CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES DURING THE
PSYCHODYNAMIC GROUP-COACHING PROCESS ON A SHORT
EXECUTIVE PROGRAM

4.1 Introduction
In order to better understand the underlying psychological processes that exist beyond the technical process of psychodynamic group-coaching, I decided as part of this research to interview participants of a former program. Now that the reader has some understanding of how the process is enacted, I wanted to understand what the participants experienced. This chapter aims to unearth and explain some of the key aspects of the developing theory around psychodynamics, groups, and coaching when they have been linked together in one intervention. We know from the self-reported scoring, already seen in Chapter 1, that the immediate or “post-treatment” effect is good. I now turn my attention to a series of structured interviews of participants of a specific program that took place in 2009.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Data gathering process
The program I identified was the INSEAD International Executive Programme (IEP) that took place in April 2009. I interviewed the participants 14 months after the end of the program using a solicitation that can be viewed in the Appendix (Fig. 1). As a researcher and practitioner, I wanted to be sure not to bias the responses. I took the following steps to mitigate any bias.

- I did not interview any of the participants with whom I had direct contact as a coach in April 2009.
- It was important, at the same time as attempting to elicit themes from the interviews by asking detailed questions, to try not to bias the responses by asking leading questions. A template for the questionnaire can be seen in Fig. 8.

Of the 34 participants of the April 2009 IEP, (four of whom were excluded as I had worked directly with them) 14 responded positively and agreed to be interviewed. One could easily infer a positive bias toward group-coaching from these respondents, simply because de facto, they were interested enough to respond. This has to be taken into account post hoc. Of these 14 participants, 12 were interviewed by telephone for up to an hour. Two responded to an electronic survey, which was presented in a similar way as in Fig. 8. The interviews were recorded electronically, time-stamped and then transcribed. After the transcription, the finished result was sent to the participant by email and checked for accuracy. The revised versions are used in this research. The electronic responses were printed and saved on a server where they still reside.

4.2.2 Data sampling
Ideally, it would have been optimal to speak with all the participants of a program to get a well-rounded picture of the experience of a particular group-coaching module. The opportunity to do that would likely have greatly increased had I solicited the
responses from a more recent module—the April 2010 module for example. It would have been fresher in the participant’s memory. However, the interviews may have been biased because the participants were still experiencing a relatively good feeling, having recently left the program. It was with these reasons in mind that I decided to study a group from a year prior. Admittedly, there is likely to be a deterioration of memory of some of the details and, as mentioned above, the possibility that there was a positive bias from respondents. As will be seen, the latter is not the case since the full transcripts demonstrate some ambivalence toward aspects of the process. This qualitative methodology also leads to other questions: 1) Studying one sample of a cohort of participants potentially invites comparison with a later cohort group, possibly a subject for future research. Also, 2) utilizing this method precludes the possibility of conceptually driven sequential sampling, or more simply put, the ability to develop an idea while researching it.

Such sampling is often described as “within case” and nested (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For the purposes of this study, that would mean group-coaching clients within a specific program, in a specific business school setting, sampled at a particular time. This type of sampling is theoretically driven, according to Glaser and Strauss and the interactions are driven by a conceptual question, not by a concern for representativeness (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The question in this case: How does psychodynamic group-coaching work and how do people that go through it experience the process? As Miles and Huberman comment:

“To get to the construct we need to see different instances of it, at different moments in different places with different people. The prime concern is with the conditions under which the construct or theory operates not with the generalization of the findings in other settings” p29 (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The point, however, in the case of my research was to try to find flesh for the bones of a theory. Having spoken with the coaches who work on the same program, I have attempted to (at the same time) uncover, confirm, or qualify the basic processes at work during group psychodynamic executive coaching.

Silverman raises the question as to whether interviews are really appropriate methods of collecting data when texts, observation, and other documentation might suffice (Silverman, 2006). I will now deal with this in detail.

4.2.3 The utility of interview data in qualitative studies

I determined early the core building blocks of the process, i.e. groups, psychodynamics and coaching. I wanted to address each of these areas in the interviews to try to understand the participants’ psychological and behavioral responses. Referencing Peterson and Luthans’ study on how 360-degree feedback combined with coaching has empirically proven to make executives more effective, I wanted to investigate both what they called the self-awareness area and the behavioral area (Peterson & Luthans, 2003).

However, there is overlap between the competing paradigms. For example, question 6 in psychodynamics: In looking for answers from others did you find answers to your own dilemmas? (see Appendix, Fig. 2). This question clearly has a psychodynamic intention (was unconscious material moved into awareness or consciousness) but it also implicitly acknowledges the presence of a group (In looking for answers from others…). Furthermore, in the coaching section, I not only investigate the behavioral change, if any, (see Appendix, Fig. 2, question 2) but also try to assess from the
participants’ perspective how the coach went about creating the transitional space required for the participants to be able to express themselves effectively and thereby learn in a group environment. Thus we see that this question implicitly combines two of the three building blocks.

In order to create a theory that is both robust and able to withstand challenge, this dissertation aims to triangulate three nodes: observations from the field both from a practitioners and participants’ perspective in the form of documentary evidence, a thorough investigation of the literature around the three different intervention types to test efficacy, and a detailed look at the underlying theory of all three. However, three important questions need to be addressed.

1. How robust are the interview data?

Whether interview responses can ever be relied upon to be wholly accurate is the subject of much debate. The organizational researcher, William F. Whyte, once commented that one is not trying to discover the true attitude of the informant. He suggested that ambivalence is fairly common and that executives hold conflicting sentiments at any given moment (Whyte, 1980). In the case of this research, one needs to accept that the possibility exists that respondents will only tell half truths, maybe because their recollections are faint, or as way to please the interviewer. As Silverman (2006) comments, the interviewer and respondent always exist in a power relationship. To mitigate this concern one requires a sizeable sample. I considered that 14 respondents is a sizeable enough sample to discount some of these notions. Moreover, it is also for these reasons that this research is triangulated between:

   a) Participant and practitioner input.
   b) Theoretical documents.
   c) Quantitative meta-analyses of the clinical interventions that contribute to theory, not just qualitative data alone.

2. Is the analytic position appropriate to the practical concerns?

The practical concerns of interviewing were necessarily put aside. Since the subject is largely un-researched, I felt it necessary to draw data from whatever sources were available. That said, I purposely put a boundary around the process. Just over 8,500 participants have been through this process at INSEAD over the last ten years. I wanted to sample data from a program that was open enrolment (where the participants came from diverse organizations yet were essentially peers) as opposed to a company specific program where everyone worked for one organization. I did this for two reasons. First, I wanted geographically and industrially diverse perspectives, and second I wanted to examine a nested, within case intervention. The alternative would be to examine psychodynamic group-coaching in different setting, at different times. This would require vastly more controls that I felt would degrade the quality of the research. Nevertheless, future research points to this as an area of interest.

3. Do interview data really help in addressing the research topic?

This was an unknown at the outset of the process. While I could broadly infer from the quantitative data collected (see Chapter 1) that in general participants attributed a high score to the experience and that I was unlikely to be met with negativity, my singular focus was to try to elicit a theory from the data. I have, therefore, included
these findings, as I believe they illustrate relevant concepts and ideas that provide pointers to the theory. They also demonstrate a broadly positive experience. Fig. 7 shows how the three data elements may combine to form a coherent theory.

![Data triangulation creating psychodynamic group-coaching theory](image)

**Fig. 7** Data triangulation creating psychodynamic group-coaching theory

**4.3 Themes from the data**

In essence the purpose of this research is to discover why psychodynamic group-coaching works and to derive from those findings a concrete theory. We know that it is effective from a self-scoring perspective from the previously depicted tabulated results of a sequence of programs in Chapter 1. When examined in detail (see Chapter 3) the process seemingly flows through five separate silos that I have mapped in Fig. 8 below. In practice, these silos blend together into one amalgamated process, such that the participant would not notice them in isolation. For the purposes of the research, I have pulled the process apart and tried to elucidate the effect of the various modalities on the overall process and outcome.

In the model Fig. 8 I have broken down the constituents of the process as pertains to time, not theory. What I have observed directly from the field, and learned from my fellow practitioners, is that the intervention tends to follow this order. From its origins in the early 90s, the order has been refined and enacted in different ways. The consensus among practitioners is that this order is optimal. That is:

1. The ground will be prepared for the participant to psychologically and practically deal with the process in the group. Its corollary in group-therapy
practice is dynamic administration, and has been covered in more detail in Chapter 3.

2. The participants are given an exercise that brings them to a level of mutual comfort/discomfort but prepares them for the day and starts the process of self-reflection. This self-portrait exercise is dealt with more thoroughly in Chapter 3. It is here referred to as an icebreaker.

3. A working alliance with the coach is created where the goal is explicit, the tasks to reach those goals are outlined, and the bond is beginning to form through a combination of what has just preceded this.

4. There arises the notion of transitional space. The executive is in an “out of the ordinary” environment. One can debate when this feeling that one is in a “special space” begins to take place. What is certain is that once trust, confidentiality, and self-reflection have been established, the participants find a place to experiment and play with different aspects of the feedback and the self, within the group. Storytelling and life narratives have an important therapeutic function in this space and are examined in detail.

5. The practical and technical aspects of the feedback are worked through, facilitated by a coach and with the other members of the group challenging and providing insights, support, and experience as required.

6. Having worked through the process, a commitment is made to embark on particular and specific actions that are not only agreed on in group, but also followed up on three months after the end of the program, in a conference call where all participate.

Fig. 8 A hypothetical time-based flow model of a psychodynamic group-coaching intervention

The interviews I undertook were designed to investigate various essential aspects of this hypothesized process. Put another way, the aim was to examine the process through the lens of the above model and reflected by the responses of the participants. By doing so where appropriate, I will attempt to find linkage to corresponding theory,
and also illustrate and highlight remarks that facilitate the construction of an independent theory of psychodynamic group-coaching.

As a note to the reader, for clarity, respondents’ comments are italicized and in inverted commas.

4.3.1 Preparation, hygiene and safety

If one broadly accepts that a reasonable analog for group-coaching is group-therapy, in the first place, it is interesting to investigate how patients in the latter are prepared for the experience to achieve optimal outcomes. Disappointingly, no single schema exists. Rutan and Stone (1984) cite a number of different approaches from witnessing a session from behind glass (total absence), to a series of practitioner interviews, briefings, and reading materials given before a first session (total presence). Truax and Wargo (1969) reviewed evidence of applicants who listened to the testimony of a “good patient” in group psychotherapy. Participants who took part in the pre training showed greater improvement than those who did not. The psychodynamic group-coaching process is much closer to the latter approach.

With all that said, Rutan and Stone (1984) again comment that no one single procedure is optimal, merely that the ideas embodied in pre-training materials point the way for the special conditions that exist in group work. It is for this reason that executives who are to undergo psychodynamic group-coaching are prepared the night before a group session. This is to help them understand the process, albeit broadly, and give a detailed explanation of how to assess their feedback instruments. Hopefully this session mitigates the need to delay the session with drawn out explanations on the subsequent day whereby momentum could easily be lost. On the day of the coaching itself, the coach will invariably make an opening presentation to the group once they are all together. At this point they are generally still anxious and it does not always allay the apprehensions of the participants. Here are two conflicting comments about safety.

“It was safe. In the beginning the process and how feedback should be delivered was laid out. The experience of the coach was important. People paid attention to others’ opinions. They were really listening.”

“I felt exposed. I needed to open up and I don’t like to but the process was OK. It is 100% my problem.”

What is revealed here is that not everybody feels the same, and is psychologically in the same place at the inception, even though they have experienced a similar preamble and received the same reading materials and handbooks. There may be reasons why the second participant here felt “exposed.” Participants with very poor feedback scores, for example, often display a higher level of anxiety than those who score well. However, without knowing one can only speculate as to why Participant 2 here had a different experience although he or she does allude to his or her own accountability with the final remark.

What actually contributes to the feeling of safety can be different for different people. One participant felt that it arose from self-disclosure of the coach:

“She was able to do that by putting her (the coach’s) own personal things on the table, creating some vulnerability around herself. She made us aware that the personal things we discussed were only for the room, not to go outside.”
Another remarked on the personality characteristics of the coach:

“The personality of the coach and the way the process was explained gave us comfort. The words she chose were appropriate and used with care. I felt I could trust her. The way the day was introduced put me at ease.”

Moreover, another talked about the “contract” the group members had with each other:

“It felt OK to express your own issues. Everyone immediately started to be open and frank. The fact we knew each other helped. We agreed on confidentiality upfront and that we could speak freely. The atmosphere was therefore OK.”

What is revealed by these remarks is that there are a variety of contributors to a general feeling of safety. Different things will inevitably resonate with different people, the same things that to others might be off-putting, like self-disclosure, for instance. Why is this hygiene or safety making a requirement? As Levine says, most people coming to group-therapy find it hard to believe that others might have similar issues and therefore worry that by revealing their own issues they may be rejected (Levine, 1979). Moreover, people in therapy groups need reassurance that they do not have to risk information until they trust the group to maintain their confidence (Wolf, 1963). However, members in therapy groups must contract to maintain confidentiality even though there is seldom any violation of it, and they need confirmation that others will do the same. In the group-coaching process this is done with a verbal open commitment from the group members. Those who do not subscribe to confidentiality and taking care of the feelings of others are in general not welcome to participate. It is a central tenet of helping the group to begin its work. There is also a rule of reciprocity. Participants typically “open up” private feelings and dilemmas but in turn expect others to do the same.

A major distinction between the unformed therapy group and the unformed coaching group in this scenario is the presence of an agenda. The lack of agenda in a therapy group lends itself to the presence of what is known as focal conflict (Whitaker, 1989). This conflict is generated by three factors: expectations of participants, nature of the group situation, and the composition (Whitaker & Lieberman, 1964). In the group-coaching intervention a clear objective is set, namely an invitation to behavioral change. Thus participant expectations can reasonably be assumed to be roughly equal. The nature of the group is fixed: it is an executive peer group. The only critical variable related to the Whitaker model is the composition. It is this aspect that I sought to explore by asking participants about their willingness to talk about issues openly in a group, a notion that they had only twelve hours to get used to. As will be seen as a recurring theme, the fact that participants had spent time together and formed a light bond mitigated this notion of focal conflict.

I hypothesize from the commentary that creating a safe and confidential environment in the PGC intervention is important as it is in group-therapy and indeed individual therapy. This is no ordinary coaching intervention. There is clearly more at stake. Participants are surrounded by their peers and are invited to open up and share experiences both positive and negative. Such is the culture of many organizations that it is not encouraged to show vulnerability or to fail. In order to create this environment where executives will do this in order to learn and grow, the conditions need to be consistent, bounded, and safe.

4.3.2 The role of the icebreaking exercise from the participants’ perspectives
In order to reduce the feeling of apprehension or the arising of a focal conflict, the intervention utilizes a self-portrait exercise, discussed earlier, whereby the participants are asked to portray themselves using a variety of dimensions. This exercise is described more fully in Chapter 3. Portraiture is often used in group-therapy to stimulate discussions on an emotional level and as vehicles of interpersonal communication (Bach, 1954). Here are some illustrative reactions to the task:

“The value it (the portrait exercise) brought was to break the ice and establish a platform for the feedback sessions. The coach was able to relate back (to it) and use it efficiently.”

“I made a big colorful drawing like a child. It made it easier to talk about personal feelings. It really helped. Perhaps for me it is difficult to do that (talk about those feelings) but people have an image of you. So as people speculate as to what the drawing means, they labeled how they thought I felt. It helped me to open up.”

Portraiture in therapy was first explored by Jung, as a route to helping patients less able to express themselves in the verbal medium. He argued that certain subconscious factors were best represented by figures and non-verbal symbols.

“It was an interesting way to start the exercise. You project yourself through the drawing. Hearing others interpret the drawing was interesting.”

Baruch and Miller have written a number of papers on how utilization of drawing in adult patients contributed to the efficiency of psychological treatment (Baruch & Miller, 1949). Here we see how it helped people to investigate themselves more deeply.

“I learned because it visualizes your thinking in the moment. It helps to initialize memories.”

“It helped me learn about others. (It) helped to break the ice so that when we talked about ourselves we had had that prior communication. It made me re-realize that I am an accumulation of past experiences. It gave me an opportunity to look back.”

While in therapy patients are often allowed to draw whatever they feel like, they often in any case, draw a self-portrait (Bach, 1954). Kinget stated that self-portraits are a highly reliable indicator of the subjects’ feelings and attitudes as the portrait of the inner self (Kinget, 1952). In the light of that, consider the following statement:

“I know my own history and I thought I had dealt with my issues. However it turned out there were some lingering issues hindering my progress. The portrait brought that out…I felt I would just tell my story. Then as I described my life it turned out there were issues I did not know about. As I told the story and people asked questions I gained some insights.”

As Bach (1954) goes on to say, however, there is often resistance to the notion of making a drawing. He cites two primary reasons for this: A protection against getting into unconscious material that cannot be handled on a verbal level and the feeling of inadequacy about the production of a drawing that has merit.

Participants I interviewed had differing responses to the self-portrait exercise, however. Some participants were unable to find value when asked about the role of the portrait in the learning:

“Not much for me personally. I drew the way I see myself. Others saw me the same.”
“I recall what I drew and why. It was not a revelation. I already knew what was important to me. I discovered nothing.”

Also a note to the practitioner that in a minority of cases, in this sample one person, felt a lack of safety in the free association that was invited around her portrait when asked the question above:

“Two things: The good thing was that each person was happy to do it. It obliged us to establish where we were. I disliked that the coach asked each of us to make an interpretation. I found it was too much. It could have put the person at risk.”

The self-portrait exercise helps people to find a voice in a room that is often filled with anxiety. It helps them to make a snapshot of their lives from a number of different dimensions. They execute it quickly. It is billed as nothing more than pop psychology or an icebreaker. In practice though it is a vital part of the process as it begins the dialogue between the participants in the group and prepares the ground for the vital work to follow.

I hypothesize from this commentary that the self-portrait exercise inaugurates the psychodynamic processes. It helps participants to understand relationships; it also helps them to see the various forces at work that have influenced their personality. It allows executives to begin the process of understanding their life story in a different way. It allows them to acknowledge what they missed in drawing themselves, or in describing their story. It reveals aspects of them that may have been hidden. I have witnessed executives beginning to tear up or even cry, just looking at the portrait they have drawn. It seems to create meaning.

4.3.3 The role of transitional space and transitional objects from the participants’ perspectives

Winnicott’s work on transition is discussed in detail in Chapter 6. It is highly relevant to the group-coaching intervention from a theoretical perspective. Here, though, I will concentrate on the practical and operation elements of transition.

Ibarra, a specialist on executives in transition, states that transition periods are ugly, likening them to a voyage with departure, a disorienting period of travel and finally a destination. She cites Bridges, who calls transitions a neutral zone, neither here nor there, where identities are in flux (Bridges, 1980; Ibarra, 2003). Pertinently for my inquiry, Dubouloy comments on the notion of transitional space during a two year EMBA program wherein executives are able to abandon their false self, erected as self-protection against a threatening environment, and to discover a new sense of self (Dubouloy, 2004).

The common theme among different transitional environments is that people find themselves in somewhat out of the ordinary situations. The individual is both free to think and, by extension, to influence outcome and directions albeit in a limited but contained manner. The notion of transitional space, however, is at the interface of internal and external reality making it a difficult area to assess. Nevertheless, one picks up its existence through some of the commentary of the participants. Here, someone talks about his or her overall experience:

“I did it honestly. It was hard but it was OK. I wanted to do it otherwise I would not have gone through with it. There was a lot of emotion. I could have done something else but I wanted to talk about real things with real people. I realized that was where I
was. We were in a coaching session. It was now or never. There were things that upset me and I kept the drawing. I am building the future from that.”

Here we see two aspects of transitional phenomena. Keeping in mind that there is no pressure for anyone to reveal anything about himself or herself that they do not wish to, or in fact participate at all, we see in this remark that an internal pressure had built in this person to let go. More analytically, it seems this person gave himself or herself permission to experiment and take some risk. For him it was “now or never.” Moreover, he decided to hang on to his self-portrait, a real-life example of a transitional object. He went on to say:

“...I dared to go to places I would not necessarily have done. It gave me confidence. Be a leader of your life.”

For some, the context of a transitional space provides pointers for the future, both contextually and concretely:

“(The process) pushed me to understand what I wanted when I grew up and what I want now, what I do not want to do and how to draw your path. Most importantly not to worry about others’ expectations.”

Yet it is reasonable to hypothesize that no process pushes anyone to do anything this major. The invitation at the beginning of the day is merely to consider one’s leadership style in the context of one’s personal and professional life and if necessary to make any changes that one sees fit. It seems from the comment that the transitional space offered the person much more than just that.

For others the experience was in the here and now, and offered the opportunity for reflection:

“You think about your own life and tend to pick up on the issues that you yourself are dealing with. It (the process) highlighted everything which I thought I had accepted in my own life but had not completely worked through.”

“You could say it was beneficial to be able to think about other participants’ problems as this also made you reflect on your own or put them in a more clear perspective.”

Elsewhere the transitional object itself, the self-portrait, offered itself up as a way to forge forward into hitherto uncharted waters:

“Perhaps for me it is difficult to do that (talk about feelings)...it helped me to open up...”

And he later went on to say:

“I opened to the group helped by the portrait. We got into the issues quickly. During that day there was safety and intimacy beyond the normal. I would have liked more.”

And finally from another participant who not only held on to his transitional object but continues to see it as a tool for growth:

“It (the portrait) clarified things and I reflected on my personal and career development. I still have it hanging at home. It is a rare thing to have 40 years hanging on a flip chart and to see how the steps took place. The difficulties and challenges are useful to reflect on. It reminds me of my strengths and desires for the future. I ask myself ‘are they still there?’”
I hypothesize from these comments that the psychoanalytic notion of a transitional space is critical in helping participants to shift their mindset. This transitional space seems to be created by the two precepts already described: Creating the right conditions and drawing a portrait that puts them into a different frame of mind. The notion of transitional space is difficult to prove. In some ways it reveals itself by the outcomes of the process, namely radical shifts in behavior, for example. The conditions for creating a transitional space are arcane. Arguably a walk in the woods may have the same effect. What may be true is that the stronger the boundaries around the space the greater the possible change. Transitional spaces have been much talked about in literature. Their existence is quite subtle, yet it seems that if the conditions are met, the outcomes can be quite powerful.

4.3.4 The role of storytelling from the participants’ perspectives

In recent years there has been increased interest and research into the utilization of narrative and storytelling in the therapeutic setting. Dwivedi (1997) explores its use in dealing with problematic children. The use of storytelling in the group setting is also investigated by Gersie (1997); Holmes (2001) assesses the use of narrative in finding a secure base; while Omer and Alon (1997) have discussed the formation of therapeutic narratives.

The telling of a life and career story is central to the psychodynamic group-coaching process. Kets de Vries (2005) says that as people tell their life stories, share feedback and talk about experiences that shaped them, participants go through a journey of understanding. Participants are encouraged to talk about their formative experiences and reflect on their life journey as they describe the self-portrait. The stories range from detailed emotional expositions to more prosaic processing and articulation of the curriculum vitae. In either case other participants both listen and are invited to ask questions for clarification. Given that the participants have a low context with respect to prior knowledge of each other, this process is often profoundly moving.

Elements of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and psychodynamics show up in the process here. CBT elements are useful in the application of coaching techniques according to Lehman and Korotov because they draw attention to unhelpful thoughts and attempt to reframe them (Lehman & Korotov, 2007). One aspect of CBT, cognitive restructuring, is especially useful in this regard. The cognitive restructuring theory holds that your own unrealistic beliefs are directly responsible for generating dysfunctional emotions and their resultant behaviors, like stress, depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal, and that we humans can be rid of such emotions and their effects by dismantling the beliefs that give them life (Ellis & Harper, 1975). Cognitive restructuring appears to take place, even in the abbreviated timeframe in the group executive coaching setting. Note the comments of these three separate participants when asked to relate the experience of telling their story:

“I gained insights from the introspection of drawing the portrait and also talking with the team about the feedback. Some aspects were reinforced, i.e. my strengths. Other things were highlighted, for example I have taken certain risks in my private life like skydiving and bungee jumping but I was not seen as a risk taker at work by some of my team. The fact that this link was made was an important takeaway.”

“I felt I would just tell my story. Then as I described my life it turned out there were issues I did not know about. As I told the story and people asked questions I gained some insights.
“It helped to realize I had been at the surface level. I had not dealt with under the surface issues. It became evident that the self-portrait was the tip of the iceberg. The questions (from the group) revealed that.”

Angus and McLeod (2004) hypothesize that narrative is in and of itself a therapeutic process. Their position is that narrative is a way for clients to organize, reorder, and repair aspects of their life story with which they are no longer happy, without interruption or competition.

This “autobiographical reasoning,” as it is termed, is a way of meaning making by reflection and by client agency. Pennebaker goes further, stating that the fact of opening up one’s story in a public setting actually serves to reduce stress and is physiologically beneficial (Pennebaker, 2001). Meanwhile Boothe and von Wyl (2004) posit that the telling of stories is in fact one of the key drivers of forming the therapeutic alliance. This arises through a process of empathic understanding wherein the narrator and therapist co-create a joint narrative of mutual understanding. This alliance phenomenon also appears to happen in the group setting:

“Where there are commonalities it binds you to someone else, it deepens the relationship. They become more special.”

“You put yourself in perspective. I took their experience and transferred it onto my own experience. I did not see my journey as either better or worse than theirs. There is no judgment.”

“The good thing was people were comfortable sharing personal issues. We all had something we wanted to get off our chest and share. We all wanted to get feedback on our issues. The fact of talking about these issues in a group setting generated unity within the group. I therefore did not feel alone.”

Moreover, participants seem to experience a sense of enjoyment listening to the stories of others. It could be a contributor to the transitional space or a sense of doing something out of the ordinary. It also seems to have a practical use for some people.

“It was interesting to experience how others see themselves and the problems they face. What people have done or where they want to go. People interest me, how they behave and act and how they come across.”

“Some people had experienced some very big issues. How they had dealt with those issues and still managed to move forward was amazing to listen to. It is helpful to know how to deal with those issues should they ever come up. Also the smaller stuff, which I had encountered, was given some perspective.”

Storytelling in this setting is not a sideshow. As the session moves forward toward more formal feedback and a prospective plan for action, even the storytelling and the restructuring around that can lend itself to participants making changes. Consider the remark of the following participant:

“I think it was interesting to listen to their stories and some of it was emotional. There were certainly a couple of deep-rooted issues with two of the other participants. It brought those to the surface and made us realize that there might even be a need for professional help. It was insightful and those issues became part of their action plan. I found it fascinating.”

I hypothesize that without storytelling much of the unconscious material would be missed.
Storytelling in the group executive coaching session gives it another dimension. Without the narrative, the central theme would be the investigation of feedback. This feedback investigation in the group-coaching process takes place after the life story and reflection. It paves the way for the coaching and feedback, which is the next building block of the process. With the contextual storytelling done, the coach and the other participants should be able to make links not only backward to the participant’s personal life, but also in the present to their feedback and forward to their stated aspirations. At this juncture, however, they are also beginning to make the links backward and forward between their private and professional selves, and are usually eliciting commentary from the individual group members and the coach. The environment is rich and nuanced.

4.3.5 The role of feedback and consequent defense mechanisms

In a world where communication is becoming ever faster and information more readily available, the proportion of large companies deploying multi-source feedback as a development tool is high. According to Edwards and Ewen the number of Fortune 500 companies deploying it as far back as 1996 was over 90%. I generally ask the class to raise a hand if they have done 360-degree feedback before. Anecdotally the response is rarely more than 50%. The discrepancy comes from the number of companies whose agenda is to use it, and the number of companies that fail to use it. Many executives tell me that they have not been reviewed for a couple of years. Coaching, although widespread, is often used for high performance individuals, the type of people who typically attend the IEP and that I am researching in this study. A lesser percentage has experienced executive coaching and I would hazard a guess that when asked generally it is around 10%. The combined experience of group-coaching is quite new for the majority. This should be kept in mind as I explore the responses to the portion of the process that concerns coaching and feedback.

During the sessions participants are invited to challenge, coach, and ask questions of others. This could be one of the key benefits of psychodynamic group-coaching. What shows up distinctly and often in a coaching group is a range of classic defense mechanisms.

“Talking to others and asking them effective questions, you are talking about situations that you have either faced or are facing or may face in the future. That helps since you can benefit from the learning of other team members. At the end of the day it is about making specific changes and clearing a way to execute them. The process facilitates this.”

“I remember talking about somebody else’s results. He had a need for recognition and the group added some commentary. Then I realized I also had the same issues. We sat and discussed it for a long time afterwards. Other group members came to me and did the same thing. There was a degree of overlap.”

“We faced the same questions, so I was asking about myself simultaneously while asking about others. It was very helpful.”

The classic theoretical representation in these comments is psychological projection—an immature defense. According to Anna Freud (1946), projection is a psychological defense mechanism whereby one “projects” one’s own undesirable thoughts, motivations, desires, and feelings onto someone else. Emotions or excitation that the ego tries to ward off are spat out and then felt as being outside the ego and thus perceived in another person. A near relative of this defense mechanism
that also shows up in groups is projective identification. The term was introduced by Melanie Klein in the object relations school of psychoanalytic thought in 1946 (Klein, 1975). Simply put, projective identification differs from simple projection in that it is a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby a person, believing something about another, falsely, relates to that other person in such a way that the other person alters their behavior to make it true. The second person is influenced by the projection and begins to behave as though he or she is in fact actually characterized by the projected thoughts or beliefs. This is a process that generally happens outside the awareness of both parties involved, and is both complex and subtle.

“I was able to help someone who was in career transition. Hearing someone else talk about the same stuff helped me and I think it helped him. He had different worries. His were financial. So you both approach it differently and the learning builds.”

Bion concluded that projective identification functioned as an essential part of mental life in groups and hence of members’ behavior (Horowitz, 1983). Foulkes likened therapy groups to a hall of mirrors, wherein members serve as objects both real and projected resonating with each ones inner reality (Foulkes, 1948). And as feedback in therapy groups comes from fellow sufferers (or in the case of psychodynamic group-coaching fellow travelers), it is inherently empathic even if delivered in an abrasive manner (Kibel, 1992).

Kibel goes on to state that cohesion is a necessary environment, creating an atmosphere of tolerance where peer confrontations and interpretations can function supportively. There were many comments that alluded to the cohesiveness of the group environment. When asked about how the group process helped the participant to learn about himself one responded:

“They were honest and open. There were aspects of the self that came up, aspects of myself about which I did not know.”

Another found the group useful in helping him to understand himself better:

“It made me accept my personality and how I am as a person. I felt previously a bit handicapped by my relationships with others. After the coaching day I was able to accept myself.”

I hypothesize that as in therapy and group-therapy, defenses may materialize in participants and need to be managed. However, without knowledge of the various complex mechanisms that can arise, the coach would struggle to make progress. I hypothesize further that these defenses arise specifically because of the precepts described: the transitional (and rather strange) space they find themselves in, the unearthing of unconscious material (which is unexpected). Because the discussion around these is often rich but challenging, the group coach will need to be observant of the signs that a participant is erecting defenses. Skillfully handled these can be dismantled without harm.

4.3.6 The role of a diverse group from the participants’ perspectives

Diversity was a key theme in my investigation. In this way psychodynamic group-coaching differs from orthodox therapy configurations where patients are most often typically grouped by their condition, for example paranoid schizophrenia or addictive behavior. The phase, which in group-therapy is termed inclusion, is necessarily fast in the psychodynamic group-coaching setting. Its antecedent takes place during the outdoor day a few days before psychodynamic group-coaching. Generally as a result
of this formative bonding in psychodynamic group-coaching, tension is low. Practitioners have commented that it can be a disadvantage if the constellations have become too emotionally close: the interpersonal feedback can in these circumstances be diluted. According to Heider (1958), people who differ are under tension to either agree or dislike each other assuming the issue has importance to both. We see this reflected below. There was much commentary around the diversity and not all agreed on its utility:

“You get views and questions from different angles and nationalities. They question, give advice and support from their point of view. Three angles are better than one. You get more convinced if there is a consensus.”

“Many different characters from many different countries (facilitated my learning from a group perspective). This led to a totally different input in terms of feedback. I think the diversity of the professional background, not age or gender, was a big contributor.”

“It was difficult in the beginning (to talk about personal things). We had a diverse group: someone from Singapore, the Nordics and a French person. Jumping that first hurdle took some time. As people began to open up though one received some fruitful feedback.”

“...I was worried my experience might not square with others’ experience. What came to the surface was that we all had similar issues, e.g. dealing with our feelings...their perspective gave me a broader view. The diversity is helpful...”

It would seem from these comments that there is a general appreciation for a broad spread of participants from different geographies and industries which typically comprise these coaching groups. What surprised participants was that at their level and age the issues and challenges they faced were in many cases aligned. This fact seems to give comfort. They were not alone with their issues. I have heard anecdotally that one aspect of diversity that does not function as well is a broad age range. This may well be worth exploring in future research.

4.4 Human roles in the psychodynamic group-coaching process

Interaction between the coach, the participant, and the group is the human dynamic in the process. Here I will explain further how that dynamic interaction is interpreted from the experiences of the participants.

4.4.1 The role of the coach

The role of the coach in the psychodynamic group-coaching process is central. In therapy according to Foulkes, the leader (as he or she is termed), is initially seen as a source of wisdom and insight, from which the group has to be gradually weaned (Behr & Hearst, 2006). It is possibly here that group psychoanalytic theory, as Foulkes determined it, departs from the coaching process. In group-therapy, the group is simultaneously treated as a “group as a whole,” each individual contribution being understood in the context of the interpersonal network existent in the group.

In group-coaching however, unlike in therapy, the coach is more the driver of the process. Nevertheless, the facilitator in psychodynamic group-coaching plays a psychological role, being there in the first place to contain the group. The notion of containment derives from a Bionian theory wherein both children and patients need a parent or therapist-like figure who can contain, understand, and cope with tensions
and conflicts that stem from primitive anxieties (Klein, Bernard, & Singer, 1992). Containment is achieved through a balance of acceptance and limit setting (Behr & Hearst, 2006). Much of this work is done initially during the dynamic administration. However, the coach plays a key role in maintaining the boundaries throughout the day and forging links to and from the various participants’ experiences.

“...He came across as caring and trustworthy and we respected the confidentiality of the situation. He was able to connect the dots especially when we talked about 360-degree feedback.”

“She did a really good job. She saw the group dynamics and how open we were and she tried not to tamper with the dynamics.”

“She was competent but spent a lot of time listening and not forcing the agenda. I felt secure with her. I did not feel I was being psychoanalyzed which can make you uncomfortable.”

The coach also has the practical role of reviewing the feedback and offering useful help and solutions. When read in their entirety, the responses comment much more about the group and its usefulness than about the coach. Yet as we have seen the coaches receive very good ratings. They are clearly not central in the participants’ psyche yet without them there would not be a process at all. This is interesting as again it demonstrates an analog with group-therapy. As a rule, group therapists follow a protocol of non-disclosure, a classic “blank screen” (Tuttman, 1992). This protocol is not necessarily so rigid in psychodynamic group-coaching. Coaches are not proscribed from self-disclosure if it is in service to the client. It is important, however, that the coach does not take over, since as we shall see, he or she plays an authority role and this can create a passive-dependent effect quite quickly. The group experience encourages the sharing of stories. Those stories that emanate from the personal experiences of the participants, illuminate different ways of dealing with similar issues. It is not unreasonable that at times the coach becomes a quasi-participant and offers her own experience. Moreover, in coaching it is within the “rules” to offer advice, if permission is sought. That advice can be backed up by a personal experience as corroboration. It should, however, be kept in mind that the coach’s voice in all likelihood has more weight and is likely to be a bigger influencer, especially if there is a positive transference, (dealt with elsewhere). It is not, however, productive if the coach becomes a director, advisor, or starts to take up space with his or her experience. I find that this can lead the group into a state of passive dependency, looking to the coach for all the answers and creates a rift between what is intended, a collaborative group experience and the outcome, a teach-in. It is particularly worrisome if the coach has narcissistic tendencies as this may lead to grandstanding.

Winnicott (1958) recognized the need for the infant to be able to be alone in the presence of others. According to Asbach and Schermer (1992), a truly empathic therapist will recognize this need in a patient and respond by offering distance. In psychodynamic group-coaching the coach will try to find this rather fine line. Maybe a helpful guide is Shermer’s earlier advice that the therapist should alternate between an empathic stance and an objective view, the therapist being both a mirror and a window on the patient’s or group unconscious (Schermer, 1988).

Ganzarain (1977) identified seven separate roles for the group therapist: I have italicized where, from my experience, the psychodynamic coach has a similar role:
1. Defines and monitors the task.
2. Selects and takes in members.
3. Delineates intra-group boundaries (roles, ground rules, culture, and contract.)
4. Delineates and manages his own role/personal boundary.
5. Delineates and manages the group/environmental boundary.
6. Serves as a catalyst and protector.
7. Processes information and interprets.

(Ganzarain, 1977)

According to Bion (1961) and Hobbs (1951), the role of the group therapist is to work through and alleviate and manage tensions and anxieties prevalent in group life. In psychodynamic group-coaching these tensions are most visible at the outset but manifest throughout the process in various forms from the most obvious defense mechanisms to physical signals like tears. Bach (1954) states that the therapist’s authority is sanctioned by his task; Jacques (1951) equated this to the authority found in industrial settings by specialist leader and managers and specified the term “task sanction.”

4.4.2 The role of the group during the feedback process

While talk of the coach was significant by its absence, the role of the group played a major part in the participants’ experience. There was a great deal of commentary around this and clearly looking back 18 months from the process itself, the participants had derived much meaning and learning from the presence of other members, especially the psychodynamic aspects of the process. Here is a detailed remark that substantiates some of this:

“Questioning from the coach (helped me learn about myself). The coach’s comments were critical. Also questions from the other participants were very important and I would highlight the fact that we knew each other first. The context was important. There was camaraderie...they added a lot. It was because we had shared quite a bit already. Not deep to the point which occurred in the session but we knew a bit about our family lives, kids, ambitions so we had the ability to comment. That was great value...the biggest value was that it focused on my personal side. I have been on several of these courses. The difference was we focused on the personal aspects of our lives. If you want to be a better manager you need to understand yourself. Then you can transfer that knowledge to the business platform. I always knew I had trouble managing my workload and difficulty with ambiguity. I always tried. But when I went through group-coaching I realized what was the root cause through the input of the coach and the group, was that I had difficulty trusting people and delegating to them. I treat my wife and child this way. So my business life is reflected in my personal life.”

According to Levine, well-timed and progressive transfer of political power from therapist to members of the groups is an extremely important phenomenon for the social/emotional growth of the members for group development (Levine, 1979). In a group-coaching day this transfer needs to happen quite quickly, since the intervention is short and one positive corollary of the process is that the group becomes self-supporting.
4.5 Feedback, action items and termination

Maybe an essential test of any theory of psychodynamic group-coaching is whether it has any effect. What is not covered in this research is the sustainability of any effect but will be of note for future research. Nevertheless, during the course of the interviewing there were remarks both around the changes that people had made and whether they had managed to maintain them. What I set out to test was whether, between the termination of the IEP program and subsequently until the call with the small group of participants three months later, there had been any effect at all.

During the opening sequence of the psychodynamic group-coaching process the coach will as a rule suggest to the participants that the output of the coaching process will be for the participants to formulate an action plan. The template can be seen in Fig. 9. Participants are told they will be “invited” to make an action plan. Nobody is forced to do anything during the whole process, either from drawing a portrait to revealing his or her feedback. In practice, people rarely refuse any of this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>On Track</th>
<th>Some Concern</th>
<th>Needs Attention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACTION</td>
<td>SUCCESS MEASURES</td>
<td>TIME FRAME</td>
<td>ENABLERS AND SUPPORT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 9 An example of a leadership action plan

Endings in group-therapy have been discussed at length and are generally well orchestrated (Behr & Hearst, 2006). There are two main types of therapy groups:

1. Open: Where group members join and leave when goals have been addressed.
2. Closed: Where there is a conceptualized inception, work through and end for all members simultaneously.

Psychodynamic group-coaching is akin to the latter. Some of the termination issues that arise in therapy groups may also arise in psychodynamic group-coaching. According to Levine (1979), they are more prevalent in closed groups so I will turn
my attention to the various aspects that may arise, seen outlined below in adapted form.

1. Regression: Where the patient exhibits previously manifested symptoms.
2. Anger or rejection of the therapist.
3. Guilt over the two items above.
4. Gratification: Where the patient turns back to the group for support rather than becoming self-dependent or looking for external sources of dependence.
5. Relinquishment: Letting relationships within the group subside.
6. Cohesion: Where group members back away from deepening their ties.
7. Controls: Being able to manage the termination phase and sharing the ambivalence of that equally, thus preserving positive feelings.
8. Accounting: Wherein patients share their achieved outcomes and their goals beyond the group.

I have italicized above the areas that in my experience often show up in psychodynamic group-coaching. I would hypothesize, given the congruence, that group-therapy as an analog to group-coaching is appropriate. Psychodynamic group-coaching is constructed in such a way as to set a termination date beyond the physical breaking of the group. That usually takes place around three months later. Moreover, the end of psychodynamic group-coaching is not in and of itself an end since the psychodynamic group-coaching module sits within a larger program of six weeks, the IEP. Nevertheless, participants attest to the feeling that the uniqueness of the psychodynamic group-coaching experience is quite special in the bigger context. When asked about the specific lessons she had learned from going through psychodynamic group-coaching one person encapsulated those thoughts thus:

“That you have to be open to looking inside yourself as a starting point for where you want to go. Secondly making an action plan and setting some goals plus being confronted with them drives the process forward. If you look at the personal development part it made a big contribution to the overall experience. If it had only been finance and, marketing etc. it would not have been as good. It opened our minds and not only to business theory.”

Here one can see how value is placed on both the psychodynamic aspects (looking inside), and the more practical aspects. The action plan and goal setting merge to give the process momentum. The action plan might be perceived to be a secondary transitional object that the participants cling to as they transition out of the psychodynamic group-coaching process. However, unlike group-therapy, the psychodynamic group-coaching process has been designed with an eye to sustainability. Thus, the action plan is not the end-point, but the final stepping-stone to the reconnection and follow-up that takes place three months later. Through this “secondary termination” many of Levine’s concerns about the process of termination in group-therapy are addressed.

In order from above:

a) Gratification: In the case of psychodynamic group-coaching there is a strong expectation that participants will look to each other for support beyond the program. This is encouraged. They are invited to become a self-supporting
network albeit without the coach. So in the absence of a conductor, they are invited to continue the “music.”

b) Relinquishment: Because of the above, the pain of letting go of the intimate and personal aspects of the relationships within the group is neither expected nor encouraged.

c) Cohesion: Far from backing away from deepening ties, what practitioners often observe is a clamor to cement those ties in order to facilitate a) and b) above.

d) Controls. The group deals effectively with the ambivalence of letting go because of the target conference call and follow-up.

e) Accounting. In the case of psychodynamic group-coaching participants share projected goals not outcomes. Therefore, there is a projection of hope into the future rather than a feeling of termination.

4.5.1 Results of action planning and follow-up

Participants were invited to share the extent to which they had followed up. There are two aspects to the follow-up as discussed in Chapter 3. One is the continuation exercise of working with a learning partner. The learning partner, who is appointed from the small group during the session, takes the role of a coach. Between the end of the IEP and the conference call, the learning partner is expected to have two contacts either in person or by telephone.

The concept is for the learning partner, having been apprised of the participant’s action plan, to coach him or her for half an hour. This serves two purposes. It gives the two participants the opportunity to coach and experience further coaching. It also serves for the action plan to be kept live and not ignored. In practice the evidence is that its use is patchy and is only sometimes effective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One call or more</th>
<th>No call</th>
<th>(If call) Useful</th>
<th>(If call) Not useful</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>57.15%</td>
<td>42.85%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 10 Conference call with learning partner use and effectiveness (14 respondents)

Of the eight respondents who had at least one call, two of them had calls in a group instead of one to one as suggested. Their response as to the utility of a learning partner call has been omitted from the table. Reasons for either having a call or not were quite varied:

“I did that (have a call). My partner was from Singapore. He had a different environment. We had a couple of phone calls. It was not very efficient. His experience was too different.”

“I did follow up. It was pleasant and useful. It also reassured me and was better than not to have done it.”

“I did follow up with my learning partner till he moved to a new job but this year has been most busy and we all keep in touch once in a while in the group. To talk about our progress in personal and business life.”
“We actually follow up with the entire group, all four of us. I find it very useful. People talk about career plans and we give each other useful feedback.”

It is interesting to note here the range of commentary from the lack or utility to groups that are still engaged with each other 18 months later where no formal process is in place to support that. While fewer than 60% of respondents actually had a call, and of them only 50% found it of use, it is suggestive that here the process demands some scrutiny. However, with that in mind, what we do know is that in every case the three-month group conference call did take place and that people to a varying degree were able to make changes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Made changes</th>
<th>Did not make changes</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 Personal/professional changes made as a result of psychodynamic group-coaching after three months (14 respondents)

One person surveyed said that he did not learn anything new as a result of psychodynamic group-coaching. Some people were equivocal if anything much had happened as a result:

“I would like to say yes but I do not know how much I have accomplished. I have become more aware. I know more nowadays when I have made a mistake. I have more recently been able to use what I have learned more efficiently. Sometimes I slip and go back to old ways. I do however make a lot more effort.”

“Yes I did an action plan. I moved a bit on it. It had some effect. I did some things a bit differently. I did not really have a result in the end. My action plan was oriented to relationships with others. It had a small effect.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substantial</th>
<th>Qualified</th>
<th>Small</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61.53%</td>
<td>30.76%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 Degree to which respondent changed (13 respondents)

However, a majority acted on their plan and was able to make moderate to substantial progress. The three following I would deem qualified:

“I followed up on half of it.”

“Yes, but not only because of the group, but because of more general interaction with others and the IEP program in general contributed to that.”

“I became aware of a number of things on the behavior side to focus on and be aware of.”

These comments, however, I would deem to be substantial or unequivocal.

“Yes to both professional and private life. The coaching session brought things to the fore for me and I am sustaining these changes.”
“Yes it opened my eyes to things enabling me to continue work. (I) also introduced coaching to my management team with good results.”

“I was able to be more confident. I sensed that I could stick to my beliefs and express my opinions. Even to my superiors. I spoke up and explained the situation and even brought in my senior management and told them why I disagreed with a strategic decision. They bought into it. This has been successful and we are moving in the right direction.”

4.6 The process of change in psychodynamic group-coaching

From the outset, participants are aware that they are undergoing a change process. Perhaps even before they arrive at the school they are mentally preparing for learning and coaching. Implicit in that is the need to grow and change professionally. Change means different things to different people. Some embrace it, others resist. For many it is just hard to change (especially sustainably), so embedded have behaviors become by mid life. The goals that participants are encouraged to create for themselves tend to be specific and actionable. This of course does not make them easier. It is therefore relevant to examine what happens from a scientific perspective when people are invited to change.

4.6.1 Theoretical aspects of change in coaching

Participant goals might be better understood from a theoretical perspective. Three models of change and transition exist which, according to Stober and Grant, can be useful in goal-focused coaching (Stober & Grant, 2006). Psychodynamic group-coaching, in the context I am looking at, can be counted as goal-focused as opposed to open ended. The three models are Bridges’ Transition Model, Schlossberg’s Adaptation to Transitions model and Prochaska and DiClemente’s Trans-theoretical Model of Change (Bridges, 1991; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Schlossberg, 1981). Looking at each in turn, one can see that the psychodynamic group-coaching process utilizes pieces of each theoretical model.

Bridges’ Transition Model differentiates between transition and change. Change is physical and immediate yet transitions take place by degrees. In Bridges’ model, there is an implicit recognition that transitions start with an end, a letting go, and possibly a grieving process. There follows a core period of a neutral zone wherein the uncertainty of change lies, and Bridges equates this with a time of creativity and renewal. Finally, there is a new beginning where the excitement of a step into the future coincides with a focus on goals and being open to unexpected events. In Fig. 11 I have represented how Bridges’ model correlates with psychodynamic group-coaching.
Schlossberg’s Adaptation to Transitions model takes a more objective view citing three psychosocial factors that affect a person’s adaptation to change. These are:

1. The characteristics of the transition, e.g. role change duration, or source.
2. The characteristics of the pre- and post-transition environment, e.g. intimate relationships, social network, and cohesion of family.
3. Characteristics of the individual, e.g. age, value orientation, and psychosocial competence.

Again these three factors come into play in the psychodynamic group-coaching process. In Fig.12 I have represented how the PGS process might interact with Schlossberg’s model. Essentially, since all of the above factors are assessed and discussed during the process, I hypothesize that the conditions for all three exist in the transitional space of psychodynamic group-coaching.
Stober and Grant (2006) point out that the challenge of this model is that although it gives a broad framework for understanding the transition process in relation to major life events and people’s goals, it does not focus on the psycho mechanics of how to achieve them nor which strategies might be most effective and at which point. In psychodynamic group-coaching, those challenges are met by the third model, the trans-theoretical model of change.

4.6.2 The trans-theoretical model of change

The trans-theoretical model of change, or TTM as it is widely known, was originally applied to addictive behaviors such as alcohol abuse and has since been applied to both individual and organizational change. Simply put, it cites six overlapping and progressive stages of change that may be cyclic in that there may be relapses back to old behavior. The six stages are:

1. Pre-contemplation (no intention to change)
2. Contemplation (considering change)
3. Preparation (increased commitment and small changes in progress)
4. Action (engaging in new behaviors)
5. Maintenance (consistent engagement in new behaviors) and
6. Relapse (a return to old behaviors).
In Fig. 13 I have represented how the trans-theoretical model might look when related to psychodynamic group-coaching.

The trans-theoretical model has been utilized by Miller in his work on motivational interviewing and also with its utility in the group-coaching process (Ward, 2009). In the model above we see the different stages and the corresponding timeline from the psychodynamic group-coaching process. At the point where the group theoretically disbands, either maintenance will occur or the participant may revert to a previous behavior. According to Prochaska and Di Clemente (1984), the client may relapse up to eight times before maintenance occurs. A note for future research may be to investigate the sustainability of any changes and the incidence of relapse.

In researching psychodynamic group-coaching I was curious to ascertain whether people in a stage of pre-contemplation would have made changes irrespective of whether they were going through the psychodynamic group-coaching process, and to what extent the group aspect made a difference. Many participants coming to the IEP have had feedback before, whether anecdotal informal feedback, or in a minority of cases a systematic multi-source review. Generally this, coupled with the relative maturity of participants, means that the feedback itself is rarely a major shock. Participants know what they need to do. Their reasons for not having done anything about it range from “I am successful in spite of my negative characteristics so why change?” to “This is me, it is in my DNA, I cannot change this now.”
Kegan and Lahey (2009), when talking about change, state it is not change itself that makes people uncomfortable; it is the notion of being left defenseless in the face of a hostile environment. The table below suggests that psychodynamic group-coaching makes the difference. Why is that? Some responses from participants around the subject of feedback in the group may provide the answer. The suspicion is that tipping points are created. How does this happen and what are they? One can pay particular attention in the following comments to the group factor and the fact of not being left defenseless.

“There were blind spots that surprised me. The group helped me make steps in the right direction and to optimize the changes I wanted to make. I made some leadership changes. I took time to think about my future and decided to leave the company. This was supported by the group discussion I had at INSEAD. The group feedback session helped me a lot to make the decisions in life that have a big impact. It helped me to fulfill my project and then leave the company. I felt it was time to do something else. It gave me the confidence to leave...”

Whether this person would have made such a life-changing decision without psychodynamic group-coaching is counterfactual. However, he did put much emphasis on the group helping him through the decision-making process.

“...I liked the fact that I was speaking to other professionals. I also liked the dual approach of the one to one and the group (sessions). I got some good examples of approaches from the group and feedback on my personality from the coach.”

In that comment is a clear indication that the peer coaching aspect of psychodynamic group-coaching and the personal support of a professional coach was useful.

“...It pushed me. I dared to go places I would not necessarily have done. It gave me confidence. ‘Be a leader of your life.’ I think that came from both the peers and the coach.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would not have...</th>
<th>Would have...</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>69.23%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 Responses to the question: Would you have made changes if you had not gone through the psychodynamic group-coaching process in percentage? (13 respondents)

The percentages suggest that for the majority the psychodynamic group-coaching process was a stimulus to change, while for some it was an accelerator.

4.6.3 Contra-indications of the psychodynamic group-coaching process as elicited from the interviews

For the purposes of notes for future research I have included a number of negative ideas and comments volunteered by participants as part of the interviewing process. Some of these contained suggestions for how the process could be improved. Others articulated why they were uncomfortable with aspects of what happened. I do not seek to resolve the issues here or to discuss them, merely to raise them as possible entry points for further investigation. I have put a discussion note alongside each comment.
“…my portrait was superficial. Only when I did my 360 and was being asked questions did I go deeper. I looked back on the portrait and felt I had not opened up.”

This may have been as a result of underlying anxiety, or the participant having his session earlier in the day before he fully understood the process. It may also be that he felt a cynicism about portrait drawing. I have encountered all three of these at various times during psychodynamic group-coaching.

Talking about doing the coaching in a group setting one person remarked:

(It was) very difficult. I don’t like giving feedback or receiving it. I felt exposed and the group setting made it feel less intimate. However, I did know that I had to go through with it. I took it as a challenge. But not in a positive sense. I did not try to obstruct the process though. The process was painful. I am a deep introvert…"

A possible future research angle here is to what extent people should be maneuvered into going through this process. It would be difficult to opt out given the larger group pressure. Also the fact that this person experienced the process does not mean he derived any benefit from it. He did comment that when giving feedback he could do it appreciatively instead of correctively so he had an insight. He also felt that he had made a contribution to the process in helping others. One wonders whether the pain of going through it was worth it.

Here someone comments on the process itself:

“It is more effective if you have a one to one. You would need two to three hours in a group to get the same result. With the group we went deeper, however with a one to one you might fail if you went in the wrong direction. In my opinion group dynamics build up to the point where the group sees one person the same way as if the group itself were one person.”

This comment is interesting to note for practitioners. The facilitator will need to be constantly on the lookout for elements of “groupthink.” It may be that the person can feel scapegoated, a notion that comes up in much of the literature on group-therapy (Whitaker & Lieberman, 1964). In addition, it may also be the job of the facilitator to leverage the diversity and ensure that opposite points of view are elicited.

4.7 Conclusion

Reading the transcripts in their entirety, one gets a strong sense that the majority of respondents to this survey had a positive to very positive experience after psychodynamic group-coaching. As I stated earlier, there may be an inherent bias since they elected to respond. Putting that aside, while people found the process challenging, they also found that as a result they were able to make behavioral changes. Scientific rigor demands that to evidence that would require a second 360-degree feedback survey based on the previous behavior and measuring the degree of change. A quantitative study would address that and may be noted as a point for future research.

At this point, the assumption is that the respondents have no innate reason to deceive the interviewer. Not only were they able to make changes but also one surprising corollary I discovered was that many of the people are still in either sporadic or formal contact with their groups and group members. Some groups still have a quarterly conference call. Of the 14 people I spoke with, seven are still in contact with the group via some means. Again, how many people from the original group are
included in regular dialogue is impossible to predict from this sample. The maximum is 28 if all the respondents come from different groups and the minimum is seven. Irrespective of that, what is clear is that close bonds are forged through this process in some cases, and that the desire to find support and support others outlasts not only psychodynamic group-coaching but also the broader International Executive Programme.

Having looked in some detail at the responses of the participants of a specific program, it is now necessary to review the available literature around the three main individual disciplines that contribute to the overall process. In order to substantiate an emerging theory, I will demonstrate that all three individual processes are grounded in science, have efficacy (albeit at this point) in isolation, and to attempt to establish if any causal links exist between these individual disciplines and the outcomes in a combined process.