BUILDING TOWARDS AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF COACHING: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

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Building towards an anthropology of coaching:

Constructing identity

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ABSTRACT

Executive coaches are specialists in coaching executives to be more resilient and productive in a competitive marketplace while keeping their self-identity intact. As a relatively new field it is often difficult to articulate what is an executive coach. I explore how individuals construct their identity through the anthropology of identity and self and its association with neoliberalism. The fieldwork included interviews with executive coaches around the world and participant observation in London, and critically reviewing the only ethnography available on executive coaching and coaches from New York.

The construction of the self plays a greater role in determining identities than a coach's skills and competencies. In the neoliberal sense, the coach represents a personal enterprise of continuous learning and adaption to their own needs and market trends. The tension between agency and reflexivity within the self directs them to act with self-control towards the market, which is important as an entrepreneur. This may explain why there confusion in the market place as to what is an executive coach because there is resistance in homogenising the definition that minimizes the self.

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1. Unlock your potential with an executive coach – everyone needs one, they just don't know it!

That moment has finally arrived as they let those words roll of their tongue, 'So tell me what do you do for a living?' With a sharp intake of the breath and a sigh the person standing in front musters their bravado and sureness: 'I'm an executive coach.' Blankness followed by realization. How should they respond? Some politely roll their eyes and shake their head in condolence, others simply correct the executive coach standing in front of them and say: 'Oh you're a life coach, well that's just like counselling really…' before moving onto a less embarrassing topic, whilst some genuinely do not know and ask 'what is coaching?' and, for a small minority they quietly break out into a knowing smile, relax and begin talking about their experiences of coaching. Welcome to the confusing world of the newly emerging field called executive coaching.

Executive coaching (herein also referred to as coaching) emerged as a response to changes in modern working life in contemporary society. For the recipients of coaching in the workplace, typically managers and leaders (herein also referred to as executives) are under greater pressure to deliver results working in or leading a 'lean' team within a matrix organisational structure. At the same time they are resolving complex challenges as a consequence of the rapid advancements in technology, innovating sustainable solutions that are important to maintain customers, and growing their market against fierce competition locally and globally. Changes in organisational structures, like the matrix structure (employees grouped by both function and product), working in project teams virtually and face to face with peers around the world, has also changed working practices from 'command and control' management to a risk-taking and problem solving style that places more emphasis and accountability on individual and team autonomy (Webb 2004;

Sennett 1999). Furthermore, it has shifted peripheral employees in many organisations from long-term employment to frequent short-term contracts. Executive coaching provides the space for executives to work through the various degrees of complexities to be even more productive, and remain competitive in the market with their self-identity intact.

Identity is constructed from productive work, and the professional role closely relates to how an individual or group conceptualizes oneself and relates to others. With work itself becoming more reactive, temporary, and insecure this has created uncertainty over how to express their identity to participate in social interaction, Sennett (1998) calls this 'character'.

> *[People] worked hard and they waited; this was their psychological experience of depth. Such a work ethic depends in part on institutions stable enough for a person to practice delay. Delayed gratifications loses its value, though, in a regime whose institutions change rapidly' (pg 98-9)*

Executive coaching provides the space for executives to reflexively and meaningful organise their thoughts and potential actions in a rapidly changing milieu, which in turn builds their character for adapting to the constant changes more efficiently. This is illustrated by Ozkan's ethnography of executive coaches in New York, USA and my own experience of coaching: '*Coaches enlist a set of techniques to increase their clients' efficiency in increasing self- awareness and becoming a different person. Coaches and coaching clients talk about a work ethics that emphasize increased knowledge about the individual and the social in which the individual operates. Increased self-awareness, self-*

discipline, and self-control are encouraged both to increase personal happiness and satisfaction and enhance productivity and functionality. '(2008: 17)

The construction of self-identity, as alluded to from the start, is shaped by the on-going exchanges in the market that impact work. Executive coaching emerged as a response to a fast changing organisational environment and provided professionals a place for continuous self-improvement in order to adapt to the volatility of markets (Ozkan 2008; Stec 2012a; Swan 2010). The goal of executive coaching is to thus (in its own terms) 'improve professional human functioning and flourishing in organisations [and] transform executives [to] make them more effective in their life and work in the organization' (Hannafey & Vitulano 2012) through 'sustained behaviour change' (Bono & Vey 2007). In the marketplace, both academic and trade, there are many published articles and studies focusing on coaching skills, the need for coaching, and how to measure the return on investment (Cox et al. 2014; Grant 2009; Kauffman & Coutu 2009; Rydlund et al. 2014) but only one anthropological study by Ozkan (2008) called 'EXECUTIVE COACHING: CRAFTING A VERSATILE SELF IN CORPORATE AMERICA'.

Focusing on coaching into itself would take longer than time permits, and from a professional and academic perspective I focused on the construction of the identity of the executive coach (herein also referred to as a coach) because there is little information available on who the individuals (the selves) are who come to executive coaching. For this research, identity is defined as the sameness of the self with others within a group that is tightly interwoven with the legitimacies of power as well as rights (Chun 2009; Sökefeld 2001); and the concept of self assumes the ability to act (agency) and reflect (reflexivity) (Sökefeld 2001). The anthropological use of the self is the equivalent of the psychological use of identity.

The identity of the executive coach is typically constructed and defined by the skills and competencies codified by the various coaching bodies that have been set up locally and worldwide that were assumed to guarantee relations of trust (Evetts 2013) or through the history and evolution of professionals (see Drake 2008). Demonstrating coaching skills to pass the accreditation process marks the suitability of the coach, however, the lack of empirical validity of the core competences and the conflict of interest between certifying coach training schools and accrediting its members threatens its credibility (Maltbia et al. 2014; Griffiths & Campbell 2008). Furthermore, the market is questioning the validity of the current identity as Glaxo Smith Klein's Sally Bonneywell comments:

> *'People have been talking about making coaching a profession for well over 10 years, but until all stakeholders are in agreement to take the industry to the next level, instead of protecting their own status quo, things will be very slow to change – to the detriment of all in coaching.' (2014)*

I intend to show that the current practices for categorizing the 'fluid' identity of an executive coach simply on skills and competencies is insufficient because the self is deeply intertwined and significantly exposed with their identity, and develops with training. Also, I hope to begin to relate the shaping of executive coaches and coaching as a manifestation of and a consequence of neoliberalism in terms of self-governance. I use Bauman's definition of 'fluid or liquid' interchangeably to describe the lack of social frames of reference, that over time are unable to maintain their form long enough to solidify, to which concepts like 'career' and 'progress' can be meaningfully applied (2007: 1).

With little anthropological data available on executive coaches, I draw from various anthropological literature including identity and self, and neoliberalism to develop the foundations in order to observe the situated practices of executive coaches 'imagined to be

located in meditational space' (Marcus 2010: 39). Following on from the literature, I analyse the fieldwork which was collected and assessed in three ways (1) critically reviewing Ozkan's ethnography, (2) self-ethnography and reflexive analysis of two coaching dialogues, and (3) determining how identity was constructed from my interviews with practicing coaches. Finally I conclude with this ethnographic finding of 'the self', in which lifelong education and training is integral to being an executive coach, and perpetuates the field of executive coaching as a 'liquid idea' that refuses to fix itself but remains popular despite this and because of it.

THE AIM: HOW DO EXECUTIVE COACHES CONSTRUCT THEIR IDENTITY?

Executive coaching is reported as emerging as one of the top five leadership-development best practices that work alongside leaders and managers to aid in responding to their immediate needs in the complex and chaotic world of work (Maltbia et al. 2014). As illustrated at the start of this chapter, individuals react to professionals called executive coaches in very different ways. Regardless of how they do this, executive coaching appeals to executives because it is a space for personal attention to explore the 'identity' of the executive and by extension the self. The purpose of these engagements is to 'unlock a person's potential' (Whitmore 2009) and help them maximise their own productivity through their desired performance whilst being held accountable to the risks taken. This is different to therapy and counselling, which many organisations also offer, to the extent that there is no stigma attached that can impact future career progression as coaching labels them as mentally stable and highly functioning. Executive coaches then are specialists in coaching executives to be more resilient and even more productive in the competitive marketplace while keeping their self-identity intact.

As a relatively new field, it is often difficult to articulate what an executive coach is, and only a little less confusing to define what is coaching. In this Chapter, I have established

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the growing popularity of the field of executive coaching and highlight the black box that surrounds the identity of executive coaches. In Chapter 2, I begin by drawing from various anthropological literatures to develop the foundations for investigating the identity of an executive coach. In Chapter 3, I outline the methodology and approach, and in Chapter 4 I explore how executive coaches and coaching emerged. In Chapter 5 and 6 I analyse and discuss how coaches construct their identities. Finally in Chapter 7, I conclude with how this thesis contributes to anthropology.

2. IDENTITY AND NEOLIBERALISM

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN IDENTITY AND SELF

Distinguishing conceptually between identity and self is important because identities can be experienced as a plurality whilst the self is experienced as a single entity. They are both constructs, just like the culture of kinship: 'identity and self does not explain anything; idea and self needs to be explained' (modified Sökefeld 2001:531).

The concept of identity delayed its entrance into social anthropology as it was considered the domain of psychology's analytical inquiry of an individual's ego and subjectivity (van Meijl 2014; Chun 2009; Rabinow et al. 2008). Here it is understood to mean that after the basic personality features have been formed and integrated during childhood, the identity is more or less fixed and this determines how an individual acts and behaves. Any inconsistencies as to what are expertly considered as a normal personality i.e. 'nonidentity or nonsameness of the self' (Sökefeld 1999) has been regarded as being mentally disturbed or even unstable. In anthropology, identity was marked to refer to ones ethnic identity (Chun 2009; Sökefeld 1999) that represents the sameness of the self with others within a group[1]. This was an extension of what was traditionally understood to be 'the historically and culturally rooted self-image of a group predominantly shaped in contact with other groups' (van Meijl 2014: 66), and had become a 'residual of culture' (Rabinow et al. 2008: 35).

The concept of identity is based on the perceptions of selected facts, rather than natural facts (Chun 2009), because it is tightly interwoven with the legitimacies of powers as well as rights (Calhoun 1997: 69 as cited in Sökefeld 2001). Being part of communities and the 'imagined community' i.e. the state or nation is compounded with issues of power and

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[1] For more details refer to Erik Erikson's Childhood and Society (1950) in which identity became transposed to ethnic groups, culture, nations on the assumption of sameness within a group.

resistance that is linked to identity because of its access to certain rights and claims. Maintaining identities requires conformity to shared values and common lifestyles, and therefore subtle representations of the self are presented to different stakeholders of communities with a 'plurality of identities'. This means that in order to have a 'personal' identity separate from the 'ethnic' or 'social' identity, one must compare and identify those differences to understand and contrast the self with others. Therefore identity was reformulated to include and refer 'simultaneously to the difference *and* sameness of self and other, both with psychological *and* sociological connotations.' (van Meijl 2014 : 71).

Following Stuart Hall's definition of identity, he emphasizes the 'suturing' of the 'variety of subject-positions in the divergent social locations of his or her life' (Mageo & Knauft 2002: 3) that is dependent on the 'context and prevailing vectors of power' (Narayan 2007) and life stages (Webb 2006). 'Far from being grounded in a mere "recovery" of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.' (Hall 1989: 70 as cited in Narayan, 2007). An individual will have a plurality of assumed identities shaped to represent the self in all the different communities he or she belongs to whether imagined or real, and this becomes a never-ending process that remains open-ended as long as there is an investment into the future. Therefore the concept of the self[2] is essential for every human invested with agency and reflexivity.

The concept of self assumes the ability to act (agency) and reflect (reflexivity) (Sökefeld 2001). Repetitive action maintains existing structures. Repetitive action with reflexivity restructures relations between others and nature, and represents a reinterpretation of the

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[2] The concept of self, as discussed by Marcel Mauss who linked the work through both sociology and psychology, reached the conclusion that the self is neither innate nor a primordial idea 'inscribed since Adam in the deepest part of our being' but a notion that was historically developed (Morris 1994).

social context that engages with a *becoming* future. The self can accommodate and expand or contract and resist depending on how the self chooses to integrate this new awareness (restructuring and reinterpretation of social context). The experience itself can either be transformative and/or transcendent or the self resists and/or retreats in defense. Hence the concept of self finds meaningful ways to connect with identity; to act and behave appropriately in their communities, and through the techniques of the self to be governable at a distance by the state.

NEOLIBERALISM AND THE POLITICAL-PSYCHIC ECONOMY

Identity is tightly connected to the political economy of the state. Capitalism dominates modernity and its identity manifests itself in the current form of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is the 'rationality of contemporary capitalism' (Dardot & Laval 2014: 4) from which a specific set of doctrines has determined a new mode of government of human beings based on the universal principle of competition. The 'government' referred to here is Foucault's idea of the 'government' being an 'activity' rather than an 'institution': '… the activity that consists in governing people's conduct within the framework of, and using the instruments of, a state' (Foucault 1979: 318 as cited in Dardot & Lavel, 2014).

This new mode of government has defined a certain existential norm that has reshaped the subjectivity prevalent in modern societies; the aim is to achieve self-government by the individual him/her-self rather than the government relying on discipline to maintain social control. In other words, instead of emerging from the 'iron cage' of bureaucracy and the capitalist economy that Weber referred too, we are busy constructing our own individually tailored 'iron cage'. However, as Foucault (1978) pointed out 'Neoliberalism should not be confused with "lassez-faire", but on the contrary, should be regarded as a call to vigilance, to activism, to perpetual interventions' through the market (Mirowski 2014: 53).

Neo-liberalism encourages competition from the top down to the individual, regardless of age, in which one conceives and conducts oneself as an 'enterprise'. The market is becoming the place for 'a process of continuous learning and constant adaptation' (Dardot & Laval 2014) rather than the 'free market' referred to by Adam Smith or other neo-classical economists. The market drives the competition for the self-construction of the *competitive* man, a lifelong learner who is accountable for his or her own actions and conduct. They are labelled as entrepreneurs, who are both calculating individuals and productive workers, and accept that he or she will not always make the best choices because they are ignorant of the decision of others. However, it is the adapting and continuous learning of tacit knowledge, as part of the reflexive self, by engaging in competitive business encounters and that is how individual equilibrium can be reached, and in turn, for the good of society.

This is shown in Elyachar's (2012) anthropological account of 'Before (and After) Neoliberalism: Tacit Knowledge, Secrets of the Trade, and the Public Sector in Egypt'. She demonstrates how equilibrium can be reached through the concept of tacit knowledge at the individual level, and progresses to deliberate how tacit knowledge is used or 'squashed' between the public and private sector, which is out of scope for this research. I focus on the individual and community.

Tacit knowledge is defined here as the informal practices of everyday business and financial practices that remain unspoken and unexpressed, but is crucial to the working of economic exchange everywhere. She describes in her fieldwork, in the 1990s and in 2006, a specific case of a successful public sector banker, Mr. Amir, in Cairo who relied on his intuition to distinguish deserving loan seekers from fraudulent ones. He applies in his professional practice, an Eqyptian Arabic term called *fahlawah* that may be translated to street smarts or trickery. *Fahlawah* 'implies such qualities as sharpness, cleverness and

alertness, a kind of intelligence that springs from experience rather than formal education [and] from continuous interaction with all sorts of people, [through which] a person becomes knowledgeable about human behavior' (El-Mesiri 1978 as cited in Elyachar 2012). Importantly, he used this to resist the World Bank's demands that his borrowers in small-scale enterprises send their worker on a course and Mr. Amir refused this on the grounds that his clients were concerned about losing their 'secrets of the trade': 'The manager is afraid of losing his skilled workers and his secrets of the trade (asrar al-mihnah). We have to work around those concerns.' Mr. Amir clearly demonstrates his entrepreneurial characteristics by mediating and adapting between the two different markets that ensures benefit to society, and keeping his clients on board.

Furthermore Elyachar highlights the importance of understanding human behaviour in economic exchanges. This can be explained through relevant 'psy' techniques and interventions that help individuals flourish at work. 'Psy' discourse (psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy etc) developed by Nikolas Rose, who is strongly influenced by Foucault's work, shows that its power of expertise and scientific legitimacy has enormously shaped daily life and practices. This power is observed by how easily modern individuals express and describe themselves as psychological beings, and according to Rose it has also given institutions and governments the resources for directing their conduct into a particular 'regime of the self' (Rose 1996: 165). Hence, a more motivated worker who is engaged in and supported to flourish in their work will be a more efficient producer because 'autonomy, choice and self-responsibility … equipped with a psychology aspiring to self-fulfilment, actually or potentially running their lives as a kind of enterprise of themselves' (p. 33). The neoliberal economy thus found 'its guarantor [in] scientific psychology' (Dardot & Laval 2014: 258) and together gradually constructed the neo-

liberal subject who is the personal enterprise whose desire is to realize oneself through practice (especially at work).

Finally, Elyachar then shows how management studies appropriated the concept of 'tacit knowledge' from research carried out by anthropologist Jean Lave on tailors and apprentices in Liberia. Lave conceptualised 'communities of practice' discusses the different tacit modes of learning, and this was expanded on by her student Etienne Wenger into management studies and taken up by John Seely Brown, director of Xerox PARC. Tacit knowledge in management studies is used to describe knowledge generated by practitioners of a trade, who learnt and gained experience through practice, but are unable to describe and articulate how they do what they do. Organisations were interested in capturing this tacit knowledge and converting into explicit knowledge. As Elyachar concludes, 'tacit knowledge is collective in origin but unmarked by traces of property or possession and thus is available for the taking by agents who could mine, format, and claim it. Tacit knowledge became a new source for profit' (pg. 86). In other words, the neoliberal market is driving competition amongst individuals in who can efficiently mine and profit from tacit knowledge and influence the emerging future.

AUDIT CULTURE: ITS IMPACT ON ORGANISATIONS AND MANAGERS

Political-economic shifts are revealed by organisational changes. By decreasing the number of layers in organisations, they have changed from a vertical 'command and control' management to a matrix organisational structure that is both flatter and involves continually changing project teams. Fewer layers has resulted in more middle managers with roles changing from an emphasis on functional specialization to managing cross-functional project teams, performance measurement and continuous improvement (Thompson and Warhurst, 1998 as cited in Webb 2004).

Moving from a technical specialist who solves problems to being a manager who facilitates and co-ordinates projects requires them to motivate their staff to own and deliver the project itself. This is the optimal outcome. At the same time they always have to be self-aware of their daily activities which affects what they do because of 'the power, politics, ideology, culture, social habitus and psychology' (Stacey 2009: 74) i.e. being politically astute in their working ecology. Senior Executive (and internal coach) from a FTSE 100 Blue Chip Company (2014) reflects on how executives are reacting to the changes in the market:

"... the state of the world and the different models that are at work across the globe, companies are trying to work across that. Capitalism emerging from communism and society emerging from capitalism in different parts of the world, and the cultural differences as you go around the world [makes it an] incredibly complex place for a leader to navigate. And then, add complexity of most large organisations these days - as a leader in the middle of an organisation who are increasing exposed to coaching as opposed to people at the top of the organisation - and realising there is corruption out there, [and increased] regulatory scrutiny - [ask] what can I do from this seat here feeling quite alone, vulnerable in this sea of change and challenge. How do all of these come together in an individual's world [whom] we might be working with [in coaching]."

'The different models' described above indicates how increasingly complex the system has become with the intersections of power relations inside and outside the organisations. It indicates that a linear relationship does not exist between management's action and results. Time and context have become key to leveraging success, progressing forward, and exhibiting visible results that leads to some acceptable outcome. This is why there has been an unprecedented rise in executive coaching because it can be seen as providing spaces for

discussing the difficulties of being a manager and leader in audit cultures that centres on performance measurement and continuous improvement (Swan 2010).

The impacts of audit culture have been thoroughly explored in anthropology and education. For example Shore & Wright (1999) describes how the rise of audit culture in higher education has led to coercive accountability that is an indirect form of governance and power. 'Measuring performance is characteristically framed in terms of "improving quality" and "empowerment", as though these mechanisms were emancipatory and enabling' (1999:557). Not only does an audit system place the responsibility for compliance on the performer, rather than the checker, it also disciplines academic freedom and 'subjecting ourselves to new self-disciplines which together are re-shaping our sense of professionalism' (pg. 568). The shift in responsibility masks the dual nature of neoliberalism and its underlying power dynamics: promoting empowerment and autonomy on one hand and on the other requiring conformity for self-governance that aligns with externally prescribed targets that carries varying risk and rewards for both the individual and the group.

IN SUMMARY

Everyone must compete to survive in a neoliberal market, which provides the majority of the social and economic resources as reliance on social welfare is reduced. In a meritocratic working environment, pragmatism becomes the reason why people work with each other, and they communicate to each other in a combination of therapeutic language and technical jargon that demonstrates their tacit knowledge. They must then learn to both work together and compete against each other to deliver the 'correct' results as part of audit culture. A plurality of identity thus manifests itself in the different combination of tensions in the workplace, and according to van Meijl (2010), dialogue has become the approach for the 'contemporary constructions of the multiplication of identifications in multicultural circumstances' (p. 77). Coaches specialize in dialogue.

3. A BRICOLAGE APPROACH TO METHODOLOGY AND FIELDWORK

Executive coaches typically work out of their home, travel to their client's office or to a mutually agreed place to carry out coaching. They belong to a mobile and fluid transnational population that operates in 'scenes' and 'spaces' rather than 'sites and places' (Kurotani 2004:210), that exist only after 'it is discursively mapped and corporeally practiced[3]' (Clifford 1997: 54). This describes coaching, which becomes created and temporarily assembled for the session, and just as easily disassembled after the session has ended leaving no trace of what had happened. For the purpose of this research, I applied three ways to assess the construction of the coach's identity (1) critically reviewing Ozkan's ethnography, (2) self-ethnography and reflexive analysis of two coaching dialogues, and (3) determining how identity was constructed from my interviews with practicing coaches. Data was collected through one-on-one interviews with some participant observation: all with informed consent.

Interviewing is the dominant approach to collecting data 'at home' yet it is risked as 'being seen as a second choice, imposed by force of circumstances' (Hockey 2002:209). As Forsey (2010) reported: 'spending extended periods of time with families in the industrial West is simply not practicable or even desirable in many instances (Yee and Andrews, 2006) and part of the impetus for identifying the difficulties associated with participant observer studies in 'the West' arises from the realities of social interactions that are often 'spatially dislocated, time-bounded and characterized by intimacy at a distance'. (p. 566). Being sensitive and respectful towards the observed group, the framework that conceptually underpins ethnography was altered to meet the privacy/cultural ontology of those heterogeneous research field sites.

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[3] Clifford cites de Certeau (1984) 'The Practice of Every Life' in which 'space' is never ontologically given.

Lofland (1971) also asserts that Western societies live in an 'interview society': 'the interview' as part of our news and entertainment, interviews for employment or social benefits, interviews for mortgages and bank loans: interviews begin to resemble forms of participant observation(Forsey 2010:568). In this world 'of consultants and confessional chat shows', of flexible employment, of personal/executive coaching and online chat-rooms, interviews begin to resemble forms of participant observation (ditto). To bridge these different tensions and derive quality data, multisited fieldwork was used.

The concept of 'multisited' fieldwork, advanced by Marcus (1995), was the most appropriate way to investigate coaching as a culturally connected, but geographically dispersed, phenomena, and extended to include the condition of 'deep hanging out[4]' as an alternative method to traditional 'dwelling' (Clifford 1997: 56). It follows and describes the emergent course of processes in the contemporary world, and allows 'ethnographic research [to] produce arguments that are speculative in the most responsible sense, are experimental in the ethos of science, and thrive as both complicating and clarifying supplements or challenges to other knowledge studied in field- work and/or as part of the interdisciplinary ecology in which they are produced.' (Marcus 2010: 32).

ACCESS VIA MY CREDENTIALS

I am an APECS[5] Accredited Executive Coach, and I have been working as an independent external executive coach since 2008. To date I have provided executive coaching in a cross-cultural context to over 18 different nationalities e.g. Hong Kong, Singapore, and Canada, in at least 10 different industries including international fashion retail, civil engineering, and non-profits[6]. In Hong Kong, I was a key member in setting up the

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[4] Clifford refers to the joint work between Karen McCarthy Brown and Renato Rosaldo that described their anthropological ethnography as distinctive using 'deep hanging out'.
[5] APECS = Association for Professional Executive Coaching & Supervision
[6] For testimonies check out my linkedin profile: http://uk.linkedin.com/in/yvonnethackray

International Coach Federation (ICF) Hong Kong Chapter and became one of the Founding Members and first Company Secretary. I am a contributing author to coaching and coach-related books and articles, and I sit on working groups that typically focus on the future of coaching as a profession. Working in and on the subject of coaching provided me with an opportunity to explore how individuals construct their coaching identity, and connect with the image portrayed in the market place.

THE METHODOLOGIES

Fieldwork was carried out over 6 weeks between June and mid July 2014 (supplemented by 5+ years' experience in the field). A bricolage of methodologies was used as part of the data collection: participant observation and 'hanging out', questionnaires, interviews and literature reviews.

Participant Observation & 'Hanging out'

Part of my continual professional development is attending new training sessions, conferences and meetings; I integrated those experiences alongside the period of ethnography. Importantly though, all these venues provide a safe space for practicing coaches to talk about the 'nitty gritty' aspects of coaching, as one of my interlocutors called it, rather than having to engage in the performance of selling coaching due to either the confusion in the market place or people just not knowing what is coaching.

'Hanging out' via online technology[7] stretches the limits of multisitedness. Virtually 'hanging out' with my interlocutors over the Internet using VOIP software such as Skype, Viber or LINE or social media like Facebook or Linkedin is the norm. Physically 'hanging out' with my interlocutors was of less importance than 'hanging out' with them online,

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[7] This is not the same as digital anthropology i.e. the study of the technology itself and how it is used and materially impacting individuals, or doing ethnography of virtual worlds, but rather being used as an intermediary to connect with someone else, the coach, and observe moments of the person in their daily life through that fixed window of the webcam.

whether this was to conduct formal interviews or just simply catch up and talk about coaching and aspects of their daily life. This is a flexible way of living and communicating. Some conversations had to be carried out online due to physical constraints i.e. living abroad, however for some of my 'home' interlocutors we started meeting in coffee shops of hotels and then moved to meeting over Skype because it was more efficient. It also seemed to suggest that they were more comfortable to talk from home – as if I am invited into their private space without physically being there – everything is transmitted through images constrained by the size and pixels of the webcam and the quality and stability of the internet connection. This also perhaps shows the mentality of coaches of keeping in touch every 6-8 weeks.

We arranged to meet, normally via invitation from the interlocutor, at a certain time that fitted our schedules and we set up in a room (typically the office or the living room) in our home to speak to each other; they may be at 'home' (Stevenage, London, Essex) or around the globe (Boston, USA; Bangalore, India; Hong Kong).

Interviews and Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire was to simply gather basic information and use it to find willing volunteers to be interviewed. 215 emails were sent (only once) via my professional network on LinkedIn using snowball techniques[8]. It was open for 3 weeks. There were 87 responses with 2 incompletes and 2 outliers, giving a response rate of 39%[9] (statistically acceptable) of which there was a 40:60 split of male to female coaches that mirrors the industry.

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[8] Snowball sampling is an approach where the research identifies a small number of subjects, who in turn, identify others in the population.
[9] Typically a sample size of 50-100 participants is recommended and from a qualitative perspective a response rate of 30% is deemed acceptable via online questionnaires.

Interviews

I approached this piece of work adapting Forsey's (2010) 'interviews with an *ethnographic imaginary*, aimed at revealing the cultural context of individuals' (p. 567). Rather than having a semi-structured interview, I opted for unstructured dialogue that had only one question 'What brought you to coaching?' and from there the interviewees talked about it from different perspectives: their social milieu, cultural influences and current challenges in coaching, and how it impacts their daily life. Being both inside and outside (knowledge of… yet objective enough) the world of coaching, I needed to develop a relationship with the group for anyone to openly talk to me, as one of the interviewers Mia[10] (2014) said:

'The big thing is that I'm gonna really try to be raw and uncensored in my responses and I think I subconsciously censor myself and edit myself a lot and one of the things I'm trying to work on is staying my course.'

From the coaches who self-selected to participate in the second phase of the questionnaire, I interviewed 11 executive coaches (6 female, 5 male) of which one female was an internal career coach, and collected 15.5hrs of dialogue. They were conducted either over Skype or face to face; where it was possible to record the interview, they were transcribed and the remaining ones were written up after the meeting for further analysis. The split is as follows:

	Age – over 50	Age – under 50	Location	Communication
Male	4	1	UK (4) Hong Kong (1)	Skype (2) Face-to-face (3)
Female	3	3	UK (2) Netherlands (1) Canada (1) France (1) USA (1)	Skype (6)

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[10] Name changed for confidentiality.

4. WHAT'S IN A NAME? THAT WHICH WE CALL A COACH

THE SEMANTIC HISTORY OF COACHING

A black box surrounds coaching, especially around how the word 'coach' transformed from being an object i.e. a carriage or 'kocsi' that was first used to describe a new kind of vehicle that was Kocs, a place near Buda in Hungary, to its current representation of a skilful expert who works alongside management to 'unlock a person's potential [and] maximise their own performance'. The noun 'coach' stems from the Latin *curro*, 'to run, to travel, to hurry, to speed, to move, to proceed, to traverse'.

Placing coaching in its historical context, Stec (2012: 232) identifies four distinct but overlapping phases, which is also complicated by the issue of payment and professionalism:

1. A technology that was a medium of transportation (fifteenth century to present day);

2. An object capable of conferring status (eighteenth century);

3. A character in sport (nineteenth century to present day); and

4. A management concept (late twentieth century).

The coach, in the context of carrying people from one place to another, has moved from horse pulled coaches to describing how much an individual is willing to pay for space and comfort on modern transportations. During the 18th and 19th Century, prestige was associated with the passenger (typically the aristocrats), and the coach driver who was capable of driving the horse and carriage with impressive speed, skill and responsibility for self and others. Coach drivers were admired for their impressive performance; and the gentlemen (amateurs) 'sought coaching' to drive a team of horses that pulled the coach that

included rules of dress i.e. wearing the appropriate attire and the time before requesting coaching.

Within the 18th Century, references to a sport coach became firmly associated with athletic competitions via rowing, who were members of the working class like coach drivers. This was also a period of the revival of the cult of sport, Pierre de Coubertin and the Olympic games, in which the athlete symbolised 'the key figure of ancient somatic idealism' and 'demonstrated an epochal change of emphasis in practice behaviour' (Sioterdijk 2013: 27). In addition, educational reforms in 1870, particularly in England, increased the number of children (1.25-5million) attending school. This in turn required access to more sport coaches (retired professionals) because sports were an integral part of the curricula for achieving social control (Stec 2012a).

The coach (object/technology) represents two things: a contraption that carried its passenger from place to place, and something that needed to be controlled and skilfully steered by the coach driver who needed to understand the assemblage (team of horses, carriage and its suspension, road conditions, acceptable comfort levels to the passengers versus speed). Accepting that technology (the coach) comes before the driver, he only becomes foregrounded after he has demonstrated his capabilities. Whilst in sports, the coach who was previously a professional or had credible experience in that game is now being paid to 'coach' others, from their experience, to improve athletes' own performance in preparation for competitions and to watch from the sidelines[11].

In the 18th and 19th Century, professionalism tainted sport because it was viewed to be the equivalent of prostitution as professional sportsmen used their body to earn money (Stec 2012b). Furthermore there was a mixing of class, and regardless of the values being

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[11] We should caution though that not every professional sportsman can be a coach either.

promoted in sports, the aristocrats were not particularly interested in competing with others though it was important to maintain 'the rules … the de facto removal of the labouring class from eligibility' (Harper and Hammond 1977: 124 cited by Stec 2012b). Against the changing national landscape and the clashes of class and language, coaches persevered, and they are now integral to individual and team sports.

Moving into the twentieth century, sports coaches continued to thrive, and with the change in management techniques (post Taylorism and post Fordism) and an increase in leisure time and an affinity to sports, managers turned to books published by sports coach for inspiration. This is also why business writers and executive coaches frequently draw upon the experiences of athletic team coaches of 'bringing the best out of the individual and team' to describe what they do in coaching but in a workplace context.

DEVELOPING THE FIELD OF COACHING

Recognising the relevance of sports coaching to executive coaching, I now trace how the coaching field developed starting from the Human Potential Movement (HPM) from which two well-known categories of coaching have emerged: life coaching (achieving personal goals in life) and executive coaching (achieving personal and professional goals at work). They overlap in the concept of the intimate private sphere and the impersonal, cold and aloof public life as defined by Sennett's book *THE FALL OF PUBLIC MAN* (1974). Transformation in society has resulted in the merging of the private sphere with the public sphere, bringing in intimate topics like love, passion, family and autonomy into a logical-rational environment. Coaching as a management tool was brought into organisations via the Human Resource department either as personal development programs that contained various degrees of HPM, or through secular disciplines, in particular psychology and management consulting. For the remainder of this section I focus on executive coaching in

which executive coaches are paid by organisations rather than the client (in their personal and professional development).

HUMAN POTENTIAL MOVEMENT

The Human Potential Movement (HPM) was an influential experimental rebellion against the mainstream psychology, organised religion, and stagflation [12] of the sixties and seventies[13]. The 1960s marked the beginning of a period of rapid social change with no fear of unemployment[14], and an explosion of rebellious creativity and experimentation. It led to one of the most significant and influential counterculture movements, which rapidly expanded from the margins into mainstream society, in the arena of personal development, emotional literacy, and human values in the workplace called 'therapeutic culture[15]'. It is a dominating influence from the day-to-day level through to public policy,

Secularisation is also important during this specific period of modernity in Western cultures. The public sphere provided the locus for the success of HPM via humanistic psychology and spirituality (Sutcliffe & Bowman 2000; Williams 2008). Maslow developed a more optimistic, holistic theory based on health and happiness that emphasised choice and values after the basic survival needs and psychological issues are solved i.e. self-actualization. Spirituality, as an alternative to organised Western religions and an extension of self-actualization, is an attractive proposition for modern individualists seeking transcendence or meaningful experience that is based on subjective experiences and psychological growth mixed with mystical and esoteric traditions and eastern religions (Puttick 2000). A more recent approach is the integral model of Ken Wilber and others,

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[12] Stagflation is the combination of high inflation and mass unemployment.
[13] This included the media coverage of successive economic crises including the Vietnam War, the Arab embargo (oil), assassination, financing of the Great Society welfare, as well as the success of Apollo 11 (first man on the moon) and advances in computer technology
[14] State-led Keynesian capitalism after the World War was the most successful period of economic management, in terms of standard of living, technological progress and financial stability and full employment policies.
[15] For more see Furedi 2003 and Swan 2010.

that offers a holistic and multidimensional view of the various modalities for understanding human development that evolves with the mental, physical, spiritual and social (Wilber 2001; Beck & Cowan 2005).

HPM trades in personal development, and whilst being 'largely pro-business and entrepreneurial' (Puttick 2000:211) it found its way into both the public and private sectors, the professions, and education by offering and delivering training courses and coaching. Most of the training and coaching does not focus on spirituality directly, though the values may be implicit and shared when the client is ready. Combining spirituality, personal development, and business impacts business philosophy. Management consultants utilise the psychological and spiritual techniques as their competitive edge in delivering successful change management programs. On the other hand, failure is almost guaranteed during restructuring programmes by organisations whose chief executives or senior leader do not share or practices these values.

SHAPING THE FIELD CALLED EXECUTIVE COACHING

The two root disciplines dominating executive coaching are psychology and management consulting, which are also used to define the boundaries of executive coaching (includes personal development).

Psychology

The logical assumption is that executive coaching has its root in psychology, because psychology is all about working with the whole individual on their behaviours, thoughts and emotions and how that impacts various areas of their life. The five theoretical traditions in psychology that have been adapted to coaching are psychoanalytic, behavioural, humanistic/phenomenological, trait, and social cognitive, and they all have different concepts of the person. Both the psychoanalytic (aka Freud) and the behavioural (Skinner) models developed from biology are focused on 'curing' pathology. The

humanistic/phenomenological approaches of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow (influential in HPM) focuses on the integrity and sense making of individuals that creates health and happiness as a reaction to psychoanalysis and behaviourism. Positive psychology extends the humanist thinker's beliefs that focus on how to help human beings prosper and lead healthy happy lives. The trait approach focuses on measuring a person's psychological characteristics, and the social cognitive tradition focuses on how an individual is motivated to understand both self and the social world in order to establish a sense of order and predictability.

An executive coach with a psychology background will see what they have been trained to see, and as long as the coaching assignment was successfully completed (based on feedback) it will confirm that this is the right approach. Their coaching identity is the sum of their experiences and feedback through their educational training as a psychologist, as Berger and Luckmann (1967:178) note: 'psychologies produce a reality, which in turn, serves as the basis for their verification' (Rousseau 2014).

Management Consulting

Management consulting is concerned with improving efficiency and increasing effectiveness in organisations through technology and management practices. The rapid growth in management consultancy coincided with the rising status of corporate managers in all sectors e.g. mining, banking and finance. Management consultants provide expertise on the claims of possessing the knowledge that clients learn experientially, Jackall (2009) labels this as '*ambiguous experience*'.

The history of management consulting begins with Taylor's scientific management principles of measuring and accelerating efficiency at work (1910s), Mayo's studies of cooperation between managers and the workers (1920s and 1930s), Drucker's focus on executive effectiveness, and Levinson's study of the psychological contract (the unspoken

contract) between an individual and organisation (1960's and 70's). The knowledge base of management consultancy is social science.

As consultants moved away from reporting on ways to implement process changes to technical challenges to being engaged in implementing their recommended changes, they became embroiled in the social structure (politicking) of the organisation and the 'expert [now] trades in other's troubles' (Jackall 2009:148). Executive coaching is an example of one of the techniques in executive development practiced by management consultants to deliver change.

Executive coaches with psychology knowledge who have a consulting background rely on knowledge, ability or skill to master a challenge or solve a problem (Kilburg 2004 as cited in Ozkan 2008). They rely on the instincts they developed during their life (professional and personal experiences) and refer to a bricolage of published works. In a similar way this is how they present their coaching identity[16].

THE REALITY IS...

Today the market is a more sophisticated consumer of executive coaching and it wants to see progress. Likewise, there is increasing demand amongst the independent suppliers of executive coaching that I spoke with, and there is a building momentum and consensus for it to become a formal profession. Different countries have different approaches, for example in the United Kingdom there is an increasing interest from different stakeholders to move towards a Chartered Institute, in Australia the commercial coach training organisations offer government accredited coach-training programs under the Australian

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[16] A number of practitioners have second degrees in psychology at the graduate level, and through informal conversations it seems that it is likened to therapy in that helps them to understand their experiences of past situations and be more self-aware of past behaviours and not transfer onto others during coaching.

Qualifications Framework, in America the Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching (GSAEC) is leading the way in professional graduate education for executive and organisational coaching. One of today's challenges of becoming a profession is about who 'owns' the definition of coaching, and from which expert body of knowledge it will stem from.

It is clear that executive coaches come from a diverse social and cultural background. Bono et al (2009) carried out a survey of executive coaching practices and they concluded that the debate should move on from whether an executive coach should have a psychological training to 'what we can expect coaches of different backgrounds to do *best* and what type of training would help *all* coaches be more effective (p. 386)'. A caveat exists. Irrespective of the background of executive coaches, what is a consistent message from executive coaches is how to define the client. Acceptable clients are 'mentally healthy' and have 'higher functioning' based on the official distinctions in DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders). The ability to correctly diagnose a client depends on the executive coaches training, and exposes the subtle controlling influence of 'psy' discourse.

5. WHO ARE EXECUTIVE COACHES AND WHAT BRINGS THEM TO COACHING?

A 2012 study carried out by one of the coaching bodies, the International Coach Federation (ICF) estimated that there are approximately 48,000 coaches worldwide, of which 57% (28,000) are engaged in executive and organizational coaching. This unregulated market exceeds US$2billion annually. Executive coaches come from a variety of professions, which they may also be practicing alongside coaching e.g. psychotherapists, university lecturers, management consultants, doctors, lawyers, pastors. Executive coaches come from a variety of professions, which they may also be practicing alongside coaching e.g. psychotherapists, university lecturers, management consultants, doctors, lawyers, pastors. They can also be described as 'cultural intermediaries', a concept derived by Bourdieu, to refer to workers engaged in 'occupations involving presentation and representation … providing symbolic goods and services' (Bourdieu 1984: 359).

Bourdieu describes cultural intermediaries as the new petite bourgeoisie (the middle class and the upwardly mobile, newly educated working class) that adopts a flexible lifestyle in both their working habits and routines of daily living. For the majority of the executive coaches who participated in the questionnaire, the concept of cultural intermediaries fairly depicts them: over 70% went to university and a further 50% continued towards a second degree (Masters and higher) after completing a minimum of 3+ years of work. They worked in professions as a permanent employee within an organisation (engineering, accountancy, information technology, psychology (organisational), in which travelling for their work is as typical now as it was a decade earlier (over 60% travel regularly every quarter whether from every week to once a month). 77% of the executive coaches are aged between 34 and 70 of which 54% are aged between 34 and 53, and over 90% work as an independent (external) executive coach. Cultural intermediaries also form a point of

articulation between production and consumption because they represent the work they are marketing and selling (Negus 2002); they actively participate in a learning and self-improvement approach in their work, home, leisure and life (Swan 2010). As Bourdieu argues, '[they are the] perfect consumers' because they consume their own practices (1984: 371).

 To date, only one study on the identity and development of coaches[17] has been carried out by Campone et al (2012) from a psychological perspective, and identified that life experiences e.g. accidents, illnesses and divorce, were frequently cited as an important part of a coach's development. It enabled them to 'lead with more courage' and be more empathetic as they have become 'more aware of their strengths and limitations' (p. 34). The combination of life experiences and continuous learning is essential for maintaining a proficient skill level. Continuous learning includes regular meetings with other coaches and formal education that includes both theory and skills development. Having frequent contact with other coaches provides an opportunity 'for active coaching and reflection that is important for coach development' (p. 34). In other words 'retraining' is an integral component for understanding oneself in order to be a better coach, and maintain skills during 'non-coaching/inactive' times.

I explore these concepts from an etic and emic perspective drawing on Ozkan's ethnography and my self-ethnographies.

AN ETIC PERSPECTIVE OF COACHES

Ozkan's ethnography in New York provides an etic perspective of coaching primarily from observing the practices of executive coaches (who moved from psychotherapy to coaching), training and with seemingly limited opportunities to observe live 'coaching'

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[17] Campone does not differentiate between the type of coaches.

with 'real' clients i.e. professional who work in organisations. He describes how coaching 'emerges in and becomes an illustration of a neo-liberal economy that *emphasizes constant retraining* of a self[18] that is versatile, pragmatic and fragmented' (2008: 206, *my emphasis*) because it is being presented as a technology of change i.e. neoliberalism. Change is achieved by measuring business performance against the executive's behaviour, and this foregrounds versatility because it can be audited and improved upon using psychometric tests.

Ozkan participated in one day of a coaching program which was used as part of a change management program for St Vincent, the second largest hospital in the Midwest, to move from an 'authoritarian' to 'an open and trusting' culture. The day he arrived to observe the training was the first time the executives received feedback from their battery of psychometric tests. The feedback process was important for clients to recognize what they have, what they are under-using or overusing.

> *'Coaches wanted clients to "digest the feedback without feeling insecure and fragile." As coaches they were to do "what they can to help them develop what their clients have and teach them not to overuse what they already use." (p. 144)*

He then focuses on a coaching session he was given permission to observe only after the client, Alice, entered the room (p. 144-5).

> *When the coachee Alice came in she looked tired and a bit worried. The coach Karen asked for permission from Alice to let me observe the coaching engagement, adding that my primary goal was to gather information about the coaching engagement and the coach, not the coachee. Alice was comfortable with me sitting in. She immediately commented that she did poorly, especially in the tests and role-playing assignments.*

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[18] The perception of the client rather than the coach.

Karen told Alice that she had done well [and]it is very rare to see people doing 'great' in all of these categories. This was excellent: she would produce great results and make correct and fast decisions in intense situations. But her high scores in all categories also implied that she would expect the same high standards from other people. Even when she is not verbalizing these expectations, she would give nonverbal clues and get impatient when things are not done quickly according to her high standards.

Alice agreed: "When I first started, I was rude. There are certain procedures for getting patients ready for surgical operations, tests to be repeated. I was very agitated when these weren't done up to the highest possible standards. A male manager approached me later and told me: 'Alice, you are getting to be known as a bitch.' I was so focused on the goal and the work. It has been ten years and I am much better in recognizing it."

The coach intervened: "well because you are so fast, fast, fast." What Alice needed to keep in mind, Karen said, was that people might be failing at what they do because they are actually not understanding their job. While Karen tried to tell Alice about herself, exploring how and why she was doing what she was doing she referred to results of several [7] methods she used to collect data.

Unfortunately, Ozkan does not report on how Alice responded to Karen's intervention nor interpretation of herself from the battery of assessments. Instead he asks the coaches their perception of how the clients received the feedback (p. 148).

How did coaches ensure that the results represented who their clients are, not just who they think they are? They gave three related answers. First, the tests include questions that do cross check and do not directly ask the client who they think they are. Second,

there is always more than just one test that is analyzed collectively and the data collected through self-filled tests is supplemented by more normative data such as observing them in simulation exercises. And finally they added that clients were surprised but not shocked. They described their analysis "an integrative process" where they look for patterns across these surveys and trace whether and how things confirm, back up or contradict each other.

He quickly moves on to talk about Alice's struggles in her new role as a manager.

In order to differentiate between contexts in which she needs to delegate things and explaining how she wants them to get done, and contexts where she just needs to delegate without explanation, she needed time (which she did not have) to step out of her role. She explained this vicious circle in the following way: "I can't take the time to recognize when it is time to take time to explain things to people."

The entrapment by time that Alice expresses is pervasive in the corporate world. ... The psychodynamic approach refers to executives who are trapped in their unconscious memories and unresolved childhood conflicts. Coaches talk about behaviors in temporal terms that move along a continuum and deploy coaching to transcend unhealthy behaviors without regressing into pathological symptoms and disorders. Coaches remind their clients that their old self that was formed in early childhood has learned patterns of behavior that are no longer 'working,' so coaching should help them move from the past to the present and become a new self.'

The identity of an executive coach described by Ozkan is someone who has a psychology background particularly in psychometric tests. They are also the experts in the coach-client discussion because they objectively know who their clients are from the array of tests. He follows Rose's argument that the rise of psychology coincided with the World Wars

particularly around psychometric testing: the meeting of 'psychotherapeutics and political power reveal not the devastation of the psychic autonomy and security of the self but the fabrication of the autonomous self as a key term in the analysis of social ills and cures' (1989:217). It has become the coach's ability to construct a simulacrum of the client based on the objective results integrated from a battery of tests.

The clients can thus be trained by repeating similar tests and becoming the versatile self to meet the challenges in the volatile market. However, as Ozkan shows the client is typically separated from their actual working ecology and required to follow a psy approach in which 'pathology gives the person the unity that health takes away' (p. 65). The emphasis being on what ever is holding them back as a child is preventing them from maturing to an adult to manage challenging matters they face in work. This reinforces that any actions that the executives' take in the business world is closely associated with their personal selves particularly during the formative year. The client can only change through re-training.

The manner in which Ozkan uses the word 'train' also emphasises the small amount of control or agency the client has because a coach holds the power and expert knowledge of how the client can grow, adapt and achieve their potential in a timely manner. He also offers no definition of the self, he presumes that the self is synonymous with the identity of the client who presents him/herself at coaching. From a sociological perspective and a psychological perspective, they both focus on the 'retraining of self' to better serve their clients. Ozkan's argument focuses on the coaches being the experts in 'retraining' clients to change from psychometric tests. I offer an alternative and personal perspective of an executive coach by sharing two self-ethnographies with two different clients.

AN EMIC PERSPECTIVE OF COACHING: SELF ETHNOGRAPHIES

As an executive coach I only take on clients who I believe are able to achieve their goals, and I am coaching at my best. My approach to coaching has a more philosophical[19] framework, which also closely resembles my identity as an executive.

Dialogue 1: A former HR Director of a privately held American clothing company known for its brand of denim in Asia. The coaching dialogue was generally held in English, although if there were words not translatable it would be referred to in the local Chinese dialect.

Typically I met my client Colin[20] in an open spaced coffee shop inside my then local shopping mall. It normally took Colin an hour each way and so we would meet late morning. I would arrive ahead of time and tried to find two seats that separated us from the breakfast crowd. Facing slightly inwards I angled the red high back chairs so that we could see each other and the nearby mountains in front of us through the floor to ceiling glass windows as well as the motorway traffic running underneath the raised shopping centre that led to the airport. In between us would also be a small coffee table that allowed us to either put down our drinks or use as a writing table.

Normally as I was waiting for Colin I would be finishing my breakfast and after he bought his cup of coffee, we would settle down and begin our session that frequently lasted between 1.5-2hours. I never knew what Colin's challenge would be from session to session and which aspect of the self and identity would be discussed, but it would somehow

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[19] I would describe my style being poststructuralist with shades of Deleuzian concepts weaving through the approach. My style, and my best work, is when I am working at the client's limits and through the folding and unfolding of their different narratives his/her habitus becomes more visible (thought and behavioral patterns). Sharing those similarities, in the different contexts, alongside the current objective bought to the session by the client, and after consideration they may resist or acknowledge (partially or wholly) the interpretation, and respond accordingly – ignore or find ways to work though or around them. In a nutshell, I work along the boundaries of limits, encouraging positive ruptures that leads to actualization – I call this work transcendence rather than transformation because its also about self-reliance.

[20] Name changed for confidentiality.

connect to his bigger vision of what he wanted more of in his life: personally, professionally and with other important relationships.

My role as the executive coach was to 'hold the space' for him to work through his challenge and find possibilities that he could then action after the session as well as celebrating the completed actions. 'Hold the space' metaphorically describes what is happening during the coaching: during that time (from my perspective) each moment is lived and explored in which the client is able to openly verbalise and express what it is that's stopping him from moving forward and taking that next step. He tells his stories and reflect on past experiences, and I openly listen and observe all that is or isn't being said and intuitively ask questions that seemed to help him explore other possibilities and integrate different experiences with other experiences he mentioned previously. Together with Colin, a professional relationship formed over time that was bounded by confidentiality and respect, and we had developed sufficient trust over a number of hours for this type of work to take place. I believe it is also because we implicitly acknowledged and accepted our vulnerabilities[21] to each other.

To summarize, the purpose of each coaching session was to find possibilities (as defined by Colin: new perspectives, clarification, understanding etc.), identify at least two or three action steps that are meaningful for him to actually carry out after completing each session. At the start of each session he accounts to me how well he completed his own prescribed action. The reason Colin provided as feedback for returning to each session was that he found it 'rejuvenating'.

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[21] An example of being vulnerable as a coach is accepting whether the question being asked is the right question to ask, or if you don't know what question to ask.

Dialogue 2: Holly, an entrepreneur of a technology start up and executive coach based in Halifax, Canada, gave me permission to reproduce an extract of our coaching conversation, which took place over Skype. Sitting directly opposite Holly via the webcam with a 5 hr. time difference, it seemed as if there was no temporal or spatial distance separating us. Each sitting comfortable in a room in our home, Holly's upper body and face fills the camera against the white wall behind her. Sitting dressed in a smart white shirt, we begin.

[I started by asking permission to coach as our conversation had moved to Holly sensing some sort of parallel between the two transition years she has taken in her 20s and 30s, and begin by asking a reflective question]

> *YT: This is gonna sound like a coaching question so excuse me, because when I was hearing you talk about when you were president [over 10+ years ago] and came in and shook things up and moved it from a 3 to 40 person team at ISIK[22]. What would the president of ISIK of then say to you now?*

> *HOLLY: Well there are two things, one I didn't realise that I had, I never thought about it, as a transition year like that before studying for six years to working full time at FMCG[23]. ... But I didn't actually consider that kind of a transition year…And that's reassuring that that's just something I had and that it worked out.*

[Holly connect past patterns with what is currently happening now, and started to regain confidence in her decision. From her past she was able to map out her successes and strengths of how she built up ISIK, and from that experience what she could bring forward to help her with what she is facing now]

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[22] Organisation name changed for anonymity.
[23] Multinational organisation changed for anonymity

HOLLY: Yeah, it worked really well. So we had a focused target and a pretty clear and simple message in something that I knew they were looking for. Now I'm not exactly sure who to target. I would love to target senior managers, 'cause I know that I would be very helpful there but I have to work on my grey hair. I'm not sure that I can do that with confidence. That's where I would want to work and that's where I think I could help. And on the other side it's also students, I've done a lot of career coaching for younger people.

[Holly talks from a position of motivation and action in which she completed a project that was aligned towards her goal, and so we began exploring how her current ecology or set up that was impacting on her behaviour, in particular motivation and confidence]

YT: Would you be happier working in a collective environment rather than an individual environment?

HOLLY: I need to be with people, I need to be with people. As much as it's wonderful to be out here I'm an extrovert. On a Myers Briggs I'm a hundred percent, clear preference for extraversion …

YT: Because once you're with people you'll naturally do what you do best?

HOLLY: I think it comes more naturally and talking about what I do and what I enjoy doing and I'm curious to hear about what other people do. It kind of comes more naturally 'cause right now I'm feeling like every time I'm interacting with someone on LinkedIn or whatever it's more forced. … It doesn't become me. I need to be with people. And that's also with the executive coaching company in the States I was hoping there would be a little more interaction. People come to the website I'm among twenty people, great … So it really boosts my credibility as an executive coaching leadership development company but there's no actual team feeling or collective feeling at all.

[Holly identified for herself the challenge she was actually facing and starting to bring her previous experiences in acting and marketing to develop her personal brand in executive coaching and I acted as a sounding board to her idea.]

HOLLY: I think that comes back to the whole acting, theatre arts thing. I don't wanna be in the spotlight, I wanna help others be in the spotlight.

YT: How can you be in the spotlight and then retreat from the spotlight once you've got it going? Because, what are you selling at the end of the day?

HOLLY: I'm selling their success.

YT: But how, you're selling their success but who's actually doing the selling of success? It's not the cream, it's you.

HOLLY: I know, I know.

YT: I mean, if you can sell cream as coaching then…

HOLLY: I'm selling radiant complexion coaching.

YT: Nice! That's actually a really nice ring.

HOLLY: That's what skin cream is for! Radiant complexion!

YT: So the radiant complexion client is who is what you become after coaching?

HOLLY: So maybe it's something like radiant coaching. Radiance coaching. And what you radiate is up to you … Radiance or radiant? I think radiance. 'What you radiate is up to you 'cause in the end people wanna be successful but what success is, is different for every person'.

From these two dialogues firstly I see each of the clients as a 'whole', similar to other coaches with my background. Each client has plural identities and depending on how they

choose to explore a certain narrative, the self becomes exposed. Only from client's feedback, and noticeable modifications or changes in behaviours, the self becomes foregrounded. Secondly, we can also see the day-to-day neoliberalism influencing how we are expected to act and perform to stay viable in the market, and how easily therapeutic language is used in conversation. The comfort and ease of talking with confidence in terms referred to in therapeutic language is a result of the rise of therapeutic cultures. And finally, accountability is an important reason for clients to return to coaching. When they return they are accountable for the actions they prescribed themselves at the end of the previous session to demonstrate whether they followed through and achieved all or some of their actions. This is his/her personal commitment to the work/enterprise. Self-auditing whilst foregrounding the organisation's objective, and observing growth as defined by the client is integral to successful coaching.

Next, I reflexively observe my position as the coach through the *assemblage* of an event: a coaching session with the client with the idea of *becoming*. Deleuze's philosophy of immanence as a positive ontology, which is particularly useful in analysing what happens in a 'good' coaching session, because it is concerned with what life can do and what a body can achieve in terms of becoming. Becoming is not a part of history; he wrote: 'History amounts only to the set of preconditions, however, recent, that one leaves behind in order to "become", that is, to create something new' (Deleuze 1995:171 as cited in Biehl & Locke 2010). In a nutshell, I am working with the 'becoming' self, not a fragmented self, to meet the multiple identities that an individual has to live and work in daily.

Assemblage (translated from French *agencement*) is a concept used in Deleuze and Guattari's work to describe a *becoming* that brings elements together, and adeptly focuses on the continual immanence as a result of 'time-space in which assemblage is imagined is inherently unstable and infused with movement and change' whilst preserving some

concept of the structural (Marcus & Saka 2006:102). Each coaching session is rhizomatic[24] because there is no origin or end point (never knowing what the challenge/agenda will be till the session begins) yet it is in the creation of the territory that is always being made and unmade (holding the space), which attempts to continually [re]create a safe and confidential space (reflection and vulnerability) for valuable coaching conversations through the arrangement of things, practices, feelings and affects (for Colin – clarity and rejuvenation, and potentially reclaiming the private self in a private-public space; for Holly – confidence and self belief, and reclaiming her professional identity in the public sphere).

In entering into a coaching-assemblage, it is the client's desire to find alternative pathways (opportunities, possibilities and virtualities) to their challenge, and the coach's desire to follow the client's agenda including 'speed, slowness, effectivity and language that makes it up' (Wise 2011: 94) that can be translated as the coach's skills in listening, empathy, humour, pacing, asking poignant questions and being non-judgemental. The power derived from desire creates the state and motivation for the client to embody and take action after leaving the session – during the session it is only 'imagined mapping[25]' but he/she sees the opportunities of becoming and ways to achieve them.

My coaching identity hinges on a strong reflexive-self sensitive to each emerging assemblage driven by the desire and motivation of the client, compared to Ozkan's sample of coaches who uses psychometric tests to drive the client towards versatility. Acknowledging the breadth of approaches to coaching and the degree of expertise, the executive coach needs to be carefully matched with the motivation and desire of the client.

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[24] A rhizome is an image used by Deleuze and Guattari to characterize machinic thinking: rhizome spreads laterally and 'can shoot out roots from any point – it has no beginning: no roots; it has no middle: no trunk; it has no end: no leaves; it is always in the middle, always in process' (May 2005:133).
[25] 'Imagined mapping' in this sense means being able to strategically map out ways to achieve their desired actions from a self-organising dialogue until it becomes actualized in the future.

6. MAKING SENSE OF THE COACHES IDENTITY

The open question of 'what brought you to (executive) coaching?' allowed the interviewees to choose however they wish to share their story – whether chronologically, from their current state, or from a transitional perspective. The stories shared by each of the coaches typically showed that they constructed their identity around the market (in terms of supply and demand), education, and typically as an extension of their current work (approximately up to 20% of their total workload). For some, if their market was only providing supervision to coaches, or if they were employed as an internal coach, then they spent a higher proportion of their time in coaching

For the majority of coaches though, coaching is either a means to achieve what they perceive to be their purpose, or simply that through practicing coaching they had the competencies to partner their clients. Below I share two stories of how identities as a coach were constructed.

1. Mia, mid 30's, career advisor at a private university in Boston, USA and part time external executive coach who has been coaching for 4 years.

2. Justin, early 70's, who has worked as an executive coach for 25+ years in UK.

MIA'S STORY

I met Mia at one of the training courses I attended in New York, USA in 2010. We remained in contact and regularly hang out with each other through Skype. Mia is a daughter of a missionary who was brought up and educated in Papa New Guinea, and for university returned to the USA to study for her bachelors (English) and master's degree (Education). Mia is an individual who is poised, confident and always well dressed, and it showed in her preparation of the key items she wanted to cover in our conversation. We begin as she waves in front of the web cam the key points written on recycled paper, what

she wanted to cover in our chat: (1) academic versus practical experience of coaching and (2) the perception of coaching.

"First I would like to talk about the academic versus practical piece and this is just a collective of my experiences to date. I mean I think I was at Columbia in what, 2010? So it's been about four years so… I was drawn to coaching because it piggy-backed very nicely on my educational interest with adult learners and because I'm very interested in psychology but in a casual way, I have not had any formal training obviously. … I wanted to sell and market myself and my services and I felt that coaching resonated with me, it's was a nice add-on piece.

Mia is an example of Bourdieu' cultural intermediary as she is the product she wants to sell. She became a coach because it resonated with her current work in adult education, rather than talking about a negative rupture in her life. However, the market indicated to Mia that marketing coaching as personal development was difficult in an American society focused on tangible results. To continue coaching, she has adopted a role where she can apply those skills in an institution with a regular salary and can continue learning.

I found it actually really difficult to translate the learning into anything truly marketable… never took off the way I had hoped and the kickback in terms of an income stream, never really became anything quickly. I think people have put their feet in the organisation or industry or field of expertise that they can market. So for example, my feet right now is in career coaching because that's what pays the bills and I can adapt coaching to fit any field and that's where it is now.

She differentiates the market economically into those who are affluent enough to focus on the commodity of spirituality, and the many who are unable to afford coaching. She then

turns inwards, to her self, and compares coaching to religion and shamanism; the two ways she believes that a coach can be legitimately paid.

Of course there's a whole internal development and evolution in an individual that can't be measured and you wouldn't want to measure it and put dollar signs on it because that cheapens the experience, almost like anything sort of spiritual. I revere all of that and yet it's really hard to make a dollar working in that capacity unless you are like a chaplain or a shamanic healer. If you're gonna measure on output and ROI and all those business-y things it's simpler. ... at least in American culture, who want to focus on that kind of spirit side of things ... They might be going to the spiritual seminars and festivals out in the west and eagle feathers and dancing, that's where you might find those people willing to spend that kind of ...and have to have a lot of disposable income in my opinion.

Mia returns to her core value 'self-love' and reflexively explores the self through the loss of intimate kinship due to the declining appeal of the church community, and the desire to bring archaic beliefs into the contemporary world.

But I do think people are desperately lonely, and they don't always have close friends or they don't have a group of friends to provide that challenge or that accountability to some extent. And truthfully, the more I think, people are moving away from their traditional Christian church environments that was very much seen as a kind of, and I've experienced this to some extent, a very tight network where there is accountability and people do call you out. ... Coaches can, at least for a time, they can fill that spot and I think people are desperate for that input, feedback, hand holding and I mean that maybe more like arm around, walk with you in something. ...

Through her exploration, she ultimately believes that coaching can temporarily replace connection with the self, however there must be a good match in the coaching relationship, again referring back to the ideal of kinship.

Coaching tries to present a bridge for people who are very rooted in today's world, but today's world is very shallow and I think people know that if they want to go deeper and become the best versions of themselves they have to widen their scope a little bit and allow more ideas and insights and traditions and awareness. ... I consider myself to some extent, a matchmaker, and in order to be a matchmaker you have to have a pretty good understanding of people ...because depending on that person and depending on what their beliefs are about themselves and the world and the meaning of life and everything else, that will significantly influence their match, what's going to work for them.

Mia sutures her coaching identity on layers of experiences, personal and market driven, from different periods of her life, and adapts to the market whilst seeing a place for it to be used. For Mia, she constructs her coaching identity through a carefully selected list of choices that motivates the other to explore future possibilities, and this is also reflected in her approach.

JUSTIN'S STORY

I met Justin at the RSA in central London. We had previously met at different coaching venues and briefly spoken with one another, but never had the opportunity to have a proper conversation until now. Justin shared his life story with me, which we edited together and I reproduce below, of how he came into executive coaching.

The story begins at ICIANZ where at the age of 24 he was part of the team in charge of productivity who were charged to make a product, which was being produced more

competitively, and 60% cheaper by the Japanese. At that time the Australian government were Tariff protecting the ICIANZ product and were taking steps to remove that tariff protection. Justin's role then was to use a Time and Motion study to set up a piece-rate incentive scheme with the intention of increasing productivity. What he noticed was that in reality everyone was 'playing the system'. He realised that this couldn't continue and he was influenced by a paper he read by 'Frederic Herzberg' that talked about taking responsibility for productivity through Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

So Justin began talking about this and eventually, he was given the opportunity to run a pilot job enrichment project. He ran the pilot and engaged the workers in taking responsibility for their own actions and with greater autonomy. Productivity for that site went up dramatically. He also got on well with the unionised workers and was invited on a fishing trip. Unions in those days were significant, and he was told that if he could find a way to get management off their backs then they could achieve the desired productivity targets. And he did. The pilot worked successfully. He was then called in to speak with the site manager who asked him what he did. Justin said he 'treated the unionised workers like human beings and supported them to redesign their jobs'. However, the Site Manager partially understood what Justin was saying and implemented a job redesign program for the whole site – whereby he was responsible for the program rather than the work team being responsible for themselves – the key point, and productivity collapsed. Justin's ideas were seen to be the cause of this productivity collapse and he left ICIANZ to work for the UN. At this time Justin undertook a program in Transcendental Meditation to deal with the stress.

Whilst at the UN, 6 years letter, he received a message in 1974 that a ' case study' had been published on successful management union negotiations on the ICIANZ site which

had started with him. He may not have stayed when they went through the down periods, but through the word of mouth people knew that he was the instigator "the engineer with a heart" – or that is how he described himself. That was when he decided to go back and study an MBA at university of New South Wales and was introduced to the study of the psycho-dynamics of organisations.

*Eventually he moved into consulting focusing on **productivity** and worked in government departments for another 7 + years. He was the trusted adviser – who sat on the boards – in this role he became privy to information revealing the corrupt side of politics. At this point Justin became disillusioned with organisational power and political games and gathered his family together and left Australia and spent the next 10 years sailing around the world and chartering his yacht in the Caribbean to make ends meet. For the first 5 years Justin and his first wife educated their children on the yacht, both later went on to university in Australia to gain good degrees. He then met his second wife, an English woman, who initially came on board as his cook. During this period Justin came across and worked through the "Course in Miracles" which was another turning point for him.*

A guest chartered his yacht 3 times and she offered him a job as a coach working initially in the USA. She used family systems therapy as an underlying framework for the coaching. Finally after the 10th year of chartering in the Caribbean Justin took up the coaching opportunity in the USA and to his shock and horror once again found himself embroiled in the rough and tumble of politics. This time Justin realised that he couldn't run away to sea again and decided to stay in the system, and became trained in her approach. One of the trainings, which became another turning point, was when he went to The Centre for Consciousness Research developed by Robert Munroe; he had a life changing experience at the Gamma level of consciousness.

Through the different twists and turns in Justin's life, training and personal developments he has been on, Justin trusts that there is something bigger going on at the transpersonal or "spiritual level". He finally ended with this important experience, whilst waiting on the 37th Floor to meet the CEO in the NatWest Building – he looked across and saw the sunset over St Pauls and as it hit the mounted cross Justin suddenly felt a burst and voice from within: '"This is where you're supposed to be!" A boy who grew up in Tasmania, I had learnt from an early age to be with nature – to live off the land – if you will, and I have taken that with me wherever I am. This is what it's all about "the ecology of the mind"'.

Justin's coaching identity:

For Justin, coaching is simply a means to achieve his vision of helping those clients who are ready for transcendence and improving industrial relationships within organizations. Although he learnt and mastered psy discourse, his approach is underpinned by his engineering education, but fundamentally it is a lesson from an early age 'to be with nature – to live off the land', it's about the ecology of the environment and of the mind.

Similar ruptures occurred at different life stages for Justin, but the difference is between running away from and moving into and towards a possible future. He worked on himself through various training programs, and he recognised them as being important turning points in his life from which to spring board off into politically sensitive change management work. For Justin there is an underlying spiritual element to his work, and he shares this side of himself only when the client asks. In this way the duplicity of how he constructs his coaching identity is with acute awareness of what is acceptable in the workplace, furthermore the breakpoint at bifurcation of the personal and public sphere. In Justin's words the leadership models he uses are 'a Trojan horse' and his approach has met the needs of the market he serves.

THE BLUEPRINT OF AN EXECUTIVE COACH

Each story focuses on the reflexive self that gives each the agency to pursue coaching as a means to pursue their desired needs. The focus on self articulated here and amongst the interviewees is about 'becoming', that is often related to intimacy, positivity, transcendence, and making a difference to society. Coaching as a process is valued more than the identity of an executive coach by the individuals themselves. Having a title gains them entry into the market, however it is difficult to articulate what an executive coach actually does. An approach, which Ozkan shows through his ethnography, is to define identity from their educational background and how they objectively observe their client. In my short case studies, I provide an alternative perspective in which a coach's identity is sutured from a plurality of identities and periods in their life history, becomes more closely aligned with the self.

Socialization during their childhood and educational training during university play an important role in how they construct their coaching identities. Educational training has taught them to validate what is right or wrong as defined by an institution, however during their socialisation as a child they learnt through direct feedback how to survive, behave and what motivated them to be curious and take action rather than being a limiting factor as Ozkan points towards. Self-identity links their life experiences into a coherent narrative to validate their coaching identity.

The market confirms and signifies the value of the coach. The weak connection linking the self to an executive coach shows how ambivalent the word 'executive coach' is with its limiting rights and claims. Thus, a gap exists between the homogenizing identity of an executive coach constructed simply on educational background and business experience, to the diversity and experiences of the reflexive-self integrated with coaching skills through which they construct and construe their coaching identity.

7. AMBIGUOUS IDENTITY AND THE TRAINED SELF

Identity focuses on categorising people and allocating them to groups that are closely tied to certain power and rights. It represents a residual of culture, and in this case the chaotic and complex situational nature of the workplace in which an executive coach has found ways to act as a temporary anchor to momentarily transcend the complexity below. Metaphorically, I compare a coach with an anchor that provides a sense of groundedness, for brief moments, in the sea of complexity, which changes with the context and content of the challenge. Hence this constructs a high degree of indeterminate and open-endedness, and feeds into the creation of the ambiguity surrounding an executive coach.

Part of the ambiguity is the liquid nature of the coaching process that can work across all functional categories and all layers within organisations. As the complexity and number of relationships required to achieve a project increases, the coaching process remains the same. An executive coach works alongside the team members and managers, when possible, to achieve the goal through empowerment. In other words, supporting their clients involves getting them to perceive themself as a personal enterprise that has the desire to achieve results because it aligns with their personal goal rather than it being imposed by the organisation. The client can also resist the intentions of a coaching dialogue.

Another way to interpret the ambiguity of an executive coach is in the duality of the role, which can create conflict internally within the coach, to coach clients to achieve their potential and personal goals alongside self-governance that allows them to also be governed at a distance by the organisation. The different roles fluidly performed under the label of an executive coach are held together by his/her core values, which normally overlap those championed by the field and link to the vision of coaching. Core values are intrinsic to the construction of the self, and become intimately linked with their identity as

a coach because it embodies and exposes more of the self than in the other professions they previously worked in. This is an example of being authentic. Being authentic encapsulates the core skills of coaching: listening, asking good questions, being empathetic, building rapport and trust. Each of these skills can be trained and retrained in, to the point that an internal scaling system has been developed from which growth can be measured from. This is the explicit knowledge, combined with or as a result of, their experience of working in similar environments or tacit knowledge, that makes the executive coach who he/she is in the market place.

This may explain why there is both resistance and confusion in the market place as to what is an executive coach. There is resistance in terms of homogenising the definition of what an executive coach is because it is intrinsically linked to the self of the coach, and it simply cannot be reduced to skills and competencies. However, organisations and the marketplace use them as Abramson (2006) succinctly states as a 'mode of securing tight control over the performance of immediate tasks and over the subjective means of performing them, aimed at producing instant results rather than long term historical impact'. Hence effectiveness cannot be linearly related to skills and competence.

Executive coaches use a set of defined categories of skills and competences to demonstrate that they have the technical expertise to both transcend and work in liquid modernity. This ethnographic finding of 'the self', in which lifelong education and training is integral to being an executive coach, perpetuates the field of executive coaching as a 'liquid idea' that refuses to fix itself but remains popular despite this and because of it. The coach is a personal enterprise of continuous learning, adapting to their own needs and market trends, and a model for employees within organisations to move towards. Audit culture forms an important part of executive coaching in terms of feedback on the success of the coaching

engagement, and in how many new clients are introduced from a past client. The self becomes integrally linked with the success and failure of the work they are selling.

Reflexively, the coach, with the support of other peer coaches or through supervision, has to make sense of the feedback of how they performed during the overall coaching engagement, in order to find even better and even more efficient and effective ways to serve their clients and themselves. To improve, one has to be a life long learner by learning and testing the tools on oneself to actualize one's own potential too. The tension between agency and reflexivity within the self that continually develops through different forms of retraining directs them to act with self-control towards the market. This is an example of self-government. Executive coaches demonstrate similar characteristics and add to the corpus in the anthropology of neoliberalism through the constructs of self and identity.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study has a number of limitations. Without a focused geographical location or physical place to travel too, it was not possible to observe the daily behaviours and practices of coaches. This includes uncovering relationships specifically around business development and networking where anxiety generally resides through to ethical concerns on preventing societal disasters e.g. financial crisis, sustainability issues. The sample size of coaches interviewed was too small to derive any major assumptions but it indicated differences to the dominant perspective. Moving forward, these could be explored further by investigating the power and resistance in coaching across different temporal periods; coaching as a highly flexible skill; and audit culture and coaching. Finally maintaining objectivity within a subject I am intimate with required constant reminders from supporters of the work to focus on the reality of the present.

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