I didn't believe other people, they don't believe me."*

SA-client recognising value of coaching

**1st Order code list**

SA-Client recognition of shifts made

SA-Inviting awareness of self-reflection

SA-Making peace with discomfort

SA-Process of doing tasks

SA-Recognising behaviour that does not serve the client

SA-Recognition of need for introspection

SA-Reflecting on influences on her behaviour



## **Annexure C2: Second-order code list- generated using Atlas ti. Software**

<b>2nd Order code list</b>	<b>Description</b>
ACC-Accountability	Ability to task a client and get them to commit to an action plan for their learning, and follow through with them as a way of holding them accountable.
BOC-Benefits of coaching	The perceived positive gain by the client and coach as a result of the coaching programmes
CCOM-Coach competence	Ability of the coach to facilitate the coaching conversation effectively.
CCOM-Coaching approach	A specific way in which the coach facilitates coaching that is informed by a theoretical base or technique.
CL-Logistics of coaching	Aspects that have to do with organising and implementing a coaching programme.
CLM-Client Mechanisms	Those processes that the client goes through or experiences during a coaching conversation
CLP-Client Processes	The client's experiences during a coaching conversation.
CLRN- Coach Learnings	lessons learned by the coach in the process of coaching
CM-Coach Mechanism	The techniques and processes that the coach applies and follows during a coaching conversation
CON- Context	The environmental conditions-internal and external to the organisation that have an impact on the client's cognitive and emotional wellbeing.
CON-Interpersonal Context	The situations or occurrences that arise between the client and others in the organisation that have an impact on the client-positive or negative
CON-Organisational Context	The organisational processes, systems that impact on the events of the client.
CON-Political Context	The external environmental ( socio- political, economic factors, organisational and individual factors ) that impact the individual coachee during the coaching process
CONM-Motivation for participation	An internal reason for doing something or acting in a particular way.
COP-Coach Processes	The process that the coach follows in a coaching conversation
COT-Coaching Outcomes	The purpose or goal of a coaching session or programme.
COT-Self value	Ability and acknowledgement that one is important or valuable.
CR-Critical Reflection	A process by which an individual reviews their values, beliefs and assumptions in order to assess their validity for current situations
CR-Inner resources	The capabilities that are inherent in a person
CR-Reflecting on meaning	Reflecting on beliefs, assumptions, and values.
CR-Reflection on content	Reflecting on events and situations or what is happening or happened Merged comment from CR-Content on 2018/03/19, 07:29Reflecting what is going on for the client or in the organisation.
CR-Reflection on process	Reflecting on processes on how events happen or the process of thinking Merged comment from CR- Critical reflection as a process on 2018/03/19, 07:29Reflecting on the process of reflection.
CR-Self Awareness	An awareness of a person's own thought process, beliefs, values, assumptions, strengths and weaknesses.
CR-Self Reflection	A process of reflecting on own thought process, beliefs, values, assumptions, strengths and weaknesses.
CRN-Client readiness	The willingness of a client to participate and take responsibility for the coaching journey
DD-Cognitive dissonance	An internal argument and or disagreement experienced by an individual through a process of thinking and feeling, caused by a clash of value, beliefs and meaning.

<b>2nd Order code list</b>	<b>Description</b>
DD-Demotivation	Lack of motivation resulting from contextual or internal factors impacting the client.
DD-Disorienting Dilemma	A significant disruption or disturbance of a person's frames of mind.
DD-Disappointment	A negative response from getting what was not expected.
DD-Emotional Dissonance	A feeling of being upset or annoyed as a result of lack of control of a situation. A state of feeling apprehension or anxiety about an unknown or known situation that might or might not happen.
DD-Inner Conflict	Conflict that arise From within the person's mind and emotion
DD-Self Doubt	uncertainty about self-capabilities or self-value
FLX-Flexibility	The ability to adapt and be open to other ways of doing things as prescribed by the context or situation.
LRN-Application of learning	Taking action by a client to apply learning derives from the coaching sessions.
LRN-Internalisation and integration of learning	A process of assimilation and amalgamating or fusing together of what has been learned, so that it becomes part of a natural way of doing things.
LRN-Learning	The acquisition of knowledge and skills through the coaching experience.
LRN-Learning about self	Identifying own strengths and weaknesses
LRN-Learning through reflection	A serious thought or consideration of what a person is doing, how they do that and why they do it or about what happened and learnings from the coaching session.
LRN-Learning through writing	Putting tasks and reflections down on paper as a way of internalising learning.
LSN-Feedback	Give someone information about their behaviour( verbal and non-verbal) as observed.
LSN-Listening Skills	The ability to pay attention to salient aspect of the conversation such as words, body- language, voice tone, beliefs, values and meanings.
LSN-Noticing non-verbal gestures	Noticing non-verbal actions and raising awareness of these to the client so that they can learn from.
LSN-Summarising	Consolidating and reflecting back to the client the main points of the conversation.
LSN-Tracking	Following up or tracking the main aspects of the conversation and picking up linkages, important events, language usage, emotions, gestures that that then used to pursue the conversation further or to summarise.
QUE- Exploration questions	Questions that explore inner resources
QUE- Outcome Questions	Questions that focuses the client on outcomes
QUE- Reflective questions	Questions that force a client to reflect on issues
QUE-Challenging the client	Asking the client questions or giving them feedback in a challenging way on specific assumptions or beliefs, generalisation they have about something.
QUE-Clarity Questions	Questions that seek clarity & understanding
QUE-Content Questions	Questions that seek information about content
QUE-Expansion questions	Question that expand thinking & knowledge
QUE-Framing	Providing a client with a boundary to shape the conversation to follow a set outcome.
QUE-Meaning Questions	Questions that explore meaning
QUE-Questioning Skills	The ability to ask relevant question for the purposes of inducing appropriate answers and solutions for the client
QUE-Reframing	Reshaping the boundary within which a person thinks by asking question that will facilitate a thinking or meaning about the same situation or event.
QUE-Seeking clarity	Asking questions or checking with the client understanding of facts and meaning

<b>2nd Order code list</b>	<b>Description</b>
RAP-Confidentiality	An agreement between the coach and client on privacy of the conversation that it will be kept between them.
RAP-Presence	The ability of a coach to be completely present to the client such that they are paying attention to the client key aspect of the conversation
RAP-Rapport Building Skills	The ability to provide an environment for the client to feel safe, build trust so that effective coaching can take place
RAP-Safe Space	Ensuring that there are no conversational barriers between the coach and coachee.
RAP-Trusting relationship	Belief in someone's ability or reliability
RD-Exploration of new things	Moving out of the normal and doing or thinking about something new.
RD-Rational dialogue	A conversation where an individual is able to suspend judgement about issues and engage with these objectively/frankly with themselves or with another person on these issues
SA- Self Awareness	A conscious knowledge of one's strengths, weaknesses, characters, and emotions.