

Presence in Executive Coaching Conversations – The C² Model

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Abstract

Presence is considered by the practitioner community to be a key factor in coaching effectiveness and is recognised as an important coaching competence. Yet to date, there has been little formal research into this phenomenon in executive coaching. By adopting a constructivist stance, this qualitative study uses the methodology of conceptual encounter, combined with the novel extension of a focus group to map the structure and nature of presence in this context. Findings generated the “C² Model”, which highlights the importance of client presence, emphasises a dynamic nature, and suggests a link to wellbeing and moments of insight. Conditions for presence were also reported and its utility was assessed. Overall, the study concludes that presence is a way of being that is an important factor in effective coaching and relevant to both client and coach.

Keywords: Presence, executive coaching, conceptual encounter, C² model

Introduction

As a research-practitioner, my motivation for studying presence in executive coaching conversations arose from my attempts to make sense of the phenomenon in my practice. Prior to this study, I held a largely tacit understanding, associating it with a sensitivity to my thoughts and feelings together with having a relational sense of being present towards and with my client. I noticed that coaching often felt at its most effective when I was more present in this way. This led to further reflection about my client’s experience; I was curious whether they also felt a similar sense of presence and if so, how our being present together affected each other during our conversation. As I began to research this phenomenon more deeply, I encountered a variety of descriptions and definitions in the literature. For instance, Silsbee (2008), accentuates the inner, individual experience. He sees presence as a state of awareness, emphasising a somatic nature, ‘characterised by the felt experience of timelessness, connectedness and truth’ (p.22). Stelter (2014) on the other hand focuses on the relational aspect where, ‘the goal is to develop a presence and an attunement where the participants are constantly trying to tune in to each other’ (p.59). Current knowledge is derived mostly from practice-based literature and whilst both inspiring and useful to coaching professionals of all persuasions, the collective picture it presents seems somewhat inconsistent and incomplete. There has been little academic research into the executive coaching context that articulates an overall structure or attempts to clarify the boundaries and overlaps with other concepts. These reflections led to the formulation of the research question being: *“What is presence and how is it experienced by coaches and clients during the executive coaching conversation?”*

Given that the motivation for the study arose from my practice as an executive coach, the research question is concentrated on this context, which is distinct from other coaching scenarios such as life coaching, personal development, career counselling and coaching supervision. A number of definitions for executive coaching exist, which are broadly similar in that they focus on an executive’s development during a one-to-one coaching relationship



in an organisational leadership context (Blumberg, 2016; Ennis et al., 2015; Bartlett et al., 2014; Maltbia et al., 2014, 2011; Baron and Morin, 2009). For the purposes of this study I have adopted this definition by Ennis et al., (2015):

Executive coaching is a one-on-one individualized process to benefit the leader and his/her organization. Working with goals defined by both the leader and the organization, a qualified and trusted coach uses various coaching methods and feedback data to develop the leader's capacity for current and future leadership. This coaching is guided by a coaching partnership to achieve maximum impact and the highest level of learning. (p.8)

Reflecting on this definition, a number of aspects may be connected to a notion of presence. There is recognition of the relational element in references to a 'one-to-one individualized process' that is 'guided by a coaching partnership'. The importance of authenticity is reflected in the coach being 'qualified and trusted'; and the use of 'feedback' as a means of client development is emphasised. Regardless of the specifics of definition, there is reasonable consensus in the literature that coaching effectiveness depends on three core factors: The competency and attitude of the coach; the strength of the coach-client relationship; and the intrinsic motivation of the client (Sonesh et al., 2015; Smith and Brummel, 2013; Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011; McKenna and Davis, 2009). The aim of the research is therefore to understand more deeply what presence is in this context of executive coaching, what part it plays in the coaching process and how it might link to these effectiveness criteria.

This paper firstly summarises the key areas of literature that have informed the study. It then introduces the methodology used to inquire into the research question before going on to present the key findings in the form of the final conceptual map. It then concludes with a discussion of implications for theory, practice and future research, whilst acknowledging some important limitations of the study.

Literature Review

As noted there is a lack of academic studies into presence in the coaching context generally and none in the specific context of executive coaching. Siminovitich and Van Eron (2008) investigated the part presence plays in the intentional use of self as a coaching process and concluded it was a natural state of being that nevertheless requires conscious intention to fully embrace. Korthagen et al. (2013) and Kinsella (2012) apply Scharmer's (2009) concept of 'presencing' to coaching contexts. This they report, involves a deep, inward listening and an ability to connect to intuitive, tacit wisdom (Polanyi, 2009). The coaching literature also references presence as a factor connected to concepts such as empathy (Will et al., 2016); Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow (Wesson, 2010; Du Toit, 2014); coach attitude (Augustijnen et al., 2011); meaning-making (Stelter, 2007); mindfulness (Passmore, 2009; Collard and Walsh, 2008) and collaborative dialogue (Stelter, 2014). In addition, there is a growing opinion-based, practitioner literature which argues that presence underpins the coaching process (Iliffe-Wood, 2014; Du Toit, 2014; Silsbee, 2008). As such, it is recognised by some professional coaching bodies as an important coaching competence (ICF website, 2018; AC website, 2018).

Beyond the coaching context, the phenomenon has been researched more deeply in other helping professions such as psychotherapy, nursing and teaching. The concepts of presence emerging from these areas are informed by a variety of theoretical perspectives such as phenomenology, humanism, the transpersonal, Gestalt psychology, dialogic theory and person-centred approaches. In psychotherapy, the concept of 'therapeutic presence' is well established (Schneider, 2015; Anderson et al., 2014; Colosimo and Pos, 2015; Boeck,



2014; Colosimo, 2013; Lee and Prior, 2013; Geller, 2013; Geller and Greenberg, 2012, 2002; Granick, 2011; Geller et al., 2010; Krug, 2009; Bradford, 2007; Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan, 2007; Greenberg and Geller, 2001; Bugental, 1992). For instance, Bugental (1992) described it as mobilising and responding to one's sensitivity towards internal and external perceptions. Geller and Greenberg (2002) emphasised that it involved 'being with' rather than 'doing to' the client, whilst Colosimo (2013), Geller (2013) and Lee and Prior (2013) accentuated a sense of deep listening. This relational emphasis was developed in a similar direction by Boeck (2014), Anderson et al. (2014) and Granick (2011), who placed the construct of witnessing at the heart of their concepts, with the former arguing that therapeutic presence involved, 'bearing witness to their client, co-creating empathy and cultivating therapeutic affirmation' (p2). Colosimo and Pos (2015) investigated the relationship between presence, mindfulness and empathy. They concluded that presence was an underlying factor for mindfulness and that it was an antecedent for empathy, being, 'necessary but not sufficient for therapists' capacity to express empathy' (p. 111). Similarly, Schneider (2015) differentiated presence in the psychotherapeutic context from its association with mindfulness as a spiritual practice, arguing that there were a number of secular ways that it could evolve, including through profound interpersonal relationships. Perhaps one of the more significant insights comes from Carl Rogers, who in his later years came to view presence as the underlying principle of his practice (Baldwin, 2000).

There is a similarly vibrant inquiry into 'nursing presence', with a number of recent meta-reviews having been performed (Turpin, 2014; Zybblock, 2010; Finfgeld-Connett, 2006; Covington, 2003), which view presence as an essential part the nurse-patient interaction. Covington (2003) introduced 'presencing' as a term to describe the act of being there for a patient, envisaging it from four conceptual perspectives: as a way of being and behaving with another; as a process of relating that promotes healing; emphasising authenticity; and as a specific nursing intervention where a nurse spends caring time with the patient. Zybblock (2010) linked presence to openness and trust, whilst Finfgeld-Connect (2006) also accentuated the relational aspect when describing presence as, 'an interpersonal process that is characterized by sensitivity, holism, intimacy, vulnerability and adaptation to unique circumstances' (p.708). In making the link to vulnerability, she suggested that present nurses put themselves on a more equal power footing with their patients since typically, it is the patient that is vulnerable. She also concluded that effective care involved not only the presence of the nurse but the patient's willingness to be open to it. As a way of being, Parse (2015) posited her notion of true presence where a nurse empathises with the values of the patient and focusses a deep attention on what they are experiencing. In a recent review conducted by Turpin (2014), nursing presence was compared with presence in other helping disciplines, including psychotherapy and teaching. She concluded that whilst there were many similarities across the professions, there was a gap both in interdisciplinary research and in research designed to differentiate nursing presence from related concepts of presence. This echoes the identified gaps in executive coaching knowledge.

In the educational context, 'teaching presence' is seen as a key factor of teaching effectiveness. Gunnlaugson (2011), like Korthagen et al. (2013) and Kinsella (2012) in the coaching context, draws on Scharmer's (2009) construct and proposes a relational construct where moments of dialogue can 'pull participants into a shared present together' (p.16). Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) reported qualities of alert awareness, compassionate receptiveness and a mental, emotional, and physical connection to students, whilst Ahangar Ahmadi (2016) emphasised, 'an authentic relationship with self and others in harmony with the context' (p.4). Similarly, Solloway (2000) highlighted an association with compassion along with an attitude of non-judgemental attention that helped a teacher to be open to the complexities of the classroom.

In broader terms, the concept is informed by dialogic thinkers such as Buber (1958, 1988) and Bohm (1996), who viewed presence as a necessary requirement for communicating



deeply with another person through fully utilising one's senses, perception and intuition. Buber for instance, called this type of interaction 'genuine' or 'I-Thou' dialogue and differentiated its quality from most of the everyday conversations we participate in, which he called 'I-It' dialogue, where the focus is more on issues and objects rather than a deep, person-to-person relationship.

These diverse perspectives have emerged from a variety of contexts and demonstrate that whilst the notion of presence is considered to be an essential element of the professional dialogue, it is a phenomenon that is constructed in many different ways. Whilst interpretations and contexts differ, the literature points to a consensus that presence is a desirable quality that contributes to the effectiveness of coaching and which can be both learnt and practiced.

Methodology

The investigation was performed within a constructivist research paradigm, which acknowledges multiple perspectives of reality, an appreciation that people create meaning together through dialogue, and that people's interpretation of their reality can change (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Conceptual encounter (De Rivera, 1981) was chosen as a suitable methodology since it is phenomenological in nature (McLeod, 2011) and aims to understand how human experience is structured or 'mapped'. During a conceptual encounter inquiry, an abstract conceptualisation emerges that is continuously informing and being informed by successive cycles of research partner experience so that there is a, 'dialectic encounter between concrete instances of the phenomenon and abstract, elegant conceptualisation' (De Rivera, 1981, p.6). The approach has been used to research human experiences as diverse as emotion (De Rivera and Kaya, 2005) and false memory (De Rivera, 1997). In the specific context of coaching, Bachkirova (2015) adopted it to investigate self-deception in coaches, whilst Maxwell (2009) investigated the boundary between coaching and therapy/counselling.

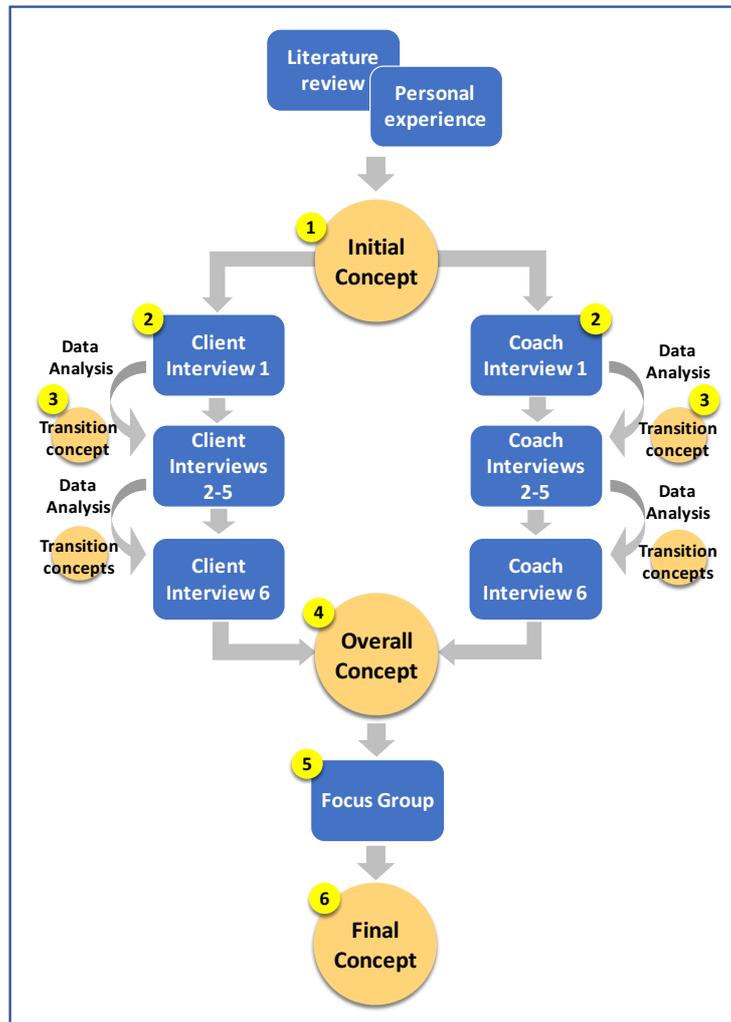
Conceptual encounter emphasises the partnership between researcher and 'research partners' and recognises the active role of both. In common with other phenomenological methods, 'social reality has to be grounded in people's experiences of that social reality' (Crotty, 1998, p.24). It differs from other qualitative approaches such as grounded theory that view the researcher's role as entering, 'the research setting with as few predetermined ideas as possible' (Glaser and Holton, 2004, p.54). On the other hand, the researcher is not as involved as in heuristic inquiry and autoethnographic approaches. In a novel modification to the standard methodology, two parallel inquiries were conducted and the research was also extended through the use of a focus group, which employed the Q-sort technique (Stainton Rogers, 1995) to further explore the concept. A summary of the approach is shown in Figure 1 and the procedure is explained in more detail in the following sections.

The Conceptual Encounter Procedure

Two conceptual encounter inquiries were conducted simultaneously, one exploring the client perspective and the other the coach. This allowed client and coach voices to be treated with equal significance, which addressed a gap in the current research where the focus was only on the coach. Six coach and six client research partners were selected via purposive sampling. Eligibility criteria ensured that the clients had received coaching within the previous twelve months, whilst the executive coaches were current practitioners holding a postgraduate coaching-related qualification, with a minimum of five years' experience.



Figure 1. Conceptual Encounter and Focus Group



In step 1 of figure 1, an initial concept of presence was developed prior to the interviews, based on my personal experience and the review of relevant literature. Central to the approach were a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews (step 2). Each interview involved two stages. In the first, the research partner was invited to recall their experiences of presence in the coaching conversation with as much richness and detail as possible. In the second, the researcher's conceptualisation was introduced and allowed to 'meet' these experiences. The two parallel inquiries shown here were conducted in the same way. Following the left-hand client path shown in figure 1, after each interview, data was analysed leading to a new evolution of the concept (step 3), which was then used in the next interview. This iterative procedure allowed a client concept to emerge that incorporated all of the research partners' experiences. The same procedure was followed for the coach perspective (the right-hand path of figure 1). Whilst these parallel inquiries could not be claimed to be truly independent, this approach allowed client and coach concepts to develop separately. A choice was then made at step 4 to decide whether the analysis suggested two different phenomena or a single, overarching concept. Since by this stage the findings pointed to a similar shared understanding, the latter was judged to have emerged.

The Focus Group

The focus group (step 5 in figure 1), which involved two clients and two coaches, helped to develop the concept in new ways. It also altered the researcher-participant dynamics and helped to address issues of undue researcher influence in the interpretation of findings. Through leveraging the creative potential of group dynamics to generate 'interaction data' (Lambert and Loisel, 2008), it provided a different exploratory context and extended the research. It aligned well with the constructivist paradigm and overall methodological approach, and further improved the credibility of the research, as judged from the perspective of the participants. In particular, the consensus and difference between the client and coach perspectives could be investigated through a group discussion.

The Q-sort technique (Stainton Rogers, 1995) was used as a basis for the first part of the discussion. The strength of this technique is in investigating subjective points of view (Bachkirova et al., 2015). It involved asking the focus group participants to rank a set of thirty-six descriptors of presence in order of how characteristic of presence they perceived them to be. These descriptors were derived from the previous conceptual encounter data analysis, hence the procedure complemented and built upon the previous concept development. For example, the focus group concluded that the following five Q-items were the most characteristic of presence:

- Being present makes me feel energised and alive
- For the coaching to be effective, the coach needs to have presence
- Being present engenders trust
- Being present means I feel connected to my intuition
- Presence helps insights to come

Whilst the least characteristic were:

- The coach's presence is generally greater than the client's
- Presence is the same as charisma
- Being present and having presence are the same thing
- When I'm present, I'm very aware on the inside and oblivious to what's going on outside
- I can be present just as easily whether I am on the phone or face-to-face

Similar to the conceptual encounter interviews, the second part of the focus group discussion involved the concept encountering the experience of the participants. The Q-sort outcomes were part of that discussion and further modifications were made, leading to a final concept. The focus group approach was used as a way of changing the dynamics of research participation to complement and extend the conceptual encounter methodology whilst also addressing some of the perceived limitations of the one-to-one interview approach. The use of a parallel conceptual encounter and focus group together represented an innovative modification to the standard methodology and allowed client and coach perspectives an equal voice.

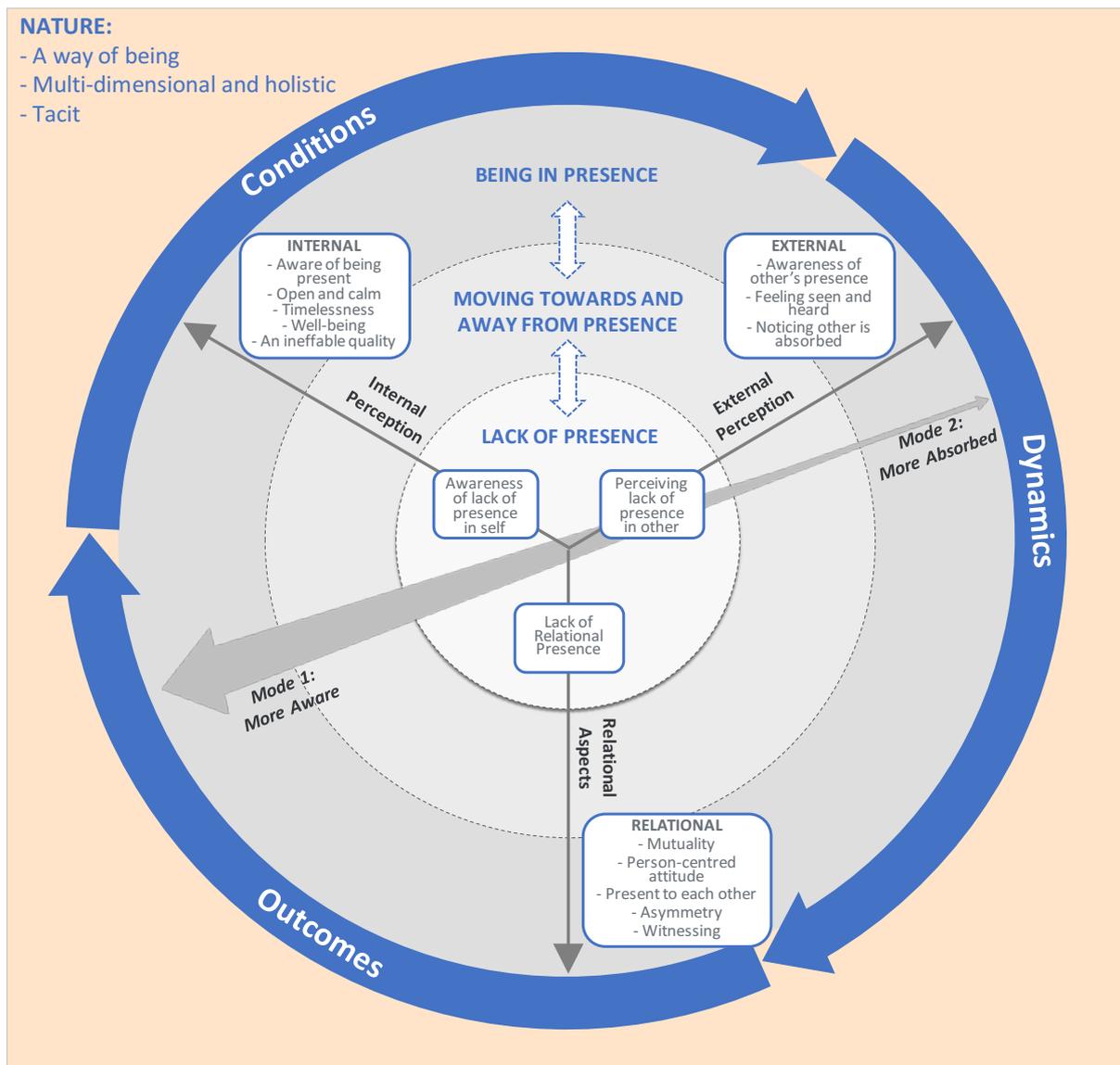
The C² Model of Presence

The C² model of presence, so-called to reflect its applicability to both client and coach, represents the final conceptualisation and is depicted in figure 2. Inherent in the model is a recognition of interdependency between the individual structural elements reflecting an overall systemic, complex and tacit nature. This nature encompasses three facets of experience. Firstly, there are envisaged to be two modes: Mode one concerns being more aware of the here-and-now whilst mode two involves a more absorbed experience.



Secondly, there are three dimensions that relate to internal, external and relational experiences. Thirdly, there are dynamics involved in moving between the two poles of a lack of presence and full presence. During its evolution, the model was informed by Wilber's integral model of human consciousness (Wilber, 2000), which proposes four perspectives of reality: A subjective interior, an objective exterior; the individual and the collective. This has influenced transpersonal approaches to coaching (Rowan 2010; Frost, 2009; Chapman and Cilliers, 2008) and has been used as a basis for conceptualising nursing presence (Shea and Frisch, 2016).

Figure 2. The C² Model of Presence



Two Modes – More Aware and More Absorbed

Presence is experienced in two different modalities. In mode one, research partners reported feeling present in a very conscious way and sensitised to their here-and-now experience. They were intentionally noticing what was going on between themselves and the other person, and were aware of their own mental, physical and emotional experience. This mode is summarised as being 'more aware'. In mode two, they became so highly focussed and absorbed in their experience that they lost the sense of being conscious awareness.

Instead, they were highly present to their experience rather than present in the room. This mode is a tendency to be 'more absorbed. Both modes were reported as being dynamic with client and coach moving between them throughout the coaching conversation.

Three Dimensions – Internal, External and Relational

The internal dimension refers to the client's or coach's internal awareness of being present. This internal awareness may encompass the mode one experience of having an open, calm, clear mind and a sensitivity to somatic and emotional feelings. Equally, it may describe the internal experience of mode two, such as a sense of timelessness and a feeling of well-being. The internal awareness of mode two is more of a reflective process occurring after the event, as by its nature there is a sense of being absorbed during the present. The external dimension of presence is defined as the client's or coach's perception of the other person's presence. For example, the perception in mode one might be that the client felt listened to, whilst the perception in mode two may be that the coach experienced the client as being lost in their own narrative. The relational dimension is conceived as the mutual experience of being with the other person whilst holding a person-centred attitude. It involves both client and coach being present to each other, with the overall purpose of being in the service of the client. There is a sense of companionship, warmth and inclusion, which enables a deep connection and heightened communication, where the whole feels greater than the sum of its parts. All three dimensions and the two modes may be experienced regardless of physical proximity, as in telephone or Skype coaching.

Dynamics

Both client and coach research partners viewed presence as fluctuating and unstable. Their ability to be present was affected by internal and external distractions (e.g. wandering attention, becoming preoccupied or being physically interrupted) and as a result they reported moving towards and away from presence a number of times during the course of the coaching conversation. They experienced a lack of presence through characteristics such as a lack of openness, boredom, anxiety, a lack of focus, judging the other person and internal chatter. When not present they reported a variety of ways of becoming more so, either through intentional action (for instance making eye contact, sitting upright in their chair or mindfully letting go of distracting thoughts), or through direct feedback from the other person. These dynamics could be visualised as a relational dance between client and coach as each party continuously moves towards and away from presence, across the two modes and three dimensions, with each person's presence affecting the other. The subjective, objective and relational experiences are not in reality isolated, rather they are part of an interdependent, holistic whole. As well as proposing this structure, the C² model also encompasses an appreciation of a set of conditions for and outcomes of presence, which are discussed next.

Conditions

Some conditions that contributed to a deepening of presence were reported to include client and coach attitudes of openness, compassion, respect and empathy; a requirement for practice; the value of experience; and a conducive physical environment (which may include face-to-face or non-physical contexts such as coaching via Skype or telephone). They also involved intentional decisions and actions during the coaching conversation such as improving posture, focussing on breath, feeling grounded, making eye contact and allowing time at the beginning of a session for both parties to become present. These conditions link to the notion of presence as a way of being that can be practiced, cultivated and learnt over both short and long-term horizons.



Outcomes

The findings further demonstrated that coaches use their presence as part of their coaching process to facilitate change and raise awareness in their clients, for instance through modelling or verbal feedback intended to sensitise and raise awareness. The final concept defines the outcomes of presence as: enabling safety and trust; feeling connected with the other person; accessing internal resources; and enabling well-being.

Clients expected their coaches to be present in order to contribute to the work that they were there to do. As such, there was an expectation for the coach to demonstrate a 'professional presence', which may occur on a mental, emotional or physical level. Correspondingly, coaches reported that they actively used presence to coach for instance, in order to make an appropriate response or as a means of creating a favourable space. The use of self is a common approach in coaching (Iiffe-Wood, 2014; Du Toit, 2014; Silsbee, 2008) and the implication for this study is that presence underpins this process.

One particularly interesting outcome that emerged from the findings was that presence is linked to transient moments of insight and change. Re-engaging with the literature in this specific area, a connection may be advanced with other research into significant coaching moments. For instance, 'critical moments' in coaching have been investigated by De Haan (2008) and Day et al. (2008), with De Haan et al. (2010) studying the specific context of executive coaching. They defined a critical moment as 'an exciting, tense or significant moment' (p.610) and found that it commonly resulted in increased awareness. The authors suggested the need for, 'radically new ways of understanding the client's experience of coaching, as distinct from the coaches' experiences' (p.616). The findings from this study may therefore contribute to this understanding.

These conditions and outcomes, interacting across three dimensions and two modes in a dynamic relational dance, generated a final conceptualisation that is expressed by the C² model, which is supported by further thematic detail shown in Figure 3. The model is translated into a summary description for presence in executive coaching shown in Box 1 and is also explained in this short YouTube video, which attempts to bring its dynamic nature to life (https://youtu.be/vPHjY_2VoWI).



Figure 3. Thematic Detail of The C² Model

Nature	General	Way of being
		Multidimensional and holistic
		Tacit
	Modes	Mode 1 - More aware
		Mode 2 - More absorbed
	Internal Dimension	Being in the here-and-now
		Somatic experience
		Lack of presence
	Relational Dimension	Being with
		Mutuality
		Lack of relational presence
	External Dimension	Perceiving presence in other
		Perceiving lack in other
Dynamics	Moving in and out of presence	
	Between client and coach	
Conditions	Attitudes	Openness
		Non-judgemental
		Empathic
		Compassionate
		Respectful
	Practice	Practice
	Experience	Experience
	Environment	Conducive environment
	In-Session Interventions	Preparation
		Practicing somatic techniques
Allowing time to arrive		
	Eye contact	
Outcomes	Enabling	Safety and trust
		Feeling connected
		Accessing internal resources
		Enhanced empathy
		Enabling well-being
	Utility	Coaching from presence
		Developing in Client

Box 1. A Summary of Presence in Executive Coaching

Presence in executive coaching conversations is a way of being, experienced by client and coach personally and relationally, which is viewed as being beneficial and fundamental to the coaching process. It involves a 'more aware' mode characterized by a highly developed awareness of and sensitivity to the here-and-now, as well as a 'more absorbed' mode where one becomes more inwardly focussed so that here-and-now awareness is lost. Presence also involves being in relation with the other person, experienced through a connection and mutuality between client and coach that is engendered by the cultivation of attitudes such as openness, empathy, compassion and respect. Conversely a lack of presence is experienced as the absence of these qualities so that the coaching conversation becomes a dynamic dance between coach and client as the move in and out of presence. The presence of one person is perceived by the other in multiple ways such as a sense of warmth, feeling fully seen and heard or a person seeming absorbed and inwardly focussed. By being in presence, client and coach are more able to access their own internal resources, experience moments of insight and feel a sense of well-being. There is also a tacit aspect of presence that makes it difficult to describe in words and which often finds expression through metaphor.

Discussion

Since presence is frequently viewed in the literature and by research partners as a somewhat nebulous concept that is difficult to describe, it has been worthwhile to enrich current understanding by expanding and refining the language used to describe it as well as attempting to differentiate it from other concepts. By proposing a taxonomy and structure, there is now a means for the executive coaching profession to debate the concept in a more informed way. The C² model can be leveraged by executive coaches and their clients during coaching engagements, by the academic community, and by the profession as a whole. The existence of a model also provides a basis for future clarification and differentiation.

A key finding was that the concept is experienced by both client and coach. By regarding both perspectives as equally important, a more rounded relational concept has emerged which also acknowledges a dynamic interplay so that at any point in time, the experience may be very different for each party. For example, a client may be in a state of presence in mode two, absorbed by an event they are recounting. At the same time, they may perceive the coach's presence as their warmth and attentiveness (the external dimension). The coach, on the other hand, may be present in mode one, noticing a somatic experience in response to listening (internal dimension), whilst holding an empathetic attitude (relational dimension) and being aware of the client's presence as an attitude of openness and vulnerability (the external dimension). It was interesting to note that research partners reported experiences of presence irrespective of whether they conducted executive coaching face-to-face, in semi-public spaces, in the workplace, by Skype or by telephone.



This suggests that whilst the ease, duration or depth of presence may be influenced by physical proximity and environment, it is a phenomenon that has relevance to a variety of different coaching contexts. If as the findings indicate, both client and coach presence is important for successful coaching, then there are significant implications for how coaches coach and develop. Coaching processes need not only to value the coach's presence but also aim to raise the awareness of clients to their own presence and to their influence on relational presence.

The study also explored the relationship between presence and a number of other related concepts such as mindfulness, trust, empathy, flow and charisma. It concluded that mindfulness closely resembles the 'here-and-now' mode one experience of the internal dimension and was an underlying condition for trust (supporting the conclusions of Maltbia et al., 2011). Empathy was found to be both a condition and an effect, suggesting a more systemic and interdependent relationship between the two. A close linkage was posited between the mode two experience of presence and Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow, interpreted here as a relational phenomenon (in common with Wesson's (2010) investigation into flow in coaching). Finally, with respect to charisma, findings indicated that research partners experienced the two concepts in distinctly different ways. Presence was perceived in the external dimension as an attractive quality in the other person, which could be associated with a particular form of charisma that was not connected with a preoccupation with self. This echoes Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan's (2007) conclusion that people with presence may be charismatic, but that charismatic people may not have presence.

Finally, an inherent tacit nature of presence was acknowledged by both research partners and in the literature (Kinsella, 2012; Scharmer, 2009; Silsbee, 2008). Research partners often found it challenging to describe their experience in words, frequently reaching for metaphors as a means of expression and explanation. These allowed new meanings and nuances for presence to be revealed during the investigation that might otherwise have remained tacit. Lakoff and Johnson (2008) suggest that metaphors are abstract maps and as such, conceptual rather than linguistic in nature. They argue that since metaphorical language arises from the conceptual domain, it is the main means of understanding abstract constructs. Whilst metaphors played a significant role in developing this concept, they also seemed to reflect personal imagery rather than universal constructs that resonated with all research partners. In all cases, they proved helpful in moving from a tacit perception to more richly expressed data that could then be analysed. The role metaphors play in uncovering and expressing tacit knowledge of presence is an area worthy of further investigation.

Limitations

Each interview was inevitably shaped by the questions and how they were asked, whilst my personal views will also have influenced interpretation of meaning both at the time and during subsequent analysis. In addition, events described by research partners may not have been recalled accurately. To mitigate these issues, participants with recent experience were selected, open questions were asked wherever possible, and the research partners were encouraged to recount their experiences with maximum detail and minimal direction. Limitations may also have occurred in the data analysis stage since I may have unconsciously favoured some aspects of data or excluded others so a different researcher may have interpreted the same data differently. These challenges to credibility were overcome to some degree by the conceptual encounter approach. If the abstract concept did not encompass a lived experience or could not be traced back to one via a clear audit trail, it needed to be modified. Similarly, the concept was being continuously exposed to, and extended by the experiences of further research partners, so the integrity of the previous analysis was being continuously reviewed.



I recognised the positional power I held as the investigator and the risk of research partners unconsciously colluding with my perspective. I sought to minimise it by attempting to build an honest, trusting and open research relationship with them. I also did not select any of my own clients as research partners. The use of a focus group also changed the dynamic of this positional power and served to enhance credibility, since it allowed open dialogue between clients and coaches. Finally, the context of the research was limited to executive coaching and whilst no claims are made concerning transferability, there may be potential implications for other contexts. Wider research is required to substantiate this, which is addressed in the next section.

Future Research

Further investigation is recommended using a larger sample and a greater diversity of research partners in order to further clarify conceptual boundaries and extend the context into areas such as life coaching and career coaching. In particular, further inquiry into the client's perspective is recommended. Including presence in the broader studies into factors affecting executive coaching effectiveness would make a further useful contribution to knowledge. The three main factors currently linked to coaching effectiveness (introduced in the introduction above) are the competency and attitude of the coach; the strength of the coach-client relationship; and the intrinsic motivation of the client. The conclusions of this research suggest that presence is foundational to all three of these factors.

More ambitiously, there is scope for undertaking research that aims to synthesise the various concepts of presence across the wider field of coaching and other helping professions. This study has been informed by psychotherapy, nursing and teaching, and the findings have supported the view that there is significant commonality in conceptual understanding across these areas. It may be possible synthesise these research contexts under one unified model (to include for instance, any context which emphasises the importance of one-to-one conversations). This would be a challenging study, or series of studies to undertake, especially in view of transferability issues and the need to understand the contextual similarities and differences. Yet, the continued and expanding interest in this phenomenon and the preponderance of context-specific research suggests that there is a potential to understand presence as a more overarching dialogic concept, rather than being constrained by professional and disciplinary boundaries.

Conclusion

De Rivera's purpose for adopting the conceptual encounter methodology was to, 'articulate an abstract description of the general phenomenon that will illuminate our specific experiences and enrich our appreciation of life' (De Rivera, 1981, p.3). In proposing the C² model, the research aims to have achieved this. It also aims to have fulfilled his three criteria for assessing completeness, namely that the map should: Make explicit some aspects of the phenomenon that were previously only implicit; encompass all of the different experiences reported; and achieve a sense of maturity that did not otherwise exist. In summary, whilst presence might be viewed as tacit and nebulous, the structure and characteristics explicated in the C² model offer a deeper understanding than previously existed and this has significant academic and practitioner value. A richer conceptual language has emerged and boundaries with other related concepts have been identified and clarified. By placing the client perspective on an equal footing to the coach and acknowledging the dynamics and interdependency between them, a more holistic, systemic view has been advanced. In terms of theoretical contribution, the C² model extends current knowledge and addresses the gap highlighted in the literature. Whilst it aligns to relational theories of coaching such as person-centred and Gestalt approaches, given that all executive coaching is inherently relational, it



has more foundational implications regardless of any particular coaching process. The model may help inform future debate with respect to both presence as a concept, and as a factor in coaching effectiveness research. In terms of practitioner contribution, coaches are invited to explore presence more deeply from their own and their clients' perspective as part of their reflexive practice and professional development. Coaching supervisors may also consider the concept as part of supervision. For educators, there is value to including presence awareness and practice in their professional development curricula. Finally, the findings may influence how coaching expertise is defined and how coaches are assessed, since they suggest a more contextual, tacit understanding of what makes a coach effective than is currently advanced by more reductionist, competency-based professional frameworks.

As a consequence of this research, a map of the territory of presence has been constructed, and an assessment of its uses and benefits has been set out. It is hoped that the C² model will help participants in executive coaching appreciate more deeply the experience of presence between them, so positively influencing their future dialogue.

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