

**ENGENDERING EXECUTIVE REFLEXIVITY:  
A MULTI-PERSPECTIVE EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCY**

**HEATHER GILHESPY**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF  
ENGLAND, BRISTOL**

**FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**BRISTOL BUSINESS SCHOOL UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF  
ENGLAND BRISTOL**

**2016**

# DECLARATION

I DECLARE THAT THIS RESEARCH THESIS IS MY OWN UNAIDED WORK. IT HAS BEEN SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND, BRISTOL, UNITED KINGDOM.

Heather Gilhespy

Date:21.10.2016

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I begin by thanking one person who has provided me with incredible support and inspiration from start to finish of this endeavour – Dr. Robert French. Without your courage, guidance, humour and faith I could not have given my best to this study. I feel deeply grateful for your helping me to stick to the task.

Another person whose help I would like to acknowledge from the very beginning to the end of the project is Dr. Charles Booth. The insights that I gained through attending your courses have helped me navigate through the choppy waters of methodology. Also I offer deep thanks to Dr Carol Jarvis who guided me in the final stages of supervision and inspired me to give ‘one last push’! Your guidance was so helpful at the very end. It would have been impossible for me to complete the challenge without both of you showing such compassion and patience. Against all the odds, we did it!

Mike Broussine only supervised me for a relatively short period during the long haul but without your inspiration and support I would never have tried a new approach to research

I would like to thank Fiona Watt, Helen Frisby and Kaye Cook for their support, professionalism and kindness. Also I would like to thank Dr. Sveltana Cicmil.

My friends and family have been the bedrock of this venture. I would like to thank them for their sustained support and encouragement –David, Jervis, Elaine, James, Sarah and Jersey thank you.

I would like to give special thanks to people who provided great inspiration and support to me during the very difficult final stages of this research – Dr. Jane Pritchard, Dr. Richard Warton, Alejandra Gordon-Watson, David Gillett, Peter Bradley, Phil Greenman and Azley Abd Razac.

There are no words with which I could express my gratitude to my Mum. You’ve helped me in so many different ways and are one of the best teachers I’ve ever met, and the funniest! You make all problems seem surmountable. I feel so lucky to have your companionship and support.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE:INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER.....	1
THE PROPOSED CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY TO RESEARCH ON EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES .....	1
EXECUTIVE COACHING AND EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES .....	2
CHAPTER OVERVIEWS .....	12
<b>CHAPTER TWO: EXECUTIVE COACHING .....</b>	<b>18</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER.....	18
DEFINING EXECUTIVE COACHING.....	21
THE BROAD RANGE OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES WHICH INFORM EXECUTIVE COACH PRACTICES .....	26
MULTI-THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE EXECUTIVECOACH INTERVENTIONS.....	36
DEBATES ABOUT EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES .....	37
GENERAL AND CONTINGENT EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES .....	44
CONCLUSIONS .....	47
<b>CHAPTER THREE: REFLEXIVITY AND REFLEXIVE PRACTICES .....</b>	<b>49</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER.....	49
REFLEXIVITY - A CENTRAL BUT CONFUSING TOPIC .....	50
EARLY ENCOUNTERS WITH THE CONCEPT OF REFLEXIVITY .....	51
REFLEXIVE PRACTICE IN PRACTITIONER RESEARCH .....	56
DECONSTRUCTIVE AND RECONSTRUCTIVE REFLEXIVE PRACTICES.....	61
A COMPETING NOTION OF REFLEXIVITY .....	65
A TRANSDISCIPLINARY MODEL OF REFLEXIVITY.....	69

THE MEDIATORY ROLE OF REFLEXIVITY .....	74
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN META REFLECTION AND REFLEXIVITY .....	79
CONCLUSIONS .....	81
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>83</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER.....	83
THE RESEARCH JOURNEY.....	84
CRITICAL REALISM .....	88
STRATEGIES FOR DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS.....	101
DATA ANALYSIS.....	106
PERSONAL INFLUENCES.....	108
CONCLUSIONS .....	111
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: PHASE ONE OF THE STUDY: CONSTRUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT .....</b>	<b>112</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER.....	112
THE CONSTRUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT MODEL.....	112
CONCLUSIONS .....	125
<b>CHAPTER SIX: PHASE TWO OF THE DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS</b>	<b>127</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER.....	127
PART ONE OF THE DATA ANALYSIS .....	127
PART TWO – DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN TYPES OF EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS BY COACHES .....	158
CONCLUSIONS .....	161
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>162</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER.....	162
KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COACH COMPETENCY – ‘ENGENDERING EXECUTIVE REFLEXIVITY’ .....	163

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUB-TYPES OF THE SET OF COMPETENCIES 'ENGENDERING EXECUTIVE REFLEXIVITY' .....	168
REFLEXIVITY, MEDIATION AND AGENCY .....	183
CONCLUSIONS .....	188
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>189</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER.....	189
THE CONTRIBUTION OF BRINGING MULTI-PERSPECTIVE SENSIBILITY TO THEORISING EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES .....	189
COMBINING GENERAL, CORE AND CONTINGENT EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES .....	191
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY .....	193
FUTURE RESEARCH .....	194
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>196</b>

## TABLE OF TABLES

Table 1-1: Distinctions between different groups research within the body of research influencing this study.....	8
Table 2-1: The broad range of theoretical influences and practices associated with executive coaching.....	27
Table 2-2: Categorisation of different theoretical perspectives associated with executive coaching practices .....	29
Table 4-1: Key aspects of the methodological argument supporting this thesis .....	84
Table 5-1: Distinctions between adult developmental stages in the Constructive Development Model (Kegan, 1994) .....	113
Table 6-1: Summary of differences between the executives' and coaches' lenses .....	156
Table 6-2: Differentiating between insights related to the different theoretical lenses used by coaches .....	158
Table 6-3: Summary of differences between the executives' and educational intervention of coaches .....	161

## TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1-1: The contribution of different types of executive coach competencies to engendering executive reflexivity.....	10
Figure 2-1: Inter-relationships between different topics discussed in this chapter.....	20
Figure 3-1: The relationship between critical coach interventions and beneficial changes in executives – Phase 1 of the data analysis .....	52
Figure 3-2: Summary of the key differences between being, and not being, reflexive garnered from encounters with practitioner colleagues .....	55
Figure 3-3: The relationship between the two step model of reflexivity and deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices .....	65
Figure 3-4: Common ground and differences between disciplinary notions of reflexivity.	72
Figure 3-5: The relationship between reflexivity, mediation and agency .....	77
Figure 4-1: Summary of the research activities associated with the two phases of data analysis.....	85
Figure 4-2: The causal logic associated with the executive coach competency ‘engendering executive reflexivity’ .....	94
Figure 4-3: Semi-structured interview questions .....	103
Figure 4-4: Schema of data within interviews .....	106
Figure 4-5: Coding with colours to distinguish between different types of sense-making .....	107
Figure 5-1: An overview of Phase One of the data analysis and the key influences which led to changing the theoretical framework used to inform data analysis in this study	125
Figure 6-1: Colour coding of mapping of difference between practicing and not practicing reflexivity and the different steps of reflexivity .....	128
Figure 6-2: Summary of analysis of case one.....	133
Figure 6-3: Summary of analysis of case two.....	137



Figure 6-4: Summary of analysis of case three .....	141
Figure 6-5: Summary of analysis of case four .....	144
Figure 6-6: Summary of the analysis of case five.....	148
Figure 6-7: Summary of analysis of case six.....	151
Figure 6-8: Summary of the analysis of case seven .....	154
Figure 6-9: The contribution of coaches inviting executives to consider the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes on their sense-making .....	157
Figure 7-1: Summary of key aspects of the coach competency 'engendering executive reflexivity' .....	167
Figure 7-2: The contribution of psychodynamic educational intervention of the coach in provoking executive to practice reflexivity.....	173
Figure 7-3: Awareness mediating between psychological/psychosocial influences and consequences .....	185
Figure 8-1: Complementary combination of general and contingent executive coach competencies.....	193

## **ABSTRACT**

The study seeks to present an original contribution to the research field of executive coach competencies. A multi-perspective, qualitative, critical realist analysis (Bhaskar, 2010) underpinned the theoretical analysis of semi-structured interviews. Five executives and thirteen executive coaches were initially interviewed. A subset of the primary data, seven interviews, was found to resonate with a body of the executive coaching literature. Connections were made between this body of research and a sub-set of the primary data collected in this study which resulted in identifying a set of executive coach competencies which have hitherto not been included in executive coach competency models. This set of competencies is categorised as 'engendering executive reflexivity'.

This set of competencies was conceptualised in relation to an interdisciplinary notion of reflexivity (Holland, 1999). His model of reflexivity is based upon drawing different notions of reflexivity together to recognize fundamental similarities alongside their differences. In a general sense reflexivity, according to Holland (1999), involves reflexively turning back to one's sense-making to be critical about implicit assumptions of its objectivity after considering that it is a product of a process that causes bias whilst at the same time giving a person subject to its influence a conviction that s/he is being objective. This type of critical self-monitoring associated with practicing reflexivity is seen by Holland (1999) to result in people being able to develop more efficacious approaches to problems caused by some psychological or psychosocial processes such as psychodynamic defences, systemic prejudices or cognitive biases.

Facilitating executives to practice reflexivity, as defined by Holland (1999), was identified as a useful executive coach competency that depended upon executive coaches having the ability to recognise signs that executives' sense-making was subject to the influence of a psychological or psychosocial process which contributed to their sustaining ineffective approaches to their problems. Also the ability to educate executives to recognise signifiers of the influence of psychological/psychosocial processes in their own sense-making was seen as a key skill executive coaches demonstrated when helping to engender reflexivity in executives. Distinctions between whether executive coaches engender executives to reflexively monitor their sense-making for the influence of processes associated with the personal unconscious, group unconscious or cognitive structuring were theorised as sub-types of this set of competencies.

It is concluded that when executive coaches' demonstrate the competency to help executives to practice reflexivity towards their problems this can play a significant role in helping them to resolve problems which are sustained through the influence of some psychological or psychological processes such as cognitive biases, unconscious group processes and psychodynamic defences (outlined in the fields of mainstream psychology, systems dynamics and psychodynamics respectively).

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter gives a brief overview of research in the executive coaching field and the debate about executive coaching competencies. The chapter begins by outlining the proposed contributions of the study; the identification of a set of coach competencies, ‘engendering executive reflexivity’, which have hitherto not been included in existing competency models. Through identifying these competencies the study hopes to bring a multi-perspective sensibility to the study of executive coach competencies.

The identification of a set of coach competencies, ‘engendering executive reflexivity’ was inspired by drawing a connection between a sub-set of the primary data collected within this study and a body of the executive coaching research not currently theorised in relation to executive coach competencies. An overview of this research is provided. The rationale for developing the analysis of data collected in this study by drawing upon a multi-perspective notion of reflexivity (Holland, 1999) is then discussed. A discussion of some of the intellectual and personal influences on the study are then outlined. A brief summary of each chapter, in sequence, is provided towards the end of the chapter.

## THE PROPOSED CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY TO RESEARCH ON EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES

The study presents an original contribution to the research field of executive coach competencies. Two of the significant contributions of the study to the field of executive coach competencies include the theorisation of a new set of competencies and bringing a multi-perspective sensibility to executive coach competency research. These contributions are discussed below:

1. Theorisation of a new set of executive coach competencies

The main contribution of the study is the identification of a set of executive coach competencies, ‘engendering executive reflexivity’, which are currently not included in existing executive coach competency models. The findings of this study are proposed to be complementary to existing competency models. Existing competency models focus largely upon identifying general core competencies, those argued to be needed for *all* coaching engagements (for example Blumberg, 2014; Clayton, 2012; Brotman, Liberi and

Wasylyshyn, 1998; Bono et al., 2009; Koortzen and Oosthuizen, 2010; de Haan and Nieß, 2012). In contrast, the set of executive coach competencies ‘engendering executive reflexivity’ are proposed to be needed to help provide executives with insights needed to resolve a particular type of problem. As such this set of competencies are conceptualised as contingent competencies. In contrast to core competencies which are argued to be needed by executive coaches for all coaching, the need/usefulness of an executive coach having the competency to ‘engender executive reflexivity’ can be seen to be contingent upon whether or not the resolution of the executive’s problem is contingent upon him/her practicing reflexivity.

## 2. Bringing a multi-perspective sensibility to executive coach competency research

Another proposed contribution of the study is that it brings a multi-perspective sensibility to executive coach competency research. The data collected within this study, and research which it is identified to resonate with, conceptualises executive coach competencies which span different disciplinary boundaries. An interdisciplinary notion of reflexivity (Holland, 1999) was used to develop a multi-perspective analysis of primary and secondary data. Applying a multi-perspective sensibility towards executive coach competencies can be seen to broaden existing competency models and help acknowledge the eclectic range of theoretical models included in research into executive coaching in relation to executive coach competencies.

## **EXECUTIVE COACHING AND EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES**

The popularity of executive coaching has greatly risen in the last few decades (Clayton, 2012, Baron and Morin, 2009). One of the defining characteristics of the field is the eclectic range of approaches and techniques which researchers suggest as useful/needed by executive coaches to help address the issues that executives bring to coaching (Kilburg, 2004a; Tooth, 2012; Turner and Goodrich, 2010). Bono et al. (2009) observe that “there is little uniformity in the practices (e.g., assessment tools, scientific or philosophical approaches, activities, goals, and outcome evaluation methods) of executive coaches” (2009, p 361). A lack of consensus about an appropriate definition of executive coaching is attributed to the broad range of backgrounds of coaches, spanning a spectrum of counselling/psychotherapy and organisational consultancy (West and Milan, 2001, Bono et al., 2009).

One debate within the executive coaching field relates to the competencies and training needed by executive coaches (for example Blumberg, 2014; Clayton, 2012; Brotman, Liberi and Wasylshyn, 1998; Bono et al., 2009; Koortzen and Oosthuizen, 2010 and de Haan and Nieß, 2012). Within such studies, explicitly focusing upon theorising executive coach competencies, there is a strong focus on determining core competencies which can inform standardisation and credentialing (Clayton, 2012). Core competencies are considered as those needed by coaches to ensure successful coaching outcomes in all coaching engagements. Executive coach competencies to: maintain trusting relationships, be authentic, self-confident and able to be empathetic are examples of core competencies advocated within this body of research (Blumberg, 2014; Clayton, 2012; Brotman, Liberi and Wasylshyn, 1998; Bono et al., 2009; Koortzen and Oosthuizen, 2010; de Haan and Nieß, 2012). In this study a different type of executive coach competency emerged as significant. In contrast to theorising executive coach competencies that are needed, or seen to be valuable, as a foundation for all coaching, the set of competencies theorised within this study are argued to be needed by executive coaches to help executives resolve a particular type of problem. It is argued that whether executive coaches can help executives to resolve some problems they bring to coaching is contingent upon whether the coach has the competency to equip an executive with a particular type of insight needed to practice reflexivity – the insight about psychological and psychosocial processes that may be influencing the executive’s problem.

The significance of the set of executive coach competencies theorised within this study emerged through recognising a connection between the primary data collected within this study and a body of research within the executive coaching literature. Whilst not focusing explicitly upon theorising executive coach competencies, a persuasive argument is made within this body of research in the executive coaching literature that executive coaches have particular types of skills and competencies can serve to help executives’ to resolve problems stemming from, and sustained by, the influence of a particular type of psychological or psychosocial process – one which causes bias which at the same time gives the executive subject to its influence a conviction that their sense-making is objective. (Arnaud, 2003; Levinson, 1996; Day, 2010; Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004b, 2010; Gray, 2006; Turner, 2010. Brunning, 2006; Day, 2010; Newton, Long and Sievers, 2006; Henning and Cilliers, 2012; MacKie, 2014 Kauffman and Scoular, 2004; Ducharme, 2004; Sherin and Caiger, 2004; Anderson, 2002; Grimley, 2003; Laske, 1999, 2000, 2002; Berger and

Fitzgerald, 2002; Levinson, 1996; Axelrod, 2005; Smither and Reilly, 2001; Kets de Vries, 2005; Tobias, 1996; Cocivera and Cronshaw, 2004).

Within this sub-set of the executive coaching literature, which as a collection includes research spanning theoretical approaches associated with the different fields of mainstream psychology, systems psychodynamics and psychodynamics, it is observed that if executives are subject to the influence of particular psychological or psychosocial processes (such as psychodynamic defences, systemic prejudices or some of those associated with cognitive bias) they demonstrate declarative, self-justifying reasoning. This is argued to lead to their believing that their interpretations related to their problems are the only valid ones, a belief that prevents them from exploring different approaches to their problems. Researchers in the body of research which influenced the data analysis in this study, argue that if executive coaches can equip executives to critically monitor their sense-making for the potential influence of processes such as psychodynamic defences, systemic prejudice or cognitive biases, executive coaches can provide executives with a rationale to explore alternative interpretations of their problems. In so doing executive coaches can be seen to demonstrate significant competencies which contribute to helping executives developing more efficacious approaches to their problems.

This argument resonated with a subset of the primary data collected within this study and led to interpreting the body of research described above in relation to executive coach competencies as follows: when suspecting, and inviting executives to consider that, rather than being an objective mirror of reality, their sense-making is better understood as a product of psychological or psychosocial processes that cause bias, executive coaches demonstrate a significant competency - equipping executives to practice reflexivity. Later in this chapter it is explained how these competencies came to be categorised as 'engendering executive reflexivity'.

Whilst a common argument can be identified within the body of research described earlier, as individual pieces of research, the focus is upon providing expositions of single theoretical perspectives and their usefulness in providing executive coaches with insights that equip them to identify influences on executives' sense-making of which they are unaware and in turn help executives gain awareness of these. In such studies the potential valuable contribution that executive coaches can make in helping executives gain insights into one particular psychological or psychosocial perspective is presented, and illustrated through

case study examples.

The interpretation of the connection between the body of research described above and the primary data in this study as indicating that executive coaches demonstrated valuable competencies when they helped executives to practice reflexivity towards their problem was informed by Holland's (1999) transdisciplinary model of reflexivity. An overview of Holland's (1999) model and an explanation of how it influenced identifying demarcations between sub-types of the set of executive coach competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' is given in the following section.

### **DEFINING EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES IN RELATION TO THE ROLE THEY PLAY IN HELPING PROVOKE EXECUTIVES TO PRACTICE REFLEXIVITY**

Holland's (1999) argument for taking an interdisciplinary sensibility towards reflexivity became the main theoretical influence drawn upon to develop the analysis of data in this study. Holland's (1999) argument for uniting different disciplinary conceptions of reflexivity rests upon suggesting that a general notion of reflexivity is implicit within the different conceptions which transcends any differences that exist between them. He also argues that the differences between different disciplinary notions of reflexivity are complementary in nature.

The assumption of the complementarity of distinct disciplinary notions of reflexivity rests upon Holland's (1999) observation that different disciplines of sociology, psychodynamics and psychology provide insights into different psychological or psychosocial processes which could affect people at different times. Applying the core logic underpinning Holland's (1999) interdisciplinary model of reflexivity to the analysis of data within this study led to conceptualising data in relation to a set of competencies which share common characteristics as well as differences.

The overarching similarity within this group of executive coach competencies is conceptualised in relation to a general notion of reflexivity outlined by Holland (1999). In a general sense, the first step in the process of practising reflexivity, according to Holland (1999), involves the recognition that ones' sense-making may be subject to the influence of a psychological or psychosocial process which leads to bias and prejudice whilst at the same time influencing a person subject to its influence to have a conviction that his/her sense-making is objective. Holland (1999) suggests that different disciplines of psychology,



sociology and psychodynamics, identify the type of processes which leads a person under its influence to believe that their understanding of their problem represents the only valid interpretation, when it would be better understood as biased, and one of many possible interpretations.

It is argued by Holland (1999) that having access to insights about psychological and/or psychosocial processes, that contribute to problems, from different disciplines in social science can have similar positive consequences of equipping people with the knowledge that they need to practice reflexivity which can be an antidote to such influences. He argues that if people are able to consider that their sense-making is subject to a psychological or psychosocial influence, one that contributes to and sustains their having a problem, they are provoked to reflexively turn back to be critical of assumptions that their sense-making mirrors reality. Thus Holland (1999) believes that practising reflexivity plays a critical role in helping people to change their interpretations of approaches to their problems and develop more efficacious approaches to that appear to sustain them.

Whilst proposing the benefits of recognising general characteristics of reflexivity which transcend any disciplinary distinctions which are made, the demarcations between disciplinary notions of the competency are proposed to be significant by Holland (1999). He suggests that since different disciplines provide insights into distinct psychological or psychosocial processes, as a consequence they can be seen to equip people to practice different types of reflexivity – for example reflexivity about the influence of psychodynamic processes or processes described in sociology. Therefore, to Holland (1999) distinctions between different types of reflexivity are significant since they highlight the different type of insights that people may need to apply at different times, to counteract the negative effects of the influence of different social or psychological processes that may affect them at different times.

Applying the logic at the core of Holland's (1999) interdisciplinary sensibility towards reflexivity to the analysis of data within this study led to identifying general qualities that unite a set of sub-types of the competency 'engendering executive reflexivity'. Theorising differences between the sub-types of the competency was achieved through identifying differences in the nature of diagnostic and educational skills executive coaches demonstrated when helping executives practice reflexivity. Significant differences were identified in relation to whether the executive coach identified, and helped educate the

executives about their personal unconscious, group unconscious or cognitive structuring (processes associated with psychodynamics, systems psychodynamics and mainstream psychology respectively). In this sense executive coaches may need to have different types of competency to help equip executives to practice different types of reflexivity. For instance, when executive coaches demonstrate the competency to help executives turn back reflexively and consider the potential influence of unconscious group processes. This can be seen to help executives to shift from sense-making influenced by systemic prejudices and consider alternative interpretations which lead to their resolving problems sustained by them. However, coaches who possess this competency may not be able to help executives whose problem is influenced by psychodynamic defences, or cognitive biases. In these situations an executive coach would need diagnostic and educational competencies to help the executives to consider that their sense-making is influenced by their personal unconscious, or cognitive structuring respectively – insights which will help engender executives to practice different types of reflexivity.

Within this study, key distinctions in relation to the set of executive coach competencies were identified in relation to distinctions identified within the executive coach literature between the competencies that executive coaches demonstrate when drawing from the fields of psychodynamics, systems psychodynamics and mainstream psychology. A list of some of the research associated with the different disciplines within this body of research is listed in Table 1.1 below:

Field	Type of process	Research
Psychodynamics /psychoanalysis	Processes associated with the personal unconscious (for example psychodynamic defences)	Arnaud, 2003; Levinson, 1996; Day, 2010; Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004b, 2010; Gray, 2006; Turner, 2010.
Systems psychodynamics	Processes associated with the group unconscious, (for example systemic prejudices)	Brunning, 2006; Day, 2010; Newton, Long and Sievers, 2006; Henning and Cilliers, 2012.

Field	Type of process	Research
Mainstream psychology	Processes associated with cognitive structuring, for example self-limiting beliefs	MacKie, 2014 Kauffman and Scoular, 2004; Ducharme, 2004; Sherin and Caiger, 2004; Anderson, 2002; Grimley, 2003; Laske, 1999, 2000, 2002; Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002; Levinson, 1996; Axelrod, 2005; Smither and Reilly, 2001; Kets de Vries, 2005; Tobias, 1996; Cocivera and Cronshaw, 2004.

**Table 1-1: Distinctions between different research groups within the body of research influencing this study**

In summary, the theorisation of a set of coach competencies as ‘engendering executive reflexivity’ was influenced by a body of research which resonated with a sub-set of the primary data collected in this study which includes research listed in Table 1.1. At the core of this research is an argument that *sometimes*, as a consequence of executives being influenced by some psychological or psychosocial processes described within the fields of mainstream psychology, psychodynamics and systems psychodynamics, executives adopt a type of declarative reasoning (‘it is’ sense-making). This type of sense-making is believed to contribute to and sustain the executives having problems they find difficult to resolve through their believing that no other interpretations other than those which sustain their problem are valid.

Analysis of the data, informed by Holland’s (1999) model, led to proposing that executive coaches demonstrate valuable competencies when they help executives to practice reflexivity. Through inviting executives to consider that their sense-making is subject to psychological or psychosocial processes that cause bias, executive coaches can play a pivotal role in destabilising executives’ assumptions that their sense-making is objective. Helping executives to gain the insight that, rather than being the only valid interpretation (‘it is’ sense-making) their sense-making is one of many possible interpretations (‘is it’ sense-making?) sense-making is proposed to be a significant positive outcome of executive coaches competency to engender executive reflexivity. Through helping executives to practice reflexivity towards their problems, executive coaches can be seen as playing a pivotal role in helping executives to explore alternative and more helpful, interpretations

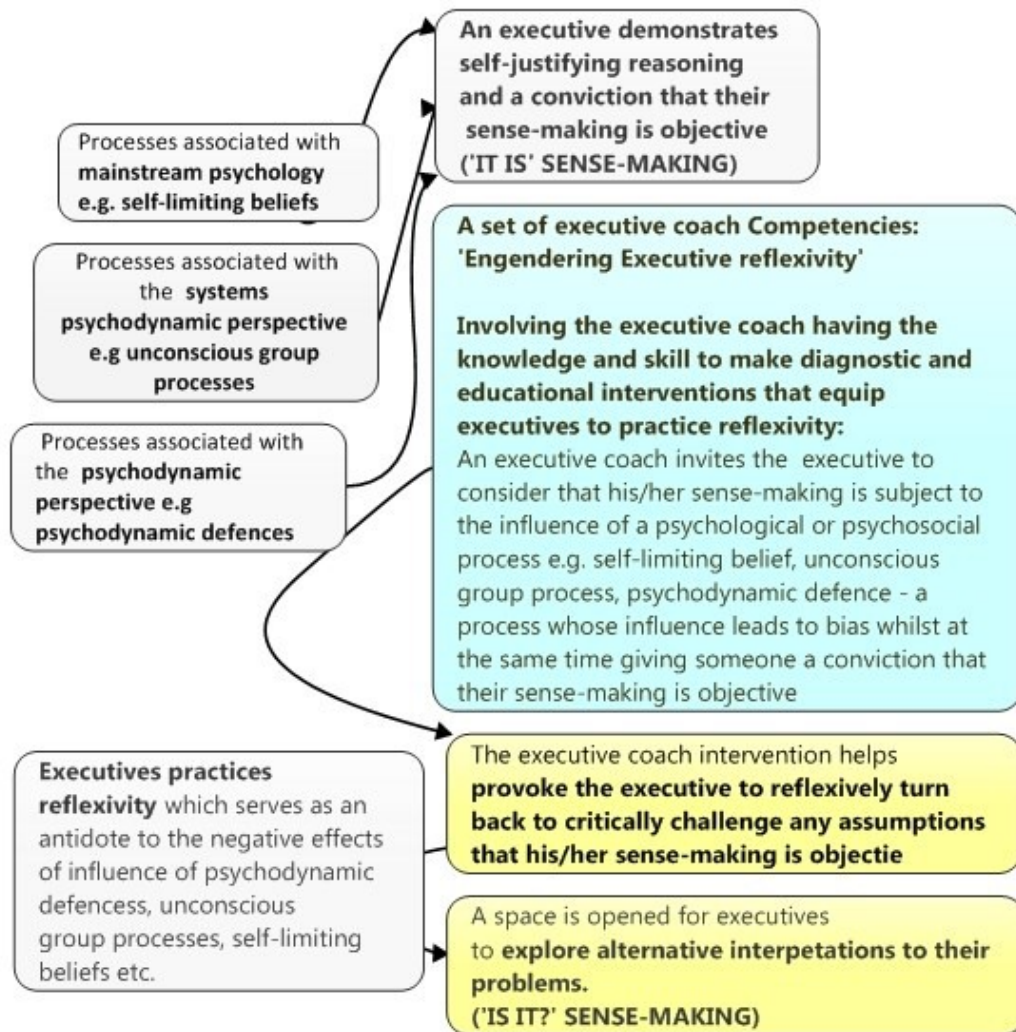
to their problems than those which they initially held which were a product of some psychological or psychosocial processes such as psychodynamic defences, cognitive biases and unconscious group processes.

The general competency 'engendering executive reflexivity' is identified as involving executive coaches' having the ability to:

- 1) Identify signifiers that executives' sense-making about their problems is potentially influenced by psychological or psychosocial processes that contribute to and sustain problems.
- 2) make educational interventions, which equip executives themselves to consider the potential influence of a psychological or psychosocial processes on their own sense-making

Differences between different sub-types of the competency 'engendering executive reflexivity' can be identified in relation to whether the executive coach helps the executive to gain and to apply insights into psychological and psychosocial processes related to the personal unconscious, group unconscious or cognitive structuring (associated with the fields of, psychodynamics, systems psychodynamics and mainstream psychology respectively).

Figure 1.1 below provides a schematic of the core logic underpinning the identification of a significant set of executive coach competencies as 'engendering executive reflexivity'.



**Figure 1-1: The contribution of different types of executive coach competencies to engendering executive reflexivity**

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The researcher was originally drawn to study executive coaching through being inspired during personal encounters with executive coaches. In such encounters coaches shared their experiences, reflecting on the positive impact their interventions had on executives' lives. Having had undergraduate and post-graduate training in psychology, the researcher was initially drawn to psychological models in the executive coaching literature. The original focus of the study was influenced by a psychological constructive development model (CDM) by Kegan (1980, 1982, 1994). However, part way through the study, the researcher questioned whether it was appropriate to have this as the sole theoretical framework for the data analysis. A decision was reached to move from this analytic lens to try and find an

alternative lens which would afford a multi-perspective analysis. This led to conceptualising a set of competencies as 'engendering executive reflexivity'.

The context of studying within a multi-disciplinary department, where theoretical pluralism is highly valued, is believed by the researcher to have had a major influence on her changing the main theoretical framework informing the data analysis part way through this thesis. At the beginning of the research process, the researcher did not have the theoretical literacy required to respond to the multi-perspective data within this study, having previously had very limited exposure with psychodynamic and systems psychodynamic perspectives. It has been observed that researchers who embark on a path of doing multi-disciplinary research can often feel overwhelmed by the extent of the challenge to navigate through, what can at first appear to be impenetrable terminology associated with different disciplines (Bhaskar (2010). Bhaskar (2010) suggests that this can be helped by the researcher finding a 'bridging concept' which can help to highlight fundamental similarities within different disciplines. For this researcher, the concept she discovered which provided a bridge between different disciplines was reflexivity.

The notion of reflexivity adopted in this study initially became conveyed to the researcher through informal education. During conversations with academic practitioner colleagues, she came to understand the practice of reflexivity serving as an antidote to the influence of a particular type of psychological or psychosocial process, one that causes bias whilst at the same time leading to the person subject to its influence believing that their sense-making is objective (examples of which include systemic prejudices, psychodynamic defences and unconscious group processes).

During the course of the study, in an attempt to gain a deeper insight into data relating to the systems psychodynamic perspective, the researcher was inspired to adopt the approach that participants reported as helping them to resolve their problems after gaining insights into unconscious group processes. The researcher found, to her surprise, that changing her approach to her own problem, after suspecting that her sense-making was influenced by unconscious group processes led to her resolving it. She had previously been unable to do this when the influence of unconscious group processes on her sense-making about her problem was invisible to her. This personal experience had a significant influence on the researcher engaging with the data differently than she had done at the beginning of the data analysis.

The researcher's development of greater literacy in different theoretical perspectives included in the data led her to make a decision to move from basing the analysis on a single psychological model, the Constructive Development Model, (CDM) (Kegan 1980, 1982, 1994) towards a more multi-perspective one influenced by Holland's (1999) transdisciplinary model of reflexivity. The researcher found herself drawn to theorise what she believed was the significant positive contribution of executive coach competencies to equip executives with cognitive tools (Bourdieu, 2004) to practice reflexivity, a practice that is described by Holland (1999) as being a powerful antidote to the often invisible negative influence of some psychological and psychosocial processes that cause bias.

This study is presented as an exploratory study and marks the beginning of the researcher's journey towards becoming an interdisciplinary researcher.

## **CHAPTER OVERVIEWS**

The following sections provide overviews of each of the chapters in this thesis.

### **CHAPTER TWO – EXECUTIVE COACHING LITERATURE**

Chapter Two presents a review of executive coaching literature. The lack of consensus about the purpose of coaching and the consequent difficulties in finding a comprehensive definition that is not normative or prescriptive is discussed. Different researchers' attempts to define coaching in relation to the distinctions between the skills, techniques and knowledge base employed by mentors, counsellors/therapists and executive coaches are then explored.

In one sub-group of the executive coaching literature, researchers advocate educational interventions which involve executive coaches inviting executives to consider that their sense-making about their problems being subject to the invisible influence of processes associated with mainstream psychology, psychodynamic and systems psychodynamic practices. Later in the thesis, the primary data in this study is related to this research and both are interpreted as suggesting that coaches demonstrate significant competencies when making a type of educational intervention that equips executives to shift from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making about their problems. A heuristic framework inspired by researchers' identification of the distinguishing features of different types of educative executive coach intervention in the body of research which influenced the data analysis in

this study is presented in this chapter. Three major distinctions between educative intervention are considered, those where the executive coach helps executives to gain insights into psychological and psychosocial processes associated with; mainstream psychology, psychodynamics/psychoanalysis and systems psychodynamics. This framework informed demarcating sub-types of the set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' in the data.

An overview of debates about executive coaching competencies is presented in this chapter.

### **CHAPTER THREE – REFLEXIVITY**

Chapter Three explores research on reflexivity which influenced theorising the proposed set of executive coach competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity'. The original understanding of reflexivity which is adopted in this study was garnered during interactions with practitioner colleagues. An example of such an interaction is presented in this chapter and it is explained how it became understood as involving two sequential steps. Practicing reflexivity came to be understood as a process beginning with suspecting that one's sense-making is subject to the influence of a psychological or psychosocial process which gives a conviction that one's interpretations are objective when they are better understood as biased. Considering such influences on one's sense-making was understood to trigger one to reflexively turn back to problematise implicit assumptions of objectivity within it. The second step of reflexive sense-making was seen to arise from this critical self-monitoring and destabilising of one's conviction that one's sense-making is objective and involved considering alternative interpretations of one's experiences as valid. In this chapter this sequential two step notion of reflexivity is related to an argument by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) who suggest the benefits of combined deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices.

The notion of reflexivity adopted in this study was found to be within a group of practitioner research (Broussine and Ahmad, 2012; Strous, 2006; Cunliffe, 2004; Taylor and White, 2000). Within this research reflexivity is advocated as an antidote to the influence of psychosocial processes such as systemic prejudice – an influence which was identified by researchers as potentially compromising practitioners' professional effectiveness. Later in the chapter, this logic is related to an argument by Archer (2007). It is suggested that one of the positive outcomes from practicing reflexivity is that people express increased agency.



This manifests as their experiencing the freedom to change their interpretations when they are influenced by some psychological or psychosocial processes such as systemic prejudice – processes whose influence is typically associated with leading to someone having a sense that their biased sense-making is objective – a freedom that is not experienced when reflexivity is not practiced.

The difference between the notion of reflexivity adopted in this study and one found within some methodological debates which advocate solely deconstructive reflexive practices (for example Lawson, 1985, Lynch, 2000, Ashmore, 1989 and Pollner, 1991) is explored towards the end of Chapter Three. Although ‘engendering executive reflexivity’ is not currently theorised in existing executive coaching competency models, a concept that resonates with it, engendering meta-reflection, is suggested as a useful meta-theoretical concept to apply to executive coaching by Gray (2006). The similarities and differences between the concept engendering meta-reflection and ‘engendering executive reflexivity’ are discussed towards the end of the chapter.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR – METHODOLOGY**

Chapter Four presents the methodological argument supporting the thesis. The chapter begins with a discussion of the methodological influences on the study and explains the research activities inspired by them and deemed appropriate for addressing the research goal. The research design in this study was influenced by an interdisciplinary application of critical realism which is founded on an open systems transcendental realist notion of causality (Bhaskar, 2010; Bhaskar and Hartwig, 2008). One of the aims of research influenced by this perspective is to develop explanatory frameworks, through identifying causal relationships associated with the research topic. An overview of the key aspects of the critical realist notion of causality are discussed and related to worked examples to illustrate the causal relationships associated with the concept of ‘engendering executive reflexivity’ conceptualised during the data analysis.

The rationale behind the interview design and coding framework used in the data analysis is then outlined. Some of the researchers’ own reflections on significant personal influences on the research during the course of the study, including the influence of significant relationships with academic colleagues, are then discussed.

## **CHAPTER FIVE –PHASE ONE OF DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

This chapter discusses the first phase of data analysis. The study was originally inspired by research by Laske (1999, 2000), Laske and Maynes (2002), Berger and Fitzgerald (2002) and Bluckert (2006). Such studies theorise competencies coaches demonstrate when accelerating innate constructive development processes in executives as described in the Constructive Development Model (CDM) (Kegan, 1980, 1982, 1994). An overview of the CDM (Kegan, 1980, 1982, 1994) is presented before a brief example of research by Laske (1999) is provided, which had a significant influence on the original data analysis. Examples of the early data analysis based on this model are presented. The reasoning which led to questioning whether it was appropriate to have the CDM (Kegan, 1980, 1982, 1994) as the sole analytic framework to analyse the data is presented. The eventual decision to abandon part of the analysis but retain another part for further analysis is also explained towards the end of the chapter.

## **CHAPTER SIX – PHASE TWO OF DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

In the second phase of data analysis interviews were screened to identify cases where the change process undergone by executives was related to their moving from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making. Seven interviews were identified as suggesting that coach interventions contributed to executives practising reflexivity. Ten interviews were analysed as indicating that the changes believed to contribute to executives resolving their problems during coaching did not involve their practicing reflexivity. These were not subject to further analysis.

The structure for organising the data analysis in this study was influenced by Holland's (1999) transdisciplinary model of reflexivity. Holland (1999) suggests the benefits of surfacing similarities across different disciplinary notions of reflexivity as well as acknowledging their differences. In the context of this analysis, the similarities across cases refer to the general characteristics which connect the sub-types of the competency 'engendering executive reflexivity'. In Part One of the second phase of data analysis, the data were analysed to highlight the similar nature and consequence of executive coaches helping executives to practice reflexivity. The analysis of each interview is presented in turn and related to the two step model of reflexivity coding framework discussed in Chapter Three. At the end of each case, a summary of the analysis is presented in schematic form in relation to the coding framework.

In Part Two of the second phase of the data analysis the summaries of each of the cases in Part One are analysed in relation to their differences. The differences are related to different sub-types of the set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity'. This analysis was informed by the heuristic framework, presented in Chapter Two, which was inspired by researchers' differentiation between executive coach competencies manifested during executive coach interventions informed by psychodynamics, systems psychodynamics perspectives and mainstream psychology described in the executive coaching literature.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN – DISCUSSION**

It is the purpose of this chapter to explore the proposed key characteristics of the competency 'engendering executive reflexivity' presented in the Data Analysis and Findings Chapter through relating the findings to the executive coaching and reflexivity literatures discussed previously. Two key components of the competency were identified. It is suggested that one component of the competency is the executive coaches' ability to read the influences of psychological or psychosocial processes on executives' sense-making that the executives themselves do not suspect. The second component of the competency is proposed to depend upon an executive coach's ability to make educational interventions which help executives to become aware of their being subject to the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes which contribute to their problem.

Examples from the findings are then related to the argument by Alvesson, Hardy, and Harley (2008) about the benefits of combining deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices. It is suggested that different educational interventions made by coaches can help provoke executives to deconstruct their sense-making a process that opens a space for the executive to explore new understandings of their problems and practice reconstruction. Some examples from the data are then related to research by Archer (2007) and Broussine and Ahmad (2012) who see a connection between practising reflexivity and the expression of increased agency when influenced by some psychosocial processes. When this argument is applied to the findings of this study it is suggested that when executive coaches help executives to practice reflexivity they increase executive's agency to respond to their problems differently than if they are subject to the influence of psychosocial processes of whose influence they are unaware.

## CHAPTER EIGHT – CONCLUSIONS

Some key conclusions drawn from the study are presented in the final chapter. The conclusions include beliefs about the positive contribution of the set of coach competencies theorised as belonging to the category 'engendering executive reflexivity'. Such competencies are proposed as manifesting when executive coaches make educational interventions which unlock executives' potential to be reflexive (Broussine and Ahmad, 2012). Further conclusions are drawn about the positive contribution of Holland's (1999), Bhaskar's (2010) and Bhaskar and Danemark's (2006) interdisciplinary research in informing the researchers' first attempt at multi-perspective analysis. A final conclusion is made about distinctions between general and contingent executive coach competencies, and the benefits of combining both types of competencies in competency frameworks.

Some of the limitations of the study are also discussed in this chapter. One significant limitation of the study observed by the researcher arose from her beginning her multi-perspective analysis partway through the study. The researcher believes that the research could have been improved if it had been located more securely within other multi-disciplinary research.

## CHAPTER TWO: EXECUTIVE COACHING

### OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

One debate within the executive coaching field focuses on identifying the competencies and training needed by executive coaches (for example Brotman, Liberi and Wasylshyn, 1998; Bono et al., 2009; Koortzen, Oosthuizen, 2010; de Haan and Nieß, 2012 and Blumberg, 2014). It is the goal of this study to contribute to this debate by suggesting a set of executive coach competencies, 'engendering executive reflexivity', which are not included in competency models to date.

This chapter begins by presenting an overview of research in the executive coaching field, highlighting how, due to the diversity of backgrounds and practices of coaches, spanning a spectrum of counselling and consultancy (West and Milan, 2001), little consensus is achieved when attempting to define the nature and purpose of executive coaching. One of the defining characteristics of the executive coaching field is identified as the broad range of theoretical perspectives that coaches describe as informing their practice (Kilburg, 2006; Tooth, 2012). Currently this diversity is not represented within executive coaching competency models, which focus upon conceptualising general, core competencies. In conceptualising a multi-theoretical, contingent set of executive coach competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity', this study helps to include one of the defining characteristics of executive coaching, the eclectic range of theoretical influences on executive coaches, in the debate upon executive coach competencies.

Later within this chapter, an overview of the defining characteristics of a body of research which was identified as resonating with a sub-set of primary data collected in this study and which inspired its analysis is then provided. Within this collection of research, researchers advocate that executive coaches have the ability to make a special type of educational intervention - one related to helping executives to gain insights the nature of psychological or psychosocial processes which may be influencing their struggle to resolve their problems. A diverse range of theoretical perspectives are described as informing coach practice within this collection of research including mainstream psychology, psychodynamics and systems psychodynamics. A heuristic framework, inspired by researchers' differentiation between executive coach educational interventions in this body of work, is presented towards the end of the chapter. This framework informs the

discrimination between sub-types of the set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity'.

To conclude the chapter, a critical examination of research in the executive coaching competency debate is presented. It is proposed that it is useful to make a distinction between general and contingent executive coach competencies. A general competency is defined as one that is deemed by researchers to be useful/necessary in all coaching scenarios. Contingent competencies are seen to be distinct from these, since they are useful/needed by coaches for helping executives to resolve particular types of problem brought to coaching and therefore may be only needed by executive coaches sometimes and not as a core aspect of all coaching. The set of competencies theorised within this study are presented as being contingent competencies. The notion of reflexivity which was applied to this collection of research and primary data collected in this study is discussed in detail the following chapter.

Figure 2.1 depicts the connections between the different topics discussed in this chapter.

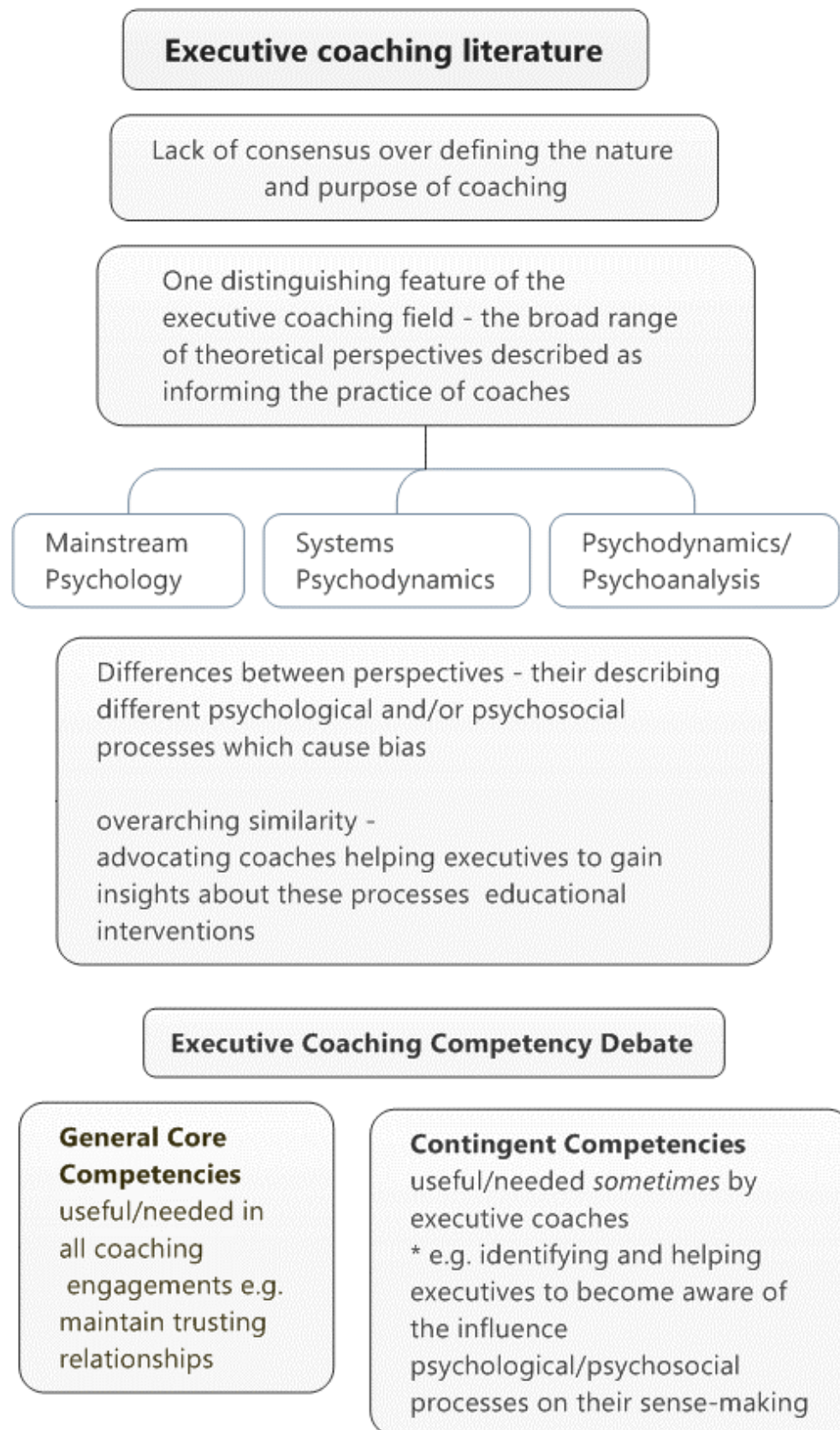


Figure 2-1: Inter-relationships between different topics discussed in this chapter

## DEFINING EXECUTIVE COACHING

A review of the executive coaching literature by Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) found that although there is no agreed definition of executive coaching, what is agreed upon within the executive coaching field is the need to improve conceptual clarity. One definition of executive coaching is provided by Kilburg (2000) who identifies one of the defining characteristics of coaching as being a helping relationship between a client at a managerial level or higher and a consultant who makes a variety of interventions to help the executive to improve his/her professional performance and personal satisfaction which will contribute to improving the effectiveness of the organisation.

Kilburg (1996, 1997, 2001, 2004a), Tooth (2012) and Turner and Goodrich (2010) suggest that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the executive coaching field is the eclectic range of theoretical perspectives and techniques described as helping inform coaches' practice. Kilburg (1996) observes how *"as it is currently practiced, executive coaching appears to be an eclectic mix of concepts and methods that are being applied by a variety of consultants who have accepted assignments to work with individual executives"* (p59).

It is suggested that one of the challenges towards finding a universal definition of executive coaching relates to the diversity of backgrounds and practices of executive coaches (Kilburg, 2006; Gray, 2006; Tooth, 2012). Clayton (2011) suggests that coaches demonstrate interdisciplinary competencies which span the social sciences, the fields of business, management and leadership as well as adult learning and education. Arnaud (2003) describes how *"the great diversity of practical methods, approaches, techniques – and a whole host of sundry notions are described in relation to executive coaching"* (p 1133). He observes that *coaching can be seen by some as "a kind of 'catch all' concept covering whatever you want to put under it"* (Arnaud, 2003 p 1133). Bono et al. (2009) support Arnaud's (2003) observation. They propose that despite the ubiquity of executive coaching interventions within organisations *"there is little uniformity in the practices (e.g. assessment tools, scientific or philosophical approaches, activities, goals, and outcome evaluation methods) of executive coaches"* (Bono et al., 2009, p361).

Tobias (1996) and Carter (2001) suggest that a fundamental aspect of executive coaching, is that it is tailored to the specific needs of the executive. Carter (2001) defines executive coaching as a form of tailored work-related development for senior managers which *"spans business, functional and personal skills"* (p 15). Through it involving a one to one



relationship between an executive and coach, it is seen to provide opportunities for executives to address issues that might not be possible through other developmental interventions, such as training and development courses, which are based on pre-conceived notions of executives' developmental needs (Tobias 1996). Tobias (1996) observes that *"the concepts and guidance a person needs are presented in ways that the person can immediately apply because they are personalized rather than abstractions or laundry lists"* (p87).

It has been suggested by Judge and Cowell (1997) that executive coaching is an outgrowth of executive development programmes which, like many other innovations, seem to have sprung up simultaneously on the east and west coasts of the United States of America (USA). West and Milan (2001) challenge this view, as they believe that there was a parallel development in both the USA and the United Kingdom (UK). It is suggested by West and Milan (2001) that there is a continuum of different types of influences on executive coaches – one end of the spectrum being the counselling field and organisational consultancy at the other. They describe the origins of coaching as coming from consultants working within organisations using assessment tools, such as psychometric and personality tests, to help with developmental planning for executives and consultants, and then being asked to assist in the implementation of these plans. Kilburg (1996) lists a range of practitioner fields that inform executive coach practice including adult education, management training, industrial/organisational psychology, as well as organisational consultancy and clinical psychology.

One approach used by researchers to define executive coaching is to make distinctions between executive coaching practices and other more established interventions such as consultancy, mentoring and counselling/therapy (Koortzen and Oosthuizen, 2010; Gray, 2006; Passmore, Holloway and Rawle-Cope, 2010; Hart, Blattner and Leipsic, 2001; Rotenburg 2000, Kets de Vries, 2005 and Kilburg , 2004b).

Distinctions between executive coaching and mentoring often focus on how mentoring involves more directive interventions where the mentor gives advice based on superior experience in the organisation and/or role, whereas coaching focuses more on helping executives to develop confidence and skills in improving their own problem solving abilities (Frisch, 2005, Gray, 2006). Gray (2006) expresses the distinction that *"mentoring is a relationship—often internal within an organization—whereby more experienced— often*

*senior or executive managers, and usually in the same speciality—provide support and a role model for less experienced colleagues” (p 476).*

Hart, Blattner and Leipsic (2001) believe that an overlap currently exists between therapy-counselling and coaching and they also describe how many former therapists have switched from coaching or therapy to both coaching and therapy concurrently. It is suggested that the prevalence in the coaching literature of identifying areas where coaching is similar or distinct from counselling can partly be explained by the growing trend among psychoanalysts and psychoanalytically trained therapists to work as occupational coaches (Rotenberg, 2000). Rotenberg (2000), Kets de Vries (2005) and Kilburg (2004b) all attempt to categorise the main differences between counselling/therapy and executive coaching. They propose that there are some transferable skills from counselling that can be applied in coaching such as creating a trusting relationship which will help overcome the coachee’s resistance to change. They also describe differences such as the fact that therapy is characterised as being of a more passive, reflective nature and more past focused and executive coaching being more active.

Reflections on the boundary between coaching and therapy by executive coaches led Berger and Fitzgerald (2002) to consider the possibility that there was no significant difference in these roles. However, the authors believed that the specialised training for therapists may help them to have greater effectiveness when executives’ issues call for more in-depth work. One of the authors shared the following reflections *“currently I feel that while there are likely to be differences in the client’s motivation to pursue deeper issues, there is no inherent difference in the range of role”* (2002 p 81).

Tooth (2012) argues that the diversity of backgrounds and theoretical influences of executive coaches calls for proceeding with caution when attempting to define or make generalisations about executive coaching purporting to encompass the wide range of different practices and philosophies evident in the literature. She believes that attempting to situate executive coaching in terms of it differing in significant ways from counselling/psychotherapy, mentoring and consultancy practices may provoke a stereotypical representation of the diversity within such related activities. Such definitions, according to Tooth (2012), tend to minimise the diversity within these different practices and fails to acknowledge the overlaps between them. She notes that it is difficult to identify unambiguous definitions of psychotherapy and mentoring.

Tooth (2012) shares Boniwell's (2007, cited in Tooth 2012) observation that the delineating of boundaries between coaching and other "helping by talking" activities are controversial due to substantial overlaps in skills, techniques and knowledge bases employed by practitioners in these fields. It is also observed by Tooth (2012) that "*debates about definitions of coaching and counselling are political, as counsellors and coaches tend to over-emphasise some factors (and downplay others) in support of their agenda to position themselves in the marketplace*" (p 84). She observes that:

*Literature definitions are also inadequate as they do not reflect, in Schön's (1983, p 16) terms, the "unique events" that characterise the situations of practice. For example, Jackson (2005) proposed that executive coaching definitions are abstractions of real-world experience, and every experience to which a definition refers is therefore unique. (2012, p 87)*

It is implicit within Tooth's (2012) argument that when definitions of executive coaching are influenced by political factors, associated with seeking to advocate the distinctive qualities of this nascent practice, there is a danger in that, rather than serving to represent the diversity within the executive coaching field, such distinctions will be normative and prescriptive rather than representative. Whilst persuasive cases are made for distinctions between these different types of interventions, Tooth (2012) proposes that it is more beneficial to recognise the contingent contribution of different types of practices by coaches that are associated with mentoring, counselling and consulting, which are useful components of some coaching engagements. This logic influenced the theorisation of the set of executive coach competencies within this study.

The lack of consensus about an appropriate comprehensive definition of executive coaching is also demonstrated in arguments about the purpose of coaching. Two distinctions can be made between the arguments relating to the purpose of executive coaching. There are those researchers which make generalisations not related to a theoretical perspective, and those where the goal of coaching is implicitly connected to the philosophical and pragmatic associations with the theoretical perspective associated with the research.

When expressed in a general sense the purpose of executive coaching can be termed as skills acquisition; performance enhancement; future development or for specific issues

related to the executive's agenda (Witherspoon and White, 1996; Day, 2010). It is observed that *"some type of behaviour change is at the heart of most executive coaching"* (Bono et al., 2009 p 363). When expressed in relation to theoretical perspectives the purpose of executive coaching is often framed as increasing executives' self-awareness (Levinson, 1996; Laske, 1999; Axelrod, 2005; Kets de Vries, 2005).

*Joo (2005) summarises the relationship between increased self-awareness and behaviour change when providing definitions of executive coaching. He defines executive coaching as a "one on one relationship between a professional coach and executive (coachee) for the purpose of enhancing the coachee's behavioural change through self-awareness and learning and thus ultimately for the success of the individual and the organization" (p468).*

Executive coaching is described by Kets de Vries (2005) as an intervention that can either fine-tune performance or help executives rebuild competencies. Kilburg (2005) states that *"no wonder coaching with its potential to establish, fine tune or rebuild the competencies needed to remain effective in the workplace, has become one of the most strategic and tactical weapons in the executive repertoire"* (p 62). Tobias (1996) questions the appropriateness of generalising about the nature of coaching interventions by making an analogy between the changes that take place in coaching and the fine tuning aspect of some types of elite sports coaching. He believes that although this may be a less threatening definition of executive coaching, it misrepresents the nature of change that is often required during coaching. He makes an observation that *there "is a subtle implication that coaching may not involve searing change and may be just a matter of fine tuning. Sometimes of course, fine tuning is all that is needed but often it is wrenching change that is required so the term although less threatening may be slightly deceptive"* (1996, p 87).

While some definitions of the purpose of executive coaching are related to meeting organisational goals, it is also believed by many researchers that the remit of issues addressed in executive coaching can extend beyond executives' work life to include their personal issues (Styhre, 2008, Tooth, 2012). One of the conclusions of research by Tooth (2012) was *"the potential of executive coaching to be more than a process of job-specific professional development and instead, to become a transformative experience with short and long-term gains in personal as well as work-related capabilities"* (p 88).

In the following section differences and similarities between research within studies in the executive coaching literature that are associated with different theoretical perspectives are explored.

## **THE BROAD RANGE OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES WHICH INFORM EXECUTIVE COACH PRACTICES**

Kilburg (1996), Tooth (2012) and Turner and Goodrich (2010) suggest that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the executive coaching field is the eclectic range of theoretical perspectives and techniques described as helping to inform the practices and approaches adopted by executive coaches. This diversity has been attributed to the broad range of professional backgrounds of coaches that West and Milan (2001) describe as spanning a spectrum of counselling/therapy to consultancy. Kilburg (2000), Tooth (2012), Judge and Cowell (1997) and Bono et al. (2009) also describe how executive coaching is defined by the eclectic range of practices and backgrounds of coaches. An illustration of the range of the different types of coach intervention is listed below:

- Exposing, challenging and changing belief systems (Sherin and Caiger, 2004; Tobias, 1996);
- Reducing defences to gain more flexibility in interpreting the cause of problems and to improve working relationships with colleagues (Rotenburg, 2000; Kilburg, 2000; Kets de Vries, 2005);
- Clarifying goals and the development of action plans in order to set achievable goals which will lead to responsibility for action (Whitmore, 2002);
- Identifying the demands of the role and increasing awareness of relatedness of person, work system and organisational context, so as to improve effectiveness in role (Bunning, 2006; Day, 2010; Newton, Long and Sievers, 2006; Henning and Cilliers, 2012);
- Using psychometric and personality tests to identify strengths and weaknesses, developmental needs and latent cognitive resources which could be developed to help solve problems and improve performance and understand and value differences in others (Kets de Vries, 2005) and

- Accelerating or stimulating adult development (Laske, 1999; Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002; Levinson, 1996; Axelrod, 2005).

Table 2.1 below expands on this selection of different coach interventions described in the literature as contributing to beneficial outcomes in coaching.

<b>Theoretical Perspective/Technique</b>	<b>Research</b>
Positive psychology and Strengths Based Coaching	Mackie 2014; Kauffman and Scoular 2004;
Cognitive Psychology Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy	Sherin and Caiger 2004; Ducharme 2004; Anderson 2002;
Neuro Linguistic Processing (NLP)	Grimley 2003;
Adult Development Models Constructive-developmental approaches	Laske, 1999; Berger and Fitzgerald 2002; Levinson 1996; Axelrod 2005;
Social Psychology	Smither and Reilly 2001;
Personality Theories	Kets de Vries 2005; Tobias 1996;
Action Frame Theory	Cocivera and Cronshaw 2004;
Alderian therapy	Sperry 1993;
Human Givens	McLaughlin 2010;
Psychoanalysis	Arnaud 2003; Levinson 1996; Day 2010;
Psychodynamics	Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg 2004b; 2010; Gray 2006; Turner 2010; Huggler 2007
Systems Psychodynamics and Organisational Role Analysis	Brunning 2006; Day 2010; Newton, Long and Sievers 2006; Henning and Cilliers 2012

**Table 2-1: The broad range of theoretical influences and practices associated with executive coaching**

Although the research included in Table 2.1 is not an exhaustive list of all the theoretical perspectives included in the literature as informing the practice of executive coaches, it illustrates the multi-disciplinary nature of this field.

It was described in the Introduction Chapter that one subset of research within the

executive coaching literature is characterised by a similar argument. The common feature of research within this collection is that researchers advocate the benefits of executive coaches educating executives about different psychological and/or psychosocial processes described in mainstream psychology; psychodynamics/psychoanalysis or systems psychodynamics. Equipping executives with insights to consider such influences on their sense-making is argued to contribute to executives developing new ways of understanding their problems that lead to their resolution.

For heuristic purposes, the differences between different theoretical perspectives described in the executive coaching literature have been organised into three categories: psychological, psychodynamics/psychoanalysis and systems psychodynamics (see Table 2.2 below). This categorisation influenced the analysis of sub-types of the set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' in the data (see Chapter Five). The criteria for discriminating between research is based on key distinctions made by researchers within the executive coaching literature between the theoretical perspectives which executive coaches draw upon to inform their coaching practice. It could be argued that all of the approaches listed in Table 2.1 above, except for behavioural approaches, all share a common goal of exposing, challenging and changing belief systems (Sherin and Caiger, 2004; Tobias, 1996), however differences can also be observed. The differences between perspectives can be understood in relation to what type of psychological and/or psychosocial processes executive coaches believe have a potentially negative influence on executives' sense-making about their problem/issues and seek to educate executives about.

Table 2.2 below lists research associated with different theoretical influences of psychodynamics, systems psychodynamics and organisational role analysis and mainstream psychology. Alongside these categories, defining, and discriminating, characteristics of each different perspective, identified in research within executive coaching which underpinned the analysis of data within this study is provided.

SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE	DIFFERENTIATING CRITERIA
Psychodynamics/Psychoanalysis Arnaud, 2003; Levinson, 1996; Day, 2010; Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004b, 2010; Gray, 2006; Turner, 2009	Emphasis of <i>individual</i> unconscious processes
Systems Psychodynamics and Organisational Role Analysis Brunning, 2006; Day, 2010; Newton, Long and Sievers, 2006; Cilliers, 2012	Emphasis of <i>group/organisational</i> unconscious processes
Mainstream Psychology Mackie, 2014; Kauffman and Scoular, 2004; Ducharme, 2004; Sherin and Caiger, 2004; Anderson, 2002; Grimley, 2003; Laske, 1999 Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002; Levinson, 1996; Axelrod, 2005; Smither and Reilly, 2001; Kets de Vries, 2005; Tobias, 1996 and Cocivera and Cronshaw, 2004	<i>Does not</i> emphasise unconscious processes (individual or group)

**Table 2-2: Categorisation of different theoretical perspectives associated with executive coaching practices**

Whilst acknowledging that the categorisation process in Table 2.2 is based on overgeneralisation of similarities within differences between perspectives, it was believed to be helpful in helping to help represent some of the diversity of theoretical perspectives that are present in the executive coaching field, and the primary data collected within this study in relation to complementary executive coach competencies. A brief overview of the logic for distinguishing between perspectives in Table 2.2 is presented within this section.

Although spanning a broad range of diverse theoretical perspective, the approaches categorised as belonging to mainstream psychology as a collection are seen as distinct from psychodynamic and systems psychodynamic perspectives by researchers including Gray (2006). Gray (2006) suggests that key distinctions are inherent between cognitive behavioural therapy (a mainstream psychological approach) and psychodynamic approaches. He states that another therapeutic approach—cognitive behavioural therapy—recognizes unconscious processes, but defines them differently and accords them a less central role in influencing behaviour. A case could be made that the criteria which Gray (2006) suggests differentiate between cognitive behavioural therapy and



psychotherapeutic approaches can be extended across different sub-groups of psychology which appear to have fundamental differences. For example, positive psychology and personality theories could be seen as significantly different, however they can also be seen as connected as a result of sharing the common ground of not emphasising the benefit of exposing and processing of unconscious dynamics related to an individual's past (psychodynamics) or the system of which they are members (systems psychodynamics). This logic of a unifying similarity across a range of diverse psychological perspectives is applied across the different sub-groups discipline of mainstream psychology in the heuristic framework presented in Table 2.2.

There are two theoretical perspectives influencing executive coaching research that emphasise the benefits of executives gaining insights into the influence of unconscious processes on their sense-making – psychodynamics and systems psychodynamics. A key difference between two theoretical perspectives influencing research within the executive coaching literature - psychodynamics and systems psychodynamics perspectives - is identified by Henning and Cilliers (2012). Whereas psychodynamic perspectives highlight the value of executives becoming aware of the influence of *past* experiences which affected their personal unconscious on their current emotional responses, systems psychodynamics perspectives emphasise the value of executives gaining access to the influence of the group-unconscious in the *present* on their emotional experiences.

For the purposes of this study, psychodynamic/psychoanalytic approaches are grouped together as perspectives which focus upon providing insights relating to an *individual's* unconscious. Although there are significant differences between these two perspectives (Arnaud, 2003), they are presented as a single category in this study on the grounds that they share a common characteristic. It is proposed that critical changes can be engendered by helping executives make connections between their current emotional responses to problem issues and significant experiences in their past. The systems psychodynamics approach can be seen as distinct from psychodynamics/ psychoanalysis in that it suggests that unconscious dynamics in groups or systems in the present can influence executives' emotional experiences and contribute to problems that they find difficult to resolve until they recognise this influence.

In the following section an overview of research which aligns itself with the different perspectives of mainstream psychology, psychodynamics and systems psychodynamics is

provided. The way in which researchers discriminate between the theoretical approach which they advocate as useful for informing executive coach practice and other theoretical approaches within social science is provided.

#### **EXECUTIVE COACH INTERVENTIONS INFLUENCED BY MAINSTREAM PSYCHOLOGY**

Peltier (2010) distinguishes between the following different types of psychological practice - personality tests; developmental psychology and adult development; behavioural concepts; cognitive psychology and cognitive therapy; family therapy and systems theory and social psychology; hypnotic communication and emotional intelligence. In a similar type of compendium of mainstream psychologically informed executive coaching practices. Stober and Grant (2006) include similar categories to Peltier (2010) adding positive psychology, as a separate sub-category. Whilst not a comprehensive list of the different approaches within psychology it demonstrates the wide diversity of approaches associated with this field. It is beyond the scope of this study to comprehensively address the differences between the different sub-groups of psychology identified by Stober and Grant (2006), therefore two sub-groups have been selected to represent the variety of approaches in psychology – cognitive psychology and positive psychology.

Peltier (2010) suggests that some of the perspectives within the executive coaching field can be seen as sharing the common ground of being influenced by cognitive psychology, for example, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (Ducharme, 2004), Neuro Linguistic Processing (Grimley, 2003), and REBT (Sherin and Caiger, 2004; Anderson, 2002). One of the common arguments within this group of research, is that through the exposing and challenging of particular thought patterns which executive coaches believe contribute to executives' problems, executives can be helped to develop more helpful approaches to their problems. Ducharme (2004) describes how a common feature of practices in executive coaching influenced by cognitive psychology is that they involve cognitive-restructuring techniques. She states that "*cognitive-restructuring techniques involve assessing and changing individual's maladaptive schemas, automatic thoughts, and dysfunctional cognition*" (p 216). Froggat (2006, cited in Grant and O'Connor 2010) elaborates on the key aspects of the change process which are identified in approaches influenced by cognitive psychology:

*Cognitive-behavioural theory rests on the notion that problematic emotions and behaviours stem primarily (although not exclusively)*

*from cognitive processes, and that such problems can be solved by understanding how such thoughts arise, and then systemically changing one's thinking patterns, behaviours, and by also changing the environment where possible. (p 104)*

Henning and Cilliers (2012, p 2) describe the defining characteristics of another sub-category of psychology, positive psychology, as involving the “*exposing and focusing on the development of executives' strengths and virtues*”. They observe that positive psychology is a “*sub-discipline of psychology that studies the nature, manifestations and ways of improving positive subjective experiences that link to strengths and virtues*” (2012, p 2).

Mackie (2014) also believes that a key executive coach intervention is helping to identify and build executives' strengths. One of the major distinctions between positive psychology and psychodynamic approaches is identified by Henning and Cilliers (2012) as not focusing on the executive's past. Cilliers and May (2010) state that “*one can regard humanistic psychology theorists as the founders of positive psychology. As a field of study, it recognises the importance of learning and optimistically focuses on a person's future rather than on the past*” (p 2).

Henning and Cilliers (2012) attempt to define positive psychology in relation to how it differs from psychodynamic perspectives can be seen as pointing to a fundamental similarity between positive psychology and cognitive psychology that connects them despite their also having significant differences. It is proposed that they share a fundamental similarity through their *not* believing in the need for the excavation and processing of unconscious dynamics in order to help executives achieve beneficial changes. Thus the rationale for connecting research which references different perspectives within mainstream psychology, in a single category, mainstream psychology, a category which is used to theorise a sub-type of the competency ‘engendering executive reflexivity’ in the data analysis is as follows: although differences exist in the type of cognitive intervention advocated, the interventions do not focus on helping executives to gaining insight into the influence of unconscious processes on their sense-making.

## EXECUTIVE COACH INTERVENTIONS INFLUENCED BY PSYCHODYNAMIC AND PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES

Judge and Cowell (1997) suggest that there are important differences between the executive coaching process and traditional psychotherapy. However there is a significant presence in the literature of research relating to coaches drawing on insights from these perspectives (Arnaud, 2003; Levinson, 1996; Day, 2010; Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004a, 2010; Gray, 2006; Turner, 2009). As with psychology a broad range of different approaches is associated with psychotherapeutic practices. Gray (2006), states that *“in recent years, alternative branches of psychotherapy have developed, many of which are practised by executive coaches. Many of these (for example person centered psychotherapy, gestalt psychotherapy and neuro-linguistic programming”* (p 480).

The psychodynamic coaching approaches can be seen as distinct from practices categorised as being influenced by mainstream psychology perspectives through their emphasis on the benefits executives can gain from having insights into the influence of unacknowledged unconscious processes, such as psychodynamic defences, or projections related to significant past experiences (Peltier, 2010).

Czander and Eisold (2003) describe one of the major aspects of psychoanalytic work *“the deciphering or translating of unconscious thoughts and feelings”* (p 475). They define the distinctions between psychoanalytically oriented consulting from other types of consulting thus: *“it is the consultant’s capacity to use the three major aspects of psychoanalytic work: the deciphering or translating of unconscious thoughts and feelings, the understanding of resistances and defense mechanisms, and the assessment of transference and countertransference reactions”* (p 475).

Kilburg (2004b) provides a vignette of a coaching session where the coach draws upon insights from psychodynamic theories to help engender positive changes in the executive. He describes how asking the question *“Does this situation remind you of anything you have faced before?”* (2004b, p 247) provoked a pivotal insight for an executive. This question can be seen as relating to the distinguishing feature of practices influenced by psychodynamic/psychoanalytic perspectives which recognise that strong emotional reactions in the present are influenced by unprocessed strong emotions from individuals’ past experiences. The psychodynamic coaching approaches can be seen as distinct from mainstream psychological ones through their focusing more on the historical situatedness

of executives' emotional responses than is found in mainstream psychological approaches (Arnaud, 2003; Levinson, 1996; Day, 2010; Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004b, 2010; Gray, 2006 and Turner, 2009).

Day (2010) believes that insights from psychodynamic approaches inform coach interventions where the executive coach helps executives to connect with emotions that are beyond their awareness. He believes that exploration of the dynamics of the executive coaching relationship can offer clues to the emotions beyond the executive's awareness. Arnaud (2003) also emphasises the value of psychoanalytically informed interpretation facilitated through a particular type of relationship between the coach and an executive as bringing new insights which can be useful for executives in helping them develop new responses to problems they bring to coaching.

#### **EXECUTIVE COACH INTERVENTIONS INFLUENCED BY THE SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS PERSPECTIVE**

A distinction is made between research in executive coaching where coaches describe psychodynamics/psychoanalysis as informing their practice and that where they cite the influence of the systems psychodynamics perspective. Psychodynamics, say Henning and Cilliers (2012), emphasises the individual's unconscious, whilst systems psychodynamics emphasises group or system unconscious dynamics. Henning and Cilliers (2012) describe the conceptual origins of the systems psycho-dynamic perspective as stemming from classic psychoanalysis, group relations theory and open systems theory, associated with the Tavistock Institute in the 1950's and 1960's. They describe how the systems psychodynamic perspective combines insights from psychodynamics and systems perspectives, where the former is described as involving 'working inside out', and the latter 'working outside in':

*It is a combination of the 'working outside in' (systems) perspective and the 'working inside out' (psychodynamic) perspective (Czander, 1996). The two different perspectives merge to provide a unique framework because it integrates the concepts of systems thinking and psychoanalysis to understand the unconscious processes in people, groups, organisations and societies better (Gould, Stapley & Stein, 2004). (2012, p 1)*

Whereas coaches who draw from psychodynamic theories interpret the executives' emotional responses to current situations as clues to past experiences which produced

similar strong negative emotional reactions, coaches who draw on insights from the psychodynamic systems perspective include another dimension of considering emotional responses of executives as providing information about the unconscious dynamics in their current organisational systems. Such information is believed to help executives gain insights into the current tensions and dysfunctions within the systems of which they are a part.

Day (2010) observes that such unconscious dynamics in organisations can be understood as being made up of the interplay of psychological, social, economic, power and political processes. He believes that conflicts and unconscious anxieties related to transition and change within the macro and micro systems manifest in the emotional experience of members of organisations. A vignette of an executive coaching intervention informed by the systems psychodynamics perspective, is provided by Day (2010) to illustrate what he believes are the potential outcomes from helping executives gain insight into the potential influence of unconscious group processes on their sense-making. It was explained by Day (2010) that, through educational interventions by an executive coach, the executive was helped to consider his current emotions influencing his problem as information about his organisational system.

Day (2010) describes how, through inviting an executive to consider his feelings of powerlessness and anger as mobilisation of social defence mechanisms against dysfunctional aspects of his local organisational system, the executive coach helped him to consider new responses to the challenges he was struggling to manage. Day (2010) describes the reasoning which supported his systems psychodynamic educational intervention as arising from how insights from the systems psychodynamic perspective could help the executive to interpret the emotional experiences of members of the organisation as being manifestations of underlying tensions within the organisation. He observed that:

*Different groups are therefore left to “carry” conflicting aspects of the pressures impinging upon the organisation (Neumann, 1999), so that they are each protected from facing its dilemmas and contradictions. Such processes result in groups blaming others for the hostile and threatening ideas that they represent. (p867)*

It is proposed that whilst distinctions are observed between the three perspectives

discussed; mainstream psychology, psychodynamics and systems psychodynamics, in terms of the particular process they help to expose, for example psychodynamic defences, cognitive errors or unconscious group processes, they share overarching similarities. The common feature of the body of research within the executive coaching literature which influenced the data analysis in this study is identified as the advocacy by researchers that executive coaches help equip executives with insights about psychological and/or psychosocial processes which could be contributing to their problems.

The following section discusses research which advocates executive coaches having the competency to make educational interventions informed by a range of theoretical perspectives.

### **MULTI-THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE EXECUTIVE COACH INTERVENTIONS**

Whilst the majority of research within the executive coaching literature seeks to elucidate a particular single theoretical perspective at the same time advocating its merits for contributing to beneficial changes in executives, other research advocates executive coaches drawing from a combination of theoretical perspectives to guide their practice. For example Turner and Goodrich (2010) believe that effectively addressing challenging problems in executive coaching requires the use of several theoretical models including psychodynamic, cognitive behavioural, and systems approaches. They state that “*there is an emerging literature on the need for multiple approaches in executive coaching but there are far too few descriptions of how to do this and how to apply a flexible perspective with actual cases.*” (2010, p 40). de Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011) also emphasise the benefits of executive coaches drawing upon a range of techniques, and stress the benefits which stem from an ability to use a range of techniques at the appropriate time.

*It has been shown by us that a broad range of techniques are deemed helpful, and equally so. It is therefore not the preference for a specific technique that makes a difference, but rather the ability to employ many techniques, to use them well and at the right moment. (p 40)*

de Haan, Culpin and Curd’s (2011) notion of the appropriateness of executive coach interventions highlights a logic that underpinned the conceptualising of executive coach competencies in this study. The sub-group of research which influenced the data analysis within this study, research which advocates that executive coaches make educational

interventions which help executives to gain the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes that the executive does not suspect is interpreted in relation to the notion of contingency. The appropriateness of executive coaches making educational interventions could be considered as being contingent upon whether or not the intervention helps illuminate the particular psychological or psychosocial process that influences the issue that the executive wishes to address in coaching.

Kilburg (2002) stresses that complex multimodal executive coach interventions may be required to help illuminate and respond to the complex nature of different factors influencing the issues that executives seek assistance on. He suggests that coaches may need to draw upon a range of skills, and insights into both systemic influences as well as those which are more related to the individual psychology and experiences of executives. Laske (1999) also advocates multi-perspective skills for executive coaches. He believes that insights from organisational theory, an adult development model, the Constructive Development Model (Kegan, 1982, 1994) and family systems therapy can all provide insights which can help executive coaches address executives' developmental needs.

## **DEBATES ABOUT EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES**

This study seeks to contribute to the debate within the executive coaching field about the competencies and training needed by executive coaches to ensure beneficial outcomes for executives (for example Brotman, Brotman, Liberi and Wasylyshyn (1998); Bono et al., 2009; Koortzen, Oosthuizen, 2010; de Haan and Nieß, 2012 and Blumberg, 2014).

The early debate about the competencies and training needed for executive coaches appeared to be provoked by the then unregulated nature of the practice (Brotman, Liberi, and Wasylyshyn 1998). As the field has grown, a greater number of accreditation bodies and professional training, including post graduate courses specifically focused on executive coaching, have emerged. de Haan and Nieß (2012 p 198) observe that "*executive coaching is rapidly becoming an established area of professional practice with recognized professional bodies, formal accreditation and codes of conduct*". Despite these developments in the coaching field, the researchers listed above believe that more theoretical debate about executive coach competencies and training is needed to contribute to the development of the field. It is suggested that there is not yet a clear consensus on the competencies required for coaching success (Blumberg, 2014; Brotman, Liberi and Wasylyshyn, 1998 and Koortzen and Oosthuizen, 2010). Clayton (2011) believes that the



multi-disciplinary nature of the coaching field poses significant challenges to the development of a standardised executive coaching competencies model which is appropriate for a cross-disciplinary corps of professionals.

Blumberg (2014) believes that research into executive coach competencies is important because without a clear and common understanding of what new coaches must learn, coach education will continue to be fragmented and confusing, and perhaps fail to produce the skilled coaches necessary to grow the profession. Research relating to two different types of skills which are needed and/or useful for executive coaches to have are discussed in turn in the following sections: relationship skills and knowledge/educational competencies.

### **RELATIONSHIP COMPETENCIES**

One core executive coach competency advocated throughout the literature relates to how executive coaches' ability to establish a productive relationship with the executive is critical to the success of coaching engagements. A belief that a trusting relationship between an executive and his/her client is a fundamental pre-requisite to promote deep transformational change is highlighted by Peterson (1996); Tobias (1996) and Wasylyshyn (2005). de Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011) suggest that listening, understanding and encouragement were seen by executives as most important in the coaching relationship. Following this, knowledge, empathy, authenticity and involvement were seen as significant.

Blumberg's (2014) review of competency models identified a range of skills as important including relationship skills and learning about the client, listening, questioning, designing actions, influencing client actions, developing others, and providing feedback. The most common skill identified by Blumberg (2014) as a key coach competency was the building of trusting relationships. Wasylyshyn (2005) uses the term 'meta principle' to describe overarching qualities which she believes are fundamental to the success of the executive coaching relationship, with one of these being trust.

Earlier in this chapter research was discussed which influenced the data analysis in this study. It was proposed that as a collection it is defined by researchers' advocacy of executive coaches having knowledge about psychological and psychosocial processes which help them to make educational interventions which give executives insights about such potential influences on their problems. Alongside advocating executive coaches having knowledge about different psychological or psychosocial processes which contribute

to executives problems researchers stressed the need for executive coaches to nurture trusting relationships with their client. Particularly within research influenced by psychodynamic and systems psychodynamics perspectives, an open and trusting relationship was seen as necessary for exploration of potential unconscious triggers to the executive's experience (for example Arnaud, 2003; Levinson, 1996; Day, 2010; Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004, 2010; Gray, 2006; Turner, 2009; Huggler, 2007; Brunning, 2006; Day, 2010; Newton, Long and Sievers, 2006).

Whilst the ability of executive coaches to nurture trusting relationships with executives is stressed in the research which influenced this study, described above, this argument can be seen as differing in emphasis other research where the relationship between an executive and his/her coach is proposed to be more significant than the specific interventions of coaches. The two different type of arguments can be seen to be distinct in relation to how one type of argument suggests that the quality of the coaching relationship is necessary and sufficient to engender beneficial changes in executives, and the other which argues that believe that it is necessary but not sufficient to ensure successful coaching outcomes.

In contrast to the argument made in relation to the significance of executive coaches having relationship competencies research in the body of research which influenced the data analysis in this study, which suggests the educational interventions made by coaches are critical to equipping executives with insights needed to resolve their problems, de Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011) interpret the findings of their research as suggesting the quality of the relationship with between an executive and his/her coach was more significant than the specific interventions made by coaches. They state:

*The findings support the idea that common factors are at work in executive coaching, so that helpfulness is much less predicted by technique or approach than by factors common to all coaching, such as the relationship, empathic understanding, positive expectations etc. (p 24)*

Lowman (2005) suggests that there is a possibility that general factors in executive coaching such as the coaching relationship itself could explain why a range of different perspectives seem to help people to resolve problems. He argues that, despite the coach believing that the technique used was a critical change agent, it is the underlying coaching relationship which

facilitated the change. This logic suggests that not only is a high quality of coaching relationship important, but it is sufficient for leveraging change processes needed by executives to resolve their problems.

Bluckert (2005) and Baron and Morin (2009) also emphasise the importance of coaches having competencies which contribute to their developing and maintaining effective relationships with executives. Bluckert (2005) states:

*For many coaches the quality of the coaching relationship is not just a critical success factor, but 'the' critical success factor in successful coaching outcomes. The coach creates a safe enough space for the individual to take the risks necessary to learn, develop and change. (p 336)*

This argument is developed by Bluckert (2005) to suggest that competencies related to the coaching relationship are necessary *and* sufficient for beneficial coaching outcomes.

It is evident that within the body of research influencing the data analysis within this study, different conclusions are drawn about the significance of executive coach relationship competencies than that made by de Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011); Lowman (2005) and Bluckert (2005). Within the body of research influencing the data analysis within this study relationship competencies are argued to be necessary but insufficient executive coach competencies. In order for an executive to be able to resolve problems that are influenced by some psychological and psychosocial processes which cause bias whilst at the same time leading an executive subject to such an influence to have a conviction that their interpretation is objective, the core argument connecting the body of research influencing this study is of the criticality of executive coaches having diagnostic and educative competencies alongside relationship competencies. Such competencies, it is argued, serve to afford executive coaches the identification of the influence of some psychological and psychosocial processes on executives' sense-making, which contribute to their problems, and to equip executives in turn with these insights.

## KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATIVE COMPETENCIES

In a review of the methodological influences on research on executive coach competencies, Blumberg (2014) suggested that competencies be differentiated between knowledge, skills, attitudes and other characteristics. Blumberg (2014) describes research by Bono et al. (2009) as providing the most complete look at the knowledge required by coaches. They list knowledge of business, organisational structure, politics, leadership, culture, how people change, human psychology, and human behavior. Koortzen and Oosthuizen (2010) present an argument for coaches developing competencies in terms of different phases of the coaching process including contracting/recontracting, assessment/reassessment, development plans, and implementation/follow-up assessments.

In the earlier sections, the sub-set of research which influenced the analysis of data in this study was discussed. The common feature of research within this collection has been identified as the advocacy of executive coaches educating executives about different psychological and/or psychosocial processes described in mainstream psychology; psychodynamics/psychoanalysis or systems psychodynamics perspectives which cause bias whilst at the same time leading an executive subject to such an influence to have a sense that their sense-making is objective. It is argued within this research that equipping executives with the insights to recognise that their sense-making could be subject to such influences can contribute to executives developing new ways of understanding their problems that lead to their resolution.

The advocacy of executive coaches making educational interventions within the body of research influencing the data analysis within this study can be seen to imply that executive coaches have two different types of competencies. One relates to the coach being able to identify signifiers that an executive's sense-making is subject to the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes. This depends upon the executive coach having the applied knowledge about such processes. The other type of the competency relates to the executive coach helping the executive to gain and apply such knowledge.

It can be seen that whilst there are commonalities within this research about the value of a particular type of educational coach competency, there are diverse views on what knowledge might be needed/useful by coaches and executives. Whilst some researchers stress the value of executive coaches having knowledge about processes described in mainstream psychology, such as cognitive biases, others highlight the need for their having

knowledge about psychodynamic processes or those associated with the group unconscious as shown in Table 2.1 above.

Kilburg (2004b) suggests the usefulness of educating executives about psychodynamic processes, which he calls psycho-educational competencies. Kilburg (2004b) observes that *“of the extensive range of interventions available to work with psychodynamic material, I believe that coaches will make the most frequent use of psychoeducational interventions to explain the nature of conflicts, defenses, emotions, and relationship issues to clients”* (Kilburg, 2004b, p 260).

Kilburg (2004b) believes there are benefits to educating client executives on the nature of psychodynamic processes which may be invisible to them, so that executives are able to apply this insight outside of the coaching engagement. The belief in the value of the psychoeducational competency described by Kilburg (2004b) could be seen as fundamental to the coaching practices which seek to give executives insights into the influence of processes described in mainstream psychology, psychodynamic and/or systems psychodynamic perspectives. It is through executives gaining awareness of these otherwise invisible influences on their problems that executive coaches inspired by these perspectives, believe beneficial changes take place during coaching.

Sherin and Caiger (2004) also make a case for coaches demonstrating competencies related to their educating executives about the potential influence of processes described in mainstream psychology on their problems of which they might otherwise be unaware. They state that *“before the coaching process begins, it is recommended that the coach should educate the client”* (p 228). They continue:

*According to REBT theory, this new system of identifying and disputing unreasonable expectations becomes internalized and this provides a means for continuous improvement; it enables the client to monitor and disable irrational beliefs independently while at the same time developing and strengthening his or her rational beliefs (Ellis, 1994; Kirby, 1993). (p228)*

The key benefit to executive coaches demonstrating educational competencies is identified by Sherin and Caiger (2004) as them serving to equip executives with insights to read their own experiences through the same theoretical lens as the executive coach *“through practice, the process is internalized, which allows for the client to continue in an increasingly*

*independent manner*” (p 229).

Styhre (2008) also highlights the benefits of executive coaches referencing the theoretical models that they draw from during coaching. When analysing data relating to coaching scenarios, which involved helping executives to improve their ability to manage conflict situations Styhre (2008) suggested *“the use of and reference to adequate theoretical models and theories capable of shedding light on the object of discussion <and > presenting theories and models of what conflicts are and how they evolve over time, plus other relevant characteristics of conflicts”* (p 287).

Koortzen and Oosthuizen (2010) also highlight the benefits of coaches sharing insights and conceptual frameworks with executives stating that *“the essence of executive coaching is to help leaders become ‘unstuck’ from their dilemmas and assist them to transfer their learning into results for the organisation”* (p 93). They continue *“in addition, coaches typically share conceptual frameworks, images and metaphors with executives and encourage rigour in the way leaders organise their thinking, visioning, planning and expectations”* (p 93).

Although there are differences within the sub-group of research discussed above, one where researchers advocate that executive coaches equip executives with insights about psychological or psychosocial processes, an overarching similarity which connects them is also evidenced which can be related to Gray’s (2006) advocacy of the executive coaches helping executives to practice meta-reflection. Gray (2006) describes the process of meta-reflection as resulting in a critical questioning of the premises of one’s sense-making and considering alternative interpretations. A common proposition is evident in the body of research influencing this study that relates to Gray’s (2006) argument is that, that executive coach educational interventions which help executives to gain insights into a particular type of psychological or psychosocial process, which cause bias whilst at the same time leading to the person subject to its influence believing their sense-making is objective can play a critical role in providing a rationale for executives to detach from, and problematise, objectivist epistemological assumptions within their sense-making. In the following chapter the similarities and differences between the competencies of executive coaches to engender executive meta-reflection and executive reflexivity are discussed in more detail.

## GENERAL AND CONTINGENT EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES

One of the earliest pieces of research explicitly focusing on executive coach competencies presented an argument assuming that there was a need to solely identify 'general' competencies for executive coaches, that is, competencies that were assumed to be needed/useful for all coaching scenarios (Brotman, Liberi, and Wasylshyn 1998). Brotman, Liberi, and Wasylshyn (1998) presented an argument that the American Psychological Association should set standards of coaching because psychologists possess many of the skills that are necessary to provide executive coaching services. They suggested that psychology graduate coaches had superior competencies to those who had not undergone this training which they should market to commissioning companies stemming from their training with psychological assessment tools, graduate training, and a significant period of supervised practice:

*Although other specialists may bring important talents to the task of coaching, there are three major factors that make psychologists uniquely qualified as executive coaches. These factors are coaching tactics, psychological tools, and graduate training leading to licensure. This combination of professional tactics, tools, and training, or "Triple T" proficiency, enables the psychologist to penetrate the executive's resistance and to provide sufficient learning and structure to ensure sustained behavior change. (1998, p 43)*

The findings of an empirical study by Bono et al. (2009) suggested that differences between psychologically trained coaches and non-psychologically trained coaches suggested by Brotman, Liberi and Wasylshyn's (1998) study are not as big as the differences within these groups. Bono et al. (2009) illustrate how there is a wide diversity within the categories of psychologically trained and non-psychologically trained coaches. They emphasise a high degree of common ground between the groups in terms of shared values, beliefs and practices. They concluded that *"the two most striking aspect of our results—differences between psychologist and non-psychologist coaches are generally quite small and that there are as many differences between psychologist coaches of various disciplines as there are between psychologist and non-psychologist coaches"*. (Bono et al., 2009, p 386)

Other studies explicitly focusing on executive coaching competencies also seek to develop

general or standardised competency models. Koortzen and Oosthuizen (2010) conducted research which they believed responded to the need for a general competency model for informing the training of coaches in South Africa. Whilst allowing for different approaches of coaches, there is no theorisation of competencies related to different coaching practices. Bluckert (2005) presents another general coaching model suggesting that *the* critical competency for coaches relates to their being able to engender a particular type of relationship within coaching.

Tooth (2012) advocates recognising the uniqueness of particular coaching engagements. Whilst all coaching engagements can be considered as unique, it could be argued that some categorisation of different types of coaching scenarios may also be useful. Implicit within the sub-set of research, where coaches describe the unveiling of different psychological and/or psychosocial processes as being beneficial for engendering changes in executives' sense-making, is the assumption of there being categories of problem types which can be abstracted from the unique features of a coaching engagement. These categories relate to the type of insight which will help an executive to resolve a problem. Such differences between psycho-educational competencies call for the notion of contingent competencies.

Whereas general coaching competencies are believed to be needed/useful for all coaching scenarios, the different types of educational competencies described above can be considered as contingent competencies – competencies needed by coaches to help executives with specific types of problems. For instance the need/usefulness of executive coaches having psychodynamic-educational competencies can be seen to be contingent upon whether or not gaining an insight into psychodynamic processes will help an executive to resolve a problem. Whilst the effectiveness of some coaching engagements may require executives to gain such an insight, others may require the coach to demonstrate systems psychodynamics educational competencies to provide them with insights into the influence of the group unconscious on their problem. Likewise, others may require the coach to help them gain insights into the influence of processes described in mainstream psychology.

A rationale for the combining of general and contingent competencies is presented by de Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011). Whilst believing in the importance of coaches having competencies which help them to develop trusting relationships, they also think that coaches need other competencies which can assist them with the potential to respond to different coaching scenarios with the appropriate techniques. They state:



*It has been shown by us that a broad range of techniques are deemed helpful, and equally so. It is therefore not the preference for a specific technique that makes a difference, but rather the ability to employ many techniques, to use them well and at the right time. (p 40)*

This argument is illustrated in research which describes executive coaches drawing from a 'combination' of theoretical perspectives in their practice. For example Turner and Goodrich (2010) believe that effectively addressing challenging problems in executive coaching requires the use of several theoretical models including; psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural, and systems approaches. Turner and Goodrich (2010, p 40) state:

*In communicating about cases either at conferences or more informally with colleagues during the course of an engagement, we have found that staying with a particular model of coaching, such as that taught in coaching schools or those emanating from a single approach (e.g., psychodynamic, cognitive– behavioral, systems approaches) is insufficient to guide decision-making as events unfold over time.*

Central to this argument is the assumption that the competencies needed by executive coaches depends on the particular issue presented by the executive in coaching. It could be argued that some problems which executives bring to coaching can be resolved through applying insights from mainstream psychology. However, this may not be efficacious with others which may require the coach to apply competencies related to their applying insights from psychodynamics or systems psychodynamics. This logic can be related to conclusions drawn by Turner and Goodrich (2010) who state:

*We conclude that the future of consulting psychology will be based less on single models of executive coaching that emanate from a single theory or approach. We believe that such approaches are of limited use in practice, especially when the cases entail multiple levels of analysis (individual, team, and organization) and require sustained intervention over time. (p 52)*

In this study, the theorisation of a set of coach competencies, where differences between sub-types of the competency are argued to be complementary is influenced by the logic at

the core of Turner and Goodrich's (2010) argument – that executives' problems may be influenced by a range of different social, psychological or psychosocial processes which are invisible to them. Therefore it may be useful for executive coaches to have the competency to recognise a wide range of potential influences on executives' problems, and help equip executives with insights about these.

## CONCLUSIONS

A case could be made that it is through the recognition of the main obstacles to providing non-normative or prescriptive definitions and goals of executive coaching, that the defining characteristic of this field is illuminated. It has been shown in this chapter how the main obstacles to providing such definitions relate to the broad range of backgrounds of executive coaches. This diversity in backgrounds of executive coaches manifests in there being a diversity of theoretical perspectives that are described as informing the practice of executive coaches.

It is this diversity that can be seen as the defining characteristic of the executive coaching field. Tooth (2012) suggests that in embracing such a definition, opportunity exists for each practitioner to realise the meaning of coaching in a particular setting. She makes the observation that:

*It is an unregulated industry at present, and some of the resistance to defining executive coaching may be a reflection of the freedom and advantages afforded to a diverse range of practising coaches of not actually doing so. (2012, p 87)*

Currently this diversity is not represented within executive coaching competency models, which focus upon conceptualising general, core competencies. In conceptualising a multi-theoretical, contingent set of executive coach competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity', this study helps to present one of the defining characteristics of executive coaching, the eclectic range of theoretical influences on executive coaches, to the debate surrounding executive coach competencies. Bluckert's (2005) and Lowman's (2005) arguments that relationship competencies are necessary and sufficient to engender beneficial changes in executives can be contrasted to that within the sub-group of research which influenced this study. Within this body of research whilst executive coaches having the competency to nurture trusting relationships with their clients are proposed to be necessary for successful coaching outcomes, they are argued to be a platform for the

executive coach to make successful educational interventions which are critical to the executive gaining insights which they need to resolve their problems. Executive coaches having the competency to recognise that executives are influenced by a psychological or psychosocial process which causes bias whilst at the same time giving executives a sense that their sense-making is objective are identified as critical in affording executives gaining insights which can lead to their resolving problems identified in this body of research.

In the following chapter how these significant executive coach competencies, implicit within the executive coaching literature yet not included in existing executive coach competency models, can be understood as 'engendering executive reflexivity' is discussed.

# CHAPTER THREE: REFLEXIVITY AND REFLEXIVE PRACTICES

## OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

Reflexivity is seen by many researchers as a problematic term which is difficult to define since it is used in a variety of different, and sometimes conflicting ways (for example Lynch, 2000; Holland, 1999; Lawson, 1985 and Ashmore, 1989). Lynch (2000, p 26) states that *“reflexivity is a central and yet confusing topic”*. It is a topic associated with debates that are applied across a range of disciplines (Holland, 1999). One of the main goals of this chapter is to define the notion of reflexivity adopted within this study and describe how it came to be identified as an appropriate concept to apply to executive coach competencies.

The chapter begins by giving an overview of the topic of reflexivity highlighting how, due to its pluralist meanings, it evades the possibility of being encapsulated through a comprehensive general definition. An example of the type of encounter with an academic practitioner that was influential in informing the notion of reflexivity adopted in this study is then described and related to research which advocates reflexive practice for practitioners (Taylor and White, 2000; Cunliffe, 2004; Broussine and Ahmad, 2012 and Strous, 2006). It is proposed that there are two components of practising reflexivity, which relate to the defining characteristics of deconstructive and reconstructive practices (Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2008). A critical antecedent and stimulus to practicing reflexivity is suspecting the influence of a psychological or psychosocial process on one’s sense-making. This is seen to lead to the problematisation of objectivist epistemological assumptions (deconstruction) and the generation of alternative interpretations (reconstruction).

A transdisciplinary model of reflexivity by Holland (1999) suggests that different disciplines in social science, including psychology and sociology, can be understood as providing complementary insights about psychological and/or psychosocial processes, which equip people to be reflexive. Key parts of this model are explored in this chapter and it is described how it came to be seen as an appropriate foundation for data analysis in this study.

Towards the end of the chapter, an argument by Archer (2007) about the mediatory aspects of reflexivity is presented. Archer (2007) suggests that reflexive practices ameliorate negative effects of unconscious responses to social forces through bringing them to

consciousness. It is proposed that if the core logic of Archer's (2007) argument is related to the notion of reflexivity adopted in this study, then reflexive practices can be seen to mediate between the influence of some psychological and psychosocial processes, such as psychodynamic defences, and negative consequences of such sense-making.

Engendering executive reflexivity has not to date been theorised in relation to executive coach competencies in the executive coaching literature. However a similar concept associated with adult learning, meta-reflection is believed by Gray (2006) to be valuable outcome of executive coaching. The similarities and differences between the nature of executive meta-reflection and reflexivity are explored towards the end of the chapter. The chapter concludes by illustrating the connections between different theories of reflexive practice proposed throughout the discussion in this chapter.

## **REFLEXIVITY - A CENTRAL BUT CONFUSING TOPIC**

Lawson (1985, p 8) states "*reflexivity has surfaced in diverging fields in superficially different guises*". Lynch's (2000) observations about reflexivity echo those of Lawson's (1985). He describes how reflexivity is defined in many different ways and is applied across a wide range of arguments, including substantive theorising as well as methodological debates:

*In some social theories it is an essential human capacity, in others it is a system property and in still others it is a critical, or self-critical, act. Reflexivity, or being reflexive, is often claimed as a methodological virtue and source of superior insight, perspicacity or awareness, - but it can be difficult to establish just what is being claimed. (Lawson, 2000 p26)*

Holland (1999) supports the observation made by Lynch (2000) that "*reflexivity is a central and yet confusing topic*" (p 463). He observes that "*just as the concept "paradigm" energized the human sciences in spite of its many definitions and uses, so now does the concept "reflexive" seem to be of increasing salience, again with many definitions and uses*" (p 463). Holland (1999) goes on to suggest that as it used in many different senses and associated with many disciplines and specialties "*the word reflexivity often sustains confusion rather than clarifying any underlying issues*" (p 463).

The source of confusion between different conceptions and applications of reflexivity may stem from one of the semantic roots of 'reflex' being a type of turning back. Lynch (2000) suggests that there are many possible different ways to apply the logic of 'turning back', when theorising reflexivity. In commenting on an inventory he developed of the different types of reflexivity, he suggests that each of the notions of reflexivity involves some sort of recursive turning back. Lynch (2000) observes critical differences in how the notion of 'turning back' is applied to concepts of reflexivity and states *"what does the turning, how it turns, and with what implications differs from category to category and even from one case to another within a given category"* (p 26).

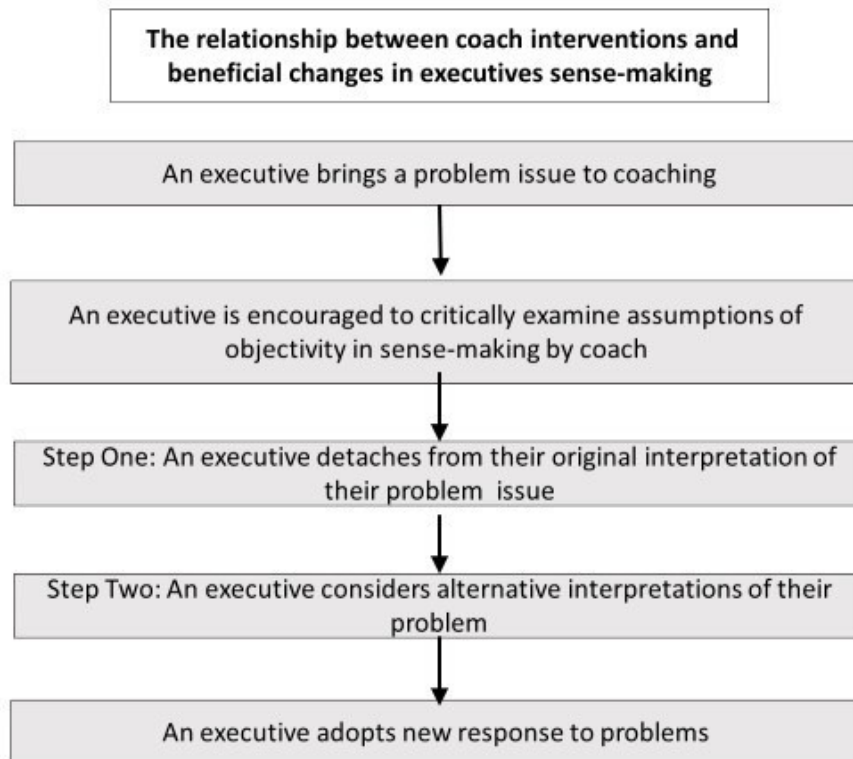
Within the notion of reflexivity adopted in this study, and in other theories which resonate with it, the 'turning back' is done by an individual, who turns back to an act of sense-making to problematise implicit assumptions of objectivity within his/her sense-making, this is through his/her suspecting that such sense-making is subject to the influence of a psychological or psychosocial process, such as systemic prejudice. The implications of this reflexive turning back to cast a critical gaze on one's sense-making is that it opens a space for the consideration of new interpretations of the same situation, ones which could have more positive consequences than those originally held.

## **EARLY ENCOUNTERS WITH THE CONCEPT OF REFLEXIVITY**

As stated in Chapter One, the proposed set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' emerged from shifting the analysis of the data from identifying executive coach competencies related to accelerating adult constructive development (Kegan, 1980, 1982, 1994; Laske, 1999, 2000; Laske and Maynes, 2002; Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002 and Bluckert, 2006. A detailed explanation of the reasons for deciding not to continue to develop the data analysis theorising coach competencies related to accelerating constructive development associated with the Constructive Development Model (CDM) (Laske, 1999; Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002) is discussed in Chapter Five. It is the purpose of this section to highlight the key findings of the early analysis, which were influenced by a concept within the CDM (Kegan, 1980, 1982, 1994; Laske, 1999; Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002) which was developed to theorise the coach competency 'engendering executive reflexivity'.

In the early stage of analysis of the data, two key components of executive coach interventions were identified which appeared to contribute to executives resolving

problems that they brought to coaching. The first component was identified as involving coaches provoking executives to problematise implicit assumptions of objectivity in their sense-making about their problem issues. Following from this executive coaches were identified as supporting executives to read their experiences and interpretations of their problems through different lenses than those that appeared to sustain them. A schema for the early analysis, abstracted from the CDM theory, is shown in Figure 3.1 below.



**Figure 3-1: The relationship between critical coach interventions and beneficial changes in executives – Phase 1 of the data analysis**

The two key steps which led to the executive resolving his/her problem were identified as follows:

- Step one: An executive detaches from his\her original interpretation of the problem issue.
- Step two: An executive considers alternative interpretations of his\her problem

The period of exploration for a complementary theoretical lens to support the data analysis led to the consideration of one notion of reflexivity. This was encountered through interactions with academic practitioner colleagues and resonated with the two step beneficial change process undergone by executives described above. Such encounters

contributed to the researcher coming to consider that a significant competency that executive coaches appeared to demonstrate in part of the data was their helping 'engender executive reflexivity'.

A vignette will now be given that is typical of the type of encounters with academic practitioner colleagues, advocates of reflexive practice, which led to associating reflexivity with a particular type of practice that resulted in the change process identified above in Figure 3.1 – problematisation of assumptions of objectivity within one's sense-making and the consideration of alternative interpretations of one's experiences and problems. An academic practitioner colleague received a telephone call from a university administrator in his organisation which provoked a strong negative emotional reaction in him. After completing the telephone conversation, he slammed down the telephone. He then started to judge the administrator's behavior, expressing anger towards what he perceived as her unhelpful and unprofessional attitude. The researcher's colleague angrily commented how he would make a complaint about the administrator's lack of professional conduct.

After a short period of time, there was a noticeable change in his response to the situation and his anger and negative judgment appeared to dissipate. He began to reflect aloud on the interaction with the administrator and his reaction to the telephone call. He paused for a few moments and then smiled and said something similar to 'I must remember not to blame her personally, and recognize the systemic influences on us both.' He continued to reflect aloud on the incident. He expressed a belief that his highly negative emotional reaction and blaming of a problem on the administrator, and her seemingly provocative behaviour towards him, stemmed from their both being influenced by 'the system'. He suggested that they were both affected by micro and macro social processes which engendered conflicts and systemic prejudices between different parts of the system.

Once this potential influencing factor on his interpretation was recognized, he reflected that in fact his strong negative reaction and judgment of the administrator was not justified. Rather than make a complaint about the administrator, he decided that the most effective course of action would be to attempt to cultivate an improved relationship with her. He vowed to provide his colleague with more positive feedback about how much he appreciated her administrative support. He explained to the researcher that the change process that he underwent after he applied an insight about systemic prejudice was the result of his practicing reflexivity.



The movement towards a self-critical stance and re-reading of his interaction with the administrator by the academic practitioner colleague described above resonates with characteristics of reflexivity outlined by Broussine and Ahmad (2012) who describe helping “public service leaders to ‘unlock’ their reflexive capacities” (p 23). They state that:

*The point about reflexivity ... is the importance of acknowledging the subjective in any context within which we operate. To be reflexive requires us to be critical of the assumptions that we may hold, and to be open to learning, possibility and surprise. We suggest therefore that to be reflexive requires an embodied, visceral, self-conscious and ‘unsettling’ momentary realisation or insight. (2012, p 21)*

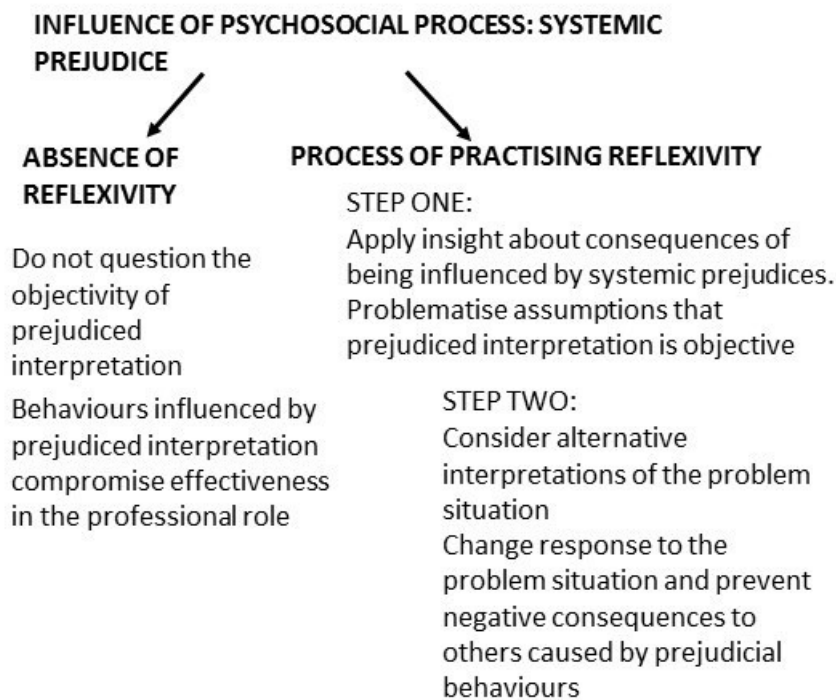
One of the defining characteristics of practising reflexivity garnered through the interaction with the academic practitioner described above was what Broussine and Ahmad (2012, refer to above as a “self-conscious and ‘unsettling’ momentary realisation or insight” (p 21). There was a visible change in his attitude and behaviour when he considered that, rather than being justified, his responses to the administrator were a product of psychosocial processes which stimulated his negative emotional responses towards her. It could be seen that his applying insights about the influence of systemic prejudices on his and his colleague’s sense-making led to the researcher’s colleague acknowledging his subjectivity which resulted in him being self-critical of his assumptions of negative characteristics of the administrator.

Informal education garnered from similar interactions with other academic practitioner colleagues reinforced this understanding of the key aspects of reflexive practice described above. The researcher came to believe that when people are unaware of the influence of some psychological or psychosocial processes, for example systemic prejudice, rather than consider that their sense-making is a situated interpretation they believe that their sense-making mirrors reality. In contrast to justifying one’s sense-making, believing it to mirror reality accurately, practicing reflexivity was described to the researcher as involving the problematising of assumptions of the objectivity of one’s sense-making - such critical self-monitoring arising from suspecting that one’s sense-making is influenced by some psychological or psychosocial processes which cause bias. This suspicion of the influence of a particular type of psychological or psychosocial process which cause bias on one’s sense-making, appeared to the researcher to be a pivotal stimulus to turn back reflexively and

problematise implicit assumptions that one's sense-making mirrors reality.

One of the beneficial outcomes of practicing reflexivity, identified from encounters with academic colleagues such as the one described above is a natural consequence of the unsettling of convictions that one's sense-making mirrors reality - the generation of alternative interpretations of experiences than those previously believed to be objective.

Figure 3.2 below depicts the difference between being, and not being, reflexive which the researcher garnered from encounters with practitioner colleagues.



**Figure 3-2: Summary of the key differences between being, and not being, reflexive garnered from encounters with practitioner colleagues**

Applying this understanding about the nature of, and benefits of practicing reflexivity depicted in Figure 3.2 to the early data analysis led the researcher to consider that when executives made a particular type of educational intervention that provoked their turning back on their sense-making, detaching from it and casting a critical gaze on it could be meaningfully understood as their 'engendering executive reflexivity'.

In the following section, practitioner research which includes the notion of reflexivity which was initially encountered by the researcher through informal education with colleagues is discussed.

## REFLEXIVE PRACTICE IN PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

In this section, the analysis of the vignette described above as typifying the type of interaction with academic practitioner colleagues which informed the understanding of the distinction between being, and not being reflexive adopted in this study, is related to similar arguments made within practitioner contexts of healthcare professionals (Taylor and White, 2000), counselling (Strous, 2006) and education (Broussine and Ahmad, 2012; Cunliffe, 2004).

Taylor and White (2000) argue that reflexive practice involves critically problematising assumptions of objectivity in one's sense-making and subjecting one's knowledge claims to critical analysis, through suspecting the influence of psychosocial processes such as those that reproduce systemic inequalities. The authors suggest that if practitioners are influenced by some psychosocial processes, for example systemic prejudices, and they do not practice reflexivity, this will compromise their ability to meet their client's needs of compassion, respect, dignity, and trust (Rojek et al. 1988: 131, cited in Taylor and White, 2000, p 199).

Extracts are cited below from an argument by Taylor and White (2000) which suggest that without deliberate interventions characterised as reflexive practice, professionals might unsuspectingly adopt discriminatory practices. Taylor and White (2000) provided a worked example to illustrate their beliefs about the positive role that they believe practicing reflexivity can play in ameliorating the negative consequences of healthcare practitioners being influenced by psychosocial processes such as systemic prejudices which will now be discussed.

Taylor and White (2000) analyse an account by a ward sister which they believe illustrates her not practicing reflexivity. The authors provide excerpts from reflections from a ward sister about a client who had been admitted to hospital due to her falling at home. The ward sister appears to feel strongly that an elderly client should not have been admitted to her medical ward because her problems could have been prevented if she had been more co-operative with other service providers such as her home help:

*Take Jessie. She came to us as a purely social admission. She'd fallen at home and is incontinent. She had turned against her home help, refused to answer the door to let her in. She didn't become ninety-*

*one overnight, she's been old for a long time. She had been going downhill. She's been here ever since. She didn't have any medical problems. (p 6)*

It is observed by Taylor and White (2000) that the comments of the ward sister suggest that her sense-making was subject to the influence of systemic prejudice against elderly patients. They suggest that the ward sister perceives the elderly patient as a 'bed blocker' and as such, is less entitled to, and less likely to benefit from, treatment on an acute medical ward than other patients:

*In essence, the ward sister is arguing that Jessie should not have been placed with her and that she is now stuck with her despite the inappropriateness of this as a solution. Jessie is a 'bed-blocker', a problem for an acute ward because she is not fit to go home and there is nowhere else to place her. Jessie is thus a problem and a nuisance for nursing staff and the organization. (p 8)*

Taylor and White (2000) believe that the ward sister's commentary about the elderly client indicates that she believes that "*Jessie is not deserving of respect as a person with rights, wishes and feelings that need to be taken into an account*" (p 8). They believe that the use of the patient's first name by the ward sister, rather than the more formal use of her title and surname, conveys the negative/dismissive attitude towards her. The authors believe that when the different components of the ward sister's commentary are analysed, it can be seen that she believes that the client "*is someone who is in the way, who needs moving on so that the 'real work' of acute nursing can occur with a 'proper' patient allocated to that bed*" (2000, p 8). Taylor and White (2000) analyse the ward sister's attitude towards the elderly client as one of disclaiming responsibility for her care. They observe that "*in effect, the ward sister is disclaiming responsibility for her— Jessie should not be her problem*". (2000, p 8)

It is implicit within Taylor and White's (2000) critique of the sense-making by the ward sister that they believe that she could have provided a better quality of care to someone else with the same needs as the patient, Jessie, described above, if she were not influenced by dominant prejudiced constructions about elderly clients within her institution and local systems. The authors suggest that had the ward sister not been influenced by systemic prejudices she could have mobilised different healthcare professionals to assess whether or not it was feasible to support the client from home, and if so what type of support could

be provided to help with this. It is suggested by the authors that the consideration of these interventions would have been illustrative of the ward sister providing ethical and high quality care which would involve client empowerment:

*The task for HW professionals might then be to work together to assess Jessie to see whether a return home is feasible and, if so, what is needed to secure this goal. For example, a different home carer or carers might be arranged who can meet Jessie's needs; alternative home support systems might be mobilized. (p 6)*

Although in relation to a different set of professional goals than the analysis by Taylor and White (2000), the researcher's academic practitioner colleague discussed earlier used a similar reasoning when advocating reflexive practice. Her colleague described how practicing reflexivity involved him recognising the potential influence of a psychosocial process on his sense-making, systemic prejudice, which he believed provided a rationale for problematising and usurping his sense-making and replacing it with sense-making that he believed would lead to his experiencing a better quality of collaboration with the colleague. When reflecting on his experiences the researchers' colleague described how he believed that this reflexive practice made a significant contribution to his professionalism not being compromised when influenced by ubiquitous processes such as systemic prejudice.

Taylor and White (2000) explain that they presented the case of the ward sister discussed above to illustrate how there can be many readings of situations which can have different consequences in terms of the quality of care provided to clients. In this situation the authors suggest that the ward sister believes that there is only one way of seeing the situation which is the objective truth. They describe how such a belief led her to fail to perceive a need to be critical of her interpretation, one which they believe compromised the quality of care for the elderly client. The authors characterised the ward sister's sense-making as being non-reflexive through her failing to suspect the influence of psychosocial processes such as systemic prejudice on her sense-making and consequently her not critically examining her negative judgements of the elderly client. Taylor and White (2000) conclude that they "*are not suggesting that the ward sister is necessarily having 'bad thoughts' about Jessie. Rather, the specific institutional context of an acute ward has affected her descriptions*". (p 8).

The belief that reflexive practice can contribute to practitioners ameliorating the potential negative consequences of being influenced by psychosocial processes which serve to

reproduce systemic inequalities is shared by Cunliffe (2004). Cunliffe (2004) believes that a lack of reflexive practice can result in subtle forms of domination and oppression which manifest in behaviours such as the silencing of voices of students. Cunliffe (2004) believes that *“critical reflexivity draws upon very different ways of thinking about the nature of reality”* (p 407). She shares Taylor and White’s (2000) view that a key indicator of practicing reflexivity is to recognise the subjectivity of sense-making. They state that *“critically reflexive practice embraces subjective understandings of reality as a basis for thinking more critically about the impact of our assumptions, values, and actions on others”* (p 408).

It is argued by Cunliffe (2004) that through provoking the examination of assumptions within one’s sense-making, reflexive practice helps to uncover the limitations of sense-making influenced by systemic prejudices. She believes that reflexive practice causes people to *“become less prone to becoming complacent or ritualistic in our thoughts and actions, and develop a greater awareness of different perspectives and possibilities”* (2004, p 408).

Similar arguments are made by Broussine and Ahmad (2012). The authors describe their professional goals as the *“creation of participatory and democratic learning environments, which encourage personal inquiry, provides people the opportunity to overcome what Freire (1978) called the ‘habit of submission’ ”* (2012, p 23). In order to achieve the goal of participatory and democratic learning environments, Broussine and Ahmad (2012) believe in the need for a reflexive pedagogical practice. They proclaim that *“by developing a reflexive pedagogical practice we will enable our students to be proactive (agentic), and in accordance with ethical and professional values”* (p 18).

A similar argument is made by Strous (2006) who suggests that it is important for counsellors to practice reflexivity to avoid their interventions unwittingly being influenced by psychosocial processes which can have a detrimental effect on the potential success of the counselling process. He describes how practicing reflexivity involves *“a critical analysis and understanding of counsellors’ own conditioning, that of their clients, and the sociopolitical system of which they are a part (Sue & Sue, 1990)”*. (2006, p 42)

Strous (2006) advocates *“training that may help counsellors to develop improved, critical reflexivity in multicultural and multiracial contexts”* (p 41). He expresses a belief that practicing reflexivity involves counsellors applying an awareness of how ubiquitous psychosocial processes which manifest as prejudicial ideological beliefs, can reproduce a

particular social order that can influence their practices, and compromise their potential to provide unprejudiced interventions to help their clients. It is observed by Strous (2006) how *“the effectiveness of multicultural and multiracial counselling may be compromised when counsellors occupy ideologically encapsulated positions”* (2006, p 41).

Strous's (2006) argument that counsellors need to scrutinize their professional assumptions and socialisation for factors which could adversely affect their work resonates strongly with the beliefs expressed above by Taylor and White (2000). As described above, Taylor and White (2000) believe that practitioners should not assume that their sense-making, particularly that which involves negative judgments of their clients, is objective. It was suggested by them in the case described earlier, that if the ward sister had practiced reflexivity, it would have provoked her to scrutinise the potentially prejudicial sense-making about the client which could have unsettled her negative appraisal of her client. This, Taylor and White (2000) believed, would have improved the quality of care received by the elderly client.

For Taylor and White (2000) there is an intimate relationship between arguments which advocate social constructionism and those which advocate practising reflexivity. They believe that the social constructionist approach to knowledge, which suggests that knowledge be considered as situated, local and provisional, provokes subjecting knowledge to a more thorough scrutiny than if it was assumed to be a mirrored representation of reality. The authors observe that when social constructionist assumptions are not applied to sense-making and beliefs that sense-making mirrors reality are held, then there is no rationale for consideration of alternative perspectives. They observe:

*If we believe something is true and universally applicable and cannot be changed then that is it, end of story. If, however, we acknowledge that there are a multiplicity of ways of understanding and making sense of the world, then these 'discourses' are opened up for examination.* (Taylor and White, 2000, p 31)

Strous (2006) also describes how social constructionist arguments give cause to recognise the need for reflexivity, and critical reflection about implicit assumptions of objectivity. He believes that when applied to the counselling field, insights from social constructionism and postmodernism provoke practitioners to critically reflect on their interventions and

practices:

*The postmodernist and social constructionist understanding is that professionals should not assume that they have a monopoly on knowledge or that their practices are based on objective understandings (King, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1992). Rather, they should scrutinize their professional assumptions and own socialization for factors that may adversely affect their work. (p 42)*

Although relating to different professions, the research discussed above shares a belief that reflexive practice involves the recognition of how, when influenced by some social processes, such as prejudice, people will believe their sense-making is objective. They also share a view about the potential negative effects of the influence of such processes in compromising practitioners' ability to perform their roles as effectively as they could have if they had practiced reflexivity. Across this research, reflexive practice is seen as ameliorating the negative impact of social processes which reproduce systemic inequalities, disempower and lead to oppression. The reflexive process is seen as beneficial since, in unsettling convictions that interpretations are objective, this opens a space for the consideration of, for example, less prejudicial interpretations.

In the next section, the logic distilled from interactions with practitioner colleagues and practitioner research is related to methodological research to help elaborate the notion of reflexivity used in this study.

## **DECONSTRUCTIVE AND RECONSTRUCTIVE REFLEXIVE PRACTICES**

Within this section, a typology of different types of reflexive practice in research, influenced by social constructionism and critical methodologies, presented by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008), is related to the propositions about reflexivity underpinning this study. The influence of methodological arguments, especially those related to social constructionism are related to the notions of reflexivity advocated by Taylor and White (2000); Cunliffe (2004); Broussine and Ahmad (2012); and Strous (2006) discussed above.

Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) believe that there are two types of reflexive practice associated with research influenced by social constructionism - deconstruction and reconstruction. They identify the defining characteristics of deconstructive reflexive



practices to be the surfacing, and problematisation of assumptions of objectivity implicit within a text. Deconstruction is seen by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) to result in 'disarming truth claims'. This is in contrast to their description of the defining characteristics of reconstructive reflexive practices which are seen to foster the consideration of alternative interpretations than those previously considered to be incontrovertibly true. The authors advocate a dialectic between deconstructive reflexive practices (labelled D-reflexivity) and reconstructive reflexive practices (R-reflexivity):

*We suggest that reflexive researchers might engage in practices that create a dialectic between D-reflexivity and R-reflexivity. Moving between tearing down – pointing at the weaknesses in the text and disarming truth claims – and then developing something new or different. (p 485)*

The authors see limitations in research where deconstruction is seen as the end point for reflexive practices. Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) believe that more positive outcomes of research are realised when, rather than the goal of research being deconstruction, and the unsettling, or destabilisation of assumptions of objectivity in texts, deconstructive practices open a space for reconstructive practices. They believe that the deconstruction process can create a space for and provoke the generation of new insights and ways of understanding phenomena which can have more positive consequences than those originally believed to be objective.

Research by Martin (1990, cited in Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) is presented by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) to illustrate how a dialectic between deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices can have potentially emancipatory outcomes. They observe how deconstructive reflexive practices in research by Martin (1990, cited in Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) destabilise text which appears to be gendered with implicit managerialist assumptions. Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) believe that through their exposition of gendered and managerialist assumptions, deconstructive practices play a pivotal role in provoking a critical turning back to problematise such assumptions of objectivity. This is argued to be through how deconstructive practices, in turn, open a space for reconstructive reflexive practices and the development of a more emancipatory text:

*Martin engages in D-reflexivity when she deconstructs the story of a female employee having a caesarean, as told from the*

*perspective of her employer. Deconstruction is used not to generate new knowledge but, to destabilize the text and to challenge its gendered and managerialist assumptions, which then enables the use of R-reflexivity to introduce new assumptions that construct a different and potentially emancipatory text, providing a new understanding of gender and organizational life. (Alvesson, Hardy and Harley 2008, p 496)*

While criticizing such notions of reflexivity, Lynch (2000) summarises the core argument that underpins Alvesson, Hardy and Harley's (2008) advocacy of combining both reconstructive and deconstructive practices. He criticises the notion that reflexive analysis can afford emancipatory practices through the transformation of a prior 'non-reflexive position' and that it "*reveals forgotten choices, exposes hidden alternatives*" (2000, p 36) which are the characteristics of the combination of deconstructive and reconstructive reflexives which Alvesson et al. (2008) advocate. Lynch (2000) states:

*It is often supposed that reflexivity does something, or that being reflexive transforms a prior 'non-reflexive' condition. Reflexive analysis is often said to reveal forgotten choices, expose hidden alternatives, lay bare epistemological limits and empower voices which had been subjugated by objective discourse. Reflexive analysis is thus invested with critical potency and emancipatory potential. (p 36)*

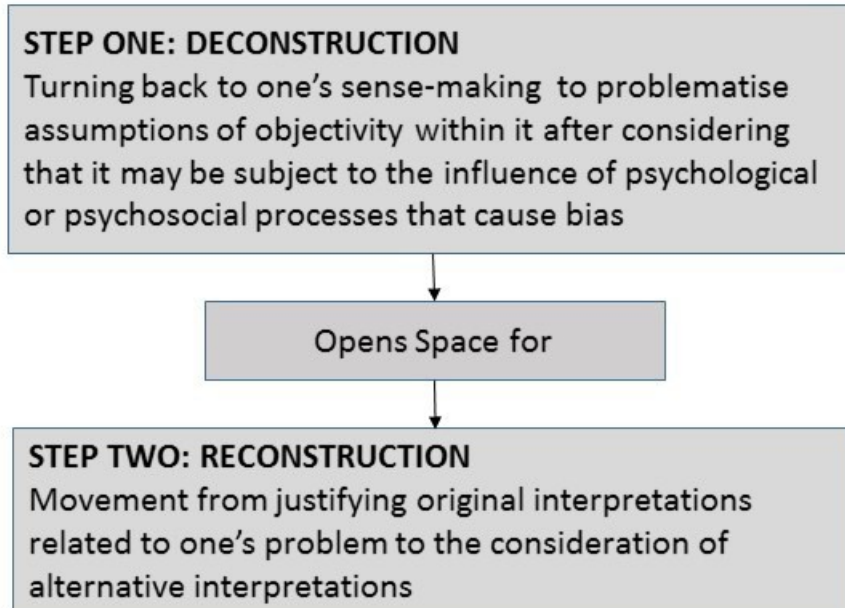
Although associated with different contexts and consequences, a similar rationale for the benefits of combining deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices can be identified across practitioner literature discussed above (for example Taylor and White, 2000; Cunliffe, 2004, Strous, 2006 and Broussine and Ahmad, 2012). Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) propose that reconstructive reflexive practice "*aims to open up new avenues, paths, and lines of interpretation to produce 'better' research ethically, politically, empirically, and theoretically*" (2008, p 495). In the practitioner research discussed above, it can be seen that the researchers' advocacy of practitioners adopting reflexive practices was as a result of believing that this would lead to new paths and lines of interpretation being opened up – a practice which could result in better outcomes and more ethical practice than if they did not practice reflexivity and sustained prejudices.

When related to the distinctions that Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) make between deconstructive and reconstructive practices, it can be seen how across this group of research is a shared belief that deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices are needed as antidotes to the negative consequences of systemic prejudices. For example Taylor and White (2000) believe that (unintentional) subtle acts of oppression, such as the silencing of the voice of an elderly client by a ward sister, could have been avoided if she had practiced deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices - questioning the objectivity of her negative judgement of the client and having a more empathic understanding of her care needs. Similarly, Strous (2006) believes that such interventions in the context of counselling can help avoid the unwittingly reproduction of systemic inequalities.

As discussed earlier, Taylor and White (2000) and Strous (2006) believe that there is an intimate link between the rationale for, and proposed benefits of, social constructionism and practicing reflexivity. Taylor and White (2000) observe that constructionist assumptions *“open up the discussion and debate areas and topics that the mind in a vat form as ‘unrealistic realism’, with its claims to absolute objectivity and infallibility, close down areas not even regarded as topics worthy of discussion”* (p 31). The observations by Taylor and White (2000) about the positive benefits of applying social constructionist assumptions to texts relate to Alvesson, Hardy and Harley’s (2008) argument of the contribution that deconstructive reflexive practices play in opening up a space for new, and more emancipatory interpretations to be generated. Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) propose that deconstructive practices *“demolish the assumptions of a text, thereby creating space to engage in R-reflexivity and construct an alternative and emancipatory text”* (p 495).

The rationale for considering a resonance between deconstructive and reconstructive methodological reflexive practices and the two steps identified as characterizing reflexive practice in practitioner research above is summarised in Figure 3.3 below:

## TWO STEPS OF PRACTICING REFLEXIVITY



*Figure 3-3: The relationship between the two step model of reflexivity and deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices*

In the following section, the argument by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) is drawn upon to locate the notion of reflexivity adopted within this study within competing conceptions of reflexivity found in social science research.

### A COMPETING NOTION OF REFLEXIVITY

As discussed earlier, reflexivity is seen by many researchers as a problematic term which is difficult to define since it is used in a variety of different, and sometimes conflicting ways (for example Lynch, 2000; Holland, 2000; Lawson, 1985 and Ashmore, 1989). The discussion thus far has centered on one particular notion of reflexivity adopted in this study, one which was garnered through informal education with academic practitioner colleagues, and is illustrated in practitioner research discussed above. When related to an argument by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) it can be seen as involving two steps: - deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices. This concept of reflexivity is distinct from one which Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) define as involving solely deconstructive practices. It is believed that comparing the notion of reflexivity adopted in this study with an alternative, competing, conception of reflexivity, whose defining characteristic is seeing deconstructive reflexive practices as the end goal, can help to further locate the study within a broader research relating to reflexivity.

One competing notion of reflexivity is that which involves 'taking destructive aspects of

reflexivity to the limit' (Lawson 1985 p 375). Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) contrast this notion of reflexivity with less radical notions of reflexivity. They believe that more *"radical practices – deconstructive or Foucauldian – emphasize the arbitrary and subjectivity-shaping character of knowledge, while weaker practices encourage moderate scepticism around interpretive and textual moves to convey legitimacy, certainty and closure"* (2008, p 494).

Authors such as Lawson (1985) align themselves with a particular post-modern argument. It is observed by Lawson (1985) that "the postmodern predicament is indeed one of crisis, a crisis of our truths, our values, our most cherished beliefs. A crisis that owes to reflexivity its origin, its necessity, and its force" (p 9). He sees one contribution of practising reflexivity is that it leads to deconstructive practices which surface a particular type of contradiction within research. An example of such an argument can be found in the sociology of science field by Ashmore (1989). Ashmore (1989) argues that the flaws which Woolgar (1981, cited in Ashmore (1989) seeks to expose in others' arguments are implicit within Woolgar's own argument:

*In this text, I attempt to show how Woolgar's discourse on the principles of practical reasoning is as much subject to The Problem as are, he argues, the discourses of science and metascience, which he analyses. Indeed, his very formulations of the "flaws" in others' explanatory and descriptive practices can themselves be seen to be similarly flawed. (Woolgar 1981c:509) (p 171)*

Ashmore (1989) highlights the contradiction within Woolgar's discourse on practical reasoning in that while it criticises implicit objectivist epistemological assumptions in other arguments, it contains the very type of assumption to which he espouses being opposed.

Pollner (1991) highlights the dissonance between the goals of what Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) term radical deconstructive research, and reflexive practices whose end goal is the generation of new ways of understanding phenomena that can be efficacious in helping improve social conditions. Pollner (1991) states that, rather than trying to debunk one type of interpretation in favour of another, the end goal is to provoke and problematise assumptions of objectivity. He states:

Moreover, radically reflexive inquiries withhold commitment to prevailing practice and discourse and, although they do not (seek

to) debunk a particular discourse or cluster of practices, the effort to move beyond the prevailing frame intimates that practitioners' accounts are incomplete or naive. Thus, radical inquiries seem groundless and subversive and raise daunting ontological and epistemological issues for those already within the ontological space of a discipline. (1991 p 375)

Lynch (2000) shares Pollner's (1991) recognition of the value of solely deconstructive reflexive practices. He declares that the notion of reflexivity which he adopts *"is not associated with any particular epistemic virtue, cognitive skill or emancipatory interest"* (2000, p 36). He continues to explain how it involves an *"uncompromising attempt to follow through on certain logical and epistemological commitments, to the point even of problematizing those very commitments"* (2000, p 36).

Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) suggest that *"reconstructive practices develop and add something"*. They believe that the reconstructive reflexivist *"is in the construction rather than demolition industry"* (2008, p 494). The goal of research which does not include reconstructive reflexive practices can be seen as being focused solely on demolition, a practice highlighted by Lawson (1985) who suggests the defining characteristic of radical reflexive theorising as *"taking the deconstructive aspects of reflexivity to the limit"* (1985, p 10).

Lawson (1985) shares Lynch's (2000) view that the positive benefit of deconstructive reflexivity is that it takes *"destructive aspects of reflexivity to the limit"* (p 10). This is unlike those he criticises above which require an exception clause, where a particular premise, such as the ability to objectively observe cultural influences causes sense-making to be socially constructed. He describes how in concert, the work of post modernists open up *"the post-modern world- a world without certainties, a world without absolutes"* (p 9). Lawson (1985) suggests that the distinguishing characteristic of the strongly deconstructive notion of reflexivity is the consequence of the power of the destructive force that they unleash. He states that *"the power of the destructive force thereby unleashed was such that they regarded all previous thought as having been placed in jeopardy"* (1985, p 10).

Lawson (1985) presents a similar critique of the notion of reflexivity adopted in this study which involves a combination of both deconstructive and reconstructive practices, as that provided by Lynch (2000). He notes how such a notion of reflexivity has inherent within it

implicit contradictions relating to critiques of particular interpretations and arguments. He suggests that the contradiction hints at their being superior interpretations and arguments, whilst presenting their arguments as having subjectivist epistemological assumptions. It is suggested by Lawson (1985) that whilst locating themselves with deconstructive reflexive practices, many researchers are not solely practicing deconstruction, since there are assumptions of the potential for objectivity at the core of their arguments. He believes that the coherence of such theories depends upon the articulation of a type of exception clause to protect them from self-referential criticisms such as those made by Ashmore (1989) against Woolgar (1981, cited in Ashmore (1989).

Lawson (1985) observes that arguments with premises such as our interpretation of society is a function of history; or a social relativism of the type: our views are determined by society and the place we take in that society or those that take a cultural or linguistic form require at a meta-level of justification, and exception clauses. He argues that these need to be introduced to avert potential contradictory paradoxes and avoid self-reference. He suggests that if these arguments include exception clauses as to what they assume to be objective, such as the potential to identify historical or social influences on people sense-making, then although they would no longer be considered in affinity with the type of post-modern deconstruction that he himself favours, they would have more logical coherence.

Pollner's (1991) beliefs about the characteristics of solely reflexive practices echo Lawson's (1985). He suggests that radical reflexivity can lead to ceaseless unsettling of belief. He observes that *"Left to its own dynamic, radical reflexivity would unsettle ceaselessly. Though it is pointless, groundless, and subversive, radical reflexivity delivers to epistemologically settled communities the work through which points are made, grounds established, and versions of reality secured against subversions"* (1985, p 378).

The perceived contribution of deconstructive reflexive practices in this study resonate with Alvesson, Hardy and Harley's (2008) view that they open a space for reconstructive reflexive practices which generate new ways of understanding situations. This can be seen as quite distinct from arguments by a group of researchers including Lawson (1985), Lynch (2000), Ashmore (1989) and Pollner (1991) which favour, not uncritically, the ceaseless unsettling of interpretations, and taking destructive aspects of reflexivity 'to the limit.

## A TRANSDISCIPLINARY MODEL OF REFLEXIVITY

Holland (1999) describes how reflexivity is often applied within the confines of a single discipline and suggests that it would be better understood as a concept that transcends traditional borders such as those associated between the disciplines of psychology and sociology. He states that *“transdisciplinary reflexivity could be more powerful and comprehensive than unidisciplinary efforts”* (1999, p 471). It is argued in this study that this notion of reflexivity is a particularly appropriate one to inform data analysis in the executive coaching field, a field characterized by disciplinary pluralism. Holland (1999) advocates bringing a measure of psychological sensibility to the sociologically biased paradigms of reflexivity and vice versa. This belief is illustrated in his critique of Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) paradigmatic matrix. He suggests that: *“both authors were limited in their “thought style”: they were sociologists and so gave little importance to psychological or psycho-therapeutic matters”* (Holland, 1999, p 47).

The practitioner field is cited by Holland (1999) as strongly influencing his advocacy of a transdisciplinary sensibility towards reflexivity. The potential contribution of different perspectives in bringing about positive changes is a common theme within Holland’s argument. He states that *“psychodynamic methods, among others, designed to raise awareness of both languages and practices have been used to bring about personal, family, group, and organizational change (Hirschhorn, 1988; Kets de Vries, 1991; Stapley, 1996)”* (1999, p 472).

Holland (1999) believes that a range of disciplines in social science can provide resources for practitioners which can contribute to their helping their clients to become aware of the influence of processes, described in sociology, psychology and/or psychotherapy – insights which can lead to their being able to develop efficacious approaches to their problems. Referring to a range of techniques used by helping professionals, Holland (1999) suggests that *“these techniques have a common characteristic: they all seek to induce a greater measure of reflexivity”* (p 472). He believes that once the common ground between different disciplinary notions of reflexivity is recognised, this provides a rationale for suggesting that they offer complementary lenses rather than being incommensurable.

The assumptions underpinning Holland’s (1999) arguments can be related to what Bourdieu (2004) terms cognitive tools. Bourdieu (2004) uses this term to describe the contribution that sociological concepts make to epistemological inquiry in the sociology of



sociology. It is argued by Bourdieu (2004) that 'cognitive tools' inspire questioning and "*the casting a gaze which unveils, unmask, brings light to what is hidden*" (p 4). He describes the benefits of cognitive tools from sociology which unveil, unmask and bring to light the hidden influence of social processes on the discipline itself. Bourdieu (2004) describes his intention in using the cognitive tools of sociology to analyse the subjective itself as "*not one of destroying sociology but rather of serving it, using the sociology of sociology to make a better sociology*" (p 4).

The suggestion by Bourdieu (2004) that insights from sociology can equip researchers with cognitive tools to help unmask, unveil and bring to light hidden influences on their sense-making, can be related to assumptions within Holland's (1999) transdisciplinary notion of reflexivity as follows - through their providing insights into different social and sense-making processes, different disciplines in social science, unmask, unveil and bring to light hidden influences on people's sense-making - equipping people with cognitive tools to be reflexive. Holland's (1999) rationale for uniting different applications of reflexivity under a transdisciplinary umbrella is that due to disciplines describing different psychological and/or psychosocial processes that can have a negative influence on people's sense-making, they offer unique and complementary resources and insights, to counteract different psychological and psychosocial influences people may encounter at different times.

Holland (1999) suggests that while offering unique insights, in the sense of their illuminating the nature of particular social or psychological processes, the insights from different disciplinary notions of reflexivity can be seen to share a common logic which pivots upon the consequences of applying these insights. Holland (1999) believes that a common consequence of applying insights about the nature of the influence of psychosocial or psychological processes, irrespective of the particular process, is that they help equip people with cognitive tools (Bourdieu, 2004) to move from "*blocked or frozen intellectual and life situations*" (p 480).

Holland (1999) observes that "*changing blocked or frozen intellectual and life situations may require an element of psychological insight, alongside the more familiar forms of critical analysis, in order to untangle the sociopsychological dynamics*". (1999, p 480). It is evident that Holland (1999) believes that helping people move from blocked or frozen intellectual and life situations may depend on their gaining insights from different disciplines about the influence of a psychological or sociopsychological process on their

sense-making.

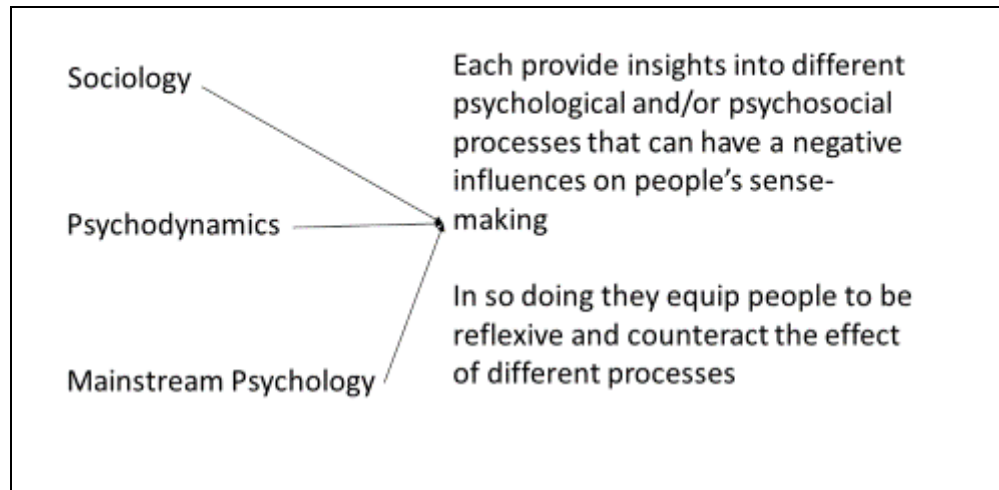
An example of the contribution of social action psychotherapy to help engender changes in clients which reduce their distress is presented by Holland (1999) to illustrate the positive changes that can be afforded through practitioner's drawing upon theoretical perspectives within social science to inform their practice. He believes that through applying insights from social action theory practitioners can help to unmask the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes on client's sense-making that the clients themselves did not suspect.

One of the common contributions of the different disciplinary notions of reflexivity within Holland's (1999) transdisciplinary reflexivity model is argued by Holland (1999) to stem from their stimulating a critical examination of assumptions of objectivity within arguments. Holland (1999, p 467) observes that "*an important function of reflexive analysis is to expose the underlying assumptions on which arguments and stances are built*". The need for this can be related to the following observation by Berger and Fitzgerald (2002):

*Some things are experienced as unquestioned, simply a part of the self. They can include many things – a theory, a relational issue, a personality trait, an assumption about the way the world works, behaviour, emotions – and they can't be seen since they are the lenses through which we see. For this reason they are taken for granted, taken as true or not taken at all. (p 30)*

As stated previously it is the assumptions of common ground between disciplinary applications of reflexivity, as well as their differences that led Holland (1999) to consider reflexivity from a transdisciplinary vantage point. The rationale which he provides for presenting different disciplinary applications of reflexivity side by side in a transdisciplinary framework is that they offer unique but complementary insights. He believes that people may be influenced by processes described in sociology, psychodynamics or mainstream psychology and cause them to "*have blocked or frozen intellectual and life situations*" (p 480).

Figure 3.4 below summarises some of the key beliefs within part of Holland's (1999) argument for common ground and differences between disciplinary notions of reflexivity.



**Figure 3-4: Common ground and differences between disciplinary notions of reflexivity**

In summary, Holland (1999) believes that the application of the concept of reflexivity to a single discipline leads to a failure to recognize the contribution that is needed from different disciplines in social science to equip people with insights which they need to practice reflexivity. Since different disciplines, including mainstream psychology, sociology and psychodynamic highlight different psychological and psychosocial processes that can influence people’s sense-making and lead them to be blocked or frozen in their response to problems Holland (1999) argues that insights from any of them may be needed by people as they encounter problems due to their unique influences. In presenting the different disciplinary notions of reflexivity side by side, as offering unique but complementary resources, Holland (1999) presents a notion of reflexivity that is both informed by, and arguably a particularly useful foundation for, practitioner research. It was believed by the researcher to be a particularly appropriate lens for the analysis of data within this study which is in the context of the executive coaching field– a field where one of its defining characteristic can be seen to be the diversity of theoretical perspectives drawn upon by practitioners to inform their practice.

The general notion of reflexivity which Holland (1999) identifies can be related to the argument by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) and be seen to involve a combination of both deconstructive and reconstructive practices. Within the body of research which influenced the analysis of data within this study, discussed in Chapter Two, executive coaches are believed to demonstrate significant competencies which are interpreted in this study as ‘engendering executive reflexivity’. When they help executives to consider the potential influence of psychological and/or psychosocial processes on their sense-making - provoking executives to reflexively turn back to deconstruct their sense-making the exercise

of such competencies can be seen to play a pivotal role in helping lead to the executives usurping their problem sustaining interpretations. This deconstructive process can be seen to play a pivotal role in opening a space for executives to undergo a process of reconstruction with the potential consequence of their developing more efficacious approaches to their problems.

The logic underpinning Holland's (1999) interdisciplinary notion of reflexivity is applied to the interpretation of the body of research which influenced the data analysis in this study to identify significant differences in the type of reflexivity that executive coaches help executives to practice. Holland (1999) suggests that differences between disciplinary notions of reflexivity can be understood in terms of how different disciplines offer unique insights into different psychological or psychosocial processes. Applying this multi-theoretical sensibility to the theorisation of executive coach competencies led to recognising differences as well as similarities within data related to how executive coaches helped engender executive reflexivity.

The logic of acknowledging the similarities and differences within the data was influenced by Holland's logic for identifying sub-types of reflexivity within a general notion of reflexivity. The data was analysed in relation to a set of competencies, which are connected through sharing common characteristics relating to Holland's (1999) general notion of reflexivity. Distinguishing between the sub-types of the competencies was influenced by Holland's (1999) differentiation between sub-types of reflexivity. When applied to distinctions between different sub-types of the competency 'engendering executive reflexivity' these relate to differences in diagnostic and educative skills needed to help engender different types of reflexivity, associated with the disciplines of mainstream psychology, psychodynamics or systems psychodynamics.

The pivotal role that Holland's (1999) theorising of the transdisciplinary model of reflexivity played in developing the data analysis in this study is outlined throughout this thesis. In particular, it is proposed that applying Holland's (1999) interdisciplinary sensibility to the data afforded respecting distinctions in the data in relation to executive coach competencies alongside similarities in such a way so as to reflect the diversity of approaches found within the data. This was then able to be contextualised in relation to the body of research which influenced this study discussed in Chapter Two.

## THE MEDIATORY ROLE OF REFLEXIVITY

It was outlined earlier how the benefits of reflexive practice described in practitioner research could be understood as their mediating between being influenced by some psychological and psychosocial processes and the negative consequences stemming from the type of interpretation that the influence of these type of processes engender and sustain. Archer (2000) also believes that reflexive practices have a mediatory effect:

*The reasons for promoting reflexivity to a central position within social theory are summarized in the following proposition. The subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explaining the social outcomes. (2000, p 5).*

Archer's (2000) logic for the mediatory effect of practicing reflexivity is made within the context of a particular sociological debate. Whilst this is a fundamentally different theoretical application of reflexivity than the transdisciplinary one described earlier as informing this study, it is believed that Archer's reasoning about the mediatory aspect of practising reflexivity can be abstracted from the specific sociological application with which it is associated and extrapolated to apply to Holland's (1999) transdisciplinary model of reflexivity.

Archer (2000) offers the following general definition of reflexivity: "*Reflexivity is defined as the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa*" (2007, p 4). She describes how each life will describe a trajectory shaped by both structural properties and powers and opportunities for practicing reflexivity. Archer (2000) makes a distinction between theories which include a notion of reflexivity as a mediatory process and those where this is absent, a type of argument she terms as social hydraulic theorizing. This argument influenced the notion of reflexivity as a mediatory process adopted in this study. Archer (2000) criticises social hydraulic theorizing for its reductionist reasoning of explaining behaviour solely in terms of the pushes and pulls of social processes on people. The context of this notion of reflexivity can be understood as relating to what Dyke, Johnston and Fuller (2012, p 832) describe as an "*enduring tension in sociological debates around decision-making and studies of life-course transitions; that is, between accounts that are socially deterministic*

*and those that emphasise individual choice and action”.*

For Archer, (2000) reflexivity is intimately related to agency and she therefore sees deterministic arguments, such as those she labels social hydraulic theorizing, as guilty of presenting a model of humans as passive agents to whom things simply happen. She believes that such theorising ignores the opportunities for people to practice reflexivity which can help them to exercise some governance in their own lives, even when influenced by social processes which reproduce social inequalities. Dyke, Johnston and Fuller (2012) summarise Archer’s mediatory argument as follows *“Archer’s interest is in examining the role of reflexivity as a process that mediates between the constraints of social structures and voluntarism (free will)”* (p 832).

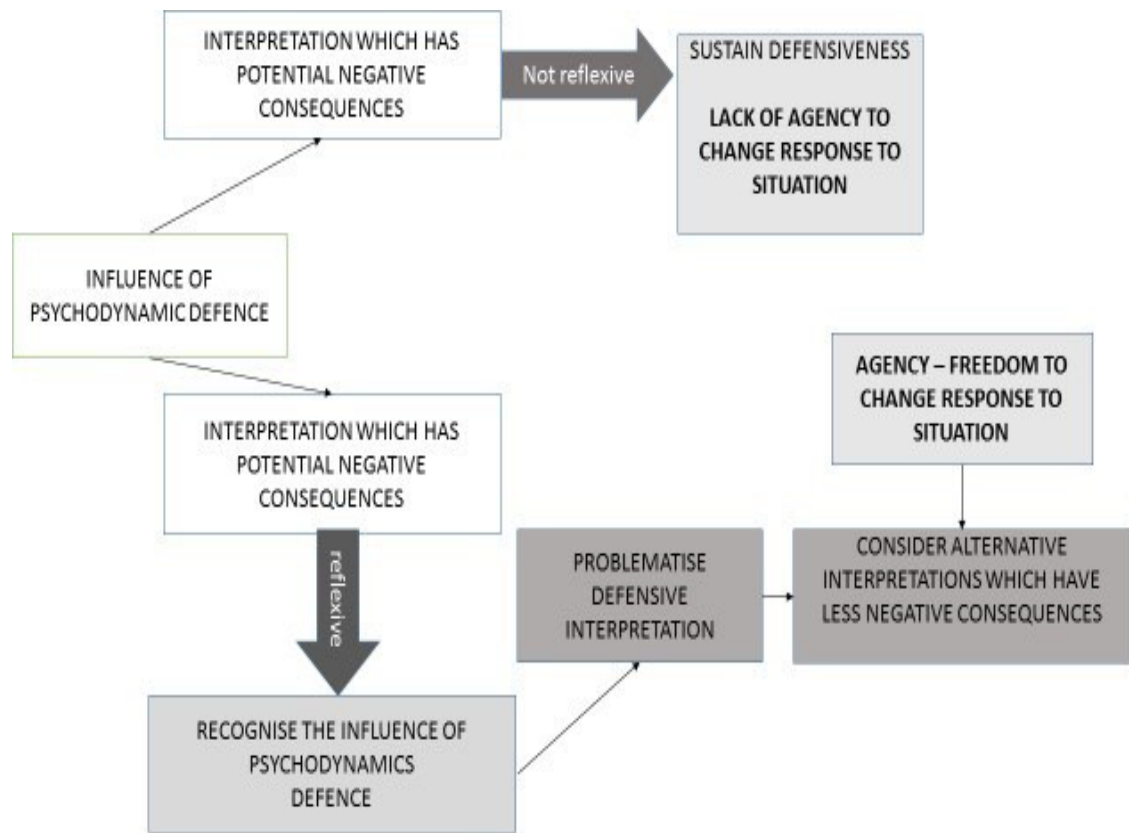
The assumptions within Holland’s (1999) transdisciplinary model of reflexivity, which influenced the data analysis in this study, can be related to the logic underpinning Archer’s (2007) argument as follows: if peoples’ sense-making is influenced by some social or psychological process of which they are unaware and they do not practice reflexivity they can be frozen or blocked in changing from such sense-making that can have negative consequences for themselves and/or others. This is through the consequence of being subject to the influence of some psychological and psychosocial being biased interpretations which are accompanied by the conviction that these are objective and therefore only valid interpretations. If however, when people are influenced by such a process, they practice reflexivity and apply awareness of the influence of a bias producing psychological or psychosocial process on their sense-making, this de-stabilises assumptions of their objectivity. As a consequence of this, someone practicing reflexivity recognises that their interpretation is one of many possible interpretations an insight that affords their having a rationale for usurping interpretations of their problems that sustain them. This in turn can afford people moving towards new ways of responding to their challenges. The usurping of interpretations, products of social and/or psychological processes, which have negative consequences and their replacement with alternatives can be seen as the mediatory mechanism of reflexivity.

At the core of Holland’s (1999) advocacy of applying a transdisciplinary sensibility of reflexivity is a recognition of the unique, and complementary insights which different disciplines provide. He suggests that through gaining insights about psychological or psychosocial processes identified in psychology, sociology and/or psychodynamics, people

are equipped to practice reflexivity – a process that contributes to people experiencing a *“greater freedom to move from blocked or frozen intellectual and life situations”* (p 480).

One example of the logic within Holland’s (1999) research which points to the potential mediatory effect of practicing reflexivity will now be discussed. The example will consider the potential mediatory effect of practicing reflexivity when influenced by psychodynamic defences. Peltier (2010), describes the influence of psychodynamic defences on someone as leading to a strong negative emotional reaction towards another person that is triggered by a past experience, producing defensive reasoning. Holland (1999) suggests that if people do not practice reflexivity whilst being influenced by a process such as a psychodynamic defence, it can result in them being ‘stuck to’ defensive reasoning. Holland (1999) suggests that if someone practices reflexivity when influenced by a psychodynamic defence, this will help him/her to be self-critical of assumptions of objectivity which maintain defensiveness and consider alternative interpretations which have less negative consequences as valid.

The mediatory role of reflexivity in the above example can be related to the following observation by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008, p 489): *“Thus, the reflexive researcher: is supposedly able to see constraints in a way that others do not and, while he or she may not be able to dismantle them, he or she can nonetheless work around them.”* When this observation is related to the mediatory role of reflexivity in ameliorating any negative consequences of being influenced by psychodynamic defences it can be argued that whilst people may not be able to prevent the initial triggering of a psychodynamic defence, applying an insight about the influence of such a process can help them to work around it and adopt strategies to counteract the potential negative consequence of such an influence. Figure 3.5 below depicts this argument.



**Figure 3-5: The relationship between reflexivity, mediation and agency**

A similar argument for the mediatory role of reflexively applying insights about the influence of unconscious processes to one’s sense-making is implicit with research by Levinson (1996) and Amado and Fatien (2009). Levinson (1996) observes how gaining insights into psychodynamic processes can result in people experiencing greater freedom to make their own choices and assume greater responsibility for their own behaviour. He states that *“fundamentally, psychoanalytically oriented consultants help their clients attain greater psychological freedom to make their own choices and assume responsibility for their own behavior”* (p 119). Amado and Fatien (2009) also propose that gaining insights about the nature of influence of unconscious processes can help people to experience a greater sense of agency than if they were under the influence of these processes without their awareness. They suggest that gaining insights into the nature of unconscious group processes, as described in the systems-psychodynamic perspective, helps employees recover their power over their own acts within institutions.

Academic practitioners, Broussine and Ahmad (2012) associate reflexive practices with engendering greater agency. This can also be related to the mediatory aspects of reflexivity. Without practising reflexivity Broussine and Ahmad (2012) argue that public service



managers can feel disempowered, perceiving that they have little freedom to perform their role ethically when influenced by oppressive micro and macro social processes. In contrast when public service managers are able to practise reflexivity this helps them to experience agency and recognise opportunities to make choices to perform their professional roles ethically:

*It is our contention that the incorporation of reflexivity as a key pedagogic strategy in the education of public managers can play a part in making them ethical/moral practitioners and enabling them to recover some form of agency which in many instances they appear to have lost in the current circumstances. (2012, p 20)*

Broussine and Ahmad (2012) believe that practitioners can contribute to public sector managers perceiving a greater sense of personal agency through equipping them with insights about micro and macro social processes which might otherwise be invisible to them.

The concept of 'social hydraulics' theorising critiqued by Archer (2007) is indicative of a strongly deterministic argument which she believes ignores the resourcefulness that people have to counteract the negative impact of social processes when practicing reflexivity. This can be seen to resonate with the assumptions underpinning Holland's (1999) general definition of reflexivity. This aspect of reflexivity can be applied to the body of research that influenced the theorising the set of executive coach competencies as 'engendering executive reflexivity' discussed in Chapter Two as follows: - through helping executives to practice reflexivity executive coaches can be seen to help the executive to become more resourceful in counteracting the negative consequences of being influenced by some psychological or psychosocial processes such as psychodynamic defences, unconscious group processes or maladaptive schemas. At the core of this argument is an assumption that whilst being subject to the influence of some psychological or psychosocial processes that can contribute to, and sustain an executive's problem an executive coach can help the executive to gain insights which contribute to their experiencing a freedom, to respond to situations differently than if they do not suspect such an influence and consider their sense-making to be objective.

Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) suggest the potentially emancipatory potential of research which has a dialectic between deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive

practices which could be considered as relating to its potential mediatory impact. Their analysis of research by Martin (1990, cited in Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2008) suggested that through her deconstruction of a text by applying insights from critical sociology about psychosocial processes which sustain gender and class inequalities, a space was opened for potentially emancipatory interpretations. This association of reflexivity with agency and emancipation is seen to resonate with the arguments within practitioner research discussed above. Across this research, a critical component of reflexive sense-making is suspecting the influence of ubiquitous processes such as those which reproduce ideologies and systemic inequalities. In the practitioner research discussed above (Taylor and White, 2000; Cunliffe, 2004; Strous, 2006; Broussine and Ahmad, 2012) practicing reflexivity was also associated with increasing practitioner's agency to challenge their own prejudiced sense-making, and consider alternative interpretations which are less prejudicial.

## **SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN META REFLECTION AND REFLEXIVITY**

Although reflexivity is not used as an analytic lens to theorise executive coach competencies in the executive coaching literature, one meta-theoretical concept used in the data which resonates with some of the key characteristics of the notion of reflexivity adopted in this study is meta-reflection (Gray, 2006). Gray (2006) suggests that coach interventions which help executives to practice meta-reflection help them to recognise that what they think of as factual aspects of their experience are socially constructed. He cites an observation by Newman (1994, cited in Gray (2006, p 487) which he believes conveys the defining characteristic of meta-reflection as follows: *"it is a form of reflection that permits us to see that our views, our identity, even apparently incontrovertible facts, are generated and constructed; and it allows us to examine the form, the nature and the validity of those construction."*

Gray (2006) argues that executive coaching may play a vital role in engendering significant transformations stemming from executives being enticed to critique the premises (perspectives) they hold about themselves. It could be argued that when influenced by psychological or psychosocial processes theorised across a range of perspectives in coaching research, executives become what Gray (2006) terms as trapped in one's own meaning perspective. For example, research which advocates coach interventions which help executives to consider the influence of psychosocial processes all suggest that without

such interventions executives will be trapped in their meaning making. These include unconscious psychodynamic processes (Arnaud, 2003; Levinson, 1996; Day, 2010; Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004a, 2010; Gray, 2006; Turner, 2009), unconscious group processes (Brunning, 2006; Cilliers, 2012; Day, 2010; Newton, Long and Sievers 2006) or self-limiting beliefs (Anderson, 2002; Ducharme, 2004, Peltier, 2010; and Sherin and Caiger, 2004).

Just as Gray (2006) believes that engendering meta-reflection in executives coaches helps people to pause and re-examine their meaning perspectives, the researchers in the body of research, to which the data analysis in this study is related, also believe that executive coaches can play a valuable role in provoking executives to re-examine their sense-making. For instance, in research which advocates the benefits of executive coaches helping executives to consider the potential influence of processes described in psychodynamic perspectives, the executive coaches provoked executives to re-examine their sense-making, and consider that it was influenced by past experiences (Arnaud, 2003; Levinson, 1996; Day, 2010; Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004a, 2010; Gray, 2006; Turner, 2009). It is the collision of events with peoples' meaning structures that Gray (2006) sees as triggering a process of reflection that *"comprises a critique of our assumptions (their origins, nature and consequences) to examine whether our beliefs remain functional"* (p 489). He believes that meta-reflection can help contribute to overcoming situational, knowledge or emotional constraints. When applied to coaching, he believes that it involves *"helping the coachee to progress towards a capacity to fully participate in rational dialogue and to achieve a broader, more discriminating, permeable and integrative understanding of his/her experience as a guide to action (Mezirow, 1994: 226)"* (p 489). This argument was identified as central to a notion of reflexivity described in practitioner research discussed above and resonating strongly with the body of research within the executive coaching field that contextualized the analysis of the data in this study.

The notion of reflexivity adopted in this study could be considered as a sub-type of meta-reflection. At the foundation of both concepts is a belief about the positive value of turning back to question implicit assumptions of objectivity within sense-making possibly leading to new and more beneficial interpretations. However, there is a key distinction between theorisation of meta-reflection and the notion of reflexivity adopted in this study, included in research (such as Taylor and White, 2000; Cunliffe, 2004; Broussine and Ahmad, 2012 and Strous, 2006). It is proposed that having a suspicion that one's sense-making is subject

to the influence of a psychological or psychosocial process is considered a critical antecedent to critical self-monitoring. This is not specified as being a critical aspect of meta-reflection by Gray (2006).

It is proposed that applying the concept of 'engendering executive reflexivity' to the notion of executive coach competencies helps to provide a meta-theoretical understanding of a group of executive coach competencies which can serve to draw together research with a significant presence yet not currently theorised in relation to executive coach competencies (for example Arnaud, 2003; Levinson, 1996; Day, 2010; Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004b, 2010; Gray, 2006; Turner, 2009, Brunning, 2006; Newton, Long and Sievers, 2006; Cilliers, 2012; Peltier, 2010; Ducharme, 2004; Sherin and Caiger, 2004; Anderson, 2002).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In this chapter, the notion of reflexivity used within this study was contextualised in terms of its relationship with different arguments made within methodological literature, and practitioner fields about what discriminates being, and not being reflexive. Holland's (1999) multi-theoretical sensibility towards reflexivity influenced the theorisation of a set of competencies, 'engendering executive reflexivity' with overarching similarities as well as differences. Holland (1999) argues that different perspectives within social science, including sociology and psychology, offer unique and complementary insights about psychological and or psychosocial processes which equip people to practice reflexivity.

This model inspired recognising fundamental similarities in research which spans different disciplines of mainstream psychology, psychodynamics and systems psychodynamics which advocates that executive coaches have the competency to equip executives with insights about processes which might contribute to their experiencing problems that they find difficult to resolve (Arnaud, 2003; Levinson, 1996; Day, 2010; Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004b, 2010; Gray, 2006; Turner, 2010; Brunning, 2006; Day, 2010; Newton, Long and Sievers, 2006; Henning and Cilliers, 2012; MacKie, 2014 Kauffman and Scoular, 2004; Ducharme, 2004; Sherin and Caiger, 2004; Anderson, 2002; Grimley, 2003; Laske, 1999, 2000, 2002; Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002; Levinson, 1996; Axelrod, 2005; Smither and Reilly, 2001; Kets de Vries, 2005; Tobias, 1996; Cocivera and Cronshaw, 2004). Engendering executive reflexivity is argued to be demonstrated by coaches when they help executives

to become aware of the epistemological limits in their self-justifying reasoning (Lynch, 2000), through their suggesting that the executive is subject to the influence of a psychological or psychosocial process that causes bias whilst at the same time leading the executive to believe that their sense-making is objective. Through providing such insights executive coaches are seen to provoke the executive to deconstruct their sense-making. Such deconstructive practices are seen by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) as pivotal first steps in the reflexive process which can result in the executive developing alternative interpretations of their problems which lead to their resolution.

In the following chapter methodological concerns are addressed and the logic of the research design is explained.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

### OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

The aims of this chapter are to describe the methodological influences on this study and to explain the research activities inspired by these which are deemed to be appropriate for addressing the research goal. The goal of this study is to theorise a set of executive coach competencies under the category label 'engendering executive reflexivity', that are not theorised in existing coach competency models, from empirical data collected within this study. This was influenced by adopting data collection and analysis strategies associated with critical realism. An overview of some of the critical realist methodological arguments which influenced this study are provided within this chapter before giving worked examples to illustrate how they were applied to the study and influenced the researcher activities of the data collection and analysis. At the end of the chapter some of the personal influences on the decisions made in relation to data analysis are outlined.

Crotty (1998) states that methodology is the strategy or plan of action which lies behind researchers' choice and use of specific techniques and procedures used to collect and analyse data (research methods). He suggests that the epistemological and ontological assumptions associated with the methodological perspective, with which the study seeks to align itself, influences the decisions for these research activities. Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao (2004) define the ontological arguments associated with particular methodological positions as relating to theories of what kinds of things do or can exist, the conditions of their existence and the way they are related. Questions addressed in arguments related to epistemological issues include whether or not it is possible to perceive reality objectively, and what can be known? The decisions made in relation to the methodological perspective adopted in this study and the reasoning for the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the research are provided in this chapter.

A summary of the key aspects of the methodological argument supporting this study are given below in Table 4.1.

COMPONENTS OF THE METHODOLOGICAL ARGUMENT	OVERVIEW
Influencing methodological argument for data analysis - critical realism (Bhaskar, 1987,1989, 1990, 1993, 1997, 1998, 2008, 2010)	Offers a rationale for identifying causal mechanisms which help explain why the set of competencies ‘engendering executive reflexivity’ contributes to executives resolving problems they brought to coaching.
Data Collection	<p><i>Primary Data</i>– Semi-structured interviews focused on gathering executives’ or executive coaches’ accounts of any changes in executives’ approaches to problems contributing to their resolution which are attributable to interventions made by executive coaches during coaching.</p> <p><i>Secondary Data</i> –A case study from the executive coaching literature is used in both Phase One and Phase Two of the data analysis</p>
Data analysis	<p>Theoretically informed coding based on notion of reflexivity outlined in Chapter Two.</p> <p>Development of causal maps inspired by the critical realist arguments relating to transcendental realism, and mapping causal relationships in open systems.</p>
Ontological assumptions	Objectivist
Epistemological assumptions	<i>Both</i> subjectivist and objectivist

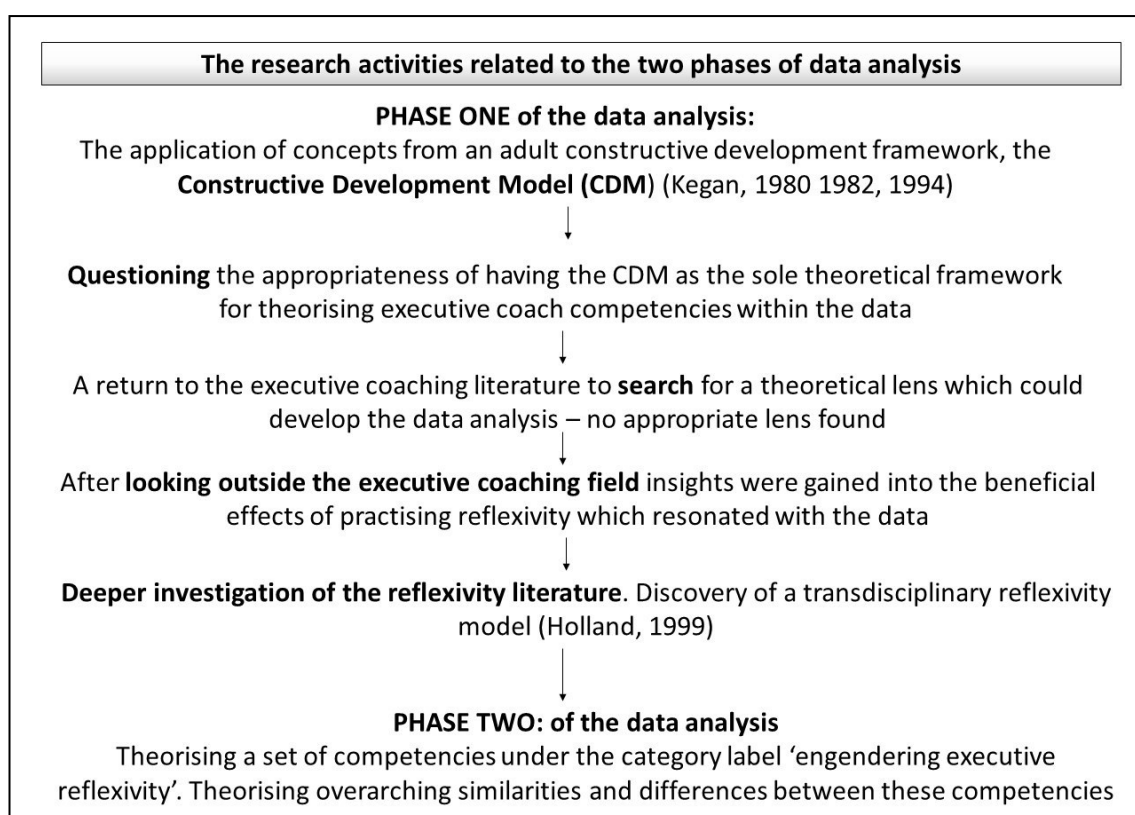
**Table 4-1: Key aspects of the methodological argument supporting this thesis**

## THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

As outlined in Chapter One, the same data were analysed through two different theoretical lenses. Thus the analysis of data could be seen as having two interrelated phases since the analysis in the first phase of the study contributed to the analysis in the second. The goal of data collection was to gain insights into changes in executives’ sense-making that took place during the coaching process and which were attributed to helping executives to resolve problems that they brought to coaching. Understanding this change process was believed to be an important starting point for identifying key characteristics of competencies that

executive coaches demonstrated when they helped executives make changes which led to their resolving problematic issues.

The first theoretical model used to inform the analysis of the data was the Constructive Developmental Model (CDM) (Kegan 1980, 1982, 1994). When the data analysis was influenced by this theoretical perspective it was concluded that a key coach competency is helping accelerate an innate process of constructive development. The second theoretical influence on the data analysis was the notion of reflexivity outlined in Chapter Three. The evolutionary process of the data analysis is summarised in Figure 4.1 below:



**Figure 4-1: Summary of the research activities associated with the two phases of data analysis**

‘Engendering executive reflexivity’ was the second analytic framework for theorising executive coach competencies in the data. This built upon earlier data analysis which was influenced by research inspired by Kegan’s (1980, 1982, 1994) Constructive Developmental Model (Laske, 1999, 2000; Laske and Maynes, 2002; Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002; Bluckert, 2006). Executive coach competencies were identified in relation to how the executive coach was able to accelerate the innate constructive development processes in executives, as specified in the CDM. A key insight from analysing the data in this phase of the analysis was recognising the significance of educational interventions by executive coaches which provoked executives’ detachment from ways of approaching their problems that appeared



to sustain them. The educational interventions involved executive coaches helping executives to gain insights into psychological or psychosocial processes which had a potentially negative influence on their sense-making of which they may be unaware. Such educational interventions provided a rationale for executives to problematise the implicit assumptions of objectivity within their self-justifying reasoning that appeared to be sustaining their problems.

Part way through the data analysis inspired by the CDM model, the researcher found herself questioning how it would be possible to know whether such educational interventions by coaches accelerated a developmental process in executives that would have happened naturally, albeit more slowly, without coaching (the defining characteristic of the type of development theorised within Kegan's (1980, 1982, 1994) constructive development model). The researcher considered there being a strong possibility that without formal, or informal education, executives may not have developed critical insights which led to their resolving problems. For instance, the possibility was considered that without informal or formal educational interventions, executives may never have considered the influence of unconscious group processes, on their sense-making. If this were the case, this would suggest that the developmental process which coaching contributed to might be of a different type than that specified in the CDM. Because of her uncertainty about whether or not the changes executives made towards their problems reported in the data as leading to their resolution were unquestionably attributable to the innate developmental process associated with the CDM the researcher lost confidence in coupling the data analysis with this model.

A decision was made to abandon the part of the data analysis which theorised executive coach competencies in relation to their accelerating an innate process of constructive development. Another part of the analysis was retained since this was believed to be of a more general nature not intimately connected with the problematised constructive development argument. The researcher began to search for an alternative theoretical framework to develop the data analysis, one which could help conceptualise the findings of the significance of educational interventions of coaches in relation to executive coach competencies. She began her search by revisiting the executive coaching literature. After failing to find an appropriate multi-perspective theoretical framework which could analyse the data in this study within the literature, the researcher began to broaden her investigation to other concepts outside of the coaching literature.

This resulted in her believing that one notion of reflexivity, which the researcher encountered through informal education from academic practitioner colleagues, could offer a multi-perspective lens to develop the data analysis. Analysing the data afresh in relation to a set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' is categorised as a different phase of data analysis in this study. This phase of the data analysis is discussed in Chapter Six.

The evolutionary process of finding an appropriate theoretical perspective to inform the data analysis can be related to what Robson (2002) defines as one associated with a flexible design strategy. Robson (2002) uses the term flexible research design to describe research where the analysis of the data unfolds through applying different theoretical lenses. He states:

*The two labels 'qualitative' and 'flexible', capture important features of such designs. They typically make substantial use of methods which result in qualitative data (in many cases in the form of words). They are also flexible in the sense that much less pre-specification takes place and the design evolves, develops, and (to use a term popular with their advocates) 'unfolds' as the research proceeds. Flexible research designs are much more difficult to pin down than fixed designs (Robson 2002, p 5).*

At the beginning of the study the researcher was not intellectually equipped to bring a multi-perspective sensibility towards the data analysis – the data called for the researcher to increase her understanding of some of the theoretical perspectives referenced within the data, particularly the systems psychodynamics and psychodynamics perspectives. The researcher has reflected that the evolutionary process of data analysis, stemmed from the data provoking the researcher to undergo her own intellectual evolution in order to develop the intellectual skills required to apply multi-perspective sensibility towards the data analysis.

Attempting to identify executive coach competencies in relation to how they accelerate a type of constructive development specified in the CDM (Kegan, 1980, 1982, 1994) is believed by the researcher to have been a useful starting point for the data analysis, one that surfaced some key aspects of the data. Changing analytical frameworks is believed by the researcher to have helped to illuminated key aspects of the data which may have remained

hidden if the analysis of the data in this study had progressed solely based on the CDM. It was believed that incorporating a notion of reflexivity into the data analysis, described in Chapter Three, through suggesting that coaches demonstrated significant competencies when they helped to engender reflexive practices in executives, helped to highlight a key part of the data. This aspect of the data was also found to resonate with a body of research within the executive coaching literature discussed in Chapters One and Two. Making connections between the primary data collected within this study and this body of research in relation to executive coach competencies was believed to help locate the data within this study within the broader context of executive coaching research. Through so doing it was believed to provide make a contribution to broadening existing competency models to represent some of the diversity of theoretical perspective within the executive coach literature in relation to executive coach competencies.

## **CRITICAL REALISM**

The research issue chosen in this study, and the choice of the data collection and analysis techniques seen as appropriate for addressing it, were inspired by the critical realist methodological perspective (Bhaskar, 2006, 2010; Fleetwood, 2011). The following sections present overviews of some of the key methodological arguments which influenced the data collection and analysis adopted in this study.

### **THE CRITICAL REALIST EMBRACE – IDENTIFICATION OF SYNERGIES BETWEEN DIFFERENT METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Bhaskar (2010) refers to three core, foundational premises of the critical realist methodology as the holy trinity of critical realism. They are defined as: ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgmental rationality. The first two premises, ontological realism and epistemological relativism, will be discussed before discussing their relationship to judgmental rationality later in this chapter. Bhaskar (2010) argues that whilst it may not be possible to perceive reality objectively (assumptions of epistemic relativism), an objective reality does exist beyond our understanding of it (assumptions of ontological realism). Or put slightly differently, Bhaskar (2010) suggests that critical realists believe that it is possible to hold assumptions of a mind-independent reality, alongside accepting that we may never be able to perceive this reality objectively.

The combination of objectivist ontological assumptions (ontological realism) and subjectivist epistemological assumptions (epistemic relativism) at the core of the critical

realist methodological argument can be understood through this being influenced by, but also departing from, other influential methodological arguments in a particular way. Bhaskar (2010) describes how critical realism originated from identifying synergies between methodologies influenced by positivism and those influenced by the hermeneutic or constructionist tradition. He believed that a sublation of the historical confrontation between positivist approaches and those from a hermeneutic tradition could serve to transcend the limitations and combine their merits.

Bhaskar (2010) uses the term '*the critical realist embrace*' to describe the belief that the critical realist methodological perspective combines different aspects of other methodological arguments:

*Critical realists can embrace the insights of the other positions and need not fear anything from them. Critical realists are welcome to join in, but so too are social constructionists, empiricists, neo-Kantians and any other variety of philosopher, social theorist and researcher. This could be called the critical realist embrace. (p 78)*

At the core of Bhaskar's (2010) argument is a belief that different methodological perspectives have strengths and limitations if they are used in isolation. He believes that these can be overcome if different aspects of them are combined, as the strengths of one perspective overcomes the limitations of another. Bhaskar (2010) explains that "*what critical realism tries to do is give a picture of the whole*" (p 78). He makes the following observation "*you realize that what all these different philosophical vantage-points are talking about is correct in so far as it goes, in so far as one focuses on one specific area of investigation or one moment of the total enquiry*" (p 78).

It can be seen that whilst critical realists believe that there is merit in both positivist and hermeneutic research perspectives, they believe that there are also significant flaws related to their having objectivist epistemological assumptions (positivist influenced research) or subjectivist ontological assumptions (hermeneutic and interpretivist research). In essence, while critical realists accept that there is a mind-independent objective reality, they query the pairing of this assumption with objectivist epistemological assumptions within research since they do not believe that assumptions associated with the implicit correspondence theory of truth, ones which are inherently connected to the holding of objectivist epistemological assumptions, are justifiable. Critical realists challenge the core

assumptions associated with the objectivist epistemological argument associated with positivist research, since they believe that it fails to acknowledge that knowledge is always conceptually mediated (Fleetwood, 2005).

Also, whilst critical realists support some of the arguments associated with subjectivist epistemological assumptions, through believing that our understanding of the world is conceptually mediated, they object to extending this argument to suggest that there is no mind-independent reality, an argument often found in social constructionist arguments. Fleetwood (2005) states:

*Critical realists, by contrast, are not forced to choose between an ontology exhausted by discourse, concepts, representations and heuristics or an empirical (naive) realist ontology that has no place for such entities. This is because critical realists are committed to an ontology that differentiates between different modes of reality, accepts the existence of a (non-empty) extra-discursive realm, and also allows for entities that are conceptually mediated. (p 199)*

Methodological arguments which are described by Fleetwood (2005) as denying the existence of an extra discursive realm, or a mind independent reality, are criticised by Bhaskar (2005) as committing an epistemic fallacy - where being is reduced to knowledge of being. Fleetwood (2005) acknowledges the value of discourse but believes that it is only part of the picture.

Bhaskar (2005) presents the argument for combining a realist ontology with subjectivist epistemological assumptions through suggesting that there are two dimensions of objects of scientific investigation. He calls for “*the necessity, accordingly to think of science in terms of two dimensions, the intransitive dimension of the being of objects of scientific investigation and the transitive dimension of socially produced knowledge of them*” (2005, p 1). The belief in the intransitive dimension of science, associated with the ontological realist assumptions of critical realism, resonates with the ontological argument typically accompanying positivist research. This argument suggests that there is a mind-independent reality, and that this reality does not change in response to our different understandings of it. Fleetwood (2005) observes that the critical realist arguments relating to transcendental realism are often misunderstood, and can be mistakenly associated with other types of realism, especially naïve realism. He states that:

*Critical realists accept fully that linguistic terms have no one-to-one relationship with observed phenomena; that language is not transparent; and that language is not a medium that allows us accurately to represent our perceived reality linguistically. For critical realists an entity is said to be real if it has causal efficacy; has an effect on behaviour; makes a difference. (p 199)*

Bhaskar (1975, 2010) also believes that the transitive dimension of science be acknowledged and represented in epistemological arguments. According to Bhaskar (2010) this involves a recognition that researchers' understanding of the world is conceptually mediated, evidenced by how peoples' understanding of the same phenomenon differs across cultures and historical epochs. He believes that this transitive dimension of science calls for researchers to recognise their social situatedness and that they are subject to social and psychological constraints that inhibit their ability to perceive reality objectively.

#### **THE TRANSCENDENTAL REALIST NOTION OF CAUSALITY**

One of the defining characteristics of critical realism which had a significant influence on the research design in this study is a particular logic for identifying causal influences on phenomena. There are two distinct, but interrelated, ways that the critical realist conception of causality differs from that which associated with research following hypothetico-deductive methods, which is at the core of much research influenced by positivism (Bhaskar, 2010). One key characteristic of the transcendental realist notion of causality which underpins critical realist analyses is that empirical or manifest behaviour can be explained by invisible generative mechanisms which are conceived by scientific reasoning alongside observation, a process termed retrodution. Alongside this notion of causality is an argument that calls for the acknowledgment that events, and manifest behaviour, occur in the context of open systems. This, according to critical realists, necessitates understanding that a multitude of possible causes may need to be taken into consideration when trying to ascertain causal influences on a phenomenon.

As argued earlier, Bhaskar (1975, 2005, and 2010) suggests that the strengths of positivist research can be combined with the strengths of constructionist research. He posits one of the strengths of positivist-influenced research relates to the intention to develop explanatory frameworks and to identify causal influences on phenomena. However he also suggests that there are limitations associated with the rationale for the method of

identifying causal influences associated with positivism and suggests an alternative – termed the transcendental realist conception of causality.

Although Bhaskar (1975, 2010) disagrees with the Humean concept of causality, which rests upon the identification of constant conjunction of events, he does not believe that the attempt to develop causal explanations of phenomena should be abandoned. Rather, he believes that there is a need to acknowledge that the identification of causal relationships between phenomena are more complex than the Humean conception suggests. Johnson and Duberley (2000) describe the key features of the transcendental notion of causality as identifying underlying generative mechanisms or powers which produce events. They believe that central to critical realism's project is the abstract identification of structures and mechanisms, which are not directly observable and underlie and govern the events of experience and hence explain why regularities occur.

Bhaskar (2010) calls the manner in which we can delve into apparent regularities between manifest phenomena and their antecedents so as to postulate underlying causal powers 'retroduction'. He defines retroduction as moving from a description of some given phenomenon to a description of a different type of thing – a mechanism of structure which either produces the given phenomenon or is a condition for it.

The following section discusses how the strategies that critical realists advocate following in order to develop explanatory frameworks of research phenomena outlined above were applied in this study.

#### **APPLYING CRITICAL REALIST NOTIONS OF CAUSALITY TO THE SET OF EXECUTIVE COACHING COMPETENCIES 'ENGENDERING EXECUTIVE REFLEXIVITY'**

One of the goals of critical realist inspired analyses of data is the development of explanatory frameworks, which propose causal relationships between different phenomena and their antecedents. Applying this strategy for the theorization of executive coach competencies was achieved through applying the logic of transcendentalist realist and open systems notions of causality to the data (Bhaskar, 1987, 1989, 1993, 1997, 1998, 2008, 2010 and Fleetwood, 2005, 2011).

The strategy for analysis of the data was to retroduce executive coach competencies as being causal influences which were pivotal in engendering changes in executives leading to their developing efficacious approaches to their problems. An attempt was made to identify

transcendentally real generative mechanisms through a rational approach of retroduction.

The data analysis within this study was also influenced by the critical realist belief in the necessity to consider the wide range of potential causal influences on phenomena which occur in open systems (Bhaskar, 2008, 2010). Bhaskar (2010) suggests that it is helpful to develop multi-perspective analyses, in order to recognise significant causal powers, which may not be realised in all situations, but can have a significant influence on phenomena. This inspired theorising the set of executive coach competencies as 'engendering executive reflexivity', differentiating sub-types of the competency from a multi-perspective vantage point.

The causal argument within the findings in this study is that the competencies of executive coaches to help executives practice reflexivity have a causal influence of helping engender changes in executives' understandings of their problems which could lead to their resolution. The data were analysed to suggest that when executives did not practice reflexivity towards their problems, they sustained the same approaches to them, which did not help their resolution. The coach competency to 'engender executive reflexivity' was seen as having a direct causal influence on equipping executives to practice reflexivity. Presenting this argument in relation to critical realist strategies for providing explanatory frameworks involves mapping nested levels of 'causes and consequences' within the argument.

This causal logic implicit within the theorisation of the set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' is shown in Figure 4.2 below.



An executive brings a problem to coaching

**The executive's sense-making about his/her problem is characterised by implicit assumptions of objectivity, indicating the executive believes that it mirrors reality**

**The executive is invited by their coach to read his/her experience through the same lens as himself, in the sense of **suspecting that the executive's sense-making is subject to the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes** (for example psychodynamic defences unconscious group processes self-limiting beliefs)**

The executive coach's sense-making about the executive's sense-making:

**The executive coach is sceptical of the objectivity of the executive's sense-making about his/her problem and reads it through a theoretical lens** (for example psychodynamics, systems psychodynamics or mainstream psychology)

**This provides a rationale for the executive to turn back to his/her sense-making and problematise implicit assumptions of objectivity within it**

**A space is opened for the consideration of alternative interpretations which can contribute to the executive resolving his/her problem**

*Figure 4-2: The causal logic associated with the executive coach competency 'engendering executive reflexivity'*

Executive coaches are argued to demonstrate the competency to 'engender executive reflexivity' when they help executives to become aware that their sense-making may be subject to psychological or psychosocial processes that are contributing to and sustaining their problems. This is because gaining these insights cause executives to turn back to

problematise assumptions that the understanding of their problems mirrors reality. This consequently opens a space for the executive to consider that alternative interpretations are valid, a process which result in the executive developing more efficacious approaches to the problems he/she sought to address during coaching.

The overall schema of the data analysis in this study in relation to nested levels of causality is as follows: At the start of a coaching engagement executives present problems that they are struggling to resolve on their own. The executive coach hypothesises that there is a causal influence of a psychological or psychosocial process of which the executive is unaware and that when influenced by a process, such as a psychodynamic defence, without their having awareness of this, an executive is likely to believe that that his/her sense-making mirrors reality – this results in the executive becoming embedded in his/her interpretation. It is argued that the first causal mechanism, which is an antecedent to reflexive practice, is the executive's gaining insight that his/her sense-making is subject to a process which causes bias whilst at the same time leading the executive to have a sense that their sense-making is objective. The analysis suggested that in helping the executives to gain this type of insight an executive coach triggered a process (a nested chain of causal influences) which resulted in the executive developing more efficacious approaches to his/her problem.

The reflexive process which executive coaches engender in executives is identified to begin with the executive problematising implicit assumptions of objectivity in his/her sense-making. This in turn, has a consequence of causing the executive to consider that alternative interpretations of their problem as valid. The final link within this causal argument is that as a consequence of practicing reflexivity executives can shift towards more efficacious approaches to their problems.

### **DETERMINING CAUSALITY IN OPEN SYSTEMS**

As stated earlier, whilst Bhaskar (2010) recognises the merits of the positivist focus on the identification of causal mechanisms, he sees limitations associated with the use of methods associated with hypothetico-deductive research to identify causal influences. One fundamental criticism he makes against positivist, hypothetico-deductivist research, is that it is based on assumptions of closed systems. The starting point for an open systems view of causality is the attempt to map a multiplicity of causal structures and mechanisms. Bhaskar (2010) states that:

*Almost all the phenomena of the world occur in open systems. That is to say, unlike the closed systemic paradigm, they are generated not by one, but by a multiplicity of causal structures, mechanisms, processes or fields. (p4)*

Bhaskar (1991) uses the term 'differences that makes a difference' to describe the difference between the logic implicit within closed systems and open systems conceptions of causality:

*Transcendental, (or as I have also called it, critical) realism makes possible a reformulation of the dusty old Greek action/contemplation contrast. There is a 'difference that makes a difference' between (a) 'it works because it's true', and (b) 'it's true because it works'....(a) gives the gist of applied explanations in open systems; (b) of theoretical corroborations in closed systems (nor is it the case that 'every difference must make a difference....for the same effect may be produced by a plurality of different (and even changing) structures or mechanism, just as the same structure (or mechanism) may generate a variety of different effects. (p 7)*

Bhaskar (2010) makes a persuasive case for the value of, and need for, an interdisciplinary approach to guiding interventions to resolve and prevent climate change, and to improve disability research (Bhaskar and Danemark, 2006). It is argued that given the complexity of open systemic-phenomena there is a need to identify a multiplicity of successive causes.

The cornerstone of the logic of open systems relates to the notion of many different possible causal influences on a phenomenon. One of the key parts of the argument is described by New (2003) who observes: *"causal powers may exist without their effects being realised in a particular context"* (p 71). Sayer (1992) also highlights the multiple possible causal influences on phenomena that social scientists try to study. He observes that *"social scientists are invariably confronted with situations in which many things are going on at once and they lack the possibility, open to many natural scientists, of isolating out to particular processes in experiments"* (p 3).

This open systems notion of causality can be seen to resonate with Holland's (1999) transdisciplinary notion of reflexivity and be considered as particularly appropriate for applying to research in the executive coaching field – a field which has a defining

characteristic of eclecticism in the theoretical approaches advocated to inform coach practice. Holland (1999) suggests that people have the potential to be influenced by a range of psychological and psychosocial processes included in mainstream psychology, psychodynamics and systems psychodynamics. He suggests that each of these perspectives can offer insights into processes which can be causally efficacious in people sustaining problems they find difficult to resolve. Holland's (1999) argument can be related to Bhaskar's (2010) open systems logic of there being a multitude of potential causal influences on a person's sense-making, which may or not be causally efficacious at different times as follows – people have the potential to be influenced by different psychological or psychosocial processes at different times which can cause their being blocked or frozen in their response to their problems. In order to counteract such negative influences people may need to practice different types of reflexivity.

### **JUDGMENTAL RATIONALITY**

The above argument will now be related to the third member of what Bhaskar describes as the holy trinity of critical realism - judgmental rationality. Al Amoudi and Willmott (2011) summarise the concept of 'judgmental rationality' as the ability to adjudicate between competing accounts. They believe that it is an *"optimistic stance that views some accounts of the world (in the transitive dimension) as better suited than others to capture its reality (the intransitive dimension)"* (p 42).

The assumption that people have the potential to adjudicate between competing accounts, the core feature assumption of judgmental rationality, has a particular resonance for the data collected in this study. The rationale for the interview questions is provided in the following section and was influenced by the critical realist assumption of the potential for judgmental rationality. In summary, the logic underpinning the interview design is that executives and coaches can adjudicate between sense-making that sustained problems and sense-making which contributed to their resolution.

Johnson and Duberley (2000) suggest that the critical realist argument for judgmental rationality can be improved by relating it to some of the core tenets related to pragmatism. They state:

*So for Bhaskar, the objective of a critical realist science is metaphorically to 'dig deeper' so as to identify these 'real' 'intransitive' essences, or 'causal powers', which lie behind*

*conceptually mediated (i.e. transitive) empirical patterns. Evidently he holds that although our knowledge of real underlying causal mechanisms and their empirical manifestation is inevitably socially constructed through our prior cultural preconceptions, they can be reliable and improved. (p 155)*

Whilst sharing an affinity with many of Bhaskar's beliefs, Johnson and Duberley (2000) suggest combining the philosophical arguments within pragmatism with critical realism to provide a criterion for how to judge which theories are better than others. They state that *"for pragmatic critical-realists a viable means of evaluating the veracity of cognitive systems and theories that avoids both relativism and objectivism, is through their practical success or failure"* (Johnson and Duberley 2000, p 162). They go on to state that *"this combination of pragmatism and critical realism supports the view that a correspondence theory of truth is ultimately unattainable because of the projective role of the epistemic subject"* (Johnson and Duberley 2000, p 162). Sayer (1992) also suggests the usefulness of considering truth concerning practice in the world as relating to practical adequacy. He states that *"to be practically adequate, knowledge must generate expectations about the world and about the results of our actions which are actually realised. It must also, as can eventually have insisted, 'subjectively intelligible and acceptable in the case of linguistically expressed knowledge'"*. (1992, p 169)

Whilst these are compelling arguments which have a strong resonance with the data in this study, a different epistemological argument is presented than those of both critical realism and pragmatism, since both are associated with and are located within solely subjectivist epistemological arguments.

As stated earlier, the epistemological argument in this study suggests that there is a combination of both subjectivist and objectivist assumptions underlying the theorisation of reflexivity underpinning this study. The rationale for this is discussed in the following section.

#### **EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS IMPLICIT WITHIN THIS STUDY**

As stated above, the critical realist methodological argument is typically defined in relation to solely subjectivist epistemological assumptions. Bhaskar (1975, 2010) argues that whilst there is a mind-independent reality which calls for holding objectivist ontological assumptions, there are constraints to our being able to gain objective knowledge of this

reality. He believes this calls for the critical realist methodological perspective being accompanied by a subjectivist epistemological argument - epistemic relativism.

The epistemological argument accompanying this study is that there is a paradoxical combination of both subjectivist and objectivist epistemological assumptions associated with the theorisation of the difference between being, and not being, reflexive. This dissonance between the epistemological arguments associated with critical realism and this study stem from seeking to emphasise the difference between two types of sense-making practices described in this study - those associated with being influenced by a psychological or psychosocial process and practicing reflexivity, or with being influenced by a psychological or psychosocial process without practicing reflexivity.

This motivation for presenting a different epistemological argument than critical realism resonates with an argument made by Taylor and White (2000) for epistemological arguments serving to emphasise a particular aspect of sense-making. Taylor and White (2000) describe how social constructionists (SC) seek to emphasise the consequences of being influenced by some psychosocial processes, such as norms, is being that our sense-making be better understood as socially situated. They state that *“social constructionism does not seek to deny that there are such things as grief, poverty, hunger, disease, genocide or a 'real world out there'. It declines to concern itself with the nature or essence of things (ontology), opting instead to focus on how we come to know about the world (epistemology)”* (2000, p 25)

The researcher wholeheartedly supports the argument outlined by Taylor and White (2000) above, and throughout their work, that when influenced by some processes such as cultural norms, sense-making is best understood as subjective. In this study there are two clear ways in which executives are argued to make sense of the world – through practising reflexivity and not practising reflexivity which is not accounted for in the critical realist epistemological argument which relates to the argument posited by Taylor and White (2000) about subjectivist epistemological assumptions helping to emphasise the social situatedness of one’s constructions.

It is believed that the subjectivist epistemological argument only stresses the consequence of being influenced by social and psychosocial processes without awareness, and not practising reflexivity. The researcher believes that the argument in this study which identifies the causal powers of reflexivity requires a different rationale for epistemological

assumptions than that associated with being influenced by psychological or psychosocial processes, such as cultural norms, when one does not practice reflexivity.

It is suggested that theories about the different consequences of being influenced by sense-making processes with or without awareness requires a nuanced epistemological argument than a purely subjectivist one. The crux of this argument relates to the critical realist notion of open systems causality and potential influences. As stated earlier, New (2003, cited in Cruikshank 2003 p 71) describes the principle of potential causal influences involved in open systems explanatory models thus: *“causal powers may exist without their effects being realised in a particular context”*. Within the theorisation of the distinction between being and not being reflexive presented throughout this study, it is assumed that *sometimes* one’s sense-making is influenced by processes which cause subjective sense-making. An example would be processes described in psychodynamics, mainstream psychology and systems psychodynamics without awareness, thus the causal power of reflexivity is not realised. At other times, if people are able to recognise their own subjectivity, a key part of practicing reflexivity, then in a sense they can be seen as demonstrating the ability to be objective about their own subjectivity.

It is suggested that whilst participants have the potential to be influenced by norms resulting in systemic prejudice without their awareness of this (subjective sense-making) they also have the potential to practise reflexivity and objectively identify this influence on their sense-making. This argument can be extended to suggest that the theory associated with practicing reflexivity underpinning this study has implicit objectivist epistemological assumptions, assumptions of the potential to accurately identify the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes on one’s sense-making (such as those described in psychodynamics, systems psychodynamics and mainstream psychology).

One motivation for suggesting that the core thesis of this study is underpinned by objectivist epistemological assumptions as well as subjectivist ones resonates with an observation made by Walby (2001, p 485) of the benefits of making bolder truth claims than are typically associated with subjectivist methodological arguments:

*Feminist analysis should be bolder about its truth claims, rather than re-treating into a defensive stance about partial knowledges. Science is not a mirror of nature (Rorty 1980), but neither is it a mirror of culture. Science is poised both in between and as a part*

*of each of these, and there is a need for concepts and metaphors that avoid the temptation of reductionism in either direction.*

It has been recognised by the researcher that there are dangers in associating methodological arguments with objectivist epistemological assumptions, described by Hacking (1999, cited in Cruikshank, 2003) as ‘escalator words’ where people have a reserve position of defending their core beliefs. However, it has been decided to acknowledge the combination of both subjectivist and objectivist epistemological assumptions implicit with the theorisation of the set of executive coach competencies ‘engendering executive reflexivity’ because it is believed that this helps to emphasise the significant contribution that executive coaches can make in helping executives to become aware of their own subjectivity – a contribution of helping executives to subject the knowledge claims implicit within their approaches to problems that sustain them to criticism. When helping executives to recognise that, rather than being objective, their sense-making is one of many alternative interpretations, executive coaches can be seen to help executives to recognise their subjectivity.

The next section relates the research activities of interviewing to the methodological argument presented thus far.

## **STRATEGIES FOR DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS**

As stated earlier, the strategy for research design in this study was influenced by critical realist notions of causality (Bhaskar, 1975, 2010). In this section, the influencing factors on the interview design and procedures followed in the interviews are described, before the overall logic of the interview is related to an argument by Alvesson (2003) about metaphors for interviews.

### **INTERVIEW DESIGN**

The semi-structured interview was chosen for this study and has characteristics of both structured and unstructured interview methods. The semi-structured interview was chosen since it was believed that it allowed for focusing on the topic of changes which were attributed to executives resolving their problem of but also allowed for divergence, and explorations of ideas related to this.

The rationale for the design of interview questions relates to what Hollway (2001) describes



as to elicit stories based on actual events in a person's life "*rather than opinions, rationalisations and generalisations which are the usual stuff of interviewbased research*" (p 15). The interview design can also be related to de Haan and Nieß's (2012) belief of the benefits of inquiring into the key factors of the coaching process:

*For understanding the impact and contribution of executive coaching interventions, we argue that it is not enough to just understand general effectiveness or outcome. We believe it is also important to inquire into the underlying coaching processes themselves, the active ingredients, from the perspectives of both clients and coaches, and, if possible, those of their organizational peers and sponsors as well. (p 199)*

A resonance with de Haan and Nieß's (2012) rationale for the focus of research is the identification of the active ingredients, from both the executive and executive coach's perspective and the rationale behind the research design for this study. The interview questions were designed to capture the experiences from both executives and executive coaches which contributed to the change process that helped executives to resolve problems they brought to coaching. It was believed that the data gathered from this type of questioning would allow theorising of coaching competencies from the application of the critical realist notion of causality to identify executive coach competencies which contributed to executives developing more efficacious approaches to their problems.

#### **INTERVIEW PROCEDURE**

The focus of the interviews with executive coaches was the same as executives but rather than talking about their own experiences, coaches were asked to share their accounts of the change process undergone by executives during coaching. The interview questions are shown in Figure 4.3 below:

**Questions to executive coaches**

Within the context of any executives you have coached where you feel the coaching process has contributed to them resolving a problem I would like to hear about:

How did the executive approach the problem before coaching when he/she presented it as a problem they were having difficulty resolving through other methods?

How did they approach it after coaching which led to you solving the problem or achieving better results?

**Questions to executives**

Were there any problem/problems that you feel the coaching process contributed to helping you resolve?

How did you approach the problem before coaching when you presented it as a problem you were having difficulty resolving through other methods?

*Figure 4-3: Semi-structured interview questions*

**LOCATING INTERVIEW DATA WITH THE NOTION OF THE REFLEXIVITY UNDERPINNING THIS STUDY**

Alvesson (2003) points out that many research methodology handbooks give the impression that if certain procedures are in place to avoid biases that researchers will be able to gain a rich account of “*the interviewee’s experiences, knowledge, ideas and impressions*” (p 13). He states:

*It is important not to simplify and idealize the interview situation, assuming that the interviewee – given the correct interview technique – primarily is a competent and moral truth teller acting in the service of science and revealing his or her “interior” (i.e. experiences, feelings, values) or the “facts” of the organization.*  
(p 14)

Alvesson (2003) describes the goal of his article as being to “*connect epistemology with field practices, as well as with social theory*” (p 14). He describes the intention of his paper as being to encourage a different way of considering the interview process. In particular, he highlights how social processes and sense-making processes, which maintain

inequalities of power and resources through reproducing discourses, can influence both the interviewer and participants during the interview process.

Alvesson (2003) sees the interview as a complex social event. He calls for researchers adopting a reflexive approach, which he defines as involving the consideration of various theoretical viewpoints, and when there are reasons for doing so, apply them. He suggests that without a theoretical understanding, any use of interview material risks being naive.

A metaphor that Alvesson (2003) uses that appears to be an appropriate metaphor for the interview scenario in this study is research participant as 'informant'. If the phrase 'serve science' in the quotation below was replaced by 'pass on truths about what has helped them resolve and prevent problems for themselves and others' then this would appear to represent the interview scenario in this study:

*Instead of viewing interviews as an expression of local dynamics, one may see the possibility of interviewees being capable of abstracting from local specificity. The scene always matters, but not necessarily in a very strong way. A counterpoint to the political metaphor could be to suggest that self-interest is not the sole motive for human beings and that, depending on the questions raised and the position taken by the interviewee, a want to serve science may dominate. The "informant" metaphor may be appropriate. (p 27)*

When applied to the data collection strategy adopted in this study it is concluded that the interview process can be categorised in relation to a category within Alvesson's (2003) typology of interview types termed 'informants' this is characterised by interview participants and researchers being able to represent their own and others' experiences without significant bias caused by being influenced by some psychological or psychosocial processes without their awareness. When specifically applied to this study it is argued that that both executives and their coaches are able to recognise and report changes which took place in their own or others' sense-making and be informants about such changes without significant bias.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Two kinds of data were used in this study, as it was exploratory and small scale. Primary data

were gathered from both executive coaches and executives who had received coaching. They all worked with organisations and they were all asked about executive coaching experiences. Thirteen executive coaches and five executives were interviewed. The selection of executive coaches and executives was through purposive sampling (Creswell, 2003). Creswell (2003) describes purposive sampling, as a strategy that is adopted by researchers to identify participants who can give access to a particular type of data. Potential participants were presented in advance with the overall goal of the interview to check that they were able to present specific cases where they believe the coaching process helped them to resolve a problem. Four of the interviews with executive coaches were not included in the final data analysis, since despite their originally agreeing that they could share their experience of resolving specific problems brought to coaching, they were reluctant in the interview to provide specific examples of changes that they believed helped the executives they coached resolve problems.

As discussed earlier, the qualitative interview was used in semi-structured form. This meant that participants were allowed to share the experiences which they believed to be relevant although not necessarily directly related to the interview questions whilst at the same time answering structured questions. Interviews combined face to face and telephone interviews, the duration ranging from forty-five minutes to ninety minutes or more. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and then analysed using the framework described in the data analysis section.

## **SECONDARY DATA**

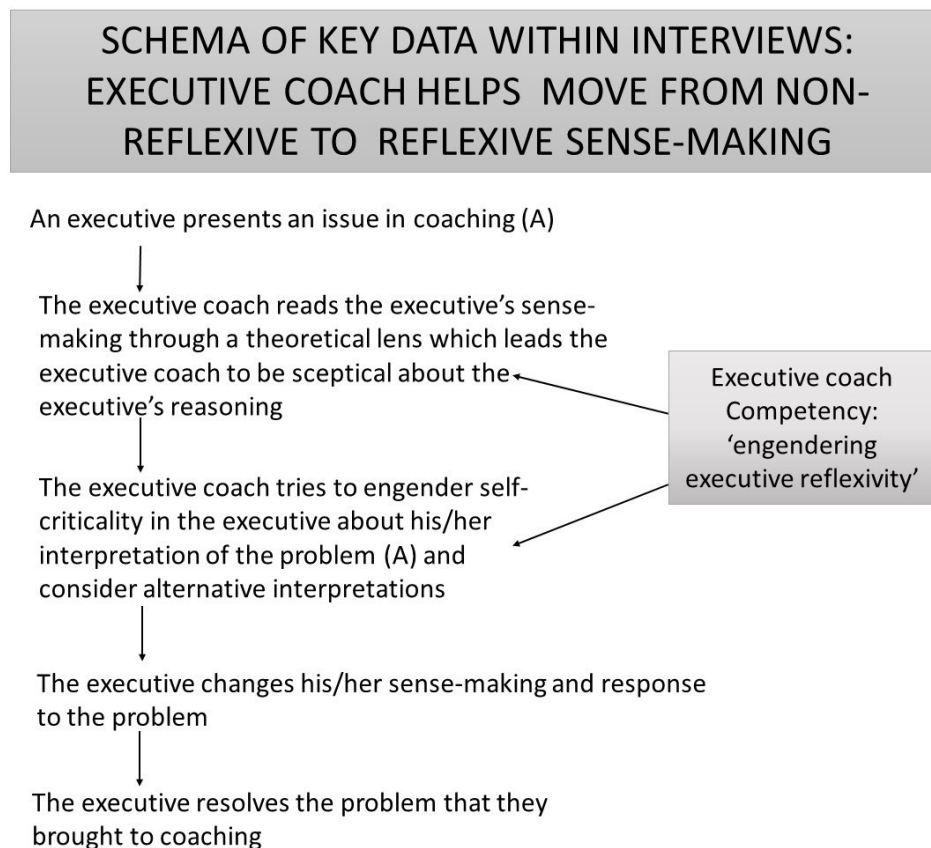
Two case studies from the executive coaching literature were used to complement primary data (Kilburg, 2004b, Peterson, 2005). In each stage of the research the researcher wanted to draw a connection between case studies in the literature and the primary data that she collected. In the first phase of the study, the researcher chose a case (Peterson, 2005) that she believed had a strong resonance with an interview she had analysed suggesting a particular shift in constructive development. In the second phase of the research the researcher chose a case that had a strong resonance with the data which were analysed as suggesting that executive coach educational competencies contributed to executives practicing reflexivity (Kilburg, 2004b).

She had previously analysed case studies from the literature for other research dissertations and believed that this could provide informative data which could

complement the primary data used in this exploratory study.

## DATA ANALYSIS

It was outlined earlier in this chapter how the goal of data analysis in this study was to identify causal mechanisms related to the coaching competency - 'engendering executive reflexivity'. A broad theoretically informed coding framework was used. This was based on the theorisation of the difference between practising, and not practising, reflexivity outlined in Chapter Three. Figure 4.4 shows the coach competency of 'engendering executive reflexivity'; as it was conceptualised for data analysis purposes.



*Figure 4-4: Schema of data within interviews*

### CODING CATEGORIES

Three broad coding categories were used which sought to distinguish between three different types of sense-making seen as indicative of either not practising reflexivity, or the two different steps involved in practicing reflexive sense-making as follows:.

1. Non-reflexive sense-making

Indication of the lack of problematisation of assumptions of objectivity within sense-making

about a problem

2. Step one of reflexive sense-making

Indication of the problematisation of assumptions of objectivity within sense-making about a problem

3. Step two of reflexive sense-making

Indication of the consideration of alternative interpretations than those that sustain the problem.

To distinguish between three scenarios, colours were used when coding transcripts. Yellow was used to indicate non-reflexive sense-making (where the executives do not problematise assumptions of their original sense-making). Blue was used when the data related to step one of reflexivity (participants problematising assumptions of their original sense-making). Step two of reflexivity is defined as involving participants considering alternative interpretations which lead to problem solving sense-making. This type of data was coded in green.

Figure 4.5 depicts the colour coding of the three categories of sense-making underpinning the distinction between being, and not being, reflexive.

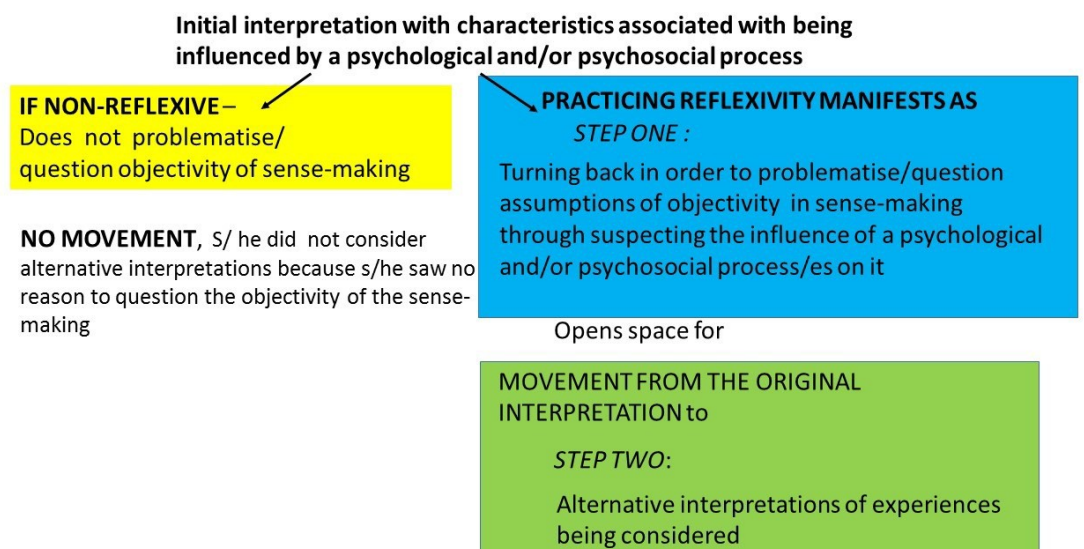


Figure 4-5: Coding with colours to distinguish between different types of sense-making

## PERSONAL INFLUENCES

Etherington (2005, p 31) believes that researcher reflexivity *“is the capacity of researchers to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry”*. She believes that this self-conscious awareness of how personal experiences and social situatedness of the researcher influences the research and contributes towards transparency, a characteristic that she believes contributes to rigour in qualitative research. In this section some key personal and social influences which the researcher reflected influenced her approach to the study are outlined to help locate the study within her personal and social context. In particular the researcher describes social influences and contexts which helped the researcher herself develop reflexivity which she believes had a significant influence on her data analysis. Some of the key social influences on her, identified as arising from informal and formal education, are discussed in this section. The first person voice has been used to describe these experiences.

It was described in Chapter Three how the notion of reflexivity adopted in this study was influenced by a type of informal education process that took place through interactions between myself and academic practitioner colleagues. Further reflection, related to the topic of the social influences on this study, led to recognising similar influences in my early education. One influence in secondary education in particular resonated with the influence of informal education during this study - a sociology teacher who was very influenced by critical and emancipatory theories in education. The teacher believed that having access to the insights from sociology could have the empowering outcome of helping students move towards feelings of self-respect, equality and self-efficacy when confronted by oppressive social practices. Put slightly differently, this early academic mentor believed that without insights from critical sociology, people would be vulnerable to social processes which serve to reproduce systemic inequality.

The self-reflective process undergone to locate the study in relation to significant personal influences led to becoming more aware of the role that gaining insights from people who were impacted by similar theories which influenced their ethical stances played throughout my life. One such experience occurred at the start of this research process. It was the early stages of the study and I was excited about choosing the aim of my study. I talked with passion about what I wanted to study and how I wanted to conduct my research. My (then)

Director of studies and supervisor then started sharing their own ideas to each other about what they believed were appropriate research questions and also their opinions on the most appropriate method of inquiry. The supervision continued along these lines for a while, with the two supervisors getting more and more animated as they sparked off each other's ideas. On reflection, I felt somewhat excluded from the conversation since I was not aware of many of the theories and methodological perspectives that inspired them.

Suddenly one of my supervisors stopped and turned to me. In essence he said 'You seem to have become a little withdrawn. Is it because we are two male members of the academy? Are you feeling oppressed about sharing your ideas?' Before he asked this question I had not actually noticed the change in how I was feeling and acting. But being asked this question by my supervisor helped me to realise that my attitude and behaviour had changed significantly throughout the meeting. Reflecting back on the situation, I could see that to begin with I spoke with confidence, authority and enthusiasm. As the meeting progressed, I became more passive, and listened silently as the supervisors turned to each other and focused the discussion between themselves. I was able to recognise that I had become quite disengaged from the meeting.

The supervisor's intervention was to offer all of us in the supervision meeting a lens through which to interpret what had led to such a dramatic change in my behaviour and attitude. It helped us recognise the possibility of their oppressive behaviour, however unintentional. At this time, I was not familiar with the notion of reflexivity adopted in this study, however later reflections have led me to conclude that the supervisors were trying to practice reflexivity. We have since discussed this incident within the early stage of supervision as having been crucial to helping me have an unacknowledged sense of academic inferiority, having little confidence in my own insights, and having a sense of dependency on academic superiors.

In later supervision sessions, the supervisor revealed how he had been influenced by arguments, such as those expressed by Turney (2009) about feminism. Turney (2009) states:

*Feminism is a political movement which aims to challenge and overturn inequalities between the sexes. Feminists have argued that women have been historically socially negated and marginalized as a consequence of patriarchy, a system which*



*privileges and perpetuates male domination, understands women as 'the Other', and thus constructs and maintains their position as submissive. Although there are arguments amongst feminists about what constitutes patriarchy and the specific site of women's oppression, there is a generally held belief that its axis lies with patriarchal society. (p 9)*

Turney's (2009) argument highlights how there are two types of social process which are related to feminist arguments. One type of social process that related to patriarchal oppression is seen to have negative consequences. Another type of social process, related to feminism, can be seen as having more beneficial outcomes. Turney (2009) believes that in seeking to engender societal changes which will help to expose and challenge oppressive practices associated with maintaining patriarchal status quo *"Feminism can therefore be seen as occupying an oppositional or marginal position, attempting to challenge and change that which is considered to be the 'norm'"* (p 9). On reflection, I believe that my experiences could be understood as being socially situated within a discourse of the potential for emancipatory practices, and what Turney (2009) describes as *"challenging and changing that which is considered to be the 'norm' of oppressive academic practices"* (p 9).

As outlined earlier, the decision to locate this thesis with an epistemological argument as having both subjectivist and objectivist epistemological assumptions, stems from believing that the distinctions between being, and not being, reflexive, underpinning this study relate to very different types of sense-making. It is argued that reflexive sense-making is distinguished from non-reflexive sense-making through the former, being aware of the subjective nature of sense-making when influenced by some psychological and psychosocial processes. It was highlighted that confessing anything other than a belief in the objective reality of processes described in mainstream psychology, psychodynamics, systems psychodynamics would be disingenuous, because reflection on personal experiences had led me to believe that the application of insights into these processes consistently led to resolving and preventing problems.

One very significant experience was influenced by gaining and applying insights from systems psychodynamics. It has been decided not to include these experiences because it would be difficult to protect the anonymity of the people related to the experience. In essence, gaining insights from systems psychodynamics (for example French and Simpson, 2014; Broussine and Ahmad, 2012; Armstrong, 2000) led to improving a relationship in my

personal life that had been fraught with difficulties. I found myself constantly frustrated that I was unable to act and communicate in the supportive way that I was typically able to do in other relationships. Despite being very motivated to be supportive, I found myself being very critical and judgmental. After watching colleagues apply insights from systems psychodynamics, particularly those related to scapegoating (Hirschhorn, 1990), I found myself able to recognise systemic influences on my relationship and develop strategies for expressing my support as I so wanted. In particular, it helped me to develop resourcefulness to counteract the pull towards scapegoating a particular person in the system. This had a deeply transformational effect on the relationship, improving it significantly.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This research design in this study was strongly influenced by critical realist notions of causality (Bhaskar, 2006, 2010). This inspired collecting data which could be subject to an analysis involving the identification of causal relationships between executive coach competencies and changes in executives which are believed to contribute to their resolving problems.

It has been discussed how, although the research strategy in this study was influenced by critical realism, the overall argument is situated with a slightly different argument for epistemological assumptions than that typically associated with critical realism. Whereas the critical realist methodological argument is typically associated with subjectivist epistemological assumptions, a different epistemological argument accompanies the application of critical realism in this study – a combination of both subjectivist and objectivist epistemological assumptions. This is argued to be needed to account for the differences between epistemological assumptions associated with reflexive and non-reflexive sense-making.

In the following chapter the data analysis and findings in the First Phase of the study is presented.

# **CHAPTER FIVE: PHASE ONE OF THE STUDY: CONSTRUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT**

## **OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER**

This chapter begins by providing an overview of the theoretical perspective which informed the first phase of the data analysis, the Constructive Development Model (CDM) (Kegan 1980, 1982, 1994). This is followed by discussing an example of a piece of research in the executive coaching literature by Laske and Maynes (2002) which inspired the early data analysis in this study. The researchers' analysis of case study data within the executive coaching literature, inspired by the CDM informed analysis that Laske and Maynes (2002) included in his research, is then provided. An example of the analysis of an interview in the primary data in the first phase of the study is provided towards the end of the chapter to illustrate the type of executive coach competencies that were identified when the data analysis was informed by the CDM. The chapter concludes by outlining the factors that influenced the decision to change the main theoretical framework used to inform the data analysis.

## **THE CONSTRUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT MODEL**

The first phase of data analysis in this study was influenced by a sub-group of research in the executive coaching literature (Laske, 1999, 2000, Laske and Maynes, 2002 and Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002 and Bluckert, 2006). In this research researchers advocate executive coach interventions that help accelerate the natural process of constructive development described by (CDM) (Kegan 1980, 1982, 1994). At the core of this research is a belief that valuable competencies for executive coaches are those which equip their making interventions which accelerate the executive's natural constructive development process. Helping to accelerate executives' shifting from one developmental stage to another is believed to contribute to executives understanding their problems differently and responding to them more efficaciously within this body of research.

Kegan (1980, 1982, 1994) suggests that there are significant differences between the default orders of meaning in adults which can be understood as indicators of different levels of constructive development. He believes the distinguishing characteristics of different stages of development are indicated by the combination of the particular types of

assumptions within a person’s sense-making which are invisible to him/her. Kegan (1994) developed a heuristic framework to guide the differentiation of different orders of consciousness by making connections between them and the defining characteristics of historical eras (see Table 5.1 below)

<b>Developmental stage 3</b>	<b>Developmental stage 4</b>	<b>Developmental stage 5</b>
Socialised mind	Self-authoring mind	Self-transforming mind
Traditionalism	Modernism	Post-modernism
Influenced by internalised group values	Self-authorship	Acknowledging and accepting plurality and contradictions in self and others
Group loyalty	Personal responsibility	Able to take a systems view
Passivity – believing future is dependent on external factors (Dependent employees)	Ownership of ideas and work (Independent employees)	Interpenetration of ‘selves’
Looking to external sources for the ‘Right Answers’ to all kinds of problems (Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002)	Ability to act independently from traditions and habits Assertiveness	Inter-individuation Self-transformation

**Table 5-1: Distinctions between adult developmental stages in the Constructive Development Model (Kegan, 1994)**

Kegan (1994) identifies the defining characteristic of the socialised mind (the third stage of development), and traditionalism as strong identification with the social group and group loyalty. This characteristic is defined by Berger and Fitzgerald, (2002) as people looking to external sources for the right answers to all kinds of problems. Kegan (1994) labels the fourth stage of development as modernism. He defines the significant characteristic of modernist sense-making as having a self-authoring mind, taking personal responsibility and a preference for own ideas and acting independently of traditions and habits. The postmodernist fifth order of meaning is believed by Kegan (1994) to involve people being able to accept plurality and contradictions within themselves and others. He also believes

that indicators of a person's constructive development having reached developmental stage 5 are their having insights into their interdependence with other aspects of a system.

It is suggested by Kegan (1980, 1982, 1994) that adult constructive development involves moving from one order of consciousness to another. Kegan (1994) suggests that every shift in constructive development is characterised by being able to detach from, and critically examine, particular assumptions in sense-making which were previously invisible to the person. Bluckert (2006) describes this aspect of development as *"the ability to step back and reflect on something that used to be taken for granted yet now enters our consciousness in a way that allows us to make new decisions about it"* (p 81).

Research by Laske and Maynes (2002) advocating executive coach interventions which help accelerate executives' constructive development, as described in the CDM (Kegan, 1980, 1982, 1994), which had a significant influence on the early data analysis, is discussed in the following section below.

#### **A WORKED EXAMPLE OF RESEARCH ADVOCATING COACH INTERVENTIONS WHICH ACCELERATE CONSTRUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Laske and Maynes (2002) believe that the notion of constructive development associated with the CDM can offer valuable insights to executive coaches. They advocate that such insights can contribute to executive coaches' gaining the competency to help catalyse a natural process of constructive development that leads to shifts in meaning-making for executives – a process which results in executives developing more efficacious approaches to their problems. Encountering the application of the CDM to the identification of executive coach competencies in research by Laske (1999, 2000), Laske and Maynes, (2002); Berger and Fitzgerald (2002) and Bluckert (2006) had a significant influence on the early data analysis in this study. In this section one piece of research by Laske and Maynes (2002) which is indicative of this type of influence is discussed.

Laske and Maynes (2002) provide a vignette of a coaching process which they believe serves to illustrate the benefits of executive coaches having insights into constructive development as outlined in the CDM, and the competency to accelerate constructive development in executives. They argue that one way that executive coaches can help executives to resolve some of their problems they seek to address in coaching is by helping them to shift to a higher order of meaning-making, as specified in the CDM. The authors provide an example of how insights from the CDM can be useful in informing executive

coach practice. An executive is reported as having sought to address a problem during coaching which related to his experience of conflict with his CEO. The executive is described as not sharing the same values as the CEO. As a result of this, he finds difficulty in integrating his department with the rest of the organisation. The executive was reported as disapproving of the operating style of the new president – believing it to be tactical rather than strategic:

*I had a tremendous amount of conflict in my own head and when we moved reporting-wise from the manager of old to the new manager. The new management clearly didn't want to take the time to understand why we were doing what we are doing on the research side. They wanted to change everything. (p 710)*

Laske and Maynes (2002) propose that the executive will improve both his and his organisation's performance if he is able to use a different approach to the problem. Laske and Maynes (2002) perceive that the executive should change his behaviour in order for the executive to integrate his department with the other departments successfully. By shifting his developmental stage of meaning-making from that associated with modern sense-making to that of postmodern sense-making by Kegan (1994), Laske and Maynes (2002) believe that the executive will be able to change the current way that he understands the cause of the problem. They state:

*Steve is presently at a level of mental growth where he follows a selfauthored theory-in use (subject-object stage 4). As a manager he is able to follow his own value system, but unable to critically assess the generator of his own governing variables. It is a challenge for him to understand phenomena in the context of larger organizing forms, which requires taking multiple perspectives, and grasping the limits of the separateness of organizational functioning. (p 709)*

Laske and Maynes (2002) believe that an executive coach can help the executive by catalysing his shifting from the fourth to fifth order of meaning-making. According to Laske and Maynes (2002) such a shift will induce the executive to be able to be critical of his own behaviour, realizing how it has a potentially negative effect on the system. Also such a shift is identified by Laske and Maynes (2002) as helping the executive to recognise that he is

holding contradictory values – one value relates to his wanting to contribute to the success of the company whereas the other is evident in his negative judgment of the CEO’s operational strategy. They observe that the executives’ current developmental stage *“points to a vulnerability in grasping and enacting transformational change in a developmental direction, both regarding himself and his unit”* (p 709). Laske and Maynes (2002) believe that the *“executive’s embeddedness in a closed value system obscures his awareness of the thought/action gap that separates his espoused theory of cooperation from his theory in-use of winning”* (p 709). They believe that helping the executive to recognise the gap between one of his espoused high-level values, co-operation, and the value evident in his theory of use would help him have a more complex understanding of himself and his values.

Laske and Maynes (2002) reported the executives’ own reflections on the transformations which he underwent through coaching that led to his resolving problems related to the relationship with his CEO. The executive was reported as concluding that *“most of the conscious impact of my coaching work has been on managing up, and figuring on what’s going around me and my unit”* (p 710). He was reported as continuing to reflect that *“the influence of the coaching has been more on understanding the impact of the way we function here, or the way I function, relative to what’s really important here, which is the surrounding environment and the upward communication, whereas my preference would be to say: ‘look, boss, we have a piece of work to do’”* (p 710).

The executives’ own reflections on how the coaching process helped him to change were interpreted by Laske and Maynes (2002) as indicating that the coaching process helped the executive to shift to higher constructive developmental stage during coaching. Through helping the executive to shift from the fourth to the fifth order of meaning, the executive coach was perceived to contribute to helping the executive access his innate cognitive resources to recognise his interdependence with different aspects of the system.

An example will be presented in the following section of how the researcher attempted to follow the methodology of Laske and Maynes (2002), described above, of applying a CDM inspired analysis to an executive coaching case study.

#### **A CDM-INSPIRED ANALYSIS OF A CASE STUDY WITHIN THE EXECUTIVE COACHING LITERATURE**

An example is given in this section of CDM-inspired analysis that the researcher applied to

a case study in the literature about a successful coaching engagement (Peterson, 2005) during the early stages of the data analysis of this study. Within Peterson's (2005) study, an excerpt is provided where the executive reflects on the significant personal transformation which she underwent during coaching – a transformation that she attributes to her adopting new, and efficacious approaches to a problem she brought to coaching. She reflected on the changes she went through in the coaching process thus:

*At a certain point in everyone's growth, you have to transition from the standard set of tools you have always been using for a different set of tools. You have to learn to use different parts of your brain and stretch your comfort zone. That is what David (her coach) did for me: It was that realization – that I needed to go and reflect and go outside my comfort zone to jar myself out of how I had always done things. I had created my own snare. I was blaming my management for not giving me new opportunities, but the reality was that I was not creating them for myself. I was not allowing myself to move forward. (Peterson, 2005, p 30)*

The executive reported that her approach to her problem before coaching as blaming her management for her not having the opportunities to develop. When the CDM-inspired analysis was applied to the executive's description of her sense-making about her problem it resulted in identifying that when the executive's sense-making was influenced by third order of consciousness she experienced problems in relation to believing that she was not achieving opportunities to develop. An indication of this was identified from how the executive described how she believed that her ability to resolve her problems was dependent upon others changing their behaviour. This passive approach to problem solving was identified as being a defining feature of being embedded in the third level of constructive development, a type of sense-making that Kegan (1980, 1982 and 1994) associates with traditionalist historical eras.

The executive described how the executive coaching process led to her develop a proactive approach to her problem, one of blaming others less and taking more responsibility for creating her own opportunities. This transformation which the executive attributed to her developing a more efficacious approach to her problem was analysed as indicative of her shifting to the fourth stage of development – a stage of development which is associated with practicing self-authorship as well as increased self-responsibility and assertiveness.



In the following section an example of the analysis of interview data which was performed at the beginning of the study is presented. The analysis aimed to identify whether or not the changes that they made towards their problems which executives reported as leading to their resolving them related to constructive developmental shifts.

### **AN EXAMPLE OF EARLY DATA ANALYSIS INFLUENCED BY THE CDM IN PHASE ONE OF THE STUDY**

In this section the analysis of one interview is presented to illustrate the early analysis of the data during Phase One of the study. The interview was interpreted as indicating that changes an executive made towards his problem during coaching could be understood in relation to his shifting to a higher stage of constructive development.

When asked if she could describe any coaching engagements which she believed resulted in an executive being able to resolve a problem brought to coaching an executive coach described that she found there was a common type of transformation that executives' underwent during coaching which she observed during her coaching of a range of clients. The key change was described as executives realising that they had more choices than they realised. The executive coach observed that:

*As a broad thing everyone I coach, whatever they come with, and that might be someone I see regularly or someone I meet for the first time, however they present, or whatever they present with, what I've found in huge amounts coaching is that it's always brought down to where they're not taking responsibility for something - whether that's a choice in their life are not taking a choice or whatever so the combination of coaching out used everyone in the end is... okay so there's something or some stuff where you've not realised... they've got all choices but they've also either not realised they've got a responsibility... or they're not choosing to look at the responsibility because they want to blame it on something else or someone else. Like the analogy of catching a cold because I sat next to someone they had a cold and I sat in a chair, or whatever, so that's really the premise of all the coaching.*

When the notion of shifts in meaning-making was applied to this section of the interview it was analysed to suggest that the executive coach found that many executives achieved

beneficial changes through shifting from what Kegan (1994) terms a traditionalist frame of meaning to a modernist one, a shift also described as moving from the third to the fourth order of consciousness. This shift is characterised as resulting in the development of self-authorship rather than looking to external sources for solutions to problems.

During the interview, the coach provided a few detailed examples of coaching engagements to illustrate her observation that a common transformation in executives which led to their resolving their problems was their recognising that they had opportunities for greater self-authorship. In the first example she describes a scenario where an executive experienced problems stemming from his feeling that he was too busy. The executive coach described the scenario as follows:

*A very practical pragmatic example would be chief executive in the north-east of a busy healthcare organisation and when I arrived and I looked at him he looked absolutely knackered ....big grey rings under his eyes and he felt really tired and... and... I just said to him.... I always start with everyone by saying: 'how's it going?'" because I always know when I meet people how it's going by just feeling and looking at them and he just said "oh it's really busy"... blah blah blah blah... which is what they usually say.. and then the next question for me is "so why is it so busy and why are you why are you reacting in this way that it's busy?" Because actually everyone says that jobs busy doesn't matter whether you work in a coffee shop wherever you work it's a kind of common parlance people say oh I'm busy or it's so busy. Then he said well my diary is always really fully booked, there's just no space with this that and the other. So I say to him since when did you not take responsibility for your own diary? And then he said well you know my secretary puts this in saying the director of such and such....and she puts things in. Then we always have to have this that and the other. So then I keep pushing down that route so I might say.... I've said things to him like so what choices are you not making and what choices are you making?*

The question that the executive coach reports repeatedly asking the executive, 'what choices are you not making?', was analysed as being a catalyst to helping the executive to

shift towards developing self-authorship, meaning-making associated with the fourth stage of development in the CDM. This question raised by the coach was analysed as being pivotal in exposing the implicit assumptions within the executive's sense-making which appeared to be invisible to him - assumptions of his busyness being beyond his control and being determined by external forces. Later in the interview, the executive coach described how the executive came to realise that he had made choices without being aware of it which influenced his understanding of the problem. She paraphrased the executive's reflections as follows:

*Ok well I'm not making a choice to take any responsibility for my diary, em, I'm not taking any responsibility, any choices to take responsibility for my PA and the way she puts appointments in and soon*

The coach reported how this led to talking through a range of things where the executive wasn't taking responsibility. She described how he moved from 'taking it as read' that his busyness was out of his control to realising that he had opportunities to make changes which could help him fulfil his role more successfully. She noted that her interventions led his beginning to become aware that he had more choices available to him than he had realised:

*He started to see he has more choice than he imagines. He was just taking it as read as it were already his realising hasn't taken responsibility for briefings secretary and top team about his diary and already his realising set within that there comes much more opportunity for him in the way that he has choices in his working week.*

The contribution of executive coach competencies to helping the executive shift his response to his problem was analysed in relation to the CDM as her accelerating the executive's constructive development. The executive coach was identified as achieving this through her helping expose the hidden assumptions relating to the executive's sense-making about his busyness and subjecting them to critical inquiry. Such interventions by the executive coach were identified as leading to the executive recognising he had the power to influence his diary, and therefore his busyness. The executive coach was deemed to have significant competencies related to helping the executive to shift to a higher constructive

developmental stage through helping the executive to dis-embed, and detach from his sense-making associated with the third stage of development and shift towards the fourth stage of development.

### **THE DECISION TO CHANGE THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE INFORMING THE DATA ANALYSIS**

At the beginning of the analysis of data using the Constructive Development Model (CDM) (Kegan, 1980, 1982, 1994) the researcher believed that this model offered insightful analysis of the data. Also, during the early stage of data analysis the researcher was offered the opportunity to conduct a workshop with five trainee executive coaches, where she presented the CDM model and gained feedback from the trainee coaches about whether or not they found this model offered a useful interpretation of their experiences. After the presentation of the CDM model, the trainee coaches were asked if they could provide examples of any coaching encounter where the change process, which appeared to help contribute to the executive resolving their problems brought to coaching, resonated with a shift in a constructive developmental stage. Four of the five coaches present at the workshop provided the researcher with an example of changes that took place in an executive's sense-making during their coaching practice which resonated could be interpreted as signifying that the coaching process helped the executive to shift to a higher constructive developmental stage.

However, later, when attempting to interpret the data in relation to developmental shifts outlined in the CDM, the researcher encountered a particular type of data which provoked her having a crisis of confidence in the appropriateness of using the CDM to analyse some of the data. In seven interviews, research participants identified the critical antecedent of executives developing more efficacious approaches to their problems was executive coaches inviting them to consider that their sense-making was subject to the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes which caused bias.

The researcher came to wonder whether or not the executive coach competencies related to helping executives to apply insights about their sense-making being subject to the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes coach could be understood as helping executives to develop in a different way than that associated with the CDM. The core premise of the CDM is that the shifts in meaning making could have happened naturally over a lifetime without any specific educational interventions. The researcher believed that

there was an alternative interpretation of the data than that which arose from applying the concept of the CDM - that executive coaches catalysed a process of cognitive development which could have occurred naturally, albeit more slowly, without the educational intervention. The researcher considered the possibility that without educational interventions by executive coaches, executives may have never, naturally over the course of their lifetime, considered the influence of unconscious group processes, psychodynamic defences, or processes related to cognitive structuring on their sense-making – insights which were described in the data as being pivotal insights contributing to executives being able to resolve their problems.

Since the researcher believed there was no way to decisively answer the question as to whether the transformations in executives' sense-making related to the type of development theorised in the CDM, a decision was made to abandon some of the data analysis that was tightly coupled with the notion of shifts in constructive developmental stages.

The researcher has reflected that the data collected in this study led to the researcher undergoing significant intellectual transformation to make sense of it. As the data analysis progressed, and the researcher became more immersed in the data, she found herself beginning a journey that she had not anticipated, the journey towards becoming an interdisciplinary researcher. An overview of the evolutionary process is described in the following section.

#### **THE RESEARCHER'S JOURNEY TOWARDS DEVELOPING MULTI-THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE SENSITIVITY TO THE DATA**

One of the defining characteristics of the executive coaching literature has been identified as the broad range of theoretical perspectives that coaches describe as informing their practice (Kilburg, 2006; Tooth, 2012). At the beginning of the study the researcher interpreted the distinctions between different theoretical perspectives included within research in the executive coaching literature as executive coaches' response to the pressure to distinguish their coaching offering from others in a rapidly growing field. She interpreted executive coaches' aligning their practice with particular theoretical perspectives as indicative of their desire to brand themselves in a particular way. Through holding this opinion the researcher initially responded to parts of interviews which referenced coaches' practice being informed by a particular theoretical perspective within

her analysis as being indicative of the executive coach's branding process and irrelevant for theorising executive coach competencies.

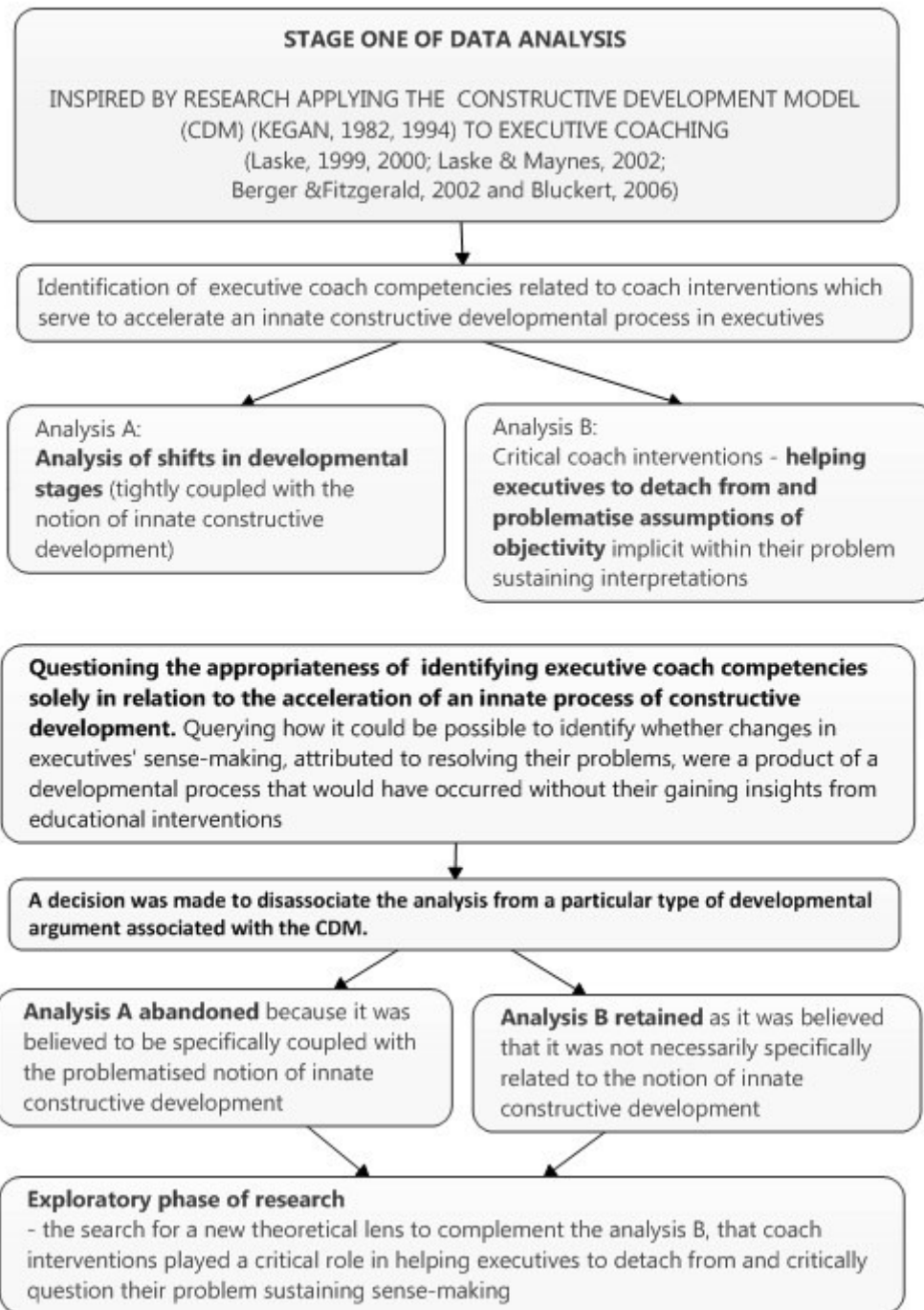
As the researcher became more immersed in the data, after repeatedly listening to recordings of interviews, she found herself becoming more sensitive to the conviction with which some of the participants spoke about the beneficial consequences of executives gaining insights into psychological and psychosocial processes described in theoretical perspectives, for example cognitive structuring, personality theories and systems psychodynamics. Further immersion in the data led the researcher to become open to the possibility that different theoretical perspectives, referenced in interviews as informing executive coach interventions, should be understood as more significant than their representing artifices of executive coach branding.

The researcher had previously had minimal exposure to some of the theoretical perspectives referenced in the data, particularly the systems psychodynamics perspectives, and drew inspiration from the interview data to gain a deeper familiarisation with it. In the interview data three respondents reported having breakthroughs in their problems through being invited by their executive coaches to consider that their problem-sustaining sense-making was subject to psychosocial processes described in systems psychodynamic perspectives - unconscious group processes (Armstrong, 2000). To the researcher's great surprise when she considered the possibility of unconscious group processes influencing her own sense-making, in such a way to cause her have strong negative emotional responses towards someone, this led to her having a breakthrough with a longstanding personal problem of her own.

The researcher has since reflected that the data led to a profound intellectual transformation being experienced by the researcher. Encountering alternative reasoning in the data about the significance of the theoretical perspectives informing executive coach practice surfaced the researcher's prejudice which had previously resulted in her dismissing theoretical differences associated with executive coach practices being indicative of their attempts to brand themselves in a particular way. Through becoming open to the research participants' reasoning that the theoretical perspective which informed the executive coach's practice was pivotal to the executive gaining insights about the negative influence of psychological and psychosocial processes on their sense-making which had been hitherto been hidden to them, the researcher came to transform her response not only to the data,

but to executive coaching research in general. The researcher came to believe to be faithful to the data she needed to increase her understanding of a range of theoretical perspectives described in the data and literature and attempt a multi-theoretical analysis of the data since this was seen as necessary to afford her acknowledging theoretical influences informing executive coach practices in relation to executive coach competencies.

In Figure 5.1 below, a schematic flow diagram is provided to illustrate the key influences for transitioning from first phase of the data analysis, based on the CDM, towards the second one, informed by Holland's (1999) transdisciplinary notion of reflexivity. The decisions which led the researcher to abandon parting of the data analysis inspired by the CDM while retaining other parts of the analysis which was later developed discussed in Chapter Three in relation to the executive coach competency 'engendering executive reflexivity' are outlined in the diagram below.



*Figure 5-1: An overview of Phase One of the data analysis and the key influences which led to changing the theoretical framework used to inform data analysis in this study*

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter discussed the evolutionary process the researcher underwent when analysing the data. The constructive development model (CDM) (Kegan, 1980, 1982, 1994) had been used successfully in reported research literature, notably Laske (1999, 2002); Laske and Maynes (2002) Berger and Fitzgerald (2002) and Bluckert (2006). During the early data analysis, it seemed to the researcher as though applying insights from the CDM model to



the data offered insightful analysis of executive coach competencies. However, an important insight emerged that caused the researcher to move from the CDM analytic framework and search for an alternative theoretical framework to develop the analysis. The researcher became aware that the type of development which the executive coaches helped to provoke in executives may not have been that associated with the CDM. It is concluded that whilst the initial analytic framework was later abandoned it was a useful starting point for the data analysis that led to surfacing key aspects of the data. However, developing the analysis to conceptualise a multi-perspective set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' is believed to have helped to emphasise significant aspects of the data which would have been hidden if the analysis focused on the competencies associated with accelerating constructive development as described in the CDM.

# CHAPTER SIX: PHASE TWO OF THE DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

## OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter presents the data analysis in Phase Two of the study which is the basis of theorising a set of executive coach competencies under the category label 'engendering executive reflexivity'. The analysis includes theorising characteristics of a general notion of the competency through identification of overarching similarities between different sub-types as well as identifying complementary but significant differences between them. Based on the meta-theorising underpinning the proposed competency described above, the data were analysed in two different ways.

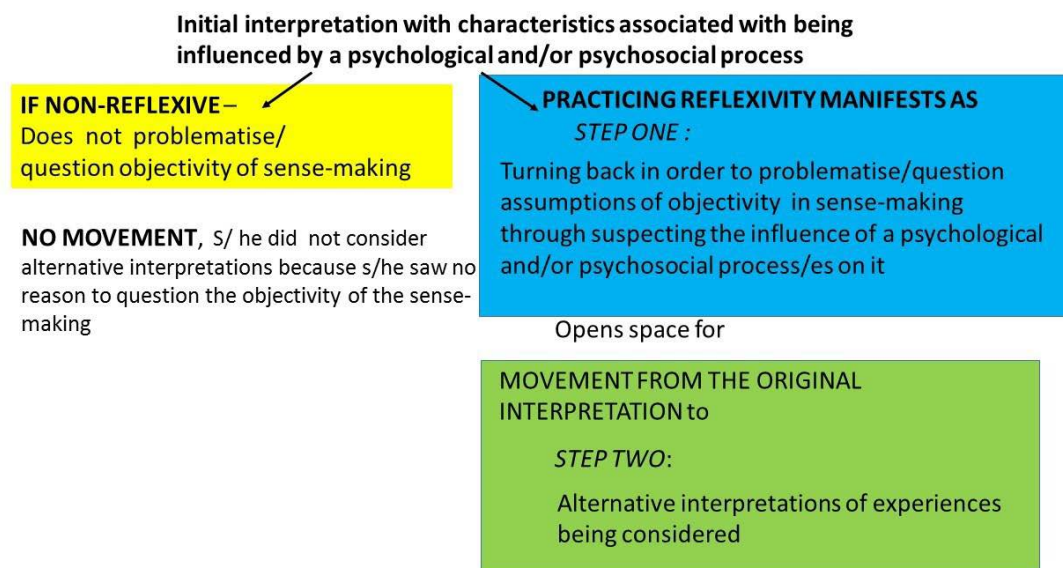
The findings are presented in two parts. In the first part of the findings the data analysis is based upon the identification of commonalities within the data in relation to interpreting the change process undergone by executives as indicating a shift from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making (in relation to the coding framework depicted in Figure 6.1). This analysis is the basis for theorising the general aspects of the competency 'engendering executive reflexivity'.

Part Two of the data analysis revisits the same cases and identifies differences between educational interventions made by executive coaches in relation to the particular insights from psychological or psychosocial processes that the coaches provide to executives so as to engender their practicing reflexivity. The analysis in this section is based on the heuristic framework presented in Chapter Two. This identified key distinctions between different theoretical perspectives associated with mainstream psychology, psychodynamics and systems psychodynamics. This analysis is presented in tabular form, using evidence from the quotations in Part One of the data analysis.

## PART ONE OF THE DATA ANALYSIS

In Chapter Three, it was described how the notion of reflexivity underpinning this study is understood as being composed of two steps. Figure 6.1 depicts the framework used to inform the analysis of the data to identify evidence for a shift from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making. This shift is believed to involve executives applying insights into the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes on their sense-making. If such an

influence is suspected by the executive, then this is seen to provide a rationale for him/her to turn back and critically challenge implicit assumptions of objectivity in his/her sense-making (the first step of reflexivity highlighted in blue in Figure 6.1). The second step of reflexivity, following from this, is defined as executives considering alternative interpretations of their problems than those which previously had been held to be objective (highlighted in green in Figure 6.1) below.



**Figure 6-1: Colour coding of mapping of difference between practicing and not practicing reflexivity and the different steps of reflexivity**

Non-reflexive sense-making was contrasted with reflexive sense-making through being characterised by the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes on sense-making not being suspected and implicit assumptions of objectivity not being problematised (highlighted in yellow in Figure 6.1).

In the following section each case will be analysed and discussed in turn. In the cases shown, pseudonyms have been used to identify different cases.

### **CASE ONE**

In a face to face interview with an academic in an executive position within a multidisciplinary department in a university, the academic executive reported first seeking coaching to help him address problems he was experiencing as he made a transition to an executive role, faculty head. Throughout the interview the executive described how he believed that the insights he gained during coaching made a significant contribution to his managing his demanding role, which he struggled to do before gaining such insights. He reported that his difficulty in detaching from the negative emotions that arose when

managing difficult interpersonal conflicts and facing hard problems made him consider leaving his job.

The executive reported how, before he gained insights into the potential influence of unconscious group processes on his sense-making through coaching, he found himself so overwhelmed by negative emotions towards colleagues that it intruded significantly on his private life. He described finding himself festering on his emotional reactions and judgments about colleagues at work who he believed were responsible for invoking his strong, justifiable, negative emotion even when on holiday:

*Years ago before I had any coaching I was the head of department which is equally a leadership role and I can remember one year in particular where I got so overwhelmed I had a couple of very difficult members of staff, very, very difficult and a couple of very hard problems to solve but I just felt so overwhelmed by it all I thought of quitting. I went away on holiday without having solved one of the problems and let it fester and I really let it get to me in a big way and I just wouldn't do that now.*

The executive reported that the first time his coach invited him to consider the role of unconscious group processes on his sense-making, as associated with the systems psychodynamics perspective (Armstrong, 2000) it had a dramatic impact on helping him change his response to problems. During the interview the executive referenced a book by Armstrong (2000), entitled 'Emotions in Organisations: Disturbance or Intelligence?' The title encapsulated one of the key ideas from systems psychodynamic perspectives that the executive found insightful, and which had a transformational effect on how he was able to manage his emotions in his demanding role.

In the excerpt above where the executive reported being overwhelmed by emotional responses to the challenges of his role, he perceived these to be disturbances from which he found himself unable to detach. He describes how he believed his negative emotions towards others were justifiable responses to their behavior or personality traits. The executive described how his executive coach invited him to explore the potential meanings of the emotions in terms of intelligence they offered about the functioning of the system rather than seeing them as disturbances, or justifiable responses to the personality traits of the members of his faculty. The executive stated:

*Originally like everybody else I just kinda thought oh 'em I've got a problem with Fred and another problem with Mary. Oh God why are they such horrible people so I thought of it entirely in those terms. I didn't think of it in systemic terms.*

Later in the interview, the executive described the process that led him to detach from strong negative emotions as '*giving the emotions back to the system*'. He used the phrase '*giving the emotions back to the system*' in the context of acknowledging how systemic tensions may manifest in the conflicts between the members of his local system:

*Very often what comes to you as a personal conflict, Fred and Mary have fallen out, is actually the built in structural problem in the system and so I think one of the key roles of coaching is to help me not bogged down in the immediate emotions of the conflict but instead to give them back to the system and say the tensions in the system are generating these problems.*

Throughout the interview the executive emphasised being encouraged to consider the influence of unconscious group processes on his, and others within his faculty's emotional responses. This insight helped him detach from strong emotions rather than being overwhelmed by them:

*I've got to be feeling annoyed by something or anxious by something in order for me to then reflect on what it is that's happening in the system and also I'm sounding very calm to you now but there are times when I feel overwhelmed by the feelings and that's the point of seeing the coach. If I didn't see the coach then I might end up being the person you've mentioned and think Oh God, Fred is such a bastard I've got to get rid of Fred.*

The executive elaborated on the contribution that being invited to read emotional responses of himself and members of his faculty as manifestations of unconscious group processes made. He described how this type of analysis served to provide him with intelligence about tensions and dysfunctions within the system stating:

*Well you know I might say oh Fred has really annoyed me and I*

*might be sitting there you know steaming away. Oh Fred's such a pillock, why's Fred done? And I'm feeling really cross with Fred. What the coaching process does is allow me to reframe that as one part of the system of this faculty is under strain and that strain is showing itself between the head of that part and me.*

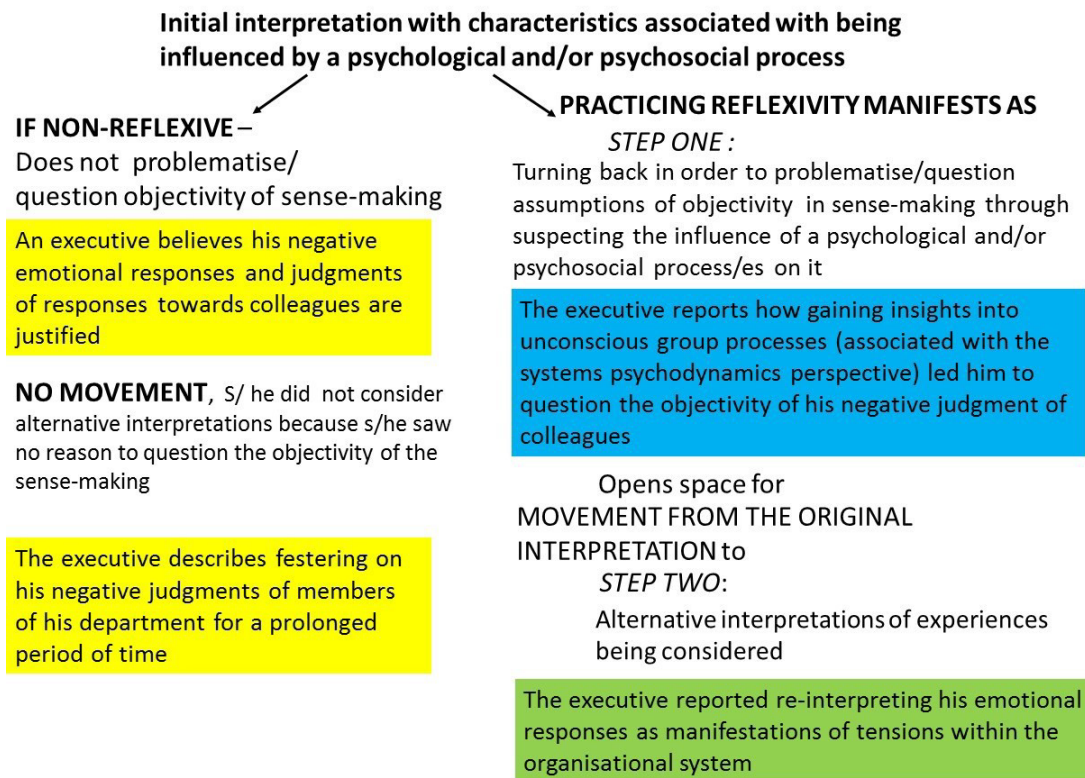
Later in the interview the executive gave another example of how valuable he found learning to read his emotional experience as intelligence and not disturbance. This was in relation to a conflict he had been asked to mediate on the morning of the interview. He described how in the morning of the interview two members of the faculty had been to see him to complain about each other. The executive reported initially feeling provoked to advise the members of his faculty to act differently. However, his experiences from coaching inspired his reading the emotional responses of himself and his two members of faculty through a systems psychodynamic lens. This resulted him recognising that the faculty members could give him information about potential dysfunctions in the system:

*Or it might be that two people come to see me and each hate the other and is furious with the other. This happened this morning. One is shouting and you know...the first one comes in and you think I've got to tell the second one to act differently and then the other one comes in and you think oh no maybe I've got to tell the first one to act differently and the point is you reframe that by saying we've got a structure here where two parts of the structure are not interacting well. Is that really because of the two individuals? Well so long as they both seem like normal people the chances are that it's not that - it's something going wrong with your organisation. So that's what I mean through the coaching process you give the feelings back to the system instead of sitting there with festering rage or with festering anxiety you think I've got a systemic problem here. It doesn't mean you can solve it but you know but that's the kind of implication.*

The case was analysed as indicating that the change process that the executive attributed to his resolving problems involved his shifting from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making. It can be seen how the executive clearly attributed applying insights from systems psychodynamics perspective to help him detach from the strong emotional responses,

which he described as *'sitting there with festering rage or with festering anxiety'*. He described these insights as helping him reframe his interpretations of the source of his emotion and *'giving emotions back to the system'*.

When the executive did not recognize the influence of unconscious processes on his sense-making and described festering on emotions through believing his interpretation was objective and justified, this can be interpreted as his being non-reflexive. His applying insights from the systems psychodynamics perspective provoked his being critical of these negative judgments of colleagues, which is categorized as step one of reflexivity. The executive described how applying the insights from the systems psychodynamics perspective led him to consider a different interpretation of the scenarios which provoked his negative response, an indicator of step one of practising reflexivity. Through *'giving the emotions back to the system'* the executive reported changing his interpretations that his emotional responses were caused by personality traits of colleagues. This relates to the second step of the notion of reflexivity underpinning this analysis. A summary of the analysis is depicted in Figure 6.2 below:



**Figure 6-2: Summary of analysis of case one**

## CASE TWO

The following case is a composite of an interview from an executive and an interview with her coach. The interview with the executive was conducted via the telephone. The digital recording of the interview was damaged and the case is presented as a summary from the researcher's notes of the interview. The observations of the coach, who was interviewed in person, are presented alongside the researcher's summary of the executive's responses.

In an interview with a chief executive of an organisation, the executive described deciding to commit to executive coaching to support her facing the challenges presented as her organisation evolved rapidly over a short period of time. The executive described how one aspect of coaching that she found particularly helpful was it supporting her to apply insights from the systems psychodynamics perspective. One thing that the executive wanted to emphasise in the interview was how the breakthroughs she experienced with problems addressed in coaching were partly dependent on her own education, and particularly her independent study of systems psychodynamics as part of post-graduate education.

The executive detailed one example of an issue addressed in coaching that she felt epitomised the contribution of applying insights from systems psychodynamics perspective to her performing her executive role effectively. The executive recounted a situation where



a co-executive had made what appeared to her a very personal, and critical comment about her performance. She reported feeling strong negative emotion towards her colleague, and presented the issue in coaching as symptomatic of a difficult relationship that she wished to improve.

The executive considered confronting her colleague about his behavior and wished to explore her options for managing the interaction during coaching. The exploration of the issue during coaching led the executive to consider that her colleague's behavior may be indicative of underlying anxiety in the organizational system related to uncertainty about a potential merger with another organisation. She reported the exploration of potential psychodynamic systemic influences on both her and her colleague's responses as reducing her strong negative emotions towards the executive. She described how during the coaching process she explored her emotional reaction to help her consider how she could manage her role effectively during the turbulence currently affecting the organizational system.

The coach of the executive was also interviewed and described how he believed exploring the influence of processes described in the systems psychodynamic perspective helped the executive to reduce the negative emotions towards her colleagues. He described the coaching process as helping her to:

*Make sense of her experience in a way which helps to understand her role, her evolving role and can kind of interpret her experience as a form of information and if you wanted a reference it would be David Armstrong: 'Emotions in Organizations, disturbance or, disturbance or intelligence - I can't remember. 'Cos he said very commonly we regard emotions as a form of disturbance - things going wrong - whereas if you take it as a just an emotional expression of an organisational event, dynamic or whatever then the emotion becomes information whatever it might be. So if there's anger, one individual becoming angry you can either say this is their personality or you can say why is it that this person in their role or position in the organisation has become angry and where does the anger belong and how can we understand the anger. So all the time we're working on her experience, what it means.*

One of the changes that the coach believed led to the reduction of negative emotion for

the executive was helping her detach from her interpretation of the cause of her emotional response. In the interview the coach described how he believed this detachment helped her to transcend strong emotional reactions which inhibited the executive's impulsive reactions to triggers.

*It is to do with detachment, it's to do with giving up the idea that our experience is just our own, I think the two frameworks that help me to understand it, one is psychoanalysis - without that I wouldn't have got anywhere on these tracks em...and the other is spiritual disciplines, spiritual insights.*

Later in the interview the coach describes how through the coaching process the coach and the executive applied the logic of interpreting emotions as intelligence, in the sense of giving information about the emotions within the organisation system connected to the uncertainty and insecurity related to the potential merger.

*Well that guy what he said - 'this must be very difficult for you <person's name>. They have a history already, she finds him difficult. He comes up with this patronising thing. <She asks> "what the hell am I going to do next time I'm in meeting with him, you know I mustn't get angry." Something happens she feels really angry it comes out somewhere in the wrong place.*

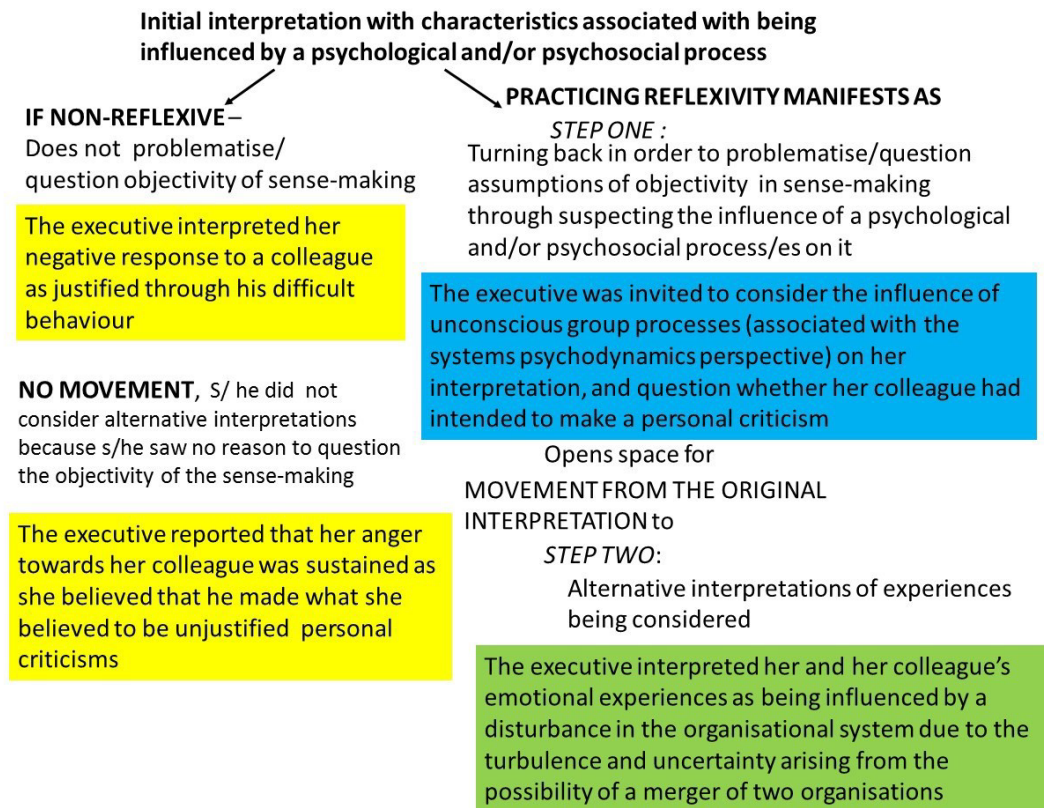
The executive mirrored the coach's observations about the role that applying insights from the systems psychodynamics perspective played in helping her to take a more detached approach to her emotional responses to interpersonal issues experienced in her executive role. She contrasted the way she was able to approach her negative emotions about her colleague through recognising the potential influence of processes described in systems psychodynamics with how she addressed similar issues in the past, before gaining these insights. Before she gained these insights into influences on her sense-making, she described how she could be swept away by negative emotions towards colleagues and sustain them for some time. She also said that she found the coaching process helped her to recognize what were particular triggers to emotional reactions for her. Her coach described how, as well as considering the executive's emotions being influenced by emotions in the organisation, they also explored how her own personal history might affect her current emotional responses to interpersonal dynamics in the organisation:

*In a sense it is also depersonalising it and making it a family issue, the family system, and the impact of family systems. Sometimes we come to the conclusion that this is a very personal thing to her. That it's simulated part of her personal history and that can be useful. That can be very useful but in a sense it also depersonalises it, because it looks at it as being part of a dynamic which she has internalised and that she is in danger of reproducing in her world around her.*

The executive described how she believed that these insights made a significant contribution to helping her detach from taking criticisms personally, as she had previously done in the past. She reported how she now actively sought feedback on her effectiveness in her role and potential areas where she could improve. One example of this was her supporting an audit process as part of the strategic deliberations about the possible merger. The executive team were surprised by her robust attitude on this matter and her ability to be unthreatened by the personal scrutiny involved in such a process.

These interviews were analysed to suggest that the contrast between how the executive responded to her problem issues before and after she was able to apply insights from systems psychodynamics could be interpreted to indicate that the executive shifted from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making. Before addressing the problem issue she experienced in relation to a colleague whom provoked strong negative emotions in her, the executive believed that her response to the perceived personal criticism by her colleague was justified. She described how, through the coaching process, she was able to be critical of her interpretation of her negative emotion being justified through her colleague's behaviour through recognising the potential influence of unconscious group processes described in the systems psychodynamics perspective on both of them. This was analysed as indicators of the coach helping equip the executive to make the first step in practicing reflexivity – turning back to question assumptions of objectivity in her sense-making after suspecting the influence of a psychosocial process. The second step of practising reflexivity was identified as being evidenced by her re-interpretation of the executive's behaviour and her own response to this as being manifestations of systemic emotions, in particular those that she believed reflected the turbulence and uncertainty related to the potential merger of her company and another.

A summary of this analysis is depicted in Figure 6.3 below:



**Figure 6-3: Summary of analysis of case two**

### CASE THREE

One executive described undergoing coaching as part of an organisational change program that involved the executive team being offered opportunities for coaching. The executive reported the coaching engagement as contributing to help him to address one particular problematic relationship with an executive in a sister organisation with whom he was required to collaborate. He described how he originally believed that the relationship difficulties stemmed from the behaviour of his colleague which he found to be unhelpful and obstructive.

The executive reported how gaining insights into personality preferences after coach interventions which followed his completing a Myers' Brigg's Personality Inventory (MBTI), and receiving feedback about his personality preference had a transformational influence in helping him understand the role that his own personality preferences played in his negative judgment and emotional response to his fellow executive.

The executive reported that when he originally presented the problem he was experiencing, he justified his negative judgment of his colleague from the sister

organisation because he believed that his colleague prevented, or made it difficult, for him to access the information that he needed. The context of the executive's problem was that there was a perceived divide between the two organisations that had been experienced by members of both organisations for some time - with the one group typically holding a negative view of the other group. The executive summarised the problem as follows:

*And whereas they would say we ask them for any information because we're sitting up in our lofty office with spare time and we've no idea of the pressure they're under and the time it takes to produce all this information and people tell them that we don't use a quarter of what they give us that was kind of the morass of it all. We weren't actually disagreeing about the presenting problem it tended to be around this we need to know more and you're not giving us this information. We're saying we're giving you <sum of money> we're entitled to know something about it and they're saying 'we're so busy up at the coal face here we don't have time or computer systems and you won't give us the money to invest in computers because you want us to spend it on <project name>. Blah blah and it just got into a circular argument around that.*

The executive described how he believed interventions made by the coach helped him to re-interpret his colleague's behaviour. It helped him to consider that rather than it stemming from his colleague having an unhelpful and obstructive nature, it was influenced by himself and his fellow executive having different personality preferences which manifested as conflicts in meetings. He described how through the insights he gained through coaching, he considered how his own behaviour may have contributed to the poor quality of collaboration between both executives:

*Did I change my own behaviour and own performance? Yeah well I got the sense that other chief executive of the other organisation found me, shall we say, intimidating or challenging simply because I would ask quite, I would say, straight forwards, but he might say, very to the point questions and be very penetrating.... and he was, shall we say, one of the old school who wasn't used to a more business-like approach. So there's maybe a clash of styles of*

*values, maybe not values, a clash of cultures, a clash of behaviour styles perhaps would be more accurate to say, with <coach's name> help I was able to see that was an issue about making me feel that I was a lesser person or that he was a lesser person. We were disagreeing about issues but the business issue, the valid and legitimate and necessary business issue was getting lost in the clash of behaviour styles.*

The executive went on to describe how, in trying to adapt to what he believed the other executive's personality preferences were, this led to the relationship improving. He described how he made a deliberate attempt to have a more relaxed meeting style. In response to being asked how about the changes that he made he described:

*...just relaxing bit more, or more accurately hiding my tension, which is not quite the same thing. I was never a confrontational person, you know, but I was seen as quite deadline oriented and proactive in that regard.*

The executive described how, through detaching from his strong negative emotion towards his colleague in the sister organisation, he was able to consider a range of alternative ways of conducting business with him that could improve their collaboration which he had not considered before coaching. He compared two approaches 'sitting opposite one another across a boardroom table' with 'sitting in two armchairs with a tray of coffee and biscuits', believing that the latter would likely improve the collaboration:

*If you are dealing with a difficult subject which is best do you sit opposite one another across a boardroom table or do you sit in two armchairs with a tray of coffee and biscuits? To me the latter approach is sometimes best, which is less confrontational, and yet you don't want the other person to feel I'm only doing this for the sake of it because my chairman expects it of me and I'm ticking a box in my mind. We're serious about this. We respect your role and your difficult challenge that you have yet we need to feel that you are committed to progressing this business problem not the relationship problem, the business problem.*

Later in the interview the executive reported how he made a deliberate effort to be less

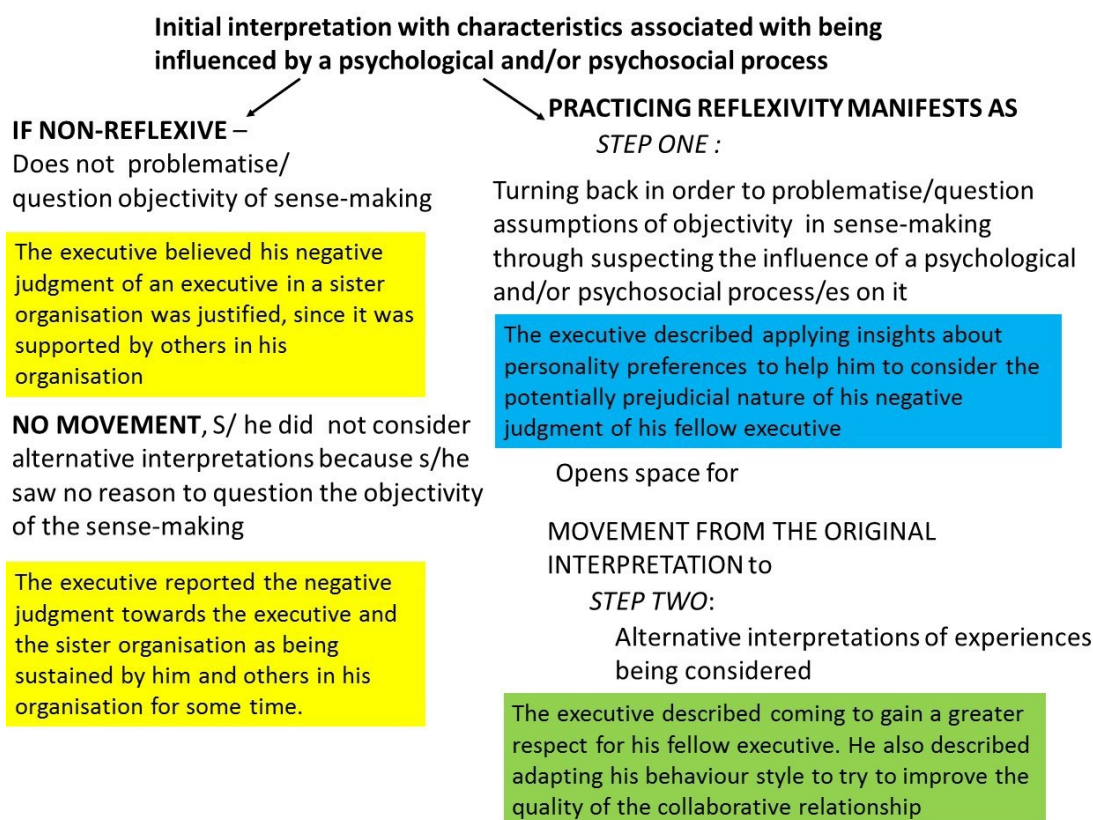
intimidating and described trying to inject humour into his meetings with his fellow executive. He described having, what he termed, 'fig roll sessions': "*we got into a little joke with the other chief executive that we would have a fig roll session*". He described how this joke he shared with the executive related to something he knew he had in common with him, their both liking a type of biscuit called a fig roll:

*He and I had one thing in common was that we both like fig rolls and I used to tease him if he brought digestive biscuits – 'those are no good to me – I want fig rolls'. I'd thump the table and give an impression of having a childish tantrum over a fig roll you know. Humour helps to lighten the atmosphere sometimes, as you know*  
Heather

It can be seen that the insights that the executive believed he gained through learning about personality preferences from the executive coach interventions had a significant impact on his changing his attitude, appraisal and behaviour towards his executive colleague. It appears that he was inspired to adapt his behaviour significantly to try to adapt to the personality preferences of the executive with whom he had previously struggled to collaborate. Towards the end of the interview, the executive emphasised again how gaining insights from the Myers Briggs Personality Inventory as part of coaching helped him to be less prejudicial when encountering different personality types, and described how it led to a "*spirit of mutual tolerance and understanding*".

This interview was analysed as the coaching process contributing to the executive moving from non-reflexive sense-making towards reflexive sense-making since the executive's description of key influences on the change and the change itself engendered through coaching relate to practicing reflexivity about the influence of psychological processes related to personality preferences as described in the theory related to Myers Briggs Type Inventory. The executive reported maintaining a negative view towards the executive in the sister organisation for quite a time before coaching, since he believed that his judgments were justified and supported by others in his organisation. This sense-making can be contrasted to the self-critical stance he took towards his negative judgments of his colleague after gaining insights into his own personality preferences. This, he reported, helped him realise how his negative judgments of colleagues may not be objective, and unquestionably justifiable, but may be a result of his failing to recognise the validity and contribution of a different personality preference and consequent behavioural style.

In describing his changing of style of behaving in meetings, the executive indicated that his shifting of his interpretations of the problem issue led to his being able to develop a more functional, collaborative relationship with his colleague. The distinction between the former sense-making about his colleague, which the executive reports having at the beginning of coaching and the sense-making which the executive reports developing after coaching can be seen as indicative as a move from non-reflexive sense-making to step one of reflexive sense-making as illustrated in Figure 6.4.



**Figure 6-4: Summary of analysis of case three**

## CASE FOUR

In a telephone interview with an executive coach who had been involved in organisation consultancy for many years, part of which involved one to one coaching, the coach described a coaching scenario where an executive presented a problem he experienced in relationship with a particular member of his team. The coach described how the specific example he had chosen to focus on in the interview, was a common one that he encountered during his coaching practice. He explained that it was quite common for



executives to believe that other people with whom they worked were the source of their problems - consequently the executives did not consider that they could resolve their problem through changing their own behaviour. The coach described helping the executives understand that the strengths of their personality which manifested in some situations may not bring the best results in other ones. He reported trying to help executives to become aware of the impact of their own attitudes and behavior on creating and sustaining problems that they brought to coaching. These insights he proposed, contributed to executives reframing their understanding of the problem issue, and their being motivated to explore changing their own behaviour, and trying different leadership styles.

The coach selected one example of such a case where an executive presented a problem at the beginning of coaching related to his frustration with the performance of a member of his team, a marketing manager. It was reported that the executive found the relationship with him very problematic, describing how *"he couldn't get through to this man"*. At the beginning of coaching he reported that the executive stated *"I don't know what to do, I've tried everything"*. The coach described how it was apparent that the executive did not believe his own behavior and attitude contributed to the poor performance of the marketing manager and the problem of their difficult relationship.

The coach described how the executive spent a large proportion of time in the opening meeting focusing on describing the negative characteristics of the marketing manager. The executive reported how he was uncommunicative, very slow at answering his questions and arriving at solutions which the executive asked for. The coach asked the executive to describe how he approached the meetings with the member of his team. The coach described how when listening to the executive describe the typical course of the meetings between himself and his member of staff, he came to suspect that an influencing factor on the marketing manager's behaviour which the executive found problematic, was executive's approach in meetings.

The coach described how the executive reported expressing great impatience to the marketing manager that he did not arrive at the same way of perceiving a situation as himself. He suspected from the executive's report of his behaviour that the executive had a default setting of pushing the people he led to quickly arrive at the same way of looking at things as himself. The coach continued to explain his reading of the contributing factors

to the problem:

*He was frustrated and I thought he was setting it up to put the person under pressure and that's why he wasn't getting anywhere.*

The coach described how he believed the executive “*was very good at thinking that he had the right answer – good at pushing*”. He described how he told the executive that he observed that he kept talking about solutions, and the executive responded to this feedback by stating that he believed he always had the answer:

*I hear a lot of words push words – actually it's really interesting you keep talking about solutions. And he said 'Well I know that ...that's right I always got the answer'...*

Although at first the coach described the executive as resisting the possibility that his own behaviour contributed to his relationship difficulties with the marketing manager he came to recognise this as a possibility. The coach reported the ‘lightbulb moment’ for the executive was when he realised that he could contribute to improving their relationship by recognising that his default style of pushing members of his team to arrive at the same solutions as himself may suppress their performance, and contribute to relationship difficulties. The coach observed:

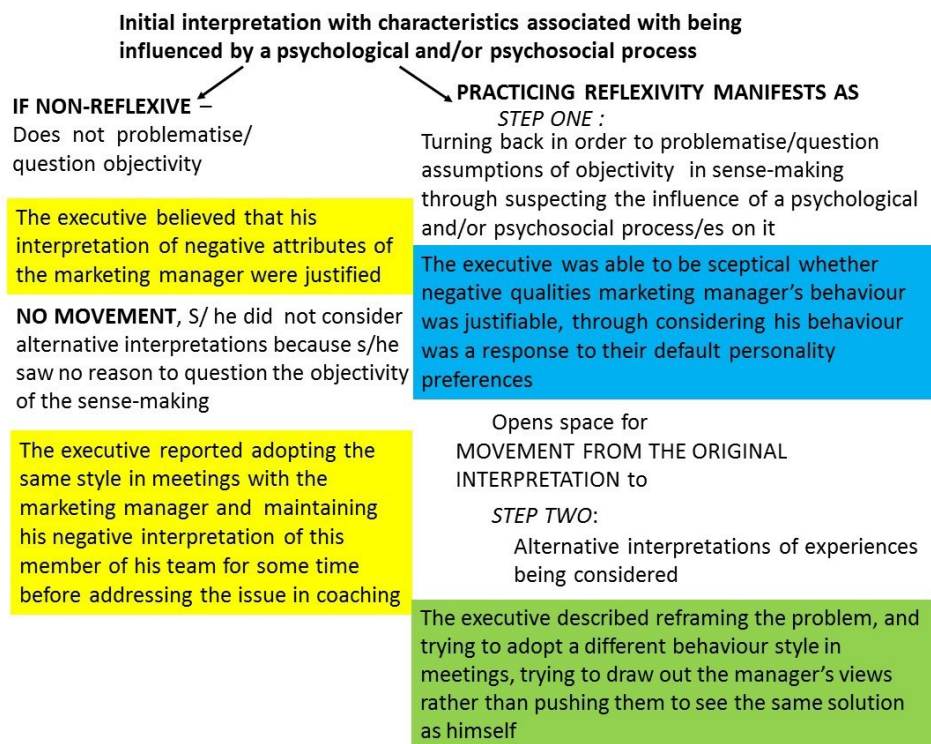
*What was interesting in that scenario was that he'd talk about everything other than how he was going about it, and what I got him to realise in terms of style, was that he had a pushing style, he'd push for solutions, pushing all the time. What I got him to do was talk about a different style, drawing out and pulling, and being comfortable with your answer isn't necessarily the answer. That was the interesting thing because when he started to reframe that, “If I look at it this way...” He started to explore. What was great was that he no longer pushed that he had the answer, and saw that there might be a better way. It was a really interesting example of how you can reframe a problem.*

The coach described how these insights led the executive to shift his focus from highlighting negative attributes of the marketing manager, which he believed justified his frustrations, to becoming much more aware of the impact that his behaviour had on his performance and their performance. The coach stated:

*Once he understood that he was the problem he realised that he had something in his toolkit a different style.... all of a sudden he saw a different way forwards that he couldn't see before on his own.*

It is suggested that the change process described by the coach in this interview can be read as indicating that the executive shifted from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making. Before coaching it appeared that the executive believed that his interpretation of the negative attributes of the marketing manager were justified and the only valid interpretation of his experiences with him - an indicator of non-reflexive sense-making. When the executive was invited to consider the influence his own personality preferences and default behavioural style had on suppressing the marketing manager's contribution in meetings, this could be seen as him taking the first step towards reflexive sense-making. When the coach described how the executive reported that the insights gained through coaching led him to re-interpret the problem as being influenced by his own behaviour, insights which led to his attempting to improve his facilitation skills, it could be considered that this was a consequence of his moving to the second step of reflexive sense-making.

The analysis of the interview is summarised in Figure 6. 5 below:



**Figure 6-5: Summary of analysis of case four**

## CASE FIVE

In a telephone interview with an executive coach who had been involved in training and development within organisations for many years, the coach described how he believed that the coaching process helped a director of Human Resources (HR). The HR executive had been promoted approximately six months ago to the executive team. It was revealed in the early coaching sessions that the executive had low self-confidence issues, and wanted to address what she believed were her failings in her fulfilling her executive role.

The executive presented her problem as relating to her believing she did not get positive feedback from her coach because of her personal failings. The coach reported how before coaching the executive had been part of a developmental program he conducted. He described how, when he encountered the executive with her boss on a couple of occasions, he noticed she seemed less confident than she did during the program. The coach stated that:

*The coachee was feeling that they had failings about the way they described things or they did things and therefore what we started to explore and uncover with some issues around confidence latterly then dealing with authority figures.*

The coach identified that the executive's boss had not, in fact, criticised her, but the executive had attributed getting no feedback from the boss as indicative of her failings in her role. He described how when the executive presented her problem in coaching he read her sense-making critically, believing that rather than being a consequence of the executive's boss not believing that her performance had warranted positive feedback, it could be related to the boss' personality preferences which he had observed during the interactions with the executive and her boss. The coach described his observations about the executive's boss in relation to the issue of his not giving the executive positive feedback as follows:

*Her boss and I subsequently met on a couple of occasions, he seemed to me to be someone who has very little need for what I call human contact. That's how he operates, is very sharp, is very business-like, he's very mathematical and used to that way of looking at things so he doesn't see a need for that. So therefore he doesn't necessarily understand that somebody else's has a need*

*for that anyway.*

The coach believed that a significant coach intervention, which gave the executive a rationale to challenge her reasoning that she did not receive positive feedback from her boss because of her personal failings, was inviting the executive to complete the Myers Brigg's Personality Inventory. He described how, as well as helping the executive to recognise the strengths associated with her personality preference, the ensuing discussions in coaching where the executive learned about the strengths and weakness of other personality types helped her to consider an alternative rationale for her boss' behaviour.

The coach described how he believed that the discussions about personality preferences led to her considering the possibility that the difference between her and her boss' personality preferences could explain why her boss did not consider the need for giving positive feedback in the same way as herself. He explained how he helped the executive to reframe the meaning she attributed to the lack of positive feedback she received from her boss from being a response to her failings, to consider that her boss' behaviour was related to her boss' personality preferences and default behavioural style as follows. The coach stated: *"put broadly like it was examining both the person's own behaviour, looking at that with what was different between the person and their boss"*. The coach described trying different interventions which he believed might help the executive to detach from her belief that the lack of positive feedback from her boss was due to her failings, one of which was his encouraging her to imagine that she was observing the dynamic between herself and her boss as an outsider, and from different points of view.

*There is a very useful technique in coaching - you block from your point of view the protagonist's points of view and now let's look at it from somebody who is an observer's point of view. And if you are observing this behaviour in these two people what would you say about either of those people and either of those situations?*

The executive was reported as giving her coach feedback on the positive contribution that she believed the insights that she gained through coaching helped reduce her negative view of herself, and her ability to fulfil her executive role successfully.

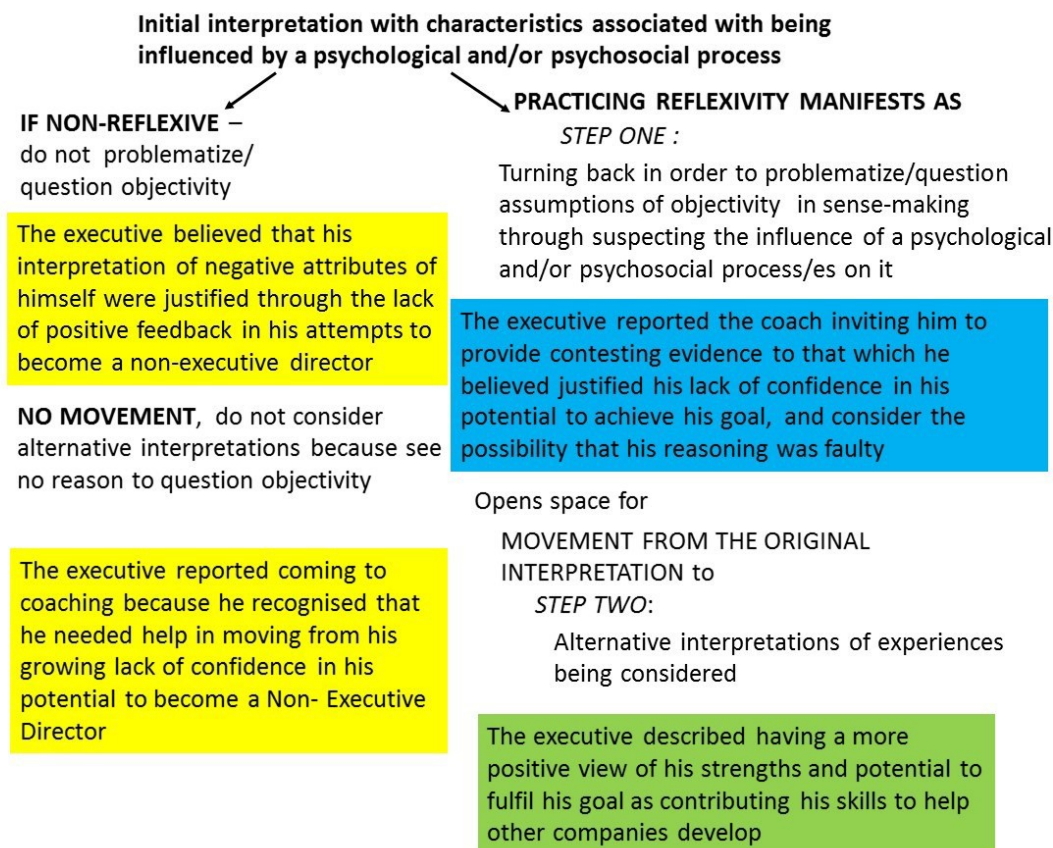
*One of the things that they've said to me that I was able to do as a coach was to do with to stop them always thinking that if there is a fault or problem it is to do with them.*

It was noted how one of the outcomes of the combination of the insights the executive gained through coaching was that she felt less dependent on external approval from her boss in order to feel positive about her performance in the executive team. The coach described how the confidence and skills the executive achieved during the coaching process contributed to her deciding to change jobs.

*Having got the confidence, having the – ‘it’s not me, I am doing things right’ and get a clearer picture of what she was about, it gave her more external confidence to apply for things and then going for other situations and going for another organisation.*

The insights that the coach believed contributed to a change process in the executive are analysed as contributing to helping the executive shift from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making. Once gaining an understanding of the influence of the difference in behavioural preferences between herself and her boss in contributing to her not gaining positive feedback, she began to question the validity of her reasoning which supported her believing that she was failing in her executive role – an indication of her moving from non-reflexive sense-making to the first step of reflexive-sense-making. As a consequence of unsettling the negative interpretation of herself, the coaching process was seen to contribute to her moving towards changing her negative view of herself and her becoming more confident of her strengths. This was seen to be an indicator of her moving to the second step of reflexivity, as consequence of her being invited to problematise the assumptions of objectivity in her beliefs that her lack of positive feedback from her boss were due to her personal failings in her executive role. In doing so she adopted new strategies to gain feedback from her boss.

Figure 6.6 depicts a summary of the analysis of the interview.



**Figure 6-6: Summary of the analysis of case five**

## CASE SIX

In one interview an executive described how he went to coaching after a successful business career as an entrepreneur. He had established and ran different successful businesses but sought coaching since he was having difficulty in achieving his next goal of becoming a Non-Executive Director (NED) of a company. The executive described how his failing to gain the opportunities that he expected to get after applying to organisations for Non-Executive Directorship positions led to his losing confidence in himself. The executive described how he had taken very proactive steps towards becoming a Non-Executive Director of a medium sized company. He reported having joined an organisation that focused specifically on helping successful businessmen to develop portfolios to gain Non-Executive Directorship appointments. The executive also reported trying to develop new skills, including becoming a coach himself, which he thought would make his offering more attractive. After feeling he had done all the right things, and still failing to gain the desired appointments, the executive started to develop a lack of confidence in his potential to achieve his goal. He gave a background to his decision to coach as follows:

*Business wise I wasn't developing my career or getting the appointments I wanted, that was the headline of the problem. With that I also felt relatively depressed, less upbeat, and a bit... simply...searching the whole me or the way that I would go forwards in my declining decades...and they kind of go together my identity, I didn't want to feel like a retired person but what was my identity. If I said I'm a coach, or NED..... I didn't feel I was satisfied. I went there with more than one level of need. That was my starting point.*

The executive described how after developing a growing loss of self-confidence in his potential to achieve his goal of becoming a Non-Executive Director he sought coaching, stating: *"if the goal was becoming a NED, I hadn't been effective and I was beginning to feel I wouldn't be effective"*. The executive described how the coaching process had a profound effect on challenging his insecurities, and his growing lack of faith in his potential to fulfil his goal. He described how one particular group of executive coach interventions were significant in contributing to his achieving his goal and helped him to develop a greater self-confidence in his aptitude to achieve his goal.

One coach intervention that was valued by the executive involved the coach asking him be explicit about what qualities he thought were needed to be a Non-Executive Director and then analysing how he measured up against this. He described how the coach helped him to regain his confidence that he had the aptitude to achieve his goal through his recognising that he had a track record of showing the skills, experience and attitude that he believed make people successful Non-Executive Directors. The executive attributed the thorough interrogation provoked by the coach of the beliefs which supported his low self-confidence as resulting in them being destabilised and eventually usurped, and replaced by those which supported him to regain his self-confidence:

*I know when we started the coach got me to do a lot of stuff around thinking about the people who do what you want to do, describe them to me, and then getting me to objectively compare their profile to my profile and ask what is the difference? And then in a coaching sort of way asking me to visualise being in a group with them. Did I hold my end up with them? and imagine me being one of them in that group that I admired - being a peer in the*



*group..... we did a series of other things looking at what I had to offer people and if I was in their position wouldn't I want what I was offering?.. And we did visualisation exercises that made me feel absolutely great straight away.*

The executive stressed how he believed that the interventions used by the coach were rational rather than relating to excavating his sub-conscious:

*I can't remember particular technique or trigger for this happening but in essence after a few months...this is all rational rather than sub-conscious. I got onto asking what could I do, what could I achieve.*

The executive described how he believed that addressing his low confidence issues and slightly reframing his goals fed into each other, and were inextricably linked throughout the coaching process. The executive reported how through slightly re-framing his goals during coaching led him to focus on a slightly modified objective, which he described as making him happier.

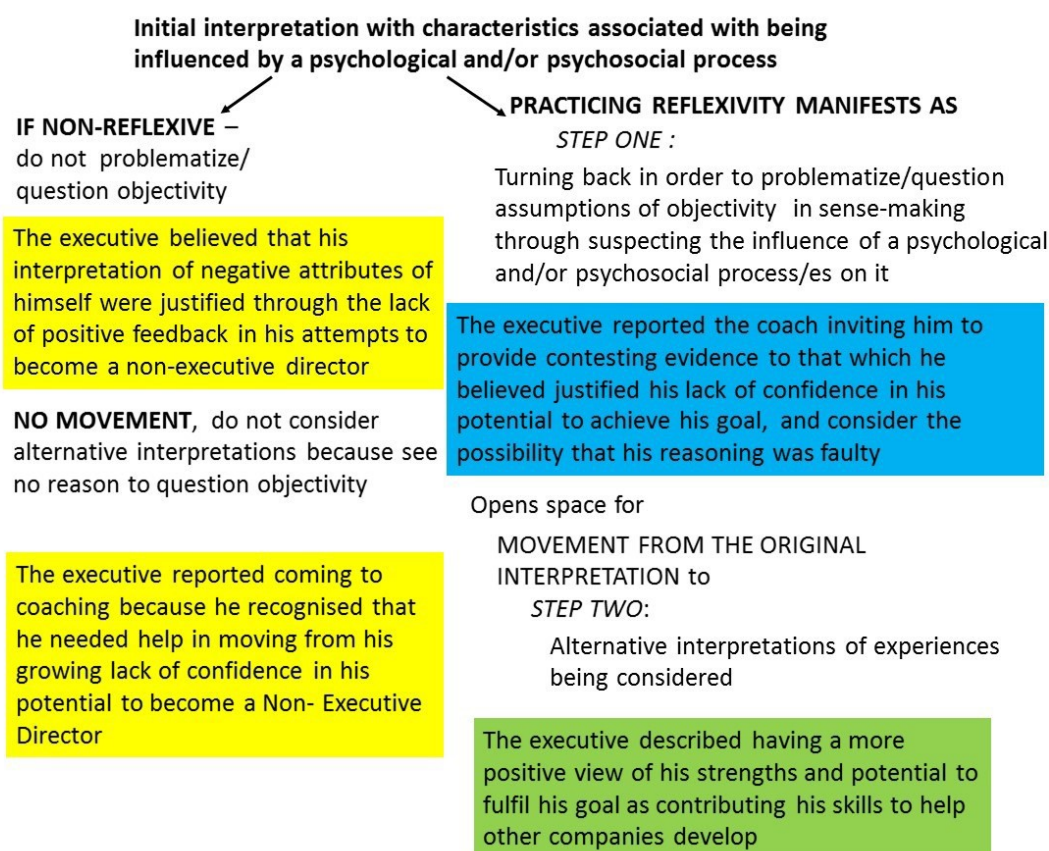
*We've gone round a lap where there are degrees of boosting confidence, modified identity, changing business tactics got me to achieve the objective, albeit a slightly modified objective, and one I'm happier about really.*

When describing his new ventures and career as a 'business angel', which involved him helping offer his expertise to entrepreneurs trying launch new businesses, he became highly animated and very enthusiastic. He described how he believed that the insights that he gained through coaching had a significant impact on helping him feel a new lease of life in his career.

When the executive reported that one significant change stimulated through coaching was the executive coach encouraging him to be critical about the reasoning that supported his lack of confidence in his potential to be a NED, this was considered as being a pivotal intervention which helped him to move from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making. The executive highlighted how through the critical interrogation of this beliefs he was able to recognise his strengths and potential to offer a significant contribution to a NED. Another movement which took place for the executive was reframing his goal and this was described by the executive as guiding him towards a similar role which he described as making him

happier. These changes can be seen as stemming from the executive coach equipping the executive with insights from cognitive psychology on the nature of self-limiting beliefs and goal setting which afforded the executive to practice reflexivity.

A summary of the analysis of part of the interview is depicted in Figure 6.7 below:



**Figure 6-7: Summary of analysis of case six**

## CASE SEVEN

The following case was from secondary data, a case study in the executive coaching literature, presented by an author/coach Kilburg (2004b). The author/coach Kilburg (2004b) described the executive presenting a problem as not knowing whether he wanted to continue with his job because he felt that he was being taken advantage of by his CEO. Kilburg’s (2004, p 247) summarises the key aspects of the early conversation as follows (the text alternates between the executive and coach’s responses):

*“I do not know if I want to continue doing this job.”*

*“Why?”*

*"The CEO cannot decide what he wants to do about the region and will not tell me what timeline he has in mind to resolve things. Truthfully, I do not think he knows what he wants to do. I cannot really clean this place up until he does because if I do, there will be too much carnage and I'll never get the permanent job."*

*"These situations do demand patience," I answered.*

*"I have patience. I just do not like to be taken advantage of," he snapped with a real note of irritation.*

*"How is the organization taking advantage of you?"*

*"Let me count the ways. I'm responsible for this place and what happens here, but I have to ask permission to do almost everything. I'm working longer hours than ever with more time away from my family, my religion, and the things I like to do. I'm doing all of this for less than a significant salary increase, and these guys cannot even tell me whether they're going to give me the job. It makes me feel like a patsy...just a big jerk."*

The author/coach, Kilburg (2004b), interpreted the executive's experience as being influenced by psychodynamic defences, and inviting the executive to consider this potential influence, as contributing to the executive reducing his strong negative emotional response to the CEO. Kilburg (2004, p247) reported provoking the executive to try to make a connection with his current emotional response and experiences in his past where he experienced the same emotions by asking *"Does this situation remind you of anything you have faced before?"* He reports that after being asked this question the executive made a connection between his emotional response in the present towards his CEO and an experience in his family when he was very young where his family felt that they he was being taken for granted by another more distant relative. He recalled this situation as provoking the same strong negative emotional response as he was currently experiencing. Kilburg (2004b) describes how after the executive articulated his story he asked: *"How do you think the story applies to your situation in the company?"* He reports the executive replying:

*“Oh, that is easy now that I’ve remembered the story. I really hate the feeling of being taken advantage of. Cannot stand it at all. The fact that the CEO cannot make up his mind what to do and keeps me in this temporary position is just driving me crazy. I feel like I just want to quit and go elsewhere.”*

Kilburg (2004b) highlights how after being stimulated to make this connection the executive was able to usurp his reasoning related to the negative emotional response towards his boss, due to feeling that he was being taken for granted. The executive stated:

*“When I remembered it, I knew immediately what was going on. I did not want to say anything, because it feels so childish in a way. But now that I know that I’m feeling that old sense of resentment about being taken advantage of, I think I can steer clear of making some bad choices.”*

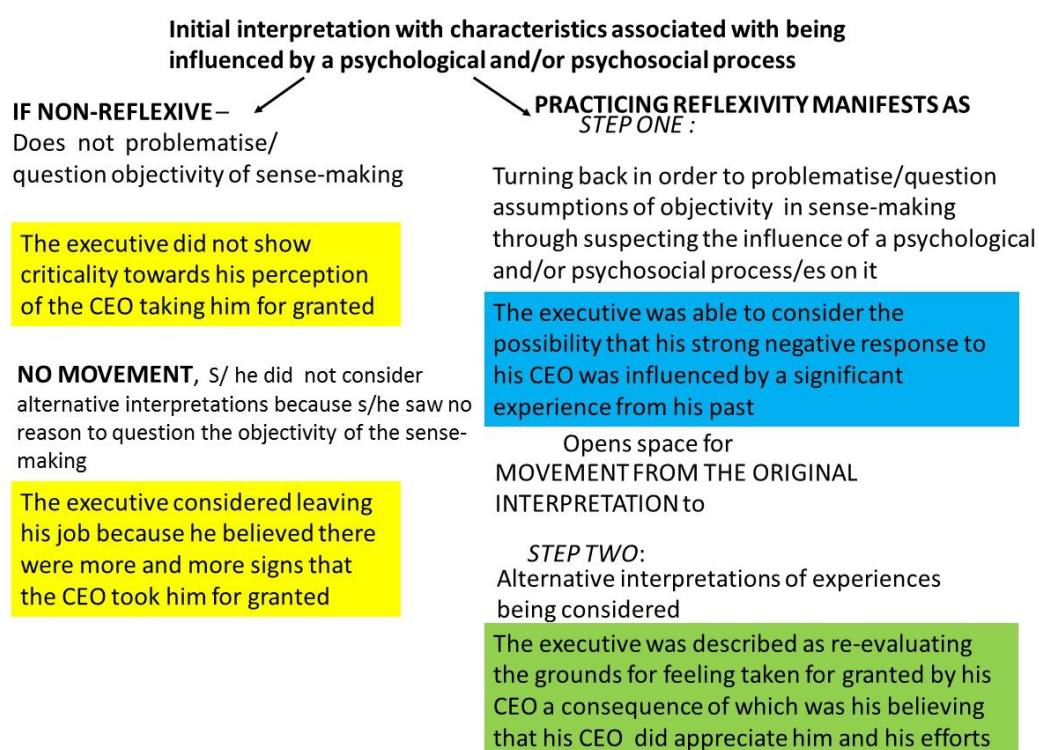
Kilburg (2004b) described how once he was able to detach from the strong negative emotions towards his CEO, the executive did not take the CEO’s decisions so personally, which reduced his feeling taken for granted by him. He described inviting the executive to explore options of how to respond to the challenges of his role without it having a detrimental effect on his private life.

*“Ron and I spent the rest of that session talking through his options and how he could address the challenges of discussing the problem with the CEO. Through the rest of the time, he seemed much more able to consider the problems and complexities without personalizing them as much.”*

Kilburg (2004b) described how, through the insights that the executive gained into how his response to the CEO triggered an emotional response connected to a past experience, the executive reported developing a better quality relationship with his boss. The executive described how he came to believe that he had earned the true appreciation of his boss.

It was reported by Kilburg (2004b) that at the start of coaching the executive reported that his interpretation that his CEO took him for granted was vindicated, and could not see a reason to question the objectivity of this sense-making. In inviting the executive to consider that his sense-making about his CEO was subject to the influence of a psychodynamic defence, which was triggered by a past experience, which had produced a strong similar

negative emotional response to the one he was currently experiencing, the executive coach helped provoke the executive to problematise the assumptions of objectivity of his sense-making. This was reported as leading to the executive changing his interpretations towards his CEO, recognising alternative interpretations of his CEO's behaviour than being evidence of his taking the executive for granted. These changes were analysed as indicative of the executive making a shift from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making, a shift that led to his resolving his problem and developing a better relationship with his CEO. This case is related to the coding framework in Figure 6.8 below.



**Figure 6-8: Summary of the analysis of case seven**

### **COACH INTERVENTIONS WHICH APPEAR TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS EXECUTIVES' PRACTISING REFLEXIVITY**

It is proposed that a similarity is evident across all cases in the data in relation to the nature of the intervention of the executive coach which helps provoke the executives to shift from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making. As a collection, the analysis of the data in Part One suggests that in each case the executive coach considers the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes on executives' sense-making that the executives themselves do not suspect. It appears that a critical antecedent to executives shifting from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making is that coaches invite executives to consider that their sense-making is subject to the influence of a psychological or psychosocial process.

A summary of the differences between the executive and coach lenses is provided in Table 6.1 below and relates to the data presented in the cases above:

Case	The executive's interpretation of his/her problem	The executive coach's interpretation of the influences on the executive's problem
One	The executive believes that his strong negative emotional reactions to members of staff are a justified response to their difficult behaviour	The executive's coach believes that both the executive and his member of staff's emotional responses are influenced by unconscious group processes, related to systemic dysfunctions
Two	The executive believes that the problem can be resolved through confronting her colleague about the personal criticism he made and his difficult behavior	The executive coach suspected that both the executive and her colleague's emotional responses are influenced by unconscious group processes which relate to anxiety related to a potential merger
Three	The executive believes that his relationship difficulties with fellow executive in a sister organisation are caused by colleague's obstructive and unhelpful behavior	His coach hypothesised that the executive's sense-making about the colleague is influenced by a his personality preference which causes him to be prejudicial towards other personality styles
Four	The executive believes that the relationship problem that he has with a member of his team is due to the behaviour of this person	The coach believes that the executive's personality preference may be suppressing the marketing manager
Five	The executive believes that she has not received positive feedback from her boss because of her personal failings	Her coach believes that the personality preferences of the executive's boss influence him not seeing the same importance on giving feedback as the executive
Six	The executive believes that his lack of confidence in his potential to achieve his goal of being a NED is justified	His coach believes that the executive's reasoning is flawed, and that the executive is ignoring other evidence which contests his self-limiting beliefs

Case	The executive's interpretation of his/her problem	The executive coach's interpretation of the influences on the executive's problem
Seven	The executive believes that his negative appraisal and negative emotional response to his CEO is justified	The coach believes that the executive's emotional response to his CEO stems from a past experience which led to the same emotional response from a past experience being triggered

**Table 6-1: Summary of differences between the executives' and coaches' lenses**

Across the cases analysed above it appears that in inviting executives to consider the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes on their sense-making, their executive coaches provide them with a rationale to turn back and critically problematise the assumptions of objectivity in their own sense-making, identified as step one of practising reflexivity. The executive coach interventions which provoke executives to problematise the assumptions of objectivity in their sense-making are seen as being pivotal in opening a space for executives to consider alternative interpretations of their problem issues, which lead to their resolution. Figure 6. 9 presents the causal logic within the analysis of the role that coaches' interventions of helping executives to read their experience through the same lens as coaches themselves plays in helping executives move from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making and consequently helping executives to resolve problems brought to coaching.

An executive brings a problem to coaching

**The executive's sense-making about his/her problem is characterised by implicit assumptions of objectivity, indicating the executive believes that it mirrors reality**

**The executive is invited by their coach to read his/her experience through the same lens as himself, in the sense of suspecting that the executive's sense-making is subject to the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes** (for example psychodynamic defences unconscious group processes self-limiting beliefs)

The executive coach's sense-making about the executive's sense-making:

**The executive coach is sceptical of the objectivity of the executive's sense-making about his/her problem and reads it through a theoretical lens** (for example psychodynamics, systems psychodynamics or mainstream psychology)

**This provides a rationale for the executive to turn back to his/her sense-making and problematise implicit assumptions of objectivity within it**

**A space is opened for the consideration of alternative interpretations which can contribute to the executive resolving his/her problem**

*Figure 6-9: The contribution of coaches inviting executives to consider the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes on their sense-making*

In the following section Part Two, phase two of the data analysis is presented. Part Two of the data analysis revisits the same cases and identifies differences between educational interventions in relation to the particular psychological or psychosocial process that the



coaches appear to unveil as influencing executives’ sense-making that the executives themselves do not suspect.

## **PART TWO – DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN TYPES OF EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS BY COACHES**

In the previous section it was proposed that there were similarities across the data in relation to the coach interventions which stimulated executives to shift from non-reflexive to reflexive sense-making. It was suggested that across the data there was evidence that a key stimulus for provoking a change process in executives, related to the notion reflexivity outlined above, was coaches inviting executives to read their experiences through the same lens as themselves, a lens that considered the influence of a psychological or psychosocial process on their sense-making. Table 6.2 below summarises the differentiating criteria which was used to categorise distinctions between the sub-types of the set of competencies of ‘engendering executive reflexivity’.

<b>Educative executive coach intervention</b>	<b>Executive insights provoked through the educational intervention made by their coach</b>
Inviting executives to consider that significant experiences in their past are influencing their interpretations of their problems, interpretations that sustain them (Psychodynamic/Psychoanalysis perspectives)	Helping executives to make a connection between their current emotional responses to relationships and past experiences – insights which provide a rationale for the executive to question the objectivity of their interpretation of their problems which appear to sustain them.
Inviting executives to read their emotional experience as influenced by group/organisational unconscious processes (Systems Psychodynamics and Organisational Role Analysis perspectives)	Helping executives to re-interpret their emotional responses as providing information which can help them to identify dysfunctional system dynamics, ‘emotions in the system’
Exposing self-limiting beliefs to executives and inviting them to consider evidence which contests self-limiting beliefs (Mainstream Psychology)	Helping executives to identify biases and contradictions within his/her sense-making and to be open to alternative interpretations of their problems

**Table 6-2: Differentiating between insights related to the different theoretical lenses used by coaches**

It is suggested that the distinguishing characteristic of processes described in

psychodynamics from the those described in mainstream psychology and systems psychodynamics relates to the former's main focus being on the role of the personal unconscious, and placing emphasis on the role significant past events have in provoking strong emotional reactions in current relationships. In contrast, psychosocial processes associated with the systems psychodynamics perspective are seen to elucidate the influence of unconscious group processes on sense-making. The distinguishing characteristic of processes associated with mainstream psychology is defined as their not relating to either personal or unconscious processes.

Table 6.3 summarises the executives' interpretation of their problems when presenting their problems at the beginning of coaching. The educational intervention used by the coach reported as helping the executive resolve his/her problem in each case is italicised.

<b>Case</b>	<b>Significant features of the executive's initial interpretation of their problem presented to their executive coach</b>	<b>Nature of the educative executive coach intervention</b>
One	The executive believes that his strong negative emotional reactions to members of staff are a justified response to their difficult behaviour	<i>Systems psychodynamics educational intervention</i>  The executive's coach invites the executive to consider that his colleague's emotional responses are influenced by unconscious group processes, related to systemic dysfunctions
Two	The executive believes that her problem can be resolved through confronting her colleague about the personal criticism he made and his difficult behavior	<i>Systems psychodynamics educational intervention</i>  The executive coach offered the executive the possibility that both she and her colleague's emotional responses to each other are manifestations of unconscious group processes which relate to anxiety related to a potential merger

Case	Significant features of the executive's initial interpretation of their problem presented to their executive coach	Nature of the educative executive coach intervention
Three	The executive believes that his relationship difficulties with fellow executive in a sister organisation are caused by colleague's obstructive and unhelpful behavior	<p><i>Personality theory educational intervention (mainstream psychology)</i></p> <p>The coach invites the executive to complete a personality inventory the Myers Briggs Personality Type Inventory, (MBTI). The coach then invites the executive to explore the role the executive's personality preference may play in inhibiting productive collaboration with his colleague</p>
Four	The executive believes that the relationship problem that he has with a member of his team is due to the behaviour of this person, the marketing manager	<p><i>Personality theory educational intervention (mainstream psychology)</i></p> <p>The coach invites the executive to consider how his own default behaviour may be suppressing the marketing manager</p>
Five	The executive believes that she has not received positive feedback from her boss because of her personal failings	<p><i>Personality theory educational intervention (mainstream psychology)</i></p> <p>The coach invites the executive to complete a personality inventory (MBTI). The coach and the executive explore the potential impact of differences between her and her boss's personality preferences</p>
Six	The executive believes that his lack of confidence in his potential to achieve his goal of being a Non-Executive Director is justified through is failing to gain opportunities to perform the role of Non-Executive Director.	<p><i>Cognitive psychology educational intervention (mainstream psychology)</i></p> <p>The coach tried to expose the executive's self-limiting beliefs inviting him to find evidence which contests self-limiting beliefs that he did not have the aptitude or experience to be a Non-Executive Director</p>

Case	Significant features of the executive's initial interpretation of their problem presented to their executive coach	Nature of the educative executive coach intervention
Seven	The executive believes that his negative appraisal and negative emotional response to his CEO is justified.	<p><i>Psychodynamic educational intervention</i></p> <p>The coach helps the executive to make a connection between significant events in his past which might have triggered his emotional response and difficulties in his current relationship with his boss</p>

**Table 6-3: Summary of differences between the executives' and educational intervention of coaches**

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the data presented in this chapter suggests that there are two aspects of the competency 'engendering executive reflexivity'. The first significant type of skills tied to the competency can be understood as diagnostic and involving the executive coach hypothesising the influence of psychological and/or psychosocial process on executives' sense-making about their problem issue. The ability for executive coaches to identify signifiers of the potential influence of a psychological and/or psychosocial process on executives' sense-making about their problem issue is accompanied their demonstration of the ability to educate executives about the potential influence of psychological and/or psychosocial process on their own sense-making when engendering executive reflexivity. Different sub-types of the set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' are identified as relating to distinctions in the data relating to the particular type of psychological or psychosocial process that the coach identifies as influencing the executives' problem – and in due course educates the executive about.

In the following chapter the proposed key characteristics of the set of competencies which are suggested to belong to the category 'engendering executive reflexivity' proposed from the data analysis in this chapter are related to the discussion of the topic of reflexivity and the executive coaching literature.

# CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

## OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

The thesis of this study is that a competency which can be demonstrated by executive coaches, 'engendering executive reflexivity', contributes to executives resolving some problems that they bring to coaching. As stated previously, this is an exploratory study which seeks to propose a set of competencies that are not currently theorised in the executive coach competency debate.

The discussion begins by summarising Part One of phase two of the data analysis. Some of the distinguishing characteristics of the competency 'engendering executive reflexivity' are then identified. These are explored in relation to an argument by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) who advocate combining deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices. It is proposed that the data support the argument of the benefits of such a combination and suggests that Alvesson, Hardy and Harley's (2008) theoretical framework offers a useful lens to highlight critical aspects of the competency theorised in this study.

A heuristic framework, presented in Chapter Two, differentiating between different categories of educational interventions reported by coaches in the executive coaching literature, informed Part Two of phase two of the data analysis. The findings from this analysis are discussed in relation to research in the executive coaching literature that inspired the development of the framework to differentiate between different sub-types of the set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity'.

In another thread of the discussion, Archer's (2007) suggestion of the mediatory characteristics of reflexivity is explored in relation to the earlier discussion of the data analysis. The findings concluded that educational interventions by executive coaches equipped executives with insights that afforded their practising reflexivity towards their sense-making. When equipping the executive to practice reflexivity towards his/her problem, the executive coaching process can be seen to mediate between executives being influenced by some psychological or psychosocial processes and negative consequences of such influences. This data analysis is then related to an argument by Broussine and Ahmad (2012) which suggests that practising reflexivity is associated with an experience of increased agency when influenced by some oppressive micro and macro social processes. The chapter concludes by recognising the combined contribution of the different notions of

reflexivity explored throughout the discussion through their highlighting different key aspects of the set of coach competencies ‘engendering executive reflexivity’ theorised in this study.

### **KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COACH COMPETENCY – ‘ENGENDERING EXECUTIVE REFLEXIVITY’**

It is proposed that it is useful to differentiate between two distinct types of coach skills which give executive coaches the competency to ‘engender executive reflexivity’. The first significant skills tied to the competency can be understood as diagnostic and involving the executive coach hypothesising the influence of psychological and/or psychosocial process on executives’ sense-making about their problem issue. The second type of skills are educational and involve executive coaches equipping executives with insights to be able to recognise the influences of psychological or psychosocial processes on their own sense-making. The findings concluded that when executive coaches demonstrated the competency to ‘engender executive reflexivity’ they showed the ability to:

- Identify signifiers of the potential influence of a psychological and/or psychosocial process on executives’ sense-making about their problem issue;
- educate executives about the potential influence of psychological and/or psychosocial process on their own sense-making

The two aspects of the coach competency ‘engendering executive reflexivity’ identified in the findings and outlined above will now be related to an argument by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) which distinguishes between deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices, and advocates their combined benefits. The authors identify the distinguishing characteristics of deconstructive reflexive practices as relating to the surfacing, and problematisation of assumptions of objectivity implicit within a text. Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) describe the deconstructive process as serving to disarm truth claims. This is in contrast to their description of the defining characteristics of reconstructive reflexive practices which are seen to foster the consideration of alternative interpretations than those previously considered to be incontrovertibly true. The authors advocate a dialectic between deconstructive reflexive practices (labelled D-reflexivity) and reconstructive reflexive practices (R-reflexivity):

*We suggest that reflexive researchers might engage in practices that create a dialectic between D-reflexivity and R-reflexivity.*

*Moving between tearing down – pointing at the weaknesses in the text and disarming truth claims – and then developing something new or different (p 485)*

Whilst Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) see limitations in solely deconstructive reflexive practices, they believe that deconstruction plays a critical role in the unsettling, or destabilising, of assumptions of objectivity in texts which opens a space for movement towards reconstruction and the generation of alternative interpretations than those originally believed to be objective.

The notion of reflexivity underpinning the data analysis, is related to Alvesson, Hardy and Harley's (2008) reasoning for the benefits of combining deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices in Figure 3.3. It is proposed that when coaches' engender executive reflexivity this stems from their providing a rationale for executives to deconstruct their sense-making. The rationale that executive coaches gave executives for turning back and deconstructing their sense-making is asking the executive to consider that their sense-making is subject to the influence of a psychological or psychosocial process that causes biased sense-making, whilst at the same time leading the person subject to its influence having a conviction that their sense-making is objective.

The findings showed that executive coaches provoked executives to practice reflexivity after educating them about a range of different psychological and psychosocial processes including psychodynamic defences or unconscious group process and cognitive biases. Providing executives with these insights was identified as serving to disarm the executives' truth claims which were reported as being evident in the way executives initially presented their interpretations of problems at the beginning of coaching when they were struggling to resolve them. As a direct consequence of being stimulated to problematise and critically question the assumptions of objectivity in their sense-making (step one of reflexive practice) a space appeared to open for executives to undertake reconstructive reflexive practices, and consider alternative interpretations of their problems (step two of reflexive practice).

Holland observes that (1999) "*an important function of reflexive analysis is to expose the underlying assumptions on which arguments and stances are built*" (p 467). Taylor and White (2000) also believe that a critical aspect of reflexivity is the problematisation of assumptions that an interpretation is an incontrovertible truth. When related to the

argument by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008) Taylor and White's (2000) beliefs about the positive contribution that insights from social constructionism can make for practitioners, stems from it stimulating a combination of deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices. Taylor and White (2000) describe how one of the core premises of social constructionism is that knowledge is situated, local and provisional. They suggest that reading experience through a social constructionist lens provokes recognising the interpretative dimension of sense-making, which leads to subjecting knowledge claims to a more thorough ongoing scrutiny than if they are assumed to be objective. They state:

*If we believe something is true and universally applicable and cannot be changed then that is it, end of story. If, however, we acknowledge that there are a multiplicity of ways of understanding and making sense of the world, then these 'discourses' are opened up for examination. (p 31)*

Taylor and White (2000) develop their argument in relation to advocating practitioner reflexivity. The authors suggest that one of the reasons for healthcare practitioners to practice reflexivity is that without such practice the practitioners can unwittingly reproduce systemic prejudices which can compromise their potential to provide quality care. Taylor and White (2000) relate reflexive practice to subjecting knowledge claims to a thorough going scrutiny through recognising the influence of social processes related to reproducing systemic prejudices. A resonance can be seen between Taylor and White's (2000) observations relating to the characteristics, and benefits, of practising reflexivity and the analysis of the data in this study discussed above. It can be seen that reading the executives' experience through a theoretical lens which describes the nature of a psychological and/or psychosocial process is a trigger for executive coaches to subject the executives' knowledge claims to scrutiny.

It is proposed that, through asking executives to consider that they are subject to the influence of psychological or psychosocial processes associated with either mainstream psychology, psychodynamics or systems psychodynamics, as indicated in the previous chapter, executive coaches help executives to recognise their subjectivity. The findings can be interpreted to suggest that one of the things that unites the different educational interventions of coaches which contribute to helping engender reflexive practices in executives is that they "*reveal forgotten choices, expose hidden alternatives, lay bare epistemological limits*" (Lynch, 2000 p 36) which is seen as a key positive contribution of



reflexive practices. Throughout the data, it was evident that through helping unsettle the assumptions of objectivity in executives' sense-making which appeared to sustain the executives' problems and their laying bare epistemological limits, executive coaches empowered executives to consider alternative approaches to their problems.

It was evident across the data that a common consequence of executives becoming aware of the subjective nature of their sense-making was their being open to learning, possibility and surprise, something that Broussine and Ahmad (2012) attribute to the process of reflexivity. The analysis of Case Six from the previous chapter will now be discussed to exemplify the common characteristics and consequences attributed to coaches practising reflexivity evident across the data and related to Alvesson, Hardy and Harley's (2008) argument about the benefits of combining deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices.

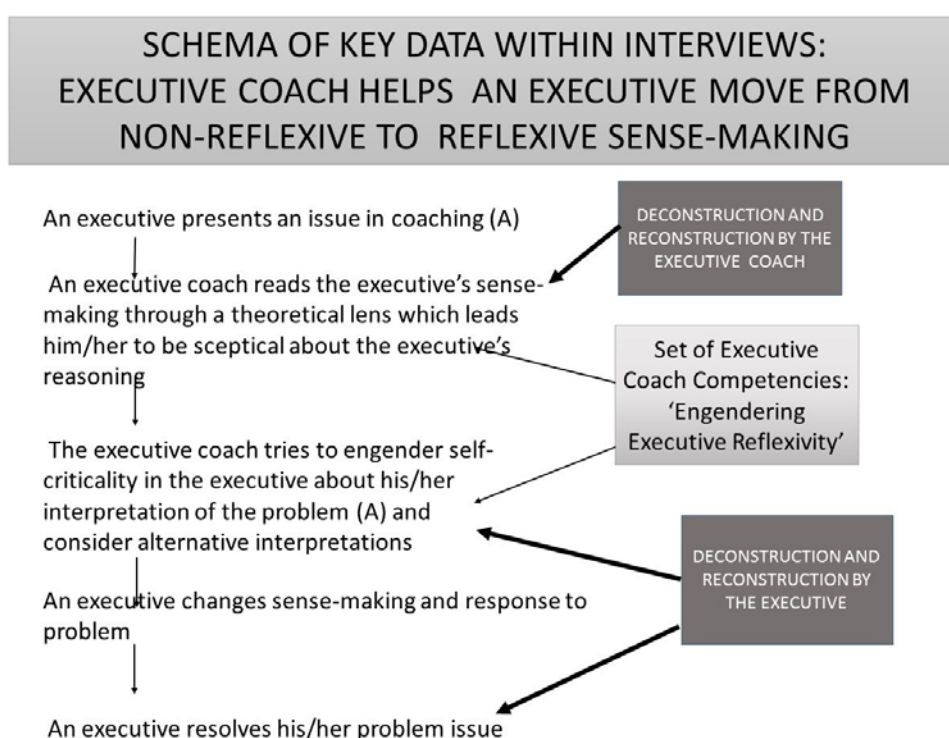
In Case Six an executive reported deciding to undergo coaching to address a problem he was experiencing which was characterised by his having a growing lack of confidence and self-doubt about whether he had the personal qualities and aptitude to achieve his goal of becoming a Non-Executive Director. The executive described a number of interventions by the coach that he believed helped stimulate a growth in his self-confidence. For example he reported the coach asking him to explicitly articulate in detail what he believed were the characteristics and experience of the type of person that he believed would make a successful Non-Executive Director. The coach then asked him to consider how his personal qualities, achievements and profile compared to this. Other examples were given of coach interventions which exposed the executive's self-limiting beliefs and subjected to scrutiny. The executive stated:

*I know when we started the coach got me to do a lot of stuff around thinking about the people who do what you want to do, describe them to me, and then getting me to objectively compare their profile to my profile and what is the difference, and then in a coaching sort of way asking me to visualise being in a group with them, did I hold my end up with them, and imagine me being one of them in that group that I admired being a peer in the group.*

The case was analysed as suggesting that the executive coach's identifying the influence of psychological processes, such as those described in cognitive psychology, on the executives'

sense-making, led him to suspect that the executive's reasoning supporting his lack of confidence was flawed. The executive coach interventions described by the executive above were analysed as serving to help the executive to gain literacy in reading his experience through the same lens as the coach himself, and recognise the influence of limiting self-beliefs and maladaptive schemas.

Through his/her educating the executive about his/her suspected influence of problem sustaining psychological or psychosocial processes on executives' sense-making, it is suggested that an executive coach equips executives with insights which provoke them to problematise (deconstruct) and reframe (reconstruct) the sense-making which can sustain their problems. A summary of the key aspects of the competency 'engendering executive reflexivity' is depicted in Figure 7.1.



**Figure 7-1: Summary of key aspects of the coach competency 'engendering executive reflexivity'.**

It is proposed that the argument presented by Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008), which advocates the combining of deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices, offers a significant contribution in highlighting the nature of, and relationship between, the core characteristics of the coach competency 'engendering executive reflexivity'. The sequential logic within Alvesson, Hardy and Harley's (2008) argument of deconstructive practices being necessary to open a space for reconstructive reflexive practices resonates strongly

with that accompanying the two steps of reflexivity theorised in the notion of reflexivity underpinning this study as shown in the coding framework (see Figure 6.1 in the data analysis and findings chapter). Through having the knowledge and skill to identify signifiers of the potential influence of psychological or psychosocial processes on executives' sense-making, and equipping executives with the same knowledge, it is proposed that executive coaches provide a rationale for executives to deconstruct their sense-making – the beginning of the process of practising reflexivity.

Differentiation between sub-types in the set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' are discussed in the following section.

### **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUB-TYPES OF THE SET OF COMPETENCIES 'ENGENDERING EXECUTIVE REFLEXIVITY'**

It has been described previously how Holland's (1999) transdisciplinary model of reflexivity was perceived as being a particularly appropriate theoretical framework to contribute to the analysis of the multi-perspective data in this study. As outlined earlier, Holland (1999) suggests that rather than think of reflexivity in relation to a single discipline, it is useful to present different disciplinary notions side by side, recognising unifying similarities between such conceptions as well as their differences. It was proposed earlier that through helping executives to develop literacy in reading the influence of a psychological or psychosocial process on their sense-making, executive coaches demonstrate educational competencies. Distinctions between educational skills of coaches which contribute to 'engendering executive reflexivity' are explored and related to the executive coaching literature in this section.

Implicit within Holland's (1999) transdisciplinary reflexivity model is an assumption that differences between disciplinary notions of reflexivity can be understood as relating to the type of psychological or psychosocial process that is associated with the theorising of reflexivity. Part Two of phase two of the data analysis was informed by a heuristic framework presented in Chapter Two. This heuristic discriminatory framework distinguishes between three different theoretical perspectives in the body of research within the executive coaching literature where beneficial coach outcomes were attributed to executive coaches drawing upon insights from a particular theoretical perspective to inform their practice. The theoretical perspectives were categorised as mainstream

psychology, psychodynamics and systems psychodynamics. Whilst aware that such a framework is based on generalisations and oversimplifications of the different theoretical perspectives, it was believed to be useful as a heuristic device for making sense of the different sub-types of the set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity'.

The heuristic framework identified that the distinguishing characteristic of processes described in psychodynamics perspective from the those described in mainstream psychology and systems psychodynamics ones relates to the former's main focus being on the role of the personal unconscious, and placing emphasis on the role significant past events have in provoking strong emotional reactions in current relationships. In contrast, psychosocial processes associated with the systems psychodynamics perspective are seen to elucidate the potential influence of unconscious group processes on people's sense-making. It was described in Chapter Two how trying to find a defining characteristic of research in mainstream psychology was found to be problematic, given the range of different perspectives associated with mainstream psychology included in the executive coaching literature (see Table 2. 2). It was explained how a decision was made to represent the defining characteristic of processes associated with mainstream psychology as their not relating to either the individual or group unconscious processes. The logic for differentiating between processes associated with mainstream psychology from those associated with psychodynamics and systems psychodynamics perspectives in the negative case, as their not emphasising unconscious processes, resonates with an argument made by Gray (2006) when differentiating between cognitive behavioural therapy and psychodynamic approaches. Gray (2006, p 482) states:

*Another therapeutic approach—cognitive behavioural therapy—recognizes unconscious processes, but defines them differently and accords them a less central role in influencing behaviour. (p 482)*

In equipping executive coaches with insights which they then pass onto executives, different theoretical perspectives informing educational executive coach interventions can be understood as providing significant cognitive tools (Bourdieu, 2004) for executive coaches which they pass on to executives. These cognitive tools help to unveil, unmask and bring to light the hitherto hidden influence of psychological and psychosocial processes on executive's problems. Each of the three educational interventions will now be explored in turn.

## EXECUTIVE COACH INTERVENTIONS INFORMED BY THE PSYCHODYNAMIC PERSPECTIVES

The executive coaching approaches where executive coach report drawing on insights from the psychodynamics perspective have been categorised as distinct from coaching practices where coaches draw on theories from mainstream psychology through the former exploring the role of unconscious processes related to the individual's past experience, such as psychodynamic defences, as influencing current relationships (Kilburg, 2004b). Kilburg (2004b) suggests that when this approach informs executive coach interventions, coaches help executives to consider the role of past experiences on problems characterised by interpersonal and relationship problems:

*Of the extensive range of interventions available to work with psychodynamic material, I believe that coaches will make the most frequent use of psychoeducational interventions to explain the nature of conflicts, defenses, emotions, and relationship issues to clients. (Kilburg, 2004, p 260)*

In Case Seven, analysed in Chapter Six, a case study published in the executive coaching literature by a coach/author Kilburg (2004b) was analysed. Kilburg (2004b) presents a vignette of a coaching session where he describes his drawing upon insights about processes associated with the psychodynamic perspective as helping contribute to an executive gaining insights which led to his resolving a problem he brought to coaching.

Kilburg (2004b) described a coaching engagement in which an executive presented a problem related to his feeling that he was being taken advantage of by his CEO. The executive reported that he found his strong negative emotion towards the CEO difficult to manage and explained that that his feeling of being taken advantage of by him was causing him to consider leaving a job that for the most part he liked. Kilburg (2004b) describes how, when listening to the executive's account of crucial encounters between the executive and his boss that were described as epitomising his being taken for granted, he found himself questioning the objectivity of the executive's negative appraisal of the CEO.

Rather than being a justifiable response to his boss' behaviour Kilburg (2004b) believed that the emotional responses of the executive could be better understood as stemming from his having unprocessed strong emotions being triggered from his past experience, which were beyond his conscious awareness. Kilburg (2004b) described how he tried to bring the

unconscious, unprocessed strong emotions from the executive's past to the surface. His reading of the executive's problem through a psychodynamic lens provoked him to ask the executive "*Does this situation remind you of anything you have faced before?*" (2004b, 247)

Kilburg (2004b) described how when asked if his current emotional response resonated with one from his past the executive was able to make a connection between his current strong negative emotional response and a significant experience in his past which had provoked a similar feeling of being taken advantage of. Kilburg (2004b) attributed the executive being able to make a connection between the past experience and his current relationship problem as leading the executive to experience a transformed relationship with his boss. He described how the executive gave feedback on the positive benefits from gaining insights into the influence of his past experience on his current emotional response to his CEO as follows:

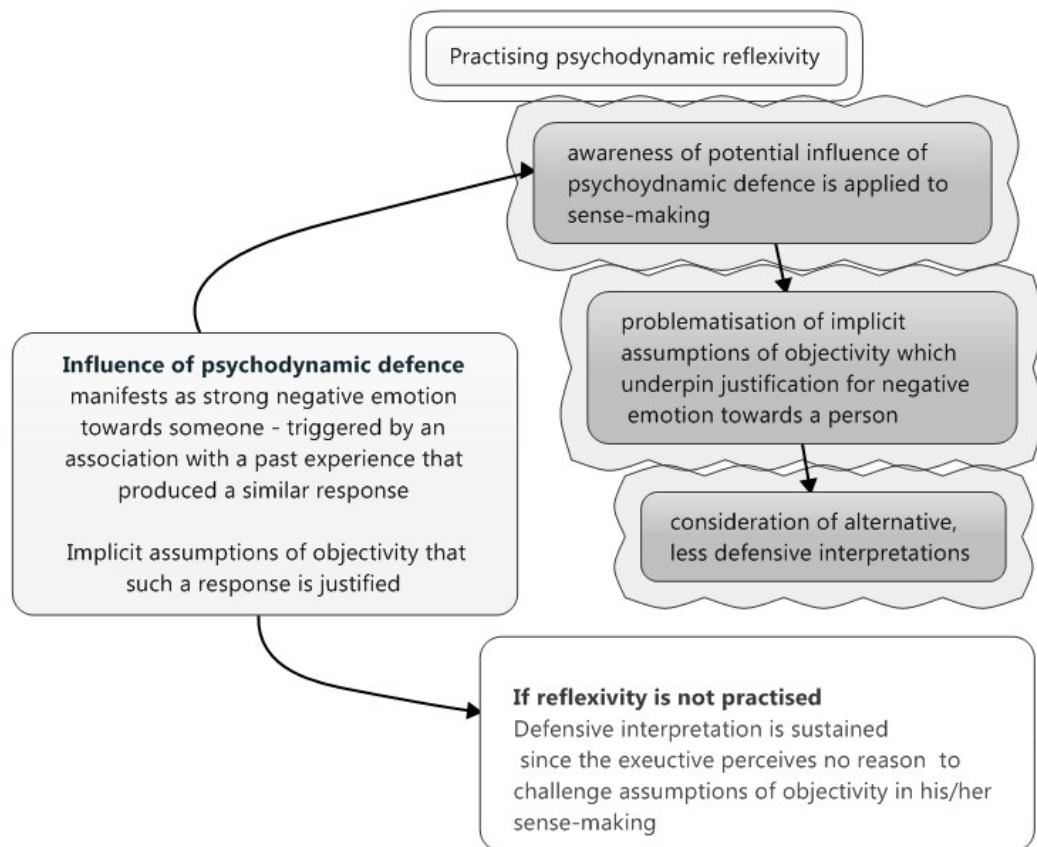
*But now that I know that I'm feeling that old sense of resentment about being taken advantage of, I think I can steer clear of making some bad choices.* (2004b, 248)

The case was analysed to suggest that through the executive gaining insights into processes associated with the psychodynamic perspective he was able to deconstruct his interpretation of the problem, and problematise the assumptions that his appraisal of the boss was unequivocally accurate. The insights which the executive gained from his executive coach were identified as being pivotal in provoking his reconstruction of his perception of his boss and his reporting no longer for taken for granted.

Within this case Kilburg's (2004b) description of inviting the executive to consider that his sense-making about his CEO was subject to the influence of a psychodynamic process was termed by him as a psycho-educational intervention. He describes this as involving explaining the nature of conflicts, defenses, emotions, and relationship issues to clients (2004, p 260). This resonates with Czander and Eisold's (2003) observation that a distinguishing characteristic of psychoanalytic work involves the "*deciphering or translating of unconscious thoughts and feelings, the understanding of resistances and defense mechanisms*" (p 475). Others studies in the executive coaching literature, including those by Rotenberg (2000) Gray (2006) Turner (2009) and Huggler (2007) share Kilburg's (2004) belief in the benefits of executives gaining insights into processes described in the psychodynamics perspective during coaching.

The key aspects of analysis of the case study by Kilburg (2004b) are abstracted and presented as a worked example in Figure 7.2 to illustrate the reasoning associated within the sub-group of research within the executive coaching literature that advocates psychodynamic educational interventions by coaches. When the executive coached by Kilburg (2004b) presented his problem in coaching it is reported that there were strong indications that he believed that his sense-making about being taken advantage of by his boss was objective. This was analysed as being an indication of his practising non-reflexive sense-making. It is suggested that the influence of a psychodynamic process influenced the executive's conviction that his strong negative emotional response towards his boss was justified, and this inhibited him from considering alternative interpretations.

When Kilburg (2004b) made the educational intervention to help the executive to recognise the influence of significant past experiences to his current response to his CEO, this could be seen as giving the executive a rationale for turning back to deconstruct, and question the objectivity of his sense-making (associated in this study with being the first step of practising reflexivity). As a consequence of this the executive was described as having less defensive sense-making which led to his developing a more positive perception of his boss (associated within this study as the second step of practicing reflexivity). This argument is depicted in Figure 7.2.



**Figure 7-2: The contribution of psychodynamic educational intervention of the coach in provoking executive to practice reflexivity**

It is suggested that the argument made above, and depicted in Figure 7.2, about the contribution that psychodynamic educational coach interventions make in helping engender executive reflexivity, can be extended to apply to the different types of educational interventions. That is, it is believed that helping executives gain insights into processes associated with systems psychodynamics and mainstream psychology perspectives are analysed as playing a critical role in ‘engendering executive reflexivity’.

### **EXECUTIVE COACH INTERVENTIONS INFORMED BY THE SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS PERSPECTIVES**

In Chapter Six, three interviews, presented as two cases, were analysed as indicating that through helping executives to gain insights from the systems psychodynamics perspectives executive coaches helped executives to resolve problems brought to coaching. In the heuristic framework differentiating between different educational interventions summarised in Table 6. 2, the defining characteristic of insights garnered from the systems psychodynamics perspectives was identified as their illuminating the influence of group or systemic unconscious processes on problem-sustaining sense-making. Day (2010, p 866)



describes how such unconscious dynamics in organisations can evoke unconscious anxieties and powerful emotions:

*Unconscious dynamics in organisations can be understood as arising in a wider psychosocial context (Lewin, 1952), which is made up of the interplay of psychological, social, economic, power and political processes (Holti, 1997). This gives rise to ongoing conflicts between the interests of individuals and groups inside and outside of the organisation which evokes unconscious anxieties and powerful emotions.*

In the case described above, the executive coach's hypothesising of the influence of the executive's past experiences which were beyond his consciousness was identified by the coach (Kilburg 2004b) as representing the defining characteristics of psychodynamic educational interventions. A significant differentiator was identified in the findings between executive coaches who provoked executive reflexivity through suggesting to executives that their sense-making was influenced by processes described in the systems psychodynamics perspective and those in the psychodynamic perspective relating to the type of unconscious influence which is theorised. The previous section highlighted how executive coaches who helped executives gain insights into psychodynamic influences on their sense-making helped the executive to read their emotional responses as clues to their personal unconscious and significant experiences in their past. In contrast, executive coaches who helped executives to consider that their sense-making was influenced by processes described in systems psychodynamic perspective, encouraged executives to interpret their emotional responses as providing information about unconscious group dynamics affecting the organisation.

Other research in the executive coaching literature, for example Brunning (2006), Newton, Long and Sievers (2006) and Henning and Cilliers (2012) highlight the potential positive contribution of educational interventions which help executives to recognise the difference processes described in systems psychodynamics make in affording them to respond differently, and with more positive results, to their problems. The commonality within this research is their advocating the benefits of helping executives to gain insights into the influence of unconscious group processes and hidden system dynamics on their experiences.

In two interviews relating to different cases, both an executive and an executive coach related their experiences of a book by Armstrong (2000), entitled 'Emotions in Organisations: Disturbance or Intelligence?' The context that the book was referenced in was the coach and executive expressing that it encapsulated key ideas from systems psychodynamic perspectives that both the coach and executive found insightful. In one case a coach described inviting an executive to read her strong emotional responses to a colleague as providing information about unconscious dynamics in the organisational system that they worked in rather than being an emotional disturbance. After describing his practice as being influenced by Armstrong's (2000) work the coach stated:

*Very commonly we regard emotions as a form of disturbance - things going wrong - whereas if you take it as a just an emotional expression of an organisational event, dynamic, or whatever, then the emotion becomes information - whatever it might be.*

The executive coach discussed one particular issue that the executive sought to address during coaching that he believed epitomised the work he and the executive did during coaching informed by the systems psychodynamic perspective. The executive recounted a situation where a co-executive had made, what appeared to her, a very personal, and critical comment about her performance. She reported feeling strong anger towards her colleague, and presented the issue in coaching as symptomatic of a difficult relationship that she wished to improve. She considered confronting her colleague about his behavior and wished to explore her options for managing the interaction in coaching.

The executive coach reported that it was apparent that the executive considered her anger as a justifiable response to the colleague's behaviour, and an emotional disturbance which she believed could be removed by confronting her colleague. The coach described how during a coaching session he invited the executive to reconsider whether her response was an emotional disturbance that would be dissipated through confrontation with the colleague, and consider instead it offering clues to unconscious dynamics within the organisational system they both worked. The rationale that the executive coach provided for this intervention was that an experience of anger towards a colleague may be a manifestation of systemic anxieties related to change processes in an organisation. He described the coaching intervention of inviting the executive to consider that her sense-making was subject to the influence of psychosocial processes associated with the systems psychodynamics perspective – unconscious group processes:

*So if there's anger, one individual becoming angry you can either say this is their personality or you can say why is it that this person in their role or position in the organisation has become angry and where does the anger belong and how can we understand the anger? So all the time we're working on her experience, what it means.*

The exploration of the issue during coaching was reported as leading the executive to consider that her colleague's behavior may be indicative of underlying anxiety in the organisational system related to uncertainty about a potential merger with another organisation. The executive reported how during the coaching process she was encouraged to explore her emotional reaction to her colleague to help provide her with insights about the current tensions in the organisation. She believed that the work that she and her coach did during coaching helped her to manage her role effectively during the turbulence that was then affecting the organisational system.

The observations of the executive's coach resonate with those by Simpson and French (2015). The authors describe how if emotions are read as providing useful information about unconscious group processes which might otherwise be invisible, they can provoke significant learning, that can contribute to people performing their group roles more effectively *"if group members understand that emotions are not necessarily a "disturbance" but can instead be a source of "intelligence" in the sense of useful information"* (2015, p 28) They continue: *"By recognising difficult emotional experiences as a form of communication, group members can learn from them"* (2015, p 28).

In another case, an executive reported how, before he gained insights into the potential influence of unconscious group processes on his sense-making from his executive coach, he found himself so overwhelmed by negative emotions towards colleagues that it intruded significantly on his private life. He described finding himself festering, even when on holiday, about colleagues at work who he believed were responsible for invoking his strong, justifiable, negative emotion:

*I got so overwhelmed. I had a couple of very difficult members of staff, very, very difficult and a couple of very hard problems to solve but I just felt so overwhelmed by it all I thought of quitting. I went away on holiday without having solved one of the problems*

*and let it fester and I really let it get to me in a big way.*

During the interview, the executive described how gaining insights into unconscious group processes described in the systems psychodynamics perspectives from his executive coach stimulated him to respond differently when facing difficult members of staff hard problems. The executive described how once he began to consider his emotional responses as useful information rather than disturbances he was able to detach from emotions that previously overwhelmed him. He described the benefits he found from reading his emotional responses as clues to unconscious dynamics and systemic dysfunctions rather than justifiable responses to colleague's behaviour:

*Well you know I might say oh Fred has really annoyed me and I might be sitting there you know steaming away. Oh Fred's such a pillock, why's Fred done <X>...and I'm feeling really cross with Fred. What the coaching process does is allow me to reframe that as one part of the system of this faculty is under strain and that strain is showing itself between the head of that part and me.*

Later in the interview, the executive described the process that led him to detach from strong negative emotions as 'giving the emotions back to the system'. He used the phrase 'giving the emotions back to the system' in the context of acknowledging how systemic tensions may manifest in the conflicts between the members of the system:

*Very often what comes to you as a personal conflict, Fred and Mary have fallen out is actually the built in structural problem in the system and so I think one of the key roles of coaching is to help me not get bogged down in the immediate emotions of the conflict but instead but to give them back to the system to say the tensions in the system are generating these problems.*

It can be seen that there were significant distinctions between the interviews where executives reported believing that the insights they gained into the potential influence of unconscious group processes from their executive coach helped them to perform their roles more effectively and the case study where insights into psychodynamics were identified as helping an executive to resolve problems stemming from his perceiving that he was being taken for granted by his CEO (Kilburg, 2004b). The significant breakthrough for the executive who was identified as practising reflexivity after gaining insights into processes

described in the psychodynamics perspective was seen to arise from his making connections between an emotional response stemming from his feeling taken for granted by his CEO and a significant experience in his past. In interviews where the executives were identified to practice reflexivity after gaining insights from the systems psychodynamics perspective, the breakthrough for the executives was seen to arise from their making a connection between their current emotions and organisational tensions and dysfunctions in the present. In the following section data relating to mainstream psychology educational interventions are discussed.

### **EXECUTIVE COACH INTERVENTIONS INFORMED BY MAINSTREAM PSYCHOLOGY**

As stated earlier, although spanning a broad range of diverse approaches, the coaching approaches categorised as being educational interventions related to mainstream psychology were considered as distinct from psychodynamics or systems psychodynamic perspectives through their not emphasising the need for exploration of the influence of personal or group unconscious processes on their sense-making.

A broad range of sub-groups of mainstream psychology were cited in Peltier's (2010) compendium of psychological coaching practices, that illustrated the range of different perspectives in the literature. Peltier (2010) distinguishes between the following different types of psychological practice: personality tests; development psychology and adult development; behavioural concepts; cognitive psychology and cognitive therapy; family therapy and systems theory and social psychology; hypnotic communication and emotional intelligence. In a similar type of compendium of psychological informed executive coaching practices Stober and Grant (2006) include similar categories to Peltier (2010) adding positive psychology, as a separate sub- category. Chapter Two presents a range of different theories included in research in the executive coaching literature which can be seen as relating to Peltier (2010) and Stober and Grant's (2006) sub-categories of approaches. Whilst not a comprehensive list of the different approaches within mainstream psychology, it demonstrates the wide diversity of approaches associated with this field.

Three interviews were categorised in relation to executive coach educational skills which helped engender executive reflexivity in relation to two sub-groups of psychology; personality theory and cognitive psychology. The first case to be discussed is one which was categorised as relating to a cognitive psychology coach educational intervention. Ducharme (2004) describes how a common feature of practices in executive coaching influenced by

cognitive psychology is that they involve cognitive-restructuring techniques. She states “cognitive-restructuring techniques involve assessing and changing individual’s maladaptive schemas, automatic thoughts, and dysfunctional cognition” (p 216). Froggat (2006, cited in Grant and O’Connor 2010) elaborates on the key aspects of the change process which are identified in approaches influenced by cognitive psychology as focusing on identifying thinking patterns from which problematic emotions and behaviour appear to arise. He states that:

*Cognitive-behavioural theory rests on the notion that problematic emotions and behaviours stem primarily (although not exclusively) from cognitive processes, and that such problems can be solved by understanding how such thoughts arise, and then systemically changing one’s thinking patterns, behaviours, and by also changing the environment where possible (p 104)*

In Case Six of the second phase of data analysis, an executive described how he believed that a range of coach interventions helped him to change his sense-making about not having the appropriate aptitude or disposition to achieve his goal of being a Non-Executive Director. It was described above how the executive believed that one particular group of coach interventions were significant in contributing to his achieving his goal were described as helping him to develop a greater self-confidence in his aptitude to achieve his goal.

The coach interventions were analysed as resonating with Ducharme’s (2004) description of the distinguishing characteristics of cognitive restructuring. Ducharme (2004) states: “cognitive-restructuring techniques involve assessing and changing individual’s maladaptive schemas, automatic thoughts, and dysfunctional cognition” (p 216). The range of interventions believed to lead to the executive’s growth in confidence about achieving his goal were analysed as having a common characteristic. The common characteristic of the different interventions, including visualisations and critical interrogation, can be seen to stem from the coach suspecting that the executive’s lack of self-confidence to achieve his goal was not justified - rather it was a consequence of processes such as maladaptive schemas and dysfunctional cognition. This was inferred from how the coach interventions which the executive believed contributed to his regaining his confidence, appeared to focus on encouraging the executive to re-evaluate the supporting evidence that he gave as justifying his negative appraisal of himself when he originally presented his problem in coaching.

As stated earlier, the reasoning underlying the defining characteristics of research advocating that executive coaches have educational skills to help executives to gain insights into processes described in mainstream psychology was these did not involve helping executives to gain insights into the influence of unconscious processes (personal or group) on their sense-making. In the case described above, the executive himself stressed how he believed that the interventions used by the coach were rational rather than involving his sub-conscious:

*I can't remember particular technique or trigger for this happening but in essence after a few months...this is all rational rather than sub-conscious. I got onto asking what could I do, what could I achieve?*

Two other cases were analysed as indicating that the educational interventions by executive coaches which equipped executives with insights which helped them resolve problems related to personality theory. In both cases to the coach intervention involved helping executives gain insights into personality preferences described in relation to the coach using a diagnostic personality test, Myers Briggs Personality Inventory (MBTI). Passmore, Holloway and Rawle-Cope (2010) describe how the MBTI is based on Jung's typology of innate personality preferences. In both cases no mention was made of the particular personality preference of the executive and the critical insights appeared to come from recognising the strengths and weaknesses of different personality preferences in different situations.

An example from one of the two cases will now be discussed. In Case Three, Chapter Six, an executive presented a problem in coaching related to a difficult relationship he had with a colleague in a sister organisation with whom he was required to collaborate. He described how he originally believed that the relationship difficulties stemmed from the behaviour of his colleague which he found to be unhelpful and obstructive. The executive attributed gaining insights into the strengths and weakness of different personality preferences, in coaching sessions after his completion of the MBTI questionnaire as being pivotal to unsettling his original view of the problem.

He described how insights he gained about the comparative strengths and weaknesses of people's different personality preferences led him to consider that his sense-making about the colleague with whom he had a difficult relationship was prejudicial. The executive

described how he believed this coach intervention helped him to re-interpret the colleague's behaviour and consider, rather than it stemming from him having an unhelpful and obstructive nature, it being influenced by himself and his fellow executive having different personality preferences which contributed to conflicts in meetings. The executive reflected on the insights he gained as follows:

*I got the sense that other chief executive of the other organisation found me, shall we say, intimidating or challenging simply because I would ask quite, I would say, straight forwards, but he might say, very to the point questions and be very penetrating.... and he was, shall we say, one of the old school who wasn't used to a more business-like approach so there's maybe a clash of styles of values, maybe not values, a clash of cultures, a clash of behaviour styles perhaps would be more accurate to say.*

The executive described how he came to develop a greater respect for his colleague through gaining insights related to personality theory:

*with <coach's name> help I was able to see that was an issue about making me feel that I was a lesser person or that he was a lesser person we were disagreeing about issues but the business issue, the valid and legitimate and necessary business issue was getting lost in the clash of behaviour styles.*

After gaining these insights the executive reported deliberately changing his style in meetings with his colleague to adapt to his fellow executive's preference for discussing business matters. He believed that this led to a greatly improved quality of collaboration between them. This case resonates with research by Kets de Vries (2005) who described how part of an executive leadership coaching programme involved helping executives to gain insights into their own and colleagues' personality preferences. Kets de Vries (2005) described how the process was attributed to improving the collaboration between executives. One of the executives who underwent this programme observed similar positive consequences from gaining insights through psychometric coach interventions as the executive in Case Three above:

*We've worked together now for 28 years. It's sad that I learned more about you in the past two days than I had in all the previous*



*years. But now I have a better sense of your strengths and weaknesses, and I understand what you stand for. I think we'll be able to work together more effectively now. (p 67)*

It can be seen how in the cases categorised as relating to mainstream psychology, educational coach interventions discussed differ from the cases relating to psychodynamic and systems psychodynamic educational coach interventions through the insights gained by executives not relating to unconscious processes.

In the conclusion chapter, the discussion of the significance of different types of educational intervention associated with being pivotal to 'engendering executive reflexivity' is explored further when contextualising the set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' as a set of contingent competencies. It is suggested that different types of educational intervention may be needed to help executives to resolve the range of problems they may experience through being influenced by some psychological or psychosocial processes that cause bias. In essence, the contingent competency argument proposes that if a problem experienced by an executive is influenced by unconscious group process, his\her ability to resolve this problem may be contingent upon the executive coach having two competencies. One is to identify signifiers that the executive's sense-making is influenced by unconscious group processes and the other is to educate the executive about this in order to engender executive reflexivity. Similarly executives' resolution of problems which are influenced by processes associated with mainstream psychology, and psychodynamics would be contingent upon executive coaches having diagnostic and educational skills related to psychological and psychosocial processes associated with these theoretical perspectives.

Put slightly differently, if an executive has a problem which is influenced by unconscious group processes and then the coach makes psychodynamic educational interventions, as described by Kilburg (2004b) this may not equip the executive with the insight to resolve his/her problem. It is argued that coaches may need to have a range of cognitive tools (Bourdieu, 2004) to help equip executives with the same type of cognitive tool to afford their unveiling, unmask and bring to light the hitherto hidden influence of psychological and psychosocial processes on their sense-making. This logic can be related to conclusions drawn by Turner and Goodrich (2010) who describe the limitations of single models of coaching, favouring instead multiple level of analysis, individual, team and organisation. Turner and Goodrich (2010) state:

*We conclude that the future of consulting psychology will be based less on single models of executive coaching that emanate from a single theory or approach. We believe that such approaches are of limited use in practice, especially when the cases entail multiple levels of analysis (individual, team, and organization) and require sustained intervention over time. (p 52)*

In the following section the discussion presented to this point will be related to arguments by Archer (2007), Sayer (2013) and Broussine and Ahmad (2012) about the relationship between reflexivity, mediation and agency.

## **REFLEXIVITY, MEDIATION AND AGENCY**

Archer (2007) observes that *“the subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play”* (2007, p5). Archer’s (2007) argument is embedded within a particular sociological argument and is located with a fundamentally different theoretical application of reflexivity than the transdisciplinary one informing this study. Sayer (2013) describes how Archer’s (2007) theorisation of reflexivity stresses the potential for peoples’ active monitoring and deliberating on their situations as mediating between their being passively moulded by constraints of social processes and actively deliberating and challenging their situations. Sayer (2013) supports this argument and believes in the benefits of people being able to deliberate and monitor their responses to situations in order to ameliorate the negative consequences of being influenced by social processes which oppress:

*Individuals are not simply and passively moulded by constraints and affordances; rather, the effect or lack of effect of such contexts depends on the active mediation of individuals’ monitoring and deliberating on their situation. (2013, p 113)*

It is believed that Sayer’s (2013) reasoning relating to the mediatory aspect of practising reflexivity within Archer’s (2007) argument can be abstracted from the specific sociological application with which it is associated and related to applications of reflexivity to the analysis of executive coach competencies in this study. For Sayer (2013) conscious deliberation on one’s experience is seen to help reduce the negative consequences of being influenced by social processes which serve to oppress. In this study the data were analysed to suggest that through helping unveil the potential influences of psychological or

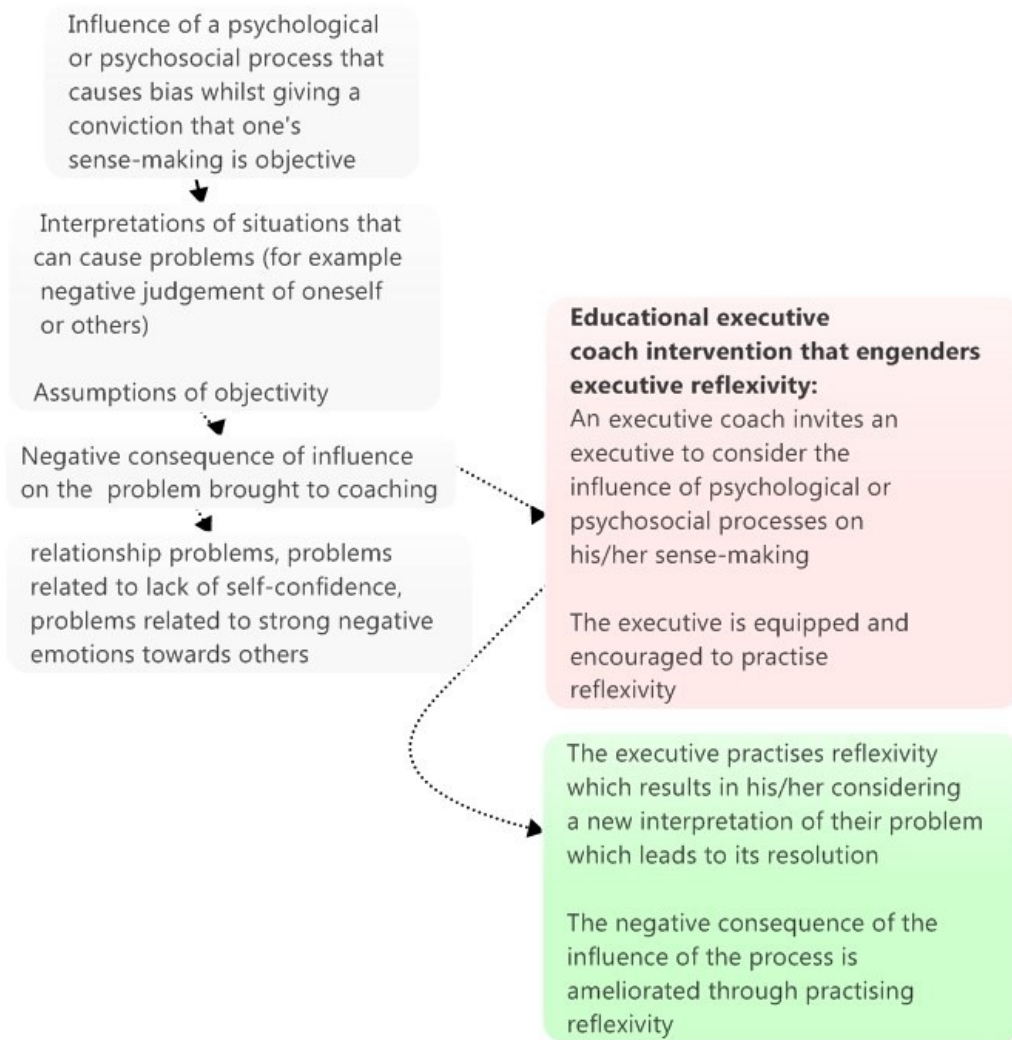
psychosocial processes on executives' sense-making, executive coaches helped provoke a process of conscious deliberation in executives which served as an antidote to these influences.

The data presented in Chapter Six were interpreted to suggest that there can be a negative consequence of being influenced by some psychological or psychosocial processes when this type of influence is invisible to the executive. The analysis suggested that executives experienced problems which they found difficult to resolve independently of coaching when they were influenced by processes such as psychodynamic defences, unconscious group processes and maladaptive schemas. However, another consequence of being influenced by the same psychological or psychosocial process was implicit within the data in the sense that executives were reported as being able to resolve the same problems that they brought to coaching after they gained insights into the psychological and psychosocial processes that affected their sense-making about their problems.

A key part of the analysis presented in this chapter is that when executive coaches helped executives to become aware of the influence of a psychological or psychosocial process on their sense-making this stimulated them to practice reflexivity. Practicing reflexivity is seen to involve the executives problematising, usurping and replacing problem sustaining interpretations with alternative interpretations of problem experiences which lead to their problems being resolved. Thus it can be argued from the data analysis discussed in this chapter that there can be two potential consequences of an executive being influenced by such a process which depends on whether or not the influence is invisible to the executive. If an executive coach engenders executive reflexivity, this can be seen to ameliorate the negative consequences of the executive being influenced by some psychological or psychosocial processes (such as psychodynamic defences, maladaptive schemas or unconscious group processes) of executives experiencing problems due to the type of sense-making engendered by such processes. In this sense, practising reflexivity can be seen to mediate between being influenced by a process and the negative consequences of such an influence which occur if a person subject to its influence is unaware of this.

Executive coaches' having the competency to help engender executive reflexivity can therefore be seen as playing a valuable role in bringing such influences to the awareness of executives a process which helps equip and provoke executives adopting self-critical practices which ameliorates their negative effects. A summary of this argument is depicted

in Figure 7.3



**Figure 7-3: Awareness mediating between psychological/psychosocial influences and consequences**

The mediatory affordances of reflexivity can be related to an argument by Broussine and Ahmad (2012) who associate reflexive practices with engendering greater feelings of agency. Broussine and Ahmad (2012) describe trying to equip public managers with insights to practise reflexivity to help them to recognise opportunities to experience a greater sense of agency when they are influenced by micro and macro social processes which can otherwise lead them to feel disempowered. The authors suggest that by helping the managers to gain knowledge about the nature of micro and macro systemic influences that can lead to their feeling disempowered, they can unlock their reflexive potential. They describe a consequence of unlocking managers' reflexive potential as helping them be aware of their having greater freedom than they previously realised to perform their professional roles ethically when subject to the influence of oppressive micro and macro

social processes. It has been proposed earlier that one of the consequences of being influenced by some psychological and psychosocial processes is a sense that one's sense-making is objective when this is not the case. The analysis of the data presented and discussed in this chapter can be interpreted as suggesting that when executives believe their sense-making is objective, they can find themselves without a rationale to consider interpretations as valid alternatives. This relates to an observation by Taylor and White (2000) *"if we believe something is true and universally applicable and cannot be changed then that is it, end of story"* (p 31). It was demonstrated across the data that once the executives were provoked to problematise the assumptions of objectivity in their sense-making they experienced greater freedom to explore alternative responses to their problems. In equipping executives with insights into the influence of psychological and/or psychosocial processes on their sense-making, the educational interventions of coaches can be seen as stimulating a greater sense of agency in executives due to their leading them to unsettle their assumptions of objectivity within their sense-making – the pivotal first step in practising reflexivity.

The concept of gaining greater freedom through gaining insights into systems psychodynamic processes has been observed by Amado and Fatien (2009). They describe the positive role that gaining insights into processes described in system psychodynamics can play in organisations in the sense of helping employees recover the power of their own acts within institutions. Levinson (1996) makes a similar observation when observing how gaining insights into psychodynamic processes can result in people experiencing greater freedom. Levinson (1996) states that *"fundamentally, psychoanalytically oriented consultants help their clients attain greater psychological freedom to make their own choices and assume responsibility for their own behavior"* (p 119).

Holland (1999) also emphasises the value of such insights in terms of their affording movement when people are in distressed problem situations. He describes how in order to move away from difficulties people may require insights from psychology as well as insights from critical sociology. He observes that *"changing blocked or frozen intellectual and life situations may require an element of psychological insight, alongside the more familiar forms of critical analysis, in order to untangle the sociopsychological dynamics"* (1999, p 480).

It is believed that applying Archer's (2000), Sayer's (2013) and Broussine and Ahmad's

(2012) arguments to the data analysis discussed in this chapter helps to highlight the significant positive contribution that executive coaches' possession of competencies to engender executive reflexivity can make in affording executives greater agency to consider alternative interpretations of their problems – ones which can result in the executive adopting more effective approaches to resolving them. Applying a multi-perspective sensibility towards executive coach competencies through drawing upon Holland's (1999) transdisciplinary model of reflexivity to theorise a set of executive coach competencies is proposed to potentially broaden existing competency models and help acknowledge the eclectic range of theoretical models associated with research into executive coaching in relation to executive coach competencies.

### **REFLECTIONS ON APPLYING THE CONCEPT OF EXECUTIVE REFLEXIVITY TO THEORISE COACH COMPETENCIES**

Many researchers believe that reflexivity is a problematic term and one that is difficult to define since it is used in a variety of different, and sometimes conflicting ways (for example Lynch, 2000; Holland, 2000; Lawson, 1985 and Ashmore, 1989). This study is underpinned by a particular notion of reflexivity that was inspired through interactions with academic practitioner colleagues, and it is believed to have been a useful theoretical framework to inform the identification of a set of executive coach competencies.

Applying Alvesson, Hardy and Harley's (2008) advocacy of combining deconstructive and reconstructive reflexive practices to the data is believed to help highlight the positive contribution that executive coaches having the competency to engender executive reflexivity can make to helping executives resolve their problems. The findings concluded that through their being able to identify that executives are influenced by psychological and psychosocial processes of which the executive might be unaware and helping the executive to gain insight into such processes executive coaches can play a pivotal role in contributing to executives usurping and their problem-sustaining interpretations a process which can result in executives being able to adopt more efficacious approaches to their problems.

Arguments by Archer (2007) about the mediatory role of agency and Broussine and Ahmad's (2012) suggestion that reflexivity is associated with increasing agency helps to highlight the significance of executive coaches having competencies to engender reflexive practices in executives since without being helped to gain insights needed to adopt

reflexive practices executives appear to experience little agency to shift from responses to their problems that sustain them. The notion of reflexivity in this study is described by Lynch (2000) as revealing forgotten choices and exposing hidden alternatives. Applying the notion of reflexivity outlined in Chapter Three to the data is believed to help identify the key aspects of the executive coach competencies demonstrated within the data and the body of research, outlined in Chapter One, with which it is believed to resonate.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Tooth (2012) advocates recognising the uniqueness of coaching engagements. Whilst all coaching engagements can be considered as unique, some abstraction of types of coaching scenarios may also be useful. The data and literature have been discussed in this chapter to suggest that general distinctions can be made between executive coach competencies in relation to the type of educational intervention that they enable. It is concluded that one of the significant contributions of different perspectives is their equipping executive coaches to make educational interventions that engender reflexive practices in executives.

The findings can be seen as resonating with the observations of researchers who believe that coaches need a range of competencies to equip them to respond effectively to different issues presented by the executive in coaching (Turner and Goodrich, 2010; de Haan, Culpin and Curd, 2011; Kilburg, 2000; Tooth, 2012). Turner and Goodrich (2010) observe that effectively addressing challenging problems in executive coaching requires the use of several theoretical models including; psychodynamic, cognitive – behavioural, and systems approaches and suggest that there are limitations of single models of executive coaching that emanate from a single theoretical perspective or approach. The findings discussed in this chapter support this observation, through suggesting that different educational interventions can serve as antidotes to the influence of different psychological and social processes that can influence executives' sense-making in such a way as to be a causal influence on the sustaining of problems.

# CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

## OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

Some key conclusions drawn from the study are presented in this chapter. They include proposals about the positive contribution of the set of coach competencies, theorised under the category label 'engendering executive reflexivity' which result in unlocking executives' potential to be reflexive (Broussine and Ahmad, 2012) and develop more efficacious approaches to their problems. Holland's (1999) and Bhaskar's (2008, 2010) interdisciplinary research was very influential in informing the researchers' first attempt at multi-perspective analysis. It is proposed that bringing a multi-perspective sensibility towards theorising executive coach competencies offers an opportunity to include contingent coach competencies in executive coach competency models alongside core competencies. It is proposed that through bringing a multi-perspective to analysing data in this study to identify a set of competencies not currently included in existing research on executive coach competencies, some of the diversity of theoretical perspectives that are present in the executive coaching field can be represented in the competency debate and thus contribute to broadening existing models.

Some of the limitations of the study are also discussed in this chapter. One significant limitation of the study is observed by the researcher to arise from her beginning her multi-perspective analysis partway through the study. The researcher believes that the research could have been improved if had been located more securely within other multi-disciplinary research.

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF BRINGING MULTI-PERSPECTIVE SENSIBILITY TO THEORISING EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES

A key conclusion from this study is that executive coaches having the competency to unlock executives' potential to be reflexive (Broussine and Ahmad, 2012) can have a significant positive impact in helping the executives to develop new and efficacious approaches to a particular type of problems - problems caused by the influence of some psychological and psychosocial processes that cause bias whilst at the same time leading to a person subject to its influence to have a conviction that their sense-making is objective. Such influences as maladaptive schemas, psychodynamic defences and unconscious group processes are reported to cause executives to sustain ineffective approaches to their problems through



leading executives to believe that interpretations of their problem that appear to sustain them are the only valid interpretation (Arnaud, 2003; Levinson, 1996; Day, 2010; Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004b, 2010; Gray, 2006; Turner, 2010; Brunning, 2006; Day, 2010; Newton, Long and Sievers, 2006; Henning and Cilliers, 2012; MacKie, 2014; Kauffman and Scoular, 2004; Ducharme, 2004; Sherin and Caiger, 2004; Anderson, 2002; Grimley, 2003; Laske, 1999, 2000, 2002; Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002; Levinson, 1996; Axelrod, 2005; Smither and Reilly, 2001; Kets de Vries, 2005; Tobias, 1996; Cocivera and Cronshaw, 2004). It is concluded that executive coaches can make a significant contribution to helping executives to resolve problems which are influenced by such psychological or psychosocial processes, ones that cause bias whilst at the same time leading to executives believing that their sense-making is objective, if they can equip the executive to practice reflexivity towards their sense-making related to their problems.

A key conclusion drawn from the findings of this study is that different educational interventions made by executive coaches are causally efficacious in equipping executives with insights that are needed to practice reflexivity. This analysis was influenced by Holland's (1999) belief that that a common contribution of different perspectives in social science, including sociology and psychology, is they offer unique insights that help equip people with cognitive tools that unveil hidden influences to which they are subjected (Bourdieu, 2002). Such tools help people to move from blocked or frozen intellectual and life situations according to Holland (1999).

It is concluded that Holland's (1999) transdisciplinary model of reflexivity provided a valuable resource for informing the meta-theoretical analysis of the data leading to theorising a set of coach competencies as, 'engendering executive reflexivity'. This analysis involved identifying overarching similarities within the set of competencies as well as acknowledging their significant differences between them. One overarching similarity between different sub-types of the competency 'engendering executive reflexivity' is identified as relating to a general notion of reflexivity. The different types of reflexivity that executive coaches help executives to engender, is seen to be a significant differentiator between the sub-types of the competency. The data, and the research which influenced its analysis, indicated that executive coaches demonstrated competencies to help executives to gain insights into fundamentally different types of psychological and psychosocial processes - these included unconscious group process, psychodynamic defences and self-limiting beliefs. Through so doing executive coaches can be seen to help

equip executives to practice different types of reflexivity. Applying Holland's (1999) multi-theoretical sensitivity to this finding led to concluding that distinctions in the set of executive coaching competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' can be determined from the type of reflexivity that the executive coach equips the executive to practice.

The reason for seeing such distinctions between competencies as significant was influenced by Holland's (1999) argument that during their lifetime people may need to practice different types of reflexivity. Applying this logic to the findings of this study led to concluding that executive coaches may need to have competencies to make a range of educational interventions to help executives to practice different types of reflexivity, depending on which psychological or psychosocial process influences the executive's problem – including reflexivity about processes described in mainstream psychology, psychodynamics and systems psychodynamics perspectives.

The rationale for combining core and contingent competencies is outlined in the following section.

## **COMBINING GENERAL, CORE AND CONTINGENT EXECUTIVE COACH COMPETENCIES**

During the course of the study the researcher came to believe that it was useful to make a distinction between general and contingent executive coach competencies. When it is suggested that an executive coach competency is needed or useful for all coaching engagements, this can be considered as a general, core executive coach competency. A different type of argument was also evident in the literature where it is inferred that executive coaches' potential to help executives with particular problems is contingent upon their having competencies to identify and educate executives about psychological and psychosocial processes of which they may be unaware. These can be considered to be contingent executive coach competencies.

The set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' are argued to be found in a body of research which advocates educational interventions by coaches to equip executives with insights without which the executive would not be equipped and provoked to practice reflexivity (Arnaud, 2003; Levinson, 1996; Day, 2010; Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004b, 2010; Gray, 2006; Turner, 2010; Brunning, 2006; Day, 2010; Newton, Long and Sievers, 2006; Henning and Cilliers, 2012; MacKie, 2014; Kauffman and Scoular, 2004; Ducharme, 2004; Sherin and Caiger, 2004; Anderson, 2002; Grimley, 2003; Laske, 1999, 2000, 2002;

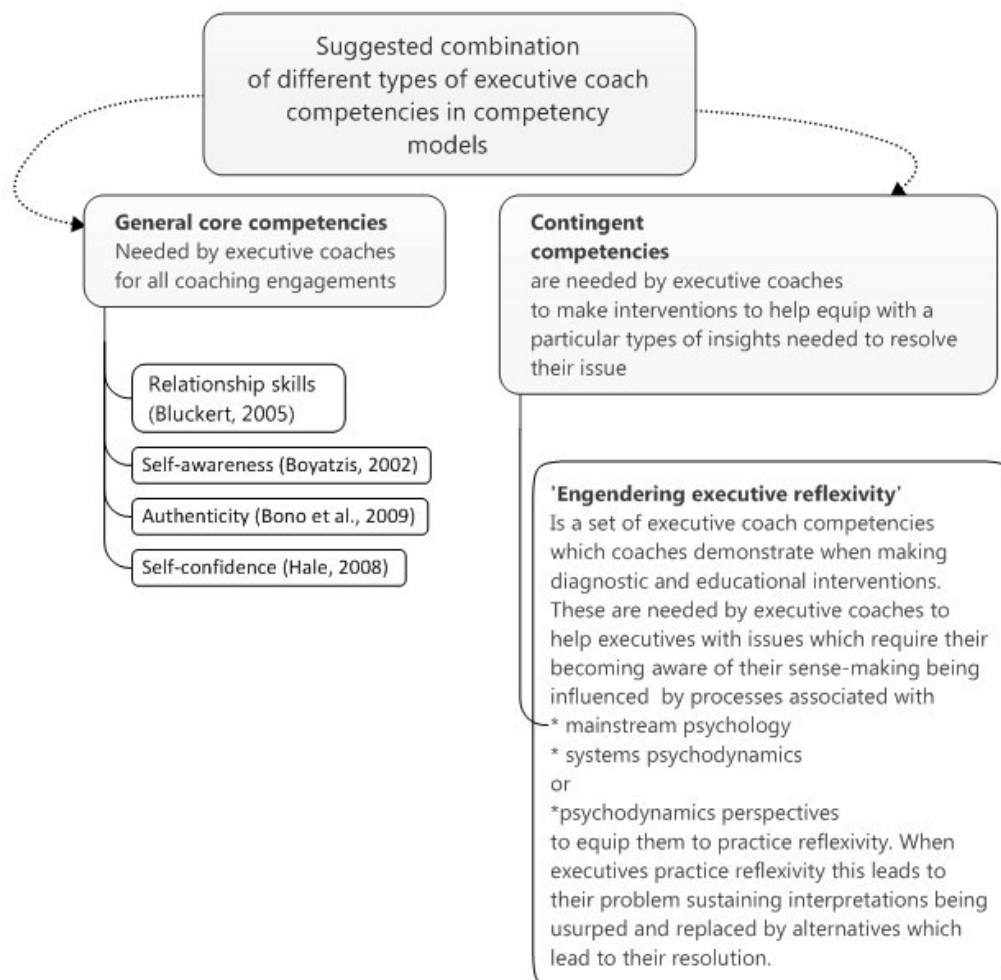
Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002; Levinson, 1996; Axelrod, 2005; Smither and Reilly, 2001; Kets de Vries, 2005; Tobias, 1996; Cocivera and Cronshaw, 2004). For example Day (2010) suggested that if an executive is influenced by unconscious group processes, the executive's ability to resolve his/her problem may be contingent upon the executive coach helping the executive gain insights into systems psychodynamics processes which equip them to practice systems psychodynamics reflexivity. Similarly, helping executives to resolve problems which are influenced by processes associated with mainstream psychology, and psychodynamics would be contingent on executive coaches inviting the executives to consider their being subject to these influences respectively and practice different types of reflexivity.

In research explicitly focused on theorising executive coach competencies, it is evident that the theorisation of general, core coach competencies and the development of standardised executive coaching competency models is highly valued (Clayton, 2011, Koortzen and Oosthuizen, 2010). It is proposed that the findings of this research can complement these models by identifying competencies related to educational interventions of coaches, which are not currently theorised. Whilst not needed by coaches to ensure successful outcomes in all situations these competencies are nevertheless believed to be valuable by researchers across a range of disciplines in the executive coaching literature. It is believed that this study offers a useful starting point for identifying some executive coach competencies as contingent competencies, ones with a significant presence in the literature yet not currently theorised in relation to executive coach competencies, and omitted from inclusion in existing competency models.

The broad range of theoretical perspectives advocated by researchers within the executive coaching field poses a great challenge to researchers seeking to develop competency models which serve to be descriptive rather than normative and prescriptive (Tooth, 2012). It is believed that one step towards developing a more nuanced understanding of the contribution of specialized competencies such as diagnostic and educational competencies evident in the data in this study, and a body of research influencing it, to include a set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' in executive coach competency models. Although competencies belonging to the set of competencies 'engendering executive reflexivity' may not be required by executive coaches in all coaching scenarios, a strong case can be made that it is important to acknowledge how some executive coaches, influenced by a wide range of theoretical perspectives, in both the primary data and the

body of research which influenced its analysis have found this competency useful in some coaching engagements.

Figure 8.1 illustrates the proposed usefulness of combining general and contingent executive coach competencies in executive coaching competency models.



**Figure 8-1: Complementary combination of general and contingent executive coach competencies**

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is presented as marking the beginning of the researcher's journey towards becoming an interdisciplinary researcher. One of the fundamental limitations of the study can be seen to relate to the stage of the journey that the researcher found herself when attempting to make sense of multi-perspective data which required gaining an understanding of differences and similarities between different theoretical perspectives mainstream psychology, systems psychodynamics and psychodynamics. The researcher only became equipped with theoretical literacy to attempt a multi-perspective analysis part way through the study, having begun with a single psychological model. It is believed that as

a consequence of this, the framework developed to distinguish between the different theoretical perspectives in Phase Two of the data analysis is oversimplified, and does not do justice to the diversity within these perspectives and the overlaps between them.

Similar limitations that Parker and McHugh (1991) presented in a seminal piece on multi-paradigm research conducted by Hassard (1991) are acknowledged by the researcher about her multi-perspective analysis. The researcher believes that had she been immersed within the different research fields for a longer period of time she may have been able to locate the model within criticisms of such analysis. Whilst the researcher did conduct background reading to inform her insight into differences within different perspectives she attempted to differentiate, she believes that did not have enough immersion in these literatures to perform more nuanced analyses. The researcher believes that the research could have been improved if it had been located more securely within other multi-disciplinary research. It is hoped that as the researcher progresses she can locate her work more securely with other research that seeks to theorise diversity within and overlaps between the perspectives studied.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

One suggested area for future research is elaborating on the multi-perspective framework which differentiates between different educational coach competencies through extending the categories theorised to include critical sociology. One set of research which influenced this study was practitioner research which advocated that practitioners practice reflexivity as an antidote to processes associated with critical sociology such as systemic prejudices and dominant ideologies which reproduce systemic inequalities (Broussine and Ahmad, 2012; Strous, 2006; Cunliffe, 2004 and Taylor and White, 2000). This may involve purposive sampling to discover coaches who advocate educational interventions which help executives to recognise the influence of processes associated with critical sociology.

Bhaskar (2010) and Holland (1999) suggest that such cross-disciplinary work has the potential to enrich and energise research through including theoretical perspectives which can illuminate aspects of the data that may remain hidden when analysed through theoretical perspectives which are favoured by other disciplines. One suggested future direction for developing this research is extending its application to a different practitioner field – such as social work. This may serve to draw fresh insights into the different types of educational interventions which may be useful in equipping people to practice reflexivity

towards their problems.

## REFERENCES

- Al Amoudi, I., and Willmott, H. (2011) Where constructionism and critical realism converge: Interrogating the domain of epistemological relativism. *Organization Studies*, 32(1), pp 27-36.
- Alvesson, M. (2003) Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research. *Academy of Management Review*, 28(1), pp.13- 33.
- Alvesson, M., and Hardy, C. and Harley, H. (2008) Reflecting on reflexivity: reflexive textual practices in organization and management theory. *Journal of Management Studies*. 45(3), pp. 480-501.
- Alvesson, M. and Skoldberg, K. (2000) *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Amado, G., and Fatien, P. (2009) *Value of ambiguity-The case of executive coaching*. EGOS Book Abstract. Held at EGOS.
- Anderson, J. P. (2002) Executive coaching and REBT: Some comments from the field. *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*. 20(3-4), pp.223-233.
- Archer, M. S. (2000) *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. S. (2007) *Making Our Way Through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Armstrong, D (2000) *Emotions in Organizations: Disturbance or Intelligence?* Copenhagen: International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations.
- Arnaud, G. (2003) A coach or a couch? A Lacanian perspective on executive coaching and Consulting. *Human Relations*, 56(9), pp. 1131-1154.
- Ashmore, M. (1989) *The Reflexive Thesis: Wrioting Sociology of Scientific Knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Axelrod, S. D. (2005) Executive growth along the adult development curve. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 57(2), pp. 118 – 125.
- Baron, L. and Morin, L. (2009) The coach-coachee relationship in executive coaching: a field study, *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 20 (1) pp. 85-106.

- Berger, J. G. and Fitzgerald, C. (2002) Leadership and complexity of mind: The role of executive coaching. In: Fitzgerald, C and Berger, J.G.(eds.).*Executive Coaching: Practices and Perspectives*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing, pp 27 -58.
- Bhaskar, R.A and Danemark, B. (2006) Metatheory, interdisciplinarity and disability research: A critical realist perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*. 8 (4), pp. 278 – 297.
- Bhaskar, R.A. and Hartwig, M. (2008) *The Formation of Critical Realism: A Personal Perspective*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Bhaskar, R.A. (1987) *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*. London: Verso.
- Bhaskar, R.A. (1989) *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy*. London: Verso.
- Bhaskar, R.A. (1990) *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom*. London: Blackwell.
- Bhaskar, R.A. (1975) *A Realist Theory of Science*. Reprint. London: Verso, 1997.
- Bhaskar, R.A. (1979) *The Possibility of Naturalism* 3rd ed. Reprint. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Bhaskar, R.A. (ed) (2010) *Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change: Transforming Knowledge and Practice for our Global Future*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.
- Bluckert, P. (2005) Critical factors in executive coaching - the coaching relationship, *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 37 (7), pp. 336-340.
- Bluckert, P. (2006) *Psychological Dimensions of Executive Coaching*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Blumberg, K.M. (2014) Executive coaching competencies: a review and critique with implications for coach education. *Journal of Psychological Issues in Organizational Culture*. 5(2), pp. 87-97.
- Bono, J.E., Purvanova, R.K., Towler, A.J. and Peterson, D.B. (2009) A survey of executive coaching practices. *Personnel Psychology*, 62(2), pp. 361-404.
- Bourdieu, P. (2004) *Science of Science and Reflexivity*. Cambridge : Polity Press.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (2002) Core competencies in coaching others to overcome dysfunctional behavior. In Druskat, V.H. (ed) *Linking Emotional Intelligence and Performance at Work: Current Research Evidence with Individuals and Groups*. Hove: Psychology Press, pp. 81- 96.



- Broussine, M. and Ahmad, Y. (2012) The development of public managers' reflexive capacities. *Teaching Public Administration*. 31(1), pp. 18-28.
- Brotman, L. E., Liberi, W. P., and Wasylshyn, K. M. (1998) Executive coaching: The need for standards of competence. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 50(1), pp. 40 - 46.
- Brunning, H. (2006) *Executive Coaching: Systems-Psychodynamic Perspective*. New York: London: Karnac.
- Burrell, G., and Morgan, G. (1979) *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*. London: Heinemann.
- Carter, A. (2001) *Inspiring Performance at Work*. Brighton: Institute of Employment Studies.
- Carter, B. (2003) What race means to racists, In Cruikshank, J. (ed) *Critical Realism: The Difference It Can Make*, London: Routledge. pp 149 – 160
- Clayton, T., (2012) The lived experiences of executive coaches' interdisciplinary competencies. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 73(3-A).
- Cocivera, T. and Cronshaw, S. (2004) Action frame theory as a practical framework for the executive coaching process, *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 56 (4), pp. 234 – 245.
- Creswell, J.W., (2003) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage
- Crotty, M. (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. London: Sage
- Cruikshank, J. (2003) *Critical Realism: the Difference it Makes*. London: Routledge.
- Cunliffe, A.L. (2004) On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner. *Journal of Management Education*. 28(4), pp. 407-426.
- Cunliffe, A.L. (2003) Reflexive inquiry in organizational research: Questions and possibilities. *Human Relations* 56(8), pp. 983-1003.

- Czander, W. and Eisold, K. (2003) Psychoanalytic perspectives on organizational consulting: transference and counter-transference. *Human Relations*, 56, (4), pp. 475-490.
- Day, A., (2010) Coaching at relational depth: a case study. *The Journal of Management Development*. 29(10), pp. 864-876.
- de Haan, E. and Nieß, C. (2012) Critical moments in a coaching case study: illustration of a process research model, *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 64 (3) pp. 198-224.
- de Haan, E., Culpin, V. and Curd, J. (2011) Executive coaching in practice: what determines helpfulness for clients of coaching? *Personnel Review*. 40(1), pp. 24-44.
- Ducharme, M.J., ( 2004) The cognitive-behavioral approach to executive coaching. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 56(4), pp. 214-224.
- Dyke, M., Johnston, B. and Fuller, A. (2012) Approaches to reflexivity: navigating educational and career pathways. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. 33(6), pp. 831-848.
- Etherington, K. (2004) *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher – Using our Selves in Research*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Fleetwood, S. (2001) Causal laws, functional relations and tendencies. *Review of Political Economy*, 13(2), 201-220.
- Fleetwood, S. (2005) Ontology in organization and management studies: A Critical Realist Perspective. *Organization*. 12(2), pp. 197-222.
- Fleetwood, S. (2011) Powers and tendencies revisited. *Journal of Critical Realism*. 10(1), pp.80-99.
- Foster, S.L. and Lloyd, P. J., (2007) Positive psychology principles applied to consulting psychology at the individual and group level. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 59 (1), pp. 30-40.
- French, R. and Simpson, P. (2014) *Attention, Co-operation, Purpose: An Approach to Working in Groups Using Insights from Wilfred Bion*. London: Karnac.
- Frisch, M. H. (2005) Extending the reach of executive coaching: the internal coach. *Human Resource Planning*, 28 (1), pp. 23-39.

- Gray, D. E. (2006) Executive coaching: towards a dynamic alliance of psychotherapy and transformative learning processes. *Management Learning*. 37(4), pp. 475-497.
- Grant, A. M. and O'Connor, S. A. (2010) The differential effects of solution-focused and problem-focused coaching questions: a pilot study with implications for practice. *Industrial and Commercial Training*. 42(2), pp. 102-111.
- Griffiths, K. E. and Campbell, M. A. (2008) Regulating the regulators: Paving the way for international, evidence-based coaching standards. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*. 6(1), pp. 19-31.
- Grimley, B. (2003) NLP and coaching: A focus on excellence. *The Occupational Psychologist*, 49, pp. 25-29.
- Hale, D.P. (2008) *Development of a Validated Core Competency Skill Set for Executive Coaches*. UMI Dissertations Publishing.
- Hart, V., Blattner, J. and Leipsic, S. (2001) Coaching versus therapy: a perspective. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 53, (4), pp. 229-237. Holland, R. (1999) Reflexivity. *Human Relations*, 52, (4), pp. 463-484.
- Hassard, J. (1991) Multiple paradigms and organizational analysis: A case study. *Organization Studies*, 12(2), pp. 275-299.
- Henning, S., and Cilliers, F. (2012) Constructing a systems psychodynamic wellness model. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 38(2), pp. 107-116.
- Hirschhorn, Larry (1990) *The Workplace Within: Psychodynamics of Organizational Life*. Cambridge: MIT press.
- Hollway, W. (2001) The psycho-social subject in 'evidence-based practice', *Journal of Social Work Practice*. 15, (1), pp. 9-22.
- Huggler, L. A. A. (2007) CEOs on the couch: Building the therapeutic coaching alliance in psychoanalytically informed executive coaching. ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing.
- Johnson, P. and Duberley, J. (2000) *Understanding Management Research: An Introduction to Epistemology*. London: Sage.
- Joo, B-K. (2005) Executive coaching: a conceptual framework from an integrative review of practice and research. *Human Resource Development Review*. 4 (4), pp. 462-488.

- Judge, W. Q. and Cowell, J. (1997) The brave new world of executive coaching. *Business Horizons* 40(4), pp. 71 – 77.
- Kampa-Kokesch, S. and Anderson, M. Z., (2001) Executive coaching: a comprehensive review of the literature. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 53(4), pp. 205-228.
- Kauffman, C. and Scoular, A. (2004) Toward a positive psychology of executive coaching. *Positive Psychology in Practice*. pp. 287-302.
- Kegan, R. (1980) Making meaning: The constructive-developmental approach to persons and practice, *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*, vol. 58, no. 5, pp. 373-380.
- Kegan, R. (1982) *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kegan, R. (1994) *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Kets de Vries, M.F.R. (2005) Leadership group coaching in action: The Zen of creating high performance teams. *Academy of Management Executive*. 19 (1), pp. 61-76.
- Kets de Vries, M.F.R., (2014) Dream journeys: A new territory for executive coaching *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 66(2), pp. 77-92.
- Kilburg, R.R. (1996) Foreword: Executive coaching as an emerging competency in the practice of consultation. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 48(2), pp. 59-60.
- Kilburg, R.R. (1997) Coaching and executive character: core problems and basic approaches. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 49(4), pp. 281- 299.
- Kilburg, R.R., (2000) *Executive Coaching: Developing Managerial Wisdom in a World of Chaos*. American Psychological Association.
- Kilburg, R.R. (2001) Facilitating intervention adherence in executive coaching: A model and methods. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 53(4), pp. 251-267.
- Kilburg, R.R. (2004a) Trudging toward dodoville: conceptual approaches and case studies in executive coaching. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 56(4), pp. 203-213.

- Kilburg, R.R., (2004b) When shadows fall: using psychodynamic approaches in executive coaching. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 56(4), pp.246-268.
- Kilburg, R.R. (2010) Executive consulting under pressure: A brief commentary on some timeless issues. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 62(3), pp. 203- 206.
- Koortzen, P. and Oosthuizen, R. (2010) A competence executive coaching model. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology/SA Tydskrif vir Bedryfsielkunde*, 36(1), Art. #837, 11 pages. DOI: 10.4102/sajip.v36i1.837.
- Laske, O.E. (1999) An integrated model of developmental coaching. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 51, (3), pp. 139 –159.
- Laske, O.E. (2000) Foundations of scholarly consulting: The developmental structure/process tool (DSPT). *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 52 (3), pp.178-200.
- Laske, O. E., and Maynes, B. (2002) Growing the top management team: Supporting mental growth as a vehicle for promoting organizational learning. *Journal of Management Development*, 21(9), pp. 702-727.
- Lawson, H. (1985) *Reflexivity: The Post-Modern Predicament*. London: Hutchinson.
- Levinson, H. (1996) Executive coaching. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 48(2), pp. 115-123.
- Lewis-Beck, M. S., Bryman, A and Liao, T.F. (2004) *Encyclopaedia of Social Science Research Methods*. Sage Publications.
- Lowman, R.L. (2005) Executive coaching: the road to dodoville needs paving with more than good assumptions. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 57(1), pp. 90-96.
- Lynch, M. (2000) Against reflexivity as an academic virtue and source of privileged knowledge. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 17(3), pp. 26-54.
- Mackie, D. (2014) The effectiveness of strength-based executive coaching in enhancing full range leadership development: A controlled study. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* 66(2), pp. 118-137.
- Maguire, M. (2008) Making our way through the world - Human reflexivity and social mobility - By M. S. Archer. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 59(3), pp. 585-586.

- McLaughlin, M. (2010) An in-depth phenomenological study of the effect that knowledge of Human Givens has within executive coaching. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*. Special Issue No.4, pp. 83 – 94.
- Motsoaledi, I. and Cilliers, F. (2012) Executive coaching in diversity from the systems psychodynamic perspective. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 38(2), pp. 1-11.
- Nairn, S., Chambers, D., Thompson, S., McGarry, J. and Chambers, K. (2012) Reflexivity and habitus: opportunities and constraints on transformative learning. *Nursing Philosophy: An International Journal for Healthcare Professionals*. 13(3), pp. 189-201.
- New, C. (2003) Feminism, Critical Realism and the Linguistic Turn. In Cruikshank, J. (ed) *Critical Realism: The Difference It Can Make*. London: Routledge pp. 57-74.
- Newton, J., Long, S. and Sievers, B. (2006) *Coaching in Depth: the Organizational Role Analysis Approach*. London: Karnac.
- Parker, M. and McHugh, G. (1991) Five Texts in Search of an Author: A Response to John Hassard's 'Multiple Paradigms and Organizational Analysis', *Organization Studies* 12(3), pp 451-456
- Passmore, J., Holloway, M., and Rawle-Cope, M. (2010) Using MBTI type to explore differences and the implications for practice for therapists and coaches: Are executive coaches really like counsellors? *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*. 23(1), pp. 1-16.
- Passmore, J. (2007) An Integrative Model for Executive Coaching. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 59(1), pp. 68-78.
- Peltier, B. (2010) *The Psychology of Executive Coaching: Theory and Application*, New York; London: Routledge.
- Peterson, D.B. (2007) Executive coaching in a cross-cultural context. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 59(4), pp. 261-271.
- Peterson, D. B. (1996). Executive coaching at work: The art of one-on-one change. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 48(2)
- Peterson, D. B. (2005) The alchemy of coaching: “You’re good, Jennifer, but you could be really good”, *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. Vol 57 (1), pp14- 40.
- Pollner, M. (1991) Left of ethnomethodology: The rise and decline of radical reflexivity. *American Sociological Review*. 56, (3), pp. 370-380.

- Pritchard, D. (2009) Defusing epistemic relativism. *Synthese*. 166(2), pp. 397-412.
- Robson, C. (2002) *Real World research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-researchers*. Oxford:Blackwell.
- Rorty, R.M. (1979) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rotenberg, C.T. (2000) Psychodynamic psychotherapy and executive coaching—overlapping paradigms. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 28 (4), pp. 653 – 663.
- Saporito, T.J. (1996) Business-linked executive development: Coaching senior executives. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 48(2), pp. 96-103.
- Sayer, A. (2013) Reflexivity and the habitus. In Archer, M.S. (Ed.), *Conversations about Reflexivity*. Hoboken: Routledge. pp.108 – 121.
- Sayer, R. A. (1992) *Method in Social science: A Realist Approach*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Sherin, J. and Caiger, L. (2004) Rational-emotive behavior therapy: a behavioral change model for executive coaching? *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 56, (4), pp.225-233.
- Skinner, S., (2014) Understanding the importance of gender and leader identity formation in executive coaching for senior women. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*. 7(2), pp. 102-13.
- Smither, J. W. and Reilly, S. P. (2001) Coaching in organisations. In London, M. (ed) *How People Evaluate Others in Organisations*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. pp. 221-252.
- Smither, J.W. (2011) Can psychotherapy research serve as a guide for research about executive coaching?: An agenda for the next decade. *Journal of Business and Psychology*. 26(2), pp. 135-145.
- Sperry, L. (1993) Working with executives: Consulting, counselling and coaching. *Individual Psychology*. 49, pp. 257 – 266.
- Sperry, L. (2008). Executive coaching: An intervention, role function, or profession? *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 60(1), pp. 33-37.

- Stern, L.R. (2004) Executive coaching: A working definition. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 56(3), pp. 154-162.
- Stevens, J.H. (2005) Executive coaching from the executive's perspective. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 57(4), pp. 274-285.
- Stober, D. and Grant A. M. (2006) Toward a contextual approach to coaching models. In Stober, D. and Grant A. M. (eds) *Evidence-Based Coaching Handbook*. New York: Wiley.
- Strous, M. (2006) Facilitating reflexivity in interracial and multicultural counselling. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*. 28(1), pp. 41-55.
- Styhre, A. (2008) Coaching as second order observations, *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*. 29 (3), pp. 275-290.
- Taylor, C. and White, S. (2000). *Practising Reflexivity in Health and Welfare: Making Knowledge*. Buckingham: Buckingham Open University Press.
- Tobias, L.L. (1996) Coaching executives. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 48(2), pp. 87-95.
- Tooth, J. (2012) *Experiencing executive coaching*. PhD thesis. Charles Sturt University, NSW, Australia
- Turner, E. (2010) Coaches' views on the relevance of unconscious dynamics to executive coaching. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*. 3(1), pp. 12-29.
- Turner, R.A. and Goodrich, J. (2010) The case for eclecticism in executive coaching: application to challenging assignments. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 62(1), pp. 39-55.
- Turney, J. (2009) *The culture of knitting*. Oxford: Berg.
- Walby, S. (2001) Against epistemological chasms: the science question in feminism revisited. *Signs*. pp. 485-509.
- Wasylyshyn, K.M. (2005) The reluctant president. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 57(1), pp. 57-70.
- West, L. and Milan, M. (2001) *The Reflecting Glass: Professional Coaching for Leadership Development*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.



Whitmore, J. (2002) *Coaching for Performance: Growing People, Performance and Purpose*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Naperville, Ill: Nicholas Brealey.

Witherspoon, R. and White, R.P. (1996) Executive coaching: A continuum of roles. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 48(2), pp. 124-133.