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**“Opportunities and Obstacles –
Incorporating Positive Psychology into
Business Coaching”**

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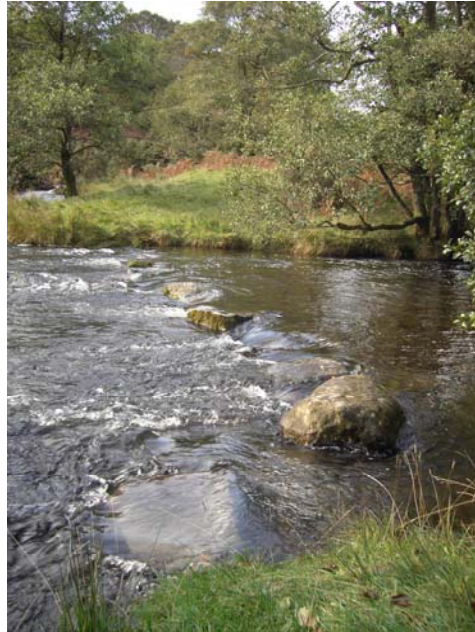
- *To my eight fellow coaching pioneers. You were encouraging, supportive, interesting and involved. I am so grateful to you for your friendship, your commitment and your open-mindedness. I hope I have done you credit in the following pages!*
- *To Tracy - our meetings every month inspired me to believe in the worth of positive psychology.*
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(Nb: the visuals throughout this paper were suggested by the participants as representative of their experience or observations of positive psychology).

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Abstract



“It (positive psychology) is like a framework without a frame... what I mean is it’s a framework which is releasing rather than limiting. I suppose what it’s like having stepping stones which are there to get over and they are the shape, but what’s flowing past them is changing all the time, so what then happens can be different...” (p. 206, H).

Abstract

Despite extensive empirical evidence supporting the field of positive psychology, minimal research has taken place that examines the reality of translating academic theory into practical business application. Therefore, this research study examines the tangible reality for experienced business coaches when integrating positive psychology into their portfolio. It was conducted over a period of six months through a qualitative study within the interpretivist paradigm using Action Research as a methodology. Nine experienced business coaches introduced a variety of positive psychology interventions with their clients, yielding a total of 102 coaching sessions. Analysis of these sessions, through reflective diaries, dialogue from action learning sets and interviews, reveals three broad themes: firstly, considerable confusion surrounds the 'branding' of positive psychology in the business world, with both the apparent simplicity of the interventions belying their positive effect and the perceived emotional language at odds with the business environment. The study also demonstrates that, in order to avoid 'invisible barriers' and achieve the coaches stated desire of authenticity, credibility and confidence, interventions needed to be practised by oneself first and applied gradually over a considerable period of time. Lastly, despite some hurdles, the study presents encouraging results achieved with clients highlighting the relevance of positive psychology for business. This outcome, together with the development of a rich 'toolkit' of practical interventions, gives business coaches wishing to incorporate positive psychology into their practice considerable grounds for optimism.

Chapter 1

Introduction



“How would I describe it (positive psychology)? If I was looking for a metaphor – I’d look for a rising sun so it’s a sunrise where you see the sun coming up over the horizon and it’s just a little bit at first and it gets bigger and it gets brighter and it illuminates and it warms and it strengthens and that’s how it is for me...” (p. 76, B)

Chapter 1 Introduction

The translation of acquired knowledge into practical knowledge, the '*knowing-how*' to do something, has dominated my career as an organisational coach, trainer and writer. My philosophy of practice is captured in a well-worn Chinese proverb "*Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime*" (Tzu & Giles, 2008). This was an important starting point for this research project as for the previous two years, studying for an MSc in Applied Positive Psychology, we acquired a rich body of theoretical and conceptual knowledge. Precisely how to translate this knowledge into practice, specifically in the business coaching field, was still a gap in our understanding. "*Yes, but how?*" was a question often asked amongst my peer group of fellow students. Therefore, the central research question became:

- ***In what ways can a business coach usefully incorporate positive psychology into their coaching practice?***

Positive Psychology has much to offer the field of coaching, for coaching is still a practice without limits on its scope, lacking theoretical foundations and yet to develop a significant empirical base. As Seligman states, "*the discipline of positive psychology can provide coaching with an evidence-based framework and a defined scope of practice. It offers a reference point from which to develop meaningful training that will help set the boundaries of responsible coaching practice*" (2007, p. 266).

Yet of the 971 books listed under positive psychology (www.amazon.co.uk, 30/11/08) only one book, *Positive Psychology Coaching: Putting the Science of Happiness to Work*

for Your Clients (Diener & Dean, 2007), is dedicated to the coaching profession, together with a chapter in Stober and Grant's book, *The Evidence Based Coaching Handbook* (2006) and a further chapter in Linley's new strengths book, *Average to A+: Realising Strengths in Yourself and Others* (2008). As Grant himself recognises, "To flourish, coaching psychology needs to remain clearly differentiated from the frequently sensationalistic and pseudoscientific facets of the personal development industry, while at the same time engaging in the development of the wider coaching industry" (2007, p. 239).

And it is precisely this engagement with the wider coaching industry that formed the primary rationale for this project. For if positive psychology is serious about reaching out to the general public, it will need to lay down a practical knowledge base that extends beyond academia and descriptions of the existing validated interventions (i.e. Seligman, 2003; Lyubomirsky, 2007). For, as action research scholars Reason and Torbert pointed out, "the findings in our scholarly management journals are often only remotely related to the real world of practicing managers" (2001, p. 2).

Whilst accepting that an understanding of, and playing to, one's strengths is vital for human flourishing, it was also worth exploring how positive psychology could extend its focus beyond the realm of strengths. As this subject is the now stated aim for the UK's Centre for Applied Positive Psychology (email communication, Alex Linley, Head of CAPP to CAPP Members, March 2008) and the concentration of much of the recently accessible literature for the general public (i.e. Biswas-Diener, 2007; Seligman, 2003; Linley, 2008) a narrow focus on this area potentially ignores an abundant wealth of research that, if translated into practical terms, could add positive meaning and fulfilment to people's lives.

The experience of a coach, who is incorporating positive psychology into their business portfolio, was also a subject of curiosity. Taken on a surface level, positive psychology sits firmly in the realm of 'life coaching', particularly with interventions labelled as 'Count Your Blessings: Three Good Things' (Peterson, 2006, p. 38) and 'Practising Acts of Kindness' (Lyubomirsky, 2007, p. 125). Over the last two years, I have witnessed a significant reluctance on the part of many coaches to introduce such validated interventions into the workplace and struggle to understand how to address and incorporate important themes such as happiness, gratitude, positive emotions and meaning into their business portfolio whilst remaining authentic and congruent with their clients (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003; Harter, 2002).

It therefore became apparent that the research study, especially in the data gathering process, needed to be guided by the following subsidiary questions:

- ***What was the experience of the coach in using positive psychology, both personally and professionally?***
- ***How can a business coach frame the validated interventions in a context that is appropriate for a business client?***
- ***What is new in positive psychology for the experienced business coach?***

Therefore, the anticipated outcome of this research study was to extend the practical knowledge base of positive psychology by offering a tangible 'toolkit' that enabled organisational coaches to translate concept to action in a 'nuts and bolts' way and that resulted in a positive experience for the coach; their business practice and, ultimately, their clients.

Chapter 2

Literature Review



“For me (positive psychology) is a whole way of thinking... an optimism, a belief...you know the picture that came into my mind, it’s the cat looking into the mirror and the lion looking back... I mean if that picture could encompass not just someone looking at themselves but how they are in the world, how the world sees them as well, to me this helps along with coaching. That’s a transformation...” (p.42, A)

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Despite the claim that “*positive psychology... fits coaching like a glove*” (Biswas Diener & Dean, 2007, p. 209) the paucity of literature that directly explores the relationship between positive psychology and coaching would suggest that this is an uneasy link in need of further maturation. Yet two important factors emerge from an examination of the literature surrounding this field. Firstly, whilst there may be a scarcity of directly related literature, there is an abundance of coaching and coaching psychology literature that has the potential to add depth and breadth to this emerging discipline. Secondly, the fields of coaching and positive psychology are still young and their ongoing development is less than assured. Therefore a remarkable opportunity exists for applying the principles of psychology – and particularly positive psychology – to enhancing the wellbeing and improving the performance of individuals, groups and organisations. As Linley states, “*an evidence-based approach is the foundation on which our future success will be built and the yardstick against which it will ultimately be measured: without this evidence base, we risk becoming peddlers of the latest self-help fashion, a situation that would serve neither us as professionals nor the people who we strive to serve*” (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007, p. 252).

Therefore, the purpose of this literature review is to explore the strengths and limitations of the existing direct literature; understand what the field can learn from other coaching approaches; recognise the current debates in coaching that are likely to inform its future direction and through this gain a deeper awareness of how a business coach can usefully incorporate positive psychology into their existing practice.

There is a curious discrepancy at the heart of the positive psychology coaching literature – is it just a simple adjunct to existing approaches with some evidence-based interventions or a recipe for lasting change with solid foundations? Arguably, many of the leading researchers appear to state the latter backed up by research, whilst providing the reader with the former. For example, Biswas-Diener and Dean, in the only book dedicated to positive psychology coaching, are clearly excited about the potential of positive psychology, describing it as a “*rich new terrain in coaching... those lucky pioneers who stake their claims early will be poised on the forefront of an exciting new direction*” (2007, p. 210) yet also suggesting that as an “*easy-to-use adjunct...it can be accepted in bits and pieces by everyone*” (2007, p. 220). In a similar vein, their book offers many fascinating and diverse questions for coaches, yet the possibility is then raised that “*positive psychology is just a new brand name for what you have been doing for years anyway*” (2007, p. 210).

Similarly, Kaufmann boldly states that “*it is our belief that positive psychology theory and research will provide the scientific legs upon which the field of coaching can firmly stand*” (Kaufmann, 2006, p. 221), yet her - albeit useful - step-by-step approach to using positive psychology in a coaching context very clearly demonstrates the dilemma facing executive coaches - for it is undeniably hard to introduce ‘*Savouring a Beautiful Day*’; ‘*Three Blessings Exercise*’; a ‘*Gratitude Visit*’ and a ‘*Strengths Date*’ (Kaufmann, 2006, p. 240) to business. Perhaps it is due to these limitations that the business case study (Kaufmann, 2006) focuses on strengths alone.

A single-handed emphasis on strengths as the direction for positive psychology at work is also highlighted by Linley who believes that this approach “*provides a rare opportunity*

for a way of working that makes the best of what people have to offer" (2008, p. 180). Yet, Linley not only agrees that positive psychology is here to stay, but that *"positive psychology represents a much needed and quite contagious paradigm shift"* (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007, p. 215).

This discrepancy could exist for two reasons; firstly one could argue that positive psychology's dominant strength – a desire to provide the coaching world with scientific rigour through evidence based interventions – is also its prevailing limitation by narrowing its offering to the coaching world. A brief exploration of coaching books on Amazon demonstrates this, with 77,626 books available on coaching (www.amazon.com, 30/11/08) and just two books on evidence based coaching.

Keen to distance itself from the vast majority of coaching literature, or what one scientist calls, the *"non-validated, self help... or just plain wishful thinking... books"* (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007, p.242), it is perhaps deceptively easy for those in the coaching industry who come from professional backgrounds such as psychology, or who are engaged in academic research, to focus narrowly on scientific undertakings. It may be forgotten that few coaches report a formal training in psychology – in one study, as few as 14% (Spence, Cavanagh & Grant, 2006). What this means is that rather than rely on empirical research, coaches are more likely to use a 'trial and error' approach with a vast range of assessment tools; techniques and interventions gleaned from an array of sources – validated or otherwise – as long as it works for the client (Kombarakaran, Baker, Yang & Fernandes, 2008). Perhaps this is unsurprising for, as Biswas-Diener suggests, *"the scientific giants investigating the inner workings of positive human psychology... are motivated by a strong curiosity rather than an eagerness to see their research results applied"* (Kaufmann & Linley, 2007, p. 90).

Yet to remove this rigour would be a throwback in an already chaotic field. Since the introduction of the term executive coaching in the late 1970's (McLeod, 2003) there has been an incredible growth in the field, with the number of executive coaches operating worldwide expected to grow fivefold over the next several years (McKelley & Rochlen, 2007). Despite its growth in popularity, a range of definitions and debates still arise as to the precise definition of coaching. Peltier (2001) defines an executive coach as 'someone from outside an organisation that uses psychological skills to help a person develop into a more effective leader'. Whitworth, Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House and Sandahl (2007) take a broader approach, defining coaching in its many forms as 'the powerful alliance designed to forward and enhance the lifelong process of human learning, effectiveness and fulfilment'. Whether internal or external to organisations, there is still no universally accepted standard for coaching competence in training or in practice and a recent CIPD survey revealed that 81% of respondents agreed with the statement 'there is great deal of confusion about the term coaching' (CIPD, 2004). Indeed, the only central entry criterion for the profession seems to be one's ability to solicit clients (Garman, Whiston & Zlatoper, 2000).

Alongside this, a review of the psychological coaching outcome literature found that there have been a total of 69 outcome studies between 1980 and July 2007: 23 case studies; 34 within-subject studies and 12 between-subject studies. Only eight randomised controlled studies have been conducted, leading to an unequivocal consensus for the need for an evidence-based approach to coaching (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007).

Secondly, it is also possible that the field of positive psychology is limiting its potential reach within coaching by an exclusive 'positive' branding and separation from a rich heritage of psychological approaches. Seligman lays down the sword on the first page of 'Authentic Happiness' suggesting that: "*For the last half century psychology has been consumed with a single topic only – mental illness*" (2003, p. xi) using Freud's doctrine of negative motivation as overwhelming evidence of a "*rotten to the core dogma*" (2003, p. xii). Likewise, Kaufmann and Scoular suggest that one of the tasks of the new wave in coaching is to re-examine the theoretical bases, with positive psychology and a strength based orientation providing a "*more appropriate model for executive coaching*" (2004, p. 288).

Certainly, the 'new wave' of coaching literature from the 1990's onwards delineated theoretical frameworks for coaching which implicitly adopted a therapeutic antecedent. For example, the work of Kilburg (1996; 1997) focused on psychodynamic and systems approaches, Richard (1999) detailed a cognitive and behavioural framework for executive coaching using multi-modal therapy, whilst Howatt (2000) discussed the use of Reality Therapy and Choice Therapy as a framework for coaching (Grant, 2003). Just in the last five years, Peterson (2006) has offered a behaviour-based approach to executive coaching, Page (2003) presented contributions from Adlerian perspectives, with Greene & Grant (2003) outlining a solutions-focused approach to coaching.

What many of these approaches appear to achieve is the ability to strike a balance between their historical underpinnings and a contemporary coaching methodology. For instance, in describing cognitive coaching, Auerbach notes that "*insightful coaches will be able to observe elements of Beck's 'cognitive distortions'; Ellis' 'irrational ideas' or Senge's 'organisational learning disabilities' in their clients*" (2006, p. 112). Yet the coach

is not necessarily operating from a medical model with the client as a patient, but instead acknowledging the complexity of the human being and using the coaching conversation to help clients as partners “*see themselves accurately, evaluate their situations and their options, examine their assumptions and thought processes and utilize introspection and insight to achieve their positive goals*” (Auerbach, 2006, p. 113).

In a similar vein, solution-focused coaching is unambiguously based on solution-focused brief therapy (Kaufmann & Scoular, 2004) and grounded on the optimistic assumption that people are healthy and competent and have the ability to construct solutions that can enhance their lives (O’Connell, 1998). In an echo of position psychology, the explicit goal of solution-focused coaching is to look for what is working in client’s lives thereby increasing optimism and hope. In describing this positive orientation, O’Hanlan suggests that by “*growing the solution life-enhancing part of people’s lives rather than focusing on the pathology-problem parts, amazing changes can happen pretty rapidly*” (1994, p. 23). Adding credibility to the approach, an exploration of 15 outcome studies undertaken on solution-focused therapy found that five studies were well controlled and all showed positive outcomes. A further ten studies, which were only moderately controlled, supported the hypothesis of its effectiveness (Gingerich & Eisengart, 2000).

Therefore, this apparent secularisation of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ approaches by positive psychologists not only ignores the very real contribution of more than a century of skilled and gifted scholars and practitioners – many of whom positive psychology borrows from – but also limits the potential for an executive coach to understand and work from a trans-theoretical basis. As Peltier suggests, “*to run away from the therapy model, to abandon it completely would be a mistake. The core ideas from accepted therapy*

theories have significant value for executive or management coaches" (Peltier, 2001, p. xxvi).

This thin line between coaching, counselling and psychotherapy becomes even more blurred with a further exploration of the coaching literature which shows that the coaching industry is now recognising the difficulty in sustaining the notion that one of the major differentiators of coaching is that it deals with a population unencumbered by psychological distress (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007). As Stephen Joseph suggests, "*coaching psychology is about facilitating optimal functioning, but this should not be arbitrarily confined to those who are already well functioning*" (Kaufmann & Linley, 2007, p. 91). Previous research had noted that only a quarter of executive coaching clients are in need of 'remedial assistance' with three quarters doing quite well and requesting coaching to help negotiate increases in responsibility as they move up the organisational ladder (Kiel, Rimmer, Williams & Doyle, 1996). Latterly, research conducted in Australia has shown significant levels of psychological distress among substantial proportions of those presenting for coaching interventions (Green, Oades & Grant, 2006) demonstrating that coaching clients have at least the same level of psychopathology as is found in the general population, if not higher.

A significant study for business coaches demonstrated that coaching clients were predominantly white men (85%), middle aged (79%), employed at a Fortune 500 company (79%) and at the vice president level or higher (68%) (Wasylyshyn, 2003). Its importance lies in the premise that as coaching is often success and goal oriented, it may be a better approach for men with high needs of success, power and competition, whereas the culture of therapy may be in opposition to the culture associated with traditional masculine roles and values (McKelley & Rochlen, 2007). Hill, Carlstrom &

Evanow (2001) make clear the importance of casting the work of consulting psychologists not as therapy but as coaching. They suggest: "*most business leaders see therapy or counselling as an option only if one has mental health problems, not business or leadership concerns. Coaching does not carry this stigma and so arouses less of the resistance that many men would experience*" (McKelley & Rochlen, 2007, p. 128).

Additional research suggests that coaches can attract a segment of the population that some economists call the 'worried well' – higher functioning adults who would rate themselves as content, but want more or feel blocked in some areas of their lives. This author cited research reporting that 85% of the 'worried well' do not seek counselling or psychotherapy when they have personal problems because they do not see themselves as psychologically 'ill' (Grodzki, 2002).

This 'blurring' of lines highlights two challenges now facing the coaching industry. Firstly, that the disciplines of coaching and coaching psychology are still in their infancy, 'jostling' for a position in the executive world and attempting to differentiate themselves in the meantime. This, however, is an anticipated and positive position to be in according to one of the original pioneers of coaching, Sir John Whitmore: "*About 25 years from its inception, the coaching industry is maturing well. Attempts are in process to agree standards and ethics, the large coaching associations are in collaboration talks, the fast-food poor-quality coach trainings have (so far) failed to hijack the industry and it continues to expand in quantity and outreach. Given the potential problems of a start-up, it has done well – so far*" (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007, p. 243).

Whitmore's communication continues with a warning to the coaching industry, "*the danger now is that its own best people may not realise how important it is and may sell*

themselves short" (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007, p. 243). This highlights the second challenge for the coaching industry – how to move forwards with vigour, whilst applying rigorous evidence-based research of the highest quality which Sheldon eloquently describes as a "*compass in the sea of commercialism*" (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007, p. 242).

What is clear is that coaching based on empirical research is the way forwards for both clients and coaches. A research study conducted with top management executives from four major business sectors highlighted the client's desire for a coach with a theoretically sound foundation in human psychology and social systems (Stevens, 2005). Added to this, a recently published study of 65 coaches highlighted a strong 'fear factor' associated with coaching, with one coach expressing: "*I found it scary that I was getting into something that I did not know how to handle. And what then? When does the coach end and the therapist begin?*" (de Haan, 2008, p. 95).

This is not a question that any author, coach, researcher or scientist seems able to answer, for coaching remains a uniquely human endeavour littered with doubts; successes; critical breakthroughs and significant learning experiences. Indeed, de Haan suggests that "*the effectiveness of coaches seems determined primarily by their ability to doubt, not to know what is coming next, and to greet what comes next with questions*" (2008, p. 105) Perhaps executive coaches can take heart in Lambert's classic article which indicated after hundreds of outcome studies of therapy that hope and expectation accounted for 15%; relational factors for 30%; factors external to the therapy for 40% and specific technique- or approach-related factors for only 15% of the effectiveness (Lambert, 1992, p. 103).

Perhaps it is due to this knowledge of uncertainty and doubt that surrounds the skill of coaching that business coaches today desire more confidence and credibility in their approach. This, in turn, highlights the unique position for positive psychology to add both breadth and depth to the quality of a business coach's practice proposition. Despite the limited interventions currently available, the field is able to offer a business coach a promise of scientific rigour that goes beyond 'self-help' and captures the desire from industry; from clients and from coaches themselves to work from an evidence basis. What is also clear is that if positive psychology embraces a truly interdisciplinary approach, possibly what Boniwell calls "*a positive science*" (Kaufmann & Linley, 2007, p. 94), it offers a coach the opportunity to work from – and present to clients - a strong and exciting orientation towards work and life that goes beyond just strengths and is based on solid foundations.

A final challenge also presents itself. Researchers advocate that "*In **spirit**, executive coaching and positive psychology are natural partners*" (Kaufmann & Scoular, 2006, p. 289). For positive psychology to achieve a deserved penetration within the coaching world, coaching leaders, researchers and practitioners need to look beyond the demands of the immediate research agenda and avoid focusing too narrowly on the scientific undertaking so that a youthful vigour and openness can infuse this field and coaches are able to translate meaningful research into powerful interventions that matter to the business world. Once this happens, it will mean that in ***practice***, executive coaching and positive psychology will become natural partners.

Chapter 3

Methodology Chapter



“This is like being a new conductor of an experienced orchestra. They’re clever, they know what they’re doing, but they’re waiting for my lead to get up and running. Here I am bursting with passion wanting to infuse everyone with my ideas and direction. Follow me! Follow my interpretation! But maybe I’d have a better understanding of the music if I’d just laid it out and let them interpret it for themselves...?” (p. 407, personal reflective diary).

Chapter 3 Methodology Chapter

"I suggest that we think about the research process as a form of adventure... a positive, yet somewhat risky, enterprise" (Willig, 2008, p.2)

After reading much of the qualitative research literature, one could draw the conclusion that only a brave (or unwise) researcher would adopt the action research methodology, for action research appears to attract a lot of misconceptions. It has, for example, been suggested that one way to excuse sloppy research is to call it action research (Hart & Bond, 1995). Patton goes a step further to suggest that within universities and amongst scholars, the status hierarchy in science attributes the highest status to basic research, secondary status to applied research and "*virtually no status to formative and action research*" (Patton, 1990, p158).

Perhaps these misconceptions arise from early theorists who believed that in science lay the promise of certainty, yet the hard and fast lines of research demarcation are blurred with action research. Firstly, action research crosses the two predominant approaches to research, which means that an action researcher can use both qualitative and quantitative methods and, indeed, they often use a mixture. For this reason, action research is described as a style rather than as a specific design (Meyer, 2000). Secondly, action researchers continue to engage in an epistemological debate, citing its intellectual roots within the interpretative paradigm, due to its emphasis on subjectivity (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992); the transformative paradigm, with its emphasis on change (Reason & Torbert, 2001) or the praxis paradigm, the art of acting upon the conditions one faces in order to change them (O'Brien, 2001).

Contemporary action research scholars have suggested embracing an 'extended' epistemology with four types of knowledge - propositional, experiential, practical and presentational - reflecting the cycles of action and reflection, theory and practice (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). And certainly these four types of knowledge appear to more accurately answer the question "*What kind of knowledge does your research study aim to produce?*" (Willig, 2008, p. 12) and informed the basis of this study design as follows:

Paradigm	Epistemology	Methodology	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Outcome
Interpretative	Propositional Experiential Practical Presentational	Qualitative action research study	Action Learning Sets Reflective Diaries Semi structured i/v	Thematic Analysis	Pragmatic

Validity

"Having good intentions is unfortunately never the point" (Silverman, 2000, p. 175)

Whilst accepting the subjective nature of an action research study, four core principles for enhancing the validity of qualitative research (Smith, 2008) were applied as follows:

1 Sensitivity to context

The introduction clarified what is known (and what is unknown) in the field of positive psychology and where the research question attempted to build on existing knowledge, theory and research from a qualitative and practical angle. Furthermore, the existing theoretical and empirical literature was considered more broadly in the literature review. Give that this was an action research project, with fellow participants acting as co-

researcher's, I attempted to be sensitive in the design of the project so that they were able to express themselves freely in a number of different contexts, whilst ensuring levels of confidentiality at every step of the way.

2 Commitment and rigour

Rigour was achieved through the triangulation of data by varying the data collection methods (action learning sets; semi structured interviews; reflective diaries); gaining a minimum of three different perspectives (my own; those of the participants and also my participants clients) and running the project over a six month period of time with at least two complete action research cycles.

However, I was aware of the limitations of the study design, discussed later in this chapter – in particular, the purposive sample of participants; the potentially complex role of my being both leader and participant in an action research project and the knowledge that validity in a qualitative project hinges “*to a great extent on the skill, competence and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork*” (Patton, 1990, p. 14).

Mindful of this, it is worth stating that this research study was as much about my own personal learning as it was about making a difference through the study outcomes. If achieving rigour is about “*substantial personal commitment to engage extensively and thoughtfully with participants or data*” (Smith, 2008, p. 248), then this received conscientious attention.

3 Coherency and transparency

Coherency is about 'fit', that is, choosing a theoretical approach that fits the research question, the methods employed and the interpretation of the data (Smith, 2008). The

belief that knowledge is gained through a cycle of theory and experience, action and reflection sits at the heart of this study and was reflected in the choice of action research as a methodology. It was anticipated that this approach would generate ideas relevant to the people involved in the research, their clients and to the environment in which it took place. The outcome was about *“not just about how people ‘see things’ but how people ‘do things’*” (Silverman, 2000, p. 283).

Data was analysed through thematic analysis (expanded on later in this chapter) with scope for personal reflexivity, that is, explicit consideration for the ways in which I influenced the study.

The spiral cycles of action and reflection within an action research study inevitably involve reflexivity - so-called ‘disciplined self-reflection’ (Wilkinson, 1988) - and involve *“constantly reflecting on, questioning and evaluating the research process... to distinguish how subjective and inter-subjective elements have impinged on (and possibly transformed) both the data collection and the analysis”* (Finlay, 1998, p. 454). This was important for I acknowledge that my influence on the set up of this research study was considerable from selecting the initial data and information to be shared with participants, through to the facilitation of the action learning sets and ultimately the ‘active’ process of analysing and interpreting data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4 Impact and Importance

From a personal perspective, I wanted this project to make a difference for the researcher; the participants; for the field positive psychology and the coaching community. Whilst this might sound ‘lofty’, there is so little practical information for coaches who want to apply positive psychology in their business practice that in setting

up an action research project I hoped to provide both myself and my fellow participants with an energizing experience that provided all parties with an outcome that had practical relevance for positive psychology and for coaching.

The role of the researcher

“The would-be initiator... must be willing to engage with the complexities of these human processes as well as with the logic of inquiry.” (Smith, 2008, p. 215).

An important epistemological question that informs the design of any qualitative research study is how the role of the researcher is conceptualised in the research process (Willig, 2008). Strictly speaking, in an action research study there is no leader - only an initiator - for collaboration and democracy sit at the heart of the process with practitioners acting as co-researchers with authentic participation and ownership of the activities (Sense, 2006). This is quite different from most forms of academic research which separate the knower from what it is to be known and conduct their research from a distance. It is also – of significance due to my own background - quite different from training, where the tendency is for the authority and expertise to lie with the trainer (Mcgill & Brockbank, 2008).

Sense (2004) discussed this dilemma of ‘control’ and ‘participation’ for action researchers engaging in such a study and posed an honest question, *“What do you do when you want to participate and let the other participants lead the process, but you know what needs to be done?”* (p.1). It was, he suggested, like trying to drive a bus from a rear passenger seat yet still wanting some degree of control over the destination!

What was evident throughout the project was my need to draw on personal experience as a coach, facilitator, energizer and reflective practitioner, in order to gain a balance

that satisfied academic, research and participants needs - putting a 'lid' on my controlling instincts. To each different situation, my response had to be appropriate to the shifting contextual milieu of the project whilst remaining attentive to the fact that sense-making within action research lies in the process of the study and the experience of the participants, not just in the written outcome (Smith, 2008).

The Participants

“Qualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities – the capacity to learn from others” (Patton, 1990, p. 7).

Since action is always *interaction*, the participatory nature of this programme – and hence the participants – was crucial. This was not research *on* people, but research *with* people.

Purposive sampling demands that one thinks critically about the parameters of the population the researcher is interested in and choose the sample case carefully on this basis (Silverman, 2000). As scientists Denzin and Lincoln suggest, *“A good qualitative researcher will seek out groups, settings and individuals where the processes being studies are most likely to occur”* (1994 p. 202).

Therefore, purposefully sampled for this action research study, the nine participants (including myself) were a group of business coaches. This group of participants was homogenous to the extent that we all shared the experience of business coaching with each individual having volunteered for this study after a presentation delivered by myself and a colleague to the Gloucestershire Coaching Network. The only two criteria specified were for each coach to have business coaching experience and possess a minimum of two business clients. In the action research group there were two men and

seven women with a mean age of 45 and a combined coaching experience of approximately 85 years. The participant's backgrounds and experience are detailed in Appendix I. The participant's clients - including who they were; their location; their business and their reasons for seeking coaching - were unknown to me.

Whilst understanding the limitations of this group, particularly due to its homogenous nature and lack of geographical representation, the criteria set was necessary in order to explore the specific research question and driven by this theoretical priority. Therefore, perhaps the key issue was not necessarily *how* I chose my participants but *what* it is I wanted to be able to say something about at the end of the study.

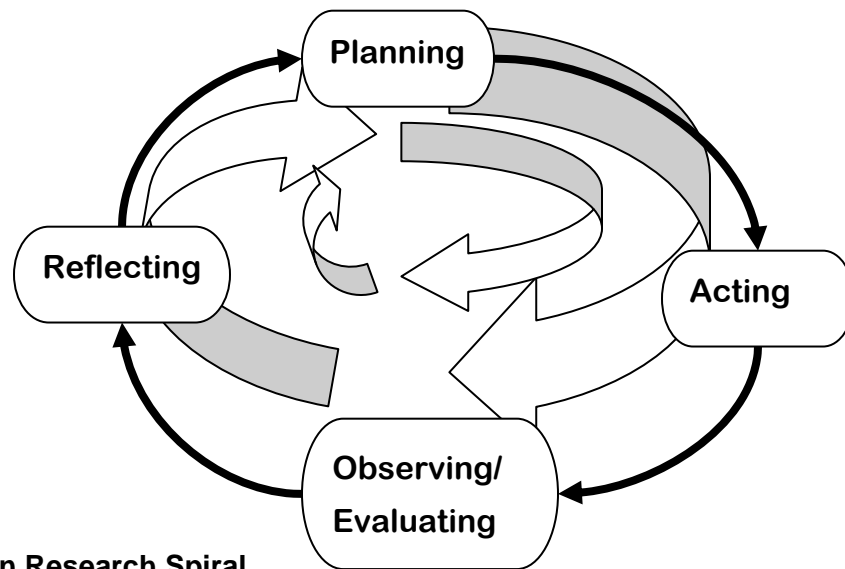
Data Collection

"Developing an evaluation is an exercise of the dramatic imagination."

(Cronbach, 1982, p. 239).

Sociologist John Lofland suggested there are four criteria for collecting qualitative data: First, to get close enough to the people and situation being studied to personally understand in depth the detail of what is going on; second, to capture what actually takes place and what people actually say: the perceived facts; third, to include a great deal of pure description of people, activities, interactions and settings and lastly, to include direct quotations from people, both what they speak and what they write down (Lofland, 1971). This, he suggested, constitutes "*a significant commitment to represent the participants in their own terms*". (1971, p. 4).

However, the commitment for this study was not only to get close, be factual, descriptive and quotative but also to represent the action research spiral of steps laid down by Lewin (1946) and refined by Kolb with his experiential learning cycle (1984) (see below).



The Action Research Spiral

To this end, a mixed method qualitative research study was designed (see Appendix II) using three different data collection methods:

- Action learning sets;
- Reflective diaries;
- Semi-structured interviews.

The data collection methods were positioned within two action research spirals underpinned by the basic principles that knowledge is achieved through a person having an experience, noticing results, reflecting on the outcomes and planning for change. However, people learn differently (Honey & Mumford, 1982) and the study design and numbers of participants made allowances for these learning styles to afford both rich data and a fruitful learning experience.

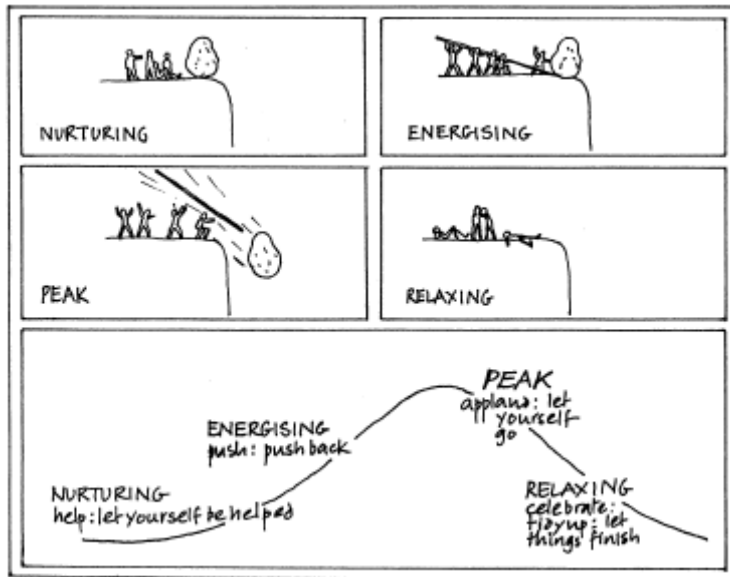
Action Learning

“Action Learning is based on the relationship between reflection and action ... where the focus is on the issues and problems that individuals bring and planning future action with the structured attention and support of the group. Put simply, it is about solving problems and getting things done.” (Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall, 2000, p. 142).

Action learning matched the philosophy of this project. Participants were afforded the opportunity to re-engage with each other at two separate stages in the study; to learn from each other and engage in shared learning; to highlight strengths, issues and potential solutions and, importantly, allow time for reflection on current practice - but all the while, encouraging action.

The scope and content of each two-hour action learning set was decided by the participants, guided by one simple question: *What are you learning so far about positive psychology within the coaching context?*

Beyond this, I was also interested in the development of a creative group in which there was an exciting interaction of both task and people. Described as a ‘living labour cycle’ (Randall & Southgate, 1980), the process of action learning is at its most productive if the experience is positive, nurturing and energising for everyone. Whilst experience tells me that group dynamics are always surprising, within a coaching and positive psychology context this was, in actuality, relatively effortless!



(The Living Labour Cycle and the Creative Group Cycle. Randall & Southgate, 1980).

Reflective Diaries

“As we think and act, questions arise that cannot be answered in the present. Reflection requires space in the present and the promise of space in the future” (Smith, 1994, p.150).

Professionals gain ‘practical knowing’ through experience, yet social scientist and consultant Schön (1987) unpacked the means by which this experience became effective - that is, how a professional can enhance their practice whilst they engage in it. His elegant term for this is ‘professional artistry’, where people engage in reflection both ‘in action’ (in this case, whilst they are coaching) and after the event, so-called ‘on action’.

The purpose of the Reflective Diary was to capture these thoughts and it was a vital tool in the study. Participants were offered two choices for recording their reflections. One was for the participant to adopt their own natural style, recording their experience of

coaching with positive psychology each week and bringing these to the action learning sets (or emailing them). Whether online or paper based this suited the coaches used to reflecting on their practice or who were put off by a sense of directive 'form filling'. The second choice was an outline diary (attached in Appendix III). This suited those participants who desired more specific guidance.

Semi Structured Interviews

I was keen to hear the coaches talk openly and freely about their experience throughout the study period in a one to one situation and therefore conducted a single one-hour, face to face interview with each participant. The interview was tape recorded and each participant was offered a transcript of the recording.

I was aware of the ambiguity of switching from facilitator (at the start of the study) to participant (during the study) to interviewer (by the close of the study). Although effective semi-structured interviews rely on the rapport established by interviewer and interviewee (Willig, 2008), after working together for six months, an abundance of rapport was more of a concern! As such, I used an informal interview framework so that the research question was answered. The interview questions are attached in Appendix IV.

Data Analysis

"It is the quality of your data analysis that will matter, not whether you can show how clever you were to access your data. Perhaps only in anthropology may the display of how you travelled thousands of miles and endured endless hardships count for something – but not much I suspect" (Silverman, 2000, p. 121).

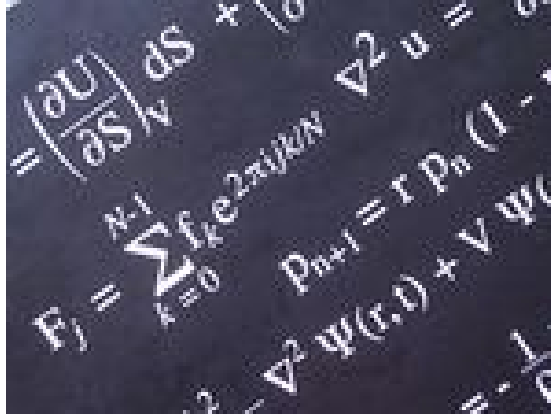
Action research scholars argue that formal data analysis, leading to the production of a written report, misses the point of participating in an action research study (Smith, 2008). Given that action research starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge, in many ways such scholars are correct for the process of generating the data *is* as important as the specific outcomes.

However, given that the primary purpose of action research is, simply, to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), I used thematic analysis to organise and give meaning to the data for the intended audiences. However, thematic analysis faces similar criticism to that of action research with scientists suggesting that it has “*no particular kudos as an analytical method*” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97). Whilst again acknowledging the subjective nature (and humanity) of qualitative research, the validity of using thematic analysis was enhanced by following a six phase process (Braun & Clarke, 2006) detailed in Appendix V.

Ultimately, thematic analysis was an appropriate method for this action research study. Not only does it have a rich historical link with organisational reporting (Boyatzis & Kolb, 1995; Boyatzis, 1998), but the emphasis is also on the importance of practical outcomes, and, in much the same way as positive psychology, the “*service of human flourishing*” (Reason & Torbert, 2001, p. 5). More importantly though, thematic analysis enabled me to ‘make sense’ of a large amount of data and articulate themes in a readable, constructive and meaningful way.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion



“When I think of positive psychology... I suppose it should be a sunflower, smiling baby or something...but what my first thoughts really were is the science...it's the science that made it so good for me and bizarrely, the happiness 'formula'... I keep coming back to the formula; I suppose it's the chemist in me...” (p. 118, C)

Chapter 4 Results and Discussion

In the following chapter an analysis of this qualitative action research study is presented which sets out to answer the primary research question: in what ways can a business coach usefully incorporate positive psychology into their coaching practice? The aim was also to explore three further subsidiary questions (a) what is the experience of the coach in using positive psychology, both personally and professionally, (b) how does a business coach frame the validated interventions in a context that is appropriate for a business client, and (c) what is new in positive psychology for the experienced coach? The intention was to offer the field of positive psychology a tangible 'toolkit' that enabled organisational coaches to translate concept to action in a 'nuts and bolts' way.

The study ran from May to December 2008. In this period the group of nine participants, including myself, met three times (the initial training programme and two action learning sets) whilst participants kept reflective diaries throughout the project period combined with a semi-structured interview in November. A total of 102 coaching sessions using positive psychology were recorded and the combined data set consisted of 411 transcribed pages (page numbers detailed in the following chapter refer to this transcribed data set). Due to the volume of data collected, thematic analysis has been conducted primarily on a semantic rather than a latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006), although I have attempted to move beyond description to interpretation, so the reader can see the significance of patterns and their broader meanings and implications (Patton, 1990).

Analysis of these sessions reveals three broad themes: namely (i) the 'branding' of positive psychology; (ii) the coaches learning experience and (iii) the tangible outcomes achieved. Themes were chosen not only because of their prevalence across the majority of participants, but also because they captured something important about the data in relation to the research question/s. Figure (1) overleaf highlights the final thematic map (Thematic Map 1, Themes and Sub-Themes) illustrating these three themes, with the journey from the generation of initial codes to the early thematic map (Thematic Map 2, From Codes to Themes) attached in Appendix VI and VII.

The Branding of Positive Psychology

"If you package it in their culture, their language, then it's going to be much more palatable for business...whereas if you do it clumsily, you're going to get a clumsy result..." (p. 350, G)

Positive psychology is branded as a new, empirically based coaching approach for the mentally healthy (Seligman, 2003; Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007). Whilst it is all of this (and more) at the heart of these factors lies a curious paradox that resulted in all nine participants wrestling to define positive psychology for their clients and position many of the evidence based interventions and assessments appropriately.

The Science Factor

"That word science really winds me up; it's more of a human art form" (p. 138, F)

Resolutely positioned within the evidence based coaching field (Kaufmann, 2006) and using its scientific basis as the differentiator (Linley, 2008), positive psychology scholars are keen for the discipline to separate itself from the "*latest self-help fashion*" (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007, p. 252) that dominates coaching. And, for the most part, (specifically mentioned by seven participants) the evidence basis of positive psychology gave the coaches credibility and confidence to position it with their clients:

"...somehow knowing that it was proven to make a difference, made a difference! I think previously my efforts to 'look on the bright side' with myself and my clients had felt a little empty and even delusional – now it feels valid"
(p. 82, C).

Much is also made of the rigour of positive psychology, for as Seligman states, "*coaching with these evidence based interventions and psychometrically established methods will help set the boundaries of responsible coaching practice*" (Seligman, p.266, 2007). It was therefore anticipated that the range of available assessments together with the accessibility of questionnaires (free on www.authentichappiness.com site) would add breadth and depth to the coach's portfolio. Yet in the subsequent six months and across the 102 documented coaching sessions, the VIA questionnaire was used only seven times with no further assessments being adopted (see Appendix VIII).

To a degree, the reason for this lies in a lack of confidence on the part of the coaches, some of whom felt they lacked enough background knowledge to answer questions appropriately: *"...it felt a bit awkward to apply... but it was more around probably the usage in terms of do I know enough about it to explain the background and empirical research..."* (p.311, G). Yet it was far more frequent for participants to state a disappointment with the 'packaging' of positive psychology on two specific grounds: (a) the face validity of the questionnaires and (b) the language surrounding the interventions:

"...I wasn't keen to use the questionnaires with people I work with... they already use branded questionnaires, you know Savill & Holdsworth, Myers Briggs, those sorts of products...I'm not saying the robustness isn't there behind these ones...but it just didn't look like it so I didn't feel comfortable doing that" (p.59, B).

Perhaps this is unsurprising given Biswas-Diener's suggestion that scientists are *"motivated by a strong curiosity rather than an eagerness to see their research results applied"* (Kaufmann & Linley, 2007, p. 90). Yet if positive psychology is to achieve deserved longevity within the executive coaching field, it clearly has to 'stack up' next to its scientific neighbours and add weight to a professional coach's portfolio.

Speak my Language

Perhaps it is the need to build trust in an authentic, credible way with business clients that caused so many issues with the language of positive psychology. No single area in

the research project drew more criticism, ranging from finding it “*a bit weird*”, “*non-worky*”, “*superlative*” to being “*awkward and clumsy*.”

Problems with the language were three-fold. Words either felt (a) too emotional and therefore inappropriate for business (“*feels more like marriage guidance*” p. 107), (b) not ‘down to earth’ enough (“*my clients can sense the bullshit factor*” p. 311) or (c) values laden (“*meaning... it’s a slippery term*” p. 226). And the issues did seem to lie with specific words, in particular:

- Happiness
- Gratitude
- Count Your Blessings
- Forgiveness
- Disputation
- Meaning
- Optimal Human Functioning
- Acts of Kindness

“I don’t think it would sit easily with some of my clients – you’ve got to know your clients and you’ve got to listen to their language and for me to match my language to their language so that we have a – they know I’ve got an understanding of where they’re coming from. If I suddenly introduce ‘counting your blessings’ to my clients they’d think where’s she coming from?” (p.71, A)

This need – whether perceived or real - for ‘translation’ had a profound effect on the application of the material and participants ended up doing one of three things: creating

their own words appropriate to their context (detailed in Appendix IX); just 'going for it' and trusting in the outcome or ignoring the intervention altogether.

Precisely why business - and British business in particular - is mistrustful of emotional language is potentially the subject of a separate research project for there is no doubt that the business world is aware of its importance:

"Yet when we talk about what brings great performance... you know they always come back to the soft stuff... make time, genuinely listen...your contribution counts, express admiration, appreciation... celebrating success, acceptance and respect...yet if we start here, the shutters just go down"
(p.333, G).

Yet if positive psychology is reduced to being perceived as "*namby pamby*"; "*airy fairy*" or just "*a little bit girly*" it is not reflective of the powerful, constructive and serious change it can offer clients.

Acknowledging the Negative

A striking observation across the entire data set is that the majority of individuals who sought coaching were far removed from what might be considered a 'mentally healthy' frame of mind. Whilst the field positions itself as the study of what is going right with people (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2008, p. 11) or, put another way, the '+2 to +5' people (Seligman, 2003), even a cursory glance of the issues facing clients in the workplace indicates genuine emotional turmoil. Adjectives in one session included "*despondent...cynical... dissatisfied... withdrawing*" (p. 79) with another client describing

himself as “*disenchanted, disillusioned and disengaged*” (p. 117). A picture of business life is presented as: “*...at the moment there are people dropping like flies because of the pressure and the process that they put these people through and now its really crippling them...*” (p. 277).

Looking deeper, these are by no means isolated incidents or individuals. From the project's 102 documented coaching sessions (see Appendix VIII) it is evident that many of the individuals seeking coaching were (and are) facing difficult, confusing and challenging times. As Participant F observed: “*the whole thing about positive psychology, its not supposed to be used for depression or real anxiety but I actually think it is apt*” (p.143) which concurs with the research conducted in Australia showing significant levels of psychological distress among substantial proportions of those presenting for coaching interventions (Green, Oades & Grant, 2006).

It appears that clients also *expect* to discuss the negatives of their situation. Participant E suggested that “*it seems more natural, more comfortable for individuals to think about the negatives and weaknesses they have. I am sure this comes not only from life experiences and messages received but also from the relationship most employees have with the businesses they work in. The main focus is what someone hasn't done and then they try to build on their weaknesses*” (p. 159).

One coach reflected on this “*overwhelming need to hear what's bad*” and drew a fascinating conclusion, that perhaps dealing in negatives “*is a way of building trust.*” (p. 274, D).

With regards to the branding of positive psychology, this is an opportunity for the field to avoid the secularisation of 'positive' and 'negative' individuals (unfortunately suggested by the name) and embrace the full spectrum of living, for what becomes clearer is that the coaching industry will struggle, now and in the future, to sustain the notion that one of its differentiators from therapy is that it deals with a population unencumbered by psychological distress (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007).

In short, trusting in the branding and the approach of positive psychology is important for an executive coach. Once this trust is doubted, it can cause particular dilemmas, as evidenced by one participant:

"I had a dream about positive psychology and I thought okay I'll have to tell you about this...the summary of what they were saying and this was my subconscious saying about positive psychology is that it is shallow, it is no more evidence based than anything else and it's a false holy grail. On a conscious level I can see all sorts of good things about it and so I was left a bit unsettled by the dream..." (p.135, F).

What is equally apparent is that the participants who married the 'art' of positive psychology with the science and created their own positive definitions for the field, whether visual or verbal, applied it more and were more creative in this application. These participants were also able to accept positive psychology as an evolving discipline, *"its like, yes it's exactly that, the concepts are there but the techniques of how to work with them are still in their, they are probably in their adolescence rather than in their maturity"* (p. 154, F).

I note that in my own reflective diary I have written a quote in the margin from Matt Skinner, Jamie Oliver's sommelier who suggested that "*the good matching of food and wine knits a little bit of art with a little bit of science and a lot of trial and error!*" (p. 397).

The Coaches Learning Experience

Invisible Barriers

"I expected cynicism...but I have found that tough, intelligent people who would potentially challenge this quite hard, have drunk it in" (p. 95, C)

An interesting aspect of this study is how many of the problems encountered with positive psychology in the coaching arena were perceived, rather than experienced. Although the familiar marketing literature stresses 'perception is reality', the actuality of using positive psychology often surprised the coach and belied their concerns. A good example of this lies in the religious overtones of positive psychology – mentioned by seven of the nine participants - which caused participants concern, specifically the questions on the VIA questionnaire, "*it just doesn't sit easily with me*" (p. 353). Yet on using the strengths cards with clients (an intervention we designed on the initial training programme), three participants found spirituality and faith forming a useful and important part of the coaching conversation:

"...so I pulled the cards out put them down and said draw out of there the words that attract you in this situation... and she pulled out some spirituality

words which we hadn't touched on before but she said it was her faith that kept her going in times that she found really difficult. She works in a very, very strong male dominated organisation, she's got a senior role and it's tough. So clearly she was looking at her inner resources as well as her spirituality that gave her the strength to carry on...we then had this great discussion around how she could use this faith to take her forward in engaging with more people in the organisation..." (p 61, B).

In a similar vein, it was common for participants to apply the interventions on themselves, be pleased with the effectiveness and yet hesitate to translate this to clients. The gratitude diary is a good illustration of this. The majority of participants started a gratitude diary which offered them energy, motivation and the "*mental and emotional capacity to just free a bit of space for me instead of it all crowding in*" (p. 71, B). Yet it was only suggested to a client in 3 out of 102 instances. One coach reflected, "*I didn't ask the real businessy people to do it, and I wish I had really...*" (p. 26, A).

Confidence and Taking Risks

"I'm becoming more confident, the more positive results I see" (p384, D)

Whilst one can put this reluctance down to language/translation problems again - undoubtedly a concern - it is as much a question of confidence and the learning process. Through the research study I became as fascinated in our ability to incorporate and take risks with new material, as I was with the original study outcomes, for there was a clear indication from the research that the learning process impacted on the outcome and enabled, or disabled, creative and authentic practice.

As a practical research methodology, what distinguishes action research from all other research designs is that it involves change enabling “*practitioners, managers and researchers to make sense of problems in service delivery and in promoting initiatives for change and improvement*” (Hart & Bond, 1995). As such, it follows the action research spiral of steps laid down by Lewis (1946) and refined by Kolb (1984), detailed on page 29 of the methodology chapter.

What is perhaps less understood or documented is how an individual moves from the ‘planning’ to the ‘acting’ phase, for without reflection on-action and in-action, the process of confidence falters (Schon, 1987). The research illustrated three factors as being significant enablers in this process:

(i) Self Application

“If I had that time again I would spend the first four or five weeks purely doing stuff on me and getting to grips with it properly” (p. 360, D).

Applying positive psychology to oneself appeared to be a vital ingredient in the transfer to others and stressed as being very important, “*I mean, once you’ve done it on yourself, it’s so obvious that it’s powerful...*” (p.17, A). Not only did it give participants a “*widening feeling of capability*” but also enabled the transfer process to happen for “*having experienced the power of the exercise to illuminate important individual facets, I now feel happier to introduce it in future, more ‘formal’ coaching relationships*” (p. 91, C).

Participant H’s reflection that “*I haven’t used it personally myself... maybe that’s why I think others won’t find it useful...*” (p. 195) appears to lend weight to the conception by

positive psychologists of authenticity as both *owning* one's experience and *acting* in accordance with the true self (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003).

(ii) *Integration not Isolation*

"...it's supplementary and complimentary to my practice..." (p. 64, B)

Despite many positive psychologist's desire for the field to remain "*clearly differentiated*" from non-evidence based branches of coaching and the broader personal development industry (Grant, 2007, p. 239), the research concurred more with the claim that positive psychology "*can be accepted in bits and pieces by everyone*" (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007, p. 220).

"...so for me positive psychology is just another approach to use in my practice, so as I would use solutions focus or I would use clean language or behaviour models, as I would use psychotherapy and psychological models this to me is another one..." (p. 57, B)

Participants mentioned previous training in NLP, Clean Language, Appreciative Inquiry, Constellations, Emotional Intelligence, Relationship Awareness Theory and Myers Briggs and in *all* cases, positive psychology was described in a congruent fashion. Moreover, the ability to integrate positive psychology with existing training appeared to give participants greater scope for practice, "*using positive psychology in my Myers Briggs session helped bring it alive for me*" (p. 108, C).

Congruence with personal values was as important as a dovetailing with previous learnings. Bearing out Harter's observation that authenticity arises from the ability to

behave and express what you really think and believe (Harter, 2002), those coaches who stated a 'natural fit' tended to use positive psychology the most, "*it's aligned with my preference for coaching in a style which emphasises possibilities rather than limitations*" (p. 45, B).

Yet perhaps the field of positive psychology should be careful about setting itself up as the 'answer' to coaching, or as Linley suggested "*the foundation on which our future success will be built*" (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007, p. 252). For anticipation that positive psychology might be superior brought disappointment particularly to one participant who observed, "*I was hoping it would be in the lead, but I don't think it is. There are some useful interventions here but no more so than lots of other approaches*" (p. 138, F).

(iii) Learning from Each Other

The process of action learning is described as being at its most productive if the experience is positive, nurturing and energising for everyone (Randall & Southgate, 1980). It was my stated wish in the original research proposal to offer participants a 'positive, shared learning experience that continues to live beyond the research study'. This was wholeheartedly borne out by participants throughout the six month project as guidance, advice, creative applications, successes and difficulties were shared: "*as I had hoped, joining a group of like minded individuals has helped me to grow and learn new research, principles, information and methodologies*" (p. 161, E). There is a lovely vibrancy of language as participants describe the experience as "*amazing... inspiring...encouraging... rich... valuable... a gift of learning.*"

Reflection is an important phase in action research spiral of steps (Lewis, 1946) and emphasised by modern practitioners of action learning (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) and its importance became increasingly obvious as the group learned from doing and learned from each other's mistakes. For example, we learned to be more subtle in positioning strengths after my own clumsy attempts to impose 'top' and 'bottom' strengths resulted in a visibly upset client. Instead, we used phrases such as, "*draw out of these cards words that attract you/resonate for you for in this situation*" (p. 60, B). Participant F was particularly experienced in explanatory styles and helped us all simplify the ABCDE methodology having left another client "*a little confused due to my inelegant and unrehearsed phraseology*" (p. 86, C).

It appears that the process of action learning is an ideal vehicle for coaches to absorb, integrate and use new material in a sustainable way, for as participant E observes:

"I would use it (positive psychology) more probably if I had input with other people to really understand it and work it through and that's why I enjoyed the action groups, although they were quite quick and everything it just brought it to light again for me..." (p. 171).

Driving from the Front Seat!

"Three days and my brain exploded..!" (p. 380, D)

Sense (2004) discusses the dilemma of 'control' and 'participation' for action researchers engaging in such a study which, he suggests, is like trying to drive a bus from a rear passenger seat yet still wanting some degree of control over the destination! His analogy

is apt for whilst I was part of the study group, the set up I created had a significant influence on the outcome of project – both enabling and inhibiting the creative process.

It was my intention that an innovative 'toolkit' for coaches would emerge as a practical outcome of this study. Whilst a toolkit for the application of interventions within organisations has emerged (see Appendix VIII), originality – above and beyond the initial training programme – was limited. As we all struggled to get to grips with the volume of information I presented in the initial training programme, let alone put the interventions into practice, this goal was, in hindsight, crazily ambitious:

“...frankly, looking back on it I didn't feel overwhelmed while I was doing it but it was too much to take away and use...how do you actually work with the concepts and interventions? What practical things might happen with clients? But I suppose you have to start with the theory and concepts and I got bogged down in some of that...” (p.154, F).

So whilst the support tools offered participants *“an accessible starting point...for having it labelled for you enables you to use it more consciously”* (p. 80, C) I am also reminded that innovation and creativity require time, confidence and freedom to take risks (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003) – an impossible task when participants are still 'making sense' of the material:

“When we were training with you it all made sense... that's not the same as being able to explain it back to someone else – there is a bit of gap there isn't there?” (p. 28, A)

Tangible Outcomes for Business

Positioning Positive Psychology

“Serious times require serious solutions” (p. 350, G)

There is no doubt that for positive psychology to be useful in the business arena it needs to be relevant to business and outcome driven: *“the ROI (return on investment) is always what they want to prove...the business is expecting an outcome and a noticeable difference in behaviour”* (p. 311, G). This is echoed in IPPA's (*Institute of Positive Psychology*) recent newsletter (October, 2008) where scientist Ed Diener notes, *“we are in the midst of tough financial times, and many people are focused on mortgage problems, oil prices, dwindling savings accounts and the plummeting stock market...the question naturally arises, “Does positive psychology have any useful suggestions for people to follow in these scary economic times?”* This means that the executive coach who chooses to use positive psychology in their practice must not only choose the right intervention but also position it well, and above all, achieve results.

There is very little in the positive psychology literature that demonstrates how to 'sell' positive psychology in a pragmatic way to business. Although Linley states the approach *“provides a rare opportunity for a way of working that makes the best of what people have to offer”* (2008, p. 180), those coaches who managed to position the role of positive psychology in an outcome oriented way found it an easier proposition to justify to clients. There are three useful examples that provide a starting point for this:

"I explain that 'happier people are more productive people'...and again if I bring it back to HR which is where I am at the minute, the discipline and the grievance and that unproductive time with unhappy people, unhappy with their relationships at work and unhappy with the trust...this makes sense to clients" (p. 119, C)

"It's a constructive fuel for change" (p. 132, F)

"It (positive psychology) stimulates action in the individual to progress...people place their energy and are motivated to excel when they enjoy what they're doing and believe they are competent" (p. 46, H).

Beyond Strengths

The interventions studied on the 3-day training programme (including those developed through the research period) are summarised below in Figure (ii). Studying the volume and complexity of interventions listed below it is remarkable (given the timescale) that all interventions were used at some point in the study by an individual, yet unsurprising that some participants did not go beyond the first:

Figure (ii): Positive Psychology Interventions

The Training Programme	
The 'Labs'	The Interventions
<p>Day 1 1. Positive Foundations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best Self • Reflected Best Self • The Life MAP (see Appendix X) • The Motivation MAP (developed during study) • The Happiness Formula • The PEM Venn Diagrams (Appendix X) • Appreciative Inquiry/Positive Questions
<p>2. Discovering Strengths</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and using Top Strengths • Using Strengths in a Different Way • Strengths as a Problem Solving Tool • Recrafting work to capitalise on Strengths
<p>Day 2 3. Enriching Positive Emotions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role Modelling & Positive Visualisation • Savouring • Celebrating Success • The Emotions/Energy Grid (Appendix X) • NUMB – dealing with negative emotions
<p>4. Enhancing Resilience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanatory Styles • ABCDE Model (see Appendix X) • Expressive Writing Paradigm • The Resilience Bank (developed by author during study programme) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Resiliency in past ○ Resiliency in present ○ Resiliency in future
<p>Day 3 5. Investing in Relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 Strategies for effective relationships • Gratitude Diary • Forgiveness Letter • Acts of Kindness • Active Constructive Responding
<p>6. Finding a Positive Direction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Motivation Continuum • Goals and the GVM Triangle (Appendix X)

What is exciting about the research is the sheer range of interventions that were used with clients over and above strengths. The concentration of much of the accessible literature for the general public (i.e. Biswas Diener, 2007; Seligman, 2003; Linley, 2008) has placed a narrow focus on this area which appears to ignore an abundant wealth of learning that is potentially useful in offering individuals alternative ways to find fulfilment in their lives. Therefore, whilst accepting that an understanding of, and playing to, ones strengths is vital for human flourishing, one of the aims of this study was to explore how positive psychology could extend its focus beyond this realm offering the business coach something new.

It is also worth noting that whilst interventions from Day 1 were used far more than those from other days (see Appendix VIII), the research suggests this is largely due to factors described earlier in this results section, namely: *(i) timing* (absorption of material after Day 1 substantially decreased); *(ii) accessibility of intervention* (those interventions, such as 'Best Self' and 'Strengths Cards' that were 'played with' on the training programme and therefore more embedded, were used the most); *(iii) language barriers* (particularly with the 'relationship' interventions) and *(iv) natural fit* (if a coach had used a similar intervention in the past, they were more likely to adopt it during the study programme).

As important, is the evidence that positive psychology is much more than the sum part of its interventions. Linley described it as a '*quite contagious paradigm shift*' (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007, p. 215) and one coach echoed these words with his experience:

“...what I’m saying is the biggest thing for me is the paradigm shift...the mindset shift that people are not broke, the majority of them, don’t try and fix them. Work with what people absolutely and luckily have already and that they and you can evidence, how can you build on that and whether that be strengths, memories, positive emotions, relationships, whatever, that’s the stuff that people can build on, so I think that’s the most its got to offer, but the methods... I’m not convinced are the best methods in the world.” (p.370, D).

Achieving Results

“You see I think outcomes can be much greater if they are given the right feeding and nourishment...” (p. 166, E)

Despite the difficulties encountered with the branding of positive psychology and the absorption of considerable amounts of new information, extraordinary outcomes were achieved by all nine participants in diverse ways throughout the study. Alongside the ‘toolkit’ (see Appendix VIII), this section explores the dominant interventions used and in which situations they were deemed appropriate. Where documented, the effect on the coach and the client is also examined.

Discovering and practising positive psychology was akin to a “*roller coaster ride*” (p. 401) with many participants embarking on a self discovery process at the same time as working with clients. The first three minutes of interviewing one coach are telling, with the following emotional range expressed: “*I felt excited...inspired...curious...sceptical...scared...comforted...awkward...clumsy*” (p.97, G). For all of this and notwithstanding a (very) limited amount of resistance to positive psychology from clients (one of whom described it as “*woolly shit*”, p. 217), for the overwhelming majority their

encounter/s with positive psychology was encouraging, giving considerable grounds for optimism.

Coaching is about developing insight and awareness (Whitmore, 1996) offering time out to stop and reflect, or as one client suggested “*the opportunity to assimilate and evaluate where I am*” (p. 164). But more than passive reflection, coaching is also about facilitating change (Whitworth et al, 2007) and in exploring the participant's words and voices it is striking how clients describe a positive re-engagement with their lives in an active, participative way:

(a) Empowerment and Confidence

Throughout the feedback, the word ‘empowerment’ occurred the most frequently, and statements such as, “*probably the most empowering two hours I have ever spent*” (p. 394) were common. Through an understanding of values and strengths in particular, clients felt empowered to be themselves, to act in accordance with their values and trust their contribution in the workplace:

“He had initially felt his top 5 strengths were dull (fairness, equity and justice) and he asked other people whether they agreed with this and found a high degree of correlation with the views of those who knew him and the questionnaire output. He told me that on reflection he realised that these were indeed his strengths, they were very important to him and how he understood why he had become disengaged (at work)... he was visibly brighter, his body language more confident – he said he felt enthused and empowered. The effect for him had been quite astounding – it had somehow

unlocked core issues for him and untangled knots. He was so positive, it was infectious. Not only has he absolutely changed how he perceived the issues at work but feels totally equipped to tackle them” (p. 80, C).

(b) Energy and Stimulation

Energy was described as being ‘released’, with sappers ‘removed’ and a sense of re-invigoration and stimulation was apparent:

“She was very energised by the whole exercise and went away and sketched it (Best Self) out and it was seeing herself performing...and having this ability to capture people in her energy and her knowledge and her excitement that has really taken her forward in her thinking because she was really struggling in her environment...it really did move her along and gave her some insight into the elements and avenues that would suit her best...because when people get a true reflection in the mirror of what they’ve got it gives them a real buzz and focus and energy that I think business can sometimes take out of them” (p. 165, E).

(c) Choice and Direction

Biswas-Diener describes happiness as being much more than verbal gymnastics. It is, he states, *“the most important topic your clients are currently overlooking”* (p. 30, 2008). And for many clients, an understanding of the routes to happiness was precisely this:

"it was suddenly she had this realisation that as much as she loved what she was doing and had loads of perks and loads of meaning in it, because she was doing trailblazing stuff and making a big difference she wasn't having any fun at the end of it, so she couldn't wait to get out the door...but it came full circle...she actually decided she didn't mind not having pleasure at work in the end, actually she said its not that important to me but what is important to me is that I have got purpose and meaning...she's got a choice now...she was burdened by it, that it wasn't at the work place, it was really useful" (p. 231, B).

(d) Courage leading to Growth

In consideration of this last brief case study, I am mindful of a note in my reflective diary, *"this stuff – it's not lightweight"* (p. 398). Scholars of positive psychology (Biswas –Diener & Dean, 2007; Seligman, 2003) are perhaps in danger of underestimating the surprising depths that interventions can tap into however simple their surface apparel, raising questions marks as to how positive psychology should be trained.

"At this point the coachee confided that six years prior she had been raped at work by her then boss and although she had some counselling at the time, she believed it was still affecting her. At this stage I offered to stop and suggested further counselling with a specialist, she flatly refused and wanted us to carry on working together. We went on to work with the 'resiliency models' and in particular had real success with the 'facts and stories'. In some ways it is quite difficult to explain how enormously this has positively impacted on her life. In simple terms, it has enabled her to see things in a

much more realistic and positive way than ever before, without putting a 'negative spin' on her interactions with people, particularly at work" (p. 402).

Reflecting on the above outcomes, Participant H's observation that positive psychology "*stimulates action to progress*" seems particularly astute and perhaps this is ultimately what positive psychology has to offer business coaches and their clients? With the engagement of employees currently being the primary concern of human resource teams; organisational resilience being uppermost in the minds of business leaders and individuals facing change and transition on a hitherto unknown scale (People Magazine, CIPD, Sep-Nov, 2008) such crucial issues should enable positive psychology not only to be 'corporate relevant' but genuinely meaningful to individuals.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

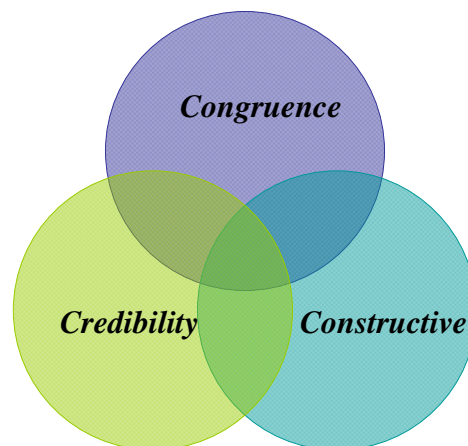


“Hey, life throws different things at us, so for me finding strawberries was putting your mind in a place where you actively look for the positive things around you...happened to you...things that you’ve got, so and there are plenty of them, you just need to find them. So there is this sort of choice, are you going to find them today or are you going to sit there are think that they are not there?” (p. 345, G)

Chapter 5 Conclusions

“You can go through the mechanics of coaching, but (positive psychology) just adds optimism, an energy, a sense of fun...” (p. 41, A)

A professional coach working in the business arena has an array of resources including assessment tools, techniques, interventions and philosophies to adopt and utilise with clients. This very assortment is what makes the profession confusing and unfettered (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007) yet offers the coach the flexibility of approach to solve client's problems and facilitate change (Kombarakaran, et al; 2008). To embrace a new approach, the study has demonstrated it needs to be *congruent* with the coach's natural values; *constructive*, that is, it works in practice, whilst enhancing *credibility*, with these three criteria working interdependently:



The 102 documented coaching sessions utilising positive psychology confirmed it has the potential to add significant value to a coach's portfolio. As well as providing the credibility of an empirically based approach and achieving outcomes that gave considerable grounds for optimism, it also offered a philosophy that was naturally congruent with the coach who was already solutions focused. As one participant stated, "*the philosophy of positive psychology is the philosophy of coaching*" (p. 93, C).

Yet the journey to transform positive psychology from theory to practice was neither straightforward, nor indeed was it conclusive. That positive psychology is a 'raw' discipline for the coaching world was obvious (as raw as the project leader!) and whether the participants will continue to incorporate positive psychology into their portfolio going forwards remains moot.

Some of this uncertainty is the result of the set-up of the research study and those researchers considering a similar project would do well to structure the initial learning period differently. Therefore going forward, five improvements could potentially transform its offering to the business world:

- (a) *Context* is important and the emotional language of positive psychology, particularly that of existing interventions, needs adapting to the (British) business environment;
- (b) The *face validity* of the assessment methods is weak in comparison to counterparts in executive coaching. Potentially this is just 'surface packaging', but it matters to an industry where credibility is key;
- (c) Creative development is needed to add fresh *vigour and choice* to the existing offering of interventions;

- (d) The practice of positive psychology should not be underestimated and comprehensive *training* of coaches, including initial self-application, is critical for confident practice;
- (e) Positioning the discipline as an *integrative* positive science that not only builds on existing best practice from other coaching disciplines but integrates the positive and negative aspects of human existence.

Although positive psychology now has a wealth of empirical data behind it, coaching is still a lamentably under researched discipline and the study gives rise to a number of questions that could potentially stimulate further research, such as:

- Why do business people seek coaching (to improve themselves or solve problems)?
- How effective are coaching interventions and what makes an intervention successful?
- How do coaches incorporate new learning material and what does it take to ensure this learning is sustainable?
- What is the role of negativity in the workplace (and can this role be positive)?
- How do emotions play out in the workplace and how can one drive through an emotional language in the workplace that is acceptable?
- What are the optimum ways to make positive psychology 'corporate relevant'?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the study provided a wealth of practical evidence that positive psychology can make a meaningful difference to an individual's life. It enabled them to *re-engage with their lives in an active, participative way*, generating:

- (i) Empowerment and confidence
- (ii) Energy and stimulation
- (iii) Choice and direction
- (iv) Courage, leading to growth

No matter how scientific a methodology, arbiters of best-practice coaching know that the adoption of a new approach is only valid if it brings about positive change for the client. Therefore it feels appropriate to complete this paper with a 'sign off' from such a client, who completed her 6-month coaching programme with positive psychology in November, 2008.

"When you read this email please know how by giving your time to working with me, you have so positively touched my life and consequently other people's lives too. It's been what I call a 'starlight' effect... I want to thank you from me and on their behalf, from them too!" (p. 404).

Word Count: 13, 600

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Appendices

Appendix I Participants

Participant A, (44)

Has run own coaching and training business for 8 years – enabling people who may not see themselves as sales people to sell and enabling managers and team leaders to manage and lead. Formal coaching study includes the CIPD advanced cert in coaching and mentoring in 2004/5, Advanced Executive Coaching with Human Technics (2005-7) and the NLP practitioners' certificate in 2007. Has built on this with coaching supervision since 2006. Typical clients in the past have included SMEs with up to 100 employees selling specialist, bespoke services and products. (e.g. engineering cos, lawyers, advisers, business owners, translators, interior designers). Recent clients include larger organisations including a top 15 law firm. "My approach is based on the particular client's style but very often starts with using a 'well formed outcome'/start with the end in mind' approach that 'pictures success' and then builds up self awareness, confidence and skills/practice along the way to getting there."

Participant B MBA FCIPD

Founder of a coaching company and a highly experienced coach, trainer, facilitator and HR consultant specialising in designing solutions that result in high performing individuals and teams. Participant B is also the chair of the EMCC UK Standards Committee. "I believe in working in partnership with my clients and enthusing others with my energy and commitment to support people in reaching their full potential".

Participant C, (42)

Has held consulting, coaching and HR roles in a variety of industries spanning the private, public and charity sectors including: IT; manufacturing; energy; distribution; science; finance and food. She has a BSc (Hons) in Biological Chemistry and holds an Advanced Diploma in Coaching & Mentoring (Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring), is qualified to BPS Level B (Saville and Holdsworth) and is a Fellow CIPD member (Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development). She draws upon a variety of well-established tools and techniques during her coaching sessions, including NLP. Psychometric profiles such as OPQ32 and MBTI can be used as part of the personal exploration phase as can 360° feedback, which can also serve as effective evaluation following a coaching programme. "My approach is a professional, pragmatic and flexible one, adapting in accordance with clients' needs and priorities. "

Participant D, (37)

Established own coaching business in 2008 having previously worked for 4 years for Europe's largest graduate recruitment and training centre for sales people. In this role he worked as a coach, trainer and training manager for a variety of industries. Prior to that, Participant D had sales and management, operational and coaching experience in a call centre environment, IT recruitment and pharmaceuticals.

Participant E, (47)

Having established himself as a Career and Performance Coach in 2000, now works with over 400 individuals each year. He specialises in working on a 1:1 basis and his pragmatic approach involves:

- ✓ Focusing individuals to achieve sustainable change by encouraging and developing options and strategies to achieve business and personal goals.
- ✓ Challenging an individual's thinking and perceptions.
- ✓ Clarifying career drivers to encourage better self-understanding and clearer direction.
- ✓ Empowering people and equipping them with the self-confidence, competence and motivation to secure future success.

Coaching assignments have been across both the public and private sectors and include BP, Brady, Whitbread, Zurich, Compass Group and Cheltenham Borough Council

Participant F, (52)

Participant F set up her own consultancy in 1998, on taking redundancy from Eagle Star after 14 years, where she held senior roles in HR, Strategic Marketing, Sales and OD. She coached senior management team members while in employment, and has continued to combine coaching with counselling, psychotherapy, NLP and facilitation in own consultancy practice. Participant F's clients are mainly professionals who either run their own organisations or departments, although also works with ex-prisoners and referrals from other therapists. The majority of these clients experience depression, anxiety or stress. A number of approaches/interventions are used to help the client develop their self-management and relationship-management skills etc. - including MBTI, Seligman's signature strengths, and block clearance therapy (which uses guided visualisation to discover the root cause of resistance, or other problems).

Participant G, (35)

Participant G is the HR Development Manager for a global multi-billion business operating in the Hygiene Solutions market that operates in over 130 countries and has around 23000 associates worldwide. She has been there 5.5 years. Her role incorporates talent development, leadership and team development, performance and developmental coaching, high potential development for example. She has been a HR Generalist since 1995 and coached employees, line managers and senior managers within the role of HR Manager. In April 2006 she completed the Advanced Certificate in Coaching and Mentoring with CIPD/ Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring ratified by Oxford Brookes University. As an internal coach she has performance based

coaching clients as well as leadership based which involve mainly transitions (sole contributor to managing others, or managing others to managing managers for example).

Participant H, (55)

After working as an HR Director, Participant H set up her own consultancy in 1997, offering HR expertise in organisational change. She has a post-graduate qualification in Personnel Management and is a Chartered Member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), one of the leading bodies in this field of work. She is qualified to use level 'A' BPS assessment tools along with 16PF5, MBTI (Steps 1 and 2), FIRO-B and OPQ. Her approach is informed by three years' part-time post-graduate training in Gestalt psychotherapy and part-time training in Organisational Systemic Constellations. She is also a qualified NLP Practitioner, Time Line Therapy® Practitioner and Hypnosis Practitioner. She has had two articles published in the learned journal 'Industrial and Commercial Training' and publishes a free monthly coaching newsletter – Positive Solutions.

Self, (45)

Having worked as Training Director of Europe's largest training centre for sales people for 6 years, I set up my own coaching and training consultancy in 1997. In the last decade, I have worked with business managers and leaders across Europe (including Sony; RAC; BMW; UNICEF) and specialise in the development of high performance through increasing confidence and personal impact skills. I am a qualified NLP master practitioner; SDI (Strengths Deployment Inventory) specialist; TA practitioner and am qualified to administer the emotional intelligence MSCEIT assessment. I have been studying for an MSc in Applied Positive Psychology for the last two years.

Appendix II The Study Design

Phase	Foundation	Methodology	Timescale
Phase 1	Propositional Knowledge	Facilitated Learning Facilitated Discussion	May 2008
Phase 2	Experiential Knowledge	Coaches own Practice	June 2008
Phase 3	Practical Knowledge	Action Learning Set 1 Reflective Diaries	July 2008
Phase 4	Experiential Knowledge	Coaches own Practice	August 2008
Phase 5	Practical Knowledge	Action Learning Set 2 Reflective Diaries	September 2008
Phase 6	Propositional Knowledge	Semi-Structured Interviews	September 2008
Phase 7	Presentational Knowledge	Collation and analysis of data	Sept-November 2008

Appendix III

The Reflective Diary

Reflective Diary
Name
Date
If you are reflecting on a coaching session, which of the areas of positive psychology were emphasised during this session? Positive Foundations Strengths Positive Emotions Resilience Relationships Positive Direction
What interventions were used?
How and why did you choose these interventions?
What was their effect for the client?
What was your experience of using these interventions?
Why did it happen this way?
How did you behave, think and feel as it was happening?
What were the main learning points from this experience?
What will you do differently as a result of this experience and reflection?

Appendix IV

Semi Structured Interview Questions

- Looking back on the last 4 months, how useful, if at all, was this experience?
- If it was useful, in what ways was it useful?
- Given what we have discussed in our action learning sets, in what ways did you incorporate PP into your practice?
- How did you choose what 'techniques' to incorporate? (and how did you introduce it?)
- How easy was it to incorporate?
- What, if anything, was their effect (for you and for your clients?)
- What did you choose not to incorporate?
- If this was at all deliberate, why was this?
- How would you summarise your experience? (personally and professionally)
- Is there a visual image/s that summarised this experience for you?
- What have you learned, if anything, from this experience?
- What has changed for you, if anything, as a result of taking part in this research study?
- If PP has anything to offer business coaches, what would that be?
- What can PP improve to be more useful to you or to other business coaches?

Appendix V

Phases of Thematic Analysis

	Phase	Description of the process
1	Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2	Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3	Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4	Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extract (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5	Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6	Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis of the research questions and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Appendix VI Codes

Code No	Description	Code No	Description
1	Link with other approaches	2	Role of PP in business
3	Probs with questionnaires	4	Resistance to PP
5	How to introduce PP	6	Interventions used (toolkit)
7	Effect on clients	8	Effect on coach
9	Circumstances that introduced	10	Self application of i/ventions
11	Negative bias	12	Why chose an i/vention
13	Lucy – effect	14	Surprised by effect/aha moment
15	Habitual use of PP	16	Result obvious
17	Stated natural fit	18	Acknowledge the negatives
19	Adapting for own use	20	How incorporate new material
21	Adapting for business	22	What not used/why
23	How background of coach affects outcome	24	The science factor
25	Taps into something deeper	26	Therapy vs coaching
27	Language barriers	28	Mechanics of coaching
29	Broadening horizons	30	Branding PP
31	Visual images/analogyes	32	Creativity
33	Action Research as positive experience	34	Role of initial training programme
35	Authenticity	36	Happiness at work as concept
37	Uses of tools & techniques	38	What is PP?
39	Learning by mistakes	40	PP & Religion
41	Interventions as a catalyst	42	Meaning and purpose
43	Strengths as empowerment	44	Importance of reflection
45	Knock on effect of PP	46	Probs with formulaic approach
47	Driving from front seat	48	Negative to positive language
49	Confidence of coach	50	Is it business concept?
51	Taking risks	52	Intuition versus formula
53	Who aimed at?	54	Negative effects of i/ventions
55	Doubts and disappointments	56	An evolving discipline
57	Accepting limitations of PP	58	Crossing values
59	Positive expectation	60	Proactivity mentioned by client
61	Simplicity belies effect	62	Coaches use same i/vention
63	Values and congruence	64	Making it compelling
65	Tapping into difference senses	66	Allowance to change
67	Importance to business	68	Specific business vocabulary
69	Coaches motivation to move forwards	70	Interventions mentioned as empowerment
71	PP seen as playing, not serious	72	Timing and when to take a risk
73	Contracting with client	74	Negativity and trust
75	Emotions in Business	76	PP and career counselling

77	Coaches emotional reaction	78	Barriers inc confidence
79	Distrust of simplicity	80	Tangible versus intangible
81	Masculine versus feminine approach to emotions	82	Importance of relationships in business
83	Culture/context of business	84	'Selling' positive psychology
85	Business clichés	86	Toxic emotions at work
87	Individual coach issues with words/phrases	88	Evidence and outcomes
89	Relevance of PP today	90	Positive Spirals

Red: Branding Positive Psychology

Green: The Coaching Learning Experience

Yellow: Tangible Outcomes for Business

Appendix VIII Positive Psychology Coaching Toolkit

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY COACHING TOOLKIT		
Page Ref	Intervention	Situation/What used for
LAB ONE – POSITIVE FOUNDATIONS/HAPPINESS INTERVENTIONS		
4/31	Life MAP/Work MAP	Individual in Transition Period
13	Best Self	Underperforming team – need to understand best in selves – set a tone of fun/team/positive support/started excellent communication
16	Life MAP (Magical Moments, Absorption & Purpose)	Client re-crafting job role
47	PEM (Pleasure Engagement & Meaning Balanced Diagram)	Individual wanting to adjust work/life balance
48	Life MAP/Motivation MAP	Individual in transition to more senior role in company – needing to 'let go' and move forwards. Also drew up a 'criteria for happiness' at work
64	PEM Diagram	Unhappy with job – intellectual but not emotional engagement
83	Happiness Equation	Senior exec trying to change circumstances to improve life. Resigned and rescinded resignation as result. Re-crafted role instead.
83	Best Self	Individual 'lost' in career/life. Wanted to create image at most fulfilled
84	Best Self	Career counselling – seeking direction
88	PEM Diagram	Individual dissatisfied with 'trappings' of conventional happiness
89	Best Self	Developing self confidence at work
112	Best Self	Client wanted to create own 'mood board' to reflect on behaviour at work and when at best
128	PEM Diagram	Relationship difficulties –developing flexible thinking around life
130	PEM Diagram	Individual in transition and reviewing work options
139	Life MAP	Individual reviewing life balance
159	Best Self	Looking for job and reflecting on self in most positive perspective
159	Best Self	Changing career path and wanting a role in alignment with values
159	Best Self	Individual changing job roles at work
182/199	Best Self/Role Models	Client designed inner role model visual to develop confidence
160	Best Self	Individual re-thinking job and career – adapted self to highly negative environment
160	Best Self	Individual taking time out to rethink next career move

216	Best Self	Used as introduction/icebreaker session – client chose 6 images that appealed most and brought to first session
224/372	Best Self/Best Department	Client chose to broaden out Best Self exercise to include department inviting colleagues to create collage to understand 'what are we like at our best?' Used visual result to create vision for future and pursue change programme
233	Best Self/Visual	Client at crossroads – employment or self employment?
325	Positive Questions	Leadership team needing to collaborate more effectively – used questions such as 'when did you last positively collaborate and what was the result?'
318	Best Self/Visualiation	Visualisation exercise for presentation skills
331	Best Self/Personal Vision	Client wrote a personal vision for self to move forwards in career
374	Best Self	Positive reframing exercise for client to understand what already doing well in career
378	PEM Diagram	Client considering options for future work
359	Positive Visualisation	Training Managers as Coaches Course – 1:1 coaching sessions: what does best look like?
391	Life MAP	Client wanting new direction in job/career
393	Best Self	Client created collage to offer new perspective on life and foundation for future
398	Reflected Best Self	Building internal and external relationships and confidence. Using feedback to create goals for new year

LAB TWO – DEVELOPING STRENGTHS

28	Strengths Discussion	Follow up to 360 feedback and appraisal meeting
48	Strengths Cards	Directing energy in the management of a business
60	Strengths Discussion	Gaining perspective in confidence of work direction
80	VIA Questionnaire	Client disillusioned with company and role – wanted to understand personal strengths and values – stayed with company and reshaped role around these
83	Strengths Cards	PDP Session – Client self confident – coach worked with question 'how can you do what you are good at in more and different ways?'
89	VIA Questionnaire	Developing self confidence in the workplace
96	VIA Questionnaire	Using top strength of curiosity to solve a tough relationship issue and become more of an observer than protagonist
129	VIA Questionnaire	Client overwhelmed with difficulties in life and lacking in self confidence
129	Strengths Cards	Client making decisions as to where to work
158	VIA Questionnaire	Helping individual build self promotion marketing tools through understanding self better
160	VIA Questionnaire	Client wanting to understand how to make a meaningful impact in life
178	Strengths	Client facing great changes in life and needing hope, confidence and clarity for finding a way forwards
178	Strengths	Client wanting a 'focused plan for moving forwards' and understanding of what strengths using; what not using and what could borrow
180	Strengths	Client wanting to write a book and using strengths as tool to avoid procrastination

185	Strengths	Client feeling bullied by individual – needing confidence to stop being victim and react assertively
239	Strengths Cards/discussion	Team in conflict – used strengths as problem solving tool
240	Identification of top 5 Strengths	Leadership Programme – used in conjunction with 360 tool
241	Strengths Cards	Client had confidence crisis after losing major piece of business – strengths used as reminder and resilience tool
269	Strengths Discussion	Individual struggling to deal with difficult people
316	Strengths Cards	Building confidence and working from an authentic basis
319	Strengths Cards	Resilience – using top strengths to diffuse conflict
320	Strengths discussion	Used in combination with 360/myers briggs to identify strengths, overdone strengths and 'derailments' in life
372	VIA Questionnaire	Department Head creating a vision for the future – used to understand strengths of team
372	Strengths 360	Department Head gained 360 from his team on personal strengths
374	Strengths	Sales team in conflict used strengths to manage conflict in future
382	Using strengths in different way	Manager with 'challenging' team members used intervention to start positive team building programme
357	Strengths Based Coaching	Using strengths to give positive feedback
394	Strengths Cards	Understanding self/confidence/life balance
394	Strengths Cards	Using strengths in a different way to achieve goal of losing weight – used 'persistence' strength effectively
399	Values and Strengths	Unhappy in job role/crossing values/once understood, shifted job role in accordance with strengths and values
399	Values and Strengths	Clients negative relationship with family impacting on work – understanding different strengths and gaining perspective
400	Values and Strengths	Director struggling to manage team because of crossed values

LAB THREE – ENRICHING POSITIVE EMOTIONS

7	Positive Emotions/Energy Grid	Client with low energy, needing to prioritise, plan time and gain control
9	Savouring	Linking with NLP Well Formed Outcomes and focusing
9	Positive Visualisation	Resilience and building on past positive states
110	Positive Emotions	Gaining awareness of body language; emotional contagion and raising positive emotions of team
121	Positive Emotions	Using positive emotions to ensure feedback is accepted well
291	Positive Emotions	Starting coaching sessions in positive way to increase emotional energy of session
314	Positive Emotions	Peer feedback on leadership course and the importance of PE
314	Positive Emotions	Using knowledge of PE to change emotional state of group
375	Positive Emotions	Team 'measure' ratio of pos/neg lang at meetings and decide how to shift ratio
394	Positive Emotions	Client negotiating for new job and v stressed. Changed emotional state to gain positive outcome

395	Positive Emotions	Identification of pos/neg states with client to gain awareness and self confidence
LAB FOUR – RESILIENCE AND BOUNCE BACK SKILLS		
53	Resilience and ABC Model	Bullying actions eroding personal power – needing skills to deal with
86	ABCDE Model	Client lacking in trust of organisation and 'walking out'. Gained skills for perspective
122	Explanatory Styles	Overcoming resistance to changes in life and developing positive explanatory styles
124	ABCDE Model	Fear of change – model led to release and 'liberation' of thinking
128	ABCDE Model	Relationship difficulties, needing to gain perspective and develop flexible thinking patterns
130	Explanatory Styles/Disputation	Client desire to be more optimistic and confident
132	Disputation	Training coaches who get 'stuck' with clients to dispute pessimistic thinking ('its all my fault')
133	ABCDE Model	Client in career transition and needing to look at life from multiple perspectives
159	Writing Paradigm	Changing career roles and challenging negative thinking
252	The Resilience Bank	Developing past resilience timeline to deal with the present
252	ABCDE/Explanatory Styles	Understanding optimism in the present to deal with situation in the future
253	The Resilience Bank	Developing future resilient thinking patterns
277	Writing Paradigm	Client facing personal and professional trauma – journaling offered positive release
400	The Resilience Bank	Director needing strategies to manage her team more effectively
LAB FIVE – INVESTING IN RELATIONSHIPS		
6	Forgiveness Letter	Client 'stuck' due to injustice at work – helped to move on
25	Gratitude Diary	Client planning work for 2009 and used to discover what wanted more of
26	Gratitude Diary	Team of managers used diaries to understand selves better before managing team
127	Forgiveness Letter	Client facing relationship difficulties and needed to move on
256	Collaborative positive questions	Leadership programme – when you collaborated well why did it work? What did you get from it? What can you learn?
258	Building positive relationships	Used 10 Strategies handout to develop options for individual with relationship difficulties
374	Forgiveness Letter	Client facing personal issues needing to address
374	Thank You Letters	Client sent 3 'thank you' letters in order to move forwards
398	Reflected Best Self	Client successfully used positive feedback to invest in better relationships with team; family; associates and clients.

LAB SIX – POSITIVE DIRECTION

(Used rarely as solo intervention because discovered that formed part of all other coaching discussions. Three sessions below are when GVM Triangle (goals, values, motivation used as solo intervention)

183	Goal Orientation	Client writing book and wanting to know where direction/energy coming from for motivation
378	GVM Triangle	Client realigning goals with values and motivation in re-crafting career
401	GVM Triangle	Client setting goals for 2009 – wanting to ensure that achieves them (unlike in 2008)

Appendix IX Business Language

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY – ADDING TO THE BUSINESS LANGUAGE	
Positive Psychology:	These words/phrases were used:
Positive Psychology	A constructive fuel for change
	A way of stimulating action to progress
	A process of re-engagement
	A way of enhancing and enriching your life
	Its all about productivity – happier people = productive people
	Developing empowerment and confidence
Strengths	Taking multiple perspectives
	Talent liberation
	Talent management
	Positive drivers
	Building positive common ground
	Developing congruence and authenticity
Relationships	Investing in positive or meaningful relationships
	High quality connections
	Positive networking
	Valuing relationships
	Having the courage to collaborate
	Building a currency of trust
	Developing the art of respectful feedback
Acts of Kindness	Developing reciprocity
Gratitude/Gratitude	Expressing Admiration
Diary	Reflective Diary
	Appreciation Notes
Forgiveness	Building Trust
	Acceptance
Goals and Values	Positive Direction
	Developing a shared vision
Positive Emotions	Celebrating Success
	Capitalising on good fortune

Appendix X Additional Interventions

(i) The Life MAP

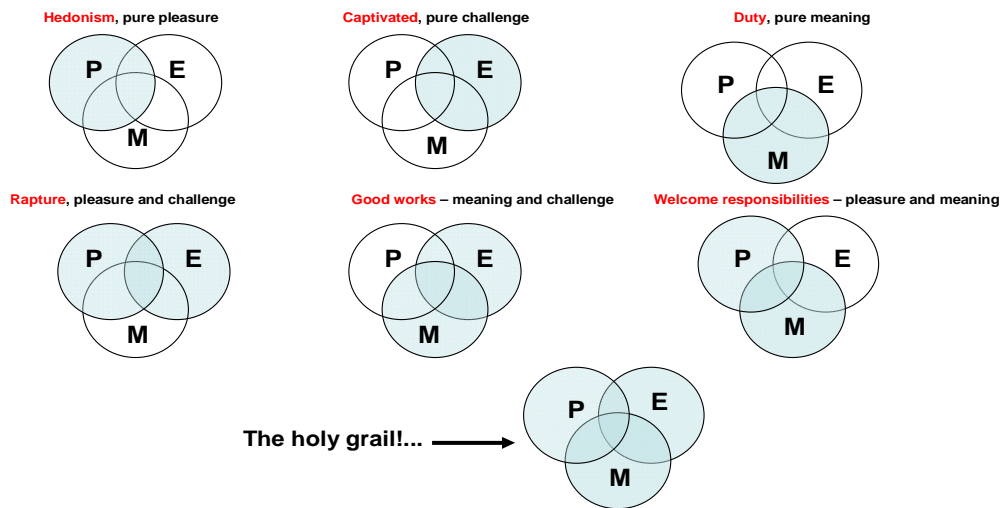
Date:
Rating:

The Life MAP

Activity	Magical Moments	Absorbing Activities	Purposeful Projects	More +/Less -/Same =

(ii) The Balancing Act

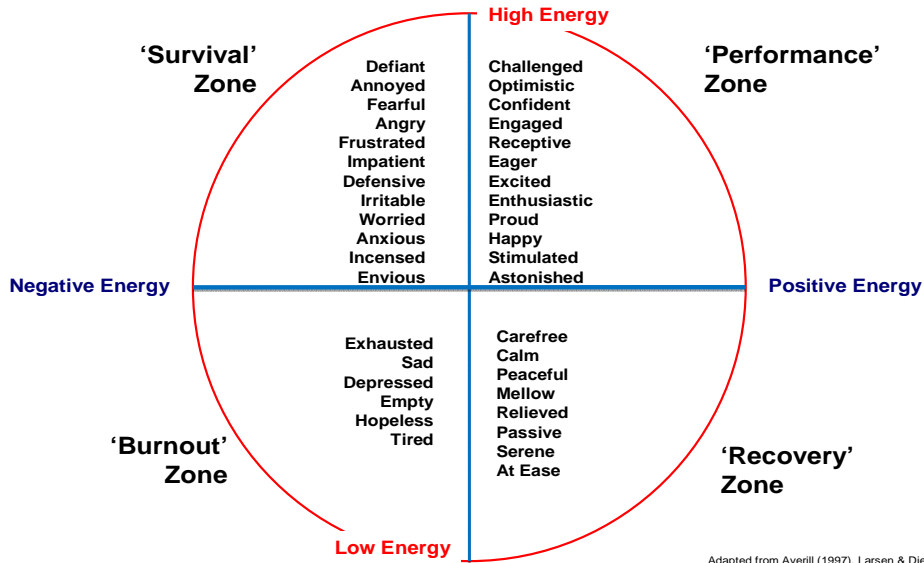
Pleasure, challenge and meaning – the Balancing Act!



Adapted from: The Mind Gym (2006)

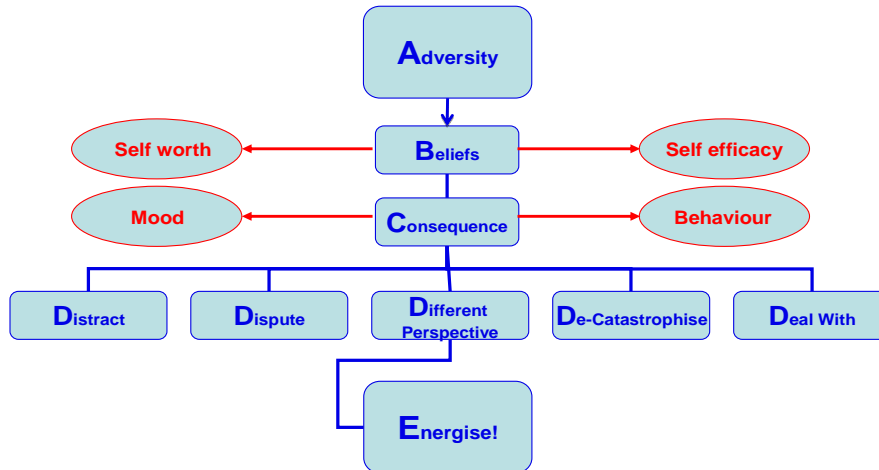
(iii) Positive Emotions and Energy

Emotional Energy Zones



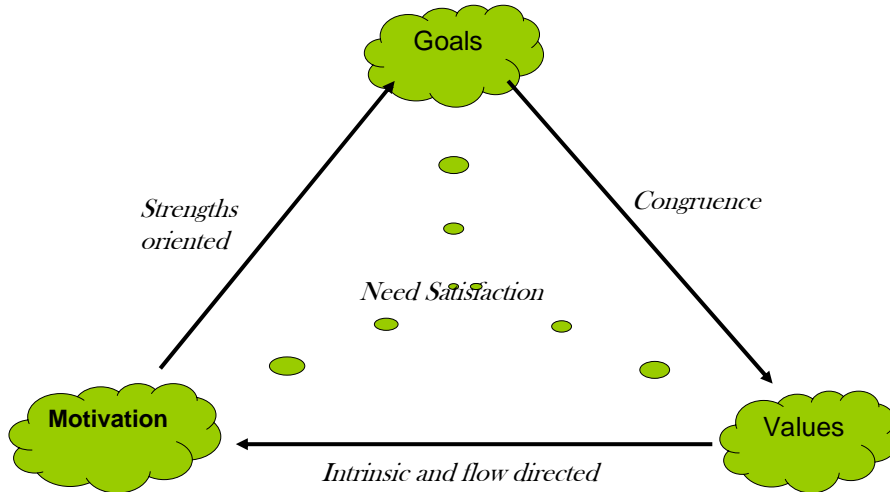
(iv) ABCDE Model

ABCDE Interventions for Resilience



(v) The GVM (Goal, Motivation, Values) Triangle

What makes goal setting successful?



Ryan, 2007

The GVM Triangle