EXECUTIVE COACHING AS THE DIFFERENTIATING PATTERNING OF POWER

ANDREW LEE-CLARKE

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Abstract

Executive Coaching is now widely applied in organisations to bring about improvements in performance through individual focussed development. Coaches work with their clients to agree outcomes for their work together and then use their skills in a structured conversation to bring about change. The change they write of is an unfolding of the limitless human potential that resides within each of us, which is accessed by removing obstacles or interferences.

The view that I present in this portfolio is significantly different to this predominant thinking and makes an important contribution to the practice of coaching, as a coach, client or line manager. I see the change that can happen in coaching, or indeed in any conversation, as occurring as movements of power. Patterns of power-relating, I argue, differentiate individual and collective identities. Coaching then, is the patterning of power-relating that has the potential for further differentiating and so transforming the identities of all those involved in the coaching process. I perceive power as ongoing patterns that paradoxically form and are formed by the processes of relating between human bodies. I argue that the complex patterning of power, that enables and constrains the actions of each person, creates identity. Identity is therefore a socially created phenomenon, simultaneously forming and being formed by the processes of relating. The differentiating patterning of power transforms identity through changes in our experience of inclusion and exclusion.

From this perspective, the change that occurs in coaching assumes transformative causality instead of the dual rationalist and formative causalities that underpin the predominant approaches to executive coaching.

This portfolio explores the nature of change in organisations, focussing more intensely, in each paper, on conversations as organisational change, culminating in the exploration of executive coaching as conversations initiated to create change. Through the methodology of participative inquiry, this research provides a way of

understanding executive coaching that is informed by the concept of complex responsive processes and the sociology of Norbert Elias rather that the humanistic and cognitive psychologies that are at the root of the work of most executive coaching.

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Introduction

This portfolio chronicles the period of research from January 2000 until December 2002. It is divided into four papers plus a synopsis. The synopsis develops the arguments in the papers to set out a way of understanding Executive Coaching that is informed by the concept of Complex Responsive Processes (Stacey, 2001; Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2001).

I have set out the portfolio with the synopsis as the first section, to provide the reader with my most recent work at the beginning. I then set out the four papers in the order that they were written to show how my work has developed during the D.Man. programme, leading to the conclusions already seen in the synopsis. An implication of this structure is that the reader will see themes and conclusions presented in the synopsis without seeing how these conclusions emerged until engaging with the research in the subsequent papers. This structure, I believe allows the reader to more clearly understand how my arguments developed during the programme of study, culminating in the presentation of the synopsis already seen at the beginning of the portfolio. The first of the four papers sets out the themes and patterns that influenced my work until December 2000. These can be summarised as my dissatisfaction with the predominant cybernetic based approaches to human resource management. I describe my movement towards coaching and show how I became more interested in a way of working that aimed to liberate rather than control a workforce. I later express my dissatisfaction with this newer way of thinking.

My second paper describes the period of me joining my current employer, the Unite Group plc. I consider the experience of joining an organisation from the perspective of complex responsive processes instead of the more usual ways of thinking about these core people management systems. I show how joining an organisation occurs as conversations and is influenced by the patterning of the

processes of relating that occur between the participants. I compare a systemic approach to change with a conversational approach in the final section of paper two.

Paper three shows the movement in my thinking as I focus on how conversations can be seen as change and that the change is experienced as a movement in the patterning of power-relating between participants. I show that power can be seen as ongoing patterns in the processes of relating that simultaneously enable and constrain activities and which are experienced as sensations of inclusion and exclusion. I show that moving away from stable iterations of the patterning of power is difficult and requires an act of risk to challenge the dominant patterns.

My final paper shows my return to an area of interest first described in paper one, that of Executive Coaching. I explore how my coaching is now different, being informed by the findings of my earlier research. I set out the history of coaching and compare the predominant approaches that are rooted in humanistic and cognitive psychologies and in a newer dialogic approach to organisational change. In this work, I show how I have moved from judging whether an intervention is valuable or whether a coaching conversation is helpful, to considering what I understand to be happening as the patterning of power-relating. In the examples of my work, I show how the patterning of power-relating forms and is formed by identity, a pattern that differentiates our experience of inclusion and exclusion in the moment by moment interaction. I conclude by inviting coaches and line managers to think differently about how they approach their coaching with clients and colleagues, informed by transformative causality and the Elias' concept of "interdependent individuals" (Elias, 1998).

I have punctuated the papers with reflections that I made in June 2002. These show how my work has moved in the course of the programme and set out how my earlier research has influenced my later conclusions.

Synopsis

October 2002

Synopsis

Executive Coaching as the Differentiating Patterning of Power

Part One

Introduction

In this synopsis I will develop my arguments that provide a new way of thinking about Executive Coaching. The key distinctions that I will draw between the approach that I have developed in my research and those in the predominant literature relate to three core concepts. The first is the how I consider organisations and my participation in them, by taking a complexity sciences perspective (Stacey, 1996; Kauffman, 1993; Goodwin, 1994) instead of the more usual systems thinking view (Ashby, 1956; Senge 1990). The second area is the approach that I take when thinking about human psychology and the processes of relating that occur between people, whilst not relying on the cognitive or humanistic psychologies (Covey, 1990; Rogers, 1961) applied in most coaching. The third area is the assumptions that are made relating to how change occurs, or the motivation for movement into the future. I will consider each of these areas to highlight the distinctions that I draw between the different ways of thinking about change in organisations and particularly those relating to Executive Coaching.

Having shown in the earlier papers how my thinking about change has moved, I will develop, in this synopsis, a way of thinking about power as being key to the changes that are promised in Executive Coaching and in other forms of organisational change. By way of inviting you into the body of my portfolio, I wish to briefly set out what I mean by the differentiating patterning of power, the phrase I use in the title of this portfolio. The most common understanding of power is as a static property contained within, or associated with, particular individuals. This is understood as the ability to influence others and is derived from an economic, expert, physical, or charismatic base (Handy, 1985). My

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interpretation is that power can be more usefully understood as ongoing patterns that paradoxically both form and are formed by the processes of relating between people. The patterning of power is co-created in relationship and is experienced as the simultaneous enabling and constraining of actions. I am arguing that the interconnected patterns of power that affect the actions of each person form, and are formed by identity. Identity therefore is a socially created phenomenon, instead of being fixed in an independent individual. By taking this position, the 'transformation' that is promised by writers on executive coaching (Whitmore, 1996; Landsberg, 1997; Zeus and Skiffington, 2000) can be seen as movements in the patterning of power, as opposed to the removal of interferences (Whitmore, 1996) or the revealing of innate potential (Gallwey, 2001). I came across a succinct example of this way of thinking on a recent visit to the theatre with colleagues from work. In a scene in the 'King and I', the English schoolteacher stands up to the King, the first person so to do and he is destroyed.

He can never again be what he was! (Rogers and Hammerstein, 1949)

In the moment of the teacher's challenge there is a movement in the patterning of power between her and the King. This is seen as him changing the course of action that he had originally intended, following her intervention. His identity as absolute ruler is changed and he flees the stage. In my portfolio, I set out a number of examples, from my work where I have experienced movements in the patterning of power-relating that are experienced as shifts in identity and which can be identified as organisational change or 'transformation'.

It is interesting for me now to reflect on the movement of my interest during the D.Man. programme. When set out chronologically, in the way that I have assembled the four papers in this portfolio, it seems clear that my thinking moved in a particular direction. I explained in paper one, that my felt experience of working in organisations did not fit with the predominant management literature that was based on cybernetic control developed in the 1940's and 1950's (Ashby, 1956). Cybernetic systems are self-regulating, goal directed systems that adapt to their environment. Much of today's predominant management literature has developed from cybernetics, as well as from systems dynamics (Senge, 1990) and

general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968). This is manifest in the activities such as gap analysis, budgeting, balanced scorecards, business process reengineering, much executive coaching and the usual human resource management activities of appraisal systems, selection methodology, succession planning and management development.

In my earlier career move, away from human resource management into coaching and consulting, I recognised how my intention, as a manager, had changed. Instead of having control over a workforce to achieve the preset goals, my arrogant and naive intention was of wishing to liberate them so that their untapped potential could be released.

My thinking has moved again to recognise my participation in the relationships of which I am part, instead of thinking of myself as simply observing those relationships. I have shifted and now understand my experience in a way not described by the predominant authors. In my research, I explored the concept of conversations as being the source of change, where movements in the patterns of relating that occur as conversation can have unplanned and significant consequences for people in organisations. This is a very different approach to change than the usual planned programme of interventions. I then focussed my attention back to an area in which I had worked for some time, that of Executive Coaching.

The promise of coaching, in its rapid adoption by commercial organisations is that it offers a form of conversation that provides change, some coaches even promise 'transformation' (Whitmore, 1996; Landsberg, 1997). I have explored how my experience of coaching has indeed been part of change and how these changes have had a significant effect on organisations. However the changes that have occurred have been very different from those promised by leading coaches and I believe have come about in a different way, or originate from a different source from those described in literature.

I have concluded that it is not the self-contained individual who is altered by coaching but it is a movement in the patterns of power between people that is the change. In focussing my attention on coaching, I have noticed how it has become a methodological approach with which I have been able to develop my thinking about the nature of power in organisations. By increasing my focus on coaching I have developed my interest in the broader concept of power, not as something located in a individual, but as dynamic, self-organising processes which differentiate identity through relating, as experienced as sensations of inclusion and exclusion.

In this synopsis, I set out and explore these arguments illuminating the experience of power in a way not previously explored in the context of coaching and organisational change. In the first part of this synopsis I will describe the methodology that I have used in developing this portfolio. In the second part I will explore my insights into coaching from the perspective of Complex Responsive Processes (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000; Stacey, 2001) and will consider the predominant humanistic and cognitive based models of coaching. In the final section I will use my conclusions from this work to develop a perspective on coaching that explores the differentiating patterning of power in human relating.

Part Two

2:1 Methodology

My approach to research in this portfolio has been significantly different to my previous experience. In my academic studies prior to beginning the D.Man. programme, I had taken a reductionist, quantitative approach to research. This involved beginning with an underpinning assumption that there is a right, or better way to approach the practice of managing in organisations and if it could be found then organisations would be more efficient. Whilst the methodology of participative inquiry was specified in the D.Man. programme requirements, it was

only by beginning my research that the methodology emerged for me. It was formed by my area of inquiry and simultaneously formed that inquiry.

In my previous studies I had attempted to isolate specific individual behaviours in order to consider the outcomes of those behaviours, or competencies, on organisational performance. I became concerned that the true richness and complexity of relating was being missed, by locating competence in the one individual being investigated. In focussing on the contribution of the coach, or manager, in a situation and by not attending to the context of an intervention, personal histories of those involved, nor the presence of the researchers, the data did not feel as relevant nor as generalisable as originally intended. Dalal (1998: 8), citing Elias, describes the interventions or conversations as being 'cut', in that only one side of an interaction is attended to, and that in the cutting the co-created emergent processes of relating are lost. I therefore felt that the predominant research methods were unsuitable to investigate aspects of human relating. Instead Heron and Reason (1998) describe a new, different paradigm of research that is accessed by making three shifts from predominant research methodology. These are:

1. Participatory and holistic knowing:

   Summarised as a move from linear cause and effect and distanced and separate objectivity to an interconnected view of the world.

   The emphasis on wholeness also means that we are not interested in either fragmented knowing or theoretical knowing that is separated from practice and experience. We seek a knowing-in-action that encompasses as much of our experience as possible. This means that aspects of phenomena are understood because we understand them in the context of the whole.
   (Reason, 1998: 11)

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2. Developing 'critical subjectivity':

> This involves recognising that purely objective data are not possible as researchers are always part of the world that they research. Instead an approach that recognises the subjectivity of research is recommended but applied in a way that accepts rather than denies that subjectivity.

3. Knowledge in action:

> A movement to view knowledge as being formed in and for action rather than in and for reflection

In making a move away from orthodox research, Heron and Reason describe an approach to methodology called 'Action Research' or more broadly 'Co-operative Inquiry'. Co-operative inquiry is offered as the overall term to describe the various approaches to 'research with' people (as opposed to 'research on' people). Reason uses the umbrella term to describe a range of approaches that emphasise different aspects of participatory methodology. Similar approaches include: participatory research (often used in Third World development projects): dialogical inquiry (often used with different stakeholder groups in organisations): collaborative inquiry and action science (from humanistic psychology roots and used in organisational development projects in the USA).

The origins of action research date back to Kurt Lewin (Lewin, 1948) in the 1940's and the range of socio-technical experiments that were begun at the Tavistock Institute and applied to change in organisations. The origins of action research can also be seen in the work of a number of other researchers. Park, Hall and Jackson (1993) argue for a redefinition of knowledge from stored information to a process of relating with one's own experiences in light of one's own reaction to the work of the researcher. Pyrch and Castello (1998) suggest that forms of practical

learning to solve day-to-day issues have been applied for centuries in domains as diverse as animal husbandry and political democracy. Other writers point to the shift in power relations in issues of race and gender occurring in local situations as part of cooperative inquiry (Maguire, 2001). Other roots of participative research lie in the practices of organisational learning and T-group training, where mutual challenge and support develops a mutual process of learning about oneself in relationship with others.

In the United Kingdom, humanistic psychological approaches (Rogers, 1993) have led to self-help organisations, co-counselling and mutual inquiry groups. This humanistic perspective informed the development of co-operative inquiry, particularly at the Universities of Bath and Surrey. Indeed, the emergence of co-operative inquiry can be seen as having many sources. I quote from Reason.

> *Action research has been equally promiscuous in its sources of theoretical inspiration. It has drawn on pragmatic philosophy (Levin and Greenwood, 1998) critical thinking (Kemmis, 1986), the practice of democracy (Gustavsen, 1996), liberationist thought (Selener, 1997), humanistic and transpersonal psychology (Rowan, 1990), constructionist theory (Lincoln, 1996), systems thinking (Flood, 1997) and more recently complexity theory (Reason and Goodwin, 1999).*
>
> (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 3)

The approach used in this portfolio is one that is influenced by the principles and process of cooperative inquiry and is congruent with the subject of the research - Complex Responsive Processes and power-relating. I have investigated my experience of human relating through relating. In taking this participative approach to research I am attracted to Marja-Liisa Swantz's thinking about her approach to research.

> *I do not separate my scientific inquiry from my life. For me it is really a quest for life, to understand life and to create what I call living knowledge – knowledge which is valid for the people with whom I work and for myself.*
>
> (Cited in Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 1)

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This participative approach applied throughout this portfolio is one of interpreting my own experiences, through a period of organisational change whilst developing insights from that experience in conversation with fellow researchers, work colleagues and relevant literature. The approach to research was one that involved the reflection on interactions and conversations as they happened in the moment and again repeatedly over time, as the meaning that I made of my experiences moved. The process was one of recording a journal containing daily observations over a period from June 2000 until October 2002, these reflections were written up to provide a description of the felt experience of incidents along with my own perception of the meaning that I made of the experiences at the time. These reflections were then used as a basis to consider the insights provided by predominant literature on coaching and management theory and then noticing and recording my reaction to those insights. I then considered the same events but from the perspective of complex responsive processes and relationship psychology (Stacey, 2000) to consider what else might be illuminated by taking this approach. My approach to literature has been to engage fully in the work of authors who have presented their understanding of Executive Coaching and to consider this with the literature from organisational behaviour, psychology and that relating to the concept of Complex Responsive Processes. I have also explored work relating to power and identity and have particularly studied Elias in relation to these concepts. My approach to literature has been to undertake an intensive review in the areas of direct relevance to my research, rather than an extensive search of related areas.

Having engaged with the literature, I revised my reflections based on my new thinking and shared these thoughts with my colleagues from the D.Man. programme and with other students and members of faculty who have expressed an interest in similar areas of work. The writing of the papers in this portfolio has also been part of my methodology, the process of writing helping to clarify and amplify aspects of my thinking and focus my attention on different aspects of my research. Draft papers have been circulated for comments and discussion with colleagues at University and at work, the comments have challenged and supported

my views and have encouraged me to develop my writing further to produce the papers contained in this portfolio.

My involvement with colleagues, or, a community of other researchers, has reflected the 'cycles of inquiry' process described by Reason (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 44-48). He writes of action researchers establishing an area of inquiry and then living with that inquiry for a period, before returning to the cohort of researchers to further process, reflect on, and make meaning from their experiences. My research, however, does not feel as if it had the linear quality implied by Reason's description. Instead of beginning with an established area of inquiry, the inquiry emerged from the day-to-day interactions of my work. The themes of my research emerged in working and were amplified by my consideration of them in my reading and in conversations with colleagues. The themes of my inquiry emerged from my research and at the same time my research formed those themes.

The D.Man. programme however more closely reflected the architecture of Reason's approach to action research with five residential modules over the period of study. These were augmented by learning set meetings between and after the plenary residential modules. Influenced heavily by the methodological process of the Institute of Group Analysis, Stacey describes the methodology of research applied in the residential modules.

> *They [participants in residential modules] discuss each others stories, drawing attention to alternative ways of making sense of what has been happening to the one telling the story. They ask questions about why people were doing what they were doing and drawing attention to how they are thinking about it. They also pay attention to their own relationships with each other in the group, because this reflects ways of interacting with others outside of the group.* (Stacey, 2001, unpublished note to students)

The process described by Stacey as being both therapeutic and research has been intensified for me in working in a smaller learning set group and in special interest groups. Here students with an interest in a particular aspect of research met to explore their meaning-making around areas of common interest. In working in this

participative way, I have become increasingly aware of the distinction between seeing research as observing what someone else is doing and commenting on it and seeing research as participating in the patterns of relating between people in an organisation as simultaneous research and work. A clear example of this is described in paper three, (page 128) where by making an intervention with my Chief Executive, I both participated in notable organisational change and was able to reflect on and explore the nature of power-relating as research in my portfolio.

Whilst having the structure of residential modules, learning sets and journals I believe that the heart of my methodology was the ongoing conversations that made up these events as my work. I see these events as ongoing conversations, with student colleagues, work colleagues and with myself. In particular, coaching conversations that I was part of can be seen as a methodology that enabled me to explore my experience of power. Coaching conversations for me, prior to the. programme, involved paying particular attention to the architecture and skills of coaching. By becoming more aware of my own participation in conversation, I noticed more of the impact of how I applied my 'skills'. The impact of either changing or reinforcing patterns of power-relating provoked me to explore how power can be seen as socially created patterns, forming and being formed by the processes of human relating. My approach to methodology therefore developed my inquiry, as simultaneously my inquiry developed my methodology. This reflective, recursive movement of research provided more intense insights into my work and illuminated how my research and work are the same activity.

2:2 Reflecting in Action

In emphasising the reflective nature of the approach to research that I have undertaken, it feels significant to describe what I mean by 'reflection' and 'to reflect'. I have reflected by focussing on my relationships and on conversations at work as they occur. I have then written down my recollections and thoughts and feelings about those events at the end of most days. I have shared my thinking with my learning set, and other colleagues, as I have thought about the meaning that I am making about the various conversations that have been described. I have been thinking about the processes of relating in a number of ways, for example, from the standpoint of cybernetic systems thinking, complexity and relationship psychology. I have made different meanings of past and future conversations based on the processes of reflection.

Reason (1998: 49) offers three categories of reflection in his description of cooperative inquiry. 'Descriptive reflection' involves stating from the perspective of the researcher what has happened, offering a narrative of events based on the researcher's experience of an event. 'Evaluative reflection' involves considering the events from different perspectives and considering how well founded the descriptions are in light of comparison with different frames of reference. The third approach is one of 'practical reflection' that involves considering what to do next as a result of the descriptive and evaluative reflections. Or, to put it another way, how has the reflection altered what will be attended to in the next cycle of research?

Whilst recognising Reason's phased approach to describing reflection, I do not agree with the linear way in which the process is described. Instead, my own experience is one of reflecting by describing, evaluating and applying simultaneously. It is the complexity of reflection both immediately after an event and in the weeks and months afterwards that I have attempted to capture in my journals, in conversation with colleagues and in writing the papers of this portfolio.

Morgan (1983) expresses the complexity and richness of the process of reflection in describing the impossibility of separating the researcher and the researched and action from thinking about the action. Reinharz (1992) characterises the relationship between the researcher and researched as the continuous process of the researcher being engaged in the search for his own identity, an emergent identity from the simultaneous action and reflection as part of the researcher's own relationship with others. In this portfolio, I have developed a view of identity emerging from the co-created processes of relating. Therefore by considering my interactions differently through my research, I have experienced movements in my experience of myself and of others. Identities have moved in the process of research as identity is shaped by the research and research shaped by the movements of identity.

The key themes and distinctions that I draw between action learning, cooperative inquiry and the approach of participative inquiry applied here are as follows:

- o Participative inquiry reinforces the researcher as part of the community that is being investigated as opposed to being separate at particular stages in the research process.

- o Action Learning involves cycles of research where a view or hypothesis is tested in the field before the researcher returns to the learning group to reflect on the findings and to prepare for the next cycle. Participative Inquiry does not make distinctions between phases of research nor the activities being undertaken as the research. Thinking, reading, speaking and writing are seen as the same process of research and inseparable from the processes being considered as the research.

- o A participative approach involves ongoing reflection and a continuous review of the themes and patterns of the research, recognising that reflection may alter the meaning that emerges as part of the research.

2:3 Knowledge and Knowing

In taking participative inquiry as the method of research, it is important to now describe what I aim to accomplish by taking this approach. My aim is to contribute to the work of coaches, managers and consultants in their participation in organisations. To explain how I will do this it is useful to consider what is meant by knowledge and knowing so that I can clearly describe my intended contribution.

The predominant view of knowledge is that of a stored body of fact and opinion that can be accessed either by reading, hearing or by retrieving stored data from a biological, technological or printed archive. With this view of knowledge, the outcome of this portfolio should be a unique addition to the body of knowledge on coaching focussed on the patterning of power-relating. This information, with its accompanying recommendations should be able to be replicated and transferred by other practitioners in other times and locations.

The methodology at the heart of this work makes such an approach impossible. This portfolio describes the unique and complex network of relationships through which I have been formed and have co-formed, by my participation in them. The concept of static stored knowledge is therefore not appropriate, instead another view of knowledge, or knowing should be considered. Stacey (2001) offers the view of knowledge as emerging in the processes of relating.

> *Knowledge, or meaning, is in the interaction, not in peoples' heads. Meaning, or knowledge, emerges in the public interaction between people and simultaneously in the private role-play each individual conducts with himself or herself.* (Stacey, 2001: 197)

Drawing on Elias, Stacey (2001) argues that the individual mind and social interaction are the singular and plural of the same process of relating. He argues that knowledge is the process of meaning-making that occurs by relating to symbols produced by others in the form of vocal or non-verbal gestures, or in the

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case of this portfolio in the form of written symbols. Heron supports this distinction in describing a category of knowledge called 'experiential knowledge' through which a research practitioner;

> *knows and understands himself more deeply and becomes a better practitioner.* (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 229).

My aim here is to develop my own experiential knowledge through my reflection as action and to produce my work in a way that can be related to by other practitioners. By then relating to my experiences, others may be stimulated or provoked to relate to my writing in a way that extends their reflections on their own experiences and practice. I am therefore not aiming to posit a hypothesis or a set of generalisable conclusions but am presenting a valid account of my own experience of being a coach, human resource specialist and manager during and as part of a period of organisational change.

2:4 Validity

Having differentiated myself from predominant quantitative and qualitative approaches to methodology I now turn to my view on the validity of the outcomes of participative-inquiry as the methodology applied in this portfolio. In addition to 'Experiential Knowledge,' Heron (cited in Reason and Bradbury, 2001) also describes two other categories of knowing; 'Propositional Knowledge', where a view is offered as fact or opinion and ' Practical Knowledge' where a new action or approach can be integrated as a result of the knowledge generated. His description of validity in cooperative inquiry calls on the interrelationship with these three forms of knowledge.

> *Validity is experienced when the propositional knowledge asserted by the research conclusions is coherent with the experiential knowledge of the researchers as co-subjects and their existing knowledge is coherent with the practical knowledge of knowing how to act together in the researched world.* (Reason, 1998: 48)

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More simply, validity occurs when the topic of inquiry is consistent with the researcher's experience in practice, which then informs the ability to think and act differently in the future. A further test of validity for Heron is that the researcher has been changed by the experience of research. *"The research has not just been grasped but has been lived through."* (Ibid:53). The authenticity of the research is seen as an indicator of validity by Lincoln and Guba (1985) who apply the following criteria as being key to authentic action research:

i)   Resonance – (the extent to which the research process reflects the underlying paradigm)

ii)   Rhetoric – (the strength of the presenting argument)

iii)   Empowerment – (the extent to which the findings enable readers to take action)

iv)   Applicability – (the extent to which the readers can apply the findings to their own work)

Habermas (1987) includes the need for authenticity as one of his criteria for valid action research. His other criteria are that;

i)   The work needs to be comprehensible to others

ii)   Any claims need to be backed by evidence

iii)   The values of the underlying work need to be transparent

My aim is therefore to be transparent about the process and findings of my research and to be clear about how any conclusions were developed. I will also describe how I have been affected by the insights that I have gained in my research and the values that emerge in the work that influence the approach and findings that result.

Part Three

3:1 A Different Way of Thinking about Executive Coaching

Executive Coaching has been presented as a way of releasing the potential or latent talents of individuals, since its widespread growth in commercial organisations in the 1980's. Whilst there are a number of definitions of coaching the predominant elements of these are captured by Whitmore.

> *The unlocking of a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.* (1996: 8)

The proposition of coaching has been that by working in a new way, through the application of the skills of questioning and reflective listening, the performance of the coachee will be transformed. The roots of coaching lie in humanistic and cognitive psychologies where clients are seen as being able to self-actualise (Maslow, 1954) through the positive mental model (Argyris, 1992; Senge 1990) in which they are held by the coach[1].

The process of my research, which has led to a different perspective, has involved the reflection on my experience as a coach, coachee and line-manager and has helped me develop significant distinctions between my experience and the recorded experiences of other coaches as presented in their work.

The predominant authors use the term coaching to describe a process that includes many of the following elements;

- o An architecture of an agreed number of sessions with predetermined goals (Bolt, 2000)

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[1] The origins and development of approaches to coaching including humanistic, cognitive and dialogic are set out in paper four of this portfolio.

- A skilled coach who facilitates the movement of the coachee to achieve the agreed goals (Landsberg, 1997)
- The coachee who will be changed by the experience and whose work performance will be enhanced (Whitmore, 1996)
- Coaching sessions made up of discrete one-to-one conversations between coach and coachee (Bolt, 2000)
- The format of the sessions allowing the coachee to develop their own solutions to issues rather than the coach offering advice or suggestions (Zeus and Skiffington, 2000)
- The coach has the belief that the coachee has more potential than he/she currently displays (Gallwey, 1975)

This list serves to highlight the key assumptions that underpin the majority of descriptions of coaching offered by the predominant authors. Firstly, the potential to perform is in some way located within each individual, as 'the essence of self' (Dahler, from Dryden, 1984) or 'the true self' (ibid) and that this potential is in some way prevented from being manifest due to obstacles (Bolt, 2000) or interferences (Gallwey, 2000; Landsberg, 1997). With this stance, we are directed to a view of the process of change as occurring by the coach in some way acting to allow the unfolding of the enfolded potential that resides within the coachee. Also, focus is placed on the architecture of the coaching arrangements and on the skills of the coach. These along with the high regard with which the coach holds the coachee allow change to occur. We are directed, by many coaches, to consider the structure of coaching sessions as being significant and that the relationship between coach and coachee should be one based on respect and a humanistic belief (See paper 4: 153) in the coachee's latent talents.

The perspective that I offer in this portfolio is not informed by these assumptions but by the concept of Complex Responsive Processes as a way of thinking about human relationships, change, communication and power forming and being formed by identity. The areas where I wish to make distinctions are set out below:

3:2 Complex Responsive Processes as a Way of Thinking About Organisations

The term complex responsive processes (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000, Stacey, 2001) refers to a range of concepts which are brought together to describe a different way of thinking about organisations than the mainstream systems approach. Systems thinking has three main strands, Cybernetics (Ashby, 1954) systems dynamics (Senge, 1990) and general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Whilst taking different positions on feedback mechanisms, the linear or non-linear relationship between parts of the system and the relationship between the system and the environment (see paper 1: 62) each strand involves the researcher adopting the stance of the natural scientist who stands outside of the system to observe or change it. Instead of applying a systemic view where organisations are seen as able to be *"designed, managed and controlled"* (Stacey, 2001: 3) the concept of complex responsive processes holds that organisations are made up of self-organising processes that simultaneously form and are formed by the patterns of relating between human bodies. This theory draws on analogies from the complexity sciences where order is seen to arise not from external control but as emergent patterns of interaction between agents in complex responsive processes of relating[2]. Stacey argues that this analogy alone does not explain the emergence of novelty and creativity in human systems and has offered another way of thinking about how change emerges from the complex patterns of relating. Stacey describes these complex responsive processes as:

> *All human relationships, including communicative actions between the body with itself, that is mind, and the communicative actions between bodies, that is the social, are interweaving story lines and propositions*

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[2] These terms are taken from Complex Adaptive Systems Theory (Kauffman 1993, Goodwin 1994) which offers an analogy for human organisations.

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constructed by those relationships at the same time as those story lines and propositions construct the relationships. They are all complex responsive processes of relating and can be thought of as interweaving themes and variations of those themes that recursively form themselves.

(Stacey, 2001: 140)

This way of thinking about the processes of *"ordinary, everyday communication"* Streatfield (2001: 61) challenges the thinking that communication involves the transmission of messages from one person, to be received by another. In this way of thinking, meaning is contained in the message to be transmitted and is sent by voice, electronically or in writing to the receiver. Stacey however is referring to a different way of thinking about communication, a way in which meaning arises in the whole communicative act rather than just in the intention of the sender. Drawing on the work of the pragmatist Mead, Stacey shows that meaning arises in the response to a gesture and not solely in the originating gesture. I showed an example of the emergence of meaning in the whole "social act" (Stacey, 2001) when describing a conversation (see paper 4: 176) with a consultant with whom I was working. She asked me. "What will you do when you leave BeerCo?"
This question could have had many meanings, including a polite enquiry, or a way of finding how long I may stay in my current role. My response of "I'm not sure but probably I will move into consulting." made the meaning of the original question become "Would you like to talk about the possibility of joining my firm?"

The conversations that I have set out in this portfolio show how meaning and power move in the ongoing conversation. Meaning is seen as arising in the response to gestures and not in the initiating question. It is however difficult to label any intervention as being an initiating gesture or a response as the patterning of relating is ongoing with each act calling forth other acts from the participants involved. It is in the social processes of relating that we make meaning together and through which identity is formed while simultaneously forming the patterns of relating.

An implication of thinking about creating meaning as a social act is that a new temporal structure needs to be considered. Instead of the linear transmission of meaning through time, a circular concept of time is required where meaning emerges from past actions and future desires in the present. Griffin, drawing on Mead, presents this idea as;

> *The past is not factually given because it is reconstructed in the present as the basis of action to be taken in the present. The past is what we remember. The future is also in the present in the form of anticipation and expectation. It too forms the basis of action in the present. Furthermore, what we are anticipating affects what we remember and what we remember affects what we expect, in a circular fashion all in the present as the basis for our acting.* (Griffin, 2002: 206)

This paradoxical concept of the 'living present' (Griffin, 2002) which contains the past, future and present, points to a recursive patterning of relating which is formed by our histories and desires and which also forms those histories and desires in the living present. The complexity of this temporal structure, where we are making meaning with others in the social processes of relating, points to the impossibility of the control that is required when acting from the premise of cybernetics in order to move from the present to the future to achieve pre-planned goals.

In addition to thinking about the processes of communication, participation and time in a different way, the theory of complex responsive processes also offers a different way of thinking about the individual. I will develop this later, but by way of introduction here, Stacey develops the work of Elias to think about the individual and society as being the singular and plural of the same processes of relating. That is to say, with this way of thinking, it is not possible to isolate, or give primacy to, either the individual or society, but instead he attends to the patterning of relating that occurs between interdependent individuals who form interactions and who are formed by them. He uses the term 'figuration' (Elias, 1978) to describe the structure of power relations between interdependent individuals.

The concept of complex responsive processes is significant in my research as it includes insights from complexity sciences, psychology and sociology and challenges the notions of change occurring through external control; the independent individual; sender-receiver theories of communication and power as an attribute of an individual. Self-organisation is a concept from the theory of complex responsive processes that has significant implications for my research. Self-organisation is the process of people interacting with each other that both forms and is formed by their local interactions at the same time. This occurs without an overall controlling mechanism and produces coherent patterns that are the emergent interactions rather than movement being pre-formed or externally designed. In our day-to-day relating, meaning, identity and power can be seen as self-organising social patterns that are formed by processes of interaction that simultaneously and recursively form those processes. The implication for me is that the concept of complex responsive processes provides a valuable way of thinking with which to explore my experience of coaching and organisational change. The notion of emerging patterns of relating that have the potential for continuity and transformation at the same time helps me understand how change occurs when focus is placed on the detail of interactions between people. An exploration of the micro-interactions of conversation, in its broadest from, provides insight into the movements that occur in the processes of relating and the patterns of power that form and are formed by those processes. In my research, I focus on power as a self-organising pattern that both forms identity and at the same time is formed by the identity of the participants who interact together as interdependent individuals.

This insight emerged for me in writing the papers in this portfolio, particularly when working on paper four and when specifically considering coaching in organisations. Whilst working as part of a senior management team, I became aware of the repeating patterns of interaction and noticed the significance of interactions that did not follow an anticipated course. The movements of power and identify that occurred as changes in patterns of relating increased my interest in the processes of change as conversation and helped me develop a way of

speaking about coaching conversations that is significantly different from the predominant view.

3:2 The Underlying Causality of Change

The term causality describes the kind of movement into the future that is being assumed and the reasons, or motivation, for that movement (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000). Teleological causality assumes that the motivation for movement comes from within and is not externally imposed. Examples of the internal reasons for movement include change in order to achieve an optimum state (Secular Natural Law Causality), to achieve desired goals (Rationalist Causality) or to survive (Adaptionist Causality). In this portfolio, I have considered the assumptions that underpin different approaches to organisational change and to coaching. These are set out in paper four (page 150) and are summarised below.

Scientific Management in the early twentieth century (Fayol and Taylor, from Pugh and Hickson, 1964) relied on a dual causality. The first is rationalist causality that argues that human action is motivated by the desire to achieve goals designed by the autonomous individual through human reasoning. This is manifest as the desire to achieve greater productivity on the part of owners and managers, then to isolate the variables that effect productivity and manipulate them to achieve predetermined goals. Whilst the owners operate on the basis of rationalist assumptions, employees lower in the hierarchy can be seen to operate under secular, natural law causality in that their work is a repetition of the past, with any change intended to achieve an optimum state. The Human Relations School (Pugh and Hickson, 1964) assumes the same dual causality with the manager considering different variables to observe and control. Mayo (1933), the key proponent of the Human Relations School, considered relationships and motivation as being tools to be manipulated in order to achieve desired outcomes. Again managers set rational goals whilst employees were implicitly assumed to operate according to secular, natural law causality in moving toward the optimum productive state.

Another dual causality, based on Kant's unique way of looking at nature as a system (Griffin, 2002) is shown in the predominant approach to coaching in organisations. The first causality is again rationalist where individuals choose to make change in order to achieve predetermined goals. The manager's goal of a direct increase in productivity in Scientific and Human Relations approaches is replaced, in coaching, with the goal of releasing human potential (a view that I described holding in my early work as a coach, see paper 1: 64). The coachee also agrees the goals of the coaching programme and of individual sessions and is therefore also acting on the basis of rationalist causality. The second causality in coaching is formative. Here it is assumed that there is an unfolding of the already enfolded potential of the coachee and movement to the future occurs to reveal this unfolding mature form. It is as if there is some higher or more perfect form of the individual locked away which coaching can in some way release. This dual causality is clear in the predominant coaching literature where the coach's role is to allow the manifestation of the pre-existing potential or the *"unlocking of a person's potential to maximise their own performance."*   Whitmore (1996:8).

The newer dialogic approaches to coaching offer the opportunity for change by adopting different ways of behaving and focussing on the conversation or dialogue between people. The intention is to change one's behaviour to be able to enter into dialogue, for example by adopting Isaac's recommendation of *"listening, respecting, suspending and voicing"* (Isaacs,1999: 83) and is again the rationalist approach. However, once this new way of communicating is adopted it is assumed that change occurs through access to some spiritual or mystical force for good. This is described as accessing the *"flow of common meaning"* (Bohm, 1996: 6) experiencing our *"common humanity"* (Rogers and Lewin, 1999: 273) or in some other way becoming aware of the interconnectivity of life in the universe. Wheatley (1999) in particular, presents the option to choose to act in a new way and to communicate through dialogue that gives access *"to the web of connections."* (Wheatley, 1999: 40) In casual terms, we make the choice to have dialogue (rationalist causality) but are left not knowing what is acting upon us in order to bring about the good that is promised. Again this is formative causality.

My perspective, as offered in this portfolio, is an approach to coaching that is based on a single transformative causality rather than dual rationalist and secular, natural law or formative causalities. Transformative causality (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000) describes a movement into the future that is under perpetual construction by the movement itself. There is no final form that is currently enfolded. There is only the perpetual iteration of identity and difference. Movement is not in order to move into a future but is the perpetual construction of the future in the living present. This is a self-organising process with micro-interactions forming and being formed by the processes of relating. Paradoxically, this movement has the potential for continuity and transformation at the same time, in that both freedom and constraint simultaneously emerge from micro-interactions as the patterns of relating.

More practically, I am saying that my experience of the change that can happen in coaching does not result from the conscious choice to apply a particular range of skills or from the unfolding of the enfolded potential of the coachee. Instead any change is a movement in the patterns of relating between coach and coachee and with him/herself. I have set out in the papers that make up this portfolio a range of studies of my work in which I see change as having occurred through an uncontrollable and unexpected shift in the patterns of relating between the people involved. In an example where I felt unable to contain my intolerance at the Chief Executive, Nick, describing some of our colleagues as 'crap' (see paper 3: 128), I felt that the moment of my challenge had both the potential for continuity in the existing patterns of relating and simultaneously the potential for transformation. A shift in the processes of power-relating, in the moment of my challenge, was the change that became repeated and again transformed in the ongoing relationship between the Chief Executive and myself.

In paper four, I described a meeting between two people who report to me and myself (see paper 4: 182). I showed my discomfort with the predominant patterning of relating in the meeting and I tried to alter this by breaking out of a

presenting mode to one of facilitative conversation. My colleagues resisted this and there was another shift in the pattern of relating at the point where Richard said he wished to leave the meeting. The processes of power-relating had moved again and Richard was threatening to exclude himself from us and therefore us from him.

As with the example of Nick, change can be seen to have occurred, not as any pre-planned intervention or plan or programme but as a shift in the moment-by-moment patterning of power-relating between participants. In each study there was the possibility that change would not occur and that the patterns of power would continue in a known, stable form. It is by looking at the detail of the conversations, the specific words, tone, non-verbal communication and my own responses to gestures, that I gain insight into the processes of change and the patterns of power differentiating identities that are the changes described in this portfolio. My research points to this detailed level of interaction as being where change occurs in coaching and in other forms of organisational change. Movements in the patterns of relating are the transformations suggested in coaching literature, although the authors look in other places to be able to understand the change. They look at their skills, the architecture of the coaching programme, the structure of sessions, the agreement of goals and the interferences removed in the coachee. However for me, any change is evidence of the transformative causality that I see operating that causes me to attend to my work as a coach and line manager in ways not presented by predominant coaching literature.

An implication of thinking in terms of transformative causality is that my focus of attention changes whilst coaching. Previously I would have attended to the overall goals of the programme and to the desired outcomes for each session. I would have exerted some control over the direction of the conversation in order to 'help' the coachee get closer to our agreed destination. I would not have been as focussed on the intricacies of our relating in the moment. Now, I am particularly concerned with noticing the patterning of our interaction and am attuned to the responses and gestures that are called forth in us whilst we work. This means noticing and

describing how I am reacting to our conversation, drawing attention to my experience of the processes of relating. In the example with Adrian (see paper 4: 171) I wrote about a physical response in our conversation that I described in the session and which began a conversation that was different to that 'contracted for' in the goal setting section of the coaching model. By drawing attention to the patterning of relating a disturbance was created that resulted in a move away from the existing pattern. The scale or direction of the move could not be planned nor forecast but represented a movement in our experience of each other and therefore in the emergence of identity as a social phenomenon through a change in the differentiating patterning of power-relating.

I am not proposing a generalisable formula here, whereby voicing experiences of the processes of relating causes a change as, over time, this also may stabilise as a pattern of relating. I am suggesting that by noticing the movements in the micro-interaction of relating a coach can be more intimate with the changes that are happening and be more present to the changes that are affecting the coach and coachee through their co-created experience of working together.

3:4 Identity and the Psychology of the Individual

In paper four (see page 163) I set out the origins of coaching and traced its development through its roots in humanistic and cognitive psychologies, psychotherapy and more recent dialogic approaches based on the work of Bohm (1976) and Buber (1956). I will briefly summarise the distinctions that I made between these approaches and my own here.

In the early part of the last century 'behaviourism' was the predominant approach to academic psychology. This involved thinking of human interaction as being based on stimulus and response where any action would lead to a reaction on the part of the person who received the stimulus. Behaviourism has been criticised for seeing humans as essentially unable to freely control their actions and creating a view of the *'powerlessness of humanity'* (Dryden, 1984: 130). By the 1960's

humanistic psychologists (Rogers, 1963; Maslow, 1964) were setting out a psychology based on the individual sensing and making-meaning through his/her own unique mixture of *"needs, history and expectations"* (Merry, 1999: 15). Humanistic psychology emphasises the appreciation of the individual's personal experience from within their own frame of reference, whereby the individual is seen as always striving for enhancement, growth and continual development. This process of 'actualisation' (Maslow, 1964) describes the need to move towards fulfilment as the unfolding of human potential. The humanistic approach is seen in the predominant view of coaching as the desire to remove the interferences or blockages that limit the manifestation of the coachee's potential. A key interference is seen as the mental models (Argyris,1992; Senge, 1990) or 'frame' (Dryden, 1984) with which coachees perceive themselves, their relationships or their environment. Here coaches call on cognitive psychology and constructivist therapeutic activities (see paper 4: 157) in order to 'reframe' the coachee's experience as a way of offering new options or ways of behaving. This is seen in the work of Argyris (1992), Senge (1990) and Covey (1983, 1992) who aim to alter the coachee's belief system and perception of events so that their reaction to events is altered.

Psychodynamic and psychoanalytic approaches to coaching aim to uncover deep-seated reasons for patterns of behaviour, to uncover the unconscious motivation for current behaviours. This methodology assumes an unconscious mind having control over the individual's actions and requires the coach to develop a type of working relationship that is neutral and firm, creating a working alliance. The work of this alliance is to explore past experiences and the effect of those experiences on present day attitudes and behaviour. By exploring these experiences it is thought possible for the coachee to have more choice in how to respond to present experiences, uncoupled from historic responses.

Each of these psychological roots assumes that each individual is a self-contained unit or 'monad' (Leibniz,1695)[3] and that the coach is objectively working with the coachee to achieve movement towards the more developed self. Instead of an individual based psychology, I have considered the individual not as a biological, independent unit bounded by our skin but as being socially created, with identity emerging through the interactions with others and with oneself.

Whilst it may seem like 'common sense', in Western thought, to view humans as self contained units, there is a body of work from the social sciences that proposes that identity is not predetermined and able to be unfolded in the humanistic sense but is socially created in interaction. This perspective as described by Burkitt (1991), Elias (1991), Stacey (2000), Stacey, Griffin and Shaw (2000) and Dalal (1998) has influenced my research into coaching. Instead of seeing the coach and coachee as separate entities, I now think of the processes of relating and the differentiating patterns of power that are co-created in their work together and from which identity as patterning of the processes of relating continues to emerge.

A problem with thinking about the individual as primary, is that it creates a division between society and the individual, or as argued in this portfolio, between the individual and the organisation. My research has involved trying to develop a way of speaking about the processes of relating that does not make this distinction between individuals and between the individual and the organisation. Elias has been particularly helpful in describing how the monadic perspective arose, in his theory of *'homo clausus'* (Elias, 1991). He proposes a way of thinking about the individual and society not as separate but as the singular and plural of the processes of relating.

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[3] Leibniz's (1646-1716)' Doctrine of Monadology'(1695) states that because the individual is the one indivisible entity which is capable of perceiving objects in the universe, then the existence of all other things must depend on the human individuals who perceive them. This includes relationships between other 'monads'. He argues that relating between 'monads' occurs by virtue of the common origin of all 'monads' as being created by God and whilst each monad retains their own point of view, 'monads' are essentially divided. (See Burkitt, 1991).

Elias described how the self-perception of individuals being separate from each other evolved in the early Renaissance period in Europe, from the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries. This change was linked to the change in patterns of social relations in this period. The increasingly centralised state controls and developing rules of behaviour meant a gradual switch from a reliance on external rules to internalised rules governing patterns of behaviour that acted as self-controls. Over this period, self-control was built into the person with more self-controls being required at each higher level of the social strata.

> *It is these civilisational self-controls, functioning in part automatically that are now experienced in individual self-perception as a wall, either between subject and object or between one's own self and other people (society).*   (Elias, 1978: 257)

The concept of the self being locked away from others is found in the work of philosophers during the Renaissance period. Cartesian philosophy splits the process of thinking from the rest of the body. For Descartes, thinking is the process that signifies identity with the rest of the body operating as a machine.

> *I think therefore I am, was so certain and so evident that all of the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were not capable of shaking it... I thereby concluded that I am a substance of which the whole essence or nature consists in thinking...so that this 'I', that is to say the mind, by which I am what I am is entirely distinct from the body.*
> (Descartes, cited in Burkitt, 1991: 5)

Leibniz, who introduced the concept of 'monads', separates individuals from each other, whilst Kant separated individuals from the world by describing two realms of experience. The first, the phenomenal world, is the experience of the world as perceived by the subject. The noumenal world is the world of objects as they exist independent of human interpretation. This distinction splits the individual from the world around them by offering a view of the individual as observing the world with a unique and subjective perspective.

We therefore see the splitting of the mind from body, thought from emotion, the person from the rest of the world and individuals from each other in the work of

these philosophers. Burkitt argues that today psychologists, particularly those with humanistic and cognitive training, adopt the thinking of the individual as isolated from the body, from experience and from others.

> *The psychology of personality is a discipline which so often begins from the assumption that the individual is a separate entity from others is a fact given in nature. The isolated individual therefore becomes not a historic and social product but a biologically given entity whose individuality is contained inside itself from birth.* (Burkitt, 1991: 17)

Instead of taking the monadic view of the self-contained coach and coachee, my approach applies a view of the individual as emerging in social interaction rather than being pre-formed and in some way blocked from fulfilling their potential.

Elias's influence on my thinking is that he describes how identity is a process of power-relating, instead of being fixed and located in the individual. My research builds on Elias's work by relating the idea of identity as patterns of power-relating to coaching. I also show how I see identity as power, move, not as a description of trends over time, as Elias and Scotson (1994) did in their longitudinal study of a community over time, but as the immediate and moment-by-moment movement in the processes of relating.

The predominant authors who describe coaching as 'the unlocking of potential' are applying an approach that gives the individual primacy. The isolation of the coachee from the context of their environment for discrete sessions is a manifestation of the view that it is the individual who will be changed through coaching. In my research, I have shown my discomfort with thinking about the individual as an independent unit as this does not fit with my experience of the interconnectivity of relating within my work. My research points to change occurring in the patterns of relating between people rather than as discrete and independent change in one individual. The studies that I present in this portfolio show how change is a movement of identity as the differentiating processes of power.

3:5 Power as Differentiating Patterning

In the title of this portfolio, I use the term 'the differentiating patterning of power" and in this section I will set out how this term is helpful in speaking about power in a way not usually encountered in organisations. In doing this, I first wish to comment on the term 'process' and make the distinction between process as a phenomenon that can be isolated and manipulated and the concept of process as an ongoing experience that we participate in regardless of our intention to observe or reify. In my research, I have developed a view of process in which we continually participate, regardless of our intention to participate. Whilst we are unable to separate ourselves from the co-created processes of relating we are able to notice patterns that occur that form and are formed by the processes of relating. In drawing attention to an experience of the patterning of relating the pattern can be amplified and so reinforce the iteration of the ongoing pattern. A pattern of the processes of relating may also be noted but not picked up by others, either dampening the pattern or calling forth some other response from participants.

In an example that I presented in paper four, I showed how I intended to move away from a pattern of relating with colleagues that made me feel uncomfortable (See page 188). Although wishing to adopt a more familiar pattern, the intervention that I made called forth a response in my colleagues that included one of them saying that they no longer wished to remain in the meeting. I had adopted a stance that involved me noticing how we were working together and then deciding that this could be improved. I intervened in order to bring us closer to my preferred way of working. I had followed a structure that could be described as 'Process Consultation' (Schein, 1988). Schein writes:

> *Not only have I observed my own communication with the client so far, but I can now observe how different members in the client organisation communicate with each other.* (Schein, 1988: 21)

What I learned from this experience, and others like them, is that it is impossible to separate oneself from the ongoing processes of relating. The act of observation is

just as much a gesture into the conversation as any speech, comment or non-verbal gesture. The way that I think about process now is to recognise the ongoing co-created processes of relating that we are always part of as interdependent individuals. In recognising that we are always participating, I wish to draw attention to how I see power as self-organising patterns that differentiate "*interdependent individuals*" (Elias, 1978) from each other as we are simultaneously enabled and constrained in our activities together. My research provides a way of thinking about power as ongoing patterns differentiating interdependent human identities, rather than as something reified that is possessed by an individual. It is through this differentiation that unique individual and collective identities emerge which are continually iterated.

Elias (1978) describes the predominant presentation of power as being like an 'amulet' owned by someone and devotes much of his work to showing that this monadic view of power is inappropriate.

Power is not an amulet possessed by one person and not by another; it is a structural characteristic of human relationships, of all human relationships. (Elias, 1978: 75)

The distinction between power as something possessed independently, as opposed to being the patterning of the processes of relating is the core to the argument in this portfolio.

In this section I will briefly review Elias' exploration of power and consider how this informs the concept of complex responsive processes. I will then develop my argument to show how the patterning of power-relating occurs at work in the micro-interactions of conversation and that it is at this level of detail that the patterning of power-relating has the potential for simultaneous continuity and transformation. I will also show how the movement of power is experienced as sensations of inclusion and exclusion and that the fear of exclusion is a fundamental challenge to our identity and therefore our existence.

Elias begins with the concept that there is no separation between the individual and the group, the inside or outside, or the mind and body. With his 'Symbol Theory' (Elias, 1978) he argues that language, thought and knowledge are all activities involving the handling of symbols and that a distinction between speech, thought or knowledge is artificial. He says that a 'symbol' is created in relationship and that *"it exists in a place that transcends the usual internal/external dichotomy"* (cited in Dalal, 1998: 88). Elias sees 'symbols' being created as social activity and power relations. The dynamic is recursive, each forming and being formed by the other and therefore having the potential for transformation. Whilst using 'Symbol Theory' (Elias, 1991) to overcome a range of dichotomies, the communication of symbol in its many forms occurs in the context of the interconnectedness of human relating or, 'figuration'.

The term figuration is used by Elias to explain that all human relating involves some form of constraint and that this constraint consists of the processes of power-relating. Elias uses the phrase 'interdependent people' to focus on the idea that interconnectedness is at the core of human existence. The concept of the individual, for Elias, refers to 'interdependent people' in the singular and the concept of society to 'interdependent people' in the plural. He argues that the term 'figuration' refers to the 'pattern of bonding' (Elias, 1978: 176) or the pattern of interconnectedness between interdependent persons.

Dalal (1998) uses the metaphor of elastic bands stretched between individuals to explain how we are connected to others through power-relating. The tension on each elastic band between ourselves and other interconnected persons represents the degree of constraint that is imposed on our actions by the figuration of the particular patterns of power-relating. Elias (1978) uses the analogy of 'game playing' to show that as the number of players in a game increases, the less control each has over the choice of moves that can be made and therefore the overall outcome of the game.

Whilst Elias describes the processes of power-relating as being essentially constraining, Stacey argues that paradoxically they are both enabling and constraining. Whilst some actions are constrained, others are enabled by the configuration of the patterning of power-relating. At its most simple, whilst someone is speaking, others are prevented from doing so. This perspective is contrary to the humanistic view of much coaching literature in which human freedom is available to all, independent of the figuration of the relationships in which a person may find himself. The reliance on an individual psychology (humanistic, psychodynamic or cognitive) focuses the coach's attention on the individual client without exploring the patterning of power-relating that the interdependent coach and coachee are co-creating in their work.

It is only when a transformation in this patterning occurs that new possibilities arise. The enabling and simultaneous constraining of the patterns of power-relating, in which some are in whilst others are out, points to a key argument in this portfolio, that of the experience of inclusion and exclusion. At a macro-level Elias and Scotson (1994) described the processes by which people lived together following the development of a new housing estate in Leicester in the 1970's. Despite there being no obvious social, racial, religious or other differences between the older 'established' group and the new 'outsiders' who moved on to the estate, hostility and prejudice soon appeared. The emergence of categories of 'The Established' and 'The Outsiders' and the experiences of inclusion and exclusion from those categories are the manifestation of the ongoing patterning of power-relating which differentiate interconnected identities from others. The ongoing processes of relating can be seen as iterations of both identity and difference that reinforce membership or non-memberships of particular categories. The processes by which categories and differentiations on the basis of membership into those categories come about can be seen as self-organising, where they both form and are formed by conversation in its broadest sense. Elias and Scotson show this process in operation in their description of 'gossip mills' (1994: 88) where the established group, who over time have developed a greater degree of interconnectedness amongst themselves, are seen to amplify critical observations

of their neighbours and share this information with others, whilst also dampening, or ignoring any positive attributes of the 'outsider' group. By doing this, the differentiating patterning of power reinforces the identity of each category, whilst simultaneously strengthening the differences between themselves and members of different categories. It is the self-organising patterns of power-relating that reinforce the inclusion in, and exclusion from, particular categories and which the processes of including and excluding simultaneously form. It is as this differentiating patterning that identities are continually iterated.

Whilst Elias and Scotson show the effects of the figuration of power over time, they do so from the standpoint of sociologists who are investigating a community. My research is based on my involvement as a member of the community, in which I am fully participating, and on the detail of specific conversations to show how movements are experienced in the processes of relating.

I conclude from my research, that differentiating patterns of power are experienced as sensations of inclusion and exclusion that configure as socially created identity. The differentiating patterning of power is at the core of human relating. The risk of being excluded is a challenge to our identity, *"an existential challenge to our very existence."* (Stacey, 2001: 149).

In our relating we co-create the range of enabling constraints as self-organising, differentiating patterns of power that form and are formed by our identities. A movement in these patterns therefore alters our experience of being included or excluded, which can be seen as the movement of identity. Our identity therefore emerges as the ongoing configuration of our relating, experienced as the enabling constraints that shape our interactions with others, and them with us.

In my research, I have shown that people often remain silent rather than voice any criticism of their manager or organisation, the risk of being excluded being too great. It is when the emotional reaction to repeating the patterns of relating, as a necessary part of remaining included, becomes intolerable that some gesture may

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be called forth that transforms the patterns of power differentiating as a movement in identity. When the price to remain included becomes too high, a gesture may be called forth that risks exclusion or which may lead to some other re-configuration of the pattern of power relating.

When I took such a risk (see paper 3: 128), I described a growing sense of intolerance with the potential for my work to be included in the category of those whose performance was seen as 'crap'. By challenging the comparing of managers in such a way, the differentiating patterning of power that were being co-created moved. I had seen that managers who challenged the Chief Executive were excluded from future meetings of the senior management group, and that many others chose not to offer their own views for fear of exclusion. Despite this, I could not contain my reaction to hearing colleagues spoken about in such a way. My reaction showed this intolerance and instead of the original disrespect and aggression, the meaning of conversation moved to recognise the embarrassment and discomfort that we now felt about his calling colleagues 'crap'. I was relatively new to the organisation at that time and was the first human resource professional to be employed. I had felt that up to that point, the Chief Executive and I were sizing each other up and that we were holding each other at some distance. The incident that I described however was a movement in the differentiating patterns of power in the moment of my challenge. I had disagreed with the Chief Executive's comments and felt as though I risked exclusion in some form. However in the movement of the pattern of power I felt more powerful and able to voice my own comments and concerns. This came from the feeling of inclusion in the shared experience of embarrassment with Nick and in our joint recognition of the unsustainability of the ongoing patterns of relating between him and the senior team. In saying that I felt more powerful, I want to stress that this is relative to Nick in the moment of our interaction, as a movement in the processes of our relating, not in any absolute or permanent sense. Indeed, I use other examples of my work to show that the movements of power-relating can shift in each moment, with each word, breath, movement or gesture that may give rise to the experience of inclusion and exclusion.

Again, Elias and Scotson (1994) in their study of the communities in Winston Parva in Leicester describe gossip as the means by which the patterns of power-relating are sustained through the maintenance of the dominant ideas or 'ideology' of the community (Dalal, 1998:118). Their sociological perspective however provides generalisations from their studies of different groups.

> *The 'village gossip' about the estate, as one saw, was based on a set belief about Estate people which acted as a selecting agency: incidents on the estate which did not fit into the predetermined belief were of little interest to the 'villagers'; one hardly thought it worth one's while to feed them into the gossip mills. Incidents which corresponded to the set images were taken up with gusto and kept the gossip mills going for a while until they got stale and were replaced by fresh gossip items.*
>
> (Elias and Scotson, 1994: 89)

Whilst presenting examples of praise-gossip and blame-gossip to show how positive and negative judgements are made and circulated around the community, we are not offered the specific details of the interactions from the perspective of the participants, who reinforce the gossip. My research moves into a level of detail, which describes my reactions to events as they occurred, as a participant in the processes of relating. I show how each moment has the potential for the reiteration of the dominant patterning of relating, recreating the same felt experience of inclusion and exclusion whilst simultaneously having the possibility for transformation. I describe, in the following papers, examples where ongoing patterns of relating are repeated and where transformation occurs as a movement in power differentiating and identity.

Shaw (2002) describes a moment which I see as a movement in the differentiating patterning of power-relating in the intervention of a manager who is uncomfortable with the discussion occurring in a meeting.

> *Eduardo raises his head deliberately and an extraordinary expectant hush fills the room. He speaks in Italian slowly and I understand every word. I have nothing to say to this situation. I suggest that the consultants and*

other extraneous parties be asked to leave the room so that the Site Committee members can continue discussion in private. (Shaw, 2002: 81)

In 'Changing Conversations in Organisations' (Shaw, 2002), published after the completion of my fourth paper, Shaw shows how, in a moment, the patterning of conversation can move. In terms of power-relating, Eduardo's intervention can be seen as re-exerting the previous authority of the site committee and creating categories of the committee who have 'private matters to discuss' and the 'extraneous others'. The labelling of the consultants as 'extraneous' distances them from the site managers and from the category of people who may help the factory. This is a significant movement for the consultants who had been welcomed and who were seen as being able to help the plant improve its productivity. My own work provides similar examples of movements in the patterning of relating that are shifts in power, experienced as sensations of inclusion and exclusion in the participants.

As the conclusion to this synopsis, I will set out the main themes that have emerged in my research and describe how my research has changed how I work as a coach and as a manager. I also invite the reader to consider how this research may cause you to think differently about your work by drawing attention to the patterning of power-relating as experiences of identity, and inclusion and exclusion.

Part Four

4:1 Conclusions

The portfolio for the D.Man. Programme compiled from January 2000 to December 2002 chronicles the movements in my work from Consultant to Human Resource specialist and Coach. It describes the influences on my work and sets out how my research, thinking and working are inseparable, each forming and being formed by my conversations in a recursive process of relating. In this synopsis, I set out how my research, as work, adds to the body of practice for consultants,

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managers and coaches and consider how I experience the processes of organisational change and coaching as significantly different from those set out in the mainstream literature. I describe how I now think about coaching as relating which is characterised by the differentiating patterning of power and reinforce the insight that is offered by considering the individual, power and identity as emerging as patterns of relating, instead of being fixed or as unfolding to reveal a final, but yet hidden form.

In reaching my conclusions, I recognise that I now think about my work in very different ways to how I did at the beginning of my studies. I locate change in processes of relating, not in an individual. I see movement into the future as jointly constructed self-organising patterns instead of as the unfolding of pre-existing potential. I see identity as socially created and emerging from relating, not as fixed and contained within an individual. I consider power as ongoing patterns of enabling/constraint not as something possessed and I see the transformational changes that are possible through coaching as movements of power and identity in the micro-interactions of relating not as the unfolding of an individual's humanistic potential to achieve predetermined goals.

Many Executive Coaches promise 'transformation' through their work and argue that it occurs as interferences are removed in their clients, revealing the enfolded talent or untapped potential. This view retains the monadic perspective where individuals can be isolated and worked with in order to lead to pre-planned change. Even where the coachee sets his own agenda, there is still an assumption that the desired change will occur as the movement towards the goals set by the logical thinking of rational humans (rationalist causality). The rationalist view is then seen to operate with formative causality, the unfolding of the human potential to move closer to revealing the mature form. I am arguing here that instead of assuming the dual causalities of rationalist and formative, as being the basis of the changes offered through coaching, there is another way of considering how change occurs that fits with my own experience, that of transformative causality.

I propose that the transformation that is promised by many coaches can be seen as a movement in the configurations of power, experienced as risk of exclusion from the predominant patterning of relating. A change in the patterning of power alters what is enabled and constrained, new actions occur that move identity. Thinking in this way assumes that power and identity are not fixed or located in individuals but are inescapable patterns of the processes of relating. I am nervous and excited at the prospect of my own identity being the patterning of power, and not something pre-existing or innate. To work with this assumption, I am drawn to be more present, or mindful, of the experiences that I am co-creating as relating. I attend more clearly to my present experiences instead of thinking and speaking about events in other times and places. In my coaching, I focus on the patterns of power and the processes of relating as the immediate conversation. With my clients I am more interested in what is occurring for us as we work together, instead of in agreeing goals and measurable outcomes to be achieved in other places. I concentrate much more on my participation in conversation, in its broadest sense, as it occurs.

My previous work involved accompanying a client on their journey through a session using a model of coaching as our map. I now participate fully in a co-created discovery in a way that amplifies the sense of risk in our work together. By drawing attention to my experience of our experience, I notice how I am more alive to the fluidity of movements in the patterning of power, differentiating our inclusion and simultaneous exclusion as identity in each moment. I also know that the change guaranteed by some coaches is not assured. Patterns of power have the paradoxical potential for continuity and transformation at the same time, but by working as a coach without attending to the patterning of power, the opportunity for change diminishes. Some of the authors that I have studied retain the perspective of objective observer or judge of the sessions and the coachee's progress, without apparently noticing how their stance may affect the patterning of their work. I suggest that by drawing attention to one's experience in the living present, the possibility for transformation as a shift in power and identity increases. However, whilst change may occur it may not be the change that was originally

planned. The co-creation of our experience and the ongoing meaning making through the combined social acts of gesture-responses means that we are unable to unilaterally control the outcomes of our actions. In coaching, the literature advises us to set goals to achieve measurable outcomes. There is little space given for the possibility that the goals might not be attained. This, I assume would be seen as failure and not as the consequence of the uncontrollable patterning of power that is our relating. The predominant coaches are looking in other places to explain change, they look at the unfolding of innate potential, the revealing of the pure self or the achievement of rational goals to explain the movement into the future. I argue that the future is constructed in the present as the iterative, self-organising processes of relating and that the changes that occur in coaching are transformations in the micro-interactions of conversation that configure and are configured by new patterns of power as our experience of identity. Whilst this portfolio offers a way of thinking about coaching not yet expressed in literature, or by the executive coaches with whom I have spoken, I believe that my research is also significant for line managers who wish to adopt a coaching approach to their work, as well as for external executive coaches.

External coaches are likely to work with a coachee for a specified period. After this time the relationship often ends with the coach moving to work on other assignments. The line management relationship is different in a number of ways. Firstly the relationship is ongoing, without a finite time span. The line manager is likely to spend more time with the coachee and be expected to play a number of roles including assessor, trainer and coach and will work with the coachee in a number of settings outside of the formal coaching agreement. A number of coaches describe how coaching can be applied in the workplace (Landsberg, 1997; Whitmore, 1996; Gallwey, 2000) without however considering the implications of change occurring through coaching at work. Most authors operate on the assumption that with the development of listening and questioning skills, combined with the application of a structure to a coaching session, change can be brought about. The change that is described often involves the subordinate being

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able to achieve more as he becomes 'empowered' or 'enabled' through coaching. By taking a monadic stance it appears possible for an individual to be able to achieve more and to have more power and authority to act[4]. However by considering change from the perspective of the patterning of power differentiating, it is the pattern of relating between the manager and subordinate that may change. For the employee to be more enabled, the manager, or both, may be more constrained in some way when power is considered as a relational paradoxical phenomenon. The level of control that the manager has may diminish as the pattern of power moves. The previous patterning of power that had sustained identity as manager and subordinate may be threatened and experienced as uncertainty and discomfort for both participants. The new patterns of power emerging from coaching may not be sufficiently robust to sustain the discomfort and the previous patterns may be reasserted to regain the sense of the known. It may therefore be helpful to draw attention to the live experience of the patterning of power as identity in working with line managers who wish to coach and as a manager working in an organisation. By speaking of the enabling/constraints as the patterning of power I believe, from my research, that movement away from the predominant patterns can be encouraged. However, the configuration of the new pattern cannot be foreseen nor can the stability of the new experience of relating. Change can be promoted but the outcome of the change is unknowable.

In this synopsis I have developed my arguments on how I see change occurring in organisations. Writers on organisational change appear to make assumptions in two areas that come together as the base of their understanding of how change occurs and how it may be managed or controlled. The first area is the perspective that the author takes in thinking about the nature of an organisation. The predominant views have their origins in systems thinking which is seen in the three strands of cybernetics, systems dynamics and general systems theory. The second area is the view of human psychology that is applied. Frequently this is based in cognitive psychology where the human brain is seen a processor of

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[4] These are cited as the key benefits of workplace coaching by Peterson and Hicks (1995), Landsberg (1997) and Alexander (1996).

electrochemical symbols much as a computer processes electronic signals. When combined, the two underpinning ways of thinking, about organisations and about human psychology, highlight the assumptions that are made in the way that organisational change comes about. This may be in order to achieve a predetermined strategy, in the case of Strategic Choice Theory (Stacey, 1996), to achieve the optimum or most efficient ways of working, in the case of Scientific Management (Taylor, 1948) or to unfold the already enfolded potential of the individual in the case of Covey's approach to management development (1990) or in coaching (Whitmore 1996).

My particular interest is in Executive Coaching and through my research I have offered a way of thinking about coaching not set out in the predominant literature. Instead of taking a systemic position, my position is informed analogies taken from the complexity sciences and particularly seen in the concept of complex responsive processes. I combine this way of thinking about organisations with its implications for control, participation and change with an approach to human psychology based on the work of social constructionists including Mead, Elias and Burkitt.

Whilst most coaching literature is based on cognitive or humanistic psychology, these authors have developed what can be termed as relationship psychology (Stacey, 2000) to explain the interconnectedness or interdependence between human beings where neither the individual nor the group is prior nor primary but where the key unit of consideration is the relating between interdependent individuals. Complex responsive processes of relating simultaneously and paradoxically enable and constrain actions. The ongoing enabling/constraints are continuously iterated as the patterns of power relating that structure our experience of ourselves and others. The patterning of power relating differentiates individual and collective identities with the potential for further differentiation as the patterns are continually iterated in conversation. Coaching, then has the potential to bring about change through an unknowable or uncontrollable movement in the patterning of power relating, enabling and constraining new actions and changing

the experience we have of each other and ourselves. To be sustained the new patterns need to reiterated over time until they form part of the silent conversation or 'mind' (Stacey, 2000) of the participants.

This way of thinking about change assumes a singular transformative causality instead of the dual rationalist and formative causalities assumed in most coaching. My research therefore combines a different approach to thinking about organisations with an alternative view of human relating. My contribution to coaching is a radical reinterpretation of the changes that are promised by this way of working. I invite coaches to consider how my research may illuminate aspects of their work not previously seen from the perspective of systems thinking or cognitive or humanistic approaches to human psychology.

PAPER 1

A reflective narrative, weaving together the influences and experiences that form my current practice in organisations, including my learning from the programme.

December 2000

Paper 1

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to provide the space to reflect on the personal journey that has led me to participate in the Doctorate of Management programme and to explore how I can more clearly develop myself, and my work, as a change consultant and coach. In writing about these areas, I aim to describe my understanding of theories of complexity and of individual and group psychologies. I will do this to record the potential of these concepts that I see so far, and also to anchor these early thoughts as a personal benchmark from which to measure changes in my thinking and work that occur during the programme of study. Already, I notice that a movement has occurred in the production of this paper during the ten months of its development. My writing has moved away from the observational narrative style in the earlier sections of this paper, almost as if I have observed myself, to a reflective, integrated inquiry of specific incidents and their implications to my work. This is particularly evident in the later sections of this paper dealing with live examples of my work.

In my participation in the programme and through my writing I am keen to include all of the aspects through which I experience my colleagues, clients and myself through the work that I am engaged in. These elements include my professional work, family life and experiences, work experience and academic background, and my understanding of my own psychology and patterns of relating.

My Current Professional Practice

As I write this paper I am experiencing a transition in my work. A change largely influenced by my participation in the D.Man. programme and through my own related enquiry into my professional work. The change that I am experiencing is as result of re-evaluating my work and restructuring of the means by which I practice.

I am employed as a full time management consultant by Sibson, an American Human Resource Company. I am currently in the process of moving from full-time to part-time employment, with Sibson, to have the time to work in a number of other ways with other clients and consultants and to develop my practice and broaden a network of relationships. This change in how I intend to work is an example of the movement in my thinking since joining the doctorate programme. I now recognise the boundaries around organisations as being unnecessary and somewhat artificial. Instead, I have more interest in working in a more complex web of relationships (Shaw, 1997) with practitioners from many backgrounds who structure their work in a variety of ways. I believe that this may have the potential to provide clients, consultants and managers with a richer and broader range of relationships and experiences.

Before moving to describe my current understanding of my own relationships and experiences, I should like to offer a flavour of my current work, this will provide a context to the movement and nature of my work that I will explore later in this paper.

An Introduction to my Work

For the first time in my career, I feel I am now defining my own areas of professional interest and practice. Prior to this year, the philosophies and processes of the organisation in which I worked heavily guided how I approached my work. I am now at a stage of exploring the areas of work in which I believe I can make a contribution and of considering how I should like to develop these areas in both the medium and longer term.

I divide my time into three broad headings of activity; executive coaching, team development and the facilitation of a range of processes that may be targeted at strategy development, process design, human resource systems and cultural change.I will now outline my general approach to each process and structure of these areas of work. Later in the paper, I will describe specific experiences and

reflections which have occurred as my work and which are illuminated by my understanding of the relationship between complexity theories and psychological approaches to viewing organisational life.

My approach to executive coaching has always felt rather simplistic, my experience was not based on a therapeutic approach, nor did it stem from any clinical training. Instead my coaching practice developed from a range of work-based and non-work-based influences.

Shortly after University, I trained as a voluntary bereavement counsellor with an organisation called Cruse that specialised in this area of work. In this work, I developed what I understand to be a *'client centred'* approach (Heron, 1986:6) to interventions. Through asking questions and by listening to the client, a sense of movement was often experienced in which the client could, over time, move through a recognised pattern of emotional states as they dealt with their grief. An underlying philosophy of this work was that the resolution to the problems faced by the client resided within the client and it was the counsellor's role to facilitate the movement through the likely stages of emotion that would be experienced. The stance of being a practitioner who objectively observed the client is one that I took with me into my organisational coaching. This work grew out of my exposure to Timothy Gallwey's (1975,2000) "Inner Game of…." series of books and by being trained by former students of Gallwey. His approach stems from a belief that each person has far more potential than he or she currently displays and that if the self-doubting inner voice, 'self two', (Gallwey, 1975) 'can be quietened' then the ability of the naturally effective 'self one' would be allowed to perform without interference. Gallwey and his disciples translated their sport-based coaching into organisations and subsequently developed a coaching structure called the "To G.R.O.W." model through which clients were led on an exploration of the topic, goal, reality, options and wrap up of the coaching conversation. (Gallwey, 1975; Whitmore, 1996; Landsberg, 1997).

Gallwey (1975) and Alexander (1996) propose that the use of a coaching model and a client centred approach can serve to reduce the self critical nature of the clients' internal conversations and allow them to view their work based issues in ways that allows them to be more readily resolved.

Whilst having had some years of success with this model and a number of referred clients, I have become increasingly frustrated that as a facilitative observer I am unable to add my own thoughts and suggestions into the coaching conversation. More significantly, I noticed that by holding coaching sessions at prescribed intervals, usually monthly, in off-site locations and on a one-to-one basis, the work often seems removed from the continuous flow of events that happen in the organisational life of my clients. One example of this was my work with a client in a pharmaceutical organisation. In the month between two sessions, the merger of that organisation had been announced, her line manager had lost his job and she was facing selection for her own role. My preference and that of my client would have been to be able to move outside of the formal coaching contract to work in a more fluid and less restricted way.

By reflecting on experiences such as these and in exploring my frustrations through working with my own coach, I have begun to explore how I contract to work with clients, and how the boundaries of formal coaching sessions do not reflect the complex web of organisational life (Shaw, 1997) that is experienced by clients outside of the punctuated sessions.

In addition to the structure of coaching work, my interest in complexity and relationship psychology has caused me to re-evaluate the approach that I adopt when engaged in coaching conversations. My interest is to explore an alternative way of working which involves engaging in broader conversations with the other people who may be involved in the issues discussed by an original one-to-one client or contact. I see this as being part of the movement from objective observer to being a participant in a joint enquiry with my clients and their colleagues in their organisations.

My work with team development is illustrated by a project with the board of an international airport. A Sibson partner asked me to work with her on a project to develop the effectiveness of the board in order that the strategy and values for the business could be more effectively defined once 'issues of relationship had been resolved'. My work involved a process of telephone interviews with each board member, the production of a report showing themes from the interviews and the co-design and delivery of a two-day event. The event was designed to involve facilitated conversations which would 'flush out' (notes from client meeting 22nd December 1999) the issues between people and would allow the board to develop a high level strategy for the airport and to begin to consider how they might develop a set of values for the airport and through this, engage the rest of the business (three thousand people) in the achievement of the strategy.

This work provides an example of a common consulting process, one similar to the "consulting cycle" described by Philips and Shaw in 1989.

1. Gaining entry

2. Agreeing a working contract

3. Data collection

4. Analysis and diagnosis

5. Feedback to clients

6. Formulating Proposals

7. Implementation

8. Evaluation and follow up

This case highlighted a number of assumptions and under-pinning beliefs that I should like to set out as I reflect on work of this type as it forms part of my consulting practice. Some of the assumptions include; the belief that values can be set by the board of an organisation for the rest of the organisation to 'live by'; that relationship difficulties can and should be solved and such difficulties are therefore implicitly judged as bad; and that the consulting cycle was appropriate for this client in the way that the engagement was carried out.

I move now to introduce the third area of my work, the area that I have described as 'facilitated interventions'. In a large leisure organisation (known here as

Armitage plc), I was asked to work with a colleague to facilitate a workshop aimed at helping the business deal with change. This followed poor trading results, low morale and a sixty percent fall in share price. The workshop had been designed as a series of modules that would supposedly develop the necessary skills in senior managers to reverse the significant decline in the fortunes of the business. These skills had been identified as communication, coaching, leading change and managing risk. Prior to my complexity studies, I believe that I would have approached this work from the perspective of needing to notice what was happening in the group of delegates and then to make interventions that facilitated movement towards the planned objective for the event. The predominant approach that I had been using for the facilitation of groups was based on the model developed by John Heron at the University of Surrey. Heron (1986) identified six categories of intervention that a facilitator of a group could make. These are supportive, informative, cathartic, prescriptive, catalytic and confronting. Heron's model seems to hold that the facilitator is external to the group or individual client and that interventions are made in order to *"service the personal development of the client"* (Heron, 1986: 3). The themes of culture, group relationships and the role of a facilitator will be picked up again as I describe an interaction as a basis to explore these areas later in this paper.

Having introduced my work and mentioned my growing interest in structuring my work in different ways and in exploring relationship psychology and complexity theories in organisations, I intend to describe my experiences that I now believe have led to my interest in these areas of enquiry. I shall then return to the examples outlined above to describe the detail of some notable interactions. I will then consider how complexity sciences and a deeper understanding of the processes of relating have illuminated my experience and practice in ways that are different from other approaches. This will involve considering how authors consider organisations and even broader theories and philosophies from sociological, philosophical or individually based psychological perspectives.

My Early Experiences

In thinking of my family-based formative experiences, I notice that it is difficult to recall the meaning that I made of events at the time that they occurred. Instead, I am able to describe events through the present meaning that I make of my work and now of my own family. In this reflection, I am reminded of the ongoing need to record my thoughts and feelings as events happen, so that I can track the movement in my experiences as events occur.

I recognise now that part of my interest in exploring the nature of relationship in organisations stems from being part of a family without strong positive relationships. My natural father left my mother when I was six months old and was replaced by a distant stepfather. I contrast my early experiences with my current intentions around my own family and my experience of being part of a very close work team in later life.

The benefits from my difficult childhood experiences include an acute ability to read people and relationships. I feel able to intuit and voice what I am intuiting. In a clinical psychological test (Defence Mechanism Test, Kraght and Smith, 1954) as part of a selection process I scored in the upper decile in my ability to make accurate conclusions based on very small and briefly shown pieces of information. It is found that people who have had some difficulty in childhood, including illness, parental separation or bereavement are more quickly able to assimilate information of the type used in the test. This ability, borne from adversity, is now my strongest gift, it allows me to be present to the real stories that lie beneath presenting conversations. I feel able to read the situation with which I am engaging on a number of levels and am able to respond to verbal, non-verbal and vocal signals in a way that often alters relationships. Associated with this, is the feeling of empathy that is often generated in my relationships with clients, colleagues and friends. This comes from a level of enhanced listening and a strong intent to act in the service of the person I am with. I define by 'being in the service of' as

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gesturing with the intent to increase my clients' self awareness and opportunity for change.

My conclusions of these areas is that my background has left me with some difficulties to resolve, a commitment to do so and a set of skills and interests that provide a strong background for my work as a coach and consultant. The areas that I have described go some way to explain my interest in group analytical perspective and Stacey's thinking on the complexity sciences, a topic that I will pick up again later in this paper.

My Professional Journey Towards Complexity

Whilst at University I was introduced to the subject of management science. I noticed the strong reaction that I had towards the premise that human beings can be reduced to being merely elements of the production process as Taylor (1947) and Fayol (1938) proposed in their scientific management approach. I remember feeling that the person had been wholly removed from work and that their hands and strong backs were all that employers needed. I reflected on the miserable existence and terrible waste of talent that must have been a consequence for many under such a regime. Although Taylor argues that it is only managers and external people who criticise his approach, the workforce are delighted by the opportunity to have some control over their ability to earn high wages.

> *What the workers want from their employer beyond anything is high wages.*
> (F .W. Taylor, 1947: 13)

I had some relief from the scientific management approach in reading about the Human Relations School and the Hawthorne experiments conducted by Elton Mayo. At The Western Electric Company's factory, the site of Mayo's experiments in the 1940's, the workforce seemed to gain some sort of victory over the view that they were just parts of a system, showing that their productivity would rise if someone took an interest in them. I was encouraged that Mayo seemed to prove that by treating people as more than inputs to the production

process, outputs would increase. However, I now notice that the Human Relations approach is no more liberating for the workforce than the Scientific Management school. In both cases, the objective observers were trying to find and then apply the rules of the system that would lead to higher productivity, in the case of Taylor by finding physical and process laws, and for Mayo the rules around human motivation in groups. Mayo also showed that although he attempted objectively to observe the system, the act of 'observing' influenced the system under investigation.

In both Scientific Management and Human Relations, the predominant way of thinking is that greater efficiency is already enfolded in the rules applied to the method of production. In both cases an objective observer, the manager or consultant stands outside of the system and observes the work force.

Scientific Management sees the parts of the organisation as being separate, distinct functions that combine to create the whole. Systems thinking retains the perspective of objective observer but focuses not on separate parts, but on how parts interrelate to create the system and achieve the intended goal.

Systems thinking has developed into a broad range of related theories to explain how the parts of a phenomenon operate together to form the whole and how wholes interrelate with other systems and sub-systems and with the environment. Systems thinking operates from the standpoint of the natural scientist who sees himself as being outside of the system under investigation, to observe its characteristics. I have set out a brief summary of three strands of systemic thinking which distinguish different ways of thinking about human systems: these are, Cybernetic systems (Ashby, 1954), systems dynamics (Goodwin, 1951) and general systems thinking (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

Cybernetic systems (Ashby, 1954) are self-regulating, goal directed systems that adapt to their environment. They are seen as the application of the engineering concept of control to human activity (Stacey, 1996). Cybernetics assumes a realist

position where there is a pre-given reality to which the performing entity must conform. Central heating systems are frequently quoted as examples of cybernetic systems, where the heating is switched on or off by the regulator as the temperature of a room rises and falls. The decision to take action is based on negative feedback loops, when performance falls outside acceptable parameters corrective measures are undertaken. In organisations, cybernetic approaches influence appraisal and reward systems as well as many change programmes that are designed to deliver a predetermined outcome.

Systems dynamics involves the construction of mathematical models consisting of recursive, non-linear equations that specify how the system changes state over time. As well as applying negative feedback loops, systems dynamics recognises that amplifying and dampening loops can lead to unintended and unexpected outcomes. Senge (1990) has used systems dynamics in his approach to organisational learning, arguing that effective managers need to identify patterns, or archetypes, in their organisations and be aware of points of leverage to bring about change.

General systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968) is based on the theory of homeostasis, where there is a strong tendency for a system to move towards equilibrium, that is, to maintain a consistent state. They do this through interaction with other systems via semi-permeable boundaries. The achievement and maintenance of the steady state can occur from a range of starting points making the history or context of the system unimportant. When general systems thinking is applied as a way of thinking about organisations, emphasis is placed on roles and boundaries with managers controlling tasks and interfaces with other parts of the system.

My journey to concluding that my early studies of management theories do not adequately explain my experience, has taken ten years of my career. The main stages during this time have been movement from operational management

through personnel management and human resources to management development, organisational development, coaching and change consulting.

In my original training as an hotelier, I remember a feeling of being overwhelmed by the responsibilities of an Executive Housekeeper in a large four-star hotel. I remarked that she was responsible for the state of every towel, corridor, picture, cup and pillow case in each of the four hundred rooms. I was told that by having clear systems in place and the authority to enforce them, the role was not too difficult. My reaction to this conversation was one that resonated with my response to the theory of scientific management – everything being seen as a mechanical process with inputs and outputs with people being parts of that process (also, that as people were the part of the process that were likely to cause the greatest variance, they were the aspect requiring greatest levels of control). I wondered whether there was an alternative way of operating within such an organisation as I noticed that the command and control process driven approach never quite achieved the high standards of uniformity that it set out to. People somehow seemed to get in the way of the purity of the designed system. I mused on an approach in which managers would focus on the people within their teams to allow the space for standards to be achieved in whatever way the teams decided would be most appropriate for them, even to set the standards themselves based on their close understanding of the needs of their customers in their areas.

Whilst working for Marriott, I saw an approach that closely linked to my thoughts at the time. Deming's work on Total Quality Management (T. Q. M.) seemed to offer the empowering approach that I had wondered about. Teams of workers were given time, space and methodology in order to solve real problems that they dealt with on a daily basis. One example was a team at one hotel who designed a new trolley for room attendants that would hold their equipment, act as protection from attack when placed across a door frame of a room and which would move easily along thick piled carpets in luxury hotels.

Whilst some examples of this kind came forth from a number of hotels, a number of factors seemed to prevent the T. Q. M. approach from having the fundamental impact that its potential seemed to offer. I noticed that some employees felt that they were being toyed with, in that they were given the time and space that managers thought they needed rather than what the teams themselves felt was required. A number of managers believed that the employees were incapable of identifying and solving problems themselves and even issued problems to the teams to be solved. All of these examples showed that although some work methods had changed and that a range of new tools had been applied, the relationship between managers and the managed had remained constant. Managers played out their established roles and behaviours and still demonstrated previous patterns of conversation and behaviour. Managers felt they were in control and that they would step in as soon as the employees began to show signs of the expected failure. Employees felt this too and acted into the repeating pattern.

All that had changed was that people were given a little more scope to work in a different way for short periods of time. Instead of very close control, the will of the managers was being exercised from one step further back but was still felt by managers and employees to be strongly present in the Total Quality approach.

During this period of T.Q.M., I was studying for qualifications in Human Resource Management as I was clear that I wished to pursue a career that was focussed on taking a more liberating approach with people in organisations. However, even as I reflect on that statement now, I notice that the act of liberation still starts with the premise of control and that my desire to liberate was not total, but relative to the environments in which I had been working.

Competency Based Control

Human Resource Management (H.R.M.), and especially H.R systems, appeared to take on an even stronger cybernetic perspective (Stacey, 1996; Beardwell and Holden, 1994; Thomason 1988) than my experience in line management. Like the

working of a thermostat, H.R. systems aimed to set a target for an individual, team or organisation, identify the gap between the present state and the gap and plan to close it with the carrot or stick being available to managers in order to ensure that the gap was closed.

Performance management or appraisal systems are the obvious examples of cybernetic based H.R. contributions (Beardwell and Holden, 1994). Whether the measures are quantifiably results driven or the less tangible competency led approaches, the philosophy underlying the systems remains constant. The business and individuals unfold their potential towards some predetermined goal or set of goals. Less stark examples of these types of systems occur with recruitment and selection processes where the aim is to recruit someone who possesses the ability to allow the organisation to move closer to its goal by adding their skills in the way that is being predicted by the outcomes of the selection process.

Management development, training needs analysis, training evaluation, discipline and grievance procedures and competencies are all sourced from the predominant management view of a cybernetic based set of controls exercised by the knowing few. In my experience with Marriott Hotels and with later employers and clients, Human Resource systems were increasingly based on an integrated system of management competencies or " *a written description of measurable work habits and personal skills used to achieve a work objective* " (Green, 2000). Whilst always having accepted the benefit of competencies as a way of measuring the contribution or predicted contribution to an organisation, I now am aware of how my knowledge of psychology has challenged the appropriateness of an individual competency based view of employee performance. The development and measurement of competencies is founded on the idea that behaviours or abilities reside within the individual and that if managers observe their employees they will be able to witness these competencies and then make decisions to focus training, promotion, selection, reward and appraisal decisions. I quote from a handbook of competencies produced by a consultancy specialising in this area of work.

The language of competencies enables you to assess people's characteristics with precision and consistency on the basis of observable evidence. You can reliably communicate your assessment to your colleagues and most important to the individuals themselves.

(Oxford European Consulting, 1996: 1)

The concept of competencies, which had formed a large part of my work as an internal consultant, and which formed the basis of my M.Sc. thesis (Developing a Competency Framework for Whitbread Beer Company, 1995), now seems inappropriate for the reality of my experience in organisational life. Whilst rooted in cybernetic systems thinking, there appears to be an underlying assumption that the skill or competence resides in the individual and that this can be observed and then modified in line with the behaviours which have been identified as leading to the greater success of the organisation. My thinking now is that the perceived success of an individual lies in the relationships of which they are part, rather than in the individuals themselves.

Through my study of psychology, I am curious about how these approaches would illuminate the competency based perspective of Human Resource Systems and Management Development. George Herbert Mead, (1863-1931), the American pragmatist, offered a way of describing human communication as a social act instead of as the transmission of independent messages. His view would be that competence or the meaning that is made of one person's gesture does not reside in the individual at all. He suggests that it is co-created, as the full meaning of a gesture and subsequent response can only be determined when the issuer of the initial gesture has received the response to his original gesture.

The logical structure of meaning, we have seen, is to be found in the threefold relationship of gesture to adjustive response and to the resultant of the given social act. Response on the part of the second organism to the gesture of the first is the interpretation – and brings out the meaning of that gesture as indicating the resultant of the social act which it initiates, and in which both organisms are thus involved.

(Mead, 1937: 78)

More simply, Mead offers the example of a dog that bares his teeth and growls at another dog. The meaning of the first gesture can only be determined in the response received to this initial gesture.

> *The act [of baring teeth] is responded to by the other dog, it, in turn, undergoes change. The very fact that the dog is ready to attack another becomes the stimulus to the other dog to change his position or his own attitude. He has no sooner done this than the change in attitude in the second dog in turn causes the first dog to change his attitude. We have a conversation of gestures.*

(Mead, 1937: 34)

Farhad Dalal (1998), drawing on Elias' theory of ideology (1994), provides another insight into the conversation of gesture. He says that in examining any conversation you have to split the meaning as the conversation is "cut". An example is the rowing couple where the husband is sarcastic because his wife is shouting, she is shouting because her husband is sarcastic. The meaning changes depending on where the conversation is 'cut'.

In the language of competencies, the conversation is cut at the point of considering only the input of the employee. In Mead's terms, only the initiating gesture is considered, a gesture that is without true meaning until the response from the other party has been received. What is missing for me is the consideration of the relationship that was forming and being formed as the initial gesture. If the context of the relationship is missing from competency-based processes then it becomes possible for managers to locate all of the positive or negative aspects of the relationship between themselves and their employees in the employee. I am keen to explore how relationships at work might be viewed differently if the relationship itself was seen as the primary unit of concern rather than the locus of attention being firmly fixed on the individual.

An Experience of Transformational Causality

In addition to the individual focus of predominant Human Resource and competency based thinking, I now notice that a further assumption of predominant people management approaches is that the development of the individual should

unfold towards some predetermined end point, often 'measured' by levels of behavioural indicators for each competency heading or by matching the profiles for ever more senior roles. This approach fits the definition of "formative teleology":

> *Movement towards a future that is a mature form implied at the start of the movement. It implies the final state can be known in advance.*
> (Stacey, Shaw and Griffin, 2000: fig3.3)

The most fundamental experience of my professional development occurred away from competency frameworks and happened in way that echoes the description of "transformative teleology". Whilst working as part of a human resource team in a large brewing organisation, I felt as if the team of which I was part, and myself, were;

> *Under perpetual construction by the movement itself. [there was] no final state only the perpetual iteration of identity and difference, continuity and transformation, the known and the unknown at the same time.*
> (Stacey, Shaw and Griffin, 2000: fig3.3)

This experience came whilst working for a traditional command and control orientated part of Whitbread plc, the same business that operated Marriott Hotels in the UK. The part of Whitbread involved here, was a traditional, hierarchical business that was populated by technical specialists. The team that I was part of recognised that the approach adopted by the business was not sustainable over the medium term due to the pressures from competitors, customers, costs and the socio-economic environment, The time to make and implement decisions was too slow and time advantages were lost as competitors were able to get products to market more rapidly. Also as the third largest brewer in the UK, Whitbread didn't have the economies of scale available to the larger operators and therefore there was a cost disadvantage in the market place. The rapid consolidation of the brewing industry and changes in legislation all perpetuated feelings of being out of control and a dissatisfaction with the current ways of working. At this point, the consultancy firm Alexander were invited to work with the business to develop a

leadership style that was more inclusive and one that recognised that employees who were closet to customers were best placed to make decisions that would effect their customers.

Alexander, described in Lewin and Regine's "The Soul at Work" (1999: 198) as *"the corporation that uses Socratic questioning as a method of coaching"*, was involved in a range of conversations in which they engaged business leaders to explore the implications of working in a new way. In addition, Alexander consultants held a position of not knowing what the outcomes of the conversations would be, but maintained a belief in the potential of people. In Whitbread's case, this approach was manifested as a series of events for senior teams in the business to develop relationships and then to have new conversations about issues that had been previously unresolved. Also, they ran a number of cross-functional workshops to develop 'coaching skills' for managers within the business. The workshops focussed on developing questioning to increase self-awareness rather than to lead or influence and on listening skills to build an empathic relationship with the employee being coached. Emphasis was placed on coaching as a 'being' activity rather than something that is 'done' or 'known' and on the effects on relationships that can occur through having a different type of conversation at work. Notably, both the team events and workshops were conducted in a way which role-modelled content and produced outputs beyond those experienced through more habitual ways of working.

My significant experience came as part of a team of facilitators who were being developed to roll out the series of coaching workshops to managers. Again run by Alexander consultants, the initial process lasted for five days with the first two days being a delegate on a workshop, the evening of day two working on personal impact with a theatrical consultancy and the third day being used as preparation time to deliver a programme to delegates on days four and five.

Whilst being struck by the continuous coaching by Alexander, one particularly 'arresting moment' (Shotter, 1993) occurred on the morning of day three when I

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asked for the materials to use on the programme that I was to deliver. From my previous experience, I expected a pack of acetates and training notes so that I could start to learn the 'script'. I was told that there wasn't any material prior to the programme as the material came in the form of the delegates and my job was to work with the material in the room, i.e. the people, to follow the interests of the group and to see what emerges. I was entering a completely different paradigm, all of my ability to train and present felt worthless. The ten years of being able to get a group to the place that I needed them to be felt wasted and the only support came from the relationships with my colleagues, my embryonic ability to coach and a belief in the potential of the delegates. Each of my questions to Alexander consultants was met with a question but this coaching allowed me to develop my own confidence in the power of an enabling approach, even though no one had a real idea of where the workshop or the delivery team would end up.

I reflect now that this transformative experience provided a completely new space in which to work. A place, somewhere between order and chaos. Stacey (1996) offers descriptions of some of the parameters that I now recognise were at play during the weeks' events. The flow of information between the people on the team was far faster than I had experienced previously. New methods, approaches and ways of working were being discovered and a shared and a precise, open, whole vocabulary of feedback was being created to add to the information each person was receiving. The giving and receiving of feedback had the effect of increasing the richness of connectivity between the team, the relationships deepened enormously, to the point of being described as person to person not role to role as had been the former pattern. The diverse nature of the participants through gender, age, experience, role and personality combined with the addition of the external consultants' perspective ensured a challenge to predominant mind sets and previously held views. Stacey says that another control parameter is the level of contained anxiety. My experience of the week's event was that all of the obvious methods of containing anxiety had been removed, materials, the organisations' hierarchy, previous skill sets and an ability to control the pace of work. Instead, there was a trust emerging between colleagues and a 'good enough holding '

(Winnicott, 1975) of the environment for creativity to emerge. Stacey's final control parameter is the level of power differential between agents in the system. In the delivery team the traditional sources of power had been removed, status, hierarchy and previous experience counted for little, except to increase the anxiety in the previously powerful as their own expectations of themselves were initially high.

Relating this experience to Stacey's control parameters feels useful in identifying the effects of a number of connected variables in my own experience. However, as I write, I notice my dissatisfaction with this comparison as the experience itself felt too complex and rich to be able to make such conclusions that seem close to describing a cause and effect.

Indeed, my total experience was one of transformation in which the outcomes for myself, my colleagues, the team, delegates and the organisation were profound but in a way that could neither be predicted prior to the event or repeated in other environments. I hope to have conveyed some of the intensity of my experience, a time that led to me leaving Whitbread and joining Alexander as an Executive Coach.

Shortly after my arrival at Alexander, the business was purchased by a US based change consultancy, Sibson and Company. This created a clash of cultures, values and the departure of all of my previous colleagues. I now understand that the purchase had resulted in the replacement of the transformative teleological philosophy with a linear, formative teleological approach to clients and work. Examples of this include replacing open-ended exploratory conversations with processes, molecules and models to lead the client to where the expert consultants believed they needed to go.

This approach is delivered through a leveraged consulting model with layers of associates, consultants, seniors and principals. Having experienced the power of a relationship-based, transformative way of working, I found impossible again to

work in a way that was underpinned by the approaches with which I had been previously dissatisfied. It has been interesting that the shift in my own employer towards a rules-based, formative approach occurred at the same time as my own thinking moved towards the complexity based, transformative approach to my work.

Culture and Conversation

Another area of my work introduced earlier is one of group facilitation. The example mentioned was the delivery of a workshop to senior mangers in a leisure organisation. The issues raised by this workshop relate to the culture of organisations and the role of a facilitator.

The event for Armitage plc was held in June 2000 and followed twelve months of working with the client to design four modules that would meet the perceived skills gap within the senior management population of the organisation. The Organisational Development Director was Sibson's key contact and had specified the input required in the areas of managing risk, informal communication, leading change and coaching. Ironically, this event had its genesis in the event that I described as my own transformational experience when I was client of Alexander's. In the Alexander event there was a premise being held that the outcomes of the event were not known before the start, but through an authentic engagement with delegates something would emerge that would cause the organisation to change in some way. For the Armitage plc event, the underpinning philosophy had been significantly changed. In this version, someone outside of the system had observed and concluded that a specific range of skills was missing and that if those skills were introduced into the business by an external firm then the performance of the business would improve, a shift from transformational teleology to rationalist teleology (Stacey, Shaw and Griffin, 2000). I remember my frustration on being asked to facilitate the event as it felt like a corruption of a process that had had such a significant effect on my own career and personal

development. I was again being asked to deliver material in a way that I had already concluded was unlikely to offer significant change for any organisation.

By the date of the workshop the business performance had fallen further and for the first time, since the business began in the eighteenth century, the business was in danger of being bought by a competitor or having much of its portfolio of brands and property being sold. The business's Director of Human Resources began the event with a presentation about how critical the situation was and how a new level of performance was required to allow the business to survive beyond Christmas 2000. Based on the significance of this message the delegates, all of whom were at the level just below the board, decided that they would like to devote some of the time within the programme to explore how they would recommend how their business could be saved. The H.R. Director had provided a high level of energy for this work and had painted a clear picture of the need to act quickly. I remember my pleasure in realising that we were to enter territory that hadn't been prepared for and that the modules that had originally planned had been overtaken by a greater imperative.

The group of delegates decided to work on recommendations to save the business in two smaller groups and then to return to a plenary session to report back their findings. I walked between the two groups and was aware of the life and energy that was evident as the groups worked on saving their organisation. After about two hours, each group had generated a range of imaginative and commercial solutions and it was time to present these to their colleagues who had worked in the other group.

The atmosphere of the plenary felt different to me. The sense of being on new ground had passed and it felt as if we were in any corporate meeting where, as Isaac's describes.

> *As the meeting begins, the atmosphere changes. People are now longer so relaxed. They withdraw and assume a professional demeanor – they become more authoritative and more formal.*   (Isaacs, 1999: 39)

This mood lasted for few minutes into the first presentation and then the delegates relaxed as one of their colleagues presented from a flip chart. The level of energy and interest sank fast until it seemed as if all of the delegates were bored in their half listening to their colleague's presentation. Curiously the presenter was reacting to delegates and his speech became less precise and his shoulders dropped. As he spoke through his final flip chart his words dried up and he slouched back to his seat. The person in the second group who was to speak next stretched out in her seat, almost in a defiant signal of her unwillingness to present to the group. As I noticed this gesture I intervened.

> " It seems that after you have worked with so much energy in the smaller groups that now you are back together you neither want to present or to be presented to. The process seems flat and dead, not alive and alert like in the conversations earlier. I wonder what is making the reporting back of a conversation so much less engaging than the conversation itself?"

Someone responded:

> " That's it! – Our culture is flattening and deadening. All we do is have meetings to report back on other conversations, or we talk about conversations to be had in the future, we are never in the conversation we are in at the time."

The noise level grew as others came in with their observations of what they had experienced and what they were now experiencing as again they became present to the live conversation. I was feeling entirely present to the group as they and I had woken from presentation mode. I asked them.

> " If you don't want to report back, I wonder how we could engage with each other after having done some work so that we keep the conversations in the present?"

I heard a slightly faltering and yet powerful reply.

> " We need to enter the next conversation based on what we have discovered in the last conversation. Just as I am doing now, I want to enter this next stage, not knowing what will happen but carrying into it the meaning I took from the last conversation and knowing that the meaning will change. That is what makes things feel alive to me."

The room stayed silent for several moments, but the quality of the silence spoke to all of us who were participating in this enquiry. The silence told us that something significant had happened and that to speak might risk the moment in which a change had occurred.

One result of this experience was that that the group changed how they engaged with others after they had been working on an issue. Instead of "show and tell" the next group to come back to the plenary began with.

> " We've spent some time in conversation about the brands that some of us think should be disposed of and we'd like to ask you to enter a conversation about your reaction to our choices and then how we might work to move to disposal, should that be the course of action that we decide on."

The invitation to enter a conversation felt like a much more engaging way to involve the thoughts of a wider group. A second outcome of the 'report back' was to explore the culture of the business and the nature of relationships between line managers and their direct reports. One delegate described how the reporting back approach felt like he was continually being judged on his performance and the 'superiors' role was to find flaws in his work. This type of relationship was thought by another delegate to be at the root of the perceived need for training in taking risks and in coaching.

I have reflected for some time now on the location of organisational culture and feel that this example provided me with data to support a view that it may reside in the nature, quality and patterning of the relationship between people in an organisation. I intend to return to this theme and to the concept of coaching as having the potential to alter the patterns of relating between managers and subordinates.

A third reflection based on this workshop is around the role of the facilitator. In the rationalist teleological approach that was intended for this programme the facilitator's role was to be one of an expert who inputs some skills and then allows some space for the delegates to reflect on and integrate their newly acquired learning. The transformative approach, which is how the event emerged, is based on more involved, participative facilitation where the facilitator provides voice for his experiences in the moment. In working in this way the outputs are likely to be far less quantifiable but will offer the prospect of the novel, as outcomes emerge as a result of the micro-interactions that occur between members of the group who are engaged together in an authentic dialogue.

Concluding Thoughts

The writing of this paper has coincided with some significant shifts in the patterns of my life. During 2000, my wife has been seriously ill and has permanently ceased to work, my son, who is now one, has learnt to walk and has started to speak and I have experienced rapid and difficult change at work.

At work, I have experienced the cessation of a coaching firm that I joined with every intention of staying in for a long time. This ending occurred mainly due to a shift in the relationships between people in the firm, from support and challenge to control and quantitative measurement. I also worked for a short period on independent assignments and had spoken to a number of organisations about part time working from 2001. I have however, settled on a decision to join a property development company and its associated charitable trust as Director of Human Resources from January 2001. This appointment has been designed to allow me to engage in my areas of particular interest in a context of some security and stability of income and location. The firm will also provide a case study of the development of a complexity sciences and relationship psychology approach to Human Resource Management and Management Development. Later papers, as part of this portfolio, will focus on the development and implementation of these

approaches whilst exploring the implications of moving away from a predominant cybernetic approach to 'people management' and coaching in organisations.

Already, this paper has served to focus my interest as I move my professional practice into one organisation. I am keen to explore the practical implications of my intellectual shift from seeing myself on the outside of an organisation and looking in to being part of the joint inquiry into an issue. My experience with Armitage plc has focused my thinking on ideas around emergent values, qualities and the nature and location of organisational culture.

The major theme from my work during 2000, has been that of 'relationship' – an interest borne out my own childhood experience, which I now understand to be the source of my current drive to explore and engage in an enquiry around the concept of relationship in an organisational setting. I currently see that the relationships between people at work are the basis for the existence of organisational culture, leadership and the access to competences which I had previously seen as residing in an the individual rather through relationship. The production of this paper has resulted in the emergence of the key themes to explore in the next. I therefore aim to describe my experiences and reflections of moving from being an external consultant to a full time employee and then to describe my work in the establishment of an approach as Director of Human Resources that is informed by complexity and relationship psychology as much as by the predominant management thinking outlined earlier in this first paper.

Reflections Towards a Synopsis (June 2002)

It is now two years since I began work on the first paper in this portfolio. Having developed my thinking since that time, I wish to highlight the movements of my thought that have occurred since June 2000. I have chosen to set this out in as an additional piece to the paper as it leaves the body of the original work intact and illustrates the emergence of themes in my research that are developed in later

papers. It has been interesting for me to notice how I surprised myself with some of the ideas that I once held and how I have developed a different understanding of my experiences over time.

In paper one the major themes were my dissatisfaction with predominant approaches to managing people. These developed from Taylor's scientific management (1947), the Human Relations school of Elton Mayo (1933) and the humanistic approaches of Abraham Maslow (1964). In considering this now, it becomes clear that in each case the researchers saw themselves as standing outside of the system and altering variables to increase productivity. I notice in paper one how despite arguing for a different approach to managing people I retain the perspective of the objective observer.

The movement that I now see is that instead of wishing to control the activities of employees through the management of processes and operating systems my intent has shifted. My career change to become a consultant and accompanying altered approach to my work resulted not only in a change of the underpinning assumptions about my role but in a movement of my intent in the way that I worked. Stacey, Shaw and Griffin (2001) apply the concept of causality to explore the different philosophical roots of different ways of thinking about change. This approach now helps me make distinctions between how I approached my work at the start of my research, the movements through this period and the conclusions that I make at the end of the programme of study.

Using the framework of causality, I see the scientific management approach being based on rationalist causality where the movement into the future is motivated by the desire to achieve goals chosen by reasoning autonomous human beings. The desire to achieve greater productivity on the part of owners and managers and then to isolate the variables which effect productivity to manipulate them to achieve goals is the manifestation of the underpinning causality. It can be argued the work of the employees in such organisations resembled 'secular, natural law teleology' in that their work was a repetition of the past in an attempt to sustain an optimal

state. Another dual causality is shown in my descriptions of joining a coaching firm, where I spoke of human potential being located in the individual, with the manager's role being to allow that potential to be released. In causal terms, I saw the manager's role as retaining its rationalist causality. The goal of a direct increase in productivity had been replaced with the goal of releasing human potential; therefore indirectly leading to improved organisational performance. The causality associated with the activities of the employees had however moved to that of formative causality in which the enfolded talents of the individual were already present in latent form and would be unfolded to reveal the previously hidden potential. This dual causality is clear in the predominant coaching literature where the coach's role is to allow the manifestation of the pre-existing potential.

In paper one I set out my experience of moving away from the dominant cybernetic model of control, based on the formative and secular natural law causalities, and moved to an acceptance of the rationalist and formative split associated with coaches such as Alexander (1996) and Whitmore (1996). I saw my role as creating the environments in which individuals could perform. Since setting out this thinking in paper one, I noticed that the most significant change with my relationship to my work was a change of intent from being dissatisfied with the requirement to control and moving to a way of wanting to liberate the workforce by focusing on the release of their talents. My position, two years later has moved again. Now, instead of believing that in some way I can control the outcomes of experiences or events I have developed an understanding of transformative causality. With this view, I recognise that the emergence of meaning and identity are not fixed in time and cannot be controlled but are under perpetual construction as the movement into the future itself. With this approach humans are seen as continually expressing identity and difference with the simultaneous possibility of continuity and transformation. An implication of considering my work from the perspective of transformative causality is that I am drawn to focus on the detail of the micro-interaction and moment-by-moment movement in the processes of relating. I refer to the need to do this in my first paper but then do not do so in my descriptions of my work. It is not until the later papers in this portfolio that I

present and reflect on the interactions that occur that I see as being change. The change that I refer to in my work is not the systemic change imposed from outside as was the intent of the consulting assignments that I described, but transformational shifts in the patterns of power differences, identity and meaning that were a shift in the previous stable iteration of the processes of relating.

In the later papers, I develop the theme of differentiating patterning of power, locating power not in individuals but as patterns in the process of relating between people, experienced as sensations of inclusion and exclusion. In paper one, I introduce my embryonic interest in power relating in noticing that in one of my experiences (page 68) a shift had occurred in the way that a group of people worked together. Previous hierarchies had been abandoned and different patterns of relating were developing. I developed the theme of power and identity in paper four and in the synopsis to this portfolio.

In re-reading paper one, I notice my developing attraction to the work of Wheatley (1999) and Isaacs (1999), authors who suggest that 'dialogue' can offer a different and more fulfilling way of working together as human beings. They too show their dissatisfaction with organisational processes built on scientific or cybernetic principles. Instead they offer a way of working that allows people to access their 'common humanity' or a 'common pool of meaning' (Wheatley, 1999: 273) by abandoning existing ways of relating.

This perspective was attractive to me at the time of writing paper one. I had a growing spiritual belief and enjoyed the idea of a formula to tap into some external source for good. I develop the distinction that I now draw with the dialogic writers in the synopsis to this paper. By way of introduction here, I see Wheatley and Isaacs suggesting that if humans exercise their will (rationalist causality) they can chose to access some external force or presence. My view is that the experience of relating does not need to rely on something external to the processes of relating themselves. Considering relating as informed by complex responsive processes maintains the potential for emergent phenomena to self organise as themes or

patterns of relating. Qualities that Wheatley may argue are desirable and which result in the presence of the collective experience can be explained as complex responsive processes, as can qualities that are not judged as desirable, indeed the act of judging is just as much part of the processes of relating as the action or subject being judged. It is the reliance on the external force for good, and the locating of difficulties of accessing it in individuals, that are the key distinctions between the dialogic approach and that of my own. It is interesting however to trace this thinking as movement through this portfolio to see how my research explores the themes of coaching, causality, power, identity and meaning. These are developed further in the second paper that was completed in March 2001.

Paper 2

Conversation as Organisational Change

March 2001

Paper 2

Introduction

In my conclusion to the first paper, I described the main themes that had emerged from my reflections on my own background, experience and professional practice. These were, my interest in the processes of relating, organisational culture and exploring new approaches to traditional human resource systems and coaching. An interest in the processes of relating means, to me, moving away from predominant management thinking in which the primary unit of concern for organisational performance is the contribution of the individual. Instead, I aim to consider an approach where the locus of attention is placed on the processes of relating between people. This view requires a consideration of the nature of relating, conversation and of culture in organisations. My personal experience suggests that the culture of an organisation is experienced by individuals as the patterns of conversation and therefore of relationships between themselves and others in that organisation. This is distinct from predominant thinking that implies that culture is in some way attached to, or is located above, beneath or floats around an organisation. Kroeber and Kluckholn (1952) studied over one hundred definitions of culture that included those covering interpretations of organisational culture as well as those covering societal perceptions of history, art and spirituality. The major themes of their research are shown in their definition below.

> *Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artefact; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values: culture systems may on the one hand be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements for future action.*
> (Kroeber and Kluckholn, 1952, quoted in Beardwell and Holden, 1994: 136)

My premise is that the culture of organisations is not located in individuals or in the symbols produced by individuals within human groups. Instead, my view is that culture is an emergent, relational, phenomenon that both generates and is generated from the patterns of interactions between people who make up the organisation. This is a paradoxical view of culture, where simultaneously it is formed by and forms the interactions occurring between people in that organisation. This approach creates the need for a major shift in thinking from the predominant view of organisations as being able to be controlled. The concept of culture as emerging between, rather than being stored or located within individuals makes it difficult to imagine that one individual, or group, can achieve a predetermined shift in the patterning of relating, and therefore change. Instead the approach that is left is that individuals can engage in conversations in local situations with intent to achieve some form of change. A change may indeed occur, but may be very different to that intended, and even if the intended change occurs the outcome may be diluted or dampened to such an extent so as not to achieve the intended results. Other writers who adopt a complexity based approach take a different view about the possibility for the unilateral ability to effect a predetermined change. Wheatley, for example, argues that culture can be observed and changed according to some predetermined criteria.

> *Together we can decide whether we would prefer different behaviours. If we do we need to figure out the values and agreements that we think will support these new behaviours. We then work together to see what it means to live into these new agreements.* (Wheatley, 1999: 130)

It is clear that Wheatley is offering a formula for cultural change within organisations. She suggests that *"we have to develop much greater awareness of how we're acting; we have to become far more self-reflective than normal and we have to help people notice when we fall back into old behaviours. "* (Wheatley, 1999: 130). In achieving a desired change, Whealtley argues for the recognition of the fractal quality of organisational culture, described as where *"self-similar phenomena occur at different levels of scale in both natural and human systems"* (ibid: 131). She suggests that the patterns of behaviour encountered in any

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interaction between people within an organisation would have similarities with interactions happening at any other level, in any other location.

As customers, we can learn how employees are treated by their bosses, by noticing how employees treat us. (Wheatley,1999: 129)

Whilst I recognise her concept of repeating patterns of interaction, Wheatley goes on to suggest that these patterns are driven by the individuals' *"purpose, intent and values"* (Wheatley 1999: 129) and it is here that the distinction between this view and the approach considered in this portfolio becomes clear. Wheatley locates the patterning of interaction as residing in the individual, whilst I am suggesting that the conversations, interaction and emergent relationships are themselves pattern forming. "Purpose, intent and values" therefore do not reside in the individual and are not knowable until they emerge from the interactions that paradoxically are formed and are being formed by them. Wheatley's view is based on a rationalist teleological framework of causality (Stacey, 2001), where autonomous human beings choose goals. The alternative offered here is a transformative perspective where the future is not already enfolded but emerges as perpetual iteration of identity and difference, of and between individuals, as a consequence of the relationships they are part of, and the boundaries between those relationships and others that may be occurring.

In reflecting on these themes, which will be explored throughout this portfolio, it is clear that traditional organisational approaches to 'managing people' and to developing 'people systems', such as those to deal with recruitment, selection, induction, appraisal, reward, management development and coaching are based on an individual centric approach to contribution to the organisation. It is assumed that the performance of each person can be isolated measured and improved. Systems of this type have their genesis in cybernetic control where the purpose is to identify and then close the gap that will result in performance that is closer to the predetermined ideal.

This paper not only provides space for exploring these themes but also allows me to reflect on my own preparation for a new role and area of work. It will allow me

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to reflect on the process of moving to a new employer and to consider my intent as I enter into conversations with my new colleagues. I will therefore be able to consider how my intent and initial approach on entering the organisation is shaped by and shaped the subsequent interactions with people at work. The third paper in this portfolio will then allow me to consider how my inquiry is developed through my involvement as a participant in a new organisation, as it undergoes a period of rapid growth. I will then compare this period of change from the predominant and complexity based perspectives.

A Changing Role

In the first paper of this portfolio, I described the reasons for wishing to leave my employer, Sibson, and move into either another full time consulting role or to become an independent consultant. The major factor in reaching the decision to leave was due to the change in underlying philosophy and the manifestations of that change, following the takeover of my employer by an American Human Resource Consultancy. I had always associated the term Human Resources as implying the ownership of the individual by the corporation, I had never truly felt this approach until the time of the takeover. Qualitative discussions about client work and the impact that could be co-created from working with clients were replaced with a quantitative approach to time spent and hours billed. Programmes from one client were amended and replicated in others under the cloak of selling a bespoke solution to meet individual needs.

This period of time provided a felt and personal experience of what I had been reading and consulting in for several years. I was experiencing a shift in the relationship between myself and my senior managers in which close attention was paid to hourly billing rates, hours billed, percentage utilisation and the ratio of hours billed to those worked. One significant example of this occurred when hearing the exasperated cry of a colleague who had spend one hour of billable time to allocate his separate mobile phone charges to different client codes, so that they could be billed. He had used £230 of hourly rated time to recover £45 of telephone

charges, but had complied with the rules of the organisation. The experience of being controlled by an organisation and simultaneously giving up one's freedom to make choices provides an example of the co-created relationship that emerges from the micro-interaction and gestures and responses that make up the experience of the relationship between employer and employee.

The frustration that I experienced from being part of such relationships made my decision to resign far easier than the choice about what to do next. I had been reflecting for months on the concept of a "network of relationships"(Shaw, 1997). My understanding of this, was that within any organisation not only is there a formal system or the "*legitimate system with its prescribed network of relations or hierarchy, its bureaucracy and its approved ideology or explicitly shared culture*" (Shaw, 1997: 236) but also the informal organisation. This had been seen as opposing the formal system and needing to be broken or manipulated for change to occur. My reflections on the informal organisation included recognising that the informal network is not bounded by the artificial line that is drawn around the formal organisation but is dynamic and spreads beyond any one organisation according to the location of each person connected by the relational web. This thinking caused me to shift in my approach in looking for alternative employment. For the first time, I considered the web of relationships of which I was part, with intent of entering conversations about the possibility of extending my practice of consulting to work in a new way as part of many informal networks.

Conversations and subsequent work included supporting a global retailer consider culture and organisational change in its European operations, working with a rail company to consider its approach to leadership and working with a brewery to facilitate the development of more informal ways of working and a more rapid flow of information. The majority of these projects came as a result of speaking with former consulting colleagues who had opted for a more independent way of working. In addition, I was asked to join three consulting practices on a full or part time basis. With each of these options I felt that something was missing.

Something that I couldn't define until I received a call from a former colleague, Claire, in November 2000.

I was told by Claire that she had just finished running a workshop with the board of a successful young company to help them develop an approach to learning within their business. One output from the event was that the board had recognised the need to appoint a new leader of its Human Resource function and that ideally the new person should have experience in executive coaching, leadership development, organisational change, accommodation provision and have led a H.R. team before. Claire mentioned me to the Chief Executive and founder over lunch at the end of the workshop. She asked if I would consider working full time for one organisation again. My positive reply was swift as I felt some excitement at the thought of being able to make a contribution to a business over a sustained period of time but also some anxiety in remembering the pressure to perform and the politics of being in one place. I said that I would be happy to meet the Chief Executive (Nick) and to have a conversation about his needs for the role and to see what emerges in that conversation.

Nick called me as I was getting off the train in Bath on the way to visit my coach for a supervision session. We set up a meeting for the following week. My reflections during that week resulted in me being less than enthusiastic about a full time role again. My wife in particular had commented on how much I enjoyed working with a range of companies and that I may become frustrated being in just one. Briefly I also felt the weight of an imaginary harness as I remembered some of the aspects of organisational life that I had been glad to leave as I moved into consultancy. I decided however to meet Nick with as much of an open mind as possible but not to play the traditional role of 'a candidate' during our discussion. This reframing of the conversation in my own mind meant that my intention was to meet to explore the issues rather than trade well rehearsed questions and answers. My earlier experiences as an interviewer and as a candidate had made me look unfavourably on meetings in which both parties performed the inauthentic ritual of a selection interview. The ability to perform by giving appropriately impressive

examples of past experience and being able to ask the 'right' questions about the potential employer, in order to show interest and preparation, seemed like the largest traditional factors in determining whether an offer would be received or not.

With my interest being focussed on the implications for organisations of a relationship, rather than individual, centric approach to organisational life, I reflected on the implications for this on selection interviews with a fellow student on the D.Man. programme. My conclusions were that instead of the potential for success of any candidate being located in the candidate, it is much more likely to be a factor of the emergent relationship between the candidate and the interviewer and subsequently between the candidate and his or her colleagues at work. With this in mind, I arrived at the offices of the Unite Group on the South Bank of the Thames. I had sent a curriculum vitae, as had been requested, and on being shown into the Chief Executive's office, I noticed that my now heavily highlighted CV was on the round table on the other side of the room to the imposing large, dark wood desk. Nick, I was told, was running late but would be with me shortly. After twenty minutes he arrived looking flustered, apologising for being held up in traffic. I asked him if he wanted a few minutes to collect his thoughts before we started our meeting. He declined and said we should get started. Still a little out of breath, he asked me if I would talk him through my CV so that he could understand my previous experience. I replied:

> " I'd prefer not to. If you are looking to see if my CV will illuminate qualities which may be useful to Unite, then my suggestion is that we talk about the issues facing Unite and then reflect on what has emerged from that conversation."

Nick's brow furrowed and I remember him swallowing. My thinking after the meeting was that we had just changed the pattern of conversation. Through my sentence the conversation had moved from a point of bifurcation into another, unknown trajectory.

Both of us adjusted positions in our chairs and Nick then spoke about the rapid growth of his business and of his concern that his management team were not sufficiently experienced to manage the fifteen-fold growth that was planned in the next three years. He described presenting his overall business strategy to the board and asking them for their functional strategies that would ensure that the gap between current and future volume would be closed. Nick relayed his disappointment when his team returned the documents. They did not contain the sense of urgency or scale that Nick had hoped he had conveyed in his original briefing. In listening to Nick speak, I became aware his sense of isolation and fear. It appeared that the clarity of his vision of a ten -fold increase in company size and of providing a "public service in the private sector" (Chief Executive's comment 15th December 2000) was Nick's strong intent but that he was not experiencing the same energy for growth from his senior team. I reflected this back to him and he replied that he was anxious about the ability of his senior managers to produce the actions to deliver the vision.

In reflecting on the interview some days later, I thought about Nick's desire to control that I had felt in the conversation with him. He clearly had an expectation that his vision would become manifest and that the role of his team was to produce the actions to bring life to the vision. I also reflected on the constraints that may affect the delivery of the vision. So much appeared to be beyond the control of the Chief Executive; government policy in relation to higher education and healthcare funding; the policies and decision making cycles of universities and hospitals; the actions of competing organisations; the ability to secure capital; the relationship with the city and the ability of the business to attract and retain high calibre new recruits to meet the predicted demand. Having decided to join Unite, and to use my experiences as the basis for my research, I soon became aware of different ways of thinking about how change occurs in organisations.

The Meeting of Two Approaches to Organisational Change

In this section I will describe my early experiences of organisational change within Unite. This will illustrate my own perceptions of the need for change and record my reaction to a process of 'business process reengineering' that was underway at the point of my arrival. I will contrast this with my own early interventions into the business and then reflect on both approaches with particular references to a time when the two processes appeared to overlap.

Conversation and the Need for Change

The current Chief Executive founded the Unite group in 1991.Within a year of starting the business he had secured a contract to run all of the accommodation for students on the campus at the University of the West of England. The business of managing accommodation for students developed rapidly from design and construction to the facilities management of halls of residence for other Universities, as well as accommodation for nurses and junior doctors in the National Health Service. The business is based in the South West of England with sixty projects operating from Plymouth to Aberdeen. In order to enter the London market, Unite formed a joint venture with London's oldest and largest housing association 'The Peabody Trust' to acquire, develop and manage accommodation specifically designed for Health Service workers who would be unable to afford housing at usual market rents. One additional business within the group is an internet based reservation system, allowing students to be able to reserve university or private sector accommodation on-line, as soon as an offer to attend a university has been accepted. The site also allows Universities to use the system as its own, branded accommodation management system, maximising occupancy levels, revenue control and efficiency of administration associated with managing large scale accommodation offices.

With the integrated approach to acquisition, development and management of institutional accommodation, Unite has developed its own niche market that

appears to bring advantages to all stakeholders. Universities are able to focus attention and funds on the education of students, without needing to manage associated services such as accommodation provision. The stock of rooms is of a higher quality and lower cost than traditional halls of residence, enabling institutions to attain higher conference revenues, out of academic terms, as well as attracting full fee paying overseas students who demand higher standards of accommodation (Student Living Forum Research 2001- MORI). Students receive newly constructed, purpose built accommodation installed with additional features including personal computers, television and wireless technology, twenty four hour security, close circuit television and maintenance and access to web-based services such as discounted student travel and insurance. The company is able to achieve profit through economies of scale and then to invest in research and manufacturing innovation to deliver an even more focused product at reduced costs.

However, in order to achieve its long-term strategy the group is required to achieve a massive increase in the number of rooms under its management. It currently operates ten thousand bedrooms around the country but plans to increase this to sixty thousand rooms before the end of 2003. The level of increase will require a significant reorganisation of the structures and processes within the business as well as a change in relationship between the most senior management group and people in the rest of the organisation.

One reason for my own appointment was a desire from the board to put in place human resource processes that would be appropriate for the achievement of its strategy and *"to provide a signal to internal and external stakeholders of a growing sense of maturity and sophistication"* (Chief Executive comments 17th January 2001). My reflections on these words were that the business needed to have in place tools to facilitate its growth, including new approaches to organisational structure, selection and appraisal. It also needed to signal to a variety of audiences that it was worthy of its new status of a public limited company on the London Stock Exchange, so that it could demonstrate competence in the management of its operations when making requests for capital.

My personal approach to my work as head of a Human Resource team includes a belief in the need for formal processes to provide clarity and some containment of an individual's career stages within an organisation, for example the points of joining, progression and leaving. However, of greater significance to me is the nature of conversation manifest in that organisation, either within or outside of those formal processes. The term 'nature of conversation' requires some clarity, particularly if my intention is to progress towards a greater awareness of and being present to the nature of conversation in my local interactions with colleagues in the organisation is to be attained.

I recognise my tendency to think from a systems perspective of cause and effect in describing my interpretation of what is fundamentally a participative and qualitative approach to exploring conversation. The noticing of factors which appear to be present or absent in my personal experience of having participated in conversations out of which "certain notable qualities" have emerged make it seem possible, when viewed from predominant management thinking, to reset the original or initial conditions to recreate the experience of previous conversations. My experience and reflections cause me to take a very different position from this predominant perspective. I will later set out my alternative position but will first describe how a range of authors seem to offer a recipe for high quality conversations.

From their standpoint, the objective observer would notice what might be present or missing from conversation and then try to add or remove 'it'. This is clearly the stance taken by Herron in his text 'Serving the Client' (Herron 1986). Herron offers six categories of intervention that can be made in order to raise self-awareness and facilitate change. Isaacs appears to offer recommendations from a similar perspective in his work "Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together"(Isaacs, 1999). He suggests that for dialogue to occur the parties should develop a range of improved behaviours:

1. *Listening*

2. *Respecting*

3. *Suspending*

4. *Voicing*   (W. Isaacs, 1999: 17)

Isaacs also proposes that by cultivating these behaviours one learns to be open to

...the possibility that what is happening is unfolding from a common source.

(ibid: 117)

The concept of tapping into something greater or larger than the present interaction is repeated by Isaacs and is a common theme in the work of Lewin and Regine (1999) who extend Bortoft's analogy (1996) of a buttercup plant to represent the common source which once tapped into spreads and connects throughout an organisation.

> *Where the tip of the runner touches the ground, it grows, and a new buttercup plant shoots up and flowers. Organically, the 'new' plant is the very same. One part of the same whole.*

And:

> *Like the buttercup, certain behaviours and ways of thinking took root, grew and spread in these organisations. Even though the companies were very different and their behaviours were qualitatively different, they all came to a similar order and gave rise to a particular quality of 'culture'. It was the very same buttercup in all these companies. These behaviours afforded them the opportunity to tap into the same generative source.*

(Lewin and Regine, 1999 : 273/4)

Bohm writes about the need for the *'spirit of dialogue'* to be present that will *"make possible the flow of meaning"*(1996: 6). In all of these examples, the idea of tapping into something else is strong. In each case, the source is presented as an organic or even mystical metaphor. Each of these approaches to conversation has, at their core, the concept of accessing a higher power or some other benevolent force. It is significant to make a distinction between these views based on a formative teleological framework to causality (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2001) and an alternative interpretation described from the perspective of transformative

teleology where the future is not the unfolded version of the future that had been enfolded within the rules of the system.

Shotter offers an interpretation of the phenomenon of conversation in his work "Conversational Realities" (Shotter, 1993) which moves towards the concept of conversation being a process that is formed by and forms the experience of the moment in which it occurs. He quotes Wittgenstein (1981: 124);

> *Conversation flows on, the application and interpretation of words and only in its course do the words have meaning.*

Shotter also writes of the difficulty experienced in understanding the language used by others in conversation as well as having one's own words understood as may have been originally intended. Instead, the meaning of gestures and responses form part of an ongoing process that is inseparable from current contexts and history. He, like Mead, encompasses within the definition of conversation not only the words used, or 'utterances' (Shotter, 1990), but also the bodily reactions of the parties present to the conversation. Shotter refers to 'bodily reactive responses' to describe Stacey's (2001) 'protosymbols' or the bodily, unconscious communication of feeling as bodily resonance originating from the *"patterns of beat, rhythm, duration and intensity"* (Stacey, 2001) of biological systems within the human body. Shotter introduces a further level of complexity in his description of the contextual nature of the likely responses to gestures by participants in conversation.

> *Acceptable responses must be negotiated within a context of argumentation. The immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine and determine from within, so to speak, the structure of an utterance*   (Shotter, 1990: 52)

A distinction between Shotter and Isaacs is that Shotter proposes that each response to a conversational gesture is new, *" a completely unique, unrepeatable response, one that is crafted or tailored to fit the unique circumstances of its utterance."*   (Shotter, 1990: 53)

The implication of this view is that conversations are not seen as some unfolding predetermined event but as something never having been possible before or since. The possibilities for their being some underlying phenomenon that can be accessed through conversation then becomes remote as attention is focussed on the micro-interactions of the conversation rather than on accessing the 'buttercup' or 'spirit of conversation'.

Placing attention on the process of conversation itself becomes Stacey's core theme in "Complex Responsive Processes in Organisations" (2001). Complex responsive processes of relating are introduced as *"human futures [being] under perpetual construction through the detail of interaction between human bodies in the living present."* (Stacey, 2001: 138). The use of the metaphor of complex responsive processes illuminates a second distinction between those writers who speak of a source to be tapped into and those who attend to the conversational process itself. Isaacs, Lewin, Regine, Bohm and Wheatley imply an ability to control the outcomes of, or context within which a conversation is held, almost as if it is possible to draw a boundary around the conversation and decide what can be altered to produce a 'better result'. Stacey is however clear that this control is impossible, as meaning is only created as the process of conversation continues. It is therefore, only possible to attend to one's own contribution to the local conversation in the living present, rather than to intend to affect a more wholesale change that will cause the entire organisation to move towards some predetermined outcome.

> *The power of this insight is the suggestion that there is no need to look for some kind of hidden reality or mechanism other than interaction itself to explain coherence in human action with its characteristics of continuity and potential transformation.* (Stacey, 2001: 140)

The complexity sciences offer analogies to assist with the understanding of both continuity and potential transformation, or, the known and unknown. Computer simulations of complex adaptive systems, (Kauffman, 1993) where agents in a system operate in accordance with local rules, show fluctuating increases and

decreases in population numbers that contain regularity and the previously unseen. Shaw (1997) employees this analogy along with the concept of amplifying and dampening loops (Senge, 1990) to show how the novel can emerge from the patterns of recognisable interaction. Amplifying and dampening loops are also seen as patterns occurring in complex responsive processes that cause some aspect of the pattern, flow of information or relationship to be escalated or to be reduced in some way, as result of the micro-interactions occurring between people in acting together. This effect is analogous to the effect that one drop of water may have when added to an already full vessel, the new drop may be 'absorbed' into the body of water with very little effect or, it may be the drop that causes the vessel to overflow.

In outlining my thinking of the nature of conversation in organisations it feels significant to describe what I earlier mentioned as a "certain notable qualities". I am aware that conversations create a range of emotional responses including boredom, frustration, anger, liberation, excitement, risk and transformation. From my personal experience of executive coaching and of psychotherapy, as well as in other areas of my life, I felt that I have experienced conversations that were notable by the feelings of risk, of being entirely present, of intimacy and of the potential for change (I provided descriptions of such experiences in the final sections of the fourth paper of this portfolio). The aesthetic nature of struggling to genuinely understand and be understood so as to highlight distinctions and identity also feels like another theme of such experiences. I also recognise the qualities of respect of empathy and of listening described by Isaacs (1999) and Lewin and Regine (1999) in their work. My understanding of the feelings of risk of potential change stems from the recognition of moving away from a recognisable pattern of interaction, to one that is unknown. Stacey provides clarity to the description of my felt experience in his explanation of control parameters (Stacey, 1996). He describes a number of factors that determine whether an organisation, or I propose, a conversation is in the stable zone, the unstable zone or the edge of chaos. My experience of the conversations described above feels close to the description offered by complexity scientists in being at the edge of chaos or *"the form of*

bounded instability found in the phase transition between the order and disorder zones of operation for a complex adaptive system" (Stacey, 1996: 178). The characteristics of this 'zone' are listed below:

- *Information both flows freely and is retained*
- *Schemas display both diversity and conformity*
- *Agents are richly but not too richly connected*
- *Behaviour is both predictable and unpredictable*
- *Behaviour has pattern but that pattern is irregular*
- *Freedom of shape and movement exist, but within the constraint of boundaries and overall archetypes*
- *There is stability in the archetype form but instability in the actualisation of that form*
- *Efficiency and effectiveness exist in tension with each other*
- *The space for novelty is characterizes by the tension between sustaining the status quo and replacing it*
- *Both order and disorder exist*   (Stacey, 1996: 179)

I notice that each of the characteristics listed here feel as if they also relate to my own paradoxical experience of 'notable conversations'. I recognise the experience of the free, but not complete flow of information; the sense of diversity but also being able to recognise the familiar; the sense of being in a paradoxically safe/unsafe relationship; the novel behaviour within the pattern of conversation; the experience of constrained freedom of exploration: order and disorder and an experience of novelty and innovation and at the same time the status quo.

The complexity theories therefore provide an analogy that illustrates that conversations of this type can be seen to be those in which the participants are able to later recall an experience similar to that which describes the conditions at the 'edge of chaos'. The distinction to reinforce here is that conversations of this type can be recalled as having had the qualities described, but cannot be set up to create these responses. The intention to create these conditions would be sufficient to

destroy the achievement of that objective. When entirely present to the conversation without monitoring its progress and outputs, there is the possibility for new insights, change, innovation, and learning whilst still feeling dangerous and having the potential for destruction as well as innovation.

My conclusions to these reflections on the examples of my work provided in paper one and in my subsequent reading cause me to reflect on the nature of my original enquiry for this portfolio. In recognising the significance of conversation, in its broadest sense, as being the means by which people relate to each other in organisations, as well as outside, my question moves to a deeper interest in the nature of conversations in organisations. Conversation viewed as the unit by which people relate and, therefore, by which change occurs. I will place this insight in the context of my early experience of two approaches to organisational change within the Unite Group.

A Conversational Approach to Change

Even before joining Unite, I had been advised by senior managers that the process of induction into the organisation was poor. I had wondered what was meant by this, and on asking, had heard that many people didn't seem to be aware of what the group was involved in. My experience of walking around the head office building and introducing myself to people on my first day confirmed that the induction was indeed in need of improvement. I was asked at two o'clock by someone who I had just been introduced to where the toilet was, as it was her first day too, no one had told her and 'everyone else seemed too busy to ask'. Other people later asked me for copies of their job descriptions to help them understand what was expected of them, others asked on which day of the month they got paid. Whilst not feeling that my own induction was planned as I had expected prior to joining, I decided to invite anyone who was interested to join me in a conversation about 'induction'. I booked a large room and sent out an email to everyone in the business Within two hours my secretary had received a number of calls about the 'event' and whether they could attend, I also received six e-mails from people

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who said that they would have liked to have attended, but, who had previous meetings, some also sent stories of their induction experiences with recommendations for how the business could improve the process for people joining. After a couple of days, I had heard that a number of people planned to attend but others thought that they had much better things to do than to sit in a room and talk. Interestingly, my reaction to hearing this was very different to how it might have been prior to this course of study. Before, I believe that I would have become angry with a group who held such a view. One year on, my reaction was very relaxed, knowing that I had made a gesture into the ongoing conversation of the organisation and that I couldn't predict or control anyone's response to that gesture.

The day before the conversation, I heard that a number of people had asked if it was still going ahead and that people were encouraging others to attend. The following day, I arrived and removed the tables from the room and spread out ten chairs in a circle. I went into the room again five minutes before nine o'clock. At nine, five people arrived and took seats, a few minutes later another group of people arrived and we needed to bring more chairs into the circle. By five past, a circle of twenty people filled the room. I introduced myself and asked the group to say who they were and what had made them decide to join the conversation. Some members described their frustration at their own early days in the business and felt that we should make this period for new starters an easier one. Others mentioned good experiences that they had had with other employers and that they wanted to share this experience. Others had never been asked to contribute to anything before and were just curious.

By the end of the hour most people said that they had enjoyed being in conversation with colleagues, they had all learnt from the experience and collectively we had designed a new process to help people join the rapidly growing business.

Over the next few days, I received a number of 'induction plans' from other companies, forwarded from people who had and hadn't been able to make the meeting. I also heard that the manager responsible for communication wanted to hold a similar conversation about internal communication in the company whilst other people offered to help design and deliver the formal company induction programme. Later in the same week, I invited managers in the business to engage in conversation about 'being a manager within the group', similar numbers attended and the outcomes included requests for management development, career planning and basic skills training. The impression that I was left with was that this was the first time that employees had been asked to contribute to the planning and direction of the business. The conversational approach feels as if it has demonstrated an interest in the development and learning of people within the group and the H.R. team appear to be viewed, by some, as a more positive and less coercive force within the business.

My intent of entering the conversations and not knowing what might emerge, contrasts strongly with another piece of work that had begun just before I arrived at Unite.

Business Process Re-engineering (BPR)

In November 2000, Unite had engaged the services of the consulting arm of Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) to assist in the management of a project to review and redesign the key processes that occur in the business. These were identified as the process of acquiring and developing property to use as residential accommodation, the process of construction, managing completed properties, the business planning process, financial processes and people management. The contract with PWC formed a typical consulting cycle, consisting of the following phases:

- *Gaining entry*
- *Agreeing a working contract*
- *Data collection*

- *Analysis and feedback*
- *Feedback to clients*
- *Formulating proposals and decisions to act*
- *Implementation*
- *Evaluation*
- *Follow up*   (Phillips and Shaw, 1989)

I joined Unite in January 2001, by which time the BPR project was drawing to the end of the data collection phase of work. This had involved assembling groups of managers to describe the 'as is' or current process that is used for each of the major processes within the business. The output of his work was a set of diagrams to show the flow of activity through each process with potential weak areas or critical control points highlighted showing where improvements were required. This process of 'as-is mapping' was achieved within the original four-week deadline, ending January 31st 2001. The next stage was to work with the same groups of managers to design the 'to be,' or new processes, to lead to improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the business' core activities. In each case a process owner was appointed to ensure that the work for each stage of the project kept to the original timetable. PWC consultants suggested that process owners reviewed the 'as-is' maps and then develop a draft, redesigned process to present to the reassembled group of managers 'as a starting point for their discussions'. The groups would then refine the draft process to produce a recommended new process within the two-hour time window allotted for each process meeting. My experience of one of the 'to be' process meetings included noticing that the most senior manager was also the process owner, this power relationship that seemed to mitigate against there being any significant challenge to his original draft proposal. The room layout of a boardroom table covered in A2 sized process maps appeared to force participants to concentrate on reading the maps and try to identify the point on the map that was being discussed at any one time. Attention was placed on the paperwork rather than on engaging with colleagues to identify opportunities for improvement. The resultant conclusion of

the meeting was that the draft process had been very strong and that little change was required before the new process could be recommended for implementation.

I was called by the leader of the PWC team the following day in preparation for the 'to be' stage of the people management process work. I was asked to prepare three draft process maps to cover induction, recruitment and selection and appraisal processes. It was intended that all of these would be discussed in a two-hour workshop in early February 2001. My initial reaction was of surprise in that I had already planned to work with groups of employees at different stages in the year to develop new approaches to people management processes. My intention had been to engage in conversation with interested, self organising groups with a hope that that process itself may lead to different conversations being held within the key conversational processes that occur at the point of selection, induction and appraisal. I had certainly intended to think of ways of developing a more conversational approach to these key stages of someone's life within the business. My suggestion to the PWC team was that I submit my plan for the year to them to show that the key processes will be redesigned by early Summer 2001, but that it would be really useful to use the time allocated for the 'people management' workshops to start to engage with people who had interest in redesigning the process of recruitment and selection. The PWC project leader agreed to this but stressed that they would still need draft process maps for the other key HR processes by the end of February. My initial reaction to this was of wanting to rebel. I didn't believe that the process suggested by PWC would result in people within the business working together to co-create new and innovative approaches. I was however mindful of the risk of amplification of my perceived rebellion as I was reminded that the BPR work had been sanctioned and funded by the Chairman of the business and ratified by the board. In hearing what I thought was a threat, I reflected on my own process of writing a people strategy as part of the launch of an overall three-year strategy for Unite. The board had also requested my work and the report had been read and the actions agreed to. It just so happened that the actions in the strategic document were different to those agreed to in the sign-off of the PWC process. Having made this observation, I was interested in engaging in

conversation with PWC, the Chairman and members of the board around the apparently conflicting timescales and approaches agreed to in by the board during November 2000.

The first of these conversations occurred with the PWC team and the Unite Project Manager on the following day. I had agreed to see one team member from PWC and the Unite Manager at six p.m. as I was to be in meetings at other times through the day. I was surprised to see five people enter my office for the evening meeting rather than the two who were originally to attend. Immediately I thought that this meeting had more significance to the PWC team than it had for me. I remember my two reactions, one of feeling as if I was about to be press-ganged and another of potential fun and challenge as the PWC team were clearly anxious that I might do something to derail their carefully crafted project plan. I welcomed the group and asked them what they would like to get from this conversation. The PWC project leader said that he was concerned that I may not comply with the timescales for producing revised business processes as had been agreed by the board and that the best outcome for him would be for me to agree to produce process maps for all Human Resource systems within twenty-four hours. I mentioned that the board had already agreed to the timescales for the development of a Human Resource strategy that were different to those of the business process mapping exercise. I also said that as I was in my second week in the business it seemed strange for me to be expected to design processes to select, recruit, induct and appraise people within a business I knew little about and without consulting with people who would be expected to use any resultant process. I was surprised by the reply:

> "You being new is not really relevant, this work is about designing processes so how long you have been here isn't an issue"
> I remember taking a deep breath before saying: " It feels as if you are interested in getting your flow charts filled in so as to complete the project on time and the quality of the work isn't important."

I was told that the quality was significant and that the board would review all of the process maps to ensure that the best processes were eventually implemented.

My journal notes from this conversation highlighted how differently I approached the remainder of the conversation to how I would have done prior to this programme of study. I thought that the project team were requesting some tools to help them achieve the results that they needed and were obviously worried about meeting their deadline. Instead of not complying with their request as I might have done before, I agreed to work into the evening to produce four process maps for workshops to be held the next day. Having agreed to do this, the Unite Project Manager remarked that it seemed like my heart wasn't in producing the maps. I replied:

> " It isn't, I really don't see how me rushing to produce something to meet an artificial deadline can result in anything useful for the business. Since joining I've noticed that people in the company focus hard on meeting deadlines and on getting tasks completed. This business process work has been branded as leading to organisational change but I don't see how it can if it is managed and progressed in the same manner that we say we are trying to move away from."

The room was silent for a moment and one of the PWC team said,

> "But also we have our targets to hit with you as a client, we've been contracted to hit deadlines and we must do so."

This seemed like the real reason for my en masse visit from the project team; a fear of not achieving their task; a desire to produce results in a way that was consistent with that of the client organisation and to have a set of tangible outcomes to show to the board.

This description of a conversation highlights some of the themes that have struck me since joining Unite. The first being the speed expected to deliver actions without giving much thought to the longer term or broader consequences to those actions. Also, a sense of the individual who performs a role being less important than the results that they deliver. Finally, a feeling of risk in the ability of the business to grow in a way that would allow the stated strategy of a growth in accommodation from five thousand rooms to seventy five thousand rooms to occur within a three year period. Indeed the Financial Times described Unite as a

groundbreaking business but said that its biggest risk would be that its management "may take on too much work and become overloaded." (Alexander, 2001).

In developing my own sense of the issues and themes facing the business I am now more able to consider my own desire to effect a change within local conversations and relationships of which I am part. My exploration and reflection on these themes will form a major part of the next paper in this series.

Conclusions

In this paper I introduced the concept of culture as being the experience of the patterns of interactions and therefore relationship between members of an organisation. I moved to describe how it is then impossible to be able to control or direct the culture of an organisation as had been suggested by Wheatley, Bohm and Isaacs. This concept may be difficult for some managers to appreciate since most management education and professional training has been built on a cybernetic model of systemic control. Whilst culture, as it is described in the predominant literature, is then impossible to control, it still remains possible to attend to conversations and relationships that the manager is part of and to be aware of, and open to, the changes that are possible within that context. In holding the view that the unit for change in organisations is relationship, manifest through conversation in its broadest definition, it becomes necessary to focus on the patterning and qualities of conversations themselves and then to notice the effect on relationships rather than on outcomes, conclusions or solutions.

I also showed how conversations can be seen as the sources of change in organisations, or indeed as the change that occurs. The example of a BPR programme to deliver change seemed to operate within the existing patterning of conversation. The approach of inviting participants to a conversation without a predetermined outcome, seemed to be a change in itself, as were the different conversations that followed the initial meetings.

In the next paper in this series I will explore my approach of participating in conversations within the Unite Group by recording my intent towards, and perception of, the relationships of which I am part and to then record what emerges from the conversations that form and are formed by those relationships. It may then be possible to notice what is amplified and dampened with and outside those conversations and therefore what may change in the broader organisation as a result of changes in the patterning of conversation in local interactions. It will also be important to notice what may also change in me and in my approach to relationships of which I am part, as a result of other changes that may happen and become amplified in other parts of the organisation. The next paper in this series will therefore describe my experience of participating in an attempt to achieve some movement in the patterning of conversation and of relationship within the organisation in which I work.

Reflections Towards a Synopsis (June 2002)

My reactions on re-reading paper two, fifteen months after it was written is that I seemed to be struggling to express alternative ways of thinking about my work, having already stated my dissatisfaction with predominant management literature. I said that I was working in a new participative way and that I was thinking very differently about culture, people management processes, change and conversation. However in paper two, I seemed to be stumbling to find a vocabulary and rhythm through which to express an alternative way of describing my experiences. I notice that I argue for the need for a reflective and integrated approach to research but had already offered a summary of literature about culture without deeply reflecting on my experience of culture in the organisations that I have experienced. It is as if I offer a theory and then look for examples to support it, instead of allowing my own theories to emerge from the reflections on my experience at work. I argued that I was moving from the position of objective observer to one of participant enquirer but then offer descriptions that appear to retain the stance of the observer. The presentation of my work in this way is very different to my approach in paper four where I believe that I integrate my experience, reading and discussions with colleagues in a way that allows the development and discovery of my key areas of research.

However, I do notice in paper two that I was beginning to develop my curiosity in several areas that have become increasingly important to me. I wrote about the significance of micro-diversity in interactions, but then offered few examples of where I experienced the emergence of transformation from a previously stable iteration of a pattern of relating. However in my descriptions of such events I used indirect speech which can distance the reader from the moment-by moment experience of moving into the conversation being described. In paper two, I developed an argument that rehearsed or repetitive conversations like those occurring in selection interviews do not contain much potential for creativity or innovation. It is as if the patterns of relating and of identity become fixed in the

predetermined roles of candidate and interviewer. This argument later helped me develop my thinking about moments in which the risk of inclusion or exclusion is perceived and when there is a movement in the patterns of power differentials and identity experienced as the shift in the processes of relating. The example of my selection interview is followed in later papers by examples of risk and movements in the patterning of power that lead to change in the experience of relating between the participants involved.

I introduced a number of other themes in paper two that have developed in my later work. It is interesting to see their origins here. I introduced my interest in conversation as the way in which people relate and noticed that some conversations appeared repetitive and unengaging whilst others feel alive and alert with the potential for significant change.

As well as pointing to the significance of conversation in its broadest sense, I also showed how I had begun to think about the implications of the predominant approach of thinking about the primacy of the individual. The focus on the individual is clear in induction to an organisation and in the example of my own selection into Unite. Instead of starting with the premise that I was to be selected to join a new organisation, I entered a conversation to see what might emerge from it. The effect of this stance was to engage in an enjoyable conversation that shifted the patterning of perception of power relating which changed the experience of our interdependent identities.

In reflecting on how my work has developed since paper two, I notice how I had started to develop some of the key areas of interest that led to my later research into coaching. I had considered conversations as being the processes of relating, had tentatively explored some different conversational experiences and had stated that I intended to research in a way that fully integrated theory into reflection and practice. The distinctions between March 2001 and today (June 2002) are that I have focused my research on to the area of coaching in organisations, and have not further developed my research into organisational culture. I have developed an

interpretation of complex responsive processes that provides a vocabulary and structure to describe my own experiences. I also believe that I have been able to demonstrate the integration of my research and work in way that considers the processes of relating as the locus of concern, instead of the individual and that I demonstrate my engagement with my research as a participant inquirer instead of maintaining the perception of objective observation.

Paper 3

Work as Complex Responsive Processes

An account of a project in which I have fully participated as a manager and leader, describing my account of organisational change in a way that develops and deepens my inquiry

October 2001

Paper 3

Work as Complex Responsive Processes

Introduction

I have set out to consider my role of Director of Human Resources by focusing on how my work may be seen from the perspective of complex responsive processes and complexity sciences instead of predominant management thinking. I intend to consider the nature and emergence of my work during a period of organisational change whilst reflecting on how my work, and therefore, I have both impacted change and at the same time have been affected by it. I will also make the distinction between traditional 'change projects', as I have experienced them in organisations and my different experience of true change resulting from a shift in the patterning of power relating and in identities of people in an organisation.

The period of time considered in this paper, from December 2000 to October 2001, relates to my first few months of joining a new employer. My focus during this time has been on developing relationships with my senior management and human resource colleagues and on establishing key processes relating to recruitment, management development, appraisal and approaches to post-acquisition integration. My journal notes during the early part of this period show that I considered focusing on a number of projects that were beginning in the business as the basis for this paper. These included the business process-mapping project described in paper two, the introduction of an IT based integrated business systems programme and the acquisition of a new student accommodation business. Whilst these processes may have provided a wealth of data, I decided not to focus on them for a number of reasons. Firstly my involvement in discrete projects may vary over time so as not to require me to be deeply involved in any one project during the period of study. More significantly, in order to raise my own awareness of the possibility that change occurs as a result of changes in the patterns of relating, and that those changes occur at the micro level of gesture- response. I need to attend to the full range of conversations of which I am part rather than those contained

within an artificial boundary of a specific project. My approach to organisational change is therefore one that follows the experience of my work and the patterns of conversation that make up that work rather than a discrete project or process.

The first half of 2001 has been a period of significant change for the Unite group. The appointment of four new senior managers, a £110 million acquisition, a refinancing programme, the trebling of number of rooms and a change in emphasis from being a property company measured by growth in net asset value to a service organisation focusing on profit and loss. This time has culminated in the establishment of a team to lead what may be seen as a formal, traditional change programme within the business: a programme of activity initiated by senior managers to achieve a predetermined goal. My perspective however is that during the time, from December 2000 to October 2001, much had already changed within Unite. Therefore, one outcome of the changes that are described in this paper has been the decision to 'change'. Or, that change had already happened which resulted in the recognition of the need to change.

My attention during this time has been placed both on the legitimate, formal and larger scale processes within the business and on the relational, group process and conversational nature of organisational change. This paper therefore sets out what I see as the real changes that lead up to the formal announcement of 'change'. The analysis contained here is significantly different from the approach taken in my previous masters degree studies. In my studies of Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour, my approach was to consider how a group of managers would come together to deliver a pre-planned change in an organisation - a rationalist teleological approach (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000). The focus of attention in this portfolio is to reflect on my experience of relating with managers in an organisation to consider how the decision to 'change' emerges from the ongoing patterns and processes of actual change in the living present. As if a number of small changes that had been occurring in many informal conversations and relationships had been elevated, or amplified and then taken up by the legitimate, formal processes of the organisation. This distinction becomes clearer

when comparing my experience of T.Q.M. as an approach to organisational change (paper 1: 64) which appeared not to effect change, with my experience with my coaching client, Adrian (paper 4: 171). Here, as a result of a shift in the pattern of relating, a change occurred in his thinking and future actions, this can be seen as the transformative change described by Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, (2000).

This paper describes a number of significant moments that seemed to create a shift in the patterns of relating that were iterated in the conversations between people in Unite. I have deliberately devoted significant space to these descriptions to both try to convey the nature of my own experience of them and to be able to sufficiently compare my response to them from systems thinking and complexity based approaches.

In this first section, I will set out my early experiences and observations as part of the executive team of the business. I will then attempt to understand this time from the perspective of predominant thinking and then reflect again to see what else might be explored with an understanding of complexity theories and the concept of complex responsive processes. I will begin with a brief description of my first day in a new role and then set out a range of other experiences from my daily journals that help me to identify the major patterns and themes that I have been aware of since my joining Unite. In particular, I will describe my early experiences as informed by Bion's systems based concept of basic assumption behaviours and then from my understanding of complex responsive processes.

First Impressions

My first day at Unite began at 8.30am on Monday 15th January 2001. I had travelled to Bristol the night before as has become a pattern since then. I decided to walk to the office on the first day to be in time for the 8.30 'executive meeting'. With about fifteen minutes to spare I realised that I was lost in Bristol and that I was unlikely to make the intended start time. I asked for directions twice and then ran the last five hundred metres to make the meeting just in time. Clearly hot and

uncomfortable from the run I introduced myself to my new colleagues and wondered if they thought that my perspiration was due to anxiety about my first day rather than a dash across the city. The meeting itself was a strange experience for me. I noted that each participant told the eight other people the contents of their diary for the past week and explained what they were to do in the coming week:

> " I had a meeting with King Sturge [property valuers] last Tuesday and agreed a price for a new property in our London portfolio. I met with Steve to discuss systems requirements and then on Friday met with our Concept Architect team to review plans for a property conversion in Bristol. This week, I'm seeing solicitors later today and am at a conference on Tuesday and Wednesday and have internal meetings on Friday."

This pattern was repeated eight times with little sense of engagement on the part of the speakers or listeners. The Chief Executive (Nick) welcomed me and advised the room that I would review salaries for everyone at the end of the week. I remember my eyebrows rising as I thought, 'that's interesting, I wonder what Nick's expectations of me are. I certainly won't review salaries in my first week especially if I don't know the people or the criteria against which salaries are reviewed'.

My other overriding recollection was of the lack of engagement between people in the meeting and of a sense of control that Nick exercised by cutting people off in mid flow and moving to the next participant. I wondered whether this was indicative of the nature of relationships within the business.

I was dissatisfied with my first experience of a meeting in Unite and in meetings with my new colleagues later that week I asked them if Monday's meeting was typical of executive meetings. I was universally told that those sessions are of no value "What use is hearing the contents of someone else's diary?" In each case I asked why they continue in such a format. I was told that Nick had told the group that they were not to converse with colleagues at the meeting, as if conversations needed to happen, they should have already done so.

I was reminded of Stacey's view on turn-taking and the constraining power of communicative interaction. Stacey suggests that taking turns by way of rounds or through question and answer is a key way that communicative interaction and engagement occurs between individuals,

> *Turns are taken through the use of general linking devices such as adjacent pairs, for example question and answer. The turn taking also arises in a manner in which symbols are sequenced, segmented and categorized. One of the principle processes of categorization is that which establishes membership categories, identifying who is who is to take a turn as well as how and when they are to do so.*
>
> (Stacey, 2001: 147)

And:

> *The process of turn taking and turn making is both enabling and constraining at the same time and it therefore immediately establishes power differences in which some people are out and some are in. This process of power-relating, with its dynamic of inclusion and exclusion is ubiquitous in all human communicative interaction, that is, all human relating.*
>
> (Stacey, 2001: 149)

This theme of power as inclusion and exclusion has become a clear pattern for me in my personal experience and observation of relationships within the senior team and particularly with the Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer and the senior managers reporting to them. I have seen, and have been part of, a number of examples of both subtle and overt exclusion and inclusion, three more are featured below. There is a clear dominant pattern in the Monday morning meetings to read entries from diaries and not to question or comment on the contribution of others. The relationships between Nick and his team involved allowing him to define the parameters of time and content into which other people feel able to speak. I noted at the time, my curiosity about the possibility of my experience of my first meeting being reflected in other aspects of relationship in the organisation. I wondered if I had experienced a particular pattern of relating in that moment which may be reflected in the broader organisation. Wheatley applies the mathematical term 'fractal' meaning *"self similar phenomena occurring at different levels of scale"* (Wheatley, 1999: 128) and argues that repetitive patterns of interaction occur between people in organisations and that those patterns are replicated throughout

the organisation. I noticed how my reading about fractals, then about repetitive patterns of interaction (Wheatley, 1999: 127) and complex responsive processes (Stacey 2001; Griffin, 2002) prompted me to move away from a cybernetic analysis of this early experience into one that focused on relationships, conversation and the link between patterns of behaviour in the moment and the personal and combined histories of the participants.

My early Human Resource training would have suggested that I look at the experience of the Monday meetings from the perspective of an objective observer and then compare my observations against perceived best practice for managing meetings. Thinking in this way leads me to want to ask the participants in the meeting about their experience of it, to clarify what they appreciated and what they did not value. I may then have concluded that the meeting was without an agreed agenda or purpose and that the chairman was in need of training in meetings management and facilitation skills. I would then recommend a process to review subsequent meetings and obtain feedback to design further changes until an acceptable experience was created for participants in future meetings.

An alternative approach is to notice the patterns and themes that seem to form and be formed by the interactions between people in the organisation and to participate in a way that draws attention to my own experience of those patterns. An understanding of Wheatley's description of fractals from natural sciences (Wheatley, 1999: 128) prompted me to be aware of other similar interactions that may occur at other levels and in other places within the organisation and between our customers and employees who interact with them.

Stacey's writing on the 'The Importance of History' (Stacey, 2000: 62) where he describes the patterning process of interaction as involving the gesture-response of the living present and the relational histories between the participants in the current conversation and in past experiences with other people prompted my curiosity about the past relationships between participants on my first Monday. Also about what was being reconstructed in the meeting as a result of those past experiences.

In particular, I noticed a different pattern between Nick and David and other people in the room and was keen to understand the different themes of their experience to those experienced between other participants.

Nick and David have been involved in the business since its inception. Nick as founder, and David originally as an accountant to the business and then as Finance Director and now as Chief Operating Officer. Having worked together for eight years, the relationship between them is very close. Clearly they have shared experiences of risk and success and their relationship has extended beyond work to provide friendship and support outside. David helped Nick through the period of his divorce and both are executors of each others wills, they holiday together and speak at least four times daily, either face to face or by telephone. Within a week of joining the business I had a sense of the business being run not by either David or Nick but by them both, in tandem. I imagined and then evidenced them being in conversation before a meeting at work in preparation for the meeting and taking all of the significant decisions prior to the input of senior managers. The meetings themselves then became a series of judgements as to whether each manager was voicing support for or was contradicting the decision that had already been taken prior to the conversation. A subsequent conversation would then be held after the meeting to review the performance of each executive in light of the predetermined agreements between David and Nick.

One further theme that I became aware of in January 2001 was that two of the executives who had relatively recently joined the group had been promised seats on the board once they had begun to 'prove themselves'. Neither promotion had occurred and in both cases Nick and David felt that they were 'not ready'. I had asked what it would take for them to be ready but was offered little in reply except that they should have achieved their development plans. They had been promised inclusion but were left excluded. I was left thinking that it was unlikely that anyone would ever make the grade as in doing so they would put at risk the closeness of the relationship between David and Nick as the third member of the operational executive having a seat on the board.

In my thinking of the senior team at Unite, I am reminded of Bion's three basic assumption behaviours (Nitsin 1996: 65)

1) *Dependence, problems are believed to be resolvable only by the idealised leader or counterpart*
2) *Fight-flight, where problems are to be resolved by attacking them or running from them*
3) *Pairing, in which solutions are expected to be generated by interaction between two people, whom the rest of the members watch.*

My early experiences of being part of the executive team at Unite gave me a number of opportunities to notice what Bion may have categorised as basic assumption behaviours. Although based in a systems perspective, Bion's work does help me to consider my experiences before considering the same experience from the perspective of complex responsive processes.

Bion's first categorisation of basic assumption behaviour is dependence, defined as the viewing of problems as solvable only by the idealised leader. I was certainly aware that all decisions needed to be made by Nick or David, decisions ranging from the purchase of multi-million pound buildings to the allocation of company cars- at one stage, even if the call centre would be allowed a refrigerator to keep their packed lunches cool. Nick in particular was also seen as some omniscient figure who would solve any problem bought to him better than any other person in the business. This dependence had the effect of paralysing a number of managers from making their own decisions and in slowing down decision making until Nick or David could be consulted.

Examples of fight or flight, Bion's second category, included Nick diving into the detail of costs of construction at the first hint of an overrun of time or cost whilst ignoring the less tangible issues of management performance, strategy or the nature of service provision. By Nick attending to detailed, quantifiable issues in

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this reactive way, other managers copied his approach by attending to the issues important to the Chief Executive but also not attending to or actively avoiding issues not on Nick's radar.

I experienced 'pairing' in a similar way to 'dependence' with the strong reliance on the two most senior executives to take all decisions and to create the impression that they were the only ones with the breadth of knowledge and experience so to do.

Whilst the list of assumption behaviours provides a neat categorisation of potentially destructive behaviours within a group, the presentation of them in this way appears to be rooted in a systems approach to thinking about groups. The 'proto-mental' model (Nitsun 1996: 65) explains the origin of assumption behaviour that is the cause of the 'disease' experienced within a group – a linear explanation of the phenomena experienced. I am reminded of Stacey's list of variables in his early writing on complexity, that tend towards an organisation being at the edge of chaos (Stacey, 1996). In both cases there is a clear presentation of cause and effect that results in the generation of notable outcomes within the group. I also note how it becomes possible to classify aspects of most of the events in my daily journals into the three basic assumption behaviours and that in doing so I take the position of objective observer reflecting after the event. The approach taken in this study is one of participative inquiry that focuses on the experience of the living present rather than on the comparison of events with an external, causal frame of reference.

A Relational Perspective

The perspective taken in this portfolio is that of not applying mechanical metaphors or cybernetic approaches to organisational change, but instead to view organisations as processes created by, and simultaneously creating, the patterns of local interaction occurring in the living present. It is therefore important to develop my own understanding of complex responsive processes and then to consider how

this understanding informs my research in the context of the relationships in my practice at Unite.

Stacey's view of organizational life understands organisations as complex responsive processes having the following characteristics:

> *All human relationships, including communicative actions between the body with itself, that is mind, and the communicative actions between bodies, that is the social, are interweaving story lines and propositions constructed by those relationships at the same time as those story lines and prepositions construct the relationships. They are all complex responsive processes of relating and can be thought of as interweaving themes and variations on those themes, that recursively form themselves.*
>
> (Stacey, 2001: 140)

More simply,

> *It is the processes of ordinary every day communicative interaction that constitute complex responsive processes.* (Streatfield, 2001: 61)

Streatfield summarises the key aspects of complex responsive processes as experienced in his work as;

- *Local interaction in the living present*
- *The use of plans, procedures and systems as tools of communicative interaction*
- *The wider process of communicative interaction*
- *Power relations*
- *The thematic patterning of communicative interaction*
- *The conversational life of an organisation*   (Streatfield, 2001: 62)

One further aspect of complex responsive processes is history or rather " *the history of each individual and of the group, organisation, community and wider self.*" (Fonseca, 2001: 125) Griffin adds *"the temporal structure of gesture-*

response between living bodies in the medium of symbols" (Griffin, 2002: 135) as a further characteristic of complex responsive processes.

I am developing my own understanding of complex responsive processes as the totality of interactions and therefore of relationship which have the potential for stability and transformation at the same time. I notice how authors describe complex responsive processes as giving rise to other phenomena, or as naming phenomena emerging from the complex responsive processes of relating – whilst at the same time, also being formed by the emerging.

Fonseca discusses innovation emerging from the complex responsive process of relating:

> *I will argue that innovation is the emergence of a new meaning and that as such new meaning emerges in conversation between people that are categorised by the paradoxical dynamic of understanding and misunderstanding at the same time.* (Fonseca, 2000: 18).

Griffin titles his text "The Emergence of Leadership" and explores how ethics emerge out of local interactions in the living present[5]. Stacey argues that knowledge emerges out of interaction between people or reified, and mostly written, symbols and the person reading and relating to them. Streatfield describes his experience of control and the lack of it emerging from the same complex responsive processes. My own perspective here is to consider how my work as a human resource practitioner and a senior manager in an organisation is my participation in complex responsive processes, rather than an entity that emerges out of them. The comparison between that approach to the development of practice and the predominant approach of systems based practice development can then be made before considering the contribution of this new approach to my work and to the wider practice of human resources management and consulting.

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[5] The phrase, 'the living present' is used here to describe the temporal structure of forming and being formed at the same time. Husserl (1960) uses the same phrase to describe ongoing potential within the context of 'life world'. Wittgenstein (1980) refers to a similar concept as the 'background' and 'hurly burly' of every day life. – From Griffin 2002:135

Work as Complex Responsive Processes

i.   A growing sense of unease

In the next section of this paper, I intend to describe some specific experiences of working with the senior team at Unite and to consider how my work is my relating at that senior level. I described above that I experienced some frustration with what seemed like an over reliance on Nick and David to make decisions and to shape the direction of the group. During the period leading up to the acquisition of Unilodge, a £110 million investment, Nick and David were required to make a series of presentations to City investors and fund managers to secure the funding to make the acquisition. They were therefore absent from the offices and operation of Unite for a three-week period. During this time, the frustration felt by the senior executive team increased in being managed in a way that they described as too detail focused, claustrophobic and inconsistent. One colleague in particular described a conversation with Nick, prior to his absence, in which he was told that Nick would be 'out of the business' for three weeks and that 'might be difficult', the colleague replied that as he hadn't had any useful time with Nick in the last month another three weeks would make little difference. He contrasted this lack of contact and conversation with other times when he felt that Nick would 'dive in to the most minute details of a plan for a new building and remove lifts or change room configurations'. Within a week of the fund raising period, six senior colleagues had spoken to me about their feelings about being managed in a way that felt as though paradoxically they were required to set out and deliver major strategic plans but also be prepared to discuss the minutest details of their areas of responsibility. In addition, they described, the difficulties in trying to plan their time and also to respond to the short -term demands for information and meetings. I was interested to learn that none of my colleagues had tried to raise their concerns with Nick offering reasons that included:

> "He won't change, it's about his need to control." And. "I'm not going to take any risks and put my head above the parapet."

In conversation with three colleagues, my suggestion that the dissatisfaction should be voiced with Nick was met with a stunned silence; one colleague's mouth trembled as he tried to imagine being engaged in a conversation that involved overt criticism of the Chief Executive.

My journal records of this period show that my reaction to the series of conversations resulted in the emergence of a number of themes. The first was one of surprise that my senior colleagues felt paralysed to voice concern over their relationship with the Chief Executive. They were each saying that they risked being ostracised or in some way excluded from the business. I reflected that I had heard a number of stories about how people had been marginalized from decision-making conversations after in some way disappointing or failing to deliver results for the group and thought that the fear of exclusion was being amplified in the conversations with my colleagues. I noticed that in four conversations my colleagues said that their experiences and their reactions to them were not in the best service of the business. Indeed, their fear of confrontation was preventing them from raising issues that may lead to better commercial results including a greater return on property investments, a reduction in operating costs and a perception of a more unified approach to achieving volume growth by the senior team.

I decided that with such a level of discontent, and the possibility for a change in the patterns of relating, that I should start to engage in conversation about the issues that I had noticed and that my colleagues were reluctant to raise outside of one-to-one informal conversations. In late May 2001, I called Nick who was still on the round of fund raising meetings. I tried to get time to see him but he said that he was seeing financial institutions until eleven o'clock each evening and that he would 'catch up' with me in the following week.

The same day I received a call from the Chairman of the business who said he would like to meet with me when I was next at the London offices. We agreed to meet two days after the call. I was used to meetings with the Chairman being well

prepared and very structured and was surprised to hear him hesitate when I asked about the topic of conversation for our meeting. He mentioned the executive structure and a review of communication processes. Later the same day, the newly appointed Finance Director came to my office to say that he had spent some time with the Chairman to express some early concerns that the relationship between Nick and his team felt strained and that he was wondering what his role would become in the group. I summarised his views at one point by saying:

> " It seems as if you are wondering if you have been appointed to change the way that the business operates or to validate, by your presence and reputation, an existing, unhealthy way of operating."

Simon thought for a moment and replied.

> " That's just it, am I going to help change the business to allow it to take its responsibilities as a PLC or will I end up just being seen as resistant to approaches and styles that I don't think add value to the group."

After this conversation, I guessed that the Chairman might have wanted to talk about his conversation with Simon in my meeting with him.

Geoffrey and I met in his office, in London, on Wednesday 23rd May 2001. He began by saying that he had spoken to Simon and was concerned about how Simon was experiencing his first few weeks with the business. In particular, he said that Simon had described being sidelined by Nick in not being invited to a meeting with financiers. Simon thought that this had happened as he would take a different view to Nick about the price to be paid for the business to be acquired and that it was easier for Nick not to invite Simon to the meeting than to risk being challenged or to hear a view contrary to his own. Geoffrey asked if I thought that this could be true.

I replied by saying I didn't know if that specific incident was true but said that there were a number of themes emerging during Nick and David's absence from the business that were causing me concern and that I would begin to raise the themes with Nick on his return. I summarised them in the following way.

> " Most of the members of the senior team appear to have concerns about their relationships with the Chief Executive. There is a sense of being

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tightly controlled and monitored but also of being expected to be entrepreneurial and to take risks. They fear that any risk taken might result in them being punished, the worst punishment being exclusion from the senior management group. I also notice that two of my colleagues were told that they would be promoted to the board shortly after joining but that this never happened and that they don't want to raise the matter for fear of being further distanced from the board."

In speaking I noticed that I felt that I was describing other peoples' situations almost in a way that distanced myself from the issues. Whilst also wanting to protect confidences, I felt frustrated that I was voicing concerns of other people and was being silent about my own sense of unease. I then participated in a way that reflected my own thinking and feelings.

" My experience of this is that Nick and David work very hard to maintain control over the themes within the business. The pre-meeting meetings and post meeting reviews take up considerable time and give me the sense of never quite being in the significant conversation. I am concerned by my colleagues' unwillingness to raise these issues with Nick and David or with each other in a formal conversation but do feel anxious about taking the risk to raise issues with Nick myself"

The Chairman tilted his head as he listened and I continued.

" I am also aware of not having integrity if I don't start to speak about the patterns of control and relationships within the Executive Team as I experience them. It would be in the best service of the group for me to enter a series of conversations to see what may emerge."

I said that in doing so I could feel the sense of risk of being excluded by Nick and David and disowned by the Executive Team who may not wish to show overt support for my comments.

ii. Shifting patterns of power relating

I had the first opportunity to enter a significant conversation about these themes the following day. I had just finished interviewing prospective candidates for a senior position within the group at the University of Warwick when my mobile telephone rang.

It was Nick:

> " I've just heard that someone in Unilodge has told their team that the acquisition had been delayed for a day – What sort of communication is that when they know something before our team?"

My mind raced for a second and I remembered that one of my colleagues had said that as soon as the fund raising finishes Nick would 'land' and start to get into the detail of the integration plans. I felt anxious and confused, as I wasn't sure why he was asking me to explain something that I didn't know about. I said.

> " Nick, I'm with Professor Roy at Warwick and will finish in 10 minutes. I'll call you back then."

I walked to my car and called the Project Manager in Bristol to see if he knew what was happening. I was told that one of our lawyers had told the Unilodge legal team that the exchange of contracts for the deal could not be completed until one day after the original deadline and that the lawyer had told his client before ours had told our team. Nick had become furious that he had heard of this from the client rather than his legal team, but had thought that the communication process must be flawed and that as I was leading that part of the process he would call me.

I called him back and could hear the tension in his voice as he said he was with David and Simon and was going to put me on speaker phone.

> "What's happening with the communication plan, it's a shambles!" No one knows what anyone is doing! We've got three days to pull this together before the biggest deal of the group's history and these things should have been dealt with months ago!"

I felt strong and clear voiced as I replied.

> " I don't know what you mean, my understanding is that Unilodge heard about a delay, before our lawyers told us, and that now we know, we have

informed all of our managers as we said we would in the event of any delay to the project."

I wasn't sure how Nick would respond to my calm voice. He spoke loudly as he next said.

" Ok if its not a big issue to you, what about the rest of the integration, I bet no one is clear about who is saying what to who and when. Let's take Friday for example, who is going to Manchester to tell them about the sale and who will tell our managers?"

I felt his challenge but replied.

" It sounds as if you're not clear about the integration plan and that is making you uncomfortable. I checked yesterday that a timetable had been sent to you with the full details on the announcements to be made and was told that you had received it. If you haven't got it, I'll have another couriered to you overnight. But the pack does contain the full details of all preparatory meetings and a timetable of events after the formal announcement of the purchase to the stock exchange."

He seemed calmer but switched the focus of the conversation.

"Ok I'll get to it over the weekend and call you if I need to, but I hope that the other exec's are ready for this as I understand that they haven't been performing in the last two weeks."

I closed my eyes as I tried to focus on the conversation and imagine Nick's demeanour as he spoke. I could feel his anxiety and thought that as he has now secured the funds for the deal his attention had moved to the management of the new larger business. He continued.

" Our senior team is just not performing and won't be able to cope with this larger scale of operation. We need to decide who to develop and then we need to clear out the crap."

I remember pausing for a moment to let Nick's words land, no one spoke for a second and then I said.

" Nick, who are you describing as crap?"

There was a silence at the other end of the conversation as if he had realised that he had crossed some boundary.

" Well, I don't mean crap but we do have to make sure that everyone performs well in the business and they are not at the moment."

" Nick, perhaps one factor affecting how the team performs is that you think of us in that way and that you want to 'clear us out'."

" I didn't mean you in that, you are doing a great job...."

I believe that these few seconds were the most significant in the development of my identity and therefore my work in Unite in early 2001. I felt a sensation in the moment similar to a bump caused by mild turbulence on an aircraft, a visceral jolt. It was as if Nick and I shared the same sense of embarrassment in him describing our colleagues in such a way. I would like to apply Shotter's description of a 'moment of common reference' to describe the experience.

Two people regard one another and their common situation, they know from each other's attunements as I shall call them, that they are sensing it in the same way.   (Shotter, 1993: 146)

I felt that Nick was embarrassed about the use of the metaphor and we both felt it in that moment. I also believe that I experienced Nick's feelings of anxiety and loneliness at that point, as if he felt that his team would be unable to meet the challenges that the acquisition might bring - possibly, also a shared anxiety about the challenge that the integration would bring for each of us. I sensed an opportunity to suggest a further conversation. I suggested that Nick, David, Simon and I meet the following week to continue the discussion about the Executive team and how all of the senior managers worked together. I was grateful to Simon for suggesting that the Chairman should also be invited into the conversation. That 'moment of common reference' had a transformative affect on the relationship between Nick and I. The existing pattern of Nick attacking one of his team, accusing them of incompetence and then taking over had been shifted. This time, in the moment of my asking, "Who are you referring to as crap?" the rhythm and flow of the conversation had moved. This shift allowed for a subsequent conversation to occur which was not patterned according to historic themes. This

moment also represented a shift in the pattern of power-relating between Nick and myself. I had experienced the constraint of his power over me in my hesitation to raise my concerns with him earlier. I had also clearly witnessed the paralysis or 'stuckness' (Scanlon, 2001) that existed in the relationship between Nick and our colleagues.

However, in the brief moment that I have described, a moment of my own intolerance, the risks of repeating historic patterns were too great for my own sense of integrity and values. I needed to speak out. The result of this could have been my own exclusion or indeed expulsion from Unite. Instead, in that transformational moment, an opportunity happened that allowed a series of conversations to occur that would reiterate the newly emerged pattern of relating between Nick and myself, and between Nick and his wider team. This, for me represents a true experience of organisational change- a shift in the patterning of power relating between people who work together in organisations, occurring as changing patterns of interaction.

The subsequent conversation is described below.

iii. Power and punishment

The meeting with the five of us was scheduled for the Wednesday of the following week. I gave the conversation some considerable thought in the interim and worked with my supervisor to consider how I felt I might react in the conversation and to voice some of my own anxieties as a way of being able to be more present in the meeting itself. My own anxieties included; being concerned about being attacked by Nick in voicing criticism; needing to maintain the confidence of my colleagues with whom I had spoken the week before; David and Simon distancing themselves from any comments that I might make as a way of protecting themselves. Despite these reservations, my supervision session helped me develop clarity of thought to feel able to voice my own experiences and thoughts honestly

in a way that I believed had integrity and which, I felt, may potentially benefit the relationships at a senior level in the business.

During my own lead up to the meeting I was aware of a number of conversations happening which also felt as if they were in preparation for the meeting. I heard from a colleague that Nick had spent time with him on the Monday and for the first time asked him how he felt he was being managed. My colleague, Hugh, reported that he had told Nick that he was being managed in a way that did not allow him to perform as well as he was able to. He didn't have regular meetings with Nick and when they did occur, the flow of information was one way. He described the pattern of the meeting as being twenty snatched minutes where Nick would download his commands. Hugh said that saying this to Nick was the first time that he had said anything critical and one outcome of the meeting was an agreement to meet on a regular basis to engage more fully in Hugh's work and that of his team. Hugh described feeling stronger having raised some of his concerns and that although he wasn't confident that a long term change would result, he did think that there now may be more openness in the relationship, should issues occur again.

I remember wondering if Nick felt that he may be criticised in the meeting to be held on Wednesday and if he was preparing the groundwork to be able to say that he had been inconsistent in his management of the senior team but that he had already committed to make changes, as evidenced by the conversation with Hugh. The Chairman told me that he was to have dinner with Nick on Tuesday evening to set out some of his concerns. I was struck by the pattern of preparatory meetings but was also pleased that Nick may be more attentive and less defensive in a one-to-one meeting with the Chairman. Simon called me on the Tuesday to see what my 'position was'. I said that my intention was to really engage with whatever happened on Wednesday to see what came out of it. I also said that I had seen a number of things that had caused me concern and that I would voice them if it were appropriate.

On the Wednesday, I spoke to David and he mentioned that Nick was feeling a little anxious about how his senior team were feeling. He said that he thought that Nick had now had conversations with all of his direct reports, similar to the one described by Hugh. David also reported that Nick had said that Geoffrey was clear over dinner the previous evening that the senior management team were not being managed well and that their performance could be improved with a different approach from Nick. I was prompted to think that my studies allowed me to think about this conversation in a different way, in suggesting that the relationships between Nick and his direct reports were complex but not authentic. Clearly, there was a lot of respect for the young Chief Executive who had quickly built up a successful business. There was also real unvoiced frustration on both sides about being disappointed that unspoken standards of work and of relating were not being achieved. The rushed and incomplete conversations were insufficient to engage fully in the way that Nick and his team were working together. Entering into those conversations themselves may, I thought, facilitate a shift in existing patterns of conversation that were creating some of the current concerns.

The Wednesday meeting was scheduled for two o'clock, at 1.45pm Simon came into my office and asked how I was doing, he looked a little uncomfortable, as he seemed to rock gently, placing his weight on alternate feet. We both appeared to hesitate about starting a conversation or to mention the approaching meeting. We chatted about a new appointment that we had just made until the Chairman came in and asked if we were ready to begin. I took a deep breath and walked into the boardroom. Nick entered through another door and quickly moved to the other side of the chairman. David and I sat on one side, with Nick, Geoffrey and Simon on the other. Geoffrey started the meeting by handing out a report that he had prepared that suggested a review of the senior structure and a new set of protocols to managing meetings and communicating across the business. I felt the tension in the room reduce as the possibility emerged that we could focus attention on the paper and its recommendations rather than on the themes that had given rise to this conversation.

Nick read Geoffrey's paper quickly and then started the conversation by saying that he agreed with the issues raised and that we should agree how to take actions to move forward. It felt as if Nick had also spotted an escape route by being present to the paper and therefore not present to the rest of us. During my reading of the paper I experienced concern that whilst the paper described issues of architecture and process for the business, it was expressed in terms of recommendations and 'ought to's' or 'shoulds'. I spoke up.

> "I think that the conclusions in Geoffrey's paper are very useful for us all to consider, and before we do that I think that we can usefully explore what has happened to lead up to the paper and to this meeting."

David quickly interjected.

> " I agree, I think that we have been very hard on the executive recently and have not given them enough praise and support."

Nick responded. " That's possibly true for some of them, but others don't deserve recognition and we have been lenient. Nothing's happened to anyone, it's not as if people are being sacked."

I noticed that again we were talking about other people at other times.

> " My experience of being part of the executive team is just as relevant in this meeting as at other times. I'm feeling as if I'm taking a risk by saying that in being honest here I risk being excluded from this group and from being able to make a continued useful contribution. I'm interested that you, Nick, feel as if people are not punished. It is true that there are fewer disciplinary meetings here than in most places that I have worked but there is certainly punishment and the fear of being punished. From my own experience, I have seen Nick punish with the movement of an eyebrow that signals his disagreement with a point being made. I have also noticed the significant looks between David and Nick when a conversation appears to be moving from its pre-planned course. More significantly, there are three members of the Exec. who are out in the cold at the moment. They are not seen to be performing and have been written off. I know that in saying this I run the risk of being excluded, but also don't wish to be included in a

pattern of working together that feels too constraining and that requires conformity to unhelpful patterns."

I spoke at what felt like a metered pace, with what I experienced internally, as clarity and groundedness. The preparatory meeting with my supervisor was helping, although my comment about punishment was not one of the topics that we had discussed.

Whilst speaking, I noticed the Chairman, smiling warmly with what I felt was encouragement. Nick also seemed to listen intently. This was my first experience of a comment being made that could be taken as criticism being listened to without being attacked. During the same meeting I made remarks about the closeness of David and Nick's relationships and that it felt difficult to have a real conversation with either without it seeming that the meeting had either been rehearsed or would be replayed. I also came back to Nick's description of part of his team being 'crap' and said that most of his team were new, him having replaced an old team for these 'crap' people and I wondered what was happening to create the sense of the next new person being the saviour, then disappointing and then being sidelined.

After about an hour of what felt like useful conversation we considered the main themes that had emerged from our discussion. These were Nick and David's relationship, the fear of exclusion by the senior team, the perception Nick had of his team and the changing relationships that occurred as people worked in the business.

After a further thirty minutes of this conversation Nick's mobile had rung three times and he had answered it each time, speaking to lawyers, a bank and the vendors of the business we were about to acquire. With each call Nick seemed less engaged in the meeting and more mindful of the phone conversation. Geoffrey in particular, was frustrated and rolled his eyes to signify that Nick's focus had changed.

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Nick apologised by saying that he needed to take calls to make sure that contracts could be exchanged by the end of the day. I felt as if the room had become less intense as my concentration moved from the conversation to the impending deal. We agreed that we had had a useful meeting and that we should meet again to continue the conversation. A date was agreed for the following week.

After the anticlimax of the tailed-off conversation, I wondered what might happen next. I was also conscious of the acquisition which would take considerable time and may cause the attention of the senior team to be diverted away from attending to how we work together and on to the task of achieving integration of the new combined businesses of Unite and Unilodge.

The remainder of the week was spent preparing for the purchase of Unilodge, by Unite on Friday 1st June 2001. On the evening of 31st May, I flew to Manchester with a colleague to advise our new colleagues in Unilodge of the purchase and of the timetable that had been prepared to cover the following four weeks. Whilst I was in Manchester, Nick was in London advising the stock market and the press of the transaction. He also told employees in Bristol and Leeds, via video conference, that the deal had happened and that a timetable of integration was in place to achieve an effective absorption of Unilodge into Unite. My experience of the Unilodge acquisition overlapped the core of my research in a distinct way on Monday 4th June, three days after the announcement of the purchase.

iv. Unilodge, induction and razor wire

I had arranged for an initial 'Induction Day' to be held in Manchester for all of the incoming employees to hear more about their new employer and to meet a number of the people who they may work with in the future. The team from Unite, consisting mostly of the Executive Team and line managers from the north of England assembled in a city centre hotel at 8.30am on Monday 5th June. I became aware during the day of the range of reactions to the choice of hotel. My intention in choosing the newly opened five star hotel was to help create an impression of a

professional, secure and comfortable company. Some reactions to my gesture included comments that the hotel was 'corporate', 'clinical' 'extravagant' and 'cold'. Reactions, I was told later, that also mirrored the impression that the new employees had of the senior managers they had met from their new employer. I was reminded of Mead (1937: 34), *"the meaning of a gesture arises in the response to it and not in the initiating gesture"*.

Nick arrived at the hotel and seemed preoccupied, he addressed the team of his senior managers.

> " I've been thinking over the weekend that our business has changed significantly. The Unilodge properties let their rooms directly to students and are at the high end of market rents for student accommodation. Also as we develop our portfolio of rooms the importance of property development reduces and the significance of property management and of service increases."

Nick seemed to be both annoyed and rather sad as he spoke, emotions that I didn't understand, as I felt that he would be celebrating the major acquisition. I became frustrated as I listened to him speaking of the poor customer service that he felt we provided and how far the business had to move in order to achieve the potential of its market position.

I noticed my colleagues seem to avoid eye contact with Nick as he spoke, as he seemed to run out of steam for a moment I interjected.

> "Nick, it feels really heavy in here now, but we have a big day ahead. Would you care to sprinkle some words of encouragement on to your team as we prepare to welcome our new colleagues."

I felt as though I was being sarcastic but wanted to make a serious point. I think that I heard my colleagues inhale sharply as I spoke as if to acknowledge the risk. Nick seemed to shake himself and used a lighter tone in his speech.

> " No, no, you're right, I'm not criticising but I am saying that we have a long way to go yet. We have done very well and the group has grown very quickly and is performing well. It's a very proud day."

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I appreciated his change of emphasis but his words sounded hollow. I wondered what was happening for him.

Due to the two, more open conversations that Nick and I had now had, I felt later able to ask him about his feelings on the morning of the induction day in Manchester. He said that he had spent a lot of time thinking about the business over the weekend. He said that he felt sad for a number of reasons; the financing required for the acquisition had resulted in him not being the primary shareholder of Unite for the first time. He now felt like an employee answerable to his bosses in the city instead of having the freedom to be strongly entrepreneurial. He also said that with the new five thousand rooms that we had purchased the business was now a service business and had moved away from its history of a South West based construction company. I sensed the shift in power of Nick's own experience, new constraints imposed by financiers and having to operate in a new unfamiliar sector. A predominant approach to reflecting on this conversation may suggest that changes in the power relations between Nick and myself, and between Nick and the banks, were the cause of organisational change. My view however is that those changes in the patterns of relating were the change.

Another significant event that supports this perspective happened in my work, or the relationships that are my work, in Manchester the day after the induction meeting. I had arranged for David R., the Chief Operating Officer and Simon, the Financial Director, and myself to visit the properties that we had purchased with the General Manager from Unilodge in Manchester. David L., the General Manager took us to the properties close to the centre of Manchester and then onto some older properties in Salford, an area south of Manchester city centre.

I was struck by loops of razor wire above the walls of the gardens of the terraced houses, the numerous burned out buildings and the absence of people. David L. explained that there was a significant crime and drugs problem in Salford and that two of the pubs that he had managed some years before had been demolished.

"They changed from turning in a profit of £250,000 per year to being unmanageable and left derelict. They were then turned into 'crack houses' so had to be demolished."

As we passed another boarded up building David said:

" That used to be a dentist until one day the door was sledge-hammered whilst a patient was in the chair as two drug addicts wanted the dentists' needles and prescription pad."

I noticed that David R. had become very quiet and looked pale, clearly disturbed by what he was being shown. As we finished the tour, David said goodbye quickly and got into a taxi to collect his car from the hotel. I met him the following day.

"What happened to you yesterday, you were so quiet?"

"I couldn't believe Salford; it was like a war zone. Such a waste of people and property."

I agreed and said that I couldn't imagine anyone renting a room in the building we had in Salford.

"I wouldn't let my son stay there." I said.

The subsequent conversation with David resulted in a shift in our relationship. We shared our thoughts on the business and that being able to bring about an improvement or more opportunities for people was more important than business results or financial reward. We agreed that we should start to work together to think about how we might be able to effect some change in the business and in the communities in which Unite had properties to facilitate a movement away from scenes that we had seen in Salford.

The conversation following our tour of Salford was an opportunity to share some of our broader beliefs and ambitions for the business and for ourselves. We had moved away from historic, accepted definitions of business success to include aspects of social responsibility and being part of the wider communities in which we operate. Each of us had risked our more radical ideas being rejected but in that shared risk had shared a moment that created the space for broader and deeper conversation instead of those that stuck to the predominant scripts and patterns associated with our roles.

The day after this powerful conversation with David, I had another conversation that was a change in a relationship. This conversation followed the brief meeting Nick and I had had after the induction day. We met in Bristol. He seemed thoughtful and even less exuberant than in previous conversations. I sat down and started speaking;

" What's going on for you, you seem really reflective."

Nick answered as if he had been waiting for an opportunity to unload some of his thinking and feeling.

"It's been another really difficult weekend. The business has changed, we now have as many rooms in the North as the South, we have more direct-let than university agreements and I am no longer the majority shareholder. The biggest change is that we need to become a service business and not a property and construction company and we're along way from that!"

I asked what Nick thought that the difference was between the two categories of companies.

" Construction companies do not treat people well and tend to focus on blaming people when things go wrong, the working practices are old fashioned with a traditional management style, we need to be a service business with effective leadership and a different approach."

Clearly Nick had been thinking a lot about the type of business he was leading and was dissatisfied as he compared how he predicted Unite needed to be with where it was in June 2001. I listened to him speak for about thirty minutes and became aware of a shift in my experience of him. He appeared more vulnerable and less sure of what to do. He seemed uncertain and in need of support and encouragement. For the first time I became aware that Nick was learning too. He was now in the role of Chief Executive in a PLC funded by institutions, facing the need to become more service orientated and focused on profit and loss rather than measurements of net asset value. I suggested that we reconvened the meeting of Geoffrey, Simon, David, Nick and myself to discuss these significant issues for the group and to plan a way forward. Nick agreed.

Conclusion

Before describing the outcome of the subsequent conversation it is important to conclude with my reactions to my experiences from both the perspectives of predominant management thinking and of complex responsive processes. From the traditional perspective, my experiences can be seen as observing an organisation react to the pressures of new external forces, from financiers, competitors and new customers and to internal forces resulting from an increase in scale and a change in operating focus. The effect of these causes would be, from cybernetic perspective, the need for a 'new culture', structure and processes in order to control the new internal and external environments. The Chief Executive would be seen as requiring some skills development in the areas of strategic management, coaching, conflict management and the ability to give and receive feedback. From reading my descriptions of events, it would be straightforward for a cybernetic orientated management consultant to recommend a teambuilding event for the senior team, accompanied by a programme of interpersonal skills development. I would also have recommended activities to facilitate the development of a mission, vision and values for the business as it navigates the transitions from a construction business into the service sector. I would want to hold focus groups with customers to capture their experience of Unite and then plan actions with the workforce to implement planned improvements. Each of my interventions would come from the perspective of an objective observer who has created an artificial boundary around the organisation and who then acts into the bounded space to affect a pre-planned change (rationalist causality). I have described my dissatisfaction with this approach in paper one, a dissatisfaction primarily based on power being retained by formal leaders, or vicariously through representatives of the leadership body, and on the concept that changes in human relationships, or organisations that are human relating can change along a predetermined path.

Instead, my view is now that the complexity of human relating in terms of ever changing power differentials, the affects of the histories of each participant and the meaning-making processes of gesture and response make the outcomes of any interaction in the living present impossible to predict and therefore control. The only way for me to then work in an organisation that is already ever changing, is by attending to the conversations and relationships that are both my work, and when added to those of my colleagues in the organisation, are the organisation. My work is therefore not constructed nor practiced through the medium of conversation but is the conversations of which I am part, in the same way that conversations are also the work of the people with whom I engage. My own process of reaching the early conclusions that are forming my current views is set out in the first paper of this portfolio and is clearly related to my interest in and attending to the conversations of which I am part. Through developing my ability to listen, reflect and probe, whilst also being open to being listened to, reflected to and probed feels like I am increasingly present to opportunities in which patterns of relating may be being altered as conversation. This approach combined with an emotional preparedness to be present in conversation and to change and be changed in them is my work. In the examples above, I have described moments of change, or moments in which the iterated patterns of relating were transformed into never previously experienced iterations, changes that were different in the patterns of micro-interactions between people. These examples were, for me, organisational change. Not incidents that led to change, nor demonstrations of previous change, but the change itself.

The changes described from my perspective, in Unite, were not the only changes occurring in the business during the period of time considered in this paper. I would not suggest that my interventions and relationships were the sole cause of later structural and procedural changes. I would however suggest that whilst I was forming and being formed by the conversations of which I was part, those conversations created shifts in subsequent conversations, just as they were formed by other conversations that occurred prior to them. The web of relationships and

the conversations that are those relationships are too complex to associate cause and effect.

I will end this paper by recording that the subsequent conversation between Nick, David, Simon, Geoffrey and myself ended in an agreement that David and I would lead a project to achieve significant organisational change. One that would aim to make the business more customer-focused and would allow decision making to occur closer to clients and customers. In my previous studies, I would have thought that this process would have been a valuable place to begin a paper on organisational change, rather than where to end it. I would have suggested that change could begin with the project instead of recognising that change had already happened, and was, in that moment happening. My work is therefore not to create change but to be part of and draw attention to the processes that may already be changing.

(October 2001)

Reflections Towards a Synopsis (June 2002)

Paper three of this portfolio represents a movement in my participation in work and in my ability to record my experience of change. I see that my research was becoming more focused on the aspects of conversation that are transformational change instead of accepting the view of change based on rationalist causality, where change occurs as the exercise of the will of individuals. I clearly made the distinction in paper three that I see change as the movement in power relating as experienced as inclusion and exclusion rather than being imposed by someone observing from outside. I also recorded how a shift in the existing patterns of relating could be perceived as a risk to those involved, as a disturbance is caused to the status quo.

In reading paper three, I became much more engaged with the stories of my experiences and felt a visceral reaction to some of the conversations and comments recounted. I noticed how in my reaction to the writing I was able to think of subsequent examples of moments in which I perceive transformational change to have occurred. I also developed a clearer, though not complete, understanding of complex responsive processes in paper three and highlighted the emergence of meaning arising in the response to gestures rather than in the original transmission. This concept of time was also introduced where the living present includes the memories and patterns of the past as well as an anticipation of the future. This concept is developed in paper four.

Finally paper three shows my movement towards being focused on particular kinds of conversation, those in which transformational change is shown to occur. This allows me to develop my research further, to explore types of conversations that appear to promise change of this type. My research into coaching conversations in paper four explores the promise of change made by leading authors and considers how the predominant way of thinking about coaching may not provide the opportunity for the transformation that is promised. I am then able to develop

insights into coaching from the perspective of complex responsive processes to see how the practice of coaching may be developed differently by taking this radical perspective.

Paper 4

A Study of Executive Coaching and Organisational Change

July 2002

Introduction

Paper four in this portfolio provides the opportunity to focus on a significant and personal area of inquiry for me. My research focuses on my experience of Executive Coaching in organisations. I recognise that this area has emerged as the core of my research from my thinking about a number of related areas including: the nature of change in organisations: Human Resource Management and themes of power and identity.

The learning set meeting with my D.Man. colleagues in February 2002 began with a remark from my research supervisor (Douglas Griffin), that illuminated the theme of coaching. It took a month for me to process this remark and reach a level of reflection that helped me in my thinking.

> " In looking at all of your work in the portfolio so far, you seem to be focussed on coaching and not H.R."

I remember my thoughts racing as I heard this. At that time I understood myself to be writing about the philosophical and geographic movement of my work, as a newly appointed Director of Human Resources, and the meaning that I made of my interactions at work.

Doug's comment made me feel challenged and uncomfortable as I saw my portfolio and my thinking unravel. Now, some weeks later the meaning of Doug's comment has moved significantly for me. Instead of a critical challenge, I see it as a liberating remark that allowed me to recognise what has been a powerful theme in all of my work so far, that of the nature of coaching as seen from distinct perspectives, firstly as an external coach, and then moving to be a senior manager in an organisation. I also recalled how my desire to inquire into my experience of coaching was strong in my original D.Man. research proposal.

The nature of the significance of relationship will be explored, in my second project, through exploring my own organisation's experience of

change following its purchase by a larger consulting practice. My third project will aim to develop my coaching practice to reflect on the implications of working one to one with a client, in apparent isolation from the relationships with other people with whom they work. A focus on the relationships between members of a team rather than on individuals or the total group will also be explored through personal reflection and through dialogue with colleagues, my own coach and with clients. The content of the fourth project will be based on exploring the implications for my practice as a result of the emergent themes from earlier pieces of submitted work.

D.Man. research proposal (August 2000)

Following the February 2002 learning set meeting, I reread my portfolio to see if I could see the themes that Doug had articulated. I was surprised to see how heavily my work focussed on the processes of change that occurred in one-to-one relationships as I described my experiences over the past five years. As I reflected, my mind turned to a phrase that Doug had said a little later in the learning set meeting.

" Well that was an important part of your life."
I noticed my reaction to the conversation change, instead of feeling criticised and anxious about the prospect of feeling less included in later conversations, I felt more able to be present to my work and more energetic and passionate about being able to research my perception and experience of coaching.

I also re-recognised the significance of developing relationships for me. From a childhood of stuck, repetitive patterns, (see paper 1: 60), to work where I felt there was little opportunity for change or innovation (see paper 1: 61) I am eager to explore the implications for considering the processes of relating as being the focus of attention in organisations and in particular how the term coaching may be used to describe particular processes or experiences of relating.

Doug provided one such example of this way of relating for me in his words.
"...you seem to be focussed on coaching and not H.R."
In this sentence, he articulated the themes in my work that I had not yet noticed, I was able to recognise something in me that was previously unseen and to recognise Doug in his recognition of me. In myself, I saw an ongoing desire to focus on one-

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to one relationships and to consider the small details of interactions as a source of change. I recognised how, despite my new role, the processes of relating were much more significant to me than the traditional processes of recruitment, selection, training and appraisal, associated with many human resource departments. I believe that I recognised myself differently, a shift in my own identity where I became clearer that my work, in whatever setting, had focussed on the processes of relating, particularly in a way that could be described as a coaching relationship.

In Doug, I saw a greater level of sensitivity than I had experienced before, a greater attunement to the themes emerging in my work and a greater level of support to me in the articulation of his conclusion about my earlier work. I use the example of this conversation to illustrate how I am thinking about how change occurs in moment-by-moment interaction between people in a way that can neither be forecast nor controlled. The change that I refer to here is of power and identity. I had experienced Doug in a different way and was then able to relate to myself through my research differently following the conversation with Doug. The emergence of identity in the processes of interaction is a theme that I will develop as part of my research into coaching throughout this paper and in the synopsis of my studies.

The opening minutes of the learning set meeting were significant for me in a number of ways. Firstly that my inquiry took on a new dimension as I realised the continuous presence of a theme. I experienced a shift in my relationship with Doug and with myself as I momentarily felt helpless and then over time felt stronger as I noticed the drive that I had for my 'authentic question'. (Journal notes from a conversation with John O'Donogue, 2000) I also became aware of how the meaning of Doug's remark had changed over time for me. From a threatening challenge in the context of the opening remark at a learning set meeting to a supportive and liberating observation that has encouraged me to develop my thinking in an area of work and life that has been and remains important to me.

This incident is an example of an experience in conversation when there has been a shift in my experience of power relations and a movement in the meaning that I have made of experience after reflecting on it. On a larger scale, paper four has taken on new meaning for me; it now represents a major opportunity to explore the most significant aspect of my work.

The Predominant Perspective on Coaching

In this paper, I intend to explore the current literature on coaching and relate that to my own experiences of working both externally to an organisation, as an executive coach, a coachee and more recently as a manager within an organisation. When thinking of the conversations that have occurred I will reflect on how meaning has moved over time and on my experience of power-relating, risk and change, as I understand them, and how shifts in power, meaning and identity are at the heart of change. The exploration of this experience will be especially valuable in helping me to develop my understanding of coaching as complex responsive processes and in reflecting on my experience in making the transition from one of external coach to that of line manager. In additional to the predominant view of coaching as being a process discrete from the perceived day to day work in organisations, I will explore the elements of coaching that are imported into, and which already, form part of the ongoing patterns of relating between people in an organisation. In particular, I will explore how ' change' or 'transformation' is perceived to occur through coaching and consider how these phenomena may be just as relevant in encounters that are not perceived as part of a formal coaching relationship. This area of the paper will consider the implications for line managers who may decide to adopt an approach to their management that is seen as more based on coaching and less on traditional methods of 'command and control.'

Before exploring the themes that have emerged from my research. I wish to set out how coaching is described by a range of authors, before relating their experience to my own. John Whitmore who worked and wrote with former colleagues at Alexander, my former employer, describes coaching as:

The unlocking of a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them. (Whitmore, 1996: 8)

He describes his model of coaching emerging from *"a more optimistic of model of human kind than the old behaviourist view in which we are seen as empty vessels into which everything is poured."* (ibid: 9). This way of thinking, according to Whitmore *"suggests that we are more like an acorn, which contains within it the potential to be a magnificent oak tree."* (Ibid: 11) Having been trained as a coach by Whitmore in the mid 1990's, it has been interesting for me now to revisit his work and that of other leading Executive Coaches to consider how I now react to their thinking, having studied for almost three years on the D.Man. programme. I immediately notice some of the assumptions that underpin Whitmore's approach to coaching that were not obvious to me three years ago. Clearly he views the potential of an individual as being locked or stored away somewhere and thinks that if the 'correct' approach can be found that potential can be released to enhance performance at work. I am reminded of the description of formative causality offered by Stacey, Griffin and Shaw (2000) in which they say that the formative perspective is one that sees the movement into the future as the unfolding of the predetermined just as the acorn unfolds as an oak tree. With this formative thinking, Whitmore argues that the role of a coach is to unfold the enfolded as a way of accessing the hidden potential. This approach assumes that the 'self' is innate or pre-existing and not socially constructed in the way that I will argue later in this work. Whitmore continues:

To use coaching successfully, we have to adopt a far more optimistic view than usual of the dormant potential of people, all people (Ibid: 13).

Coaching then, according to Whitmore, is a process of finding and releasing the hidden talents of individuals in whom that talent resides. The process relies on the positive frame, or mental model, (Senge, 1990) with which the coachee approaches his work. Whitmore when quoting Gallwey, the author of "The Inner Game" series of books, shows this idea.

The opponent within one's own head is a more formidable than the one the other side of the net. (Gallwey, 1975: 6)

It is clear that Whitmore holds an individual centric view in which an individual coach helps in the release of the enfolded potential in the individual and that his work is based on a view that individuals have enormous potential that often remains unused unless interventions are made to help release that talent.

Before considering my reaction to Whitmore's approach, it is useful to consider how he represents a predominant view of many leading authors on coaching and to consider how his experience follows the main themes found in the history and development of organisational coaching. Basing his work on assumptions of enfolded individual potential and the need for positive self-regard, Whitmore demonstrates an approach to coaching that integrates both humanistic and cognitive psychologies. These two areas along with a psychotherapeutic and the newer dialogic approaches make up the four main psychological roots of the predominant current approaches to coaching. I shall set out a description of each before considering how they can be seen to influence the work of leading coaches.

Humanistic Psychology

In the first half of the 20th century, the predominant approach to academic psychology was 'behaviourism' which was based on the concept that man like the universe could be thought of in terms of mechanical metaphors, where any action would lead to reaction, or where a stimulus would lead to a response. This left human beings operating under a doctrine of *" essential passivity and the powerlessness of humanity"* (Dryden, 1984: 130). By the 1960's a number of psychologists shared concerns that behaviourism did not adequately address important aspects of social behaviour and individual experience. A "third wave" psychological movement developed (Merry, 1999) which supplemented the behaviourist and psychoanalytic approaches to the study of psychological processes. Later known as humanistic psychology, the approach:

stood to contrast the belief that the assumptions about human nature required by a strictly scientific approach to human behaviour communicate an image of human kind that is mechanistic, passive and most important incomplete.(Wrightsman, 1992: 11)

Carl Rogers (1961) and Abraham Maslow (1964) were amongst the first to describe a philosophy that was distinct from the psychoanalytic and behaviourist approaches in the early part of the last century. I have set out below the main themes and assumptions that make up a humanistic approach to understanding human behaviour:

- Humanistic psychology takes a phenomenological approach to the person. This means that humans behave in the world in response to our personally experienced reality. The way people experience the world is made up of their individual sensing and meaning making which is made through our unique mixture of *"needs, history and expectations"* (Merry 1999: 15). Each of us then lives in our own subjective experience that can never be completely understood by anyone else.

- A humanistic approach to understanding human nature places emphasis on appreciating peoples' personal experiences from within their own 'frame of reference', that is, from their own subjective point of view.

- Humanistic psychology takes an essentially existential[6] view of life and the process of living. It emphasises the potential for individual freedom and for individual responsibility.

- The person is always seen to be in process, always developing and never fixed, static or complete. This 'process of becoming' (Rogers, 1961) is not motivated by deficiencies but by the need for enhancement, growth and continuing development.

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[6] An existential view refers to the philosophical movement in which personal experience and responsibility is key to human existence.

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A key tenet of the humanistic approach and described by Maslow and Rogers is the concept of 'actualisation'. This is a theory that describes *"the human need to move in the general direction towards the fulfilment of potential"* (Merry, 1999: 16). Rogers described his view of actualisation as follows:

> *We are, in short, dealing with an organism which is always motivated, is always up to something, always seeing. So I would reaffirm, perhaps even more strongly after the passage of a decade, my belief the there is one central source of energy in the human organism; that is the function of the whole organism rather that some portion of it; and that it is perhaps best conceptualised as a tendency towards fulfilment, towards actualisation, towards that maintenance and enhancement of the organism.*
>
> (Rogers, 1963: 24)

The link between humanistic psychology and coaching is taken up by Rogers where he says that the *'successful coach nurtures the client'* and offers what Rogers describes as *'unconditional acceptance and warmth.'* (Zeus and Skiffington, 2000: 10)

The development of latent potential which is achieved by working with the coach is rooted in Maslow's model of a hierarchy of human needs, developed in the 1950's. He studied people who were seen to be mature, successful and fulfilled and concluded that human beings only need to overcome their *'inner blocks'* (Whitmore, 1996: 102) to develop and mature. Maslow's hierarchy of needs describes different categories of requirements of humans which once met motivate the individual to meet their needs at the next level of the hierarchy. The needs are categorised as food and water, shelter, and safety, belonging, esteem from others, self esteem and self actualisation" (ibid: 103)

In organisations where the most basic needs are taken as being met, the focus of coaching is placed on the development of the individual to clarify skills, knowledge, purpose, values and the *"factors leading to a more fulfilled life"* (ibid: 113). These are explored and developed into goals to be achieved in conjunction with the coach. It is significant to notice that Maslow uses the term self-actualising rather that self-actualisation to imply that the fulfilled, fully developed

state is never achieved but is seen as an ongoing journey towards that point of completion.

Whether in the context of sport, education or business, the most common underpinning approach to coaching comes from the humanistic psychology of Rogers and Maslow (Rogers, 1980; Whitmore, 1996) The application of this work can be seen in the desire of coaches to help develop self understanding and self development with their clients so as to ' *achieve their full potential*' (Landsberg, 1997: 10).

Cognitive Psychology

The humanistic approach includes the consideration of the subjective experience of the client as key to the movement towards change. The cognitivist approach develops this further to work to change the client's interpretation and meaning that has been made of an experience so as to reinterpret and understand the experience in a different way. The basic tenet of this approach is that it is a person's beliefs that influence how they feel and behave, rather than events.

In coaching the cognitive approach is seen in its related form of constructivist therapy, where how an individual constructs his or her own reality of an event determines the behaviours that will be demonstrated in response to the situation. The constructivist model underpins many related approaches and is at the core of the work of authors including Argyris (1992), Senge (1990) and Covey (1983,1992). The aim of the approach is to alter the coachee's perception of events and therefore in their reaction to those events to provide alternative ways of thinking of problems and events. For example, Covey advises his readers to 'think win-win' in business negotiations instead of the predominant 'win-lose' approach to generate novel solutions to problems. At its simplest, even thinking of a problem as not an obstacle but an opportunity is an example of 'reframing' that may be seen to lead to an improved outcome. I have set out below three examples of psychological practices that aim to explore a different way of resolving issues

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through changing the mental model within which the issues were originally explored.

i) Constructivist Therapy – Based on constructivist learning principles, constructivist narrative therapy is seen as a way of removing problems, or self-limiting beliefs by rewriting the individual's story or biography. In executive coaching, the technique is used to invite clients to rewrite their own story in order to *'celebrate their gifts and abilities'* (Zeus and Skiffington, 2000: 11). Skiffington describes using this approach in a way that allows clients to *'transform their inner reality, to become more mindful and are better able to dictate their own stories'* (ibid: 11)

ii) Transactional Analysis – (Berne, 1937; Harris, 1994). This approach helps people identify their ego states, as parent, adult or child, and focuses on evaluating how they currently function to find strategies for improvement to achieve a *"more adaptive, mature and realistic attitude to life"* (Berne, 1937). This approach is particularly applied in coaching to help develop interpersonal skills and to resolve conflict.

iii) Neurolinguistic Programming (Kostere and Malatesta, 1989) – This approach has been used in coaching since the early 1990's and involves the linking of thinking, language and behaviour. This technique is used in coaching with the intention of improving relationships and managing thoughts and emotions to lead to a desired and pre-planned outcome.

A cognitive perspective is strongly evident in the work of Peter Senge. He draws heavily on Argyris, arguing that many of the problems experienced at an individual, family, organisational and even national level occur as a result of the underlying mental models that " *not only determine how we make sense of the world but also how we take action*" (Senge, 1990: 175). He uses the example of the Cold War arms race in the 1970's where the USA believed the USSR to be a threat and therefore increased its arsenal, the USSR believing the USA to be a

threat acted similarly. The effect of these mental models was to increase the range and number of weapons aimed at each country and to increase the tension felt in international relations.

At an individual level, coaching can aim to provoke alternative ways of thinking about relationships or problems, thereby altering the mental model and leading to a more successful outcome. Argyris describes the underlying mental model as the 'theory in use' (Argyris, 1992: 89). This is made distinct from the 'espoused theory' (ibid: 90) which is the one that may be voiced by the client but is different from the true underlying approach that is directing behaviours in a particular situation.

Approaches to coaching that are derived from cognitive psychology involve the exploration of the underlying views of a coachee by way of raising awareness of these beliefs so that changes may be made to the 'theories in use', 'mental model' or 'framing'. This is seen to lead to increased choices and changes in the way that a coachee may proceed to resolve an issue.

Psychoanalysis and Psychodynamic Therapy

Largely influenced by Freud in the exploration and reinterpretation of past experiences, (Dryden, 1984: 23), this therapeutic approach aims to uncover unconscious motivation and searches for deep causes and patterns of behaviour that may have their root in childhood experiences. In the United States, many coaches are trained in psychodynamic therapy[7]. The therapy emphasises the importance of assessing the underlying dynamics surrounding certain behaviours. Dryden describes the therapy as helping the client *"re-experience old conflicts but with a new ending"* (Dryden, 1984: 32). He also describes some of the intentions of the Freudian psychotherapist in relating to patients: the therapist should be neutral but not indifferent, firm but flexible and relate to the patient in four ways,

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[7] A Centre for Creative Leadership Study (1996) showed that 61% of US business coaches said that their training in or knowledge of psychodynamic concepts significantly influenced their work with clients.

'creating a working alliance', 'as authority figure',' as someone with their 'own neuroses'[8] and fourthly as 'a real person'. (Ibid: 33). Guntrip (1968) suggested that psychotherapy can range from intensive levels of exploration and discovery to *'psychoanalytical first-aid'* (Guntrup, 1968: 275). Somewhere towards the first-aid end of that spectrum is the 'Brief Focal Psychotherapy' developed by Malan (1980)[9] at the Tavistock Clinic. Here a series of focussed sessions are held between therapist and patient with the aim of achieving goals as agreed at the outset of the programme. I am reminded here of the structure of a programme of coaching where goals are agreed and some objective assessment or diagnostic carried out at the start of the programme.

Whilst the relationship with the Freudian therapist may be characterised as neutral, the Kleinian psychotherapist will aim to develop a therapeutic alliance *"characterised by an intimate, real and close working alliance."* (Dryden, 1987: 61), more in line with the relationships described by the dialogic approach to coaching as set out below.

Whilst recognising the psychodynamic training of many coaches, Zeus and Skiffington make the simple distinction that coaching is frequently *'future-focussed'* (Zeus and Skiffington, 2000: 11) in outlook whilst therapy can involve the exploration of past experiences as a way of understanding the present and having a better understanding of future choices and behaviours.

A Dialogic Approach

Whilst humanistic authors approach their work from the perspective of helping the individual to change in some way, a different approach has been described in the last quarter of the 20th century. This new perspective is based on the idea that change is not an individual phenomenon but a process that emerges out of the encounter, or relationship, between coach and coachee. McKewan (2000) distances

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[8] Neurosis is defined as a *"relatively mild psychological disorder"* (Collins English Dictionary).
[9] From Whitmore (1996).

herself from the concept of coaching as being two individuals working together to solve the problems of the coachee. She advocates a view and approach based on the dialogic school of writers, originating with Martin Buber's ' Ich-du' (1956). She makes the distinction between the individual centric approach which she calls 'I-it' relating to indicate a more objective attitude of a coach working with a coachee and the person to person relating of ' I- thou'.[10]

> *The dialogic approach proposes that the potential for change and self development arises not through you, the coach, nor even through the client alone but through what emerges in the meeting or existential encounter between the two of you. Development evolves from the inter-human or inter-subjective realm of the dialogic. The realm of the dialogic does not refer to speech in the ordinary sense but to the fact that human beings are essentially relational.*
>
> (McKewan, 2000)

The dialogue based writers (Bohm, 1976; Isaacs 1999; Lewin and Regine, 1999) take the view that by focussing on the processes of relating between people and by developing a range of improved behaviours, for example, listening, respecting, suspending and voicing (Isaacs, 1999) a more harmonious way of working and being together can be created. Isaacs also proposes that by cultivating these behaviours one learns to be open to *" the possibility that what is happening is unfolding from a common source"* (Isaacs, 1999: 117).

The concept of tapping into something greater or larger than the present interaction is a theme in the work of Lewin and Regine (1999) who extend Bortoft's (1996) analogy of a buttercup plant to represent a common source that once tapped onto spreads and connects throughout an organisation.

> *Like the buttercup, certain behaviours and ways of thinking took root, grew and spread in these organisations. Even though the companies were very different and their behaviours were qualitatively different they all came to a similar order and gave rise to a particular quality of culture. It was the same buttercup in all these companies.*
>
> (Lewin and Regine, 1999: 273-4)

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[10] 'I-Thou' is used to translate Buber's 'Ich-du'. The translation of 'I-thou' has a rather more archaic tone than the more intimate tone implied by the German.

Bohm offers the concept of 'the spirit of dialogue' that when present will " *make possible the flow of meaning* " (1996: 6) whilst McKewan (2000) suggests the possibility of *"experiencing your common humanity"*. Each of these authors recommend a way of behaving that will lead to a change in what happens in organisations and how changes in organisations occur. Each however assumes that new behaviours give access to some external force for good, whether the buttercup, the spirit of dialogue or common humanity.

A further distinction can then be highlighted between the underlying causalities in humanistic and dialogic based approaches to coaching. In humanistic based coaching, change is perceived to occur as a result of the unfolding of the already enfolded, or, the release of potential or talents that had been dormant until their release whilst working with the coach. This way of thinking about the occurrence of change can be described as formative causality (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000: 52: fig 3.3) where the movement into the future *"reveals, realizes or sustains a mature or final form of identity, of self. This is actualisation of form or self that is already there in some sense. "*

The dialogic model with its reliance on an external force for good and the emergence of change as a result tapping into the external common source can be described as being derived from a rationalist causality. Here, humans decide to suspend their existing assumptions and in some way are seen as then being able to gain access to 'the pool of common meaning' (Wheatley, 1999: 40), 'the spirit of dialogue' or 'the experience of common humanity'. It is as if by deciding to enter dialogue change occurs due to the exercise of some spiritual or mystical phenomenon. Whilst not wishing to discount the presence of such forces my research indicates that there is another approach to considering how change occurs as the processes of relating before having to rely on an external force for good.

Whilst recognising the influence of psychology and psychotherapy and in some cases spiritual practice on the development of coaching, most authors distance

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themselves from an over reliance on therapeutic interventions. Levison (1996: 116) cautions that it is important for coaches to avoid being becoming psychotherapeutic, *"because time does not allow them to develop and deal with the transference."*[11] He claims that Executive Coaching requires the coach to differentiate coaching from therapy but still to be informed by *'basic psychological skills and insights.'* (Zeus and Skiffington, 1999: 11). Whitmore recommends limiting the depth of the work with a client and where necessary *' bringing in a professional with the necessary skills' (Whitmore, 1996: 23).* Landsberg points to the use of psychotherapeutic approaches which explore early childhood experiences, as having the potential to adversely alter the relationship between coach and coachee which can be especially unhelpful when the coaching is between employees in an organisation instead of with an external coach. (Landsberg, 1997: 81). Whilst both recognise the relatedness of coaching to psychotherapy and warn against importing psychotherapy into coaching, Zeus and Skiffington provide a useful summary of distinctions they see between the two areas.

- *Therapists rarely give advice, whereas coaches are free to make suggestions, advise, make requests and confront the individual.*

- *Therapists tend to work on the resolution of old pains and old issues, whereas coaches acknowledge their historical impact but do not explore these in depth. Coaches are more inclined to reflect proactive behaviours and move the person forward out of their feelings into action.*

- *Therapy tends to deal with dysfunction, either vague or specific whereas coaching moves the functional person forward to greater success and refers clients on for clinical issues.* [Whitmore makes this same distinction by saying that *'coaching is about proactive issues, whilst therapy is a reactive process' (Whitmore 1996: 24)].*

- *Therapy tends to focus on past-related feelings whereas coaching is about setting goals and forward action.*

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[11] Transference is described as the ' displacement of patterns of feelings and behaviours originally experienced with significant figures of one's childhood, to individuals in one's current relationships." (Whitmore, 1997: 46)

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- *Therapy explores resistance and negative transference whereas coaching attempts to rephrase complaints into goals.*

- *Therapy is about progress, whereas coaching is about performance.*

<div align="right">(Zeus and Skiffington, 2000: 12)</div>

Executive Coaching – A Brief History

Having explored some of the psychological roots of coaching, it is important how, from these sources, coaching has developed into a recognised discipline in its own right. I will explore the development of Executive Coaching and consider how it has developed into one of the predominant interventions in US and UK organisations. I will also set out how I have developed a different way of thinking about coaching. The view that I will describe is informed by a different way of thinking about the source of change where a relational perspective replaces the individual centric approach adopted by predominant authors. My view is one where the self is perpetually socially constructed with the potential for both continuity and transformation at the same time. This view is fundamentally different to the enfolded self, described in the predominant literature as summarised below.

Zeus and Skiffington (2000) suggest that coaching is *" essentially a conversation – a dialogue between coach and coachee. (ibid: 3)* Using their broad definition, they suggest that coaching has *"probably been around since pre-history" (ibid: 3)*. As coaching conversations feature elements such as clarifying values, supporting, encouraging and planning new ways of acting, it is and has been embedded in our everyday interactions and conversations. However, when taken into an organisational context coaching reflects the amalgam of different disciplines including sports psychology, psychotherapy, teaching, training and counselling.

Some of the basic principles of coaching, including those described and taught by Whitmore and Hemery (Whitmore, 1996) come from their sporting achievements, as a motor racing driver and Olympic gold medallist respectively. These views

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involve developing the individual's personal best, keeping focussed on the future and working through any obstacles or self-limiting beliefs. The development of sports psychology from the 1960's occurred at a similar time to the development of principles of adult learning in the United States. Based on constructivist learning theory (Dryden, 1987), in which the individual rewrites, reframes or reconstructs their experience or 'biography' in order to transform their 'inner reality' to work towards a more enabled and powerful future. It was this model of learning that led to the development of 'life skills coaching' in the 1960's. Adkins and Rosenberg (cited in Zeus and Skiffington, 2000) recognised that traditional models of education through teaching were not effective when used with disadvantaged adults, as attention was not paid to the emotional and cognitive barriers to learning. The life skills model of 1:1 coaching based on constructivist theory and Maslow's theory of human motivation (Whitmore, 1996) was adopted to help disadvantaged adults in Canada as part of a public sector 'New Start' initiative. Since its inception in New York, some years later, life-skills coaching has been developed in the U.S., Canada and Australia, but to a lesser extent in Europe. However from the mid-1980's coaching, applying a humanistic philosophy, has been taken up by private sector organisations (Downey, 2002). The comparison with high achieving sports stars working with a coach may have helped coaching be seen as attractive by senior executives who may have not been attracted to other forms of training or executive development. Coaching can be seen as enhancing excellent performance instead of remedying some deficiency of skills or other under performance.

The migration into the corporate context occurred in parallel to the growth of leadership development programmes in the 1980's and with the increasing complexity and change in corporate life. As part of leadership development programmes, coaching was seen as a useful support to *"facilitate the integration of learning into the day-to-day work of executives"* (Hicks and Peterson, 1996: 3). My own experience of the structure of executive coaching, both as coachee and coach is that an external coach is selected to work on an agreed agenda of planned improvements with a client. The coach, who is usually external to the organisation in which the coachee works, agrees a series of meetings, often a series of six, one

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to one sessions to work on the agreed agenda which will include the achievement of specified quantifiable or observable objectives. I have also noticed that as well as the growth in the number of external coaches being engaged, there has been an increase in organisations aiming to develop the coaching ability of their own employees as part of programmes of 'management development' or 'organisational change'. I have worked with a range of clients in this way, including Whitbread, Marks and Spencer, Barclays Bank, Mars and McKinsey. My experience is supported by the Industrial Society's research (Downey, 2002) where thirty-eight percent of organisations had implemented the means of developing the coaching skills of line managers.[12]

In each of these programmes the underpinning, but unspoken, assumptions were clear; Managers in organisations will develop their skills in order to 'release the potential' of the people around them, and in particular the people who report to them in a hierarchical relationship.

It is valuable to make distinctions about what coaching is and what it is not before describing how other coaching specialists view their work and their roles with the people they coach. I will develop my own views of coaching later in this paper but will first set out other related approaches as a way of making distinctions between my own experience of coaching and the views set out by predominant writers. The two activities that I will comment on here are mentoring and management consulting.

Mentoring

Often the term mentoring is used interchangeably with coaching. There are a number of key distinctions to be made between the characteristics of the predominant approach to coaching and the characteristics of mentoring. The most

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[12] An Industrial Society survey (Downey, 2002) also showed that 79% of organisations contained some form of recognised coaching activity.

important that I have seen in my work is that the underpinning assumption of mentoring is that skills or knowledge will be transferred from the more experienced mentor to the more junior 'mentee'. This should be compared with coaching view of an unlocking of the potential that resides within the coachee. Whilst in both disciplines an individual centric approach to the location of talent predominates, it is the location of the source of change that differs. It resides in the knowledge and experience of the mentor and is seen to be transferred to the mentee rather than the unfolding of the coachees potential in a coaching relationship.

The concept of the transfer of experience is supported by a number of definitions of mentoring:

A natural way of passing on knowledge, skills and experience to others by someone who is usually older and wiser with broad life experience and specific expertise.   (Lewis, 1996: 4)

Mentoring has its origins in the concept of apprenticeship, when the older, more experienced individual passed down his knowledge of how the task was done and how to operate in the commercial world.
(Parsoe, 1992: 9)

A mentor is one who offers knowledge, insight, perspective or wisdom that is especially useful to the other person.
(Shea, 1996: 6)

The architecture of coaching and mentoring relationships are frequently similar: - monthly sessions using questioning and listening skills, challenge and support is provided to the individual to assist with the achievement of pre-agreed objectives.

Mentoring however is usually more focused on career enhancement, where the mentor often has experience at a senior management level and has knowledge of the individuals, relationships and environment in which the mentee works. Mentors often have influence over the career decisions affecting the mentee. A less overt aspect of mentoring is that mentors can reinforce the patterns of relating within the organisation " *conveying and instilling the standards, norms and values*

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of the organisation of profession. Coaching is more about exploring the individuals standards, values and vision. " (Zeus and Skiffingham, 2000: 18)

Management Consulting

Whilst there are numerous models of and approaches to management consulting, the most significant difference between the predominant approaches to consulting and coaching is in the perception of the location of the phenomenon that will be the source of any change. In consulting this is the knowledge or specific skill that the consultant has which is required by individuals within an organisation. This may include an ability to rapidly gather and analyse data in order to make specific recommendations. The consultant is seen as an expert in an industry, profession or discipline whilst a coach is 'expert' in conversation, interpersonal skills and communication, regardless of industry sector.

Coaching Case Studies – The Predominant Approach

The predominant approach to coaching, as I have set out above is that the coach operates from a humanistic stance believing that the coachee has more potential than is currently manifest in current work performance. There will be a view that the talent resides in the individual and that this can be released through an effective coaching relationship. The coach may use a variety of constructivist techniques in order to facilitate the client to 'reframe' his experience, in a way that provides the possibilities for new ways of acting and thinking.

Here are two case studies provided by different authors that I use to demonstrate the fundamental assumptions that are being made in their work. I will then contrast their case studies with one of my own, to begin to draw the key distinctions that differentiate the findings from my research from the predominant perspectives.

"The Self-Awareness Model"

N.W. is a 40-year-old executive in a large financial services organisation. He was assigned a coach because of the frequent 'blow ups' with colleagues. The interview and assessment procedure indicated that some form of relaxation and arousal control would be beneficial. N.W. was initially resistant to the intervention. The coach recognised that N.W. lacked self-awareness, in that he was unable to appreciate how his colleagues responded to his outbursts. To him, these flare ups were brief, not personal, and he never held a grudge. Through feedback, from colleagues and role- playing, he began to see how his behaviour might impact on others. Coaching conversations also revealed that N.W. considered that it was his drive and forcefulness that got him to his current position. Tampering with that could make him lose the edge. The process of developing some self-awareness was rather protracted and occupied numerous coaching sessions. However, the coach realised that unless N.W. understood why he behaved in the way he did, and that previous winning behaviours were now seen as liabilities, no real change would occur. Over 10 sessions, N.W.'s self–awareness and self-understanding increased sufficiently to allow N.W. and the coach to develop goals, strategies and action plan to deal with his anger situations.

(Zeus and Skiffinton, 2000: 75-6)

"The Supporter or Enabler"

Clare loved her job and was doing very well but felt that her immediate manager was very patronising towards her. She was in her mid-thirties and her manager was only ten years or so older but she felt that he didn't treat her with the same respect and seriousness he did her mainly male colleagues.

The first step was to determine whether Clare's concerns were justified – in other words was the manager indeed acting in a patronising way. After considerable discussion, my colleague agreed that the complaint was justified and that Clare would need to address the problem. The next step was to ensure that Clare wasn't giving her manager any reason to be patronising, that is, that she was acting professionally at all times. When my colleague was convinced that Clare was in no way at fault, they then decided to consider the alternatives. After much debate they decided that Clare would have to meet with her manager to express her concerns so that the issue would be out in the open. They discussed the pros and cons of this plan and decided that it was the best course of action. Clare confronted her manager, who denied that he had been in anyway patronising, but gradually the situation improved. (Bolt, 2000: 62-3)

These two extracts illuminate some of the key assumptions made by the predominant writers. In both case studies the coach is seen as the objective observer, either recognising the lack of self-awareness, in the first example or deciding if the client's concerns were justified in the second. By taking the position of objective observer, the authors distance themselves from their own part in the co-creation of the coaching conversation and the patterns of interaction that make up the experience of coaching for both coach and coachee. Whilst speaking of the need for a *'participative approach'* to coaching, Bolt shows his perception of his role of observer in his phrase:

In general, the coach needs to take control of the sessions to ensure that they are useful and relevant and that time is not wasted. (Bolt, 2000: 23)

Here he sees himself as taking a stance of evaluating his perception of the success of each conversation without recognising the part that his evaluation may play in the dynamics and power relating in the conversation with his client. For example, in the case study with 'Clare', the sense of being patronised may just as easily surface in her being questioned by the coach to ensure *' that she was in no way at*

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fault' in making her original comments. Bolt does not seem aware, in the case study nor his accompanying commentary of the continuous processes of relating that are as much part of the coaching sessions as they are in day to day interactions at work. It is as if he accepts that it is possible to isolate coaching, in time and location from the ongoing patterns of communication and relationship that are being investigated in the coaching.

In both case studies, issues or problems are located in individuals: a lack of self-awareness in the first client or in the second, the manager being patronising. This view of a fixed identity and patterning of relationships does not fit with my developing understanding of the co-creation of meaning and identity through on-going communicative interaction. For example, in Bolt's case study the meaning of the 'patronising' gestures arises in 'Clare's response to them, and in turn, leads to the calling forth of other responses in her manager. The relationship between Clare and her manager will have been co-created by the interactions that form and are formed by their relationship in the context of the other patterns of interaction from their experiences of themselves and others. More simply, it is not possible to isolate and judge her manager's 'patronising' behaviour without considering how this interpretation emerged from the relationship between Clare and her manager. Also, the process of evaluating Clare to see if she contributed to being 'patronised' may also have an effect on the patterns of interaction between her and her coach that are not considered in Bolt's interpretation of the sessions. Similarly, in Zeus and Skiffington's case study, N.W. is seen as needing a remedial intervention to develop his self-awareness. Attention is not paid to how his 'outbursts' are co-created nor on the differentials of power that influence the iterations of identity that make up the relationships between N.W. and colleagues. It is as if the clients in both case studies have been isolated from the context of the relationships that they form, and are formed by, to be examined by an external coach who objectively diagnoses the issues to be addressed.

This approach, combined with the suggestion, in both examples, that 'feedback' will increase the likelihood of removing the problems, either through confrontation

or carefully designed instruments reminds me of the description of cybernetic systems, as set out in paper one, (page 62). The coach takes the role of 'controller of the thermostat' in order to bring behaviours within parameters of acceptability.

In neither example, nor elsewhere, do the authors give an impression of the dynamic, fluid nature of the conversations of which they were part. Attention is not placed on the movement in power where, in the first case study, the manager who may have felt powerful and safe in his role may have come to realise the threat to his inclusion in the organisation. Nor is the sense of risk explored in the second example where, by challenging her manager, Clare too could have been expelled from the organisation or could have found herself in a relationship with her manager that she found increasingly difficult.

Another common aspect of both case studies and related commentaries is that meaning is fixed in time. In the first example N.W. is 'difficult' until he does something differently to show his movement away from that label. The same is true of Clare's 'patronising' manager in the second example. My experience of making meaning differs from that presented by Zeus and Skiffinton and Bolt, and in other examples by Whitmore (1996), Landsberg (1997), Whitworth, Kimsey-House and Sandahl (1998). In the opening of this paper, I provide an example from my own experience in my learning set where the meaning I made of a conversation shifted over time, from being criticised to feeling liberated. Nothing in the words of the conversation have changed, but the meaning I made of it over time changed significantly as I experienced a shift in power and feelings of inclusion that made up that shift in the process of relating. The movement of meaning, when considered as a circular process, can be seen to offer other insights into coaching not yet offered in the predominant literature.

In considering the underlying causalities of each case study, it is clear that in both cases that desired outcomes are set early on in the coaching relationships. Clare's coach has the goal of helping her to develop strategies to stop her manager from being patronising whilst Clare's goal is to implement the selected strategies. The

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ability of a person to set clear goals is shown again in NW's case study. The coach decides that NW needs to develop his self-awareness and sets about to focus on this in the coaching conversations. NW, after some time, decides to work on ways to manage his anger. Stacey, Griffin and Shaw (2000: 52) describe the setting of goals, as having a rationalist causality, where change occurs in order to move towards chosen goals as the "*rational exercise of human freedom*" (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000: fig. 3:3). In addition to rationalist causality, the case studies show the assumption of the presence of formative causality as it is believed that the potential of each coachee will be unfolded to allow them both to achieve improved relationships and higher standards of work performance. I have developed the concept of causality as it applies to coaching in the synopsis of this portfolio and will set out how my own view relies on neither rationalist nor formative causality to explain the process of change as I have it experienced in coaching relationships.

A Case Study Informed by Complex Responsive Processes

From my own research, through my work and reflection, as an external coach and as a senior manager, I have developed an interest in a way of thinking and writing about coaching that is different from the predominant approaches. I will use examples of my experience to draw attention to these differences. The two case studies that I have set out highlight the predominant approach to coaching. I will first of all set out one of my coaching experiences in a similar way and will then describe the same relationship as influenced by my experience as a participant on the D.Man. programme.

Adrian was Head of a supply chain operation for an international food production organisation. He had been offered coaching by his Chief Executive who felt that all of his senior team might benefit from a programme of executive coaching with an external coach. Adrian had recently been promoted and had been asked to lead a major reorganisation of the UK business so he decided to take up the offer of coaching support. An objective of the programme was to be able to ensure that Adrian was able to effectively persuade his colleagues of the need for change in the business. He however felt that his peers did not have the same commitment to the business as he did and was frustrated by his interactions with fellow board members.

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Through the coaching conversations, Adrian developed an awareness of how his approach to his colleagues may be a part of the issue in their engagement with him. Over time Adrian developed an ability to be more open with his colleagues who responded similarly to him. The effect of this was an agreement to establish a team to work on the reorganisation and Adrian was able to gain input from his colleagues in order to design a better overall solution for his business.

This description of a programme of coaching is presented in the style of predominant writers. By taking this stance I have located Adrian's difficulty in persuading his colleagues in him and have suggested that by tapping into some as yet untapped potential he was able to find a new approach to working with his colleagues. I also imply that by 'reframing' his relationship with his colleagues he was able to attain a more successful commercial result. What is however missing from the description is the experience of how these changes that seem like cybernetic outcomes of the process actually occurred. We are not invited into the relationship between coach and coachee and are therefore unable to relate to the changes that emerged from the coaching experience. In order to provide an example of the richer and more dynamic experience of coaching I have set out below an extract of my session notes from the coaching conversation that I experienced as being a moment in which transformational change occurred.

The August session provided significant learning for both Adrian and myself. At the beginning of the session Adrian said that he wanted techniques to "get more out of people" when he spoke to them, and in particular when he spoke to his colleagues on the board about the need to improve the management of the supply chain. Initially he said that he wanted to get more out but to still direct the flow of conversation and the outputs but then reflected and said that in controlling the conversation he would only hear back six versions of his own conclusions, but he recognised the risk of keeping the conversation open to the views of other people.

As he requested a list of tools to help get people to be more open in conversations with him I asked Adrian if he had noticed anything that John or I had done to 'encourage' him to speak in our work together. As I asked this Adrian looked at his watch and said that he didn't know any techniques. I stayed silent and he came up with that I seemed to use silence to encourage him to speak and that I said: 'What else?'

I then described some other ways that I had seen encourage people to speak; open questions, open non-verbal communication, listening etc.. In saying this I felt as if the gap between my client and me was widening. I believe I was experiencing his disinterest and my own.

A shift began to occur when I asked Adrian to do an exercise with me. I asked him to only ask me open questions. He agreed but his first two questions were:

"Did you have a good flight?" and, " Do you enjoy your work?"

The conversation flowed after his third question." What do you enjoy about your work?" I replied: " I enjoy the variety of working with a range of people in different clients and I am fascinated by the similarities that I see in the different places that I work."

"What similarities?"

I said. "I seem to notice ways of behaving and of relating between people which seem to get in the way of them interacting together beyond a repetitive pattern".

Adrian asked, " What problems does this cause organisations?"

I remember feeling as if I was taking a risk but in the moment said:

" Well in Bravo Foods, I suspect that there is a distance between the board members so that conversations are never really started or finished. I suspect that conversations are held around tasks and that if there is a problem, finding someone to blame becomes a major priority."

I noticed that I was leaning forward and that Adrian sat forward and leant on the table, listening.

"What kind of problems do you think this causes?"

"I guess that some issues might be that the function heads work in isolation from their colleagues and that the board doesn't represent the horizontal way of working that you are trying to generate in other parts of the

business. People may feel that it's better not to take a risk and that as a result innovation and creativity are low. I imagine that the management of people is not seen to be a strength although there are probably a number of celebrated examples of heroic recovery once things have gone wrong."

I noticed that Adrian's breathing had deepened and I felt that I was in a place that felt significantly risky, as if to say more would be a further challenge to the status quo but to go back was no longer possible.

I was asked: " How would you sort some of this out?"

I was in full flow:

"I'm not sure of how I would want to 'sort this' or what the outcomes might be if we tried, but there are certainly some conversations that I would want to enter into and in particular I would want to draw attention to what is happening in the moment rather than exploring what had happened historically or in planning the future. The first would be to ask the board as a whole to enter into a conversation together around how they perceive how they are working together and collectively delivering their responsibilities as Directors of the firm. I would also want to alter the agenda for November's event; I would remove the team building 'boat trip' and use the time to explore the real issues that the board feel are blocking their progress. I also suggest that as the development of managers of the future is a significant part of the long term supply chain strategy that you work closely with the H. R. Director to explore how by working together you both have a better chance of achieving your plans."

In each of my responses to Adrian's questions I was moving further away from the approach to coaching that I had historically used. I felt much more like a participant in a joint enquiry and less like an observer of a client. Both Adrian and I experienced a shift in our conversation and were entirely present to it.

As I discussed with Adrian later, the common reference was that we were both aware of the lack of true conversation, or authentic relationship in the Board of Bravo and that the board were not serving the business well. Also, that by naming

this difficulty an opportunity had been created to start to engage more freely in our experience.

Power as Differentiating Patterns

The predominant authors focus on the architecture of a coaching programme or the skills of coaching that can be seen to lead to change. They also focus on outputs of coaching such as increased self-awareness (Landsberg, 1997), self understanding (Zeus and Skiffington, 2000) improved leadership (Whitmore, 1996), reduced conflict (Bolt, 2000), increased interpersonal effectiveness (Peterson and Hicks, 1998) and career planning (Whitworth et al, 1998). I have taken the perspective of looking at the detail of the processes of relating that are coaching as a way of understanding the movements that occur in the iterations of these processes that can be described as 'change'. In particular, the description above sets out the movements that occurred in the moment-by-moment interactions between Adrian and myself. I have not located change in him but in the differentiating patterns of power that shifted between us as our conversation developed. The movements that I refer to here are differentiating the structure of power-relating as identity between us[13]. The differentiating patterns of power moved during our conversation and were experienced by me as changes in the iteration of identity. In thinking about power as a pattern rather than as being fixed and located in an individual, it becomes possible to reflect on the movements in the patterning of power as ongoing iterations of identity in the complex responsive processes of relating. By suddenly having more power in relation to another, one's identity can be seen to alter, a change in the relativity creating a movement in the shared experience of identity between the participants in conversation. In order for such shifts to occur, in my experience, some kind of risk taking has to be called forth which may lead to the experience of the exclusion of the person who embodies the risk from elements of the ongoing conversation.

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[13] The concept of differentiating patterns of power is developed in the synopsis to this portfolio and is based on Elias' concept of 'Figuration'(1991) as a way of describing the interdependence of human relating.

In the example with Adrian, I risked criticism and possible exclusion due to my movement away from the pattern of being an objective coach to describing my subjective experience of the patterns of relating that I had noticed in the client organisation. Similarly, in paper three, I described taking a risk with my Chief Executive when he described some of our colleagues as 'crap'. In challenging his comparison I risked being excluded from his inner cabinet and potentially from the organisation. It is however in those moments of intolerance and risk that a shift in the pattern of relating occurs. This movement is experienced as a disturbance in the differentiating patterns of power that were previously configuring and being configured by the processes of relating between participants. The iteration of identity occurs simultaneously with the movement of power differentials and can be seen as the same phenomenon – identity being a relational process that simultaneously forms and is formed by the movements of power in the processes of relating. The example below provides a further illustration of the fluidity of power, meaning and identity and describes a conversation with a consultant, Claire, whilst I was employed by Whitbread Beer Co.

"What will you do after you leave BeerCo?"

" I'm not sure yet, but I think that it will be in some form of consulting." I hesitated, waiting for a response.

" Um, have you done anything about that yet?"

"Not yet."

" Well it won't happen then."

I felt a little irritated by the response but seized what felt like an opportunity.

"OK, let me do something about it now. If you know of any opportunities in Alexander, will you let me know?"

Claire smiled.

" Yes, of course."

We returned to our desserts.

One-way of making sense of this interaction was that a consultant approached a client about joining the consultancy, another, that the client asked a consultant

about work. From the perspective taken in this portfolio, this extract can also be described in other ways.

I experienced a transformative movement of the differentiating patterns of power in this encounter. My own relationship with Claire included her being employed by my company as a consultant, this, in my perception had the effect of her wishing to provide a good experience to her client. At the same time, Claire's team were helping us develop new skills and I was keen to demonstrate working differently with my colleagues from BeerCo and with the external 'experts'. Within the first few hours of being together, I had experienced a shift in how I related to the consultants from thinking, ' go on then, impress me' to ' this is really interesting, how can I find out more'. The movement in the patterns of power differentiating between consultant and client were experienced for me as a shift in conversation between Claire and me.

The dinner conversation was made richer because of the backdrop of our role relationship as client and consultant. The meaning of Claire's question " What do you think you'll do after you leave BeerCo?" emerged as " Would you like to speak about the possibility of joining Alexander?" in my response to it. A range of other meanings could just have easily emerged including, " which part of Whitbread do you think you may move to next?" Or, " How long do you think you will remain in your current role?"

The continuing movement of power differentiating is marked in these few sentences. From the more stable iteration of client-consultant the opening question can be seen as Claire taking some tentative risk in approaching a client and therefore shifting power from her. My response caused another movement in the patterns of power. By suggesting that my next move may be into consulting, I had admitted thoughts of leaving and that my next role would be outside of the current organisation. This felt like a risk in a very stable organisation where many people had long service. Claire's statement " Well, that will never happen then…" felt like a provocation to act, I rose to the perceived challenge, as I would have done in my

youth after being told that I couldn't do something. Power differentials moved again as I risked asking directly to be advised of any positions in Alexander. I risked ridicule at the idea that I could ever be included in the cadre of Alexander consultants.

In describing this interaction from the perspective of the movement of power, I notice the impression of rather staccato shifts, as if the power moved at the end of each gesture and response in our conversation. My lived experience of those moments is different to that. Instead, I notice the very fluid, visceral and emotional experience of this conversation where every look, movement or breath, like in the coaching case study with Adrian, had some impact on the ongoing process of conversation, meaning making and the emergence of our relationship.

Elias describes this process as 'gameplaying' (Elias, 1998) where the relative power differentials between people affect the 'moves' or interventions that can be made.

> *Imagine a game played by two people in which one player is very much more superior to the other, A being a very strong player, B a very weak one. In this case, A has a very high measure of control over B. To a certain extent A can force B to make particular moves. In other words, A has power over B… player B, relatively weak though he is, has a degree of power over A. For just as B, in making each move, has to take his bearings from B's preceding moves so must A take his bearings from B's preceding moves.*   (Elias, 1998: 23)

Elias continues his metaphor of a game, by saying that as power differentials diminish the degree of control that one player has over the other, and therefore the game, diminishes too. This leads to a game in which there is the *" interweaving of moves of two individual people in a game, that neither of them has planned" (ibid: 24)*. In a game with more than two players, the interdependent actions of each player become more complex with the mixing of relative power differentials and responses that are formed by the preceding move and which simultaneously influence the next move in a way that is not under the control of autonomous individual players.

In relating Elias' thinking to my experience, I notice that my experience of the patterns of power differentials is that they change in the moment-by-moment movement of the process of relating in a way that means that the moves, or gestures and responses, do not emerge from the power differentials but are simultaneously formed by and form the differentials.

A behaviourist perspective of stimulus and response would involve seeing meaning being located in an individual or stimulus which when received by another person stimulates a response. The view that I am proposing here is that a gesture is formed by the preceding responses and the meaning of that gesture emerges, not in the transmission of the gesture, but in the response to it and, even then, this meaning can change over time.

An implication of thinking about meaning in this way is that time is not experienced as a linear process. Instead of locating meaning in the time that a gesture in a conversation is spoken, the meaning of that gesture emerges in response to it. This creates a circular concept of time in which meaning emerges from past actions and future desires in the present. Griffin presents this idea as:

> *The past is not factually given because it is reconstructed in the present as the basis of action to be taken in the present. The past is what we re-member. The future is also in the present in the form of anticipation and expectation. It too forms the basis of action in the present. Furthermore, what we are anticipating affects what we remember and what we remember affects what we expect, in a circular fashion all in the present as the basis for our acting.*   (Griffin, 2002: 206)

In a game with more than two players, the interdependent actions of each player become more complex with the mixing of co-created meaning, relative power differentials and responses that are formed by the preceding move and which simultaneously influence the next move in a way that is not under the control of autonomous individual players.

More complex, and more like my experience of working in an organisation is Elias' description of a multi-layered game, or the processes of relating between more than two people where:

the experience that out of the intertwining of many peoples' actions there may emerge social consequences that no-one has planned." (ibid: 135) and " *On first meeting models of this type, it may seem puzzling that we can no longer point to any one individual or even a group of individuals who exercise unilateral power over all of the others* (ibid: 135).

I notice that my experience of the differentiating patterns of power is that they are constantly in flux continuing the processes of relating in a way that means that the moves do not emerge from the patterns of power-relating but are simultaneously formed by and form the differentiating. This view makes the predominant coaching approach appear less valid, as an individual is isolated from the complex web of relating of which they are normally part, to work one to one with a coach. On finishing the session however they must return to their original context with the aim of having more control or influence over a complex network of relationships that is uncontrollable. I have set out below an extract from my journal notes illustrating how I experienced being unable to control the outcomes or meaning that was made of a difficult conversation that I experienced with my Chief Executive.

I felt boxed-in on reflecting on the conversation with Claire. Nick was suggesting that Claire's judgement was not good and that she had made a poor evaluation of one of Nick's team. I imagined that if Claire made any other point with which Nick disagreed, he would invalidate her contributions by reminding himself of her "poor judgement".

I thought that by implication if I strongly supported Claire I may also be excluded or my views 'invalidated'.

Nick felt powerful to me in this conversation; he had excluded both a senior member of his team and an experienced and skilful consultant from the category of people that he saw as trustworthy. I sensed that if I overtly supported them in this stage of my relationship with Nick, I too ran the risk of exclusion. This experience felt like the first time that I noticed not saying

something that I believed in at Unite for fear of the consequences for me. I was left unsettled, knowing that I wished to be able to notice and better understand such experiences. What I had seen with Matthew was that he had lost some of his original power in relation to Nick and as a consequence, with others in the organisation. Instead of exploring the patterns of relating between Nick and Matthew and those between Nick and others in the business, Matthew was being 'taken away' to be cured by his coach. Clearly any issues were being located in him and he was to resolve them in order to be readmitted to the body of senior managers in the organisation.

It is interesting to notice now that although it is the individual, Matthew, who is working with the coach, it is the relationship between himself and his line manager that needs to be addressed and not Matthew's individual skills and competence. The approach being adopted here is the predominant coaching model described earlier in this paper (see page 166) and illustrated by Bolt and Zeus and Skiffington in their case studies. This extract also the highlights how power emerges as a fluid, relational pattern from the processes of relating rather than being fixed in an individual at a particular time. In the next example from my work, I will explore my approach to coaching whilst in the formal role of a line manager as opposed to the role of external coach. This new role is significant for me as it reflects my movement back into an organisation from a consulting firm and highlights some of the implications for line managers in adopting an approach to their management that can be described as being based on a coaching philosophy.

The Manager as Coach

Since the mid-1990's a large number of organisations have attempted to encourage coaching in the workplace. The Industrial Society Survey, mentioned earlier, (Downey, 2002) showed that thirty-eight percent of organisations in the UK had

some initiative in place to develop the coaching skills of line managers. The reasons for developing the ability to coach were seen to be:

- To improve individual performance –   81% of respondents
- To support personal development –   79% of respondents
- To improve company performance –   78% of respondents

These results demonstrate a number of points in relation to the underpinning assumptions about coaching in UK organisations. Firstly, there is a desire to invest resources in the development of coaching in organisations. However it is perceived that coaching is a skills based activity and that those skills can be located in a line manager. What is missing for me from this perspective is that coaching is relational, an emergent transformational experience from the ongoing processes of communication. I am particularly interested in the definition of coaching provided by the Industrial Society. They say:

> *The majority of organisations are defining the practice of coaching in the 'true' sense of the word. That is as the practice of the coach using listening and questioning skills to facilitate the learning /development or performance of the coachee by helping them to learn for themselves.*
>
> (Downey, 2002: 1)

Here, the predominant thinking is so strong as to have developed a "truth". The perspective I take in thinking about coaching whilst in the role of line manager may not be seen as 'true' by the current orthodoxy, but I contend that my approach as informed by complexity sciences and relational psychology provides a radical and significant approach to considering the experience of coaching in organisations.

The next example of a coaching experience is between a direct report, Richard and myself. Richard is Health and Safety Manager for Unite and began to report to me, instead of the Head of Construction, in January 2002. Richard had had a difficult relationship with his previous line manager and was apparently pleased to report to the HR Director, as it would be allow him to widen his remit to provide group

wide Health and Safety services instead of focussing on the construction division of the business. I was also pleased to work with Richard as it gave me the opportunity to be the line manager of a specialist team in an area in which I had no technical knowledge.

Richard and I had met regularly in the first quarter of 2002. On one occasion he asked if I would like him and a colleague to present an update of Health and Safety requirements to me, as part of my induction into this new area. I agreed and was keen to have some understanding of legislation and the implications for Unite. About a week before the scheduled session I was speaking to Richard and asked if it would be possible for us to visit one of our construction sites as part of the update, so that I could see the Health and Safety requirements in a part of the business with which I was less familiar.

Richard looked disappointed and replied that he didn't think there would be time to do this as he and Gary had already prepared their lecture for me. Not wanting to disrupt the preparation, I suggested visiting a site in a few weeks time.
On the day of the scheduled session, members of the HR team teased me, assuming my low level of interest for a three-hour lecture on Health and Safety legislation.

The session described below has three participants rather than the two who usually participate in coaching conversations. Another distinction is that I did not think that the conversation would be of a type that may lead to change, i.e. a coaching conversation, prior to my participation in it. I had imagined that the session would take the form of a presentation from Richard and Gary to me.

At the scheduled time of the session, I waited for Richard and Gary in my office and then after 20 minutes was told that they were waiting for me in 'Board Room One', our most imposing venue. I went to the room, apologised for my delay and noticed a pack of bound papers entitled " A Health and Safety Update – for Andrew Lee 26th February 2002". I felt flattered that my colleagues had invested so much time in the preparation but I felt heavy at the thought of wading through a

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set of documents and slides. The six-foot plasma screen flashed in to life with the first slide on it. I guessed that there must have been 50 slides in the pack and clearly Richard and Gary intended to speak to each of them. I scanned the table to work out how Richard and Gary intended to manage the afternoon. I noticed my pack of notes and theirs', which had the addition of speakers' notes under each slide. I was to be the only audience member for a well prepared, high-tech, set piece presentation. My mind wandered to thinking that although I might get bored I needed to respect both the preparation and the medium that my colleagues had chosen to use in order to feel comfortable working with their new line manager.

Gary started by speaking about the first slides. Not only were there fifty of them but each was composed of lists of bullets, or in some cases animations that would simultaneously try to bring a point to life as it killed it for me. After reviewing the key points of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974,Gary said,

> "After we have gone through the slides there are something we want to talk
> to you about."

I was curious as I heard the possibility of a conversation instead of a presentation. The need to speak about something was referred to twice more and each time I resisted asking more in case I caused too much disruption by moving the course of the meeting away from its intended path.

On reflecting on my hesitation, I notice how I felt both enabled by my management role to intervene if I wanted to, but simultaneously constrained by not wishing to interrupt and disrupt the rhythm of the prepared session. I also felt a little less influential due to my lack of technical knowledge of Health and Safety matters and concerned that I may miss something that related to my statutory obligations of this new aspect of my role. I am reminded of two of the types of power as described by Handy (Handy, 1985). In his way of thinking, I had position power in the meeting due to the line management relationships but also low levels of expert power due to my lack of understanding of technical Health and Safety matters. I could also be coerced into complying with the plan for the afternoon due

to my fear of being prosecuted should I miss a point and then not ensure that Unite complied with Health and Safety requirements.

From the perspective of complex responsive processes however, power was not located in me, or in my colleagues, but in the differentials that emerged from our personal histories, our previous experiences of each other and the anticipation of our future relationship. The fluidity of such power relations are clearly illustrated later in this example.

The perspective of moving power differentials helps my understanding of my experience in the moments of deciding whether to intervene in Richard's presentation or not. My experience of set-piece presentations is that questions and interruptions are not desired and that any intervention would be seen as unhelpful. The effect then of a scripted, power point presentation was of constraining my contributions in a way that ensured that "turn-taking" happened in a way that Richard, Gary and I co-created, based on our experiences of making and attending presentations. Simultaneously, Richard and Gary were both enabled to plough through their intended material whilst also being constrained to staying in the parameters of the pre-prepared material. The three of us were constrained by the process, and prevented ourselves from moving from a predetermined path but were enabled to deliver and receive the intended material.

Despite the apparent control over turn-taking in the meeting, it wasn't possible to control the meanings that were being made as a result of gestures of communicative interaction. For example, whilst Richard and Gary were able to stick to their scripts, they were not able to control how I reacted to their gestures. I know that they didn't intend to bore me or make me feel unengaged and excluded. I know, for example, that they didn't attempt to provoke feelings in me from twelve years earlier.

As one slide on the 157 pieces of Fire Legislation was displayed I experienced a feeling that I remembered from lectures as an undergraduate, the weight of

boredom as I watched a lecturer go through slides of information, watching to see the pile of slides diminish slowly as the lecture progressed. I checked myself and tried to refocus my attention on Richard and Gary. Within a few minutes I began to think about the factors that made this such an unengaging session for me. The subject matter was not particularly interesting although I knew that as a provider of accommodation for twenty thousand students, Health and Safety was of vital importance. I was curious about what was happening to make me feel so unconnected to the session. I watched Gary as he spoke towards the screen giving examples of case law and descriptions of E.U. directives. I had a sense of watching a video, where the presenter is unconnected and even unaware of his audience. At one point after Gary had said.

" Health and Safety needs to be like DNA in an organisation, present everywhere and replicated in all aspects of work."

Richard spoke saying, " Oh, I really like that, can I make a note of it."

In Richard's appreciation of the metaphor I noticed that a number of other devices were being used in order to emphasise points.

" Our Health and Safety approach is like a Vauxhall and we need it to be like a Rolls Royce."

"We need you as a champion of Health and Safety, we need you on the inside."

My impression was that the use of metaphor and cliché had been intended to make issues simpler to understand. The meaning that I made of their use however was, that they seemed to distance the conversation from the real underlying issues of our need to develop processes to ensure compliance with Health and Safety standards.

By saying that the " approach is like a Vauxhall" Gary in some way created a 'whole' that needed to be both broken down so that the meaning of the comparison could be understood in terms of the operational practices in Unite.

Being told that they 'wanted me on the inside' had the effect of making me feel more distant from Richard and Gary. I didn't want to be included in the patterns of

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relating that I was experiencing so far. On reflecting on my subsequent notes, I noticed how I thought that each of us had constructed different meanings from the conversation. Richard's request to make a note of the DNA analogy showed his appreciation of Gary's comparison. Gary, from his smile, enjoyed his words being captured in writing. My thought was of a cliché that didn't help us understand what was currently happening to promote an engagement with Health and Safety requirements. Richard's acknowledgement also amplified the positive reinforcement of such devices, encouraging their use unless the pattern of communications was in some way altered.

My experience was of watching Richard and Gary be present to their material, the presentation, the legislation, their stories of disasters, case law and each other. I was feeling less present to them and felt that they were oblivious to me. I had previously requested that they do not use so many stories from other organisations to illustrate their points. I had noticed a pattern when I first spoke to Gary in December 2001. After mentioning something to me he would break eye contact and tell a story of an incident in some other time and place. Rather cruelly, I noticed that in one conversation of twenty minutes, fourteen minutes were spent telling stories of other places, without linking the implications of the stories to the present experience in Unite - both of us reinforcing the distance between us. I spoke after slide twenty-four:

> " You've mentioned a couple of times that there is something you want to discuss. I wonder if we can make sure we have sufficient time to do justice to that conversation."

> "Um, yes, I think we'll have a few minutes left."

I asked,

> " What's the topic of the conversation?"

> "Well," Gary replied. " We want to talk about how you in HR have done so much to get the business to think about working together more effectively, at the moment everyone is doing their PDP's [appraisals] and we want to learn from you about how you've got everyone engaged."

I was fascinated by this request, I had now been sitting for two hours in a presentation that was most unengaging, and was now hearing a request to discuss with the Health and Safety team how to engage their colleagues. I suggested that we have that conversation now and return to the slides later, or even allow me to read the slides overnight and come back to them with questions if I needed to. Richard and Gary seemed hesitant but agreed. I asked what they had noticed about how the PDP process had been introduced and how that may be relevant for the Health and Safety team. Gary said.

> " Well for a start you're senior and you're behind it so your support helps. Also everyone has been trained and there is a clear process and suggested approach. Even I who am often cynical about these things have been changed, I thought I'll give it a go."

I was curious.

> "Gary, tell me what has happened for you so that your scepticism has changed to understanding and engagement."
>
> "Well, no it's the whole business being prepared."
>
> " Gary, help me out here, I'm really interested in hearing about what happened for you, we're talking about needing people to engage and I'd like to think about your experience."

Gary was sitting opposite me, in my peripheral vision I became aware of Richard moving and I became aware of his agitation. He leant forward and said.

> " I'm not here to fuck about!"

Whilst being somewhat startled by this interjection, I was later reminded of my experience when the Chief Executive referred to some of senior team as 'crap'. This time it was Richard's threshold of intolerance that had been breached, instead of mine. Richard's remark made me believe that he was ready to walk out of the meeting, shifting the power differential to make him relatively more powerful, by threatening to exclude himself from Gary and me and therefore excluding us from him.

This movement in the processes of power and the shift in the meaning that was made of our interactions resulted in us engaging with each other in a different way.

" Richard, I'm not here to fuck about either, but I do want to explore what is happening so that you feel that people in the business are disinterested in Health and Safety while at the same time I feel unengaged by the process that we have followed today. When your intention today was to increase my interest in the area."

Richard's challenge to me was hard, for the first time in Unite I was challenged in a way that I have described challenging others. The processes of power moved so Richard appeared to have more control over what happened next than I did. I was clear in his statement that he wouldn't tolerate the questions that I had begun to ask his colleague. In this challenge, the meaning that I made of my question to Gary shifted. Gary's response to the question was:

> " Well, attending the workshop and having the time to think about and discuss the important conversations that I needed to have with my line manager made the process of PDP's become more relevant to me".

The meaning of my question was ' lets see how we can compare your experience of becoming interested in something with what you are trying to achieve in your team.'

Richard's challenge caused the meaning of my original question to shift significantly.

In the moment of hearing " I'm not here to fuck about!" I saw my experience of myself as trying to ask some artificial coaching questions to lead Gary to an insight about how he might engage others. I recognised myself in Richard's expletive.

I thought for a moment and said:

> "Look, I don't want to mess around here, but I think that there is something important for me to say about my experiences this afternoon that may help us think about how we can engage people in the business about Health and Safety issues."

I was still aware of Richard's tension and felt that at any moment he may walk out of the room. It felt as if the security of his carefully designed process had now evaporated and that we were in uncharted territory. On reflecting later I guessed

that Health and Safety specialists might like to feel safe. Instead of asking Gary or Richard questions, I described my own experience of the meeting.

"Let me try to explain how I have been feeling this afternoon. I know that Health and Safety is really important and that we need to do much more to get to the standards that we would like to achieve. However I don't know from this session what I now need to do or what I am doing that is ok. It feels as if you are both explaining some broad concepts but together are not looking at the impact of your information on what we are doing here."

Richard used a defence that I had heard before.

"Ah, but the legislation is not prescriptive, it is goal setting legislation and the business needs to set its own goals and agree its standards. The Health and Safety team can't do that for them.'

" I'm really clear that the law is about goal setting, but what I'm not clear on how we are helping our colleagues to set those goals. How are they engaged in coming up with what they need to do to ensure compliance?"

"Well we've used this presentation as a basis of a meeting with the senior managers, but I don't think that it made much impact."

" If I think of this afternoon again, I have felt flattered by the preparation that you have done for me today and also frustrated at not being able to get to the real conversation that you wished to have. You have given me so much information but I am not clear what we need to do next. I imagine that this is a similar experience to the impact that the session would have had with the management group."

Gary was quiet for a few minutes whilst Richard and I spoke. He then said,

" I'm just thinking that the areas where we've had most success in getting people to think about Health and Safety is where they have decided on the issues and actions themselves. Not when we've tried to instigate something ourselves. It's better when the managers think for themselves."

Richard became animated in his agreement:

"Even this afternoon, we're struggling with this issue together now instead of presenting slides............."

Richard's comparison of the two halves of our session was marked. He, and I, had experienced the difference between the formulaic approach to the slide based presentation and the alert and fluid nature of our later conversation. Richard had taken a significant risk in intervening strongly, and we were awoken from our co-created patterns of disengagement to a way of working that felt risky and unknowable. Richard's remark shifted the patterns of power-relating and caused us to find a different way of being together. In addition, the relationship between Richard and I shifted. I now see him as stronger and more passionate about his work. He recognises my desire to explore the immediacy of our experience rather than to think about past or describe what 'should' and 'ought to happen' in the future. I feel that we can have more robust conversations without preparation and that our identities have shifted as we now see each other in a different way.

This episode provides a strong example of my perspective on coaching. It is clear that change happened in the moment of Richard saying, " I'm not here to fuck about!" I experienced a movement in the patterns of power between us, he become stronger due to the risk that he took in potentially excluding himself from our conversation. I recognised the artificiality of my earlier questioning through his interjection and became aware of his passion to promote a healthy and safe working environment. I recognised Richard and myself differently in that moment. I point to the moment of Richard's exasperation as the time that change occurred rather than the whole session as would occur with predominant writers. For me, it

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is the movement of power and identity in the micro-interaction of the moment that is coaching, a shift in the patterns of relating and not the application of skills by a coach. In this example, it was my use of 'coaching skills' (asking open questions, summarising and listening) that led to Richard's annoyance rather than leading to a controlled transformational outcome as would have been promised by mainstream authors.

This experience of working with Richard and Gary points to a significant aspect of my research not discussed in the predominant literature. In the meeting, the dominant pattern of interaction was that of presentation. The use of graphics and a script were tools to apply control to the conversation. In challenging the constraints of this way of communicating I was seen to replace one formulaic approach with another. The pattern that I introduced was that of ' coaching', not in a transformational sense but as formulaic coaching in the application of particular skills. I had replaced one pattern of interaction with another; one that was equally as artificial and which prevented underlying concerns from being voiced. It was only when Richard's tolerance threshold was breeched that we were able to speak candidly about our experiences of working together. When I reflect on the experience of working with line managers to help them develop their coaching skills the implications of the meeting with Richard and Gary become clear. In attempting to replace the presentational style with a coaching conversation I had attempted to reassert the original power differential between us – regaining control of the meeting by introducing a way of speaking together that I was more comfortable with. It felt as if the presentational mode was being used to reduce the anxiety of the Health and Safety team and as I felt uncomfortable with that I had attempted to replace it with a mode of communication and control that I felt more comfortable with.

Instead of coaching having the effect of reducing the power differentials as often intended in this 'enabling' way of working, the existing processes of power-relating had been reinforced. This resulted in an increase in Richard's frustration. Having had this experience, I am more aware of other situations in which the

newly trained line manager may impose his coaching skills on a subordinate in a way that may be intended to 'release potential' but which has the effect of not only reinforcing existing patterns of power-relating but also creating confusion and frustration in the relationship. In my example it was Richard's risk taking that caused the newly introduced coaching pattern of communicating to be replaced with a more intense and real exploration of our experience of working together.

The theme of risk taking is present in this example as it has been in the earlier examples with Nick, Adrian and Claire. In each situation, some sense of risk was perceived as a movement away from an existing pattern of communicative interaction. I had moved away from a passive role as the receiver of a presentation and Richard fought against being in the role of a reluctant coachee. I had challenged Nick's dominance by questioning his description of our colleagues and Claire had moved away from a fixed role by suggesting I think about joining Alexander. My experience of change being a disturbance in an existing pattern of relating and therefore in the power differentials and identities of the participants is significant for organisations and line managers who say that they wish to adopt a coaching approach. Firstly, it can be assumed that by wishing to alter their way of managing they wish to create change of some kind. My view however, is that by focusing on developing coaching skills, organisations are looking in the wrong place for the source of the desired change. They are following an approach that locates change in the coachee and the source of that change in the ability of the coaching line manager. My research shows that coaching is a relational experience in which change occurs as movement in relative power and therefore the socially created identities of the participants involved. This shift in power is associated with a gesture of risk being called forth in a participant which alters the pattern of previous relating that is simultaneously formed by and forms the differentiating patterning of power-relating. Any change that occurs in which the 'coachee' is seen to be more confident or empowered will have simultaneously resulted in the coach or line manager experiencing a reduction in their relative power as a movement occurs in the patterning of power-relating. Many line managers and reports may feel uncomfortable by the experience of having to renegotiate or co-

create new patterns of relating that do not possess the security or reliability of the existing status quo. In some situations, managers may use their new skills in a way that reinforces the power differentials between them and their coachee using the very skills that were introduced to 'empower' the workforce. The dual rationalist and formative causalities result in the line manager asserting his same views and desired outcomes in an altered way of communicating, through the use of coaching skills. This can have the effect of reinforcing power differentials and reiterating stable identities in the processes of relating. The predominant authors however, promise improved performance through transformation in this way of coaching. My experience is that coaching emerges as movements in patterning of power relating but that those patterns cannot be controlled by the will of an individual. The changes are not necessarily for the better. Coaches and line managers may therefore wish to reflect on their experience of living with the emergent movement of power and identity and consider how they experience the risk of such encounters whilst they develop their ability to apply the traditional coaching skills and models in their interactions with their clients and direct reports.

Conclusions to Paper Four

The themes that I have articulated in this paper illustrate how I think about coaching in a way that is fundamentally different from that of the predominant authors. I have shown that my approach to coaching relies on a different underlying causality, transformative rather than rationalist or formative. The approach to coaching explored here is also distinct from humanistic and cognitive psychologies and dialogic practices that are at the core of much of the existing literature. Change, in the predominant literature, is thought of as the unfolding of the enfolded potential of the coachee. My approach locates change in the transformative experience of movements in identities, in relation to others and to oneself, as experienced as movements in the patterning of power-relating and the moment-by-moment experience of inclusion and exclusion. The synopsis, at the

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beginning of this portfolio, develops these themes further and sets out how, from the beginning of my research, I have developed a radically different approach to coaching that has a significant impact on how coaching relationships may be perceived. I will explore the implications for the traditional roles of coach and coachee and on the process of coaching in the context of complex responsive processes of relating. The implications of this different approach will be explored further along with a consideration of the applied methodology that resulted in the emergence of the conclusions to my research. Whilst I will develop my arguments in the synopsis to this portfolio, paper four already sets out the key distinctions that I would wish to make and offers a challenging perspective on coaching not explored in the existing literature.

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