

This study "sheds light on the practical realities of applying diverse expertise within professional practice." [...] It "outlines the benefits and challenges of this integration, offering relevant insights for practitioners, academics, and stakeholders interested in the ethical, effective, and transformative potential of NLP-enhanced coaching."

## Integrating Modalities in the Support Professions

How practitioners, accredited in both coaching and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), apply their expertise within their professional practice

*Geoff Duncan*

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Professional Practice

Date of submission: 31 May 2025

Student: Geoff Duncan [Redacted Student ID number]

Academic Mentors: Dr. Martin Andrew  
Dr. Sean Quifors

## **Attestation of authorship**

“I, Geoff Duncan, hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of an institution of higher learning.”

Signed:

[Author signature redacted]

Date: 31<sup>st</sup> May 2025

## **Acknowledgements**

Completing this doctoral thesis has been a monumental journey, one that I could not have embarked on, much less completed, without the support, guidance, and encouragement from a host of individuals and organisations. It is with much gratitude that I acknowledge their contributions here. First and foremost, my thanks go to my academic supervisors, Dr. Sean Quifors and Dr. Andrew Martin. Their guidance, support, and insightful feedback have helped shape both my research and my professional growth as a researcher-practitioner. Although the names of my committee members have yet to be confirmed, I am deeply grateful for their forthcoming evaluations and insights, which will undoubtedly enhance the quality and impact of my work. Their expertise and commitment to academic and practitioner excellence are sincerely appreciated.

My research would not have been possible without the fourteen individuals who generously contributed their time and insights as research participants. Although I cannot name them here, their narratives and input are the basis of my study. I therefore extend my thanks to them for the significant role they have played in my research. I am also indebted to many colleagues, peers, managers, and trainers over my career to date, who have enriched my perspective and ultimately influenced my values, beliefs, thoughts, and behaviours in countless ways. Their collective wisdom and support find expression in my thesis. To all of them, far too many to list, I offer my thanks.

Special mention must also go to those contributors to the field who have published works that have influenced the content of my thesis, and I trust that I have given a fair interpretation and acknowledged their contributions. Further, to individuals such as the critical and proofreaders, I thank you for applying your expertise and attention to detail in helping me complete this thesis. Lastly, to my family, [family details redacted], whose love, patience, and encouragement have sustained me through the ups and downs of this academic pursuit, I am both grateful to you and inspired and motivated by you.

## **Abstract**

My doctoral study explores how fourteen dual-accredited neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) and International Coaching Federation (ICF) coaches experience and navigate the integration of NLP expertise within an ICF-compliant coaching context. In my study, NLP operates heuristically to address the challenge of integrating diverse knowledge in the coaching context, particularly regarding modality boundaries, ethical standards, and practitioner identity, given the ICF's emphasis on non-directive, coachee-centred approaches. While NLP has been widely applied in coaching, therapy, education, and other fields since the 1970s, it has faced persistent academic scepticism. It has been critiqued for lacking empirical validation and theoretical coherence. On this basis, it may seem like a surprising choice of a heuristic. However, NLP-informed coaching is the third most commonly used coaching model in practice, and, given my researcher-practitioner positionality within my study, it allows me to act as an 'insider' in the field, as I am also a dual-accredited, practising NLP and ICF coach.

To investigate this underexplored area of practitioners' integration of diverse expertise in the coaching context, my study adopts an interpretive phenomenological approach. The fourteen experienced, dual-accredited NLP and ICF coaches were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling and interviewed using semi-structured, in-depth interviews to capture their subjective lived experiences. Reflexive thematic analysis was employed to generate research insights, with me, as the researcher-practitioner, maintaining an explicitly reflective and immersed stance throughout the process. The key findings of my study were expressed through four themes derived from my interpretation of the participants' narratives and my own experience as a researcher-practitioner. In summary, the themes suggest that NLP has practical value, amplifying coaching engagement and outcomes when applied flexibly, ethically, and contextually. Participants emphasised the importance of clear contracting, informed consent, and transparent communication to manage modality boundaries effectively.

My study highlights that the successful integration of diverse expertise in the coaching context is less about technical mastery of tools and more about ethical discernment, professional maturity, and the capacity for reflexive and reflective judgment. Practitioners described complex identity negotiations as they balanced alignment with ICF's coaching standards alongside their broader professional expertise. They also spoke of the importance of supervision and continuing professional development (CPD) to maintain ethical and professional alignment. Academically, my study contributes to coaching research by enriching discussions of the theory-practice gap and the navigation of modality boundaries.

Methodologically, my study demonstrates the value of ‘insider’ reflexivity and interpretive, qualitative approaches for generating practitioner-informed knowledge. In practice, the findings offer actionable recommendations for the NLP field, including calls to strengthen theoretical frameworks, promote rigorous practitioner-led research, and enhance ethical transparency and collaboration with and among accrediting bodies. My study also offers valuable practical insights for coaches, coach educators, accrediting organisations, and researchers, advancing understanding of how diverse expertise can be integrated within the professional coaching context. In turn, my research contributes to the ongoing professionalisation of both NLP and coaching, offering academically supported perspectives on how expertise can be elegantly blended to support coachee outcomes. Future research is encouraged to build on these insights by exploring coachee perspectives, cross-cultural variations, and a longitudinal understanding of the integration of expertise within coaching careers.

## Executive Summary

My doctoral thesis explores how dual-accredited practitioners, who are qualified in both neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) and International Coaching Federation (ICF) coaching, integrate their NLP expertise into ICF-compliant coaching practice. Their integration of coaching and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) within professional practice addresses a significant gap in the existing literature concerning the practical application of multiple modalities in support professions. Specifically, my research explores the lived experiences of fourteen such dual-qualified practitioners, aiming to understand how they integrate their knowledge and skills from both fields to enhance their coaching practices. My inquiry reflects my personal journey and development as a researcher-practitioner, highlighting broader issues surrounding a perceived theory-practice gap in coaching. It further explores the potential of integrating diverse methodologies to advance practice while adhering to compliant coaching standards. My thesis begins with an overview of the literature and context. This sets the stage by clarifying the definitions of coaching and NLP and distinguishing them from adjacent modalities such as mentoring, consulting, and therapy. My critical analysis of the literature highlights an insufficient exploration of practitioners' lived experiences, particularly how they integrate different areas of expertise (skills and knowledge) in practice. Consequently, I identified the integration of NLP and coaching as an important area for deeper exploration, with a focus on practical implications and applications.

Methodologically, I employed an interpretive phenomenological approach, consistent with my constructivist philosophical stance. This methodology emphasises my commitment to authentically capturing practitioners' lived experiences in their real-world professional contexts. Through qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews, my research uncovers the complexities of integrating NLP with coaching, highlighting both the synergies and the challenges practitioners' encounter. Using reflexive thematic analysis, my findings demonstrate that combining NLP and coaching enhances communication, deepens mutual understanding between coach and coachee, and contributes meaningfully to their personal and professional development. Nonetheless, practitioners also face challenges, managing perceptions of NLP, maintaining ethical boundaries, and aligning NLP methods with the standards and expectations of coaching practice.

My study identified four interrelated themes: (1) *What gets in the way?* which relates to perceptions of NLP's contested credibility and the reputational risks of association, (2) *Challenges ahoy!* relating to the complexities of boundary management and identity negotiation between professional codes, (3) *Learning and growth for both*, reflecting how integrating NLP

deepened practitioner reflexivity and client responsiveness, and (4) *What makes the difference?* revealing practice and practitioner maturity, ethical discernment, and congruent embodiment of both modalities as important dimensions. Collectively, the themes reveal that successful integration relies less on applying techniques and more on cultivating reflexive awareness, ethical clarity, and adaptive judgement. My study contributes to the professional coaching knowledge by reframing NLP not as a competing discipline or an alternative coaching model, but as a resource that, when ethically and transparently integrated, enriches coaching presence and effectiveness.

In line with this, my study makes several important contributions, both scholarly and practical, centred on using NLP as a pragmatic heuristic to explore various areas of practitioner expertise in the coaching context. Firstly, my study contributes to the academic discourse with new insights into how coaches navigate the boundaries between coaching and adjacent modalities, such as NLP, emphasising the importance of clear contracting and ethical awareness. Secondly, by surfacing practitioner integration strategies, my study deepens understanding of the theory-practice gap between formal coaching standards and the adaptive, context-sensitive practices of experienced coaches. Thirdly, my analysis suggests that successful integration relies on, in addition to technical expertise, ethical discernment, reflective practice, and a commitment to supervision and professional development. These, in turn, highlight the important role of ethical and professional maturity in successful integration. Penultimately, my research provides insight into how practitioners actively construct and negotiate their professional identities as they integrate their expertise into a specific professional setting. Lastly, and more parochially for NLP, my research identifies practitioner-informed priorities for strengthening NLP's standing in the coaching context, including strengthening its theoretical foundations, fostering context-appropriate practitioner-led research, and promoting aligned and transparent standards of training and ethics to its broader audiences. These findings then offer practical value for practitioners, training providers, accrediting bodies, and supervisors seeking to support cross-modality competence and ethical practice.

In relation to the evolution of my professional practice framework (PPF), resulting from the primary research and personal professional reflection components, several dimensions have changed. The change in my PPF marks a shift from a largely procedural, modality-driven practice to a more integrated, reflexive, and context-sensitive approach over eight years. Initially focused on compliance and objectivist assumptions, my practice has evolved towards ethical responsiveness, epistemological pluralism, and practitioner agility. My capability has become embodied and relational, ethics contextual and enacted, and language understood as co-

constructed and powerful. The integration of these modalities has moved my practice beyond technique to principled adaptability, supported by deep listening and practitioner insight. The doctoral journey has fostered a personal identity shift from ‘technician’ to ‘researcher-practitioner’, demonstrating how theory and experience can intertwine in praxis, yielding a humanistic engagement with the complexity of contemporary professional practice.

In conclusion, my thesis makes a significant contribution to the fields of coaching, NLP, and professional practice. By exploring the integration of NLP and coaching through the lived experiences of fourteen dual-accredited practitioners, as well as my own professional practice experiences as an ‘insider’ to the field, my study sheds light on the practical realities of applying diverse expertise within professional practice. My study outlines the benefits and challenges of this integration, offering relevant insights for practitioners, academics, and stakeholders interested in the ethical, effective, and transformative potential of NLP-enhanced coaching. Future research could examine practitioner-led integration across other blended domains, such as positive psychology, to inform professional standards and training design. Methodologically, my study also demonstrates how insider reflexivity within an interpretive phenomenological approach yields rich insights relevant to both academic discourse and professional practice.

# Table of Contents

Attestation of authorship .....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Executive Summary .....	v
List of Figures.....	x
List of Tables.....	xi
Acronyms .....	xii
<b>Chapter 1: Practitioner Research Enquiry - Introduction.....</b>	<b>14</b>
1.1 Overview .....	14
1.2 The reason for my interest in the study .....	17
1.3 Significance and worth of the study .....	18
1.4 Learning Outcomes .....	19
1.5 The Study .....	20
1.6 Thesis structure.....	21
<b>Chapter 2: Literature and Context Review .....</b>	<b>23</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	23
2.2 Literature and context review search strategy .....	23
2.3 Defining coaching .....	24
2.4 Defining neuro-linguistic programming (NLP).....	28
2.5 Modalities in practice .....	31
2.6 Coaching contexts and constraints .....	34
2.7 Professional development and coach maturity .....	37
2.8 The theory-practice gap.....	38
2.9 Chapter conclusions.....	39
<b>Chapter 3: Methodologies and Methods .....</b>	<b>41</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	41
3.2 Identifying my philosophical stance as a researcher-practitioner .....	41
3.3 Identifying a suitable research design for my study.....	43
3.4 Research procedures (including sampling method and sample size).....	54
3.5 My positionality and reflexivity as researcher .....	68
3.6 Research ethics .....	69
3.7 Robustness and rigour .....	70
3.8 Limitations.....	72
3.9 Chapter conclusions.....	73
<b>Chapter 4: Findings .....</b>	<b>75</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	75
4.2 Theme One: ‘What gets in the way?’ .....	76

4.3 Theme Two: ‘Challenges ahoy!’ .....	79
4.4 Theme Three: ‘Learning and growth for both’ .....	84
4.5 Theme Four: ‘What makes the difference?’ .....	89
4.6 Chapter conclusions.....	96
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion .....</b>	<b>98</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	98
5.2 Theme One: ‘What gets in the way?’ .....	100
5.3 Theme Two: ‘Challenges ahoy!’ .....	109
5.4 Theme Three: ‘Learning and growth for both’ .....	127
5.5 Theme Four: ‘What makes the difference?’ .....	148
5.6 Chapter conclusions.....	167
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusions.....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Chapter 7: Recommendations.....</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>Chapter 8: Reflective Practice.....</b>	<b>185</b>
8.1 Introduction .....	185
8.2 Analysis of my reflections.....	186
8.3 Reflexivity statement resulting from my researcher-practitioner positionality within my study .....	193
8.4 Conclusions to the reflective practice component of the PRE .....	194
<b>Chapter 9: Conclusions to the full Practitioner Research Enquiry .....</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>199</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>218</b>
<b>Appendix A: Learning Agreement and Ethics Approval [Partially redacted] .....</b>	<b>219</b>
<b>Appendix B: Example research participant interview transcript [Redacted] .....</b>	<b>229</b>
<b>Appendix C: Implementation of Braun and Clarke (2022) RTA Six Phase Process .....</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>Appendix D: Table of themes, sub-themes/codes .....</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>Appendix E: Reflection events during the course of my DPP journey [Redacted] .....</b>	<b>238</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 3.1.....	231
Figure 3.2.....	233

## List of Tables

Table 2.1 .....	26
Table 2.2 .....	30
Table 3.1 .....	42
Table 3.2 .....	57
Table 3.3 .....	61
Table 3.4 .....	64
Table 3.5 .....	68
Table 5.1 .....	103
Table 5.2 .....	104
Table 5.3 .....	114
Table 5.4 .....	131
Table 5.5 .....	136
Table 5.6 .....	148
Table 5.7 .....	163
Table 8.1 .....	186
Table 8.2 .....	194

## Acronyms

ABNLP	American Board of Neuro-Linguistic Programming
AC	Association for Coaching
ACC	Associate Certified Coach
AIP	Alternative Inquiry Paradigm
ANLP	Association of NLP
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DProfPrac	Doctorate of Professional Practice
EMCC	European Mentoring and Coaching Council
GCMA	Global Coaching Mentoring Agreement
HARP	Heightening your Awareness of your Research Philosophy
IANLP	International Association for Neuro-Linguistic Programming
ICF	International Coaching Federation
ICI	International Association of Coaching Institutes
IN	International Association of NLP Institutes
INA	International NLP Association
INLPTA	International Neuro-Linguistic Programming Trainers' Association
IoD	Institute of Directors
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
KTO	Kaitohutohu Office
LR	Literature Review
mBIT	Multiple Brains Integration Technique
MCC	Master Certified Coach
MM	Methodologies and Methods
MP	Master Practitioner
NLP	Neuro-Linguistic Programming
NLPers	A person trained in and using NLP
NLPt	NLP Psychotherapy
NLPLS	NLP Leadership Summit
PCC	Professional Certified Coach
PCF	Participant Consent Form
PIQ	Participant Interview Question
PIS	Participant Information Sheet
PPF	Professional Practice Framework

PPS	Professional Practice Statement
PR	Practitioner
PRE	Practitioner Research Enquiry
PSC	Participant Selection Criteria/(ion)
RoL	Review of Learning (Paper 1a of the DProfPrac)
RQ	Research Question
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022)
SMDs	Sub-modalities
SNLP	Society of NLP
SP	Senior Practitioner
TA	Thematic Analysis
tLA	The Learning Agreement (Paper 1b of the DProfPrac)
WFO	Well-formed outcomes

# **Chapter 1: Practitioner Research Enquiry - Introduction**

The purpose of my PRE was to gain an appreciation of the lived experiences of practitioners qualified and experienced in more than one support profession, and how they apply their knowledge and skills in their professional practice contexts. I chose coaching and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) as the support professions to explore in my study, as I am a qualified and experienced practitioner in both fields, and this firsthand experience provides many additional benefits to my research.

## **1.1 Overview**

In recent decades, the field of professional coaching has emerged as a globally recognised discipline, growing rapidly in both reach and sophistication. Alongside this evolution, many practitioners have sought to integrate diverse bodies of expertise into their coaching practice, including neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), a methodology developed in the 1970s that is centred on meaning-making within subjective experience. Despite NLP continuing to face scepticism and contestation within some parts of the academic community, it is nonetheless widely used in practice across coaching and related fields. Furthermore, as a researcher-practitioner in this field, I am experienced and accredited in this modality and in coaching. NLP is a heuristic for exploring the integration of expertise in the coaching context. It is a relevant choice because of its importance to coaching practice and to me professionally as a dual-accredited NLP and ICF coach. The integration of NLP into International Coaching Federation (ICF) compliant coaching raises important theoretical and practical questions about professional boundaries, ethical practice, and practitioner identity. My study investigates these questions by exploring how dual-accredited NLP and ICF coaches like myself experience and manage the integration of their NLP and ICF coaching expertise within the coaching context.

### **Background and context (preview)**

Foreshadowing the subsequent literature and context review chapter, I summarise here that professional coaching has evolved over the past fifty years from a loosely defined practice to a professionalised and increasingly research-informed field (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017; Grant, 2017). At the same time, NLP has evolved as a parallel body of practitioner-focused knowledge, providing tools and methodologies to enhance communication, personal growth, and professional development (Grimley, 2019b; Tosey & Mathison, 2009). Whilst definitions of both coaching and NLP are explored in detail in the next chapter, with the ICF and ANLP definitions adopted

for my study, it is worth defining NLP from a coaching perspective. Building a potential integration of those ANLP and ICF definitions, NLP from a coaching perspective might be seen as ‘the application of NLP principles and techniques within a coaching partnership, where the coach helps the coachee explore and reconfigure the internal structures of their subjective lived experience (thoughts, language, behaviours) to expand choice, achieve outcomes and support personal and professional growth’.

As mentioned above, despite its popularity among coach practitioners, NLP has been marginalised in some quarters of mainstream academic discourse, mainly due to concerns about its scientific validity (de Rijk et al., 2019; Dormandy & Grimley, 2024; Greif, 2022). Yet many coaches continue to have an NLP-informed coaching practice, creating a complex interplay between institutional standards, personal expertise, and ethical responsibility. My study is firmly situated at this underexplored intersection, addressing an identified gap in the coaching literature (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Sime & Jacob, 2018).

### **Problem statement**

There is a limited understanding of how dual-accredited NLP and ICF coaches navigate integrating their expertise within professional coaching frameworks. While ICF standards emphasise a coachee-led, non-directive process, NLP methods can involve more structured, sometimes directive, dialogical interactions. This raises questions about how coaches manage boundaries, align their practices with ethical standards, and construct their professional identities. Without a deeper understanding of these lived experiences, the coaching field risks overlooking crucial dynamics that shape real-world practice.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of my qualitative, interpretative phenomenological study is to explore how dual-accredited NLP and ICF coaches experience, interpret, and navigate the integration of their NLP expertise within ICF-compliant coaching. By focusing on practitioners’ lived experiences, my study aims to reveal the practical strategies, ethical considerations, and identity considerations involved in integrating expertise.

## Research objectives

My study into the lived experiences of dual-accredited NLP and ICF coaches integrating their expertise in their coaching practices has the following objectives:

- To explore the lived experiences of dual-accredited practitioners in integrating NLP with coaching to understand the synergies and challenges involved

The literature reveals an underexplored area: while conceptual debates about NLP and coaching abound, few studies have examined the integration of expertise amongst adjacent modalities and how practitioners navigate such integration. Most prior research has emphasised theoretical tensions, efficacy claims, or practitioner toolkits, rather than exploring the subjective, situated experiences of integrating expertise (de Rijk et al., 2019; Passmore & Rowson, 2019).

- To examine the professional and ethical considerations in blending NLP methodologies with ICF-defined coaching practices.

The literature emphasises that professional coaching, particularly in relation to ICF standards, is consistent with a non-directive, coachee-led ethos, requiring clear ethical boundaries and well-maintained professional roles (International Coaching Federation, 2021a; Sime & Jacob, 2018). In contrast, NLP approaches can often involve more structured, sometimes directive interactions, raising concerns about how such practices can be ethically and professionally integrated without undermining the foundational principles of ICF coaching (de Rijk et al., 2019; Passmore & Rowson, 2019).

- To identify applicable practices for integrating NLP to amplify the coaching effect

While debates about the scientific credibility of NLP have dominated much of the academic discourse (Greif, 2022), a parallel body of practitioner literature highlights the pragmatic value of NLP-informed approaches for generating insights, supporting client change, and fostering behavioural flexibility (Grimley, 2019b). Few studies have explored the specific coaching practices that dual-accredited practitioners find most helpful in enhancing coaching outcomes while maintaining alignment with professional coaching (ICF) standards. This gap in the literature signalled to me the need for research that focuses not on debunking or defending NLP as a whole, but on learning from practice. In effect, exploring how such practitioners selectively and thoughtfully apply NLP-informed approaches to support client goals within the coaching context.

## **Research title and research questions**

Research title:

‘Integrating modalities in the support professions. How practitioners, accredited in both coaching and NLP, apply their expertise within their professional practice.’

Main research question (RQ):

“How do practitioners, accredited in both International Coaching Federation (ICF) coaching and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), apply their knowledge and skills within their professional practice?”

Sub research questions:

“What are the practice dimensions to integrating NLP expertise with ICF-compliant coaching amongst dual-accredited practitioners?”

“What are dual-accredited practitioners’ reflections on the impact integrating their NLP expertise has on their coaching practice?”

## **1.2 The reason for my interest in the study**

Having established in 2018 my professional practice statement (PPS) of being ‘a developer and deliverer of personal and professional development learning experiences’, I embarked on six years of intensive personal and professional development. During that journey, alongside my doctorate of professional practice (DProfPrac) studies, I have attained master accreditation in both coaching and NLP from recognisable, reputable international accreditation bodies (EMCC, IANLP, ICF, and IN). Achieving this represents the culmination of over 25 years of professional experience across both fields, delivering a total of over 18,000 practice hours, as I pivot towards my ikigai, as expressed in my PPS. Through that journey, I have been able to reflect and appreciate that many of my historic practice hours were likely more ‘mentoring’, ‘consulting’, or ‘training’ in nature, rather than ‘coaching’. From my initial literature search, I found that, depending on the definition of ‘coaching’ used, a theory-practice gap exists in the profession. Articulating this as an interest in the phenomenon of how a coach can utilise the breadth of their expertise, whilst keeping within some relatively narrow definition of coaching, I developed my initial research

question (RQ) of “How does knowledge of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) tools and techniques enhance the professional practice of active coaches trained in both coaching and NLP?”

### **1.3 Significance and worth of the study**

In an unregulated industry like coaching, it may seem inconsequential to debate the existence of a theory-practice gap. However, from the perspective of an individual professional practitioner like myself, the importance of addressing this gap cannot be overstated. It is important to clarify the specific modality (coaching) and to enhance flexibility and understanding when differentiating it from other modalities (such as mentoring, training, and consulting). Being able to confidently and competently articulate and use different modalities carries profound ethical, contractual, and professional implications for both the coach and the coachee, and indeed for the broader system within which they are both part of. Furthermore, the concerted efforts of prominent coaching organisations across Europe to develop a professional practice framework (PPF) to preserve the industry’s ability to self-regulate indicate the importance of understanding how such a framework affects the theory-practice gap for any professional in the field.

In my professional practice, I have acquired skills and knowledge across diverse fields, including business, coaching, and tertiary education. For each specific professional setting I encounter, there’s a need for me to configure myself, from within my choice set of skills and knowledge, the most effective approach for me to align with the context and the goals and objectives present within it, whilst remaining congruent with my sense of identity and values that exist at that time. This adaptability extends beyond mere technical or behavioural application; it involves gaining a clear understanding of the context, a deep awareness of the people involved, and a reflective consideration of my own role and objectives within that context. The necessity for an effective yet adaptable self-configuration is perhaps most critical in the helping professions. In these roles, clients typically expect a particular ‘way of being’, encompassing not just the activities and behaviours during sessions but also the ethical framework and context within which these occur.

The coaching profession often espouses the philosophy that ‘who you are is how you coach,’ and this serves as a useful foundation for my study. For me, this perspective accentuates the importance of my adapting my coaching style to meet the unique needs of each coachee, including the broader system that brings us together, fostering a dynamic where my wide-ranging professional experiences can be integrated and applied in service to the coachee, whilst complying with the applicable ethical and practice frameworks. While my professional background is varied,

I have elected to focus my study on the application of NLP within the coaching context. NLP offers a compelling field for study in coaching due to its inherent synergies with coaching methodologies, despite its traditional association with more interventionist or therapeutic practices.

As a practitioner, I am fully accredited and possess extensive experience in both coaching and NLP, holding master-level accreditations. My practice is characterised by a deliberate application of knowledge and expertise to support my clients and enhance our relationship, always within the bounds of professional standards and ethical expectations. Within this framework, I conscientiously apply NLP techniques that align seamlessly with coaching practices, while cautiously avoiding those that do not fit as neatly. The merit of this study lies in its exploration and understanding of NLP's application, seeking a balance in the liminal space between rigid adherence to and complete avoidance of specific NLP tools and techniques. This inquiry not only has implications for NLP's integration into coaching but also opens the door to considering how other knowledge and skill bases could navigate similar challenges in the same professional context; hence, NLP also acts as a heuristic in this study. As a coaching supervisor, I have worked with numerous coaching practitioners across diverse fields, including business, psychotherapy, counselling, education, HR, and leadership. Many of these practitioners are on a quest for a deeper understanding of how their diverse expertise can be harmoniously integrated within their professional practice. My study, therefore, goes far beyond merely integrating NLP with coaching, highlighting its broader significance in fostering a more holistic and adaptable approach to professional practice.

## **1.4 Learning Outcomes**

In my Learning Agreement for this programme, I set three learning outcomes I expected to achieve through the study. These are:

- To gain an understanding of the challenges faced by coaches currently active in the profession in relation to managing an identified theory-practice gap in delivering professional 'coaching'.
- To establish insights into how coaches trained in NLP and coaching find that their knowledge and use of NLP methodologies, tools, and techniques enhance their coaching practice, and

- To reflect on my journey in achieving the above, including the challenges encountered and how any resolution has enhanced my own professional practice.

I developed these learning outcomes from my own reflections during my DProfPrac journey. My consideration of a theory-practice gap in coaching emerged early in my studies (2017-2019). Coaching saw a vast increase in the amount of theory espoused, whilst the theoretical notions evident in coaching practice were less apparent. This was ultimately articulated as the first learning outcome, as stated above. Meanwhile, I had growing concerns about how my other professional knowledge and skills might still be helpful to my coaching practice. I was dual-trained to mastery level in NLP and coaching (2018-2021) and increasingly involved in professional accreditation across several fields. During the process of achieving over 20 accreditations in less than three years, I found myself exploring the concepts of ‘modality’ and ‘contracting’. From this, as my doctoral research proposal or learning agreement was being written in 2021, the second learning outcome listed above was developed. Finally, the third learning outcome mentioned above was created partly because it is a course requirement and partly because I had become interested in observing my own personal and professional evolution in response to these same questions as a practitioner in the field of study. This is a reflection on my professional practice journey, both in relation to studying DProfPrac and its impact on my practice.

## **1.5 The Study**

My qualitative practitioner research enquiry (PRE) is an interpretivist-phenomenological exploration of the lived professional practice experiences of practitioners trained in both NLP and coaching.

Three items have been produced as outputs of my PRE:

- Firstly, a piece of primary research that reflects the lived experiences of research participants who work as accredited professional coaches and incorporate NLP expertise into their current coaching practice.
- Secondly, an account of the significance of the primary research findings to the practice of coaches in the coaching context. Specifically, how the practitioners integrate their NLP expertise within the coaching context to yield enhanced outcomes for their coachees.

- Finally, a reflective piece about my experience of completing this doctorate, specifically focusing on how the project has influenced me personally and professionally, including changes to my professional practice.

### **Philosophical and methodological orientation (preview)**

My study is grounded in an interpretivist philosophical stance, emphasising the co-construction of meaning between myself, as the researcher, and the participants in my study (Creswell & Poth, 2025). Methodologically, it adopts an interpretive phenomenological approach, drawing particularly on the traditions of Merleau-Ponty (2002) and van Manen (2023), to explore the subjective, situated lived experiences of dual-accredited coaches. Within a qualitative, exploratory, and cross-sectional research design (Saunders et al., 2024), semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection method (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), complemented by purposive and snowball sampling methods to recruit prospective participants (Saunders et al., 2024). Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was used to analyse the dataset and identify patterns and insights.

### **Scope and delimitations**

My study focuses on coaches who hold both NLP and ICF accreditations and who actively integrate their expertise from these domains within their coaching practice. It offers an in-depth, qualitative exploration of the lived experiences and reflections of such practitioners, situated solely within the professional coaching context. My study does not aim to verify or refute the effectiveness of either NLP or coaching as personal or professional development approaches, nor does it seek to offer any quantification or generalisability from its findings.

## **1.6 Thesis structure**

In reporting my PRE, I have chosen a layout typical of qualitative doctoral studies, although modified to reflect the specific requirements of the DProfPrac programme.

After the ‘Abstract’ comes an ‘Introduction’ chapter which builds on what has been covered here in terms of: the reasons for my choice of study, my learning outcomes and outputs, and what I see as the worth or significance of my research. After that comes the ‘Literature and context review’, which is lighter than might be anticipated, as I have chosen a heavier use of literature *ex post* in the discussion chapter, where I believe it can more usefully assist my research enquiry.

Nevertheless, the chapter is still used to reveal gaps in the extant literature, articulate the proposed study, and reflect the study's potential contribution to knowledge. Following that is the 'Methodology and methods' chapter, which both locates the study philosophically and justifies the selection of methodology and methods consistent with my philosophical stance and my research design. The next chapter is a 'Findings' chapter where there is an analysis of the participants' narratives in the context of the four themes I have created for my study. Connected with this, the 'Discussion' chapter weaves relevant literature with my study's findings and my own voice, as a researcher-practitioner, and in the context of the themes created. Finally, there are 'Conclusions' and 'Recommendations' chapters which review and reflect on my whole study and take into account the professional practice component required within this Doctoral programme.

## **Chapter 2: Literature and Context Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature and the contextual considerations relevant to my study. My study examines how dual-accredited NLP and ICF-accredited coaches effectively integrate their expertise in a manner that complies with ICF coaching standards. On this basis, this review serves a few interlinked purposes:

- It seeks to provide conceptual clarity around the multiple definitions of both coaching and NLP,
- It examines the systemic, organisational, and epistemological pressures facing professional coaches, and
- It identifies an under-researched theory-practice gap in how experienced coaches draw on diverse expertise in practice while operating within defined coaching parameters.

The chapter begins by outlining the methodological approach to the literature and context review search, including its scope and rationale. It then examines key debates surrounding the definition and professionalisation of coaching, highlighting the unresolved tensions between coaching as a discipline, coaching as a profession, and coaching as a practice. In parallel with this, my review provides a definitional and historical account of NLP, clarifying its methodological origins and conceptual positioning, particularly in light of common misconceptions stemming from its therapeutic origins. The chapter then investigates how coaches interact with and navigate adjacent modalities, such as mentoring, counselling, training, and consulting, within real-world coaching contexts. These practices are explored through the lens of legal, ethical, and contractual considerations, as well as the influence of global organisations representing both NLP and coaching.

### **2.2 Literature and context review search strategy**

My literature and context review adopts a purposive and pragmatic approach, rather than a systematic one. The decision not to conduct a systematic review was based on my recognition that NLP, unlike coaching, remains underrepresented in the peer-reviewed academic discourse. While coaching has been increasingly explored in scholarly research over the past two decades,

NLP has predominantly been discussed in practitioner literature, with only a limited number of academically rigorous contributions available. Consequently, a flexible and inclusive approach was required to construct a review that accurately reflects the knowledge landscape relevant to this study.

My literature search strategy employed multiple digital databases and repositories, with Google Scholar serving as a helpful gateway to both peer-reviewed articles and significant grey literature. Through the online libraries of academic institutions I am affiliated with, I was able to secure access to articles that weren't available through Google Scholar. Search terms included combinations and variations of “neuro-linguistic programming”, “NLP”, “coaching”, “professional coaching”, “coaching modalities”, “coaching integration”, and “coaching professionalism”. Textbooks, conference papers, and practitioner-authored publications were included where they offered substantial theoretical or methodological insight. A significant proportion of the NLP-related material consulted was authored by leading NLP developers [such as Dilts (2020)], NLP renowned academics [such as Tosey et al. (2014)], and NLP researcher-practitioners [such as Grimley (2019b)]. In determining which sources to include, the quality and relevance of the literature were prioritised. For NLP, given its limited academic representation, influential practitioner works were incorporated where they offered coherent definitions, practical applications, or conceptual frameworks relevant to professional coaching. For coaching, a more extensive and academically robust literature base was available, which allowed for more selective inclusion based on methodological quality and conceptual contribution.

The aim of my literature and context review search was not to be exhaustive but to be sufficiently inclusive, capturing the complexity, debates, and tensions surrounding the integration of NLP and coaching. The decision to adopt this style of literature chapter, intended to ensure thematic and conceptual integrity, reflects a methodological stance aligned with the reflexive qualitative research adopted in my study. It enables deeper engagement with literature during the analysis and discussion phases, where the literature is woven directly into the interpretation of both the study's participants' lived experiences and my own 'insider' viewpoints as a researcher-practitioner.

### **2.3 Defining coaching**

Coaching has emerged as a diverse and rapidly evolving field, characterised by conceptual ambiguity and a multiplicity of definitions. Coaching as a practice is further complicated by

unclear boundaries between it and other professional activities (Hardingham, 2004; Parsloe & Leedham, 2022; Rutkowski, 2014; Summerfield, 2006). These definitional tensions are not just an academic concern; they have practical implications for how coaches understand their role, how coachees experience coaching, and how professional boundaries are drawn between coaching and other adjacent ‘helping’ modalities. This ambiguity is especially consequential in an unregulated industry, where the title ‘coach’ can be adopted by anyone and applied to many activities they may perform (Association for Coaching, 2024; Tee et al., 2018). This makes it all the more crucial to delineate what coaching entails, differentiate it from other activities, and clarify what is meant by a ‘coach’ in the present context (Sime & Jacob, 2018).

Humanistic psychology, particularly the work of Carl Rogers (which emphasised, among other things, non-directive facilitation), is seen to be a foundational influence on the coaching field (Koopman et al., 2021; Wildflower, 2013). Gallwey (1974) and Whitmore (2017), whilst at the Esalen Institute in California, built on these early foundations and wrote, respectively, *The Inner Game of Tennis* and *The GROW Model of coaching*. Both of these books rose to prominence in the 1970s and gave rise to what is now considered ‘modern coaching’. The key shift is that these early coaching frameworks and approaches identified the coach as a ‘facilitator of insight’, rather than as a ‘provider of advice’ (Wilson & Bresser, 2021). This led to the formalisation of coaching practices, facilitating the proliferation of coaching courses and their integration into organisational training programs (Wildflower, 2013; Wilson & Bresser, 2021). This diversity reflects the dynamic nature of coaching as a discipline, which subsequently saw a significant increase in scholarly attention from the mid-1980s, signalling coaching’s rapid evolution and global adoption (Koopman et al., 2021).

More recent conceptualisations of coaching are captured in Table 2.1 and reflect the above foundation while also incorporating elements such as: adult learning theories (Knowles, 1980; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1990), organisational development, and psychological practices. Clutterbuck and Turner (2018) argue that, regardless of the definition of coaching, “adult learning principles are at the heart of coaching and underpin what makes coaching work” (p. 7). Thus, coaching can be seen as both a dialogical process and a structured intervention designed to promote reflection, learning, and transformation. However, despite its growing sophistication over time, coaching remains epistemologically and methodologically eclectic, drawing on counselling, psychotherapy, neuro-linguistic programming, management theory, and education (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Wildflower, 2013). This integration supports diverse evidence and

literature, contributing to the depth of coaching. The proliferation of definitions reflects this complexity.

**Table 2.1**

*Definitions of Coaching*

Definition	Source	Commentary
‘partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential’	International Coaching Federation (2025b, p. "what is coaching?" section)	Unites parts played by both coach and coachee in a process which is ‘creative’; ‘potential’ retains its centrality and is to be maximised (outcome), and; advances ‘inspiring’ over ‘facilitating’.
“a collaborative, solution focused, results orientated, and systematic process where the coach facilitates the enhancement of work performance, self-directed learning, and personal growth of the coachee”	Association for Coaches Grant (2019a, p. 36)	Unites parts played by both coach and coachee in a ‘process’; gives a nod to ‘outcome’ intentionality, and; acknowledges both ‘growth’ and ‘learning’
“unlocking people’s potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them”	Whitmore (2017, pp. 12–13)	Connects the notion of inherent potential with the focus on their learning process, rather than from any external intervention (knowledge/direction)
“a form of development in which an experienced person...supports a learner...in achieving a specific personal or professional goal by providing training and guidance”	Passmore (2016a, p. 4)	‘Outcome’ (development), rather than ‘process’ (how achieved) focused arising from external intervention.
“facilitated, dialogic learning process”	Cox (2013, p. 1)	Identifies learning as an essential element of coaching
“partnership of equals whose aim is to achieve speedy, increased and sustainable effectiveness through focused learning in every aspect of the client’s life”	Rogers (2012, p. 7)	Not only sees learning as a crucial component of the coaching experience but sees it as essential to generating sustainable change

*Note.* Table constructed by the author.

Definitions offered by leading professional bodies seek to codify a standardised view of coaching, with the ICF defining coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential” (International Coaching Federation, 2021b). Similarly, the Association for Coaching describes it as “a collaborative, solution-focused, results-oriented, and systemic process” (Grant, 2019a, p. 36). These definitions emphasise a partnership dynamic, a focus on the coachee's agency, and a facilitative rather than directive role for the coach. By adopting the ICF definition for my study,

I identify a boundary between coaching and other modalities. The coachee is responsible for bringing the content (including the agenda and goals), while the coach manages the process. This delimitation is central to maintaining modality fidelity, which for many in the field is held to be a requirement of professional coaching practice.

However, the definitional ambiguity reflected above continues to be a source of friction both academically and in practice. For example, Renton (2009) offers a more informal definition that frames coaching as a guidance-based learning relationship, which clearly blurs the lines with mentoring. Parsloe and Leedham (2022) seek to preserve distinctions between mentoring and coaching, while others argue for greater alignment between them, or even complete conflation (Brock, 2009; Clutterbuck, 2008; Parsloe, 1995). The evolution of mentoring reveals a rich history of academic inquiry, with research into mentoring predating and subsequently growing alongside coaching research (Koopman et al., 2021). The authors' work shows that the research paths of mentoring and coaching have remained largely distinct, reflecting the individual contributions of each modality to professional development. A study of 140 coaches by Coutu and Kauffman (2009) reveals that, nonetheless, the coaching field is rife with contradictions, including coaches often grappling with the reasons behind their hiring, or how to measure coaching success (Bossons et al., 2016). According to Sime and Jacob (2018), coaches are prompted to rely on personal reflection and self-derived metrics in the absence of widely accepted external benchmarks or comparators. Clutterbuck and Turner (2018) importantly distinguish two forms of mentoring: 'sponsorship', identifiable by one-way knowledge transfer, and 'developmental', characterised by bidirectional learning. This, I believe, helps explain why, for some contributors, the two are quite different, while for others, they are quite the same.

In summary, defining coaching is both necessary and fraught. In my study, the ICF definition is employed to explore how professional coaches integrate their expertise while maintaining compliance with this standard. This definition serves not only as a methodological boundary but also as a filter through which practitioner narratives, as well as my own 'insider' perspective, are interpreted in subsequent analysis and discussion. In this way, the ICF definition acts as a benchmark, not because of it necessarily being 'right', but because it is 'useful' in relation to my study to have such a comparator against which practitioner choices can be considered.

## 2.4 Defining neuro-linguistic programming (NLP)

With the concept of coaching now clarified, I turn my attention to the definition of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), the second core domain of my study. NLP is often identified as both a methodological framework and a set of practical tools concerned with understanding, modelling, and influencing subjective human experience. Before proceeding further, it is necessary to provide clarity around what is meant by ‘modelling’ in the NLP context. In NLP:

*behavior modeling* [sic] involves observing and mapping the successful processes which underlie an exceptional performance of some type...to create a pragmatic map...which can be used to reproduce...that performance...by anyone who is motivated to do so (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000a, p. 790).

This requires identifying and replicating the patterns of thought, behaviour, and language used by individuals who excel in the chosen area and transferring these patterns to others who desire similar outcomes (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000a). The modelling methodology was iterative and recursive, and its impact in bringing about change was found to be amplified by weaving in other relevant and useful theories and models to enhance it. These other theories and models included: the ‘transformational grammar’ of Chomsky (2002), the ‘systems theory’ of Bateson (2000), and the ‘TOTE model’ of Miller et al. (2020). These all contributed to enhancing the NLP modelling methodologies themselves. This NLP definition of modelling differs from other definitions, particularly those used in social learning and in the psychology field more generally. In social learning, modelling typically refers to the process of learning behaviours by observing and imitating others (Bandura, 1971) and, by extension, in psychology, where a therapist might demonstrate a behaviour for their client to imitate to learn new skills or behaviours to achieve some (clinical) goal (Thomas, 2011). The critical distinction between NLP modelling and the meaning of modelling in psychology or social learning lies in depth and focus. While psychological modelling focuses on observable behaviours and their reproduction (imitation), NLP modelling focuses on uncovering and transferring internal cognitive and subjective structures, thereby moving far beyond mere behavioural mimicry. With this important distinction in mind, I will return to the discussion of NLP within which NLP modelling is a central foundation.

What became known as NLP grew out of the application of these modelling methodologies developed by Bandler, Pucelik, and, slightly later, Grinder (Grinder & Pucelik, 2013) and has evolved into a complex, inter-disciplinary methodology (Dilts et al., 1980; Grimley & Dilts, 2024). Although its conceptual boundaries remain contested and its ‘scientific’ credibility frequently

debated, NLP continues to be widely applied by professional practitioners in contexts such as therapy, education, business, and coaching (de Rijk et al., 2019; Grimley, 2020). At its core, NLP is based on the premise that individual experience is mediated by neurological processes ('neuro'), encoded through language ('linguistic'), and shaped by internalised mental strategies ('programming') (Dilts et al., 1980). The initial development of NLP came from the modelling of renowned therapists of their day, such as Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir, and Milton Erickson. By analysing and reconstructing the communication styles and intervention strategies of these highly effective therapists, teachable patterns, such as the 'meta model' and the 'Milton model' were established (Bandler & Grinder, 1975a, 1975b, 1979; Grinder & Bandler, 1976; Grinder et al., 1977).

Given the diverse fields in which NLP is applied, NLP is best appreciated as a methodology, such that the domain-specific tools and techniques it is often associated with are actually the outputs of applying its methodology to a specific context (de Rijk et al., 2019). In this sense, NLP is not a static set of techniques, but a dynamic system for capturing and transferring such excellence in human functioning (Dormandy & Grimley, 2024). Fundamentally, NLP's purpose is both pragmatic and educative, as it is designed to increase people's behavioural flexibility and help them create new options for themselves in relation to their subjective experience (how they think, feel, and act), thereby enhancing their agency to change their experience through their interpretations and meaning-making. Definitions for NLP, provided by its developers, practitioners, and membership organisations, can be found in Table 2.2. Such definitions of NLP remain varied and often circular (Hollander et al., 2016), but common threads across them include modelling of excellence, understanding and shaping subjective experience, strategic use of language, and the design of interventions aimed at increasing behavioural choice. For example, the Association for NLP (ANLP) defines NLP as:

A collection of models, techniques, and strategies for modelling excellence...to help us better understand how our thought processes and behaviour, including the language we use, influences the result we get (The Association for Neuro Linguistic Programming, 2021).

As a largely independent and authoritative source has developed this definition and encompasses the principal components discussed above, I have adopted it for my study.

**Table 2.2***Definitions of NLP*

<b>Definition</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
“a collection of models, techniques & strategies for modelling excellence, in order to help us better understand how our thought processes & behaviour, including how the language we use, influences the way we think & the results we get”	The Association for Neuro Linguistic Programming (2021, p. webpage)	Connects a sense of the epistemology, ontology, methodology and methods of NLP within a framework of subjective experience intra- and inter- personally
“A behavioural model that consists of a series of tools and techniques modelled on performance excellence”	de Rijk (2015, p. 29)	Limits NLP to its tools and techniques without expansion to include its methodology
“is a field that explores how people effectively attain what they want (that is, succeed in reaching their objectives), the resources they need, and how to keep enhancing their ability to achieve their desired goals”	NLP Leadership Summit (2013, p. webpage)	Whilst giving a sense of ‘usefulness’ and ‘intentionality’, it does not sufficiently differentiate what NLP is versus other approaches to achieving similar outcomes
“how people communicate, perform skills and create experiences through patterns of thought and behaviour, mediated by language...helping people create more preferable and useful (to them) experiences of the world, typically by attending to and modifying those patterns of thought and behaviour”	Tosey and Mathison (2009, p. 19)	Identifying six faces of NLP, the authors identify the interface of philosophy and practice
“an attitude and a methodology, that leave behind a trail of techniques”	Bandler in O’Connor (2001, p. 2)	Connects a sense of the epistemology, ontology, methodology and methods of NLP, but imprecise as similar could be said about other discoveries, such as ‘book printing’ (Hollander et al., 2016, p. 32)
“a modelling technology” (p. 50) “the core activity that defines NLP...the mapping of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge” (p. 271)	Bostic St Clair and Grinder (2001, p. 50)	Identifies the NLP methodology as ‘modelling’
“it is not a set of techniques it is an attitude”	Bandler (1985, p. 155)	Again, imprecise, but shifts attention away from NLP outputs (methods) towards NLP ontology and methodology

“the study of the structure of subjective experience”	Dilts et al. (1980, book subtitle)	An early definition of NLP much used in the NLP community but imprecise and not unique to NLP
“formal patterns of communication that are content-free. <i>They can be used in any context of human communication and behavior [sic]</i> ”.	Bandler and Grinder (1979, p. 190)	An original definition by two of the original developers of NLP

*Note.* Table constructed by the author.

Despite this broad applicability, NLP remains marginalised in most academic circles, particularly in academic psychology. This is primarily due to its early excessive claims, limited empirical validation, and the proliferation of inconsistent training standards (Tosey & Mathison, 2003; Witkowski, 2010). While such concerns persist, recent NLP-oriented academic contributions have begun to reframe NLP as a practical and epistemologically coherent method for facilitating experiential change, particularly when applied within a structured and ethical context such as coaching. This contrasts significantly with the historic view of NLP as a pseudoscientific set of therapeutic practices (de Rijk et al., 2019; Dormandy & Grimley, 2024; Grimley, 2012). My study treats NLP not as a standalone modality, but as a methodology that can be aligned with professional coaching practices. When considered outside its therapeutic associations and recontextualised as a phenomenologically model-based approach, NLP offers significant potential to enhance a coach’s ability to facilitate insight, shift perspective, and support client agency. For professional coaches who are also NLP-trained, the challenge lies in determining which NLP elements align with the coaching process and how to employ them in ways that respect ethical boundaries and align with ICF standards. This challenge lies at the heart of my study, which explores how professional coaches integrate their NLP expertise within their ICF coaching practice.

## 2.5 Modalities in practice

With both coaching and NLP individually defined, my review now explores how these modalities, and others, interact in real coaching contexts. The academic discourse reveals that there are few studies on the lived experiences of practitioners in the helping professions, in general, and particularly from the perspective of those seeking to integrate their expertise. Within the helping professions, counselling, psychotherapy, and coaching (amongst others) can be grouped as predominantly ‘talking interventions’ with many similarities and leading to unclear boundaries between them (Giraldez-Hayes, 2021). Whilst many studies have explored the boundaries between these as professions over the past two decades (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Baker,

2014; Grant & Green, 2018), Bachkirova and Baker (2018) conclude that the waning of interest in the topic in the literature is at odds with the fact that many important questions are still to be answered. Further, the study by Giraldez-Hayes (2021) notes that there have been even fewer studies that have at any time sought to understand how professional practitioners “perceive, explain and apply those boundaries” (p. 21) in the lived experience of their practice.

In the coaching context, particularly where experienced coaching professionals with diverse backgrounds and expertise are involved, the boundaries between coaching and other modalities often become fluid (Giraldez-Hayes, 2021; Sime & Jacob, 2018). Coaches often draw on knowledge and approaches associated with adjacent disciplines, such as mentoring, counselling, therapy, training, and consulting (Hardingham, 2004; Silsbee, 2010). A systematic literature review by Pandolfi (2020) identified coaches’ ‘expertise and skills and coaches’ ‘background’ as the two most important ingredients to effective coaching, while a study by Fisher et al. (2023) found that coaches’ background and prior career experiences made a difference within the coaching contexts they studied. The Fisher et al. (2023) study found that these coach attributes made clients feel better understood and increased their confidence in their coaches and the coaching they provided. Additionally, the coaches themselves felt more confident and better able to question, probe, and challenge their coachees. The Pandolfi (2020) study concluded that further research was required to “clarify what elements of expertise influence outcomes” and “understand the influence of coaches’ background” (pp. 12–13). For Sime and Jacob (2018) these role shifts may occur unintentionally, intuitively, or even intentionally, and are often shaped by context, client expectations, or the coach’s professional identity.

From a compliance standpoint, such shifts present significant challenges for practitioners. The ICF and other professional coaching organisations advocate for clarity around modality, both to protect the integrity of the coaching relationship and to ensure ethical conduct. According to Parsloe and Wray (2000), staying ‘within modality’ is essential for coaching to remain coaching. The use of teaching frameworks, diagnostic tools, or solution suggestions, for instance, may veer into modalities such as training or mentoring, especially if the coach’s role shifts to sharing their knowledge in some way, such as explaining and utilising a model of some kind (Sime & Jacob, 2018). The distinction between coaching and (developmental) mentoring is particularly germane. While both are dialogic and developmental, mentoring traditionally involves guidance, direction, and experience sharing by someone with more relevant expertise or seniority (Clutterbuck & Turner, 2018), which can create a potential power imbalance in the relationship (Blackman et al.,

2018; Koopman et al., 2021). For Parsloe and Leedham (2022), mentoring is therefore directive to some varying degree, whereas coaching is fundamentally non-directive.

Nevertheless, several authors such as Brock (2009) and Clutterbuck (2008) argue for the integration of the two, particularly when coaching is deployed within complex organisational settings. In this study, mentoring is treated as a reference modality, highlighting the dilemmas professional coaches face when shifting between roles that may still be seen as ‘developmental’ in orientation. In this regard, NLP is often associated with a more practitioner led approach akin to mentoring and has been chosen as the additional ‘expertise’, as a heuristic, to be integrated into the coaching context, because it is the third most popular coaching model amongst professional coaches (Passmore et al., 2017) and because of my own researcher-practitioner positionality as a dual qualified NLP and ICF coach professional.

The literature further supports that the interplay of modalities is often situational and relational. A coach might begin a session within the coaching frame but shift momentarily into a mentoring or educational posture. This is particularly likely when a client seeks clarity, explanation, or reassurance. Such shifts aren’t inherently problematic; rather, the issue arises when the coach is unaware of the shift, fails to contract for it, or inadvertently breaches ethical or professional standards in doing so (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). Professional coaching practice requires more than technical competence; it demands reflexivity, situational awareness, and transparency in managing modality transitions. These transitions must be navigated with conscious reference to the client’s goals, the agreed-upon coaching contract, and the ethical framework governing the practitioner’s work. My study examines how coaches accredited in both NLP and ICF coaching navigate such transitions, specifically, how they apply NLP-informed approaches to preserve the integrity of the coaching relationship and avoid unacknowledged shifts into adjacent modalities.

In summary, modality integration is not merely a methodological issue; it is a matter of professional identity, ethical clarity, and systemic awareness. Coaches must discern not only what they are ‘doing’ but also who they are ‘being’ in the moment: coach, mentor, trainer, consultant, or something else. The capacity to navigate these roles with self-awareness and procedural adherence is an essential component of coaching maturity and forms a key dimension of my study’s inquiry.

## 2.6 Coaching contexts and constraints

Although coaching remains an unregulated field globally, various systemic, contractual, and organisational dimensions shape the advancement of coaching professional practice (Sime & Jacob, 2018; Tee et al., 2018). These factors influence how coaches conceptualise themselves and how they deliver their work, including the expectations of both individual coaches and client organisations, legal and psycho-social agreements governing engagements, and the frameworks established by professional coaching bodies such as the ICF (Hawkins & Turner, 2020). I now consider each of these parameters in turn:

### i. Coachee and client organisation expectations

External professional coaches often serve both an individual client (the coachee) and a sponsoring organisation, creating a triadic relationship in which expectations between all parties need to be aligned. Organisations often define the scope of coaching through their policies and pre-determined coaching programmes, often referencing specific coaching models or professional body standards. In such contexts, coaching is positioned not just as a development intervention for the coachee, but also as a tool for enhancing organisational performance and building culture (Hawkins, 2012). Such parameters certainly shape, and at times constrain, the autonomy of the coach (and coachee), particularly when there is pressure to deliver predefined outcomes or adopt directive approaches that may be inconsistent with expected coaching standards. A coachee unfamiliar with coaching may expect advice, guidance, problem-solving, and expectations that are more consistent with those of mentoring, consulting, or therapy. Coaches must therefore engage in careful contracting to ensure: a clear definition of the coaching modality, clarity about their respective roles, and effective management of expectations regarding both process and outcomes (Lee, 2013). This also provides a safeguard against unintentional shifts into other modalities, especially when a coach possesses diverse expertise. However, monitoring adherence to these standards can be challenging, emphasising the importance of accredited coaching provision, which has grown predominantly within large corporations (Blackman et al., 2018; Koopman et al., 2021).

### ii. Legal and psycho-social contracting

Contracting is the bedrock of professional coaching. It establishes both the scope of an engagement and ensures psychological safety and mutual accountability for co-creating meaningful outcomes. To achieve this, Hawkins and Smith (2013) distinguish between legal contracts (covering confidentiality, logistical considerations, and broader organisational considerations) and psycho-social contracts (covering boundaries, roles, and relational norms).

Both types of contract require active maintenance and re-contracting over the life of a coaching relationship (including within any given session) (Gettman et al., 2019). In coaching sessions where the coach considers drawing on explicit techniques or models from adjacent disciplines, such as NLP, clear and transparent re-contracting becomes essential. This protects the ethical integrity of the coaching process and ensures that coachees understand and consent to shifts in approach. This is particularly important, given that as few as one-third of coachees recognise their coaching session outcomes as aligned with the initial agreements (Turner & Clutterbuck, 2019). In line with this, Foy (2021) and Hawkins and Smith (2013) argue that re-contracting is particularly crucial when it comes to modality integration, where failure to clearly and transparently discuss and agree a shift can: blur professional boundaries, misalign expectations, or compromise trust and safety. Key considerations in modality-related contracting include:

1. The extent and nature of contracts (legal and psycho-social) made with the coachee,
2. Client organisation (if applicable) contracts, including broader ethical dimensions,
3. The alignment of modality choices with the session's intended outcomes,
4. Adherence to any professional body's standards and definition of coaching hours,
5. The coach's willingness, ability, and qualification to employ alternative modalities.

### iii. Role of professional bodies

Global professional coaching bodies play a vital role in shaping how coaching is defined, practiced, and evaluated, as they define coaching and its frameworks, accredit coach training programs, and delineate ethical coaching practice boundaries (Moin et al., 2023). The ICF, EMCC, and AC are the three largest bodies, collectively representing two-thirds of the 110,000 accredited coaches worldwide (International Coaching Federation, 2023). This number has doubled in just seven years (International Coaching Federation, 2016). Within this, a broader group of coaching bodies (currently excluding the ICF) is increasingly aligning their standards through the Global Coaching Mentoring Agreement (GCMA) (Blackman & Clutterbuck, 2018). Their alignment includes: mutual recognition of credentialing standards, continuing professional development (CPD) requirements, and ethical guidelines. Such developments have been accelerated in recent times by the rise of digital coaching platforms, including BetterUp, CoachHub, and Ezra (Passmore & Woodward, 2023). Despite these recent advances, global coaching organisations remain only partially representative of the coaching field. Tee et al. (2018) estimate that accredited coaches account for approximately one-third of those who self-identify as

professional coaches. This creates both challenges and opportunities for research and practice. On the one hand, accreditation provides legitimacy, clarity, and ethical protection. On the other hand, it may constrain methodological choice and innovation, particularly in integrating diverse areas of expertise, such as NLP.

NLP lacks such a unified representation or regulation. It has significantly more accrediting bodies, including ABNLP, IANLP, IN, INLPTA, and SNLP, and approximately 5 million people worldwide hold NLP accreditations (Lazarus, 2020). Further, the level of co-operation, the standardisation of training, and the maturity of the profession fall considerably behind coaching, with an understandable impact on consumers' (individuals and organisations) appreciation of its professional standing and ethical expectations of its practitioners (Falconer, 2022). In relation to the intersection of NLP and coaching amongst professional practitioners, Passmore et al. (2017) suggest that NLP is used by ten per cent of coaches, and as I have mentioned, Tee et al. (2018) identifies that accredited coaches represent about a third of the true number of professional coaches. Applying these numbers to the figures provided earlier (10% of 110,000 multiplied by three) suggests that up to 33,000 professional practitioners worldwide are integrating coaching and NLP into their practices. It is likely that, given their shared historical roots and complementary knowledge bases, the numbers could be (much) higher. This intersection of NLP and coaching is of central interest to my study, which aims to inform and enrich coaching practices (Grimley, 2012). Their experience navigating institutional expectations, contractual clarity, and understanding, as well as personal integrity, provides critical insight into how modality integration is possible without compromising professional coaching standards. Further, Blackman and Clutterbuck (2018) detail some crucial areas for further professionalisation in coaching, which could just as well apply to NLP:

- defining excellence in practice
- mandating accreditation beyond mere membership
- requiring supervision beyond CPD
- enhancing research for evidence-based practice
- making CPD obligatory for ongoing accreditation and membership
- integrating reflective practice for professional advancement, and
- emphasising postgraduate academic qualifications in relevant fields

## 2.7 Professional development and coach maturity

Professional coaching isn't a static discipline; it's a development journey marked by increasing complexity, reflexivity, and contextual responsiveness. As coaches evolve in their practice, they tend to progress through stages of development that reflect differing priorities, levels of self-awareness, and relationships to structure and methodology. This developmental trajectory informs how coaches engage with modalities like NLP and how they manage integration of such diverse expertise within a coaching framework defined by professional standards, such as those of the ICF. Clutterbuck and Turner (2018, p. 11), identify four levels of its maturity:

- Models based. Where the coach is concerned with controlling the coaching activity to achieve objectives such as adherence to a set coaching framework, using a list of coaching questions, and guiding the coachee toward the output for the session.
- Process-based. Where the coach is concerned with containing the client's deviance, providing some flexibility while keeping them 'on track'.
- Philosophy-based. Where the coach facilitates the client's exploration of topics more loosely yet ensures that what occurs remains within the bounds of the coach's map of coaching or coaching self-concept.
- Systemic eclectic. Where the coach serves as an enabler to the coachee in exploring whatever is useful to the coachee, and the coach may draw upon an eclectic mix of processes, frameworks, and tools to assist in this process.

These stages reflect the increasing autonomy, discernment, and methodological agility typically observed in mature professionals across many fields. For dual-accredited NLP and coaching practitioners, this development journey includes a key added dimension: the capacity to discern how NLP, in all its dimensions, might be integrated to enhance coaching effectiveness, while ensuring professional ethical practice is adhered to in navigating any modality boundaries encountered. The kind of integration occurring here is as much philosophical as it is technical. It involves navigating identity, client relationships, and context, often occurring *in vivo*. Skilled and experienced coaches constantly make subtle decisions about whether, when, and how to apply insights from adjacent domains, including NLP, without reverting to prescriptive or content-driven interventions that would contradict the coachee-led nature of ICF-compliant coaching they seek to deliver.

In the absence of a clear consensus on what ‘good practice looks like’ in coaching (Blackman et al., 2018, p. 39), coaches often look inward, relying on reflective practice, supervision, and CPD to shape their evolving practice. This is likely to be even more the case where coaches seek to integrate diverse expertise, but possibly with less established routes for this type of support, given that each coach’s background will be quite different. The work of Sime and Jacob (2018) highlights how ICF master certified coaches (MCC) make conscious decisions about their professional boundaries and role enactments, recognising that even highly experienced practitioners must continually navigate ambiguity and complexity. My study centres on this broader developmental inquiry, particularly for coaches seeking to integrate diverse expertise in an ICF-compliant coaching context.

By focusing on the lived experiences of dual-accredited coaches, my study investigates how professional maturity influences the integration of NLP into coaching practice. In particular, it explores how practitioners conceptualise, justify, and contract for the use of NLP-informed approaches. These practices reflect both individual competence and broader efforts within the field to professionalise.

## **2.8 The theory-practice gap**

A challenge for coaching, as it is for many applied professions, is the gap between theoretical models and the lived realities of practice. This theory-practice gap refers to the dissonance between how coaching is described in formal training and professional standards, and how it is actually enacted by practitioners navigating the complexities and dynamics of coaching environments. Monaghan (2015) defines the gap as the difference “between what theory states should happen, and the reality of what actually does” (p. e1). In the context of my study, the gap is most apparent in how dual-accredited coaches reconcile their diverse expertise with the requirement to operate within the ICF’s coaching-specific framework. The existence of these kinds of professional theory-practice gaps has been highlighted in the literature for other fields such as nursing (Rolfe, 1993), sales (Pullins et al., 2016), and social work (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020).

In coaching, the gap manifests as a tension between the ideal of a clearly defined, coachee-led, non-directive process and the practices coaches employ. The actual practices coaches employ are often shaped by organisational demands, client expectations, and the practitioner’s own repertoire of tools and frameworks (Sime & Jacob, 2018). This gap is compounded by limited academic

exploration in coaching and the constraints imposed by adherence to ethical practices mandated by accreditation bodies (Grant, 2017). The Sime and Jacob (2018) study illustrates the complexity of real-world coaching, particularly the regular encounters reported by MCC coaches involving role ambiguity and boundary blurring. This was particularly prevalent when their experience or client needs tempted them to offer advice, guidance, or interpretation. Even at this highest level of accreditation, coaches described subtle negotiations of professional identity and modality discipline, revealing that theoretical clarity does not always lead to practical certainty. The gap is further exacerbated by the ethical obligations imposed by professional coaching bodies. The ICF, for example, mandates strict adherence to a coaching definition that prioritises client-led dialogue and requires any directive intervention (if used) to be explicitly contracted (Grant, 2016). While these standards promote ethical rigour and professional identity, they also constrain the methodological flexibility many experienced coaches seek.

For practitioners seeking to integrate diverse expertise in the coaching context, such as the participants in my study, the challenge centres on using that expertise without breaching ICF coaching parameters or undermining the coachee's agency. This interplay between expertise and compliance is exactly what my study seeks to explore. By examining how experienced NLP-trained coaches navigate the terrain in practice, given that they are also ICF-accredited, an understanding can be gained of how integration occurs, the ethical strategies they employ, and how they construct meaning around their choices. In this way, my study contributes to an appreciation of how theoretical fidelity and practitioner flexibility co-exist to bridge the gap between coaching theory and practice.

## **2.9 Chapter conclusions**

My study examines how dual-accredited NLP and ICF coaches incorporate NLP expertise into their coaching practices while remaining compliant with professional coaching standards. My literature and context review has sought to provide the conceptual, professional, and methodological context and foundation to the relevance and worth of my study. In tracing the historical and theoretical evolution of coaching and NLP, many definitional and methodological ambiguities are emphasised, and these continue to shape the practice of both today. Coaching and NLP face similar challenges from having inconsistent definitions, varied accreditation standards, and an ongoing quest for legitimacy. However, whilst coaching emerges from this context as a dynamic, diverse, academically engaged, and increasingly professionalised field, NLP, whilst widely practised across multiple domains, continues to face academic marginalisation, low levels

of recognised professionalism, and limited co-operation between its accrediting bodies. However, NLP serves as a suitable heuristic for exploring how coaches integrate diverse expertise within the broader practice of coaching because it is the third most widely used coaching model, its methodologies make valuable contributions to the coaching field, and it supports my positionality as a researcher-practitioner.

This chapter also emphasises the practical and ethical complexities that professional coaches face when integrating adjacent modalities. It shows that coaching doesn't occur in isolation and is primarily shaped by systemic influences, such as client expectations, organisational frameworks, legal and psychosocial contracting, and the ethical standards of accrediting bodies. For such professional coaches, these dimensions present particular challenges, requiring them to discern how to draw on their diverse expertise without breaching professional boundaries, undermining the coachee's agency, or shifting into other roles (such as mentoring, therapy, or training) without explicit contracting. In this context, a key theme emerging from the literature is the persistence of a gap between theory and practice. Even highly experienced and qualified master coaches encounter tensions between the theoretical expectations prescribed by professional standards and the adaptive, context-sensitive decisions required in practice. This gap becomes particularly pronounced for coaches with potentially multiple accreditations, who must navigate integrating expertise in a context where they need to meet the expectations of multiple professional bodies, while also remaining true to the non-directive, client-centred ethos of coaching.

My study builds on these insights by exploring the lived experience of dual-accredited NLP and ICF professional coaches. It investigates how coaches conceptualise, negotiate, and apply NLP-informed approaches in their coaching work, how they manage boundaries between adjacent modalities, and how they make sense of their own professional identity. In doing so, my research aims to contribute to the ongoing professionalisation of coaching, offering practice-informed insights into ethical integration, reflective practice, and the evolving meaning of 'good coaching'. This sets the stage for my study, which has sought to address many of the above literature gaps and to provide practitioners and professional bodies alike with relevant insights that further advance professional practice.

## **Chapter 3: Methodologies and Methods**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Having completed the initial literature review (LR) in the previous chapter, I turn my attention in this chapter to this study's research methodologies and methods (MM). To arrive at my chosen research approach, or methodologies, I firstly considered my philosophical stance as a researcher in relation to my topic. Then, I explored the set of research designs that align with my philosophical stance. Lastly, I selected research methods appropriate to both my philosophical stance and research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). According to those authors, the process of configuring a research approach (or methodology) may be non-linear, indeed recursive, and also likely takes into account "the research problem or issue being addressed, the researcher's personal experiences, and the audiences for the study" (pp. 3-4).

### **3.2 Identifying my philosophical stance as a researcher-practitioner**

Guba (1990) states that a philosophical stance in research is revealed by the "basic set of beliefs that guide action" (p. 17) on the part of the researcher. Lincoln et al. (2023), develop this further by attributing the resulting configuration of values, assumptions, and beliefs brought by a researcher to their research context as an 'alternative inquiry paradigm' (AIP). Others have variously referred to similar constructs as 'epistemologies and ontologies' (Crotty, 1998), 'broadly conceived research methodologies' (Neuman, 2014), and 'philosophical worldviews' (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Adopting the Lincoln et al. (2023) typology and establishing my AIP were essential to understanding how my assumptions and beliefs would influence my research approach within my professional practice context. I chose to complete Bristow and Saunders' (Saunders et al., 2024, pp. 161–164) 'Heightening your Awareness of your Research Philosophy' (HARP) questionnaire. Based upon my 'interpretivist' AIP discovered through my use of that tool (Saunders et al., 2024) and my exploration of the AIP choice set (Lincoln et al., 2023), Table 3.1 details the resultant ontological, epistemological, and axiological aspects of my research stance. This table can be usefully expanded upon using the "Themes of knowledge: An heuristic schema of inquiry, thought and practice" completed by Byrd for Guba, Lincoln, and Lynham in 2008 (Lincoln et al., 2023, pp. 114–131).

**Table 3.1***Philosophical stance and methodological choice\**

<b>Interpretivism</b>			
Ontology (nature of reality or being)	Epistemology (what constitutes acceptable knowledge)	Axiology (role of values)	Typical methods
Complex, rich Socially constructed Multiple meanings and interpretations Flux of processes, experiences practices	Theories/concepts too simple Focus on narratives and interpretations New understandings as contribution	Value bound Researcher is: -part of the research -interpreting narrative -reflexive	Qualitative Inductive Small samples In depth studies Interpretations

*Note.* \*Table built by the author combining Saunders et al., (2024) HARP tool and their ‘Comparison of research philosophical positions’ (pp144-145), and (Lincoln et al., 2023) AIP choice set.

Using the HARP tool revealed that in the context of contemplating the facets of my study, I had a very strong self-assessed leaning towards ‘interpretivism’, which is also typically referred to as ‘constructivism’, or ‘social constructivism’, by other authors (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2023). Interpretivism best represents my philosophical orientation when, as a researcher-practitioner, I consider an approach to research within the professional practice context of this study, which involves “where the researcher gains understanding by interpreting subject perceptions” (Denzin et al., 2024, p. 114). From the perspective of this AIP, these individuals or research subjects develop subjective meanings to their experiences as they attempt to make sense of the world in which they live (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Researching within this AIP, my objective has been to explore research participants’ lived experiences within the study’s professional practice context, so that I might “make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world”, to generate ‘patterns of meaning’ across their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2022, p. 9).

According to Denscombe (2021), from an interpretivist stance, “researchers’ thinking will be shaped to some extent or other by their own experiences and identities as members of the social world within which their work takes place” (p. 2). My role as a researcher is to interpret what I find, a process shaped by my own experiences and background (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on this, it is likely that my philosophical stance comes from both my training and my experience as a practitioner in the field, as well as from my broader psycho-social, educational, and cultural background (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). As indicated from the above, I identify myself as a researcher-practitioner from within my field of study (Parsons et al., 2021), and according to

Tietze (2012) researcher-practitioners can be categorised by their relationship to the location or context of their study. By their model, I would be classified as an ‘insider’, as this relates to where “individuals undertake research on their own areas of work, with those they work with on a day-to-day basis” (Baxter & Gandhi, 2021, p. 6).

### **3.3 Identifying a suitable research design for my study**

Research within the above AIP would reflect the breadth and complexity of views held by those being researched. My aim as a researcher is then to develop insights into the beliefs and lived experiences of those I am researching, which typically involves collecting qualitative data (Denscombe, 2021). Beyond choosing between quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods for my research study, I also had to decide on a research design [or ‘strategy of inquiry’ (Denzin et al., 2024)] consistent with such a qualitative approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This was the case for both my primary research component and for my reflection upon my professional practice journey with my PRE. Regarding the primary research component, as my intention was to explore meaning-making within the lived experiences of individuals in my chosen professional practice context, a phenomenological research design was selected (Crotty, 1998; Denscombe, 2021; Saunders et al., 2024).

Within the set of suitable qualitative designs for my exploratory study (Saunders et al., 2024), I also considered alternative methodologies, including narrative research (Clandinin, 2022) and case studies (Schoch, 2020; Yin, 2018). I chose phenomenology as it: centred upon a clear phenomenon experienced by all participants, rather than exploring the broader life story of each participant, as would be the case with narrative research (Clandinin, 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2022), could remain broader in contextual scope and not require me to delimit a bounded system for my enquiry as was likely with a case study approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), did not require the identified participants to be available for more than a single data collection opportunity (rather than having me collect data from them in a variety of ways over a prolonged period) (Creswell & Creswell, 2022), and this inquiry design has a strong philosophical history and is connected with professional practice in related contexts (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2023).

#### **i. In relation to my chosen methodological approach**

The traditional philosophical phenomenology is represented by the work that Husserl built upon, drawing from Brentano and Stumpf (Spiegelberg, 1994). Within this, Husserl articulated the concept of the phenomenological reduction, also known as the epoché. These terms relate to the

suspension of the researcher's judgments and preconceptions about the phenomenon being studied, to focus on the essence of that phenomenon, free from the biases, assumptions, and theories that usually colour our perception. The process of achieving this for Husserl was through an activity known as 'bracketing', or 'phenomenological reduction' (Husserl, 2012). Bracketing is closely related to epoché as it is the process through which this suspension of judgment is implemented. It entails researchers 'bracketing out', or methodically setting aside, their own biases and judgments by identifying and reflecting upon their preconceptions about the phenomenon being studied, to ensure they focus purely on the research participants' experiences, isolated from any external causation or explanation. It is considered crucial by some schools of phenomenological thought, as it maintains the researcher's objectivity in phenomenological studies (Husserl, 2012; Spiegelberg, 1994). Since Husserl, contributors to the development of phenomenology have been:

extraordinarily diverse in their interests, in their interpretation of the central issues of phenomenology, in their application of what they understood to be the phenomenological method, and in their development of what they took to be the phenomenological programme for the future (Moran, 2000, p. 3).

While contemporary phenomenological researchers generally agree on the focus of returning to embodied, experiential meanings and producing complex, rich descriptions of phenomena as they are lived, debate continues over methods that adequately balance responsiveness to both the phenomenon itself and the interconnection between the researcher and the researched (Finlay, 2009). Whilst there are many configurations to this, there are two key considerations regarding the use of the phenomenological approach in my study.

Firstly, the importance of the phenomenological reduction and its corresponding requirement for the researcher's bracketing began to be challenged by some significant contributors to the philosophy of phenomenology, most notably Heidegger (Spiegelberg, 1994). Through his development of his Dasein (Heidegger, 2008), 'being in the world' and the existential aspects of experience, Heidegger moves the conversation away from Husserl's focus on consciousness and the methodological tools of epoché and bracketing to explore the question of 'Being' itself (Spiegelberg, 1994). Through Dasein (being there), Heidegger (2008) emphasises the situatedness of human existence such that phenomenological investigation becomes more about interpreting the structures of existence than about bracketing and reducing experiences to their essences.

Subsequent contributors, such as Merleau-Ponty (2002) and van Manen (2023), not only acknowledged the impracticalities of a researcher being able to truly bracket out their own biases, but also began to advocate for the possible benefit, if not necessity, of the researcher playing a more active role in understanding phenomena and creating knowledge about them through their own interpretations. In his book 'Phenomenology of Perception', Merleau-Ponty (2002) argues for the primacy of perception and the embodied nature of human existence, suggesting that our engagement with the world is always already interpretive. So, the idea of achieving a pure, presuppositionless perspective becomes highly problematic. Correspondingly, van Manen (2023) and others have then taken such phenomenological approaches into various professional or applied fields (such as educational sciences in the case of van Manen), to focus upon the lived experiences of practitioners without adherence to the methodological constraints of bracketing and epoché, focusing instead on the richness of lived experience as it presents itself (van Manen, 2016b).

The second key consideration regarding the use of the phenomenological approach in my study is the phenomenological orientation towards interpretation and description, which may well sit on a continuum (Finlay, 2009). According to Finlay (2009), phenomenological inquiry typically starts with lived experience accounts being expressed in everyday language, such as through interview participant narratives. Analysis of these accounts typically involves the use of themes centred upon perspectives or dimensions of the phenomenon studied. It is then that a further variation in the configuration of the research approach tends to arise between different schools of phenomenological thought. Specifically, it relates to the researcher going beyond the surface expression of the lived experiences to 'read between the lines' and accessing the 'fleshy actuality' (Marion, 2005), or implicit dimensions and intuitions, in relation to them. This activity encourages the researcher to interpret, rather than describe, lived experience with the justification that the expression of lived experience is "embedded in the world of language and social relationships, and the inescapable historicity of all understanding" (Finlay, 2009, p. 11).

For van Manen (2023), all phenomenology is interpretive, either 'pointing to' something (which could be considered as descriptive) or 'pointing out' something (interpretively making meaning). Through this exposition of the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of my study, my research design is revealed as 'interpretive phenomenology'. This combines my interpretivist philosophical stance with a phenomenological perspective reflecting Merleau-Ponty's approach to exploring lived experience within a van Manen professional practice context of my specific field of study, in which I identify myself as a researcher-practitioner insider (Parsons et al., 2021;

Tietze, 2012). As a result, I do not bracket out my preconceptions about my study's topic; instead, I embrace them to enhance the depth and richness of my analysis and discussion.

Separately, this 'interpretive phenomenological' approach can often be confused with a specific methodology known as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The IPA model, developed by Smith (1996), was explicitly designed for psychological research and is markedly different from the interpretive phenomenology being adopted by my study. This is because IPA combines phenomenology with hermeneutics and idiography, and therefore has its own distinct philosophical and methodological configuration, which is reflected in its application (Smith et al., 2022). As a result, IPA is suited to smaller-scale studies (involving just a few cases) that focus on the greater depth of individual experience achieved through a double hermeneutic process. My choice of interpretive phenomenology as the approach for my study reflects that I do not seek to reveal the much deeper psychological processes or broader stories behind the lived experience of those being researched. Instead, I seek to explore the lived experience of those researched, centred solely upon their experience of the clear phenomenon shared by those included in the study. This, I believe, is more relevant to the exploration of professional practice in the coaching context. In this way, interpretive phenomenology is my preferred methodological approach, and it is not limited to such small sample sizes and exploratory depth as IPA (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Smith et al., 2022).

With regards to the PRE component involving my reflecting upon my professional practice journey through my doctoral studies, in the context of the same choice set of qualitative research designs as before, I emphasise myself as a researcher-practitioner 'insider' (Parsons et al., 2021; Tietze, 2012) and I make no attempt to 'bracket out' (Heidegger, 2008) my preconceptions of my study's topic for two reasons. Firstly, based on the argument put forward by Merleau-Ponty (2002) that we can never achieve a pure, presuppositionless perspective on lived experience, and secondly, in recognition of my immersion in my study as a researcher-practitioner insider, which enhances its depth and richness (van Manen, 2023). In interpretive phenomenology, at least when in line with the approaches of Merleau-Ponty and van Manen, the subjective experiences of both those studied and the researcher-practitioner are embraced.

ii. Selecting a suitable data collection method for my primary research component

Given the qualitative interpretive phenomenological research approach that I had configured to this point, I sought to identify methods consistent with: my philosophical stance, my chosen research design, my research topic, norms for studies within my professional practice context,

characteristics of my intended participant pool, and the intended audiences for my study (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Denscombe, 2021; Lincoln et al., 2023; Saunders et al., 2024).

In anticipation of possible difficulties in identifying and recruiting my intended research participants, the likelihood I would only have the one data collection opportunity with them and the multiple facets to the study given above that I would have to balance to ensure coherence methodologically, I decided upon a mono method cross-sectional approach when selecting methods for my exploratory study (Denscombe, 2010; Saunders et al., 2024). A mono method qualitative study means using “a single data collection technique, such as semi-structured interviews, and corresponding qualitative analytical procedure” (Saunders et al., 2024, p. 179). Cross-sectional means a ‘snapshot’ in time, rather than a study of, say, a group over time (Denscombe, 2010, p. 101). Methods within the choice set for a qualitative research approach are typified using: open-ended questions, data from one or more of such items as interviews, observations, and documents, textual and/or image analysis, and interpretation relating to patterns or themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Denscombe, 2021; Lincoln et al., 2023; Saunders et al., 2024).

The choice set regarding applicable data collection methods that I identified for my study included focus groups, observations, and interviews (Denzin et al., 2024; Gold, 2017; Krueger & Casey, 2014; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Observation was ruled out because sufficient ‘proximity’ between the participants and me could not be achieved to utilise the method appropriately (Bratich, 2024). Focus group(s) at first appeared to be an attractive and suitable data collection method for my study. This is because “focus groups often produce data that are seldom produced through individual interviewing and observation and result in particularly powerful interpretive insights” (Kamberelis et al., 2024, p. 698). However, whilst they allow the researcher to see “the complex ways people position themselves in relation to each other as they process questions, issues, and topics in focused ways” (Kamberelis et al., 2024, p. 699), this deviated from the actual intention of my research which has been to reveal the lived experience of the individual in their own personal professional practice context, such that any socially constructed meanings relate to the practitioner with their clients, rather than other practitioners (Saunders et al., 2024). This concern, combined with the likely logistical issues of coordinating multiple participants from different time zones and their diaries, led me to decide against adopting this method as a data collection option.

In relation to using interviews as the data collection method for my study, this approach appealed to me because interviews centre on self-reports, that is, “what people say they do, what they say they believe, what opinions they say they have” (Denscombe, 2021, p. 184). This represents

exactly what I sought for my study, as indicated in my intention above, and, in turn, would maintain cohesion with my qualitative exploratory research approach thus far. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015, pp. 99–100) “no standard procedures or rules exist for conducting a research interview” and so the focus is upon the interviewer (the researcher, me) making “thoughtful decisions about method based on knowledge of the topic of study, the methodological options available, their ethical implications, and anticipated consequences of the choices for the entire interview project”. In line with this, they advance a “seven stages of an interview inquiry” framework (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 102). In adopting their framework, with the ‘Thematising’ first stage completed (establishing the purpose of the study and gaining subject matter knowledge), the focus of this methodology and methods chapter is on the ‘Designing’, ‘Interviewing’, and ‘Transcribing’ stages. The remaining three stages are suitably covered in the following chapters: ‘Findings’ and ‘Discussion’.

A key consideration in designing my approach to interviewing as a data collection method was determining how structured it would be. The choice set is typically reported as being: (relatively) structured, (relatively) semi-structured, and (relatively) unstructured (Brinkmann, 2018; Denscombe, 2021; Saunders et al., 2024). The bracketed word ‘relatively’ is added by Brinkmann, as they see selection as a configured choice across a spectrum, rather than as either/or options, which is important to know in relation to my choice of interview approach (Brinkmann, 2018). Firstly, I established that a structured interview approach would be incongruent with the configuration of my study to date, as structured interviews are typically associated with research in which a more rigidly managed data collection requirement exists (Brinkmann, 2018; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Saunders et al., 2024). An example might be a large-scale survey with multiple researchers needing to use the same list of questions and restricted answer options; for this reason, they are often referred to as ‘standardised’ interviews (Denscombe, 2021).

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews are ‘non-standardised’, and oftentimes they are usefully referred to as ‘qualitative research interviews’ (Saunders et al., 2024) and therefore represent the choice set for a study like mine. The key difference between the two is that, in unstructured interviews, the researcher relies more on an emergent narrative style to inform the questions asked (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The interviews are fully exploratory and emergent. As a result, each interview will likely be conducted at considerable depth, and across interviews, the dataset will have extensive breadth. The main role of the interviewer is to remain as silent as possible in such interviews (Brinkmann, 2018). Unstructured interviews might then be an

approach more in line with a methodology such as IPA, which was described above in the research design section, which would not be applicable to my study.

Along similar lines, semi-structured interviews are more in line with my methodological approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saunders et al., 2024), as I seek to explore the lived experience of those researched based solely on the research sample's experience of the study's identified phenomenon, rather than to explore their deeper psychological processes, or broader stories. With semi-structured qualitative interviews, there are likely to be some initial themes or key questions to give the interview some focus, and the effect this has on the interview output really depends on the researcher's philosophical stance (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Saunders et al., 2024). As I have taken an interpretivist stance, I am not expecting to reveal any sense of 'truth' through my interpretations of participant narratives. Instead, I have used my interview questions as a jumping-off point, yielding contingent flexibility as an interviewer (Saunders et al., 2024). According to Brinkmann (2018, p. 579), this approach, "makes better use of the knowledge producing potentials of dialogues" and the interviewer (the researcher, me) has "a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process". This is a declared intention of mine at the outset of this study, as I have identified myself as a researcher-practitioner from within the field of study (or professional practice context) (Saunders et al., 2024).

Additionally, Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) define semi-structured qualitative research interviews as "an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 6). This approach appeared to be consistent with my qualitative research methods. I selected it as the data collection method for both my primary research component and the reflection on my professional practice component of my PRE. In taking account of the feasibility of using semi-structured interviews as my data collection method, I have also needed to consider: the size of the pool of prospective participants, the ease with which I might identify, communicate with, and recruit them, their willingness and authority to be able to participate in the study, and their acceptance of such a semi-structured interview approach to their participation (Denscombe, 2021). These logistical aspects regarding my choice of data collection method are explored after I have covered my choice of data analysis method.

iii A data collection method for collecting data from myself for my reflective component

For the reflection part of my PRE, which is my reflection on my professional practice throughout my DProfPrac journey, I remained consistent with my interpretative phenomenological approach,

using my own lived experience as a researcher-practitioner as the focus of the reflective component of my study. As indicated above, I sought to identify methods consistent with: my philosophical stance, my chosen research design, my research topic, norms for studies within my professional practice context, characteristics of my intended participant pool, and the intended audiences for my research (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Denscombe, 2021; Lincoln et al., 2023; Saunders et al., 2024). As established in the last section, my interpretive phenomenological approach, in line with Merleau-Ponty and van Manen, where the phenomenological epoché and bracketing are set aside, invites the use of a methodology suitable for a researcher-practitioner insider (Parsons et al., 2021; Tietze, 2012) to use critical reflexive self-study (Boufooy-Bastick, 2004). I have simultaneously adopted semi-structured self-interviews recorded by me and featuring me answering a small number of set reflective questions with an irregular cadence as the data collection method for this reflective component of my PRE (Boufooy-Bastick, 2004) with respect to developments in my professional practice framework. More on how this was done is given in a later section.

iv Selecting a suitable data analysis method for analysing data for my primary research component

Again, in the context of my qualitative interpretive phenomenological research approach I sought to identify methods consistent with: my philosophical stance, my chosen research design, my research topic, norms for studies within my professional practice context, characteristics of my intended participant pool, and the intended audiences for my research (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Denscombe, 2021; Lincoln et al., 2023; Saunders et al., 2024). As detailed in the data collection method, research methods within the choice set for a qualitative study are typified by the use of open-ended questions, data from one or more sources such as interviews, observations, and documents, textual and/or image analysis, and interpretation relating to patterns or themes. (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Denscombe, 2021; Lincoln et al., 2023; Saunders et al., 2024). In line with this, the choice set of applicable data analysis methods I identified for my study included thematic analysis, grounded theory, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis (Saunders et al., 2024).

The first two are noted for their use of ‘data fragmentation’ where their respective analyses break up the data “by coding and reorganising them into analytical categories. This process often involves simplifying or reducing qualitative data by summarising their meanings to be able to comprehend them and undertake further analysis” (Saunders et al., 2024, p. 1397). With the second two alternatives they seek to “maintain the integrity of the data by analysing them without

using fragmentation” (Saunders et al., 2024, p. 1397) with narrative analysis seeking to preserve the sequential and temporal aspects of data stories, and discourse analysis seeking to preserve the wholeness of the data. Within this choice set, thematic analysis stands out immediately as it “is often thought of as a general approach to analysing qualitative data” (Saunders et al., 2024, p. 651). Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2006) the developers of the leading thematic analysis approach have described it for the last 20 years as the “foundational method for qualitative analysis” (p. 78). Whilst this is also the choice of data analysis method that I have made for my study, not least because it is commonly applied in phenomenological studies which “thematize lived experience” (Finlay, 2021, p. 107), it is important to consider two things: on a broad footing, what the other data analysis methods I considered were and why I chose not to use them, and on a narrow footing, which thematic analysis approach did I choose and why that one.

Considering my other data analysis method choices, grounded theory was immediately ruled out as it is part of a wider methodological approach that is both emergent and systematic (Saunders et al., 2024). As such, the data collection and data analysis methods employed in grounded theory are interrelated and must be applied consistently within the overall grounded theory methodology. In this respect, the authors observe that “its use in practice is criticised when researchers only implement some of its elements, not all” (Saunders et al., 2024, p. 668).

Then there is narrative analysis, which is neither part of a broader methodological approach, such as grounded theory, nor a specific analytical technique, like thematic analysis (Saunders et al., 2024). What unifies all narrative analysis approaches is their preservation of the original narrative data. Rather than coding and assigning codes to categories (or themes) as occurs in thematic analysis or grounded theory, in narrative analysis, whole tracts, or extensive units of narrative sequence, are preserved and analysed as a whole. This typically means “extracts will tend to be short stories that have a clear purpose, encompassing a situation, an action and an outcome, expressed in a structure containing a beginning, middle and end” (p. 674). As narrative analysis invites exposition around the broader story of each individual participant at a deeper level, rather than across participants’ experience of an aspect of the phenomenon being studied, as is desired in the interpretive phenomenological approach adopted in my study, I decided not to use this data analysis method.

Similar to narrative analysis, discourse analysis encompasses a range of approaches that examine the social effects of language use. Of particular interest in discourse analysis is “how language is used to shape meaning-making process, to construct social reality” (Saunders et al., 2024, p. 677). Discourse analysis is typically associated with analysing naturally occurring talk, possibly through

an ethnographic study, rather than through the contrived narrative or conversational setting of an interview where the researcher's involvement disrupts the authenticity of the discourse (Hepburn & Potter, 2003). For this reason, discourse analysis was discounted as a potential data analysis method for my study.

When exploring thematic analysis (TA) in depth, several important distinctions should be noted (Finlay, 2021). Fundamental to appreciating the contemporary situation with TA is an awareness of the significance of how codes and themes, upon which all styles of thematic analysis are based, emerge. This is exacerbated in the TA literature by the principle proponents of this method (Braun and Clarke) shifting their position: from accepting the generally held view at the time that the codes and themes exist in, or emerge from, the data set for the researcher to 'discover' (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to their contemporary view that the researcher reflexively creates codes and themes based upon the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Finlay (2021) provides a useful review of how this might come to be, distinguishing, from the outset of their paper, that a continuum from 'systematic' through to 'intuitive' approaches to TA exists, with no single right way of employing it. Braun and Clarke (2021a) refer to there being "a family of methods" (p. 39) with respect to TA. In that same paper, they provide an exposition of how their TA approach compares with other 'pattern-based approaches' such as grounded theory, discourse analysis, and IPA.

Finlay (2021) concludes "the form of analysis engaged depends on the research and methodological context as well as on the type of data collected, the researcher's own preferences, and what is required by others (e.g., the journal, examiners)" (p. 103). Irrespective of the TA approach adopted, the author observes, "a 'good' thematic analysis doesn't simply emerge – it has to be actively 'worked with'; it involves painstaking extraction and reconstruction" (p. 104). In approaching this, Finlay identifies two (overlapping) approaches: 'scientifically descriptive' (large sample sizes) and 'artfully interpretive' (very low sample sizes). Those philosophically and methodologically taking a more objective standpoint (positivist, realist) adopt the more 'scientifically descriptive' styles of TA where "systematic and reliable coding procedures" (p. 104) are established and observed to provide 'validity' to the thematic categories produced. In such cases, according to Levitt et al. (2017), the analysis is focused upon enhancing objective explanations or predictions and removing subjectivity and biases.

Meanwhile, those philosophically and methodologically adopting a more subjective stance adopt the more 'artfully interpretive' TA approaches, in which researchers are typically "more explicitly creative, artful and/or reflexive" (Finlay, 2021, p. 104). According to Levitt et al. (2017), such researchers' analyses seek to reveal participants' meanings through a transparent interpretive

process where, according to Finlay (2021) such “meanings are understood as contingent upon the specific context and the particular interpretive/theoretical lens through which they are viewed” (p. 104). Reviewing the above in the context of my study’s philosophical and methodological position, it becomes clear that a TA approach not only suits my study as a data analysis method, but that a blending ‘artfully interpretive’ leaning TA approach is likely the best fit for my study. This view is supported by my “constructivist epistemological position, which recognises that any knowing is produced by the researcher who is actively constructing meanings with participants” and that I might “embrace creative opportunities and literary embellishment” (Finlay, 2021, p. 105).

Further, by falling within this ‘constructivist crafting’ bracket between the two poles, my position and values should be made explicit as they have “implications for the aim of the research and the nature of the knowledge claims that can be made” (Finlay, 2021, p. 105). A point that Braun and Clarke, and fellow authors, have argued leads to ‘mash-ups’ in which adherence to TA analysis approaches has occurred without reference to explicit epistemological positions (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Terry et al., 2017). When these are made clear, the flexibility that TA offers becomes a strength rather than reflecting a lack of clarity and rigour as is often levelled by its detractors (Finlay, 2021). This emphasises again the importance of methodological integrity, where according to Levitt et al. (2017):

research designs and procedures (e.g., autoethnography, discursive analysis) support the research goals (i.e., the research problems/questions); respect the researcher’s approaches to inquiry (i.e., research traditions sometimes described as world views, paradigms, or philosophical/epistemological assumptions); and are tailored for fundamental characteristics of the subject matter and the investigators (pp. 9–10).

Having adopted TA as my data analysis method in my study, it has been identified from the above discussion that there is no one right way for me to apply TA. Braun and Clarke are known for their six phase generic framework for TA which is both accessible and frequently cited (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Terry et al., 2017) and emphasises a coding approach that is recursive between phases rather than linear, and is “flexible, organic, and emergent through the coding process” and can be configured to suit a range of methodological approaches (Finlay, 2021, p. 107). In more recent times, Braun and Clarke (2019) have sought to configure, from their more generic framework, a more explicitly constructivist TA approach that reflects their own

methodological preferences. This they refer to as reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022), and it is this that I have employed as my data analysis method in my study, as it values researcher subjectivity, recognising the co-construction aspect of meaning consistent with my role as researcher-practitioner immersed as an insider from within the field of study. In this way, my subjectivity, knowledge, and preconceptions are viewed as a resource within my inquiry, rather than as a problem to be addressed, as they add richness and depth to the resultant exposition (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). My engagement with each phase of the six-phase process detailed by Braun and Clarke (2022) is documented in Appendix C of this thesis with the intention of providing a robust, rigorous, and transparent account of the evolution of the resultant themes used in my research.

v      Selecting a data analysis method for analysing data from myself for my reflective component

Again, for the reflection part of my PRE, that is my reflection upon my professional practice through my DProfPrac journey, I remained consistent with my interpretative phenomenological approach as a researcher-practitioner ‘insider’ (Parsons et al., 2021; Tietze, 2012). As indicated previously, I sought to identify methods consistent with: my philosophical stance, my chosen research design, my research topic, norms for studies within my professional practice context, characteristics of my intended participant pool, and the intended audiences for my research (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Denscombe, 2021; Lincoln et al., 2023; Saunders et al., 2024). As established earlier, my interpretive phenomenological approach, in line with Merleau-Ponty and van Manen, where the phenomenological epoché and bracketing are set aside, invites the use of a methodology suitable for a researcher-practitioner to use critical reflexive self-study (Tietze, 2012). Auto-interviewing was established as the data collection method I employed to capture temporal developments and critical incidents that occurred during my study journey (Boufoyo-Bastick, 2004). This method was then adopted for analysing the semi-structured self-interviews that I recorded, and the output of this approach, revealing corresponding developments in my own professional practice, is detailed in the reflective component of my PRE.

### **3.4 Research procedures (including sampling method and sample size)**

This section considers the processes of recruiting and assessing prospective participants for their eligibility to participate in the research study, as well as the collection, handling, and tidying up

of the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews that were subsequently conducted, prior to structured data analysis or interpretation.

#### i Participant sampling and recruitment

Prospective participants were selected from the global community of coaches and NLP practitioners, with the key requirement that they could engage in the process through spoken English and that they met the research study's participant selection criteria (PSC). According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), "qualitative research aims to purposefully sample to select participants...that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (p. 198). In this way, for such qualitative studies, random sampling and large sample sizes are unlikely to be suitable. Instead, 'purposive' sampling, or "non-probability sampling procedures in which judgement of the researcher is used to select the cases that make up the sample", tend to be adopted (Saunders et al., 2024, p. 830).

In this way, I, as a researcher-practitioner from within the field of study, was able to create and apply my PSC to guide my purposive sampling approach, intent upon "building in variety and acknowledging opportunities for intensive study" amongst the participants successfully recruited and interviewed (Denzin et al., 2024, p. 772). At the outset of my research, before I had any knowledge of the likely success of my participant recruitment strategy, I was also prepared to use 'snowball' sampling, which also fits qualitative studies for similar reasons as a "non-probability volunteer sampling procedure in which subsequent respondents are obtained from information provided by initial respondents" (Saunders et al., 2024, p. 834). For the initial participants I interviewed, I utilised the snowball sampling approach, and this resulted in one of the other participants being successfully selected and interviewed similarly. However, as recruitment of participants got underway using only the purposive sampling approach, I found that there was no need for me to continue with the snowball sampling approach.

In scoping availability, I used one of my selected participant recruitment channels, LinkedIn, to assess the size of the potential participant pool for my study. Using the search string 'coach -sports -football -sport -basketball -baseball -hockey -soccer -badminton -tennis -cricket -volleyball' (this being done to exclude the multitude of sports only coaches), the global number of coaches was gauged at 3.1m (LinkedIn, 2024a). Applying the core participant criteria through a revised LinkedIn search string of 'ICF NLP Coach' reduced the total to around 7,800 (LinkedIn, 2024c). As a cross-check, the LinkedIn search string of just 'ICF NLP' yielded a number of 2,700

(LinkedIn, 2024b). This gave me encouragement that the pool of prospective participants was large enough and accessible enough for me to commence my recruitment strategy as I had envisioned in my research proposal, which the ethics committee had approved. Utilising this channel, along with the other planned recruitment channels, whilst also filtering them with my PSC as best I could from afar, I was soon responding to a healthy stream of prospective participants for my study, showing success in relation to ‘leverage-saliency theory’ (Groves et al., 2000). Once I was in dialogue with prospective participants, I began placing them in the recruitment process to ensure they each received electronic copies of the participant information sheet and consent form, and that they had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and their participation, prior to making their final decision (Saunders et al., 2024).

Furthermore, once in communication with them, I checked each prospective participant against my PSC, which included verifying their sufficient longevity of professional practice, as well as the sufficiency & recency of both coaching and NLP activities within their professional practice, along with their NLP and ICF accreditations. This is consistent with Saunders et al. (2024, p. 316) the ‘non-probability sampling technique’ flowchart relating to my choice of data collection and data analysis methods, and the use of purposive sampling. For ICF accreditation status, this was generally easy to establish. In contrast, NLP accreditation status was more problematic to establish and required evidence from participants in the form of their NLP certifications, as well as my evaluation of each, due to the large variety of accreditation bodies and certification offerings. As each candidate participant cleared this process, I set up a mutually convenient interview date and time and sent an invite with a link for the synchronous ‘internet-mediated interview’ (that is, the narrative-style, semi-structured interview via Zoom) to them (Saunders et al., 2024, p. 443). This process was repeated for each prospective participant as they successfully cleared the recruitment stage.

## ii Collecting data

In this way, I successfully implemented my prospective participant recruitment and assessment processes, thereby ensuring that my PSC were met. This strategy yielded a steady flow of opportunities for my semi-structured interviews (Belcher, 2019) designed to provide my study with an appropriate purposive sample based upon my PSC. In my interviews, I used my six pre-established semi-structured participant interview questions (PIQ) (Kallio et al., 2016), as shown in Table 3.2. According to Moustakas (1994) in an interpretive phenomenological study,

participants should be asked a minimum of two broad, general questions: “What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79). Whilst more of this type of open-ended PIQ can be asked, the key point is that any PIQ should focus participants’ attention on providing rich, thick descriptions of their experiences, allowing an appreciation of the commonality of such experiences across the collected dataset. In line with this, I constructed six PIQs based on the contributions to the academic discourse on this topic from such interpretive phenomenological authors as: Adams and van Manen (2017), Bevan (2014), Finlay (2009), and van Manen (2016b). During interviews, in situations where the use of ‘minimal encouragers’ (such as me saying: “I see”, “tell me more”, and “interesting”) were insufficient to maintain the participant narrative, I constructed follow up questions designed to clarify or probe the participant’s narrative to that point, ensuring that I constructed such questions on what they had actually introduced themselves to the dialogue. The construction of my six PIQs for my study is given in the Table below and clearly has a direct connection in eliciting their narratives as dual-accredited professional coaches, to both the title of my study and the specific research question (RQ) my study sought to answer.

**Table 3.2**

*Development of the Participant Interview Questions (PIQ)*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>PIQ developed</b>	<b>Rationale and source(s)</b>
<b>Contextualisation</b>	How do you prepare for, engage in, and subsequently reflect upon your coaching interactions and their co-created outputs?	Opens the narrative, allowing participant to orient themselves to the relevant context and topic (Bevan, 2014)
	What part does compliance with ICF’s definition of coaching for claimable practice hours play within your choices for these components of your coaching activities?	Takes them into the concrete lived experience of them making choices around integrating their expertise <i>in vivo</i> (Bevan, 2014)
<b>Apprehending the phenomenon</b>	What part does your NLP expertise play in any of these components of your coaching activities?	Both extends and deepens the narrative, generating ‘rich, thick description’ (van Manen, 2016a)
	What NLP tools and techniques are you aware of employing within these components of your coaching activities?	Invites interpretive reflection (Finlay, 2009)

<b>Clarifying the meaning</b>	What relevance do you see the use of these NLP tools and techniques have within these components of your coaching activities?	Encourages reflection on meaning making of applied practices (van Manen, 2023)
	What suggestions might you have for a peer without NLP training in terms of your reflection on the worth of NLP expertise to coaching practice?	Encourages retrospective meaning making (Adams & van Manen, 2017)

*Note.* Table constructed by the author.

Before I detail how I decided to cease interviewing participants in my study, I will provide participant recruitment, assessment, and interviewing activities up to that decision event, as follows:

- I received positive interest from 27 prospective participants as the participant recruitment strategy was implemented (out of some 43 approached)
- None of these were close contacts of mine, and only one was even vaguely known to me. All participants received copies of the participant information sheet (PIS) and the participant consent form (PCF). They were allowed to ask me questions about the study and their participation before deciding whether to be involved.
- In processing these 27 as prospective participants:
  - o One expressed their view that the ICF coaching world and the NLP world were ‘polar opposites’ and ultimately declined to be interviewed for the study.
  - o Three ceased communications at some point during the assessment against the PSC process, resulting in my discontinuation of the pursuit after two follow-up emails.
  - o Four did not pass the assessment according to the original PSC process and were declined as prospective participants, despite their interest.
  - o Two were declined as prospective participants despite their interest because of the new criterion requiring no involvement with an NLP or coaching training company within the last two years.
- Of the remaining 17, I successfully conducted sixteen synchronous technologically mediated (via Zoom) semi-structured interviews before I decided to discontinue the recruitment, assessment, and interviewing process.
- The data set for my study comprises fourteen successfully completed participant interviews. The other two successfully completed interviews were not included in this dataset, as they involved participants who were currently actively engaged in training

coaches. This experience led to the creation of an additional PSC which was added to the ongoing screening process of recruiting prospective participants.

Furthermore, as my research design was intentionally 'cross-sectional', in that I only sought to collect data from those participants I interviewed (Saunders et al., 2024), participants were not allowed to verify, amend, or add to their transcripts. They could, however, withdraw from the study at any point up to the point at which their data had been amalgamated with other participants' data into the study's dataset (none did). Furthermore, they were also offered the opportunity to receive a copy of the study's findings.

When considering how many interviews are appropriate for a qualitative, interpretive phenomenological study, the notions of 'data saturation' and 'information power' emerge (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Malterud et al., 2016). The concept of data saturation in qualitative studies, particularly those involving interviews and case studies, has been a pervasive notion used to guide researchers in determining when they have adequately captured the phenomena under study. However, several new approaches have begun to challenge the primacy of data saturation and its connotations and associations with realist and grounded theory (Varpio et al., 2017). In effect, each identified approach aligns with different philosophical stances and carries with it its own set of implications for the research process. Data saturation refers to the point at which no new substantive information or insights into the topic can be gleaned from any additional interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Whilst an interview quantity measure has limitations regarding this data saturation call (Fusch & Ness, 2015), it is nonetheless quite typical for such saturation to be reached when somewhere between 8 and 15 interviews have been completed, and typically around 12 (Guest et al., 2006). Creswell and Poth (2018) indicate a range between 5 and 25 as usual, while Creswell and Creswell (2022) distinguish that for a phenomenological study, the range might be as low as 3 to 10, and for a grounded theory study, the range could be as high as 20-30. Despite my research meeting the 'magic number' for data saturation, methodologically, the notion of saturation is problematic for my study. Not least, employing reflexive thematic analysis as my data analysis method makes me the creator of my study's codes and themes, rather than the discoverer of them amongst the participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

In choosing such an approach, I have embraced the notion that my research is, with me in the role as researcher-practitioner from within the field of study, largely reflexive where, according to Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 232), "knowledge is situated, and inevitably and inescapably shaped

by the processes and practices of knowledge production, including the practices of the researcher”. For the authors, “research within a qualitative paradigm values reflexivity, subjectivity, and indeed the contextual, partial and located nature of knowledge” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 232). This makes the use of the data saturation concept, with its implicitly realist underpinnings, problematic from both epistemological and ontological perspectives when applied to the reflexive thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2021c), as I have employed in my study. The authors go on to say that there “is no simple way to take all data related elements – such as data depth, richness, complexity – and determine the right size of dataset for a particular project” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 28) and as a result they find concepts such as ‘information power’ (Malterud et al., 2016) more useful.

With Malterud et al. (2016) ‘information power’, the researcher is invited to reflect on the information richness of their dataset in relation to their study’s aims and requirements. As I recognise my role as researcher-practitioner from within the field of study in creating and shaping information and knowledge in my research and in adopting a data analysis method that advocates the role of the researcher in making meaning from research datasets, I chose to follow Braun and Clarke’s lead and adopt the approach of Malterud et al. (2016) regarding information power. Table 3.3 reflects my assessment of my study against Malterud et al. (2021) information power dimensions, and I confidently conclude that the number of interviews in my dataset was appropriate for meeting the requirements of the indicated dimensions, thereby providing an appropriate level of dataset richness.

All of my interviews were conducted synchronously by me, the researcher, and were technologically mediated via the Zoom conferencing platform, from which both audio and video files were created. Permission to record, along with a repeat explanation of what happens to the recording files, was explained to each interview participant. Each video file was immediately deleted after each interview, whilst each audio file was automatically sent to Otter, the speech transcription software, for immediate transcription. Given the inaccuracy of transcription software like Otter, I needed to listen to each interview again, whilst simultaneously amending the digital transcription on the screen to ensure it accurately captured what was being said. Further, any references to names or potentially identifying content were redacted.

Files were named sequentially from ‘Participant01’ to ‘Participant14’ and stored in a password-protected electronic storage medium, along with a single master file detailing the identity of each numbered participant. In addition to providing an accurate transcription of each interview, the data tidying process also initiated the familiarisation phase of the subsequent data analysis using

RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Table 3.4 presents the basic profile information of the fourteen participants interviewed by me, whose interview transcripts form the primary research dataset for my study. It can be seen that the participants reflected different levels of ICF (ACC, PCC, and MCC) and NLP (Practitioner, Master Practitioner, Trainer, and Master Trainer) accreditation. The variance in accreditation level between participants (and between the coaching and NLP accreditations of any one participant) was seen as both a benefit and a limitation of the study. NLP accreditations at the practitioner level for all participants were a minimum of 16 days, and as can be seen, most had NLP accreditations beyond the practitioner level.

**Table 3.3**

*'Information power' regarding dataset richness*<sup>1</sup>

Items having an impact on information power <sup>2</sup>	Explanation of dimension <sup>2</sup>	My assessment of my own study in terms of each 'information power' dimension expressed by the suitable number of interviews required to support information richness for that dimension <sup>3</sup>									My rationale for my assessment of my study by information power dimension <sup>3</sup>		
		<3	<6	<9	<12	<15	<18	<21	<24	<27		<30	
Study aim – narrow or broad?	The narrower the study's aims, the smaller the sample required.	X	X	X	X	X							Narrow study – about integration of specific knowledge and skills versus being about their practice and its dimensions as a whole. Informative exploration of approaches taken, rather than establishing transferable specifics of their actions.
Sample specificity – dense or sparse?	The more specific the characteristics of the study's participants need to be, the smaller the sample needed.	X	X	X									Purposive sampling chosen over convenience sampling. Specific sample criteria including dual accredited NLP and ICF coaches relevant to a much smaller number of instances existing. Participants belong to the specified group whilst also exhibiting variation within the experiences to be explored
Established theory – applied or not?	The more the study is supported by theoretical perspectives, the smaller the	X	X	X	X	X							Study has limited theoretical dimensions, so extant literature is limited in its synthesis of existing knowledge. Whilst

	sample needed.										the study is not using grounded theory methodology or method, to generate theory, it is needing to establish support for its conclusions
Quality of researcher-participant dialogue – strong or weak?	The stronger and clearer the communication between researcher and participants, the lower the sample number.	X	X	X							Study has very clear communication between researcher and participants (helped by researcher being a researcher-practitioner from within the field of study) reducing ambiguity and unfocused dialogues leading to data thickness. Data co-constructed through with strong analytic value arising from experienced interviewer skills and interviewing alliance of interviewer and participants through rapport and interest/dedication to the study's field.
Sample variation – homogenous or diverse?	The more participants provide diverse aspects of equivalent and specific phenomena, the smaller the sample required.	X	X	X							The study seeks to uncover realistic and pragmatic descriptions of NLP coach practitioners integrating their knowledge and skills in the ICF coaching context. The data provided by participant sample aligns with the research question and provides varying examples of related lived experiences adding both breadth and for a more supported and sustainable interpretation.

Note. <sup>1</sup> The above table has been created by the author, using the dimensions of information power developed by Malterud et al., (2021) and applied by the author to his study in a manner he considers helpful in dataset richness. <sup>2</sup> Taken from Malterud et al., (2021) <sup>3</sup> Generated by the author based upon Malterud et al. (2021).

On balance, the potentially disparate skill levels (and likely confidence and experience, too) arising from such variations in accreditation likely provided a richer understanding of practitioners lived experiences of integrating coaching and NLP into their professional practice. Future studies may refine this aspect of participant selection in conjunction with other selection criteria employed. However, it is likely to be a relatively limited or hard-to-access pool of prospective participants if stricter selection criteria were applied. The fourteen interviews also varied in duration, from just over 30 minutes to just under 52 minutes, averaging around 42 minutes per interview. This is within the typical range for semi-structured interviews within interpretative phenomenological qualitative studies (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Participants were from a range of countries, including five from the USA, three from the UK, two from Europe, and two from New Zealand. The other two participants were from Thailand and Lebanon, respectively.

**Table 3.4***Profile of research participants*

Participant Number <sup>1</sup>	Geographical Location	ICF level <sup>2</sup>	Academic Education level	NLP level <sup>3,4</sup>	Interview Length (mins)
01	Greece	ACC	Masters	Practitioner	51:13
02	U.K.	SP*	Certificate	Trainer	34:16
03	New Zealand	PCC	Bachelors	Trainer	43:42
04	France	PCC	Masters	Master Practitioner	51:52
05	U.K.	PCC	Masters	Master Practitioner	39:45
06	USA	PCC	Bachelors	Master Practitioner	46:11
07	U.K.	PCC	Bachelors	Master Practitioner	45:51
08	New Zealand	ACC	Diploma	Master Practitioner	46:21
09	Switzerland	PCC	Masters	Trainer	43:42
10	USA	MCC	Masters	Master Practitioner	40:45
11	USA	PCC	Doctorate	Practitioner	45:54
12	Thailand	MCC	Doctorate	Trainer	34:36
13	Lebanon	PCC	Masters	Trainer	30:43
14	USA	PCC	Bachelors	Trainer	39:35
					591:06/42:22

Note. Table constructed by the author. \*This participant had been an ICF PCC until a recent lapse of accreditation and was now coaching as an EMCC Senior Practitioner (which, for the purposes of the necessary dimensions for inclusion in the study, was accepted by the researcher as equivalent).

<sup>1</sup> All participants successfully interviewed met this study's research participant selection criteria (PSC) of having:

- successfully completed at least 75 hours core coach training accredited by a major international coaching body (ICF, EMCC, AC, etc.)
- successfully completed at least 75 hours of NLP training accredited by a major international NLP body (IANLP, INLPTA, ABNLP, etc.). (All had in excess of 130)
- been practising as a coach for at least two years and have performed at least 75 hours of coaching in the last 6 months, and
- no involvement in coaching or NLP training for at least the past two years

<sup>2</sup> ICF levels from entry level to highest level sequence as follows: ACC, PCC, MCC

<sup>3</sup> NLP levels from entry level to highest level sequence as follows: Practitioner, Master Practitioner, Trainer

<sup>4</sup> NLP training hours ranged from 100 (practitioner) to over 400 hours (trainer) [mean 208 hours] and included having been trained by such people as Robert Dilts, Ian McDermott & Dr. Richard Bolstad, and accredited by such organisations as NLPU, IANLP and INLPTA.

### iii Analysing data

This section examines the implementation of the six-phase reflexive thematic analysis (Bossons et al.) process (Braun & Clarke, 2022), which is the chosen data analysis method for this study, specifically, how the RTA process was applied to the study's dataset to create meaningful insights that help answer the study's research questions and meet its research objectives. This then ensured that a robust, rigorous, and transparent data analysis process was used to create and evolve the resultant coding and theming before exploration and discussion. A key point of Braun and Clarke's more recent work on RTA is that it is more of an iterative and recursive process in which codes and themes are created by the researcher, rather than a rigidly sequential process in which codes and themes emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2021). Within the application of RTA, a researcher-practitioner such as myself is positioned as an active, reflexive meaning maker. A detailed description of how I implemented the six-phase reflexive thematic analysis process in my study is provided in Appendix C. The following is a brief summary of that more detailed description.

The first phase of RTA (data familiarisation) involved deep immersion, beginning with my conducting both the interviews and the transcription process of those interviews. The transcription of the interviews I conducted was automated through the integration of Zoom as a synchronous, technologically mediated means of communication with the participant. An audio file recorded by Zoom was uploaded to Otter, which instantly transcribed it into written text. These transcripts were rigorously checked and amended by repeatedly listening to the audio file and then correcting the written transcription. Such multiple interactions with the data in this way built 'data intimacy' which supported the sense-making characteristic of the data familiarisation phase (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2021). To deepen my engagement with the dataset, I structured each transcript into a three-column layout: one for the participant's narrative, one for rough, contextually interpretive notes, and one for more generative and emergent analytical insights as I progressed through the dataset. Additionally, I shuffled the transcripts between rounds of familiarisation activity to avoid sequential bias and ensure equal attentiveness across the dataset.

The second phase (generating initial codes) naturally extended from the foundational, iterative, and recursive familiarisation. Coding was approached manually, supported by the reflective notes made in columns 2 and 3 during familiarisation. As Braun and Clarke (2022) highlighted, coding within RTA spans a spectrum from 'semantic' (surface-level) to 'latent' (underlying conceptual) meanings, offering a high degree of latitude for me, as a researcher, when interpreting the participants' narratives.

This is all the more significant as I identify as a researcher-practitioner ‘insider’ to the field of study. This flexibility allowed me to iteratively generate, test, and refine code, deliberately avoiding both superficial ‘topic summaries’ and overly deep interpretations that have become detached from the study’s purpose. Following this process, and after several cycles, a preliminary coding structure was arrived at with approximately 98 codes across seven candidate themes. This is comfortably within both the ranges quoted by Hart (2018) of 50-300 and 80-100.

The subsequent three phases of RTA are concerned with theme creation, moving from ‘constructing initial themes’ through ‘reviewing themes’ to ‘defining themes’. In Phase Three (constructing initial themes), the preliminary codes were reviewed for broader, patterned meanings across the dataset. Here, I drew on both my generative analytical notes and my contextual ones to craft candidate themes. This active role as a researcher is consistent with the RTA ethos that themes are constructed rather than discovered. Managing the increasing complexity at this stage led to the introduction of NVivo software, which helped organise transcripts, text segments from the transcripts, and preliminary codes, thereby easing data management. However, in the fourth (reviewing themes) and fifth (defining themes) phases, NVivo felt too restrictive given the recursive and iterative nature of creatively exploring configurations of codes and themes. As a result, revisiting data, codes, and themes to ensure internal coherence, distinctiveness, and alignment with the central organising concepts of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2022) became more manual, allowing for more fluid adjustments to theme structure and naming. Finally, the sixth phase (writing up) was not the discrete endpoint that was imagined, but rather a parallel analytic activity throughout the process. Early informal writing evolved into more formal thesis sections, integrating participant extracts, codes, and themes until a seemingly coherent narrative addressing the study’s aims was generated.

Overall, the data analysis approach I took in my study, particularly around coding and theming, reflects my researcher-centred, interpretive practice, prioritising conceptual depth and flexibility over procedural consistency and coding reliability metrics that are typical in other thematic analysis approaches. Consistent with RTA, I believe that my researcher-practitioner stance and analytical approach added depth and value to the study’s outputs. Table 3.5 summarises the codes and themes developed through this process.

**Table 3.5***Summary of themes and codes/subthemes*

No.	Theme	Code/Sub-theme
1.	What gets in the way?	Reputation
		Evolving perceptions
		Positive affirmations
2.	Challenges ahoy!	Modality demarcation
		Staying in lane
		Coachee communication
		With permission
3.	Learning and growth for both	Presuppositional mindset
		Catalytic convert
		Reflective practitioner
		Crystallising intentionality
		Adaptive experimentation
4.	What makes the difference?	Coach state
		Coaching alliance
		Aligned, deploy with ease
		Artful deployment, if at all

*Note.* Table constructed by the author.

### **3.5 My positionality and reflexivity as researcher**

In qualitative inquiry, and especially within interpretive phenomenological research, the researcher's positionality plays a crucial role in shaping the research process and the generation of knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2025). As the researcher, I approached my study as an 'insider' from within the field I was studying and therefore identified myself as a researcher-practitioner (Baxter & Gandhi, 2021). This is because I am accredited in both NLP and ICF coaching, with significant experience integrating these domains in my professional practice.

This insider status provides contextual familiarity and sensitivity, enabling me to engage deeply with participants' narratives and the theoretical and practical literature (Tietze, 2012). As discussed earlier, rather than seeking to bracket out my own experiences or assumptions, an

approach characteristic of Husserl (2012) me, I adopted an interpretive stance more aligned with Merleau-Ponty (2002) the researcher and van Manen (2023) the participant, such that meaning is seen as co-constructed between the researcher and the participant. My reflexivity is therefore not about achieving detachment but about immersion, recognising that my perspective shapes the collection of data, its analysis, and its interpretation (Finlay, 2009). Throughout my study, I sought to maintain a reflexive awareness of how my practitioner identity, prior beliefs about NLP and coaching, and my professional approach influenced and were changed by the research process and its outputs. By making my positionality explicit and embedding reflexivity within the research design, I aim to enhance the quality of this study's contributions (Tracy, 2024). This reflexive stance is also consistent with the broader commitments of qualitative research to situate knowledge within its social and relational context, acknowledging my active role as a researcher, both as an instrument and a co-creator in the inquiry process (Denzin et al., 2024).

### **3.6 Research ethics**

My study was supported by a strong commitment to research ethics, aligned with institutional, academic, and professional expectations. Full ethical approval was obtained from Otago Polytechnic Research Ethics Committee, and all data collection, analysis, and reporting activities were conducted in strict adherence to the approved protocols. My ethics application is in Appendix A, along with my original research proposal and my subsequent approval letter.

Participants were purposively recruited using clear inclusion criteria (PSC), and recruitment was conducted individually, ensuring informed, voluntary participation without coercion. All participants provided me with a signed informed consent form (PCF) and were fully aware of the study's aims, methods, and their rights, including the option not to participate, not to answer questions, and to withdraw up to a certain point in time, as outlined in the participant information sheet (PIS) provided to them. To safeguard confidentiality, all data were de-identified and anonymised at the earliest opportunity, with pseudonyms assigned (e.g., P01), and documents were securely stored on password-protected devices or in locked cabinets. Access was restricted solely to the researcher, with backup procedures in place. Furthermore, all data will be destroyed in accordance with Otago Polytechnic's seven-year data retention policy. Participants were also assured that no identifying information would appear in subsequent publications or presentations.

My study involved no vulnerable groups, no foreseeable power imbalances, and no emotionally sensitive topics. Interviews were designed to explore participants' professional experiences, rather

than personal or private business matters, thereby minimising any risk of harm. Further, no incentives for participation were offered, and throughout the research, I maintained a reflective ethical stance, not only meeting formal approval requirements but also upholding ethical standards consistent with both the NLP and coaching fields. This ensures respect, transparency, and responsible engagement with all participants, whom I remain incredibly grateful to for the time they have graciously provided for my study.

### **3.7 Robustness and rigour**

To ensure the robustness and rigour of my study, I have aligned my research design with Tracy's eight 'big tent' criteria for excellent qualitative research (Tracy, 2024). This framework offers a comprehensive and widely accepted set of benchmarks for evaluating the quality of qualitative research across various criteria, complementing my study's use of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) within an interpretivist paradigm. Here, I evaluate my study against the eight criteria of the framework by discussing the various means, practices, and methods I employed to meet the benchmarks.

In relation to 'worthy topic', my study's exploration of the integration of coaching and the adjacent modality of NLP is an area underexplored in the academic literature (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Giraldez-Hayes, 2021; Grant & Green, 2018), and yet of considerable practical importance to coaching practitioners (Grimley, 2019b), highlighting its worthiness. Because of this, my study's focus on lived experiences of practitioner integration is both "relevant or timely" and, in turn, ensures that the research addresses "interesting and significant" questions (Tracy, 2024, p. 291). 'Rich rigor' for Tracy (2024) refers to "the care and effort taken to ensure the research is carried out in an appropriate manner" (p. 291) which I believe is evident in my careful design of purposive and snowball sampling, the use of semi-structured interviews, the structuring of my participant interview questions (PIQ), and the detailed six phase reflexive thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2022) applied iteratively and reflexively (Finlay, 2021). My research procedures coverage thereby explains "the process by which the raw data were transformed and organised into the research report" (Tracy, 2024, p. 292). Furthermore, 'information power' (Malterud et al., 2021), the sample size methodology preferred by Braun and Clarke (2022) for use with their reflexive thematic analysis method, was employed to determine a suitable sample size for my study, thereby adding rigor. Further support for my sample size and the rigor it adds

to my study arises from the view that research that is “new, unique, or rare, less data may be required to make a valuable contribution” (Tracy, 2024, p. 292).

‘Sincerity’ is demonstrated in my study by my explicit reflexivity, transparently identifying my researcher-practitioner positionality (Tietze, 2012), and the continuous reflection on my role through relevant parts of the thesis. This sincerity highlights how my subjectivity and interpretive authority shape, rather than threaten, the meaning-making process in my study, consistent with a reflexive analytical approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Levitt et al., 2017). Within this, I believe that I have balanced consideration of my “own needs with those of participants, readers...and potential audiences” (Tracy, 2024, p. 293). This extends to the ‘credibility’ of my study. This has been strengthened by both my prolonged immersion in the data and my methodological transparency discussed earlier, as well as the crystallisation of interpretations from different bodies of literature, participants’ narratives and my own reflexive researcher-practitioner positionality (‘multivocality’) “to construct a multifaceted, more complicated, and therefore more credible picture of the context” (Tracy, 2024, p. 296). This ensures ‘rich, thick descriptions and resonance with participants’ realities, which are themselves further supported by integrating participant quotations with transparency of analytical decisions around their inclusion (Creswell & Poth, 2025; Tracy, 2010).

Tracy (2024) suggests that “people grow by learning about something in one situation or context, and then being able to use and practice what they have learned in another context” (p. 299). In my study, such ‘resonance’ is achieved by presenting findings in a way that invites recognition and connection, particularly for coaching and NLP practitioners. The narrative style of my study, along with its use of extracts from participants’ narratives, aims to make my findings accessible and meaningful to diverse practitioner audiences (Creswell & Poth, 2025), particularly those integrating adjacent modalities within the coaching context, thereby encouraging both theoretical and practical resonance and transferability (Tracy, 2024). I believe my study makes a ‘significant contribution’ by extending scholarly understanding of how NLP can ethically and effectively integrate with coaching, an area that has been largely neglected in the literature (Grimley, 2019b). My contribution spans theoretical, practical, and methodological dimensions and offers insights that are potentially actionable for both researchers and practitioners, in keeping with the view that “insight or deepened understanding need not be huge, but it must somehow impact the current landscape of knowledge and practice” (Tracy, 2024, p. 302).

The ‘ethical’ rigour of my study is evident from my obtaining formal institutional ethical approval from the Otago Polytechnic Research Ethics Committee, through my safeguarding of participant

confidentiality and the gaining of their informed consent, to the respectful treatment of their contributions to the study, reflected in my research procedures, collectively considered as ‘procedural ethics’ (Tracy, 2024). ‘Situational ethics’ are also reinforced by my consideration of the practical coaching context and the role of the ICF in providing an ethical framework by which the coaches in my study are bound (International Coaching Federation, 2021a). With my positionality as a researcher-practitioner, I have embraced within my study an awareness of my own role and the ‘relational ethics’ this reflects with me “treating participants as whole people rather than as subjects from which to wrench a good story” (Tracy, 2024, p. 305). Lastly, I believe my study demonstrates ‘meaningful coherence’ by aligning its philosophical assumptions, methodological choices, overarching research design, and specific methods employed. In places, what I have highlighted might be “layered or intentionally jarring” for some readers, and I may have “borrowed and combined concepts from different theories” (p. 306). Still, in relation to what Tracy (2024) meant by the term ‘meaningful coherence’, I believe that all parts of my study, from design to analysis to interpretation, fit together to address my study’s aims, especially around “attentively interconnect literature reviewed with research foci, methods, and findings” (Tracy, 2010, p. 848).

Having systematically attended to each of Tracy (2024) eight ‘big tent’ criteria for excellent qualitative research from a study’s “means, practices, and methods” (p. 289), I believe my research meets the standards of robust and rigorous qualitative inquiry, supporting its trustworthiness, credibility, and academic contribution.

### **3.8 Limitations**

As detailed above, my study adopts a qualitative research approach, rooted explicitly in the interpretivist or constructivist paradigm, and emphasises exploring the lived experiences of practitioners who integrate coaching and NLP expertise into their professional practice. My methodological choice was guided by my own philosophical stance, aiming to generate deep, subjective insights into the phenomenon under study. My methods section elaborates on the selection of semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool, supported by a reflexive thematic analysis for data interpretation. I believe that this approach is congruent with the study’s intent to understand the complex, socially constructed realities evident in the coaching context within which the practitioners live. However, I am also aware of several potential limitations to my study that others might perceive. Whilst my research does not attempt to make its findings

generalisable, their application to broader contexts might also be seen as limited. The participant selection criteria, recruitment channels employed, and reliance on purposive and snowball sampling for participant recruitment, although suitable for my qualitative inquiry, which values depth over breadth, are likely to introduce heterogeneity among the selected study participants, introducing bias from the outset. Although it is important to note that this heterogeneity also serves to promote the transferability of my study's findings.

Within my study, given its interpretivist approach and my dual role as a practitioner in the field, I acknowledge and embrace the biases and subjectivity that influence the study, which I believe will add to the richness of the exploration of coach practitioners' subjective experiences. This becomes central to my approach through my choice of reflexive thematic analysis as my data analysis method. Whilst it offers a robust framework for interpreting qualitative data, the process is by its very nature highly subjective, with outputs heavily reliant on my interpretive authority as a researcher. Of particular importance here is the understanding that from a reflexive thematic analysis perspective, codes and themes aren't 'discovered' in the data but are 'created' by me, the researcher. Ultimately, this impacts the exploration of alternative interpretations and may lead to underrepresented themes within the data, thereby narrowing the study's analytical scope, which may be of concern to some. In this regard, I view my positionality and reflexivity as strengths. However, I recognise that others may have different perspectives and may have made different choices along the research journey.

### **3.9 Chapter conclusions**

In this chapter, the exploration and selection of methodologies and methods for this doctoral research within the interpretivist paradigm have been meticulously detailed. The journey began with a philosophical justification, locating the study within an interpretivist or constructivist framework that emphasises the subjective understanding of practitioner's lived experiences as they integrate coaching and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) into their professional practice. These then inform my chosen research approach and design, ensuring they are consistent with my assumptions, beliefs, and values, while also remaining cognisant of the research topic and the intended audiences for my study. This choice reflects a deliberate alignment with a qualitative research approach, privileging depth and nuance over breadth and generalisability. The research design, phenomenological in nature, was carefully chosen to facilitate a rich exploration of the

phenomenon of interest, supported by semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection.

This methodological choice emphasises the study's commitment to capturing the complex, socially constructed realities of the participants, facilitating a deep dive into their experiences, beliefs, and practices. The use of reflexive thematic analysis (Bossons et al.) for data analysis further exemplifies the study's interpretivist stance, enabling a sophisticated interpretation of the data that acknowledges the researcher's subjectivity as integral to the research process. This chapter has also sought to transparently address the potential limitations inherent in the chosen methodologies and methods, including the non-generalisability of findings, potential biases in participant selection and recruitment, and the subjective nature of the data analysis process. These limitations, however, do not detract from the value of the study. Instead, they point to the complexity of qualitative research and to the thoughtful, transparent considerations that informed my research, seeking to ensure it is robust, rigorous, and reflective of the lived realities of the participants. Furthermore, the chapter's detailed account of the methodological journey sought to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the ethical considerations, participant recruitment strategies, and data collection and analysis procedures.

This approach seeks not only to enhance the robustness and rigour of the research but also to provide valuable insights into the practical aspects of conducting qualitative research within the interpretivist paradigm. In conclusion, the Methodologies and Methods chapter presents a coherent, well-justified research design aligned with the study's aims and objectives. It showcases a thoughtful engagement with the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research and demonstrates a rigorous approach to studying the integration of coaching and NLP practices. The reflections on limitations and the careful consideration of ethical issues further attest to my commitment to conducting high-quality research that makes meaningful contributions to the field. This chapter not only sets the stage for the findings and discussions that follow but also serves as a valuable resource for other researchers interested in qualitative research within similar contexts.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the lived experience of the phenomenon, as expressed through the words of the research participants in relation to the codes and themes I have identified in my analysis. This is designed to continue along the path of answering this study's research questions and meet its research objectives. As detailed in the methodologies and methods chapter, I have identified four discrete themes (see Table 3.3), and this chapter will explore each of these themes in turn. The ordering of the themes was intentionally structured to reflect the practitioner journey from negotiating challenges through to finding a solution. This meant beginning with the antagonistic elements, then working through the enabling conditions before arriving at successful integrative practices. This sequence starts with the theme 'What gets in the way?' to explore the barriers, tensions, and constraints that participants encounter when first considering integrating their NLP expertise within an ICF-compliant coaching context. Then the theme 'Challenges ahoy!' speaks to navigating modality boundaries, the role of communication and contracting, and the requirement to meet ethical and professional standards. Then, with 'Learning and growth for both,' we gain insight into the value of integrating NLP expertise into an ICF-compliant coaching context, in terms of its amplifying the coaching effect. Lastly, 'What makes the difference?' highlights how the practitioners ultimately reconcile these challenges and achieve elegant, context-sensitive integrations to yield the hoped-for benefits within their coaching practice.

## 4.2 Theme One: ‘What gets in the way?’

### i. Introduction to Theme One: ‘What gets in the way?’

Whilst this theme had the fewest codes and supporting data segments, it offered an important gateway to the study’s findings: NLP use specifically in the coaching context, and the concerns any practitioner might have bringing different knowledge skills into the coaching context. This is important to this study, as practitioners from other fields will experience perceptions and prejudices towards additional knowledge and skills they bring. Participants discussed the mixed reception NLP received from their coachees, arising from either the coachees’ prior encounters with NLP or the information they had read or heard about along the way. Adverse perceptions of NLP reported by the participants had multiple parameters, which are explored in the following analysis of the theme. All participants considered NLP knowledge and skills to be valuable to them both personally and professionally. However, there were multifaceted viewpoints among participants, ranging from scepticism to enthusiasm concerning their incorporation of their NLP knowledge and skills into their coaching practices.

### ii. Reputation

The code of ‘reputation’ supports the theme of ‘what gets in the way?’ by revealing participants’ own and reported views of how NLP is received in the coaching context. Central to this is the question of whether NLP can be considered a ‘science’. A critical stance around NLP is taken by at least one participant, with P01 asserting “NLP is a pseudoscience” and yet they go on to add “NLP helps in a lot of areas” of their practice. This interplay between the desire for scientific support and practical utility is an underlying theme in the application of NLP in practice, regardless of the field. P14 alludes to this when they contribute, in complete contrast, that NLP is “completely significant and relevant to coaching” as well as to other fields, adding “NLP is so helpful”, and reflecting that “NLP can get a bad rap out there...and it bugs me because it’s not how people think it is”. The remaining participants were more measured in their views of NLP, acknowledging its practical utility in the coaching context and beyond, although not all of them were deeply committed to it. Their reflections centred on the challenge of making sense of NLP and how to use it appropriately, including how to incorporate it into their own broader professional practice. “I’m not a very NLP committed person,” says P05, adding, “it helps me to self-manage...which is a skill in coaching more effectively”. P08 adds “When it comes to NLP, there are some contradictory approaches as to how that should be used”. Meanwhile, P07 speaks to what it can feel like on the receiving end of NLP when not used considerately:

Someone's been on a Tony Robbins course, okay. They've done their weekend, they've walked on fire, which is amazing, and they've come out of it clearly euphoric. And then they're "...all you need do is change your state, change your story. Yo yo yo" And they're trying to do it on me without, without what? Without being present, I suppose, to where I'm at" (P07).

### iii. Evolution of perception

For this code, within the theme 'what gets in the way?', some participants reveal an evolution from their own reservations about NLP to a total embracing of its applicability to their practice. P07 spoke of a shift from a "feeling of coercion, potential coercion" in their first NLP training to an appreciation of "the generative elements, the permission to play, to be present with people, see what emerges and to ...foster the most ... amazing outcomes" as a result of their subsequent NLP training. For other participants, their narratives reveal how they manage to do this in a practical sense, such as not mentioning NLP by name to avoid potential adverse reactions to its use by their clients. Similarly, an evolution took place for some participants in how they represented NLP in their coaching practice. For instance, P10 says that as a strategy within their coaching practice, they "don't ever use the words NLP ... there's sometimes a negative reaction to NLP" and as it can "sound a little scary," they don't see the point in drawing attention to its use by them.

### iv. Positive affirmations

Within this code, many participants' insights identified that the NLP coach practitioners themselves often magnified the perceived challenges of integrating NLP into their coaching practice. These participants emphasised the need for strong ethics in the communication and use of NLP, highlighting the importance of practitioners genuinely valuing the upliftment of the human condition. For instance, P10 states "I think people present it to be much more complicated than it is...it can be made to sound scary and complicated," and suggests that those who are "really interested in human performance, and human psychology...can step into NLP and make it a part of their practice with confidence". P14 identifies that people "think it's a mind game...and you're manipulating people. It's nothing like that!" and goes on to fully advocate for NLP by saying "I really wish NLP had a more positive reputation... I love NLP...and I love having all the tools and belief system".

v. Conclusion to Theme One: 'What gets in the way?'

In conclusion, the theme 'what gets in the way?' may have fewer codes and data segments, but it serves as an essential gateway to the study's overall findings. It offers insights into the use of NLP in coaching and the challenges faced by practitioners who bring diverse knowledge and skills into the coaching context. Participants recognised that while NLP techniques such as anchoring and reframing can facilitate rapid shifts in perception, these same interventions can be perceived as directive and possibly even manipulative. This is even more the case if they are applied without explicit client consent or contracting. This reflects an ethical tension inherent in aligning NLP's solution-focused, interventionist stance with the ICF's non-directive ethos. For example, participants described hesitating to introduce structured processes, such as timeline or sub-modality work, fearing they might cross into 'doing NLP' with clients rather than coaching collaboratively. Participants' contributions went on to reveal the mixed reception of NLP among coachees when it is used by name, primarily influenced by perceptions shaped by Google searches and, in some cases, by polarising prior encounters. These challenges highlight that the issues faced are often less about the validity of NLP models themselves and more about their perceived fit with ICF-aligned professionalism and client-centred dialogue. The theme encompasses the codes of: 'reputation' (where some participants question NLP's scientific validity, contrasting with others who champion its usefulness and allay misconceptions about it); 'evolution of perception' (shows how participants' experiences often shift from initial doubt to enthusiastic adoption), and; 'positive affirmations' (emphasising the importance of ethical communication and practitioners' values around effectively utilising NLP).

### 4.3 Theme Two: ‘Challenges ahoy!’

#### i. Introduction to Theme Two: ‘Challenges ahoy!’

This theme captures the challenges faced by practitioners in integrating their coaching and NLP knowledge and skills bases. Whilst the majority of participants encountered the specific challenges articulated, their perspectives on and responses to those challenges were often quite subtle. This theme is also valuable to the broader study, as practitioners from other fields are likely to encounter many of the challenges represented here when integrating their knowledge and skill bases. The theme pays particular attention to the often liminal space between modalities, the need from an ethical perspective of bringing the client along in their understanding of modalities and the choice set they represent, as well as the need to gain informed consent or permission to head in any particular direction, which is always best decided by the client.

#### ii. Modality demarcation

This code refers to distinguishing between different modalities. For some modalities, such as coaching and mentoring, the boundaries might be blurred or even conflated. For other modalities, the distinctions can be quite pronounced, such as between coaching and therapy, where coaching is opportunity- and future-focused, while therapy is more retrospective and problem-focused. Developing the skill to understand and work with these modalities and their distinctions is a requirement for practitioners, including being able to explain them to clients, moderate their own actions and language during sessions to stay within boundaries, and follow a clear process if the intention is to change modalities. For P03 this begins with answering the question “what is one crediting as an NLP thing that’s significant within one’s coaching practice?”. A point that P04 builds on when they observe “there’s a huge overlap with ... NLP, I don’t know which is chicken and egg!” and reflect that “the exploration of texture, colour, etc, working with the senses, I’ve connected that knowledge, or content, more with coach training than I have with NLP...but, you know, to be fair, that is an NLP technique”. P06 concludes “sometimes a lot of the things I’ve learned just become one big stew of things, like mindfulness, hypnotherapy, etc”.

#### iii. Staying in lane

This code, within the theme ‘challenges ahoy!’ gave voice to the participants’ recognition of other considerations being taken into account with the use of NLP in their practice. P08 reveals that within their practice, “coaching is 30%... then 10% facilitation and the remainder is training”. Another dimension to be considered is indicated by P01, who contributes, “with sponsored clients,

it is a combo of training and coaching, it is about skilling up and then allowing them to ... reflect on how they are using it". Participants' responses to these challenges typically sat on a spectrum from those who stayed solely in the coaching modality to those who regularly shifted between modalities, most doing so with a set process. P10 indicated why, for them, their practice naturally extended beyond pure coaching into areas of mentoring and training by highlighting "If I'm working with an emerging leader and they don't have that experience, it's hard to tap into prior experience and say, 'what could work here?'" P11 indicates that clients often expect more than just coaching by contributing "I coach a lot of entrepreneurs ...they are looking for both coaching and consulting...coaching gives inner work kind of thing...whereas consulting, more the external".

Considering this topic through an ICF lens polarised some participants' views within the spectrum. At one end, P11 said, in relation to what they perceived as ICF's 'hard rule' about the topic, "in practice no one actually follows that", adding that the "idea of serving clients and ... [being] hired because of your expertise, resources and ideas" typically wins out. For P11, clients are less concerned with "some sort of theoretical or philosophical background [to what] I'm doing ...they're interested in their problem and some kind of...resolution" to it. P14's view was very much at odds with this: "I really believe in complying with ethics and confidentiality and staying in my lane," adding, "a lot of coaches cross the line... I don't do it..., so staying in my lane and referring people out when necessary is big for me". The views of the majority of participants are reflected in P08's contribution to the topic "I think you have your 'ideal' and then you have how you actually make it work. You know, like you have some legislation and then you have [the courts] making that legislation work". This acknowledges the legitimacy and need for 'rules' for coaching, like those provided by ICF in its ethics and coaching competencies, as it advances professional practice. It acknowledges that practitioners need to have a sustainable business model. The focus of participants seemed to be more on how changes to modality occurred in a coaching context than on which other modalities were brought, but still within specific parameters.

In considering this, the majority of participants had similar views about the importance of how shifts from one lane to another, that is, moving from one modality to another, or utilising different knowledge and skills whilst in a coaching session, occurred. P10 states, when "I'm stepping ... into a different modality, I want them to be clear about which role(s) that I am playing for them", which indicates P10's recognition that if "we're not clear as coaches, and we start mentoring in the middle of the conversation, then we are definitely leading them somewhere". This risk of being directive is very much uppermost in the minds of the NLP coach practitioners interviewed. As

P13 indicates, “NLP is a very powerful methodology...you have to be cautious as a coach ... not to be directive with your clients...you will have to ... change hats”. P10 contributes an additional perspective on a potential driver for modality change that a few participants expressed. If a client is “really interested in hearing our opinion and we deny them the opportunity, it’s gonna sit with them through the whole conversation” says P10, and this will leave them to “either wonder around why we won’t share, which could impact trust and safety,...Or they’ll just continue to think ‘well I really need some support here and I’m not getting it from anywhere’”.

#### iv. Coachee communication

With this code, communication between coach and coachee was cited by a few participants as a challenge to integrating NLP with coaching on several fronts. As much as the ‘big stew’ regarding knowledge and skills described by P06 was both problematic and potentially overwhelming for practitioners, P06 also acknowledged the difficulty this created in explaining NLP to coachees. “I will just say something like ‘I have a model that might interest you, might be helpful in understanding...’” said P06, adding “and then if they ask more, I’ll say it’s from NLP, if they are interested...”. This more subtle and cautious approach, only delving deeper if clients expressed an interest, was adopted by many participants as a way of ensuring that NLP was communicated to coachees in a client-friendly manner. P10 reflected in their approach an alternative consideration in this regard, overuse or overreliance on NLP tools and techniques in the coaching context, by saying “there are opportunities to use tools and techniques from NLP all over the place”. For P10, they suggested that “the coach does not get attached to any one tool and to really consider what fits in the moment. Does this fit with the client? And then, also importantly, to ask for permission” from the coachee.

#### v. With permission

With this code, participants’ views on the need for informed consent regarding decisions that could affect the direction of the coaching session were expressed. As P02 described, “I primarily coach...sometimes I move into mentoring and ... go backwards and forwards between the two things” whilst adding, “and occasionally, I make a teaching point”. This notion of ‘with permission’ really encapsulated the intricate dynamics between practitioners and their clients when they were operating at the boundaries of potentially multiple modalities (coaching, mentoring, teaching and so on).

The ‘with permission’ concern was, for the majority of participants, fundamental to respecting and honouring the autonomy and preferences of their clients. For most participants, but not all,

informing and educating clients about the different modalities and how they might be used formed part of their client onboarding process and featured in most client sessions. For instance, P06 reflected that they explained “the difference between coaching, therapy, consulting, mentoring, so that people are very clear with coaching, what it is, and what it is not”. Meanwhile, P14 observed there being a limit to changing modality by not only asking for permission but by also recognising that “I’m not doing that ten times that appointment, I limit that...its training yourself to not do it and waiting, leaving those pauses” instead.

P09 brought ICF competencies into the discussion on shifting modality in securing client permission. “One of the key ICF principles I do follow is to always ask for permission” says P09, adding “If I bring in an idea, such as a metaphor or story, or...certain frameworks or philosophies, I would ask ‘would you be interested in me sharing?’”. Further, P09 would, after sharing, ask “was it helpful what I just said, how does it land or what would that trigger as an afterthought?”. From a different tangent, P13 observed “there are things I do automatically...I don’t need to put on an NLP hat” and gave the examples of “when I’m reframing, and I’m getting to know their way of thinking or trying to get them to an achievable outcome in terms of goal setting”.

From P13’s perspective, whilst it wasn’t necessary to seek permission for those NLP tools as they were “aligned” with the coaching context, when they were “anchoring or trying to run a strategy or something” they sought permission by explaining “this is an exercise ... we’re borrowing it from NLP”. Several participants identified this distinction regarding the use of NLP tools and techniques in sessions. They identified that some NLP tools and techniques were fully aligned with the coaching modality and could be used more fluidly. Meanwhile, they also recognised that other NLP approaches might be considered more interventionist, or practitioner-led, and require more careful handling, particularly regarding client permission. As P08 observed regarding the use of NLP in coaching, “there are two things: there’s the way you show up and how you work with people with your questions, and there’s also the actual, you know, tools and techniques you use”.

When speaking about modality changes, many participants used the metaphor of ‘changing hats’ and each relayed variations on a similar narrative relating to how that occurred in sessions. P01 reflects “I’ve noticed switching hats ... because in that moment it is crucial for the client” adding “clients tell me ‘I love this part’ ... ‘We’re grateful about that’ and then we continue as per the ICF guidelines”. For P06, they “take off one hat and ... put on another hat... ‘would you like some mentoring?’” emphasising, though, that they “would ‘badge’ it as such”. On this point, some participants’ language indicated shifts in modality, in which they, as practitioners, appeared to be

deciding to change modality rather than the client. However, when probed, those participants conveyed a sense of seamlessness around how this was achieved in practice. P02 says they get themselves “hired to share” something they know and then, having shared it, they “flick that back and say ‘well, how does that fit?’” for the client in their situation. “It’s always permission-based,” says P14, and “it’s always up to them whether they choose to or not”. P10 emphasises that “if they say no, then not having any attachment to that” suggestion is key on the part of the coach. This indicates a conscious and conscientious commitment to ethical practice. Creating safety and trust, where the client will feel empowered to make informed choices, without fear of judgment or repercussions, and without the practitioner imposing methodologies or interventions without explicit permission.

vi. Conclusion to Theme Two: ‘Challenges ahoy!’

In conclusion, the theme ‘challenges ahoy!’ reflects an intricate and multifaceted relationship between NLP and coaching that reveals challenges in understanding and marshalling their successful integration within a coaching context. Participants discussed the difficulty of distinguishing between coaching dialogue and NLP process work. For example, several referred to using meta-model questioning to clarify meaning, or perceptual positions to help clients explore different perspectives. While these would be identified as NLP techniques, they were applied from a coaching stance that prioritised client agency and awareness over direction or instruction. Others reflected on the overlap between NLP interventions and coaching micro-skills, such as listening for linguistic patterns and reframing client narratives. This demonstrates that integration was often intuitive rather than NLP being imposed as a discrete methodology, ensuring it was typically owned and drawn upon when helpful in enhancing insights and driving change. Participants also emphasised the value of the NLP knowledge and skills base, the inherent interconnectedness of the two, the difficulties in attempting to isolate their respective contributions to the profession, and the benefits of persevering with the successful integration of the two modalities. P11 states, “I don’t know for a fact coaching came out of NLP, but it seems like it did...the more important point is that I don’t see how coaching could exist without NLP”. P02 builds on this by saying “Is it worth doing NLP? I would 100% would say it absolutely is...it is transformative. I transformed my coaching approach; it transformed me, and I think it transforms clients”.

#### 4.4 Theme Three: ‘Learning and growth for both’

##### i. Introduction to Theme Three: ‘Learning and growth for both’

The creation of this theme acknowledges the purpose behind the professional activity of coaching in general. Specifically, it focuses on integrating NLP within coaching practice for personal and professional growth and development. All participants advocated the personal and professional learning and growth achievable through NLP, with most acknowledging its impact on both the coachee and the coach. P01 noted that integrating NLP “acts as a catalyst for bringing change quicker”, a sentiment again shared by all participants. Building upon this, P13 states “NLP has the ability to [enable someone] to reach what they want...in a much quicker time”. For P07 this extends to both the coach and the coachee as “you learn a lot about yourself, you learn a lot about how you approach things”. Exploring this theme reveals the dimensions of NLP’s capacity to foster learning and growth, as reported through the subjective lived experiences of the research participants.

##### ii. Presuppositional mindset

Central to NLP are its presuppositions, or the premises upon which its knowledge and skills are based, and it is this that this code relates to. In effect, it’s NLP’s epistemology, what constitutes knowledge in the NLP worldview. In practice, acknowledging and adopting these presuppositions were reflected in practitioners' beliefs and mindsets. Participants recognised that individuals’ mindsets and beliefs played a pivotal role in determining whether learning and growth occurred or were promoted. They considered the NLP presuppositions to be central to their mindsets and beliefs. NLP presuppositions are assumptions accepted by NLP proponents for their practical utility rather than for their absolute truth. Examples of these presuppositions referred to by the participants include there’s no such thing as failure... failure is feedback in disguise (P01); you have all the resources (P02); positive intent of behaviours (P06); and the map is not the territory (P09). In addition to these, participants expressed a range of other expansive beliefs that reflected a mindset promoting learning and growth. For instance, P09 mentioned having “a trust that things will work out...I definitely feel I have a wealth of resources at my fingertips”, P11 shared “I try to stay curious, I try to stay open”, and P14 asserted “I can just change this right now, I can create a new state for myself”

### iii. Catalytic convert

The use of the code 'catalytic convert' expressed the view consistently held by participants that NLP acts as a catalyst for transformational change. To this extent, the participants were all 'converts', as they absorbed the presuppositions of NLP and, through its methodologies, skills, and techniques, witnessed changes in themselves or in others that represented varying degrees of transformation, with NLP as the catalyst. As P04 observed about NLP, "you can really promote your own self-development and use the tools on yourself...in your own personal life". P07 extends this to include the powerful role NLP can play in the journey, saying, "you learn a lot about yourself, you learn a lot about how you approach things, you learn about your preferences...it's potentially transformative."

P01 refers to NLP as a modelling methodology by indicating that NLP can "help you in knowing who to model...help in keeping the goal within control" and certainly NLP advocates enhancing choices available: "I find that NLP gives me more options and more variety", says P02 and "a lot of different ways of looking at things", adds P06. P14 gives a personal testimony to how NLP has impacted their life, not just as a coach practitioner but as a human being: "You just get to know yourself at a different level...NLP helps you think more about who you are, how you make decisions, the way you are with people...I really believe it's made me a better human". Expanding on the last comment regarding change, NLP emerges as a catalyst for change and a driving force behind continuous improvement in participants' lives. For many participants, NLP has become a constant companion in their pursuit of excellence, or being the highest version of themselves, fostering awareness, self-knowledge, and cultivating ways of being in the world, both personally and professionally. For example, P02 talks about NLP, saying, "it's running in the background, so it is part of my continuous improvement strategy. Yeah, it makes me want to be better."

### iv. Reflective practitioner

'Reflective practitioner' as a code within the theme 'learning and growth for both' represents how reflective participants acknowledge practice as a key factor in fostering learning and growth. P04 sees the use of NLP as a "of checking in to "how has that gone?" ...very much a part of the reflection "what am I doing that's contributing?", "what's working, what's not working?", "What could [be changed]?". In the coaching context, participants advocate for the incorporation of reflective practice into the coachee's journey, considering it integral to the coaching process that utilises NLP and other techniques. Furthermore, participants perceive NLP as an opportunity for self-reflection as coaches and as individuals. P06 states "I notice my feelings... if I'm edgy or sad... I look for what happens for me and then I look for self-reference, did it trigger something

for me?” P11 observes that reflective activities can so easily be overlooked, adding “maybe I don’t put as much conscious effort into it as I did once upon a time and that maybe I...would be better served if I did”.

v. Crystallising intentionality

This code reflects the phenomenological perspective that we act in the world with intention. So it is with NLP that any change sought begins with a clarity about what the desired outcome is, the intention behind the action. In coaching and NLP, this finds expression through the provision of a goal of some description, the client’s desired change or outcome. Participants emphasised the paramount importance of establishing goals to foster learning and growth, and how they have internalised this practice through NLP. P07 viewed the purpose of a session, regardless of the topic, as centred around “identifying that achievable outcome and how to reach it”. All participants discussed how NLP provided a ‘supercharged’ approach to goal setting, known as ‘well-formed outcomes’ (WFO). P14 noted that this was something not typically covered in standard coach training, saying NLP “outcome specification. I didn’t learn that in my coaching training...I’ve used it so much; it works like a charm”. P03 elaborated on the importance of achieving clarity around this, specifically about the types of questions you would ask to establish it: “what’s your outcome for today?...What are you going to see? What are you going to hear? What are you going to feel?” and emphasised “getting a really clear outcome is really important”, one that is sensory specific. P01 summed that up by stating it’s an opportunity “to know who you [will be] when [a] goal is achieved”.

vi. Adaptive experimentation

This code gives voice to the participants’ view that people act as part of a system. Each person is a system in themselves, acting within a system of which they are only a part. They understood behavioural flexibility as being crucial for personal growth, and it is in this context that P01 stated “‘Do what works’, that’s the NLP thing about if what you’re doing isn’t working, then do something different!”. P02 supported this by revealing that in their practice, “one thing I might do is kind of mentally take a step back and think ‘okay, so let’s try something else’...I love active experimentation”. For other participants, this adaptive experimentation extended to their interactions with the world. P10 noted “being able to adapt to learning preferences” of others, while P14 expressed it as “finding more resourceful ways of doing things” through NLP. P02 described how NLP helped pick “up on some patterns that are inhibiting or impeding progress”.

Moving beyond intrapersonal aspects, participants discussed the value of adaptive experimentation in interpersonal contexts. Drawing from NLP presuppositions, several participants emphasised the importance of understanding others' perspectives when engaging with them, such as P12 observing "I see the person first and I will answer to that map of the world", a sentiment shared by almost all the participants. Building on this, P05 suggested that "to meet [the other] where they are, you need to understand where they are, and NLP tools help me to do that", while P07 emphasised that NLP "enhances one's acuity" in achieving this.

Participants then expanded on NLP tools and techniques that assisted with adaptive experimentation, such as the power of reframing and modelling others as typical examples. These strategies generate more options, especially when, as P01 noted, "you think there is no choice". P10 explains reframing as "the experience of having butterflies in nervousness and reframing that into this is really your body gearing up for you to give your best performance in your life". Participants stressed that NLP frames and reframing are important contributors to learning and growth, with P14 reflecting that they used NLP frames and reframing "every day. I don't even know when I wouldn't be using them because it's the 'how else could you look at it? What else might it be if it's not this?'. Modelling, too, was highlighted as a very important NLP contributor to learning and growth, which could play a part in adaptive experimentation. For P04, modelling can be something like "noticing what ...people do...think how you could apply it to yourself...take that and do what will work for you".

#### vii. Conclusion to Theme Three: 'Learning and growth for both'

In conclusion, participants emphasised the pivotal contribution NLP makes in promoting personal and professional learning and growth. They recognised the significance of mindsets and beliefs, which NLP's presuppositions shape and guide. Participants described using NLP processes for their own development as much as for the benefit of clients. Several noted applying state management and anchoring before sessions, or outcome framing to prepare mentally for coaching. Others mentioned using reframing and neurological levels reflection to examine their own practice and assumptions. NLP emerges as a catalyst for change, fostering self-awareness and continuous improvement. Reflective practice, well-formed outcomes, adaptive experimentation, and effective interpersonal engagement were all enriched by the tools and techniques that NLP provides. Self-application reflects one of NLP's central presuppositions, behavioural flexibility, to increase effectiveness. By 'modelling excellence' in themselves, participants embodied the reflective mindset that underpins both NLP and coaching mastery. NLP thereby offers a comprehensive framework for learning and growth, allowing practitioners and clients alike to

navigate challenges, reframe experiences, and model positive behaviours. As P02 aptly put it “NLP gives me more options and more variety”, while P06 referred to NLP’s capability as “giving permission to explore who they are and who they want to be”. P14 added “this is always about your choices and what you want to do and what feels right for you”. Overall, NLP shows itself as a powerful resource, empowering individuals to embrace growth and development in both their personal and professional lives.

## 4.5 Theme Four: ‘What makes the difference?’

### i. Introduction to Theme Four: ‘What makes the difference?’

This theme expresses the NLP approaches, including tools and techniques, used by participants and integrated into their coaching practice. This is relevant to the broader study because it reveals which participants’ NLP knowledge and skills, they use most, and when and how they use them. From the outset, the exploration of participant narratives around this theme reveals a distinction the participants draw between NLP use for self-management and communication with coaches (intra-personally and inter-personally), and NLP use in terms of techniques and activities with coachees. Participant 8 aptly expressed this by saying, “there are two things: there’s the way you show up and how you can work with people with your questions, and there’s also like the actual techniques”. This emphasises how adept the practitioner needs to be in utilising NLP integrated within their overall coaching practice, and how multifaceted the context might become in relation to its demands for modality management.

### ii. The coach state

In exploring participants’ narratives, how practitioners used NLP for intrapersonal self-management was striking and formed the code ‘coach state’. A key concept in NLP is ‘state’ and the majority of participants referred to their acquiring and maintaining what was usefully referred to by P06 as “the coach state”. In relation to this, many participants referred to the ‘NLP presuppositions’ they held as beliefs, or as a mindset, with P06 giving examples such as “there’s no failure, only feedback” and the “positive intent of behaviours”. Importantly, P07 emphasised how the “presuppositions in NLP do not conflict with coaching, or the ICF”. How ingrained these NLP presuppositions are for the NLP coach practitioners is reflected in P03’s comment that “I don’t think I use them; I embody them in who I am, and so they’re just a part of me”. Considering then how the NLP presuppositions prepare the coach for their interactions with others, P09 details the NLP presupposition “the map is not the territory”, which, for P13, in relation to coachee interactions, means “seeing how they see the world, so understanding their model of the world”.

In configuring the most useful coach state for themselves, the participants adopted a range of approaches they believed were core to the impact of coaching. For P03, this was using NLP to get themselves into “a really resourceful state”, and P02 emphasised how by applying NLP to themselves first it supported their congruence as a coach “because I’m doing the things that I’m offering to other people. NLP is an integral part of how I prep myself, how I get myself into the

right state”. P06 describes the coach state for them as being “open, alert, connected and holding space for my clients, not getting attached to outcome” and that in that coach state they can “actively listen without getting drawn into the content of their story... active listening, watching how they’re using their body.

### iii. Coaching alliance

Moving on from the practitioners’ own use of NLP to achieve a ‘coach state’, most participants emphasised the importance of forming an effective coach-coachee relationship, and this formed the code ‘coaching alliance’. P05 reflects how, in coaching, “meeting the coachee where they are” is so important, and that to do that, “you need to understand where they are... NLP tools help me to do that”. This emphasises the participants’ use of NLP knowledge and skills in the interpersonal aspects of coaching, linking the NLP presuppositions underpinning their coach state to how they show up, using NLP to generate an effective coaching alliance. Developing and maintaining such an alliance was seen by participants as requiring ongoing focused awareness, which, at its heart, according to P02, requires “noticing what’s happening with the client”. For P03, this means “being mindful about where my mind is ... picking up on cues...around rapport and connection,” and for P09, it was “the ability of my ongoing presence during the interaction, that I am ‘in the moment’”.

NLP’s usefulness in enhancing rapport and the quality of communication in sessions was identified as a stand-out benefit. For this reason, it is important to note that ‘rapport’ has a precise meaning in NLP which may be at odds with an everyday understanding one might have of the word, or indeed, its general meaning within the psychology field. ‘Rapport’ in NLP is the ability to enter someone else’s world, to help them feel heard and understood, and to do so through enhanced connection. The significance of this quality of rapport to developing an effective coaching alliance is immense, as it centres on building, within a coaching relationship, a deep and practical understanding, trust, and co-operation. “The state of rapport is a loop of mutual influence and interaction in which each element is influencing, and influenced by, the other elements” (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000b, p. 1051), strongly avoiding any sense of leading or directing that many might anticipate would be present with NLP. In NLP, appreciating distinctions in learning styles, body language, language patterns, and so on supports the use of communication techniques such as mirroring and matching to enhance connection quality. This contrasts with the meaning of ‘rapport’ in psychology, which is the suggestion of “a warm, relaxed relationship...and sympathetic compatibility between individuals...in order to facilitate and deepen the therapeutic experience” (American Psychological Association, 2015).

In light of the above, building rapport that's "based on more than just verbiage... matching and mirroring and that I'm 100% with my client ...just those subtleties of really being tuned in" makes such a significant difference, according to P10. In this way, participants reported gaining a deeper understanding of their clients' 'map of the world', enabling them to observe and adapt to their clients' communication package. P09 contributes that they "take notice of the language patterns" of their coachees and then "consciously match...or consciously disrupt" them with their line of questioning, depending on the circumstances during a session. P11 reports that by using NLP, "I try to stay curious; I try to stay open; I try to focus on deeper structure ... the language people are using". For P03, the richness of the linguistic patterns provided by NLP and how they are used consciously and unconsciously was seen to be "a really powerful tool... I don't think that ICF coach training kind covers that to anywhere near the same degree", adding emphatically "I found that the coaching I was doing was, in many areas, way above the level that the ICF training offered".

The participants were also alert to any calibrated loss of connection during a session and spoke of how NLP helped them regain it, including for themselves. For instance, P11 noted their own self-management "in the sense of my brain is now making assumptions, or beliefs or ideas, about what they're saying" and so they recognised that they needed to either "bracket and park that" or even "make that a point of inquiry". Other times, the issue may be the practitioner becoming too connected to the coachee's story, and that they had NLP-based mechanisms for recognising and responding to that. For instance, P02 reports, "I will dissociate...I'll remember this is not my thing to solve. I'll put the emphasis back on the coachee." Finally, participants also spoke about how they use the coaching alliance to consider matters such as client permission and modalities contracting. This was represented by P11, who suggested "there will be... the requesting and granting of permission, both from the initial outset but also as we go along".

#### iv. Aligned, deployable with ease

The code of 'aligned, deployable with ease' within the theme 'what makes the difference?' reflects the use of specific NLP tools and techniques used by the participants to promote client change that were considered to be a 'fit' with coaching. In representing the majority, P13 summarised "there are things I do automatically, I don't need to put an NLP hat on" such as "when I'm reframing ...or ...an achievable outcome in terms of goal setting", going on to explain "I don't say it because it is aligned" to the coaching context. For most practitioners, it was about keeping to what had been contracted, rather than whether any specific NLP tool was in itself suitable for deployment. As P10 observed "this is where coaches, if they're not clear about which role they're in...can step

into the trap of mentoring, advising, consulting, etc without being aware” adding “they think they’re doing it out of service to the client, but they’ve moved out of the modality” for which there is “a psychological agreement between the two parties”.

Maintaining the coaching alliance and rapport remained uppermost in participants' minds whilst they coached. Most spoke of continuing to track their client’s body language and language patterns, adjusting their coaching approach accordingly to their calibrations, and also utilising the information gleaned to move the session forward. Much of this was about generating questions from what was said or observed. For P08, it included noticing “how they’re...answering questions, using the words that they use...finding out more about what that word means” to them. P04 spoke of using the NLP meta model, saying that clients are “always amazed at the insights they gain from that...it’s enabling both action in a safe space and reflection.” In a myriad of ways participants generated questions from sensory data arising from within the session, such as P08 “listening for “limiting beliefs and challenging those at times”, or P11 listening for the stories they tell “cliches and metaphors, so not just the words people choose, but the linguistic patterns”. Several participants raised the notion of ‘coach as instrument’, such as P10 explaining “if I notice something about my body that’s happening...I will bring it up and say, ‘I’m noticing, I’m sensing’” adding that they then ask ““how might that be relevant in our conversation today?””. Although this notion is not itself an NLP tool, the participants emphasised that NLP knowledge and skills really help them utilise their sensory acuity about their own experience within the coaching session.

Focusing more on the NLP tools and techniques that influence the coaching dialogue as ‘activities’, many were identified as aligned with the coaching context. Participants recognised that this was as much about the way a tool was introduced and used by the coach and coachee, as it was about the choice of tool itself. Some tools that were identified by the participants as being clearly aligned with coaching, and therefore deployable with ease in the coaching context, included:

- ‘well-formed outcome’ (WFO) which, as P06 states, “I use that all the time...really testing an outcome...like a smart objective but more than that, it’s how it fits in their greater system”.
- ‘framing’, including ‘reframing’, with P13 suggesting listening to the “linguistics...figuring out what they want and reframing”, adding “This is non-directive by my standard”.

- ‘modelling’ which, according to P04, can be as straightforward as noticing “what confident people do...think how you could apply it to yourself, make it what they do, take that, and do what will work for you”.

v. Artful deployment, if at all

The code of ‘artful deployment, if at all’ acknowledges that how a coach uses an NLP tool or technique is just as important as the choice of NLP tool or technique itself. For several participants, this distinction was relevant to what they described as professional coaching. As P03 observed, “a lot of coaches use the word ‘coach’ and then they just basically ‘tell fest’, and that’s not coaching, it’s lecturing, or training, or educating, or mentoring...or parenting in some cases!”. According to these participants, coaching professionally meant that the practitioner was aware of the differences between modalities and what had been contracted with the coachee and the broader system. With all participants dual-accredited, they had a firm grasp of the modalities and the need to contract to move between them. For example, P02 says “I move between coaching and mentoring and...occasionally I make a teaching point, but there’s no therapy” with P06 adding “using that contract...explaining the difference between coaching, therapy, consulting, mentoring...so that people are very clear”.

Given that many people associate NLP with therapy, some participants expressed concerns about how well this was understood amongst coaches, particularly NLP coaches who are only accredited in NLP. As P14 shared, “I really believe in complying with ethics and confidentiality and staying in my lane. I think a lot of coaches cross the line into therapy”. Many participants spoke of moving outside ICF-style coaching to other modalities, ones in which they were suitably qualified and where such modality changes had been contracted with the client. All of the participants concerned recognised the need for re-contracting and made what they considered to be defensible and considered decisions regarding their approach. For instance, P08 shares “whenever somebody feels like they can’t get a change to happen, because it’s just part of their past” I tell them about NLP, saying that it’s “something I have in my kit bag and if it’s relevant to use, it could be really significant to them gaining traction”. P12 shares similar thoughts, adding “if they accept it, I’m doing it. If they say, 'that’s too weird' or 'I cannot accept it', I’ll just let it go”.

In the coaching context, most participants considered the above considerations very important, as NLP tools and techniques are abundant, and many can be viewed as therapeutic in nature. P12 contributes that there are “so many NLP tools and what I need to be aware of is ‘which tool will be the best for this particular client in their style?’ ... ‘which tool will best serve the client?’”

whilst also ensuring alignment with the modality that has been contracted for. Again, it is the choice of the NLP tool, combined with how the practitioner introduces and uses it, that is significant to its professional use in a coaching context. On this basis, the practitioners' ability to elegantly configure approaches suitable to the individual client and the coaching context was seen to expand the range of NLP tools and techniques qualifying for artful deployment in the coaching context, as the following participant examples illustrate:

- 'Timeline'. Typically used as an NLP tool to resolve past issues it can, as P01 suggests, be used to "take [clients]...to the future and then coming back and seeing the present to...generate more ideas".
- 'TOTE/Strategy'. P13 emphasises that with this practitioner-led client exercise, they say "this is an exercise ...we're borrowing from NLP'...and if they don't mind, we run the exercise".
- 'Six-step reframe'. Again, a practitioner-led activity and one that P09 says "I like to use it. It's probably my main one. You get your preferences" and adding that they recognise that "it's leading, I bring it in as a conscious container that the client can say 'no, I'm not interested'".

vi. Conclusion to Theme Four: 'What makes the difference?'

The theme "what makes the difference?" emphasises the significance of using NLP for self-management, both intra-personally and inter-personally. It reveals how useful NLP can be in enhancing flexibility and adaptability in ICF-defined coaching. Participants described a shift from explicitly 'doing NLP', employing techniques such as reframing, perceptual positions, and anchoring, to a more embodied way of being that better reflected the spirit of NLP rather than its mechanics. This evolution parallels the NLP neurological levels framework, moving from behaviour-level techniques to identity-level integration. Participants detail the importance of the 'coach state' and the alignment of NLP presuppositions with coaching practices. They also accentuate the intricate balance between maintaining a coaching alliance and deploying NLP techniques artfully, ensuring ethical considerations and client-specific approaches are prioritised. According to the participants, they use NLP tools and techniques within the coaching context to build rapport, deepen understanding, and facilitate client growth and development. Analysis of the participants' contributions suggests NLP's principles of effective communication (including rapport), goal orientation, and flexibility/adaptability in approach align well with the core objectives of coaching.

Meanwhile, many NLP tools require more artful deployment, with coaches needing to maintain distinct boundaries between coaching and therapy (and other modalities), respect the contracted coaching alliance, and acknowledge the ethical implications of both. Within this, NLP tools are typically selected and used by participants relevant to each client's unique context and objectives, the contracted modalities and other systemic requirements, ensuring an effective match between the approach (including the tools used), the desired outcome, and the context. The participants, being dual-accredited, identify themselves as suitably adept at modality awareness and contractual agility, and emphasise NLP's role in helping them achieve this capability. P12 concludes "knowledge of NLP is ...fundamental to being a coach, it should be required for all coaches," arguing "NLP is fundamentally communication," the bedrock of coaching.

## 4.6 Chapter conclusions

The participants' narratives support the four themes I have developed for this study, offering a comprehensive reflection on and exploration of the interplay between NLP and coaching practices. The first theme, 'what gets in the way?', reveals the reception and perceived legitimacy of NLP within the coaching field. It captures a critical tension between scepticism and acceptance, indicating that while NLP faces challenges in terms of its scientific recognition, its practitioners find undeniable value in its deployment for personal and professional enhancement. The exploration of NLP's reputation, through both resistance and endorsement by practitioners, reveals a complex dynamic that arises when seeking to integrate the methodology into mainstream coaching practices. The second theme, 'challenges ahoy!', delves into the practical difficulties of merging NLP with coaching. It emphasises the 'liminal space' between modalities, where practitioners navigate ethical considerations and the need for informed consent. This theme reflects the ongoing effort to maintain professional boundaries while creatively incorporating diverse approaches to meet client needs effectively. The third theme, 'Learning and growth for both' emphasises the reciprocal nature of learning in the coach-coachee dynamic, particularly through the integration of NLP in coaching practice. It emphasises that NLP not only accelerates personal and professional growth but also catalyses transformational change. This theme suggests that NLP facilitates a rich, reflective practice that benefits both practitioners and their clients, fostering an environment of continuous improvement and self-discovery.

'What makes the difference' as the last theme, extends the utility of NLP beyond professional boundaries, illuminating its impact on practitioners' personal lives. This theme is particularly insightful as it illustrates the broader applicability of NLP tools in enhancing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal dynamics. It articulates how NLP fosters a profound level of self-reflection and adaptive capabilities that resonate well beyond the coaching context. Across all four themes, participants demonstrated the integration of NLP processes at multiple levels, from the use of practical techniques (anchoring, reframing, perceptual positions) to the embodiment of presuppositions about resourcefulness, choice, and relational ethics. By making these connections explicit, the chapter illustrates that NLP contributes to coaching not as a competing modality but as a flexible, ethically informed resource that enhances reflective practice and deepens the coach's capacity for presence and responsiveness. Together, they lay the foundation for the next chapter, where discussion will further elaborate on how these findings relate to broader knowledge and understanding, including my own researcher-practitioner experiences and insights.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

My study explored the lived experience of dual-qualified practitioners, integrating their knowledge and skills within their professional practice. My choice of NLP and ICF coaching practitioners was strategic: ICF is the largest global coaching accreditation body, with a highly delineated definition of coaching, and a robust framework of competencies and ethics (International Coaching Federation, 2021a, 2024, 2025a), and; NLP is the third most used coaching model in Europe, representing a significant portion of methodologies applied across the coaching landscape (Passmore et al., 2017; Tee et al., 2018). My researcher-practitioner position and perspective have sought to enhance my investigation, embracing my inherent biases and preconceptions as elements that contribute depth and richness to my study, consistent with my study's philosophical stance (Denscombe, 2021; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Parsons et al., 2021; Tietze, 2012; van Manen, 2023)

While existing literature touches on various modalities within support professions and their boundaries, there's a noticeable gap concerning the integration of diverse knowledge and skill sets into coaching practice (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Bachkirova & Baker, 2018; Giraldez-Hayes, 2021; Grant & Green, 2018; Sime & Jacob, 2018). Further, some studies emphasise the importance of coaches' 'background' and 'prior career experiences' to coaching outcomes (Erdos et al., 2021; Fisher et al., 2023; Pandolfi, 2020). This discussion chapter explores the themes of my study, detailed in the last (findings) chapter, drawn from participants' narratives of their lived experience integrating NLP into their coaching practices, in the context of the literature and my own researcher-practitioner perspective. The ordering of the themes in this chapter deliberately mirrors the sequence used in the previous chapter, maintaining the focus on the practitioner journey from negotiating challenges to achieving integrative success in their practices. This ensures a coherent connection between the presentation of the participants' narratives and their analysis, interwoven with relevant literature and my researcher-practitioner perspective.

Therefore, the discussion begins with coverage of the barriers, tensions, and constraints encountered (Theme: 'What gets in the way?'), including practitioner disposition around modalities, their boundaries, and how they navigate them through communication and contracting (Theme: 'Challenges ahoy!') to ensure ethical and professional coaching practice. The discussion progresses to the enabling insights (Theme: 'Learning and growth for both') and culminates in the success strategies for integration (Theme: 'What makes the difference?'). This provides a layered

analysis that reflects participant's lived experiences while progressively building theoretical and practical insights through the literature and the researcher-practitioner perspectives woven into the discussion.

## 5.2 Theme One: ‘What gets in the way?’

As we saw in the findings chapter, the participants’ experiences reflected in this theme are built on three key areas: the reputation of NLP, evolving perceptions of NLP, and positive affirmations about NLP. The reputation of NLP is in turn seen to impact in three ways: the participants’ own perspectives, their clients’ awareness and reactions, and the broader system(s)’ dispositions within which those relationships exist. Connected to its reputation, the way in which participants’ own perceptions of NLP as their understanding, experience, and use of it grew plays an integral part in their practice. Lastly, irrespective of NLP’s reputation and the evolution of participants’ understanding and knowledge of NLP, all spoke positively of the role NLP played in their coaching practice, and their ability to configure its integration into their practice ethically and professionally effectively. The discussion identifies NLP’s academic and practical challenges, the different ways in which participants have responded to those challenges in their professional practice, and the importance of ‘professionalising’ the activity to retain NLP’s relevance to ethical and professional coaching practice.

### i. NLP reputation

In the findings chapter, participants revealed an array of views and responses about NLP’s reputation, ranging from seeing it as “unscientific, a pseudoscience” (P01), through to solid advocacy for it, “I love NLP...and I love having all the tools and belief system” (P14). Interestingly, regardless of their perspective, all participants embraced NLP as a valuable and integrated part of their coaching practice. As a researcher-practitioner embedded in the field, I have experienced firsthand how NLP has become an inseparable part of my coaching practice. I doubt that I could successfully disentangle it from my coaching practice, even if it were possible, without some loss in the quality and impact of the coaching I provide to my clients. As to my position on NLP being ‘scientific’, then I would say my position is ‘it depends’. It depends on: what is being called ‘NLP’, what claims are being made about NLP’s efficacy, and what kind of evidence might be reasonably expected to be provided to support the types of claims being made about it within any given context of its application.

Reviewing the academic literature, I have found that NLP has variously been described as ‘discredited’ (Heap, 1987), ‘cargo cult’ (Roderique-Davies, 2009), ‘pseudoscientific’ (Witkowski, 2010), and ‘charlatanry’ (Greif, 2022). These views represent, at the extreme, concerns about NLP from essentially three key perspectives: theoretical ambiguity (vague and unfounded theoretical constructs) (Roderique-Davies, 2009), lack of empirical evidence (sparse research,

often with methodological flaws or inconclusive findings) (Passmore & Rowson, 2019), and ethical considerations (lack of practitioner standardised training and regulation) (Greif, 2022). While the professional NLP community challenges these labels, contributors de Rijk and Parker (2022) acknowledge that NLP's early research shortcomings "prevented the development of an extensive evidence base" (p. 239). However, recent efforts have sought to address this gap, with the authors reporting that "there has been an increase in RCTs, systematic reviews and meta-analyses" with regard to NLP (p. 239), at least in clinical settings. Further, since 1999 NLP has become "a recognised psychotherapy modality in the UK and across Europe" (de Rijk & Cheal, 2016, p. 81) known as NLPt, with representation in fourteen European countries banded together under the auspices of the European Association of Psychotherapy (European Association of NLP Psychotherapy, 2024) with a clear agenda of enhancing high quality research regarding NLP in the therapeutic domain, which is where NLP originated.

Having observed these opposing narratives for decades, I recognise that this debate is not new. Grant (2019b) aptly describes it as "a table-tennis match, in which the players keep serving the metaphorical ball back and forth" (p. 47). At the centre of the argument is typically 'what constitutes evidence supporting NLP's claims?' From my engagement with NLP over the years, and particularly since I have been considering NLP through a professional practice lens (rather than a personal development one) I have been drawn to three aspects of the debate: 'what is being attributed as being 'NLP'?', 'what are the evidential norms for the context in which such 'NLP' is being applied?', and 'how does 'NLP' compare with other approaches in that same context with respect to meeting those evidential norms?'. Whilst I will provide exposition of 'what is NLP?' as the discussion of my study's themes unfolds, looking at the notion of 'evidential norms' in the coaching context, my view is that the above debate is akin to the 'paradigm wars' referred to by Gage (1989). Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that resolution of such a situation is only likely to occur if the proponents of the differing views come together to discuss their differences, rather than argue the sanctity of their respective views. So, what prevents this from happening to a greater extent? As I shall go on to explore, efforts are hampered by two key dimensions: the low engagement of NLP developers and practitioners in the academic discourse to date, and (some quarters of) academia giving insufficient recognition to the application of 'alternative inquiry paradigms' (Saunders et al., 2024) regarding research within the helping professions. In the externally peer reviewed academic discourse relevant to NLP application in coaching, one notable contributor has been the psychologist and NLP advocate Grimley (2019b) who deserves special mention for extensive enquiry over time and approaching the areas of contention from multiple

perspectives (de Rijk et al., 2019; Dormandy & Grimley, 2024; Grimley, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019a, 2019b, 2020; Grimley & Dilts, 2024).

In my opinion, the NLP community has not helped itself within this debate in two principal ways. Firstly, there is a view from within the NLP community that NLP “makes no commitment to theory...has the status of a model [where]...usefulness not truthfulness is to be the measure of its worth” (Dilts et al., 1980, foreword). This has fed into a narrative of NLP distancing itself from academic discourse, rather than fostering advocacy for more relevant research approaches within that discourse. Secondly, NLP has created its own parallel system to the advancement (perhaps arguably ‘non-advancement’) of NLP ‘knowledge’ which avoids being peer reviewed by those outside of the NLP community and has thereby delayed the kind of resolution argued for by Guba and Lincoln (1994) which would have the respective proponents of the differing views discussing their differences through the academic dialogue. Discussion of Theme 2 of my study includes the NLP community’s response to the concern about its engagement with academia and its view of ‘theory’. Grimley (2019a) in any case, suggests NLP’s efforts will continue to be challenged all the time as it evades building stronger ‘construct validity’, that is, enhanced theoretical underpinnings to explain what NLP is and how it applies to the different domains of its application, which would be required for any meaningful engagement within the academic discourse. Within the coaching context, criticisms of NLP’s evidentiary support arise despite coaching itself facing similar challenges. This suggests to me that some critiques stem from a narrow interpretation of what constitutes valid evidence of efficacy, and that this is not applied in an even-handed way across both NLP and coaching. These points will be explored more as the discussion of my study’s themes unfolds.

When I say ‘some quarters of academia’, I highlight that the key critics of NLP detailed above [Greif (2022), Passmore and Rowson (2019), Roderique-Davies (2009), Witkowski (2010) and others] are all psychologists. This is relevant because a recent article by Dormandy and Grimley (2024) reports a history of claims of ‘inappropriate gatekeeping’ by some quarters of the psychology field towards NLP, with multiple members of the professional NLP community asserting such discrimination (de Rijk et al., 2022; Wake et al., 2013). Gray et al. (2013), and others, claim that all too often the criticisms levelled at NLP “rely on flawed techniques, poor meta-analyses and cherry-picking” (Dormandy & Grimley, 2024, p. 2), indicating some psychologists’ bias against NLP. Recalling also that from a professional practice perspective, particularly in the coaching context, practical utility may be favoured in such human interaction

over the quality of scientific substantiation, and this likely impacts the way that it should be researched and evaluated academically. Despite its contested standing in academia, NLP’s widespread use in coaching (Passmore et al., 2017; Tee et al., 2018) suggests to me that NLP has a tangible value in practice. This enduring presence, spanning over half a century, may indicate a theory-practice gap existing (Monaghan, 2015) that merits further exploration.

Building on the analysis of ‘pseudoscience’ by Mukerji and Ernst (2022), who emphasise distinctions between pseudoscience and variously: ‘protoscience’, ‘bad science’, ‘science fraud’, and ‘bullshit’, Dormandy and Grimley (2024) identify that NLP is viewed by its ‘science-minded’ proponents (see Table 5.1) as a ‘protoscience’, whilst many psychologists (like the ones detailed earlier) think of NLP as being “irremediably bad science, or even science fraud or pseudoscience” (p. 3). Whilst the overall academic discourse around NLP’s standing continues, from a professional practice perspective, the segmentation of the NLP community into the debate by Dormandy and Grimley (2024), I find helpful to both my study and to the NLP profession as a whole. Based on my participants’ narratives, I classify them as being either ‘science minded’ or at least ‘ascientific’. This is a categorisation I also apply to myself, although through this professional practice doctoral journey, I find myself increasingly aligned with the ‘science-minded’ segment.

**Table 5.1**

*NLP community segments in relation to their attitudes toward science\**

Segment name	Descriptor
‘science minded’	These NLPers support research, or perform research activities, into NLP. Such activities include: <u>Advocating scientific approaches to NLP:</u> contributors such as de Rijk and Parker (2022), Grimley (2020) and de Rijk et al. (2019) <u>Defining NLP’s theoretical base:</u> contributors such as de Rijk et al. (2022), Wake et al. (2013) and Tosey and Mathison (2009) <u>Performing scientific research into NLP:</u> contributors such as Parker (2022) and Arroll et al. (2017)
‘ascientific’	These NLPers claim nothing beyond their own personal and professional experiences of NLP and leave answering questions

	on NLP’s standing scientifically to ‘science minded’ members of the NLP community.
‘bullshitters’	These NLPers typically disrespect scientific endeavours by either inflating, or creating unsubstantiated, claims about NLP, and represent though those claims, beyond ‘mere puffery’, as if they were supported by scientific evidence, and doing so is typically for commercialisation gain or relevancy.

*Note.* \*Table contents based on Dormandy and Grimley (2024, p. 4).

To contextualise NLP’s reputation within coaching, it is important to recognise its shared historical and conceptual foundations. Both fields have evolved from shared but diverse theoretical influences, remain loosely defined as activities/modalities, and have faced ongoing reputational scrutiny (Wildflower, 2013). The differences between them appear to have helped coaching develop the way it has, in many ways reflecting possible learnings from what has limited NLP’s broader acceptance over the last 50 years. Key differences include fewer international professional bodies, established ethical codes, standardised training and competency frameworks, and a structured commitment to research-based practice. Additionally, coaching requires periodic accreditation renewal, typically involving evidence of relevant continuing professional development (CPD) and supervision. Having completed professional training in both coaching and NLP to the highest levels of professional accreditation since I began my doctoral journey in professional practice, I have certainly noticed the differences in approach between the two modalities. Whilst I won’t be expanding on my experience of these here, a comparison of these areas between NLP and coaching professional bodies is captured in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2**

*Professional dimensions profile of coaching and NLP professional bodies*

Professional dimension	Coaching	NLP
Different levels of credential attainable	Yes	Yes
Documented training content requirements	Yes	Yes
Evidence of adherence to stated quality standards	Yes	Varies

Ethical standards communicated	Yes	Yes
Practice hours required for credentialing	Yes	No
Scope of practice specified	Yes	Varies
Credential expires, requires re-application	Yes	No
Continuous professional development (CPD) practising requirement	Yes	No
Super-vision practising requirement	Yes	Varies
Advocates/facilitates/provides research based practice	Yes	Varies
Participates in academic discourse which includes (external) peer review	Yes	Varies

*Note.* Table constructed by the author.

ii. Evolving perceptions

Beyond the participants' own views of NLP, they also spoke extensively about configuring their approach to their clients' real (and perceived) dispositions towards NLP, and, indeed, those of the broader system(s) within which they operated. This cautious approach is evident in P10, who says they "don't ever use the words NLP" in their practice due to anticipated negative reactions. Similarly, P14's wish for NLP to have "a more positive reputation" reflects broader concerns about external perceptions of NLP. How they each configured their approach was quite multifaceted and reflected common dimensions in the challenges they encountered and in the manner in which they typically applied their NLP knowledge and skills. Discussion of subsequent themes in my study (particularly themes two and four) elaborates on these areas. The key consideration here was the participants' clients' existing knowledge of and/or disposition to NLP, typically resulting from: NLP's Wikipedia entry and other internet and print-based sources that identify NLP as a 'pseudoscience', and internet searches detailing a myriad of NLP providers, courses, and claims about NLP, its applications, and its efficacy. All of this, according to my study's participants, led to client doubts, uncertainty, and weariness about NLP, creating a feedback loop that affected how they then represented and utilised NLP with their clients.

In my opinion, the identification of NLP ‘bullshitters’ (Dormandy & Grimley, 2024) might usefully be used to describe that part of the NLP community that amplifies the negative reputation that is perpetuated. However, historically, I recognise that there may have been aspects of NLP's evolution that initiated and encouraged this set of behaviours, including blocking participation in the development of NLP community-agreed definitions, qualification requirements, and so on. The application of NLP to my own coaching practice mirrors the multifaceted approach taken by my study's participants, as I, too, have navigated the challenges encountered. Discussion of my own NLP configuration within my practice will occur in subsequent themes of my study (particularly themes two and four).

### iii. Positive affirmations

The participants extended their discussion of prospective coaching clients' likely experiences in researching and encountering NLP by drawing on their own NLP journeys. This was polarised, with some identifying concerns about their earlier (NLP practitioner) training and trainers, such as “feeling manipulated” (P07). In the literature, the psychologist Grant (2019b) tells of their multiple negative experiences of attending NLP trainings, although, like P01, they spoke positively about the usefulness of the NLP content to them personally and professionally, exposing a degree of cognitive dissonance in the context of the ‘pseudoscience’ labelling of NLP. Hayes (2006), in giving an account of their own experiences with NLP, cautions “anyone against swallowing NLP uncritically”, emphasising the need to “identify those who work well and ethically with NLP”, and reassuringly adds “thankfully, they can be found” (p. 12). Others, however, experienced great NLP training and trainers, although they were fully aware that quality varied and that ‘caveat emptor’ (Grimley & Dilts, 2024) really applied. Sitting behind all of this seemed to be how long ago the trainings took place and what field the trainee entered training from. Amongst the participants, those from therapeutic backgrounds, entering their first NLP training some decades ago, had the most negative stories to tell, whilst those more recently trained, especially those doing ICF coaching and NLP dual accreditations in a single combined training from a reputable provider, and who typically came from a more leadership and organisational development background, had the far more positive experiences to report.

Decades ago in the UK, my journey into NLP began with a personal and professional development program arranged by my employer, spanning approximately ten months and comprising 96 hours of unaccredited training that integrated NLP principles. This meticulously structured program significantly influenced me both personally and professionally, leading me to train as a facilitator

and to undertake an additional 40 hours of train-the-trainer education. Over three years, I facilitated five group programs, each with about ten participants. Although not formally an NLP practitioner course, it was a custom program, crafted collaboratively with the employer, that selectively incorporated NLP elements to meet the employer's specific goals. This experience profoundly enhanced my self-awareness and shaped my sense of self and personal responsibility. Subsequently, my interest in NLP surged, and after studying contemporary NLP literature such as Knight (2020, although an earlier edition), O'Connor (2001, although an earlier edition) and Andreas and Faulkner (1994), I aimed for NLP accreditation. However, encountering overly aggressive NLP sales tactics in the UK at the time deterred me, leading me to enrol in an academic coaching course instead. Years later, in New Zealand, a recommendation led me to a quality INLPTA-accredited NLP Practitioner course, reigniting my enthusiasm. Further explorations, in which I was led to exceptional Master Practitioner and NLP Trainer courses accredited by IANLP and IN, solidified my journey, guided by informed choices and additional excellent training experiences.

iv. Conclusion to Theme One: 'What gets in the way?'

I find the discourse surrounding NLP's reputation pivotal, as it reflects a dichotomy between scepticism from some elements of academia and endorsement from those who value NLP in the professional practice context. I believe this tension reflects broader challenges in defining what constitutes scientific legitimacy, particularly in applied fields such as the helping professions, including coaching. NLP's positioning as 'protoscience' provides a gateway for NLP to engage more robustly in academic discourse, bringing to the fore a greater understanding of its development and ongoing evolution. The participants in this study, alongside my own professional experiences, highlight NLP's pragmatic utility within subjective lived experience, central to coaching, and despite its contested status in academic literature. Further, my journey as a researcher-practitioner has mirrored the trajectory described by the participants in my study. Initial curiosity, followed by tempered scepticism, has led to informed support for NLP based on practical efficacy rather than theoretical validation alone. Diversity of experiences in NLP training and accreditation highlights the importance of ongoing quality parameters, such as consistent training standards, practice hours, credential renewals, continuing professional development (CPD), and supervision. All of which can be considered as contemporary requirements for any professional practice. This emphasises that reputation is shaped just as much by behaviours and standards of ethical and professional practice as it is by academic critique.

In this context, my participants' narratives suggest that they are adept at pragmatically and effectively navigating these challenges. Their approaches emphasise the importance of client-centredness over ideological debates. Moving forward, NLP's future in coaching and other professional domains hinges on a commitment to more substantial theoretical underpinnings, participation in the academic discourse, and the provision of enhanced relevant evidentiary support. As both a practitioner and a researcher, I advocate for improved engagement between NLP professionals and academia to foster mutual understanding, constructive critique, and professional, ethical practice solutions fit for the future. Achieving this reconciliation is crucial not only for practitioners' integrity but also for securing NLP's legitimacy and long-term viability across its fields of application. Without this, NLP risks remaining on the margins of academic and professional discourse.

### 5.3 Theme Two: ‘Challenges ahoy!’

In line with my findings, participants’ experiences, as reflected through this theme, are built around four distinct concerns: modality demarcation, staying in lane, coachee communication, and permission. Building on the previous theme’s discussion of “What is NLP?”, ‘modality demarcation’ examines how NLP is distinguished from other modalities often appearing in the coaching context. ‘Staying in lane’ gives voice to practitioners’ deliberations on whether to stick to a specific delineated modality when they have alternatives within their scope of practice they might use. ‘Coachee communication’ explores how coachees are communicated with, ensuring that they remain in the driver’s seat for coaching interactions. Lastly, ‘informed consent’ refers to the need for coaches to ensure they provide a transparent and ethical process when they are tempted to do something, like alter the modality employed, or change the focus of the session. The discussion provides a sufficient understanding of NLP that locates coaching as a context within which NLP can be deployed, integrated even, into the practitioner’s professional practice. It highlights the interdisciplinary nature of both fields and emphasises their shared history and focus on learning and growth. Exploration of the challenges presented yields insights into how participants make choices about their use of the modalities they practice and how they seek to practice them professionally and ethically.

#### i. Modality demarcation

In the findings chapter, I identified how, for some modalities, such as coaching and mentoring, boundaries between them can be blurred, and possibly even conflated. Based on my participants’ narratives in this study, this appeared to be the case for coaching and NLP as well. Participants face challenges in explaining modalities to clients, moderating their actions and language to adhere to the boundaries, and ensuring a straightforward process when shifting between modalities. As P04 highlighted, there is a “huge overlap” between coaching and NLP. This ambiguity is echoed by P03, who questioned: “What is one crediting as an NLP thing?” P08 encapsulates this ambiguity, asking, “Is that NLP? Is that coaching? Is it both? Who knows!” Similarly, P06 reflects “a lot of things I’ve learned just become one big stew”, illustrating the difficulty and fluidity of modality integration in practice. For example, P04 explains “the exploration of texture, colour, etc, working with the senses, I’ve connected that knowledge more with coach training than I have with NLP...but to be fair, that is NLP!”. This strong overlap suggests that the practical application of NLP in coaching may hold more relevance than pinpointing the precise origins of each approach.

As a researcher-practitioner, I have encountered similar challenges in navigating these overlaps while ensuring a defensible, professional approach to my coaching practice. For me, this doesn't just arise at the interface of coaching and NLP; it arises for all my other areas of knowledge, skill, and experience that might be usefully and appropriately deployed in the coaching context. For me, this would include fields such as leadership, project management, mentoring, and training. In the present case, integrating NLP and coaching, the definitions of coaching and NLP adopted for my study (International Coaching Federation, 2025b; The Association for Neuro Linguistic Programming, 2021) reveal a shared goal: facilitating personal and professional growth. What I discern from closer evaluation of these two definitions is that while ICF coaching appears to emphasise more the relational, collaborative, and exploratory elements, NLP appears to focus more on the underlying mechanisms of change within the process. This distinction is important in understanding how NLP integrates into coaching practice and will be explored further during the discussion of the next theme.

In reviewing the academic literature, I found confirmation of what I imagine every NLP practitioner is aware of, and that is that NLP has a strong association with the therapy context. This is where NLP was first developed and applied (Bandler & Grinder, 1975b). Grimley (2020) reveals that NLP has subsequently found expression in many diverse fields, including coaching. In appreciating NLP's success in its other fields of application (coaching, sport, education, and so on), Grimley (2020) suggests viewing NLP as a 'methodology' as being the most helpful in developing such an appreciation. A methodology, Grimley (2020) argues, that is synonymous with 'modelling', 'communicating' and 'systems thinking' to effectively understand, replicate and change subjective lived experience (de Rijk et al., 2019). This, according to Dormandy and Grimley (2024), makes NLP a "phenomenologically oriented framework" (p. 1). This resonates with me, notably as my professional practice doctoral journey has deepened my engagement with phenomenology, the methodology chosen for this study.

However, I argue that NLP requires more than just an acknowledgement of its phenomenological foundation; it demands a broader explanatory framework to capture its complexity, an area to which 'oriented framework' alludes, making it an area requiring further inquiry. Given the previous theme's discussion of NLP as 'atheoretical', a stance held by many within the NLP community, this offers a crucial point of engagement in academic discourse. This is particularly relevant, as NLP's lack of theoretical grounding has been identified as a key barrier to its broader acceptance and integration into professional practice. This has included, in more recent times, whether NLP coaching should even, from a largely academic viewpoint, be accepted as a coaching

model at all (Passmore & Rowson, 2019). However, despite academic scepticism, NLP remains the third most widely used coaching model in Europe (Passmore et al., 2017). From a professional practice standpoint, this highlights the need to reconcile theoretical critiques with NLP's practical significance in coaching. The current situation supports the assertion of a distinct theory-practice gap "between what theory states should happen, and the reality of what actually does" (Monaghan, 2015, p. e1) in relation to coaching models.

In continuing my exploration of the literature, I reviewed Whitmore (2017), often credited as being 'the father of modern coaching' and whose GROW model is the number one coaching model in Europe (Passmore et al., 2017), and most likely the world. Whitmore (2017) emphasised that there is "no one right way to coach", seeing 'awareness,' 'responsibility' and 'self-belief' as being "at the very core of human growth and effectiveness" (p. 171). He saw these as more important than modality labels such as 'coaching', 'counselling', 'mentoring', and even 'psychotherapy'. While this challenges the need for strict modality boundaries, it assumes that practitioners possess the skills and flexibility to adapt to diverse client needs. However, the observance of 'professional boundaries', defined as the demarcation of "the scope and limits of professional practice" (Myers & Bachkirova, 2021, p. 212) for any specific profession, remains a perennial issue for professional practitioners in the context of coaching and other helping professions. As an accredited coaching supervisor, I find this topic often surfaces in my supervisees' reflections on their practice from formative, normative, and supportive perspectives. As such, it remains a professional and ethical concern, particularly as contemporary coaching has evolved to incorporate multiple stakeholders, formal contracting, and regulatory considerations such as membership bodies and insurance.

A study by Doel et al. (2010) suggests that "formal research plays little part in the guidance that individuals use to help them determine professional boundaries" (p. 1), and we heard in the introduction chapter how Bachkirova and Baker (2018) concluded that interest in the topic of boundaries within the literature has waned, despite many essential questions still being left unanswered. I believe this to be a gap of paramount concern. We also heard that the coach's background, skills, and experience impact the coaching context (Pandolfi, 2020), with a recommendation for further research to clarify their interplay. My argument here is that the more diverse the coach's background, skills, and experience, the more complex the boundary issues encountered are likely to be. Giraldez-Hayes (2021) further connects these issues, highlighting a lack of research on how practitioners operationalise professional boundaries within their lived experiences. Given the influence of individual skills, knowledge, and backgrounds, this remains an important gap, one that my study directly seeks to address.

To deepen my understanding of Dormandy and Grimley (2024) “phenomenologically oriented framework” (p. 1), I consulted Palmer and Whybrow (2019) classification of NLP coaching as a ‘constructive’ model with “strong roots in existential phenomenology and gestalt psychology” (p. 95). These foundations link NLP to the broader ‘humanistic psychology’ movement. NLP detractors such as Hardingham (2020) suggest that NLP has simply “borrowed and stolen from a wide range of approaches” (p. 168). Grimley (2019b) acknowledges that NLP is indeed ‘eclectic’, and that it makes particular use of both behaviourist and cognitive psychology (amongst other things), asserting that the interdisciplinary nature of NLP offers a rich framework for understanding and facilitating human communication and behavioural change, which is precisely what is required in the coaching context (Grimley, 2019a). No wonder P13 reflected “NLP is a very powerful methodology... [and]...you have to be cautious as a coach” with how you bring NLP into your practice. As I reflected on the terms ‘constructive’, ‘gestalt’, ‘existential’, and ‘humanistic’, I recognised their significance not just in NLP but also within the broader coaching landscape. They are all names (or types) of coaching approaches (Palmer & Whybrow, 2019).

A quick reference to coaching literature and this confirmed coaching’s own ‘eclectic’ underpinnings by Graf and Dionne (2021) describing coaching “as an ‘applied field of practice’ with intellectual roots in a range of disciplines” (p. 38). Wildflower (2013) further highlights the intertwined evolution of NLP and contemporary coaching, emphasising their shared developmental trajectory. This would surely mean coaching has similar issues to NLP in providing an appropriate evidentiary base? In relation to my own professional practice journey, as an NLP coach practitioner with accreditations in both NLP and ICF/EMCC-accredited coaching, significant overlaps in their foundational knowledge are evident. At the same time, meaningful distinctions must be drawn to ensure ethical and context-appropriate coaching practice. I contend that NLP offers much that can help a practitioner manage these challenges and can, in turn, amplify the coaching effect. This is explored further during the discussion of the remaining themes of my study. In this theme, however, I believe a more thorough exploration of what is being credited as NLP is necessary to ensure that any demarcation between NLP’s contexts of application (such as between coaching and therapy) is better understood.

In this vein, further exploration of the literature revealed that coaching, like NLP, faces significant challenges in establishing a robust and relevant evidentiary base, with persistent research gaps (Fillery-Travis & Cox, 2018; Graf & Ukowitz, 2020). It can be argued that the ‘multidisciplinary’ nature of both hinders the provision of more settled knowledge for either, further driven by their being so practitioner-led and successful in their respective ways (Graf & Dionne, 2021). Whilst

de Rijk et al. (2019) and Grimley (2019a) point to enhanced efforts to support NLP with research in the coaching context, pointing to case studies, the development of professional standards, and advocacy of codes of ethical conduct, NLP is likely to continue to face challenges in gaining recognition within the academic community discussed in the last theme. NLP, along with coaching, still has time to provide the level and type of evidence required, as, according to Wilkinson (2022), few coaching studies actually mention what model of coaching is being used in the research. Building on my earlier points, coaching appears to tackle similar challenges to NLP. It does so more effectively by, amongst other things, engaging in academic discourse, encouraging external peer-review processes, and being flexible in the use of defensible research paradigms to provide evidence appropriate to the claims made. This then allows NLP to consider “What are the evidential norms for the context in which NLP is being applied?” and “How does NLP compare with other approaches in that same context, with respect to meeting those evidential norms?”.

In expanding on the original question of “What is NLP?”, my literature search revealed several contributors who have attempted to define NLP’s parameters (de Rijk et al., 2022; Grimley, 2016), yet doing so remains challenging due to NLP’s vast knowledge base, varied applications, and diverse accrediting bodies. Approaching the topic from a different direction, I discovered that the NLP Leadership Summit (NLPLS) which was established in 2012 (Heron, 2016) brought together, by its fourth summit in 2024, over 500 NLP leaders to foster collaboration and develop professional standards. According to Hollander et al. (2016), NLPLS saw the importance of providing boundaries for NLP from five perspectives: recognition of NLP, development of new NLP formats and models, scientific research into NLP, teaching standards for NLP, and branding of NLP services. NLPLS conducted and published a Delphi poll as ‘expert validation’ or ‘expert panel review’, a tool accepted as an established academic approach (Hollander et al., 2016). Through this process, NLPLS surveyed its participants to develop consensus on which tools, techniques and theoretical frameworks constitute NLP. Table 5.3 is an extract of the output of this activity based upon (Hollander et al., 2018a), with a published journal article of the activity written by the same group of authors in 2019 (de Rijk et al., 2019).

**Table 5.3**

*NLPLS Delphi poll results\*, based on Hollander et al., (2018a)*

Category	Category name	Item	%		
1A	Premises about experience	The map is not the territory	100		
		Structure is more important than content	92		
		<i>Life and mind are systemic processes</i>	90		
		Experience can be reduced to sensory elements	88		
1B	Premises about communication and change	The meaning of communication is the response elicited	98		
		There is no failure, only feedback	98		
		People make the best choices available to them	98		
		People have the resources they need for the changes they desire	97		
		If what you are doing does not work, it is useful to do something else	97		
		All behaviour has a positive intention	97		
		If one can do it, others can learn to do it	97		
		Sub-modalities determine the effect of an experience	97		
		<i>The system with the greatest flexibility survives</i>	88		
		Resistance is a signal of insufficient rapport	86		
		2A	Distinctions	Sensory modalities	100
				Sub-modalities	100
<i>Association versus Dissociation</i>	100				
<i>Elements of the structure of subjective experience</i>	97				
<i>Focus outside versus focus inside</i>	95				
<i>Analog versus Digital</i>	93				
Metaprograms	92				
Sensory experience versus categorisation (complex equivalence)	90				
2B	Attitude	Neurological levels	85		
2C	Model of change	Modelling orientation	97		
		Well-formed outcomes	100		
3A	Skills	TOTE model for goal directed change	98		
		Utilisation	97		
		<i>As-if frame</i>	100		
		Calibrating internal states and processes	100		
		Eye accessing cues, detecting and working with	100		
		Meta model questions	100		
		Milton model language patterns	100		
		Modelling	100		
		Rapport (mirroring/pacing)	100		
		Strategies	100		
		Verbal reframing	100		
		Anchoring	98		
		Ecological check	98		
		Timelines, working with	98		
		Leading, verbal and non-verbal	95		
3B	Techniques	Future pacing	100		
		<i>Six step reframing</i>	100		
		<i>Change personal history</i>	98		
		Changing a strategy	98		
		Collapsing anchors	98		
		<i>Negotiating between parts</i>	98		
		<i>Swish pattern</i>	98		
		<i>Trauma process using V-K dissociation</i>	98		
		Circle of excellence	97		
		Eliciting a resource, using a reference experience	97		
		Eliciting a resource, using a role model	97		
		<i>New behaviour generator</i>	97		
		<i>Re-imprinting format</i>	97		
		<i>V-K squash</i>	95		
		Eliciting a resource, using communication with self	93		
		Eliciting a resource, using physiology	93		
		Aligning perceptual positions	92		
		Metaphor for inducing change	92		
		<i>Compulsion blow out</i>	86		
		<i>Shifting the importance of criteria</i>	86		
Aligning neurological format	85				
Disney strategy	85				

*Note.* \*Scientific survey practices involving Delphi polls use 70% yes-responses (“this is part of NLP”) as the cut-off point. At 85% yes-responses adopted here as the cut off reflects NLP as it was in 1980 (Hollander et al., 2018a) and also to adjust for the different training lineages of the participants. As it happened, the only NLP knowledge and skills mentioned by my study’s participants that fell outside of those listed in the Delphi poll results extract given in Table 5.1 are: the skill of ‘clean language’ (32%), and; the techniques of ‘meta mirror format’ (68%) and ‘mBIT – multiple brain integration techniques’ (5%). Those in italics were not specifically mentioned as having been integrated by participants (see Table 5.2).

I found that in Grimley and Dilts (2024), describing NLP as “an approach to studying human behaviour”, they build upon this NLPLS Delphi poll to suggest that NLP offers:

- an epistemology that is “formalised within the presuppositions of NLP” (Table 5.3 categories 1A and 1B)
- a methodology that in NLP is “modelling” (Table 5.3 categories 2A, 2B and 2C), and
- a technology (methods) represented by the NLP techniques and “models which are created through application of the modelling” methodology (p. 186) (Table 5.3 categories 3A and 3B).

Whilst subsequent themes in my study will expand on ‘NLP presuppositions’ (predominantly theme 3) and ‘NLP methods or techniques’ (predominantly theme 4), I contend that the NLP modelling methodology warrants deeper exploration, as it is arguably the foundational mechanism, possibly NLP’s ‘source code’, within the entire NLP framework. To begin, it is necessary to be reminded again what is meant by ‘modelling’ in the NLP context. In NLP:

*behavior modeling* [sic] involves observing and mapping the successful processes which underlie an exceptional performance of some type...to create a pragmatic map...which can be used to reproduce...that performance...by anyone who is motivated to do so (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000a, p. 790).

Doing this requires identifying and replicating the patterns of thought, behaviour, and language used by individuals who excel in the chosen area and transferring these distilled patterns to others who are desirous of obtaining similar outcomes (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000a). This NLP definition

of modelling differs from other definitions, particularly those used in social learning and in psychology more generally. The critical distinction between NLP modelling and the meaning of modelling in psychology or social learning lies in depth and focus. While psychological modelling focuses on observable behaviours and their reproduction (imitation), NLP modelling focuses on uncovering and transferring internal cognitive and subjective structures, thereby moving far beyond mere behavioural mimicry.

Building on Grimley and Dilts (2024), NLP's core methodology 'modelling' has not remained static. Some of its 'technology (methods)' outputs, originally developed in therapeutic contexts, have evolved to refine and enhance the modelling approach itself, particularly the 'meta model' and the 'Milton model', and models relating to systems thinking (Burgess, 2014). Crucially, the efficacy of NLP's modelling methodology lies in its emphasis on 'process' over 'content', shifting the focus from narrative descriptions to actionable structures. NLP modelling requires attention to 'how' someone, who is outstanding in relation to some particular result(s) they get, goes about achieving that, rather than becoming immersed in the story they tell about it. As Bandler and Grinder (1979) put it:

We call ourselves *modelers* [sic]...We essentially...pay very little attention to what people *say* they do and a great deal of attention to what they *do*...then we build ourselves a model of what they do...We have *no* idea about the "real" nature of things, and we're not particularly interested in what's "**true**." The function of modelling [sic] is to arrive at descriptions that are *useful* (p. 7)

Burgess (2014) identifies multiple NLP modelling methods, the most prevalent being 'cognitive modelling' due to its accessibility and it being "the most conversational approach" (p. 112), thereby yielding both familiarity and comfort for modeller and exemplar alike. In NLP modelling, the language used by the individual being studied offers insights into how they are representing their actions to themselves. These representations are structured through 'sensory modalities' (such as sight, sound, and touch) and refined through 'sensory sub-modalities' (SMD's). For instance, the SMDs of the auditory domain include volume, pitch, and tone. Chomsky's 'transformational grammar' was purportedly a significant influence on NLP modelling (Grinder & Pucelik, 2013), demonstrating how raw, pre-verbal ('deep structure') is converted into communicable expression ('surface structure') (Burgess, 2014). This linguistic transformation underpins human interaction and aligns with Bateson (2000) framework of socially constructed reality. In modelling in this manner, the NLP presuppositions, which are "beliefs and operating principles that underpin the rationale given to all behaviour" (Burgess, 2014, p. 92), are embraced

by NLP modellers in some configuration relevant to the modelling context they are in. This fosters a ‘modelling mindset’ a guiding philosophy that shapes NLP practitioners’ application of the modelling methodology. Across NLP applications (therapy, coaching, business, and so on), modelling is used to analyse and replicate the strategies of people who are exceptional at what they do, continuously generating new NLP skills and techniques.

For example, NLP’s first application context was ‘therapy’ (Bandler & Grinder, 1975a, 1975b), and so leading therapists of the day were modelled (Perls, Satir, Erickson, and so on) and several methods, or NLP techniques, were thereby generated. NLP’s modelling methodology is widely acknowledged, even by its critics, as a valuable contribution to understanding human behaviour. For instance, Greif (2022) asserts that the “psychological consequences implied appear interesting” (p. 760) and advocates for further investigative research. Through the modelling methodology, NLP developers have successfully created methods tailored for the coaching context. According to Grimley (2019b), what makes a coaching approach specifically ‘NLP’, is the adoption of “the presuppositions of NLP”, and the use of outputs from new or existing “NLP modelling projects” (p. 282) by the developer or practitioner involved. For example, some NLP developers have created and published models for use in the coaching context, such as ‘Resolve’ (Bolstad, 2007), ‘Provocative coaching’ (Hollander, 2013), and ‘7 C’s’ (Grimley, 2020). Although some NLP-based coaching models may require modifications to align with ICF (adopted in this study), it is noteworthy that NLP coach training programmes were among the first to receive ICF accreditation. With the ICF established in 1995, the first NLP coach training programmes were accredited by the ICF in 1998 (McDermott & Jago, 2001).

Drawing from my own experience as a practitioner, I have consistently encountered challenges in defining modality boundaries. I have found this to be particularly the case with NLP and coaching, given their shared aims, history, and ‘eclectic’ theoretical underpinnings. NLP’s therapeutic origins have created ongoing debates, particularly among academics who challenge its theoretical legitimacy as a coaching model. However, coaching, as a field, faces scrutiny regarding its evidentiary support but receives less criticism than NLP does, and this appears to be linked to some of the reasons highlighted in the last theme. As the third most widely used coaching model, NLP relies heavily on practice-led insights. Given its contested status in academia, I am motivated to contribute to research that embraces alternative inquiry paradigms and closes the gap between practice and theory. In the current context of discussing modality demarcation, I also find it of interest that formal research plays little role in how practitioners establish boundaries. For myself and my study’s participants, all of whom are dual-accredited in NLP and ICF coaching,

maintaining professional coherence and ethical integrity are paramount. This requires a sophisticated understanding of modality boundaries and their role in coaching practice. As my discussion progresses, I will explore how my participants and I navigate the integration of NLP within our coaching practices. This includes defining the appropriate deployment of NLP skills and techniques, managing the tension between NLP's practical effectiveness and its contested legitimacy, and utilising NLP's modelling methodology to close the theory-practice gap. Ultimately, our approach prioritises the development of highly personalised and effective strategies for our coachees over adherence to any abstract theoretical constructs.

## ii. Staying in lane

With this foundational understanding of NLP established, the discussion can return to how participants respond to the previously described boundary issues. Participants were all aligned in stating that their businesses typically involved a mix of mentoring, training, consulting, and coaching. For instance, P08 reported that “coaching is 30%...10% facilitation...the remainder training”. All participants reported integrating NLP into their professional practice where appropriate. However, when applying an ICF lens to their activities, a notable shift emerged. The majority strongly emphasised professionalism and ethical integrity in their modalities of choice, particularly in their application of NLP. Some, such as P14, emphasised how “staying in lane” was paramount, adhering to a strict interpretation of ICF guidelines. For such practitioners, they were staying entirely to ICF coaching, even if they might utilise NLP within that, avoiding any ‘grey areas’ and ensuring they didn’t ‘cross lines’. For many others, the primary concern was maintaining awareness of modality boundaries and ensuring ethical shifts within the coaching context. This included a heightened awareness of avoiding being “directive with the client” (P13), or “leading them somewhere” (P10). The participants typically held the view that they came with knowledge, skills, and experience that they would be prepared to deploy ‘at service’ to the coachee in their development, that the coachee may even be aware of them having this knowledge, skills, and expertise, and this was often the reason they had been ‘hired’ in the first place. The emphasis here was on “changing hats” (P13) within a modality, rather than “changing lane” (P14) entirely. This distinction highlights the importance of transparent communication with clients about modality shifts, ensuring alignment with ethical coaching practice and facilitating learning and growth.

According to Myers and Bachkirova (2021), “awareness of boundaries is fundamental to ethical practice” (p. 215) and Maxwell (2009) asserts that coaches with ‘therapy’ backgrounds (e.g., psychology and counselling) are more comfortable coaching at the boundary with therapy than

coaches from other backgrounds (such as business or leadership). We have also heard that NLP is often thought of as ‘therapy’ as this was the context in which application of its modelling methodology first yielded models and methods (Bandler & Grinder, 1975b), and that now it has found application in multiple contexts including coaching (Grimley, 2020) where it is the third most used coaching approach in Europe (Passmore et al., 2017). Taken together, these findings suggest that many professional NLP coaches may feel more confident operating near the boundary with therapy, regardless of their psychology or counselling background. However, their decision to do so remains contingent upon their personal practice framework and ethical considerations. Study participants demonstrated a heightened appreciation of the modality boundaries, employing strategies such as ‘staying in lane’, ‘changing hats’ within the ‘coaching’ frame, or fully transitioning to another modality (where permissible and within their professional practice parameters). Across all cases, ethical and professional considerations remained paramount. As P13 asserted, “NLP is a very powerful methodology”, emphasising the complexities and the responsibility it entails. Similarly, P10 highlighted the importance of role clarity, stating the need to be “clear [to the client] which role I am in”. These perspectives illustrate the deliberate, ethical decision-making processes that professional NLP coaches undertake in their practice.

In my own practice, my portfolio similarly encompasses training, coaching, consulting, and mentoring. Each of these has multiple informing sources from my life to date (experiences, knowledge, skills, training, qualifications, accreditations, and so on). When I am coaching, I am aware that I am configuring all this according to the broader system contract (client organisation, sponsor, and so on) where it exists, the coachee contract (their individual style and preferences), and my own professional practice constraints (applicable codes of ethics, and professional practice options proffered). I do not enter sessions with a fixed coaching model: rather, the approach emerges dynamically, co-developed with the coachee, although it is (implicitly and explicitly) informed by some configuration of these various sources (of which ‘NLP’ is one, and ‘coaching’ another) managed by me within the context.

In this way, I am curating from a rich set of options within my broadly defined professional practice in response to the coachee's decisions and the contextual, or systemic, aspects that bring us together. Some decisions involve ‘bracketing out’ elements of my expertise when they don’t align with the immediate context. Yet, as will become clear later, complete neutrality or being entirely presuppositionless is neither achievable nor desirable. Instead, I’m looking to align the coachee-driven preferences for how we interact to achieve the coaching experience the coachee desires, with the ethical and professional expectations placed on us in the current context by the

broader systems to which we are responsible at that time. As a result, I deliver a highly individualised experience that is improvised or created *in vivo*, but is cognisant of and responsive to contextual influences. So, there is no fixed process nor cookie-cutter coaching model necessarily, just a heightened awareness of contextual ‘guardrails’ and improvisation around coachee cues. In this regard, I consider myself to be in the ‘systemic eclectic’ level of coaching maturity described by Clutterbuck and Megginson (2011). My NLP expertise has accelerated my progression towards this systemic eclectic maturity, with NLP skills and techniques playing crucial roles in each coaching ‘improvisation’.

Systemic considerations, such as adhering to ICF coaching guidelines, help frame the boundaries of my practice and directly shape the choices available when integrating NLP. Whilst the default position in, say, a corporate coaching session might be configured around my understanding of ICF coaching (‘staying in lane’), as that is a contextual requirement, I might on one or more occasions contract for ‘changing hats’ to a different modality. For example, I might offer a teaching or mentoring element, such as a model or framework I believe might be useful to the coachee, to help them reflectively navigate a particularly challenging issue, without imposing a solution or attaching any personal meaning to it or its inclusion. In private, direct-to-client engagements, greater freedom in contracting allows more frequent or pronounced modality shifts (‘changing lanes’), compared to minor role adjustments (‘changing hats’) in corporate contexts.

### iii. Coachee communication

In the coaching context, what the global leading coaching bodies (such as EMCC and AC) expect of their members with respect to modalities and the observance of boundaries between them is captured in a joint code of ethics (European Mentoring and Coaching Council et al., 2021). It should be noted that the ICF still maintains its own code of ethics (International Coaching Federation, 2021a), quite separate from this, for several reasons generally irrelevant to the present topic. Some interesting ethical dilemmas to ponder are provided, including “Dilemma 3” (p. 12), which concerns a decision point about a modality change when the coaching/therapy boundary is encountered. From this, a professional coach who is appropriately experienced and qualified in another modality (European Association of NLP Psychotherapy) may choose as a professional practice option (assuming they are permitted to do so by the broader context) to change modality from coaching to that other modality (European Association of NLP Psychotherapy), with the coachee’s ‘informed consent’. The suggestion of such a modality change, and the method by which it is enacted, occurs through a process known as ‘contracting’.

According to Block (2000), ‘contracting’ is an exploration and subsequent agreement between the practitioner and the client about what they can expect from one another during an engagement. Given the complexities dual-accredited practitioners face in managing modality boundaries, it is unsurprising that participants strongly emphasised ‘contracting’ in their client engagements. For instance, P06 emphasised needing to be “very clear with coaching, what it is and what it is not”. For Foy (2021), Block’s definition is only part of the story, as for them the notion of ‘contracting’ builds further into designing an appropriate ‘coaching alliance’, such as that represented in the ICF core competency ‘co-creating the relationship’ (International Coaching Federation, 2025a). This broader consideration of ‘contracting’ I discuss in Theme 4, but for now, I will focus on considering ‘contracting’ from the narrower perspective of modalities and their boundaries.

When a coach contracts to shift from coaching to using an alternative modality, they are appropriately experienced and qualified to provide, in complete agreement with the coachee and within a context approving of such a change (for example the disposition of a paying sponsor, or an organisation’s coaching programme), then it is likely that they stop coaching and begin using the other modality. The EMCC ethical Dilemma 3 example referred to above illustrates this, with the practitioner shifting from providing a ‘coaching’ session to delivering a ‘therapy’ session (EMCC, 2018). For NLP coaches or any coaches qualified and/or experienced in alternative modalities, offering modality shifts is a professional choice they may present to clients, subject to context. There are, of course, arguments like ‘role confusion’ that represent a challenge by some to the appropriateness of a professional coach ever shifting out of the coaching modality and delivering services in a different modality.

Contributors such as Hardingham (2004) and Silsbee (2010) report that deviations into other modalities (such as mentoring, therapy, consulting, training, and teaching) are often observed in practice, and that the coach’s own prior knowledge and skills typically influence the extent and direction of this. This adds further weight to the notion of a theory-practice gap (Monaghan, 2015) existing within coaching. A practitioner seeking to integrate NLP into their coaching practice will encounter similar issues, and how they respond to such challenges will likely be influenced by the level and nature of their prior knowledge and skills in one or more modalities involved. For example, Sime and Jacob (2018) in their study of ICF MCCs identified that in moments quite typical in a coaching session where a coach is explaining or utilising a model of some kind, the coach is most likely operating in a modality other than coaching, such as training or mentoring.

From my experience, contracting is foundational, ensuring modality transitions occur transparently and ethically, thus establishing the essential preconditions for informed consent, a

topic discussed next. As an NLP coach, I see how the ability to shift modalities presents both opportunities and challenges, and it emphasises for me how contracting also helps avoid the risk of role confusion that might challenge the professional and ethical integration of NLP and coaching. Through self-awareness, explicit contracting, and rigorous adherence to ethical boundaries, I find my NLP expertise invaluable in navigating those requirements. This is particularly relevant, as formal guidelines advocate strict modality boundaries, yet real-world practice typically necessitates improvisation *in vivo* blending disciplines based on client needs and practitioner expertise. Given my diverse expertise, shifting modalities often feels both intuitive and advantageous for clients. Yet this ease accentuates critical ethical considerations: when does an intervention (whether NLP or drawn from elsewhere) remain a ‘coaching’ thing, and when does it belong to something else? Additionally, how can a coach clearly communicate to clients the potential value and implications of any proposed modality shift before their implementation?

For me, I appreciate NLP methods for offering so much in ensuring clear contracting and gaining informed consent, thereby upholding ethical integrity while maximising effectiveness. Further, it highlights to me the value I gain from ongoing self-reflection and coaching supervision from suitably qualified and experienced supervisors, ensuring specific instances of decisions made *in vivo* around modality shifts align with professional standards and coachee needs. Looking ahead to Theme 4, these reflections reinforce the importance of regularly revisiting and refining my personal framework for integrating NLP into coaching, ensuring that practical effectiveness consistently aligns with ethical responsibility. This reflection prompts me to differentiate between ‘NLP coaching’ (Hayes, 2006; McDermott, 2016), ‘coaching with NLP’ (Grimley & Dilts, 2024), and ‘using NLP in coaching’, distinctions that warrant further exploration as the discussion advances.

iv. With permission

The key challenge for professional coaches equipped with capabilities in multiple modalities is navigating the liminal space between these modalities while maintaining professional and ethical compliance with coaching standards. According to Parsloe and Wray (2000), ensuring compliance involves adhering to coaching boundaries, specifically aligned with the ICF definition of coaching (International Coaching Federation, 2025b). Thus, a practitioner employing NLP in the coaching context would need to ensure that they configure its use to achieve such compliance. Clearly, this can and does happen. There are ethically sound ways within the coaching conversation for the coach to do a range of things, such as share an experiential personal story, introduce a model or approach, provide a ‘how to’ training point, or just listen empathetically. Central to ethical

coaching practice is the coach acting solely in service to the coachee, ensuring offerings are made without personal attachment. According to research by Sime and Jacob (2018), coaches are always playing multiple roles in coaching sessions (mentor, teacher, mirror, listener, to name a few). The coach's dexterity in “assessing the needs of the client and moving between roles” (p. 47) might be considered the master coaching skill, such that any expectation of delimiting role or modality boundaries and aligning coaching practice with some ‘standard’ might be flawed.

The recognition of how modality changes arose and were implemented suggests two main concerns: communicating the opportunity for, or value of, a role or modality shift, and the importance of obtaining permission, or ‘informed consent’, for any suggested change before implementing it. Each of the study’s participants, as well as I, has sought and found ways through this maze, with the key professional dimensions identified in this study being: modality proffered by the practitioner, process and content of the client’s involvement, and responsiveness to systemic requirements. These concerns, and the pathways established by professionals in navigating them, support the worth of integrating the richness of professional coaches’ broader ‘expertise’, ‘skills’ and ‘background’ within the coaching context, which has been suggested in diverse studies (Fisher et al., 2023; Pandolfi, 2020; Sime & Jacob, 2018). From such exploration of navigating modalities and their boundaries, coachee communication is seen as being key to managing understanding, expectations, and transitions.

Examples from participants illustrate this clearly: P02 explicitly seeks “permission to...share something...and...say[ing] ‘well, how does that fit?’”, and P10 similarly emphasises a client-led approach by “seeing where they want to go, asking ‘would this be helpful?’” re-enforcing consent and client autonomy. P14 concludes, “It’s always permission-based, and it’s always up to them whether they choose to or not”. Although when it came to NLP, P13 contributed that some things are “aligned” with coaching, such as ‘goal setting’ and ‘reframing’, so they did not have to “put on the hat of NLP”. Whereas for something like “anchoring” they would explain it and seek permission: “if you don’t mind, we can run this exercise and see”. This distinction around ‘alignment’ with coaching is explored further in Theme 4. As an expansion on the manner in which participants apply and integrate their NLP knowledge, skills, and experience in the coaching context in practice is explored in theme 4, particularly in relation to communicating and building an effective working alliance, nothing further is discussed on the topic so avoid duplication.

The notion of ‘with permission’ emphasises how professional coaches navigate the liminal spaces between modalities to ensure compliance with coaching ethics and professional practice. It highlights that whilst strict adherence to the coaching modality is expected, professional coaching practice often involves fluid role shifts, and these need to be contracted and communicated effectively. Informed consent is foundational, ensuring coachees fully understand both the nature and potential value of any modality shifts before they occur. By coaches remaining transparent, adaptable, and client-centred, it ensures that coachees can make choices based on their own growth rather than reflecting the coach’s preferences. In my practice, careful navigation of modality boundaries is central. My integration of NLP specifically emphasises remaining aligned with coaching principles, notably maintaining a non-directive stance with my coachees.

As previously stated, my NLP expertise provides me with skills and techniques that enhance my communication with my coachees, ensuring that they understand and provide informed consent to any changes in modality. Further, coaching supervision is an effective means by which the coach can reflect on decisions made in this regard, particularly on ensuring that modality changes are not arbitrary but purpose-driven and client-focused. Reflecting on the alignment of certain NLP aspects with coaching prompts me to critically evaluate how I currently deploy NLP in my practice. Further, how best can I communicate NLP’s value within coaching to ensure a seamless, ethical, and client-driven integration? The varying suitability of specific NLP components within coaching warrants further exploration, particularly concerning their ethical application and professional acceptability, a topic that will be examined in greater detail in subsequent discussions.

v. Conclusion to Theme Two: ‘Challenges ahoy!’

In conclusion, the discussion of this theme has emphasised some key challenges practitioners face in integrating NLP within the coaching context whilst maintaining ethical and professional integrity. The historical development and the shared interdisciplinary nature of both fields have clearly shaped the interplay between NLP and coaching. Although NLP’s therapeutic origins have prompted scepticism regarding its legitimacy in coaching, its extensive application and practical influence remain undeniable. The ongoing debate concerning NLP’s academic legitimacy further reinforces the broader challenge of evidentiary support. However, it is noteworthy that is true for coaching as well, so the question might be what kind of evidentiary support is to be expected? And how does that compare between NLP and coaching?

It is evident from participant reflections and the literature that modality demarcation is not merely a theoretical consideration but a complex and dynamic aspect of daily professional practice. Working at the boundaries of modalities remains a perennial challenge for practitioners as they seek to balance ethical and professional concerns with delivering impactful learning and growth opportunities to their clients in ways that meet those clients' desires. Participants, myself included, continually negotiate the blurred boundaries of diverse skillsets, ensuring professional coherence, ethical integrity, and client-centred effectiveness. Participants exhibited a spectrum of responses to these specific challenges, ranging from strict adherence to 'compliant' coaching by 'staying in lane', through to more adaptable and flexible approaches that involved temporarily 'changing hats', as well as intentional and permissible shifts in modalities, or 'changing lanes'. Maintaining transparent communication, ensuring clients remain the decision-makers, and underpinning this process with 'informed consent' were central to participants' ethical and professional practices. My journey as a dual-accredited NLP and ICF coach mirrors that of the participants, regularly balancing my expertise with the need to adhere to relevant professional standards. Recognising that my coaching often integrates insights drawn from leadership, training, mentoring, and other sources, I have become increasingly reflective and intentional about the conditions under which modality shifts occur.

Integral to this modality of navigation is the role of contracting, particularly in managing the coaching process to promote coachee autonomy. The discussion reinforces the argument that effective coaching is not about rigidly adhering to a single framework or approach, but about skilfully navigating the multiple dimensions of the dynamic coaching context and relationships, and the interplay between different knowledge, skills, and experiences of the professional NLP coaches to promote clients' learning and growth best. Central to my own navigation of the modality boundaries issue is an enhanced commitment to contracting. In this way, I have found that transparent communication, safeguarding informed consent, and promoting client autonomy naturally follow, and these are all dimensions of the coaching context that my NLP expertise supports. The integration of NLP into coaching practice might remain academically contested, yet it remains highly valued by practitioners for its multidisciplinary underpinnings and its practical effectiveness. It allows practitioners myself included, to creatively tailor coaching to clients' needs, negotiating modalities whilst adhering to ethical and professional principles. As P13 remarked, NLP is "a very powerful methodology".

Ultimately, this theme exposes a significant theory-practice gap in NLP and coaching, revealing that coaching's complexity transcends theoretical and modal distinctions. Instead, it is the practitioner's awareness, adaptability, and client responsiveness that determine how effectively NLP is integrated within the coaching context professionally and ethically. The diverse backgrounds, skills, and experiences practitioners bring inevitably find expression in coaching (who you are is how you coach), complicating professional boundaries and calling for ongoing reflective practice, supervision, and continuing professional development. This discussion sets the scene for a deeper exploration of how participants integrate NLP to amplify coaching effect, particularly in promoting client growth and strengthening coaching alliances, themes that will be examined next. By doing so, it seeks not only to clarify NLP's ethical and professional deployment but also to illuminate further how coaching practitioners effectively negotiate modality boundaries to prioritise client development within a context of reasonably rigid theoretical constructs. These topics are discussed in the following two themes.

## 5.4 Theme Three: ‘Learning and growth for both’

Drawing from this study’s findings, participants’ experiences in this theme centre around five key areas: catalytic convert, presuppositional mindset, crystallising intentionality, adaptive experimentation, and reflective practitioner. ‘Catalytic convert’ voices participants’ belief that NLP is an effective catalyst for personal change. An important foundation of this belief is the role of adopting a ‘presuppositional mindset’ in this case based on NLP’s explicit presuppositions underpinning its model of change. Building on this and the phenomenological presupposition of human intentionality ‘crystallising intentionality’ captures NLP’s approach to explicitly defining sensory-specific goals, thus clarifying and articulating otherwise implicit intentions. Since the change process involves environmental influences beyond individual control ‘adaptive experimentation’ emphasises two key capabilities: awareness and calibration of environmental influences, and willingness and flexibility to adapt their activities. ‘Reflective practitioner’ highlights two capabilities: interpreting one’s ‘lived experience’ meaningfully within a context of intentionality and using these ‘useful’ interpretations to expand one’s range of actions and responses. In essence, the discussion identifies NLP as fundamentally change-oriented, thereby promoting learning and growth for the practitioner and the coachee alike.

### i. Catalytic convert

In the findings chapter, all participants held the view that the application of NLP can act “as a catalyst for bringing change quicker”, as P01 expressed it. In this way, they were all ‘converts’ to the transformational potential of NLP. This conversion was apparent in the way in which they advocated for NLP and how they experienced profound changes in themselves as well as witnessing similar in their clients from the application of NLP’s methodology and methods. For instance, participants clearly expressed NLP’s transformative potential: P04 noted NLP’s power to “really promote your own self-development”, while P07 highlighted its deep self-learning potential, calling it “potentially transformative”. Some participants went on to give insights into how NLP, as a model of change, achieved this. P01 referred to the NLP modelling methodology as being a help “in knowing who to model...keeping your goal within control” whilst P02 stated, “NLP gives me more options and more variety”. Lastly, P14 contributed, “you think more about who you are, how you make decisions”. The dimensions of this catalytic capability of NLP appear, according to the participants, to stem from: having a supportive presuppositional mindset, being able to articulate concrete intentions, the flexibility to be adaptive and willing to experiment, and to be a ‘reflective practitioner’, all of which form subsequent topics in the following discussion.

As discussed previously, the definitions of coaching and NLP adopted for this study (International Coaching Federation, 2025b; The Association for Neuro Linguistic Programming, 2021) revealed an important similarity: both ICF coaching and NLP seek to facilitate personal and professional learning and growth in the coaching context. Having provided sufficient introduction to NLP to this point, it is now relevant to explore NLP's model of change, as this underpins participants' claims about NLP's catalytic role and its relevance to the coaching context. Coaching literature defines coaching as “a deliberate practice to enhance learning” (Passmore & Evans-Krimme, 2021, p. 1), recognising learning itself as “a tremendously complex phenomenon” (Bennett & Campone, 2017, p. 103). Kluge and Hagemann (2022) combine these perspectives, arguing that such a learning process is implicit in coaching, as coaching assists coachees in managing the changes that are inevitably necessitated by the pursuit of achieving self-congruent goals. Self-regulation by the coachee is seen as providing the ‘initial spark’ for learning, as “people observe their own behaviour and evaluate it in comparison to an internalised standard” (p. 545).

The meaning the coachee makes of such a comparison typically results in a decision from a set of possible responses available to them. Such alternate reactions available to the coachee will depend on the richness of their choice set to begin with; for example, they might: change nothing, adjust their view of their own self-efficacy, or try something different going forward. In this way, a coaching intervention can promote coachee learning through exploration of the coachee's situation, goals, meaning-making, choices, decisions, and decision-making, and enacted responses. Grimley and Dilts (2024) highlight how NLP fosters coachee learning across similar dimensions, yet distinctively through its own epistemology, methodology, and structured model of change. The core dimensions of NLP application to coaching, explored in depth in this and the following theme, impress just how uniquely NLP supports learning and growth.

NLP's original developers assert that NLP is a “model for transforming environmental variables into the class of decision variables” in this way increasing “the possible outcomes of behaviour” (Dilts et al., 1980, p. 13) on the basis that NLP is a “model to give people choice[s] where previously they had [less or] no choice” (Grimley & Dilts, 2024, p. 186). Indeed, Grimley (2019b) suggests that “NLP coaching is all about co-creating choices for your coachee” (p. 283). Reflecting the origin of ‘coach’ as being a carriage for conveying a person from one place to another (Clutterbuck & Turner, 2018), Grimley and Dilts (2024) build on the earlier work of Dilts et al. (1980) to express the NLP model of change applied to the coaching context. NLP applied to the

coaching context is about the coach partnering with the coachee to support them in moving “from their present state to some desired state along...the most efficient and effective path” (Grimley & Dilts, 2024, p. 188). Along the journey, there are potential ‘interferences’ to negotiate and ‘resources’ to identify, develop, and utilise.

The definition of NLP adopted in this study (The Association for Neuro Linguistic Programming, 2021) centres on explicating the underlying human mechanisms that generate and amplify change within the learning process. This contrasts with the coaching definition adopted by the International Coaching Federation (2025b), which emphasises the relational, collaborative, and exploratory elements of the coaching process. However, it is important to note that NLP applied to coaching also significantly contributes to those relational, collaborative, and exploratory elements of the coaching process. The NLP coaching approach relies on the interplay of ‘process’ and ‘relational’ components (as well as ‘tools and techniques’ that can be deployed). The discussion of this theme explores the process aspects. The relational aspects (along with NLP tools and techniques) are explored in the discussion of the subsequent theme. In exploring the process aspects of the NLP coaching approach here, we have already heard that learning in coaching rests on the premise that “people observe their own behaviour and evaluate it in comparison to an internalised standard” (Kluge & Hagemann, 2022, p. 545), and learning begins from there.

When addressing a coachee’s topic, an NLP coach engages directly with the coachee’s subjective experience, exploring it at both the sensory specific and linguistic levels. That is to say, to glean how the coachee communicates, both verbally and in relation to their use of their primary senses, such as seeing, hearing, feeling (and more), with regard to the experience of interest or relevant component(s) of that experience. Extending Andreas (2006) contribution, Grimley and Dilts (2024) describe NLP coaching as “a sensory-based model” that helps individuals “systemize their experience” (p. 187). Grimley and Dilts (2024) further argue NLP’s effectiveness applied to coaching lies in NLP making “explicit the dual information-processing on both...[these levels]...as well as the systemic relationship between both” of them (p. 187).

For example, based upon what we discussed above, this will be drawn from how the coachee expresses (through words, sounds, body language) such things as: their situation with regards to the topic, their desire to move away from or towards something, the meaning they’re making about others that are in some way ‘present’ in the context, their dilemmas within their current choice set, perhaps their indecisiveness or procrastination about responses, and so on. The coach, in applying NLP in this way, can help the coachee gain insight into: how they are interpreting and making

meaning of the specific experience, the possible consequences to them within their broader system resulting from those current interpretations and meanings, and how additional choices might be generated for them by exploring and most likely challenging those interpretations and meanings. This sensory-based exploration resembles ‘phenomenology’ (van Manen, 2023), indeed closely enough that Tosey (2014) compares NLP’s sensory elicitation to Vermeersch’s ‘psychophenomenology’. However, there is so much more to NLP, specifically as a model of change, than being purely descriptive or interpretive of experience as phenomenology might be viewed (Beck, 2021).

Like the participants, I strongly affirm NLP’s catalytic power, having personally experienced its effectiveness in facilitating meaningful change throughout various personal and professional challenges. Although NLP is not unique in facilitating change, it has provided unparalleled structure and consistency in achieving the outcomes I’ve sought. From my experiences, I can affirm that NLP enhances awareness, adaptability, and decision making, and extending that to NLP application in my coaching practice, I find it supports the coaching process by expanding a coachee’s choice set, often returning or creating resourcefulness that improves their ability to regulate their own learning and growth better. A common misconception is viewing NLP merely as a set of tools and techniques rather than as a comprehensive model of change, deeply embedded in structured yet flexible methodologies. Understanding NLP’s model of change as a structured yet highly flexible methodology enables appreciation of its application in coaching as a process-driven, systematic approach to exploring meaning-making at both sensory and linguistic levels. However, effective NLP integration into coaching requires careful alignment with a professional practice framework that respects the coachee’s autonomy and the developmental process.

NLP’s approach to coaching is one among numerous coaching approaches prevalent today. Table 5.4 provides a profile of the principal coaching approaches, drawn from a purposefully curated selection of leading scholastic texts. From the table, there are two points to assert: firstly, that NLP is the third most used coaching approach in Europe (Passmore et al., 2017), and the second is evidence that some coaching psychologists are ‘gatekeeping’ NLP’s broader acceptance within the coaching community (Dormandy & Grimley, 2024). The latter point is further evidenced by the removal of the chapter on NLP as a coaching approach between the two sequential editions of the same text (Passmore, 2016b, 2021b) given that Passmore and Rowson (2019) assert that coaching practitioners would “be wise to ignore NLP” (p. 67). This occurs in the context that other parts of that same community, along with the broader coaching community as a whole, have continued to include NLP as a valid approach to coaching (Cox et al., 2024; Palmer & Whybrow,

2019). Putting the points together again supports the assertion of a ‘theory-practice’ gap in coaching, particularly for NLP, where there is a “gap between what theory states should happen, and the reality of what actually does” (Monaghan, 2015, p. e1).

**Table 5.4**

*Profile of principal coaching models, their use, and their appearance in key texts*

Coaching approach	Data concerning use 2016**		Coverage in leading academic texts***				
	Rank	% Coaches	Text1	Text2	Text3	Text4	Text5
			2016	2019	2021	2021	2024
<b>Behavioural (GROW) coaching</b>	<b>1st</b>	<b>23.1%</b>	<i>Ch05</i>	<i>Ch08</i>	<i>Ch06</i>	<i>Ch17</i>	
<b>Solution focused coaching</b>	<b>2nd</b>	<b>16.2% (14.9%)*</b>	<i>Ch06</i>	<i>Ch21</i>	<i>Ch07</i>	<i>Ch19</i>	<i>Ch03</i>
<b>NLP coaching</b>	<b>3rd</b>	<b>11.1%</b>	<i>Ch08</i>	<i>Ch22</i>			<i>Ch13</i>
<b>Cognitive behavioural coaching</b>	<b>4th</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<i>Ch07</i>	<i>Ch09</i>	<i>Ch08</i>	<i>Ch20</i>	<i>Ch02</i>
<b>Transactional analysis coaching</b>	<b>5th</b>	<b>9.4%</b>		<i>Ch23</i>			<i>Ch12</i>
<b>Gestalt coaching</b>	<b>6th</b>	<b>5.4%</b>		<i>Ch14</i>		<i>Ch21</i>	<i>Ch05</i>
<b>Motivational interviewing coaching</b>	<b>7th</b>	<b>7.4% (5.3%)*</b>		<i>Ch11</i>			
<b>Psychodynamic coaching</b>	<b>8th</b>	<b>3.3%</b>		<i>Ch25</i>		<i>Ch22</i>	<i>Ch01</i>
<b>Transpersonal coaching</b>	<b>9th</b>	<b>2.7%</b>	<i>Ch09</i>		<i>Ch09</i>		<i>Ch10</i>
<b>Existential coaching</b>	<b>10th</b>	<b>2.9% (2.6%)*</b>		<i>Ch13</i>			<i>Ch06</i>
<b>Other coaching approaches</b>	<b>11th</b>	<b>7.6%</b>					
<i>Appreciative coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Ch10</i>		<i>Ch10</i>	<i>Ch30</i>	
<i>Integrative coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Ch11</i>		<i>Ch11</i>		
<i>Person centred coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>		<i>Ch10</i>		<i>Ch18</i>	<i>Ch04</i>
<i>Pluralistic coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>		<i>Ch12</i>			
<i>Mindfulness coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>		<i>Ch15</i>			
<i>Compassion focused coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>		<i>Ch16</i>			
<i>Ontological coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>		<i>Ch17</i>			<i>Ch07</i>
<i>Somatic coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>		<i>Ch18</i>			
<i>Coaching with personal construct psychology</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>		<i>Ch19</i>			
<i>Narrative coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>		<i>Ch20</i>		<i>Ch24</i>	<i>Ch08</i>
<i>Systemic constellations approach to coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>		<i>Ch24</i>			
<i>Universal eclectic model</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>				<i>Ch16</i>	
<i>Neuroscience coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>				<i>Ch23</i>	
<i>Outdoor eco coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>				<i>Ch27</i>	
<i>Acceptance and commitment coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>				<i>Ch28</i>	
<i>Positive psychology coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>				<i>Ch29</i>	<i>Ch11</i>
<i>Psychological development coaching</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>					<i>Ch09</i>

*Note.* The table created by the author and the sources used to do so are acknowledged as follows: Those items in italics within the table have nothing to do with the Passmore et al. (2017) study, and N/A = not applicable

\* For some approaches, numbers using the model (first %age) exceeded those actually trained in the model (second %age)

\*\* EMCC: The state of play in European coaching and mentoring (Passmore et al., 2017, p. 19)

\*\*\* Leading academic texts consulted were:

Text 1: Excellence in coaching (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) (Passmore, 2016b)

Text 2: Handbook of coaching psychology (Palmer & Whybrow, 2019)

Text 3: Excellence in coaching (4<sup>th</sup> Edition) (Passmore, 2021b)

Text 4: The coaches' handbook (Passmore, 2021a)

Text 5: The complete handbook of coaching (Cox et al., 2024)

Referring again to Table 5.4, the variety of coaching approaches presented highlights their diverse methods for promoting coachee learning (Kluge & Hagemann, 2022). Each has its own emphasis on the exploration of the coachee's situation, goals, meaning-making, choices, decisions, and decision-making, and enacted responses. With so many models available to a coach, Palmer and Whybrow (2019) have usefully allocated their 'not exhaustive' list of seventeen coaching approaches into six categories "grouped loosely according to their philosophical roots as viewed by the authors" (p. 93). This is a help for any professional coach wishing to gain a broader appreciation of how the approaches relate to one another within the broader coaching field. However, there will likely be overlaps between the approaches and even between the categories generated. This raises questions about practical clarity: do coaches distinctly delineate individual approaches in practice? Can a coach trained in multiple coaching approaches effectively distinguish among them during sessions?

An illustrative example from Table 5.4 is Passmore et al. (2017) study in which 2,791 coaches indicated multiple coaching approaches they regularly employed and were trained in. With around 8,000 instances of the eleven approach options listed in the survey being selected, it revealed that each coach was using around 3 different coaching approaches in their practice. Parsloe and Leedham (2022), referring to 'coach model agility', indicate that a number of studies have found that "the ability of the coach to choose from three or more different coaching models) to suit the situation or context is important" to coach effectiveness (p. 16), and this is particularly interesting given that it is rare in coaching research for the actual model of coaching being employed in the study to be revealed (Wilkinson, 2022). Within the context of the discussion here, the above would indicate that this may, in any case, be problematic. Further, as we saw from the literature

review chapter, Clutterbuck and Turner (2018, p. 11) propose that as coaches mature professionally, they typically progress from adhering strictly to fixed coaching models or techniques ('model' based, such as adhering to a set coaching model, or specific coaching techniques) to adopting 'process based' and 'philosophy based' practices, ultimately reaching a 'systemic eclectic' professional practice. 'Systemic eclectic', as the name implies, is where the coach draws on an eclectic range of options regarding coaching models, tools, and processes, if indeed any at all are to be deployed.

Clutterbuck (2023) goes on to acknowledge the 'relational' aspects of coaching throughout this maturing of coach practice, away from just coaching content and towards an orientation around what's 'helpful' for the coachee. 'Helpfulness' or 'usefulness' that prioritises client development over the application of rigid theoretical constructs fully supports the relevance of NLP application to the coaching context. Clutterbuck (2023) differentiates between the leading coaching bodies: "simplistically, it's about the difference between emphasising the process (ICF) versus the relationship (EMCC)" (p. 3). NLP applied to the coaching context effectively combines 'process' and 'relational' considerations, supported by a versatile set of skills and techniques that can be highly individualised to the coachee's needs. This underpins my second key assertion: NLP knowledge and skills significantly enrich the coaching context.

A further corollary of the above discussion concerns the type of evidence required to support NLP's efficacy in the coaching context. Grimley (2019b) notes that those identifying randomised controlled trials (RCT) as the necessary evidential standard for the coaching context are reducing NLP (in fact, many coaching approaches!) to a 'specified technique' or 'content-oriented' coaching construct. This significantly hampers any coaching approach that treats coaching sessions as co-created events highly individualised to the needs of each coachee, as NLP applied to coaching would. According to Clutterbuck and Turner (2018) the 'coach maturity model', relying on RCTs restricts participating coaches to lower-level, less adaptive 'model' or 'process' approaches. This negatively impacts many widely accepted measures of coaching effectiveness.

This supports Erdos et al. (2021) call to recognise "the possibility of coaching being socially constructed" and advocating "understanding of how coaching as a context-sensitive and dynamic change intervention can aid clients' development as a meaning-making process" (p. 177). This re-emphasises Clutterbuck (2023) acknowledging the 'relational' aspects of coaching throughout this maturing of coach practice, away from just coaching content and towards an orientation around what's 'helpful' for the coachee. These points are relevant to NLP applied to coaching:

NLP's modelling methodology is about the individual not the population (Burgess, 2014; Dilts & DeLozier, 2000a), NLP chooses 'helpfulness' over proven 'veracity' (Grimley & Dilts, 2024; Linder-Pelz, 2010; Tosey & Mathison, 2009), and NLP draws on an eclectic foundation to its approach (Grimley, 2019b; Wildflower, 2013).

My own experiences align with earlier discussions, reinforcing that NLP elicits varied responses across audiences. I don't tend to indicate the incorporation of NLP into my coaching practice unless there is a reason that it would surface, and even then, my communication about NLP would be context-specific within the broader systemic influences present, for instance, whether a private coaching client or through a third party. The concept of 'coach model agility' strongly resonates with me, reflecting my purposeful blending of multiple approaches rather than adherence to a single one. As indicated in the discussion of the previous theme, this configuration is improvisational, drawing on my broad-based expertise, the coachee's preferences, and the systemic context we are present in. From my experience, the application of NLP to coaching aligns well with 'systemic eclectic' coaching maturity, integrating both process and relational elements to enhance coachee outcomes.

Despite resistance to NLP from some academic circles, NLP remains widely used, and there is clearly a need to address the theory-practice gap in both NLP and coaching. The discussion highlights the need for alternative evidence standards to evaluate NLP (and indeed, other coaching approaches) effectively, given that RCTs often overlook its highly individualised, co-created nature. Otherwise, NLP and coaching are reduced by such evidentiary expectations to measurement of practice at the lower levels of coach maturity. A key takeaway for me from the discussion is the importance of balancing structure and flexibility. The NLP application must support the coaching conversation without overshadowing or dictating it. The focus on coachee-driven meaning-making and systemic change aligns closely with my practice, encouraging me to carefully assess when and how to introduce NLP tools and techniques, ensuring that ethical and professional coaching boundaries are always respected. This vital consideration is explored further in theme 4.

ii. Presuppositional mindset

In the findings chapter, the participants made numerous references to the presuppositions of NLP. Virtually all participants acknowledged that these presuppositions were explicitly reflected in their personal and professional mindset and beliefs. Further, they sought to enhance the adoption of these presuppositions within their practice. Most participants identified the pivotal role that the

adoption of this ‘presuppositional mindset’ played in NLP in promoting learning and growth, both for themselves and for their clients. For most, the presuppositions were something that set NLP apart, not just in terms of their content, but also the fact that they are made explicit for evaluation and incorporation into guiding proponents’ thoughts and actions within the contexts they operate. Participants provided clear examples of NLP presuppositions, including “there’s no such thing as failure...failure is feedback in disguise” (P01); “you have all the resources” (P02), and “the map is not the territory” (P09). Participant 2 concludes that they are always “running in the background”. As a researcher-practitioner in this field, I similarly regard these presuppositions as central to my personal and professional mindset. I often return to these presuppositions both when coaching clients and when reflecting on my personal and professional concerns.

Schneider et al. (2020) provide a contemporary definition of a presupposition as a meaning component “...for speakers in a conversation, that is, background information which is taken for granted” (p. 247). In this way, the NLP presuppositions are accepted for their practical utility, rather than as absolute truths, and they play a pivotal role in shaping the mindset and beliefs of those practising NLP (Grimley & Dilts, 2024; Tosey & Mathison, 2009). Whether consciously or unconsciously, by and large, everyone brings presuppositions into their interactions with others (Habermas, 2002), and that is no less true in the coaching context than in the NLP one. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty (2002) asserts that it’s not possible to achieve a pure presuppositionless lived experience. However, such presuppositions can all too often be left implicit. A distinctive feature of NLP is its explicit approach to presuppositions, which leads my participants to value them strongly in their practice.

Whilst the original developers of NLP never provided a specific list of NLP presuppositions, only alluding to them as “organising assumptions” (Bandler & Grinder, 1979, p. 137), Tosey and Mathison (2009) defined them as premises or “principles that are intended to be assumed or taken for granted when practising NLP” (p. 97). This takes the meaning of presuppositions in the NLP context away from the purely semantic definitions of presuppositions used by semanticists, such as Lakoff (1971) after the style of Strawson (Soames, 1989) and gives them a more pragmatic role along the lines of Stalnaker (1975). Stalnaker (1975) posited that presuppositions reflect within those expressing them “their beliefs, intentions and expectations” (p. 31). This is an important distinction for NLP use of an explicit presuppositional mindset and is one that provides immense benefits, particularly in the coaching context.

According to Grimley and Dilts (2024) NLP presuppositions represent NLP’s epistemological foundation, evolving significantly during NLP’s first two decades (1975-1995). In discussing the

previous theme, Table 5.5 included 14 such presuppositions (as ‘premises about experience’ and ‘premises about communication and change’) as part of the NLPLS Delphi poll (Hollander et al., 2018b, pp. 91–92). However, there are many other lists of these presuppositions permeating published sources and NLP training resources, often with different quantities and/or expressions of the presuppositions. Two other lists of 14 are provided here: Walker (1996) as an oft-cited list (Tosey & Mathison, 2009, p. 98) and provided here in Table 5.5, and Burgess (2014), a slightly different list of 14, arrived at by looking at the antecedent contributors (pp. 92–94). Research conducted in 2019 for my own NLP trainings identified 22 discrete NLP presuppositions drawn from a range of relevant published sources and training materials from other accredited NLP trainers. However, for the present study, consideration will be given only to NLP presuppositions included in sources appropriately referenced.

**Table 5.5**

*Fourteen NLP presuppositions*

	<b>NLP presupposition</b>	<b>Attributed to</b>
1	Every behaviour is potentially communication	Bateson, Perls, Satir, Erickson
2	Mind and body are part of the same cybernetic system	Bateson, Perls, Satir, Erickson
3	People have all the resources they need to make changes	Perls, Satir, Erickson
4	People orientate themselves by their internal maps, their model of the world, and not the world itself	Korzybski
5	The map is not the territory	Korzybski
6	People make the best choices that present themselves to them	Satir
7	Choice is better than no choice	Satir
8	Every behaviour is generated by a positive intention	Satir
9	The meaning of a communication is the response it elicits, not the intention of the communicator	Erickson
10	Resistance is a message about the communicator	Erickson
11	If what you are doing isn't working, do something different	Erickson
12	There is no failure, only feedback	Erickson
13	The most flexible variable controls the system (law of requisite variety)	Ashby
14	Everything that a human being can do can be modelled	Bandler, Grinder

*Note.* \*Table created by the author. Contents based on translation of Walker (1996, p. 111) from Tosey and Mathison (2009, pp. 98–99).

Despite concerns among many contributors about the lack of consistency between NLP trainings (Grant, 2019b; Hayes, 2006), it is interesting to note that these same NLP presuppositions are consistent across the main professional NLP trainings. Grimley and Dilts (2024) state that the

NLP presuppositions are application and context neutral, meaning that those same NLP presuppositions also apply to the deployment of NLP in all its other areas of application: therapy, education, sport, and business. Grant (2019b), whilst being a critic of NLP, acknowledges that the NLP presuppositions are “in themselves hardly controversial...and essentially non-problematic” (pp. 46–47).

When it comes to coaching as an activity, recognising that there is a lack of consistency in training there too, and remembering Merleau-Ponty (2002) asserting that a presuppositionless perspective on experience was not possible, presuppositions of most approaches to coaching remain implicit. Exploration of the presuppositions of individual coaching approaches may yield valuable insights into commonalities among them and the appropriate means by which their comparative efficacy might usefully be measured. This could even be extended to other fields, such as leadership, organisational development, and human resources. One of the four themes identified from the study participants of Sime and Jacob (2018) was “Belief within coaching”, reflecting: “belief in a client’s ability to take responsibility and manage their own content” and “the client is whole and complete” (p. 56). Perhaps more studies that establish what coaches are ‘believing’ or ‘presupposing’ when they are coaching might provide a richer vein to mine, given that coach maturity (Clutterbuck & Turner, 2018) means they are increasingly choosing models, tools, and techniques from an eclectic mix of coaching approaches. Given that the NLP presuppositions “draw on a range of humanistic traditions” (Grant, 2019b, p. 47), they are likely highly consistent with the intentions of many alternative approaches to coaching, especially given the shared history between the two (Wildflower, 2013).

Reflecting on my own coaching practice, I recognise the profound impact of presuppositional thinking on both my coaching approach and my interactions with coachees. The NLP presuppositions provide me with a structured and intentional lens through which I facilitate client change. My study’s participants, like myself identify the NLP presuppositions as foundational to promoting learning, growth, and adaptability for both ourselves and our clients. These presuppositions underpin my professional coaching practice, empowering me to interpret coachee challenges positively, recognise their innate resourcefulness, and facilitate exploration of new possibilities. Whilst I don’t make these presuppositions explicitly clear to coachees, it is not unusual for one or more of them to make their way into a coaching session. However, it might be worded slightly differently to better fit the situation.

Explicit awareness of NLP presuppositions has significantly enriched my personal and professional practice. Clearly, the words are easy to read and understand, but appreciating their

significance for our interpretations of our lived experiences takes dedicated practice, and I found this consistently came through in NLP training. While presuppositions exist in all other coaching approaches and other expertise I use, they are seldom explicit and certainly not to the extent seen within NLP. Significantly, all participants reported the same NLP presuppositions across their diverse range of NLP training providers, and all held the presuppositions to be foundational to their coaching practice. A future direction of my research will involve exploring the explicitness of presuppositions across different coaching methodologies to identify potential insights and shared foundations. Ultimately, intentional belief systems can bridge the gap between structured and intuitive coaching, driving impactful coaching outcomes by harnessing the multidimensional expertise of professional coaches.

### iii. Crystallising intentionality

At its core, NLP is a learning-oriented framework that seeks to facilitate personal and professional development through structured approaches to self-awareness, intentionality and adaptive change. Relevant to the application of NLP to the coaching context, Bandler and Grinder (1979) identified three fundamental components (The 3 fundamental legs of NLP): “know what outcome you want...flexibility in your behavior [sic]...sensory experience to notice when you get the responses that you want” (pp. 54–55). ‘Crystallising intentionality’ reflects the phenomenological presupposition of human intentionality and foreshadows an understanding of NLP’s approach to explicitly defining sensory-specific goals or outcomes, thus clarifying and articulating intentions that might otherwise remain implicit. NLP has a more precise name for such a goal: a ‘well-formed outcome’ (WFO). More precisely, they are outcomes that meet “well-formedness conditions for outcomes” (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000b, pp. 1548–1550). The concept of ‘well-formedness’ originates from Chomsky (2002) ‘transformational grammar’, in which specific transformations “when applied to deep structure, produce surface structures that are well-formed and unambiguous” (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000b, p. 1474). Outcomes that are developed to meet well-formed conditions are held within NLP as being ‘useful’ as a means of articulating intentions that might otherwise remain implicit as an important part of NLP’s change model.

Participant narratives clearly highlight goal articulation as central to fostering learning and growth, with P03 stating that “getting a really clear outcome is really important”. Consistently, participants emphasised NLP’s unique contribution to their internalisation of structured goal-setting practices. In the coaching context, goal establishment is a universal feature, present in

almost all coaching models. However, the participants described an enhanced, or ‘supercharged’, goal-setting approach in NLP known as the ‘well-formed outcome’ (WFO). Identified as a component of the ‘model of change’ within NLP methodology in Table 5.3, Grimley and Dilts (2024) highlight the typically cognitive nature of conventional goal setting in coaching, whereas “WFOs account for ...the complete phenomenological experience of the coachee” (p. 188). Participants welcomed WFO’s structured approach, highlighting its strength in clarifying ‘who you will become when the goal is achieved’, emphasising NLP’s unique capacity for fostering deeper, more meaningful coaching outcomes. P14, for instance, observed that this approach was not covered in standard coach training: “I didn’t learn that in my coaching training...I’ve used it so much; it works like a charm”. Similarly, P01 described WFO as a means “to know who you [will be] when [a] goal is achieved”. P03 emphasised the value of clarity in goal articulation, describing typical NLP questioning: “what’s your outcome...what are you going to see? What are you going to hear? What are you going to feel?” illustrating the sensory specific nature of NLP goal setting.

A common criticism of some coaching models, such as the widely used GROW model (Passmore et al., 2017; Whitmore, 2017), is that they place goal setting at the outset of the coaching process. Evidence and experience suggest that understanding the coachee’s context first, then introducing goal-setting as a flexible, revisable middle step, is preferable (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017). Supporting this point, Blackman and Clutterbuck (2018) highlight: a study showing coachees’ goals morph as they reflect on their experiences within the given context, and that “coaching is often about helping the client work out what they want” (p. 50). This is why many coaching models have evolved, with the goal-setting stage coming later in the process. Bachkirova (2013) critiques NLP’s goal-specific orientation for potentially narrowing the scope of change. However, this critique overlooks the extensive exploration of the coachee’s ‘map of the world’ integral to NLP’s WFO process. Indeed, the conclusion to the WFO process often comes at the end of coaching (Grimley, 2019b).

To understand why this is, it is crucial to understand those well-formedness conditions for an outcome. Dilts and DeLozier (2000b) specify that in NLP, a ‘well-formed’ goal or outcome meets the following conditions: “1. stated in positive terms. 2. defined and evaluated according to sensory-based evidence. 3. initiated and maintained by the person or group who desires the goal. 4. made to preserve the positive by-products of the present state. 5. appropriately contextualised to fit the ecology of the surrounding system” (p. 1548). Other variations, or enhancements, of these basic conditions are provided by different contributors such as Bolstad (2007, pp. 8–10),

Steinhouse (2010, pp. 120–125), and Grimley and Dilts (2024, p. 189). Research on goals in a coaching setting by Grant (2019a) sought more of an evidence-based approach, emphasising self-concordance and adaptive learning, and emphasised: “goals as ‘internal representations of desired states or outcomes’” (p. 36). This sounds very much in line with NLP, which, from its early days, identified that individuals create their own subjective lived experience through their own internal representations and that this influences their behaviours and outcomes (Bandler & Grinder, 1975b). Unfortunately, Grant (2019a) acknowledges “Internal representations of desired states or outcomes” originating from the work of Austin and Vancouver (1996, p. 338) a whole two decades after NLP’s development. However, Grant (2019a) does go on to state that “goal-focused self-regulation sits at the core of the coaching process” (p. 36), and this picks up on a topic from earlier around self-regulation, which will be explored further in the next theme.

In my coaching practice, intentionality and goal setting are central to how I effectively support coachees. WFOs are as significant to me in the way I apply NLP to my coaching practice as are the NLP presuppositions, NLP modelling methodology, NLP model of change, and other NLP distinctions that we haven’t encountered in this discussion so far and will likely come to later. Re-examining NLP’s well-formed outcome conditions more formally through this research has demonstrated to me just how naturally embedded they have become in my practice, often without conscious reference. My go to reference is Bolstad (2007) both for S.P.E.C.I.F.Y. as an acronym for meeting the well-formed conditions and also for an integrative NLP and coaching model (RESOLVE), although I note that I have changed ‘L – lead change’ to ‘L – lend a hand to change’ to emphasise to myself the more client led ethos of coaching and that “the coachee...needs to understand ultimately they shoulder responsibility” (Grimley, 2019b, p. 288).

Reflecting further on my practice, I see goal setting initially as an exploratory activity, integrated within a broader process of facilitating coachees’ reflection on their ‘map of the world’. In recognition that effective coaching is a co-created activity, the timing and quality of the goal constructed are always a function of the coachee, the contract, and the context. In line with this, I reflect that I am not always fully leveraging the sensory-specific elements of NLP, either in WFO or more broadly in the sessions. Although context, contract, and coachee familiarity influence this limitation, there is clear potential to explore further how explicitly communicating NLP-based goal setting might be achieved for clients unfamiliar with, or with reservations about, this methodology. Enhancing how I communicate NLP’s value in the coaching context, a powerful tool for clarity, adaptability, and more profound change, could significantly strengthen my

professional coaching effectiveness. However, I am also cognisant of those same three considerations that may require me to adjust my approach: context, coachee, and contract.

#### iv. Adaptive experimentation

Having established a WFO, participants highlighted the importance of doing “whatever works” (P01) which is attributed to Dilts et al. (1980) by O’Connor (2001, p. 1). This is a pragmatic maxim which participants described as a strategy of ‘adaptive experimentation’. This concept of adaptive experimentation emphasises behavioural flexibility, which participants recognise as an essential catalyst for effective personal and professional development in NLP applied to coaching. P01 succinctly encapsulated this approach: “if what you’re doing isn’t working, then do something different!”. Such behavioural flexibility was repeatedly emphasised by participants as foundational to their successful integration of NLP into their coaching practice.

For many, behavioural flexibility is enshrined in an NLP presupposition known as the “law of requisite variety”, or ‘Ashby’s law’, named after the system’s theorist Ross Ashby (Ashby & Goldstein, 2011). In line with this presupposition, according to Dilts and DeLozier (2000b) “a member of a system requires a minimum amount of flexibility to successfully adapt, achieve or survive” (p. 1106). This is consistent with the earlier discussion about the role of coaching in increasing coachee choice, a stance reinforced by another systems theorist Bateson (2000) who asserted “to be infinitely intelligent implies to be infinitely flexible” (p. 241). P02 adds weight to NLP’s role in this by stating, “I find that NLP gives me more options and more variety”. Participants echo this sentiment, highlighting flexibility not only as a technique, but as an attitudinal disposition toward adaptive change. P14 articulated the value of this clearly, expressing that NLP had enhanced their capacity for “finding more resourceful ways of doing things”.

Participants repeatedly referenced the NLP principle “if what you’re doing isn’t working, then do something different” as a central aspect of ‘adaptive experimentation’. Rather than following rigid, predetermined methods, participants valued a dynamic, iterative approach, experimenting with different strategies based upon real-time feedback. P01 emphasised NLP’s encouragement of continual adjustment, enhancing effectiveness, while P14 similarly highlighted NLP’s role in “finding more resourceful ways of doing things”. This iterative practice aligns closely with Kolb’s experiential learning cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2018), advocating continual cycles of action, reflection, conceptualisation, and planned experimentation. Participants described NLP’s adaptive experimentation occurring at two interconnected levels: interpersonally (in interactions with others) and intrapersonally (within themselves). People act as part of a system, and each person

is a system in themselves. In inter-personal contexts, NLP practitioners emphasise understanding and responding to the coachee's 'map of the world'. P12 reflected on the importance of prioritising knowledge of the coachee's subjective experience, stating "I see the person first, and I will answer to that map of the world", so essential for effective coaching practice. P05 noted that to meet another person "where they are, you need to understand where they are" and they found that NLP really helped them to do that. For instance, this included for P10 "being able to adapt to learning preferences in the moment".

The NLP coach seeks to bring back into the coachee's awareness the assumptions, beliefs, and interpretations, along with their consequences for their choices and decisions, so that the coachee can reconsider and adjust their choices and decisions to better support them in the pursuit of their WFOs. In making changes, coachees often struggle as they mistake their map for the territory. The NLP coach can pick up on the surface structure of the coachee's narrative and bring to the coachee's attention any significant and relevant linguistic deletions, distortions, or generalisations they are making. In this way, Grimley and Dilts (2024) argue, an NLP coach can explore how coachees "systemise their experiences when they [believe themselves to be] empowered, as well as when they [believe themselves to be] helpless" such that the NLP coach can provide them "with a choice in the undesirable context of being stuck in an unhelpful state" (p. 187). As we have previously heard, it operates at both the sensory and linguistic levels of information processing, whilst also revealing the systemic relationship between the two (Grimley & Dilts, 2024).

Adaptive experimentation and behavioural flexibility are foundational to my coaching practice, significantly enhancing my effectiveness and engagement with my coachees. I am conscious of my focus on the coachee and appreciating their map of the world. I am also aware of myself adapting multiple facets of my approach to my calibration of the coachee, congruently adjusting things such as my language and pace. My NLP expertise enables me to do this and in doing so, it reinforces my belief that coaching should be dynamic and responsive, rather than rigidly tied to a set single approach. Recognising each coachee's uniqueness deepens my commitment to engaging authentically with their individual 'map of the world'. Reflecting on this balance, I recognise the importance of a coherent coaching approach that invites authenticity and vulnerability from coachees, while also satisfying broader coaching outcomes. In balancing this, I appreciate how NLP feeds and supports my improvisational capability that I referred to in earlier discussions.

As I consider the opportunity to use NLP in my coaching practice more broadly, such as NLPs role in revealing linguistic distortions and cognitive biases, I reflect on whether I am fully leveraging this capability in my coaching. I believe I exercise adequate discernment by selectively

challenging coachees' assumptions and beliefs, aiming to expand their awareness and increase their available choices. I consciously focus on ethically expanding coachee awareness, thereby enhancing their autonomy and available choices. For me, this highlights to me that I am applying the same level of reflective adaptability in my own decision making as a coach as the coaching session progresses, as I am encouraging my coachee during the same time. In real time and improvisationally, I can weigh up choices about what I might bring into the session (if anything), evaluating suitability and appropriateness with the measure being my appreciation of where my coachee is in their map of their world. By discarding unnecessary information and selectively offering feedback, my attention remains on the coachee, closely monitoring how each interaction affects them and where it leads.

This is me being attuned to client cues, adjusting my approach accordingly, and co-creating with my coachee an experience that has meaning and usefulness for them. In this way, ensuring that my application of NLP is both woven naturally into the coaching dialogue and integrated coherently into my professional coaching practice reflects the way that I am demonstrating my own behavioural flexibility, adaptively experimenting with what emerges in the coaching moment and thereby being a role model to the coachee in achieving the same for themselves. Looking ahead, I will continue refining my capacity to balance structured goal setting with adaptive, real-time responsiveness, ensuring optimal flexibility and effectiveness in pursuit of meaningful coaching outcomes while maximising coachee involvement in the co-created process.

#### v. Reflective practitioner

The final dimension of NLP's catalytic capability for fostering learning and growth in the coaching context, as identified by participants, was the enhancement of reflective practice. This adaptive approach to reflection aligns with NLP's pragmatic principle of "doing what works" (P01). As we have seen, this principle encourages a structured experimentation process rather than mere trial and error, involving deliberate reflection on experiences, formulation of new strategy hypotheses, and planned actions to guide subsequent attempts to achieve WFOs. Participants described NLP as significantly strengthening their reflective capability. P07 emphasised that NLP specifically "enhances one's acuity", enabling more effective reflection and adaptive experimentation as a practitioner. This strengthened acuity helps participants form more precise plans for future actions, thereby fostering continuous learning and personal development. Participants emphasised the value of structured NLP reflection, such as P04, highlighting a constant reflective cycle

“what’s working, what’s not working...what could be changed”. In this way, reflection in NLP coaching is identifiable by its systemic and purposeful nature. P10 described reflection as an intentional inquiry process, where “I think there’s the sense of questioning, making some kind of inquiry...what kinds of things could I do better?”. P11 also acknowledged the necessity of consistent reflection, noting a clear reduction in effectiveness whenever reflection was neglected.

Literature on coaching echoes these findings, emphasising the critical role of reflection in effective decision-making and action (Bachkirova, 2013). Indeed, both coaching and NLP are united in their ability to help people “achieve greater understanding of both their inner ...and outer world...to achieve better decisions and act upon them” (Blackman & Clutterbuck, 2018, p. 45). NLP equips coaches, and subsequently their coachees, with the skills to reflect effectively and non-judgementally, examining their identities, values, beliefs, and behaviours. NLP can provide tools to do these things before, during, and after action. This reflective dimension of NLP thus significantly enriches coaching practice by fostering deeper self-awareness and promoting informed, intentional action within an adaptive experimental approach. According to Blackman and Clutterbuck (2018), “good coaches...need to have deep insight into their own thinking processes...their own behaviour and their own decision making” (p. 41) and similar extends to coaches, given that “the impact of coaching typically happens between coaching conversations” (p. 40). NLP’s application to coaching serves as a catalyst for enhancing the effectiveness of converting reflective insights into planned adaptive experiments to achieve WFOs.

The notion of being a ‘reflective practitioner’ has profoundly influenced my professional practice. My initial exposure to being a ‘reflective practitioner’ and, indeed, to NLP, occurred during my MBA studies at the Open University Business School, which provided foundational insights into the importance of reflective practice. The importance of being reflective and its connection with NLP has stayed with me ever since and has been a feature of my broader professional practice. Though reflection is central to my coaching style, this discussion prompts deeper consideration of whether I consistently leverage a structured, systematic reflection process to make the most of my NLP expertise in promoting experimental adaptation and continuous learning. P11’s reflection, that they “would be better served” if they did, strongly resonated with me.

One important insight is the significance of NLP’s focus on enhancing sensory acuity within the reflective practice context. The use of NLP promotes reflection being taken beyond an interpretation or meaning making of what happened, to providing an approach that embraces noticing patterns, surfacing beliefs and values, challenging assumptions, and fine-tuning

interventions, and all potentially in real time. This reflexive component strongly characterises the improvisational approach I have previously described. However, I question how effectively I currently encourage coachees to integrate such reflective depth consistently into their ongoing practice, beyond our coaching conversations. While confident in my ability to facilitate reflective processes that foster intentional adaptive experimentation, I recognise clear opportunities to strengthen how effectively I encourage coachees to deepen their own reflective capabilities and to adapt intentionally. I recognise I could do more in ensuring the coachees take stock of both how they are changing over time and what is changing within their own practice that is most helping them deliver that change for themselves.

#### iv. Conclusion to Theme Three: ‘Learning and growth for both’

In this theme’s discussion, NLP is presented as being an incredible catalyst for facilitating meaningful change, both in practitioners and in their coachees. This is something that both the study’s participants and I have experienced, from our practice with coachees and also within ourselves. Coaching and NLP are seen to have a common purpose: learning and growth, and NLP provides a clear model of change in terms of how it promotes such learning and development. The participants’ narratives identify several interrelated dimensions to NLP’s transformative capability: catalytic convert, presuppositional mindset, crystallising intentionality, adaptive experimentation, and reflective practitioner. In line with the first of these dimensions, the participants, as well as I, identify as converts to the catalytic capabilities of NLP in accelerating personal change, typically having witnessed this in ourselves and in our peers or coachees. NLP offers structure and flexibility through its methodologies and methods, which emphasise deep engagement and exploration of human subjective lived experience. At its heart, NLP engages with the sensory and linguistic dimensions of human experience and their integration within a system of which they are both a part. Each participant, including myself, configures, deploys, and integrates NLP’s methodologies and methods into our practices in highly individualised ways. However, what results is a shared impact for any coachee: greater awareness of their internal and external worlds, expanded choices, enhanced adaptability, and greater resourcefulness.

Beyond the shared impact we seek and the diversity in how we each configure, deploy, and integrate NLP within our practices, NLP remains consistent as an approach within the helping or support modalities, through its presuppositions and methodologies. Over 5 million people are trained in NLP worldwide, amid a highly fragmented training landscape. Yet, we would all most

likely know: the NLP presuppositions, the modelling methodology, sensory and processing distinctions, and the NLP model of change. Considering this in the context of NLP's application to coaching and the rigour of ICF coaching in particular, the previous theme's discussion highlighted the need for ethical and professional practice among participants in how they communicated and integrated NLP into their practices. These parameters formed part of the participants' mindset, along with the NLP presuppositions, to form a 'presuppositional mindset'. Collectively, these are explicit assumptions intended to guide practical actions and interpretations, and they serve as an empowering set of beliefs that actively underpin the cognitive and behavioural flexibility essential to successful coaching outcomes. For me, they offer a clear set of principles that are 'useful' in my interpreting coachee experiences constructively, influencing positive-growth and adaptive decision-making.

Through NLP's structured approach to defining well-formed outcomes (WFOs), coachees are provided with goals that are both clear and precise, going beyond cognitive goal-setting methods by integrating sensory-specific elements, making implicit intentions explicit, and thereby more concrete and actionable. Participants and I acknowledge the significant role that WFO plays in the effectiveness of NLP coaching. They are an essential ingredient to the NLP model of change, clearly articulating the coachees' desired future state. Reflecting on my own practice, I acknowledge that while NLP's WFO conditions have become essentially embedded, there remains an opportunity to more explicitly introduce the sensory-specific formulation of WFOs, especially where coachees may be less familiar with NLP, assuming the context warrants it. Participants noted that WFOs reveal the deeper purpose behind goals, significantly enhancing their meaningfulness and attainability. With a WFO in place, participants spoke of the importance of behavioural flexibility and adaptive experimentation in relation to doing 'whatever works', foreshadowing the idea of a feedback evaluative loop that is captured in being also a 'reflective practitioner'. Combined, they reveal the often iterative and recursive nature of generating personal and professional change and the requirement for pragmatism within experiential learning cycles, embedding continuous reflection and recalibration as experience unfolds. The maxim of such flexibility and adaptability is expressed in my practice through an improvisational approach, constantly evolving with each coachee interaction. For me, it encourages both myself and my coachees to remain agile and responsive, continually refining our co-created interaction.

From my own reflective standpoint as a researcher-practitioner, this theme has confirmed and deepened my conviction that integrating NLP into my coaching practice enriches my professional

capabilities. From participant narratives and my own experience, it is clear that NLP offers a structured yet adaptable methodology to building awareness, expanding choices, and developing adaptability and resourcefulness, so crucial to the coaching modality. However, careful attention to its integration in the coaching context is also required to balance structural processes with intuitive agility, advancing professional and ethical practice that respects coachee autonomy and the expectations and needs of the broader system in which the coaching occurs. In this way, learning and growth remain co-created and dynamic processes for both the coach and the coachee.

Furthermore, the recognition of the theory-practice gap encourages ongoing exploration of how NLP's unique epistemological stance and structured methodologies might better bridge the gap. The insights gained encourage further exploration of NLP's application to the coaching context and establish perspectives to address potential resistance from some academic quarters and to build acknowledgement of the impact NLP can contribute to coaching practice.

## 5.5 Theme Four: ‘What makes the difference?’

As we saw from the findings chapter, the participants’ experiences reflected in this theme are built around four key areas: ‘coach state’, ‘coaching alliance’, ‘aligned, deploy with ease’, and ‘artful deployment, if at all’. Achieving an appropriate ‘state’ for effective coaching, through the intrapersonal use of NLP, was seen as an important starting point for all participants. Next was the importance of establishing and maintaining an effective coaching or working alliance between coach and coachee, achieved through the use of NLP interpersonally. The next area explored was how comfortably various NLP constituents integrate within the coaching context. Those NLP constituents that the participants identified as most comfortable in the coaching context were aligned and could therefore be deployed with ease. Other NLP constituents, however, were identified by the participants as likely to require varying amounts of thought for deployment in the coaching context, if used at all.

Based upon these insights, this discussion highlights how participants integrate NLP into their professional coaching practice to enhance its effectiveness. This theme’s structure was inspired by P08’s insightful distinction that “there’s two things: there’s the way you show up and ... work with people..., and there’s...the actual techniques you use” in relation to their integration of NLP into their coaching practice. This, together with NLP and coaching, which share a learning-and-growth focus, led me to build Table 5.6. The table combines the work of NLPLS and de Rijk et al. (2019) with the four dimensions of this theme, as well as participants’ integration of NLP constituents encountered during the study. This theme aims to illustratively discuss key NLP constituents, complementing earlier discussions, rather than exhaustively detailing all possible NLP methods.

**Table 5.6**

*Mapping what NLP is, based on de Rijk et al., (2019), against this study’s findings*

		Coach State	Coaching Alliance	Aligned, deploy with ease	Artful deployment, if at all
1A	Premises about experience	NLP Presuppositions	‘The map is not the territory’ ‘Structure is more important than content’ <i>‘Experience can be reduced to sensory elements (VAKOG)’</i>	‘The map is not the territory’ ‘Structure is more important than content’ ‘Experience can be reduced to sensory elements (VAKOG)’	‘The map is not the territory’ ‘Structure is more important than content’ ‘Experience can be reduced to sensory elements (VAKOG)’
1B	Premises about communication and change	NLP Presuppositions	‘The meaning of communication is the response elicited’	‘The meaning of communication is the response elicited’	‘The meaning of communication is the response elicited’

			<p>‘There is no failure, only feedback’</p> <p><b>‘People make the best choices available to them’</b></p> <p><b>‘People have the resources they need for the changes they desire’</b></p> <p>‘If what you’re doing does not work, try something else’</p> <p><b>‘All behaviour has a positive intention’</b></p> <p>‘If one can do it, others can learn to do it’</p> <p><i>‘resistance is a signal of insufficient rapport’</i></p>	<p><b>‘There is no failure, only feedback’</b></p> <p>‘People make the best choices available to them’</p> <p><b>‘People have the resources they need for the changes they desire’</b></p> <p><b>‘If what you’re doing does not work, try something else’</b></p> <p>‘All behaviour has a positive intention’</p> <p><b>‘If one can do it, others can learn to do it’</b></p> <p>‘sub-modalities determine the effect of an experience’</p> <p>‘resistance is a signal of insufficient rapport’</p>	<p><b>‘There is no failure, only feedback’</b></p> <p>‘People make the best choices available to them’</p> <p><b>‘People have the resources they need for the changes they desire’</b></p> <p><b>‘If what you’re doing does not work, try something else’</b></p> <p><i>‘All behaviour has a positive intention’</i></p> <p><b>‘If one can do it, others can learn to do it’</b></p> <p><b>‘sub-modalities determine the effect of an experience’</b></p> <p><b>‘resistance is a signal of insufficient rapport’</b></p>
2A	<b>Distinctions</b>	<i>Metaprograms (own)</i> <i>Neurological levels (self)</i>	<p><b>Sensory modalities</b></p> <p>Sub-modalities</p> <p>Sensory experience versus categorisation</p> <p>Neurological levels</p> <p><b>metaprograms</b></p>	<p><b>Sensory modalities</b></p> <p><b>Sub-modalities</b></p> <p>Sensory experience versus categorisation</p> <p><b>Neurological levels</b></p> <p><b>metaprograms</b></p>	<p><b>Sensory modalities</b></p> <p><b>Sub-modalities</b></p> <p><b>Sensory experience versus categorisation</b></p> <p><b>Neurological levels</b></p> <p><b>metaprograms</b></p>
2B	<b>Attitude</b>	<b>Modelling orientation</b> (for own ‘coach state’)	<b>Modelling orientation</b> (for own ‘rapport state’)	Modelling orientation	Modelling orientation
2C	<b>Model of change</b>		Utilisation	<b>Well-formed outcomes</b> TOTE model for goal directed change Utilisation	<b>Well-formed outcomes</b> <b>TOTE model for goal directed change</b> <b>Utilisation</b>
3A	<b>Skills</b>	Anchoring (self)	<p>Calibrating internal states</p> <p>Eye accessing cues</p> <p><b>Meta model questions</b></p> <p>Modelling</p> <p><b>Rapport (mirror/pace)</b></p> <p><b>Verbal reframing</b></p> <p><i>Anchoring</i></p>	<p>Calibrating internal states</p> <p>Eye accessing cues</p> <p><b>Meta model questions</b></p> <p>Modelling</p> <p><b>Rapport (mirror/pace)</b></p> <p><b>Strategies</b></p> <p><b>Verbal reframing</b></p> <p>Anchoring</p> <p>Ecological check</p> <p><i>Leading (verbal/non-verbal)</i></p>	<p><b>Calibrating internal states</b></p> <p><b>Eye accessing cues</b></p> <p><b>Meta model questions</b></p> <p><i>Milton model</i></p> <p><b>Modelling</b></p> <p><b>Rapport (mirror/pace)</b></p> <p><b>Strategies</b></p> <p><b>Verbal reframing</b></p> <p><b>Anchoring</b></p> <p><b>Ecological check</b></p> <p><i>Timelines</i></p> <p><b>Leading (verbal/non-verbal)</b></p>
3B	<b>Techniques</b>	<i>Circle of excellence</i> Calibrating internal state (own) Eliciting resources in self to attain state	<p>Eliciting resource in self</p> <p><b>Perceptual positions</b></p> <p><b>Metaphor for inducing change</b></p> <p><b>Aligning neurological levels</b></p>	<p>Future pacing</p> <p>Changing a strategy</p> <p><i>Collapsing anchors</i></p> <p><b>Eliciting resource</b></p> <p><b>Perceptual positions</b></p> <p>Metaphor for inducing change</p> <p><b>Aligning neurological levels</b></p> <p>Disney strategy</p>	<p><b>Future pacing</b></p> <p><b>Changing a strategy</b></p> <p><b>Collapsing anchors</b></p> <p><i>Circle of excellence</i></p> <p><b>Eliciting resource</b></p> <p><b>Perceptual positions</b></p> <p><i>Metaphor for inducing change</i></p> <p>Aligning neurological levels</p>

Note. \*Whilst my study is a qualitative study, such that numbers have no meaning, approximately where more than eight participants spoke about the identified NLP content being used in one of

the four given situations, then it is in emboldened text. If fewer than four participants spoke about the identified NLP content being used in one of the four given situations, it is in italics. If between four and eight participants spoke about the identified NLP content being used in one of the four given situations, then it is in standard text.

Having constructed Table 5.6 and compared it with Table 5.3, it is striking to me how the participants' narratives gave full voice to the NLP presuppositions, almost word-for-word or with very close variations. For me, this suggests practitioners effectively align their professional mindset with NLP's epistemology expressed in its presuppositions (Grimley & Dilts, 2024) and, whilst recognising that the sample is small and that there is no real opportunity for generalisability of my findings, it is quite a testament to the consistency of NLP training across multiple: locations, training organisations, and membership organisations. This is something that I have not seen in the broader coaching field with its many definitions, multiple models, and only a few membership organisations. This consistency between participants extends somewhat into NLP 'methodology' (Grimley & Dilts, 2024), particularly around 'model of change' and 'attitude', although not as much with 'distinctions'. Finally, regarding NLP models, 'skills' and 'techniques' practitioners deploy, participants demonstrated strong alignment around the NLP skills integrated, yet much greater diversity in the NLP techniques they applied. This perhaps reflected individual professional practice dispositions regarding their potential deployment. Building on prior recognition of NLP's overlap with coaching's purpose, this theme delves deeper into how participants specifically integrate NLP into their professional coaching practice.

i. Coach state

The first dimension, 'coach state' refers to how participants were using NLP for their own self-management: their beliefs and mindset, and how they configured their 'state' to orient themselves in preparation for a coaching interaction. Whilst I generically called it 'coach state' it should not be confused with Dilts (2020) 'COACH state', which is a specific proprietary configuration of 'coach state', although there can be varying degrees of similarity. In relation to how the participants showed up as NLP coaches, P06 referred to adopting such a "coach state" which captured the multiple facets reported by the other participants. The 'coach state' for the participants was about their own use of NLP in their preparation for coaching, and it provides insight into how they used NLP for intrapersonal self-management when about to practice as a coach. Here, 'coach state' refers to "the gestalt of the neurological processes (body and mind)

within an individual” (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000b, p. 1300), facilitating effective coaching performance.

In line with NLP’s philosophy and methodology, which begins with the adoption of the NLP presuppositions previously explored, the ‘coach state’ can be modelled and replicated. P07 highlighted the alignment between NLP presuppositions and coaching, stating explicitly that they “do not conflict with coaching”. It was established earlier that the NLP presuppositions “draw on a range of humanistic traditions” (Grant, 2019b, p. 47) that are likely highly consistent with the intentions of many alternative approaches to coaching, especially given the shared history between the two (Wildflower, 2013). However, the participants emphasise that they don’t ‘use’ the NLP presuppositions but seek to, in the words of P03, “embody them...they are a part of me” and that this is a key facet of the ‘coach state’ they adopt. For instance, P13 described embodying the NLP presupposition ‘the map is not the territory’ by intensely appreciating “how [the coachees] see the world”, seeking to understand “their model of the world fully”. P02 highlighted personal congruence as a benefit of self-applying NLP techniques to achieve the ‘coach state’: “because I’m doing the things that I’m offering to other people. NLP is an integral part of...how I get myself into the right state”. When in the coach state:

I am open, alert, connected, and holding space for my clients, not getting attached to outcome...[and I]...actively listen without getting drawn into their story...watching how they’re using their body [P06]

It was described in the discussion of a previous theme that NLP is believed to be effective because “it makes explicit the dual information-processing on both sensory level and then the secondary linguistic level, as well as the systemic relationship between both levels of processing” (Grimley & Dilts, 2024, p. 187) and this applies as much to NLP’s application to the coaching context as it does to other contexts of NLP’s application. Since ‘state’ in NLP denotes “the gestalt of the neurological processes (body and mind) within an individual at any given time” (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000b, p. 1300), participants’ emphasis on ‘embodiment’ highlights their deliberate integration of these processes into practice in accordance with NLP. When a ‘coach state’ has been effectively modelled using NLP methodology, capturing both sensory and linguistic levels and their systemic relationship, an NLP coach can “embody the meanings” in alignment with NLP’s presuppositions and “embed this embodiment further in [their] neurology within multiple frames and at different levels (e.g. purpose, identity, values and beliefs, strategies, behaviour and environment (Dilts, 1990)” (Grimley & Dilts, 2024, p. 187).

This reflects an ability, or at least a clear intention, to direct phenomenological subjective lived experience *ex ante*, that is, ahead of living the experience itself, with the expectation that then living the experience will provide, *ex post* (that is, ‘after the event’), an outcome that provides the desired interpretation or meaning. In this way, phenomenology describes or interprets meaning-making regarding subjective lived experience, and this is the raw material elicited and utilised by NLP. Still, the additional worth or contribution of NLP is that it provides a means of either: providing choice concerning meaning making of past experiences (tending towards the therapeutic domain) and/or creating choice *ex ante* for the interpretation or meaning making that is to occur *ex post*, that is, in the future (tending towards the coaching domain).

In the coaching literature the closest equivalent to NLP ‘coach state’ would be coverage of ‘coach mindset’, although Cox et al. (2024) observe that research on “coaching beliefs is still somewhat limited” (p. 265). A study by Hunt and Weintraub (2016), whilst focused on managers as internal coaches, identifies common characteristics of the ‘coach mindset’ being: an attitude of helpfulness, less need for control, empathy in dealing with others, openness in personal learning and receiving feedback, high standards, a desire to help others develop, and a belief that most people do want to learn. Achieving and maintaining such a mindset or orientation whilst coaching requires suitably developed self-regulation capabilities in the coach. We heard earlier from Parsloe and Leedham (2022) the importance of “regulation (self-control) capabilities of the coach” (p. 16) as a strong predictor of coaching success, and Kluge and Hagemann (2022) asserted that self-regulation provides the ‘initial spark’ to learning that is the engine to change inevitably necessitated by the pursuit of achieving self-congruent goals. Grant (2019a) reinforcing this still further by stating that “goal-focused self-regulation sits at the core of the coaching process” and goes on to acknowledge that “internal representations of desired states or outcomes” (p. 36) sit at the very heart of that.

In practice, it is highly likely that each coaching model touches upon a ‘belief system’ or ‘mindset’ that is conducive to that particular approach to coaching, such as that described for ‘transpersonal coaching’ in Passmore (2021b, p. 162). However, it is unlikely to be explicated to the extent of the NLP ‘coach state’ or to be applied in practice as consistently as it is in NLP coaching, given NLP’s more consistent presuppositional underpinnings and modelling methodology for creating and replicating states. Given the limited existing research, comprehensive comparisons are currently difficult. This highlights a valuable opportunity for future research, given the importance of NLP’s contribution to coaching practice. In summary, NLP was being utilised by participants

in an intrapersonal manner to achieve their ‘coach state’ and reflected their configuration of the NLP presuppositions for mindset and beliefs (although treated mainly as a set), their own state, metaprograms and neurological congruence from an NLP methodological perspective and the use of techniques to support the above (such as anchoring, calibrating own state, eliciting resources in self and so on).

This discussion prompts deeper reflection on my application of NLP principles to regulate my state before and during coaching sessions. While I naturally adopt a focused and open stance, I’m not sure I am consciously calibrating my mindset and physiology in a deliberate way ahead of coaching sessions, unless I am aware that my state is not congruent with what I require of myself ahead of a session. When I notice an incongruence in my state, I consciously adjust my thinking and physiology, including my breathing, to restore alignment with the desired state. In practice, I promptly address any state of dysregulation or unhelpful internal state that arises. I am adept at quickly self-regulating, and NLP has significantly enhanced my ability to achieve this consistently over time. Thus, fully embodying NLP presuppositions, beyond merely applying them, strongly enhances my professional coaching practice and aligns with my ethical commitment.

I mentioned before that I often come back to the NLP presuppositions both when coaching clients and when reflecting on my own personal and professional interests, so they play a significant part to my practice both implicitly and explicitly. I seek to achieve congruence among my beliefs, intentions, and behaviours, and I am more actively aligning my internal state with contextual requirements. Over time, this alignment has become increasingly automatic, reflecting my transition into being ‘unconsciously skilled’ in this aspect of my practice. Despite unexpected personal or professional challenges, I typically feel well-resourced, primarily due to my NLP expertise, to regulate and experiment with states that best serve me. Although I regularly utilise NLP techniques such as anchoring, self-calibration, and resource elicitation, this reflection encourages me to reconnect with them more systemically and consciously. Further, reconnecting systematically with NLP techniques could enhance how effectively I communicate the importance of the ‘coach state’ to coachees. Demonstrating intentional NLP-based self-regulation not only improves my own performance but also powerfully models this approach for my clients.

ii. Coaching working alliance

Participants consistently emphasised the significance of establishing and maintaining an effective coach-coachee relationship, or coaching working alliance. This alliance was seen as central to successful coaching interactions and was supported significantly by their NLP expertise applied interpersonally and intrapersonally. P05 highlighted the importance of “meeting the coachee where they are”, noting that NLP provided many tools to achieve exactly that. The NLP presupposition that “the map is not the territory” was particularly influential in their approach to an effective alliance. Participants recognised the necessity of appreciating and working flexibly with their coachees’ unique worldviews, thereby promoting deeper rapport and tailored communication. For example, P09 consciously matched or strategically disrupted language patterns, while P10 highlighted “matching and mirroring” to strengthen non-verbal connection. This building and sustaining of strong interpersonal relationships underpinning the alliance required deliberate attention. P02 drew attention to the need to be “noticing what’s happening with the client,” and P03 referred to “picking up on cues...around rapport and connection” from the coachee. Overall, according to P09, there was a need for “ongoing presence” and to be “in the moment” with the coachee and the coaching context.

In working to develop an effective alliance, participants were aware of the connection between their own internal coach state and the need to make congruent adjustments to suit the coachee's preferences in building and maintaining effective rapport. To do this, participants relied upon NLP strategies for self-management and relational calibration. These included NLP models such as sensory modalities, sub-modalities, communicational models, neurological levels, and metaprograms. Whilst individual techniques are considered later in the discussion, the point here is that participants use them to establish and manage an outstandingly effective coaching working alliance. As P03 observed about the NLP approach to communication and rapport, being:

a really powerful tool...I don't think the typical ICF coach training covers this anywhere near the same degree...I found that the coaching I was doing in many areas was way above the level that the ICF training offered (P03).

P11 also described actively managing personal biases by either “‘bracketing’ assumptions or by making them a part of the inquiry”. Lastly, NLP techniques guided participants’ ethical considerations, such as the contracting and boundary considerations spoken about in Theme Two,

such as explicitly seeking client permission and ensuring explicit agreement to ‘changing hats’ or ‘changing lanes’ with regards to modalities. P11 encapsulated this perspective by emphasising the importance of “requesting and granting permission” throughout the coaching process. Collectively, these narratives illustrate robust integration of NLP into the coaching working alliance, highlighting NLP’s role in enhancing rapport, communication, ethical practice, and overall coaching effectiveness.

The original concept of the working alliance by Bordin (1979) is widely adopted in coaching literature, emphasising the essential relational component between coach and coachee as central to coaching outcomes (McKenna & Davis, 2009). This alliance encompasses the quality of collaborative engagement and purposeful interaction between the coach and coachee, where the coach’s “ability to establish trust, rapport and build relationships” (Cox et al., 2024, p. 265) was foundational to their effectiveness as coaches (Hunt & Weintraub, 2016). Further, according to contributors such as O’Broin and Palmer (2010) and Parsloe and Leedham (2022), the coach’s ability “to develop a strong rapport with the coachee” is reliant on the “regulation (self-control) capabilities of the coach” (p. 16). According to Graßmann et al. (2020), the effectiveness of the coaching working alliance significantly contributes to successful coaching outcomes and even helps explain why some coaching approaches are more effective than others.

However, while the importance of an alliance is well-established, the precise behaviours that foster its effectiveness remain under-researched (Graßmann & Schermuly, 2020). For O’Broin and Palmer (2014), the working alliance “reflects the quality of the client and coach’s engagement in collaborative, purposive work” (p. 305). Effective alliance formation typically involves a combination of perceived coach competence and experience, coachee motivation for coaching, mutually agreed-upon goals and activities employed in the coaching, and an established ‘trust bond’ that involves respect and liking (Graßmann & Schermuly, 2020; Graßmann et al., 2020). Additionally, client attributes such as extraversion and openness to sharing information, as well as specific coach behaviours such as challenging and supportive interventions, reflective engagement, and emotional facilitation, are associated with stronger alliances (de Haan, 2019; Gettman et al., 2019; Graßmann et al., 2020).

Graßmann and Schermuly (2020) also highlighted the strong importance of coach and coachee ‘similarity’ to the affective combined coach-client dimension of the alliance. The ‘similarity’ referred to here was found to be behavioural, such as: complementary learning and managerial

styles (Boyce et al., 2010) and the strength of the affiliation dimension (Ianiro et al., 2015) which included 'mimicry' (Hess et al., 1999). Interestingly, personality similarity was not identified as important (de Haan et al., 2016). Further, de Haan and Gannon (2017) indicate the role of rapport as an important "affective aspect of the coaching relationship" (p. 197), where rapport is defined by Boyce et al. (2010) as being about "reducing the differences between the coach and client, and building on similarities" (p. 917). Bachkirova (2013) suggests that an effective coach is described as "a thought partner who assumes a non-directive" (p. 138) and holistic approach to engage the coachee's intrinsic capacity for change fully, and "ensuring that the coaching approach adopted avoids any loss of agency by the coachee" (p. 151).

Moreover, de Haan and Gannon (2017) assert that diversity amongst coachees necessitates an individualised approach to the working alliance to the extent that "each coachee requires a unique tailoring...in their coaching relationship" (p. 198). Variations in how the relationship elements manifest reflect each coachee's individual preferences and behavioural style, reinforcing still further that coaching effectiveness is markedly influenced by personising the coach's approach to each specific relational context (O'Broin & Palmer, 2018). In conclusion, the academic coaching literature emphasises a relational foundation for the coaching working alliance, characterised by trust, rapport, perceived coach competence, and coachee motivation. Further, it highlights that an effective alliance requires ongoing attention to relational dynamics, behavioural adaptability, and sensitivity to the coachee's individuality, whilst ensuring meaningful and sustainable coaching outcomes are established and achieved.

Looking at the NLP literature on these facets of the coaching alliance, we have already discussed much of NLP's application relevant to this dimension of coaching. Firstly, NLP's epistemology, expressed through its presuppositions (Grimley & Dilts, 2024) and used to inform participants' NLP 'coach state', is rich in beliefs that underpin multiple dimensions of the coaching alliance, particularly around the coachee's individuality and resourcefulness. Whilst these NLP presuppositions were embodied by the participants as their coaching mindset, it is clearly a professional practice consideration that any other practitioner has the relevant skill and knowledge to do so themselves and to utilise such a mindset ethically in the coaching context. Secondly, NLP, as a methodology, has become synonymous with modelling, communication models, and systems thinking, and can be viewed as a means of effectively understanding, replicating, and changing subjective lived experience (de Rijk et al., 2019). In relation to developing an effective coaching alliance, this understanding of NLP's methodologies reveals a focus on the individual coachee, effective communication with them and by them, their lived experience (considered

within the context of the systems of which they are a part), them determining the changes they want for themselves, them enhancing their own choice set concerning what they want and the strategies they choose to achieve their goals.

Here, whilst NLP provides the resources for the acquisition and use of an effective capability, it is beholden to individual practitioners' training and experience to fulfil the promise of the methodologies by integrating them into their practice ethically and professionally. Lastly, NLP's methods, or its tools and techniques, "that can be almost endlessly modified and enhanced to suit individual needs, requirements and circumstances" (McDermott, 2016, p. 148). Remembering that these methods are created from the application of NLP's modelling methodology, such that a distinct stand out for the first NLP methods developed being communication models and tools, modelled from such luminaries in the helping professions as Virginia Satir, Carl Rogers, and Milton Erickson. The specifics of NLP models and tools, and their application in the coaching context, are the focus of the remainder of the discussion for the current theme. The key point to note here is the precise fit with the current context of building and maintaining an effective coaching alliance.

The participants' emphasis on NLP's capacity to enhance rapport, trust, presence, and tailored communication strongly resonates with my own practice. I do not doubt that I learnt the advanced skills that underpin my abilities in this regard, relevant to the coaching context, through my NLP training. For instance, in my four-day ICF coach knowledge training, we spent just one hour specifically talking about rapport, and as if it was a one-off event in the coaching conversation. By contrast, my 18-day NLP practitioner training dedicated at least sixteen hours specifically to rapport. As helping professions, it is no surprise to me that both NLP and coaching literature confirm the centrality of a strong working alliance to coaching success. It is unsurprising to me that qualities such as trust, mutual respect, harmonisation, and collaboration are consistently associated with positive coaching outcomes.

I actively utilise NLP's systemic approach and powerful tools to manage both interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics and cultivate and sustain an effective coaching alliance. However, what particularly resonates with me is how NLP supports me in providing an individualised, 'other' focused, adaptive coaching approach that I reflect here aligns well with my literature findings that the most effective coaching relationships are personalised to the coachee's context, style and motivation. Additionally, NLP's communication models, systemic awareness, and modelling methodology offer rigorous methods for ethically engaging with the coachee's subjective experiences. I see these as aligning with my view of contemporary coaching, emphasising

relational depth, adaptability, and coachee empowerment as core dimensions of effective practice, and note that this is reflected in the coaching literature.

The discussion reinforces for me just how central the quality of the coaching alliance is to meaningful outcomes. NLP offers powerful tools for creating deep rapport and reading subtle cues. I acknowledge that I might become even more intentional and strategic in how I use those same tools, not just to connect but to facilitate the enhancement of coachee agency. I feel that I do prioritise individualised relational calibration, especially in adapting my communication style, pace and focus to match each coachee's unique preferences and context. Additionally, I actively seek direct feedback from coachees rather than relying solely on my own calibration, recognising practitioners often overestimate their effectiveness in this area. To help with this, I strive to provide a space where that feedback can be surfaced openly, directly, and immediately, without judgment and typically with positive consequences for our alliance. Looking ahead, I aim to further deepen my application of NLP to promote shared ownership of the coaching process, thereby enhancing coachee empowerment and agency. This includes continuously refining my approach to seeking permission, navigating boundaries, and maintaining presence, key elements essential for fostering a strong, adaptable, and ethical coaching alliance.

### iii. Aligned, deploy with ease

This area and the next typically revealed a shift in how the participants integrated NLP as they engaged in the coaching conversation. Here, participants spoke about incorporating distinct elements of their NLP expertise, typically without feeling that they needed to explain their actions within the usual dialogical process of coaching, because those NLP tools were 'aligned' and could be 'deployed with ease'. In these instances, the participant's interpretation of the coaching conversation at that particular point of time in the coaching conversation supported the introduction of such things as: a specific NLP presupposition, or the exploration of an individual component of NLP's model of change (for example, creating a WFO), or a particular tool or technique fitted the moment (for example, making a reframe). In these instances, the choice of relevant NLP skill or technique, or the way that it was employed, was considered to be entirely consistent with the (ICF) coaching context. In this way, a professional coach from any background would witness the kinds of topics, activities, and conversations that would unquestionably meet ICF competencies and professional ethics.

P13 summarised this type of use of NLP expertise by saying “there are things I do automatically, I don’t need to put an NLP hat on” such as “when I’m reframing ...or ...an achievable outcome in terms of goal setting”, going on to explain “I don’t say it because it is aligned” to the coaching context.

For most practitioners, it was about keeping to what had been contracted, rather than whether any specific NLP tool was in itself suitable for deployment. Maintaining the coaching alliance and rapport remained uppermost in participants’ minds whilst they coached. Most spoke of continuing to track their client’s body language and language patterns, such as P11 listening for “the linguistic patterns”, adjusting their coaching approach accordingly to their calibrations, and also utilising the information gleaned to move the session forward. For instance, P08 was “listening for ‘limiting beliefs and challenging those at times’”, while P04 spoke of using the NLP meta model as clients are “always amazed at the insights they gain from that...it’s enabling both action in a safe space and reflection”. Several participants raised the notion of ‘coach as instrument’, such as P10 explaining “if I notice something about my body that’s happening...I will bring it up and say, ‘I’m noticing, I’m sensing’” adding that they then ask their coachee, ‘how might that be relevant in our conversation today?’

According to such contributors as Witherspoon and White (1996), a coach helps explore topics, identify options, articulate challenges and generate behavioural change. Evers et al. (2006) add that the coach achieves this by delivering relevant questions to the coachee to facilitate the coachee’s own reflection and discovery. Whilst there are many different coaching approaches (Passmore et al., 2017) and their configuration and delivery can vary immensely (Blackman, 2006), a key facet is that coaching occurs ‘with’ someone, rather than ‘to’ them, thereby suggesting the importance of the relationship component (Clutterbuck, 2020). Effective, professional coaching, therefore, requires “both a mindset and a skill set” (Blackman & Clutterbuck, 2018, p. 40).

In relation to my practice, I see this use of my NLP expertise as moments when I seamlessly integrate NLP with coaching, as there is a natural alignment. When this occurs, the NLP application flows organically, aligning with the moment in the coaching process and being ethically sound from an ICF competencies and ethics perspective. NLP metamodel questioning, clarifying goals using WFO, and reframing are all examples of being seen as a part of the natural coaching dialogue, rather than being an explicit NLP ‘intervention’. Like the participants, working this way is so embedded that no explanation is required, and there is no disruption to the

sessions flow. Of course, contracting remains relevant, as does the coach's role in managing the process, but there is no sense of the coach leading or disempowering the coachee from choices and decision-making. The literature here reminds me that coaching is a relational, co-created process that requires both a mindset and a skill set, as previously mentioned.

My NLP expertise, when ethically and congruently integrated by me, strengthens my management of the coaching process, allowing me to intuitively and adaptively respond in the moment, enhancing coachee insight and transformation. Similarly, it may not just be my NLP expertise I bring here, as the choices I make have the coachee's needs in mind rather than my own preferences. As I reflect on this, I am confident that I integrate NLP into my coaching conversations with an appropriate balance between conscious deployment and embedded practice. I am also aware that when I use a reframe, challenge a limiting belief, or help define a WFO, I am consciously checking myself against the coaching contract and the context, and that what eventuates is of service to the client, rather than to my own needs or preferences. Ultimately, what happens in this area of my NLP integration reinforces to me the value of NLP to my practice, not as an external toolkit but as an integrated dimension of who I am as a coach, always seeking to act in service to my coachee's growth and autonomy.

#### iv. Artful deployment, if at all

The final category I called 'artful deployment, if at all'. Here, there was a temptation to a more ambitious use of NLP or, more specifically, NLP tools and techniques. Participants diverged significantly in their approaches, ranging from elegant and ICF-compliant integration to clunky, consciously shifting modalities. This accentuates how adept the practitioner needs to be at integrating NLP into their practice, and just how multifaceted that context might become in relation to the demands of modality management. P10 highlighted potential risks, stating "this is where coaches, if they're not clear about which role they're in...can step into the trap of mentoring, advising, consulting, etc without being aware" and went on to add "they think they're doing it out of service to the client, but they've moved out of the modality" for which there is "a psychological agreement between the two parties" and this can be unprofessional and unethical. In light of this, P11 concludes:

the onus ends up having to be heavily on the coach... I don't know what the right descriptors would be, but they would have to be nuanced enough to be able to shift gears

in either some intuitive way, or as being led by the client...and I don't know to what degree that can be taught and/or regulated in a certifiable way (P11)

Often featured in here will be the sense that the coach is “doing things to the client” (Grant, 2019b, p. 53). Whilst this was something that all the participants sought to avoid, the perception continued to be a challenge for professional NLP coaches in integrating NLP into their practice. Specific NLP tools were viewed as overly practitioner-driven, excessively mechanistic, therapeutically oriented, or ethically problematic. For example, Wildflower (2013) quotes Bandler and Grinder as describing the NLP technique known as ‘anchoring’ as ““one of the most powerful covert tools you can use as a therapist or communicator”” (pp. 35–36), emphasising that: changing between communicator and therapist, and employing something ‘covertly’ throws up ethical issues. These ethical issues relate to ‘informed consent’ and the risk of being seen to ‘manipulate’, neither of which has a place in the coaching context. However, anchoring is a naturally occurring phenomenon and can be introduced and used in a fully transparent and helpful manner. The requirement is that the practitioner is acting professionally and ethically. Grant (2019b) critiques the NLP ‘swish pattern’ technique as overly mechanistic, questioning its suitability for a client-centred coaching context.

As I reflect on ‘artful deployment, if at all’, Clutterbuck and Megginson (2011) coach maturity model and Burgess (2014) NLP competence development model came to mind simultaneously. Both models share a common emphasis on progression, from lower maturity, characterised by tool-based thinking, to higher maturity, characterised by an embodied ‘way of being’. In the coaching maturity model (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2011), the coach at the ‘systemic eclectic’ level becomes an enabler to the coachee in exploring whatever is useful to them, and the coach draws upon an eclectic mix of processes, frameworks, and tools to assist this.

In the NLP competence development model (Burgess, 2014), coaches at the ‘expert’ level “apply their skills effortlessly, almost instinctively, being open to new learning...they develop their own style...Their elegance makes NLP look easy”. In the context of professional and ethical coaching, ‘artful deployment, if at all’ serves as a valuable lens through which to evaluate practitioner confidence and competence in NLP integration.



**Table 5.7**

*Participant NLP integration in coaching practice for ‘artful deployment, if at all’*

<b>Practitioner descriptor in relation to NLP and ICF integration</b>	<b>Evaluation of competence dimensions in integrating NLP with ICF coaching</b>	<b>Profile characteristics of such practitioners</b>
Elegant ‘who you are is how you coach’ expert practitioner	Selectively use, or use with elegance, NLP expertise not straightforwardly aligned with the coaching context, but skilful deployment of such NLP tools and techniques that fulfil ICF requirements. If not possible, then contract for a choice from next tier down.	Typically, more experienced with the higher levels of qualification in both (understand their competence), OR moderate qualifications in both, but have achieved those accreditations as an integrated whole (may not fully understand their competence) Adept at relevant, ethical, professional integration of NLP and coaching and fully aware of boundaries which are successfully navigated.
Efficient ‘who you are is how you coach’ proficient practitioner	In a given context, and where permitted to, will likely remain with a choice within their expertise and experience that can be delivered assuredly ICF compliant.	Typically, suitably experienced but likely with imbalance between levels of accreditation biased towards ICF coaching and/or have a predominantly coaching practice preference. Adept at relevant, ethical, professional integration of NLP and coaching and have boundary awareness which is possibly too rigid or have an overwhelming desire to err on the side of caution.
	In a given context, and where permitted to, will go with a support choice best fitting the coachee’s preferences but still within their expertise and experience by contracting out of coaching modality.	Typically, suitably experienced but likely with imbalance between levels of accreditation biased towards NLP and/or have a predominantly NLP practice preference. Adept at relevant, ethical, professional integration of NLP and coaching and have boundary awareness which is possibly too rigid or have an overwhelming desire to err on the side of caution.
Effective/Efficient ‘predominantly tools and techniques driven’ beginner/competent practitioner	In a given context, will go with a support choice best fitting the coachee’s preferences, and likely still within their expertise and experience but possibly with insufficient contracting and modality boundary understanding.	Typically, suitably experienced but likely lower levels of one or both accreditations and typically have a less defined practice preference. Clunky at relevant, ethical, professional integration of NLP and coaching and less developed boundary awareness leading to modality and contracting challenges.

*Note.* Table created by author using participant information, Burgess (2014) NLP competence development model (p. 51), Clutterbuck and Turner (2018) coach maturity model (p. 11), International Coaching Federation (2021a) coaching code of ethics and International Coaching Federation (2025a) coaching core competencies.

Table 5.7 has been created to provide insights from participant narratives on the integration choice set and decisions based on participant profiles. Reflecting on these narratives, I recognise a shift in my own practice from efficient toward elegant, informed by my experiences with coaching, NLP, and this doctoral journey. The table highlights participants' awareness of needing to be highly attuned to role clarity, client consent, and the coaching contract. Practitioners adopting a tool-and-technique-based approach were more likely to execute their choices clumsily. They were at greater risk of taking the lead in sessions, rather than partnering for growth and autonomy. For me, this highlights the need for professional NLP bodies to enhance their support for professional practice and ethical clarity through periodic credential reapplications, supervision requirements, and CPD to avoid undermining the relational and client-centred foundations of NLP application to coaching. The concept of 'artful deployment, if at all' resonates deeply with me, highlighting the conscious decisions I frequently make in my practice. Though my practice has predominantly aligned with ICF standards, I aim to further refine the elegance of my NLP integration, exploring a broader range of options while remaining ethically compliant. I increasingly appreciate that the ethical and practical effectiveness of NLP tools depends fundamentally on the relational context and coaching mindset in which they are embedded.

v. Conclusion to Theme Four: 'What makes the difference?'

This discussion sheds light, and in a more granular way, on how NLP practitioners integrate NLP into their professional coaching practice to enhance effectiveness. Four key dimensions emerged clearly from the analysis: the 'coach state', the 'coaching alliance', along with 'aligned, deploy with ease' and 'artful deployment, if at all' in relation to the handling of NLP tools and techniques. 'Coach state' emphasised the central role of a supportive coaching mindset and the importance of the coach's self-regulation in maintaining that mindset during coaching interactions. Participants consistently highlighted NLP's ability to help them establish an appropriate coaching 'state', defined as "the gestalt of the neurological processes (body and mind) within an individual" (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000b, p. 1300). This 'state' encompassed beliefs, embodiment of NLP presuppositions, congruence, and physiological alignment, and enabled the practitioners to maintain optimal presence, openness, and attentiveness during coaching. I share participants' reflections that effective state management has mainly become automatic. However, I also acknowledge that consciously reconnecting with NLP state-regulation practices could further enhance my coaching effectiveness in the way I share this capability with my coachees. This suggests that intentional self-regulation, explicitly supported by NLP's presuppositions, enhances

coaching efficacy by ensuring congruence between internal state and external engagement with coachees. An effective ‘coaching working alliance’ is consistently emphasised as vital to successful coaching outcomes. The application of NLP expertise, intra- and interpersonally, appears to substantially contribute to building trust, rapport, effective communication, and ethical practice among participants in the coaching relationship.

The alignment between NLP presuppositions and coaching philosophies, particularly regarding the coachee’s unique subjective experiences, fosters necessary relational depth. Practitioners appreciated NLP’s structured yet flexible methodologies, notably modelling and communication techniques, as essential tools for effectively calibrating to the coachee’s ‘map of the world’. Reflecting on this, I recognise that NLP supports my capacity to individualise my coaching approach, facilitating both deeper awareness of client cues and enhanced coachee autonomy. This ability to nurture a dynamic and empowering coaching alliance through my NLP expertise is something I see myself further refining.

Regarding the integration of NLP tools and techniques, participants (and I) found the distinction between ‘aligned, deploy with ease’ and ‘artful deployment, if at all’ particularly useful. ‘Aligned, deploy with ease’ reflects practitioners’ capacity to integrate NLP seamlessly and naturally within coaching conversations. Participants highlighted techniques like well-formed outcomes (WFOs), reframing, and NLP meta-model questions as seamlessly integrated, ethically sound, and fully aligned with relevant coaching competencies. Here, the deep congruence between NLP practice and the broader coaching ethos is apparent, and NLP can be seen as an approach to enhancing coaching outcomes organically.

With ‘artful deployment, if at all,’ complex considerations regarding NLP methods, seen as practitioner-imposed interventions, are raised. Participants acknowledged varying degrees of caution, or even discomfort, deploying a varying range of other NLP tools and techniques. Heightened ethical awareness, clear role boundaries, effective contracting, and explicit consent were all emphasised as mechanisms for ensuring professional coaching outcomes eventuated. Participants’ expertise, experience, training pathways, and scope of practice shaped their approaches to resolving these challenges, yielding ethical and competent coaching outcomes. My own practice reflects this recognition that some parts of my NLP expertise naturally fit the coaching context, while other parts present challenges. I seek NLP integration in my coaching practice that is intuitive, authentic, and delivered improvisationally. Nevertheless, I remain careful to calibrate and consciously cross-check my NLP integration to maintain ethical standards, negotiate modality boundaries appropriately, and consistently enhance coachee empowerment.

Through reflection, I recognise my personal evolution towards greater discernment and elegant agility, thereby maximising opportunities to ethically and professionally deploy NLP expertise within my coaching practice.

## 5.6 Chapter conclusions

My study set out to explore the lived experiences of practitioners who are dual accredited in NLP and ICF coaching, specifically examining how they integrate NLP into their professional coaching practices. From the rich narratives, insights have been generated that reveal significant gaps between theory and practice, ethical complexities, and the inherent potential of NLP in professional coaching. Based upon the participant narratives, academic discourse and my reflections on my own practice, the key conclusion from the above discussion is that: the integration of NLP into professional coaching is undeniably valuable. However, it requires careful, ethically aware and technically informed navigation. Participants' experiences clearly revealed NLP's transformative impact on coaching outcomes, emphasising its structured, yet adaptive methodology. This is reinforced by the literature, recognising NLP's widespread practical adoption in coaching, despite continued academic criticism from some quarters. Reflectively, my professional experiences clearly validate these findings. I have consistently experienced the benefits of NLP, despite encountering complexities around modality boundaries and ethical considerations.

Across the four themes that I created, my study suggests that:

- **Integration is negotiated, not assumed**  
Dual-accredited coaches make deliberate, context-sensitive choices about when and how to use NLP within coaching, reflecting high levels of ethical discernment.
- **Boundaries are relational and reflexive**  
Participants defined professional boundaries not as fixed rules, but as dynamic zones that require constant awareness and client contracting.
- **Embodiment replaces technique**  
Mature practitioners no longer 'do NLP' but embody its presuppositions, resourcefulness, and curiosity, along with respect for clients' models of the world, within ICF-aligned coaching.
- **Reflexivity anchors professional integrity**  
The coaches' ongoing reflection on self, process, and ethics represents the mechanism through which integration remained credible, client-centred, and safe.

The discussion behind these began with an exploration of NLP's contested reputation. Participants revealed how NLP's historical academic critique, variously labelled as 'pseudoscience', 'charlatanry', or lacking empirical evidence, has influenced their practice. Despite these critiques,

participants consistently affirmed NLP's pragmatic utility, reinforcing my own experiences; I have found that NLP deeply enriches the coaching process. Analysis of the literature reinforced this tension, revealing a persistent theory-practice gap, intensified by differing evidentiary standards, both between academia and practice and across academic disciplines. My professional practice reflections align closely with these findings, acknowledging NLP's reputation challenges whilst emphasising its undeniable value to practitioners provided that it is approached ethically and professionally.

Furthermore, evolving participant perceptions indicated strategic adjustments in how explicitly NLP was communicated to clients, in direct response to NLP's contested reputation. Participants often adapted their language and transparency based on anticipated client reactions and broader systems perceptions. This adaptive stance mirrors my professional practice, where sensitivity to the client's disposition toward NLP requires careful contracting and explicit communication to maintain client trust and ethical clarity. The literature also detailed similar adaptive strategies within coaching contexts, where practitioners' backgrounds significantly shape client engagement and modality management.

Challenges related to modality demarcation, particularly the careful navigation of coaching boundaries when integrating NLP, were highlighted. Participants emphasised ethical clarity and explicit role awareness, consistently prioritising informed consent and client autonomy during modality shifts. The literature confirms this boundary complexity, identifying a persistent lack of research on how practitioners operationalise these boundaries. My professional reflection confirms that maintaining ethical and professional coherence within modality transitions demands rigorous attention to contracting and transparent communication. Such clarity ensures NLP remains congruent with coaching's collaborative, non-directive ethos, avoiding potential ethical pitfalls associated with modality confusion. Within this context, the discussion emphasises the strategic importance of practitioners' maintaining 'informed consent', highlighting permission-based modality shifts and clear client communication. Participants' narratives consistently supported transparency, reflecting broader ethical standards advocated by coaching accreditation bodies like ICF and EMCC. My practice similarly reinforces informed consent as foundational to ethical integration, ensuring modality shifts occur explicitly and deliberately, supporting rather than undermining coachee autonomy.

In relation to NLP's contribution to learning and growth, its structured and adaptive approach to facilitating meaningful change was highlighted as unique and a standout that fully aligned with coaching. Participants consistently affirmed NLP's role as a powerful catalyst for accelerated

personal insight, enhanced self-awareness, and increased behavioural flexibility. Again, the literature supported these assertions, positioning NLP's explicit presuppositions, structured outcome-setting methods, and adaptive experimentation as significantly advantageous compared to less structured coaching methodologies. Reflectively, my professional journey echoes these conclusions, recognising NLP methodologies, particularly around presuppositional mindset and crystallising intentionality, as critical to enhancing both my coaching effectiveness and my personal development as a practitioner. Furthermore, NLP's explicit presuppositional mindset emerged as pivotal, with participants emphasising the powerful impact of internalising NLP presuppositions on their professional practice. In this instance, the literature highlights this strength, noting NLP's explicit clarity about beliefs and assumptions, which again differentiates it positively from many other coaching approaches. For me, embodying NLP presuppositions has significantly strengthened my personal and professional congruence, enabling greater alignment with coachee goals and systemic contexts.

In terms of what makes the difference from NLP integration in coaching practice, some key dimensions were identified: 'coach state', 'coaching alliance', 'aligned, deploy with ease' and 'artful deployment, if at all'. Participants strongly highlighted the management of a 'coach state' as foundational, citing NLP's methods for self-regulation as critical for optimal coaching effectiveness. The importance of self-regulation in coaching is widely supported in the literature, positioning NLP as uniquely effective due to its explicit state-management methods. My practice reflections confirm these findings, and I recognise deliberate NLP-based state regulation as essential for maintaining a congruent and effective coaching presence. Similarly, participants emphasised NLP's role in cultivating a robust coaching alliance, citing NLP's sophisticated communication techniques as central to building trust, rapport, and adaptive responsiveness to coachee preferences. The literature emphasises the centrality of an effective coaching alliance to delivering successful coaching outcomes. Further, my own reflections identify advanced communicative and rapport-building methods as significantly enhancing my relational effectiveness, allowing tailored, context-sensitive coaching approaches that consistently align with client needs.

Additionally, participants asserted that NLP tools and techniques, such as well-formed outcomes and reframing, align with the coaching context and integrate effortlessly and ethically into the coaching dialogue. The fact that coaching's relational nature readily accommodates such NLP integration is borne out in the literature, and my practice confirms this to be the case as well, provided, of course, that it occurs transparently and ethically. Seamless NLP integration enhances

coaching's depth and effectiveness, provided ethical vigilance and professional clarity remain paramount.

Ethical concerns arose regarding the application of NLP tools and techniques that might be viewed as more practitioner-led, mechanistic, or therapeutic in nature. At their worst, they might be seen as 'manipulative', although this appeared to be more about the practitioner's use of the method in the coaching context, rather than the method itself. Participants' cautious approaches, expressed through 'artful deployment, if at all', highlighted their ethical discernment and helped avoid some literature warnings that NLP could compromise client autonomy if misapplied. My professional reflections highlight the critical importance of discerning ethical NLP deployment, continually refining my practice toward heightened ethical sensitivity, explicit informed consent, and transparent modality transitions. Finally, the discussion highlighted opportunities for NLP to bridge its theory-practice gap by increasing academic engagement, conducting structured research, and promoting methodological transparency. Participants implicitly called for more explicit research to validate NLP's coaching efficacy, reflecting critiques in the literature that advocate clearer theoretical underpinnings and more robust evidentiary support. Reflectively, I strongly advocate for academically rigorous, practitioner-led research that explicitly acknowledges NLP's inherently relational, phenomenological, and context-sensitive nature.

In conclusion, this synthesis of the discussion clearly demonstrates NLP's considerable potential in professional coaching practice, significantly enriching practitioners' capabilities, coachees' experiences, and relational depth. However, successful NLP integration demands rigorous ethical mindfulness, transparent modality management, technical competence, and structured professional verification (accreditations, supervision, CPD). Future developments should prioritise enhancing NLP's theoretical clarity, evidentiary support, and ethical standards, ensuring it remains aligned with coaching's foundational values. Ultimately, these insights emphasise the need for sustained dialogue between NLP practitioners and the broader academic and professional coaching communities, seeking reconciliation between theoretical critiques and practical applications. By fostering greater transparency, ethical vigilance, and professional maturity, NLP's full potential in professional coaching can be realised with confidence, securing its legitimacy and deepening its transformational impact.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

My study contributes by exploring the impact of NLP on coaching practices and by advancing the ongoing discourse on modality boundaries and their interactions, blending academic inquiry with insights from professional practice. This informs and enriches the still-evolving nature of both coaching and NLP, in the context of enhancing academic understanding and professional practice for the benefit of practitioners, clients, and the wider system(s) of which they are a part. Furthermore, the development of training programs could be guided by my study's conclusions and recommendations to benefit practitioners without an NLP background, and enable those accredited in just NLP to enhance their practice within an ICF-compliant coaching framework (Passmore, 2016a). By providing a discussion grounded in participant narratives and a broad yet focused review of the literature and context, my study navigates the interdisciplinary implications of NLP in practice, mindful of the evolving nature of literature selection and the quality of available NLP sources in relation to the coaching context.

My research study is titled “Integrating modalities in the support professions: How practitioners, accredited in both coaching and NLP, apply their knowledge and skills within their professional practice”. My study sought to explore the lived experience of practitioners in the helping professions who integrated multiple sources of skills and knowledge into their practice. In my study, the coaching context was the domain selected for enquiry, and the expertise being integrated by the practitioners investigated was ICF coaching and NLP. These were chosen specifically by me as I am a qualified and experienced practitioner in both fields and consider myself a researcher-practitioner from within. I have over 25 years of professional experience across both fields, to date delivering over 18,000 hours of practice. This, I believe, has added multiple additional benefits to my study's implementation and output. My professional practice statement (PPS) relates to my being ‘a developer and deliverer of personal and professional development experiences’. My reflections on my own professional practice, through my review of learning (RoL), regarding my activities in these same fields, helped me crystallise into the research topic upon which my study is based. The dimensions of my reflections on practice included:

- How might a practitioner bring as a strength to a particular practice context (like coaching) the breadth and depth of their skills and knowledge (like coaching and NLP)?
- How does a practitioner distinguish between different modalities (like coaching, mentoring, and training) as they practice?

- How does a practitioner navigate any theory-practice gap they encounter as they practice between what they are taught and what they judge to be effective?
- How does a practitioner navigate the ethical and contractual requirements that may be placed upon them in configuring their practice response, cognisant of the above?

The significance of answering these questions is increasingly relevant to a rapidly professionalising field like coaching. Although coaching remains unregulated as a profession, the strengthening role of accreditation bodies in a context of more powerful and aware purchasers, like the digital coaching platforms and global corporates, creates a context of professionalisation. For clarity, the study is viewing coaching through the lens of external coaches, that is, ones that are typically self-employed (or perhaps banding together with some other coaches), rather than internal coaches (employees of companies, such as a manager using coaching with their team, or a human resource professional for whom some part of their role may include coaching).

Such practitioners, at least those intending to make a sustainable living from the profession, seek to continuously enhance their coaching skills and capabilities (although for some this might partly be due to membership and accreditation requirements), and to be perceived as ethical and professional in their activities. Further, the incredible growth in coaching has attracted people from diverse backgrounds, such as teachers, psychologists, leaders, and counsellors. Whilst the professional coach, gaining coaching accreditation, is likely to have no problem acquiring coaching skills, there remains a challenge for them: how might they integrate their existing skills and knowledge into their coaching practice? Which in turn leads to other important questions, such as: What is coaching? And what does my being a coach mean to me?

If a theory-practice has not already been encountered by the practitioner at this point, it will likely soon follow. That theory-practice gap typically relates to the theory of what coaching is versus what actually happens in practice, and may involve the practitioner crossing into another modality, such as mentoring, training, or consulting. Of course, it is recognised that the definition of coaching applied and the degree of complexity in the breadth and depth of the practitioner's skills and experience are likely to impact the size of any theory-practice gap encountered. An example from the extant literature is the debate between those who advocate that coaching and mentoring are distinct and those who view the two as conflated. For this reason, my study chose the ICF coaching definition, which was the most well-known and clearly delineated coaching definition at the time, largely because it held coaching as distinct from mentoring, thereby requiring enhanced modality awareness on the part of the practitioner. Likewise, NLP was chosen because, amongst other reasons, it is the third most used coaching approach amongst practitioners and it shares a

very high degree of similarity with coaching, yet has a more practitioner-led, interventionist reputation, largely due to its historical association with therapy.

My interest in my study, not least as a researcher-practitioner from within the field of study, was then in how such practitioners, accredited and experienced in both ICF coaching and NLP, set about configuring their practice activities cognisant of the modalities they use and, in a context, built around adherence to ICF ethics and coaching competencies. This I refer to as the professional coach practitioner's challenge: how to leverage an extensive breadth and depth of skills, knowledge and experience while adhering to their chosen definition of coaching and/or meeting the compliance expectations of either the professional body they are affiliated with, or the entity employing them, or both. Few studies have explored how different groups of practitioner's view and use coaching, and even fewer studies have explored the lived experience of practitioners integrating skills and knowledge in the coaching context. The coaching field has the expression 'who you are is how you coach', and this resonates well in a context of coaching practitioners seeking to bring their full selves (including other skills and knowledge) to their coaching, whilst also ensuring they do so within the prescribed professional constraints of the coaching modality as defined by ICF.

I discovered a paucity of extant literature on studies investigating the lived experience of coach practitioners, particularly regarding the integration of knowledge and skills from different fields. Authors point to earlier exploration of boundaries between professions and to a waning interest in such exploration despite many important questions still unanswered (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Bachkirova & Baker, 2018; Baker, 2014; Giraldez-Hayes, 2021; Grant & Green, 2018). One standout study is one by Sime and Jacob (2018) that explored seven ICF MCCs' lived experience with regards to roles, borders, and boundaries within their professional practice context, although the coaches' activity areas were coaching and therapy. Distinguishing the boundaries of coaching from other modalities and clarifying expectations within the coaching modality are topics of an earlier paper by Popovic and Jinks (2013).

Given that the Sime and Jacob (2018) study focused on practitioners at the pinnacle of their field navigating complexity and ambiguity in their practice, it suggests the existence of a 'theory-practice gap' which, according to Monaghan (2015) is where there is a "gap between what theory states should happen, and the reality of what actually does" (p. e1). Such gaps have previously been suggested in nursing, sales and social work (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020; Pullins et al., 2016; Rolfe, 1993). Gebhardt (2016) puts the scarcity of academic discourse on this subject down to coaches' ethical concerns linked to their ties with their accreditation bodies, whilst others attribute

the paucity to challenges of delineating what coaching actually is, especially when considered in the context of its overlap with other modalities (Hardingham, 2004; Parsloe & Leedham, 2022; Rutkowski, 2014; Summerfield, 2006).

My study centred on this gap in the literature, exploring the lived experience of coach practitioners, accredited and experienced in two distinct knowledge and skill areas (coaching and NLP), who are integrating them in a defined professional practice context (ICF coaching). Building on this, the study by Pandolfi (2020, p. 13) identified coaches' 'expertise and skills' and coaches' 'background' as two predominant active ingredients in the success of coaching, calling for more research to better "understand the influence of coaches' backgrounds on coaching". Answering that call, a more recent study by Fisher et al. (2023) suggests that coaches' background and prior career experiences were reported as making a difference to the coaching studied, with coachees having greater confidence in their coaches and their coaching, coachees feeling better understood, and the coaches themselves feeling more confident in questioning, probing, and challenging their coachees. This echoes the work of Erdos et al. (2021, p. 177) whose study advocated deepening "understanding of how coaching as a context-sensitive and dynamic change intervention can aid clients' development as a meaning-making process...[embracing] the possibility of coaching being socially constructed" and adds 'coaches' background' and 'prior career experiences' to be considered in research to "account for the dynamically patterned context-sensitive nature of coaching".

My study reflects an interpretivist phenomenological approach to the lived experience of practitioners trained in both NLP and ICF coaching, exploring how they navigate the terrain of integrating these skills and knowledge within their professional practice context. Through a reflective thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) of fourteen participant interviews collected through semi-structured interviews, my study illuminates the multifaceted impact of NLP on coaching practices. I identify myself as a researcher-practitioner within the field, allowing me to interpret data through a lens of my own professional experience, as well as through the academic rigour of my study's participants' perspectives.

My study provides insights into the application of NLP to participants' practices, despite the scepticism NLP often faces, revealing a highly sophisticated, ethical, and client-centred approach among the practitioners concerned. Clear communication, informed consent, and adaptive practices to meet client needs and perceptions were highly evident. My study also advances new knowledge on a number of fronts, particularly at the coach-coachee interface and the skill of tailoring, including the use of NLP, to foster an environment conducive to growth and

development. My study also raises critical questions about how NLP is communicated and how that affects its acceptance and use, as well as ethical considerations around contracting for modalities and gaining informed consent to share ideas and introduce activities. Based on this, my research contributes to the ongoing discourse on coaching professional practice, the role NLP can play in amplifying the impact of coaching, and the broader implications for personal and professional development.

My study reveals a multifaceted application of NLP, rather than a broad-brushed adoption or rejection of its incorporation into the coaching practices of the study's participants. The NLP coach practitioners unanimously acknowledge the potent synergy between NLP and (ICF) coaching practices. This synergy is particularly evident in the way NLP techniques enhance communication, deepen client understanding, and facilitate more profound transformational change. However, NLP coach practitioners also pointed to challenges in integrating NLP into their coaching practice, including navigating perceptions of NLP, maintaining ethical boundaries around modalities, and aligning with the core competencies of coaching as outlined by the ICF. Many NLP coach practitioners described the process of integrating NLP with coaching as a transformative experience, one that not only enhanced their skills but also contributed to their own personal and professional development.

This reflection emphasises the importance of continuous learning and self-improvement in coaching and NLP. From a practical application perspective, the adaptability of NLP tools in meeting diverse self-management requirements (intra- and inter-personally) and enhancing the choice set of coaching contextual resources was celebrated by NLP coach practitioners. NLP tools and techniques for goal setting, communication, and systemic change were amongst the variety of strategies and techniques shared by the NLP coach practitioners. The practitioners made a distinction concerning NLP tools and techniques and their deployment in the coaching context. Some NLP tools and techniques, such as framing, were seen to sit comfortably within the coaching context and could therefore be deployed without concern when their suitability arose. Contrastingly, other NLP tools and techniques, such as timeline, required more thought about their appropriateness and the approach to deploying them if used in a coaching session. From a professional practice perspective, my research contributes to the ongoing discourse on integrating diverse methodologies in coaching. It provides a framework for effectively integrating NLP into coaching practices, offering valuable insights for all coaches. Furthermore, my study illuminates the potential of NLP for a range of coaching contexts, from executive and leadership coaching to personal development and life coaching.

Building on my four high-level findings from my study it can be said that: integration is negotiated, not assumed, boundaries are relational and reflexive, embodiment replaces technique, and reflexivity anchors professional integrity. Accordingly, several conclusions can be drawn about the implications for coaching and NLP training. Traditional coaching training typically treats boundaries as procedural: when to refer, what not to do, or how to maintain confidentiality. My findings deepen this understanding by showing that in integrative practice:

- **Boundaries are negotiated, not static**

NLP-trained coaches use heightened sensory and linguistic awareness to notice subtle shifts in client readiness, adjusting interventions ethically.

- **Boundaries are internal as well as external**

Practitioners used NLP's calibration and state-management tools to monitor their presence, emotions, and triggers, thereby strengthening their boundary awareness and navigation.

- **Boundaries are sites of reflexivity**

By consciously reflecting 'who I am being' versus 'what I am doing', coaches maintain congruence between NLP techniques and coaching ethics.

Thus, my study expands boundary discourse in coaching away from 'compliance' and towards 'discernment': a lived, moment-by-moment practice of ethical sensemaking. This then has multiple implications for coaching and NLP training, supervision, and broader professional practice. With regards to coaching and NLP training, coaching qualifications could include modules on 'cross-modality appreciation and discernment'. This would train learners to reflect on how techniques from other domains (such as NLP) can be ethically and contextually integrated. Also, NLP curricula could reposition their models (such as the Meta-model or neurological levels) as reflective practice frameworks rather than solely as intervention tools. This enhances the reflective use of NLP models in coaching. Similarly, NLP training could enhance accreditation awareness in other fields (such as ICF-compliant coaching) by including elements that orient to coaching ethics (ICF, EMCC, AC, etc) and their competency frameworks to better prepare practitioners for professional integration.

In considering the practical impact of my findings on coaching practice, several key points can be made that expand on the points mentioned above. For instance, in client engagement, effective integration of NLP with coaching enhances a coach's capacity to remain both present and purposeful. Coaches reported that NLP tools, such as calibration, pacing, and reframing, all sharpened their sensory and linguistic awareness, improving attunement and rapport. In daily

practice, this translates into heightened awareness, recognising subtle shifts in client state and language, timely responsiveness that deepens inquiry, and enriched reflection. Coaches can use NLP tools ethically and professionally, avoiding or adapting tools and approaches that might appear to direct the client, instead utilising them as awareness-based resources that support deeper presence and the depth of inquiry. Similarly, NLP's sensory acuity and state-management techniques help coaches maintain ethical self-regulation, particularly when navigating clients' vulnerability or emotional intensity. In this way, NLP helps the coach monitor both external boundaries (role clarity, contracting, and scope) alongside internal ones (emotional state, congruence, and triggers), redefining professional boundaries as reflexive zones or 'boundaries as awareness', thereby supporting congruence between NLP techniques and relevant ICF competencies.

The dual-accredited practitioners identified how they benefited from CPD that integrates reflective, embodied, and inter-modality literacy. My study's findings can provide further impact on practice by enhancing training and CPD activities that strengthen these capacities. CPD design could include peer reflection groups using NLP's modelling principles to analyse coaching excellence, as well as tools such as neurological levels or reframing techniques to track personal/professional development and growth, and self-regulation under performance pressure. This ability to utilise NLP to embed reflexivity, presence, and linguistic awareness into CPD supports the evolution in practice when integrating NLP into coaching from 'doing' NLP to being truly 'integrative' through embodied presence and awareness.

My study also suggests supervision informed by NLP could blend meta-level inquiry with reflective depth. The Meta-model could be used in supervision to explore how coaches represent their client experiences linguistically. Supervisors could also use neurological levels to help coaches notice at what level their stated challenges lie. In this way, NLP supervision would therefore emphasise awareness of process language, ethical congruence, and embodied presence, extending NLP's traditional performance focus into developmental supervision. There are also broader professional implications stemming from my study's findings. For instance, in coaching educators, my research highlights the importance of teaching inter-modality literacy to help future coaches critically evaluate multiple frameworks without over-identifying with any particular one. In turn, for accreditation bodies, my study's findings appear to support the recognition of cross-trained practitioners as valuable integrators who can strengthen both evidence-based rigour and practitioner creativity in the field.

Strengthening this consideration of the impact my study's findings might have, now focusing on its possible implications for the profession, the significance of my study's findings arises from: advancing professional practitioner dialogue, contributing to professional standards, and developing professional credibility for the wider coaching community. As my research explores the integration of coaching and NLP by reframing the process as one of ethical discernment in action, attention shifts away from the debate over NLP's legitimacy toward practitioner reflexivity, client contracting, and embodied presence. These are all dimensions closely aligned with ICF core competencies and EMCC's emphasis on reflective practice. By articulating how dual-accredited coaches negotiate credibility and boundaries, my research promotes new ways of considering integrative coaching practice with notions of 'integration maturity', 'identity negotiation', and 'boundaries-as-awareness'.

Building on the above points, my study provides concrete recommendations to inform accreditation frameworks, professional training syllabi, and supervision practices across the coaching and NLP domains. Professional bodies could reference this research when refining competency frameworks to recognise cross-modality discernment, defined as 'the capacity to apply diverse methodologies without compromising ethical and professional standards, or client-centred practice'. Further, coaching and NLP training organisations can adopt my study's emphasis on inter-modality literacy, training practitioners to integrate expertise responsibly and contextually. For instance, using neurological levels in supervision would enable supervisees to identify practice challenges at the behavioural, belief, and identity levels.

At a field level, my research strengthens NLP's position within the evidence-informed coaching community by demonstrating that when NLP-informed practice is applied reflexively and ethically, professional coaching standards can be met, whilst the coaching effect can be amplified through its focus on awareness, presence, language, and embodiment. For the coaching profession, the findings expand the concept of competence to include practitioner reflexivity and inter-modality integration as dimensions of professional maturity. For the NLP community, the findings offer an academically grounded pathway to engage more fully with mainstream professional bodies and evolve toward a supervised, ethically aligned, and credible practice culture.

In summary, my research offers a helpful contribution to the field by blending academic inquiry with insights gleaned from practice. It reflects the still-evolving nature of both coaching and NLP, accentuating the endless possibilities for growth and development when these modalities are deployed. As a researcher-practitioner from within the field of study, I anticipate that my research will inspire others in the field to explore how they are integrating the diverse knowledge and skills

that they likely hold, and to continuously seek new ways to enhance their practice for the benefit of their clients and the broader system of which they are a part.

I miss talking to other practitioners. It reminds me that I miss the structure of learning, you know, learning things together in shared ways and then putting things into practice. It reminds me that I could use NLP more effectively and intentionally than I do (P11).

## Chapter 7: Recommendations

Given the comprehensive nature of my thesis exploring the integration of NLP into the coaching practices of fourteen dual accredited coaching practitioners, the following recommendations that I put forward promote the potential for my research to have impact and contribute to the field, as well as support my continued development as a professional practitioner from within the field of study, and in relation to my broader professional practice framework, as follows:

- Further empirical research: given the paucity of studies within the extant literature regarding the integration of diverse expertise into the coaching context by professional coaching practitioners, along with current discourse in the literature about the coach's background and experience having an effect upon coaching outcomes and impact, further research is recommended that may look at other areas of dual accreditation (for example: counselling and coaching, leadership and coaching, psychotherapy and coaching, teaching and coaching, and so on) or to take my own field of study (NLP and coaching) deeper or more longitudinally.
- Deepen theoretical frameworks: Given the plethora of coaching models applied within the coaching context, consideration of NLP epistemology and methodology in relation to these coaching models may reveal areas for effective deployment and enhanced application of NLP in the coaching context. This could, for example, include theories of learning, behaviour change, and human development that could improve the academic foundation for NLP's integration into coaching practice, as well as provide modelling opportunities for coaching approaches recognised for their greatest impact.
- Ethical considerations and best practices: further examining and articulating ethical considerations and best practices when integrating NLP and coaching could provide enhanced guidance around the use of NLP appropriate to the contexts in which it is applied. It is considered that these would likely differ across therapeutic, coaching, educational, and other applications of NLP, which appear to be missing from the literature.
- Cross-disciplinary applications: The study highlights NLP's applications across multiple contexts. Separating NLP's epistemology and methodology from its techniques presents an opportunity to seek an appropriate exposition of their application across different fields, rather than assuming practitioners rely on a straightforward mapping from one field to another. Given many of its historical criticisms, it is likely that these criticisms will just follow NLP unless a different approach is taken for each field of application. It's never too late.

- Practitioner training and development: from the study, it was suggested, anecdotally at least, that those having the easiest and likely most effective time in integrating NLP into their coaching practice were those practitioners who had been trained in NLP and ICF coaching simultaneously, although a drawback for them was that they often were unable to differentiate what came from the NLP lineage. Following these were those who had learnt the two separately, but taken their studies and practice to the higher levels in both and had a heightened awareness of the breadth and depth possibilities with NLP, matched with an elegance in making judgements about what suited the coaching context and how to navigate other modalities, if used. From this, my view is that those qualified in NLP would benefit from a coaching conversion course that would be built along ICF competencies, so that they would become more sensitive to expectations within different modality contexts, and similarly, a coach conversion course for those who have had little or no exposure to NLP to learn what NLP has to offer in amplifying coaching effect. In both cases, more attention should be paid to the epistemology and methodology of NLP, rather than just to its extensive tools and techniques (many of which might be perceived as more therapeutic in approach).
- Professional association guidelines: enhanced collaboration between NLP membership organisations to develop or refine guidelines and accreditation standards that specifically address the integration of NLP and coaching. This would contribute to the professionalisation and quality assurance of the field and would also benefit from syllabuses focusing on the epistemology and methodology of NLP, rather than just its extensive tools and techniques (many of which are more therapeutic in focus), thereby ensuring that it becomes more contemporary in its content. This would likely encourage a return to the wellspring of NLP and give rise to new outputs of modelling activities, thereby creating new tools and techniques for new contexts and more universally embraced.
- Public awareness and education: Initiate public awareness campaigns or educational programs to inform potential coachees and organisations about the benefits and limitations of NLP in coaching. This can help manage expectations and promote informed choices in coaching services. This would best begin through NLP and coaching membership and accreditation bodies and would likely need to be supported by publication in peer reviewed journals for NLP developments in coaching locating NLP epistemologically and methodologically within accepted academic approaches for the field in which studies relate and providing the kind of evidence that would be expected for the types of claims being

made, most likely compared with similar that exist for other coaching methodologies of similar import.

- Personal reflection and continuous learning: encourage practitioners to reflect and learn continuously, emphasising the importance of self-awareness, ethical practice, and the pursuit of knowledge as central to the effective integration of NLP and coaching. Within NLP, membership bodies could help by producing annually renewable practising certificates that require supervision and continuing professional development (CPD) hours to support the professionalisation of NLP coaches. This may require a new agreed syllabus, hopefully agreed across all NLP bodies, for an accreditation called 'Professional NLP coach' which might be pre-approved by ICF, EMCC, and/or AC.

In a more concrete articulation of the practical significance and professional impact of my study, I will elaborate further here on my researcher-practitioner view of what might be done in relation to my recommendations for CPD, supervision, and the wider professional practitioner community. In relation to CPD, the key purpose would be to help practitioners to have the flexibility to translate NLP principles into ICF-aligned, client-centred practice that honours both paradigms. Inter-modality literacy and reflexive integration capacity are central to this, with modules centred on peer learning communities that explore, using case-based scenarios or dilemmas: integration maturity, ethical self-awareness, and boundary discernment. The CPD thus provided should move beyond technical upskilling to cultivating reflexive competence. This would mean supporting coaches to 'be' integrative, not merely to 'do' integration. Ideally, such CPD would be offered by both ICF-accredited CCE providers and NLP training schools that identify themselves as preparing practitioners for the professional coaching context. This then would ensure both methodological rigour and reflective practice for all.

Building on this as a form of CPD, there is supervision. Supervision for such dual-accredited practitioners might combine reflective depth and linguistic precision. This enables practitioners to remain ethically centred while drawing flexibly on NLP-informed awareness. The NLP meta-model might prove fruitful in exploring how practitioners narrate their work and decisions made in vivo. This would surface assumptions, deletions, and generalisations through reflection. Combined with neurological levels, it would likely help practitioners identify whether their professional challenges lie in the behavioural, belief, or identity layers. A framework for integrative supervision might thus be conceived and developed, and this could be explicitly recognised for cross-modality discernment, which could be a development goal within credential renewal or progression.

In considering the implications for coaches, training organisations, accrediting bodies and supervisors in responding to my study's findings, central to any response is the understanding that integration is a negotiated and reflexive process. There can be no automatic blending of techniques or a rule-based process with established procedures. Each client requires ethical discernment and contextual judgement from the practitioner. This reinforces the notion of seeing NLP in the coaching context as offering reflective lenses rather than directive techniques to the practitioner. Professionalism, and indeed congruence, arises from the development of inner boundaries through NLP embodiment in practice, continually checking 'who am I being?' rather than 'what am I doing?'. Through this, coaches would gain a framework for embodied, ethically grounded flexibility and be able to draw from diverse expertise without diluting the core integrity of ethical and professional coaching.

With this at its core, training schools can strengthen professional alignment for those seeking to integrate expertise by embedding cross-modality discernment and reflexivity into their curriculum design. In part, this is also supported by a similar shift by accreditation bodies in requiring this. Accreditation bodies and professional (membership) associations play a crucial role in supporting integrative competence as a professional standard and offering joint CPD or accreditation tracks or faculty programmes between NLP and coaching institutes to foster professional coherence. Training institutes are evolving toward meta-professional education, equipping practitioners to negotiate and navigate interdisciplinary complexity with competence, confidence, and ethical awareness. Across accrediting bodies, encourage collaboration to build evidence-informed, ethically reflexive standards, perhaps recognising 'integration maturity' as part of credential maintenance and advancement. Through this, the field gains frameworks for evaluating integration as enacted, maturing professional dialogue, and ethical practice. Ultimately, the practical significance of this research, in my opinion, lies in embracing the 'humanness' of the integration conversation. It invites practitioners, educators, and professional bodies to move beyond polarity and boundary definitions, and towards partnerships in which ethical discernment, reflexivity, and embodied awareness are valued and promoted as hallmarks of credible, integrative ethical coaching practice.

By addressing these recommendations, I believe more can be done to assist 5m+ accredited NLP practitioners to join the ranks of 3m or so coaches, but by meeting in the zone of 'professional renewable accreditation', where possibly only 150,000 coaches or NLP coach practitioners currently operate. This would require those involved to be supportive of both academic inquiry

and practical application, and collectively these efforts would enhance the credibility, effectiveness, and ethical application of integrating NLP in the coaching context.

## Chapter 8: Reflective Practice

### 8.1 Introduction

[REDACTED]

## 8.2 Analysis of my reflections

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Table 8.1**

*My personal and professional development activities by field over my doctoral journey*

	Pre-2017 (start of DProfPrac)	2025 (end of DProfPrac)	2033 (Intended)
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

*Note.* Table constructed by the author.

i. Shifts in my personal identity

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

ii. Evolution of my professional framework of practice

[Redacted text block containing multiple paragraphs of blacked-out content]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

### 8.3 Reflexivity statement resulting from my researcher-practitioner positionality within my study

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## 8.4 Conclusions to the reflective practice component of the PRE

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Table 8.2**

*Framework of professional practice*

[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## **Chapter 9: Conclusions to the full Practitioner Research Enquiry**

This PRE represents the culmination of seven years' work to provide an in depth, multi-layered exploration around the topic of “Integrating modalities in the support professions. How practitioners, accredited in both coaching and NLP, apply their expertise within their professional practice” in relation to my DProfPrac programme. The PRE comprises two parts: a practitioner thesis component and a reflective practice component. My PRE had three learning outcomes, which I now find better expressed as: to investigate the real-world challenges that active coaches face in managing the theory-practice gap, to generate practitioner insights into how NLP can amplify coaching effect, and to reflect on my own professional evolution as both a coach and researcher-practitioner.

The first two learning outcomes were approached through the first component of my PRE: my practitioner thesis. Having established my professional practice statement (PPS) in 2018 of being “a developer and deliverer of personal and professional development learning experiences”, built around my ikigai, I consolidated 18,000 hours of coaching and mentoring practice from over 25 years by embarking on becoming NLP and ICF coaching dual-accredited to the highest levels in parallel with my doctoral journey. In this context, my initial foray into the academic discourse around my professional practice framework (PPF) as a coach/mentor heightened my understanding of a theory-practice gap in coaching. In time, I articulated this into my practitioner thesis' research question: “How do practitioners accredited in both ICF coaching and NLP apply their expertise within their professional practice?”

This had three research objectives: to explore the lived experiences of such practitioners, to examine the professional and ethical considerations, and to identify useful practices for doing so that amplify the coaching effect. Adopting a constructivist-interpretivist philosophical stance, this led to a qualitative, cross-sectional research design utilising interpretive phenomenology as its methodology, with the following research methods: semi-structured interviews for data collection, purposive and snowball sampling, and reflexive thematic analysis for data analysis. Based on the use of ‘information power’, a sample of 14 practising dual-accredited NLP and ICF coaching professionals formed my dataset. As I identified as an ‘insider’, I took the stance of a researcher-practitioner, which was consistent with both my choice of methodology and methods, but also sat well with the second requirement of my PRE in relation to the reflective practice component.

I believe these two learning outcomes have been met satisfactorily, with a meaningful set of insights linked to findings generated through interwoven discussion of the literature and my own researcher-practitioner perspectives. These yield both theoretical and practical value, which is also applied to my PPF, reinforcing the intentions around professional development, ethical practice, and meaningful contributions to the field. The research objectives of my primary research component I believe, have also been met were also met, not least through the four themes of my study which reflected the practitioner journey represented in the participants' narratives: the initial barriers and tensions, boundary management challenges, opportunities for mutual learning and growth through co-created coaching, and the eventual emergence of context sensitive integration practices. Importantly, my study suggests that, while NLP, which served as a heuristic in the study, continues to be contested in some academic quarters, its value at the practitioner level is understood by many practitioners not as an unquestioned system but as pragmatic.

My PRE also included a reflective practice component, and my third learning outcome related to this requirement was to glean insights around my own development as a reflective researcher-practitioner. This has been achieved in multiple ways. Firstly, identifying my positionality as a researcher-practitioner within the primary research component of my PRE has given me a platform to share my reflective and reflexive involvement in the field, as an 'insider', thereby reinforcing the impact my research had on my own practice and my PPF. Separately, I have tracked my journey through the DPP through self-interview reflections that have helped me engage with my development, as a coach and as a researcher-practitioner. In this way, the PRE experience demonstrates a deepened capacity for reflexive practice, critical thinking and scholarly engagement. The journey of conducting this enquiry has allowed me to embody more of what is stated in both my PPF and my PPS, integrating research learning with my coaching practice. This has enhanced both my capabilities as a practising coach and my ability to meaningfully contribute to the profession. For me, this highlights that a corollary benefit to me has been that my research journey hasn't just provided more knowledge but has transformed me into a researcher-practitioner with enhanced research skills that enable me to help further the communities to which I feel a part.

At its heart, this PRE sought to generate such insights not only for academic purposes, but also for my own development as a reflective researcher-practitioner, and for the broader coaching and NLP communities. It provided a vehicle for critically examining the complexities, synergies and tensions involved in integrating NLP into coaching practice in a professional and ethical manner.

Academically, the PRE contributes to the advancement of coaching scholarship by offering insights into how practitioners navigate the ethical, relational, and epistemological tensions that arise when integrating diverse expertise. My study adds to the literature by challenging simplistic categorisations or dismissals of NLP, showing that dual-accredited NLP coaches can ethically integrate the two through their professional maturity, ethical discernment, and technical understanding. Methodologically, my research demonstrates the value of a reflexive insider in surfacing layered practitioner knowledge that might otherwise remain invisible to external observers or through quantitative approaches. Practically, the PRE offers several important recommendations. For practising coaches, it emphasises the necessity of clear contracting, transparency about the use of modalities, and a commitment to ethical standards that prioritise client autonomy and informed consent.

The audiences for this PRE are diverse, spanning academic researchers in coaching and related fields, practitioner communities of NLP and coaching, professional accreditation bodies and other bodies, coach educators and trainers, and supervisors. For coach educators, trainers and supervisors, the findings highlight the importance of supporting practitioners in developing reflective capabilities and professional growth, enabling them to negotiate boundaries and integrate expertise ethically and professionally. By addressing both scholarly and practical concerns, I believe my PRE offers a robust, practice-grounded contribution that supports the continued evolution of coaching as a professional field. In conclusion, this PRE is a contribution to academic understanding of coaching practice and highlights my own professional development. By bringing the voices of experienced accredited practitioners into conversation with academic debates, this PRE advances the professionalisation of coaching and offers a model for how practitioner research can meaningfully shape both the academic discourse and professional practice.

## References

### References in American Psychological Association (APA) 7th Edition

- Adams, C., & van Manen, M. A. (2017). Teaching phenomenological research and writing. *Qualitative Health Research, 27*(6), 780–791.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732317698960>
- American Psychological Association (2015). Rapport. In *APA Dictionary of Psychology*.
- Andreas, S. (2006). *Six blind elephants: Understanding ourselves and each other: Volume II, Application and Explorations Scope and Category*. Real People Press.
- Andreas, S., & Faulkner, C. (1994). *NLP: The new technology of achievement*. HarperCollins.
- Archer-Kuhn, B., Samson, P., Damianakis, T., Barrett, B., Matin, S., & Ahern, C. (2020). Transformative learning in field education: Students bridging the theory/practice gap. *The British Journal of Social Work, 51*(7), 2419–2438.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaa082>
- Arroll, B., Henwood, S. M., Sundram, F. I., Kingsford, D. W., Mount, V., Humm, S. P., Wallace, H. B., & Pillai, A. (2017). A brief treatment for fear of heights: A randomised controlled trial of a novel imaginal intervention. *The International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine, 52*(1), 21–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091217417703285>
- Ashby, W. R., & Goldstein, J. (2011). Variety, constraint, and the law of requisite variety. *Emergence: Complexity and Organisation, 13*(1-2), 190–207.
- Association for Coaching (2024). *Legal requirements for coaches*.  
<https://www.associationforcoaching.com/page/legalrequirements>
- Athanasopoulou, A., & Dopson, S. (2018). A systematic review of executive coaching outcomes: Is it the journey or the destination that matters the most? *The Leadership Quarterly, 29*(1), 70–88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.11.004>
- Austin, J. T., & Vancouver, J. B. (1996). Goal constructs in psychology: Structure, process, and content. *Psychological Bulletin, 120*(3), 338. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.120.3.338>
- Bachkirova, T. (2013). Development coaching - Developing the self. In J. Passmore, D. Peterson, & T. Freire (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Coaching and Mentoring* (pp. 135–154). John Wiley and Sons Limited.
- Bachkirova, T., & Baker, S. (2018). Revisiting the issue of boundaries between coaching and counselling. In *Handbook of Coaching Psychology* (pp. 487–499). Routledge.

- Baker, S. (2014). *Practitioners' perceptions of the boundaries between coaching and counselling* [Doctoral thesis, University of Bedfordshire].
- Bandler, R. (1985). *Using your brain - For a change*. Real People Press.
- Bandler, R., & Grinder, J. (1975a). *Patterns of the hypnotic techniques of Milton H. Erickson, M. D.* (Vol. 1). Grinder & Associates.
- Bandler, R., & Grinder, J. (1975b). *Structure of magic* (Vol. 1). Science and Behaviour Books.
- Bandler, R., & Grinder, J. (1979). *Frogs into princes*. Real People Press.
- Bandura, A. (1971). *Social learning theory*. General Learning Corporation.
- Bateson, G. (2000). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. University of Chicago Press.
- Baxter, J., & Gandhi, S. (2021). Becoming a practitioner-researcher. In *Using Data to Aid Organisational Change* (pp. 6–8). United Kingdom: The Open University.
- Beck, C. T. (2021). *Introduction to phenomenology: Focus on methodology*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Belcher, W. L. (2019). *Writing your journal article in twelve weeks: A guide to academic publishing success* (2nd ed.). The University of Chicago Press.
- Bennett, J., & Campone, F. (2017). Coaching and theories of learning. In T. Bachkirova, G. Spence, & D. Drake (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Coaching*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Bevan, M. T. (2014). A method of phenomenological interviewing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 24(1), 136–144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732313519710>
- Bird, C. (2005). How I stopped dreading and learned to love transcription. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(2), 226–248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800404273413>
- Blackman, A. (2006). Factors that contribute to the effectiveness of business coaching: The coachees' perspective. *Business Review, Cambridge*, 5, 98–104.
- Blackman, A., & Clutterbuck, D. (2018). What does good practice look like? In A. Blackman, D. Kon, & D. Clutterbuck (Eds.), *Coaching and Mentoring in the Asia Pacific* (pp. 39–53). Routledge.
- Blackman, A., Kon, D., & Clutterbuck, D. (Eds.). (2018). *Coaching and mentoring in the Asia Pacific*. Routledge.
- Block, P. (2000). *Flawless consulting: A guide to getting your expertise used* (2nd ed.). Pfeiffer.
- Bolstad, R. (2007). *RESOLVE: A new model of therapy*. Crown House Publishing Limited.
- Bordin, E. S. (1979). The generalizability of the psychoanalytic concept of the working alliance. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 16(3), 252. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0085885>

- Bossons, P., Kourdi, J., & Sartain, D. (2016). *Coaching essentials: Practical, proven techniques for world-class executive coaching* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- Bostic St Clair, C., & Grinder, J. (2001). *Whispering in the wind*. J&C Enterprises.
- Boufooy-Bastick, B. (2004). Auto-interviewing, auto-ethnography and critical incident methodology for eliciting a self-conceptualised worldview. *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 5(1), Article 37.  
<https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-5.1.651>
- Boyce, L. A., Jeffrey Jackson, R., & Neal, L. J. (2010). Building successful leadership coaching relationships: Examining impact of matching criteria in a leadership coaching program. *Journal of Management Development*, 29(10), 914–931.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711011084231>
- Bratich, J. (2024). Observation in a surveilled world. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln, M. D. Giardina, & G. S. Cannella (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (6th ed., pp. 526–545). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021a). Can I use TA? Should I use TA? Should I not use TA? Comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 21(1), 37–47.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12360>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021b). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328–352.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021c). To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample-size rationales. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 13(2), 201–216.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1704846>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage Publications Limited.
- Brinkmann, S. (2018). The interview. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

- Brock, V. (2009). Professional challenges facing the coaching field from an historical perspective. *The International Journal of Coaching in Organisations*, 7(1), 11.
- Burgess, F. (2014). *The bumper bundle book of modelling: NLP modelling made simple*. Kilmonivaig Publishing.
- Byrne, D. (2021). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, 56, 1391–1412. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>
- Chomsky, N. (2002). *Syntactic structures* (2nd ed.). Mouton de Gruyter.
- Clandinin, D. J. (2022). *Engaging in narrative* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2), 120–123.
- Clutterbuck, D. (2008). What's happening in coaching and mentoring? And what is the difference between them? *Development and Learning in Organisations*, 22(4), 8–10. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14777280810886364>
- Clutterbuck, D. (2020). *Coaching the team at work* (2nd ed.). Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Clutterbuck, D. (2023, 19th December). ICF? EMCC? What's the difference? *David Clutterbuck blogs*. <http://www.clutterbuck-CMI.com>
- Clutterbuck, D., & Megginson, D. (2011). Coach maturity: An emerging concept. In L. Wildflower & D. Brennan (Eds.), *The Handbook of Knowledge Based Coaching: From Theory to Practice* (pp. 297–316). Jossey-Bass.
- Clutterbuck, D., & Turner, T. (2018). A brief history of coaching and mentoring. In A. Blackman, D. Kon, & D. Clutterbuck (Eds.), *Coaching and Mentoring in the Asia Pacific* (pp. 3–22). Routledge.
- Clutterbuck, D. A., & Spence, G. (2017). Working with goals in coaching. In T. Bachkirova, G. Spence, & D. Drake (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Coaching* (pp. 218–237). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Coutu, D., & Kauffman, C. (2009, January 2009). What can coaches do for you? *Harvard Business Review*.
- Cox, E. (2013). *Coaching understood: A pragmatic inquiry into the coaching process*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Cox, E., Clutterbuck, D. A., & Bachkirova, T. (Eds.). (2024). *The complete handbook of coaching* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2022). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2025). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE publications, Inc.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Allen & Unwin.
- de Haan, E. (2019). A systematic review of qualitative studies in workplace and executive coaching: The emergence of a body of research. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 71(4), 227. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cpb0000144>
- de Haan, E., & Gannon, J. (2017). The coaching relationship. In T. Bachkirova, G. Spence, & D. Drake (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Coaching* (pp. pp195–217). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- de Haan, E., Grant, A. M., Burger, Y., & Eriksson, P.-O. (2016). A large-scale study of executive and workplace coaching: The relative contributions of relationship, personality match, and self-efficacy. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 68(3), 189. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cpb0000058>
- de Rijk, L. (2015). *NLP: Principles in practice* (2nd ed.). Panama Press.
- de Rijk, L., & Cheal, M. (2016). Modelling exemplars for the successful spread of NLP. In NLP Leadership Summit (Ed.), *Powered by NLP: Reflections and future developments of NLP* (pp. 81–92). GWiz publishing.
- de Rijk, L., Derks, L. A. C., Grimley, B., & Hollander, J. (2019). The evidence for NLP. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 14(1), 5–30.
- de Rijk, L., Gray, R., & Bourke, F. (2022). *Neurolinguistic programming in clinical settings: Theory and evidence-based practice*. Routledge.
- de Rijk, L., & Parker, P. (2022). The future of NLP research. In L. de Rijk, R. Gray, & F. Bourke (Eds.), *Neurolinguistic Programming in Clinical Settings: Theory and Evidenced-Based Practice* (pp. 236–244). Routledge.
- Denscombe, M. (2010). *Ground rules for social research*. Open University Press.
- Denscombe, M. (2021). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects* (7th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Denzin, N. K., Lincoln, Y. S., Giardina, M. D., & Cannella, G. S. (2024). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (6th ed.). Sage.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40(4), 314–321. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02418.x>

- Dilts, R., & DeLozier, J. (2000a). *Encyclopedia of systemic neuro-linguistic programming and NLP new coding* (Vol. A-M). NLP University Press.
- Dilts, R., & DeLozier, J. (2000b). *Encyclopedia of systemic neuro-linguistic programming and NLP new coding* (Vol. N-Z). NLP University Press.
- Dilts, R., Grinder, J., Bandler, R., & DeLozier, J. (1980). *Neuro-linguistic programming: The study of the structure of subjective experience* (Vol. 1). Meta Publications.
- Dilts, R. B. (1990). *Changing belief systems with NLP*. Dilts Strategy Group.
- Dilts, R. B. (2020). *The COACH state with Robert Dilts*.  
<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=coach+state+dilts&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:f37c9675,vid:GSgn45pfeYg,st:0>
- Doel, M., Allmark, P., Conway, P., Cowburn, M., Flynn, M., Nelson, P., & Tod, A. (2010). Professional boundaries: Crossing a line or entering the shadows? *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(6), 1866–1889. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcp106>
- Dormandy, K., & Grimley, B. (2024). Gatekeeping in science: Lessons from the case of psychology and neuro-linguistic programming. *Social Epistemology*, 1–21.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2024.2326828>
- Elliott, V. (2018). Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(11), 2850–2861.
- Erdoş, T., de Haan, E., & Heusinkveld, S. (2021). Coaching: Client factors & contextual dynamics in the change process. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 14(2), 162–183. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2020.1791195>
- European Association of NLP Psychotherapy. (2024). *About the EANLPt*. Retrieved 28th March 2024 from <https://www.eanlpt.org/Membership>
- European Mentoring and Coaching Council International (EMCC) (2018). *Research policy and practice provocations report series: Coaching ethics in practice: Dilemmas, navigations, and the (un)spoken*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.trishturner.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/EMCC-Research-Provocations-Report-April-2018-eBook.pdf
- European Mentoring and Coaching Council, Association for Coaching, Association for Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision, Associazione Italiana Coach Professionisti, Mentoring Institute University of New Mexico, International Mentoring Institute, de, A. P., Gestão das Pessoas, International Organization for Business Coaching, The Association of Business Mentors, Coaches and Mentors of South Africa, European Association for Supervision and Coaching, & Swiss Coaching Association.

- (2021). *Global code of ethics for coaches, mentors and supervisors*. In: <https://www.globalcodeofethics.org/download-the-code/>.
- Evers, W. J., Brouwers, A., & Tomic, W. (2006). A quasi-experimental study on management coaching effectiveness. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 58(3), 174–182. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1065-9293.58.3.174>
- Falconer, K. (2022). *The NLP professional: Your future in NLP*. McNidder & Grace.
- Feldman, D., & Lankau, M. (2005). Executive coaching: A review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Management*, 31(6), 829–848. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279599>
- Fillery-Travis, A., & Cox, E. (2018). Researching coaching. In E. Cox, T. Bachkirova, & D. Clutterbuck (Eds.), *The Complete Handbook of Coaching* (3rd ed., pp. 445–459). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Finlay, L. (2009). Debating phenomenological research methods. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 3, 6–25. <https://doi.org/10.29173/pandpr19818>
- Finlay, L. (2021). Thematic analysis: The ‘good’, the ‘bad’ and the ‘ugly’. *European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, 11, 103–116.
- Fisher, R. H., Garvey, B., & Chapman, L. (2023). Executive coaches’ backgrounds: Yes, they can make a difference. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 21(2), 118–133. <https://doi.org/10.24384/ve0b-gb52>
- Foy, K. (2021). Contracting in coaching. In J. Passmore (Ed.), *The Coaches’ Handbook* (pp. 344–354). Routledge.
- Fusch, P., & Ness, L. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(9), 1408–1416. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2281>
- Gage, N. L. (1989). The paradigm wars and their aftermath a “historical” sketch of research on teaching since 1989. *Educational Researcher*, 18(7), 4–10. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X018007004>
- Gallwey, T. (1974). *The inner game of tennis*. Jonathan Cape.
- Gebhardt, J. (2016). Quagmires for clinical psychology and executive coaching? Ethical considerations and practice challenges. *American Psychologist*, 71(3), 216–235.
- Gettman, H. J., Edinger, S. K., & Wouters, K. (2019). Assessing contracting and the coaching relationship: Necessary infrastructure? *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.24384/0nfx-0779>
- Giorgi, A. (2009). *The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: A modified Husserlian approach*. Duquesne University Press.

- Giraldez-Hayes, A. (2021). Different domains or grey areas? Setting boundaries between coaching and therapy: A thematic analysis. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 17(2), 18–29. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpstcp.2021.17.2.18>
- Gold, R. L. (2017). Roles in sociological field observations. In N. K. Denzin (Ed.), *Sociological Methods* (pp. 363–380). Routledge.
- Graf, E.-M., & Dionne, F. (2021). Coaching research in 2020: About destinations, journeys and travelers (part 1). *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 16(1), 38–53. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsicpr.2021.16.1.38>
- Graf, E.-M., & Ukowitz, M. (2020). Transdisciplinarity in coaching process research—new forms of collaboration. *Coaching | Theorie & Praxis*, 6, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1365/s40896-020-00035-z>
- Grant, A. (2017). Coaching as evidence-based practice: The view through a multiple-perspective model of coaching research. In T. Bachkirova, G. Spence, & D. Drake (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Coaching* (pp. 62–84). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Grant, A., M. (2016). The third ‘generation’ of workplace coaching: Creating a culture of quality conversations. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 10(1), 37–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2016.1266005>
- Grant, A. M. (2019a). Goals and coaching: An integrated evidence-based model of goal-focused coaching and coaching psychology 1. In S. Palmer & A. Whybrow (Eds.), *Handbook of Coaching Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 34–50). Routledge.
- Grant, A. M. (2019b). A personal perspective on neuro-linguistic programming: Reflecting on the tension between personal experience and evidence-based practice. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 14(1), 45–56. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsicpr.2019.14.1.45>
- Grant, A. M., & Green, R. M. (2018). Developing clarity on the coaching-counselling conundrum: Implications for counsellors and psychotherapists. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 18(4), 347–355. <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12188>
- Graßmann, C., & Schermuly, C. C. (2020). Understanding what drives the coaching working alliance: A systematic literature review and meta-analytic examination. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 15(2), 99–118. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsicpr.2020.15.2.99>
- Graßmann, C., Schölmerich, F., & Schermuly, C. C. (2020). The relationship between working alliance and client outcomes in coaching: A meta-analysis. *Human Relations*, 73(1), 35–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718819725>

- Gray, R., Liotta, R., Wake, L., & Cheal, J. (2013). Research and the history of methodological flaws. In L. Wake, R. Gray, & F. Bourke (Eds.), *The Clinical Effectiveness of Neurolinguistic Programming: A Critical Appraisal* (pp. 194–216). Routledge.
- Greif, S. (2022). Pseudoscience and charlatanry in coaching. In S. Greif, H. Moller, W. Scholl, J. Passmore, & F. Muller (Eds.), *International Handbook of Evidence Based Coaching* (pp. 755–772). Springer.
- Grimley, B. (2012). NLP a promising coaching paradigm. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 8(2), 86–91. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpstcp.2012.8.2.86>
- Grimley, B. (2013). *Theory and practice of NLP coaching*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Grimley, B. (2015). NLP: Misunderstood by psychologists. *Sport & Exercise Psychology Review*, 11(2), 66–72. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpssepr.2015.11.2.66>
- Grimley, B. (2016). What is NLP? The development of a grounded theory of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) within an action research journey: Implications for the use of NLP in coaching psychology. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 11(2), 166–178. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsicpr.2016.11.2.166>
- Grimley, B. (2019a). The need for neuro-linguistic programming to develop greater construct validity. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 14(1), 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsicpr.2019.14.1.31>
- Grimley, B. (2019b). Neuro linguistic programming and coaching. In S. Palmer & A. Whybrow (Eds.), *Handbook of Coaching Psychology* (pp. 282–294). Routledge.
- Grimley, B. (2020). *The 7Cs of coaching: A personal journey through the world of NLP and coaching psychology*. Routledge.
- Grimley, B., & Dilts, R. (2024). The NLP approach to coaching. In E. Cox, D. A. Clutterbuck, & T. Bachkirova (Eds.), *The Complete Handbook of Coaching* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Grinder, J., & Bandler, R. (1976). *The structure of magic* (Vol. 2). Science and Behaviour Books, Inc.
- Grinder, J., Delozier, J., & Bandler, R. (1977). *Patterns of the hypnotic techniques of Milton H. Erickson, M.D.* (Vol. 2). Grinder & Associates.
- Grinder, J., & Pucelik, F. (Eds.). (2013). *The origins of neuro linguistic programming*. Crown House Publishing Limited.
- Groves, R. M., Singer, E., & Corning, A. (2000). Leverage-saliency theory of survey participation: Description and an illustration. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64(3), 299–308. <https://doi.org/10.1086/317990>

- Guba, E. G. (1990). The alternative paradigm dialog. In E. G. Guba (Ed.), *The Paradigm Dialog* (pp. 17–30). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 105–117). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? *Field Methods*, 18, 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- Habermas, J. (2002). *On the pragmatics of social interaction: Preliminary studies in the theory of communicative action*. The MIT Press.
- Hardingham, A. (2004). *The coach's coach: Personal development for personal developers*. Kogan Page, Ltd.
- Hardingham, A. (2020). The universal eclectic model of executive coaching. In J. Passmore (Ed.), *The Coaches' Handbook: The Complete Practitioner Guide for Professional Coaches* (pp. 168–175). Routledge.
- Hart, C. (2018). *Doing a literature review: Releasing the research imagination* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Hawkins, P. (2012). *Creating a coaching culture*. Open University Press.
- Hawkins, P., & Smith, N. (2013). *Coaching, mentoring and organisational consultancy: Supervision and development* (2nd ed.). Open University Press.
- Hawkins, P., & Turner, E. (2020). *Systemic coaching: Delivering value beyond the individual*. Routledge.
- Hayes, P. (2006). *NLP Coaching*. Open University Press.
- Heap, M. (1987). Neurolinguistic programming: What is the evidence. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (34), 103–107.
- Heidegger, M. (2008). *Being and time*. Harper Perennial/Modern Thought.
- Hepburn, A., & Potter, J. (2003). Discourse analytic practice. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice* (pp. 180–196). Sage.
- Heron, H. (2016). Community, collaboration & connection. In NLP Leadership Summit (Ed.), *Powered by NLP: Reflections and future developments of NLP* (pp. 9–12). GWiz Publishing.
- Hess, U., Philippot, P., & Blairy, S. (1999). Mimicry: Facts and fiction. In P. Philippot, R. S. Feldman, & E. J. Coats (Eds.), *The Social Context of Nonverbal Behavior* (pp. 213–241). Cambridge University Press.
- Hollander, J. (2013). *Provocative coaching: Making things better by making them worse*. Crown House Publishing.

- Hollander, J., Derks, L., Grimley, B., & de Rijk, L. (2016). The elder columns: Using expert validation to define the boundaries of NLP. In *Powered by NLP: Reflections and Future Developments of NLP* (pp. 29–52). GWiz Publishing.
- Hollander, J., Derks, L., Grimley, B., & de Rijk, L. (2018a). The elder columns part 2: Using expert validation to define the boundaries of NLP. In NLP Leadership Summit (Ed.), *Powered by NLP 2: The evolution of NLP* (pp. 83–88). GWiz Publishing.
- Hollander, J., Derks, L., Grimley, B., & de Rijk, L. (2018b). The elder columns part 3: The results of the survey preliminary findings. In NLP Leadership Summit (Ed.), *Powered by NLP 2: The evolution of NLP* (pp. 89–97). GWiz Publishing.
- Hunt, J. M., & Weintraub, J. R. (2016). *The coaching manager: Developing top talent in business* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Husserl, E. (2012). *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology*. Routledge.
- Ianiro, P. M., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N., & Kauffeld, S. (2015). Coaches and clients in action: A sequential analysis of interpersonal coach and client behavior. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 30, 435–456. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-014-9374-5>
- International Coaching Federation (2016). *ICF global coaching study: Executive summary*. USA: International Coach Federation.
- International Coaching Federation (2021a). *Code of ethics*. USA: International Coaching Federation.
- International Coaching Federation (2021b). *The ICF ecosystem: A world of coaching excellence*. International Coaching Federation. <https://coachingfederation.org/about/the-icf-ecosystem>
- International Coaching Federation (2023). *Global coaching study: 2023 executive summary*. USA: International Coaching Federation.
- International Coaching Federation (2024). *There's a place for you here: Join ICF*. International Coaching Federation. <https://coachingfederation.org/professional-coaches#:~:text=With%20more%20than%2050%2C000%20active,way%20in%20all%20things%20coaching.>
- International Coaching Federation (2025a). *ICF core competencies*. International Coaching Federation. <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/core-competencies>
- International Coaching Federation (2025b). *What is coaching?* International Coaching Federation. Retrieved 1st January 2025 from <https://coachingfederation.org/get-coaching/coaching-for-me/what-is-coaching/>

- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A.-M., & Johnson, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(12). <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031>
- Kamberelis, G., Dimitriadis, G., & Welker, A. (2024). Focus groups : Strategic articulations of pedagogy, politics, and inquiry. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln, M. D. Giardina, & G. S. Cannella (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (6th ed., pp. 692–716). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Kluge, A., & Hagemann, V. (2022). Learning as the basis for coaching. In S. Greif, H. Möller, W. Scholl, J. Passmore, & F. Müller (Eds.), *International Handbook of Evidence Based Coaching*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81938-5>
- Knight, S. (2020). *NLP at work* (4th ed.). Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Knowles, M. S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy (revised and updated)*. Cambridge Adult Education.
- Kolb, A., & Kolb, D. A. (2018). Eight important things to know about the experiential learning cycle. *Australian Educational Leader*, 40(3), 8–14.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice-Hall.
- Koopman, R., Englis, P. D., Ehrenhard, M. L., & Green, A. (2021). The chronological development of coaching and mentoring: Side by side disciplines. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 19(1), 137–151. <https://doi.org/10.24384/3w69-k922>
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2014). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Lakoff, G. (1971). Presupposition and relative well-formedness. In D. D. Steinberg & L. A. Jakobovits (Eds.), *Semantics: An Interdisciplinary Reader in Philosophy, Linguistics, and Psychology* (pp. 329–340). Cambridge University Press.
- Lazarus, J. (2020). NLP v quality NLP: The case for having standards (and discussing the elephant in the room). In NLP Leadership Summit (Ed.), *Powered by NLP 3: Breaking Waves, Turning Tides* (pp. 23–28). GWiz publishing.
- Lee, R. J. (2013). The role of contracting in coaching: Balancing individual client and organisational issues. In J. Passmore, D. Peterson, & M. Freire (Eds.), *The Wiley-*

*Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Coaching and Mentoring* (pp. 40–57). John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

- Levitt, H., Motulsky, S., Wertz, F., Morrow, S., & Ponterotto, J. (2017). Recommendations for designing and reviewing qualitative research in psychology: Promoting methodological integrity. *Qualitative Psychology*, 4, 2–22. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000082>
- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2023). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln, M. D. Giardina, & G. S. Cannella (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (6th ed., pp. 108–150). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Linder-Pelz, S. (2010). *NLP coaching: An evidence based approach for coaches, leaders and individuals* (1st ed.). Kogan Page.
- LinkedIn (2024a). *Search: coach -sports -football -sport -basketball -baseball -hockey -soccer -badminton -tennis -cricket -volleyball*. LinkedIn. [https://www.linkedin.com/search/results/people/?keywords=coach%20-sports%20-football%20-sport%20-basketball%20-baseball%20-hockey%20-soccer%20-badminton%20-tennis%20-cricket%20-volleyball&origin=GLOBAL\\_SEARCH\\_HEADER&sid=8x-](https://www.linkedin.com/search/results/people/?keywords=coach%20-sports%20-football%20-sport%20-basketball%20-baseball%20-hockey%20-soccer%20-badminton%20-tennis%20-cricket%20-volleyball&origin=GLOBAL_SEARCH_HEADER&sid=8x-)
- LinkedIn (2024b). *Search: ICF NLP*. LinkedIn. [https://www.linkedin.com/search/results/people/?keywords=icf%20nlp&origin=GLOBAL\\_SEARCH\\_HEADER&sid=m3Q](https://www.linkedin.com/search/results/people/?keywords=icf%20nlp&origin=GLOBAL_SEARCH_HEADER&sid=m3Q)
- LinkedIn (2024c). *Search: ICF NLP Coach*. LinkedIn. [https://www.linkedin.com/search/results/people/?keywords=icf%20nlp%20coach&origin=GLOBAL\\_SEARCH\\_HEADER&sid=u6C](https://www.linkedin.com/search/results/people/?keywords=icf%20nlp%20coach&origin=GLOBAL_SEARCH_HEADER&sid=u6C)
- Malterud, K., Siersma, V., & Guassora, A. D. (2021). Information power: Sample content and size in qualitative studies. In P. M. Camic (Ed.), *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding Perspectives in Methodology and Design* (2nd ed., pp. 67–81). American Psychological Association.
- Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: Guided by information power. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1753–1760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>
- Marion, J.-L. (2005). *Being given: Toward a phenomenology of givenness*. Stanford University Press.

- Maxwell, A. (2009). How do business coaches experience the boundary between coaching and therapy/counselling? *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 2(2), 149–162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17521880902930311>
- McDermott, I. (2016). NLP coaching. In J. Passmore (Ed.), *Excellence in Coaching: The Industry Guide* (3rd ed., pp. 146–158). Kogan Page.
- McDermott, I., & Jago, W. (2001). *The NLP coach*. Piatkus.
- McKenna, D. D., & Davis, S. L. (2009). Hidden in plain sight: The active ingredients of executive coaching. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 2(3), 244–260. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9434.2009.01143.x>
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002). *Phenomenology of perception* (2nd (Kindle) ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203994610>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Mezirow, J. (1990). *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Miller, G. A., Galanter, E., & Pribram, K. H. (2020). *Plans and the structure of behaviour*. Barakaldo Books.
- Moin, T., Giraldez Hayes, A., Stopforth, M., Lynden, J., & Rees-Davies, L. (2023). Who is a coach and who is a coaching psychologist? Professionalising coaching psychology in the United Kingdom. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 19(1), 4–18. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpstep.2023.19.1.4>
- Monaghan, T. (2015). A critical analysis of the literature and theoretical perspectives on theory–practice gap amongst newly qualified nurses within the United Kingdom. *Nurse Education Today*, 35(8), e1–e7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2015.03.006>
- Moran, D. (2000). *Introduction to phenomenology*. Routledge.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Mukerji, N., & Ernst, E. (2022). Why homoeopathy is pseudoscience. *Synthese*, 200(5), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-022-03882-w>
- Myers, A., & Bachkirova, T. (2021). Boundaries and best practice. In S. O’Riordan & S. Palmer (Eds.), *Introduction to Coaching Psychology* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (7th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- NLP Leadership Summit (2013). *How do we define NLP*. <https://nlpleadershipsummit.org/define-nlp/>

- O'Broin, A., & Palmer, S. (2010). Exploring key aspects in the formation of coaching relationships: Initial indicators from the perspective of the coachee and the coach. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 3(2), 124–143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2010.502902>
- O'Broin, A., & Palmer, S. (2014). Reappraising the coach–client relationship: The unassuming change agent in coaching. In S. Palmer & A. Whybrow (Eds.), *Handbook of Coaching Psychology* (1st ed., pp. 295–324). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315820217>
- O'Broin, A., & Palmer, S. (2018). The coaching relationship: A key role in coaching processes and outcomes. In S. Palmer & A. Whybrow (Eds.), *Handbook of Coaching Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 471–486). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315820217>
- O'Connor, J. (2001). *NLP workbook: A practical guide to achieving the results you want*. HarperCollins.
- Otago Polytechnic Te Pūkenga (2022). Doctor of professional practice candidate guide.
- Palmer, S., & Whybrow, A. (Eds.). (2019). *Handbook of coaching psychology: A guide for practitioners* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Pandolfi, C. (2020). Active ingredients in executive coaching: A systematic literature review. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 15(2), 6–30. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsicpr.2020.15.2.6>
- Parker, P. (2022). Psychoneuroimmunology - Research on lightening process. In L. de Rijk, R. Gray, & F. Bourke (Eds.), *Neurolinguistic Programming in Clinical Settings* (pp. 138–161). Routledge.
- Parsloe, E. (1995). *Coaching, mentoring and assessing: A practical guide to developing competence* (Revised ed.). Kogan Page Limited.
- Parsloe, E., & Leedham, M. (2022). *Coaching and mentoring: Practical techniques for developing learning and performance* (D. Newell, Ed. 4th ed.). Kogan Page.
- Parsloe, E., & Wray, M. (2000). *Coaching and mentoring: Practical methods to improve learning*. Kogan Page Limited.
- Parsons, R. D., Owens, E., & Neale-McFall, C. (2021). *The counselor as practitioner-researcher*. Cognella, Inc.
- Passmore, J. (2016a). Coaching: The future. In J. Passmore (Ed.), *Excellence in Coaching: The Industry Guide* (3rd ed., pp. 1–8). Kogan Page.
- Passmore, J. (Ed.). (2016b). *Excellence in coaching: The industry guide* (3rd ed.). Kogan Page.
- Passmore, J. (Ed.). (2021a). *The Coaches' handbook: The complete practitioner guide for professional coaches*. Routledge.

- Passmore, J. (Ed.). (2021b). *Excellence in coaching: Theory, tools and techniques to achieve outstanding coaching performance* (4th ed.). Kogan Page Publishers.
- Passmore, J., Brown, H., Csigas, Z., & the European Coaching and Mentoring Research Consortium (2017). *Executive report 2017: The state of play in European coaching & mentoring*. Henley Business School & EMCC International.
- Passmore, J., & Evans-Krimme, R. (2021). The future of coaching: A conceptual framework for the coaching sector from personal craft to scientific process and the implications for practice and research. *Frontiers in psychology (positive psychology)*, *12*, 1–8.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.715228>
- Passmore, J., & Rowson, T. (2019). Neuro-linguistic programming: A review of NLP research and the application of NLP in coaching. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, *14*(1), 57–69. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsicpr.2019.14.1.57>
- Passmore, J., & Woodward, W. (2023). Coaching education: Wake up to the new digital and AI coaching revolution! *International Coaching Psychology Review*, *18*(1), 58–72.  
<https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsicpr.2023.18.1.58>
- Popovic, N., & Jinks, D. (2013). *Personal consultancy: A model for integrating counselling and coaching*. Routledge.
- Pullins, E. B., Timonen, H., Kaski, T., & Holopainen, M. (2016). An investigation of the theory practice gap in professional sales. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *25*(1), 17–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2016.1236665>
- Renton, J. (2009). *Coaching and mentoring: What they are and how to make the most of them*. Bloomberg Press.
- Roderique-Davies, G. (2009). Neuro-linguistic programming: Cargo cult psychology? *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, *1*(2), 58–63.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/17581184200900014>
- Rogers, J. (2012). *Coaching skills: A handbook: A handbook* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Rolfe, G. (1993). Closing the theory - practice gap: A model of nursing praxis. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, *2*(3), 173–177. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.1993.tb00157.x>
- Rutkowski, N. (2014). Coaching and therapy: Finding common ground in gestalt practice. *Gestalt Review*, *18*(2), 146–153. <https://doi.org/10.5325/gestaltreview.18.2.0146>
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2024). *Research methods for business students* (9th ed.). Pearson.
- Schneider, C., Bade, N., & Janczyk, M. (2020). Is immediate processing of presupposition triggers automatic or capacity-limited? A combination of the PRP approach with a self-

- paced reading task. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 49(2), 247–273.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10936-019-09686-3>
- Schoch, K. (2020). Case study research. In G. J. Burkholder, K. A. Cox, L. M. Crawford, & J. H. Hitchcock (Eds.), *Research design and methods: An applied guide for the scholar-practitioner* (pp. 245–258). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Silsbee, D. (2010). *The mindful coach: Seven roles for facilitating leader development* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Sime, C., & Jacob, Y. (2018). Crossing the line? A qualitative exploration of ICF master certified: Coaches' perception of roles, borders and boundaries. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 13(2), 46–61. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsicpr.2018.13.2.46>
- Smith, J. A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology & Health*, 11(2), 261–271.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08870449608400256>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Soames, S. (1989). *Presupposition*. Springer.
- Spiegelberg, H. (1994). *The phenomenological movement: A historical introduction* (3rd ed.). Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Stalnaker, R. (1975). Presuppositions. In D. Hockney, W. L. Harper, & B. Freed (Eds.), *Contemporary Research in Philosophical Logic and Linguistic Semantics: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the University of Western Ontario, London, Canada* (Vol. 4, pp. 31–41). Springer, Dordrecht. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-1756-5\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-1756-5_2)
- Steinhouse, R. (2010). *How to coach with NLP*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Summerfield, J. (2006). Do we coach or do we counsel? Thoughts on the 'emotional life' of a coaching session. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 2(1), 24–27.  
<https://doi.org/10.53841/bpstcp.2006.2.1.24>
- Tee, D., Passmore, J., & Brown, H. (2018). Distinctions in practice within coaching in Wales. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 14(1), 26–33. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpstcp.2018.14.1.26>
- Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology* (2nd ed., Vol. 0, pp. 17–37). SAGE Publications Ltd.  
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526405555.n2>
- The Association for Neuro Linguistic Programming. (2021). *Definition of NLP*.  
<https://anlp.org/knowledge-base/definition-of-nlp>

- Thomas, E. A. (2011). Modeling. In S. Goldstein & J. Naglieri (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of child behavior and development* (pp. 961–962). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-79061-9\\_1812](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-79061-9_1812)
- Tietze, S. (2012). Researching your own organisation. In G. Symon & C. Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative Organizational Research* (pp. 53–71). SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526435620.n4>
- Tosey, P. (2014). NLP: Phenomenology by another name? *Rapport*, (38), 44–46.
- Tosey, P., Lawley, J., & Meese, R. (2014). Eliciting metaphor through clean language: An innovation in qualitative research. *British Journal of Management*, 25(3), 629–646. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12042>
- Tosey, P., & Mathison, J. (2003). Neuro-linguistic programming and learning theory: A response. *The Curriculum Journal*, 14(3), 371–388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0958517032000137667>
- Tosey, P., & Mathison, J. (2009). *Neuro-linguistic programming: A critical appreciation for managers and developers*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>
- Tracy, S. J. (2024). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact* (3rd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Turner, E., & Clutterbuck, D. (2019, 11th May). *All in the small print: A brief study of contracting issues in coaching and supervision* Presentation at the 8th International Coaching Supervision Conference, Oxford, United Kingdom.
- van Manen, M. (2016a). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315422657>
- van Manen, M. (2016b). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- van Manen, M. (2023). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Varpio, L., Ajjawi, R., Monrouxe, L. V., O'Brien, B. C., & Rees, C. E. (2017). Shedding the cobra effect: Problematizing thematic emergence, triangulation, saturation and member checking. *Medical Education*, 51(1), 40–50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.13124>

- Wake, L., Gray, R., & Bourke, F. (Eds.). (2013). *The clinical effectiveness of neurolinguistic programming: A critical appraisal*. Routledge.
- Walker, W. (Ed.). (1996). *Abenteuer Kommunikation: Bateson, Perls, Satir, Erickson und die Anfänge des Neurolinguistischen Programmierens (NLP)*. Klett-Cotta.
- Whitmore, J. (2017). *Coaching for performance* (5th ed.). Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Wildflower, L. (2013). *The hidden history of coaching*. Open University Press.
- Wilkinson, D. (2022). Coaching - What the research says. In E. Parsloe & M. Leedham (Eds.), *Coaching and mentoring: Practical techniques for Developing Learning and Performance* (4th ed.). Kogan Page.
- Wilson, C., & Bresser, F. (2021). What is coaching? In J. Passmore (Ed.), *Excellence in Coaching: Theory, Tools and Techniques to Achieve Outstanding Coaching Performance* (4th ed., pp. 13–33). Kogan Page Limited.
- Witherspoon, R., & White, R. P. (1996). Executive coaching: What's in it for you? *Training & Development*, 50(3), 14–15.
- Witkowski, T. (2010). Thirty-five years of research on neuro-linguistic programming. NLP research database. State of the art or pseudoscientific decoration? *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, 41(2), 58–66. <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10059-010-0008-0>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix A Learning Agreement (redacted) and Ethics Approval
- Appendix B Example research participant interview transcript (redacted)
- Appendix C Implementation of Braun and Clark's (2022) RTA Six Phase Process
- Appendix D Table of themes, subthemes/codes
- Appendix E Reflection events during the course of my DProfPrac journey (redacted)

## **Appendix A: Learning Agreement and Ethics Approval**

### **Learning Agreement / Research Proposal**

[Redacted]

### **Ethics Application**

[Redacted]

# Ethics Approval



10 May 2021

Geoff Duncan  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear Geoff

**Ethics approval for project**

**Reference Number:** 903

**Application Title:** *How a knowledge of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) tools and techniques can enhance the coaching skills of trained professional coaches*

Thank you for your application for ethics approval for this research project.

This letter is to advise that the Otago Polytechnic Research Ethics Committee review panel has approved your application, following the amendments made in response to feedback.

We wish you well with your work and remind you that at the conclusion of your research to send a brief report with findings and/or conclusions to the Ethics Committee.

All correspondence regarding this application should include the project title and reference number assigned to it.

This protocol covers the following researchers: Geoff Duncan.  
Project approval is valid for three (3) years from date of letter.

Regards



Dr. Liz Ditzel  
Chair, Otago Polytechnic Research Ethics Committee

---

Otago Polytechnic

Forth Street  
Private Bag 1910  
Dunedin 9054

Freephone 0800 762 786  
Phone +64 3 477 3014

Email: [info@op.ac.nz](mailto:info@op.ac.nz)  
[www.op.ac.nz](http://www.op.ac.nz)

---

**Research Ethics**  
**Information Sheet for Prospective Research Participants**

**Research Question**

“How does a knowledge of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) tools and techniques enhance the coaching practice of professional coaches trained in both coaching and NLP?”

**Introduction**

My name is Geoff Duncan and this research project is part of the Doctor of Professional Practice I am studying at Capable NZ (a part of Otago Polytechnic). This document is designed to help you make an informed decision about whether to participate in the research. If you decide not to take part in the research there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind.

**What is the aim of the project?**

The aim of this research project is to explore the impact knowledge of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) tools and techniques has on the professional practice of practising coaches trained in both coaching and NLP.

A key aspect of ‘coaching’ is that the client (coachee) brings the content and is the one that leads the direction of the coaching session. In practical coaching contexts, if the coach contributes significantly to the content, or leads the direction of the coaching session, then it is no longer ‘compliant coaching’. Instead, what’s happening might be described as ‘mentoring’, ‘consulting’, or some other practitioner led activity. Misunderstandings around this occurs even amongst coaches who are formally trained and accredited as practising coaches.

NLP is often thought of as one of those alternative practitioner led activities (‘therapy’). However, viewing NLP as a model of modelling is more accurate and it is associated with therapy because that was the first field modelled using it. Since then, it has been used to model in fields as diverse as education, sport and business. By interviewing practising coaches, who have been trained in both coaching and NLP, I hope to identify which NLP tools and techniques are considered most helpful in enhancing their coaching practice.

**Who would qualify as a participant for this research project?**

I wish to interview coaches who have:

- successfully completed at least 75 hours core coach training accredited by a major international coaching body (ICF, EMCC, AC, etc)
- successfully completed at least 75 hours of NLP training accredited by a major international NLP body (IANLP, INLPTA, IN, ABNLP, etc)
- been practising as a coach for at least two years and have performed at least 75 hours of coaching in the last 6 months.

### **What will research participants be asked to do?**

Attend a research interview with me, of up to 60 minutes duration, at a mutually agreed date and time. This will be conducted and recorded online via Zoom. A written transcription of the interview recording will be created using Otter.

Within the 60 minutes of interview time, I will introduce around 6 topics that are connected to the research question detailed at the start of this document. The intention is that you have the opportunity to speak both at length and to depth about each of these topics. I will manage the time and ensure we do not exceed 60 minutes.

The transcript will be manually tidied up to correct any transcription errors and to de-identify you as a research participant (that is, remove all characteristics that could identify you as the interviewee). You may request to see the final transcript of your interview by emailing me (the researcher) at any point up to 14 days after the date of your interview, using the email address provided below.

After this, your transcript will begin the process of being amalgamated in with the transcripts of other participants' interviews and together they will represent the research data for the study. Individual transcripts may also be manually re-inspected to illustrate comments in relation to the research themes identified.

### **Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?**

**Yes, you are able to withdraw at any point up to 28 days from the date your interview took place.** This is because after that date your transcript will become fully amalgamated in with other research responses. If you do decide to withdraw, simply email me (the researcher) at the email address provided below informing me of your desire to withdraw from the research project. There will be no disadvantage or consequence to you from withdrawing.

### **How will confidentiality and /or anonymity be protected?**

Only you and I will be present in the zoom interview. Only I will have access to any recordings made of the interview and these will be stored securely. At the transcription stage of the interview, all information that could identify you will have been removed. Any personal information about you (recorded and written) held by me will be stored securely and treated confidentially according to the Otago Polytechnic Limited data policies and procedures (more on this below).

### **How will the data you hold be stored?**

CapableNZ and Otago Polytechnic Limited are responsible for safe data storage and have policies and procedures in place to support data protection. Data collected will be held on a password protected shared drive with restricted access for the researcher and project supervisors only. Any hard copies of data will be stored in a locked cabinet, accessible to the researcher, the project supervisors and the Post-Graduate Co-ordinator within CapableNZ. All hard copies of consent forms will be stored in a separate location from the project data. Raw data, including audio, video and typed transcripts will be retained on a password protected shared drive for a period specified under the Otago Polytechnic Limited policies (currently 7 years). After that period, all data will be destroyed.

### **What happens to the results of the research project?**

The results of the research project will be presented as part of my doctoral thesis. They may also appear in conference papers and/or journal articles of academic or relevant professional bodies or publications. You can also request a summary of the research findings within one year of the programme of study having been completed and the thesis finalised.

### **What rights do I have as a participant?**

Your participation is voluntary. The purpose of this document is to ensure any consent you give to participate is an informed consent and the consent document will attest to you having read and understood this document.

If you agree to participate, you have the right to:

- ask any questions about the research project at any time during your participation
- withdraw from the interview at any point
- decline to answer any question asked in the interview
- withdraw from the research project **within 28 days from the date of you interview**
- be provided, upon request, with a summary of the research findings when the project is concluded

If you have any questions about any aspect of this research project either before, during or after your involvement in it, please contact the researcher and/or the research supervisors.

### **Who are the project contacts?**

Geoff Duncan  
Researcher  
[Redacted address]

email: [Redacted email address]  
phone: [Redacted phone number]

Dr. Sean Quifors  
Supervisor  
[Redacted address]

email: [Redacted email address]  
phone: [Redacted phone number]

Dr. Martin Andrew  
Supervisor  
[Redacted address]

email: [Redacted email address]  
phone: [Redacted phone number]

### **Does this research project have ethics approval?**

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Otago Polytechnic Research Ethics Committee (Otago Polytechnic Te Pūkenga, 2022)

## Research Project Participant Consent Form

### Research Question

“How does a knowledge of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) tools and techniques enhance the coaching practice of professional coaches trained in both coaching and NLP?”

### Informed consent to participate in this research project

I confirm that I have read and understood the relevant **Information Sheet for Prospective Research Participants** provided to me. Any questions that have arisen for me to reach my decision to participate have been fully and satisfactorily answered.

I know that:

- My participation in the project is entirely voluntary
- I am free to stop participating at any time
- I can withdraw from the interview, or decline to answer any question posed
- I can fully withdraw from the research project at any point up to **28 days from the date of my research interview**
- I can make my withdrawal without having to give any reasons and without there being any disadvantage or consequence to me from doing so
- Any interview data of mine that is used in the research will have been de-identified and only used in a way that ensures my anonymity
- Any personal data of mine will be treated confidentially and all data relating to me will be stored securely and subsequently destroyed according to Otago Polytechnic’s data storage policies and procedures, currently 7 years
- The results of the research project may also appear in conference papers and/or journal articles of academic or relevant professional bodies or publications
- I can request a copy of the research findings within one year of the programme of study having been completed and the thesis finalised.

### Declaration of informed consent to participate in this research project

I have read and understood both the content of the **Information Sheet for Prospective Research Participants** previously provided to me, and the content of this **Research Project Participant Consent Form** and give my informed consent to participate in this research project under the terms and conditions specified in those documents.

Full name of Research Participant:

Full name of Researcher:

Signature:

Signature:

Date:

Date:

## Consultation with the Kaitohutohu office

In chronological order:

- My initial email to the KTO
- The KTO response (with attachment of response matrix)
- My response to KTO [Redacted]

### Initial email

Thursday, May 20, 2021 at 17:03:31 New Zealand Standard Time

**Subject:** KTO consultation for my DPP research project  
**Date:** Monday, 12 April 2021 at 9:17:56 AM New Zealand Standard Time  
**From:** Geoff Duncan  
**To:** Scott Klenner  
**CC:** [Redacted] Sean Quifors  
**Attachments:** DPP GD tLA Mar21.docx

Kia Ora Scott and the Kaitohutohu Team

I am currently progressing the learning agreement of my Doctorate of Professional Practice (DPP). My doctorate is about investigating the theory-practice gap in relation to the 'coaching' profession. Specifically, it is about what Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) tools and techniques might offer in enhancing good coaching practice, whilst ensuring that the coaching performed remains compliant with the definition of coaching (as defined by the International Coaching Federation).

I am unsure at what stage of my studies it is best to make a formal approach to you, but I am encouraged by my academic mentors (copied on this email) to make contact and initiate dialogue now, as I have a draft learning agreement that I can share with you for your consideration. This is copied to you with this email. I hope that now is an appropriate time for your involvement.

Whilst there will be extensive auto-ethnographic components to my final thesis, given that it is a professional practice doctorate, the primary research that I intend to perform will be qualitative in nature and will utilise an interpretive phenomenological lens. In effect, it is a study of the subjective experience of established practicing coaches who have been trained in both coaching and NLP (where that training is accredited by relevant international associations). I intend to use semi-structured interviews for my data collection tool and thematic analysis for the data analysis one.

I will be using purposive sampling as my primary sampling approach to recruit participants. Besides the dual accreditations qualifying participants will be expected to hold (in coaching and NLP), they will also be expected to have been active as coaches for at least the last two years, performing a minimum of 40 hours of coaching in the last 6 months. A particularly global feel to the participant pool is envisaged and I guess this is where my discussion segues neatly into the questions posed on the Moodle site as to how to initiate the consultative process with you and the KTO.

In line with the first question on the Moodle site "Will the research involve Māori?", my research is not specifically intended to target Māori. Through the purposive sampling process, it is possible that a participant might self-identify as Māori. This though would be a result of their role being a coaching practitioner, as I am not specifically targeting Māori. The purposive sampling activities will be largely through global coaching and NLP channels (mainly international coaching and NLP membership organisations). In relation to the second question "Is the research being conducted by Māori?", the answer is no. I self-identify as Pakeha and I will be the only person conducting this research activity. In relation to the third question "Are the results likely to be of specific interest or relevance to Māori?", the answer would again be no. However, depending on the findings of my research, any coaches who self-identify as Māori might find the outputs useful, but it is unlikely that this would be any more so than any other coach. Similarly, in terms of the fourth question "Could the research potentially benefit Māori?", whilst it is unlikely that any useful findings from the research would be beneficial specifically to Māori, it remains that coaches that self-identify as Māori might find the outputs beneficial, but again, no more so than any other practicing coach. Enhancing the professional practice of all coaches is of course to the benefit of all organisations and citizens, including those that self-identify as Māori.

I hope this summary of my intended research is helpful to you in your deliberations and I welcome and value your feedback and guidance.

All the best  
Geoff Duncan

## KTO email and response matrix

Thursday, May 20, 2021 at 17:01:08 New Zealand Standard Time

---

**Subject:** KTO consultation  
**Date:** Tuesday, 27 April 2021 at 2:05:03 PM New Zealand Standard Time  
**From:** Scott Klenner  
**To:** Geoff Duncan  
**Attachments:** Geoff Duncan\_KTO FEEDBACK\_22 April 2021.pdf, image001.png

Kia ora Geoff,

Thank you for submitting your consultation to KTO for feedback. Please find your feedback attached.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best wishes for your research.

Nāku noa, nā

Scott Klenner  
(MA; BA (Hons); Dipgrad Phil and Māori; Dipgrad Tching)

Tumuaki: Rakahau Māori | Director: Māori Research  
Otago Polytechnic: Te Kura Matatini ki Otago.

Academic Learning Advisor  
Otago Polytechnic  
Te Kura Matatini ki Otago



**Whāia te pae tawhiti kia tata. Whāia to pae kiā maua.**

**Pursue the distant horizons so that they may become your reality.**

**Office of the Kaitohutohu Māori Research Consultation Feedback Date:** 22 April, 2021

**Researcher name:** Geoff Duncan

**Department:** Doctorate of Professional Practice

**Project title:** How might a knowledge of NLP tools and techniques enhance coaching practice amongst NLP and coaching accredited practicing coaches

<p><b>TAIAO:</b> Achieving environmental sustainability through Iwi &amp; Hapū relationships with the whenua &amp; moana</p>	
<p><b>Mātauraka Māori:</b> Exploring Indigenous knowledge</p>	
<p><b>Hauora:</b> Improving health &amp; wellbeing</p>	<p>Your research aims to explore the intersection between NLP tools and techniques and coaching. You intend to draw on qualitative research methods to gather interview data from purposively selected participants who match the need of having both coaching and NLP experience. You will use a phenomenological interpretivist approach to analyse the data, exploring the subjective experiences of the participants and the meaning and use of NLP in their coaching.</p> <p>You will also include an auto-ethnographic approach that incorporates action research to critically reflect on and seeks to change your own practices in light of your research findings.</p> <p>Your projects' focus on NLP and coaching and the need for these experiences to be fore-fronted in the selection of your participants means that it is not appropriate to include ethnicity as part of the selection process in this social research. KTO understands this research requirement.</p>

	<p>The one area where we would encourage additional thinking in this methodology is the point that you will be: “investigating subjective experience of the research topic, the meaning attributed to it by participants and the values and beliefs that lie behind those interpretations.”</p> <p>From KTO’s position the “values and beliefs” that lay behind interpretations are imbued with cultural, historical and social meaning (including cultural and ethnic bias, the role socially constructed artefacts such as the Treaty of Waitangi and colonisation play). In other words, subjective experience is not all that subjective – and to neglect this ignores the turn from phenomenology to a focus on language and power and how these constitute subjects that characterised later 20<sup>th</sup> century European philosophy.</p> <p>While phenomenology historically shifted from a transcendental to existential approach can still be open to the criticism that it struggles to account for the wider structures (e.g. language and culture) that construct the subjective experience (see e.g. Bourdieu, Pierre (1977) <i>Outline of a Theory of Practice</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) and the difficulties associated with researchers being able to bracket their biases and preconceptions.</p> <p>With this critique in mind, it may be worth exploring phenomenology’s attempt to cater for this (e.g. Heidegger’s <i>Dasein</i> and the ideas of lifeworlds and the ‘embodied subject’) and discuss what this means for your research.</p>
--	--

<p><b>To Live as Māori:</b> Kaitiakitaka to ensure Māori culture and language flourish</p>	
--	--

**Unlocking the innovation potential of Māori knowledge, resources and people.**

**Name:** Scott Klenner

**Position:** Tumuaki: Rakahau Māori | Director: Māori Research, Otago Polytechnic

**3. Response to KTO**

[Redacted]

## **Appendix B: Example research participant interview transcript**

[Redacted]

## **Appendix C: Implementation of Braun and Clarke (2022) RTA Six Phase Process**

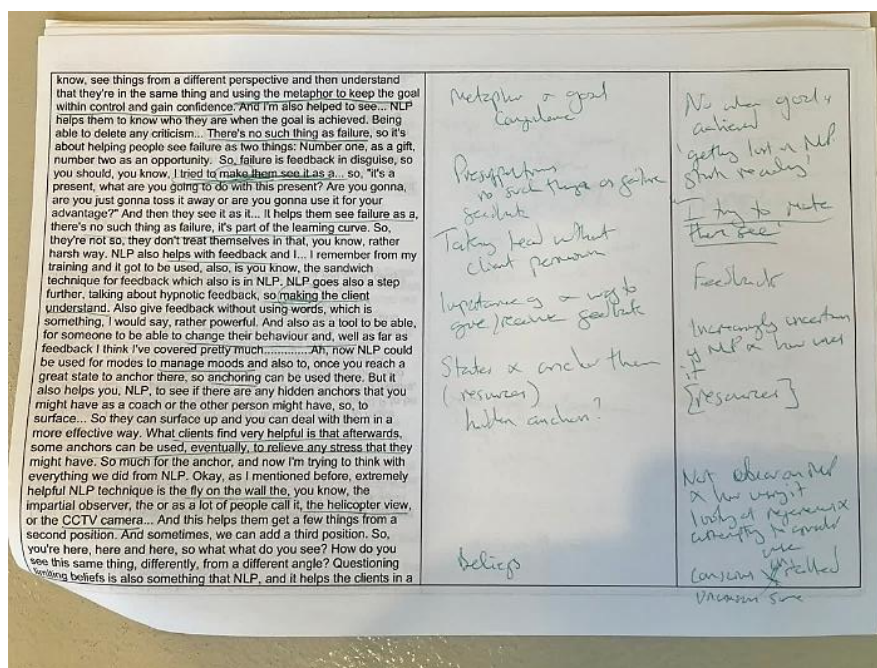
### ***Phase 1: Data familiarisation***

It has been said that data analysis begins with the transcription process (Bird, 2005), and my study's data analysis was no different. The transcription process was automated using the digital tool Otter, which was applied to the audio file generated by Zoom, the videoconferencing platform used to conduct the participant interviews. Due to transcription anomalies typical of digital transcription tools, I had to tidy up the transcripts. This meant listening to, reading, amending, re-listening to, and re-reading every interview to ensure the text was an accurate transcription of the participants' audio recordings. Thus began the data familiarisation stage, typical of most qualitative data analysis approaches (Byrne, 2021), and specifically the first stage of Braun and Clarke (2022) RTA. It was certainly a process that facilitated deep immersion, although it was very time-consuming and required a lot of patience (Byrne, 2021). Whilst I made no notes during this tidy-up process, there was some sensemaking of participants' lived experience and their assumptions, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2021b).

The data familiarisation continued beyond tidying this transcript to enhance data intimacy further. I printed out the tidied-up transcripts in three-column landscape documents. Column one contained the participant's interview narrative; column two was a space for me to make rough notes on what the participant said; and column three was a space for me to capture generative thoughts and insights, including potentially across the dataset. Further, where appropriate, specific participant quotes were highlighted for future reference. An early example of this approach is shown in the figure on the next page. Conscious that the tidying up of transcripts had occurred sequentially by participant number, I shuffled the participant transcript pack at each familiarisation iteration of the dataset. This brought a freshness to the process and prevented too much emphasis on any one part of the dataset that could be brought about by repeating a set sequence to the familiarisation process. By doing so, I counteracted any temptation to be selective on what was read when, or even of 'skipping over' transcripts, or indeed the whole phase itself (Byrne, 2021). I read and re-read the entire dataset (the fourteen interview transcripts) multiple times, and I made increasingly reflexive notes about the data content and my own thoughts about that content I was encountering (Finlay, 2021).

Figure 3.1

*My data familiarisation approach leading to coding and theming*



Note. Extract from participant transcript showing researcher notes. Author's own.

**Phase 2: Coding**

Through the above process of data familiarisation, which brought deep and intimate knowledge of the dataset, it then became possible for me to “work systematically through the dataset in a fine-grained way” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 34). Analytically meaningful descriptions (codes), created by me to support the study’s research questions and objectives, were applied to the identified cross-sections of the data. These codes were intended to capture single meanings or concepts and to connect in an identifiable way with their selected data items. Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 34) indicate that within RTA it is possible to code at a ‘semantic’ level (explicit, or surface meaning) through to a ‘latent’ level (implicit, or conceptual meaning). This gave me a lot of latitude to select a level that suited both my study and the meaning I was making of the content of the participants’ narratives, whilst also adhering to Braun and Clarke’s proviso that coding doesn’t end up providing ‘topic summaries’ that just summarise and reduce content.

Developing such codes whilst working on paper with notes from data familiarisation proved to be a recursive, complex, and time-consuming activity. Some iterations were rejected by me as too surface-level and like a topic summary, and others were rejected as too deep and veering away

from the study's purpose, specifically in addressing the research questions and objectives. Eventually, through further iterations of codes and familiarisation with the dataset, a preliminary coding structure was developed. Whilst the actual numbers of codes arrived at are generally considered less important than the use to which any codes created will be put in the analysis (Elliott, 2018), other contributors, such as Friese and Lichtman, indicate 50-300 and 80-100, respectively, eventually synthesising into five to seven themes (Hart, 2018).

At this point, I was looking at 98 codes across seven themes, comfortably within the ranges of other similar studies. In terms of the level of coding arrived at, this ended up being mixed, but usefully so.

### ***Phase 3: Generating initial themes***

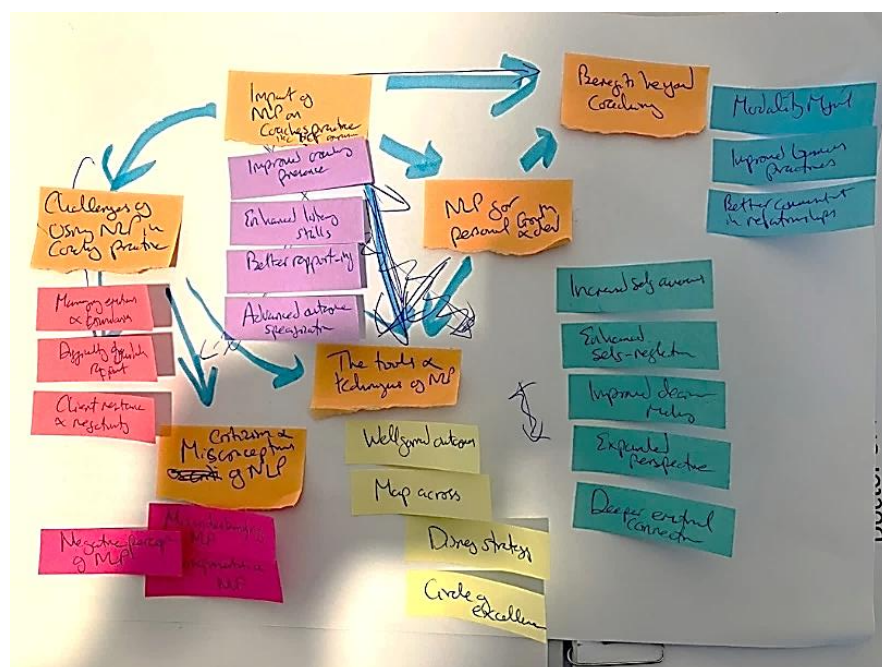
In this phase, I developed 'candidate themes' reflecting 'patterned meaning across the dataset', based upon my reflections and insights from the deep familiarity with the dataset I had gained (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 35). Whereas the preliminary codes were about specific meanings of data segments, the candidate themes were to be about broader meanings across relevant data segments. Implementing this process was particularly aided by using the content of the third column of the sheets that I had been using from the outset, where reflective and insightful notes had been made about links between disparate segments of data (horizontally, vertically, and holistically), as part of the recursive familiarisation and coding processes in the first two phases. The approach in this third phase of the process represented a clarification of Braun and Clarke's earlier work on thematic analysis, where their idea of 'searching for themes' had often been interpreted as meaning themes were there in the data to be 'discovered' or 'unearthed' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). This clarification gave me a much more active and creative role in developing the candidate themes, with even more license as a practitioner-researcher insider within the field of study.

The candidate themes I created using this recursive process eventually reached a point where they appeared to embody the study's research questions and objectives. However, with all of this still being a largely paper-based activity, it was messy, and at times it was hard to see the wood for the trees and vice versa. However, with a preliminary set of codes and a set of raw candidate themes, I was now able to proceed with connecting identified data segments to both codes and themes in a more consistent, transparent/interrogable manner. To assist with data management in this process, I employed NVivo, not least because it would help with the subsequent configuring and reconfiguring of data, codes, and themes that were going to occur in the subsequent phase.

The use of NVivo involved importing the original Word document data files of the fourteen participant transcripts that formed the study’s dataset and setting up the preliminary set of codes and a constructed set of candidate themes within the software. Using NVivo, I was able to run through each transcript again and adopt the selective approach (van Manen, 2016b), guided by the notes I had made during the data familiarisation and coding phases of the RTA process. On this basis, I was able to work manually through each digital transcript, ascribing segments of text to the preliminary codes, which, in turn, had been nominally ascribed to the candidate themes established. Whilst doing so, I was also able to make changes, and with RTA being a recursive process, this became part of the next phase in the process.

**Figure 3.2**

*My initial mapping of emerging codes and themes created*



Note. Author’s own.

**Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes**

Whilst NVivo was an asset for data management and small shifts in data configuration, it was restrictive when it came to recursively altering the more creative aspects of emergent shifts in coding and theming. This phase was all about revisiting the full dataset and refining the preliminary codes and candidate themes to better reflect data insights and align with the study’s research questions and objectives. I worked through the transcripts, assigning segments of text to preliminary codes, which in turn had been nominally assigned to the candidate themes.

At first, I attempted to make these changes through NVivo, which served as the repository for the data segments, but as I became more familiar with the transcripts and found NVivo more restrictive for creative shifts in my approach, it became more of a manual process using the transcripts themselves. NVivo did, however, yield some additional benefits to the overall process.

Amongst these benefits were the ease of adding and removing data segments from codes, shifting codes between themes, changing code and theme names, ascribing any data segment to multiple codes, and so on. Not least, just cognitively keeping abreast of the complexity and ambiguity of data, codes, and themes was made all the easier by employing NVivo to some extent. By this stage of the process, the manual approach used for familiarisation and coding was complex and unwieldy, whereas here, more of my time and energy could be devoted to generating insights into data configurations and meanings. As I got greater clarity on the emerging picture of codes and themes and my familiarity with the data supporting them, I found I was able to make changes more quickly and coherently without NVivo and by the more manual process, I was able to begin writing up parts of the thesis relating to the methodological and findings aspects. Whilst the RTA process was certainly recursive, a key output of this phase was to ensure that each theme had a ‘central organising concept’ (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 35). That is, ensuring each theme had at its core a connection to the data set it represents and one that sits comfortably with the other themes created, the research objectives and questions, and the area of professional practice covered. This was completed as an extension of the manual process that had now resurfaced, away from NVivo, such that the resultant output of codes and themes ended up quite different to the final iteration captured in NVivo.

### ***Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes***

I found this phase a fluid extension of the previous phase, given that I was no longer using NVivo to help configure the key themes, their central organising concepts, and their supporting codes. The recognition in this phase that each theme should be consistent with yet separate from the other constructed themes was indeed a challenge throughout the process. The ability to follow a line of thought in coding and theming, and then just as readily let it go, became an important requirement to avoid duplicative representation of a topic while retaining a sense of cohesion across the themes. This was made all the easier by having let go of NVivo.

Further, reducing theme names down to something ‘concise, punchy and informative’ (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 35) was surprisingly challenging. Attempting to hold onto the meaning a theme name had when familiar with the content of the diverse data segments it was intended to cover

was problematic when the demand was also to be precise and concise. By persevering, I reduced the character count in their theme names from 46-98 to 16-29. For instance, the theme ‘Challenges ahoy!’ had originally been ‘NLP represents challenges according to knowledge and skill level’. As a result, the final codes and themes arrived at (see Table 3.5) appear to achieve the goal of telling a story that is part of a coherent whole across all the themes. Further, with 64 initial codes, 22 code/sub-themes, and 4 themes, the output remained well within the range indicated by Friese and Lichtman (Hart, 2018) as detailed earlier.

### ***Phase 6 - Writing up***

I continued to write up as part of the analytical process through the phases, firstly informally in phases 1 and 2, then more formally from phase 3 onward. This writing up as the research study proceeded assisted in developing themes, cohesion among themes, and connections among data segments, codes, and themes. The significant part of the primary research write-up is revealed in two chapters (4. Findings and Analysis, and 5. Discussion). Firstly, an in-depth analysis of the participants’ narratives (including transcript data extracts) in line with the codes and themes created, and then in the context of the literature and my own experiences as a practitioner from the field of study, to provide an exposition of the dataset in answering this study’s research questions and meeting its research objectives.

## Appendix D: Table of themes, sub-themes/codes

Theme	Sub-themes/Codes	Codes
Learning and growth for both!	Presuppositional mindset Catalytic convert Reflective practitioner Crystallising intentionality Adaptive experimentation	Deeper emotional connection Enhanced (multiple) perspectives. Enhanced self-management. Enhanced self-reflection Enhanced self-regulation. Faster change Feedback Improved decision making Increased self-awareness More helpful/optimal ways of doing things
'What?' makes the difference	Coach state. Coaching alliance Aligned, deployed with ease. Thoughtful deployment, if at all	Anchoring Associate/Dissociate Behavioural flexibility Calibration Cartesian questions/Tetralemma Circle of excellence Clean language Congruence Conscious/unconscious Disney pattern Ecology Eye accessing cues. Feedback technique Frames Future pacing Head, heart and gut brains. Language patterns Limiting beliefs Mapping across Meta-model

		<p>Metaphor</p> <p>Metaprograms</p> <p>Mirroring and matching</p> <p>Model of communication</p> <p>Modelling</p> <p>Neurological levels</p> <p>NLP presuppositions</p> <p>Pacing and leading</p> <p>Parts integration</p> <p>Perceptual (meta) position</p> <p>Rapport-ing</p> <p>Role playing</p> <p>Sensory modalities and acuity</p> <p>Social panorama</p> <p>State management.</p> <p>Sub-modalities</p> <p>Timelines</p> <p>TOTE and strategies.</p> <p>Transforming communication</p> <p>Well Formed Outcomes (WFO)</p>
<p>Challenges ahoy!</p>	<p>Modality demarcation</p> <p>Staying in lane</p> <p>Coachee communication</p> <p>With permission</p>	<p>Constant re-contracting</p> <p>Distinguishing what is NLP.</p> <p>Remembering and using techniques</p> <p>Shifting modalities</p>
<p>What gets in the way</p>	<p>Reputation</p> <p>Evolving perceptions</p> <p>Positive affirmations</p>	<p>Misrepresentation</p> <p>Misunderstanding</p>

## **Appendix E: Reflection events during the course of my DProfPrac journey**

[Personal reflections redacted]