

WHITEPAPER

AMPLIFYING PERSONAL AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT THROUGH GROUP COACHING

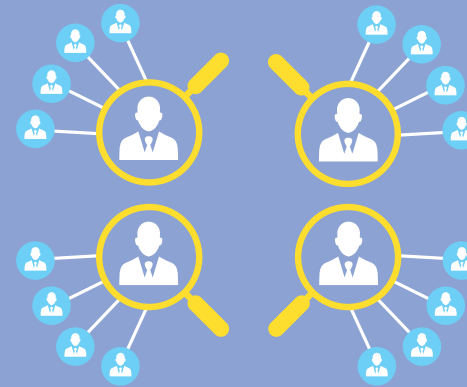
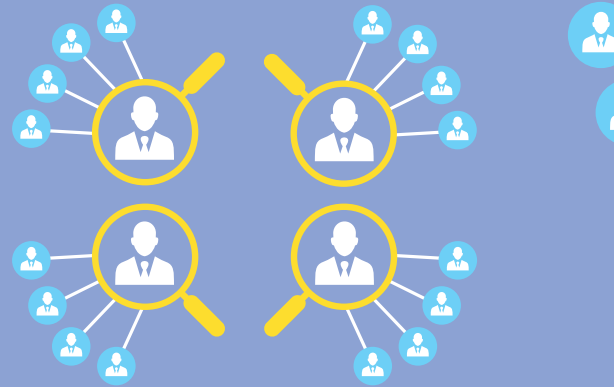
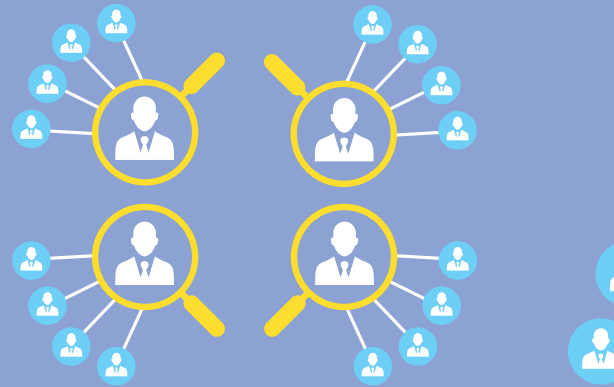
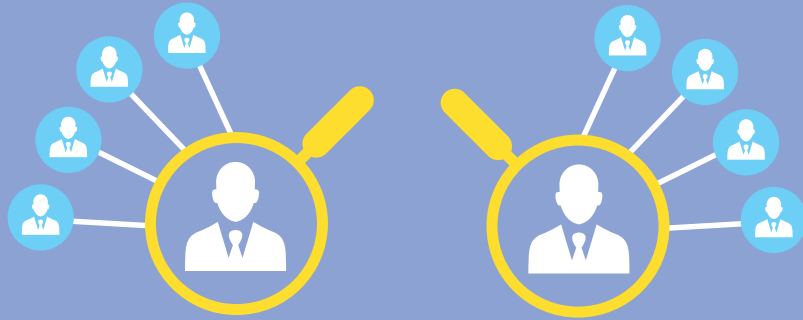
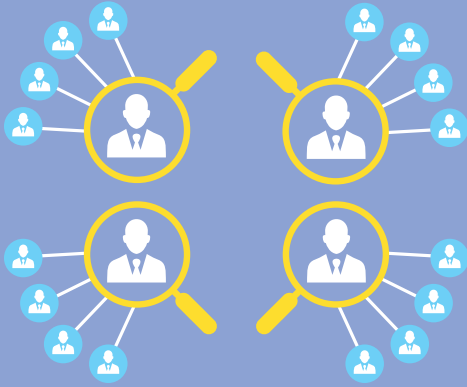
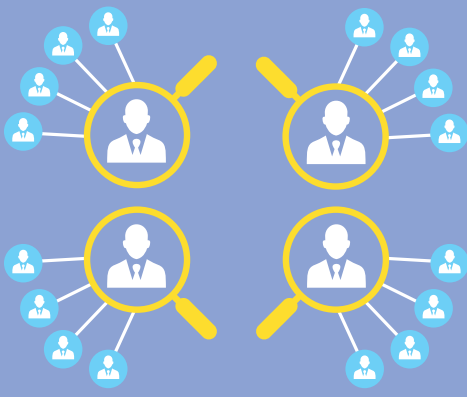
NATALIE VAN DER VEEN & ALISON REID

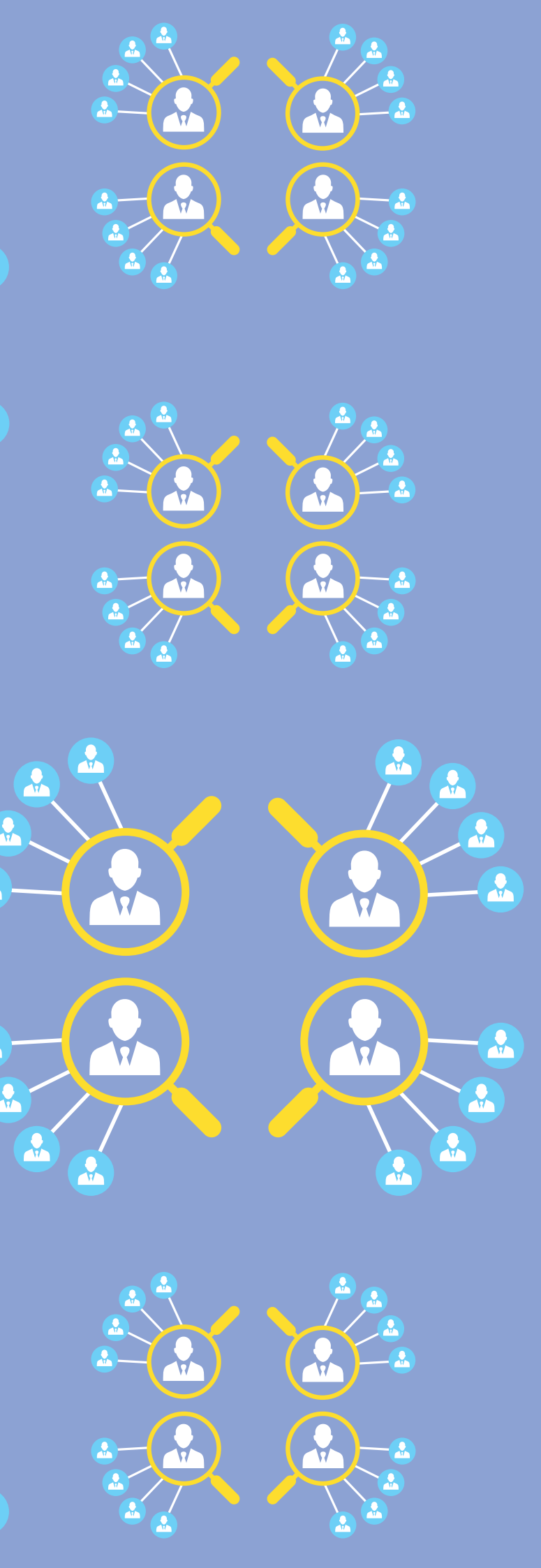


**Gordon Institute
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University of Pretoria

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Amplifying personal and leadership development through skilled group coaching

Executive summary

With the ever-expanding role of technology, an increasing focus on human-centricity and ubiquitous global influence, workplaces have become increasingly complex. Working effectively in groups will be essential to future organisational and individual success.

Human beings have always survived and thrived in groups. In today's fully globalised environment, we have seen the benefits of multiple perspectives and cross-cultural collaboration. We have also witnessed the devastating impact of groups not being productive together, such as communication breakdown, anarchy, and porous borders contrasted with high walls.

To continue to thrive as a species, we need to work and grow constructively in groups.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution highlights our uniqueness as human beings – that is, our ability to work together, to create, to imagine, to empathise, and to change. These qualities are our key differentiators from technology. While they are personal skills, these qualities also interdepend on other people. **At their best, they are collective and compounding group activities.** As groups, we can mitigate our inherent blind spots and be “better together”. These skills demonstrate how much more powerful we are when we pool our insights and work and grow together effectively.

Coaching is a proven means for leveraging human potential and elevating critical and creative thinking, action, and clarity. It is the recognition that, with time to think and a partner to your ambitions, you are more likely to succeed. Coaching is about training the muscle of “learning to learn” or “learning to shift”. One of the main reasons why it can do this is that coaching offers or elicits alternative views/perspectives to existing limiting paradigms and presents repeated practice in adapting these. This makes individuals more agile, which is vital in the current context of constant change. Business coaching takes the theory and



practice of coaching a step further, as it was developed to enable leaders and organisations to thrive in complex environments. **Business coaching concerns the nexus of personal and organisational goals.** In business coaching, success is amplified when these two goals intersect.

Group coaching takes the theory and practice of individual coaching to the next level. It is an advanced form of coaching that leverages the power of peer learning and was developed to enhance people's ability to grow, learn, and adapt with others, using multiple perspectives to create a fuller picture. Based on coaching capabilities, the process demands coaching *and* group facilitation skills from the coach. It is usually conducted with a group of no more than six people who may or may not be an intact team.

Group coaching has become increasingly popular as a development tool in the workforce, because it offers economic efficiencies and scalability. Moreover, given that 20% of

learning takes place through supportive learning relationships, group coaching enhances peer learning, communication skills, empathy, and understanding. These factors may also profoundly impact team morale, cohesion, and outputs. One may argue that the greatest benefit of group coaching is the mitigation of “the single story”. Group coaching allows individuals to consider multiple (often contradictory) perspectives, amplifying the learning experience.

The collective and interactive nature of group coaching means that the group can also act as a microcosm for what is happening in a larger context within the organisation or greater community. This gives the group the opportunity to bring unconscious biases to the surface and tackle more widespread blind spots head-on, thus elevating self-awareness and deepening collective connection.

The process of learning and self-discovery in a group context allows for deep reflective thinking, with challenging questions of purpose and belonging being raised and explored. Therefore, successful group coaching has the extraordinary capacity to facilitate individual and leadership change and collective intelligence, as well as inspire motivated, happier, and purpose-driven people. **Given these benefits, leadership development specifically lends itself to a group coaching format.**

This white paper explores the research and benefits of group coaching. It provides insights on how group coaching can be applied effectively in personal and leadership development contexts. The paper includes leadership lessons that showcase how group coaching can impact leadership development, team effectiveness, and organisational performance, and mentions where the same principles of group coaching can be applied in a team coaching context. Moreover, the paper indicates where team coaching differs (refer to later GIBS white paper on the unique benefits of team coaching).

This paper includes case studies on best practice and provides commentary from thought leaders in coaching and business. It shows how group coaching, supported by adult learning theories (see Appendix C), has the potential to supersede executive coaching in some contexts, considering its many benefits that far exceed time and money. While executive coaching has been carefully developed for profound individual leadership development, group coaching combines the very best of personal and peer learning to enhance both individual development and how that individual is able to relate to and lead others. Group coaching is advancing in reputation and demand. This paper encourages organisations and management development institutions to ask themselves: **“How are you leveraging group coaching to develop individuals, managers, and leaders for effective transformation to thrive together in the Fourth Industrial Revolution?”**

To date, there has been little advanced research on group coaching, positioning it in its infancy when compared to its more established older cousin – executive coaching – thus creating discriminating doubt. The Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) is an example of a leading institution that has effectively used group coaching to enhance leadership effectiveness, positioning itself as thought leaders in this capability. GIBS has found that group coaching is a particularly useful modality in leadership development contexts. As a result, GIBS has developed significant group coaching capability, building group coaching into the majority of its academic and executive education programmes.

Coaching@GIBS has established a Special Interest Group (SIG) – a group of GIBS professional associates dedicated to the latest research and best practices in group coaching. The contributions of the SIG as well as academic research conducted by Alison Reid, director of GIBS Personal and Applied Learning Centre (home to Coaching@GIBS) have largely informed this paper.

Introduction

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.”

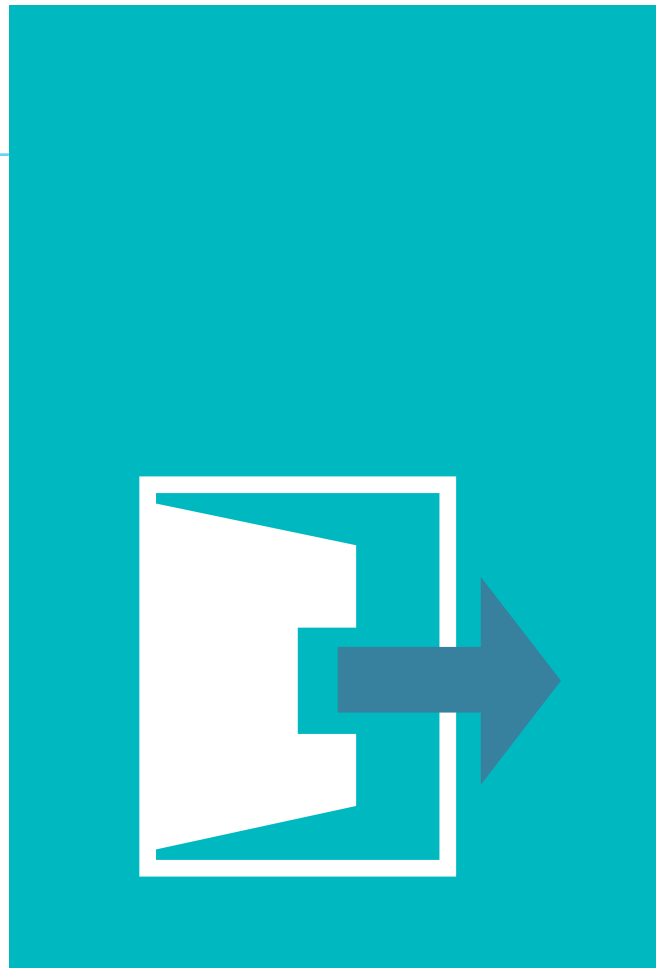
Charles Darwin

Human beings are differentiated from the rest of nature by our ability to think critically, problem-solve, imagine, and create. **As technology continues to play a larger role in our day-to-day existence, our capability to amplify this “humanness” is becoming increasingly important.** Within business, we are seeing an emerging trend towards human-centric leadership, where individuals and teams are applauded for their ability to connect, collaborate, and create as fellow human companions. These are our most powerful levers for change and adaptation. It is this capacity to adapt and transform in response to changing environments – to learn – that supports competitive, sustainable business practices and strong adaptive leadership in an ever-changing environment.

As headlines are dominated by pandemic concerns, socio-economic uncertainty, and accelerated technology, the challenges of 2020 have only further amplified our need to think critically, problem-solve, and adapt. Leaders have identified **escalating complexity** as the number-one issue in business today (O’Connor, 2020). Our volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment means more and more is being asked of leaders and, in many cases, the pace of change is outperforming the pace of leadership development. This is a sure way to damage business potential and team output. Leaders need to lead and remain clear-headed and resilient amidst the chaos, so there is a strong business case for ongoing leadership development. This is especially relevant for development positioned for navigating and leading change.

McGrath (2013) talks about the critical need for organisations to develop “transient advantage”, to replace the long-standing and somewhat stuck mindset of the classical “competitive advantage”. To build and exploit multiple transient competitive advantages, employees need to learn to think, adapt their mindsets, be more resilient, be capable of generating more with less resources, and work collaboratively with diverse stakeholders in informal groups and formalised teams. **Because of this need to harness transient advantage for their organisations, leaders must foster empathy and become more human-centric.**

Human-centricity recognises that individuals are unique in their thinking, expressions, and actions. Our beliefs, values, and experiences impact the fundamental structuring of our brains. We pay attention selectively and we do not all choose the same



attentional focus areas, resulting in attention blindness. As we focus, we select; and as we select, we become blind. This is an inherent process and culturally scripted. However, it is not necessarily useful as our world of work becomes more complex, connected, and unpredictable.

The 21st century requires something new. Being so connected, we have a great opportunity and are able to distribute various parts of attentional tasking among others dedicated to the same end. As a result, we are able to leverage multiple perspectives, options, and opportunities. **Group coaching is a powerful way of managing this attentional blindness through “perspective multitasking”, effectively and at scale.** If we can shift how we learn and pool our insights, together we will see more of a whole picture (Davidson, 2011).

The good news is that you do not (and should not) have to navigate this new world of work alone. **While growth is initiated at the individual level, its impact is scaled through relationships.** Human beings are differentiated and unique as individuals, but **we find meaning in groups.** Having a sense of meaning and purpose in your work – investing your energy in something greater than yourself – drives commitment and performance.

Like everything in nature, **it is the human being’s ability to cooperate effectively as a group that has ensured our ongoing adaptation and survival.** Of course, there is a dark side to groups and if they do not function effectively, they can encourage collective stupidity rather than collective intelligence. However, well-functioning groups nurture our sense of belonging and this sense of safety encourages learning, and

facilitates diverse thinking and innovative problem-solving, which are essential for change and growth. **Learning is the constant disruption of an old pattern**, a breakthrough that substitutes something new for something old (Davidson, 2011). By leveraging different strengths within well-functioning groups, results (sometimes surprising ones) are inevitable. Therefore, man-made ecosystems are designed deliberately as groups. Socially, professionally, academically, romantically, we naturally gravitate towards the collective.

An organisation is a potentially thriving and productive collective. One of the world's leading coaches and a top expert on leadership, Manfred Kets de Vries (2017) compared companies to cars, indicating that they don't run themselves, but need people (the right ones) to make them work.

While balancing profits with purposes, leaders also need to hire and develop the right talent. Furthermore, they need to institute effective practices to encourage *collaboration* for accelerated innovation and sustainable success. The art of the *relationship* is a powerful and primary differentiator for business. Globalisation means that diverse teams need to be able to work together effectively. Given the pace and scale at which business is operating to be competitive, these teams need to learn how to communicate and collaborate across cultures and geographies quickly (Reid, 2011). As relationships become increasingly important in business contexts, so does the art of working and learning in a group. Rachel Botsman, leading business strategist and thinker, talks to the "economy of trust" (Strum, 2018). Technology has changed the way we do business. **Scaling business in the new economy is beyond just focusing on efficiency and cost; "relationship" and "trust" are the new currencies.**

The whole notion of an "organisation" implies working and learning efficiently as a unit for a common purpose. Managing and leading organisations concerns harnessing and influencing collective energies and efforts. In modern contexts, managing and leading are inherently socially interactive acts. The modern organisational, human development practitioner, and the modern manager cannot afford not to leverage processes of continuous, agile group connection and learning (Reid, 2014).

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead

Despite this potential and the natural inclination to be arranged in groups, we do not always function effectively together. Cultural idiosyncrasies, social contexts, diverse opinions and experiences, misinterpreted behaviours, stressful environments, and conflicting goals cause anxiety, friction, and resistance to cooperate. **This is why leadership within groups is imperative.**



There is a rich body of literature illustrating the importance of leadership for competitive (or rather *transient*) advantage, sustained organisational performance, innovation, creativity, and responsiveness to change. In fact, research indicates that **leadership, along with the culture it creates, is the single most important, if not the only, differentiator between organisations** (O'Connor, 2020).

A leader has always been defined as a guide, a commander, an influencer, a transformer, or the principal player in a team. As organisations pivot to a matrix (or helical) designs with leaner structures from traditional hierarchy, the title of "leader" is no longer reserved for those at the top. With the flattening of organisational structures, every individual within a group should have the opportunity to contribute towards the success and progress of the group. While this may not happen in practice (yet), it is imperative to recognise that every individual has the **capacity to demonstrate leadership competence. Successful learning and development initiatives acknowledge and develop this innate capacity.**

Leadership is a collective phenomenon in the sense that it happens between people. It is not located in you as an individual; rather, **it is a function of your impact on others.** As a leader, your ability to deeply relate to others is essential for organisational success. While there are times when directive leadership is required, research continues to confirm the importance of **scaling leadership through relationships with others, which is its truly transforming effect.** Moreover, leadership is a collective phenomenon in the sense that one mind (based on inevitable selective thinking) cannot absorb the complexity required to lead in an ambiguous and complex world. Instead, multiple (useful) perspectives, smartly collated, are required.

Leadership's focus has shifted from the individual to prioritise the *relationship between* individuals. Consequently, it makes sense to develop *each* individual's full leadership potential and ability to influence and affect others positively. Groups provide a natural environment in which leaders are able to develop themselves and others. Well-run groups also offer the opportunity to expand a limited perspective (i.e., to learn). **This space needs to be held expertly to ensure that every leader within the group is given the opportunity to grow and to guarantee that learning (and not group think) occurs,** which is where the power of group coaching enters the arena.

In summary, leadership today is different (and more effective) because:

- a. modern business environments require organisations to be adaptive and agile, and to develop transient advantage. Leaders drive the adaptiveness of their organisations by exercising the agility and growth of their own mindsets;
- b. people have selective attention, resulting in blind spots. In a VUCA world, sharing, challenging and changing mindsets through the art of relationship is not only encouraged, it is critical;
- c. every individual has the potential to be a leader and business should be leveraging this capability;
- d. leadership is amplified when everyone is committed to people development and to developing themselves; and
- e. leadership is a result of individuals relating effectively with one another. It is the transforming impact/result of mutually beneficial and reinforcing action.

The impact of our Fourth Industrial Revolution world of work

The ability to function and develop effectively in groups and to lead these groups well is even more important as we head into a different future world of work, characterised by **different work, workplaces, and workers**.

As an organisation in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, you are facing an accelerated pace of business, hyper-competition, hyper-connection, market shifts, regulation, disruption, and plenty of ambiguity and volatility. Despite this, in many instances, our workforces and education institutions are still structured for 20th-century learning. This looks like directive, non-helical structures, with a focus on individualistic thought, action, and accountability.

As a worker in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, you find yourself needing to be agile, resilient, adaptive, and able to learn how to learn (and learn quickly!). You need an internal capacity to navigate change, intentionally filter information and choices available, and access the hyper-connected world without losing a sense of self and purpose.

As a team in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, you may work in matrix organisations, in virtual teams across vast geographies, and in permanent, project, and temporary teams. Your team may be restructured often. Your teams are diverse and can include individuals from up to five generations. To get things done, your ability to communicate, influence, adapt your relationships, and be socially intelligent is critical. Equally crucial is your ability to challenge your own biases,

reflect objectively, exercise perspective-taking, be vulnerable, and build trust. Moreover, you may be from different teams/groups that do not report to one another, but still have to work together to perform.

As a leader in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, you find yourself in the depths or aftermath of a pandemic. Things look very different from one year ago and you are rediscovering the advantages of your human creativity and thinking capacity. However, with prolific uncertainty and increasing demands, finding time to think and focus is not always easy. You are limited by your own experience and cultural scripts (as is everyone else). You have important decisions to make, fast, and you certainly do not want to pioneer a new way of working alone.

How do you bring groups on a journey of self-discovery with you? How do you leverage the full potential of each person and team within a system? How do you ensure that the system actively learns together? How do you collectively compete, grow, and win?

In all these instances, you understand that collaboration is key for future sustainability and success. Groups offer a unique opportunity to truly learn by offering new and alternative perspectives for expanding an existing view. **While knowledge can be expanded with additional content** (shared by an expert, as is the case in teaching), **personal and leadership development require additional perspectives to occur through exchanges from multiple people.**

The case for group coaching in enhancing personal capacities



Joan* entered the GIBS Leading Women programme with trepidation. She didn't see herself as a leader, nor did she understand why she was given a position and title. Her lack of confidence made her extremely shy in group discussions. Despite her reluctance, she could not avoid group interactions. Group coaching formed an integral part of the programme design. In order for Joan to receive her credits, she needed to complete all six sessions over the course duration.

The group coach took time in establishing a safe container. There was hard containment in the shape of rules, developed and agreed by the group. There was also soft containment – a psychological safety that was reinforced by the group coaching process. This included respect; a knowing that you would have uninterrupted time to contribute to the group; that the group would listen as silent witnesses; that your contribution would be heard, but not judged; and that all conversations were confidential, allowing for openness and honesty amongst all members of the group.

Over seven months, Joan blossomed. The group and its container allowed her to be her authentic self. Joan's growth in confidence led her to spearhead impactful initiatives within her organisation. She became an active mentor within the system. Her individual transformation had a profound impact on her personal and professional life as well as on the organisation.

~ Stephanie Martinis: GIBS professional associate, group and executive coach

As one of the fastest-growing industries in the world, business coaching is a powerful lever for enhancing accountability, decision-making, team alignment, and performance. Leading organisations across the globe use business coaching as a key differentiator – it is about good business or, as Coaching@GIBS puts it, **it is the business of being human.**

Group coaching takes this even further, as has been shown to unleash both individual and collective potential by leveraging individual growth in, and through, an inter-relating group. This coaching is especially relevant for our modern business contexts and emerging future workplaces that demand we interact with others.

Many emerging trends have been accelerated in 2020, as COVID-19 has forced individuals to rethink the way we work, relate, and lead. An increase in digital adoption means that organisations can continue to connect during lockdown. However, the type of connection is largely dependent on the organisational culture. As many workers migrate to home offices, there is the risk of task-orientated output that neglects team collaboration, traditional brainstorming, and notes of empathy and encouragement around the water cooler.

Group coaching offers a safe containment of communicating with others to increase social intelligence and enhance self-awareness. Moreover, group coaching is an opportunity to learn through and with others, challenge social norms and dominant perspectives, and deepen relationships through listening and understanding. **A reminder that effective leadership is about the business of people, and great leaders foster self-awareness and relationship at all levels.** As mentioned, like all of nature, humans thrive in groups and group coaching leverages this idea, being aligned to our learnt and natural way of being together in business – that is, **developing new ideas and effectively executing these as a group.**

“The greatest benefit [of group coaching] I have seen for individuals is having a platform for reflection and sense-making. The greatest benefit for the organisation is the building of trust, allowing for greater collaboration and reduced competition and silos...

[Individuals gain the] awareness that they are not alone and that others are grappling with similar issues but don't talk about it. What I find most surprising for the organisation is that by creating a space where people feel seen and heard, a respectful connection is created and deeper issues, such as appreciation of diversity, are indirectly addressed.”

~ Bjeffe Breebaart: learning and development consultant at South African Reserve Bank (SARB) Academy

“Graham*, a 37-year-old executive at a leading multinational, finds himself in a predicament of holding teams accountable virtually. He has tried various methods and nothing seems to stick. The organisation has a strong culture of independence and free thinking – this has always been considered an advantage. However, without accountability and direction, employees can get lost in their own creativity. Graham seeks the advice of his business coach, who suggests that the team work together on coming up with ways to manage their own accountability. Through a process of group coaching, the team not only defines, but also buys into an accountability approach. They agree collectively on how this will work. In fact, including the team means that the onus of holding people to account does not only fall on Graham. The team has voluntarily offered to hold one another accountable. They feel empowered, consulted, and informed.”

~ Natalie van der Veen: group and executive coach, researcher and author

Given the safe containment of the space, unconscious biases are free to surface and can indicate potentially destructive attitudes and ideologies within a system. It is up to the experienced group coach to call attention to polarisations within the group or illustrative phrases like “those people”. The group coach does this without judgement. The gentle illumination of blind spots and simple provocation of acknowledgement – for instance, “do you notice the effect on others when...?” – is often enough for the group to reflect on what has surfaced and the impact that this may be having on the group and the larger system. **Awareness is the first step towards learning and change. In this way, group coaching is a powerful means for transformation.**

“As an executive within a large South African bank, Max* benefited from the process of deep questioning within the group. Reflecting on feedback allowed him to gain insights on his blind spots and break down rigid thinking around gender, age and race, which were certainly a reflection of biases held in some parts of his broader system. Max raised his sense of self-awareness and was inspired to become a more inclusive leader. Really listening to others' stories made Max realise that we are far more similar than what we are different and that there is deep connection in our shared human experience.”

~ Riette Ackermann: GIBS professional associate, head of GIBS Group Coaching SIG, group and executive coachy

Group coaching brings into question identity and purpose, with the profound opportunity to collect opinions, mirror behaviours, speak without interruption, practise generative and reflective thinking, and recognise common threads in our shared stories and experiences. **This learning process enables us to fundamentally change who we are; to be better leaders; and to be happier, more connected, self-aware and motivated human beings.** The multiplicity of perspectives and relationships in a group can amplify this learning through exchange, beyond what individual dyad interactions can do.

Perhaps one of the most underrated benefits of group coaching is its potential to **act as a microcosm for the larger context.** While the catalyst for group coaching can be a “less-than optimal” functioning group/team with issues/ambitions unique to that group, dynamics that play out in session are often reflections of broader paradigms.

So why has such a powerful tool been relatively underutilised in business?



“The key literacy skills of the 21st century is the ability to learn, unlearn and relearn.”

Alvin Toffler

There is a lack of compelling empirical research on group coaching **because it is relatively new** – about 20 years behind its counterpart, individual coaching. In writing this paper, a “group coaching” search on Emerald Insight (a database of journals, books and case studies) yielded only 131 hits and majority of the articles do not provide a comprehensive framework or set of holistic recommendations. This illustrates the lack of awareness of its tangible benefits to business. However, this is changing because, as experience and evidence grow, so does the use of group coaching. Since its inception in 2000, GIBS has invested in coaching as a leadership development tool, supporting critical conversations, deep thinking, collaboration, and group effectiveness. What started as a simple supportive process for classroom training, has mushroomed into an attractive stand-alone product, which enables a small group of people to come together and actively engage and interact with one another. This facilitated peer-to-peer process offers something one-on-one coaching in isolation cannot – that is, the dynamism of interaction, competition, support from contemporaries, and a plethora of different ideas and approaches (Reid, Proudfoot, & Ackermann, 2020).

While executive coaching has proven itself as a profound learning and development process, its demand of human resources means that it is often challenging to scale or to offer as a long-term solution. It has also developed a somewhat unfair reputation for being reserved for the elite of an organisation, which is better than its previous reputation of being inappropriately used as a remedial performance management tool.

Group coaching has emerged as a **time- and cost-effective process when compared to executive coaching, making it scalable and sustainable for organisations**. Group coaching is an opportunity for more individuals to receive the benefits of coaching at scale. This, coupled with its focus on group dynamics and multiple perspectives, means that this coaching form can be applied effectively as a **strategic tool in the inculcating of**

a **performance and learning culture**, especially in complex relational and systemic leadership contexts. While time- and cost-efficiencies are evident, these are only the beginnings of group coaching benefits, which extend into **tangible return on investment for organisations**.

“[Group coaching has a] visible benefit to the organisation: the team learns to speak the same language. They clarify concepts with each other. They then all know what is meant by “leadership”, for example. Or they develop and agree on steps to hold difficult conversations. This is particularly useful for teams from different units. For example, finance teams that are working with sales reps... one wants to sell against all costs and the other wants to guard against outstanding debt. Developing a common understanding on why we do things, and possibly why there is natural tension between teams, is eye-opening for individuals and beneficial for the organisation.”

~ Ulla von Holtz: GIBS group and team coach in Namibia

“The “Traction” group coaching leadership initiative was delivered in Transnet’s Rail Engineering’s Coach Business division. It was designed to assess and develop the coaching and mentoring skills of their managers, in order to support a four-point turnaround (which became a growth) strategy. The Return on Investment (ROI) of the group coaching initiative was assessed and found to have had both tangible and intangible benefits for the participants, with the ROI calculated at 32,64% (above 25% target)”

~ Rika Tome: GIBS group and team coach

The nature of group coaching

Let's get to know it a little better, shall we?
What exactly is it?



Coaching@GIBS defines group coaching as:

A small group of individuals engaging with each other for the purposes of personal and leadership growth and development, as well as group learning and development, primarily through exchanges, interaction and reflection, facilitated by a qualified group coach.

The power of group coaching is in the interaction *between* the participating individuals as they become “assistant coaches” to each other. With trust and empathy, there are increased opportunities for learning, given the collective wisdom, feedback, and support of the group. One person’s development provokes and catalyses another to grow. **In addition to a focus on personal goals, individuals develop the skills of feedback, awareness, accountability, and facilitation.** As previously mentioned, to mitigate the effects of group think, confirmation bias, or simple resistance to learning from alternative views, the real learning in group coaching is best facilitated by a skilled group coach.

This definition includes important elements of the process to ensure that full advantages are experienced by the individual and the collective. These elements include:

- a small group:** GIBS recommends **no more than six persons;**
- exchanges, interaction and reflection: active and equal participation** is required by all individuals; reflection is a critical part of adult learning;
- facilitation by a qualified group coach:** the process demands an additional skill set from the coach – that is, the ability to effectively facilitate group communication and exchanges for relevant and transformative learning;
- personal growth and development:** the individual benefits of the process; and
- group learning:** the additional benefit of learning through and with others (mirroring the natural way of being within organisations), as well as **becoming better as a group or team.**

“Lindiwe* worked in a large multinational. She felt completely lost, given her exposure to patriarchal and toxic leadership. She had assumed this was a company-wide culture and was considering alternatives. Team coaching across geographies made her realise her situation was unique. In fact, the more exposed she was to other parts of the organisation, the more passionate and excited she became about the organisation’s current positioning and future potential. Becoming aware of the organisational culture gave her the confidence to not accept her negative circumstances. Team coaching gave her the opportunity to reframe her thinking and take ownership of her experience at work.

“I now love the company more than I ever did!” says Lindiwe.”

~ Tracey Proudfoot: GIBS professional associate, head of GIBS Group Coaching SIG, group and executive coach

The word “group” indicates the distinction from individual coaching and the implied inclusion of group dynamics and facilitated adult group learning principles. Again, **it is our humanness that is our competitive advantage today. Group coaching allows us to be fully human**, by encouraging:

- **vulnerability** as we think and learn out loud with others;
- **transparency** that can be mirrored by our peers;
- us to **acknowledge and appreciate that we are ALL in a development gap**. We do *not* have all the answers, nor are we always correct (neither of which are possible);
- **self-awareness**, as we receive feedback from the group explicitly and implicitly;
- **validation**, an indication that we are on the right track and the change is valuable and valued;
- **similarity**, we have more in common than we realise and this can inspire confidence and support to act. One of the things we all have in common is a very selective attention and, therefore, a limited view of reality; and **difference**, we all vary and this offers enormous opportunity in personal learning and inclusive group work. One of the things this difference can offer is a chance to reconfigure our blind spots for a richer view of reality (Davidson, 2011; O’Connor, 2020; Rock, 2009).

Being “fully human” encourages learning, change, and growth, which are essential for leadership development and organisational success. Interestingly, **we appear to be socially aware before we are self-aware**; we experience acceptance by a social group as “survival” and rejection in the same way as physical pain. We make decisions according to these social sensitivities and threats (Goleman, 2006; Ringleb, Rock, & Ancona, 2012). **We learn from one another and adapt to, and with, one another using collective experience and wisdom** (Thornton, 2010; Ward, 2008). This is the power of social influence and the foundation of group coaching – a process that, when skilfully applied, can significantly accelerate transformation (Ward, 2008). Group coaching can achieve what individual coaching cannot – namely provide a transpersonal network that reacts and responds as an interacting unit (Thornton, 2010; Ward, 2008). This is critical to the unique value of group coaching: the elegant mix of coaching and group dynamic processes is designed to support a **solutions-orientated approach in a socially complex and hyper-connected world**.

Group coaching builds its value from three primary fields. These are individual executive coaching, learning facilitation, and group analysis. Where a group is also a team, team process is also a significant contributing field.

- **Individual coaching**: this is evident, given its name. Coaching implies that coaching competencies are applied in the process (especially a focus on goals and forward-moving growth) (Reid, 2014). There is a strong focus on individual learning, despite its group context. Given this focus, group coaching tends to take place in **smaller groups of no more than six people**.
- **Group facilitation**: like facilitation, group coaching relies on a non-directive and emergent process, where everyone’s contributions are elicited and important in the creation of collective wisdom (Reid, 2014). Similar to facilitation, the group coach sets direction around **process and outcome, rather than content** (as is the case in teaching/training).
- **Group analysis/dynamics**: Thornton (2010) describes the central idea in group analysis in terms of the value of different and even contradictory perspectives in presenting a fuller picture. This aligns with learning theory, where an individual needs safety (support of current views) and stretch (openness to differing opinions) **to remodel established ideas, philosophies, or behaviours**. In group coaching, safety is created through the containment of the group (set up by the group coach) and contributions are encouraged by all participants (in a fair and predictable way). This allows for effective learning exchange. A key difference is that group coaches are not trained therapists and, while the process may borrow insights from group analysis, it is not the same
- **Team processes**: a team is a group with work interdependencies and an explicit and shared purpose within a larger organisational context (Reid, 2014). Similarly, group coaching is about **supporting a group** (this may or may not be an intact team) **to move towards an agreed learning objective and move through certain phases as they develop their goals**. A key differentiator is that, in group coaching, the focus is on the individual and group development, more than on achieving the organisational goals a team may be responsible for. Team coaching will emphasise the team process components more than group coaching. Both group and team coaching rely heavily on an understanding of team/group dynamics, problem-solving, communication, conflict management, decision-making and performance, as well as a core team process of working towards a common goal (in open groups, this is jointly agreed to, while in organisational teams, this is often set by organisational needs).

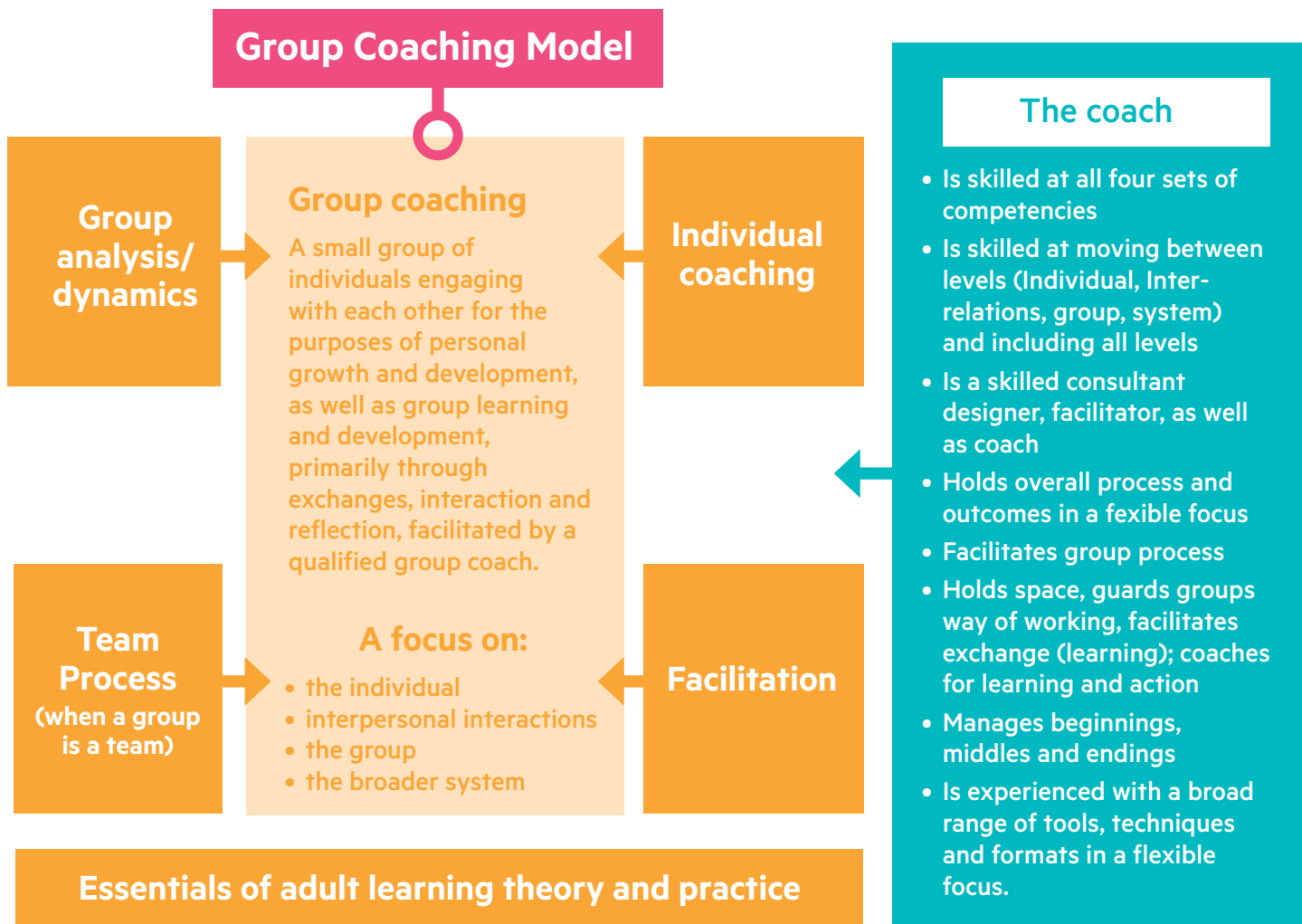


Figure 1: A group coaching model, incorporating the primary theoretical and practical influences and required coaching skills" (Reid, 2014)

A little more on the difference between group and team coaching:

When the group is an intact team, there are additional factors that contribute to effective team coaching. These include the various ways a team can be structured for its organisational purpose, working with specific work interdependencies, inclusion of the right individuals, sponsorship for the team objective/programme, and alignment with the team's strategic objectives. This paper does not discuss these unique aspects of team coaching – a future GIBS white paper will explore the fundamentals of team coaching in more detail. However, to the degree that all teams are also groups, the coach skills, coaching processes, and amplified effects on growth that are available in group coaching should also be the basis of great team coaching (O'Connor, Studholme, & Grant, 2017; Thornton, 2010). See Appendix A: Differentiating features of team coaching.



Looking for more sound justification for group coaching?

“Coaching is a critical skill and practice. Done right, it can yield favourable results to drive team cohesiveness and high performance. Very engaging and good insight on how to listen to others.”

~ GIBS group coaching participant

Group coaching has important but underutilised potential as a means of creating goal-focused change in organisational contexts. The benefits of individual and team coaching seem to be more commonly accepted. These benefits apply to group coaching as well – for example, enhanced trust, better communication, and personal growth. Over and above these, there are some very specific group coaching benefits, including:

- **Peer learning** amongst people who work in the same organisation, but are not in same team
- **Personal learning** through feedback, interaction, and exchange with others
- **Developing a common language** across people from diverse backgrounds
- **Breaking down barriers** across an organisation
- Cost-effective – **time and money efficiencies**
- **Scalable**
- **Developing relationships** and networks across organisations
- Improved **systemic awareness** of the organisation
- Prevention of organisational silo formation
- **Knowledge transfer**
- Improved **group energy** levels
- Better organisational results
- Improved likelihood of **durable changes in behaviour**

(Brown & Grant, 2010; Kets de Vries, 2014; Thornton, 2010)

“The benefit of group coaching is that it offers participants a sense of belonging. They feel safe psychologically, supported, seen and heard by the coach and fellow group members. They are vulnerable, share experiences, they call each other out; this facilitates shifts in perspective. They emerge and become confident in their abilities to navigate complexity and this enables them to contribute meaningfully to make an impact within their teams/organisations.

They are confident to speak up and to be heard; asking for promotions, setting boundaries to achieve work-life balance; delegating more to focus on strategic issues; shifts in behaviours, to coach more/listen to get the best performance from their direct reports and teams.”

~ Tumi Moloto: GIBS professional associate, group and executive coach

Group coaching is a tool to enable collaborative, systemic social learning. **It is appropriate for today’s complex, multicultural, and rapidly changing business climates.** When implemented correctly, group coaching has the potential to support the kind of learning that not only empowers individuals, but also enables better teamwork and institutionalises organisational **cultures of learning agility** (Reid, 2014).

Group coaching’s key benefits can be summarised as:

- Profound individual learning and change that impacts personal and professional performance;
- An enhanced peer learning experience, given the safety of the container (as established by the group) and group dynamics;
- An opportunity to expose unconscious blind spots and biases within the group that may act as microcosms for a broader context; and
- Better leadership with enhanced self-awareness, listening skills, deep questioning skills, and inter- and intra-personal competencies.

The nitty gritty: How to implement group coaching

Variations in **group size, duration of engagement, diversity, stability, membership, and purpose** all affect how the group coaches can work and what tools and techniques they will choose to use.

A note on group size and duration of engagement:

Groups should be kept small (five or six individuals). The duration should be long enough to allow for equal contributions from all participants and a complete coaching process. A half- to full-day per session is recommended, with a minimum of three sessions per group, depending on learning objectives.

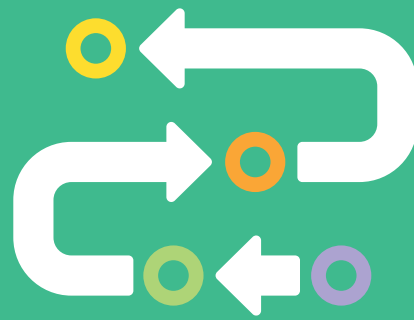
A note on group coaching process:

Beginnings and endings are important. The process of group coaching flows from client engagement and design to development and delivery (Britton, 2010). Group coaching can occur in person or virtually. Each session also benefits from a complete process, which comprises of:

- A beginning: preparation and opening. This includes setting the container with ground rules and check-ins, as well as agreed focus and expectations for the session.
- A middle: session activities with opportunities for learning and action.
- An end: reflections on key themes, critical takeaways and accountability agreements for actions, check-outs and closing.

(Thornton, 2010)

According to Britton (2010), a pure group coaching format is one where each person gets a certain amount of individual coaching time during the session, while others listen and participate in the process. However, in other types of group coaching, the degree of individual focus varies. Regardless of the individual or group level focus, the process should not focus on one individual's context to the exclusion of others. Therefore, it would not explore personal growth or meaning to the degree that individual coaching might and should be appropriately selected given that tradeoff.



A note on coaching methodology/ model:

There are various coaching models and methodologies. A coach may choose to specialise in a specific approach or use a blend of approaches in their coaching process. Examples of coaching approaches include:

- Systemic coaching
- Psychodynamic coaching
- Organisation and Relationship Systems Coaching (ORSC)
- Team coaching
- Narrative coaching
- Gestalt coaching
- Integral coaching
- Brain-based coaching
- Ontological coaching

Some coach training will focus on a specific approach, with the expectation that students master this approach. Others, including GIBS, choose to focus on a context (for GIBS, the context is business coaching), rather than one methodology. In GIBS's case, training and application is in a **variety of approaches**, allowing the coaches to select their preferred way of coaching or apply an appropriate blend. The GIBS orientation is also based on adult learning and change as a knowledge base. In the case of group coaching, it is important to have some training in systemic interactions, systems thinking or group dynamics as a complement to your chosen coaching methodology. Moreover, there are multiple approaches in team coaching specifically, which are useful (e.g., Systemic Team Coaching by the Academy of Executive Coaching [AoEC]).

It is important that the coach allows for a comprehensive coaching process. The power of coaching is in its ability to clarify goals and assign actions to achieving these goals, as well as in creating experimental spaces where thinking and insight lead to experimental actions, the feedback from which drives iterative learning. This allows for progress, accountability, and increased ability to learn, which are essential to demonstrate the sustained impact of coaching. GIBS uses its own V-GROWTH model, that prioritises Vision – attaching a sense of meaning and purpose to the desired goal(s). **GROW** references the standard GROW model – Goals, Reality, Options, Way forward. T refers to Trying, highlighting the experimental and active component of coaching. The model also identifies iterative adjustments and refinements as essential in learning and **Honing** new behaviours.

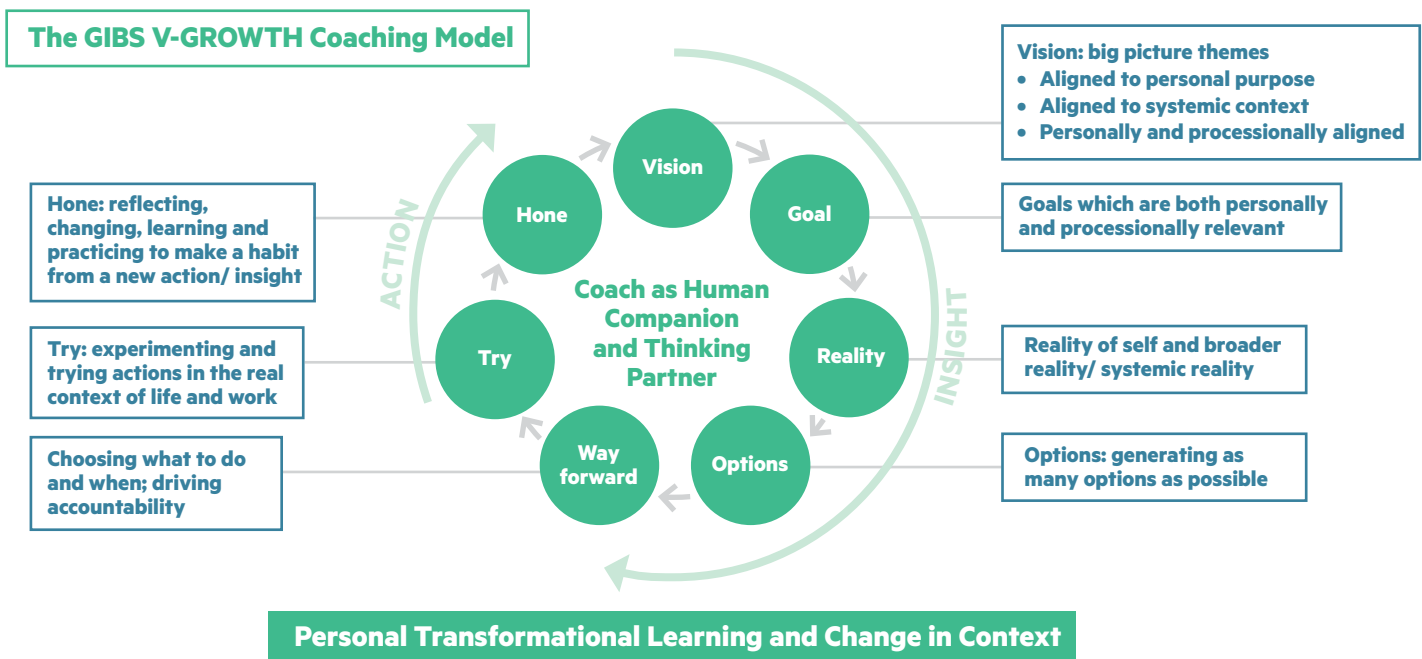


Figure 2: GIBS V-GROWTH Model – an extension of the standard GROW coaching model

What makes an effective group/team coach? The skills and competencies required by a group coach include:

- **Excellent coaching and group facilitation skills.** This includes the fundamental skills of a good individual coach – namely an ability to empathise, hold a non-judgemental space, listen well without projecting own needs, catalyse thinking and action through great questions, and manage accountability. It also includes the fundamental facilitation skills of eliciting the views from a diverse group of people, moving them towards an agreed goal, while managing the energy and enablers/disablers of that group process.
- **Astute self-awareness.** This involves recognising and understanding how our attention is limited and selected. It is particularly important that coaches have the self-management skills necessary to hold space for the group’s learning, while also having their own perspectives challenged. Like all group members, the coaches are not necessarily “right” in their views, but still have the responsibility to guide a group with credibility.
- **Ability to create a safe container** through hard and soft containment. Establish and maintain group boundaries (as defined and agreed by the group).
- **Protect the group’s way of working**, providing feedback on enabling and disabling behaviours. This would include conflict management or avoidance behaviours.
- **“Hold the space”** as leader/authority when anxieties are high (relinquishing this role at other times).
- **Coordinate the process and energies of the group**, ensuring the group stays on track to deliver agreed outcomes.
- **Facilitate sufficient time per individual** for focused reflection and development, also allowing sufficient interaction and exchange to enhance peer learning.
- **Manage dominant personalities** in the group, ensuring fair contributions and creating space for shared wisdom and diverse opinions and ideas. Use interactions like domination as an added “real-time” opportunity for awareness.
- **Manage the output.** Ensure that the group works together in creating actionable outputs to which they can be held accountable.
- **Manage accountability.** Frequent sessions mean holding the group accountable to progress/agreed actions.
- **Understand unconscious group dynamics** and have the ability to raise group awareness by surfacing impacts of the unconscious group.
- **Facilitate reflective thinking** to allow for continuous learning and change in motion – in particular, actively using ongoing reflections and exchanges as ways of highlighting learning opportunities for individuals and the group. These can be intrapersonal insights, interpersonal insights, insights about the group, or insights relating to a broader context outside the group (e.g., a mirror of a larger dynamic).
- **Enable and embed a learning culture.** Leveraging actions and accountability to embed positive behavioural shifts.
- **Design and develop group coaching processes** in alignment with client needs.

“The interesting thing about coaching is that you have to trouble the comfortable, and comfort the troubled.”

Ric Charlesworth

“We certainly need coaches in our busy schedules and professional careers; to keep us relevant, focused and out of the comfort zone.”

~ GIBS group coaching participant

A note on group coaching tools and techniques: coaches' selection of tools may depend on whether they are coaching a group as a set of individuals, or coaching a group as an existing team. With the former, the recommended approach is that some design with themes is important as a common anchor for participants. With the latter, there may be more emphasis on group process, problem-solving or coaching the group towards the group's vision, values, and goals (Britton, 2010; Kets de Vries, 2011; Thornton, 2010). Nevertheless, **it is important to remember that the tool is not the coaching. Tools are only enablers for a coaching process and are to be held lightly.**

Many of the tools used in group coaching are shared with individual coaching models, such as 360-degree questionnaires, Motivational Appraisal of Personal Potential (MAPP), StrengthsFinder, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. There are also tools that are particularly helpful in the context of team coaching, because they focus on team relationships or are well matched to the leadership and organisational context of work. Examples of these tools include the Leadership Practices Inventory, Team Diagnostic, Belbin Team Roles, and systems analysis tools (Brown & Grant, 2010; Kets de Vries, 2011; Thornton, 2010). Furthermore, some tools or methodologies have been developed especially for the context of group coaching, such as laser coaching and ORSC (Britton, 2010; Thornton, 2010). Table 1, Appendix B provides a robust summary of these tools.

For a while now, Thabo* had received feedback that he was unapproachable as a mid-manager in a creative firm. He rejected this feedback mostly because he did not know how to be different. Then, as part of a team coaching process, Thabo received 360-[degree] feedback from his peers. He was also asked to give feedback to others. The process was enlightening and empowering and Thabo decided to mirror the technique within his own team as a way to address his own approachability. His willingness to be vulnerable with his team, to actively listen to their feedback, and to engage in their shared stories removed personal barriers and positively impacted his role as a leader.

~ Riette Ackermann: GIBS professional associate, head of GIBS Group Coaching SIG, group and executive coach

Group coaching in a box

- This is neither pure coaching nor pure facilitation, but rather a blend of both.
- Individual learning is key to the process, despite it taking place in a group. Learning is influenced by social cues.
- It differs from a community of practice, given the role of the coach/facilitator and the express purpose of intentional and active learning and development.
- While there is impact at an individual level, group coaching is a proven means of impacting learning at a group/team and organisational level, too.

Group coaching as a lever for transformative leadership development



The process of group coaching allows leaders to effectively develop the competencies outlined below.

Group coaching leadership lesson 1: Group coaching offers a learning opportunity for both intra- and inter-personal competencies

Group coaching is designed specifically to enhance individual and social awareness, with a renewed sense of one's individual impact on group dynamics. In other words, **what is your individual impact on a group?** Building leadership that has the power to transform is about supporting the development of human and social capital (Dalakoura, 2010; Day, 2000; McCallum & O'Connell, 2009). In this context, human capital refers to **intra**personal competencies, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation. Social capital refers to **inter**personal competencies – that is, relational aspects of leadership like social awareness (e.g., empathy, developing of others) and social skills (e.g., collaboration, open-systems mindset, building internal and external networks and conflict management) (Day, 2000; McCallum & O'Connell, 2009; Stout-Rostron, 2006).

Intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies are complementary, interactive and mutually reinforcing, and both are required for effective leadership (Alban-Metcalf, Alban-Metcalf, & Alimo-Metcalf, 2009; McCallum & O'Connell, 2009). Group coaching provides a space where real interpersonal dynamics can play out (Kets de Vries, 20005). The group often acts as a microcosm for a bigger context. This can surface unconscious dynamics, allowing for a conversation around topics often considered taboo, such as race, gender, age, and other biases.

“When the best leader’s work is done, the people say, ‘We did it ourselves’.”

Lao Tzu

Leadership development is as much about the self (and self in relation to others) as it is about the “harder skills” of leadership that can be taught in more traditional training programmes. In today’s business world, **leadership development is about the individual leader’s ability to shift attention and mindset, to learn, and to keep learning.**

“I initially thought that there was a set of skills and things that you need to learn and practise before you can lead; but actually, the one thing that the [group coaching process] taught me is going back inside yourself and asking “what do I already have that makes me an influential leader and how can I use what I have already got?””

~ GIBS group coaching participant

Group coaching leadership lesson 2: Group coaching encourages reflection of feedback – a powerful tool for personal development and mastery

Like all coaching, group coaching encourages reflection of feedback and behavioural patterns. This enhances personal awareness. As a self-aware leader, you will be able to better self-regulate, meaning better management of your responses to social cues and systemic pressures, and better awareness and management of your influence. Productive influencing skills are important in any leadership position. **Our ability to reflect allows us to see ourselves as both part of the problem and part of the solution.** This encourages and allows us to be disrupted/changed, as we then aim to positively disrupt/change the organisation (O'Connor, 2020).

Group coaching provides members with opportunities to **identify and set goals related to a purpose larger than themselves** (Kets de Vries, 2005; Thornton, 2010). We thrive when we understand our connection to something bigger than ourselves. **Group coaching's power to call purpose into question and provide meaningful resolution means that it often results in happier, more holistic and motivated human beings.**

“Group coaching as a relationship-centred teaching and learning paradigm is particularly well-suited to the African context. In group coaching, the group exists and functions as an interconnected being – the learnings, sharing, reflections and awareness that arise for individual participants are grounded in the value of Ubuntu: “I am because we are”.

Grounded in inherent recognition of the other person's worth, value and contribution, when supported by a learning facilitator and coach, the group usually builds their coaching capacity more quickly and becomes more adept at translating their insights and skills back on the job.”

~ Sifiso Mbuyisa: GIBS group and team coach

Group coaching leadership lesson 3: Group coaching's impact far exceeds the individual/leader, catalysing culture

The positive effects of group coaching can snowball through an organisation. This is a combination of leadership lessons 1 and 2 – our ability as humans to reflect and change are critical to the success of group coaching. How do we then transfer our newly acquired knowledge to our colleagues? **Open communication, turn-taking, active listening, deep questioning, collective empathy, exploring options, and actively managing accountability are key characteristics of a coaching engagement.** As we venture further into our new world, driven predominantly by technology, uncertainty and change, these traits have proved invaluable in leading successful teams. As a leader, embodying a coaching way of being sets an example for others. In addition, **our role as leader is to multiply/scale the positive effects of leadership development.** Group coaching is an efficient and effective way to do this.

“One of the most consistent benefits of group coaching... is a cross-pollination of good leadership practices. There just seems to be a resonance in peer-to-peer group coaching conversations about what works that enables leadership insights to hit home much more than in other modes of learning.”

~ Vezinlahla (Vezi) Mncwango: GIBS professional associate, group and executive coach

Group coaching leadership lesson 4: Leveraging group coaching to embed and cross-pollinate new knowledge and mindset into an organisation

Classroom education accounts for only 10% of learning. Practical application and reflection through and with others are essential to embed new knowledge. Group coaching is a powerful way for leaders to reflect on new ideas and collectively brainstorm opportunities for application. Group coaching has a strong emphasis on accountability to ensure that new ideas and behaviours are actioned and embedded. This has a grand impact on group productivity, outputs, and innovation.

Given today's volatile environment, management and leadership should prioritise effective team and organisational functioning, and the **application of learning to systemic workplace results**. Businesses can utilise group coaching processes in small group syndicates to **permit half-formed insights to mature, provide affirmation and clarity around taught knowledge, and allow peers to collaborate and share ideas and observations** (Cook & Viedge, 2011; Vidmar, 2005).

“Group coaching is a powerful tool for making new knowledge accessible and meaningful to others.

Tony*, a young, talented leader in a small family business, did not understand the most recent lecture on strategy. “I just don't get it,” was her response to others' enthusiasm. **Despite her obvious poise and perceived confidence, this only further amplified her insecurities around her age and leadership role within her business.**

A few weeks later, Jarryd*, a senior manager in a large corporation, shared how he had applied the strategy principles in his workplace. The penny dropped for Tony. **Jarryd's application of the theory and his willingness to share this in a group coaching context, facilitated Tony's learning.”**

~ Stephanie Martinis: GIBS professional associate, group and executive coach

Group coaching leadership lesson 5: Leveraging diverse thinking and feedback from coaching group members to develop a holistic sense of self

Feedback is an important part of a leader's growth and development. Feedback from organisations and managers is often scarce, but challenge, validation, social comparison, and alternative perspectives are important for personal development. **Group coaching can be an effective way of receiving feedback, given its multiple interactions, inputs, and collective sharing and support.** In group coaching, everyone has the opportunity to take on the role of “assistant coach” or “sparring partner” to dialogue with, challenge, and give and receive feedback.

Mutual accountability and commitment in the presence of “assistant coaches” support leadership growth. Diversity in the group mimics the multiple dynamics and interactions evident in the current globally connected leadership conditions. Group coaching offers a safe space for leaders to better understand, tolerate, explore, and accept **diverse thinking and behaviour.**

“I'm consciously aware of my behaviour and how others perceive me... now [I am] much more aware, so I can improve on it.”

~ GIBS group coaching participant

Group coaching leadership lesson 6: Group coaching is especially useful in today's modern business contexts, given its influence on learning and agility

Group coaching offers the opportunity for participants to share learnings, build on new ideas, and reflect on established but potentially irrelevant behaviours. Individuality means that a group is naturally unpredictable and diverse, reflecting organisations today. Behaviours modelled and learnt in the safety of a group coaching setting can be applied effectively in reality. Feedback offered in the safety of the group allows for learning through social networks. **It is an opportunity to practise and hone human-centric skills, such as empathy, listening, questioning, collaboration, and giving and receiving feedback.** Considering that the output is part of the process, the coach takes on a learner role too, facilitating fresh thinking and new engagements.

Research reveals that group coaching facilitates an increased understanding of self and meaning by enabling experimentation with various identities through multiple interactions. Group coaching allows input from the group's collective knowledge, which can support new ideas, challenge existing ideas, and allow for alternative perspectives. These forms of alternative and external inputs challenge existing mindsets, resulting in learning. Given the informal role of silent witnesses, group coaching allows for the creation of game plans and the necessary accountability for sticking to these.

"[The group coaching] sessions were great because I got to know more and more about myself; the characteristics I have that I never knew I had. Every time we had a session, I learnt something new about myself, which I really, really enjoyed."

~ GIBS group coaching participant

Group coaching leadership lesson 7: Group coaching democratises the influence and impact of business coaching, giving equal opportunity for leadership development

Leadership capabilities are no longer reserved for those at the top. Successful business develops leaders at all levels. Coaching is a proven means of doing this. However, it is often not practical, given the associated costs and perceived commitments of time.

There is an economic, business and learning case for group coaching, as it is more time-efficient and cost-effective than individual coaching. Group coaching generates scalability and reach with respect to business and learning impact. Paradoxically, it may be in groups that we can learn to most fully be ourselves, as we become aware that other people differ from us, but are no better or worse than us. This could be especially relevant for multigenerational workforces and (as group coaching becomes more accessible to all) for developing **highly talented youngsters as well as seasoned executives.**

Conclusion

We've seen unprecedented change – how are you equipping current and future leaders?

“There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered.”

Nelson Mandela

Change is the only constant and this has certainly proven true in 2020. As organisations navigate COVID-19's impact on “business as usual”, individuals have had to fervently adapt. Leaders and their teams need heightened resilience and adaptive capacity to continue to thrive in the present environment. **It is our ability to learn that powers our own transformation and our organisations' ongoing performance. To learn and to adapt is to fire at full capacity.**

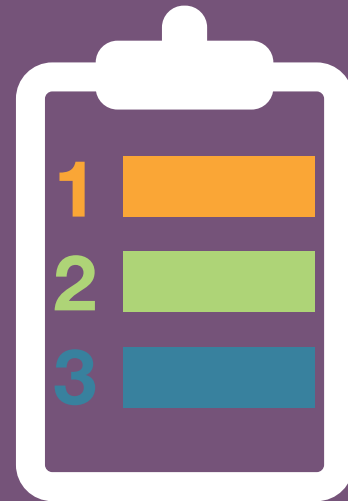
Layered with 2020's daily unpredictability, there is an obvious need for a different type of leader, namely one who is able to navigate complexity, think critically, and contribute sustainably to an organisation. **Leading today means investment in personal and leadership development**, both in alignment with and directly supportive of team and organisational development. Without scope for social interactions and water-cooler conversations, employees may be drowning in task-heavy focus. Unfortunately, as leaders and managers scramble for survival and to adapt to a new reality, many critical conversations are simply not happening. This puts collaboration at risk and makes it harder for leaders to motivate and inspire their employees. By deploying group coaching to check in with

employees and guide them through this new working reality, companies are finding better ways to encourage healthy working behaviours, while drawing out unconscious psychological concerns and fears (Reid et al., 2020).

However, groups can neglect to leverage the opportunities to expand individual selective attention and mindsets, or worse, collude to dilute diversity of thought and normalise/justify limited thinking. A highly skilled group coach and well-designed group coaching process ensure this does not happen and that group coaching amplifies our ability to deeply connect, creating space to fully express our creativity. There is an emphasis on action and accountability, which fosters a culture of continuous agile growth, performance, and results. Individuals are able to contribute uniquely and effectively to the overall system and possibly even transform it.

As research compounds, it becomes increasingly evident that **group coaching can (and should) play a profound role in both individual and leadership development to ensure that humans continue to thrive** in our ever-evolving environments.

**Names have been changed to protect identity.*



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Appendix A

Differentiating features of team coaching.

A team:

- has an explicit shared common purpose, goal or task
- has team members with work interdependencies (with respect to information, resources, skills).
- has members who seek to combine their efforts to achieve those common goals.
- usually exists before and after the coaching engagement and has a history.
- achieves success to the degree of their capacity to collaborate

Team coaching:

- is coaching a team to achieve a common goal, paying attention to individual performance as well as group collaboration and performance (in group coaching, learning goals can be separate and personally unique)
- works with the alignment of individual and team efforts to organisational needs
- should be a continuous, strategic process entrenched in the organisational culture and within the broader organisational context
- is usually directed at the relationship to the team's goal and/or the team's capacity to meet that goal
- works with a team to help members make coordinated and task-appropriate use of their collective resources in accomplishing the team's work.
- focusses on the whole team
- ensures that project or learning is usually applied back into the work context by the team which was originally coached
- assists the team members to make intentional and coordinated use of their collective resources and talents in accomplishing the team's work.
- uses a team coach who understands not only individual coaching skills but also the ways in which teams communicate, solve problems, and make decisions, as well as a degree of organisational knowledge.

Appendix B

Examples of tools that can be used in group coaching

Learning orientated towards individuals	Learning orientated towards interaction between individuals	Learning generally orientated towards the group/team as a unit	Learning generally orientated for transfer to the larger system
MBTI (Myers Briggs Typology Indicator) Disc personality Personality audit (PA) The Big Five OPQ (Occupational Personality Questionnaire) MAPP (Motivational Appraisal of Personal Potential) Enneagram Working with FLOW, Strengths, confidence and positive emotions, e.g. StrengthsFinder; VIA; Realise 2020 360-degree questionnaires Personal logos Time and life balance- various wheels Personal Development Plans (PDPs) Honey-Mumford Learning Styles questionnaire Kolb Learning styles Inventory	Perspective work Witnessing Drama triangle Crucial conversations Coaching triads Peer coaching Role plays Fish bowl FIRO-B (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation-Behaviour 360-degree processes and instruments Video recording and playback	Experiential simulations/ exercises Deep democracy Group constellations ORSC (organisation and relationship systems coaching) GROW, GROUP Bottom-lining Laser-coaching Force-field analysis Open-space technology Project definition tools Team effectiveness survey Tuckman model JOHARI Window 360-degree processes Big Five team Psychometric team profiling Kline thinking environment approaches Appreciative Inquiry Belbin's Team roles De Bono 6 Thinking Hats Games for team building Bath consultancy group High Performing Team Questionnaire	Team diagnostics TAN (The Achievement Network) Situational leadership Systems analysis tools Belbin systems analysis Stakeholder analysis Resistance analysis PEST analysis (political, environmental, social, technical)

Table 1: Examples of tools that can be used in group coaching (Reid, 2014)

Note: The tools in the table have been categorised broadly by learning orientation at individual, relational, group, and larger-system levels.

Appendix C

Group coaching is informed by adult learning theories and practices and assumes that:

- **learning is** complex, unique, and situated.
- **learning is** self-directed, based on accumulated experiences, and centred on a purpose.
- adults want to be autonomous learners.
- adults are capable of learning about how to learn, and they regard learning:
 - as a characteristic of all real-life activities;
 - as a consequence of thinking about how to resolve real issues and problems; and
 - as having the potential to be personally and socially transformative.

Andragogy:

- We “learn by doing”. Learning incorporates individuals’ real-life experiences, social interactions, social identities, and engagements with others and their contexts.
- Learning is gained through a direct encounter with something (subjective experience) and with emotion. Learning should focus not on outcomes, but on process.
- “Learning is relearning” – surfaced, discussed, refined.
- There is a cycle in learning of reflection, action, feeling, and thinking.
- Learning is holistic.
- Learning is an interaction between the learners and their environment.
- Learning is constructivist in nature.

Experiential learning theory and situated learning:

- Learning is influenced by social norms, imitation of role models, and the roles played by observation.
- Learning is influenced by concepts from organisational learning.
- Learning is situated within wider social units or communities of practice.
- Learning happens through social interactions between actors within these social networks.

Social learning theory and identificatory process:

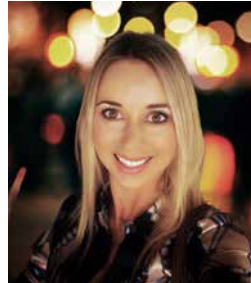
- Learning relies on critical reflection on experience.
- Learning can be central to social transformation.

Transformative learning theory

- **Holistic learning:** learning emerges from interactive mind, body, and soul processes.
- **Meta learning:** learning involves “learning how to learn”, and its sister term “metacognition”.

Authors

NATALIE VAN DER VEEN



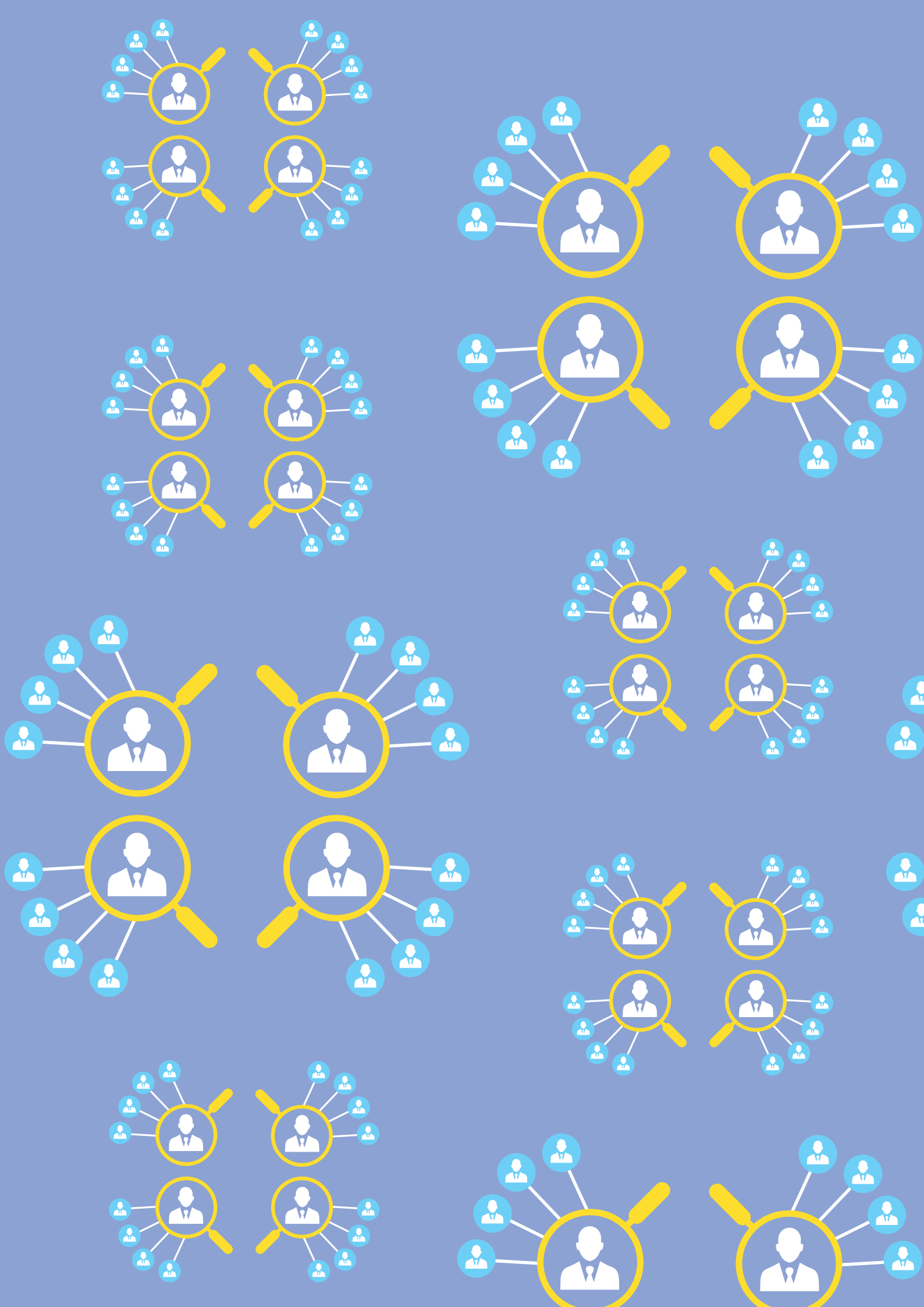
Natalie is a trained business coach (with International Coaching Federation [ICF] Approved Coach Specific Training Hours accreditation) and facilitator. With a deliberate blend of marketing and coaching skills, she uses human-centric methods and ideas to research, write, and consult in impactful marketing, leadership, and the future of work.

Previously, Natalie worked at Africa’s leading business school, GIBS, focusing specifically on personal learning processes and application. Natalie has experience in the design and delivery of customised leadership development programmes for corporates across industries. She blends her multinational marketing experience with her capacity as a consultant and coach to understand drivers of human behaviour. She strives to ensure that all learning experiences are made personally meaningful so that this relevance translates into transformation, impact, and sustainable change in the workplace. Natalie is deeply passionate about human-centric leadership and the future of work. To this effect, she has published various articles and case studies. She enjoys working with intentional individuals and organisations that prioritise balance, collaboration, inclusion, and sustainability.

ALISON REID



Alison is an internationally accredited professional coach and the director of the coaching and facilitation functions at GIBS. Prior to joining GIBS, she ran her own consultancy and worked in clinical and academic brain function settings in the Middle East and South Africa. Alison is an educator, researcher, and coach, holding a master’s degree in executive business coaching and is accredited with the ICF, AoEC, and International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations. She writes for both academic journals and media. Alison is passionate about human-centricity and believes that human-specific skills like creativity, emotional and social agility, critical thinking, and capacity for complexity will become the key differentiators in tech-dominated workplaces as well as a catalyst for healthier, more connected, and responsible societies. With the right motivation, awareness and support, humans are able to connect, collaborate, and solve the largest problems facing us as a species for a space where all can thrive.



Gordon Institute of Business Science

University of Pretoria

26 Melville Road, Illovo, Johannesburg
P O Box 787602, Sandton, South Africa, 2146
011 771 4000 | Acumen@gibs.co.za