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"Poor substitute or exciting possibility: the place of e-coaching in the coaching landscape."

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Abstract

One of the biggest barriers to the acceptance of e-coaching as a valid form of coaching, and not just a stop-gap measure when face-to-face coaching isn't available, is the lack of conceptual awareness of the methodological structures at work in both traditional face-to-face coaching and e-coaching mediums. One notable benefit of integrating modern technologies into the coaching process is that it forces an attention to the structure and role of each aspect of human interaction, an attention that is highly beneficial to the coaching process itself. Proficiency and comfort in e-coaching mediums can enable the coach to meet a greater range of coaching needs as well as client preferences.

Key words: e-coaching, face-to-face coaching, the coaching process, coach training, modern technologies

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Introduction

Every year for the last 11 years, Sherpa Coaching, an executive coaching consultancy in Cincinnati, Ohio, has published the result of a survey of executive coaches operating in a total of 65 countries. The survey questions coaches on their use of published or customised processes with clients, their clients' organisational seniority, their methods of client procurement, their choices of marketing tool and their choices in coaching mediums. Here is an arresting extract from the most recent survey, released in March 2016:

*"*Technology has changed the way coaches and clients interact. We first reported the use of webcams and applications such as Skype in 2009. Since then the use of these methods for coaching has exploded. More than half of coaches and clients experience webcam coaching to some extent, and nearly a quarter (22%) of all coaching services is delivered that way. Nearly 100% of coaching clients (and purchasers of coaching services) prefers 'face-to-face' coaching. Until 2009, coaching was delivered in person more and more frequently. Seven years back, 85% of coaches had in-person meetings with clients, at least some of the time. Four years ago, that number had climbed to 93% ... almost every coach meets their clients in person, at least some of the time. But when it comes to the overall number of meetings, and how services are delivered, the percentage of coaching delivered in-person has fallen in the last seven years, now hovering below 40%. That is happening because high-definition video conferencing (HD) is starting to replace the in-person meeting. In-person meetings are dropping by the same amount at which HD is rising*." (*Sherpa, 2016, p.45*)

It is easy to find explanations behind the increased use of e-coaching, such as the increased demands on executives' time and budgetary constraints caused by the world's ongoing financial crises. And it would also be easy to assume that coaching through video conferencing, telephone or even email and SMS are necessary evils for coaches. But an imposed adoption of modern technologies has revealed some interesting possibilities for the future of coaching and should lead coaching professionals to interrogate the presumption that face-to-face coaching is, at all times, the optimal coaching medium for coach and client alike.

The first part of this text is concerned with the position of e-coaching mediums in the current professional coaching landscape, the reasons for that position and the possibilities for the future. This part draws on the work of Harald Geissler, one of the European pioneers in the use of modern technologies for coaching purposes. The second part examines the elements of human interaction in

play in face-to-face coaching and their roles in both the coaching process and the working alliance between coach and client. The third part compares the elements of communication present in face-to-face coaching with those present in video, telephone and text mediums in both synchronous and asynchronous forms. The fourth and final part of this text focuses on several considerations when choosing the optimal coaching medium for each client and coaching issue, followed by a brief, non-exhaustive review of the current training provision for e-coaching.

PART 1: Where is e-coaching in today's professional coaching landscape?

1.1 A definition of coaching.

The definition of coaching provided by the International Coaching Federation will serve well as a starting point for an exploration of the components of human interaction present in the coaching process and their relative importance. The ICF offers this, "Through the process of coaching, clients deepen their learning, improve their performance, and enhance their quality of life. In each meeting, the client chooses the focus of conversation, while the coach listens and contributes observations and questions. This interaction creates clarity and moves the client into action. Coaching accelerates the client's progress by providing greater focus and awareness of choice. Coaching concentrates on where clients are now and what they are willing to do to get where they want to be in the future… ICF member coaches and ICF credentialled coaches recognize that results are a matter of the client's intentions, choices and actions, supported by the coach's efforts and application of the coaching process." What is striking about this definition is the emphasis on process, and the placing of the client, their words, their choices and their actions at the centre of coaching. It essentially positions coaching as a problem-solving process enacted by the client and facilitated by the coach.

1.2 A definition of e-coaching.

E-coaching is exactly the same process as coaching, the difference lying in the medium of communication chosen to host the process. As Harald Geissler states, "e-coaching is coaching mediated through modern media and ... is characterized by *replacing* face-to-face communication with modern media." (Geissler, 2014, p.166)

Before going further, it is necessary to set out the terminology referred to in this paper:

- *face-to-face coaching* is the traditional basic medium of in-person coaching, whereas *e-coaching* refers to the following modern basic mediums of *video coaching*, *telephone coaching* and *text coaching*.
- *working alliance* is the establishment of a relationship between coach and client which

makes possible the management and resolution of the *coaching issue.* The term *working alliance* has its roots in the literature of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Bordin[1] supplies a conceptualization of the working alliance which includes all change-inducing relationships (therefore, including coaching) and suggests that the strength of the working alliance rests on an agreement between the client and the therapist/coach concerning the following three aspects: the objectives of the intervention, the tasks required to reach those objectives, and the bond that develops between the client and the therapist/coach.

- A distinction is made between *synchronous* and *asynchronous* forms of each modern coaching medium. A video conference between coach and client is synchronous, as both interlocutors share the same time frame, whereas a text coaching exchange using email would be asynchronous. The client doesn't read the message at the same time as it is written by the coach.
- *coach*, *client* (coachee), *prescriber* (possible third party buying coaching services)

This paper investigates the contributions of the mediums of video, telephone and text to the coaching process and compares them to the traditional medium of face-to-face interaction. The paper does not investigate the remaining basic modern medium available to coaches, i.e., the use of avatar-based communication in virtual worlds such as Second Life, nor add-on tools (for example problem-solving tools hosted by basic mediums, such as online coaching platforms), nor self coaching.

1.3 What place does e-coaching have today in coaching activity?

The previous Sherpa Executive Coaching Report of 2014 summarized the findings of a survey of over 840 coaching professionals, 77% of whom were operating as executive and business coaches. The report states, "There is no doubt that technology is changing the way coaches and clients interact. Our 2009 report showed the first use of webcams and applications, including Skype. In 2010, the number of coaches who reported using webcams approached ten percent. In the last four years, the use of webcams for coaching has quadrupled, to the point [where] nearly 40% of coaches and clients say that coaching is often delivered by webcam." (Sherpa, 2014, p.24) The report states that there is a decrease in the number of coaching using face-to-face coaching from 93% in 2012 to just over 90%. The writers suggest that this is due to the investment in increased use of High

1 Bordin, E.S. (1979), The generalizability of the psychoanalytic concept of the working alliance. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Vol. 16 (No. 3), 252-60, cited in Baron, L et al (2011).Executive coaching: the effect of working alliance discrepancy on the development of coachees' self-efficacy. *Journal of Management Development*. September 2011, 847-864

Definition video conferencing as a replacement for in-person sessions, as Skype and telephone use also decreased slightly. Neither this report nor its successor gives a satisfactory reason for the decrease in the number of face-to-face coaching interactions. The fact that 'people increasingly have access to webcams' doesn't adequately explain why they would choose to use them more instead of continuing with their stated preference of face-to-face coaching interactions. This absence of explanation leaves the reader free to insert his/her preferred assumption. Instead Sherpa could ask the following questions: Do clients and prescribers value convenience *more* than in-person interaction? Does HD video conferencing enable prescribers and clients access to specialist coaches previously unavailable due to distance? Is it possible that there is a discrepancy between what coaching clients state is their preferred coaching medium and their actual preferences? While awaiting answers to these questions, one must rest in the certainty that modern technologies will continue to have an impact on the coaching landscape.

1.4 Where can e-coaching go?

Geissler predicts our "globalized knowledge economy," will be a key driver of "coaching on demand" in the years to come. Citizens of this global economy are learning faster and more flexibly, and choosing their own learning paths, due to the integration of digital technologies into almost all aspects of their personal and professional lives. The shrinking costs of digital technologies and the speed at which they evolve also creates a need for fast, self-directed learning in order to keep up with a rapidly changing economic environment. Geissler identifies a further eight drivers of an increasing demand for e-coaching (Geissler, 2015):

1. Technological advances make synchronous video conferencing and video-sharing platforms more stable. As a result, the possibility of e-coaching experience is less off-putting to users.
2. More and more people are engaged in remote-working, using the self-same technologies to conduct business. Workers' increasing familiarity and ease in using modern technologies to create and maintain working relationships allows them to see e-coaching as a more viable option to face-to-face coaching.
3. Generation Y. People born in the last two decades of the twentieth century have grown up with internet technologies and are at ease with the high rate of change in new communication technologies. This generation is of an age to become both coaching clients and coaches and their ease with technology, combined with other considerations, drives the demand for e-coaching.
4. Companies are required to adapt very quickly to changing markets, requiring a highly adaptive pool of personnel who can adapt within short time frames. Coaching processes are

a key tool in facilitating this rapid change.

5. One of the key criticisms levelled at coaching is that, due to its focus on means rather than results and its necessary insistence on client confidentiality, it is difficult to measure the quality and efficacy of the coaching intervention. One possible driver of e-coaching is that, because there are written traces of coaching tools, companies may lean towards structured e-coaching programmes which can be seen to offer a more standardised coaching approach.
6. Of course, a key driver for the uptake of e-coaching mediums is the reduction in cost and time, most notably for the coach and client but also for the prescriber. The 2016 Sherpa Executive Coaching Survey reports that executive coaches operating solely through Skype or telephone meetings charge hourly fees 30% under the industry average. Financial considerations aside, clients can find a coach who will be able to offer times convenient to them and coaches may also find that this flexibility to organise their work day around client demand enables them to achieve a more equitable work-life balance.
7. Just as clients and coaches have diverse scheduling needs, e-coaching's flexibility allows clients to access coaches with expertise in specific coaching demands. Geissler predicts a greater degree of specialization in coaching, with individual coaches reducing their portfolio of coaching services and instead deepening their knowledge of particular branches of coaching
8. As knowledge of the coaching process and its efficacy spreads, coaches will be able to reach a great number of clients

1.5 An explanation for the relative absence of commentary on e-coaching and training provision.

Despite a predicted healthy future for e-coaching practice, there is a marked absence in commentary and training materials from accrediting boards and industry associations. In a comparative analysis of the codes of ethics published by the four most prominent coaching federations in France, Persson notes that only one, the Fédération Francophone de Coaching, makes explicit reference to e-coaching as a practice. The wording employed by Persson in her observation of this anomaly seems to underline a reluctance on the part of the other federations to explicitly support e-coaching as a practice: "*son originalité provient de* ***sa volonté affichée*** *de promouvoir le télé-coaching en utilisant les technologies actuelles.*" (Persson, 2008, p.173)

The wording of the clause itself in the FFC Code of Ethics is explicit and unambiguously supportive: "*Les coaches de la fédération considèrent le téléphone, Internet ou d'autres*

technologies de communication à distance comme des outils, utilisables dans la pratique de leur activité."

Syntec recognises that coaching may happen "à distance" but frames this within its clause of Confidentiality and Restitution. Similarly the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) recognise that "Members will store, and dispose of any records regarding clients, **including electronic files and communications**, in a manner that promotes confidentiality, security and privacy, and complies with all applicable laws and agreements." The International Association of Coaching's Code of Ethics also bears testimony to the impact of new technologies on coaching practice, stating clearly in the section concerned with Records Management, "Coaches take precautions to ensure and maintain the confidentiality of information communicated through the use of telephone, voice mail, computers, email, instant messaging, facsimile machines, and other information technology sources. The IAC also includes a clause regarding coaches' ongoing professional development which could be interpreted as pointing to the development of competences in other coaching mediums: "Coaches **keep themselves informed of new technologies, practices**, legal requirements and standards **as are relevant to the coaching profession**."

It may be argued that a federation's code of ethics is not the right place to look for explicit guidance on coaching mediums, giving that legal codes are open to interpretation according to each specific case. Nowhere is it stated explicitly that face-to-face communication is the benchmark medium for coaching delivery. However, just as it would appear unnecessary to consider e-coaching as in any way different than face-to-face coaching in terms of ethical considerations, it also would appear unnecessary to provide training for the demands of online coaching. An interesting paradox occurs: whereas many courses on becoming a coach are delivered online as webinars, there are very few hours devoted to training on how to become an effective online coach. This seems an odd state of affairs. How can this absence be explained?

Geissler maintains that there are five main conceptual barriers to e-coaching that explain this reticence to invest more time, money or ink in the exploration of the potential of e-coaching.

Firstly, the very absence of explicit, published support from coaching associations for e-coaching contributes to the perception of its practice as an add-on. Secondly, there is a lack of understanding about what an e-coaching experience is, as distinct from the more traditional experience of face-to-

face coaching. As such, e-coaching is seen as a stop-gap measure when face-to-face coaching opportunities are not available or the cost of providing them is too prohibitive.

Much has been written about the problematic of measuring the efficacy of coaching interventions in business (Sue-Chan and Latham 2004, Agarwal, Angst and Magni 2009, St-Onge and Gins 2011). The lack of empirical research into the efficacy of e-coaching interventions acts as a third brake to its adoption in business circles. No one wants to invest in an intervention that has even less guarantee of working than one delivered using more conventional means.

The fourth barrier to e-coaching is the recognition that technological instabilities still exist. For example, two participants of a video conferencing session may experience sound and image issues arising from three separate sources: the computer equipment belonging to each participant, the network provider (for example, SFR) or the communication platform (Skype). Of course, the participants' control is limited to their own equipment and, even then, a large number of users are passengers of modern technology rather than drivers and engineers. In addition to Geissler's consideration of technological instabilities, it could be added that the participants' level of comfort with technology and their resulting reactions to technical difficulties also has a role to play in the reluctance to subscribe to modern technologies as a valid medium for coaching. This point is further investigated in the fourth part of this text.

The fifth conceptual barrier to e-coaching is the absence of coach training. The coach has to be an experienced user of their chosen coaching medium, with the ability to exploit the medium to achieve the coaching objectives. The coach must also be able to resolve issues arising from any barriers to communication, technical or otherwise. This requires in-depth knowledge and experience of the qualities and limitations of the medium, both generally and specifically in regard to the coaching context. Without this knowledge, e-coaching practitioners run the risk of placing themselves or their client in a situation which is damaging to the working alliance and to the coaching process and which may also have wider repercussions. The provision of training in e-coaching techniques, however, is in its infancy. The danger is that coaches will increasingly encounter clients with experience and expectations of modern problem-solving and communication tools and the coaches' lack of experience and comfort with such tools will work against them.

It can be argued that coaching itself is a relatively new field: there are still misunderstandings of what coaching is and can do for individuals and businesses because of the necessarily responsive

and fluid nature of the process. Persson describes the ambiguity of coaching "*d'une part, son horizon est celui d'un discours fonctionnaliste, axé sur l'adaptation des individus, mais d'autre part, la pluralité des pratiques et des discours autorise une réappropriation stratégique du coaching par le coaché. Le flou interprétatif est à l'origine du détournement de son usage.*"(Persson, 2015, p.105) If coaching is still a misunderstood young adult, e-coaching is the anarchic younger sibling.

It's also useful to remember that the origins of coaching can be attributed in part to practices in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy which are themselves rooted in the traditional medium of face-to-face communication. Yet even in these practices, there is discussion on the merits of managing the flow and type of information between therapist and patient. The psychoanalyst may choose to sit out of sight of the patient, to allow the patient to explore his or her own thinking without considering, and as a result attempting to manage, the reactions of the analyst.

E-coaching has been defined as computer-mediated coaching and coaching itself as a problem-solving process enacted by the client and facilitated by a human coach. The potential for e-coaching in current and future coaching markets has been investigated and several explanations have been offered for the absence of recognition of e-coaching from the international coaching federations. E-coaching appears to be viewed as an add-on or substitute for face-to-face communication, the apparent benchmark medium of coaching delivery If, for the moment, face-to-face coaching is considered as the benchmark coaching medium, how do e-coaching mediums compare in terms of content and process? To answer this, it is first necessary to examine the components of face-to-face interaction, in order to establish their importance in the problem-solving process.

PART 2: What elements of human interaction are in play in a face-to-face coaching session?

In this part, the components of human interaction operating in a face-to-face coaching session are enumerated and the importance of each component in the problem-solving process is evaluated. The interrelation between the problem-solving process and its environment is explored, leading to a discussion of the construction of trust.

2.1 What components of communication exist in face-to face-coaching?

According to Geissler (2015), five main channels of communication are at work in a face-to-face coaching session. Firstly, there is the channel of linguistic speech, what words the client and the coach say to each other, what discursive and grammatical structures they use and so on.

Secondly, there are paralinguistic features: the ways in which a speaker modulates his/her speech, for example, using intonation to emphasise certain ideas, temporal and dynamic aspects of speech, idiomatic pronunciation and tone of voice and non-verbal sounds that communicate support of the interlocutor's speech as well as hesitation, agreement or disagreement with the content.

Thirdly, in addition to communication using sound, there are non-verbal body expressions: head and limb movements, facial expressions and eye contact between interlocutors, and posture.

The first three channels of communication could be seen as facilitating communication that is closely related to the coaching issue itself, that is to say the issue that has brought the client and coach together. However, two other communication channels are at work in face-to-face coaching, namely the personal appearance of the coach and the client and the physical environment in which the coaching intervention takes place. Whether the interlocutors mean to communicate a specific message or not, their choices in clothing and hairstyle and even the less controllable aspects of age, gender and physical form will communicate messages about them. Similarly the coaching venue itself will communicate value systems, ranging from the message contained in the decision to meet in the client's workplace or the coach's to the respective choices of furniture and decoration, the physical condition of such and the care (or lack of care) demonstrated in providing an environment which optimises the coaching process.

Of course, in face-to-face coaching, the above components are experienced simultaneously through the senses of sight, sound and touch. Whilst listening to the client's description of the coaching problem, the coach will be aware of the words used by the client, their hesitations in the formulation of the description, the frequency with which they cross and uncross their arms, bring their hand to their face or shift position in their chair towards or away from the coach, the resulting squeak of the chair's springs – a chair which nevertheless appears more comfortable than the coach's - the flash of light across the expensive watch on their right wrist and the resulting glimmer on the wall opposite, as well as the sounds of sporadic laughter and ringing phones from the office next door. And in turn, the client will be receiving an equally information-rich message from the coach and his/her surroundings. David Clutterbuck, founder of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, sees this information-rich environment as potentially problematic for the coach "If we start with the fact that face-to-face coaching is extremely rich: there's a lot going on in that conversation. And it's very easy to be distracted by all sorts of things that are going on in the conversation around you. And so, if we're concentrating on the other person, if we're getting caught up in their emotions – there's so much happening that we often miss some of the most important things...What tends to happen is that [as a coach] you get drawn in to doing too much."[2] The question is, what information in face-to-face communication is essential to the coaching process and what isn't? How does the coach decide?

2.2 How important are each these components of communication to the problem-solving process in coaching?

Of course, one is familiar with the information-rich environment of face-to-face communication: human affairs have been conducted within it for millennia and humans unconsciously draw on all components when initiating and defining new relationships.

It's at this point that it can be useful to return to Bordin's definition of the working alliance in change-inducing relationships. Bordin (1979) identifies three aspects of the working alliance: the objectives of the intervention, the tasks required to reach those objectives, and the bond that develops between the client and the therapist/coach. The first two aspects can be grouped together as being concerned with issue management: the alliance is formed and maintained following an agreement between coach and client on the character of the coaching issue and the means employed to resolve it. The third aspect of the working alliance, the bond which forms between coach and

2 Interviewed , Geissler H, Coaching through modern mediums: Lesson 7. 4 mins 48.

client, could be seen as belonging to relationship management.

As Geissler (2015) argues, issue management can be seen as the management of communication centred around the articulation, exploration and attempted resolution of the coaching issue while relationship management can be seen as the information which is used to build the working alliance between the coach and client, building the psychological environment that enables the coaching issue to be addressed successfully. The methodological structures of the coaching process serve in both issue and relationship management.

Linguistic speech plays a major role in both issue and relationship management in the coaching process. If the smallest sense unit of communication is taken to be a speech act, one can see that this unit can itself be broken down into two components: a propositional component (the information given about a subject) and an illocutionary aspect (the relationship or attitude of the speaker to this information). For example if a client says: "My line manager will be at the meeting tomorrow" we are given information about the presence of the line manager at a meeting. The illocutionary component of the speech act shows the expressed attitude of the speaker to this information through their choice of vocabulary and grammatical components.

Basic propositional component	X will give a presentation next Tuesday and X's line manager will attend.
Illocutionary variations	I have to give a presentation next Tuesday and my line manager will attend.
	I have to give a presentation next Tuesday and my boss will be there
	I have to give a presentation next Tuesday, which I'm not ready for, and my boss will be there.
	I have to give a presentation next Tuesday, which I'm not ready for and, worst of all, my boss will be there.

The coach is involved in teasing out the meaning that is attached to each proposition made by the client. "My client says X; what does this mean for my client? The coach does this by paying close attention to the language chosen by the client. During this process, the coach must remain aware

that the information given about a particular issue stems from “a mental virtualisation of the client's real life and not an objective mirroring of the client's reality” (Geissler, 2015[3]). In addition, s/he must also take into account that the resulting speech act is a highly conscious construction on the part of the client: the client has control over what s/he chooses to communicate to the coach and how.

In the table above, the client is engaged in giving information about an event. In the basic proposition it is clear what and who is involved in an event and when it will take place. The way in which the client chooses to give this information reveals evaluations of the client's current situation and of the future experience, both of which are, at this point, negative. Through the client's use of “have to”, the coach may assume that the client currently feels obliged to give the presentation and with the additional evaluative subordinate clauses, it appears that he doesn't feel in control of the presentation and that the presence of his line manager will be unwelcome.

There is not just a question of how the client sees the issue themselves but how they then express that perception to the coach.

The coach's speech acts tend to have a higher illocutionary component than those of the client, i.e., as facilitator to the process, they are more concerned with relationship management. To clarify, the relationship here is the relationship between the coach, the client and the coaching issue itself. Geissler (2015) offers a four-part analytical framework with which to view the management of issue and relationship decisions inherent in the coaching process. The four decision types are classified as **frame-setting decisions, problem-solving decisions, decisions regarding social point of view** and **decisions based on temporal points of view**. In addition, the decision types are joined by two modes of being: the coach is operating predominantly in a facilitating mode, allowing the client to reach their own conclusions and to decide their own actions, whereas the client is operating in an instructional mode, providing information and feedback with regards to the issue at hand and the possible avenues to its resolution.

3 Geissler H, Coaching through modern mediums: Lesson 6 the importance of linguistic speech 6 mins 30

The first group of decision type, **frame-setting decisions**, comprises linguistic decisions made in order to elicit the issue and to give shape to it.

1. asking a question
2. mirroring what one has recognized
3. presenting case specific information
4. presenting a self-disclosure
5. presenting general information
6. disputing an issue
7. giving an impulse, order or advice
8. giving feedback
9. forming the relationship explicitly

Coaches prefer to ask questions or to mirror the information presented by the client, whereas clients prefer to give case-specific information or present a self-disclosure. For example:

Coach: So, what brings you here today, John? (question)

Client: Uh, I've got a problem with a presentation I have to give next week. (self-disclosure)

Coach: Okay, what's the problem with the presentation? (question)

Client: Well, I have to give the presentation next week, which I'm not ready for and, worst of all, my boss is going to be there. (Presenting case specific information)

Coach: You don't sound happy about the presentation or your boss's presence. (mirroring)

Client: No, if I don't give a good presentation, I'm afraid there's going to be hell to pay. (self-disclosure)

Once the framework of the coaching issue has been set, the focus moves to a second set of decisions, which can be referred to as **problem-solving decisions**. Here the coach is operating as facilitator and he is using questioning and mirroring techniques in order to attain one of five objectives, to 1) move the client to a positive problem-solving mode, 2) to aid identification of the key data, 3) to encourage analysis of each aspect of the key data, 4) to help the client evaluate insights arising from this analysis, and 5) to help the client make a decision.

Coach: So what's our plan of attack here? What do we need to do here today? (questioning)

Client: Well, I need to figure out a way to be ready for the presentation on Tuesday, which isn't going to be easy.

Coach: You see some obstacles in your way to getting where you need to be with the presentation.

(mirroring)

Client: Yep, multiple obstacles.

Coach: Which are? (eliciting question)

Client: Well, I'm missing data, for one, plus I have two days this week when I'm away on training so I'll have to work on the presentation at night in the hotel. Then, yesterday, I was asked to stand in for the Finance director on an interview panel on Monday: I'd been guarding that day as a day for working on the presentation. (Identifying basic elements of issue)

Coach: Okay, lots of time pressure there as well as missing information. (mirroring) From all that, what's the biggest obstacle to getting the presentation where you want it to be? (questioning)

Client: The data. I need to present an analysis of data regarding sales figures for the four regions. I have three but the southern region is really dragging its heels in providing the data, despite numerous requests. (isolating key element of issue)

Coach: What could you do about this? (hypothetical questioning)

Client: Well, I can keep nagging the southern sales manager for the data.

Coach: You need to nag him for the data? (mirroring of language but also disputing the information contained in the word choice of "nagging")

Client: Yeah, he doesn't seem to respond to anything else. Mind you, he's not responding to nagging at the moment...

The coach is in a facilitating mode, asking questions and mirroring. The client is operating in a instructional mode, most often giving case-specific information and feedback, which serves to guide the coach to their next question.

Social point of view Operating in a facilitating mode, the coach can invite the client to take any one of a number of positions regarding their proposition: the client can remain with their own point of view or the coach can invite them to take the coach's point of view, the point of view of another specified actor in the issue (for example the position of the line manager) or the point of view of generalized others. The coach can create this positioning through grammatical choices, for example using conditional sentence structures

Coach: If you were the southern sales manager, how would you interpret your (client's) requests?

Client: I'd be pretty annoyed, I guess, I mean he has a sales team to manage. It's not an easy region - and here's this number cruncher bothering him.

The fourth type of decision one can apply to the coaching process is the lens of **temporal point of view**. In facilitating mode, the coach can ask the client to reflect on a specific or general, personal or other point of view regarding past situations, the present situation or future situations. In doing so, the client in instructional mode, offers information about his/her mental constructions of past and present realities and can begin to analyse any constructed assumptions about the future.

Coach: What has your relationship been with the southern sales manager up to now? (questioning, point of view of the client, past and present)
Client: Well, I've usually only been in touch with him when I need data like this. In face we've actually never met.
Coach: How would the sales manager describe your working relationship to date? (questioning, point of view of the other)
Client: He'd probably say that we don't have a working relationship. I'm just an occasional nuisance.

Of course, the above exchanges are possible in any medium which features a linguistic component: the exchanges could be found in text-based chat as well as in the transcripts of a face-to-face session. So what else is going on aside from linguistic speech?

It's received wisdom that only 7% of human communication is given over to linguistic speech. This allows us to think that the remaining 93%, is of much more importance and therefore face-to face-coaching would be the optimum environment in which to mine relevant information from non-linguistic sources. However, like most received wisdoms, this one is based on a misrepresentation of factual evidence. The source is Albert Mehrabian's 1971 opus, “Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotion and Attitudes”, which focuses on the findings of research into the importance of paralinguistic and non-verbal features in determining the “truth” of mixed messages regarding “like/dislike” statements, i.e., messages where the non-verbal and paralinguistic acts seemed to contradict the linguistic content. In these cases, the receiver only trusted 7% of the linguistic content of the message related to “like/dislike” statements, as opposed to 38% trust in paralinguistic features and 55% in non-verbal cues when attempting to determine the “real” position of the speaker.

Mehrabian himself has been careful to address the misrepresentation by popular media of his findings, and states the following: “My findings on this topic [Inconsistent communications -- the

relative importance of verbal and non-verbal messages] have received considerable attention in the literature and in the popular media. "Silent Messages" contains a detailed discussion of my findings on inconsistent messages of feelings and attitudes (and the relative importance of words vs. non-verbal cues) on pages 75 to 80.

Total Liking = 7% Verbal Liking + 38% Vocal Liking + 55% Facial Liking.
Please note that this and other equations regarding relative importance of verbal and non-verbal messages were derived from experiments dealing with communications of feelings and attitudes (i.e., like-dislike). Unless a communicator is talking about their feelings or attitudes, these equations are not applicable." [4]

So what role do paralinguistic features of speech play in face-to-face coaching? As can be seen from Mehrabian's studies, paralinguistic features of speech do provide an emotional enrichment of linguistic speech which the coach can exploit to effect, exploring apparent contradictions between the proposition offered by the client and the emotion attached to the phrasing of the proposition. Another advantage noted by Clutterbuck (2010) is that paralinguistic features of speech are less subject to control than non-verbal cues, i.e., it is easier to curb physical movements and correct postural tells than to control our voices. However, in face-to-face coaching, the spoken word is ephemeral: documentation of what is said and how it is said is provided only in the memory of the interlocutor(s) and memory becomes unreliable, particularly in complex, high-stress and information-rich situations. It is also very difficult to know if the emotion heard in the client's voice is due to the coaching issue itself or due to the articulation of the issue aloud, i.e., the coaching situation itself. Again, to explore this uncertainty, the coach will need to clarify their understanding, by posing a question or making an observation about the apparent emotion. In other words, the coach will need to resort to linguistic speech as a means of verifying the provenance of the information supplied by paralinguistic means.

With regards to non-verbal body expressions, issue management can be deduced by observation of facial expressions, posture and body movements as the client is engaged in their description, analysis, understanding and resolution of the coaching issue. Again, these forms of non verbal expressions may also show reactions to the coaching situation, i.e., the client may react to the tone in which the coach poses a question rather than to the question itself. Mutual eye-contact is one form which may say more about relationship management than issue management. Yet the reading

4 Source: Mehrabian, A . kaaj.com (online) Accessed 17th May 2016 http://www.kaaj.com/psych/smorder.html

of eye contact must also be conducted in the knowledge that cultural differences may impact on this reading. It is clear that linguistic features of speech are central to the problem-solving process and have greater bearing than other components in face-to-face communication. But there remains the question of how to establish the optimum environment in which the problem-solving process can take place. With this in mind, it is necessary to return to the working alliance and its foundation: the creation of trust.

2.3 How is trust created in face-to-face communication?

Charles Feltman, an executive coach, sees the building and construction of trust as primarily a matter of language and behaviour. In "The Thin Book of Trust," Feltman maintains that "understanding and consistently demonstrating trustworthy language and behaviour will help you earn and keep the trust of the people you work with." (Feltman, 2009, p.5)

Feltman defines trust as "choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person's actions... whatever you choose to make vulnerable to the other's actions, you do so because you believe their actions will support it, or at the very least, will not harm it."(Feltman, 2009, p.7)

But on what basis does one choose to trust someone?

Feltman sees choosing to trust someone one as a risk assessment: some people complete that risk assessment very quickly, others take their time. The risk assessment itself, according to Feltman, is based on four core assessments of the interlocutor; their sincerity, their reliability, their competence and their care. The four assessments can be articulated simply as follows:
Sincerity: the person means what they say (and they say the same thing to everyone).
Reliability: the person does what they say they will do
Competence: they *can* do what they say they will do
Care: What they do is in the service of others (as well as themselves).

One can see that Feltman places high importance on the linguistic component of communication and then on behaviour. If one needs to build or repair trust, Feltman argues, one does it by being "intentional and consistent in (our) language and actions." (Feltman, 2009, p.5)

If trust is seen central to the working alliance between the coach and client, then the foundations of trust appear to rest on what the coach says or presents linguistically to the client. This can be in the

written form of the coaching contract and the coach's code of ethics, as well as in the language the coach uses to structure and conduct the coaching sessions. The fact that the coach is most likely to remain in the facilitating mode, rather than in an instructional mode where the coach imposes their own views on the client, also demonstrates how trust is built on a foundation of care: the coach's consistent choice of questioning and mirroring language shows that s/he puts the client first.

Similarly, in “Motivational Interviewing”, Miller and Rollnick (2013) evince the importance of language in interventions leading to behavioural change. The Motivational Interviewing process can be divided into four distinct processes: engaging, focusing, evoking and planning. The engaging process can be seen as the creation and maintenance of the working alliance, as Miller and Rollnick state (2013, p.56), “Engaging is the process of establishing a helpful connection and working relationship.” The writers are at pains to emphasise that engaging is not a stage but a process, a process that is critical to the formation of the working alliance but which may also be called into play at any point in the intervention. The writers place importance on five key communication skills during the engaging process: asking open questions, affirming, reflecting, summarizing and providing information and advice with permission. These communication skills are shaped primarily by linguistic choices. However, there are indications that these communication skills are not entirely shaped by linguistic choices.

For example, the writers suggest questions that the coach or therapist should be asking themselves in the process of engaging:

1. How comfortable is this person in talking to me?
2. How supportive and helpful am I being?
3. Do I understand this person's perspective and concerns?
4. How comfortable do I feel in this conversation?
5. Does this feel like a collaborative partnership?

Interestingly, the questions which seem most linked to linguistic speech here are questions 2 and 3. The coach can review their language choices in the questions they pose and the mirroring language they employ, as well as the responses and feedback they receive from the client. But how does one assess the *comfort* of the client? How does one measure one's own level of comfort? The language with which Rollnick and Miller formulate these questions point at a non-linguistic answer: How comfortable do I **feel**? Does this **feel** like a collaborative partnership?

Similarly the client will be measuring the success of the engaging process, deciding the answers to internal questions, such as:

1. Do I **feel** respected by this coach?
2. Do I **trust** this person
3. Does s/he listen to me
4. Do I have a say in what happens in this session?

Again, questions three and four are rooted in verbal communication, yet the phrasing of the first two questions hints at something other than linguistic input. In particular, the choice of the verb "**feel**" hints at links to physical or emotional sensation. The decision to take a risk and to trust someone doesn't necessarily rely solely on what they say.

Whilst Miller and Rollnick do not enter into a discussion of the place of non-verbal communication in the process of building a working alliance, Feltman does allow that some of the systems determining the ability to extend trust may be beyond one's control: "the emotions, thoughts and actions of trust originate in our brains and nervous systems, which react in particular ways that drive how we think, feel and act depending on whether we trust or distrust someone. Unfortunately we are not consciously aware of most of what goes on in our brains." Pointing to the developments in neuroscience which offer greater insights into the construction of trust, Feltman references research showing that increased levels of the neurotransmitter oxytocin "correlated with a greater willingness to accept risks in interpersonal interactions." (Feltman, 2009, p.121) Similarly feelings of distrust are associated with an increase in adrenalin and cortisol.

What Feltman omits to address is *how* oxytocin levels are increased. One of the key stimulators of oxytocin release is touch. And, interestingly, when touch is initiated, it has physiological benefits for both the toucher as well as the touchee. The result on the touchee is particularly interesting in regard to the idea of comfort and compliance. In a 2001 study, Willis and Hamm asked participants to sign a petition in support of a local issue. The participants who were not touched during the request signed at a rate of 55%; those who were touched signed 81% of the time. Even without touching another person, our attitudes and readiness for collaborative behaviour may be influenced by our physical experience of warmth. Williams and Bargh conducted studies based on the following hypothesis, "that mere tactile experiences of physical warmth should activate concepts or feelings of interpersonal warmth. Moreover, this temporarily increased activation of interpersonal warmth concepts should then influence, in an unintentional manner, judgements of and behaviour

toward other people without one being aware of this influence." (Williams and Bargh, 2008, p.607) The studies, where participants were asked to make subjective judgements on the personality of Person A after they had held either warm or cold therapeutic pads, found that participants who had held hot cups of coffee or heat pads consistently rated Person A as having "warmer", pro-social personality traits than those who had held ice-cold drinks or pads. The reason for this correlation is perhaps that the same part of the brain, the insula, is responsible for processing information about ambient and personal temperature and as well as feelings of trust and empathy.

This poses an interesting, yet unanswerable question regarding face-to-face communications: how many times have our initial experiences of a person been affected by the ambient temperature of our surroundings or even our choice of beverage?

Facial expressions also play a huge part in what makes us prepared to take risks. Experiments conducted by Sorce, Emde, Campos and Klinnert at Berkeley in the 1980s, showed that when mothers and one-year-old children were placed on either side of a visual cliff, that is to say, a glass surface over a chasm, the child would look to the mother for information about the scene which would appear to be both dangerous and navigable. Not one child would crawl across the glass surface if the mother's face registered fear or concern. If the mother smiled, around 80% of the infants crossed the surface. Similarly in the «still-face paradigm» experiments developed by Tronick, Crohn and Field in the 1980s to study post-partum depression in mothers, a child around 9 months old who received no facial signals from their mother in a lab room filled with toys, would quickly cease to explore the toys and, after trying unsuccessfully to elicit a response from the mother using touch, smile or a vocalization, would move away from the mother, refuse eye contact and become listless.

Studies by Paul Ekman (1990) identified the Duchenne smile, the smile which arises from the activation of muscles surrounding the eye as well as the lips. The Duchenne smile lowers cardiovascular arousal in the smiler and activates the part of the frontal lobe of the brain which processes reward-directed action *and* also triggers the release of the neurotransmitter dopamine in the smile's perceiver. Dopamine facilitates feelings of affiliation, a very useful reaction in terms of building a basis for collaboration.

One can see that face-to-face coaching, with its access to linguistic, paralinguistic and non-verbal forms of communication could be seen as offering the coach and client unparalleled opportunities

for trust building, particularly in the early stages of the working alliance. How important this advantage will be throughout the entire course of the coaching intervention remains to be seen. And it may be argued that other mediums can provide an environment more conducive to the problem-solving process at the heart of the coaching process. The third part of this text explores this possibility in greater detail.

Part 3: What happens if we change the coaching medium?

Primarily the author's position was to analyse that which is lost from the coaching experience in using modern mediums for remote coaching. But it is quickly apparent that there are also gains, particularly when one keeps in mind the problem-solving nature of the coaching process. Therefore the question becomes: how do these **changes** impact the problem-solving process at the heart of the coaching process? There follows an examination of the convergences and divergences between face-to-face coaching and each of the basic media in their synchronous versions and then an investigation of asynchronous communication, in particular asynchronous text communication. In each case, the impact of the changes on both the coach and client will be examined.

3.1 Video – synchronous

The key difference between video coaching and face-to-face coaching is the removal of physical proximity. The coach and client may be on opposite sides of the planet, time differences allowing. The physical context for the coaching session is then defined by the screens of their computer, tablet or mobile phone. This tends to limit the visual information to the head, shoulders and chest of the interlocutors, depending on the positioning and distance of the web camera in relation to the subject. In addition, the visual image is mediated by the webcam, normally located at the top of the screen. A frequent complaint of webcam users has been that they are talking to someone's forehead rather than making eye contact: as the interlocutors react to what is shown on screen, rather than the black eye of the webcam. Online video service providers have been working to address this issue, with the release in recent years of Iris2Iris and Kinnect applications to modify the angle of the image and correct the positioning, making eye contact seem more real. However, eye contact remains a cognitive construct rather than a physical fact of video coaching. Furthermore, in the majority of webcam and video-conferencing applications, the speaker can also see themselves at the time of speaking, a kind of enforced meta-positioning. This can prove distracting to the communication or, conversely, it can prove useful, for example, allowing the interlocutors to discuss visible reactions to the coaching issue or situation. The author became aware of her tendency to frown when thinking which could come across as a discouraging non-verbal expression: the webcam image has helped to make this a less frequent occurrence in coaching sessions. The interlocutors may be also looking at other information on screen, for example, another web window or a document and if no explanation is given this can appear as an apparent lack of engagement in the communication.

These differences may have implications for the creation of the working alliance and the problem-solving process at the heart of coaching. The lack of visual information may put more emphasis on the need for explicit commentary. In a face-to-face coaching session, the client and coach have shared knowledge of the environment, whereas in certain cases in online coaching, that might need to be explained. One of my coaching clients is always outside for our coaching meeting. She lives in Southern California and the 9-hour time difference means that our meetings are held during her lunchtime walk but at the end of my evening. Occasionally, she needs to interrupt the coaching conversation to explain a noise from a third party, a garbage truck or a gardener working with a leaf blower.

Similarly, with the reduction of visual information regarding the client's physical state, there may need to be explicit signposting of potential obstacles to the uptake of particular courses of action. It may be a crude example but if a sports coach can see the plaster cast on his/her client's arm, s/he will be less likely to suggest swimming as an alternative to weight-training during the healing process. It is possible, of course, to imagine times in a face-to-face coaching session when a client needs to explain an interruption from outside the coaching context or when the coach misses important contextual information. It's maybe just more unlikely.

Much is made of the loss of “true” eye contact and the full panoply of non-verbal body expressions when we move from face-to-face coaching to video coaching. Mutual eye contact is crucial for relationship management because as the coach and client observe each other, each person can see how the other responds to what they say as well as how they are. What complicates matters for the coach is that eye expression is also connected with issue management. So the emotion that is displayed in a client's eyes when s/he describes a situation may be connected with the emotion itself but also with the situation in which the client finds themselves at that moment, i.e., the coaching situation where they are explaining the issue. One of the challenges facing a coach would be to be able to discern the difference and maybe the only way to be sure is to pose the question verbally.

Similarly other non-verbal body expressions contain this duality. Paul Ekman and William Friesen expressed clearly the problematic regarding the well-known non-verbal expression of shame, the eye-cover, “Does the person who covers his eyes do so to express his shame, or to communicate to others his shame, or adaptively to hide his shame?” (Ekman and Friesen, 1968, p.51) Again, the coach must make the decision to interpret this gesture or to ask explicitly for its signification.

Proponents of video-coaching could possibly argue that the mismatch of eye contact and the reduction of access to non-verbal body expressions may actually be beneficial to the coaching process. If both coach and client know (or sense) that eye-contact cannot be used effectively for relationship management purposes, they will not try to use it for this purpose. The client, when speaking, will be freer to focus solely on his/her side of the communication and therefore could be more focused on issue management rather than with how to present the issue to the coach. Countering this of course is the presence of their own image on the screen, perhaps making them more aware of how they present themselves and how they might be perceived.

Another consideration within video-coaching is the participants' comfort with the technology and their understanding of how it may differ from face-to-face interactions, particularly if video coaching is being used as an alternative in situations where face-to-face coaching is the established norm. This understanding on the parts of both participants is crucial in order to avoid potential damage to the working alliance. The psychotherapist Linda Cundy illustrates this beautifully in her account of Skype sessions with a long-standing client during a business trip. “It was a frustrating experience. I felt I was still picking up subtle communications about her internal state but she was no longer attuned to me; she was not reading the cues that I had something to say... I was reduced to an insubstantial, impotent observer. She continued to send out signals but was closed off to receiving anything in return. This was a person who was well-functioning and who could operate effectively at the level of language and interpretation but the shift to Skype had somehow reduced me to a useless blank screen for her, a voyeur... Perhaps the added anxiety of working in an unfamiliar culture and context contributed to the change in her. We were able to talk about it usefully on her return, but it was an unsettling counter-transference experience at the time, making me question what seemed “real” between us.” (Cundy, 2015, p.114)

One of the most interesting areas of enquiry regarding reduction of physical proximity is opened up in the notion of inter-corporeal understanding. In her paper, “Is proximity essential in the psychoanalytic process: an exploration through the lens of Skype” the psychoanalyst Mary Bayles makes a compelling case for the information communicated between two beings sharing the same physical space. She recounts an initial meeting with a client and her strong sensory reaction to him:
“When I opened the door to meet my patient Evan for the first time, he stood with his arms leaning on two large guitar cases that were placed on either side of his body. “I didn’t want to leave them in the car,” he said, “I thought they might get stolen.” I nodded awkwardly aware of a feeling of contempt. I said, with a question, “Evan?” He lifted his guitars and began to walk across the waiting

room towards my office door. I noted his straggly, balding, and what I thought was his "too-young-for-him" shoulder length hair. I felt a silent "eeewww" in my mind, my stomach dropped and my skin got goose bumps. Over the next four years, what my body had detected in Evan's body with such immediacy, was elaborated in the numerous stories he conveyed about the hatred directed by others towards him … it seemed that there was nowhere Evan went where he wasn't met with contempt." (Bayles, 2012, p.574)

Bayles argues that this reaction is a result of our capacity to communicate, read and respond to information provided by body language and physical presence. The ability to process non-verbal information is honed from very early infancy: in copying a caregiver's mouth movement such as sticking out its tongue, babies process the received visual information and integrate it into their own physical movement (proprioception). And because humans have needed this ability to read and send messages in groups to survive, our intra-corporeal communication has evolved into a highly complex and sensitive system.

Bayles argues that, in terms of psychoanalytic processes, it is necessary not only for the therapist to be physically present but aware of the effect of their own physical presence, as well as that of the client. She posits that "Through cross-modal interaction between the senses, within an interpersonal system that recognizes structural equivalences, I was able to know, at the implicit level something about Evan's sense of himself in relation to the world and this was registered within the motoric and visceral domains of my non-verbal information processing – on seeing Evan, I immediately felt it in my muscles, in my gut and on my skin... [registering] something significant about Evan's internal state." (Bayles, 2012, p.574)

While Bayles raises some very interesting points about corporeal awareness, it could be argued that she almost doesn't go *far enough* in exploring the importance of context. Not just the physical context but the contextual framework in which she and Evan met. It was the initial meeting at the beginning of a four year relationship as analyst and patient. The position of psychoanalysis is to look for root causes and explanations of pathology. The therapist knows this and so too does the client. In this case, Evan comes to his psychoanalyst's office in an (perhaps) unfamiliar part of town. He also comes seeking answers from an expert and this positioning in the power relationship can affect the ways in which people present themselves in relation to others.

Yet it is easy to bring to mind the physical memory of a less-than-satisfactory handshake with a

colleague or client or “see” the accompanying displacement activities in an introductory meeting, those movements such as smoothing a tie or adjusting the hem of a sweater that signal some discomfort in the situation. We are adept at seeing these signals and, in the latter case, we're correct at seeing these as signals of discomfort. However, we're probably much less adept at attributing the signals correctly to their cause.

3.2 Telephone - synchronous

Without the visual information of eye contact or non-verbal body expressions, the coach and client are forced to pay greater attention to the spoken word and how it is spoken. Paralinguistic features such as the pace, volume and dynamics of speech or hesitations that may occur may alert the coach to the emotions attached to particular aspects of the coaching issue, as well as their choice of words.

As paralinguistic features of speech are less open to control than non-verbal body expressions, they may be more useful in determining the 'real' position of a client in regards to the coaching issue. Similarly, given that the client is in their own environment during the interaction and unable to see the coach, they remain more in touch with the issue rather than the relationship between themselves and the coach. The coach isn't there.

The mobility of the telephone allows coaching to take place wherever and whenever, notwithstanding disparities in time zones. It can be useful for interventions where the client requires support or clarification immediately before facing a particular challenge and where a face-to-face or video coaching session would be impossible. Furthermore, the focus of such an intervention could be seen as more on the message itself rather than on the positioning of the coach as a symbol of support.

There are issues raised by the loss of visual information. With telephone calls over long distances there may be problems with latency, the time delay in the transmission of sound, which can mean that coach and client speak over one another. This is more difficult to correct than in video coaching or face-to-face situations (and it can happen in the latter) because of the lack of non-verbal body expressions that serve as cues for turn-taking in speech.

Perhaps a more important issue in telephone coaching is how to manage silence. A common practice in coaching is that of holding the space for the client while they process information, whether that is a question or reflection from the coach or the chance to reflect on a self-disclosure the client may

have made. In face-to-face or video coaching, the client can *see* that the space is being held open for them: the coach can use a neutral facial expression and body language to reassure the client that an immediate response is not necessary. But silence can become something different in a telephone session. Attachment therapist Niki Reeves expresses the problem facing a client during a telephone session, “In face-to-face work, the therapist's silence may be experienced by the client as a calm, soothing space, but on the telephone it might be felt more readily as desertion, a black hole, where the therapist is simply gone.” (Reeves, 2015, p.153) The coach may need to prepare the client beforehand for this possibility in telephone sessions and by briefly reassuring the client of his/her presence during any silence.

3.3 Text -synchronous

The move from spoken interaction to written is an important one for a number of reasons. For the first time in synchronous communication, there is the creation of a tangible and more-or-less permanent artefact which can be read and experienced multiple times, both at the moment of reception and afterwards. In most programs and applications offering synchronous text conversations such as Facebook Chat and Messenger, WhatsApp or Google Talk, the text cannot be recalled or edited once sent. It can be amended, however, by additional explanations and caveats, which, like the initial text, are permanent. This is potentially an advantage over spoken word interactions where the emotional impact of a response may deafen the participant to any explanations and clarifications that follow, and in turn this may cause either party to edit the amendments in their memory.

Similarly the process of writing is a reflective one and the writer has the possibility to craft their contribution to a text-based conversation, to choose their words and order more carefully than in spoken interaction. Of course in spoken interaction, we do this, we pause mid-sentence to reformulate an idea and to gauge the response of our interlocutor to what we have already said. However, in text conversation, because the client is less concerned with letting the other speak and managing the conversation collaboratively, they may say MORE; they can let it all out, as opposed to waiting for the most appropriate moment in the conversation.

But what of all that information-rich non-verbal and paralinguistic behaviour? Is this not a loss? Well yes, it IS a loss but it is a loss that the written word has been developed to tackle since its advent.

If one takes the preceding paragraph as an example, one can see that punctuation marks can take the place of rising intonation to signify a question and capital letters (or italics or bold type) can add emphasis to a particular word. Spelling and punctuation rules are generally adhered to but can be played with to simulate the articulation of specific words, for example the use of “Helloooooo” signifies a different relationship to the receiver than “hello.” Formalised spellings of non-verbal vocalisations are common, ranging from “ugh” to signal disgust, “uh-huh” to show listening, “hmmm” for reflection, “argh” for frustration. These aren't just limited to English: for example, the “bof” or “hein?”, or “waouh” in French corresponds nicely with the North American English “meh” “huh?” and “wow.” These vocalisations often find their way into synchronous text conversations.

In addition to written forms of non-verbal vocalisations, text chat conversations also include use of emoticons to suggest the facial expressions or posture and therefore the frame of mind of the message initiator, helping the receiver to correctly interpret the text. As one might expect, emoticons appear with greater frequency in text chat messages containing socio-emotional content than in those concerned with task-oriented content, and again with greater frequency in positive social contexts rather than negative contexts. The latter pattern is in line with manifestation rules apparent in face-to-face communication, in that members of a similar culture follow established implicit rules as to which emotions are acceptable to show and in which context. (Derks, 2004)

The codes of written language can be seen to have developed to replace the codes of spoken language, in order to enrich the exchange between participants. Moreover, just as there can be issues surrounding the causes and effects of silence during a telephone conversation, coach and client need to be aware of the time lapse between the transmission of a written message and its response. In synchronous text chat, as in telephone conversations, there are two possible issues to be addressed. One is the overlap of messages. In the same way that the telephone participant has fewer cues to alert them to the fact that the other person has something to say, the chat participant doesn't know if their interlocutor wishes to expand on or explain an idea or pose a question of their own. The time needed to reflect, formulate a response and type is usually greater than that needed for a spoken response. Some text chat programs and apps try to address this by including a message to the effect that the interlocutor is typing a response. Delays in transmission due to connection and application malfunction make this an unreliable gauge, however, so the majority of users seem to ignore it. The result is that synchronous chat conversations may appear to be more fragmented and less linear than face-to-face exchanges, which may give the impression that neither participant is really “listening” to the other.

Secondly, there is the issue of no response, again like the “black hole” of telephone silences reported by Reeves. When experiencing a long pause in text-based chat, the coach could surmise that this is due to issue-related discomfort when, in fact, it is due to an unseen interruption from the client's physical environment or even a break in internet connection. This is increased by the fact that, unlike the telephone call, where there may be auditory evidence of an interruption, in text based chat there is no extra information available to the participants regarding their interlocutor's current environment. One mitigating strategy could be to discuss any potential breaks in text communication early in each session, enabling the coach and client to “see” the coaching situation through the eyes of their interlocutor.

3.4 Asynchronous video, voice and text-based communication.

Just as all three mediums of video, telephone and text can be used synchronously for coaching, their asynchronous forms can be exploited. There are benefits and disadvantages common to all three asynchronous forms.

When we talk of asynchronous communications, we are referring to a recorded communication. In the case of video communication, this can be a short video shot from a webcam, camera or telephone and uploaded to sites such as Vimeo or Youtube. The client and/or coach accesses the video using the link provided by the video's generator. Similarly, one can record a sound file using a smartphone and send it, using email or a file hosting service such as Dropbox. And of course, for asynchronous text communication we can use either the chat functions used for synchronous text communication as discussed earlier, or email.

The main advantage for an asynchronous version of video and telephone communication is the creation of an artefact that can be referred to and reviewed at will. Video and telephone join text based communication in this respect.

For the coach, for example, a voice or video artefact offers the possibility of a more lasting re-framing or summary of the client's articulation of the coaching issue, or a restating of the action points agreed on in an earlier exchange. At the same time, this form of communication maintains the paralinguistic and non-verbal components of the synchronous versions of video and telephone which may help to communicate non-verbal support to the client.

For text based communication, the switch from synchronous to asynchronous communication

allows a greater time for reflection. Freed from the demands of a more-or-less immediate response the text's creator is able to craft their communication, paying greater attention to discourse structure, grammar and word choice. And this crafting also forces a focus on the coaching issue, on its clarification – to avoid misunderstanding- and possibly on its resolution. In the confrontation with the issue during the drafting stage, the client may formulate their own problem solving strategies. In recounting the benefits of e-coaching for clients, McNamara states " Anecdotal feedback from our clients tells us that the very act of explaining a situation in an email means people often end up answering their own questions and they don't need to press send after all." (McNamara, 2011, p.68) This recalls Clutterbuck's exhortation that in face-to-face coaching situations, coaches must learn to apply "the rule of three." In a face-to-face situation, when a coach thinks of a question, Clutterbuck insists that the coach wait until the next pause in the conversation, check if the question is still valid and then wait again to the next lull in speech from the client, only then posing the question. The reason for this, Clutterbuck maintains, is that "mostly by then the person has come up with the question themselves, the same question or a better question."[5] The coach is prevented, or prevents themselves, from doing too much.

However, despite the communicator's best effort to express their ideas, obscurities of meaning still exist and with asynchronous forms there is a reduced possibility for clarification, leading to misinterpretations or misunderstandings which could impact on either the perception of the coaching issue itself or the working alliance. The lack of paralinguistic or non-verbal expressions can be felt most acutely here and the coach needs to be aware of the multiplicity of interpretations that could be made of a written communication.

In the author's own experience, this was clearly demonstrated during an in-company workshop on email-coaching held in 2015. Trainee coaches were given the following email from a client on a weight loss program who had been following e-lessons on identifying negative and positive self talk. The "team members" referred to in the client's email are externalisations of internalised messages regarding motivation for habit change.

5 Interviewed in, Geissler H, Coaching through modern mediums: Lesson 7. 4 mins 55 to 5 mins 40.

Email from Client:

"I really needed to read the "Who's on your team" lesson and do the exercise. Because of the set back [a mild stroke]... my self talk lately wasn't doing me much good ... I was listening to the wrong team members. So I've cut some team members and "given a raise" to others so I can hear their voice more clearly and I reminded myself why I'm signed up for this journey. That's what success is about, not the number at the goal line. Rah Rah Rah ...You go girl! Look at all you're grateful for and how far you've come. Love this program...It comes at the exact time I need it."

One trainee coach's response was this:

"Reminded myself why I'm signed up for this journey"...this is great, (client name)!

So, my question for you is: are you allowing YOUrself to be the #1 player (aka "VIP" or "super awesome all-star") on your team? :)

Keep it up!

In the feedback between the coach trainer and the trainee, held as a video conference, there was discussion about the tone of the phrase "So, my question for you is..." As the trainee coach repeated this aloud, she leaned forward towards the camera, seeking eye contact with the receiver, and adopted a playful, conspiratorial tone of voice, placing the greatest emphasis on the word "question." The result could be interpreted more clearly as a friendly, supportive and playful recognition of the client's success in navigating through her own conflicting internalised messages. As the coach trainer pointed out, without these paralinguistic and non-verbal body expressions, the phrase could be read as more aggressive. If we imagine a neutral tone and body language accompanying an emphasis on the pronouns "my " and "you", for example, the same message could be seen to convey a message of doubt on the part of the coach.

The coach-trainer offered her own response to the same client email. In this response, the use of the first person plural pronouns "we" and "our" in the first paragraph help to create an impression of shared experience, yet the coach chooses to change to first and second singular pronouns to celebrate the client's success.

I'm so happy to hear this, (client name)! So much of our feeling about ourselves and our life depends on how we talk to ourselves about our experiences and who we are - how we explain things to ourselves and what lens we use to view what happens.

I'm delighted to hear that you're intentionally choosing a positive, encouraging, growth-focused lens! That's a lovely gift to yourself, (client name) <3

Big hugs!

The goal of both coaches was the same, but in the first example the articulation muddied the message. Of course, this could be the case in a face-to-face situation but the presence of paralinguistic and non-verbal communication channels would work to diffuse the effect of the speaker's lexical and grammatical choices. In addition, the exchange would be ephemeral and therefore not subject to rereading.

The preceding email examples also serve to highlight a product of text-based communication which may be advantageous to both the coach and client, if handled correctly by the coach. Neither the trainee coach nor the coach trainer in this instance had met the client in person. The trainee coach had no other information about the client other than that contained in the email. The coach-trainer had a relationship based on text-based communication and data available through an online coaching platform. The construction of a coach-client relationship was based solely on the written word. Both coaches would struggle to identify the client in an in-person environment. This in turn raises the question of the possible role of anonymity in the coaching process. The anonymity afforded by the written word and, particularly, the electronically written word, is a key difference between text-based coaching and other modern and traditional coaching mediums.

Whereas audio and/or visual mediums provide the participants with information regarding, at the very least, the gender of the participants, and can provide information regarding their age, physical appearance or physical environment at the time of speaking, writing only reveals what the writer consciously chooses to reveal. The resulting phenomenon is referred to as the “online disinhibition effect.”

In a 2004 investigation, John Suler identified the features of text-based communication that interact and intersect to create the disinhibition effect. As well as the relative asynchronicity of communication - Suler was writing at a time when the majority of online communication was text based, either as emails or online user forums - and the physical invisibility of participants, Suler identified four additional factors: dissociative anonymity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination and minimization of authority.

Dissociative anonymity. Self-disclosure becomes easier because the client can do so in the knowledge that their words and actions online can't be directly linked to the environments in which they are physically present. “In a process of dissociation, they don't have to own their behaviour by acknowledging it within the full context of an integrated online/offline identity.” (Suler, 2004 p.322)

Solipsistic introjection. Imagination, like nature, abhors a vacuum. In the absence of visual and auditory cues as to the other's appearance, age, gender, social and economic status, a participant will fill in the gaps by either choosing to ask for the missing information or to supply the information from their own imagination. If the information is then forthcoming from the other, the participant has another choice to incorporate it in their mental construction of the other or to offer their own interpretation. In any case, the other is, in part, a construct of the participant's imagination. According to Suler, “the online companion then becomes a character within one's intrapsychic world, a character shaped partly by how the person actually presents him or herself via text communication but also by one's internal representational system based on personal expectations, wishes and needs.” (Suler 2004, p.323)

Dissociative imagination. In some ways, because of the virtual world that is being created in the exchange of words and the transference, it is possible for the participant to believe that the new world exists and operates according to a set of rules different to those operating in the real world. Therefore the rules that determine what is acceptable, wished for or feared in the real world are not necessarily applicable within the virtual world created between the participant and the other.

Minimization of authority. Again, visual and auditory cues to social reputation and relative power are minimised. In an unplanned meeting in cyberspace, the relationship between interlocutors is initially a meeting of equals. Only the dynamics of the interaction itself can alter the power balance between participants. This is less likely to be the case in a looked-for interaction between coach and client, where already the client may have expectations regarding the power balance in the interaction. A coach can exploit the opportunity to place the client firmly in a dynamic role. What becomes important in shaping power in text communication is the facility with the written word.

The effects of several of these factors may be advantageous to both the coach and client: the dissociation and minimization of the coach's authority may allow the client to say more directly what is on their mind while the asynchronous nature of text communication may allow the client needed space and emotional security to articulate the issue and return to it when emotionally ready. Another advantage to text communication is the internalization of the written word into one's own voice. The message from the coach becomes a message of the client's own making because they hear it with a voice they have assigned rather than a non-negotiable, external voice.

In analysing the communication channels present in each of the coaching mediums, one can see the advantages and disadvantages of each medium with regards to the two key components of the coaching process: issue management and relationship management . In face-to-face communication, all five channels are present, creating an information rich environment, yet this wealth of information may obscure the focus of the coaching intervention for the client, that is to say, the coaching issue itself. Furthermore, the ephemeral nature of the face-to-face session, as in the case of synchronous video and telephone coaching, means that client and coach rely more on their own memory of what is said and memory itself is open to subjective review. Synchronous text chat and asynchronous video, phone and text communication allow for the creation of artefacts which can be reread. However, the absence of non-verbal channels of communication and the absence of immediate feedback mean that misunderstandings can arise and remain unchallenged, if the coach not proficient in the chosen medium.

Not only do modern basic coaching mediums offer the coach a greater flexibility to respond to the demands of the market, they offer a greater range of options when approaching the coaching issues of the client. How then, do coach and client choose the medium that offers the best chance for success in the coaching process? The fourth and final part of this paper investigates several considerations that may affect the choice and uptake of e-coaching mediums.

Part 4: Knowing the client, knowing the medium: creating comfort in e-coaching

4.1 Knowing the Client

Once face-to-face coaching is placed as one of a number of possible means of intervention rather than as the zenith of the coaching experience, the coach can choose the medium that offers the "best fit" taking into account the client's needs in terms of coaching issue, the constraints of time, money and geography, the client's preferred communication style and attitudes towards self-disclosure.

It could be argued that when the development of interpersonal skills are identified as central to the coaching issue, face-to-face coaching is the optimum medium, allowing the coach to experience and address all aspects of the client's "public" persona. Similarly in team coaching, if the focus is on the effect of individual relationships on team performance, then it may be easier to experience and address team members' interactions in the flesh. Outside these areas, however, the arguments for face-to-face coaching become less obvious, and other factors come to the fore when making the choice of coaching medium.

As mentioned before, constraints such as working hours, working environments and access to specialist coaching provision can also have a bearing on the choice of coaching medium for both the client and the prescriber. Yet these considerations tend to place e-coaching in its habitual position of second-best to face-to-face coaching. A consideration which places e-coaching as the equal to face-to-face coaching is that of the client's own preferred working style and his or her attitude towards self-disclosure.

Precision Nutrition was founded in 2004, initially to offer nutritional advice to athletes. The company's founders saw the opportunity to offer a web-based service to non-athletes wishing to gain muscle while losing fat in a sustainable way. Since 2004, the company has created an online delivery of lessons and advice around nutrition and exercise, teamed with a strong personalised coaching component. Clients enrol on a year-long programme and are assigned both a team and a coach. Clients have the choice of how and with what frequency they interact with the assigned coach, mentors and team members, i.e., using text (initially via email but now within the programme's dedicated platform), by telephone or synchronous video mediums, for example, Skype or Zoom web-conferencing.

As a former client of the programme and as a team mentor for two years, the author has witnessed a

wide variety of client responses to the coaching offer. It's clear that for some clients, the closer the experience is to a face-to-face coaching experience, the better. These clients choose to schedule regular Skype or telephone appointments with their coach. For others, the choice of an asynchronous text-based coaching experience is paramount. They choose the rhythm and duration of the communication according to the individual coaching objective under focus, creating a more self-paced experience than is permitted by the timetable constraints of synchronous coaching mediums and particularly of face-to-face coaching. Additionally, remoteness allows self-disclosure for some PN clients in a way that face-to-face coaching can't. Again one witnesses the disinhibition effect of text-based coaching operating to the advantage of both client and coach.

The client's preferred working style and coaching medium may be also affected by the age and cultural background of the client. In business contexts, the culture of the organization in which the client works can also plays a part, as it is the organization that prescribes the coaching service for their employee. As coaching is a metier that requires professional experience, the majority of today's professional coaches come from the Baby Boomer and X generations, those born between 1946 and 1964, and 1965-1979 respectively (Spiro, 2006). For example, the 2014 Sherpa Executive Coaching Survey reported that 55% of external executive coaches were over 55 years of age, compared with 42% of internal executive coaches. However, 28% of external coaches surveyed reported that they can be asked to work with clients at any level of an organization as opposed to 33% working with topline executives (board level) or 35% senior managers. It is therefore highly likely that there will be generational differences between the prescriber, the coach and the client.

Much has been written about the impact of Generation Y on the workplace. Those people referred to as belonging to Generation Y are born between 1977 and 1995 according to Pauget and Dammak (2012), or 1977 and 2000 according to Spiro (2006). In 2014, Generation Y accounted for nearly half the workforce in the world.

“Generation Y-ers want jobs with flexibility and telecommuting options that allow them to work, yet at the same time give them the opportunity to leave the workplace temporarily to care for children. They see work as one component of a balanced life portfolio that includes family, friends, fitness and fun. Demonstrating flexibility while focusing on goals and accountability can go a long way towards inspiring loyalty in Generation Y employees.” (Spiro, 2006, p.17)

It's no surprise then that coaching has been identified as a successful means of intervention for

Generation Y-ers “because it allows employees to thrive in an environment designed to enable their success.”

Furthermore, Generation Y's familiarity with online identity and anonymity allows them to approach distance coaching and mentoring in a relaxed fashion. Meister and Willyerd's 2010 article recounts the experiences from both sides in a programme that matched a company's mentees with external mentors contracted to work with them for a period of between six and twelve months. The mentors and mentees remained anonymous to each other throughout. Interestingly, the benefits seemed to be felt by mentors and mentees alike, regardless of generation. Again, the disinhibition effect seems to have had no small part to play:

One of the mentors we spoke to was Bob Wall, 64, of Connecticut. Having spent 29 years as a consultant and executive coach, he at first couldn't imagine that anonymous coaching could work. But once he was matched with a mentee, he was amazed at how well they were paired. “I felt I had a twin out there,” he told us. “It turned out to be a highly intimate relationship while remaining totally anonymous.” In fact, “when the six months were up, it felt like losing a dear friend.”

*We heard from both mentors and mentees that the anonymity was an unexpected boon. Joanna Sheriff, 33, the vice president of creative services at Decision Toolbox, is just such a mentee. “My original thought was that it would be odd, and it was awkward initially,” she says. “In the long run, though, I could see why the anonymity was required. I would never have shared some of the things I did with my mentor if he had known my identity or my company. (*Meister and Willyerd, 2010 p.4)

In addition to considerations of generational differences, one may also wish to consider cultural differences and the impact that this may have on the client and the coach in choosing an e-coaching medium. In “Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business,” Fons Trompenaar and Charles Hampden Turner outline seven continuums of cultural difference along which attitudes and behaviours can be placed:

Universalizing or particularizing. The degree to which one looks towards rules to determine conduct versus the degree to which one looks towards relationships to determine conduct.

Individualizing or communing. The orientation towards oneself or towards the goals and objectives shared by a group.

Specifying and analysing or diffusing and synthesizing. The degree to which one engages others in activities in specific life areas or across multiple areas.

Communicating neutrality or communicating emotionally. How, to what degree and to whom one shows emotion, particularly with regards to business situations and practices

Achieving or ascribing status. How one accords status. One is powerful and has reputation because one has achieved, or one has power and reputation, therefore one *will* achieve

Sequencing time or synchronising time. How one approaches tasks and objectives, dividing the journey towards an objective into a series of predefined steps performed consecutively or adapting the journey towards the objectives according to opportunity and circumstance, performing tasks as when they become necessary or pertinent.

Directing oneself from the inside or going with the flow of the environment. To what degree one sees oneself as the driver of his/her destiny and environment as opposed to a natural product of their destiny and environment.

A number of these continuums are of interest to the coach when considering the choice of coaching medium, namely those concerned with universalizing/particularizing, achieving/ascribing, specifying/diffusing and communicating neutrally/affectively

If a client (or arguably the prescriber) tends towards a particularist approach and thus is convinced that the personal relationship between the coach and the client is key to the success of the coaching process, then they may lack confidence in an "invisible" relationship and the subsequent strength of a working alliance built entirely or even partially online. Just as Trompenaars and Turner argue that companies wishing to succeed with those operating within a more particularist culture must spend longer building and fostering the relationship at the beginning than with those operating in a universalist culture, the coach may find that clients or prescribers from a particularizing culture expect more time to be spent building the working alliance before the coaching issue is addressed. What is key here, however, is not necessarily the coaching medium but the expectations of the individuals regarding the outcome of each coaching session.

Similarly, an organisation working within an ascribing culture may be less comfortable with the absence of a physical space to represent or underline the expertise and prestige of either the client or the coach during the coaching session. The lack of ascribed power in an e-coaching scenario may be seen as particularly useful to the coach, however, allowing them to insist on a position secondary to that of the client. "*Le coach est maître du processus (position haute) mais pas du contenu ni de la relation*" (Cannio and Launier, 2008, p.34)

Perhaps most interesting for the coach are the continuums concerned with neutral versus affective behaviours and specifying versus diffusing behaviours, as they focus more on the process of coaching itself rather than the logistics and practicalities of securing the coaching contract. Here it could be argued that text-based coaching could allow the coach a number of freedoms over face-to-face coaching.

Stripping away the facial expressions and body language accompanying the spoken word could simplify the coaching process significantly for the coach. For example, in a face-to-face session, a client may describe a particularly brutal altercation with a subordinate in an apparently "cold" and detached way. The coach needs to recognise any counter-transference and act on it immediately, in order to separate their reaction from their line of questioning. Furthermore they need to do this in such a way that they don't communicate their own initial shock, which could itself influence the client's subsequent reactions. Removing these non-verbal exchanges could therefore enable the coach to develop a line of questioning more in tune with what the client is saying than with how they are saying it. The non-synchronic nature of text-based chat also allows both the coach and the client time to reflect over their word choices. In particular, the coach is able to take the time to reflect on whether this unusual reaction on the part of the client is due to a differing cultural attitude towards the situation and decide how to proceed with the client in order to explain and reconcile the gap between positions.

Additionally, by removing some of the constraints of physical time and space over the coaching session and by focusing purely on the words used by the client to describe their situation, the coach and client have the opportunity to explore the client's attitudes towards the culture in which they find themselves and to interrogate their own attitudes. Again, the coach is allowed time in which to reflect on the attitudes s/he brings to each area of investigation: attitudes which are, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced by the dominant culture(s) in which they operate.

In "Cas de Coaching Commentés" Cannio and Launier describe the first coaching session between a European coach and a Japanese client who had arrived in Belgium six months previously, having worked for the same American company in Tokyo. The American company had requested the coaching following an unsatisfactory progress review. The following exchange takes place in a face-to-face session:

Yoko raconte son parcours et son ressenti quand elle est arrivée en Belgique. Elle explique à quel

point elle se sent éloignée de sa famille. Son entreprise est devenue sa nouvelle famille, dit-elle

Coach: Au risque de te décevoir, j'aimerais te rappeler que tu as été engagée par la filiale belge de XX et que tu travailles dans le cadre d'un contrat d'emploi. Même si tu es très motivée pour réaliser ton travail et même si ton équipe est très sympa, elle n'est pas ta famille et ne pourra jamais être considérée comme telle.

Yoko reste silencieuse. Une grande tristesse se lit sur son visage. (Cannio and Launier, 2008, p.231)

It's true that, in this text, the reader has no access to the tone of voice employed by the coach, nor to the non-linguistic aspects of the exchange, but the verbal message, delivered synchronously to a recently arrived foreign national who appears to be suffering displacement issues *and* who knows that they are there for reparative coaching; delivered instantaneously in response to (reported) comments from the client, seems rather brutal. It's possible that text-based coaching would be a better choice here, allowing both the client and the coach emotional distance from the topic.

A counter-argument could be that the opening session of a coaching sequence will be more concerned with relationship building; in which case the exchange above could be seen as provocative to say the least. However, this is based on rather circumstantial evidence. What is interesting is that in the account of the subsequent coaching sessions, frequent mention is made of the client's difficulty with direct open questions in face-to-face sessions, which leads the coach to employ more closed and directive questions. The client herself later explains that having to answer open questions gives rise to a fear of losing face, a fear which can override any spoken messages of support. Furthermore, it is the client who later asks for the addition of weekly email progress reports to the coach in which she can list examples of the desired communication styles that she has employed, enabling the coach to give her positive written feedback.

The cultural and generational profiles of clients (and coaches) may make them more or less predisposed to the opportunities provided by e-coaching mediums. The culture of the organization in which the client works must also be taken into account as it is often the organization who prescribes the coaching service for their employee. Given that working careers are extending across national borders and continents and across generations in a hitherto unseen manner, means that there is a greater possibility of generational and cultural differences between coach, client and prescriber than ever before.

4.2 Knowing the medium

In order to offer the optimum choice of coaching medium for each client, the coach must know where his/her strengths and weaknesses lie. Each coaching medium requires a high level of both comfort and proficiency on the part of the coach, to ensure that the client is guided through the coaching process in that medium. Text-based coaching demands a level of comfort with the written word from both parties. The coach's written communication needs to be concise and accurate. Not only do they need to remove the possible misunderstandings created by the absence of meaning signposted by non-verbal communication, they need to be aware that their written communication is in fact a lasting document, reflecting their professionalism. In addition, the coach must know how to interrogate the client's written text, evaluating the client's position regarding the coaching issue from his or her language choices and deciding when to seek clarification. Similarly, the comfort and competence necessary to manage a video session is evident, as the coach must be able to create an environment conducive to the coaching process within the parameters defined by the camera and microphone. Considerations such as lighting, choice of background and positioning in relation to the camera become important, as does the coach's capacity to minimise the possibilities of interruption from the outside world and to refocus a coaching session should a significant interruption occur.

In addition to comfort with the chosen e-coaching medium, the coach must also be clear as to its limitations. In video coaching, both client and coach are at the mercy of their Internet service providers and a Skype or web conference call can be brought to a sudden halt during a critical moment by low data connection. Agreeing a fallback method of communication beforehand in these cases, i.e., resorting to text messaging, email or a phone call, can help both client and coach to ride out the vagaries of the Internet climate. Similarly, encouraging clients to use cabled rather than wireless connection can ensure a smoother experience for everyone.

A coach who uses e-coaching mediums may need to devote more time to explain to the client the structure of the coaching session and to manage expectations. It is the author's belief that this is also a very necessary step in face-to-face coaching. However, due to the predominance of face-to-face interaction, the interested parties can falsely assume that they know how to proceed without any explicit formulation beyond that made at the stage of contract negotiation.

4.3 What provision is there currently for this development of coaching comfort?

One may imagine that the majority of coaches who have adopted e-coaching mediums have done so in a piecemeal fashion, and that expertise in managing these mediums and exploiting their potential has been hard-won through experience. However, just as there has been a move towards more rigorous control and harmonisation of coaching practices leading to general and specialist coaching certifications, one could expect that the same will happen to e-coaching. So what provision exists for certified training in e-coaching? While the following survey is by no means exhaustive, it does serve to illustrate the two options on offer to coaches wishing to receive training in e-coaching mediums: stand-alone training offered by private companies and training offered in the use of specific e-coaching platforms.

The company eCoachpro offers a six-week online masterclass in e-coaching, organised as five modules including a three-week practical module and a module for strengthening writing skills. The practical module involves the online coaching of a client: a certified e-coach operating as a client. Promotional material for the masterclass states, "The emphasis in the Masterclass is on text-based coaching. The eCP-methodology is a method to display the online communication of the professional effectively and analyse the written message of the client in a structured way." The founders of eCoachpro have developed a secure coaching platform, Pluform, open to clients seeking coaches and independent coaches, where materials and assignments can be shared. In addition to this, the founders have developed a coaching model, Accelerated Behavioural Change or ABC model which they claim is particularly suited to text-based coaching. At the time of writing, the masterclass had received recognition from the Dutch chapter of the EMCC, who award 5 PE (professional evolution) points to members upon completion.

The propitiously named Online Therapy Institute www.onlinetherapyinstitute.co.uk offers coaches a Specialist Certificate in Online Coaching which comprises a 30-hour foundation course in cyberculture, followed by 30 hours focusing on online coaching through written, audio and visual communication. The application procedure requires that candidates are already certified coaches and asks for evidence of qualifications and motivation. The institute also offers a short 10-hour online course focused on applying the International Association of Coaching's code of ethics and list of coaching masteries to working online. Again, the offer from the Online Therapy Institute is attractive because the courses are endorsed by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and the International Association of Coaching.

Other e-coaching training provisions are attached to specific online platforms, for example, CoachMaster. According to its website, the CoachMaster platform can be used by coaches "as a purely text-based tool, a support to phone or video coaching [or] for preparation for a face to face session." The CoachMaster system insists on internal training and accreditation within the platform, based on testing after training, ongoing supervision of coaching from the company's accredited coaches and client feedback. There is no mention, however, of affiliation with or endorsement from a coaching association on the platform's website, nor on other websites belonging to its founder, Bob Griffiths

Coach.me originally started life as a smartphone application, facilitating auto-coaching based on habit change. Now, it also exists as an online coaching platform. The coach.me platform, allowing clients to access over 2000 coaches with specialisations in business and marketing as well as life and health coaching, employs a user rating system familiar to anyone who has used Uber or AirB&B: the happier clients are with the coach, the better the rating. It can be argued that platforms such as coach.me could pose the same threat to the nascent e-coaching industry as Uber and AirB&B have done to transport and hospitality.

Moreover, as of 2015, coach.me has also offered training in digital coaching free of charge. Tony Stubblepine, the CEO of coach.me, explained the reasoning behind this, "We think that digital coaching is a new branch of coaching and nobody at all is training for this. Most people would charge for the certification, but we felt the opposite. Releasing under the creative commons license and offering a free grading of the certification exam lets us expand the greater digital coaching ecosystem (good for everyone) and helps make us a key component of that ecosystem (good for us)."[6] Its training materials also offer coaches a framework for coaching interventions, called the Momentum Framework – consisting of four phases: assessment, habituation, skills building/growth and graduation/review. What coach.me doesn't appear to offer is any form of professional supervision or evaluation from experienced coaches or an explicit code of ethics with which to regulate coaching provision.

6 Stubblepine, T Response to Quora reader question www.quora.com (online) PublishedAugust 13th 2015. Accessed 17th May 2016https://www.quora.com/Will-coach-me-suffer-the-same-fate-as-TaskRabbit-as-more-specialized-coaching-solutions-emerge

CONCLUSION

The initial question prompting this investigation was one born of unease. Having experienced webcam sessions and emails as a client, the author knew that these were effective coaching mediums, yet had frequently encountered the attitude that coaching success was in spite of, rather than due to, the mediums themselves. Therefore the starting point for this investigation was to trace what was lost between *the* optimal coaching medium and the basic coaching mediums offered through modern technology. In considering the separate aspects of human interaction and the role each plays in either issue or relationship management, it became clear that e-coaching mediums could enable the coach and client to focus their attention more acutely on the coaching issue.

Far from being solely a stop-gap measure, the panoply of e-coaching mediums offers both the client and the coach the possibility of reaching the intended coaching outcome more quickly and more satisfactorily than with a sole reliance on face-to-face coaching. This may be due to the accelerated rhythm and flexibility of coaching interventions, to the disinhibition effect of text-based mediums or to the reduction of audio-visual information that is, in effect, non-essential to either the working alliance or to the coaching issue. E-coaching methods may help to reduce the impact of inter-cultural and generational differences, allowing coaches and clients to find the blend of coaching mediums that fits with the demands of clients' working lives as well as their preferred communication styles and that empowers them in their personal development, a key objective of any coaching process.

It is clear that coaches need to be aware of the components and structures of each coaching medium, whether traditional or modern, in order to reduce the limitations of the medium and optimise its potential. Coaching comfort can be gained through experience. Without methodological frameworks, however, such as those proposed by eCoachpro and the Online Therapy Institute, the process of gaining proficiency in e-coaching mediums may remain a long and costly process of trial and error. Industry-endorsed training in e-coaching is needed. In today's rapidly changing market, it is imperative that coaching associations and federations not only publish explicit positive policy regarding the use of e-coaching mediums but also work to promote training in e-coaching, in order to ensure the quality of coaching provision across all coaching mediums. Otherwise, there is a considerable risk of a decline in reported quality of service across the industry, a decline that won't only be laid at the door of e-coaching.

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