Coaching: Meaning-making process or goal-resolution process?

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Abstract

Two schools of thought exist about the purpose and process of coaching. One school of thought holds the strong belief or assumption that the purpose of coaching is to change behaviour through a goal-directed approach. The counterview has the underlying assumption that coaching is a meaning-making process, a shared journey that may or may not result in behavior change. These two approaches have different ontologies (definitions of the nature of reality) and epistemologies (explanations of how we come to know what we know). They are underpinned by worldviews rooted largely in either modernism (goal-resolution focus) or postmodernism (meaning-making). These schools of thought are explained in this paper, after which the paper examines a study that examined the lived experience of coached executives. It concludes that goal-resolution and meaning-making can co-exist. It appears from the study of coached executives who were interviewed through a constructivist grounded theory study that what is actually occurring in coaching is that meaning-making precedes goal-resolution. The implications of this for coaching education are that coaching education could address the ontology and epistemology of knowledge and methodology. This may increase an understanding of the coaches' own worldviews and consequently they would be more mindful of the impact and potential bias of the methodological choices they are making in their coaching practice.

Keywords: coaching, goal-resolution, meaning-making, postmodernism, modernism, worldviews

This paper begins by sharing the need for theory development with the field of coaching. It contextualizes how the role of reflexivity, with particular reference to reflecting on our worldviews, is needed in research and in our coaching practice. Two articles are reviewed, which reflect different schools of thought about the purpose and definition of the coaching process. One school of thought shares the strong belief or assumption that the purpose of coaching is to change behaviour (Grant, 2012), while the other school of thought has the underlying assumption that coaching is a meaning-making process, a shared journey that may or may not result in behavior change (Stelter, 2016). These two approaches have different ontologies (definitions of the nature of reality) and epistemologies (explanations of how we come to know what we know).

They are underpinned by worldviews rooted largely in either modernism or postmodernism. These two worldviews as they relate to coaching are briefly explored in this paper.

The paper then examines a study in which I, Cunningham (2017), explored the lived experience of coached executives and I document what the clients experienced coaching to be, not what theorists postulate that it "should be."

The paper concludes that despite the debate over coaching definition as to whether coaching is a goal-resolution or meaning-making process, it is in fact both. Meaning making and goal resolution may co-exist in the coaching process with the suggestion from the coached executives interviewed that meaning making comes first.

Need for theory of coaching based on lived experiences of coached executives

I was motivated to conduct a study on the lived experience of coached executives with the primary purpose of developing theory. Coaching by nature is located in a multi-disciplinary field and consequently draws on a multitude of constructs and concepts from various disciplines. It draws its influence from diverse fields such as psychology (De Haan & Duckworth, 2013; Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh, & Parker, 2010; Passmore, 2009; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007), organizational development (Egan & Hamlin, 2014), leadership development (Kahn, 2011; Stout-Rostron, 2014), learning and education (Cunningham, 2014), and management (Kahn, 2011).

It appears that authors and researchers tend to describe the contribution of the discipline or field to coaching based on their own training and background. Therefore, researchers who tend to have a psychological background will often cite the psychological foundations of coaching (Grant, 2006; Kauffman& Scoular, 2004; Passmore, 2009), whereas those with a stronger business background will focus on the contextual aspects such as organizational development (Kahn, 2011; Peterson, 2006; Stout-Rostron, 2014). Authors do tend to acknowledge the multi-disciplinary nature but the emphasis varies in terms of their own dominant background, orientation and education.

Coaching theory may be shifting in focus from the original 1980s transmitter generation (Brock, 2008), which took theories and adapted them to coaching. Of the 17 transmitter-generation influencers on coaching, 8 (41.2%)

were from business, 4 (23.5%) were from psychology, 3 (17.6%) were from sports, and 2 (11.8%) from philosophy (Brock, 2008, p. 308). However, much of the theory is still developed on the basis of the researcher's background, training and worldview without the philosophical position being acknowledged by the author.

Methodology flows from the philosophical orientation of the researcher or the practitioner coach. Guba and Lincoln in Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 105) state that "questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm." They define a paradigm as a "basic belief system or worldview that guides the researcher not only in choice of method but in ontological and epistemologically fundamental ways." The ontological question would focus on the perceptions of reality, while the epistemological questions would focus on the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participant and the reader of the research. The methodological question would focus on how this information can be found. The same principles would apply to the practicing coach except that the focus would be on the coach and the coachee and the methodological question would focus on the choice of methods used in the coaching process.

A key driver for the future of coaching research is the need to develop coaching theory based on evidence. Ultimately theory is the development of perspective and the creation of a mental model of the phenomenon to be understood. Theory development encourages the advancement of knowledge and aims to move the field's thinking forward, providing new connections and discussing the practical implementations of these connections (Corley & Gioia, 2011). Theoretical contribution is often evaluated on two criteria – the originality of the contribution and the usefulness of the contribution. The research I conducted is useful in that it presents evidence of the experience of goal-resolution and meaning-making in the coached executive's perceptions. This research could facilitate and potentially resolve the tension that coaches may feel between being focused on goal attainment and wanting to step into a reflective mode. This would be useful to both coaches and coach educators.

We are seeing that the very answer to the question "Is coaching goal directed or a meaning-making process?" is influenced by one's ontological view of the world, combined with one's experience and training. We thus find a situation where coaches and theorists defend their approaches without necessarily making explicit their ontological and epistemological views of knowledge. The debate then becomes a debate of methodology, as opposed to an understanding of a different worldview.

The role of reflexivity

I believe that coaches and researchers need to be aware of their philosophical worldview and able to articulate it. As an example, I stated in my research:

> I will begin by exploring the ontological question of how I perceive reality. My philosophical orientation has been influenced strongly by the work I do and the area I am researching, namely business coaching. I have been coaching for close to 20 years and in my experience, I have found people see their world from different perspectives and that their experiences influence the language that they use to describe their world and this in turn influences their world. An example, an adult who was bullied as a child might have the word "bully" in his vocabulary and when in the corporate world power politics are at play, he might revert to describing the manager as a "corporate bully." In contrast, someone who has not had this experience might describe the manager as narcissistic based on their training in psychology and react differently. The same experience gets labelled differently and evokes a different behaviour. There are, therefore, multiple realities and perceptions.
>
> A philosophical orientation that supports my experience is that of symbolic interactionism. The very approach of coaching is congruent with this philosophy as it is believed that by talking and thinking about one's life (being reflective and interacting with someone), one is able to construct and give meaning. Coaching is a space for self-reflection and allowing oneself to view a situation in a certain way or to challenge one's views about a situation.
>
> Coaching becomes part of the interpretive space or process. The paradigm of symbolic interactionism (that believes we create meaning through interaction) is therefore an appropriate tradition or theoretical perspective to underpin this research. (Cunningham, 2017, pp. 22-26)

This reflexivity from researchers needs to be encouraged as a critical part of the research and writing journey. By stating the philosophical assumptions that underpin the study, the purpose is not to minimize the value of one type of study over another but to encourage and appreciate alternative modes of knowledge enquiry. We should be transferring this awareness of philosophical assumptions from research to practice. Our education of coaches should include orientations to different philosophies. By making our worldview transparent, we can become aware of potential biases and through reflective processes such as coach supervision become more self-aware, attuned practitioner coaches.

Modernism and Postmodernism

Bachkirova (2017) argues that our worldviews influence the way in which we write, research and practice coaching. These worldviews are not always clearly defined and separate but rather move along a continuum. A key defining factor is the ontology incorporated in the worldview – that is, how the nature of reality is defined. Modernism tends to see the nature of reality as containing a pre-existing pattern that can be discovered. Postmodernism sees social reality as chaotic, fluid and ever changing without a master plan. The worldview that the author, researcher or practitioner holds influences the lens or philosophical position in which knowledge is perceived differently. Modernism will desire a rational, logical argument presented on the basis of facts. The postmodern lens will view the world or knowledge as composed of multiple realities, with no one explanation more true than other explanations. Postmodernism will see that the knowledge is true for all who accept the presented facts but that there is no one universal truth (Bachkirova, 2017; Neuman, 2010).

Bachkirova (2017) summarizes the co-existence of what she terms "epistemological attitudes" by stating that both could learn from one another. Postmodernists could become more precise – a lesson from modernists – and the value of self-reflexivity used by postmodernists could be used by modernists. The way this would play out in research would be that modernists would believe that there is a clear cause-effect relationship. As a result of 'x', then 'y' would occur. For example, specific coaching interventions would lead to a set of outcomes in coaching. In contrast, the postmodernist stance in coaching would encompass the view that coaching is a process of joint meaning-making, of co-creation, and that reality emerges. Not all qualitative studies are conducted in the postmodernist tradition. Yet the rich, descriptive focusing on context makes most such studies fall into the worldview of postmodernism.

I will now look at two papers which demonstrate a particular worldview. The content of the papers focuses on the purpose of coaching and the process of coaching, with a particular reference to the role of goal-resolution and meaning-making. The first paper is a study by Anthony Grant published in 2012. The second paper is a conceptual paper written by Reinhardt Stelter in 2016. These are briefly described and are then followed by a commentary about the two papers as they relate to a worldview. The papers were chosen as it was very clear to see the philosophical underpinning guiding their papers. Both authors are well-respected academics and researchers. In an attempt to locate the articles in relation to modernism and postmodernism, I would like to

acknowledge that the worldview is located on a spectrum and my interpretation is open to a different viewpoint.

The purpose of coaching – goal-resolution or meaning-making?

In 2012, Anthony M. Grant wrote a paper entitled "An integrated model of goal-focused coaching: An evidence-based framework for teaching and practice." He positions the paper by stating that "goal theory per se has much to offer coaching research and practice" (Grant, 2012, p. 146). The paper reviews the body of literature on goals and goal setting, commenting that at the time of the research there were relatively few papers that articulated an explicit link between goal theory and coaching. Goal theory is discussed in detail, from timing of goals, types of goals, and goal hierarchies to the implications of goal neglect. The paper discusses the different professional bodies and how the use of words such as 'goal' and 'outcome' are common. He states that "all these definitions of coaching are essentially about helping individuals regulate and direct their interpersonal resources in order to create purposeful and positive change in their personal lives" (Grant, 2012, pp. 148-149). He then states that as such all coaching conversations are explicitly or implicitly linked to goal focus. The paper systematically develops an integrative model of goal attainment.

Grant acknowledges in this paper and in an earlier paper by Grant, Curtayne and Burton (2009) that well-being is part of the coaching process. In 2009, he had conducted coaching using a cognitive-behavioral solution-focused approach, within a randomized controlled study in which coaching was conducted by professional executive coaches. The results showed that, compared to controls, coaching enhanced goal attainment, increased resilience and workplace well-being, and reduced depression and stress (Grant *et al.*, 2009, p. 396). Grant reports on a study he conducted where participants were asked to identify their desired outcome for the coaching relationship and then rate the degree to which they had reached this outcome. The fact that the study uses language such as "degree to which the outcome" was reached suggests that coaching can be measured in quantifiable scores. The paper makes a further argument that the achievement of behavioral goals has a positive impact on individuals' workplace performance. He states "To enhance the goal directed nature of the coaching program, the GROW model (Whitmore, 1992) was used to structure each coaching session" (Grant *et al.*, 2009, p. 399).

If we look at Grant's (2012) paper, it is clear that he builds up a strong, logical argument, drawing on a range of theories and pointing to existing

structures such as definitions by professional bodies. The paper reports on a study he conducted in which a cause-and-effect relationship is assessed using a scale from 0 to 100%, and participants are asked to rank their answers. This is more modernist than postmodernist in orientation, as are randomized controlled studies. Ives and Cox (2012) also provide a strong justification for a goal-focused approach.

In contrast, Ordóñez, Schweitzer, Galinsky, and Bazerman (2009) suggest goals have gone wild and there is a systematic side effect of over-prescribing goals. Perhaps given the relentless focus on business goals, it is suggested that the coaching space might be needed as it could provide a much-needed reflective window in our hectic world (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2013).

In contrast to Grant *et al.* (2009) and Grant (2012), Stelter (2014) has developed a construct that he labels "third-generation coaching." He describes third-generation coaching as a journey where the coach and coachee collaboratively and jointly generate meaning in the conversation. He contrasts this with first-generation coaching, in which the objective is to assist the coachee to reach a specific goal, and further compares this to second-generation coaching, where the coach assumes that answers reside within the client or coachee and that they (the client) know the solutions to their challenges. An example of first-generation coaching would be the GROW model (Whitmore, 2007), which in its very acronym indicates goal as a focus – Goal, Reality, Options/Obstacles and Way Forward/Wrap up (GROW). A second-generation approach could include the "time to think" approach, which many coaches have used. The "time to think" approach strongly embraces the philosophy that wisdom and answers lie in the client (Kline, 2015). The trend of using positive psychology and a strengths-based approach in coaching may philosophically be situated in this second wave, where emphasis is on the good and strengths in people. However, increasingly, positive psychology is moving away from this viewpoint. Kauffman (2006, pp. 221-222) states that she "must emphasize that positive psychology is not interested in pretending all people are paragons of virtue, maturity, and mental health."

In the meaning-making approach, Stelter (2016) believes that identity development is vital and the meaning-making process will result in (1) a strengthening sense of coherence in the coachee's self-identity; and (2) integrating past, present and future into a whole. The reflection and renewed understanding for the client or coachee would be about (1) his or her own experiences in relation to a specific context; and (2) specific relationships, coordinated actions with others and the processes of negotiation in a specific

social situation. Meaning is essential because people assign specific meanings to their experiences, their actions in life or work and their interactions. What is important in relation to Stelter's point about understanding is that things will begin to appear meaningful when people understand and when they make sense of their way of thinking, feeling and acting (Stelter, 2007).

The postmodernist stance is that effects cannot necessarily be allocated proportionally and that uncertainty and ambiguity are in fact the reality. The following quote from Stelter (2016), who adopts a postmodernist approach, captures the essence of uncertainty:

> A coaching agenda that focuses exclusively on goals and quick solutions will fail to meet the needs of postmodern, late modern and hypercomplex societies, where the challenges and demands on the individuals are changing very rapidly. I encourage the reader to focus less on specific goals and instead invite their coaching partner to linger on thoughts and feelings and to make time for reflection. In our time, we have lost the idea of simply having time. Coaching has to be a dialogue from where we reinvent the concept of just lingering, of having time to be on a journey with another person. It is a journey into the unknown, where neither the coach nor the coaching partner clearly knows the destination or the route. It is a journey of discovery into relatively unknown territory, where both parties are travel companions, and neither knows anything for sure about the road ahead. (Stelter, 2016, p. 63)

Neither goal-resolution or meaning-making but both

This paper concludes by examining a study that investigated what coached executives say about their experience of coaching (cf. Cunningham, 2017).

Research that has been based on the client's perspective is in the minority. Bush (2004) studied the client's perceptions of effectiveness in executive coaching. Critical moments in the coaching experience were researched and one of the significant findings was that an increase in insight and realization was valued by the clients (Day, De Haan, Blass, Sills, & Bertie, 2008; De Haan, Bertie, Day, & Sills, 2010). A useful distinction is made that whilst a majority of studies have collected views from coaches, considerably fewer have given a voice to the coachee's experiences (Passmore, 2010). Some studies from the client's point of view include those of Augustijnen, Schnitzer, and Van Esbroeck (2011), which, based on interviews with coached executives, developed an executive coaching model. The two central variables of the model are: (a) the relationship based on trust between coach and coachee; and (b)

openness to coachee introspection. Elston and Boniwell's (2011) study found ways in which women through coaching identify how they may use strengths and gain value in the workplace. Gray, Ekinci and Goregaokar (2011) concluded that coaching was used for predominantly personal benefits rather than to build business-oriented competencies. Roche and Hefferon's (2013) overarching finding was that the debriefing conversation about a strengths-based assessment tool was influential in moving the participants to act. Another significant finding was that the debriefing heightened the participants' understanding of their strengths and how to better utilize them.

This is a brief summary of a part of the Cunningham (2017) study but it lets us hear the voice of coachees or clients. It is, after all, for their purpose that coaching exists.

The study did not specifically focus on the question "Is coaching a goal-directed or meaning-making process?" It was an exploratory study using constructivist grounded theory methodology and asked the participants to talk about their coaching experience. The research questions guiding the study were:

- What is the lived experience of coached executives?

- Based on the lived experience, what theory about the coaching process emerges from the evidence?

To obtain rich data through interviewing, it was important that the participants in the research were able to speak openly and without restrictions. They also had to be able to tell their stories in their own voice and evolve their ideas in an emergent and reflective manner. Charmaz (2014) has developed the terminology 'Intensive Interview,' which describes a contingent conversational style of interviewing that allows for the ebb and flow of dialogue in a conversational way. This allows the participant in the research to share what they consider important in contrast to answering guided or semi-guided questions.

In much qualitative research, the interview guide is based on the conceptual framework derived from the literature review. However, this is not the case with grounded theory interviews, which need to gather data from respondents that is 'uncontaminated' by existing theory. The theory that emerges from grounded theory is grounded in the data collected, not in previous literature. One can conclude that interviewing skills on the part of the researcher vary, and surmise that unstructured interviews require greater skill because they have less literature guiding them. The interviewer thus needs to be

sensitive to subtle nuances and body language cues in respondent replies (Cunningham & Carmichael, 2017).

I thus wanted to find out how the coached executives experienced coaching. The methodology was a phenomenologically oriented constructivist grounded theory study. The study was primarily designed to follow Charmaz's (2014) approach to grounded theory, but, since elucidation of experiences was being sought, it had a flavour of phenomenology, but without the depth of a normal phenomenological study (Cunningham & Carmichael, 2017). The findings of the overall study will be articulated in other publications, but the purpose of this paper is to highlight one finding; namely, how executives experienced goal-setting and meaning-making in coaching.

The context within which the research took place was that of business executive coaching. Coaching was described as a relatively young field as recently as 2014 (Cox, Bachkirova, & Clutterbuck, 2014). Coaching is considered one of the fastest growing human resource (HR) development techniques. These techniques are used both internally and externally by organisations (Ciporen, 2015).

The study had a total of 17 participants.

Companies (via their HR directors, learning and development managers or talent managers) that offered coaching to their executives were identified purposively (Roulston, 2016) and contacted to obtain permission to approach executives who had already been coached within their organisations. The main selection criterion was that executives had experienced coaching (regardless of who the coach was and regardless of industry). Data was analysed after each interview in order to revise the next interview guide. Eleven executives from seven organisations were interviewed in the first round of interviews. This was supplemented with six coaching students sharing their reflective journal about their coaching experience. Ten coaches had coached the executives. One coach had coached two people. Only two coaches were male. The coaches had different training, credentials and backgrounds. They were spread across various industries and across the country.

The coached executives consisted of five males and six females.

The first interview was kept broad and open-ended, asking questions such as: "Please tell me about your experience of being coached", "What was the context of the coaching intervention?" and "Please describe the relational

aspects between you and your coach." Probes were along the lines of, "…and what happened next?" and "What kinds of things did you reflect on…?"

A finding from this constructivist grounded theory study, in terms of the coaching process, was that it appeared that one of the practices of the coach was offering a different lens to the executives. The consequence of the sharing of a different lens was that it allowed the coached executives to see things differently. Comments documented included how the coach had encouraged them to look at things through a different lens or have a different insight. Some executives (Executive 7 and Executive 9) stated: "The big positive for me was the whole concept of making you think differently about things" and "It challenges you, it helps you think through, opens up your mind, you look at things differently" (Cunningham, 2017, p. 73). Another executive said,

> Coaching has been massively helpful and I have grown in leaps and bounds as a manager, I think in terms of how I manage people and how I just see things. It makes me look at things from a different perspective (Executive 5). (Cunningham, 2017, p. 73)

Another executive (Executive 7) said: "I think the lasting part of it [coaching] for me is that I now think a little bit differently." Coached executives used several analogies or phrases about seeing things differently. Statements included: "I had blinkers on," "hit a light bulb," "been an eye opener" (Cunningham, 2017, p. 73).

Many spoke about the sense-making or meaning-making process and one executive (Executive 11) summed this up as follows:

> When I have gone in to see her, just feeling totally confused and my brain full of mush, just in terms of thousands of things I am worrying about or thinking about and then just having really powerful experiences through her ability to ask, to translate my thoughts and to help me process what I am experiencing. So the end result has been huge clarity and huge support and huge confidence actually…So to have somebody for whom my world made sense and she can affirm my way of being, has been really, really helpful. (Cunningham, 2017, p. 85)

The coached executives did not use the phrase 'meaning making' or 'sense making' but stated it in context.

Executive 6 stated: "She helped identify with me all the layers of the decision – you as a person as a whole, you as a person and your goal, in your career, recommendations, relationships – whatever. Everything had to **make sense** [bold added for emphasis] for me to take that decision, at an emotional

level. It was like all different layers." Executive 6 also commented on understanding self in relationship to context and said, "So if I went into a coaching relationship again, it would give me another layer of understanding about myself and the way I interact with the world" (Cunningham, 2017, p. 82).

Executive 5 said,

> My coach is brilliant; she really gets to the bottom of things, really why I do certain things or why I react in a certain way and makes me look at them from different perspectives. And a lot of what I find every time you know you go to a session and you kind of hit a light bulb moment and you go like "wow" you know, it's like so logical. I have gone through a process whereby I have looked at serious things, there may be another way or thought about it differently but I am where I want to be and it is that conscious decision through thinking. (Cunningham, 2017, p. 87)

The consciousness of decision making definitely contributes to the enhanced understanding. Executive 6, expanding on Executive 5's words above, stated, "I think it [coaching] is around focus, mindfulness, you as an individual have to have enough knowledge to see it but that kind of mindfulness around pausing enough to really analyze things" (Cunningham, 2017, p. 87).

Executive 1 said, "I think it [coaching] would be an intervention to assist on improving your understanding the role that you are in and imparting your thinking into the organization" (Cunningham, 2017, p. 89).

This expanded the insight from self-reflection to sharing within the context. This cluster of awareness, understanding and meaning-making were the first responses the executives gave when they were asked about their coaching experience. They would later go on to list other benefits but, in terms of order of outcome, it would appear that this cluster was necessary for the other benefits to take place.

Based on the executives' stories and their lived experience, for them the coaching process begins with understanding. Understanding encompasses many factors – understanding preferences, understanding context, and understanding emotions, values, history, and multiple other considerations. Once understanding is present, it moves to making meaning, which is personalizing the understanding to one's own identity and own life choices. It could also be described as personalizing the level of awareness to the context. An example might be an individual becomes aware that they are an introvert in preference. Meaning-making comes from understanding what it means to be an introvert in their particular context, which might be a very extroverted sales-driven

environment. This leads to a person's thinking differently and only after that behaving differently. The insight achieved in the example above might be along the lines of 'I am ok. I doubted my ability because I am not like them but I just do it differently. I can sell but I sell using my introvert style. I just need my manager to understand this.' The subsequent behavior would be communicating with the manager. This behaviour can be displayed in many different ways – some of which are illustrated in the diagram shown in Figure 1 below. These different behaviours and actions include better managing stress, better managing time, and enhanced interpersonal relationships, but this is not an all-inclusive list of behaviours.

Executive 8 summarised the difference between behaviour and thinking by saying: "It was just like an opportunity to press the pause button on the operational side of the business and look more towards nurturing 'what do I think' – because I had sort of stopped thinking and was more acting" (Cunningham, 2017, p. 92).

Executive 6 confirmed the importance of meaning-making. As she put it, "Everything had to make sense for me" (Cunningham, 2017, p. 92).

This is reflected in Figure 1 – in order to shift from the process of understanding to the process of thinking differently, meaning-making has to take place. I would suggest that many companies send people for coaching to achieve changed behaviors but changed behaviors will be sustainable and lasting when the process described above is followed in detail. Behavioral change happens after steps 1, 2 and 3, as reflected in Figure 1.
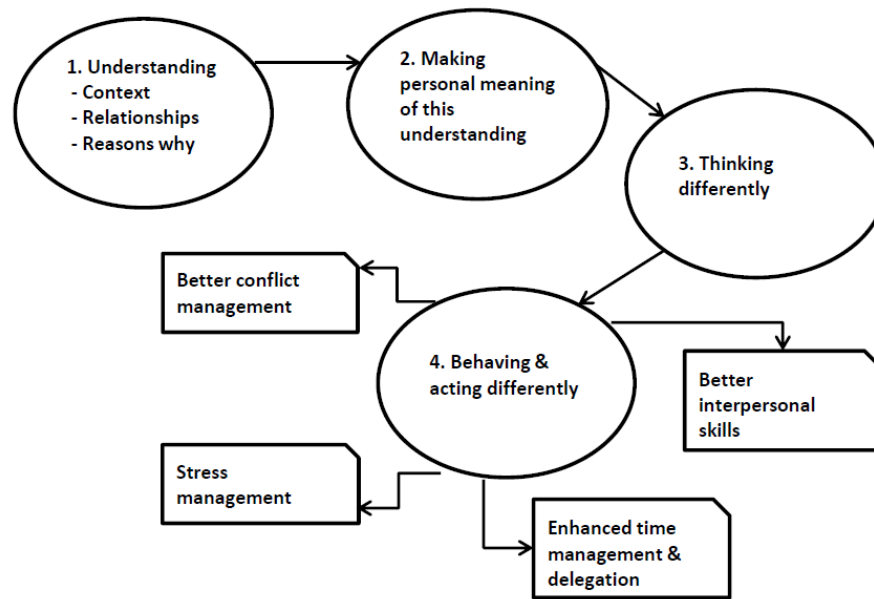
Figure 1: Diagrammatic overview of flow of process that leads to outcomes in coaching as developed in grounded theory study (Cunningham, 2017, p. 96)

This study found that the coachees stressed thinking differently as the most important part of coaching. It included meaning-making as a key part of the process and it led to behavior change which could be part of goal-resolution. Therefore, regarding goal-resolution and meaning-making, it is not either/or but rather an answer with both/and. It is important to not start to pursue meaning-making as a goal. A modernist orientation might be to set a goal of meaning-making but a postmodernist view of meaning-making would be different. A postmodernist view would see meaning-making needing a space of free exploration. It requires a sense of not knowing, a space for emergent discovery, a place without a predefined agenda. Meaning-making can co-exist alongside goal attainment. To encourage such meaning- making, Jinks & Dexter (2012) suggest coaches might want to safeguard the space for coaching clients to experience and reflect on the rewards and enjoyment linked to goal attainment. They go on to say "If an unremitting relentless focus is on goal achievement, then the coaching profession as a whole may be facilitating and reinforcing the compulsive behaviour of goal pursuit *as an end in itself*" (Jinks & Dexter, 2012, p. 101).

An important reflection is who says what and who are we listening to? Are we developing our theories according to our existing way of viewing the

world and adapting known theories to coaching or are we challenging the way we think, write, practice and teach as coaches? Are we listening to the evidence, to the coachees/clients?

Having reflected on the question: "Is coaching a goal-solution process or is it a meaning-making process?" we should ask: "What are the lessons or questions that we can leave for institutions that are training and educating our future coaches?"

- Do we teach the ontology and epistemology of the knowledge that we share with students?

- Is the focus on the methodology sometimes at the exclusion of understanding the worldview and philosophy that underpin it?

- Are we developing discernment and critical thinking in our students about the methodologies that they use? And if we say we are doing so, what are we doing to develop this distinctive critical thinking?

- Are we teaching our students or are we learning together in a collaborative, contingent, emergent way?

- Where is the evidence for the theories that we teach?

The paper began by pointing to the need for theory development in the coaching field. It discussed the need for researchers and practitioners to be reflective and aware of their worldview. Modernism and postmodernism were described. Two papers were explored – Grant (2012) and Stelter (2016) – and briefly analyzed in terms of how their worldviews impact on their conclusions about goal-resolution and meaning-making. I ended the paper by sharing a study I completed in which one of the findings demonstrated that meaning-making needed to precede goal-resolution. This was based on the lived experience of coached executives.

The findings could be summarized as follows. Based on a constructivist grounded theory study rooted in evidence, the coaching client finds the coaching process valuable as it increases understanding and facilitates meaning-making, which leads to thinking differently. As a result of changes in the viewing lens and in the thought process, new behaviors result. These changed behaviors may link to predefined goals or new goals that evolved through the meaning-making process (Cunningham, 2017).

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