

## Chapter 9: Findings—Reflection and Learning

*“This waking up goes hand in hand with what we might call ‘wisdom,’ a seeing more deeply into cause and effect and the interconnectedness of things, so that we are no longer caught up in a dream-dictated reality of our own creation. To find our way, we will need to pay more attention to this moment. It is the only time that we have to live, grow, feel and change”.*

*(Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.xv)*

My inquiry:

What are the qualities and conditions that create enough safety in the supervision relationships within a group to enable self-disclosure, reflection and learning? How are these qualities and conditions designed and brought forth?

The garden is necessary for reflective practice and reflective practice is essential for personal and professional development. In the previous chapter I set out the co-creation and stewardship of the garden—the qualities and conditions and how they were designed and brought forth. In this chapter I set out the reflective and learning practices that occurred and were necessary parts of the personal and professional development process, and five ethical considerations. In Chapter 10, I state my conclusions and articulate my current theory of practice.

### [Reflective and learning practices in supervision](#)

In the supervision groups, the learning was as much about one’s self as it was about tools, methods, and processes. It included the whole person of the coach—emotions and feelings, narratives, stories, interpersonal relationships, emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2004), and coaching methodologies. It was important to expand the definition of reflection and reflective practice to be more than learning how to be a coach, beyond the professional competencies to embrace the fullness of one’s self as the instrument of the work (McLean, 2019; Bachkirova, 2016, p.144).

As discussed in the last Chapter, the garden was alive, and vibrant, it required tending and care as its elements varied moment to moment, and it was almost always in service to reflective practice which utilized what happened in the session as fertilizer for growth. The coaches' abilities to integrate their experiences over time, contributed to the possibilities of learning and ultimately personal and professional development.

### [The six elements of reflective and learning practices](#)

Enabled by the five Principles of Good Practice, there were six elements of reflective and learning practices that occurred over the year—before, during, and after the sessions as well as in the time between. These were cultivating observing self, reflecting on what had happened, reflecting on what was happening in the moment, considering and challenging one's beliefs, values and stories, imagining future actions, and cultivating one's coaching capabilities, competencies and capacities within the session. The group was a community of inquirers who assisted each other in developing and deepening these practices through their collaborative exploration, challenge and diverse perspectives as a situation was considered.

There was wide variability in what was experienced, by each coach, in any single session and over the course of the year; no two had the same experiences. They are not listed in sequential order as any one or more of the six could have been going on for one or more of the coaches. My definitions of these elements are:

1. The ability to observe one's self in the past, and in the present moment, with increasing discernment.
2. Looking back at past situations with inquiry, thoughtfulness and curiosity.
3. Looking inward and noticing our feelings, body sensations, and inner dialogue in the moment.
4. Inquiring about or challenging our habits, stories, beliefs and values.
5. Looking forward and imagining how we might experiment being or observing ourselves differently with a client, or each other.

6. Practicing core coaching competencies including presence, being in relationship, curiosity, inquiry, listening, challenge and dialogue.

Supervision was a space for discovering more about our capabilities and skills as a person and as a coach when we used the opportunities for reflection, and for experimenting with what was stirred, discovered or learned through the reflections in preparation for the sessions, in the journaling following the session, individually, in experimentation with clients in coaching sessions, and as each of us engaged in our lives. Reflective practice is the field for cultivation of awake-ness.

### One: The ability to observe one's self

Coaches in supervision had many opportunities to learn, cultivate and deepen their ability to observe their self. This ability was an essential capacity to engage in considering our work; one could not reflect unless one could see one's self in the prior interactions. This was cultivating the subject/object distinction (Kegan, 1994). The reflection questions and journal prompts were designed to invite our noticing. In the sessions we practiced and deepened our abilities to observe ourselves through the inquiries of what we were noticing about ourselves and our self as a coach. We learned how to notice what we were doing, feeling, avoiding and how we were experiencing others—what moved us to curiosity or judgment, triggered us or activated us to move out of coaching stance.

### Two: Looking back at past situations

Supervision provided opportunities to practice reflection on action (Schön, 1983). We looked back at the past, in three different ways. The presenting coach was looking back to describe what happened. As we listened, we were looking back in inquiry with them and often looking back at our own client work that was similar, e.g., “that reminds me of a client and this is what I did there”, or “I remember being stuck with a client”, or “I've been with a client in the doldrums”, and with judgment, potentially assessing the other coach, the other client, ourselves, the group interactions, or noticing our judgment and suspending it.

### Three: Looking inward in-the-moment

Supervision provided the opportunities for coaches to notice how they were in their mind, heart and body, in the moments of the session and utilize that noticing in their practicing and learning. This was the aspect of looking in; looking inward to how we were feeling, or noticing sensations in our body, or our inner dialogue. For example, sometimes I said, "Let's do a drawing of what comes up for us when the coach is presenting". That was going inward, within us, to find an image that we drew. Or I asked, "What did you notice when the case was shared?" A request to go within and name what were we feeling as we heard the coach present the case or the theme. Similarly sharing our reflections on the reflection question, was a practice of noticing within.

There was evidence that we were editing how we participated in the group by noticing in the moment what the others were saying or how they were interacting, when our judgment came to the forefront. This was noticing in-the-moment and doing something differently.

### Four: Inquiring about or challenging our habits, stories, beliefs and values

Supervision, through the inquiry process, included opportunities to challenge the habits, stories, beliefs and values of the coaches. If the coach had sufficient developmental maturity, the challenges created the possibility of critical self-reflection (Mezirow, 1990).

These inquiries and challenges to our views of the world, and how we made meaning from what happened was less evident across the group members than reflecting in the past or into the future. There was an interplay between one's ability to observe one's self and the willingness to reflect beyond one's actions, to one's life stories. For the coaches who could see themselves within their stories, e.g., "performance anxieties", "need to please", "deference", "deliver value", they caught themselves being just who they were and could see their role in what was going on. Many times, the coach arrived with an inquiry about the client, their lack of resourcefulness, their transactional responses, or their lack of commitment and realized, as they explored what had been going on for

them, that it was their need to drive the client to deliver value or prove their worth. It was more about who they were as a coach. The reflections from the challenges did not necessarily land the first time they arose, nor in the session; sometimes the coach discovered them through subsequent experiences and reflection.

### Five: Generativity – looking forward

The fifth element of reflection was looking forward. Supervision provided space for looking forward, to consider, design, experiment and develop new practices and ways of being. These were the design and experiment steps in Kolb's (2015) experiential learning cycle. I asked a coach, "what might you do going forward?" "How might you work differently with this client?" "How might you be more present and let the value-added piece go?" I inquired, almost always, of the presenting coach following the group interactions— "what are you sitting with?" or "What are you taking away?" Then going around the circle, I asked each coach to share what was learned or stirred about their self as a coach or their practice. Often, it was, "I noticed this, and I might want to do something slightly different going forward".

The opposite reaction, when the coach could not move beyond what they already knew, resulted in no new learning. There are examples within the groups where a coach was unable to move beyond their downloading (Scharmer, 2009). They came into the session describing a situation with a client, their inquiry was in service to confirming they had "done the right thing" and they allowed nothing in their perspectives to come into question or be shifted.

### Six: Practicing being a coach

Participation in the group offered a place to practice many competencies of a coach, including presence, being in relationship, curiosity, inquiry, listening, challenge and dialogue. By engaging in reflection on our work together, we called on and practiced many of the competencies required of executive coaches (McLean, 2019; International Coaching Federation, 2019; Rogers, J., 2008) including building trust and intimacy with others, being present, listening actively and deeply, holding unconditional positive regard

(Rogers, C.R., 1980), staying in curiosity, challenging or supporting as appropriate, observing one's self in the moment, self-regulating, demonstrating empathy, inquiring and contracting.

We used the group setting to practice being in relationship with others. In our practicing, through participation, each of us had the opportunity to witness these in the others' actions. Practice observing others. Could we be present with each other? Could we stay in unconditional positive regard or when did we move to judgment? Could we stay curious or did we go to problem solver? Were we listening or were we distracted? Were we triggered by something that came up? Or not? Did we jump into our story or stay with the other's story? There was practice space, for the varied ways of being what we wanted to be as a coach.

We utilized live-action coaching in the sessions to practice and to use the mini coaching session for reflection for the coach as their client case. This method opened up possibilities for the group members in other ways to work with a client and in their noticing their reactions while observing the coach and client work together. There were a handful of ways to do live-action coaching.

We reflected on self-as-coach (McLean, 2019) and our coaching practices, with as much vulnerability as we could in those moments; utilizing our ability to observe our interactions in the past (Schön, 1983; reflection-on-action), to share with the group, reflect critically, on occasion, and practice these crucial skills which led to a deepening awareness and insight by the participants, discoveries of blind spots, strengths and development edges, the impact of their own stories on their client relationships and coaching stance, toward personal and professional development in service to their clients.

## Opportunities for reflection

### Pre-session Reflection

Some coaches found receiving an email with a reflection question a few days in advance of the session very useful, others found case write-ups in advance to be useful. It reminded them of the session, it invited them to reflect, and to prepare for the session.

There were at least 5 kinds of opportunities for pre-session reflection for both the coaches and the supervisors:

1. A reflection question sent in advance which was either questions, quotes, or very short videos (See Appendix 14).
2. The supervisees who prepared for the session reflected on their practice to decide what case, issue or theme they might bring to the group; the supervisor preparing for the session reflected on the group.
3. The presenting coach sent a write-up of their case, issue or theme to the group in advance.
4. The presenting coach sent a recording and transcript in advance to the group with a request to listen or watch.
5. The coaches and supervisors reflected on something that had happened in earlier sessions, or earlier times of learning, and brought it forward for this session.

These are illustrated in the figure below.



Figure 24: Pre-session reflection possibilities

### In session reflections—presenting coach

The presenting coach would bring their voice into the room through describing the case, issue or theme. They shared their story, in a few minutes, of what had happened, often with a description of the client and the client's system, the overall contract, the relationship with the client, and what was stirring for them that resulted in their bringing this situation to the group. The supervisor would inquire with them about their inquiry with the group – what did they want to focus on. The group would co-inquire with them opening possibilities in new ways to see or consider what had happened. They often noticed what was coming up for them in the group and how that in-the-moment awareness sometimes informed their understanding or provided new insights about the situation. There were times when the dialogue led to the coach identifying new approaches or ways to be with the client or with his-or-her-self as the coach. Focusing on in-the-session reflection cycles possible for the presenting coach are illustrated below.

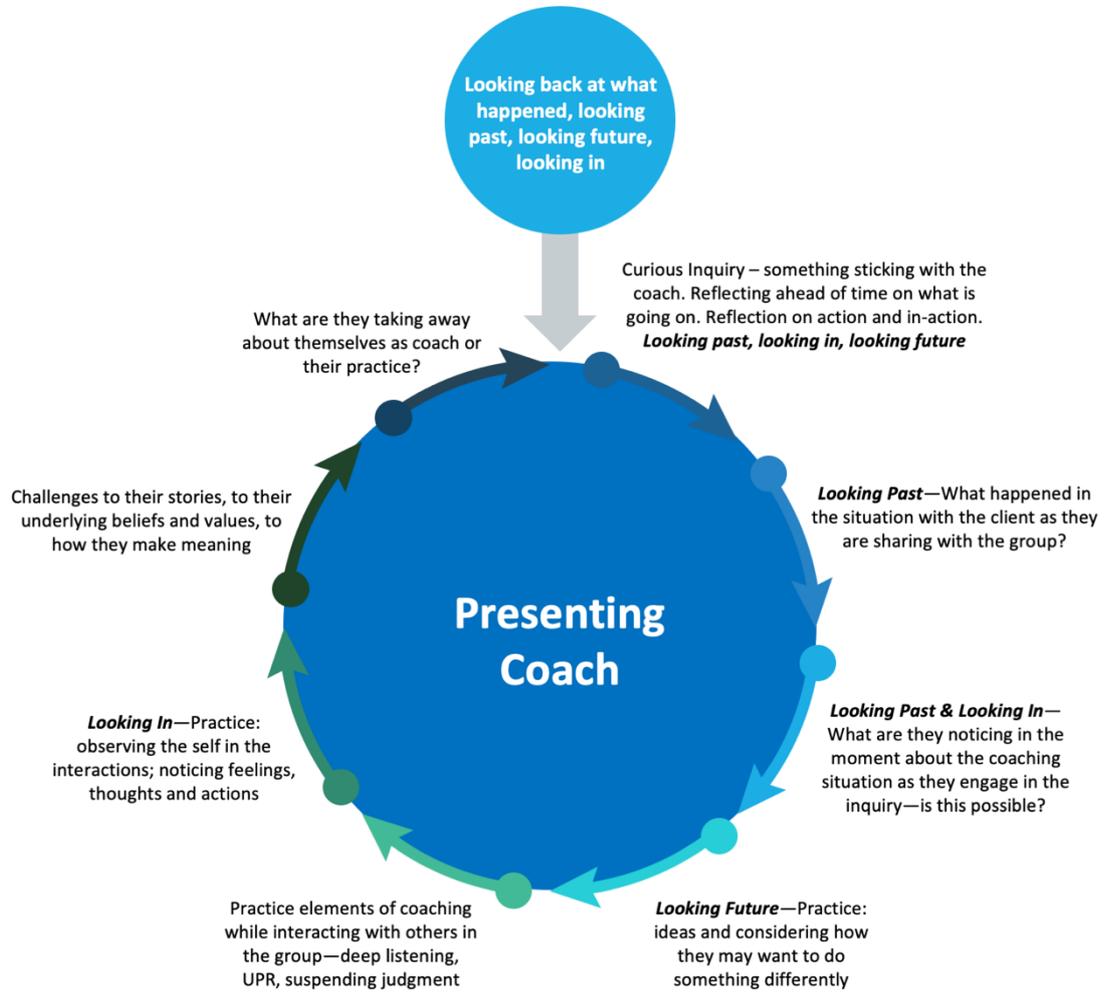


Figure 25: In-Session Reflection Cycles: Presenting Coach

## In session reflections—group members

Another way of visualizing the reflective practice and the practice opportunities is to consider the other members of the group – they have similar opportunities for both reflection and practice.

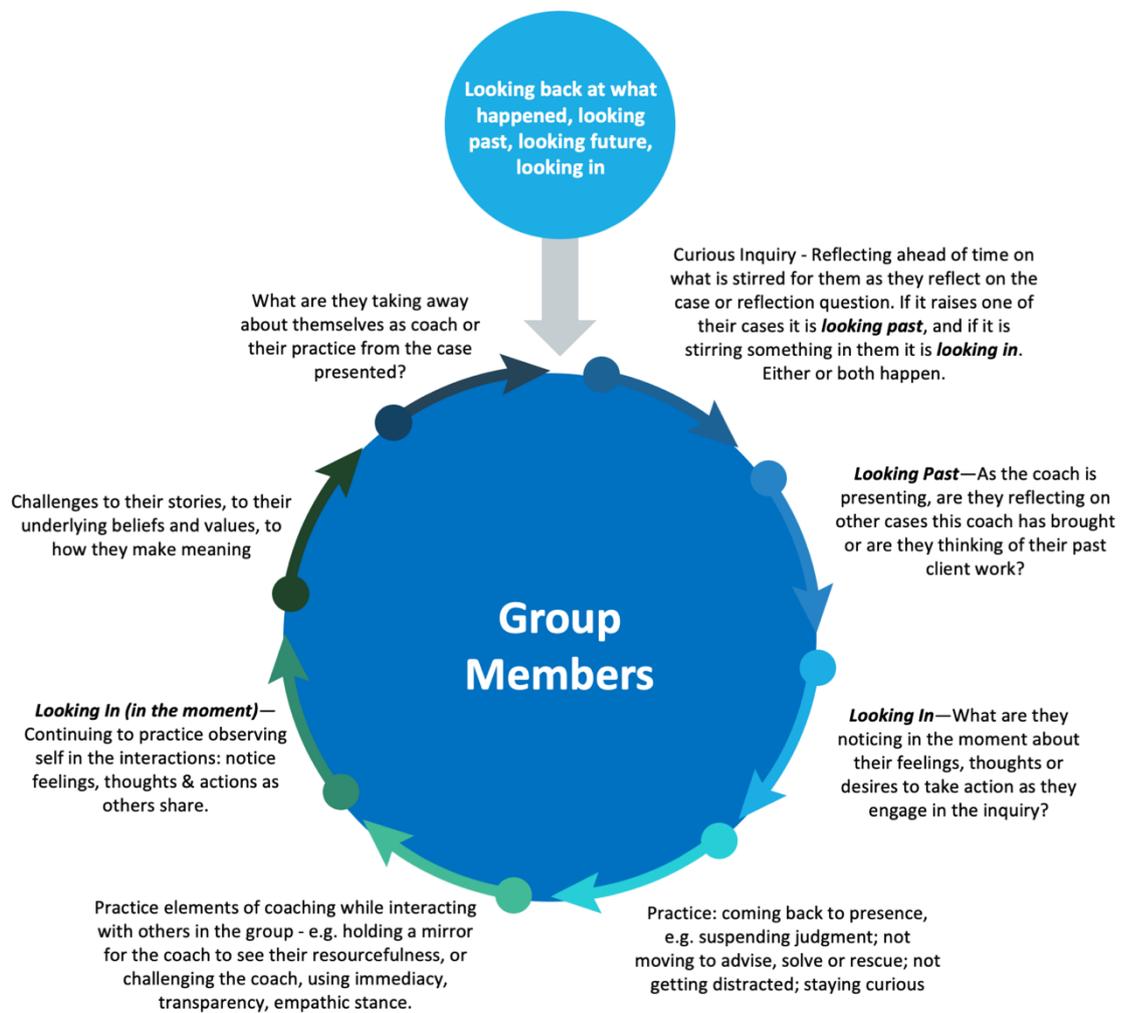


Figure 26: In Session Reflection Cycles Group Members

If we were to diagram this, using Kolb’s (2015) experiential learning cycle, we would see that there are learning cycles for each person, including the supervisor, some of these overlap in some content areas, and some are discreet. One of the key elements of the

circle was that after review of what happened, one could identify what they wanted to do differently, and seek out opportunities to practice. The group sessions offered practice space as well as reflection space.

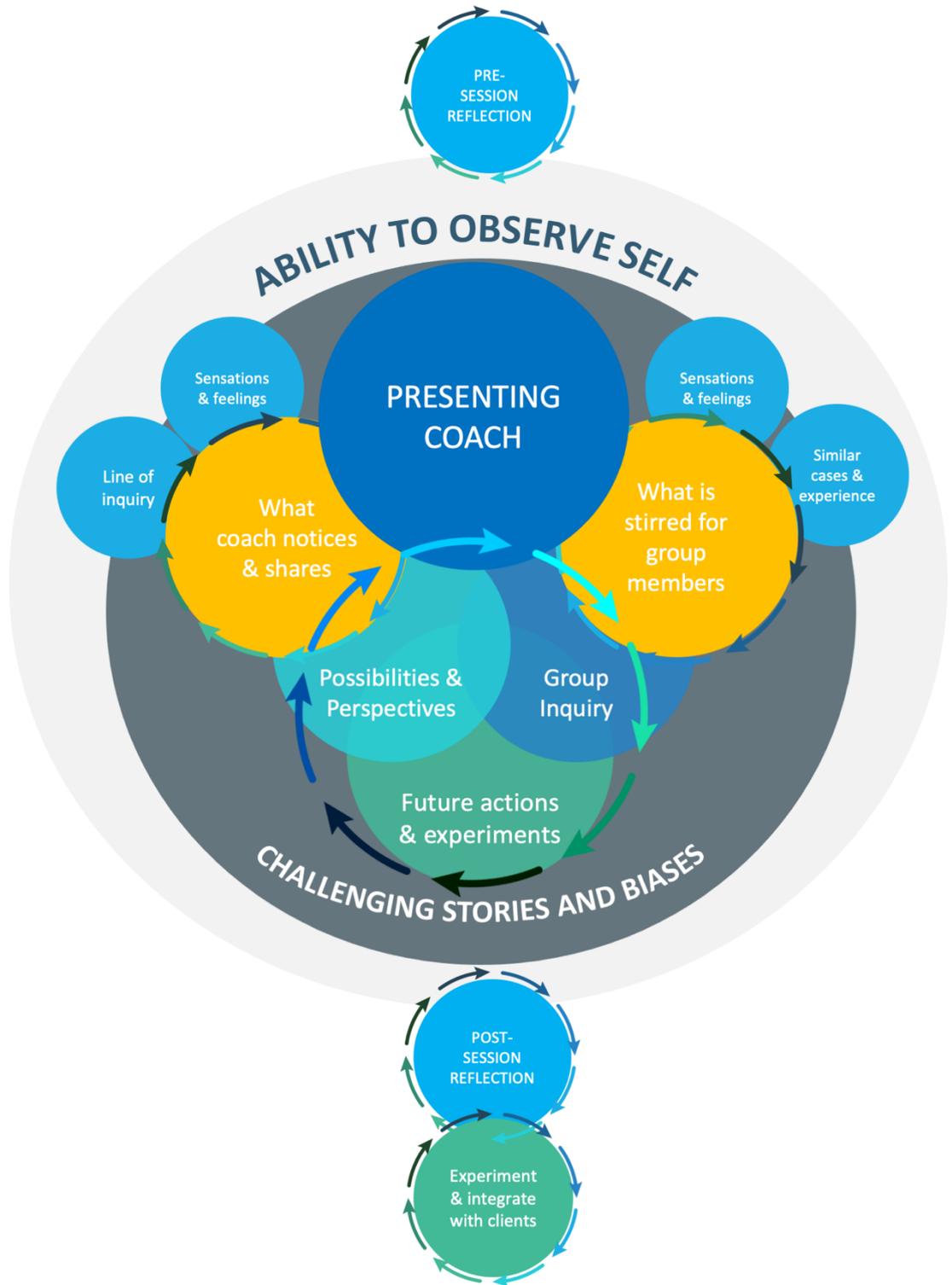


Figure 27: In-session Reflection Cycles

Our learning did not map to the calendar. The coaches articulated their learning in 3 moments each month: reflections coming into the session, within the session and in the journaling. This does not reflect the totality of what may have been learned or continues to be learned by each participant; it reflects what was disclosed or observed. The learning cycle is “a continuous recursive spiral of learning” (Kolb, 2015, p.61). The figure below illustrates the potential for continuous learning and reflection.

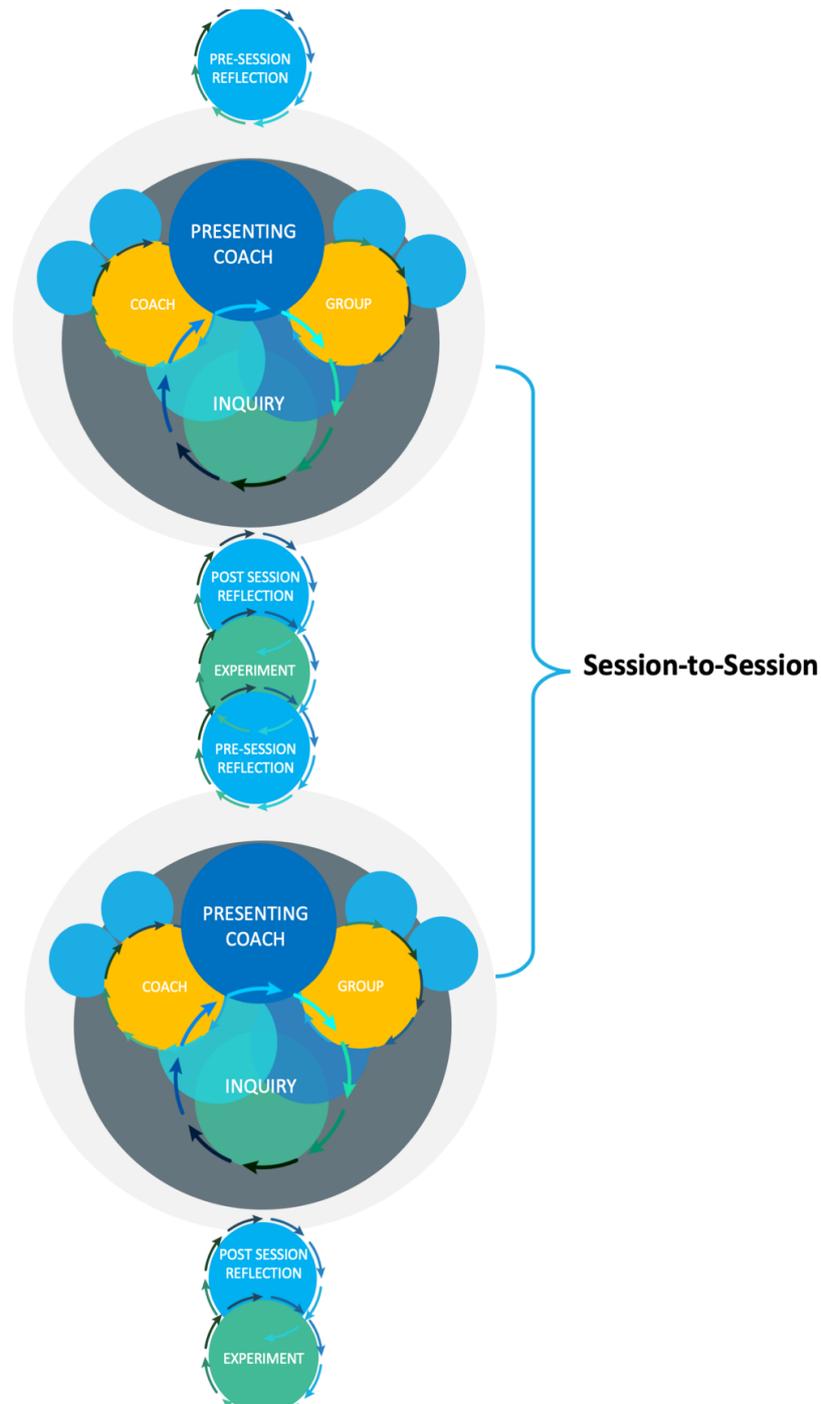


Figure 28: The Reflection and Learning Cycles

### Influence and impact: Sharing the reflective practice model with participants and other supervision groups

In my final meetings with the five groups, as I described in the last chapter, I shared an earlier version of the reflective practice model. I asked the groups to listen for whether it felt true to their experiences. They confirmed that it did represent their experiences. No participant raised an issue or concern.

The supervisors' and coaches' responses to the reflective practice model was one of enthusiasm for a new articulation of what was going on in the supervision sessions. They had grasped aspects of what I described but had not understood it as I presented it. Their experiences felt more disjointed than the model. Two consistent responses were that cultivating one's ability to observe one's self was crucial, and they appreciated understanding for the first time all that was possible in reflective practice within the sessions. Comments included:

- "in awe of the distillation of these reflection practices and while it seems sort of emergent in the moment...there is really a purpose and thoughtfulness put into the questions you are asking us..."
- "biggest benefit...is that this is practice space...becoming more self-aware and how we show up"
- "as you talk through this, yes, yes and yes...often reflection is an individual practice and supervision makes it collective"
- "value adds for us as we figure out how to maximize this supervision experience"

I have integrated the reflective practice model into my ongoing supervision. I have introduced it to my longer-term groups, and with new groups, I introduced it about 6-8 sessions into the year when they have had enough supervision experiences to be able to consider what connects with them. Each time, there are insights, curiosities and resonance. It often broadens the coaches' perspectives of what is actually possible within supervision. On occasion I can sense the "settling into" a greater ease of the experience; or an overwhelm at all of the possible moving parts. A list of webinars where I have shared my findings is set out in Appendix 13.

### Outcomes: The coaches learning

Coaches learned and developed in supervision, in small, experiential or transformative ways in service to the continuing personal and professional growth.

The reasons for coaching supervision are personal and professional growth. Was this accomplished in these sessions? What were the learning outcomes of these year-long engagements in supervision? Are these the questions to start with? We joined the participants for several months out of their several decades of life experience. We stayed with them only for this limited period and they continued on their journeys (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). It was their declarations, in the sessions, in the journaling, in the action learning meetings or focus groups that enabled me to write about the learning they claimed at those moments in time. I brought my own observational skills to frame what other learning may have occurred— and I offer those instances— as well as what I perceived as obstacles to potential learning.

### Group composition impact on learning

Group composition had an impact on the learning and development that occurred; actively coaching coaches appeared to have learned more in a group with others with robust coaching practices than with emerging coaches; whether this was true with groups with coaches who had been active and had moved on to other endeavors is not clear.

In the Creating Community Group, the most experienced coach explicitly claimed experiential and transformational learning in her coaching practice. The other members articulated that their significant learning was about how to be in relationship and create a “safe harbor” to be with others with the fullness of their personal lives. They learned about showing up, being more authentic, and being in relationship. They took what they learned into their current context of work and life, rather than implementation in the coaching context. “Taking action itself involves the significant and distinctive process of instrumental learning, which can become decisive for successful transformational learning” (Mezirow, 1991, p.197).

Their participation created the space for them to learn how to observe themselves and begin to practice reflection; they were on the journey to becoming reflective practitioners.

However, the actively coaching coach had an experience in coaching supervision that was less substantive than if she had been in a group of similarly situated coaches. I hold three tension points as a supervisor about the culture within the supervision center that had supervisee-led group membership which came from our respect and honoring of adult learning principles (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 2015).

1. How were we, as supervisors, considering the membership composition in each group?
2. Was there a lack of appropriate boundaries around enrolment in the supervision groups?
3. Was the community so cohesive that the actively coaching coaches were reluctant to exclude existing members based on life transitions?

Coyle (2018) advocates that team members be chosen carefully, and weeded out (p.81), in the context of teams working together in organizations toward shared goals. Here the stated shared collective goal was the personal and professional development of the group members; yet was this true for those who had moved away from the coaching profession to other endeavors, including retirement? What was the collective accountability for the coaches who were seeking this development; if there was not accountability to the non-coaching group members for their own development, were there any ways for them to be accountable for contributing to the growth and development of the coaches actively coaching? Block (2009) states that “an invitation at its best must contain a hurdle or demand if accepted” which suggests the actively coaching demand would be appropriate in his approach (p.118); merely showing up would be insufficient.

## Reflective practice for emerging coaches

There is learning for emerging coaches in coaching supervision.

Clutterbuck and Megginson, (2011) developed a coaching maturity model, Hawkins and Shohet (2012) and Sheppard (2016) have proposed maturity models for coaching supervisees, identifying the different inquiries and focus the relatively newer coaches may have in supervision as contrasted with more experienced coaches. Sheppard (2016) observed 3 levels of supervisee's development— the novice, the experienced and the very experienced, intended to be useful to both the supervisor's approach and to the supervisee's self-understanding. In these models, it is assumed the coach is actively coaching.

I propose there is an earlier stage—one of “emerging coaches” that includes coaches who have completed their certification, were engaged in other endeavors (full time work, transitioning into retirement from full time employment, pausing for health reasons) and intended to coach in the future. These coaches sought coaching supervision, invested their time and money, for the learning community, to keep their familiarity with the coaching methodology and to have opportunities to think through client situations. The demand for this exists, whether it is coaching supervision or reflective practice for emerging coaches.

## Ethical Considerations and Findings

### One-on-one interactions outside the group

It was useful, in limited circumstances, for the supervisor to engage one on one with a group member, outside the full group setting.

The context in which one-on-one interactions occurred with a group member outside of the group fell generally into two buckets. The first was when there was a possible relationship breach between the supervisor and one of the coaches. For example, I responded if they had reached out to discuss and I initiated when I was feeling there might be an issue. If the breach was apparent to the group, I asked the coach to share the

resolution in the next group session. The second was when the coach personally initiated communication with the supervisor about a personal matter, e.g., a shame storm, not feeling valued by the group. I did not specifically contract for this with these groups and I think it should have been. I do know that the other supervisors had one-on-one conversations when it felt appropriate to them; I do not know if they explicitly contracted for this.

In my community of supervisors, the supervision engagement is structured for multiple interactions: the supervisor and full group in the monthly supervision sessions, the group without the supervisor in the monthly peer learning calls, emails continuing discussions or raising issues for on-the-spot supervision by email, leaving it up to the coach which emails go to the full group and which to the peer learning group. In addition, the coaches sometimes have interconnected relationships outside of the group. We had discussed the issues that might arise within the group dynamics where there is one-on-one communication and as a group of supervisors concluded this practice was more useful to the supervisory relationships than harmful.

### Protecting confidentiality

The use of video recordings of clients requires precise contracting to ensure confidentiality and the appropriate deletion of the recordings. The distribution of client session video recordings to the group for advance listening raised greater confidentiality concerns. I contracted with the group about retention only for the few days before the session and deletion of the recordings following the session.

My project proposal, as approved, contained the commitments to protect the confidentiality of the participants and the identities of clients in any recorded coaching session; the Informed Consents incorporated these commitments. The recordings of the supervision sessions, in which we listened or watched a portion of the client coaching session were edited, and the transcripts were redacted, to remove the client session.

## Adult learning – balance of accountability and acceptance

In my researcher role, I acted ethically in accepting the decisions of the participants on what they would experiment with in their supervision sessions.

I was puzzling over whether the role of researcher, as compared with the supervisor role, required more accountability with participants. The research agreements, in the Informed Consent, stated “You will be asked, as a group, to experiment at least once with each of three observational approaches: the use of live-action coaching, transcripts and recordings of actual client sessions.” In the first meetings I had with each group, I stated that I hoped they would experiment. One group, supervised by a colleague, had decided not to proceed with the use of recordings. I wondered about my role as researcher and about my relationships with them. My initial stance was to accept what they decided; I could not imagine how to “require” this in any event.

I was learning how to be a researcher and noticed my worry and frustration about getting it approximately correct. A critical friend in academia in the US had advised me that I had a responsibility to ensure all the participants engaged as asked. I returned to living the principles of adult learning—that if the process was going to be meaningful for them, it would have to be their decision, when they were ready, in recognition of the value the learning could provide and motivated by the service to the profession and to their own development (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 2015, pp.43-47).

As an insider-researcher, one element of designing the research was to “give a say to all participants” (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010, p.6). What they were saying was no recordings. They did not see a need to learn a new method; they had been engaged in meaningful and supportive supervision for 5-6 years. They did not see any value in experimenting and the group reported a variety of barriers both in time and client relationships. They articulated the fears of disrupting their patterns within the group and of negative feedback. At the same time, they were innovating their ways of using live-action coaching methods, and they used the transcript brought by one coach. The most

important consideration for insider-practitioners is the duty of care, of approaching the research with a caring approach in each relationship and interaction (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010, p.43). I accepted their decisions.

### Potential harm to participants

There was no harm incurred by the participants through the research process. In the second and third meetings with the groups I inquired if the participation in the research was having any impact on them. Some of the responses were that they had forgotten about it as it wasn't something they talked about. More of the responses were that it had not had any impact. A few coaches said that it had a positive impact as they were more awake to their practice because of the opportunity to contribute to the profession.

### The research happened within a commercial arrangement

As the researcher in my relationships with the participants I prioritized that they were engaged in a commercial arrangement for supervision. As noted earlier, my agreement with the sponsoring organization was that the research would take place within the standard commercial relationship. The coaches would pay the standard rates for supervision; the supervisors would be paid the standard rates for supervising; I was being paid to supervise the Creating Community Group. The only group that was excepted from this arrangement was the pilot group (which was renamed the Daring Group) as it was expected to only be a three-session pilot.

I have been mindful to ensure the supervision purposes were primary; that the commercial arrangements between the sponsoring organization and the participants were not negatively impacted by the research asks, and that the brand of the organization was appropriately represented. One measure that this was successfully accomplished is that coaches in four of the groups renewed for another year, although some individual participants, for personal reasons (e.g., retirement, pursuing a Ph.D., running a company) did not. In the fifth group, two of the three coaches had transitioned out of coaching, so they did not renew, independent of their participation in the research.

This concludes my findings. In the next chapter I share my conclusions and my evolving theory of practice.