
Introduction

The book and I: a reflective journey

Looking back at the times when I was reflecting on the contents of this book and how to best present them, I realised that this book had morphed, taking on a life of its own, as a tangible expression of the way my own thoughts were evolving, influenced by external events and by my own thinking, preferences and values and how I was moderating this interplay, by keeping the readers in mind.

I initially considered writing a book, after almost two decades of practice as a career coach, because the work with hundreds of individuals over thousands of hours of coaching had generated a significant amount of information that seemed to structure itself around themes and patterns. I thought that the work done between me and so many clients had co-created a valuable nugget of wisdom, which deserved recognition and needed to be reshaped into an open gift to many others, likely to encounter similar situations and contemplate similar challenges and questions.

But as I went back in time, to collect my material, I could not help paying attention to the signals of the present, about the things to come in the world of work, in the future. With readers in mind, I asked myself again who will this book serve and for what purpose, to conclude that it was imperative for the book to serve not only the present but more importantly the future and those who need to prepare today for the world of work of tomorrow.

The urgency of this new objective was amplified by the increasingly unsettling realisation that the future has become, at this point in our evolution, somewhat impossible to fathom, because it involves changes and transformations never seen before and so making it difficult to extrapolate and predict something for which we have no historic data to work with.

In addition, having worked in the last few years with a younger generation – people aged between twenty and forty – it is a fact that they contemplate up to forty years of an active working life ahead of them with decreasing certainty about what the world will look like, even in the next few years. In this light, and with a need to still be somewhat prepared, it became clear that the only

certain resource they could count on was themselves. Meaning that awareness of self, others and volatile contexts, readiness of resources, flexibility, resilience, self-belief and hope were imperative more than ever before; the very domain of personal development and coaching.

And so the book that started as a reflection on the past experience, set to inform the readers of today, acquired the reassigned purpose of also serving the future. I then set about to design the best way I could gather and present the contents to fit this more ambitious purpose of being useful to a wider audience.

Considering the equal importance of various strands of interest, the number of perspectives that I decided to represent increased to six, to cover: my client group, an individual case study, my thoughts on my reflective practice, people who take an interest in actively managing their careers, academics and researchers and, last but not least, my peer coaches. As a result, the relevant content was structured as follows:

- Themes and trends emerging from my clients as a group: positioning this material from the perspective of a practitioner–researcher, which is briefly described further in this section
- Myself as a case study, because specific examples are useful to complement group findings, but restrictions around confidentiality are sensitive and I wanted to have total freedom of expressing such information
- Professional reflective thoughts and knowledge; as a practicing professional psychologist and coach
- Scientific models, theories and research that are used in development work and can be useful to all who wish to go deeper in making sense of themselves and the world
- Useful suggestions and practical tips that everyone can apply in their own career and personal development
- An overview of the capabilities that are likely to be useful in the future, as a way to prepare for the seismic changes that the world of work will experience in the next five to twenty years.

This task has been trying at times – plagued by indecisions between the option of covering a lot of ground and that of focusing on a few specifics – but also useful and joyous; one unintended consequence led me to an unexpected window into my own evolution as a person, thinker, professional and writer. I had the chance to review the way my thoughts have been guided by inheritance, nurture and education; how the seeds of knowledge and ways of thinking planted in my teens and early twenties in school and university have built a scaffolding upon which the rest of my experience and knowledge has found a place to rest and merge with all the other fragments of accumulated experience. Also, I experienced a new confirmation of the importance of understanding the history of our cognitive and moral development as the legacy that founded our adult personal and professional development.

Our actions are an outward expression of our inner worlds and the many sub-personalities and identities that we contain, and so this book is also an artefact of my history and my resulting thoughts, after a meandering journey of months during which it transformed many times under the pressures and conflicting demands of my own considerations and changing perspectives. I am hoping that reading this book will also enable others to do the same, as they move along the chapters; take a moment to reflect, become aware of and own their identity on a deeper level, and embrace the strengths and the foundations that the reading journey will reveal about present and future professional and personal options.

Setting the scene

The scope of this book may be ambitious, and it is by design. It represents an attempt to map our increasingly challenging, divided, volatile and contradictory world, as a result of a rapid succession of major disruptive events that have marked the first two decades of this millennium, followed by suggestions on how to respond to this in an adaptive way.

The social, ideological, political, economic and geographic tensions and conflicts have now spread – all rolled up into one big wave – across the planet, uncontrolled and unresolved, sending clear and alarming signs of a leadership adrift, that lacks answers. Yet we remain unavoidably positioned for a continued, accelerated and massive shift in an unclear direction, with the rapid unravelling and transformation of the world as we have known it. This new world is set to be complex and unpredictable and can no longer be explained, understood or controlled by the usual thinking paradigms. What has worked before may no longer work in the future and there is no clarity on how to get out of this predicament in a swift and easy way. The days of ready answers are gone.

At an individual level, all this calls for an adaptive change. The next level of a developmental stretch involves stepping up to a view of the world and a way of thinking that demands some capability and fluency in complex thinking containing paradoxes and the acceptance of uncertainty as part of a normal life, and proactively builds flexibility and adaptive resilience as a new model to face this unprecedented challenge. Hopefully this book provides content for such a stretch and facilitates a paradigm shift beyond current comfort zones, to mirror reality and mobilise individual and collective strengths.

The lenses here are set to look at the interplay between individual facets, the social context, and the wider global community, shining an integrative and hopefully useful light on complexities within complexities. And we should clearly differentiate between complex and complicated; two completely different concepts. Complexity is about intricacy and subtleties, about a non-linear causality where cause and effect are not directly visibly linked, and where the link between events is so distanced in time that we cannot see it; complexity is also about intended and unintended consequences and about probability

instead of certainty. Complexity is unsettling not because it is too complicated, but because often the answers are probabilistic and this requires us to deal with anxiety and uncertainty whilst remaining strong and hopeful. Complexity has its own elegance and dynamic principles that can be understood and explain its inner activity.

Making sense of the world around us is one of the defining characteristics of humankind. We need to find meaning, assign value and find certainty, feed our hopes, and act in the best way we can at a given point in time. Our humanity – personal or collective – has been and may continue to be our greatest strength and weakness. Finding that deep core, that evolving yet still point, from where to flexibly and adaptively adjust to an emerging context, whatever this may be, could provide an answer to successfully riding this storm, from a strong individual inner centre of self-belief, to meaningful connections with others, to the co-creation of an adaptive capability for the future of humankind.

Intended audiences and outcomes

Various categories of readers may benefit from this book in different ways, depending on circumstances. For people in their twenties, who contemplate half a century of working life before retirement at seventy – if today’s parameters still hold – it is imperative to become alert to the signs on the horizon and create an integrated picture of the fast approaching new world, in order to develop resilience, flexibility and an understanding of their skills and how they can meet the challenges and opportunities ahead. This, alongside a clear understanding that their working life will be quite different; fragmented across a few changes in profession or activity, with different ways of delivering work, which may include a mix of corporate employment, self-employment, working for a small company, or delivering against successive short contracts, specific sets of skills for a pre-agreed “gig” and amount of money, arrived at by a bidding process. Faced with this future, being prepared and establishing a point of certainty within themselves becomes critical.

For those readers in mid working life, the question is how to adapt, upskill and overcome the technology gap to remain professionally relevant for another fifteen to twenty years and respond adaptively to situations where they may have to step out of their comfort zone, work in contexts they may not prefer, and embrace resilience and change as a way of life. For readers close to retirement, the challenge is how to continue staying active and pledge their wisdom and experience for the greater good, perhaps secure part-time work, in spite of a massive technology gap and generational differences.

For people who contemplate becoming self-employed (start a business) after some time in employment, or those who have never been employed but have always worked for themselves, there is scope to reflect on how this type of work is delivering on what they set out to achieve. Perhaps they will ask some questions about the alignment between who they are and what they have to

offer or gain in this exchange with the outer world, or have the need to rethink or change their working path and careers by evaluating their employed or self-employed status, starting from the “self”.

Coaches may use this book as an opportunity to have a career review in terms of self-evaluating how fit for practice they are, going forward. The integrated vision of the future of work, presented here, offers a fast and ready digest of what is to come and assists with ways of proactively adapting personal and professional capabilities, thinking and practice, so as to remain relevant and helpful to clients, who face an emerging new world of business and work.

The human resources practitioners, who are the custodians of the recruitment process, may wish to see how “the other half feels” about the recruitment process. And as candidates in their own quest for work, they may also evaluate their own professional position in the future world of work and prepare for the forthcoming changes. Finally, academics may find themes, topics or informed opinions that could capture their imagination and create an appetite for some novel and specific lines of research.

Therefore, whilst attempting to write a book for “everyone” may be too ambitious, the fact is that everyone able, and of age, is actually in work right now and will continue to work for whatever duration applies to their circumstances. As a result, everyone is quite likely to be challenged at several points in their life, by the need to adapt and change, and will have to pause, reflect and decide on the path of their future working life. And do so a number of times, over a number of decades. This is how things are. And the critical difference is in whether we accept to allow such a path to “happen to us” or we help along events, opportunities and change, by exercising a sense of purpose and agency, coming from awareness and active involvement in the dynamic context of our times. And this is indeed a decision that everyone, sooner or later, will have to make!

Contents, style and structure

I have used accessible language and structured the contents in a way intended to make sense and follow an internal organic flow. There are sections where I felt I had to introduce a more rigorous tone, to support opinions, examples and lessons learned, because of a personal belief in the value of formal and scientific backing to our experiential views. This is why the book combines, on the one hand, the information that I have gathered from practice and, on the other hand, in the second chapter, a number of models and scientific thinking that are likely to help in structuring the experiential knowledge, by providing multiple frameworks to explain it.

The book has a structure that looks at the relevance of the legacy of the past experience (Chapter 1) and then consolidates this legacy in the present aided by a scientific underpinning (Chapter 2). It then moves forward with a vision of the future and the world of work in the age of artificial intelligence (Chapter 3)

and finally concludes with what are the learnings of past and present that individuals and groups of people could take with them into the future (Chapter 4) to prepare their successful transition and landing into an age of great change, at the cusp of a new unprecedented chapter in the history of humanity. The four chapters are interconnected, but are also structured as stand-alone pieces.

Notwithstanding my own interest, I have introduced scientific theories and models to provide credibility and formal underpinnings and language to real life examples that enable everyone to access the theory. As a result, the formality of some sections has purposely been complemented by accessible case studies and comments in plain language to hopefully remain interesting for all. Guided by primary sources that I have tapped into – for almost two decades – in my own Continued Professional Development (CPD) specifically related to coaching and psychology, I have also used for this book current information that is freely available to all, on the internet. This is why I have given few references, hoping instead, that this will stimulate individual research in readers who wish to further explore some of the themes, and extend to them the invitation to engage their own curiosity and follow their own cognitive style, rather than mine.

The relationship between theory of science and reality is strong. By endeavouring to expand our appreciation of a conceptualised representation of our outer and inner worlds, in the way science talks about them, we can also develop another level of thinking and comfortably work with the intricate and interconnected rules, principles and dynamic factors that have been instrumental in describing, changing and moving our own minds, as well as the world around us.

This aspect is mainly evidenced in sections where I have brought in philosophical and scientific examples, research and other pieces of information that relate to what the future may look like – or what type of higher conceptual structure we need to consider in the way we develop and use our higher level of thinking, in evaluating our opportunities and choices. This we will have to do in the complex and uncertain world – the world of work as it will manifest itself to us – after the fourth industrial revolution; a world dominated by Big Data and the artificial intelligence (AI) of the learning machines of the future.

The themes and subjects covered are not treated exhaustively and there is a lot of information and literature in the public domain that provides great detail to those who wish to pursue a more in-depth exploration. Instead, what is attempted here is the opposite: to create an integrated “big picture”, which is not commonly done, because it is challenging. To this end, I have used a “sampling” approach. I selected a number of subjects that could be significant and useful, which I have covered just enough to have an impact and hopefully leave a mark of their own; but also be instrumental when trying to reconstruct the wider view, which in fact reflects reality much better. Because our wider context is dynamic, complex and unbounded; and this is a challenge.

We introduce the linearity of time and the simpler cause and effect or inputs-outputs principles to make sense of reality around outcomes, in some succession and in an easier-to-understand way. But even so, there are many other planes of concurrent activity that continue to happen, even if we have narrowed our field of vision and do not look that way. It would therefore be useful for us to become more capable of holding this wider vision by first using such familiar knowledge islands as markers – like nodes in a flexible mesh or a net – to later re-create the vision of the entire archipelago, which as a result becomes more familiar and easier to understand and navigate. So the subjects and themes covered in the book are meant to become such markers or stepping islands; individually covered enough to leave a useful trace in our minds, as a first step to building a much richer and complex context to our thinking. This can hopefully increase our capacity to work with a dynamic foreground-background flexible interplay, in a concurrent and fluid manner.

In reality, in our shifting, rapidly changing, volatile and uncharted future, where predictability will be low and probabilistic, high background activity will continue even when we may be absorbed with what is immediately in front of our eye. Across this dynamic landscape I felt it necessary to find a thread of certainty, to connect past, present and future, to guide our way, back and forth, across events and history, to also connect us with our human nature and our amazing resources of transformation, adaptability and resilience. Based on my work with clients and my own reflections, I believe that thread to be deeply set in our system of ethics, values and beliefs and our individual identity, to support that unique psychological marker and identifier of who we are.

This personal psychological profile is unique for each one of us, even if we know that it has been forged by many shared and common dimensions across all individuals of our species and under the collective influence of our societies. And it is this synthesised core that makes us who we are both as individuals and as members of our collective humankind, which has been, is and will continue to be our raft – our surfing board – that will hold firm against the waves and the unpredictable winds of the future changes.

If well designed, constantly maintained, upgraded and skilfully used, it will keep us afloat and enable us to navigate and choose the direction of travel that will lead us to a shore where we can start building a new existence, on a new ground and for a better new world. Without a doubt there are going to be casualties on this perilous journey in stormy, choppy waters, but the hope for success and triumph resides still within ourselves and the way we build a strong core as our own strong reliable foundation, whilst otherwise we will need to flex, reshape and transform in whichever way the – sometimes hostile, sometimes auspicious – demands of the future impose on us.

Self-developing or coaching from the centre, from the core, from the inside out, offers a profound and impactful way to adapt to the world of work of the future and to the world as such, because it is within our direct reach. Putting together an experience-based argument in favour of such a personal approach

to our responsibility for our adaptation to the future and aspiration for a successful transition also enabled me to reflect on my own transitions and development as a professional. This resonated with the practitioner–researcher framework proposed for coaching in 2011.

Healing the divide between theory and practice: the practitioner–researcher model in coaching

In many ways, the journey of this book is similar to my own journey from childhood to the professional adult that I am today. I was raised with an appreciation for science, technology and the arts. My first years as a professional were spent learning and acquiring knowledge and filtering it through my understanding at the time, which grew with experience, to the point when I eventually had something to offer and share with others. This development reflected the worlds of our existence: an individual one and a collective one.

And there are people who follow a vocation and choose the way in between those worlds, to act as facilitators, “skilled others”, as a result of their own quest for development but also because they wish to illuminate the developmental path of their fellow human beings. They belong to the category of occupations known as talking therapies and dialogical professions. Practicing coaches, psychologists, mentors, therapists, counsellors, psychiatrists and advisors have all contributed over time to gathering a significant body of knowledge, which has given rise to models, techniques and scientific scrutiny as a formalised and standardised synthesis, offering a solid platform to that which has been collected in the first instance, intuitively and experientially. And eventually I also joined them.

But in my first business career, in the corporate world, my focus was on the market and the products. Therefore my acquisition of knowledge and the way I processed my thoughts were directed at and related to the scope and objectives set for me by someone else – that is to say, by the job description and by the organisation. And I pursued my other interests on the periphery of this core activity, which I genuinely enjoyed very much.

The world of business fascinates me because it combines people, process, technology, culture and leadership – all so different in nature, yet connected in one dynamic entity that is almost miraculously effective and produces a designated outcome. I have met a lot of interesting and inspiring people in business – who contributed an exceptional human (coaching and mentoring) touch to the excellent training programs and the availability of state of the art technology and methodologies for business and people management. But eventually, I experienced the feeling that a part of me was lost. That side of my Self, interested in the arts, poetry, writing, reflection, people and culture. Adaptively, I navigated towards “softer” business roles. Quality management – with its total quality management (TQM) philosophy and the self-managed teams with shared leadership – was one. Operational HR was another. Yet after a while, I became restless again with a sense that what I could learn in this environment had run

its course. Organisations were pushing me hard to be an achiever, an expert, and a “doer”; and with my mother’s legacy strong in me, I was happy to be one for a good while. But there was also my father’s legacy, sidetracked yet strong and asking for a place in my life. My Self was out of balance and I had for too long neglected to listen, to dream and to be. I had become someone who was not the real me, distorted by my context. It was time to reconsider my purpose and review my values. I needed to move on and rebalance myself by recovering what was missing; my other creative, sensitive, empathetic self. With so much experience acquired, I felt I needed to turn a new page, start working and developing under my own agenda, instead of that of an organisation.

This is how, after decades in international business, I became self-employed and regained full control to self-determine the direction of my development, the acquisition of knowledge, the alignment to my own values and beliefs, the content of my work, the way I delivered it, the people I chose to work with, my creative interests and, most importantly, who I was becoming. This led to my second career, which I began in 2001, as a practicing business psychologist and professional accredited coach, in London.

An important part of my coaching practice has been dedicated to career coaching, which always held a special place in my work due to the holistic aspect that career conversations take. Whilst at first glance career coaching is about updating a *curriculum vitae* (CV) – including CV writing services that are available to purchase – in order to find a new job, in fact it is not. Career coaching is really about a review of a person’s entire life; and in my experience, writing the CV is the last thing one does, and when that time comes, it writes itself; with no need to hire other people to write about one’s working life. This is because it is done with ease and pride by the client – the person who has now taken full ownership of their working life – with a newly gained, profound and meaningful understanding of their identity, empowered to decide, for themselves, from their core, the direction of travel into their working future.

This highly rewarding work was now enabling me, too, to acquire experience in a new and quite self-determined way; by my choice and in collaboration with people who also chose to work with me. And I also felt that the outcome of that extensive interaction with hundreds of people during thousands of hours was worth documenting, so that its value could be shared with and benefit many more.

Just like other dialogical professions or talking therapies, coaching has flourished in practice, well before being academically researched or peer group self-regulated. Meaning that just like therapy, psychiatry and psychoanalysis, coaching practitioners have initially gathered findings from case studies, which eventually reached a critical mass, significant enough to allow for process, structure, definitions and models to be created, and enable subsequent scientific research to formalise general explanatory principles. This has repositioned coaching as an increasingly credible and professionalised activity, rather than just another occupation.

Codes of ethics, training standards, accreditation criteria, professional associations, scientific papers and publications that have flourished since the early 2000s, have all contributed to formalising and controlling the practice of coaching, for the benefit and protection of the coaching clients and to create and maintain a positive reputation of professionalism for the coaching practice.

The practitioner–researcher model is one such framework that aims to end the academic vs. practitioner divide and put forward criteria that help differentiate the quality of coaching practice and the attainment of a certain level of quality, against competencies comparable to those of the academic researchers. In general perception and in the professional world, the academics are considered outsiders to the reality of practice, preoccupied with questions of a fundamental nature and focused on generalising knowledge and developing theory. To this end they also have access to funds and resources that may be needed for large-scale undertakings. The practitioner, on the other hand, is at the front end of the process, exercising a reflective practice effectively delivering, witnessing and analysing the reality or their client interactions, conducted in the context of a complex working, organisational and personal life. So the questions that they formulate reflect the context of their activity, the other players and their own role in the wider setting of their work.

The increasing reputation of coaching as an effective method, the accumulation of evidence, the involvement of science and rigour in the processing of evidence have all made the practice of coaching increasingly appealing to academics. As a result they, too, became progressively involved in part-time coaching work, alongside their core academic activities.

Competencies: Practitioner Researcher vs. Academic Researcher

COMENSA 2011

- Practitioner Researcher
- Achieving impact: commercial value, dissemination, use within practice, contribution to professions
- Research knowledge: research methodology knowledge, research design, listening and observing skills, maintaining credibility, adhering to process, discipline
- Self-management: Self-awareness, leadership, process management, stakeholder engagement, maintaining practice focus.
- Project management

VITAE UK 2010

- Academic Researcher
- Knowledge and intellectual ability: competencies, knowledge, creativity
- Personal effectiveness: self-management, personal effectiveness, CPPD.
- Research governance and organization: professional conduct, research management, finance, funding and resourcing
- Engagement, influence an impact: communication, dissemination, engagement and impact, working with others.

Figure 0.1

Career coaching is particularly suited to convergent academic and experiential scrutiny which – combined – supports the proposition of a practitioner–researcher role in coaching.

Unlike other types of coaching, career coaching has clear directive aspects plus rigorous steps similar to the scientific approach, such as: methods, tools, performance indicators, a critical path to goal attainment, transparent goal-setting and defined success outcomes, contracted and objectively measured. At the same time, the nature of the process work between coach and coachee is individualised, emergent, subjectively experienced and amplified by the quality of the relationship. The value of the practitioner’s personal experience when exercised against a set of criteria, and with the deployment of certain skills and capabilities, meets a way of scientific thinking that makes room for positioning oneself as a practitioner–researcher or scholar-practitioner, with a credible voice in the scientific world (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011).

It slowly but surely treads the path that leads from surveys and case studies to theory development and qualitative techniques, to quantitative randomised controlled trials, and finally to meta-analysis and outside-the-norm findings. This process reveals the acting factors, prerequisites and specific context, and expects a result that can be generalised and it is the way of “formal” research. But the complementary and mutually enhancing role of practitioners as inside researchers and academics as outside thinkers, both in the pursuit of the same purpose of finding answers, is rarely explored or realised even when it comes to long and old established professions. It is obvious that a dialogue between the two groups can only be meaningful and beneficial to both, plus the other potential users of those findings. However they are also separated by different values and thinking paradigms.

The differences reside not only in resources, time scales, issues and enquiry methods, but also a difference between the questions each group is interested in. In this light, raising questions about the respective competencies that may be needed for researchers and practitioners, as well as how those sets of competencies may be similar or different, is topical and pertinent (Armsby & Fillery-Travis, 2009).

Coaching practitioners, organised in professional groups such as The Global Coaching Community or local professional associations, such as the South African Coaching Professional Association (COMENSA), have come together with academics on the matter of competencies, and good progress has been made since 2010. Now there is a framework that identifies the clusters of competencies for practitioner–researchers, compared to academic researchers:

Practitioner–researcher

- a Achieving impact: commercial value, dissemination, use within practice, contribution to professions;
- b Research knowledge: research methodology knowledge, research design, listening and observing skills, maintaining credibility, adhering to process, discipline;

- c Self-management: self-awareness, leadership, process management, stakeholder engagement, maintaining practice focus;
- d Project management.

Academic researcher

- a Knowledge and intellectual ability: competencies, knowledge, creativity;
- b Personal effectiveness: self-management, personal effectiveness, CPPD;
- c Research governance and organisation: professional conduct, research management, finance, funding and resourcing;
- d Engagement, influence and impact: communication, dissemination, engagement and impact, working with others.

The overlap areas are quite clear, even if the language may be different (points a. and d.), (c. and b.), (b. and a.), for example. The points of difference relate mainly to:

- *Source of funding*: external versus within practice itself;
- *Stakeholder engagement*: to raise funds (at the beginning of the process) or throughout the research process (in the case of the “insider” position of the practitioner);
- *Explicit sharing of the research back to the profession*: publishing is mandatory in academia but not a regular activity in the practitioner community.

The practitioner–researcher model applied

I hold a strong belief in the value of backing up practice with science, and experience with formal training. I also believe that our opinions and perspectives benefit from being informed and supported by what the wider circle of academic and practitioner peers may have to offer as credible and robust; a common body of professional references.

And this is how I related my own activity to the practitioner–researcher model when reflecting on my competencies and overall professional capability. My career took me from an extensive international business practice back to my earlier interest in and study of psychology, having accumulated on the way significant cross-cultural savvy gained through life and work in six countries, which all led to me establishing an evidence-based belief that the critical factor of success in business and life relates to people factors.

My point of access into management consulting happened to be career coaching, in an associate role. This setting provided structure and rigour to the process of working with individual career coaching clients. This enabled me to track and map my own body of experiential evidence, against the practitioner–researcher competencies listed previously. And here are some highlights of that match:

On the subjects of research knowledge, methodology and discipline, in career coaching there is specific knowledge supported by:

- Specific selection/recruitment process to this profession;
- Specific career coaching training;
- Experienced peer environment;
- Continued professional development (CPD) and supervision.

The operational set-up included:

- Use of specific systems;
- Data recording and reporting against key performance indicators;
- Client and sponsor satisfaction tracking and reporting;
- Process improvement;
- Multi-contracting between service providers, corporate sponsors and individual coachees;
- Integration of the career coaching function within the wider remit of talent management.

The packages offered to clients enabled for me a fast learning curve and exposure to high client diversity and visibility of the outcomes – hard to otherwise achieve in private practice in such a short period of time and within a regulated and formalised set-up, at the beginning of my own coaching career. This satisfied my own standards gained in my previous years with exceptionally good companies, which required a highly professionalised context for practice, and to which I had long been accustomed.

Self-management – evidenced in:

- Process management: as required by the packages on offer and the goals and targets that were pre-set;
- Stakeholder engagement: by the communication and reporting that linked targets, goals and results through the “four-way contracting” (sponsor, individual coachee, coach and service delivery organisation);
- Maintaining practice focus: my main task as a coach was to deliver career coaching services, directly and indirectly, to individual coachees, sponsors and the delivery organisation. In this dynamic process I have been able to gather my own sample of data by meeting hundreds of individuals who found themselves at that point in time in a moment of transition, change and need for decision-making and decisive, focused action to further their professional lives.

In parallel I also developed my own private practice of clients, which added another set of contracting and working principles that I developed myself.

Knowledge and intellectual ability – including competencies, knowledge and creativity, as follows:

- Psychology: also psychophysiology and psychopathology, therapy, pharmacology, psychiatry, experimental psychology – all providing scientific underpinning to my thinking and work;
- Sociology: group dynamics, social group, anthropology, enculturation and acculturation, which provide models on thinking and behaviour of groups;
- Psychometric assessments: for occupational assessments of abilities and personality (known in the UK as levels A/B) plus, StressScan, Thinking Style, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Jung Type Indicator (JTI), Birkman, Values & Motives, Fifteen Factor Questionnaire Plus (15FQ), Belbin, Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), The Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory–2 (MMPI-2), Occupational Stress Inventory (OSI), and so on – all useful ways to map and articulate ideas about individual preferences in mental processes and behaviours;
- Neuroscience: MRI-driven knowledge on the workings of the amygdalae and the limbic system, to regulate subcortical emotions and related behaviour – provided specific science related to processes of the mind and behaviours;
- Executive and team coaching: variety of models as stated previously also own models – the Unified Coaching Model and the Onion Model, the multilayers of culture;
- Philosophy: dialectic materialist principles, history of philosophy, formal logic and ethics – these gave me useful frameworks for my thinking and work;
- Science: chaos theory, complex evolving systems theory, quantum physics – constantly informed my thinking and practice;
- Extensive business experience: with IBM, Alcatel, Johnson & Johnson, Bristol-Myers Squibb, etc. across functional expertise in quality management, audit and process improvement (ISO 9000, CMM) operations, manufacturing, supply chain, international trade, project and operational resources management, which enabled me to work with the widest range of clients knowing their work environment so well;
- Extensive multicultural exposure: lived/worked in London, Paris, Bucharest, New York, Johannesburg and Sydney and also travelled extensively; multilingual: fluent in English, French, Romanian and German, and some Italian and Russian – this gave me an advantage in my work with international clients;
- Martial arts and Eastern philosophy: the practice of tai chi, chi gong, yoga and aikido have enabled me to develop unprecedented states of awareness and focus (distributed or simultaneous) over my mind and body. This new

learning has developed my ability to be “present and open to the other” in my coaching practice;

- Academic experience and research methodologies: as a visiting lecturer, with UK and European institutions, teaching business psychology and strategic HR management subjects, which kept me up to date with the latest thinking and research;
- Speaking and publishing: on subjects related to people, psychology and work/life balance; to peer, academic and business audiences, which enabled me to share knowledge with others;
- International education: in business and psychology (MSc, London; MBA, Paris; BA, Bucharest), which has given me access to and experience of the diversity of education systems, policies and politics, and the possibility to analyse how they impact working adults’ self-awareness and positioning in the labour market.

Significantly, my life in London – arguably a most influential centre in coaching with a mature coaching market – has provided an exceptional opportunity for immediate access to primary sources of learning through talks and presentations given by thought leaders, such as Sir John Whitmore, Prof. David Lane, Prof. Stephen Palmer, Prof. David Clutterbuck, Prof. Daniel Goleman, Prof. Philip Zimbardo, researchers Dr. Paul Babiak and Dr. Robert Hare, Jonathan Passmore, Meredith Belbin, Sir Richard Branson and many others. I had the chance to meet some of them and with some I have worked on specific projects or collaborated in pro bono professional settings.

I also embraced over time multiple professional memberships and accreditation standards: Accredited Member of the Association for Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision (APECS); Accredited Member of Association for Coaching (AC); Principal Member of the Association of Business Psychologists (ABP); Member of International Coach Federation (ICF); Member of the Special Group in Coaching Psychology (SGCP); Life Member of The Coaching Academy; Affiliate Member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD); and Graduate Member of the British Psychological Society (BPS).

My continued professional development (CPD) log is in the public domain and this direct access to and enjoyment of primary sources has informed my opinions and professional views. Over time, I have accumulated a sufficient body of knowledge and experience to be able, in turn, to share it with others. And I do so through pro bono work and various forms of knowledge exchange, such as this book.