TOWARDS A MODEL OF MENTAL PREPARATION IN ELITE SPORT

by

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SUMMARY

This study examines the mental preparation of elite athletes using naturalistic action research. The focus of investigation was on the personal difficulty of dealing with the "expert issue" that existed in the consultative relationship.

The unfolding research experience confronted the researcher with personal dilemmas that needed to be resolved; activating significant shifts in the direction of exploration. These shifts were triggered in conversational contexts, highlighting the impact of co-evolved intimate sharing.

Quantum leaps in understanding occurred when the researcher; (a) realised that a research proposal had been formulated that was not congruent with ecosystemic philosophies, (b) discovered action research, thereby shifting from an isolated self-reflective position to embracing the phenomenon of shared inquiry, (c) formed an action research group to investigate consultative issues, (d) became aware that the action research process was a reflection of an individual's unique idiosyncratic interactive and thinking style, (e) had to deal with the impact of a work experience as the action group turned into a therapeutic team, and (f) aligned himself to a narrative writing style to formally report on the "fluid", "free-flow" conversational experiences that had occurred in the research context.

"Reflective interactive exploration" emerged as a formal written methodology to capture the ideas that evolve during conversation. This methodology became the vehicle to (a) shift more responsibility onto the athlete to become the "researcher of self", (b) open up further conversation, and (c) to relieve the psychologist of the expert position. The methodology was also utilised in the action research group to explore issues and to exchange ideas with the supervisor.

The theory of the "mask of competency" of the athlete existing in a "culture of competition" is forwarded. A therapeutic model that balances intervention techniques with therapeutic conversation is suggested when consulting with athletes. Therapeutic conversation is broadened to incorporate concepts such as "energy flow", "obstacles and resistances" and "connection and intimacy".

The personal "expert issue" was found to be a "reflection" of the researcher's own unique perceptions and interactive tendencies. Addressing issues at this level of personal identity required special interpersonal conditions; a context of respectful, intimate conversation.

Key Terms:

action research; constructivism; energy flow; intimacy; mental preparation; personal issue; reflective interactive exploration; sports psychology; supervision; therapeutic conversation.

CHAPTER 1

SHARING MY EXPERIENCE WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY

> There is a time to break free, transformed;
> It will not do to be too early or too late.
> Truthfulness within reaches outside, not admitting force;
> When a melon is ripe, it naturally separates from the stem.
> (Chang Po-tuan, 1986, p.45)

In this introductory chapter, I will give a general description of (a) the focus of the investigation, (b) the type of research approach that I adopted, (c) the research context, and (d) the personal difficulty of writing up my research experience. Since conversation was the vehicle for researching concerns in this project, an overview of the conversational network (research context) that I was involved in will be outlined. Finally, an overview of the whole research process will be outlined, as it unfolded over time.

The Research Problem

The problem that provided the starting point for my project was a personal one. It was a problem that I had encountered in the course of my professional practice as a sports psychologist. In a strange way, the problem arose as a result of my success as a consultant.

When consulting with elite athletes, I seemed to be perceived as the psychologist with the "magic wand". Coaches and athletes had unrealistic expectations - I had to produce the winning formula regardless. This in turn produced unacceptable levels of personal stress which impacted negatively on the consultative relationship. This state of affairs led me to define my problem as the "expert issue". Despite its unique personal characteristic, it was surmised that it was not an isolated phenomenon. Given the nature of sports competition,

consultants were constantly being put under pressure to produce the "success formula".

This thesis is the story of my attempts to resolve the "expert issue" and the resulting informative experiences. This formal written report is a representation and reflection of a unique personal research journey.

The Research Methodology

Initially, I prepared a research proposal which corresponded with the requirements for a controlled experimental study. After discussions with various potential supervisors the said proposal somehow lost its appeal. I also realised that it was not in keeping with the epistemological orientation on which I had based my professional practice (Jennings, 1993).

In was only after I had been introduced to some basic literature on "action research" that I recaptured my motivation for pursuing doctoral studies. The action research approach requires that the researcher repeatedly moves through the problem solving cycle of reflecting, planning, acting and observing (Rademeyer, 1997). In the action research process, understanding tends to follow doing (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The predominant intention of doing action research is to improve a practical situation (the "expert issue") rather than to develop a theory. "It is value- rather than theory-driven" (Rademeyer, 1997, p.9).

In doing action research both quantitative as well as qualitative methods may be used. When using qualitative methods, the term "naturalistic action research" applies (Argyris, Putman & McLain Smith, 1985; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). This approach may legitimately be used at the level of doctoral research (Marshall & Reason, 1993). Aligning myself with the naturalistic action research approach enabled me to investigate a personally relevant professional issue.

The Research Context

Action research is a participatory and collaborative research process which involves the incorporation of ideas of others (Argyris et al., 1985). According to Real (1990, p.258):

> In the constructionist perspective, the idea of objectivity is given up altogether...all descriptions, including descriptions of pattern, are seen as a creation rather than as a discovery. We do not live in a universe but in a "multiversa" with as many descriptions as there are willing describers.

There are multiple evolving realities interacting in an interpersonal context (Auerswald, 1990). These realities are described in language (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Hoffman, 1990). I was involved in a number of "conversational contexts" during the research process. Each of these conversational contexts had its own impetus, direction of investigation, and area of interest. The conversational contexts of importance were (a) my supervisor, Professor Gert Rademeyer, (b) two colleagues who were interested in the field of sports psychology, Dr Paul Avis and Ms Lesley-Anne Pedlar, and (c) my clinical consultations with clients, athletes, teams.

From these conversations, a number of new insights and discoveries emerged. In a sense, all of my discoveries have their seeds in what was being said in a conversational context. Individuals are involved in many conversational contexts in a day. Spoken language is free-flowing and ideas move rapidly between people in conversation. The conversational context with Gert had offered me a meta-position in which to discuss research issues, with particular reference to what was emerging in the conversational context with the psychologists.

After my conversations with Gert, I formally reflected (in writing) on what we had spoken about. The writing was in narrative form and tried to capture; (a) ideas or statements

that were actually mentioned during the conversation, (b) my own perceptions as to the value of these ideas as they related to my own concerns, and (c) some questions that were triggered which needed further investigation.

Unknowingly (at that point in time), this conversational context with Gert would evolve and provide me with an "action research group setting" in which we ourselves could research and debate the researcher-in-research process that I was to become involved in. It also provided me with a supportive interpersonal context to look at all my ideas in more detail, to question my tacit assumptions regarding research, and to unleash my own creativity during the research process.

The conversations with the psychologists provided me with another meta-position in which to research concerns regarding the work that we were doing in the field of sports psychology. As time went on, our focus broadened to the work we were doing in our clinical settings.

Concurrently, I was still consulting with athletes and teams, who were talking about their own unique sporting demands and challenges.

I was aware that I was involved in a conversational network of different levels of conversation and interest. From my perceptual perspective, an intricate matrix of interconnected relationships existed with me being in the central position. In a sense, it felt as if I was at the centre of the universe. I felt like the connection between the different levels.

All the individuals who were involved in the discussions with me were also involved in other conversational contexts, separate from me. While these other conversational contexts may not be directly significant to me, it is important to acknowledge their existence and the indirect contributions that they may have had on the conversations that I was involved in.

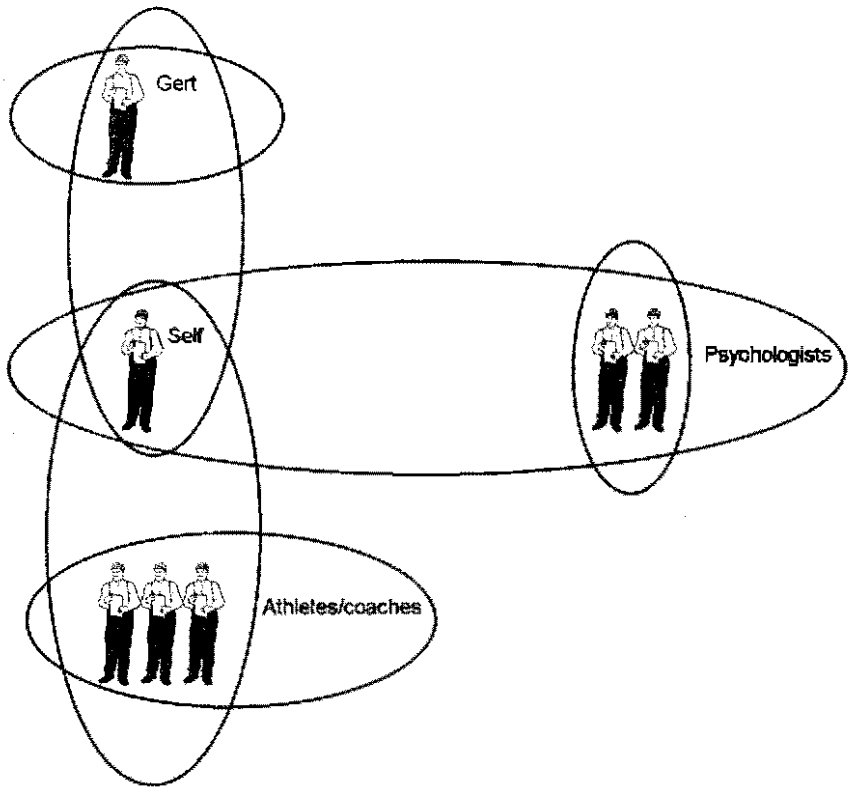


Figure 1.1. An intricate matrix of connections with self as centre.

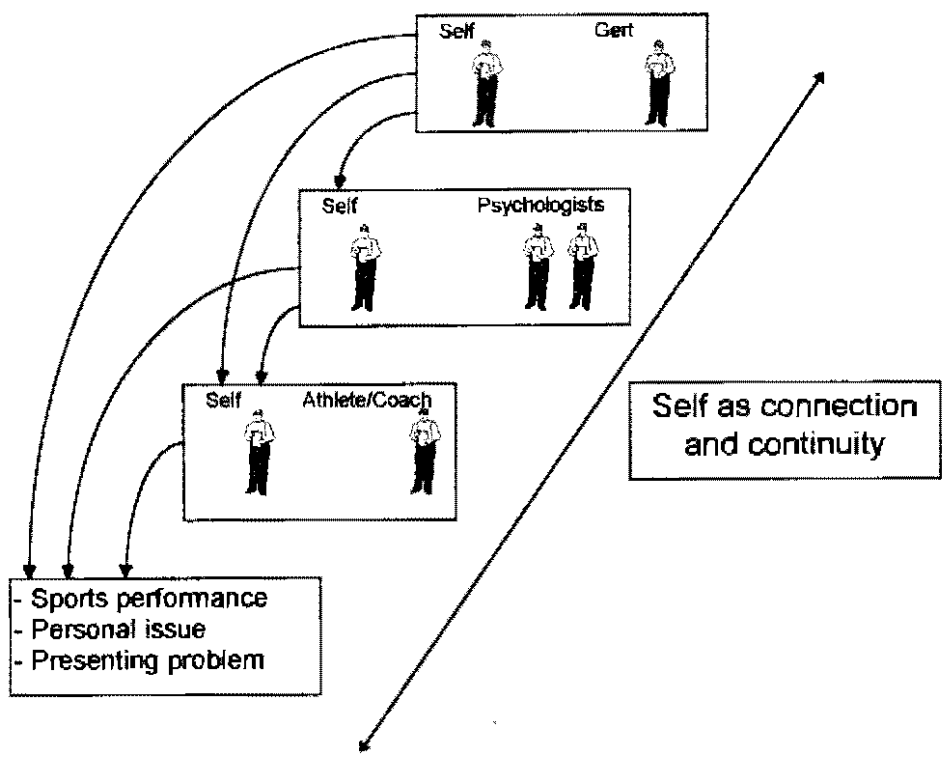


Figure 1.2. Meta-perspectives of conversation levels.

I had to juggle issues that were emerging concurrently on these different levels. Each issue that is encountered in the research process can be thought of as an obstacle that needs to be transcended and worked through. In the process of dealing with a particular research issue, the researcher moves onto newer levels of interpersonal understanding. The process of how this understanding unfolds is captured by Hoffman (1990, p.3):

> Social construction theory posits an evolving set of meanings that emerge unendingly from the interactions between people. These meanings are not skull-bound and may not exist inside what we think of as an individual "mind". They are part of a general flow of constantly changing narratives. Thus, the theory bypasses the fixity of the model of biologically based cognition, claiming instead that the development of concepts is a fluid process, socially derived.

The Research "Atmosphere"

As the research experience unfolded, I became more aware that for interpersonal contexts to evolve to greater complexity in thinking, it was necessary that a conversational context be created where there is honesty, sharing, intimacy, co-operation and curiosity. These values, attitudes or "relationship ingredients" seemed to be the building blocks for creating group synergy, thereby triggering creative thinking in the participants in the group.

Writing up an Action Research Report

The action research process cannot be predicted or anticipated (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Since the process is of a serendipitous nature, one cannot predict in advance where it is going to lead to. Documenting this type of investigation is therefore not easy. Problem solving does not necessarily follow a logical or linear progression. One may intuitively move in ways which ostensibly digress from carefully laid plans. It is

only in retrospect that underlying patterns become visible. The various chapters have been organised so as to provide a sense of the project's implicit coherence.

When looking at how I should formally present my research experience, I was confronted with four fundamental difficulties, namely;

1. How do I report on personal experiences that may have no objective value in the traditional scientific sense?

2. Is it possible to separate myself in the writing process when I have been so intimately involved in the actual doing of the research?

3. How do I deal with time and the sequence of events that unfolded in the research process? Throughout the research process, I was constantly confronted with the notion of time. Was I to write sequentially (according to linear time), or integrate themes and ideas across time without concerning myself when those meaningful ideas had surfaced?

4. How do I integrate diverse and seemingly "unrelated" events (that had emerged in different conversational contexts) into a coherent and harmonious whole?

In examining the difficulty of writing up qualitative research projects, Meloy (1994, p. 12) states:

> There is an ongoing, multilayered sensemaking inherent in the role of qualitative researcher as the human research instrument. Although we can know more than one thing at one time, our ability to communicate multiple understandings simultaneously remains limited.

In this project, I have opted for a narrative style of reporting because of (a) the personal nature of the problem under investigation, (b) my adherence to the philosophy of

constructivism, and (c) the need to align myself with fundamental principles of scientific inquiry as outlined by Argyris et al. (1985), Auerswald (1990), Bateson (1980) and Capra (1975, 1982). According to Meloy (1994), however, this type of representation (narrative) has fuelled intensive debate in academic circles since there may be a fundamental challenge to the notion of research itself.

Being sensitive to the fact that the "I" is the creator of written reality (even in scientific fields), may pose an obstacle for the "inexperienced" research writer since this may challenge some fundamental "internal" beliefs regarding how one should report on scientific activity and/or experiences. Meloy (1994, p.10) believes that "the one characteristic of qualitative researchers is that they usually enjoy writing". Paradoxically, these researchers often encounter difficulties in writing up their research projects. While this may be attributed to the nature of the research design that is employed in the project, Meloy feels that "perhaps it is because of this characteristic [enjoyment of writing] that the question of the 'articulate I' as creator of fiction or presenter of fact remains unresolved" (p.10).

In a postgraduate writing skills course for family therapists, Piercy, Sprenkle and McDaniel (1996) contend that when writing for a professional journal it is important that the writer (amongst other things): (a) emphasises originality, (b) uses simple, clear, concise and jargon-free language, (c) advertises one's limitations, and (d) does not make extravagant claims not justified by the data. More importantly, Piercy et al., believe that writing should be thought of as nothing more than a "way to collaborate with friends [colleagues], to be heard, and to make a difference" (p.177).

Looking at what Happened, After it has Happened

With regards developing a theoretical understanding of one's experiences in the research process, Meloy (1994, p.12) contends

that there comes a point of closure in which "the complex, layered [research] experience in which we engage begins to take shape as a sensible whole that can be organized, interpreted, and perhaps understood". This thesis will focus on some of the significant events (and turning points) of a four year experiential process as I navigated my way through research issues (on both content and process levels). A brief overview of the process follows.

The research process started when I intended to set up a formal, controlled experiment to investigate the effectiveness of three intervention techniques (namely, using music, tai chi and eye movement desensitisation), as a means of enhancing athletic performance. My original research proposal (the start of this journey) is included in Appendix A.

In chapter 2, I will examine how a shift in focus occurred when I realised that I was using a research methodology that was not congruent with my own constructionist philosophy. This only emerged after talking to Professor Gert Rademeyer. Realising that I had to move away from embarking on a research project that was embedded in traditional Newtonian methodology was a direct consequence of that conversational experience with Gert. This unbalanced me completely, especially since I did not know how to move forward.

A significant change occurred when Gert introduced me to the world of action science (Argyris et al., 1985; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Setting up an action research group of two other sports psychologists followed, with the objective to share ideas about the work that we were doing. This expanded my research base, from the isolation of self (which is usually the case when conducting traditional type of experiments) to collaborative sharing with others. This will be explored in more detail in chapter 3.

As an initial group focus, I had formulated a personal concern that I wanted to resolve, namely, the need to look more

closely at the consultative dynamics that tend to exist between the psychologist and the athlete. I was keen to examine what I had termed, the "expert position" that the psychologist assumes or is manoeuvred into during the therapeutic process. In chapter 4, I will examine some of the consultative issues that the psychologist may need to address when consulting with athletes.

In chapter 5, I examine how I may have inadvertently created a "block" in the research process by being too eager and enthusiastic in the sharing of my ideas. The responses of Lesley-Anne and Paul to this "block" are included. This leads me on to looking at levels of intimacy in conversation.

As the action group process unfolded, I had to take a closer look at how we were generating our knowledge. In addition, I was becoming more aware of my own unique way of constructing meaning in my relationships with others. The action research process confronted me with myself. It forced me into examining all of my perceptions and assumptions more closely. This personal focus will be covered in chapter 6. In addition, this chapter broadens the focus and introduces the concept of "personal theme".

Right in the beginning of our group meetings, I had decided to write about some of my perceptions regarding the content or process issues that were emerging in our conversations. As time went on, I became more sensitive to how I was capturing key concepts in our group meetings. My own unique methodology of constructing meaning in conversational settings started to emerge. The methodology of reflective interactive exploration was formulated. Chapter 7 is dedicated to examining this methodology in detail.

In the action research process, a researcher is expected to put into action ideas that have emerged in the group context. I decided to test the reflective interactive exploration methodology in my consultations with the coach of a provincial hockey team. This consultative process will be examined in chapter 8.

Our group changed its personality in early 1995 and consulted with a soccer team. This opened up a can of worms, and suddenly we found ourselves confronting work issues that therapeutic teams need to consider. The work experience forced us to make a decision regarding our future: what did we want to be? We had changed our identity during the work experience. Chapter 9 will look at the work experience in more detail and examine our struggle in trying to determine what we wanted from our group.

The action research process can be emotionally taxing on the participants. Each one of us in the group seemed to be grappling with a unique personal theme (issue). The process demanded a level of intimacy and sharing that seemed to challenge the very core of our being. The work experience had highlighted some fundamental epistemological differences that existed in our group. Unknowingly, as time went on, a rift was busy occurring in our group. This rift first showed itself in an unexpected event that had as its focus a financial issue. Unfortunately, Lesley-Anne left the group, shortly after I had handed in the draft copy of my research report (May, 1996). Chapter 10 will examine more closely some of the group dynamics which may have caused the research process to end in such a way.

In seeking an alternative way of working with athletes (and not just imposing techniques), our action group had become interested in examining "therapeutic conversation" more closely (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). This provided us with newer insights into our own therapies with our clients. The research focus shifted from athletes and performance to "therapeutic conversation" with clients. Chapter 11 is dedicated to the phenomenon of therapeutic conversation and extends the theory to examine conversation from an "energy" perspective.

In chapter 12, I will examine the supervisor/student relationship more closely, with particular reference to teaching and learning. The need for creating a research context that embodies the notion of "shared inquiry" is also addressed. In

this chapter, I will share some of the formal reflections that we sent to each other to indicate how supervisor and student are wrapped up in a relationship of inquiry, without which action research would not be possible.

Chapter 13 takes on a meta-perspective of the total research experience and integrates the process and content issues that emerged in the study.

In Chapter 14, a therapeutic model that integrates the use of techniques with therapeutic conversation is forwarded.

CHAPTER 2

FRAGMENTING THE INTENDED RESEARCH FOCUS

> In the martial arts, technical knowledge is not enough. One must transcend techniques so that the art becomes an artless art, growing out of the unconscious.
> (Daisetsu Suzuki, quoted in Hyams, 1982, p.91)

Striving to Achieve the Success Formula

In August 1993, I had reached a point in my life where I felt the need to embark on a formal process of investigation into the mental preparation of athletes (individuals and teams). I was working alone in a private practice at the time and periodically consulted with individual athletes and teams in a variety of sports. Approximately 20% of my time was devoted to the area of sports psychology. I had a keen interest in the field and felt the need to develop a model of performance enhancement. The research thrust of the majority of studies in the field of sports psychology tends to be in this direction (Barr & Hall, 1992; Crocker, 1989, 1992; Dorney, Goh & Lee, 1992; Howe, 1986; Kendall, Hrycaiko, Martin & Kendall, 1990; Lee & Hewitt, 1987; Onestak, 1991; Partington & Shangi, 1992; Quittner & Glueckauf, 1983; Rushall, 1989; Suedfeld & Bruno, 1990; Van Gyn, Wenger & Gaul, 1990).

From these research studies, it appeared that sports psychologists utilised a variety of techniques, such as imagery, visualisation, hypnosis, self-talk, relaxation, resting in flotation tanks and listening to music in an attempt to enhance the levels of sporting performance. In formulating my doctoral research proposal, I wanted to integrate three of my own intervention techniques into a workable programme. I had previously used music to activate creative problem-solving through the use of imagery (Jennings, 1991). In addition, I based much of my work on the Eastern philosophies of Taoism and

Zen and actively practised tai chi chuan, a soft martial art. I had also stumbled onto the technique of eye movement desensitisation, which had been purported to be effective in dealing with post-traumatic stress reactions (Shapiro, 1989).

Since sport is played in the nonverbal domain, I felt that it was important to integrate the auditory (through the use of music), body movement and balance (tai chi), and visual (utilising eye movement desensitisation) levels of an athlete into a whole. I had utilised these interventions when consulting with individual athletes and teams when I had "intuitively" felt the need. I now wanted to investigate their impact under more controlled conditions (see Appendix A).

Stumbling onto My Supervisor

After writing up my research proposal, I was confronted with the problem of finding a suitable supervisor. I had spoken to two potential supervisors who were working in the sports psychology field. In talking to them, however, I did not feel comfortable. This unease may have been due to the competitiveness that exists between professionals working in the field of sports psychology. I felt that this dynamic might hinder the research process.

After speaking to the person who had previously supervised my Master's dissertation, I decided that I would approach my Alma Mater and register my research proposal (even though I did not have a supervisor). While walking down the corridor in the department of psychology, I smelt the familiar cigar smoke that was associated with Professor Gert Rademeyer. I knocked on the door and walked in. I had a very comfortable conversation with Gert that day. It was almost as if two old friends had re-connected. I told him about my intentions regarding the doctoral thesis and left a copy of my proposal for his perusal.

After a couple of days Gert phoned me to set up an appointment in order to discuss the matter. I was pleased that

his quick response had matched my intensity to get on with the project. At this meeting, Gert made the following comments:

1. My proposal was only presenting the "tip of the iceberg" and did not do justice to the complexity of the work that I was doing.

2. He was not au fait with the literature in the field of sports psychology.

3. He had moved beyond the typical experimental approach to doctoral research and wanted to pursue work that was creative and unusual.

4. He would have liked to be my supervisor but felt that he had to decline under these circumstances.

After my conversation with Gert, I intuitively felt that he was going to be the right supervisor. These were some of my reasons:

1. He was noncompetitive (I did not want my supervisor to compete with me and in the process dictate and prescribe to me).

2. His lack of knowledge in the sports psychology field was an advantage. He would probably ask questions that the typical sports psychologist would not even consider.

3. He was easy to talk to and did not try to hide behind an academic mask.

I shared this with him and he provisionally agreed to act as supervisor. Further exploratory discussions were needed, however.

Exploring the Subterranean Levels of My Work

In subsequent conversations with Gert, I became more sensitive to other factors that I had bypassed while formulating my research proposal. These factors needed to be considered, since they provided a contextual base for a closer examination of my work. Intervention techniques (that are carried out by psychologists) are always embedded in a larger context. Success or failure with these techniques, therefore, could be attributed to the nature of the relationship that exists between athlete and psychologist, as well as the contextual and/or cultural factors operating at any given moment in time.

The unique personal therapeutic style of the sports psychologist and the nature of the therapeutic relationship are important factors in determining the success of a therapeutic sports intervention (perhaps more important than specific techniques). In looking at how I work with athletes, I had to take into account that I based a great deal of my work on the Eastern philosophies of Zen and Taoism. In accordance with these philosophies, an attitude of "non-action as opposed to forced-action" is conveyed during the therapeutic process (Jennings, 1993, p.89). This type of philosophy (on my part) may contrast significantly with the attitudes or expectations of athletes, coaches or administrators who operate in the South African sporting context. For example, during the consultation the athlete or team may be confronted with a totally unexpected situation, since permission is given to accept and incorporate personal limitations and concerns (Jennings, 1991, 1992).

I also needed to acknowledge my own unique experiential background and history. Before embarking on this project, I had had a reputation of having achieved significant past successes in the sports psychology field. Athletes may therefore have certain expectations regarding the success outcome of the consultations with me (as opposed to consulting another psychologist who is not established in the field). I also had had unique experiences in the pressures of elite sporting

competition (having played provincial cricket and hockey).

In order to make allowances for the influence of such contextual and interpersonal factors, a shift in research focus, research philosophy and research methodology was required.

Where to from Here?

The fundamental impact of these conversations with Gert (January, 1994) was to fragment the clear focus of my intended research project. I was being confronted with the issue of personal congruence; I had strayed from the principles of ecologic when I had written up my research proposal (Auerswald, 1990). The research process and research methodology would have to be seriously addressed. With this realisation, the clear focus of my original proposal was fragmented. I had to start all over again. At that moment, I had no idea of what the alternative could be.

I went through a three month period (February-April 1994) of questioning everything - from the reasons why I wanted to embark on the doctoral research, to personal concerns about the work that I was doing, to the meaning of life in general. It felt as if I was dealing with an "existential crisis" (Frankl, 1962).

Gert responded to my inability to energise myself by stating that he felt that I had come to the end of a phase (with reference to my book, "Mind in Sport") and that a new beginning was called for. During this period, he did not try to offer any suggestions as to what I should do. Instead, he just reflected on my experience of "heaviness" and "lack of movement".

Connecting to some Fundamental Research Philosophies

Realising that all my past efforts might come to nothing, I wondered whether I would have enough energy to restart the process. I decided to review some of the well known publications that specifically focused on the implications of ecosystemic

principles for science and research (I had originally been trained in this paradigm).

I found that Capra (1982, p.416) believes that:

> A true science of consciousness will deal with qualities rather than quantities, and will be based on shared experience rather than verifiable measurements. The patterns of experience constituting the data of such a science cannot be quantified or analysed into fundamental elements.

Although I had shifted away from the quantitative, I seemed no nearer in getting a suitable and practical replacement that embraced the qualitative aspects of consciousness. It seemed easier to quantify; it was a clear-cut procedure. I found myself grappling alone, struggling to give some form to Capra's concept of "patterns of experience". In the process, I became aware that the notion, "based on shared experience", was also foreign to me. What did this actually mean, especially when it encompassed scientific investigation?

Bateson (1980, p.32) stated that "science probes and does not prove". He argued that science is nothing more than a way of perceiving and making sense of one's own perceptions. He believed that one should not assume that one can predict certain responses or reactions from an intervention. In an open system there are random events that usually shatter one's perceived notions of any causal relationship that was thought to exist.

> When natural scientists move from the closed systems of idealized, laboratory settings to open, real-world systems, their causal laws suffer suppression and interference through interaction with other, unknown and unpredictable, laws and regularities. (Martin, 1993, p.368)

The particular type of experimental design a researcher uses has an impact on the nature of the research process which ultimately determines the types of conclusions that are drawn.

Obtaining (or not obtaining) statistically significant results may, in fact, only prove (or disprove) that an intervention program is successful (or unsuccessful) at one particular point in time, in one unique experimental context. A certain complexity of thinking might have to be sacrificed if such methodology is rigidly adhered to in an one-off controlled experiment.

Although I was aware of the principle that an observer cannot be separated from what is being observed (which is highlighted in quantum physics), I became sensitive to how easily one can get seduced into believing that one can separate oneself from the research process so that an objective experiment can be carried out. In revisiting my original research proposal, it was clear that I had tried to create a research context that would keep me separate from that which I was intending to research.

According to Dell (1985), a living system is organisationally closed. This implies that the system is autonomous and that its structure (mental and physical) will specify how it will react under certain conditions. "It is the system that specifies how it will behave; and not the information. The information has no existence or meaning apart from that given to it by the system with which it interacts. Information has no objective existence" (p.6). I needed to look more closely at how I was constructing my understanding of the work that I was doing. I realised that the development of a personal theory (regarding any topic of investigation) was bound by the limits of one's own thinking patterns. My conversation experiences with Gert had forced me to take a more careful look at the constraints in my own thinking.

Going Back to My Own Work Context

After my original research focus had been fragmented, a three month period of confusion and disillusionment followed. During this period, an internal turbulence was experienced.

Besides the emotional rumblings within, I was grappling with a work issue which related to my own perceived effectiveness as a sports psychologist.

I had been contacted by the coach of a rugby team who was concerned that the players lacked discipline at practice and made careless mistakes on the field due to a lack of discipline. The team was going to play in the annual club championship tournament and he felt that they needed some mental preparation.

I arrived on time for the consultation and found only half the team present. The coach apologised for the inconvenience, and suggested that we start. Since I felt that this would create a disturbance due to the possible interruptions of players who entered the room late, I suggested that we wait for those who were late. While waiting, I wondered what message the players were giving by being late? What were the underlying group dynamics?

After waiting for thirty minutes, we decided to start, even though there were two players who had not arrived. The coach introduced me to the players as "the man behind the 1990 Natal victory in the Currie Cup". At that moment, I intuitively felt that I would struggle to be effective and/or helpful to this team and coach if I did not (a) address the expectations of the players regarding the type of mental preparation that I carry out with a team, and (b) examine the unique patterns of interaction and interpersonal dynamics that existed in this team (with particular reference to the players being late).

After being introduced to the team, I commented about the lateness of players and wondered whether this was a common occurrence and whether it had an effect on those players who were on time. My invitation to explore what I had perceived as being a fundamental obstacle to achieving group synergy was turned down. The coach made statements that seemed to protect the players, and stated that he felt that this issue of lateness never affected the performance of the team. He felt there was no

connection between "lateness" and "performance". By contrast, there were some players who seemed to give nonverbal messages that disagreed with the comments made by the coach.

It became clear to me that the team did not want to deal with its own functioning. It seemed that this was a topic that should not be spoken about. It appeared as if the team wanted to separate its overall interpersonal functioning from its performance. Any attempt on my part to connect interpersonal functioning with performance was immediately neutralised by the team. In trying to engage the team in conversation regarding their own functioning, I was also told that "I was too negative and that I was breaking down their confidence". This surprised me since I felt that I was trying to create a context where thoughts and feelings could be shared. It was evident that I was not "operating" in a way that they had wanted me too.

The Expert Position

This experience seemed to capture the essence of a dynamic that I was encountering when consulting with athletes/teams. In broad terms, the issue was related to my concern that the sports psychologist is expected to assume (or is manoeuvred into) the expert position when consulting with athletes or teams. There seemed to be a dynamic in the psychologist/athlete relationship that: (a) "forced" the psychologist to act in a didactic and positive manner, (b) placed enormous pressure on the psychologist to apply some technique that would improve performance, and (c) prevented the psychologist from creating a context of conversation in which the athlete or team could participate in resolving their own difficulties regarding their performance.

I had previously forwarded the concept of "shared responsibility" as an attempt to counter some of the above mentioned interactive tendencies and to activate more participation and involvement on the part of the athlete in the consultative process (Jennings, 1993). If the psychologist

always assumed the position of expert, the athlete could become disempowered. I felt that this needed to be addressed.

In trying to distinguish between those teams which had performed successfully on the field of play (effective mental preparation intervention) and those teams which had not managed to lift their levels of performance (ineffective input), I started to formulate a general hypothesis that I wanted to investigate further. On a general level, it appeared that the teams who were successful were not afraid to engage in conversation about any aspect of their functioning (on and off the field). With these teams, I also found myself combining therapeutic conversation with techniques such as relaxation, visualisation and imagery.

I usually felt ineffective with those athletes/teams that only wanted me to "supply" a technique in a mechanical way so that they could improve their chances of winning. When consulting with these types of teams, I always tried to find ways to add the "conversation element" to the consultative process. This invariably failed. I wanted to resolve this issue.

By identifying this personal issue, a new direction for my investigation was emerging. While this helped to restart the research process, the problem confronting me was how to go about resolving these difficulties. Although I had been struggling with these concerns for some time, I was not gaining any clarity. It felt as if I was trapped in my own mind. My own thinking patterns were stopping me from progressing.

CHAPTER 3

DISCOVERING ACTION RESEARCH

> Learning the contexts of life is a matter that has to be discussed, not internally, but as a matter of the external relationship between two creatures. (Bateson, 1980, p.147)

By the end of April 1994, I had become frustrated and despondent by my lack of movement regarding the research project. I was struggling to find a way forward. I was slowly starting to get a focus regarding the possible content for my investigation, but I did not know how to go about it. It was as if I knew the most likely destination that I wished to visit, but had no map available.

A significant turning point occurred when Gert introduced me to the field of "action research" and in particular to the work of Argyris et al. (1985) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). An intensive period of reading followed. It became clear that the notion of "action science" had the potential to show me a way forward. I was most excited by the simplicity and participatory nature of the approach.

The General Methodology of Action Research

Action research provides a way of working which links theory and practice into a whole. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p.6) refer to this process as "ideas-in-action". It is a dynamic process where planning, acting, observing and reflecting spiral into each other in never-ending cycles. In the process, issues, ideas and assumptions are defined more clearly so that those involved in the process can define more powerful questions for themselves as their work progresses. It becomes a systematic learning process in which people act deliberately, though remaining open to surprises and responsive to opportunities. In addition, action research involves people in theorising about

their practices, being inquisitive about the relationship between circumstances, actions and consequences in their own lives.

Argyris et al. (1985, p.49) contend that it is "characteristic of action that most of the knowledge informing it remains tacit". Reflecting-in-action is a way of making explicit some of the tacit knowledge embedded in action so that a person can discover what to do differently. In the process, one becomes an observer of self; thinking about one's thinking; examining one's underlying assumptions (which may have prompted a certain response in a situation). The action research cycle spirals from planning, to acting, to observing, to reflecting and then back to planning. This is best done in a conversational context.

> In action science we create communities of inquiry in communities of social practice. In the pursuit of practical interests, members of a community of social practice make, challenge and justify claims to knowledge. In so doing, they enact rules and norms of inquiry that may be more or less appropriate to generating valid information and effective action. (Argyris et al., 1985, p.34)

Any conversational group can become an action research group if there is a desire by the individuals to become more curious about the type of work that they do and if they are prepared to adopt a reflective stance with regard to themselves and their work. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p.22) contend that action research "is not research done on other people. Action research is research by particular people on their own work, to help them improve what they do, including how they work with and for other people". This is a significant shift in research focus. Whereas the traditional research methodologies tend to have an external focus that imposes itself onto the subjects in a designed experiment, action research adopts an internal stance and concerns itself with the self-in-action.

> Action research is open-minded about what counts as evidence (or data) - it involves not only keeping records which describe what is happening as accurately as possible (given the questions being investigated and the real-life circumstances of collecting data) but also collecting and analysing one's own judgements, reactions and impressions about what is going on. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p.23)

In basic terms, action research is saying: in order to get some answers to questions, converse with those in the field of concern. Regarding my concerns about the nature of the psychologist/athlete relationship, it was necessary to create a conversational context to obtain the views of other sports psychologists working in the field. I could then share my own concerns in the group and observe what their responses to my difficulty would be. The action research process would make me sensitive to the complexity surrounding the difficulty that I was encountering. If necessary, I could then modify my way of thinking or acting while consulting.

Formalising Ideas and Reflections

During the action research process, a journal should be kept so that a process of formal reflection can occur (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Meloy, 1994). In this journal, no specific format need be followed. The researcher can organise the ideas in whatever way he or she wishes. According to Meloy (1994), during the process of writing about one's perceptions, feelings, observations and experiences in the conversational context, a clarity of thinking will emerge. Formalising and concretising one's thoughts leads to further understanding of the issue at hand.

If one is writing about one's observations or feelings, the reflection process allows one to get some distance and separation from the issue. If one introduces a time element to the process, then when one comes to review one's reflective statements, new distinctions on what has been written can also

be made. Further, the very act of writing down one's observations allows one to define the block or obstacle that may have been hindering one's creative energy flow.

A dance between participation and reflective distancing (in which formal writing occurs) is necessary in order to create form or shape to one's experiences. This may be particularly true in an applied psychotherapy setting such as a private practice. As knowledge or personal theory interacts with reality, modifications of previously used interventions may need to occur, especially if the process enters into the unknown or if confronted by the unexpected.

Setting Up a Discussion Group

I had just come out of a period of intense self-reflection (January - April 1994). Action research was suggesting that this reflection should not be carried out in isolation. This realisation was a freeing experience for me, since I had always soldiered on alone in my work. The concept of action research was offering me an alternative. It was imperative that I: (a) arrange a conversational context for a group of colleagues in order to research topics of mutual interest, and (b) clarify exactly how such an activity should be managed in order for it to qualify as valid research.

My immediate focus was the establishment of a group of psychologists who would be prepared to meet on a regular basis in order to share ideas and research relevant issues in a conversational context.

The norm that seemed to be operating in the sports psychology field was to closely guard what one does in consultation with elite athletes. This was obviously a reflection of the nature of our work since one is judged as being good or bad depending on the results that are achieved by the athlete or team. Approaching these sports psychologists would undoubtedly be going against the grain (since sports

psychologists tend to perceive each other as competitors who do not share ideas with each other).

I was now going to try to set up a co-operative context where ideas could be researched. It was going to take courage to telephone my own competitors to set up a context for conversation. How was I going to be received? How was I going to tell them about my need to converse with them? If this research was going to be meaningful for me, it was necessary for me to risk myself and be open about my intentions regarding the group.

I needed to decide whom I would contact. Although I could not use any selection criteria, I wanted to get three or four fellow professionals to be part of the process.

I also had to decide how I was going to talk to colleagues about my plan. I realised that I had to set a suitable context so that the group had every possible chance of evolving into something meaningful. I decided to emphasise the following points:

1. I was doing a doctoral thesis and had reached a dead-end. I was looking specifically at my concerns about issues that might need addressing in the sports psychologist/athlete relationship.

2. I felt that I needed to be more effective in the work that I was doing with athletes.

3. I realised that I could not get some of the answers that I was looking for alone. I needed a group context in which to research my ideas.

4. I needed to learn more, and wondered whether they would like to be part of a group where one could bounce ideas around.

5. I felt that if a context for conversation was achieved, meaningful learning would take place for all those involved.

6. At our first meeting, I would outline some of my concerns regarding sports psychology and then an open agenda should prevail.

7. The main overriding concern would be to make the experience a meaningful one where individual and group learning could take place.

With the above message in mind (providing a structure for conversation), I decided to contact Paul, Lesley-Anne and Andre. I knew nothing about their professional training, where they obtained their degrees, or what experiences they had had in the field of sports psychology. However, I was aware that they were all involved in the field (either through newspaper articles or word of mouth).

I had never met Paul personally, although his father and I had often spoken about him and his achievements (his father and I had worked together in the personnel department of a mining concern in 1983-1984). Paul had a doctoral degree in psychology. I did not know anything about his educational history and his experiences in the field of sports psychology. However, I was aware that he had done some work for the South African Tennis Union.

I had met Lesley-Anne on one occasion (two weeks before I telephoned her). We were sitting on a curriculum committee for the development of postgraduate degree courses in sports psychology at the University of Witwatersrand. She was soft spoken and co-operative at the meeting. I had previously heard that she had consulted with the provincial women's hockey team. I was not aware of any other experiences in the sports field. I was aware that she was in private practice.

Andre had had extensive publicity regarding past successes. He had consulted with the Transvaal rugby team in 1991 and 1992(?), when they had reached the finals on both occasions. Besides this, I was not aware of any of his other professional

experiences. Regarding his educational history, I was aware that he had a doctoral degree. I knew that he was lecturing at a local university and was also in private practice. I had spoken to Andre on only one previous occasion. He had phoned me to arrange for me to do a guest lecture at a college. I had never met him personally.

The First Telephonic Contact

Paul's response. I left a message on his answering machine. On his return call, we spoke easily for a "first call". I got to know that he was lecturing at Vista University and that he has a private practice in the afternoons. After listening to me outline my plan to set up this group, Paul stated that he would be only to pleased to join. He seemed to trust my intentions.

Lesley-Anne's response. Lesley-Anne was excited about setting up a group. She stated that she had thought of the same sort of idea many times in the past, but somehow did not know how go about setting it up. She felt that she would be able to learn a great deal in the process of conversation in the group. During the discussion she shared a personal concern regarding the psychologist/athlete relationship. It centred around sexist issues in the field of sports psychology. This was totally unexpected, and seemed to broaden my own concern regarding the nature of the sports psychologist/athlete relationship.

Andre's response. He seemed to be taken aback initially when he heard it was me telephoning. I felt that he was perhaps doubting my intentions. After further discussion, he said that "he would be prepared to help me". This was an interesting remark for me. It seemed that he saw little or no benefit for himself in the process. Despite this, I felt that his interest in the project seemed to increase the longer we spoke. This was positive.

From his perspective, I felt that he probably considered me to be a major competitive threat. There was a time when I

definitely viewed him as a threat. This was our history. It was therefore expected that he would be somewhat cautious and hesitant. Despite our history, Andre seemed prepared to participate in the group.

Unique Personal Issues

After my telephonic discussions with Paul, Lesley-Anne and Andre, I started to become aware that there may be unique personal concerns that impact on the consultative relationship. While I was particularly sensitive to the "expert position" of the sports psychologist, this might not be a universal concern or issue. In my initial invitation to Lesley-Anne regarding her joining the group, she commented that she also felt that there were powerful sexist issues in the relationship between sports psychologist and team/athlete. In contrast, Andre stated; "I will be prepared to help you", when I telephoned him. He did not show as much enthusiasm as Paul or Lesley-Anne about the possibilities of further learning, and I got the feeling that he would be prepared to do me a favour in joining the group. What did this mean in terms of how he constructs his relationship with teams or athletes? Could one, for example, hypothesise that every psychologist will need to deal with an unique fundamental personal issue before he/she can be effective with athletes or teams? On a more general level, I began to wonder whether or not each individual (not only psychologists) is confronted with a unique evolutionary issue that is in some way linked to one's own performance in the past (in contexts such as family, school, or work)?

On a personal level, the field of sports psychology had become increasingly frustrating for me. I had come to experience that the sports psychologist is manoeuvred into a position of expert, where he/she is expected to come up with techniques and answers to help improve the performance of the athlete. I was feeling under stress because of this and felt it necessary to look very closely at the nature of the psychologist/athlete (or coach) relationship in order to make some sense of my own

feelings.

I had sensed that two fundamental reactions occurred when the expert position was adopted. Firstly, within the consultative relationship, the psychologist was expected to perform, while the subjects remained passive and empty recipients of important information. Secondly, there was constant pressure on the sports psychologist to achieve success. I felt restricted by this. I believed that a re-definition of the nature of the relationship needed to occur.

In the process of looking at this expert role more carefully, I started to wonder whether this position of expert which I continually seemed to find myself in, was not due to (a) my past successes, and (b) my own unique style of interaction. It appeared that others may have come to expect that I had all the answers to problem situations, and all that was required was for me to tell them how to respond or behave on the field of play to achieve higher level performances. Did this apply to all sports psychologists or just to me? These were some of my fundamental questions as I prepared for our first action research group meeting on the 19 May 1994.

CHAPTER 4

FOCUSING ON CONSULTATIVE ISSUES

> Let your mind move together with another's in understanding with sensitivity. To understand one another, there must be a state of choiceless awareness where there is no sense of comparison or condemnation, no waiting for a further development of discussion in order to agree or disagree. (Lee, 1975, p.19)

In this chapter, I will outline some of the work that was covered in the early stages of the group's formation (May 1994 to January 1995). During this phase, the content of conversation usually centred on consultative issues that were being experienced in our work with athletes.

Getting Started

I was excited at having been able to set up an action research group. I had had the courage to risk, and all the responses were favourable. In talking to Gert, he mentioned that I should (a) keep audio records of the group conversations, and (b) not over-plan what I wanted to do in the group (cautioning me against unilaterally structuring the group).

This was a valuable piece of information at this point in time. I had achieved so much by setting up this group. I now had to let the group decide on its own culture and direction of inquiry. Objectives and goals too early on in a group process may hinder the creative energy flow. Yalom (1975, p.303) contends that:

> Two tasks confront members of a newly formed group: first, they must determine a method of achieving their primary task - the purpose for which they joined the group; second, they must attend to the social relationships in the group so as

to create a niche for themselves which will not only provide the comfort necessary to achieve their primary task but will also result in additional gratification from the sheer pleasure of group membership.

What was evident at this early stage was that I knew so little about those who I had invited to be part of the group. I had never met two of the group members. It became clear to me that we would have to go slowly in the initial stages. Everyone had to get to know each other. Each person should be given enough space and time to define him/herself in a meaningful way. From my own perspective, I felt that openness and trust were two ingredients that were going to guide my interactions in the group. I wanted to remain co-operative and inquisitive when dealing with any piece of information in the group.

I could not draw on any previous experience to help guide me during this process. I intuitively felt that if we maintained a spirit of adventure and curiosity about ourselves, the work we do, and the points of views of others, our journey together would be rewarding and thought-provoking. Although I did not know where the process would lead us, this did not concern me. Of greater significance was the fact that a conversational context had been created where I could interact with other professionals in the field.

The First Meeting

Andre did not arrive for the first meeting. The last time that I had spoken to him was during our initial telephone conversation. The group spent time talking about Andre's not arriving and decided that no attempt should be made to try and get him involved in the group process. His non-arrival was a message that may have suggested that he felt threatened by the proposed group process of sharing ideas with potential "competitors".

Paul and Lesley-Anne seemed to share my excitement about

being part of the group. We all believed that there was potential for learning in the group. We decided to meet once every three weeks for about two hours (a suitable time was decided on after each meeting). We felt that it would be counter-productive to follow an agenda. Instead, we decided to meet and talk about anything that we felt was relevant at that particular moment in time.

Since I had taken on the responsibility of setting up the group, I felt that I needed to create a suitable learning context. Driven by this need, I took it upon myself to formally document my perceptions after the group meetings. I did not want to lose the ideas that were being generated in our conversation. In order to capture information in more detail, I audio taped our conversations with the other's permission. When reviewing the tapes, I reflected on three levels (or facets) of the meetings (or conversational experiences):

1. The content that was being discussed (the issues that may be useful to research further).

2. My own perceptions of the group process. While this may have proved to be a sensitive area of reflection, I sensed that action research had an interpersonal dimension to it that needed to be monitored and understood.

3. Perceptions of myself, my own feelings, and reflections about my own work with athletes/coaches in my private practice.

Exploring the Consultative Dynamics

In broad terms, two different situations usually present themselves when a psychologist is consulted: (a) the mental preparation of elite athletes for an important match or final, and (b) the resolution of difficulties in a team (or individual concern) that may be hindering performance on the field. Since I had originally specified my thematic concern regarding the expert position of the sports psychologist, it was natural that

the group's focus would be on discussing this topic. Regarding this issue, there was the feeling that:

1. There is intense pressure on the sports psychologist to perform successfully. "I feel stuck in the position of always having to come up with something new; to end the session with something new. I feel more pressure working as a sports psychologist than when I competed as an actual athlete. I feel that the responsibility is put all on me. I feel more under pressure than when working with a suicidal patient" (Paul in conversation, May 1994).

2. Consultations with the psychologist are invariably seen to be the last resort in a string of interventions that the athlete has embarked on. A "well nothing is working, so it must be your mind" type of message is passed from coach to athlete. Paul stated that "by the time an athlete comes to me I find that they have exhausted all their channels".

3. Since the athlete's physical training programme is embedded in structure and direction being offered by the coach, mental training takes on the same flavour in that the athlete expects to be told what to do.

Certain relationship dynamics were starting to emerge during our conversation.

Table 4.1
Relationship Dynamics between Sports Psychologist and Athlete

Sports psychologist	Athlete
Expert	Ignorant, stupid
Active	Passive
Impart techniques	Receive/accept techniques
Pressure to perform	No performance
"Acting on" position	"Being acted upon" position
One-up position	One-down position

Table 4.1 highlights the relationship dynamics that I was sensitive to when looking at the "expert position" of the sports psychologist. Although we felt the necessity to try to change or influence these dynamics in the relationship, we realised that the sports world had very definite views of how the sports psychologist should operate during consultation. In brief, the sports psychologist may be expected to (a) "motivate" athletes, (b) emphasise only positives in conversation with the athletes, (c) teach athletes mental skills that could be used during performance, and (d) apply some "technique" off the field that will enhance the performance on the field.

From our perspective, it appeared as if the following elements (messages) existed in the "request" for "therapy" or "motivation" when an athlete enlisted the help of a psychologist:

1. I am an elite athlete and I do not have any problem (I do not really need help).

2. Help me to improve my on-the-field performance without changing my off-the-field functioning.

3. This help should "fit" with my expectations of sports psychology in which you give me a "technique" to improve my performance (which may then reduce the psychologist's options of how to define the therapeutic relationship).

4. Your (the psychologist) help will be evaluated by the way I will perform on-the-field after I have seen you.

We felt that these expectations may reduce the effectiveness of the psychologist. While certain psychologists (operating from other epistemological frameworks) may feel comfortable working according to these expectations, we felt that psychologists working within the constructionist domain may feel restricted and pressured.

Our Perceptions of the Athlete

In trying to make more sense of the consultative dynamics between psychologist and athlete, Lesley-Anne (July 1994) made a distinction between "ordinary" clients and athletes. This distinction seemed to be based on the assumption that "ordinary" clients who come to a psychologist are "helpless" while athletes are not helpless. In addition, she felt that an athlete was not "helpless" in the same way as a person who is depressed. It seemed that she perceived athletes as being more "competent" than other types of client who consult with her. If her attempt to make this distinction, why did she use the term "helpless"?

According to Lesley-Anne, the athlete and the ordinary client are "coming from opposite directions". In response to her distinction, I forwarded the idea that the athlete may show a form of "helplessness" that he/she (a) is not "allowed" to acknowledge, (b) does not want to show, and/or (c) may have denied. As I was proposing this, my experience with the rugby team (as outlined in chapter 2) started to take on newer meaning.

Paul stated that there is less pressure when working with a really helpless and depressed person because you cannot really make things worse. He believed that the athlete is not desperately calling for help; all the athlete wants is for the psychologist to "apply the finishing touches to" his preparation (the "mind is not quite right").

The athlete may be "forced" to build defences around himself as a form of protection, to maintain an image that is seen to be positive, confident and capable. Does this stop them from opening up on other personal levels? As I thought about this in more depth, the terms "pseudo-competence", "mask of competency" or "pseudo-effectiveness" seemed to fit more appropriately with what we were encountering when consulting with athletes. Lesley-Anne and Paul both agreed with this notion.

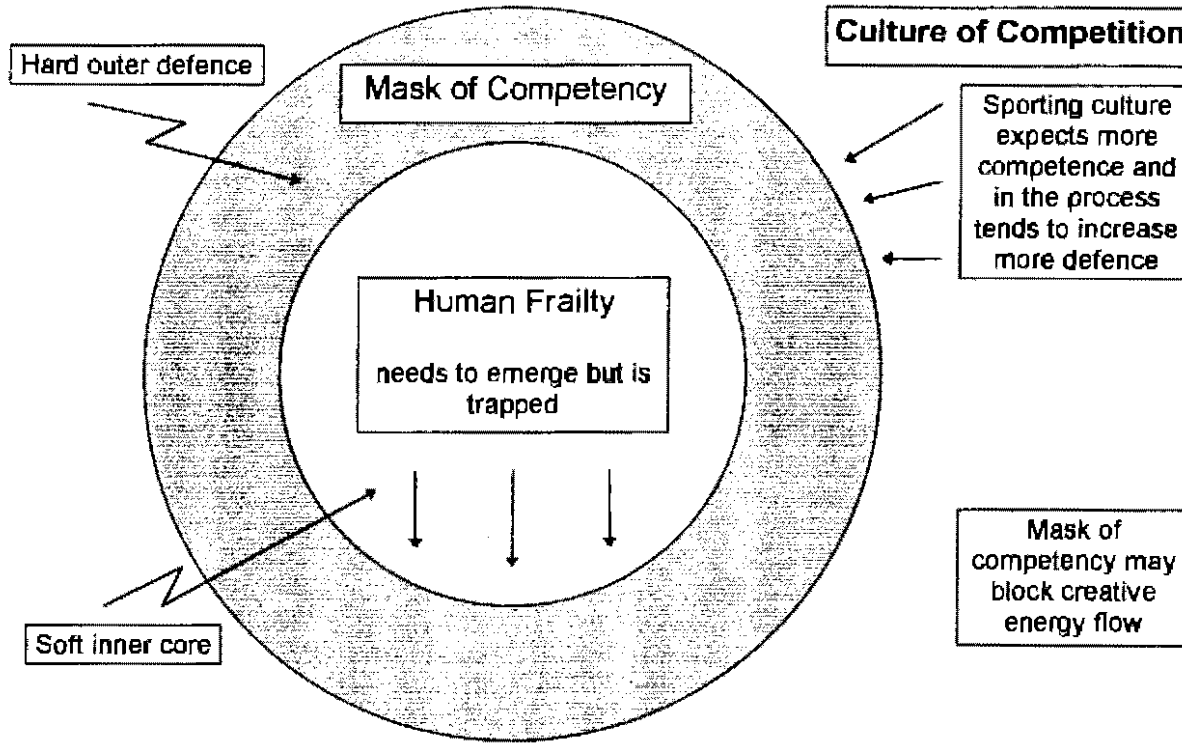


Figure 4.1. Human frailty being protected by a defensive wall.

Figure 4.1 represents a diagram of the nature of the problem that may be presented to us by the athlete. The outer shell or defence is the so-called "psuedo-competence", or "mask of competency". We felt that only first-order change may be possible if the therapy "connects" to the "mask of competency" of the athlete (only using performance enhancing techniques). Motivational techniques that try to get the athlete to perform to higher standards may inadvertently feed into the "psuedo-effectiveness" and may heighten stress levels regarding on-the-field performance.

Behind the "mask of competency" may lie a personal issue that the athlete is grappling with. From our perspective, it seemed important to move beyond the mask of the athlete and to "connect" the athlete to his own unique issue. Addressing this personal issue will expose the athlete's "humanness and frailty".

The inner core (the human frailty) was most likely to show itself when performance declined, yet may be kept in check by the "psuedo-effectiveness" of the athlete. In addition, the sporting culture (coaches and teammates) may work against the athlete showing his "frailty" to the others. In the process, the athlete may use a great deal of internal energy in order to keep the "humanness and frailty" from surfacing. Due to this, we felt that a therapeutic context needed to be created where the athlete could discard the "mask of competency" and engage in therapeutic talk about concerns, doubts and frailties.

In considering the above, it is important to acknowledge that the "mask of competency" is a natural consequence of the "culture of competition" that operates in the sporting world. A "culture of competition" demands high levels of competence and will not tolerate failure.

Towards Further Understanding of an Athlete's Needs

In January 1994, I had consulted with three ice skaters in preparation for the Winter Olympics and the 1994 World Championships. In May 1994 (just before the formation of our action research group), I set up a meeting with the three ice skaters and their coach, to talk to them about their experiences and perceptions of the consultations that I had had with them. I was keen to get some feedback about the work that I was doing. In the light of the ideas that we were creating in our group, the information that I had obtained about their mental preparation needs, needed to be considered. It was necessary to incorporate their perspective into our thinking in order to provide a more balanced view of the topic under discussion.

In my discussion with the ice skaters, three major themes emerged regarding their mental preparation needs: namely, (a) to feel relaxed, (b) to talk with an outsider, and (c) to deal with the unexpected.

The Need to Feel Relaxed

The athletes felt that the "breathing" interventions that were made on the "body level" helped them to remain balanced and calm. Further, the unstructured visualisation using music was considered to be effective only when I verbally guided the process and their mental focus. The athletes felt that they experienced little benefit in only listening to the music. They tended to get bored, resulting in a loss of interest. In addition, it was pointed out to me that they needed a context where they could "keep still to reflect inwardly". During the World Championships and the Olympics it appeared that they could not find the time or the place to relax and reflect (using the music).

The Need to Talk with an Outsider

The athletes felt that there were certain things that they could not talk to the coach about, and that they needed somebody to talk to who was not connected to the ice skating world. The sports psychologist was seen as being an outsider who provided an outlet. From the ice skaters' perspective, the psychologist did not have any vested or conditional interest in how they performed. It was considered a relief to consult with a psychologist who allowed them the space to explore their concerns.

The Need to Deal with the Unexpected

The ice skaters felt that dealing with whatever arises in the buildup to competition, was the main ingredient for successful performance. Being able to deal with the unexpected was considered to be of importance. By definition, the unexpected is "anything that you have not spoken about, or thought about or anticipated". The unexpected event is linked to the random event, the "out of the ordinary". It is impossible to predetermine how one will respond to an unexpected event.

The unexpected event tends to unbalance a person. In reflecting on what the athletes had said to me, I found myself questioning the type of attitude or therapeutic position that the psychologist may need to take in helping the athlete incorporate the phenomenon of the unexpected in his way of thinking. One of the ways of getting the athlete more comfortable with the unexpected is not to prescribe any suggestion, technique or type of visualisation too narrowly or specifically during consultation.

Techniques and Conversation

Some athletes or teams may be reluctant to talk about their concerns. The rugby team (as discussed in chapter 2) only wanted me to impose a technique in a detached manner (without any therapeutic talk about their functioning). After my conversation with the three South African ice skaters and their coach, and the emerging content of the discussion in our action research group, I realised that the "mask of competency" may prevent an athlete from engaging in therapeutic talk.

The discussions with the ice skaters highlighted the value of giving an athlete an opportunity to converse. In talking about the breathing and music interventions that I had carried out, the ice skaters only felt them to be effective when I had guided the process. It was becoming evident that the success of mental preparation may be dependent on the nature of the relationship that exists between psychologist and athlete/team (in which the athlete can explore his concerns), as well as on the type of technique being used (and not solely on the type of technique per se). In looking at successful mental preparation programmes, one should not separate techniques from the relationship that exists between psychologist and athlete. This needed further exploration.

CHAPTER 5

CREATING AND ENGAGING THE BLOCK

> An obstruction that lasts only for a time is useful for self-development. This is the value of adversity. A wise man will seek the error within himself. In this way external obstacles become, for him, occasions for inner enrichment and education.
> (I Ching; in Wilhelm, 1984, p.78)

At our meeting (28 July 1994), I presented a formal outline of the "mask of competency" model of the elite athlete to the group (based on what had emerged during our conversations in the previous meetings). I was excited about this achievement and shared my ideas in a spontaneous and uncensored manner during the meeting. Unknowingly, this had a recoil effect on the group process. At our next meeting (18 August 1994), we all seemed to experience a "block", with a high level of intensity in the group. In order to make more sense of this "block", I wrote a formal reflection focusing on the group process.

How are We Doing?

So much has happened in our group in such a short time. It seems that we have covered so much ground. This formal reflection focuses on the group process and the phenomenon of how we may be learning in our group context.

The meeting on 18 August 1994 was an emotionally difficult one for me. Each one of us seemed to be at a personal crossroads. After our 28 July 1994 meeting, when I had presented my "insights" (based on our conversations in the previous meetings and your formal reflections and questions), I felt really disappointed with myself in allowing my excitement and energy to take over the group process. It must have been like an avalanche to you. I had so much to share with you during the

28 July 1994 meeting, that I just let it out. Unfortunately, the "conversation" became a monologue. So much had happened to me while producing that piece of work that I could not stop myself in wanting to share my thinking with you.

I feel that it is necessary to examine what impact that piece of writing had on the group, as well as to examine the impact of how I went about sharing this work during our 28 July 1994 meeting. As I see it, the following emerged from our 18 August 1994 meeting:

1. All of us experienced a "block" at our 18 August 1994 meeting. Can we explore this more? Did the group process confront us with our own personal issues? In Lesley-Anne's formal reflections she stated that regarding her personal issue her "initial reaction was defensiveness, then anger. 'More of the same' - the group is doing to me what's done out there. Ken and Paul's personal issues don't feel nearly as personal as mine is/might be". Further, Lesley-Anne stated that the "process felt like some sort of climax. All of a sudden everything appeared so crystallised and concrete. I found it very exciting to see what had come out of the work put in, but at the same time I 'hit the wall'".

2. Can we explore how personal issues interact with each other in a group context? In other words, it appeared that the 28 July 1994 meeting confronted us with ourselves. It seems that you may have felt that I had resolved my issue and that you were now left "hanging". In a way, it seems that you may feel that there will be no time or space to take from the group process what you wish to explore.

3. I came to realise that we had not started the group from the same experiential backgrounds. I had an unfair "start" in that I had been busy reading and writing about my experiences before the group formed. I was also involved in other conversational contexts (discussion with Professor Gert Rademeyer, meetings with ice skaters, meetings with hockey

groups, etc.) that may have impacted on our group process.

4. I became aware that interactional processes are complex and can block the conversational process. Conversation should then focus on the perceived blocks that are being encountered in the interactional process. It becomes important to remain in the present and deal with the unfolding moment. This is what the group did during the 18 August 1994 meeting. This is not an easy process. It requires courage, sharing and intimacy.

5. I became aware of our uniqueness during the meeting. In some way, each one of us needs to incorporate and accept the uniqueness of other group members. In other words, the group would have to accept and incorporate my (Ken's) "expert concerns", Paul's "competitive concerns" and Lesley-Anne's "feelings of exclusion and/or sexist concerns". If the group tries to cover up these issues, we may block the creative energy that exists within and between us. I have a feeling that our personal concerns will continue to emerge periodically over time in some way or other.

6. From the discussion on 18 August 1994, it seemed that Paul and Lesley-Anne wanted to take more from the group process. I have taken from the group process by writing and reflecting on issues that I personally feel are of importance. There may be other areas of interest that you may wish to introduce. With regard to what we discuss in our meetings, there is an open agenda. With regard how many times we meet, there is no time limit.

7. Although I initially set up the group, I do not own the group process. We are all contributing to the group process. I have found your reflections of the work that I have presented to be very meaningful. It has added the "news of difference" that is required for new insights to be made. Further, your comments have acted as "energetic recoils or triggers". They have energised me into confronting my own thinking patterns.

8. In all our meetings I have attempted to be curious about all that is happening (the unfolding content of conversation and the unfolding interactional processes). I have also attempted to share all my insights as openingly as possible. I have no hidden agendas; there is no predetermined intentionality in what I want to research. My idea of action research is to create a group context that allows each member in the group to bring whatever is meaningful or of interest into the group exploration. In other words, we must hold onto our own individual freedom and not feel too trapped or inhibited in the group process. This "inhibition" may force us into showing our "masks of competency". In other words, it may be necessary for us to grapple with our own human frailties. As we do this, we may become freer with ourselves. Does this make sense?

9. Up till now, I have learned a great deal during the group meetings. I have learned more about myself than I have about sports psychology. This process is powerful and allows meaningful learning to occur. However, I feel that my role in the group may need to be carefully examined. I know that I initiated the formation of the group but two comments that Paul made had a very powerful impact on me: "I (Paul) can learn more from you (Ken), than I feel that you can learn from me" and "before coming here I did not know what to say, but I knew that Ken would come up with something". Am I not taking on too much responsibility in directing the group? Am I not too much of the expert in the group? If one has to accept this position, what impact will it have on Paul's and Lesley-Anne's learning?

10. Our group is not a therapy group, but it is. Our group is not an educational group, but it is. Our group focuses on areas of interest. Is there a feeling that too much has happened too quickly? Interpersonal processes cannot or should not be rushed. This implies that there may be some sort of time notion regarding the speed of the unfolding interactional process and learning. But how does this compare or fit with the concept of quantum leaps where sudden insights "burst" into consciousness? Can we please reflect on the whole phenomenon of learning and

creativity? Did my individual learning and the production of the piece of work (16 June 1994 and 4 July 1994 reflections) interfere with your own learning? Do you maybe feel that I used the group to satisfy my own ends? Should I formally produce pieces of work or should we just meet and converse about professional areas of interest without my "formal input"? Maybe the formalisation of ideas needs to be examined more carefully. The formalisation (through my reflective writing) may be hindering the interactive process. I feel that we need to discuss this at our next meeting.

In conclusion, I would like to re-emphasise the values that I have personally held onto throughout the group process. These are (a) a sense of curiosity, (b) co-operative conversation and respect, (c) an openness to share, and (d) support and trust.

These values may also be the values that underlie the phenomenon of creative learning. Creativity may be embedded in the type of relationships that a person is involved in. The nature of learning may be determined by the energy flow (and mental activations) that exist in these relationships.

Lesley-Anne's Response

Last session (18 August 1994) was a hard one, but the most worthwhile one for me yet (I got so much out of it). I feel very strongly that it was absolutely necessary to move us as a group to a new level. I am feeling totally unblocked after last session, bursting with ideas and initiative.

I realise I have been leaving Ken to take a lot of responsibility in the group (a personal choice). I would like to unhook myself from that (and would like to talk about that further in the group).

I would like to continue exploring the issue of "...confronting us with ourselves..." (how personal issues interacted in the group context). I trust the group implicitly

and want them to work through my issue of exclusion with me. The term "exclusion" definitely pinpoints more accurately what it is I have been grappling with (the language is important).

The fact that Ken had "started" (writing/talking with groups) before Paul and I joined the group definitely impacted on the process from my perception. I have felt all the way through that no matter how fast I run, I'm always one step behind (Ken has been there already).

In response to "is there a feeling that too much has happened too quickly"; the answer is NO. I do not think it could have been any other way - it is what we do now with what has happened that's important (closing the loop?).

I have been taking from the group, but doing nothing with the energy, information and creativity. I want to change that. If the group were happy with that, I would like to start playing with ideas for a Ph.D. proposal.

Paul's Response

I experience the group as having evolved (quite quickly) into a "therapy-type" group. Our inadequacies, worries, concerns (personal) appear to be "pushing through" - I say "pushing" because I am not sure that Lesley-Anne and I were ready, but Ken was - am I right?

The group can be very powerful to each one of us, but too powerful too soon? (this is an important theme in my head). Is there trust already in this group? Trust to share these inadequacies, or "human frailties"?

There is a feeling in me that I want to slow down. During the last session (18 August 1994), I would have preferred to spend two hours discussing rugby issues or case studies (de-personalise it a little).

In the unfolding interactional processes, Ken has taken the "expert role". Is this only my perception - my tendency to attribute expertness in others? I have taken on a "hesitant role"; thinking what to contribute, not spontaneous etc. I perceive Lesley-Anne to be closer to my role, but not sure yet how to describe her role. Tied up with the above, I think I have a greater need than her to formalise our "systemic sports psychology group" (I feel more "powerful" that way). I feel the need to formalise ideas, but I experience this need more as a way of "slowing down" the group.

Examining our Levels of Intimacy

During the group process with Paul and Lesley-Anne, I discovered that it can be emotionally risky to be honest and to share openly too quickly. Each person may move according to his/her own rhythm regarding "how much to share, how quickly to share it and finding the space or place to share it". The previously mentioned relationship ingredients (curiosity, openness to share, co-operation, trust) may be time dependent and therefore should not be expected to apply to everyone in the same way at the same time.

Although I shared my formal insights (in written form) with the group in an open and honest way, it seemed that my insights had an emotional impact on Paul and Lesley-Anne. The question of how to share intimacy, timing of sharing, and the readiness of others to receive the information became more obvious to me. I felt that I might have damaged the "free flowing" nature of the group by being too intimate too quickly. My eagerness to share my ideas in a spontaneous, yet intimate way, may have inadvertently created a "block".

While I had found myself grappling with my personal issue in the group, it seemed that both Paul and Lesley-Anne were reluctant to define their own unique personal themes. This reluctance may have been due to them not being ready - the timing may not have been right.

Since I had benefitted enormously from my own discoveries about myself, I was eager for Paul and Lesley-Anne to embark on their own exploration of their uniqueness. In retrospect, this eagerness (on my part) may have made them more cautious. Unfortunately, this reluctance on their part, seemed to activate me to formulate tentative personal themes for them (based on my experiences of them in the group and on how they spoke about their work). In retrospect, I feel that this was arrogant of me since I may have imposed my reality onto them. From this, I realised that getting in touch with one's personal theme needs to be internally activated. While life may give one a clue as to what one's issue may be (by "frustrating" one's efforts in how one goes about constructing one's relationships), it is necessary that one engages oneself in the exploration.

How we were conversing with each other in our group triggered me into thinking about intimacy and sharing. I had become aware that there tended to be certain levels of intimacy during our discussion. My feeling was that our action research group should be able to tap into these different levels and not become a comfortable interpersonal conversational context where the individual member remains "untouched" on a personal level. I felt that our group should provide the context for the individual to connect to himself on a more personal level.

In reviewing the nature of our discourse, I started to get a sense that there may be five different levels of conversational intimacy as I was experiencing it in our group.

Level 1: Common talk and sharing about topics of interest. For example, talking about the World Cup rugby where there was no actual personal involvement in the event. The actual personal investment is minimal so little emotionality is released in what is being said, or how it is being said. This is safe talk.

Level 2: Talking about the work that one does outside of the group. The conversation is directly linked to what the individual is busy doing in his own individual context, but

remains on a level that is still external of the individual who is operating in the here and now in the group. For example, the conversation could centre on a case study. When talking about such an experience, the focus is still outside of the individual who is functioning in the group (although it is indirectly linked to the individual).

Level 3: The individual may become emotionally "hooked" in what is being talked about, even though he/she is not personally involved in the particular event or experience being discussed. There is an emotional "trigger". This may reflect an "attachment" or "involvement" with the present event that has some connection with a "similar" event in the past. The topic of discussion triggers an emotional reaction (energy). Trying to make some sense of the emotional reactions in the present will provide the individual with an opportunity to "revisit" the seeds of the past.

Level 4: Talking about your own reactions and feelings when dealing with a particular work/life situation that worries or blocks you provides you with an opportunity to reflect on the process to make more sense of your own personal reactions or perceptions. This allows for "news of a difference" to emerge, via the comments and perceptions of the group members regarding your responses. Curious questions and tentative reflective statements will help create the interpersonal context for a more in-depth personal exploration.

Level 5: Talking about one's own personal feelings or perceptions of the unfolding group process. At this level, everyone in the conversation is connected and has some sort of personal investment. This level of intimacy allows for significant "quantum level" jumps to occur in understanding (to be discussed in chapters 7 and 11). It also provides the opportunity to juxtapose the "present moment" with deeper levels of past experiences (that have shaped the unique evolutionary issue of the individual).

With regard to the five levels of intimacy, I have the image that these levels of intimacy can be likened to the gears in a car. In conversation, people are continually shifting and moving to different levels of intimacy. Deeper levels of intimacy can be achieved if there is unconditional respect and no judgement in the interpersonal context. Guarded and defensive reactions may be evoked if the individual gets a sense that you have some intention to try and "control" or "intervene" or "give unwanted input" to the individual. Too much conversation on one particular level may result in a form of energy staleness, with no news of difference being triggered. Moving to deeper levels of intimacy too quickly can result in a protective or defensive recoil. In other words, the movement to deeper levels of intimacy can be equated to scuba diving. Descent into the depths of the water needs to occur fairly slowly, and carefully.

Families (individuals) in distress may become "stuck" around an issue where deeper levels of intimacy are seldom achieved. While the issue (which brings them into therapy) allows them an opening to reach deeper levels of intimacy, it also tends to "split the reality" into two contrasting perspectives, thereby not allowing easy or comfortable intimate discourse. In other words, the nature of the issue may create opposing energy forces that tend to clash and rigidify the interpersonal process. Because of this, defensive and protective reactions may emerge during conversation, thus preventing an intimate connection. This will be covered in more detail in chapter 11.

CHAPTER 6

BECOMING MORE AWARE OF SELF

> I am I, uniquely me, because I am an utterly unique pattern of relationships, and yet I cannot separate this I who I am from those relationships. For the quantum self, neither individuality nor relationship is primary because both arise simultaneously and with equal weight from the quantum substrate. (Zohar, 1991, p.219)

More Relaxed with the Expert Issue

Our group was meeting once every three weeks for about two hours. After about three months of conversation, I was feeling more relaxed about the expert issue that had originally activated me into getting the group together. In order to give the group a sense of the progress that I had felt I had made regarding the issue, I formally outlined the following (28 July 1994):

1. I see our group as a "safe haven" to explore personal concerns and a context for learning about the complexity of psychotherapy with athletes. In addition, our group provides us with a reflective context where (a) reflections of reflections of reflections can occur over time, (b) open and honest feedback is shared, and (c) co-operative interactions can occur.

2. Because of our discussions, the issue of being the expert no longer seems an issue to me. I have become more aware of myself and some of the factors that operate in the sports psychologist/athlete relationship. I have become sensitive to the potential "clashes" that may occur where "traditional" expectations of the role of the sports psychologist (as perceived and desired by sporting teams/athlete) interact with my own perception of how I would like to define the relationship and where I feel the focus of the consultation needs to be.

3. There is a need in me to refine my own thinking regarding the work that I do with athletes. This results in my continually challenging my own thinking. There is a curious part in me that wants to learn more, to discover more, to seek the complexity that underlies all the "techniques" that sports psychologists use in the hope of enhancing an athlete's performance. Therefore, the group process that we are embarking on may "make us more expert at what we do".

4. I feel that I need to make peace with the expert part of myself. The part in me that does not want to accept the expert position may be "my shadow" (Jung, 1964). The expert issue that I am so sensitive to is fundamentally a personal issue and may not be a general concern for all sports psychologists.

In referring to the notion of "self", Rosenbaum and Dyckman (1995, p.29) warn that "there is a pervasive tendency to assume that we each have some core identity that underlies our existence and defines each one of us". In a formal response to a piece of work that I presented to the group, Paul (August 1994) felt that the acceptance of the "expert position" may not be truly systemic since one may trap oneself in a role, as if the role exists "in reality". It was clear that Paul was adopting a more cautious stance regarding the overall notion that all sports psychologists were encountering the "expert issue" as I was suggesting or implying. Although we all felt the excessive pressure in working in the field, we were also unique in how we perceived the dynamics of this pressure. This uniqueness needed to be explored in more detail.

From Outside Concern to Inside Functioning

Although I consciously tried to refrain from directing the group discussion, there was a tendency in the interactional process for me to get pulled into adopting the "expert position" in our group. This bothered me. Both Paul and Lesley-Anne tended to wait on me to initiate conversation or "capture" the key concepts that were evolving in the discussion. This may have

been due to my doing a great deal of formal writing which I was unconditionally sharing with Paul and Lesley-Anne.

The research process was becoming a personal inquiry into self and the perceptions that I had had about myself and my involvement in certain interpersonal situations. While I felt that I had moved through the original issue of concern, I was having to look more closely at how I was functioning in our own group. I was sensitive to my position in the group and periodically I made comments about not wanting to direct the process. Although I was enthusiastic about the group process, I expressed a fear that Paul and Lesley-Anne may not be getting out of the process what they were needing. They constantly reassured me that they were learning a great deal from the discussions. Lesley-Anne (August 1994) commented: "I experience a personal 'energy burst' after each meeting that we have, although I don't always know how or where to direct it". Despite this, I felt a little uneasy at always having to drive the process.

The action research process was having a personal impact on me - an experiential impact that no literature in the field could have informed me about. The process was challenging a number of the tacit assumptions that I had unknowingly brought into situations. Action research seemed nothing more than a personal exploration of self in which I was dealing with my own unique personal issue. Although I had given myself the freedom to move in a fairly chaotic way during the research process (regarding the focus of our group conversation), I was realising that the process was having a therapeutic effect on me. I was becoming sensitive to my own idiosyncratic way of thinking, feeling and acting in relation to others.

In the group discussion, I found myself shifting my focus from my original "expert issue" concern, to the notion of a more unique "personal issue" phenomenon. This shift was triggered by formal comments that both Paul (July 1994) and Lesley-Anne (July 1994) had made which highlighted some of their own unique

struggles in working in the field. Paul had stated that "when Ken mentioned his idea of possibly forming another group with 'traditional' psychologists I felt disappointed. It felt as if 'history was repeating itself' - am I opting out of competition again"? In contrast, Lesley-Anne commented; "I cannot fully relate to your (Ken's) comment of 'sports psychologists are viewed as being competitors'. However, I have felt the isolation, exclusiveness, protectiveness of information, the controlled and disciplined impact of the selfishness".

Cecchin, Lane and Ray (1994, p.14) contend that:

> One's prejudices [or personal issue], reveal themselves, whether we mean to or not, sooner or later in our words and actions - in how we live our lives. These prejudices seep through our pretenses coming out in our relationships with others - revealed more by what we do than what we say.

During the group discussions, I started to become more aware that there may be two fundamental interacting sources of personal knowledge that "unconsciously" operate within each of us to direct our thinking and/or actions (resulting in a holistic energy thrust). I have broken these knowledge sources into (a) epistemology, and (b) personal theme (or issue). Before examining the nature of the relationship between these two sources, it may be useful to examine Bateson's (1980) understanding of epistemology.

Defining Epistemology

> Epistemology is a branch of science combined with a branch of philosophy. As science, epistemology is the study of how particular organisms or aggregates of organisms know, think, and decide. As philosophy, epistemology is the study of the necessary limits and other characteristics of the processes of knowing, thinking and deciding. (Bateson, 1980, p.250)

Given the above definition, and having experienced the group

process, a number of ideas started to form. It seems that one's experiences in life and the types of life demands that are placed on one, largely determines the type of unique "knowledge base" that one develops over time regarding "the workings of life and one's role in the life process".

> Science, like art, religion, commerce, warfare, and even sleep, is based on presuppositions. It differs, however, from most other branches of human activity in that not only are the pathways of scientific thought determined by the presuppositions of the scientists but their goals are the testing and revision of old suppositions and the creation of new. (Bateson 1980, p.25)

We are all scientists of life. We are all involved in one or other experiment (experience) where certain results are obtained after certain activity. Some experiments may be emotionally taxing and confusing. We try and make sense of the unexplainable or unpredictable and try and construct for ourselves a set of "laws". We start drawing certain conclusions after some of our experiments (experiences). In the experimental process, however, one's understanding of the workings of life and one's activities/involvement in the experiment (experience) are interconnected and wrapped around each other.

Bateson (1980, p.98) states that "epistemology is always and inevitably personal. The point of the probe is always in the heart of the explorer: What is my answer to the question of the nature of knowing?" Bateson contends that his knowing is a small part of a wider integrated knowing that knits the entire biosphere or creation.

Personal Theme

Human beings have vocabularies or repertoires of theories, categories, schemas, scripts, patterns and other forms of knowledge which direct and organise action (Argyris et al., 1985). These may be referred to as "knowledge structures"

(Nisbett & Ross, 1980, p.28). Individuals will act and respond according to the constraints or limits of their existing structures of knowledge (Dell, 1985).

As a means to make more sense in how we were interacting in our group and how we were going about creating our knowledge, the concept of "personal theme" was forwarded. This was my own construction, and is not a "truth". While I may create the impression that the personal theme or issue is a single, static and absolute phenomenon, this is not the case. During the action research process, I experienced my personal theme as being multifaceted with a fuzziness that prevents any definite clarity of shape or form. Although Rosenbaum and Dyckman (1995, p.27) contend that "self is not a thing, but a process....self is not unitary, but a product of multiple drafts", the concept of "personal theme" offered me a way to explain the general thrust (or tendency or recurring pattern) of how one goes about engaging others in an interpersonal context and the difficulties that one may encounter in this process.

The group process had made me aware that I was dealing with an idiosyncratic type of interactional style or functioning within myself that seemed to "manoeuvre" me into adopting the expert position. There were times when this expert theme surfaced in the way that I wrote or spoke (where ideas or concepts were formulated in a rather definite and/or absolute way). Gert had to remind me of this on a number of occasions (after I had handed parts of this manuscript to him). This has made me more conscious in the way that I convey my ideas to others.

The exploratory process of self that I was undergoing in the group, challenged the very being of my existence and way of functioning. While this proved to be unsettling, the fundamental conclusion that I was able to draw from my research experience at that point, was that "I was the constructor and creator of my own reality; of my own thoughts; of my own perceptions; of my own meaning; of my own insecurities". This realisation seemed to

free me of myself, and with it, came a feeling of acceptance. Due to this, the "expert issue" no longer felt an issue to me.

> You know, when you take a mirror and hold it up to a piece of shit, it looks like the shit is in the mirror. It's easy to believe this illusion. Imagine what it would be like being a mirror if you believed you were everything you reflected. (Rosenbaum & Dyckman, 1995, p.39)

Unlocking Deeper Awareness of the Evolutionary Self

Outside of the group activities, I was becoming more fascinated with trying to find processes in my therapies that could help clarify my client's personal theme (which is the subterranean level of the issue that brings them into therapy). I felt that I had evolved a more complex understanding of myself while sharing my perceptions in the action research group. I was beginning to believe that the focus of psychotherapy should be to co-evolve new understanding and meaning around the unique central personal thrust or issue of the person.

In looking at myself, I realised that my personal issue had a history and had evolved over time. The seeds of the presenting problem may be locked up somewhere in the past; either being (a) crystallised around a traumatic past experience/event, and/or (b) wrapped around rigid patterns of family interaction that evoke the types of reactions which the person is presently having difficulty with.

A Simple Exercise

Integrating my experiences in tai chi and incorporating the knowledge about my own discoveries during the action research process, I started to test a simple body exercise during my consultations with my clients. The exercise attempts to integrate mind with body, and encourages conversation to focus on the internal reactions of the body during the exercise. The exercise is based on the fundamental principle that each of us

is striving to maintain our balance in whatever context we are interacting. It is also based on the assumption that in any interpersonal context, energy forces are operating. These forces may clash and cause a person to become unbalanced. In the process, the individual has to "fight" in order to maintain his/her balance. How one "fights" is a reflection of and gives an indication of the personal theme that the person may be struggling with.

The exercise attempts to reflect or mirror how the individual responds to his/her world; and provides a conversational context for making sense of the workings of life and in particular, the nature of the relationships that one is involved in.

Ask the person to stand with feet separated, one shoulder's width apart. The person should be in a balanced position, with equal weight on both feet. Knees should be slightly bent. The instruction to the person is:

> In life, there are a lot of forces moving around you that may unbalance you. These forces may not be fully understood by you, and could be operating on you without your awareness. Stand in a balanced and relaxed position. Your task is to remain balanced throughout the exercise. I am now going to take my hand (which is a force) and "push" against your shoulder. Try and maintain your balance while this is happening.

As I push lightly or softly or more forcefully, the person's body responds to my force. Sometimes I push a little and then maintain the force. Sometimes I push a little and then withdraw. Sometimes I just push hard and fast. My "types" of forces vary in a spontaneous way, without planning.

After a couple of minutes, I ask the person to talk a little about the body experience. After some conversation, we then go back to the exercise. We move to and fro between body feelings

(during the exercise) and conversation about the meaning of these body sensations. The conversation can be taken to another level, if the individual tries to "connect" and "link" the body feelings that were experienced in the exercise to the problem that has brought the client into therapy.

Case Study 1

A 30-year-old woman came to see me because there was no communication between her and her husband. She has two young children, aged 3 and 2 years old. Over the past two years, she had become involved in the Jehovah's Witness religion and her husband was blaming their poor marital relationship on her involvement in this religion. He wanted her to give up the religion, so that the marriage could be saved. According to the woman, she was deriving immense personal courage and benefits from the religion.

During the exercise, she pushed harder and harder against the originally "static" force, which in turn made me apply more force. In doing this exercise with her, she made the following comments: "Every time I feel the force, I react. If the force maintains itself, I need to keep pushing so that I don't get dominated". I asked her: "What is the nature of your force that you use against your husband, when he tries to dominate you?" This evoked more intimate conversation, with her stating that she "cuts off her feelings and emotions" as a way to counter her husband's force.

She questioned whether she should "give into the force". I asked her how her body would do this, and we went back to the body exercise. While doing the exercise, I became aware that she was resisting the force even more. After some time, I reflected this back to her in conversation. She immediately acknowledged that this was true and stated: "I always have to give in first. I have to give 200% for him to give 5%. I have to give in to keep the peace. I am getting tired of always having to give in first".

I then asked her to "go back into time" to a point where she had similar feelings around the theme that "I always have to give in to keep the peace". This opened up new awareness, as she expanded and explored her experiences in her family where she always had to wash up, or feed the dogs, or tidy up, and where her two sisters put in minimal work. She also linked it to the fact that to this day, she always does what her mother wants her to do, despite it being inconvenient or not being in line with her own needs.

Case Study 2

A golfer, aged 34, had just turned professional after working as a plumber for 11 years. He consulted with me because he had not been able to qualify for tournaments or make the cut in those tournaments that he had qualified for (at the end of two rounds of golf he "falls" out of the competition).

We did the exercise in order to make more sense of his personal issue, and the way that he was dealing with the golf demands. After some time in the exercise, he stated that "it feels like my back is up against the wall". In addition, he outlined that he is naturally an aggressive player and that he had become tentative and cautious. After some more time in the exercise, he stated; "You are fighting the force, knowing that you are going to lose". I asked him to expand this theme to other aspects of his life, and/or to go back into time when he had had a similar feeling to what he was feeling now. The theme "I am fighting the force, knowing that I am going to lose" made a lot of sense to his inner self as he became more connected to his fundamental personal issue.

I only saw this golfer for two sessions, doing the exercise in the last session. He then played in two tournaments. In the first tournament, he qualified and made the cut, eventually ending 17th. In the second tournament, he led the field for the first round, placed 2nd after 2 rounds, and eventually finished 7th for the tournament.

Guidelines for the Therapist during the Process

The Need for Trust

This exercise should only be introduced into the therapy process once trust has been established between the therapist and the client. Introducing the exercise too early in the therapeutic process may create tension in the client since the therapist's intentions may be questioned with suspicion.

Talking about the Body Feeling

The interactional process between client and therapist shifts between the body experience and conversation about the feelings of the body. The therapist should not interfere with the reflections of the client. The therapist could capture some of the statements that are made by the client and reflect this back to the client verbatim. The client should focus on these statements, and go back to the exercise (body experience) to try to make more sense of the statements (connecting verbal language with body experience). Allow the client to add more complexity to the statements, so that he/she feels more congruent with the statements.

Be Careful of Reframing

The process of linking mind with body or body with mind is a personal internal experience. The client will unlock his/her own wisdom and meaning if the therapeutic context is respectful and non-judgemental. The therapist's only responsibility is to create the interpersonal space for the client to connect to him/herself. Do not try to give your meaning to the experience or try to positively reframe the experience. This may nullify the client's own inner meaning or sense of how this operates for him/her in his/her life.

The to and fro movement between body message and conversation around the body sensation represents an inner

journey of exploration for the client. Be careful not to interfere in this personal journey by giving your interpretations.

Link Present to Past and Future

Once the fundamental personal theme is starting to take shape (and become crystallised), and the client is satisfied with the understanding and meaning that has unfolded, a new level of therapy can be introduced.

The personal theme that was "discovered" occurred in the present, with the therapist, and was crystallised while doing an exercise. It is necessary to shift this meaning to other levels. Firstly, ask the client to go back in time to a point where he/she had similar feelings that were experienced during the exercise. This connects him/her to a point in time where the "seeds" of his/her theme may exist. Let the client create his/her own reality as he/she talks about this time in his/her life. Asking curious questions or making tentative reflective statements are helpful in allowing the client to expand and explore the complexity that existed at that point in his/her life.

This personal theme needs to be connected and linked to the presenting problem. Thinking of a metaphor of an iceberg is useful, since the tip of the iceberg can be equated to the presenting problem. The presenting problem is the actual manifestation of the deeper levels of the unique personal theme. As the client converses about relevant past experiences, and draws from the created meaning of the body messages during the exercise, and links these to the present presenting problem, new complexity unfolds. A co-evolved reality of the nature of the whole of the iceberg starts emerging.

CHAPTER 7

REFLECTIVE INTERACTIVE EXPLORATION

> Awareness is without choice, without demand, without anxiety; in that state of mind, there is perception. Understanding requires not just a moment of perception, but a continuous state of enquiry without conclusion.
> (Lee, 1975, p.19)

Harvesting the Fruits of Conversation

As the research process unfolded, I was becoming aware that two different levels of journal writing were emerging for me. In the beginning, I was writing on a personal level to myself (in which I wrote down my own perceptions of the events that I was experiencing). As time went on, I found myself wanting to break out of the privacy of my journal. I then started to formally write to others as part of my journal writing. This shift was propelled by my desire to fully embrace the notion of "shared inquiry".

Although I had encouraged each of the group members to formally document their own perceptions, this did not materialise during the early stages of the group's evolution (May 1994 to January 1995). In response to this, I forwarded an alternative (as a means of keeping every member of the group connected to the research process). I suggested that a formal feedback needed to be given to whoever presented any formal work to the group. This was agreed on. This resulted in the group adopting a certain type of methodology regarding the sharing of ideas with each other, namely reflective interactive exploration.

Reflective interactive exploration offers the opportunity for the evolutionary construction of meaning and understanding of experiences that are shared in conversation. Reflective

interactive exploration starts with a formal written reflection of a conversational experience that one has had with another person or in a group. The process provides one with the opportunity to detach from the conversation and to take a meta-perspective of the experience that one has gone through. The impact of this reflection, however, may not be truly felt if there is no "interaction" around the formal ideas/comments that were made. Therefore, the formal reflections that one has come up with needs to be shared with somebody whom one can trust and feel comfortable with. The nature of this interaction needs to create more interpersonal space for further reflections. This can be done if the other person reflects (in a formal way) on the formal reflections by posing curious questions and making tentative comments. It is not enough to just verbally give feedback, since words seem to disappear and evaporate after a short period of time.

Any situation (or activity) that one is involved in can become a researchable project. The process links talking, writing, researching and doing into a never-ending flow of interconnections. Anything and everything can be the investigation of the research process. The reflective interactive exploration process concerns itself with the integration of a series of evolving questions and answers from those involved in the action group. Once anyone poses a question, then one tries to seek a solution (or carry out a new action). A curious question triggers a process of finding out (research), which in turn, produces insights and information, which in turn feeds back to the original question. Original questions produce some answers and solutions, but also produce further questions. These questions would never have emerged (and could not be predicted) at the beginning; since they evolved in the original process of investigation and that path (or direction) of investigation produced (amongst other things) further questions that needed investigation. A question or comment becomes meaningful in the way a person decides to relate to it, according to his/her own experiences and cognitive structures. While some questions or comments may trigger further

insight and motivate further in-depth exploration, other comments or questions may have little or no impact on one.

The reflective interactive researcher cannot unilaterally determine the direction of the research, it is a co-evolved process. Reflective interactive exploration is embedded in relationships and the research is dependent on the setting up of an interpersonal context where trust and respect are essential ingredients. The process demands intimacy from the participants, a honesty and openness in the issues that one is grappling with. One should always be sensitive to what the other participants are grappling with, and be prepared to explore their concerns and not rigidly hold on to what one wants to do. In this way the process allows for impracticabilities and/or for random events to determine the direction of the research process. One will be an integrator of what emerges in the exploration process and personally take from the unfolding process what one finds of interest and relevance, without sacrificing what others will want from the process.

While a formal outline of the reflective interactive exploration process now follows, the steps should not be seen as separate, water-tight compartments since this will go against the "fluid-like" nature of conversation. The attempt on my part to break the process into steps is to help the reader gain an understanding of the process. The seven steps outlined below, complete a full research loop that involves formal writing and formal reflective feedback from others (as it applied to our action group). It is an investigative process that linked the research part of me to the action/practice part of me.

Step 1: Share the Problem in Whatever Form

To share a problem with others may initially feel risky. Therefore, this phase may take courage for one to open up to others, since it requires a fundamental trust in those one talks to.

In dealing with the demands of life, two fundamental areas of possible "research" emerge. Firstly, in our everyday work environments we are constantly having to deal with difficulties or obstacles, which tend to absorb or block our energy. Secondly, as one goes about one's work, certain aspects of what one does may generate intrigue or confusion. This may spark an interest in wanting to get more insight or knowledge about the phenomenon.

Step 2: Allow the Group Process to Unfold around the Problem

In this phase, the group discusses the problem in a free and creative way. Ideas are shared, curious questions asked and tentative hypotheses formed. No definiteness should emerge. No one solution should be strived for. Instead, a free-flowing exchange of ideas needs to be encouraged.

In this phase, one needs to trust the group process and in particular the direction of the conversational flow. Letting go of control underlies this phase.

Step 3: Go Away, Reflect and Write

In this step, one should spend time alone, gathering one's thoughts about what was discussed in the group. This process needs to be done in a formal way, where ideas are written up.

While one derives new ideas and insights in this phase, it is not necessary for all group members to undergo this step. However, it is necessary for the person who "owns" the problem to take the time to formalise the ideas according to his/her own cognitive structure.

In this phase, one stands alone and takes on responsibility for one's own insights. Insights will occur and form according to one's own cognitive structure (Dell, 1985). Insights that are derived from within (as opposed to being externally described) will form the basis for significant learning and personal change

to take place. In the process, one starts to expand one's own cognitive structure internally.

Step 4: Individual Interaction around a Piece of Work

In this phase, the learning is broadened to include others who become involved with the work. The formal piece of work that is written up in step 3 needs to be distributed to the group. Careful reading and further reflection of what is written is required. A group discussion is not necessary. Instead, each group member reads the piece of work and then formally (in writing) reflects some curious questions or tentative comments (with an underlying message of "let's try and make further sense of the issue being confronted") back to the person who presented the piece of work. This becomes the "news of difference that makes the difference" (Bateson, 1980, p.76).

Without feedback one may become apathetic, unmotivated and uncommitted. The piece of formal writing provides a definite focus for the group members. It is during this phase that others will learn from the work that has been presented.

Step 5: Deeper Exploration

The different perspectives that are offered by the group members creates an "intellectual recoil" that unleashes further energy for deeper exploration of the difficulty being researched. This energy recoil occurs when one confronts the formal views of others regarding how you were perceiving and/or dealing with the difficulty. It is during this phase that one's old limiting mindset is fragmented, allowing new and refreshing information to enter your cognitive structure. One experiences an expansion of the mind.

Step 6: Share Insights with the Group in Conversation

One can now go back into free-flowing conversation around your more formalised understanding of the problem that is being

investigated. Sharing one's formal ideas provides further clarity, and a phase of consolidation of the insights occurs. New meaning and understanding of the problem starts emerging.

A sense of accomplishment is the most predominant feeling in this phase. The work that has been done is of a very personal nature (one feels as if one has been on a spiritual journey). You were the director and actor of your own world. This is an enormously satisfying feeling.

Step 7: Apply the Insights to Your Everyday Work

Becoming more aware of the area under investigation (and having journeyed through steps 1 to 6) creates an inner feeling of lightness and freedom.

Now you can go back into your work context and be of benefit to others. You can take your new-found wisdom with you into the work that you do and start applying your new ideas to the situation that you are dealing with. Alternatively, you could approach the situation in the same way, yet with a deeper understanding of the complexity that encompasses that situation.

It may be necessary to modify one's insights and knowledge slightly in order to better fit the demands of the reality that one is encountering.

Variations of the Process

Depending on the availability of time or on one's own need to extract deeper levels of complexity around the presenting problem or area of investigation, three possible types of research interactions are possible.

Firstly, one could remain on a conversational level throughout the process in which steps 1, 2, part of step 3 (with no writing), step 6 (where new insights and ideas are again taken back to the group for further conversation) and step 7

(where the insights are applied to the problem being encountered) are worked through.

Secondly, a researcher may take a short cut by combining the first three steps, thus producing a piece of formal writing about an experience or difficulty that is being encountered. The group then adds further complexity into the work by moving through steps 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Thirdly, the person investigating a particular area of interest moves through all of the above mentioned steps.

Integrating Discourse and Writing

Quantum physics has emphasised the importance of the participation of the observer during quantum processes and how the observer impacts on the nature of the situation (Capra, 1975; 1982). The wave-particle duality surfaced as a major dilemma for scientists involved with subatomic material. I would now like to draw some parallels around the wave-particle notion and reflective interactive exploration.

Consider language, and in particular the talking/writing distinction. Talking can be likened to the wave notion. There is a free-flowing element to talking. Talking is spontaneous, is not consciously directed and lacks organisation. At the end of conversation, however, there is no substance. There is nothing to hold on to. Talking dissipates; it evaporates.

When we talk about things over time, or when we develop ideas over time, there are natural punctuations that occur when we need to capture the essential aspects of the ideas to create meaning. If we don't capture this information at these critical times, then we may get out of sync with the process and/or lose the wholeness.

If we let time go and allow the process to evolve before we reflect into the process, we get a wider, longitudinal picture.

This reflects the macro flow. More immediate reflections into the process; with a reduced time dimension, may only produce parts to the whole. This may be referred to as the micro flow of information.

One may not get sense of the obstacle because one may not have allowed enough time to pass in order for the ideas around the obstacle to form and crystallise. Meaning and understanding have a time dimension. In order to understand complex phenomena, one may need a certain time period to pass in order for ideas to evolve. If this occurs, ideas and concepts will have had a natural period to incubate before one starts making sense of the complexity. If the timing is right, ideas seem to flow during the writing phase.

Reflective interactive exploration representing written reflections of what has transpired in a situation can be likened to the particle notion. During writing, one is forced to "detach and stand still" in order to capture the essence of one's experiences. One organises the material during writing. Writing also offers one the opportunity to take on a meta-position. According to Penn and Frankfurt (1994), adding writing to conversation in therapy hastens the discovery of new voices and the creation of new narratives. "The writing, a tangible object as well as a process, serves as an artifact of the relationship between client and therapist" (p.219).

Table 7.1 draws further analogies of how to integrate the different levels or realities of the wave/particle duality. It is important to connect these two levels (talking and writing) throughout the unfolding process. Timing is critical. If one does not take stock of what is happening at certain stages; one can lose important information.

Table 7.1

Comparing Creative Activities using the Wave/Particle Distinction of Quantum Physics

Wave nature	Particle nature
Nonverbal	Verbal
Right-Brain	Left-Brain
Mind	Body
Talking	Writing
Image	Drawing
*Using music to transcend obstacles	*Reflective interactive exploration

Note. *The integration of these two approaches forms the basis of the therapeutic model when working with athletes and will be discussed in chapter 14.

Quantum Leap Discovery

During the process, I became more aware of the notion of time and timing. In reflective interactive exploration, timing of reflections and comments seems to be critical. During the reflective interactive explorative process, spontaneous insights tend to "explode" into consciousness. This can never be anticipated. The timing of this depends on the unique unfolding process that the person is busy with.

In examining the overall impact of the reflective interactive exploration process, Lesley-Anne (February 1995) commented:

> This type of research does not allow for complacence because too many questions remain unanswered if you do not continue. I found that there was a natural momentum that just carried me along. It implies a depth to the topic that I would ordinarily ignore. The initial impression I had on both occasions that I received reflections from you (Ken) was that all of a sudden there was so much more than before.

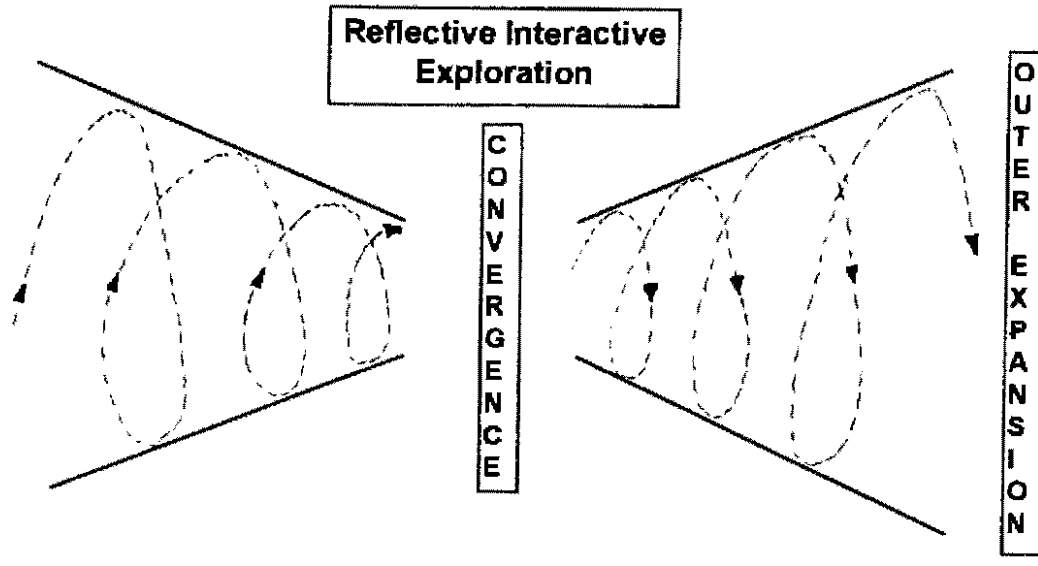


Figure 7.1. The expansive effect of the reflective interactive process (as shown by Lesley-Anne).

Further, Lesley-Anne (February 1995) stated that:

1. The process seems to stimulate a more permanent curiosity about the subject, rather than a final conclusion about it.

2. Each piece of response that I received from you forced me into discomfort and, I can even say, blocked me;

- it forced me to look at issues I would not have even considered myself,
- it made me look at things that I was avoiding for whatever reason,
- it is easy to get lazy and feel O.K. about superficial conclusions.

3. Very importantly, the reflective research helped me to confront myself as a therapist. I had to justify to myself why I did what, and this makes you a lot more tuned in or aware the next time you go into an intervention. It forces a greater responsibility when you examine where you are coming from and where you are going. If you work a lot on instinct (as I do), you tend to go with the flow, and then don't always question things afterwards, especially if it was an effective intervention.

4. The reflections unleashed an initial energy in me, and made me feel motivated and inspired.

Things can move quickly in the reflective interactive exploration process. There appear to be periods in the process where an escalation of new information emerges. This creative unleashing of ideas of second-order magnitude can be explosive. When experiencing these quantum insights, I found myself full of energy. In trying to make sense of the process of discovery, the following stages of intellectual states are proposed (as I had come to experience the process).

Stage 1: Period of stability, with no internal agitation or excitement. Not susceptible to too much external influence. Little energy expended. No new information or insights.

Stage 2: Over time there may be an evolutionary block or critical stage of an investigative process that an individual is having to confront (to be covered in more detail in chapter 11). The individual is confronted with his old thinking patterns that may have inadvertently contributed to the obstacle and blockage.

Stage 3: It is during this stage that most people move into "more of the same" problem-solving approaches, using old thinking patterns (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974). In order to get out of this potentially draining and destructive situation, the action research process was suggesting that an intimate, co-operative and respectful relationship was necessary

for an energy and information exchange to occur between the participants. In this exchange, relevant "news of difference" becomes a reality (Bateson, 1980). This "news of difference" needs to be concretised and incorporated into the cognitive structure of the individual. One way to do this is through reflective interactive exploration, where ideas and curious questions are formally externalised.

Stage 4: A period of internal excitement and high energy levels (mentally and physically) occurs in the individual who is "preparing" for the quantum leap or breakthrough. This gets activated when the individual grapples with the formal comments or questions that were posed. If the individual "connects" to this input, commits him/herself to a curious exploration of the information and has an open two-way energy flow in the relationship where the conversation can take place, then a quantum breakthrough is possible. In essence, a quantum discovery is a creative journey of self-discovery in relation to the content or concern being explored.

Stage 5: A great deal of energy is released as one "jumps" from one level to another. The energy gets triggered if one starts "encountering" the internal block that is stopping the learning process from unfolding. In order to increase the possibility of quantum discovery, it is imperative that one keeps the focus on the present moment that one is struggling with. One's energy should be used to formalise personal ideas around the content that unfolded during the reflective interactive exploration. Quantum insights need to be shared. Since the reflective process is embedded in relationships that exist in the conversational group, it is imperative that the individual has an outlet to talk about his/her insights. What role or position should be taken by the another person who is interacting with the "high energy" of the participant who has "broken through"? While the "passive participant" may not fully understand the insights that the energetic person has discovered, reflective listening is suggested. While the listener may feel "overwhelmed" by the energy and enthusiasm of

the "discoverer", one should not feel pressured into thinking that meaningful comments or questions should be made (see Gert's reflection in chapter 12, section "Teaching and Learning").

Stage 6: During the high there is a sense of cosmic connection and wholeness, as well as an intuitive understanding of the underlying complexity that one may have just touched. Quantum leaps of discovery use up a great deal of energy. A period of consolidation is needed to regenerate the expended energy. The length of this consolidation period is dependent of the amount of energy triggered and released in the quantum leap. There may be a sense of closure, which in turn may cause one to feel emotionally low. It is the after-effect of coming off the high.

Trusting the Research Process

In his interpretation of verse 29 of the Tao Teh Ching, Page (1989, p.60) writes:

> The universe is sacred.
> You cannot improve it.
> If you try to change it, you will ruin it.
> If you try to hold it, you will lose it.

It is necessary to examine what type of attitude is necessary for the individual to move through the above-mentioned stages and especially through stage 3, where "more of the same" tends to occur most often (de Shazer, 1985; Watzlawick et al., 1974). Stage 3 is usually a highly energetic phase where there may be a clear focus regarding how one should tackle the problem being encountered. This clear focus, however, may be based on the old thinking patterns of the person.

When a person senses that no solution is forthcoming, a further burst of energy is released in order to break through. A struggle unfolds; a struggle against oneself and one's self-imposed construction of reality. The energy that is

triggered may get wasted/trapped if one follows the previous historical interactional pattern (predictable pattern) that exists around the creation of this problem. This trapped energy leads to more inward frustration and irritation, which in turn acts as nature's activator to trigger the person into trying to resolve the obstacle once more. This continues over time. More and more frustration may build.

One should stop feeding into the destructive spiral. According to the philosophy of Taoism, "wanting more" and/or "wanting to control or intervene" are some of the attitudes that underlie the "more of the same" problem-solving behaviour (Dreher, 1990; Lash, 1989; Page, 1989).

> The wisest person trusts the process,
> without seeking to control,
> takes everything as it comes,
> lives not to achieve or possess,
> but simply to be all he or she can be.
> (Verse 2 of the Tao Teh Ching; Dreher, 1990, p.66)

In order to move through stage 3, an individual will have to trust the unfolding process and be patient (a time dimension) with what transpires in the process. Learning to trust is opposite to trying to prescribe or control the unfolding process. Learning to trust in essence means that one has to accept one's inability to change the conditions surrounding oneself, to accept one's own "smallness" or "frailty". Being patient implies that one should not have a predetermined time constraint in one's mind as to when and how things will change. There is a willingness to wait. To accept and incorporate the problem being experienced without feeling the pressure to solve the problem indicates that one is prepared to "embrace" the situation for what it is. In chapter 11, I will re-look at this in more detail under the section of "Engaging the Process".

CHAPTER 8

UTILISING REFLECTIVE INTERACTIVE EXPLORATION

> There is above all a reflexive loop between professional and client that includes the therapist's own working philosophy. Social constructionists hold firmly to the idea that there are no incontrovertible social truths, only stories about the world that we tell ourselves and others.
> (Hoffman, 1991, p. 13)

Due to the personal benefits that both I and the action research group had derived from the reflective interactive exploration process, I decided to test its application in my work with athletes. In this chapter, I will explore how the reflective interactive exploration process was utilised with the coach of a provincial men's hockey team (as part of a mental preparation programme). This chapter also examines (a) the interpersonal issues that surfaced in the process, (b) some of the complexity surrounding the timing of the mental preparation intervention with the team, and (c) the "flow" of messages between players, coach and myself as more and more demands were placed on the team as the competition date drew closer.

History of the Coach/Psychologist Relationship

My relationship with Craig (the coach) goes back to 1991, since when I had periodically consulted with Craig and his team on both club and provincial levels. In this time (four year period), we had developed an open and respectful relationship where ideas regarding players and tactics were interchanged.

Craig had been very successful as a coach. He had won the Transvaal premier league in 1991, 1992 and 1993. In 1992, his team won the South African club champion of champions and in 1993 his team reached the finals of this championship. In 1992, he coached the Transvaal under-21 team which won the

interprovincial tournament, and again reached the finals of this tournament in 1993.

I was involved in the mental preparation of these teams in the buildup to the finals. In addition, there were other critical times in the season when I consulted with the teams due to below average performance. These intervention times were discussed in great detail with Craig before I intervened on the team level, so that we could both explore what issues he and the team were having to deal with.

I considered Craig to be a dedicated coach who took his coaching responsibilities seriously. He was an "analytical planner". There were times, however, when he tended to become too intense in his planning and interaction with the players. From my perspective, Craig's intensity often resulted in his becoming too narrow in his focus at times. Craig always consulted with me during critical periods where important decisions needed to be made. This contact was usually done telephonically, with periodic face-to-face meetings.

Appointment as Senior Provincial Coach

In early 1994, Craig was appointed to take over as the senior coach of the Transvaal men's hockey team. He was very excited about this. Periodic telephone discussions suggested that he was planning a new programme of technical, tactical and mental training for the provincial team.

The Issue of Coach Neutrality

After his appointment, he approached me to discuss the issue of whether he should remain as the coach of the Wits Technikon club side while being the coach of the provincial team. Most of the previous provincial coaches were also coaches of club teams.

In our conversation, both Craig and I felt that (a) there was evidence of subgrouping of players in past Transvaal

provincial teams, (b) the Transvaal team had a "block" during the interprovincial tournament and never played to potential, (c) there was an "arrogance" in past teams that interfered with the team's performance, (d) very little synergy was evident in past teams, and (e) a new team culture was needed.

In order to make himself accessible to all players and clubs (and not aligned to the Wits Technikon club team), Craig decided not to coach at club level. This was not an easy decision for him. His position, however, would be a clear statement of his neutrality to all players.

The Issue of Old Versus New

In the middle of June 1994, Craig telephoned me to discuss team selections and appointment of captain. From this conversation, it appeared that Craig and the selectors had embarked on a "youth policy". Craig was also thinking of appointing a 20-year-old player as captain (he has tremendous potential and had just recently being selected for the national team). I reflected back to Craig that he seemed to be confronting an "old versus new" dilemma.

My comment made sense to him. Our conversation became more complex with statements/questions being posed such as:

- Which of the old players could provide the core of the new culture?
- What impact would the responsibility of being captain have on the performance of the 20-year-old? Are we pushing him too quickly?
- Old and new need to mix and integrate. This is where the synergy lies.
- What were we actually trying to discard in the old?
- It is important to acknowledge the history of a team. The "new" needed to accept the "old" pitfalls of the team and become aware of possible repeated interactional or thinking patterns.

When the side was selected a number of interesting things emerged:

- There was a balance and mix of old and new players.
- An old experienced ex-national player was appointed captain. He had never previously been captain of any team before (club or provincial). He was an easy mixer with people and was well-liked. He was respected as a player who had achieved success.
- The young 20-year-old was appointed as vice-captain. Previously, no such appointment of vice-captain had ever been made (unfortunately this player had to withdraw from the team due to his national selection which meant that he would be away on tour during the interprovincial tournament).

The Issue of Intensity and Overload

This issue had been "bubbling" for some time, with signals being given by the players that "too much was happening". When I met with Craig on the 28 July 1994, I attempted to connect him to this issue, by asking him to engage in the reflective interactive exploration process. He agreed to this.

In order to provide a contextual understanding of the intensity and overload issue, I will outline and cover (a) the unfolding process leading up to our meeting and some of the "messages" that were being given by the system, (b) my own perceptions of the meeting, (c) Craig's reflections of our meeting, and (d) my reflections and comments of Craig's reflections.

The Unfolding Process and the Messages of the System

Craig had made it known to me right in the beginning that he would want me to do the mental preparation with the team. The fundamental question for me was when I was to intervene, and what form the intervention would take. At this stage (27 July 1994), I had not been involved with the team during the whole of

the season. I had consciously kept my distance, since I had felt it necessary for Craig to develop the team synergy and culture himself and to establish himself as coach and leader of the team.

After a telephonic discussion with Craig, I decided to set up a formal meeting (28 July 1994) only with him to reflect back my perceptions of where he and the team where at that point in time (two weeks before the start of the interprovincial tournament). I walked into that meeting with information that I had received (from my consultations with the Wits Technikon Club side) regarding the intensity of the demands that the players were having to deal with. I felt that these signals needed to be listened to and that I needed to focus on these messages as part of the mental preparation of the provincial team.

Wits Technikon hockey club. Craig had coached this team in 1992 and 1993. He had left the club to concentrate all his efforts on his provincial commitments. Six of the provincial players were in the Wits Technikon club team.

On 28 June 1994, I was asked to consult with the Wits Technikon team (this was seven weeks before the start of the interprovincial tournament week). The new coach had heard about the work that I had done with the team in the previous year.

In discussion with the new coach, I came to learn that, (a) his team was not performing to potential, (b) there was little or no inner desire to win, (c) players felt lethargic, and (d) players felt torn between club training and provincial training.

The Wits Technikon side were favourites to win the league again. However, they had just lost 0-1 to a third placed team. It was this result that had triggered the coach into asking me to meet with the team. I asked the players in the team to draw their own images of where the team was at that moment. In the follow-up discussion, it surfaced that the players were feeling

tired from all the demands. If they were not practising with the club, there were provincial demands. All the players and the coach had stated what fun the team had off the field, and that there was a great team spirit. I sensed this as well. However, an irritability among some of the players had surfaced on the field of play. It was unusual for players to be "fighting" with each other during a match. This was of great concern to the players and the coach.

After the meeting, I acknowledged that the players were having to deal with excessive demands (which caused pressure and tension). I had felt that the irritability on the field was a message to the coach that the players were playing too much hockey. I recommended that the club coach reduce his training and give the players some time off.

Informal telephonic conversation with a national player. On 23 July 1994, the Wits Technikon team lost a further match (this time when playing against the second placed team in the league). After the match, I had a telephonic discussion with a senior national player of the team who had played in that match. This player was not part of the provincial team since he was in the national team that would be touring Malaysia during the interprovincial tournament. He stated that the individual players had no desire to win. He stated that it was not a team problem, but rather an individual player problem. What he meant was that each player seemed to be unable to achieve the objectives that they had individually set for themselves. Individually, there was no inner desire. He said that he personally felt tired and overburdened. The players had little energy.

Team building exercises in the provincial team. I had heard from one of the players that Craig had asked a management consultant to do team building exercises with the provincial team. I had no knowledge of what was done in this workshop. The workshop was conducted before the team embarked on a preparation tour of Natal on 15/16 July 1994.

As a psychologist, I always feel that it is important to know what reality is being created by other professionals who have connected with the team before my services are required. The information that is passed on by other professionals needs to be carefully assessed so that one does not negate, reject or disqualify this information, but instead links with it in a meaningful way. One should not challenge or reject a previous professional's input since this may result in your own rejection. Instead, a conversational context needs to be created where concerns and issues can surface regarding the understanding of past information, knowledge or experiences. In this way, the players can make sense of what they had learned from others in the past and be able to expand this knowledge in a more meaningful way.

While I was not at all concerned at what this other professional may have said to the players, I did wonder WHY Craig had felt it necessary to introduce this person to the team. In addition, he had not discussed this with me (in the past he had always bounced ideas off me regarding types of interventions he had made in the team). What was behind Craig's making this decision? I needed to understand this further.

The Formal Meeting with Craig

Craig phoned me on the 20 July 1994, to ask me to do the mental preparation with the team. He asked me to come back to him regarding when I would like to meet the team. He stated that they had a heavy schedule, but that he would definitely fit me in whenever I felt it was necessary to meet with the team. In talking to me, my perception of the intensity that other players had given me regarding the preparation programme was confirmed. How useful could I now be to both Craig and the team? What position should I now adopt in the system? Given this background information, I decided to: (a) not formally meet with the team at that present point in time (this would only add to the intensity being experienced by the players even if the content of discussion was to focus on how to relieve the intensity), and

(b) set up a formal meeting with Craig to converse.

Before arriving at the meeting on 28 July 1994, I was aware that: (a) the top provincial club, Wits Technikon, was struggling to perform to potential, and (b) the players felt under stress with all the intensity of demands. There was just too much happening. Was Craig aware of this? What was making him so intense with all the demands? How did he perceive the perceptions of the players? What were his own concerns about the team and the interprovincial tournament?

At our formal meeting (this was our first formal meeting since January 1994 when the issue regarding his coaching a club side was explored), Craig stated that: (a) the team was integrated and synergetic, (b) their tour to Natal had been successful, with the team winning both games (2-1 versus Natal, 4-1 versus Mynahs), (c) the team was really physically fit due to the introduction of a physical trainer, (d) he was very happy about the commitment of the players, (e) a new culture was evident in the team, and (f) the clubs might be suffering since the players might be more committed to the provincial team.

He then outlined the programme that he had set out for the team for the two weeks leading up to the tournament (1-13 August 1994). In that programme, he had scheduled a workshop of a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) on Monday 8 August 1994 with the same management consultant that was mentioned in the previous section. The programme included three practice provincial matches, technical training and social activities. On every night there was a commitment.

After listening to him, I asked him what concerns he had at the moment and how he saw me fitting into the system? These two questions seemed to jolt him. He then stated that he did not know what to expect at the tournament. Previously, this team had always under-performed at the tournament. Would this happen again? He also stated that the team had never played under stress before, and therefore he did not know how the players

would handle stressful/pressured games at the tournament.

As he spoke, I became aware that the intensity of his programme was in response to his concerns that he was now expressing. He was driven to get the team properly prepared. He was leaving nothing to chance, yet in the process of preparation was adding pressure to the side that could inadvertently reduce the performance of the team during the actual tournament (especially on the last two days when the semi-finals and finals are played).

I commented on his thorough preparation so far. I stated that this was going to be the "fertile soil" on which the team's success will be laid. However, I felt that I needed to connect him to the intensity of the demands that the players were having to deal with. In order to do this, I stated that I was really wanting to be of assistance to him. In previous years of working together we had always managed to grapple with the issues that he and/or his team were confronting. At the moment, however, I stated that I could not see time or place where I could fit into the programme. In fact, I stated that it might be counter-productive for me to add further commitments to the players. Having said this, I felt that the players needed mental preparation due to the unexpectedness when playing in a provincial tournament. How did he see the dilemma that I was having?

Craig then started to speak of overload and stated that he had become aware of this. I started to wonder whether Craig could reduce this overload? Did he himself feel its potential destruction for the team? After further conversation, I stated that he would have to deal with his own feelings of insecurity if he decided to distance himself from the team and reduce their commitments. He was now caught between his need to try to further improve their technical skills and the team's response to reduce the commitments that he was placing on them. This would mean changing his well planned programme for the last two weeks.

After listening further, I suggested that I would meet with the team on Thursday 11 August 1994 (three days before the tournament started) to do a reflective relaxation with music in order to reduce old tensions and to build up creative energy (Jennings, 1991). I would not cover any topics or have any in-depth conversation with the team. After this, he and I could connect during the tournament and deal with any relevant issue that he or the team might be experiencing at that particular point in time. At this stage, however, it was impossible to plan for this. Instead, we should just move with the unfolding process during the tournament.

I stated that he should leave our meeting and reflect on our discussion and decide for himself what he wished to do. If need be, he could contact me again. After our meeting, I telephoned him to ask him to put in writing some of his reflections about our discussion. He said he would be happy to do this, and stated that he was in the middle of changing his programme. He had definitely decided not to ask the other consultant to come and do the SWOT analysis. "The team would learn nothing new about themselves in this process". Further, he had decided to cancel the last of his provincial practice matches (to be played on Saturday 6 August 1994).

Craig's Perceptions and Comments about our Meeting

In a formal reflection Craig (30 July 1994) commented:

I left the meeting feeling relaxed and with a clear mind as to how the team should approach the two weeks build up to the tournament.

Bearing in mind that the squad of players had been doing physical, technical and tactical skills since mid-April, the emphasis in the next two weeks needs to be shifted to one of LOW KEY - I was happy with this approach after our meeting.

Ken pointed out the dangers of overload and I am aware that

a lot of the homework and preparation has already been done and it is the fine tuning on team tactics, set plays and mental preparation that requires attention.

Ken suggested a revised programme be drawn up which does not place great demands on the players in terms of additional time with the team. Timing is critical and as a result of the discussion, two training sessions were taken out of the programme.

Ken's phrase "trust the process" springs to mind - overkill will cripple the process.

My Reflections and Comments about Craig's Comments

From Craig's comments it appeared that he felt more relaxed internally after our meeting. It seemed that he became more aware of the "bigger picture" after our conversation. He realised that timing is important. When to do what so that there is a sense of integrative fit is the essence of timing. When one starts running out of time how does one still hold on to the concepts of timing and balance? What happens to timing when time becomes pressured and reduced? The concepts of trust and waiting then become more applicable to the process.

> Waiting means not advancing, it does not mean giving up an undertaking. To defer is not to abandon. Waiting is not mere empty hoping. Every act is confined to its proper place and one is not damaged by external influences while waiting. (I Ching; in Wilhelm, 1984, p.10)

The waiting period before competition time is extremely stressful for coaches. There are always doubts and uncertainties whether the team has been sufficiently prepared.

Of significant importance is how the team responded to Craig's revised programme. Craig stated: "I put the revised programme to the team before our match. There was no immediate

verbal reaction but the mood in the team talk was very good and the performance of the team in the first half was above my expectations felt prior to the match". It seemed that the team had answered to Craig's revised programme in the best possible way, through their performance. It also seemed that Craig was taken aback by their performance. From this feedback (the team's performance) it was hypothesised that we were moving in the correct way at this point in time. The concept of WAITING, with no extra commitments, seemed to match the needs of the players.

There were three verbal comments from the players that need further examination.

1. "I'm very happy with the change in programme but it is very much a mental thing and the easiest excuse is to complain of too much hockey". This comment seems to suggests that this player feels that one's mental framework determines how the body will function over time. There is a sense that as long as the mind is right things will get better and better with excessive training. Further, this player may believe in pushing himself to the limit. It was hypothesised that the performance of this player might decline over time during the tournament due to excessive overload. While this player expressed happiness with the changes in the programme, he came up with a "Yes, but" type of response. I suggested to Craig that he monitor this player's performance over the week's tournament to test my tentative hypothesis about him.

2. "Why the change in the programme - why the change of thought"? Craig was perceived as being very ordered and organised. Players may have come to expect a rigid structure of how practices are to be conducted. This player seemed surprised at Craig's changing. He may have come to expect Craig as always placing commitments and demands on the team. There was also a sense of curiosity and intrigue as to why Craig had changed direction.

3. "All the preparation has been done, cutting down is

great". This comment captured the global view of the team regarding where they had presently found themselves in the buildup. The "fertile soil" was in place. It was now time to wait for the seeds to grow. One had to wait; one could not rush the process.

In his formal reflection, Craig had listed three concerns. In some way these concerns may have been linked to his own personal issue.

Firstly, he commented: "The team has not been placed under any form of stress or pressure - we therefore have no way of seeing or measuring how we will react in any of these situations".

Secondly, he questioned whether he should use the SWOT guy. It appeared that the team has been responsive to new innovative ideas. The players perceived Craig as being an innovative coach. Was it important for him to have new ideas up his sleeve? Did he always feel the need to stimulate his players?

A further concern related to how certain players perceived him as a person. Some players found Craig's interactional style somewhat dictatorial and rigid. Craig stated that "certain players have expressed the view that I seem quite tense, they say I may be too distant, regimental and 'Hitler-like' were the words used". These players were from the Wits Technikon club (where Craig had coached in 1993). I wonder whether these players had noticed a change in Craig? Was he more serious and intense now that he was coaching a provincial team? The issue of respect was mentioned by Craig. Did he sincerely feel that the players trusted and respected him? What sort of coach did Craig respect when he himself was playing provincial hockey? I asked him to reflect on this.

I forwarded Craig a condensed version of my own reflection of our meeting. I asked him to reflect on my comments and in particular whether he feels that he is an intense person. I

stated in my letter to him: "It may be your own personal intensity that may be putting pressure on the team and not actually the playing/hockey commitments".

Acknowledging the Coach's Situation

After our formal meeting, both Craig and myself had exchanged formal reflections of the conversation that had transpired. After reading my reflections, Craig added further comments to my statements. I then responded back to him in a formal way; as outlined below.

The Issue of Coach Neutrality

It appears that you have missed the interpersonal interaction in the club set-up. Being apart and separate must have been lonely. This may have lead to a buildup of energy and intensity within you. You must have felt very fresh and energetic when you interacted with the provincial squad. The players may not have had your level of enthusiasm.

From a time management, neutrality and "planning" perspective, it seemed that it was a good decision not to coach at club level.

You state that a new culture is emerging and that there is more team unity. Well done. Developing a healthy culture within a group is often a difficult process.

The Issue of Old versus New

You speak about "commitment to the cause". This is of interest to me. Do you perhaps know what the cause is? Can you try to define the cause?

The Issue of Intensity and Overload

In this section, you make mention of "weak characters, with

no drive" in reference to the Wits Technikon players in the provincial team. You coached these players last year. You therefore have more insight into their functioning than that of players from other clubs. I would like to reflect on some of your comments regarding some of these players. You mentioned "lack of confidence" for Batch, Bruce and Peter. How will this impact on how you coach or handle these players? Do you feel that they need special attention? Try and reflect on how you intend dealing with these players. They may need a different approach.

Another term you used was "soft on ball and tackles". You used this for Roger, Bruce and Steve. These are your midfield players! Our discussion last night also centred on the midfield players. In addition, you mention "loses concentration" for Bruce, "occasionally goes on walkabout" for Roger, and "floats around the field" for Steve. These are all statements that suggest that they are not maintaining a consistent level of performance. I am wondering how you could structure their playing roles for them in such a way as for them to have specific tasks to focus on. You could then get them to monitor their own achievement in these tasks and to report back to you on how they feel they have done.

You seem very aware of some of the personal difficulties of the players mentioned. As you said last night, coaching is all about people management. It seems that the players see you as being different. You are constantly trying to get the most/best out of them. Your challenge at the tournament will be how you manage the players that you mentioned. You are an innovative coach; you are not stereotyped and predictable.

Of interest to me is your statement regarding the sort of coach that you respected when you were a player : "Someone I liked and could connect to - someone with a good overall balance; fair, approachable, disciplined and open". Do you think one bases one's own coaching philosophy on one's past playing experiences and interactions with past coaches?

You seem to have got in touch with your intensity and seriousness. You stated that "in a sense I may be rushing the process". In a follow-up discussion at a club game (6 August 1994) you stated that you felt more relaxed and calmer. Even Karen (wife) had remarked on it. Last night (11 August 1994) you spoke at length of how you had heard the Australian coach speak to his players (at an international match that you were watching). Are you becoming more aware of how you need to interact with your players off-the-field, during team-talks and half-time talks?

I would like to suggest that you keep a diary of the interprovincial tournament week. In this diary you can make brief notes on how you feel about the team's performance, individual player concerns, your own doubts and important learning points. This will help you keep in touch with the unfolding process at the tournament. Try and spend 30 minutes a day away from the team to reflect inwardly.

As stated, I will meet you and the team on Sunday (14 August 1994) at 8.00pm for a one-hour meeting.

Involvement with the Team at the Tournament

In a follow-up discussion, Craig mentioned that (a) the team wants to know when I (Ken) will be meeting them, and (b) that the players know that we work well together and have a good relationship.

These two comments seemed to refer to my perceived "value" in the hockey system. Was I the one person who could influence Craig most? Did I balance or complement Craig? Did the players sense that I could reduce Craig's intensity through our relationship and interaction? It became apparent to me that the the sports psychologist may have a function in a sporting system other than conducting mental preparation sessions.

The provincial hockey team had to play seven provincial

matches in seven days. There were 12 teams divided into two sections. Over the first five days, teams in the two sections played a round robin against each other. The first placed team in section A then played the second placed team in section B and vice versa in a knock-out situation. The teams that win this semi-final played in the finals on the last day of the tournament.

The interprovincial hockey tournament is both physically and mentally demanding. Two distinct levels are evident: (a) the round robin section, and (b) the final two days of semi-final and final matches.

The First Formal Meeting with the Team

I met with the team on the Thursday (11 August 1994) before the interprovincial tournament. In discussion with Craig, I had not wanted to introduce anything new into the team. However, I did feel that it was necessary to (a) get an idea of how the players were feeling about the tournament (30 minutes), and (b) do a creative visualisation and relaxation with music (45 minutes).

In the group discussion, three themes emerged:

1. The team did not have a measure of itself. Were they good enough? How would they perform during the tournament? What were their weaknesses and strengths? Although the team had gone on the week-end to Natal and had won both of their games, they seemed doubtful and unsure about their level of performance.

2. The players wanted to play. They felt energetic and enthusiastic They stated that the reduction of training demands over the past two weeks had made them feel "hungry".

3. A new culture of togetherness was evident. The players stated that they felt very comfortable in the team. There was a great deal of support and trust in the team. Everyone felt part

of the group.

In response to these themes, I stated that the team was in a phase of waiting. It was not possible to bring the tournament forward. They had to trust the process. Further, I complemented them on all the hard work that they had done in the buildup. This was the fertile soil on which to build success.

After 30 minutes, I did a relaxation with music and asked them to work on their own individual obstacles (Jennings 1991).

After the formal meeting, we all went to a bar to have a drink. I spent an hour with the coach and players in informal social conversation. Craig seemed relaxed and calm during the whole process.

Second Consultation (14 August 1994)

On Sunday evening I met with the team again (45 minutes). They had just completed their first match of the tournament and were going to play their traditional rivals, Natal, on Monday. The intention of this meeting was to get some player comments about their first match and to develop a focused mindset for the Natal match.

To kick off the conversation, I asked the players why they thought the team had always stumbled against Natal in the past. This question stimulated the players and responses such as "a lack of self-belief", "a lack of confidence", and "some sort of block" were offered. The conversation then moved on to the players' feeling that they had the ability to beat Natal and that the Natal players were only human.

After some conversation, I started to talk about the fact that Natal had always relied on their previous history to win matches. I questioned whether this history had gone on for too long. Their players were on the old side while our players were on the young side. Previous teams had created a certain mindset

about Natal which inadvertently had blocked them from performing to their own potential. The team therefore had to be aware of how they were thinking about this match. The new culture in the team could only be made a reality through actual match performance. The match against Natal was going to be a good test to see how the team's new culture stands up to the challenge.

Third Consultation (16 August 1994)

I met with the team to reflect on the previous two days and to do another relaxation with music. The players were feeling very confident. The results to that point in time were:
Eastern Province Settlers 6-0
Natal 2-0
Northern Transvaal 6-0

No concerns surfaced during our conversation. I asked the players to reflect back on the phenomenon of critical moments in the flow of play and especially the 5 to 10 minutes after the half-time interval (with reference to Jennings, 1993). It was during this period that Natal had exerted a lot of pressure on the team. The half-time score against Natal was 2-0.

Fourth Consultation (18 August 1994)

The side had just completed the round robin section. The match against the Witwatersrand team (the provincial second team) was their most disappointing match to date, although winning 2-0. The coach reported that the players were lethargic and that it took them about 50 minutes to get into the game. In discussion with the players, it surfaced that the team had gone to a shopping mall for the whole morning to play laser games and walk around. They had a great deal of fun, with excitement and laughter. On reflection the players stated that this had taken a lot out of them.

Further, the players felt that they were always having to do things together. I asked if they felt that they needed some

individual space and freedom. There was an unanimous agreement to this and it was decided that the players should have the next morning doing their own thing. There was to be a meeting time for lunch and a team talk before the semi-final match.

I was aware that a balance between togetherness and individual separation in a team needed to exist and that the coach had to monitor this balance carefully.

After the discussion, I did another relaxation with music with the players.

Fifth Consultation (19 August 1994)

We had originally planned to meet to do a relaxation on the night immediately after the semi-final match (in preparation for the final). Before the semi-final, both the coach and manager approached me to see if we could do the relaxation at a venue closer to the field. After thinking about it, I told them that a foreign venue may introduce other interfering factors and that we should rather go back to the familiar venue (about a 25-minute ride away).

The semi-final finished at 19h30 and after a couple of socialising drinks the team left to meet for the relaxation at 21h00. Everything seemed to be a rush. In retrospect it was also too late at night. It may have been more beneficial for the players to go back to their hotel and sleep.

On reflection, there was actually no need to meet and do a relaxation. It was my preconceived notion of the need to do a relaxation before the final. The players did not actually enjoy and savour the winning of the semi-final. There was no time to enjoy winning the semi-final. The coach and I had decided to go straight into the relaxation as the players arrived and settled down. There was no formal discussion and conversation of the semi-final (on reflection this is unusual for me).

During the relaxation, I did not feel inwardly comfortable. I stumbled over some words, and did not feel totally connected to the context. After the relaxation I asked some of the players about their experiences during the relaxation. They said that their minds were very busy. They could not really relax.

Sixth Consultation (20 August 1994)

This was the day of the final. The coach asked me to come into the team talk. He would cover the tactical aspects and I should spend about 15 to 20 minutes on the mental aspect of the final against Natal.

I did not allow for any discussion during my talk (in retrospect this surprised me, since it went against my philosophy of conversation). I made the following points to the team (in a motivational way):

- There should be a part of oneself that still feels unsatisfied. This would provide the desire to succeed.
- Unfortunately, everything in the past week counts for nothing. This final is a one-off match.
- Natal were the favourites. They are the holding champions. They are familiar with the demands of a final.
- Natal will rely on their history. We can rely on our new culture.
- I re-emphasised and supported the coach's points of alertness and quick release with the ball.
- I told them to expect a tough final, an on-the-edge type of match.
- I emphasised the following practical points: (a) breathing to relieve pressure, (b) organisational communication between players during the match (to maintain the connective links between players), (c) interpersonal support on the field, and (d) the awareness of critical moments in the flow of the match.

I then asked them to listen to a piece of music: "When the

going gets tough the tough get going". The intention was to create an image of commitment for the match, to create a mindset of the toughness of a final.

The team lost a closely contested final 1-0.

Important Learning Points

As I reflect back on the process, the following points emerge:

1. A sports psychologist adds energy into a team as he connects with the team. This energy should be used to spark off the internal energy of the team for a possible quantum leap in performance. After two very brief meetings (11 and 14 August 1994) the team performed remarkably well against Natal in what was described as a one-sided match.

2. Too much time spent with a team can neutralise the impact of the "news of difference" that a sports psychologist can introduce into a team. In 1990 (when the team had won the tournament), I only consulted with the Transvaal provincial hockey team before the semi-final and final matches. My involvement provided an extra input into the system. For this tournament, I may have reduced my effectiveness by consulting with the team on too many occasions in a short period of time.

3. Teams are living organisms with interpersonal concerns. In addition, as the team evolves over time there are certain contextual conditions that surround or envelop a team. A sports psychologist needs to be sensitive to these conditions. Linked to these conditions are the elements of time and timing.

4. The relaxation on the Friday night did not fit for the team. I went against their own natural rhythm. It would have been more beneficial for the players to talk more about their semi-final victory and their feelings about their performance in an informal social setting. This is necessary and allows the

players to connect fully to their success. I had inadvertently cut this short.

5. There seemed so little time after the round robin set of matches. On reflection, the Friday night meeting added to the demands on the team and inadvertently may have created more time pressure.

6. In the last two sessions (Friday night and Saturday afternoon), I took on too much control and gave input. This was due to the pressure of time. I realised that the psychologist has to deal with situations where there are severe time constraints.

7. For the semi-final and final matches, I seemed "forced" or positioned into taking more direct charge of the interactional process with the team. I wondered how I may have contributed into getting myself into this controlling position?

8. I seemed to have a set idea (mindset) that the team needed to do a relaxation on every second day and then the night before the final. According to the coach and players it was fairly easy to get into the relaxed and meditative state, except for Friday night. In all, the players did a creative relaxation on the Thursday (11 August), Tuesday (16 August), Thursday (18 August) and Friday (19 August).

9. A consultant needs to be sensitive and aware of the messages that are being given to him by the team. Before the Friday night, both the coach and the manager had requested a change of venue closer to the field. Were they not actually asking me to review the necessity of the planned relaxation?

10. I became aware of the element of luck in sport. Sporting activity is unpredictable. There are days when one can under-perform and still win (with reference to score), while on other days the overall play may be exceptional with the result not reflecting the level of the performance.

The 1995 Interprovincial Tournament

I consulted with the Transvaal team on two occasions before they left for the tournament which was to be played in East London. In the first meeting, the "Wayne G" issue was of significance. Wayne G was the present South African hockey captain, and was picked to play for Transvaal. However, he had not attended many of the practices, was always away on work commitments, and had not shown any loyalty to the team. At our first meeting on the 20 July 1995, Wayne G was overseas and the feeling of the team was hostile towards having Wayne in the team. The coach and manager felt that he should be dropped from the team due to his lack of commitment.

At our second meeting (3 August 1995), I learned that Wayne had withdrawn and was to play in the tournament for Northern Transvaal. There was a sense of relief in the team. There was also anger at the way he had manipulated himself into the Northern Transvaal set-up. It was only a week before the tournament that he had withdrawn and been accepted into the Northern Transvaal team.

At both of our meetings, I found the team to be relaxed and focused. The discussions were open and relaxed. Of significance, however, was that not all the players attended the meetings. I meta-communicated my observation to the team. No significant responses were made, except the captain stating that "we should carry on regardless". During both the meetings, I had the sense that, besides the Wayne G issue, there was nothing else to talk about; there was nothing new to say. It was as if there was no need to have therapeutic talk.

I was not involved with the team during the week, except for a telephone call from the coach giving me the following results:

vs Northern Transvaal (4-1)
vs Witwatersrand (1-0)
vs Western Province (4-2)

I tried to call the coach on his cellular on Wednesday, 10 August 1995, only to speak to his wife and to learn that she had just given birth to a son, Mitchell. Craig had flown back from East London early Wednesday morning to be with his wife for the birth. Craig had had telephonic contact with his team for the matches against Border (6-0) and Natal Mynahs (1-0). This was the end of the pool section, with the team unbeaten.

Friday, 11 August 1995 was a rest day (this was a new innovation), and the team was going to play Natal in the semi-final on Saturday. This was the team that they had lost to in the final of the 1994 tournament. Craig phoned me on Friday in order to meet with him to discuss the preparation for the semi-final against Natal.

At our meeting I was aware of two things. Firstly, he was talking a lot about the birth of his son. Secondly, I was consciously trying to come up with a "technique" or "approach" or "method" which could be used by the team so that they could overcome the Natal hurdle. It was as if I was searching hard for something meaningful to give to the coach and team. I felt a great deal of pressure to come up with something. I reflected this back into the conversation with Craig, and stated that maybe we were trying too hard to come up with something clever. It then suddenly hit me: BIRTH. It became apparent to me that the theme of "BIRTH" could be the magnet that could pull all the mental energies into a focused and connective way. Craig was excited by this, and there was a great deal of energy in our discussion around the birth theme.

After our meeting, it was decided that (a) Craig would fly back to East London on the Saturday morning to be with the team and prepare them for the match against Natal, and (b) I would draft a facsimile (see Appendix B) to the team around the birth theme which I would send to the team before the semi-final match against Natal.

The Final Hurdle

The team won the semi-final 2-1 and were to play Northern Transvaal in the final (whom they had beaten 4-1 in the round robin section). Craig phoned me after the final to tell me that they had lost to Northern Transvaal in a penalty shoot out, after being 1-1 at full-time. This result was totally unexpected and a shock to all those involved in the hockey world.

In order to make sense of this result, I decided to telephone six of the players for their perspectives. In particular, I wanted to find out:

- What was the atmosphere like in the team before the final?
- What was their explanation of the result?
- What did they think of the fax that I sent them, and did they feel that I should have sent them another fax for the final?
- What other important factors or forces were operating on the team at the time of the final?

Conversations with Some of the Players

There was consensus that:

1. The coach had stressed the importance of the one-off final. It was a clean slate. All the players felt that the coach could not have done anything more. All the players stated that he stressed the seriousness of the point and that they should not underestimate the Northern Transvaal team.

2. The team had prepared in the usual, predictable way for the final; nothing different could have been done.

3. The team was not arrogant, but were inwardly confident for the final. There was a great team spirit in the side. Everyone had had an enjoyable week of hockey.

4. The result was a shock, a disappointment, a mystery,

unexplainable, a feeling of disbelief. The players felt cheated, especially when they compared the amount of work and commitment that they had done to that of the Northern Transvaal team.

5. When playing Northern Transvaal in the pool match, there was a "knowing" within the team that they were going to win, despite being 0-1 in the first half. Final score was 4-1.

6. During the final there seemed to be a change at half-time (1-0 to Transvaal as that stage). No one could specify what this change was; there was a "different feel". It appeared that the Transvaal team had dominated completely in the first-half.

7. The Northern Transvaal team had "sneaked" into second place in the pool; had "sneaked" into winning the semi-final; and now had sneaked a win in the final.

8. Everyone felt that the fax that I had sent was great and fitted the team's mind at that point in time. All the players felt that I should have sent another fax for the final.

My Personal Feelings before the Final

1. While talking to Craig on the Friday, I felt excited and energetic. It was a challenge to draft the fax, and I thought deeply about what to write and what the possible impact would be.

2. On Saturday, I heard that the team had won and I was delighted. I also heard that we were going to play against Northern Transvaal in the final (unexpected opponents). In the hockey world, they usually end up 8th in the 12 team tournament. Last year, they came 11th in the tournament. It seemed strange that Northern Transvaal would be the opponents.

3. During Saturday evening, I wondered what the impact of my fax would be for the final. I questioned whether I may have "created" a trap for the team. Maybe I had given a great deal of

attention to the semi-final. What would the repercussions be, especially when having to play Northern Transvaal? As time went on I became more and more worried that I had not drafted a new fax for the team for Sunday's final. Why had I not? This was unusual.

4. I woke up on Sunday morning and felt lethargic and worried. Why? What was the meaning of this body sense? I phoned Craig at 7.30am and warned him that this final was not going to be easy. The team had to be serious. It was a one-off match. A clean slate. I told him that the birth process was not over, only the "head of the baby had emerged". I told him that the players may need a "slap".

5. After our telephone discussion, I was worried that he would not convey the fact that the birth process was not complete. I still felt the need to write something to the team. Unfortunately, I had a number of personal matters in the morning, and was unable to send them a fax. On reflection, I am upset at myself for neglecting to do this (notice the expert position, implying that I could have made a difference).

Teasing out Some Themes/Conclusions

The Transvaal team had beaten Northern Transvaal convincingly on three occasions before the final. The team had met Northern Transvaal in the pool match, and now faced them again in the final. This was a similar pattern to that of 1994.

The semi-final may psychologically have felt like the final. Firstly, the match was against Natal. Secondly, the format of the interprovincial tournament had been changed. A rest day had been introduced on the Friday, and the final dinner was on Saturday night after the semi-final (this is usually held after the final as a concluding event). To further complicate matters, 8 of the 12 teams had completed their matches on the Saturday, with only two matches to be held over for the Sunday (the final and the match for 3rd/4th position). One player mentioned that

on Sunday morning as the team was leaving their hotel to meet for a walk on the beach, most of the teams were checking out of the hotel and leaving. This created a funny feeling, a feeling of "is the tournament over or not"? He then had to remind himself that they still had to play a final.

It seems that even though the coach had verbally addressed the seriousness of the one-off final, the team may not have believed him. All the "actual evidence" that led up to the final, may have suggested another reality for the team which may not have supported the coach's concern about the one-off clean slate final. Although the coach and team may rationally know that what is being said is logically true and cannot be faulted, there may have been other factors or forces that were operating within the team on an unconscious level. Therefore, what is said in a team talk may prove to be ineffective if it does not touch the unconscious of the team or "connect" the team to the conditions that are operating on the team at that moment in time.

The team talk should try and expand the team's consciousness, and create more awareness of the "forces" that are surrounding them. It may be useful to map out some of the past history of the team. As a case in point, the Transvaal team may have had to deal with:

- The image of the Cinderalla team, Northern Transvaal.
- The past year's results against Northern Transvaal.
- The defection of Wayne G to Northern Transvaal and the surfacing of the issue of his lack of loyalty and commitment to Transvaal.
- The pattern of Northern Transvaal "sneaking their way up the ladder".
- The pattern that the results in the pool game do not transfer into the knock-out stages of the semi-final and final.
- The psychological release of the semi-final win against Natal.
- The changed format of the semi-final matches and the concluding dinner after the semi-final matches.

- The Transvaal's own past pattern of failing in the final and their loss in the 1994 final.
- The perception that the final may be easier than the semi-final, when one compares the opponents to be played.
- There are no guarantees in sport; there is no linear cause-and-effect in the amount of work that is done in training to the actual results that are eventually attained.

In reviewing the above, it becomes evident that the psychological demands on the team may have been far more complex than meets the eye. Unfortunately, this complexity only tends to surface after the event when one takes the trouble to reflect on the unfolding process. It was only after talking to the players after the final that one could make sense of the dynamics that were operating within the team and around the team.

A team needs to get connected to its own mindset and the "atmosphere" that is prevailing in the team at a particular moment in time. This suggests that an attempt must be made to become more aware of the dynamics which are operating in the present. How can one do this? Maybe, one needs to become more aware of feelings or atmosphere that are ever-present in the moment. Time should be given to reflect on these messages before the event. As a case in point, I personally did not really feel motivated to write the fax to the team for the final. I also felt physically drained and lethargic on Sunday morning. I also felt worried. Even though I was in Johannesburg and the team was in East London, this piece of information may have been telling me something important. All the players should be given the opportunity to make sense of their inner intuitive feelings and to create meaning around these feelings.

There are certain times in the unfolding process when there is a convergence and/or joining together of certain types of energy forces, which then make up or determine the nature of an event. Certain types of complementary opposites attract each other more easily. Energies operate on an attraction or repulsion basis. The "sneaky" Northern Transvaal pattern that

connects with the "consistency" pattern of the Transvaal team may give rise to certain types of possible outcomes (or realities), based on certain levels of probability outcomes. In trying to predict the next stage or event of an unfolding evolutionary process, one needs to refer to the notion of probability and be aware of the complexity in the situation, since it is this complexity that could throw up the unexpected (or that event that has a very low probability of occurrence). As the coach said to me, if we had to play Northern Transvaal on 10 occasions we would beat them convincingly in 9 of the matches and probably draw just once.

Processes unfold over time. In the evolutionary process, events may unfold in a logical predictable way for most of the time. If there is a critical point in the process, the use of probabilities for the occurrence of certain events may help to expand the conscious mind into being able to expect and/or anticipate the possibility of the "unexpected". Heightened awareness of the subtle energies operating during the tournament week may help expand the team's consciousness to entertain the possibility of unpredictable events which can change the course or pattern of the evolutionary process.

CHAPTER 9

FROM ACTION RESEARCH GROUP TO WORKING GROUP

> Helpers may not only define the world as outside themselves but also succeed in externalising the whole process of change. (Brandon, 1976, p.81)

The original intention of setting up the group of psychologists was to create an interpersonal context for sharing ideas in a reflective and co-operative way. In January 1995, Lesley-Anne was approached to consult with the national under-23 soccer team. In a group meeting, she suggested that maybe we as a team should consider working together on the project. At that point in time, we had been together for eight months and had covered a range of consultative topics in our meetings. It therefore seemed part of a natural progression to consider working together as a team. Without much discussion, our action research group turned into a therapeutic team.

Starting the Consultative Process

The contact in working with the soccer team came through Lesley-Anne, who was contacted by a person called Nick, a sports marketing person. The contact occurred ten days before an international. Before meeting with the team, we felt that it was necessary to meet as a group to discuss our consultative strategy with the team. However, due to the short notice and the pressure of time, no suitable time could be found in order for all three of us to meet to plan how we should go about consulting with this team. Therefore two separate meetings (Paul and myself; Lesley-Anne and myself) were set up.

During these meetings Lesley-Anne shared what she had learned about the team from Nick. During the conversations with Paul and Lesley-Anne, areas for further exploration were highlighted. In the process of our conversation, a reality was

constructed in which the following points emerged:

1. We did not know how the coach felt about having a team of psychologists consult with his team.

2. We learned that there was a previous motivational speaker who had addressed the team. We did not know what was said by this speaker.

3. The team was fully multiracial and under-23. There was likely to be an emotional immaturity and racial complexity in the side.

4. There was a possibility of subgroups in the team due to the geographical and racial factors.

5. We knew nothing of the history of this team (e.g., results and team selection over time).

6. There were perceptions that the under-23 side would outstrip the senior national team, if a match was arranged between the two teams.

From the above, it was felt that a meeting with the coach (and his management/medical team) should be set up. In this meeting (Lesley-Anne and myself would attend since Paul had a previous arrangement), it was decided to focus the conversation around the above points. During the meeting with the coach and the team medical doctor we came to learn that (a) it was a "gutsy" team that did not have a lot of talent, (b) they were in the process of trying to qualify for the All-African games which was to be held in September 1995, (c) socially the team mixed along racial lines (this was the most comfortable way for the players once off the field), and (d) there were no "problems" among the players.

Formal Reflections of the Work Experience

We had two group consultations with the soccer team on the Wednesday and Thursday before their international against Lesotho (11 February 1995). The meetings were of two hours duration and the idea was to engage the team in conversation to try to co-evolve meaning with regards their past performances and future matches to be played.

Our two meetings with the team contrasted enormously. In our first meeting, a co-operative conversational context was achieved while in our second meeting a "defensive wall" was experienced. Since the work with the soccer team was our first experience in working as a group, we decided that each of us should document any aspect of this experience in his/her personal way. We felt that this would provide us with a rich diversity of perspectives regarding our consultative experience with the team. We decided that the writing should not be determined by any prescribed focus, but should rather be triggered and guided by an internal meaningfulness that we had connected to during our experience with the team. In line with the reflective interactive exploration methodology, we felt that these reflections would provide further impetus to our understanding of the work that we were going to do with the soccer team.

Reflections of Lesley-Anne

It is difficult to know exactly where to start in bringing together my thoughts and perceptions of working with the under-23 soccer side. Perhaps I need to begin by looking at our own team coming together to work with the soccer team. Often during the two meetings with the under-23 team, I wondered how each of us would be dealing with the process if we were working as individuals and not as part of a team ourselves.

On receiving the request from Nick (sports promoter) to work with the under-23 soccer team it seemed like a wonderful

opportunity to start putting into practice what we are all about as a group. I think we talk about some really powerful things in our meetings, and I couldn't wait to be able to put this into practice as a team. At the time I did not examine my motives for including Ken and Paul - it was a spontaneous reaction to include them.

There were certain times that I experienced our functioning together as three psychologists as really strong and powerful, influential and even energetic. The way we dealt with the first meeting with the coach, and then Paul playing the objective party at a later meeting, I felt functioned very well.

Generally, I saw our interaction with the coach on all occasions as having gone well. There is many a coach who may have been intimidated by three psychologists interacting with them at once - but I felt it was well handled by us.

It may be worth talking in our group a little about how the three of us functioned in a "crisis situation" (second night working with the team). This is the part I found most difficult because if any of us had been there on our own, our focus would have been on the soccer team only. I found a conflicting focus, where there was a dissenting team/group amongst ourselves to focus on, as well as the soccer team. This seemed to block my ability to be "instinctive" about an intervention, which needed to be justified/explained to the group.

I think that particular second meeting with the team is a wonderful growth opportunity for our group to learn from in terms of functioning as a cohesive threesome.

An additional interesting factor to contemplate is the roles we assigned ourselves before the intervention took place, and the roles we subsequently took. How does this relate back to our personal issues? Do we in fact all work very hard at creating and maintaining our "issues"?

The theme of "surprise" is something I linked into very strongly, and would have loved to have seen taken further. I was also very interested in the three subgroups that the soccer team split themselves into (and the names given): skape, zebras and ninjas. If there was more time, this "medium" could have told us a lot more about the players themselves. (e.g., What makes a zebra different from a skapie? Why do you think the ninjas came together?)

In retrospect, the feedback we received from the physiotherapist prior to starting the second session with the team appears to have been a crucial indication of what was about to hit us. Some of the questions I asked myself after the session were:

1. Ken and I had commented before the first team intervention that often black athletes need a more didactic and supportive intervention. We tended to override this completely - were the team asking for this on the second night?

2. Were we too focused on treating the team like a therapy group, rather than bonding more strongly and closely with them? How did they perceive not one, but three strangers and psychologists at that, moving into their midst?

3. Should we have, could we have, used the "management team" (coach, doctor, physiotherapist) more than we did to influence the team dynamics?

4. Would the venue (schoolroom style) have made a difference to the second team meeting's outcome? (i.e. the venue supported them, not us).

5. Were the team uncertain about what it was, or how to explain what they had "felt" the night before (session 1), and they were possibly just needing reassurance (session 2) and thus we came under fire?

6. We tried to find out from the coach what his needs were from us. Perhaps he did not have a clear enough picture of what his players' needs were?

7. How much difference did we make to the final score against Lesotho?

I will not try and answer these questions here, because I do not think there is only one answer, and perhaps to debate the questions in group discussion would be of greater value.

I saw Happy, George and Quintin as being the three most influential members of the under-23 side. Coincidence that they each belonged to a different race groups, and each represented the skapies, ninjas and zebras?

Reflections of Paul

Concept of conversation: On a couple of occasions the coach mentions visualisation and relaxation but we ignore him. He has experienced something positive with these techniques, and expects us to do it with his team. We converse with the team, and he is present throughout, so he is part of the team, but we are not in conversation with him - are we rude to him, by ignoring his contribution? During the second night, he sits reading the newspaper during the session. He was a key element in the team, the most powerful...

I think we definitely allowed ourselves to get involved in a "strategic" epistemology, rather than a "conversational" epistemology. Strategies block energy levels of the recipient and the strategist needs to defend/resist (underlying premise of a strategy). This completely negates the idea of co-creating therapeutic conversation. During the first night, I feel that "unblocking" occurred in their conversation about the "South African thing". Something became unblocked, which was necessary for the group (part of the group - white part?) to close up and defend, and push us into a strategy model. On the second night

this group (white group) "conversed" for the "black" group - "they did not understand what was happening the previous night". The black group was quiet, saying they are "mentally tired" (not physically tired but "mentally tired"!) What did that mean? This team has a lot to say and converse!

Team work (as psychologists): If the concept of therapeutic conversation is to be used, do the team converse in one "spirit" or do we converse about the group in front of the group? I think the latter, the former can be "strategic". Spontaneous conversation is essential - reflect this to the team. I think guidelines need to be thought about concerning how we as a team must work - two engaging, one "behind" mirror, vice versa, or three engaging etc. Just as we need to define who is in the other group (coach, physiotherapist, doctor), we need to define ourselves.

Goal of the consultations must be co-creations coming out of the conversations with team members. Did we not on our own prescribe to them in a linear fashion what the goal was; i.e. to build a united force? In other words we had already planned what we were going to talk about, and perhaps the second night was their reaction to that - "Now we will tell you what you will talk about" - which is O.K., because if you take the two sessions as connected, dialogue took place, but did we allow it to go further - or did we stop it and say "No, we are here to talk about becoming a united force and that's what we will talk about". We won, and they ended up saying, "I'm mentally tired - have nothing to say". So perhaps there are two ways to apply therapeutic conversation:

1. Therapists plan the first session and initiate the conversation, but then be sensitive to the feedback to that initiation. In this way, a circular process still occurs. On a therapeutic level this may be comfortable for all parties.

2. Therapists and group join together, with therapists having nothing planned, group have nothing planned; and a

circular meaningful conversation arises from "nothing".

My Reflections

I feel somewhat overwhelmed at having to formally reflect on my experience with this soccer team since I fear that the writing will not be able to capture the true complexity of my experience. Having said this, however, I do believe that it will be in the process of writing that further insights will form on a conscious level. I suppose that the trap during the writing phase will be to try to capture everything that unfolded.

From being an action research group (that had no pressure to perform as a whole), the soccer experience forced us to address two fundamental issues. Firstly, our group was confronted with its own functioning in a therapeutic context. Secondly, the complexity of "therapeutic conversation" when working as a therapeutic team was highlighted during the process.

What follows are some of my perceptions of the unfolding consultative process that I had connected to. In particular, I have decided to focus on:

1. The dynamic shifting nature of a consciously planned focus of conversation and the reactions of the group to that direction of conversation.

2. The phenomenon of an outer group defensiveness that needs to be more fully understood by the psychologist, especially in the initial stages of conversation and meeting.

3. How easily co-operative conversation can shift into strategic chess play of team of psychologists versus team of soccer players.

Is planning the direction of conversation a strategy? This question addresses the issue of consciously planning areas of exploration with teams/groups before actually meeting with the

team.

We had a series of meetings during which a number of hypotheses regarding the functioning of the soccer team were put forward. At the end of each of these meetings, a conversational direction was decided on by us (psychologists) for the next meeting. The areas of exploration were determined by what had previously transpired in interaction or conversation.

On a general level, at the end of any meeting an area of therapeutic investigation emerges. A decision is made by the psychologists to find out more about a certain area of interest. In a sense, this is a unilateral decision and is based on what is known or not known about the team at that point in time. Call this the initial focus of investigation or point of entry (based on the previous conversational event). Invariably, this focus of investigation will be full of "important" questions. If the group "accepts" the direction of conversation, and answers the questions or follows the suggestions made, then a co-operative interchange of ideas becomes possible. But is this true co-operative therapeutic conversation or just an interactional fit that goes with the image of what should happen between psychologist and group?

What benefits does the client receive in co-operating and answering a psychologist's questions? What is the therapeutic impact of continually asking questions? Can too much questioning block co-operative sharing and intimacy? Too much questioning can be likened to interrogation. So what is therapeutic conversation, if it is not only asking curious questions?

With regards the therapeutic conversational context, Kopp (1974, p.14) contends that:

> The guru instructs by metaphor and parable, but the pilgrim learns through telling of his own tale. Each man's identity is an emergent of the myths, rituals, and corporate legends of his culture, compounded with the epic of his own personal

> history. Along the way, on his pilgrimage, each man must have the chance to tell his tale. And, as each man tells his tale, there must be another there to listen. But sometimes it is not enough for there simply to be another to listen. A man not only needs someone to hear his tale, but someone to care as well.

At the beginning of our first meeting, a certain direction of conversation was decided on in order to connect with the team. We wanted to get their perceptions and feelings around the theme of "country". When asked to form comfortable groups in which to present their ideas or images around the concept of country, three groups formed. These groups gave themselves a name: "skapies", "ninjas" and "zebras". All three groups committed themselves fully and the participation and involvement was good.

Comparing the conversational flow: First and second meetings. If the group "accepts" the conversational direction of the psychologist, then it will co-operate and answer questions and follow the activities that have been suggested. If the group "resists or rejects" the conversational direction (for whatever reason), then a conversational block may start to form.

When comparing the first and second meetings, I wondered how we could have handled the "powerful defensive silence" of the team more appropriately. Before one considers this, it is necessary to first examine some hypotheses as to why this defensive powerful silence may have emerged.

Firstly, one needs to consider what had transpired in the meeting before. In this meeting Paul joined very effectively with the team. They co-operated and explored the concept of "playing for one's country" in a very open way (this was particularly evident for the zebras who were a group of silent black players). The meeting ended after all three groups (skapies, ninjas and zebras) had presented their ideas to the whole group. After this, we asked the team to come up with a

symbol that could represent the whole group. In other words, what would one get if we joined a skapie, a ninja and a zebra together?

Given the above, and the fact that each of the three subgroups had presented something to the group at the previous meeting, would the group not have wanted us (as a group of psychologists) to present something as well? Was this not where the conversational process was heading? Was this not the process that we had created for ourselves?

Secondly, one needs to question what type of conversation occurs between therapeutic meetings regarding the impressions and perceptions of those who were or who were not involved in creating the therapeutic reality. Paul had the hypothesis that the physiotherapist may have spoken to the players between the meetings about the phenomenon of "mental preparation" and in the process may have unleashed a more resistant position in the team regarding how we were dealing with the team.

Thirdly, it is important to look at the interplay between the personality, interactive style, personal issue and energy flow of the psychologist on the one hand, and the presenting defensive wholeness of the group on the other. A psychologist has a certain interactional style that will allow him/her to move through certain types of defensive walls more easily than others. In the first meeting, Paul handled the frivolous, joking defence very easily. He joined with the group and bantered along. For example, while trying to explore what the other motivator had spoken to them about, the group said that they remembered two statements "Anything is possible" and "Shit happens". On hearing this, Paul wanted to know whether shit did happen and whether it was good or bad shit. This type of conversation linked very strongly with the group and started to create distinctions for them to converse about. In a sense, it was not only the fact that "shit happens" (linking what was said by the previous motivator), but also that there were distinctions to be made around the type of shit that could be

experienced.

On the first night, the group presented a frivolousness where joking and mockery dominated the conversation in the beginning. On the second night, the group defensiveness had changed. The frivolousness had given way to a powerful challenging silence, with only a couple of the players conversing with the psychologist. For the first meeting we decided that Paul should start the process with the group. Since things moved so effortlessly in the first meeting, we again decided that Paul should start the group process for the second meeting. Of significance is that while Paul was able to move through the defensive wholeness without difficulty in the first meeting, he was somehow neutralised by the group's intense silence on the second night.

A number of general questions are triggered:

1. Did the group change its defensive wholeness because Paul was able to enter the system so easily? What had happened between the first and second meeting for the group to change?

2. On meta-communicating about the silence, it emerged that the group were wanting:

- Some answers from us (?), since we were always asking questions. It seemed that the group wanted to know what our objectives were during the meetings. It appeared as if they wanted some feedback from us regarding themselves.

- Us to "perform" for them since they had given so much the night before. It was almost as if the group had given a lot emotionally and energetically and were now wanting to get something from us. They may have wanted to know whether we were committed to the process. This "wanting us to perform" request may also be linked to their experience with the previous motivator (who was a performer).

Obstacles in conversation. With respect to therapeutic conversation, what creates linguistic immobility or monologue in therapy? What creates conversational blockage?

With reference to our experience with the team, the following points have relevance:

1. We may have been perceived as being secretive and strategic. "What is this process all about?" and "what are the intentions of these psychologists?" may have been two questions that were floating around in their minds. According to Cecchin et al. (1994, p.13) influence is unavoidable:

> When people interact, they inevitably influence each other, but not always with predictable results....In therapy one can try to be extremely respectful, or a careful listener, or even silent, but regardless of these intentions the client could perceive the therapist as a subtle, secretive, wise person who is somehow withholding possible solutions he or she is not willing to share.

2. The conversation may have been too structured around continual questioning, resulting in a feeling of interrogation on the part of the team.

3. Co-operative sharing implies that both the therapist and client co-evolve new meaning and explore the unsaid. The team may have felt that they were the only ones giving or participating in the conversation context. They wanted us to participate more.

4. They may have been trying to make sense of this new conversation experience where their ideas are respected and openly discussed (this as opposed to the coach standing up and instructing them).

5. There may have been too much exposure and conversation around the "unsaid" that results in a reluctance to open up at

the next meeting. In other words, did we move too quickly in the first meeting and then had to deal with a type of recoil reaction in the second meeting?

6. Planned directional conversation on the part of the therapists implies that some sort of agenda is being followed by the therapists. This unilaterally planned conversational direction or testing of a hypothesis may be picked up by the client and a battle of "what should we be talking about" may start to surface.

7. The initial stages of the therapeutic conversation are very important. It is hypothesised that there is an initial period of defensiveness between psychologist and client. This is considered to be a normal phase where both therapist and team are trying to make sense of one's own expectations, perceptions, and impressions of the person who one is engaging. It is the responsibility of the therapist to join with the client through their language and to move beyond the defensive wholeness that may block the exploration of the problem being encountered.

8. The possible uncovering of interpersonal dynamics may interfere with the ease of conversation flow. In other words, as soon as the therapist approaches a sensitive interpersonal or group issue, a conversational obstacle may start emerging. In a sense, this is a protective device and gives the therapist a very important message. The therapist may need to move more slowly, or reflect into the unfolding process in order to elicit further conversation about the "here and now".

> Nowness is with us, yet always elusively evading our grasp. Bringing ourselves into the here and now sounds deceptively simple but is essentially very difficult. Other times and moments - traces of the past and shadows of the future - crowd into our awareness of the present moment. Nowness practice does not mean excluding the past and future but an awareness of the subservience of both to the present moment. (Brandon 1976, p.62)

While one should not move away from or deny any obstacle being experienced in a conversational context, Reschke (1994) contends that the hallmarks of a reflexive therapeutic approach are trust and uncertainty. Therapy should aim to provide a conversational context that encompasses attitudes such as respect, acceptance and gentleness as a means of embracing the obstacle. In the reflexive process, the client will have the opportunity to connect to his own unique idiosyncratic obstacle if the therapist operates in a tentative and uncertain manner.

Functioning as a Therapeutic Team

As a therapeutic group, we were confronted with the obstacle of how we should function while interacting with a team. Since we did not work in a setting with one-way mirrors, this forced us to create something new regarding the way we function. During our discussion regarding how we functioned with the under-23 team, it was evident that we had hit a "conversational block" in the unfolding process. This block had the effect of "fragmenting" us.

Given a conversational block, can it be expected that fragmentation, separation, or splitting will surface in any group? In a sense, this fragmentation may reflect the rich diversity of perceptions regarding the unfolding process. During these times of blockage, however, one's personal issue may surface or one's unique idiosyncratic interactional style will be evoked.

Paul (March 1995) questioned whether "the fragmentation was not part of a fragmented epistemology in the team. When one has a strategic epistemology, the team will have different 'strategies'. If the epistemology is one of 'conversation', this 'fragmentation' can now be defined as complexity or diversity of perceptions, which instead of being negative is positive and essential for the unfolding 'complexity of curiosity'".

Given this, how should we (as a group) then function in

times of conversation blockage? During our discussion, it started to emerge that it would be useful to take time out and reflect in on the process in order to elicit further conversation about the "here and now". But how should this be done? If we move out the room to discuss the process, we will set up a conversational context that takes on a strategic nature. A more natural position to take at these critical times is to comment about the obstacle and to take time out to have conversation about the reasons and meanings of the blockage. The group being consulted should be asked to reflect in on the obstacle. Individuals can form little groups in order to make sense of the obstacle being encountered. After this, the therapeutic conversation focuses on the meanings and reasons for the obstacle being experienced.

It is the responsibility of the therapeutic team to start dissolving the blockage through co-operative sharing and openness. The process of talking about the "unsaid" will provide an energy release in the system. How one goes about doing this is the art of psychotherapy.

Paul (March 1995) posed the question of whether having a group is an "advantage" if one is working with the notion of co-operative conversation. In responding to this, I felt that the word "advantage" needed to be looked at since it may suggest a 1-up position with a strategic connotation. From my perspective, the value of having our group work together is to add more diversity and complexity to our own unique perceptions.

In reviewing the material that had emerged from our experience with the soccer team, a rich fabric of interrelated ideas evolved regarding the way therapeutic teams should try to function while operating within the therapeutic conversational domain. The group had provided a context to test our own ideas, to expand our own perceptions regarding our experiences.

Paul (March 1995) commented:

> One can never not "plan"; even the idea of having therapeutic conversation is a plan. Even the idea of making the client "curious" about his thoughts or behaviours or of himself must be "theorised". This is why I believe that the team has an "advantage" over the individual therapist. A team will focus on different issues in the conversation - "curiosity of the emerging complexity". Very similar mechanism to the reflecting team, but no mirror. Part of therapeutic conversation will necessarily mean revealing our personal sides (at times) to the client. We are no longer hiding behind strategies or mirrors.

On another level, Paul (June 1995) felt that the process of reflective interactive exploration can be used as the methodology that binds the individual member of the group to the "therapeutic team". In this way, an individual is able to function alone in his/her own work context, yet be able to reflect into the therapeutic team and be able to co-evolve new meaning and understanding of whatever is being conversed about. These ideas can then be taken back into the work situation with more understanding, more energy, more freedom, more curiosity on the part of the group member who reflected into the group.

In this way, the "therapeutic team" can be thought of as being a fluid conversational experience with group members, which helps "dissolve" blockages that may be occurring in a particular individual's work/life context. The "therapeutic team" acts as an interpersonal context where each group member is given the personal space and safety to co-operate and share ideas in a curious manner. This group experience provides an opportunity for the individual to examine his/her work on a more personal level.

Working on Her Own: Feelings of Exclusion?

After the initial two consultations with the team, further work with the soccer team was requested. However, due to prearranged commitments, both Paul and I were not available to consult with the team before their next international. After discussing this in our group, we decided that Lesley-Anne should work on her own with the soccer team. While this was not considered to be the ideal solution, the other alternative was not to have any contact with the team at all (which we wanted to avoid).

While Lesley-Anne stated that she had a clear idea of how to proceed, Paul and I may not, in retrospect, have given her the necessary support to be effective in working on her own (especially since we had previously seen the team as a group). Although we had a meeting to discuss ideas regarding how Lesley-Anne should proceed with the team, both Paul and I did not offer her any significant suggestions in her preparation in consulting with the team.

After she had consulted with the team, Lesley-Anne reported back to our group (April 1995). She had decided to first meet with the coach to ascertain what his perceptions were regarding our previous meetings with the team. At this meeting the coach stated: "(a) do not make the sessions too long, (b) keep the message simple and directly connected to soccer, (c) players are neutral towards the sessions (not positive or negative), (d) there was no conflict between the black and coloured players (as was reported by the sports promoter, Nick), and (e) the players did not go onto the field holding hands at the Lesotho away game (as was decided in a previous meeting)".

Lesley-Anne's perception of her meeting with the coach was that there was a frenzy of activity and she questioned whether the coach felt disempowered. Unfortunately, this perception was never ever addressed, despite our being aware that a "Sasol management committee" was making all the decisions regarding the

introduction of expert input into the system. For example, our involvement with the team was activated by a sports promoter and not the coach.

In reflecting on the coach's messages to Lesley-Anne, it could be hypothesised that the coach may not have seen value in how we were going about consulting with his team. Lesley-Anne wondered whether there might be (a) a rebellion, (b) a lack of insight, and/or (c) a need for help, behind the way he attempted to structure how she was going to conduct the sessions with the team. This did not occur when we had met the soccer team as a group before the Lesotho match. However, his messages may have been due to the reactions during our previous group meetings.

After her two individual sessions with the team, Lesley-Anne (April 1995) felt that "the team was arrogant and over-confident due to their win in a practice match against the senior national team". In addition, she questioned the pragmatic value of the therapeutic conversational model when working with teams. She stated that "there was conversation with individuals only which resulted in her losing the rest of the team". In addition, she questioned; "Is conversation only meaningful when everyone has a 'base level' that is equal, with different opinions on top of that"? This question tended to reflect a tacit assumption that therapeutic conversation may require a certain level of common educational or language ability in a heterogeneous group.

While this may have some validity, it can be argued that "therapeutic conversation" should be able to address whatever the group wishes to converse about and that, if a reflective mode of feeding into the process is adopted, then "news of difference" regarding content of discussion or process activity will surface. Part of this "news of difference" should focus on the diversity that exists in the team and the difficulty that may be experienced in trying to integrate this diversity in various situations.

Given our previous involvement with the team as a group, it

was clear that Lesley-Anne had found it difficult to consult on her own. In addition, it was evident that Lesley-Anne had not "shared" the same theoretical perspective of "therapeutic conversation" as Paul and I did. At the time, this difference in perspective was not considered to be significant. However, without our knowing it, a fundamental issue of her not feeling part of our group was starting to evolve.

The Work Becomes Tiresome

After Lesley-Anne's involvement, there was still a request for our input. This was coming from the sports promoter. However, the coach appeared to be resisting our involvement (he was not returning any telephone calls that Lesley-Anne made to him). Lesley-Anne felt that she was being blocked. To change the pattern, we decided that I should call the coach. I was fortunate to get hold of him, and in talking to him, he stated that we should "keep our topics short and simple, since we were 'losing' the players".

In addition, we had learned (in talking to Nick, the sports promoter) that a "motivator" had also been speaking to the team in order to psyche them up for the internationals (while were we consulting with the team). According to the coach, the players had found this person entertaining.

Our group was becoming frustrated with the above process. Being in the group seemed like being at work; it was becoming an extension of our everyday type of work. We were feeling burdened. The action research philosophy that was operating in the group before working with the soccer team had been lost. While we had become more aware of the dynamics of therapeutic teams and had focused a great deal of our efforts on exploring the notion of therapeutic conversation, we needed to seriously examine the nature of our group.

After examining our positions in the soccer system, and noting that the management committee (who employed us) was

probably operating from the premise that "the more outside expert input introduced into the team, the greater the chance of success"; we felt that an overload of interventions was occurring and that the coach had become disempowered. We decided to outline our position (via facsimile) to the management committee and suggested that we should meet with the committee to "share our perceptions of the dynamics within the team". Unfortunately the management committee did not respond to this and our involvement with the soccer system terminated.

Learning about the Workings of a System

1. A system is more complex than you think it is. An outside consultant only has an entry point into a system that determines what you will see, what you will hear, and what you will experience. The system is always more than you think it is and will always continue to be so as you become more involved in dealing with the system. There is a never-ending "more than this" type of phenomenon existing in systems.

2. You start to understand some of the processes that were operating in a system only after you have separated from the system. It seems that time away from a system provides one with the necessary clarity and insight. When you are in it, your understanding is reduced. This points to the necessity of being able to reflect in a detached way after some time when you have had some experiences in the system. From this, it can be deduced that the consultant will experience a delayed intellectual insight when interacting in a system.

3. In order to feel what those in the system are feeling, one needs to listen to one's own heart during the consultative process. These internal messages will tell you about the expectations of the system, and reflect how others are feeling in the group. Your intuitive self or body sense carries very important messages that need to "connect" to your intellect (Gendlin, 1981). A mind-body oneness needs to operate in the context.

4. A system needs you to become what it thinks that you need to be. A system has its own ideas about how it wants to be helped. However, this is not strictly true since a system cannot make decisions; only people make decisions. Nevertheless, certain influential members in a system determine whether a consultant should be called in, and if yes, how they would want the consultant to function.

5. One cannot expect to influence the ideas of those in a system because of one's professional standing (I am a psychologist so listen to me). Everyone in a system is influencing the system. There are, however, some important influential members in the system that dictate how the system generally functions. These members need to be identified and need to be engaged in conversation. In our group discussion, it surfaced that our biggest competitor (regarding influence) may have been the physiotherapist in the team.

6. There tends to be a number of dominant mindsets that float around in a system and continually rear their heads during crisis. This dominant mindset organises the members in a system in a certain way and tends to absorb individual energy. These mindsets will often restrict the manoeuvrability of the outside consultant. These mindsets tend to set the parameters in which all actions, expectations and anticipations are filtered through. These mindsets lie beneath consciousness and should be opened up in therapeutic conversation. This is one of the main functions of the therapist operating within the paradigm of constructivism. Therapeutic conversation tries to make sense of these mindsets and to explore the unsaid around these dominant mindsets (the system's tacit knowledge and assumptions) in an open and respectful way. With the soccer system, we needed to address the two dominant themes of:

- "If one just adds more and more outside consultants (ingredients) to our system we will be seen to be professional and this will ensure our success". This dominant mindset

seemed to have its origins in the steering management committee (and in particular with the sponsor, Sasol).

- "All your input (psychological) is going over their (the black players') heads; they don't understand. Keep your talk short and simple". This was continually conveyed to us by the coach.

8. The dominant mindsets impose "how things should work" and therefore will direct the behaviour of those operating in the system. One needed to take the two fundamental mindsets, as outlined above, and examine how these may have impacted on specific members in the soccer team. Some tentative ideas/questions are now formulated:

- The coach had to deal with an overload of expert knowledge. He had to make sense of all the information and then integrate this into a meaningful whole. The players had to deal with "outsiders" coming into their worlds and "giving" them knowledge/information. How should they receive all this "help"?

- Was the coach able to integrate all what was happening in a workable way? Was not his mindset regarding the black players in some way linked to his also feeling overloaded and pressured, and everything going over his head?

- What were the players' understandings of the consultant-player relationship? It appeared to me that the players believed that the consultants were there to "entertain" them or to give them a piece of knowledge to make them successful. Just by being there to "receive" this knowledge was what was required from them. The underlying interpersonal dynamic that was in evidence was that of the expert being active, in the 1-up position; while the players were passive, in the 1-down position.

- In our first session, we worked on the theme of "country" with

the players. During this session, we created an interpersonal context that provided the team with a different interpersonal experience, a context where the players had to co-evolve their own meaning around the theme of "country". During this process, the coach remarked at how surprised he was at the way the players were responding to the session. In the second session, a fundamental block was encountered. It seemed that the team wanted to again establish the traditional 1-up (active) expert versus 1-down (passive) subordinate-type relationship. Paul felt that this sudden change in the team was due to our being sabotaged (probably by the physiotherapist). Happy (a player) stated that "I am mentally tired" when he was asked a question. Although this was a defensive block, it was also a very important message to us. What was causing his tiredness? Too much input too quickly (referring to consultants in general)? Or was he being challenged and activated by us to start generating his own ideas? According to the coach, the players did not understand what we were trying to do; it was going over their heads.

9. A system under stress may push for "more of the same". In line with the mindset of "the more consultants the better" we discovered that:

- A motivational speaker was also consulting the team while we were contracted to work with the team. According to the coach, the motivator's input was considered to be effective in that the players liked him and he entertained them. It was during an informal telephonic discussion with the coach at the end of a tiresome process in which we were trying to remain "connected" to the team, that we discovered that this motivator was being employed to "psyche up" the team.

- Once we had decided to withdraw from the system (due to our concern that "too much of anything is not necessarily more effective"), four extra professional coaches were brought in to help the coach train the team. This occurred after the 2-0 home loss to Zambia.

10. There are critical times when cracks in the outer wall of the system appear, inviting an entry. Systems are living organisms that have their own rhythms. Consultants need to move according to the "pace" of the system. Although timing may not be thought of as significant in therapy, I have become aware that critical issues develop intensity over time. Critical issues that are left for too long are extremely difficult to influence once they have passed a certain point in time. The process then becomes "irretrievable" with very little possibility of being externally influenced by an outside consultant.

11. Systems often behave in unpredictable and chaotic ways. This needs to be accepted. As consultants, we should not expect the system to behave in any particular way (which makes it more comfortable for us). We should also not expect to control the unfolding processes in the system. Once connected to the system, we need to examine how useful we can be to the system. For me, being useful means creating the necessary interpersonal space for everyone in the system to have conversation around whatever the "critical mass" of mind energy is busy focusing on. How this is done is part of the therapist's responsibility. If the system feels that I should be useful in some other way, then the therapeutic conversation, between me and those who want to redefine me, needs to focus on the metaphor of "what does it mean to be useful to your system". This conversation will then define your position and function in the system.

What is Our Identity?

While the soccer experience started to open up a range of exciting areas of possible research investigation (into "therapeutic conversation" and "therapeutic teams"), it also forced us to work more closely together (to discuss and plan our therapeutic interventions with the soccer team). Due to the work experience, we were going through an identity crisis that needed to be addressed.

The group had turned one year old during the period of work with the soccer team. The first meeting was on 19 May 1994. As we celebrated our "birthday", my mind travelled back to "how" it all started. In April 1994, I felt that I had come to a dead-end in my isolation as a practising psychologist. Energetically, I felt tired. I wanted to "expand" and "open up" as a person. Of significance, I wrote: "I was now going to try and set up a co-operative context where ideas can be researched. I needed to learn more, and felt that if a context for conversation is achieved, meaningful learning would take place for all those involved. There were no specific goals that I hope to achieve. The group should evolve in whatever way it decides. The main overriding concern would be to make the experience a meaningful one where individual and group learning can take place".

In working with the soccer team, the group took on another role, that of being a therapeutic team. When our group turned into a therapeutic team we were inadvertently changing our nature. With this change, came consequences of change.

There were times in the soccer process where I felt that the experience was becoming energy sapping. The group was becoming an extension of my work load. The practical issues of arranging suitable meeting times and meeting places started to take its toll. After Lesley-Anne's consultation with the soccer team for the Berundi match, the process started to get tiresome. More time was needed to meet to reflect on how we were going to consult with the team, and there seemed to be a feeling of being pressured and rushed to plan how we were going to operate and function as a team. In addition, the coach made it more difficult for us in that he did not return calls and did not seem to have much faith in how we were working.

Paul started to question the usefulness and benefits of a therapeutic team that works within the constructivist framework if there was too much individual diversity operating in the team. On a pragmatic level, there seemed to be a need to create a "cohesive" threesome where diverse individual ideas could be

streamlined into a common pragmatic methodology of therapeutic intervention. It was felt that a set of unifying principles should guide our way of consulting. A great deal of focus went into this during our soccer experience, in that we all seemed to feel that the group did not have a clearly defined way of operating.

Lesley-Anne had felt that our individual "instinctiveness" may have been neutralised when working as a team. When our group had to deal with a critical point in the therapeutic process, the group's diversity emerged. Trying to incorporate and connect all the diversity became a nightmare. While the article on the "reflecting team" by Andersen (1987) offered us a model in which to look at how we were functioning as a team, I felt that we needed to expand on Andersen's work since we did not have a one-way mirror. We were working in a more natural setting. I tried to propose a methodology of how our group could maintain its co-operative position during the conversational process and not be pulled into strategic type thinking. Unfortunately, no further opportunity presented itself in which to test the tentative ideas regarding how we could remain co-operative in a conversational mode with the soccer team.

In a formal reflection Lesley-Anne (May 1995) outlined a number of possible permutations regarding how we as a group could function if we considered working together again on a project in the future. Of significance was the notion that it may be easier to work in pairs as opposed to working as a team.

Although it was decided that we should not close off any options in how we evolve in the future, both Paul and I felt that we should avoid working as a team again. We felt that each one of us should feel free to approach the group with any potential project for further conversation. Our soccer experience had provided us with some important information about ourselves and the nature of our group. We could draw on this experience to help us become more effective in future projects that we may consider getting involved in.

> In retreating, the wise man's intent is a willing, friendly departure. He adjusts his mind and does not violate his convictions. (I Ching; in Wilhelm, 1984, p.67)

It became apparent that we should not feel pressured to move in the anticipated direction of "now we should work together", especially if this direction impacts on us in such a way as to sap energy, reduce the fun-like nature of being part of the group and where there is a sense that more work demands are being placed on us (i.e., the group becomes like an extension of work).

What Did Our Group Offer Us?

After the work experience, the group needed to re-look at its purpose again. At a meeting, Paul (August 1995) stated that the group needed to define itself more clearly. From his perspective, the group offered little or no closure to what was being discussed. He felt that the group dabbled in a little of everything, and in the process was "a jack of all trades, but a master of none". He also stated that the group had offered us a variety of possibilities through which we had moved, eg. a study group, a research group, a therapeutic group, a reflective group, an educational group, a tea group, a support group. From his comments, it appeared that he needed a clearer definition of what the group was. There was an element of frustration in how he spoke.

Lesley-Anne supported Paul; but added that she was taking a closer look at her overall life-style. She felt that she had lost her balance and needed to introduce some fundamental changes in her life. She had just returned from a two week holiday, in which she had had time to reflect on her life-style.

From the conversation it appeared that both Paul and Lesley-Anne were not getting as much out of the group process as I was. From Paul's perspective, it was as if the group process was not providing the necessary structure and closure for him to

"get" what he was looking for. It seemed as if he and Lesley-Anne had found the group process too chaotic, too undefined, too open-ended.

During this period, I tried to get a grip on what it was in our group that I had found meaningful and/or useful in the past (before the work experience). What should the nature of our group be for each one of us to evolve and transcend our own unique obstacles?

The Group as Rejuvenation

I think that psychologists are involved in a lonely profession (especially those in private practice). Our relationships with our clients tend to be "unbalanced"; we seldom receive creative energy from our clients. We are always on call and have to respond when our clients need us. But what about our energetic needs and where can we go to to get renewed and rejuvenated?

Our group's power is to provide an interpersonal context to "charge our battery". Feelings of excitement and keenness were often around me after our meetings. This energy buildup is a measure of whether old stale energy has been released and replaced by new creative energy.

The Group as Fun

Before our soccer experience, there were no "work" demands being placed on the group. The group offered me an opportunity to get away from my work. During the soccer experience, however, the group started to became an extension of my work. This concerned me, since I had to start becoming serious and professional; I had to get into work mode.

The Group as Freedom

Therapists continually have to deal with restrictions imposed on us by the client systems that we consult with. These restrictions limit and/or rigidify our personal freedom. The group offered me an opportunity to free myself from the limited and contaminated thinking patterns of my work system.

The Group as an Intellectual Trigger

I had benefited from the intellectual stimulation that our group had provided me with. When reflecting on our discussions, I had always tried to make sense of the complexity of our thinking as we were focusing in on a particular issue by formulating ideas around the issue in a more formal way (through my writing). Our ability to be curious when examining issues in a reflective and detached should be nurtured.

The Group as Individual Uniqueness and Diversity

In line with the contention that each person unfolds in a unique way (Beck & Linscott, 1991), our group offered us a "resting" or "stopping" point in which to examine our own unique difficulties and/or our own unique areas of interest in a co-operative supportive context. During the soccer experience, I became more aware of our individual uniqueness. This uniqueness always popped up during times of crisis or blockage. It was during these times that a feeling of group tension or fragmentation came to the fore. In examining the dynamic of individual operating in a group, it was necessary for each individual to take a closer look at his/her personal issue and how it may play itself out in the group context.

CHAPTER 10

DIVERGING PHILOSOPHIES

> When misfortune has spent itself, splitting apart reaches its end and better times return. Fruit must first disintegrate and split apart before new seed can develop. (I Ching; in Wilhelm, 1984, p.46)

An Issue as a Reflection of a Personal Theme

The Eruption of the Unexpected

At the conclusion of our meeting on the 6 July 1995, Lesley-Anne brought up a financial issue pertaining to our group (relating to the soccer consultations). It was an issue that was totally unexpected and unconnected to the "in the moment" conversational process at the time. Both Paul and I were taken aback by Lesley-Anne, since we had agreed on (what I had believed to be) was a fair split regarding the financial remuneration in the work done before the Burundi match. It was an issue that was discussed and decided on in the middle of April 1995, and it appeared that we all had felt comfortable with the decision. I, for one, did not pick up any "vibes" around Lesley-Anne in all our meetings that followed the decision. It therefore came as both a surprise and a shock to me when she opened up the issue, at a time when we were all getting ready to leave our meeting.

Paul and I had initially misunderstood Lesley-Anne's request for a higher financial percentage. While she may not have expressed herself clearly in the beginning, the timing and her "views" regarding this issue seemed totally "out of sync" with the group process. Both of us seemed to think that she felt uncomfortable with the 60% contribution and wanted to go for a third, third, third split. Did this mean that Paul and I saw the individuals in the group as having an equal partnership, while

Lesley-Anne felt otherwise? How could we so easily have misunderstood her? What was this telling us about ourselves and about Lesley-Anne with regard to the group process? What was the "message" behind the issue?

Looking Beyond the Issue

Any issue tends to "split" reality into either/or parts. If not handled and dealt with, the issue could block open and co-operative sharing in the future. How much to share, and what type of intimate knowledge to share could then be brought into question. In dealing with the issue, we needed to guard against thinking of this issue in a "linear" way and get stuck into a rigid interaction around the issue. An issue always highlights the dynamic interplay of "opposites", or creates a context where "one side of the coin" could be ignored or excluded. We had to endeavour to stay away from blame and one-sided thinking in the process of exploration.

An issue generates emotional energy. An issue attracts energy from others. It activates. It has a magnetic pull to it. An issue may also trap internal energy (resulting in an emotional buildup). In our group, we were constantly triggering each other. After the meeting on 6 July 1995, I felt angry and was occupied with the thought; "maybe I will not give so readily in this group anymore". In addition, there was another dominant thought that had as its message, "if you don't like it, then leave; you obviously do not value the experiences in the group". These were my initial, spontaneous reactions. There was a part of me that (a) wanted to withhold energy/information and withdraw, and (b) wanted to reject or exclude Lesley-Anne.

Any "external" issue will trigger an "internal" reaction. Although the nature of these internal reactions will depend on the nature of one's own personal life issue/theme and thus will vary from person to person, the issue may trigger a predictable type of external response for that person grappling with the issue. I, for example, wanted to reject/exclude Lesley-Anne.

These predictable responses "create" the "reality" for the person having the issue. This "reality" further "entrenches" and "fuels" the personal issue.

I did not believe that it was only a financial issue. It was a more complex issue that made statements to all of us in the group and challenged every level of our group. The issue may have been part of a dynamic in our group that Lesley-Anne was sensitive to, and which I may not have been aware of. The nature of the issue, however, seemed to go against the spirit of our group and questioned some of the principles on which our group was based. While discussing the issue she stated; "I have rubbed the word 'sucker' off my forehead". This statement suggested that she felt that there was an unfairness in the group process. In addition, she seemed to feel used.

The issue may have been making a statement about the nature and amount of the "contributions" in the group. "I think what I am trying to say is that I am not comfortable anymore with the 60%-20%-20% split. What I am saying is that maybe I don't feel that there was that much interest(?) from the two of you having been away for that week". This statement seemed to reflect that Paul and myself may have had little interest(?) in her ideas and that we may not have acknowledged her "worth", "efforts" or "contributions" to the group process. Lesley-Anne stated that; "I think that we had our normal three-weekly meetings the week before I went into that session (the consultation with the soccer team) and we spent possibly not more than five minutes talking about the soccer during that meeting, except when asked: 'Lesley-Anne are you O.K. with that; go with what you want'. So it wasn't as though we spent any time preparing, and I was happy with that". While Lesley-Anne seemed to feel that she had made all the contribution in actually working with the soccer team, how did this financial issue link to her perception of her contributions in our group?

Paul (21 June 1995) stated: "We must be careful that we don't fall into the trap (linear trap) of thinking that unless

all three members interact/communicate with the team, we are not a 'therapeutic team'. The ideas that I take into my therapy room/life have been co-created by our group - the 'therapeutic team' is in my head". This statement brings into question whether an individual therapist (who meets/works in a therapeutic team on a three-weekly basis for a two hour period); is able to not be influenced by the team's energy and ideas when working separate from the team. In raising the financial issue, Lesley-Anne may have attempted to punctuate certain events that separate or exclude herself from the group. When trying to resolve the issue she said: "Maybe you (Ken) and Paul need to discuss this (the financial issue) and let me know". This again created the context of us (Ken and Paul) and her. Since this may have further heightened her feelings of exclusion, I rejected this suggestion, and said that we should only talk about this in the group context.

Lesley-Anne may have felt threatened in the group. While I had endeavoured to create the interpersonal context for group members to share their ideas (by continually encouraging the group to write about any aspect of the work that we did), Lesley-Anne seemed to be carrying some resentment towards Paul, me and/or the nature of our group. How long had this resentment being simmering and what had stopped her from dealing with her feelings sooner? She knew that we were not going to continue working with the soccer team in early May. It was now early July. Why did she have to bring up the issue now?

Although the raising of the issue did not seem to fit the unfolding group process (from my perspective), it took courage for her to say the unsaid (which was in line with the nature of therapeutic conversation). The total unexpectedness (the timing) had unbalanced us (Paul and myself). Lesley-Anne needed to stand up "against" the group and/or on an individual level confront Paul and me about the way that we were dealing with her. What was it that she was confronting in me, Paul and/or about the group? Maybe it was not a confrontation, but rather an attempt to re-define herself in relationship to us. The raising of this

issue had the effect of immediately "stopping" the ongoing accepted group pattern and "forced" us to look more closely at the group process.

Was our group evolving into something meaningful for all members? When an interpersonal issue arises, one or more of the following is possible: (a) a re-negotiation of relationships around the person having the issue, (b) a predictable "more of the same" type of response from those interacting with the issue, and/or (c) an opportunity to "dissolve" some of the past inner hurt around the issue so that one can feel more internally free to evolve to a newer level of complexity. It was clear that Lesley-Anne felt unfulfilled and resentful. The group needed to re-assess its direction. A new direction needed to be re-negotiated, a re-definition of each individual needed to occur. We needed to discuss whether the group format (of how it operates) needs to change; whether the group should increase its membership; and/or whether we still wanted to be part of the group. In essence, was the group still a worthwhile (although sometimes emotionally painful) learning experience for all those involved?

I had the feeling that this issue may be connected to certain seeds that exist further back in the past (even before the group started?). What other things may have occurred in her everyday living over the past month or so (outside of the group); that may have contributed to her feeling the way that she did while outlining her position (and feelings) regarding the financial issue? With regards the group process, I questioned whether I may have said something that may have hurt her. I needed to know what my part was in this process. What was the process in our group that needed to be understood, that took Lesley-Anne to the point of trying to re-negotiate her position around the financial issue?

In line with the open, curious and respectful principles that bound our group together, I felt that Lesley-Anne needed to be given the interpersonal space to share her views regarding

this issue in more depth. In this way, she could use the group to examine her perceptions of herself, Paul and me around the issue under question.

The issue that Lesley-Anne had brought up in our group may in some way be linked to her "evolutionary theme/issue/task". In our group, I had hypothesised that three evolutionary themes (as I had come to understand them) were interacting, namely the (a) expert theme (myself), (b) competitive theme (Paul), and (c) exclusion theme (Lesley-Anne). I felt that the next meeting might be a critical point in her own unique evolution in that she should have an opportunity to reflect inwards in a supportive context. She had created the situation where she would have to go into the issue in more depth. This would require her to share some of the "unsaid" of her life (thereby trying to make sense of her own complexity as she interacts with life). How the group handles her and whether enough "interpersonal space" is created for her to reflect inwards would be important.

Giving an Opportunity to Talk about the Unsaid

At a group meeting (20 July 1995), Lesley-Anne was given the opportunity to explore the financial issue in greater depth with the group. During the meeting, there were periods of tension as we grappled around the issue of finance. During the group process, I became aware that (a) the major focus of the conversation was on Lesley-Anne, (b) Paul and I seemed to take up a position of trying to prod and probe in order to create a context so that she could share her feelings about herself in relationship to the group, (c) Lesley-Anne seemed reluctant to open up and enter into the complexity of the issue (her reactions were somewhat defensive and protective), and (d) fundamental differences in the way we were approaching the issue was becoming more evident as the process unfolded.

In asking Lesley-Anne to explain and expand her views, we may have inadvertently placed more pressure on her. In the

process, a "we (Paul and myself) versus you (Lesley-Anne)" divide was becoming more evident. Throughout the discussion, Lesley-Anne felt that the issue was a simple quantifiable business venture that was separate from the group's existence and/or activities. During our conversation, a dynamic existed between the following opposites: (a) simplicity versus complexity, (b) quantity versus process, (c) business versus pleasure, (d) individual versus group, and (e) contribution versus non-contribution. It was as if the group wholeness had been split into opposing parts. The rubbing together of these "opposites" created the emotional energy in the conversation.

During the group process, I experienced that (a) Lesley-Anne was becoming more excluded and alone, (b) Paul and I were getting closer, (c) Lesley-Anne wanted to separate the money issue from the group process, while Paul and I were continually trying to connect the issue with the group process, (d) frustration was being felt by everyone in the group, and (e) a rigid circular pattern of interaction was unfolding.

If the group process continued, where would it take us too? Looked at another way, Lesley-Anne had an experience in our group which may or may not have fitted in with her epistemology about the nature of relationships (her predictable expectation of "the workings of relationships"). Did the group experience provide her with a different experience in which she could explore her epistemology about herself and the nature of her relationships with others? Unfortunately, I feel that the group process was unable to do this. I had the sense that Lesley-Anne felt even more trapped and frustrated after our meeting.

After two hours of conversation, Lesley-Anne still felt that her contribution during the Burundi match "outweighed" the 60% financial remuneration that was decided on in April 1995. She felt that she should get 80%. In line with this proposal, Paul suggested that he should now get less than I (since I had attended more soccer meetings than he had). If one was congruent with the epistemology that Paul and I believed in, then I felt

that Paul and I should still get the same, that is, 10% each. At this point, I realised that if we (Paul and myself) shifted to this position, it would inadvertently go against the whole ethos and spirit of the group culture. I then stated that I felt that the 60%-20%-20% split that was decided on in the group in April should remain, since it had built into it extra remuneration for Lesley-Anne's sole efforts. I stated this openly, as the meeting was drawing to a close. This seemed to upset Lesley-Anne.

I had the sense that Lesley-Anne may have felt that Paul and I went through a two hour exercise of futility (knowing that we were not going to change), so why did she have to go through this process? It could have been so easily solved if we had just said to her: "No, we do not agree with you. The split stays 60%-20%-20%. Now, let's move on to the next topic of discussion". In fact, at one point during the conversation, Lesley-Anne said that she preferred to be handled in a "simple and direct way". The question of whether Paul and I were too sensitive about the issue was raised, whether we were not reading too much into the process, whether we were not becoming too complex? In my own mind, I questioned whether this issue was as simple and quantifiable as Lesley-Anne was wanting us to believe.

Attempting to Re-define the Relationships

In discussing the unfolding process in the action research group with Gert (July 1995), he introduced the notion of "doing the unusual or unfamiliar" in our group. According to Gert, Lesley-Anne had responded in an unfamiliar way by "standing up against the group". In the process, she had "separated" herself from the male subgroup. In response, I found myself "not wanting to share my perspectives" and becoming "more definite and assertive in my views". In addition, Paul did not "back-down" regarding the money issue and remained congruent with his epistemology. He supported me in standing firm on the 60%-20%-20% split. In conversation with Paul after our meeting, he stated that he would usually have backed down in such

situations.

In the last two meetings, we had all made significant personal shifts. With regards my own personal issue (the expert theme), I became aware that (a) those around me may try to suck me dry or latch onto me to learn from me, and (b) I feel an internal pressure to produce and produce (to always give unconditionally).

On a simple, basic level, my familiar, interpersonal position that I invariably adopt requires me to (a) share my ideas with others, (b) take on responsibility for initiating processes, and (c) be accommodating regarding the needs of others.

The dramatic personal shifts that we experienced in the group "threw" us onto another level, or catapulted us in the opposite direction, forcing us to respond in an unfamiliar way. On reflection, however, the unfamiliar way for me had previously surfaced in other interpersonal contexts where I had (a) felt under emotional pressure, (b) felt threatened, (c) wanted to have my needs satisfied, and/or (d) not felt appreciated for what I had done/contributed.

On reflection, the personal shift that occurred in our group was a freeing experience. It had freed us from the rigid positions that we had evolved in our group over time. It allowed one to make a personal statement in which one was prepared to fight for what or who one was. In the process, it gave one a sense of one's own personal power.

Lesley-Anne's response went against her fundamental need for "inclusion". She stood alone against the group. She risked being excluded by the group. While her actions went against her familiar pattern in the group, her method of standing up against the group put her at risk to be excluded. In the process, Paul also had to make a personal statement. While he usually tended to back down under competitive pressure (and avoid

confrontation), the financial issue forced him to stand up and align himself with his principles (he needed to be congruent).

It can be deduced that any interpersonal issue that surfaces in a group is created by the nature of the interpersonal dynamics that have evolved over time. At a critical point in the group process, an issue may appear (the form or content will depend on what the group is focusing on) which could challenge or trigger the "personal issues" of each group member. On another level, these personal shifts could be seen as offering a corrective mechanism to a potentially rigid pattern of interaction. The personal shifts unconsciously and spontaneously occur, as a way of trying to introduce the correct balance into our relationships with others.

These personal shifts provide an opportunity for new patterns of interaction in the group to occur. After this personal shift has occurred, one often worries about whether one has not been disruptive and in the process upset the apple cart. Midway through our last meeting, Lesley-Anne had commented: "I wish we could forget what has been said and go back. I hope that I have not thrown a spanner in the works".

On a very basic level, "standing up", "not backing down", "not sharing" and "being firm" were reflections of our preparedness to assert our personal power. These may be the positions that we feel bad about, that we consciously try to avoid, that we have been encouraged never to adopt. In the group, we found ourselves in these positions where it was necessary for us to make a stand (in line with those feelings that we may have been taught to repress or deny). There was now more honesty in the group. The paradox, however, was while the group process had allowed us to be more congruent with our feelings (there was an opportunity to free ourselves from the bondage of our unique personal issues), it had also increased the possibility of accentuating our unique personal themes.

The Group Drifts Along

After Lesley-Anne had raised the financial issue, I found myself examining my role in the group more closely. On a practical level, I stopped writing to the group (formally sharing my perspective). I was aware that this "withdrawal" on my part went against the action research philosophy, but I decided that I did not want to drive the group process anymore. I felt as if I had given enough.

In the period from August 1995 to May 1996, there were no formal reflections being shared. The group still met every three weeks and conversed about current topics of interest (sporting events). In addition, we spoke a great deal about "therapeutic conversation". From my perspective, however, little intimacy existed in the group. There was a cautiousness in how we conversed with each other.

Re-establishing the Focus

In May 1996, I told the group that I had handed in a draft manuscript of the thesis. This was a significant event, since there was always a feeling that a lot of what we were doing in the group was because of my research project. During this meeting, we discussed what the future held for the group. Lesley-Anne was keen that we should present a workshop together, since we had learned a great deal as a group. She felt that we could do this at an international conference. As was the case with the soccer team, Lesley-Anne was keen that the group work together (driving for inclusion and cohesion). Both Paul and I were cautious; I felt that we had not addressed fundamental epistemological differences that existed in the group. Although I was comfortable with the way Paul was thinking about issues, I could not always relate and connect to Lesley-Anne's perceptions.

As an alternative, we decided that we should go back to our work contexts and formally reflect on a topic of interest that

we could research as a group. For the first time in the group's history, each one of us would take on the same responsibility to formulate a research focus. This was a relief for me.

This decision forced each of us to reveal ourselves more openly. Unfortunately, this also highlighted the significant distance that existed between Lesley-Anne, and Paul and me (which eventually resulted in Lesley-Anne leaving the group). Our individual areas of research interest are presented to indicate the extent of the epistemological difference that existed in our group.

Lesley-Anne's Work Issue

1. Mr and Mrs "automatic". A need for quick-fix, short-term solutions without having to take responsibility themselves. The world around us is structured towards touch-of-a-button technology. Have noticed the same demands from medical practitioners, and same thrust is coming through in therapy.

2. A symptom of this is a lack of skills re: communication (CONVERSATION), and multi-relationships.

3. Teenagers - complex, small adults, no transition from child to adult.

4. Therapy very often geared towards short-term problem solving. Very little inclination towards a need for personal growth. If you have any kind of physical pain, there is any number of tablets one can take to combat the discomfort. Psychological pain is not seen as an opportunity to grow, there is a knee-jerk reaction to avoid any sort of discomfort.

5. Family and personal pathology increasing with political and economic strains.

Paul's Work Issue

Introduction. I have been struggling with the pragmatics of conversational therapy. The definition of conversational therapy could be defined as:

> To create a space, to facilitate a conversational or dialogical process, so that new meanings will develop leading to the dissolving of the problem.

In this way therapy is co-created. The therapist is not guiding the process to his "truth". However, he is still doing something in therapy - he is "facilitating" the therapy, so that this space is created.

Role of the therapist. If one has to break the above definition up, the therapist does the following during therapy: (a) creates a space, and (b) facilitates a dialogue.

I have gone out exploring how this is best done. When is a space created? How does the therapist talk during therapy so that meaningful dialogue is facilitated?

I looked at (a) what types of QUESTIONS should be asked by the therapist, (b) should the therapist offer suggestions, and (c) what techniques are useful in creating space.

Your philosophy is the thing. Going through an article by Anderson (1995) re-awakened the problem of looking for answers in the wrong places. A conversation therapist (for a lack of a better term) is characterised not by his techniques but by his philosophy/mindset/epistemology. Behind his therapy is an epistemology of (a) curiosity, (b) openness, (c) multiple realities/meanings, (d) suspending of own "truth", and (e) each client has a story - you have not heard it all before.

Therefore, what happens in therapy is unpredictable, cannot be prescribed, cannot be repeated. Techniques cannot be taught

because as one repeats certain techniques we are not really being "open".

Therefore the "trick" is to develop the above philosophy, so that it becomes a way of life, a way of talking, a way of listening. But in order to do this we have to suspend our expert position - which we have been taught to be - "we are the experts of human behaviour"!

I have seen that it is not that easy to develop this philosophy of "unknowing". My mind is continually coming up with interpretations of what is going on with the client and his life - interpretations that are then phrased in my mind and to the client as the truth. Nothing wrong in giving interpretations, opinions - as long as a philosophy of openness is retained in the therapist's mind. If a spirit of openness is not present in the therapist's mind, a spirit of curiosity, openness will not be present in therapy, no matter what technique or question is used.

Therefore, to develop as a therapist, one has to develop this philosophy. I suspect that it is not as easy as it sounds. I have been trained in this way. I have read all about it. I agree with it, but yet I have come to see that my mind is not open, not really curious - it is more natural to jump to "truth conclusions" and get the client to accept my explanations. WHY?

My Work Issue

Therapeutic conversation can be defined as creating the interpersonal space to talk about the "unsaid". Talking about the unsaid suggests that a certain level of intimacy is reached between therapist and client.

1. Is there a natural resistance to enter this level of intimacy?

2. If so, what is this resistance? Wilber (1979) states that

therapy is the process of creating "special conditions" that frustrate one's resistances that then results in one moving to a deeper level of non-resistance.

3. Co-operative conversation suggests that we create a conversational context where there is little or no resistance. Is this possible? I have noticed that I use tentative reflective meta-communication to "challenge" the "resistance" of the client. But what am I challenging, and do I need to challenge it?

4. Does the therapist have an agenda in therapy? What are his intentions in the process? Do his intentions trigger a client's resistance?

Our Final Meeting (4 June 1996)

It was clear that an epistemological rift existed in our group. In talking about the above three research (work) areas, Lesley-Anne stated that: "We are coming here to talk about things, but does it really matter from where we come (our perspectives)? Regardless of what has happened, I have got a lot of value from the group. Although the difference (between Paul/Ken and I) has always been there, this group experience has been a unique experience. I did not have to be in or out. In my other experiences (outside of the group), I have always resisted change and/or conformity, and have dug my heals in. By digging my heals in, it has stopped me from moving out. But the more I try to hang on in this group, the more cohesion from Ken/Paul".

For the first time, Lesley-Anne had verbalised some of her complexity to the group. It was clear that she was feeling excluded on one level, yet was experiencing a simultaneous "in and out" type of feeling in our group. At the end of this meeting, I remember feeling heartened by the process since we had achieved a newer level of understanding regarding Lesley-Anne's functioning in the group.

One week after this meeting, Lesley-Anne telephoned me to say that she was leaving the group. She was not prepared to talk about why she had decided to leave. In the very brief discussion we had had, she came across as being defensive and resisted any attempt on my part to get her to come into the group to discuss the matter. It appeared that Lesley-Anne had finally decided to "dig her heals in" and exclude herself from the group process.

With regards our group, Paul and I still meet once every three weeks. We share ideas in a co-operative way and formally write up our thoughts and perceptions in order to trigger further exploration. To create more diversity in our group, we are contemplating inviting another colleague to join us in our on-going exploration of relevant issues that we are encountering.

We are All Vulnerable

In interaction, where the nature of the conversation starts entering the different levels of intimate depth, a "fear" may start surfacing within an individual. This fear may be linked to the fear of being (a) controlled or dominated by others, (b) manipulated by others in having their needs met at one's expense, and/or, (c) placed in an interpersonal situation where the past has the possibility of repeating itself, resulting in one having to re-experience the past pain/hurt again.

Everyone has their vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities may have their origins in some painful past experience/s or in the past/present recurring patterns of family interactions which one was/is part of. These vulnerabilities are potential targets for others. Paradoxically, they may also be the entry points into the deeper self.

In leaving the group, it can only be hypothesised that Lesley-Anne had felt vulnerable and was not prepared to open herself up further. Her exclusion theme seemed to be her protection. While Paul and I respected her decision, there was

no further opportunity for us to gain further clarity. Many questions still remain. By excluding herself from the group, she had also excluded us from further insight.

CHAPTER 11

INTIMATE CONVERSATION: EXCHANGING IDEAS AND ENERGY

> A true test of independence is not how self-sufficient we are but whether we can be sufficiently selfless to connect totally with another person. (Pearsall, 1994, p.37)

Throughout the research process, the theme of "therapeutic conversation" was always around. Our action research group spent a great deal of its time discussing this topic. During these discussions, I realised that therapeutic conversation was not only an interchange of words and phrases between therapist and client/group/family. While the work of Anderson and Goolishian (1988) provided us with a basis for further investigation, I was becoming interested in concepts such as "obstacles in conversation", "energy flow between people" and "connection and intimacy". When one considers the concept of energy (in relation to therapeutic conversation), it is necessary to examine (a) how mental processes are activated, (b) the convergence and divergence of the interactional process, (c) the Taoist concept of energy flow, (d) human systems as holistic energy systems, and (e) engaging (or connecting to) the interactive process.

Human Systems as Linguistic Systems

Anderson and Goolishian (1988) state that the therapeutic system should be viewed as a problem-organising, problem dis-solving system. In essence, this means that the therapeutic system is created through language in conversation about the problem being experienced.

According to Gadamer, (cited in Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, p.380), any linguistic account carries with it a "circle of the unexpressed". Gadamer refers to this as the "infinity of the unsaid". This implies that no communicative account or action is complete, clear and univocal.

> Thus the subject and content of all dialogue and discourse is open to evolutionary change in meaning. Knowledge advances through this process of looking for the unsaid.... [Therapy can be seen] as a process of expanding and saying the unsaid - the development, through dialogue, of new themes and narratives and, actually, the creation of new histories. Therapy relies on the infinite resources of the "not-yet-said" in the narratives around which we organize ourselves in our conduct with each other. [The resource for change] is in the "circle of the unexpressed".
> (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, p.381)

According to Anderson and Goolishian (1988), the goal of therapy is to participate in a conversation that continually loosens and opens up, rather than constricts and closes down. Through therapeutic conversation, fixed meanings and behaviours (the sense people make of things and their actions) are given room, broadened, shifted and changed. There is no other required outcome in the therapeutic process.

Understanding Mental Processes

In examining how mental processes are triggered and energised (in conversation), Bateson (1980) believes that it important to understand the nature of mind and specifies six criteria to constitute mind, namely (a) a mind is an aggregate of interacting parts or components, (b) the interaction between parts of mind is triggered by difference, (c) mental process requires collateral energy, (d) mental process requires circular (or more complex) chains of determination, (e) in mental process, the effects of difference are to be regarded as transforms (i.e., coded versions) of events that preceded them, and (f) the description and classification of these processes of transformation disclose a hierarchy of logical types immanent in the phenomena.

Bateson (1980) contends that thought, ecology, evolution, life and learning occur in systems that satisfy the above

criteria. Energy is inherent in all living systems. Energy can be activated or unleashed only by news of perceived difference. "Mental processes are triggered by difference and that difference is not energy and usually contains no energy" (Bateson, 1980, p.111). No energy exists in information.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) believes that new information entering consciousness will be evaluated internally to ascertain whether it reinforces or blocks one's goals. "Every piece of information we process gets evaluated for its bearing on the self. Does it threaten our goals, does it support them or is it neutral?" (p.39). When information conflicts with the existing intentions of a person, psychic entropy (or chaotic disorder) emerges in consciousness. Psychic disorder has many names, depending on how one experiences it: fear, rage, jealousy, apathy (to mention a few). This disorder in consciousness activates internal energy as attention is focused on ways to counter the entropy. In the process, energy is used on the undesirable intrusions that have entered consciousness. This reduces one's energy for other preferences.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) asserts that when information comes into awareness that is congruent with the goals of a person, psychic energy flows effortlessly. There is no reason to worry or question one's adequacy in such situations. Csikszentmihalyi termed this state the "flow experience" (p.40), in which attention can be freely invested to achieve one's goals, where there is no disorder to straighten out, or no threat for the self to defend against.

Convergence and Divergence

While the action group had provided each one of us with an interpersonal context to (a) rejuvenate, (b) have fun, (c) be free, (d) be intellectually triggered, and (e) maintain our uniqueness, a fundamental question needed to be addressed by each of us: How best can one utilise the group experience so as to unfold and evolve to more complexity as a person? For me, the

power of the group was to provide a reflective context where meaningful issues could be explored. It was important for the group to provide the interpersonal space for each of us to put our "thumb prints" on the canvas. In discussion, I told Paul and Lesley-Anne that this might be risky, since it required them to examine their most fundamental assumptions concerning the specific topic under review and their own personal concerns regarding this topic (or when examining an obstacle).

On a personal level, I had gained much from the process and I had always tried to make time after the group meeting to reflect on the group discussion. It was in this process (after the group meeting), that I had taken the responsibility of closing an issue, or investigating the issue further, or writing about the topic under review. It was at this point when Paul seemed to make a quantum shift in realising that the time away from the group was as important as the time spent in the group. He stated that:

1. He always left the group meetings feeling energised.

2. After each meeting, he was always confronted with deciding on what he should do with this energy.

3. In the process of his everyday living (his work demands, family demands, the interpersonal interactive processes that surrounded him), his energy would get "killed".

4. His good intentions to use the "triggered" energy from the group meeting was neutralised by his normal everyday living pattern.

5. He then waited for the next group meeting. On one level, he felt excited that the group would activate and energise him again, but on another level he felt frustrated and powerless to use the energy effectively.

From this reflection, it became clear to me that there may

be a convergence and divergence in the unfolding group process. There is a limited time period when three individuals meet in space. During this period, there is a convergence of three different perspectives or points of interest.

A two hour conversation unfolds around a topic. Complexity unfolds. New insights may be triggered. Energy is shared. In this period, there is a feeling of integration. The group context provides the opportunity for each individual "to meet", "to pull together", "to converge". This phase has a wave-like, fluid feel to it, where feelings of creative flow are triggered. This is an exciting feeling, where new ideas are shared between people.

This period of convergence is followed by a phase of divergence, where each individual now has to stand alone from the group and "take" from the group meeting that which is personally meaningful and of interest. In order to do this, the individual needs to make the necessary time and space for him/herself outside of the group, to "focus" and create the solid particle (the written word). This is an integrative process, where one tries to bring together the ideas that emerged in the group context or in a work context. This level of integration, however, is different from that which occurred in the group context. It requires the incorporation of new information into one's existing cognitive structure.

The ability to create the context for oneself for this reflection to occur seemed to be what both Lesley-Anne and Paul were struggling with. In order to take out of the group process, each individual needed to create the sort of context outside of the group which allowed for the opportunity to think, read, write, act or reflect about those aspects, experiences, comments or ideas that had emerged in the group meeting.

A Taoist View of Energy Flow

In Taoism, the concept of chi is central to understanding

the nature of energy flow. Although chi has been broadly defined as being "vital energy", "intrinsic energy", "original, eternal and ultimate energy", its nature cannot be determined in quantitative or scientific terms (Chia & Chia, 1986; Horwitz, Kimmelman & Lui, 1976; Liao, 1990).

Embedded in the attempted definition of chi is relationship. According to Porkert, (cited in Capra, 1988, p.173): "Without relationship there would be no chi, because chi is not empty air. It is the structured pattern of [dynamic and moving] relationships, which are defined in a directional way". The notion of directionality suggests that the flow of energy follows a particular direction. This direction, however, is determined by the dynamic interplay of certain energy forces or movements. The dynamic interaction of energy movements and forces, in turn, will determine certain patterns that flow in a particular direction over time.

Liao (1990, p. 18) states that "it is chi that determines human mental and physical conditions. The way in which chi is expressed is commonly known as the nature of things". Being aware of the nature of the conditions that surround one is important, since meaningful and effective decisions or interventions can be made in a situation only if the dynamic pattern of energy flow is considered. How one relates or connects to these conditions will determine whether one works with or against the natural energy flow.

The dynamic interplay of complementary opposites in any situation determines the nature of the situation. Yin and yang chi represent energy forces that have opposing directionality. Integrating opposing forces into a harmonious whole is a fundamental principle of Taoism. The striving for inner harmony and balance in a co-operative way (when being confronted with certain conditions) is necessary if the power of chi is to be utilised (Lash, 1989).

"Chinese tradition holds that chi flows ceaselessly in the

human body. Whenever there is an interference of the flow, or the path is blocked, sickness occurs" (Liao, 1990, p.28). The concept of blockage or interference of energy flow highlights the need to remove the "obstacle" so that energy can move unhindered.

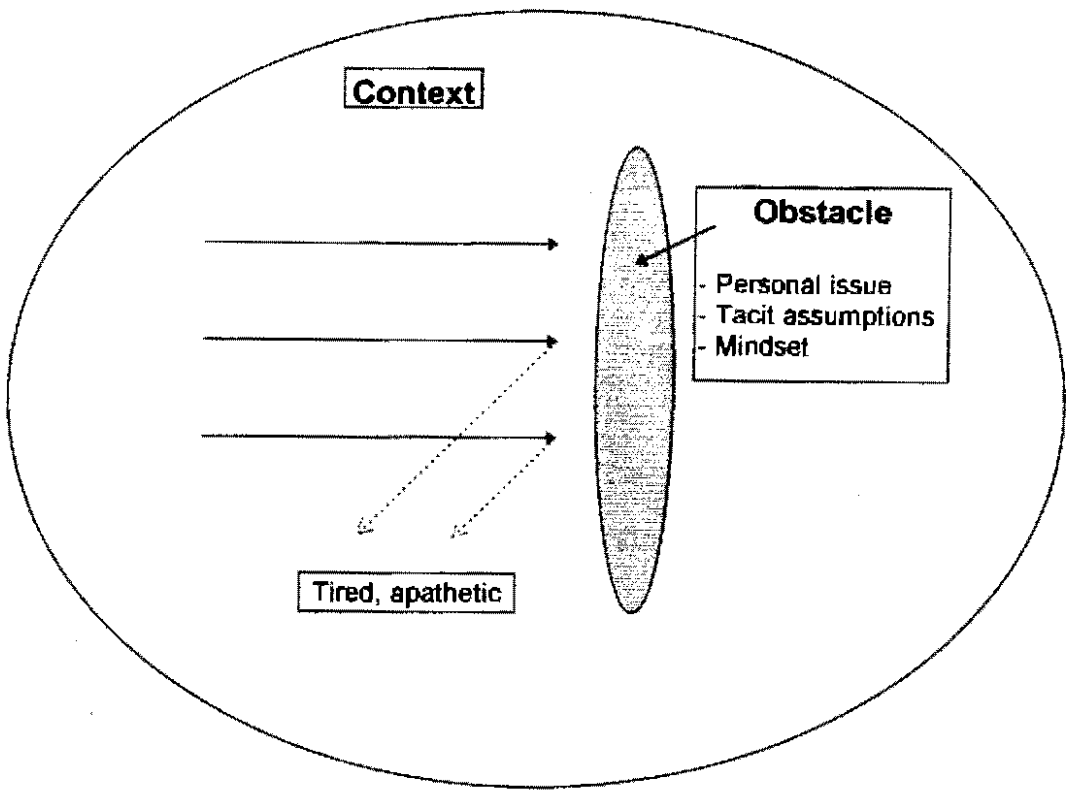


Figure 11.1. Energy flow gets blocked or absorbed by the obstacle.

It is important to consider one's intentions regarding the direction of the energy flow. Intention is linked to the achievement of certain predetermined objectives or goals, or to satisfy certain internal needs. The intention to achieve a goal implies that "force" in action may be used, especially if no success seems likely. In any context, there is always a dance between trying to achieve internal objectives or goals and dealing with the external reaction or response that exists in the context. Mental and/or physical activity always occurs in a context. It is the context that will determine the meaning of action.

The obstacle can be thought of as being a restrictive mindset. It is created by one's thinking and/or acting. This restriction limits thinking possibilities and in the process traps the internal energy of the human system. A mindset absorbs energy. According to Gawain (1982, p.6), "an idea or thought is like a blueprint; it creates an image of the form, which then magnetises and guides the physical energy to flow into that form and eventually manifests it on the physical plane".

How one thinks about situations determines how one responds in situations. "Mind is a powerful generator of energy. Your focus of energy release will be directed at the content of thought existing in your mind at a given time" (Jennings, 1993, p.74). This suggests that ideas precede action. Ideas create reality. For the obstacle to be solved, something new and random needs to occur in the thinking pattern of the person (Bateson, 1980; White 1986). It is believed that this newness can emerge if a context is created where the nature of the obstacle can be examined and explored in a co-operative and curious manner in conversation. Language or "how you talk about" can either limit mindsets or open up new possibilities for a person (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; White 1989a, 1989b). The obstacle should not be viewed as a threat, but rather be understood as an important message to the person (the meaning of this needs to be discovered).

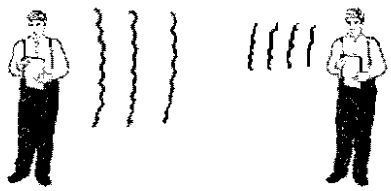
The experiences in our action research group were suggesting that one's personal theme (and the manner in which this theme constructs relationships and/or determines one's perceptions) can be thought of as being the "obstacle" that one needs to resolve. From this perspective, the "obstacle" is not separate from oneself, by rather a consequence of oneself. The action research process had highlighted this. For example, my initial concern about the "expert position" of the sports psychologist (external concern), shifted to my own "expert position" in the action research group (internal functioning). The same process had occurred with Lesley-Anne in which she had excluded and separated herself in the group.

Humans Systems as Holistic Energy Systems

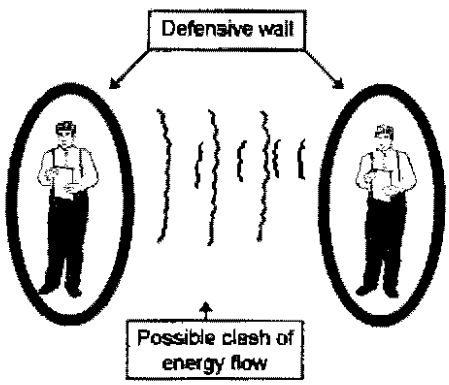
An interpersonal context is a complex energy field where there are attractions and repulsions in what and how things are being communicated (both verbally and nonverbally). Energy forces are generated in the way people interact with each other and can be thought of as the verbal and nonverbal "implied" messages that reflect one's intentionality in the context and/or the personal theme of the person. When two people interact, an energy flow unfolds. The nature of this energy flow will depend on, (a) the type of relationship that exists between these two people, and (b) the organisational structure of each person (which includes the unique way in which the energy is expressed).

As a result of my work and action group experiences, I was becoming aware that an "outer protective wall" may exist around a person/system which prevents the attainment of intimate conversation (where energy flows effortlessly). This "protective wall" or "obstacle" (which is linked to a person's personal theme and to the way in which one goes about interacting with others) needed to be transcended (or dissolved) for an intimate connection to be achieved. However, the dissolving process only starts occurring when an intimate state of conversation is reached. This presents a catch 22 type of situation.

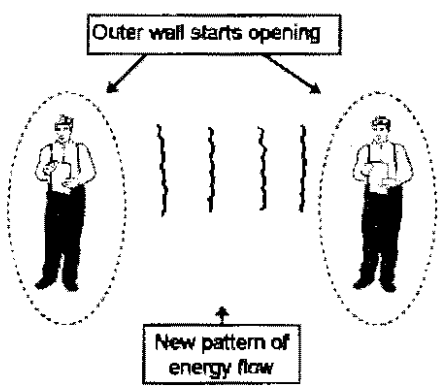
As a way to describe my own sense of conversational experiences (when considering that people are holistic energy systems), a tentative model is represented in figure 11.2 to reflect the interaction of energies when two people come into each others' space to have conversation. Gert (in conversation, March 1995) believes that this attempt to describe the unfolding stages of conversational energy flow should not be considered an absolute truth but rather as a move towards making more sense of my own experiences in this field of energy exchange, intimacy and connection during conversation.



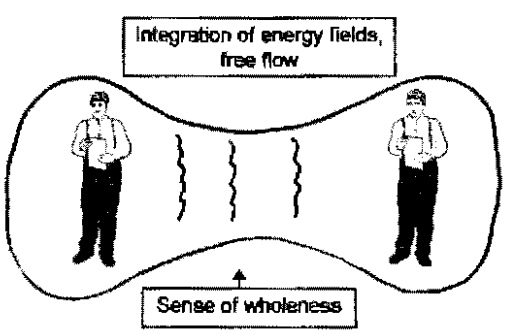
The energy wave-lengths radiate outwards, varying from person to person. The intentionality of each person is "assessed" by the other.



The energy waves start merging and interacting. During this phase, the defensive outer walls tend to protect one against the invasion of the external energy field of the other person.



After some time, the different wave-lengths join and connect to form a different energy pattern that allows for more harmonious movement of energy flow.



Once the integrated wave-lengths find a new pattern, the outer defensive walls can be penetrated. As this occurs, there is a sense of personal intimacy and connection.

Figure 11.2. Integrating and harmonising energy flow between two people in conversation.

Entering an intimate state of conversation is a complex process, that can be likened to a satellite re-entering the earth's atmosphere. If the angle of entering is not right, the satellite will be consumed and burnt by the re-entry or thrown off into space, never to be seen again. With reference to the therapy process, (a) the therapist's manner (and personal theme), (b) the client's manner (and personal theme), (c) the resulting relationship as these two personal themes interact and connect, (d) the timing of intimate comments as a therapeutic reality is co-evolved, and (e) the perceived intentionality, trust and respect that exists in the relationship, are factors that will determine the level of intimacy in the relationship.

On a body level, I have taken note of the breathing patterns of others who are in "therapeutic conversation" with me. There tends to be a release of built-up tension during conversation when the client is given space to talk about the issues (obstacles) that he is encountering. This release of energy (through sighing) also occurs when an intimate connection is being achieved during conversation (when the defences have been dropped, as reflected in stage 4). These body (breathing) signals can be thought of as being indications that the client is releasing internal tension while addressing the internal obstacle in a connective bond.

Andersen (1992, p.66) contends that "when words are expressed, the words themselves and all the emotions that are embedded in them are brought to others through the physiological act of breathing".

> ...the phase of exhaling is our expressing ourselves and also our releasing inner tension....Thus, if the talking in a conversation is a process where a person searches for being the person he or she wants to be, that search is not only a mental but a physiological search as well....One might say that pain and aches and stiffness in the body are related to obstructing the free flow of air through the body. In other words, they are connected to persons being in

> a state of not expressing themselves. With that in mind, it becomes even more important for me to not interrupt a person's talking and thinking. Sometimes as I listen I can hear the small sighs that come when some tension somewhere in the body goes and thereby lets the air out more easily. (Andersen, 1992, p.65)

It is hypothesised that a person may pick up the vibrational intentions of the other person during conversation. A type of "sixth sense" gets provoked. This may result in the body giving off a "felt sense", even though one may not fully understand the body feeling. According to Gendlin (1981, p.10):

> A felt sense is the body's sense of a particular problem or situation. A felt sense is not an emotion. We recognise emotions. We know when we are angry, or sad, or glad. A felt sense is something you do not at first recognise - it is vague, fuzzy and murky. It feels meaningful but not known. It is a body-sense of meaning.

In his work in the field of psychoneurosexuality and immunology, Pearsall (1994, p.38) contends that the immune system functions as a sensory organ:

> Some researchers suggest that our immune system is so sophisticated and subtle that it is a body-brain that thinks and may even be our "sixth sense". Our immune system senses in ways that we cannot yet measure or even imagine. When our immune system senses something is happening that needs attention, it tells us how to think as much as we tell it how to function through our thoughts.

When a person tries to dominate, control or prescribe to the other person during conversation, an uncomfortable body sense may emerge in the body and the "protective shield" will intensify in order to block out the forceful energy flow. This is a protective response when a person feels threatened or exposed. In linking to the work of Pearsall (1994), this could

activate a defensive type of response in the immune system, resulting in a potentially destructive energy exchange between the participants in the conversation.

Moving from stage 2 into stage 3 will depend on whether there is enough trust and respect in the relationship. A therapist needs to be sensitive to this and be aware that any "strategic intentionality" on his part, can be picked up by the "sixth sense" of the client, which in turn, may activate the "protective shield". Anderson and Goolishian (1992) contend that a therapist needs to adopt a "not-knowing" position in relation to the client. "The not-knowing position entails a general attitude or stance in which the therapist's action communicate an abundant and genuine interest in the client's reality and the client's evolving reality" (Goolishian & Anderson, 1992, p.13).

Pearsall (1994, p.9) cites research done by Ornish that demonstrates that a sense of intimate connection has a real and measurable impact on our physical health. "When a sense of connection is increased or a sense of isolation decreased, the immune system itself gets stronger". Pearsall found that one intimate and sensually demonstrative dyad is the core of sexual healing.

> Sexual healing asserts that one loving relationship between two people is the healthiest of all acts because it allows pentamerous connection with self (self-esteem), another person (intimacy), something more (connection with a sense of purpose and meaning), the present moment (mindfulness) and the sensual awareness of another body (an intense physical expression and manifestation of all five levels of connection). (Pearsall, 1994, p.10)

Conversational connection (as reflected in stage 4) seems similar to the intimate sexual dyad connection proposed by Pearsall (1994); but without the sensuality. Being enveloped in a harmonious energy flow in conversation allows the two selves to merge into a oneness (emotional intimacy).

> Intimacy is not a relationship between "I" and "you"....In intimacy, I and you appear to influence each other, we seem to "get inside" each other and change each other from within in such a way that "I" and "you" become a "we". This "we" that we experience is not just "I and you", it is a new thing in itself, a new unity. The "we" both alters the I and the you who make it up and takes on its own identity and own capacity for further relationship. (Zohar, 1991, p.110)

Being in intimate conversation can be likened to being in the zone, where energy (mind and body) is exchanged in an effortless manner. In sport, the zone is often spoken of as being an altered state of consciousness. "Internal and external distractions were not attended to, whereby everything flowed, temporal and spatial dimensions were altered and the target couldn't be missed - is called the flow state or zone in archery" (Heathcote, 1996, p.17). A state of effortless effort is then achieved where there is not too much thinking or planning. It is only the being and doing that matters.

> The mind of a perfect man is like a mirror. It grasps nothing. It expects nothing. It reflects but does not hold. Therefore, the perfect man can act without effort. (Chuang-Tzu, quoted in Hyams, 1982, p.101).

Being Ready to Engage the Process

In conversation, Gert (August 1995) stated that the action research process is an existential process. As one examines the issues under investigation, one's tacit assumptions start being exposed. Fundamental assumptions of how one goes about doing things are challenged and put under the spotlight during this process. Indirectly, one may then start to examine and question the core of one's existence. This can be an unsettling experience. An individual needs to be ready for this sort of process (as is the case for psychotherapy). One cannot force the process. One is either ready or not. Being ready may require that an individual:

1. Be comfortable in working with chaos and diversity.

2. Is able to detach from him/herself, in order to make more sense of the interpersonal processes that surround him/her.

3. Is keen to get more understanding of his/her own uniqueness.

4. Is able to overcome the initial inner fear that surfaces when one is presented with a clean canvas and asked to imprint something on it that reflects one's own unique self.

5. Stops hiding from oneself, and shifts from a more defensive position to a more incorporating and accepting position.

6. Has a need to expand his/her consciousness by examining the most fundamental tacit assumptions that are made while operating in the world.

7. Is able to let go and trust; to let go of past and to let go of future. This allows for an openness to occur in the present moment.

Beck (1989, p.55) refers to quiet Zen meditation (in which one becomes the observer of mind and body in a detached way) as "practice".

> Practice is not easy. It will transform our life. But if we have a naive idea that this transformation can take place without a price being paid, we fool ourselves. It takes enormous courage to have a real practice. You have to face everything about yourself hidden in that box (Pandora's Box), including some unpleasant things you don't even want to know about.

The formal reflective interactive exploration process, in which one stands back and makes sense of the recent

conversational experience that one has had, can also be termed "practice". Kopp (1974, p.12) states that "we are all pilgrims and that there is no master, and there is no student". However, Kopp outlines the necessity to be courageous in one's openness in interaction with those who you may be journeying with:

> If I am transparent enough to myself, then I can become less afraid of those hidden selves that my transparency may reveal to others. If I reveal myself without worrying about how others will respond, then some will care, though others may not. But who can love me, if no one knows me? I must risk it, or live alone. My one free decision to be transparent is a commitment to my never-ending struggle. Before a man can be free, first he must choose freedom. Then the hard work begins. But if this commitment invites a like commitment in my patients, we can offer each other courage to go on, joining each other along the pilgrim's way, foregoing semblance for openness, and solitude for community. (p.18)

Although the group offered each one of us an interpersonal playground to expand him/herself, each one of us needed to actively engage the group process and grapple with our own unique personal issue in our own unique way. However, there may be a natural reluctance and hesitancy to walk the road that is being suggested. If one concluded that the success of our group meetings (from an individual's standpoint) was largely dependent on what each of us did (with the group experience) outside of the group during the phase of divergence, then the therapy process needed to be examined more closely. If Paul and Lesley-Anne were finding this difficult to do in our group, then how did our clients feel in the therapy process? On a fundamental level, the success of therapy may depend on what the client did with that small package of energy and cognitive "news of difference" (which emerged during the therapeutic conversation), when returning to his/her old, familiar living patterns and life-style.

From our group discussions, two important questions emerged with regards the therapeutic process. Firstly, when a client enters the therapy room, is she/he emotionally and existentially ready for the unfolding process? Secondly, what will the client do with the energy (which is triggered in the therapy room), once she/he leaves and enters her/his old familiar context?

When a client enters the therapy room, there is a phase of convergence which creates the therapeutic system. In this therapeutic system, conversation takes place. A fluid, wave-like process unfolds. On leaving the room after the therapeutic meeting, the client has been energised (which was triggered in the therapy room), and has some "news of difference" which evolved during the therapeutic conversation. The client now moves into the phase of divergence (in relation to the therapeutic process) and enters his/her old life-style again. This old existence, however, may be a master at neutralising and killing creative or enthusiastic energy.

After a couple of sessions with my clients, I often find myself going through an intuitive feeling exercise, in which I inwardly try to predict whether the client will have success in resolving the issue under review. For some clients, I have a pessimistic feeling. But what is it in the therapeutic process that gives me this feeling? On reflection, it comes down to the way the client engages the process (refer to the above list on being "ready"). Some clients may enter therapy not being ready for therapy. I have now begun to address this issue with those clients by conversing around the theme of "expectations of therapy, and being ready for therapy". This has invariably opened up the therapeutic process for the client to reflect on, since it has addressed the client's unique way of functioning when dealing with life's demands.

CHAPTER 12

SHARED INQUIRY: SUPERVISOR AND STUDENT CONVERSE

> The wisest people tend never to rationalize a misunderstanding or give proof or apologize or defend their exposition. Their covert and overt motives are the same: simply to present opportunities for listeners to use their own potential to experiment, and so that listeners may discover their capacity to listen to the echoes that resonate deep from the center of their beings.
> (Dang, 1993, p.62)

When examining action research activities from a social constructionist perspective, a supervisor cannot remain outside of the research process (like an objective observer of an experiment). Since "one cannot not communicate" (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967, p.48), one also cannot not influence an interpersonal process that one is involved with (Cecchin et al., 1994).

Some of my conversational experiences with Gert influenced me greatly; I found myself deviating radically from my original path of inquiry without conscious intention. Although this challenged me further (often frustrating me in my efforts), I did not consciously question this or try and hold onto the old. I accepted that my journey with Gert would have its own direction, especially if one understands that therapeutic realities are co-evolved and/or co-created (Hoffman, 1990; Keeney, 1983; Keeney & Ross, 1985), so why would the conversational reality between supervisor and student be any different?

In examining the master/student relationship in the martial arts, Dang (1993, p.135) states:

> We must understand that the authentic master never guides

> his students to originality, reality or truth. He can only guide them away from the path leading to unoriginality, unreality and untruth. For originality cannot be taught, reality cannot be sought, and truth cannot be imparted to others. They are states for which one must prepare oneself, not by seeking but by living the purest life one is capable of living.

Being actively involved in the martial arts myself, I could see similarities between the martial arts master and the doctoral supervisor. From a simplistic perspective, it seemed that Gert was continually guiding me away from unoriginality and redirecting me inwards towards myself (so that I could examine my own assumptions and perceptions). In making reference to the master/student relationship in the martial arts, Dang (1993, p.51) states that "instructional discourse is often abstract. It may appear too eccentric for us to grasp with our physical senses; something in it always remains hidden from us, out of sight like the plumbing and the wiring of a house".

While the action research process may trigger different needs in different students, I had become aware of my strong need for open and honest feedback from my supervisor. While I had come to experience fundamental shifts in my thinking after I had had conversation with Gert, I felt that we (as a research unit) needed to look more closely at the notion of "shared inquiry". In particular, we needed to make sense of what this really meant in terms of how we related to each other. While the role of the supervisor may be understood from a traditional research perspective, I felt that we needed to examine the unique role that my supervisor was playing in the research process that I was involved in.

Gert and I were able to share ideas in an open, intimate way. There was a connective bond that seemed to transcend any difficulty or disagreement that we encountered. During the research process, I became aware of an interpersonal dynamic that existed between Gert and myself. In broad terms, the

dynamic seemed to be fuelled by my need for formal feedback and Gert's reluctance to "adopt an evaluative stance" to my work. Both of us grappled with this dynamic, trying to provide explanations to each other as to why we were responding in the ways that we were.

> If there is true communication between Master and student, and a close relationship which endures and matures to an advanced stage, harmony and love will be manifest and a oneness will emerge from that seamless horizon....More important than words and concepts is the union of the hearts, for the mind is often misled by the heart. The old saying is true that "the heart has its reasons which reason cannot know". (Dang, 1993, p.52)

Narrative reflections between supervisor and student can enrich the research experience, and add extra complexity into the investigation that a student is embarking on. Three examples of formal reflections between Gert and myself will be presented to show how we went about our exploration of concepts such as learning, teaching, feedback, sharing. In the process of our sharing, we were also trying to make more sense of our unique supervisor/student relationship. It should be borne in mind that these examples are part of a research process and therefore are unfortunately taken out of the action research context. Subtle meanings that were shared between Gert and myself in these formal narratives may be lost to the reader, who was not actively involved in the conversational and experiential process that occurred during this period.

In August 1994, the formal reflection focused on the student-supervisor relationship and the phenomenon of learning. In January 1995, the reflections centred on the topic of formal feedback. After handing in the first draft copy of this project (June 1996), I wrote a formal reflection on the notion of "shared inquiry" (focusing specifically on our relationship), questioning whether it was possible to do action research in a formal academic institution, such as a university.

Teaching and Learning

Gert's Reflections - 15 August 1994

Thanks for this morning's fax! As always, I enjoyed what you were sharing with me. I was again amazed at the process in which you have become involved and with the enthusiasm that it was generating! I particularly noted what you said about the necessity for feedback within the context of an overall trusting and respectful relationship. I was indeed amazed at how you perceived my role and that you preferred me to be an onlooker (metaviser) rather than overseer (supervisor)!

What beats me is that on Thursday I was really doing nothing...nothing in the sense of making any substantive contribution. I merely listened to what you had to say, I enjoyed the way you did it and related to you in a relaxed way. You seem to have appreciated this more than anything else!

This started me thinking along the following lines: ever since we (me and my colleagues) started our doctoral project and experimented with ways and means in providing a more suitable/relevant approach, I have followed a rather "instrumental" line of action, that is, I tried to find a recipe that would lead to success. I was in fact busy with my own action research project, trying out various things at various times and learning a lot during the process. In monitoring the results, I learned about those aspects of my involvement that were counterproductive and also learned about some things that had the potential of facilitating creative movement in my students.

However, movement was often slow and I sometimes became exasperated with the process. Luckily enough, there was also a brighter side to all of this: I had some poignant moments with my co-workers or collaborators as I started calling my students. (This was to a large extent due to my experience with Derek S. Do you perhaps know him?). In his work we explored the notions

of spontaneity, intuition and metaphor. My sessions with him and others became encounters during which anything could happen. (At some stage I remarked that would my colleagues observe my "supervisory" work with doctoral students, they would think that I was off my rocker!). Apart from making audio recordings of those sessions, I did little else. I did not write extensive reflections in a diary and did not necessarily share feedback in any depth with those concerned.

This is where your work enters the picture. Since we got together, I have had the good fortune of stumbling across recent literature on action research. That not only confirmed a lot of my initial ideas regarding doctoral methodology, but it also prompted me to start keeping a personal journal. This provided new momentum for what I was trying to do. Equally important, though, has been the notion of "reflections on reflections on reflections". I suddenly realised that I have never really shared my reflections to a large enough degree with my collaborators...at least not in written form. What transpired between me and them could be likened to therapy: I was trying my level best to be of help to the client, but never really shared with that client my thinking about what I was doing, let alone asking him/her directly about the experience.

This relates to another (for me) important idea. (I think I have shared with you my distinction between the rational and the metaphorical. In the rational domain we try to achieve a goal, employ all kinds of strategies during the process, and read feedback, i.e. knowledge of results, so as to modify what we are doing in the service of greater effectiveness). I now believe that we cannot solve problems by rational means. The rational is analogous to the executive arm of the government, whereas the metaphorical fulfills the legislative function. Through imagery, metaphor, analogy, we enter into the domain of creativity and align ourselves with the creative process. When in the rational mode, we can analyse, refine, control,..etcetera, whilst in the creative mode, we can stimulate or be stimulated and catapulted into new domains of experience. In Afrikaans, "die een

kritiseer, die ander stimuleer".

Obviously, the notion of feedback also takes on specific connotations within the contexts of these different realms. Within the former, feedback has an evaluative character, and that is what most supervisors do all the time. Whilst in the case of the latter, feedback is really a matter of sharing experiences, happenings and notions in a free associative manner. The metaphor of conversation (and I am referring to relaxed conversation), seems to be applicable here; when we are having coffee and sharing things without necessarily wanting to achieve anything, ideas are bounced off other ideas in a free-wheeling interactive mode. This process takes its own course...we are not steering it in any particular direction. (And this is exactly what happens through sharing reflections!).

All in all, you have provided me with a very useful notion: the idea of "reflecting on reflection in a formal way" is really saying to me in so many ways: "hands-off! You cannot be an operator, controller or even facilitator...but should rather settle for the role of catalyst. (A catalyst in a chemical reaction does not itself undergo any changes!).

This is the closest I can come to say what is uppermost in my mind at this stage. I would sincerely like to receive your reaction to the above.

My Reflections - 18 August 1994

Thank you for your fax; it provided me with more understanding regarding the evolution of our relationship and the important issues that you are grappling with. While reading your comments regarding the role that a supervisor may be "expected" to play in the learning process, I became acutely aware of the notion of help and the way we may have become indoctrinated into believing how one defines the helping relationship and more importantly how one should respond or behave in that relationship.

I decided to enrol for the doctoral programme because there was a part in me that wanted to discover more. Part of this discovery should also include the discovery of self. This is meaningful and powerful learning. I have become more and more aware of the necessity to be connected to self in this learning process.

The million dollar question is how one should go about trying to connect the learner to learning. My hypothesis is that we all bring our "personal issue" to the party (teacher and student). These "personal issues" start interacting and playing themselves out over time in the relationship. If there is a block in energy flow or learning, then we need to "touch or encounter" our own personal issue. In other words, if true learning (self discovery) is to take place, then each person in the learning/teaching relationship needs to incorporate, integrate, accept, become aware of the potential obstacles (personal issues) that may block creative energy flow. These obstacles are incorporated in self. Creative energy explosion occurs when one "touches" this personal concern. True learning therefore becomes a risk of self. Both teacher and student must be prepared to risk with more intimacy (i.e., show more human frailty and remove the "mask of competency").

My notion of reflections on reflections on reflections requires that curious questions and/or tentative open-ended comments be made in the process of learning, about the process of learning. These reflections need to be made formal in some way (externalised in a sense). This allows each person in the unfolding process to "stand back" and look at what they are up against.

The process of self-learning is explosive. I have found that I have just wanted to go on and on discovering (the process has its own power). I agree with your distinction of evaluative feedback versus co-operative sharing feedback. All (or most) academic institutions fall into the evaluative feedback section. This inadvertently blocks creativity. The reflective interactive

exploration does the opposite. It links teacher and learner in such a way as to break the teacher/student distinction. Rogers (1967) used to reflect feelings back to his client, but this process was only one-sided. I think that this must have frustrated clients and often blocked creativity. I will discuss this with you in more detail at a later stage.

Your idea of a catalyst is interesting. How does it compare with my understanding of non-action? "There seems to be two kinds of activity - activity in harmony with nature and activity against the natural flow of things" (Capra, 1982, p.20). Taoism offers the concept of non-action (Dreher, 1990; Maslow, 1973; Page, 1989). This should not be interpreted as a "passive acceptance" of a problem. Instead, non-action refers to abstaining from activities that go against the grain of things. In a sense, trying to teach may inadvertently go against the grain of learning. Sometimes one wastes energy by pushing against "the wall", despite intuitively feeling that the action is not resulting in the desired outcome. Non-action is the opposite of forced-action. Non-action understands that timing is a very important factor in unleashing creative energy. This is what makes good teachers. There is an intuitive knowing about timing. This requires a sensitivity to the process. Good teachers do instruct. You in a way instructed me to read a little more about action research. The timing was perfect for me. You reflected my stuckness in that one meeting. Your timing was again perfect. Non-action considers the type of conditions that prevail in a situation, and responds according to those factors that are operating at that moment.

The words "abstaining", "harmony" and "timing" are important to consider in any learning process. There is no intentionality or instrumentality in this process; instead there is true respect of the process. This means that one becomes what the process wants, without feeling guilty or at conflict with what you believe is expected from you (your own mindset regarding how you should be before you actually are). Before one becomes that which the process wants you to become, however, you should

formally reflect it back into the process to see or hear what others feel. This can be risky but provides the quantum energy for new insights.

Now comes the part of the learner. Most learners are afraid to learn. Most learners have become disconnected from learning in the process of trying to learn. As soon as you try to make a student learn, you inadvertently block his learning. What a dilemma for the teacher! A learner entering the doctoral programme needs to be curious, pro-active and enthusiastic to commit himself (courageous?) to the unfolding process. These are values (ingredients) within the learner and cannot be imposed by an outsider. Unfortunately most of children have been forced to learn, prescribed to, and in the process have developed a block or obstacle to learning. The personal issue that one may have becomes intertwines in this block to learning (which in turn may hinder the process of self-discovery).

Reflective Feedback and Sharing

The general thrust of this section centres around the question of sharing, feedback and on the phenomenon of "reflections on reflections on reflections". Three pieces of formal reflections are presented to show how the process of reflective feedback unfolds. These formal reflections focus on the actual topic of formal feedback, using the methodology of reflective interactive exploration.

My Reflections - 6 January 1995

It seems to me that in order to get the full value of one's own writing and research, the circle of exploration needs to be completed by another person, separate from oneself. By obtaining different perspectives from others, one is able to gain newer insights into what is being researched. In your parting line under the P.S. section of your memo on the ADORE methodology, you stated: "Your response to this memo shall be appreciated. Please drop me a letter or send a fax as soon as possible".

The above request for feedback is of interest. Can one deduce that one needs a companion in the research process? A companion who is not directly involved in the hurly-burly of one's research topic, but is connected to you in the research process by means of a "creative research relationship" that requires co-evolved sharing and feedback? Without this relationship, the researcher may stagnate while trying to do action research. In order to do action research, the researcher needs a companion who will give formal feedback by means of posing curious questions or making tentative suggestions about one's ideas. This is where the role of the research supervisor needs to be looked at. What are the responsibilities of the research supervisor? Does one really need a supervisor while doing action research? Why was the research supervisor/promoter "invented" by academic institutions anyway? Does the supervisor not need to examine the part that he plays or does not play in the research process? How does he influence the process since he himself cannot be separated from the process?

The above questions cannot really be answered by me, but in reflecting inward I asked myself what I wanted from you as my supervisor. My immediate response was "FEEDBACK"! Can I be arrogant enough to ask whether you could pose a couple of curious questions to any piece of formal work that I present to you? Would this be a hassle? I believe that these questions will trigger deeper levels of understanding.

Having said this, however, I do not believe that it is essential that this is done in order for new learning to take place. In reflecting on how I have learned over the past couple of years, and in particular in writing my book, the above request would in fact be a luxury to me. So what process of idea formulation do I then propose [as compared to your ADORE model in which, A stands for Aim, D for Do, O for Observe (outcome), R for Reflect (evaluation), and E for envisage (next step)]?

Firstly, I believe that doing action research requires an enquiring attitude that embraces most of the principles that I

have mentioned previously. Without these principles, it would be difficult for the researcher to evolve new ideas in association with others.

Secondly, in any interpersonal situation or research context in which one is involved, there are immediate impacts and delayed reactions that one has to make sense of. The researcher needs to make notes about his own feelings/perceptions regarding the situation after some time has passed. These comments should be of a personal nature and will obviously be written according to one's own cognitive and emotional structure.

Thirdly, during the above writing phase one is reflecting in on a past experience. The writing offers one the opportunity to detach from the experience and allows one to take on a meta-position in the experience. Time has also provided one with a little more distance from the experience. It is always difficult to determine the time delay period of the writing. In order to capture both the immediate impacts and the delayed reactions, varying time periods of writing may need to be applied. Immediate impacts on one may be understood almost immediately after the experience. The more subtle and underlying impacts may only emerge after a lengthy time period.

Fourthly, after one has written one's perceptions/feelings down, it is necessary to try to connect the ideas around a theme. This theme can develop if you pose yourself a question or if there is a particular concern that you need to resolve. This phase is an integrative phase. I have found that long distance running during this phase allows me to generate a number of new ideas around my investigative topic or concern.

Your writing during the above stage should provide you with some clarity regarding your topic of investigation. While the process can stop at this point or start again (following the steps that are outlined above), a different level of investigation can occur if you share your writing with a research companion or somebody who also experienced the

situation/context that you are writing about. While reading your work, your companion will have an experience in its own right. Your companion is then, in fact, having to deal with two different level of experiences. In the first place, he is trying to make sense of the experience which you have outlined in your writing. Simultaneously, he is having a personal experience of his own while reading your work. This experience provides him with an opportunity for further learning on his part if he writes down some of his thoughts/perceptions about what he has read. In other words, your companion follows the above mentioned steps himself. If your companion has a genuine interest in what you have written, he will "unknowingly" take up a research position around your topic of investigation and he will follow the same steps as above.

I feel that your ADORE model links closely with what I have tried to outline above. However, I feel that the ADORE approach may falter if the researcher does not have a research companion. Since action research can be risky and unpredictable, the research companion can offer the researcher security and support in the process. The research companion does not have to be the supervisor. In fact, one's research companion can be anybody who has a genuine interest in both you and your work.

I contend that the piece of narrative work that you have requested from us students should be given to another interested party whom one has developed a trusting and respectful relationship with. This companion needs to give the researcher some formal feedback about what was written. In this way, the research loop is well and truly completed.

Gert's Response - 3 February 1995

Initially, I was tempted to gauge your production in terms of its logical consistency, internal coherence and terminological clarity...asking questions like: what do you mean?, how come?, could you explain a bit more?, what are you driving at?..etcetera. However, I almost immediately rejected

this line of approach because it did not feel right. I did not want to evaluate what you had given me. I was not going to check your work...

I located the source of my uneasiness; it was the way in which you had formulated certain statements. In a nutshell...some statements had a ring of finality to them. Eg. "The research process has its own natural rhythm", "there is no beginning or end", "The question 'what is research' was investigated with Professor Rademeyer". Statements like these not only suggested a somewhat formal style, but also an authoritative stance...

I was therefore intrigued at your request for feedback. Feedback (at least in terms of the cybernetic model) implies that change is either necessary or inevitable. In this sense, feedback has an evaluative function or character. I was not sure whether you really wanted that kind of response. The latter would be part and parcel of the activities of the typical supervisor who is continually checking in order to establish if things are being done properly. Your question as to what the supervisor should or should not do within the context of doctoral research is very germane. I would add...action research seems to change the name of the research game...and seems to imply that we think in terms of egalitarian rather than authoritarian terms.

<u>My Response - 14 February 1995</u>

Thank you for your comments dated 3 February 1995. As always, I enjoyed the way that you formally feed back into my "cognitive structure".

Can we please address the notion of feedback. From your comments, it appears as if I had unknowingly requested an evaluative feedback position from you regarding the work that I produce. After reading your comments, I went back to my piece of work and read it again and again in order to look at my position

while writing. In particular, your comment regarding my taking "an authoritative stance" seemed to trigger me. I noticed a number of feelings shooting through me as I moved through this piece of writing. There was a defensiveness; there was an aggressiveness; there was an energy burst to explain further, all of which pointed to something meaningful that I needed to address within. Maybe I was asking for feedback that I did not need or did not want because I was adopting an authoritative position. Is this what you were maybe picking up? I will again reflect on this in order to make more sense of why I was so sensitive to that statement. It is obvious that it links to my personal issue in some way; otherwise I would not have experienced all those inner feelings.

I have been thinking a lot about the notion of feedback. Does feedback imply evaluation in some form? Or is there an element of true intimate sharing in the notion of feedback? On re-reading my piece of work to you, I seemed to imply that I wanted you to evaluate my work by spurring me on through probing questions. While I wrote this, I may not have truly considered the interpersonal complexity that surrounds the phenomenon of feedback.

I have really found your feedback in your letter of significant value. In some way, it challenged me to look more closely at how I write; what assumptions I may be making during the writing phase; what interpersonal impact my writing position may have on others; and how my own personal feelings, enthusiasm or ego may overtake me at certain points of the process.

I have just recently been involved in a group project (with the group of sports psychologists), and after the experience, I came away more intrigued by the complexity of true co-operative conversation and feedback in interpersonal groups (I am in the middle of putting some ideas down on paper and once completed I will set up a time to meet). At one point in the process, we came up against a very powerful group silence. On trying to make sense of this silence, it surfaced that the group wanted

feedback from us before they were prepared to be co-operative (in the previous meeting they were very co-operative and answered all the fancy questions that we posed to them, and followed the instructions given regarding group activities). Now they were wanting something from us. In particular, they wanted some comments concerning how we perceived them. They wanted to know a little more about the process that was unfolding before them. They wanted to know a little about the phenomenon of mental preparation as we (psychologists) saw it and how this preparation related to them. Disappointingly, we (psychologists) retreated and started to become more strategic with the team. We shifted our position from what we believed to be a co-operative conversational position to a strategic planning position and started to ask more questions. On reflection, we did not give them the feedback that they were requesting. But why were we reluctant to give feedback to the group, to share our perceptions with them, to make some tentative comments about the unfolding process? It struck me that maybe we term therapy co-operative if the client moves according to our expected ways; answers all our questions and moves in ways that are comfortable to us.

So why am I telling you this, out of context? This links very strongly to my feeling of when I asked you about feedback. I did not really know what I wanted from you, but I needed to maintain an intimate connection. I also needed to know whether you were committed to the unfolding process. More importantly, I just wanted to know what you thought of what I had written. You know why: because I respect and trust your opinion. Were the team that we were working with also not wanting to know what we thought? Psychologists hold a very powerful position in the eyes of the ordinary person, but we always seem to be so suspicious of the intentions of others. I believe that our views/comments can have very powerful impacts on people. Of importance, however, is to provide reflective feedback that allows people to look at themselves in a way that challenges them, yet supports them. Knowing when to give the feedback and deciding on the nature of the feedback is the true nature of therapy. Giving

feedback is also risky, since the psychologist needs to define himself in some way. He needs to remove his professional mask and become transparent. This is what feedback demands from us.

Having tried to clarify the notion of feedback for myself, I have also been indirectly talking about our relationship. I agree with you when you stated; "I have not been relating to you in this mode at all (the evaluative position); but I rather tended to share some of my own work with you or tried to understand what you were sharing with me". This is a spot-on comment, a comment that defines our relationship. Maybe on some level, I am actually afraid that this type of relationship will not continue and my request for feedback is actually saying:

> "I am getting a great deal from our relationship. It is a special relationship. I have learned so much about myself, and the work that I am doing. Please let it continue to evolve".

The Final Hurdle: Sharing My Inner Self

I was becoming aware that my need for formal feedback was not as simple as it might appear to be. Embarking on this type of research tended to provoke emotions in me that could not be easily understood or given rational explanation. It was becoming evident to me that the action research process is a personal pilgrimage, in which one grapples with the inner workings of self (personal theme) as one explores a research topic (content focus) which may have been "chosen" to challenge the fundamental core of the "patterned" workings of self (by exposing the tacit assumptions that may have been directing action/behaviour). I was personally experiencing this circle (where "researcher" and "what is researched" become intimately interwoven). It was becoming impossible for me to separate myself from what I was looking at, or hearing, or feeling. I was realising that what I saw or heard or felt in a situation was more a reflection of myself that anything else.

Gert had provided all that I could have wished for regarding the feedback issue. He seemed to trust me more than I trusted myself. When I was struggling with an issue, he intuitively knew when to leave me or when to provide some tentative comments that facilitated the process. After handing in the draft copy of this project, I was keen to get his feedback (since I was becoming desperate to complete this project). After waiting for about five weeks (which seemed like eternity to me), Gert telephoned me to apologise for the delay, but gave me feedback, saying that he had "strongly connected to one of the chapters that I had written in an experiential, narrative way". During our conversation, he also made reference to the metaphors of "hacking away" and having "the nose to the grindstone" regarding the pressures of his work. I seemed to take this very personally (feeling that he was making comments about my work).

Gert must have sensed my "unspoken tension" over the telephone because I received a journal entry after a couple of days, in which he outlined the nature of his work demands in more detail (and the personal impact that that was having on him). Regarding how Gert (4 June 1996) perceived my reaction; he wrote:

> I sensed that he tended to take my comments as a matter of criticism...as an indication of how his document could be improved or modified so as to satisfy the academic community. He was probably anxious to know what I thought about it. Eventually we agreed that action research necessarily had implications for style of presentation... Yet, rightly or wrongly, the impression remained that he was concerned about the possibility of having to modify his style of presentation. He even asked whether it was worth the trouble to cast it into an ostensibly academically acceptable mold. This question upset me because I was convinced of the importance of his work. I felt that we were pursuing a fresh (and much needed) approach to research.

My Formal Reflection - 17 June 1996

This formal reflection focuses on the notion of shared inquiry between supervisor and student; and in particular, on my own reactions, feelings and perceptions concerning issues around the presentation of my draft manuscript.

On the one hand, I had serious reservations about sharing this formal reflection with Gert, since there was no way of predicting or anticipating where this would take the process, but more importantly I wondered what impact this reflection may have on our relationship. On the other hand, I had always advocated writing up formal reflections based on the reflective interactive exploration philosophy, which takes content and process issues and turns them into themselves for further exploration.

Shared inquiry: A move towards more intimacy. A month ago, we (the group of psychologists) decided that each of us should go back to the work that we were doing and try to formulate a personal area of interest that could be researched and discussed in our action research group. This was a major shift in our group, since I was not left alone taking on the major responsibility of directing the group's focus.

My particular focus was to start examining therapeutic conversation from a shared inquiry perspective and I was looking particularly at blockages or resistances that could occur between people which would stop the flow of ideas.

As I see it, the therapeutic challenge for the therapist operating within the ecosystemic constructionist domain is to create a space, so that the "unsaid" can be spoken about. I believe that this necessitates a certain level of intimacy and emotional connection between those engaging in the conversation. In order to create a context of conversational intimacy, the therapist needs to be extremely sensitive to the way that he thinks, the way he talks and the way he connects. Otherwise, an

interpersonal block may come to the fore that prevents talking about the unsaid.

In trying to make sense of the flow of therapeutic activity (verbal, nonverbal, emotional, energy exchange) that occurs between two or more people interacting and/or conversing in space, I came up with a number of questions to direct my focus in examining the process of therapeutic conversation from a shared inquiry perspective.

1. When a client consults with a therapist, is there a reluctance to enter a deeper level of intimacy?

2. The theoretical understanding of co-operative and co-evolved conversation suggests that a therapist needs to strive to create a conversational context where there is virtually no interpersonal resistance. In this context, there is a freedom to talk openly. Wilber (1979, p.152) believes that "there exists a global resistance to and non-acceptance of the entire quality of present experience". Wilber states that therapy is the process of creating "special conditions" that frustrate one's resistances which then results in one moving to a deeper level of non-resistance. From a constructionist's perspective, does such a level of non-resistance exist, and if so, how can it be described? While I operate from a therapeutic position that strives to encompass all the stated values of ecosystemic constructionist theory, I have notice that I use tentative reflective meta-communication to "challenge" the "resistance" of the client or family. But what am I really challenging, and do I need to challenge it?

3. Does the therapist have an agenda in therapy? What are his intentions in the process? Could these intentions trigger an interpersonal resistance?

I am becoming aware that therapeutic conversation is not a technique of what types of questions to ask, or what types of interpretations to make, but rather a way of being with the

client. In essence, to engage in therapeutic conversation depends on a certain type of attitude that envelops the therapist. This attitude needs to permeate and flow from the therapist, so that the client can experience the healing effects of this attitude. But what is this attitude?

Anderson (1995) believes that when the therapist genuinely immerses himself in trying to understand what another person is going through, then this position acts as an invitation to join in a mutual puzzling, a shared inquiry. The mutual puzzling relates to curiosity and intrigue, while the shared inquiry reflects a togetherness or partnership. While this sounds easy, the pragmatics of this type of approach need further investigation. Paul (May 1996) states that he has been struggling to develop the philosophy of "unknowing" which (he believes) will counter his tendency to constantly come up with interpretations of what is going on with the client and his life. He states: "I have read all about it, I agree with it, but yet I have come to see that my mind is not open, not really curious - it is more natural to jump to 'truth conclusions' and get the client to accept my explanations".

Examining my own resistances and perceptions. In order to examine the notion of shared inquiry between supervisor and student, I would like to reflect on my feelings regarding the handing in of my draft manuscript to you (five weeks ago) and in particular, on my feelings regarding the fax that I had received from you. I would like to "talk about the unsaid" and I would like to reflect on my own personal tentative perceptions. I would like to share these perceptions with you, without blame or intention. They are not truth statements; they are personal subterranean perceptions that are often the building blocks of my reality.

You know that I am anxious to get some feedback on my draft manuscript. Unlike when we first met, when I handed in my proposal for your comments (to which you immediately responded), you have not matched my inner urgency this time. I do not have

an explanation for this, and I only hope that it is not a "strategic move" on your part. My draft manuscript seems to have immobilised you and triggered complex and sensitive supervisory issues within you. I have previously shared with you my notion of feedback (and the necessity for feedback to help facilitate and nurture the process of inquiry). Yet, you still seem to be stalling on sharing your thoughts with me. You seem to have a reluctance to give me open, honest feedback about my work, stating that you "do not want to take an evaluative stance".

Rightly or wrongly, for the first time I feel that you are using me as a guinea-pig. Before writing up the draft thesis, you did not offer me any suggestions on how I should tackle the formal presentation of the task. I had the feeling that you were waiting for me to present something, so that you could use it as a measure on which you could "react/recoil and re-formulate" your own thinking about the nature of this type of research that we were embarking on.

I felt sad at the first paragraph of your fax. For me, it highlighted a very important point. In essence, the question of respect and care was triggered. If my work and "our shared inquiry" was of true value to you, how could you have "neglected" that which is meaningful and of value? It seems so sad that a person's "activity trap" may throw into question the value and/or meaning of one's relationships with others. It appears that we may need to be on guard against being seduced into meaningless activities that get imposed on us. But does it just happen that one gets seduced into other activities so easily? I have a strong need to complete this project, and would value any suggestions on how to refine or improve the project. As I am writing this, I am seriously questioning my own motives for doing this work. I am beginning to feel trapped by all the "formalities" of trying to present my ideas. I have decided that this formal process is going to end at the end of this year. I will not be re-registering again. It is becoming a burden to me and I feel as if I have to "conform" to certain unspoken expectations regarding the presentation of my work. Although I

have written this, I also realise that this is an unfair statement, since you have always encouraged me to go about my business in my own way. However, it seems that now when my ideas are formally written up with a view to having them "evaluated", a "tug-of-war" starts surfacing. But what is this "tug-of-war" about? Is it a "tug-of-war" between you and me, or between traditional scientific inquiry and the philosophies of action research, or between the expectations regarding the formal presentation of my work and the necessity for an evaluation of this work to take place?

Not doing a traditional research project forces you to try and present your ideas in a different way. Yet, will this difference be accepted? While I do not have a fear of this, you may feel differently. My thesis can be considered to be a reflection of your standards and intellectual prowess. Every time a thesis is presented for examination, the supervisor is also being evaluated. For me, I am not worried about what other academics think or feel about the work that I do. I am only part of the academic system by virtue of this project. At the end of this year, I will separate and leave the system. But, what about you? You live in the system. You have to face the academic world every day of your life. You have to operate within this system according to certain expectations. I am beginning to realise that there is no freedom in formal education, no matter what type of methodology a researcher utilises. It seems that as soon as one tries to formalise a creative process, it suffers under the strain of unintentional prescription, expectation and evaluation.

Now let me examine the role of the supervisor from my perspective (as a doctoral student). I feel that the action research process will trigger different needs in different students. A research project is normally seen to be a personal inquiry into an area of interest, and with it the testing of certain hypotheses. As I see it, action research shifts the inquiry from being a personal inquiry to being a shared inquiry. This challenges the supervisor to engage himself in the process,

in order for it to become a shared inquiry. Shared research inquiry puts personal demands on the supervisor. I believe that it is only through the reflective interactive exploration process that the inquiry truly becomes shared.

I do not want to be checked on and be motivated to produce work. I have a naturally curious and enquiring mind. I feel that I am a productive person. Secondly, I do not want recognition, positive reinforcement and approval. I also do not want to be treated as an equal (since the definition of our relationship has determined this). Supervisor and student are different, their roles are different. Let us not run away from this. I do not know what you are personally struggling with, what your work demands are throwing at you. This is not for me to know. Unfortunately, this does impact on how you relate to me. In the early stages of our relationship, all I wanted was a non-competitive "academic" friend who could stimulate my thinking and with whom I could bounce ideas around. This was my notion of shared inquiry. But can shared inquiry really work in an academic setting? Is not the student only sharing with the supervisor? In essence, this type of sharing is not true sharing. Maybe true, participatory action research cannot "fully function" in a formal academic institution as part of a formal study since the definition of the supervisor/student relationship will only allow a one-way flow of ideas to occur. My stated need for feedback was attempting to correct what, for me, is an imbalance in the supervisor/student relationship.

Paradoxically, sending me the fax left me feeling angry (one needs to consider the timing of this fax in terms of the unfolding process; my urgency to move along to complete the formalities of presenting my work and my personal perceptions that you may be stalling the process). I felt that the fax was only sent to me after you had sensed that I was becoming agitated with how you were trying to deal with me regarding my need for your feedback about the draft manuscript. At the time of this writing, I feel angry towards you. I feel that the intention of your "sharing" the fax was to spur me on, so that I

can engage you with further exploration of ideas (in a shared inquiry which I am beginning to seriously question). I feel that your fax was in reaction to our telephonic discussions and not sent to me with a sincerity of wanting to share. This has now caused a resistance in me and I feel as if I no longer want to share any of my ideas with you. This triggers me into thinking that co-operative conversation (shared inquiry) is a complex process, linked to perceived intentionality and resistance.

Unfortunately, your telephone calls came at a difficult time for me. I was particularly busy and had little time to explore our thoughts. While your fax correctly reflected some of my feelings regarding our telephonic discussion, these feelings were in response to what was being discussed (and possibly how you were coming across to me - my perceived intentionality). The fax you sent me was your journal entry. I do not believe that you wrote it to share with me. Re-read how you wrote it. It was not written for us, or for me. It was written for you. You do not seem to understand a very important principle regarding the nature of shared inquiry of action research. You can write as many notes and comments as you wish about your experiences, but unless you share them, you remain isolated in your inquiry. I feel that you only sent me the fax in "reaction" to our telephonic conversation, especially when I responded to your use of the "hacking away" and "keeping my nose to the grindstone" metaphors. Your journal entry was in reaction to our conversation. I do not know if you had honestly intended to share it with me in an unconditional manner.

In contrast, this formal reflection has been written to (a) you (because you are a special part of our connection, you supply half the ingredients), (b) me (so that in the process I can gain more clarity of myself as I evolve to becoming "issueless"), and (c) us (so that the notion of shared inquiry is nurtured).

The sharing of formal reflections has a powerful emotional impact on all participants involved in the process. In

re-reading the previous paragraphs, I have become more tuned into my own feelings. I have become more aware of my idiosyncratic way of handling interpersonal situations that trigger the deeper part of my self. When you and I had previously shared our thoughts in a formal way, I found that there was an emotional charge that was activated which in turn supplied the energy for more creative intellectual activity. After reading the chapter on reflective interactive exploration, you stated; "I was forcibly struck by the ideas it contained as well as the reciprocal influence of those ideas on ourselves. I was transported back in time and relived that earlier feeling of excitement! It made me yearn after similar experiences".

In the process of this writing, I am starting to feel less of a need for your feedback. It is not important anymore. That is a shift. This may explain why I did not even feel the need to immediately respond to your fax. Before, I would have been activated to write something back, to explain myself more, to justify some of my comments. Now, I almost feel as if there is no need to get your opinion or point of view. I don't know what to make of this. On one level, it challenges the notion of the shared inquiry, since I may be implying that I do not care if you do not share your ideas about my work.

Unfortunately, you will be required to evaluate my thesis. Please accept this. I have put a lot of work into my thesis. It has been (and still is) a very taxing personal journey. I have tried my best. I cannot ask more of myself. I also had nine or ten balls to juggle in the process of doing this research. There were all my work demands, my family, and then my research project. Because of the nature of action research, our relationship is wrapped around my research project. I feel that I have given 100% effort to the process, but unfortunately I am finding myself questioning your contribution in this "shared inquiry". But what should the nature of the supervisor's contribution be in the action research process? Do you have any answers? While I may seem to be demanding (regarding open, honest feedback), I have never felt that I have placed any

unfair responsibilities onto you. In fact, I have always refrained from becoming dependent. I have always been sensitive to what my own responsibilities have been in situations that I have been involved in.

Shared inquiry demands that each of the participants feels respected and appreciated, while everything outside of that domain of inquiry fades into insignificance. A shared inquiry will only continue if each participant feels that there is no manipulative intentionality coming from the other. Trust, honesty and appreciation (respect) will ensure that there is a free-flow of energy and ideas between those engaging in the conversation.

Healing through reflective interactive exploration. Being able to formally reflect on your fax was a liberating experience. I have become aware of a deep-seated pattern of interaction that relates to care, love and respect.

I realise that it is risky to share my feelings with you regarding the impact of your fax, but if we cannot talk about the "unsaid" how can we expect others to? I place a great deal of value on intimacy and sharing (interpersonal connection). I give readily, but there comes a point in the process when I start feeling unappreciated for my efforts and start feeling used. This feeling invariably emerges when I notice that "irrelevant activities" (as I perceive them to be) start getting in the way of the sharing or caring that I have given. I then start questioning my unconditional giving and start retreating.

After formally reflecting on your fax (June 1996), coupled with some very meaningful conversations with my wife, I have become aware that my reaction to your fax is only part of a much deeper pattern of perceptions and feelings that centre on love, appreciation and interpersonal connection. This deeper pattern has its seeds in my family (I do not want to outline this although I have gained tremendous clarity of these past patterns that re-surface from time to time).

I have become aware that I may expect too much from those close to me, regarding their openness and honesty to me. I seem to question the intentionality of those who do not meet me in my openness and my giving. I will always be prepared to risk first and to give. I will do this a second and third time, and will continue to try and engage the other in connection. After a while, however, I will start withdrawing and then "challenge" the other as to the value of the relationship: is our connection of value? And if so, show me in your actions (show me that you care). I am aware that this puts a lot of pressure on those closest to me. I challenge the "quality" of the connection.

There is no blame in all of this. In fact, as I get in touch with those deeper parts of me (coupled with all the feelings), a sense of self-acceptance emerges. The spin-off of this is as I re-read your fax, I am able to align myself closer to your personal difficulty regarding doctoral supervision. I realise that you are very sensitive to the evaluation issue. While I would never be able to fully comprehend the complexity and/or subtleties of your dilemma, I can truly acknowledge how difficult it may be for you (since I myself have had to grapple with certain parts of myself).

Becoming a free-flowing conduit that reflects. The process of formally reflecting on your fax in which I attempt to examine my own personal perceptions has helped harmonise parts of myself that may have needed to heal. This process has also gone about dissolving that part of myself that attempts to get others to respond to me in a way that I believe to be acceptable. Engaging in an intimate, shared inquiry requires acceptance of self and respect for the other. Acceptance of self is a painful process, in which you have to engage, and then incorporate, and then love personal feelings that may be judged as being unacceptable.

Becoming a free-flowing conduit that reflects suggests that one needs to be highly sensitive to one's own internal energy flow (body messages and prevailing ideas at a given moment in time). Over the past couple of months, I have felt that I have

come alive emotionally (experiencing a wide range of feelings, that surface very quickly). The feelings not only come very quickly, they also move off very rapidly.

> For until he sees that absolutely everything he does is resistance, he will secretly continue to move away, to grasp, to seek, and thus to totally prevent the discovery...At the very point where absolutely everything seems wrong, everything spontaneously becomes right...When he sees this resistance in every move he makes, then quite spontaneously he surrenders resistance altogether. The surrendering of this resistance is the opening of unity consciousness, the actualisation of no-boundary awareness...Once this primal resistance begins to dissolve one's separate self dissolves with it...As you begin to see everything you do is a resistance, you start to see that even your feeling of being a separate self 'in here' is also nothing but a resistance...Thus to the extent this primal resistance dissolves, your separation from the world also dissolves. (Wilber, 1979, p.158)

In order to truly engage in a shared inquiry with another person, you need to lose your separateness and fuse with the interpersonal situation. Before you are able to do this, you need to realise that all of your efforts to be of help may be nothing more than resistances: resistances to becoming fully connected in the moment.

Some of my clients are difficult to connect to. They have styles of interaction that stops the intimacy. In addition, they have perfected defensive manoeuvres that block the "connective process". This defensiveness seems to strangle the person, stopping the free flow of energy that exists when connection occurs. I am starting to sense that it is this difficulty to connect and to be open that underlies whatever problem clients bring into therapy.

I contend that "becoming connected" is the fundamental aim

of therapy. Being intimately connected shifts the focus from me and you to we. This "we" is a unity. Without this unity, therapeutic conversation will not have the bridge to allow movement of ideas, feelings, perceptions. Becoming fully connected in the conversation means staying in the moment without any preconceived notions of what to do or what to say. There should be no pressure to come up with ideas or suggestions.

Once fully connected to the situation, I have found it useful to just share my own perceptions and feelings (that are evoked at a given moment in time) in a tentative manner with those whom I am interacting with, without trying to influence, manipulate or control. These perceptions are my own and focus in on what I see, hear, think, feel or fantasise and may relate to anything or anyone that is operating around me. There are times when I just share perceptions of what is happening to me in the process. These reflections may be my way of connecting, which in turn challenges the resistances that may exist in the interpersonal situation. In essence, the resistances that I am most sensitive to are those actions or thoughts that may block the necessary "connective fabric" on which therapeutic conversation is based.

The timing of my reflective perceptions can never be predetermined or planned. A free-flowing conduit becomes what the moment wants it to become. Trusting this process allows for no pre-planned strategies or agendas on the part of the therapist. However, I have become aware that sharing intimate thoughts and feelings can inadvertently block the shared inquiry if (a) the timing is wrong, (b) the manner of the therapist is not tentative, and/or (c) too much, too quickly is reflected back.

The fax that you sent me, triggered a wide range of resistances in me. I took the opportunity to engage these resistances and feelings, and recognised that these were my own personal thoughts and feelings at a certain moment in time. My

formal reflection to you is nothing more than sharing an intimacy with you in which I tentatively reflect into the process these personal feelings and perceptions.

Gert did not formally respond to what I had written. At our follow-up meeting (24 July 1996), we discussed our feelings in more depth. He stated that he was taken aback by how I felt. Although he was hurt by what I had written, he seemed to respect my feelings. He did not try and defend himself nor negate my feelings. He cared about how I felt. This was reassuring.

During my conversation with Gert, I became aware of how complex perceptions of events can become. We can get triggered by the actions of others due to the unique way we may perceive an event.

Concluding Thoughts

In looking at the process of supervision (of therapy), Anderson and Swim (1995, p.2) state that "implicit in this system is the idea that supervisor and supervisee are learners as they share and explore each other's voice. In this process, their voices connect and intertwine, constructing something new and different". In reflecting on the formal reflections that Gert and I had shared, I am struck by the level of intimacy and sharing that was achieved in our supervisor/student relationship. A very personal type of feedback loop existed between Gert and myself.

Embarking on an unusual, unknown journey can be unsettling (and scary) for both student and supervisor. I found it reassuring when Gert made comments about the process (or shared his own personal perspective of my progress). By doing this, I felt that he was "connected" to the process. I also felt nurtured. "The supervisor's primary focus is on the process of the dialogue rather than on its content. The agenda is not to teach the supervisee what the supervisor knows (predetermined content) nor how to do therapy ("cookbook" skills) nor to

correct the supervisee's faults or repair defects" (Anderson & Swim, 1995, p.5).

Bobele, Gardner and Biever (1995) contend that a supervisor (of therapy) operating from a social constructionist perspective has to confront the dilemmas of (a) hierarchy, (b) the non-expert position, (c) multiple "truths", (d) classification and non-labelling, (e) personal style and/or skill development, and (f) evaluation. Although these dilemmas would also pertain to the supervision of a doctoral research project, Gert seemed to hold onto what Hoffman (1991) refers to as being a respectful, reflexive and collaborative position throughout the research process.

In looking at a philosophy of supervision, Cantwell and Holmes (1995, p.37) contend that the supervisor should "lead from one step behind". This philosophy embraces the educational principles that (a) there is no one right way to do therapy, (b) learning builds on competencies already acquired, (c) the supervisor's expertise consists in creating a collaborative learning environment, (d) the supervisor provides a selection of ideas/models of working, (e) there is a balance between requirements and person-specific learning, and (f) learning never stops.

Learning, feedback, resistance, caring, sharing (for example), are interpersonal processes that may not have universal meaning in an absolute sense. While there may be some "core" theoretical understanding of these interpersonal processes, a wide range of variance may exist when one considers the unique needs and expectations of individuals. One could argue that the unique personal meaning of these activities may have been determined by the unique experiences one has had in relationships. By formally reflecting on these concepts, Gert and I were trying to link the experiential level of our unique relationship with our own cognitive understanding of these processes. On a metaphoric level, our process of trying to formalise this meaning (in which experiential and theoretical

are connected) can be likened to what quantum physicists have had to deal with when trying to pin down the exact location of an electron in its orbit in the atom.

> An electron in an atomic orbit has a definite energy, but both its position and its momentum are in a partially indefinite state. These are spread out in a fuzzy, doughnut-like ring around the nucleus.
> (Zohar & Marshall, 1994, p.95)

The action research process can take the student into the "fuzzy" areas of life, where the exact location of research focus shifts when another perspective is added to the inquiry (action group members and/or supervisor). The discourse and formal written reflections between student and supervisor needs to be enveloped in an intimate, connective bond (refer to "Human Systems as Holistic Energy Systems" in chapter 11), without which one may not derive much personal value or meaning from the investigation.

CHAPTER 13

REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

> Whenever I recognise that my way is not the only way, I am already on the path to taking a further way. Whenever I am willing to admit there is more to understand, I have understood more. My consciousness, and the physical patterns out of which it is formed, has taken an evolutionary step. (Zohar & Marshall, 1994, p.142)

In this project, I was involved with three different levels of conversational activity (with my supervisor, two psychologists, and athlete/team/coach). This formed an interpersonal matrix or template in which I was the connective thread between these different levels. Throughout my investigation I had to deal with:

1. My "personal issue/concern", as well as the way that I was going about constructing my knowledge.

2. Process issues and interpersonal obstacles that were unfolding in the various conversational contexts.

3. Content that was emerging on these different levels that did not appear to be connected. For example, while my supervisor and I were talking about learning and teaching, the action research group was dealing with consultative issues in working as a therapeutic team. Concurrently, I had to take on a professional stance in consulting with athletes and teams (see chapter 8), which was not connected to either the work that I was doing with my supervisor nor the action research group.

4. As I involved myself in all of this activity, there were personal ideas about issues that were triggered which were not shared with the psychologists nor my supervisor, but were used in my work with others. For example, after I had become more

aware of my own personal theme (as I had come to understand and experience it), I started to use a simple exercise on body balance to help my clients make more sense of their own unique functioning (see section on "unlocking deeper knowledge of the self" in chapter 6). This was not shared with Gert nor the group of psychologists since it would not have "fitted" with the unfolding processes in these contexts (in what was being spoken about).

Throughout the project, I was always having to deal with information that was being generated on different levels (and which at times, appeared to be "disconnected"). The challenge of the project was to connect and integrate the diversity and complexity that emerged.

Critical Moments along the Way

The "I" in the Process

As I reflect on all the events prior to my engaging in doctoral research, as well as during the investigation, I feel that I have moved through several clearly defined stages. On a process level, the unfolding research experience confronted me with personal dilemmas that needed to be resolved. The resolution of these dilemmas seemed to open up my awareness, resulting in quantum leaps in my thinking.

Stage 1: Doing creative consulting. This phase (January 1991 to August 1993) was activated after I had consulted with the Natal rugby team for their 1990 Currie Cup final. Due to the result of this match, there was a great deal of interest in the work that I was doing. I was productive during this phase and shared my work at a number of workshops. This culminated in the publication of a book in which I integrated all of my experiences and philosophies regarding mental preparation of athletes and teams (Jennings, 1993).

During this phase, I did not feel any pressure to conform to

any "traditions" or protocol regarding the presentation of my work. I was not connected to any tertiary institution. I worked on my own. I felt free and congruent in applying ecosystemic principles to elite sport.

Critical moment: This period of relaxed creativity ended in August 1993 when I decided to do a doctoral project.

Stage 2: Pondering on doctoral studies. Not ever having attempted a doctoral research project, I remember pondering questions; (a) what does it mean to do a doctoral thesis? (b) how does one construct a doctoral research project? (c) what are the academic expectations regarding the level of this research?

While presenting workshops and giving talks at some of the universities (during the period July 1991 to July 1993), I met and spoke to a number of academics and fellow professionals. From the conversations that I had had with them, I unconsciously built up expectations and perceptions regarding doctoral research. I came to believe that only "controlled experimentation" was acceptable.

I started to work on a research proposal that contradicted my own paradigm. Unconscious contamination had occurred. I was unknowingly translating the principles of ecologic into the rules of mechologic (Auerswald, 1990). This phase last from August 1993 to December 1993, when I finally approached the University of South Africa with a doctoral research proposal (see Appendix A).

Stage 3: Finding a supervisor. This was a particularly difficult period, since I had drafted a research proposal but was unsure about where I wanted to do the project. I had had discussions with academics at several universities about my proposed project. However, I experienced a sense of unease during those discussions. It felt as if there was an underlying tension during the conversation (which may have been activated by the competitiveness that exists in the sports psychology

field).

Eventually, I decided to approach the psychology department at my Alma Mater since I was well acquainted with the theoretical orientation underlying their professional training programme.

Critical moment: My first informal discussions with Professor Gert Rademeyer in January/February 1994 in which the clear focus that I had had regarding my intended "traditional" research project was fragmented (see chapter 2).

Stage 4: Entering the depths of confusion and despair. I drifted aimlessly for four months, knowing that I could not go back to the old but not knowing how to move forward to the new. I was encountering an "obstacle".

Critical moment: During a meeting in April 1994, Gert introduced me to the literature on action research (Argyris et al., 1985; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

Stage 5: Finding the way: Action research. I felt energised that I had found an approach that "connected" practice with research in a never-ending spiral of activity.

Critical moment: I formed an action research group.

Stage 6: Experiencing quantum leaps in understanding. Action research is a personal inquiry into a problem being encountered. I had to engage and then reflect on my own tacit assumptions. In the process of my investigation I started to develop a research methodology that I felt comfortable with (and which I felt was congruent with ecosystemic epistemology and constructionist philosophy). I called it "reflective interactive exploration". This method allows for the construction of new thinking after engaging in conversation with others.

In May 1996, I was ready to start integrating my ideas so

that I could formally present my experiences to others in the wider academic community.

Critical moment: Handing in the first draft copy of the thesis to Gert resulted in an emotional turbulence within me (culminating in my writing a 12-page document to Gert).

Stage 7: Allowing the "I" to report. After a meeting with Gert, and on re-reading my draft copy, I realised that I had again been seduced into believing that there was an expected way to present my experiences in written form. While the traditional research format is clearly set out (with the structure being defined), I realised that this structure could not deal with the fluidity of the conversational experiences that I had had.

I realised that I was the thread that moved from experience to experience; I was the one that was grappling with issues and "pulling my hair out" to make sense of the unfolding research process. The unifying, integrative thread of my experiences was the "I". There was more chance that the many divergent parts of the research experience could be "weaved" into a coherent, understandable whole (for others, as well as for me), if the "I" was given the freedom to formally report. In realising this, I consciously decided that I should map out my activities in a personal, sharing way, writing in the first person. I also decided that I would use first name terms for those who had personally shared some parts of my journey with me. Making these decisions was a liberating experience for me.

In giving the "I" permission to (a) decide on how to report on the research experience, and (b) construct meaning around such an experience, it felt as if I re-lived my experiences again (but on a different level and from a slightly different perspective). Being personally connected to my writing, activated further understanding of the experiences that I had gone through.

Making Sense of the Emerging Content

The practical problem which provided the starting point for my action research project related to the effects of unrealistic client expectations. Since I had had previous success in the field of sports consultation, I was often regarded as the psychologist with the "magic wand". This created undue stress and threatened to detract from the quality of my work with elite athletes. How to be relieved of such stress was the crucial question.

In trying to further my understanding of the problem that I was encountering, I hypothesised that the "expert issue" existed in the psychologist/athlete relationship. With this in mind, I formed a collaborative action research group with two interested colleagues. I found that they had also experienced a lot of pressure in consulting with elite athletes. Of interest, was that each one of us had a unique perception of the nature of this pressure. This led me into expanding my hypothesis from a specific "expert concern/issue" to forwarding the idea that each psychologist needs to deal with a unique "personal issue" that gets triggered in the consultative relationship.

In the course of our action group discussions, I developed the hypothesis that athletes were rather vulnerable but could not admit to the same because of the "culture of competition". Moveover, I realised that subjecting them to special techniques (positive motivational talk, visualisations, hypnosis, goal achievement) for purposes of improved performance could in fact be counter-productive. Such an approach could easily exacerbate the athlete's problem if it represented but an extension of the "culture of competition". In order to avoid this so that the "mask of competency" can be dissolved, I started to focus on the psychologist/client relationship and eventually explored the notion of therapeutic conversation. The need to talk to an outsider in confidence (not aligned to the sporting culture) was supported by the comments made to me by the group of ice-skaters (see chapter 4).

During the action research process, I was also struck by a number of process phenomena: (a) keeping notes and reflecting on the group experience (journaling) were powerful factors in facilitating insight - especially when it was fed back to the group in written form, and (b) I was taking a leadership role in the action research group despite the tact that I tried to avoid it. My "expert issue" seemed to be activated even in relation to my colleagues.

These observation prompted important developments. Firstly, I augmented existing action research methodology by exchanging "written reflections" of group discussions/events with my colleagues and coined the term "reflective interactive exploration". Furthermore, I "tested" this method during consultations with a hockey team. Secondly, I linked the "expert issue " to my personal history and hypothesised that my professional problem was in fact a personal one. This in turn led to experiments with body movement in an attempt to connect the client's presenting problem to his/her personal style/history. The body became the vehicle for personal exploration.

Dealing with my personal issue was inter alia facilitated by the my relationship with Gert (hence the extensive description of the student/supervisor interaction given in chapter 12). The importance of respectful, spontaneous and intimate conversation was again confirmed.

In January 1995, the research team changed into a consulting team with unexpected results. A crisis ensued which eventually resulted in the disbanding of the group. This could however be regarded as a blessing in disguise. Given the particular personal issues that each one of us was grappling with, the crisis seemed to enable each participant to move closer to a resolution of his/her personal issue (unfortunately, this could not be confirmed with Lesley-Anne). On a personal level, I discontinued sharing written reflections, thereby shedding some of the responsibility for ensuring an efficient and productive

group process.

A Research Stance

Anderson (1995, p.12) talks about taking a "philosophical stance" in her work in therapeutic conversation, in which "ways of thinking, ways of being, ways of talking with, and ways of being in relationship with other" are closely examined. It is from this perspective that this project should also be viewed.

Being involved in conversational action research, I found myself adopting a "non-action" philosophical research stance. Non-action or "wu wei" is a Taoist principle in which one avoids planning and striving in situations (Dreher, 1990; Page, 1989). Instead, it is suggested that one should watchfully move with the flow of circumstances as they arise. This implies that the researcher will need to adopt an openness or "emptiness" to the situation that he is dealing with. With this, there is an acceptance that things will evolve according to "their" own way.

While non-action is a philosophical stance that is essentially non-interventional, it requires careful observation of the unfolding situation. Reflective comments or observations regarding the issues being confronted are necessary. This requires honesty, intimacy and respect in the interpersonal context that one is involved in. Constantly embracing these "relationship ingredients" should ensure that any action on the part of the researcher will be in spontaneous response to, or be a reflection of, the interpersonal context that one is involved in. There is a "research fit" between what the context is "calling for" and the action of the researcher. Encompassing this "fit" is the notion of timing. In this way, the actions of the researcher cannot be perceived as having strategic intentionality. Instead, actions are carried out according to the circumstances that are prevailing at the time (without having pre-planned intentions or concern with the achievement of a particular end result).

Dissolving the Obstacle

In the action research process there were little conclusions and insights and quantum leaps that occurred during the process. Since adopting some of the ideas of Anderson and Goolishian (1988; 1992), I had come to understand that the action research process (in much the same way as the therapeutic conversational process) is a problem dis-solving process. With this research stance the drawing of conclusions tends to take a back seat. In my earlier days of being a therapist, for example, I always felt that I had to give a family a well-thought-out positive reframe or conclusion to their difficulty after each session (in line with the end of the session type of intervention of Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin & Prata, 1980). The action research process was suggesting that one should not concern oneself with the end result, but rather work at dissolving the "obstacle" being experienced.

If the conversational (or research) context is embedded in the attitudes of respect (non-interventional), co-operative sharing (a move towards intimacy), and curiosity (how come is it like this?), then one is afforded the opportunity to become a "researcher of oneself". This realisation regarding the research/therapeutic process released me from the pressure of always trying to come up with a meaningful insight or strategy or conclusion in order for change to occur.

No Pre-planned Intervention

Action research is not a one-off, controlled experiment that is planned. Such experimentation is considered to be a contrived investigation in the eyes of the action researcher (Argyris et al., 1985; Martin, 1993).

The shape of the project (as being presented) only started to form after the integration of diverse pieces of information (obtained during conversational experiences) had occurred. No one intervention programme was tested or researched in this

project (although such an intervention was initially suggested in the research proposal). This project, that is presented in thesis form, is better thought of in terms of time rather than in terms of a specific intervention programme. The research project reflects a four year time period in which a number of obstacles or issues were confronted, discussed, reflected on, and then acted on. In the process, some of the issues "dissolved", while other concerns needed more investigation and exploration due to their complexity.

A Research Methodology

In a traditional type of research project, the researcher takes on the responsibility for experimental control, standardisation of procedure, and formalising of the test context so that subjects are allocated to certain experimental groups (without necessarily sharing the intentions of the research project with the subjects). The concepts of validity and reliability of measurement and standardisation of research design are of concern to the researcher (Anastasi, 1982; Kerlinger, 1986). In contrast, action research "involves a kind of social analysis which locates individuals' language, activities and relationships in the wider context of the collaborating group" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p.45).

Reflective interactive exploration can be considered to be a research methodology that provides the researcher with a structured process in which to investigate issues of concern or to gain more understanding in any area of interest. It is a methodology that is congruent with the fundamental principles of ecosystemic philosophy and is a way to concretise social discourse according to constructionist epistemology.

Reflective interactive exploration allows the researcher to continue the investigation into any topic of interest until an "acceptable" level of understanding has been reached. The individual embarking on the action research journey comes to a point where there is a level of inner contentment regarding the

topic of interest. Reaching this contentment can be likened to the "dis-solving" of the problem. What is an acceptable level of understanding is also determined by the agreement reached within the collaborating action research group. This agreement is reflected by the language that is used in the group and by the activities of the group members outside of the group.

The Process has Its Own Rhythm

The research process seemed to have its own natural rhythm and was dependent on other personal demands that I had had. There were times when creative energy bursts occurred as I became totally absorbed in the investigation; there were also times when more pressing personal things outside the research process demanded more time and effort from me (thus diverting me away from the investigation). I found that the action research process became a part of my everyday living. In comparison, I found myself thinking about the research design of traditional, controlled experimentation (which is usually planned to occur at a certain moment in time) and which seems to stand separate from or outside of the researcher's everyday activities.

Issues Shift and Change

The initial focus of investigation in the action research group of psychologists was the expert position of the psychologist in the consultative relationship. Once we had gained understanding of this issue, our assumptions about the athletes we consult with were examined, leading us onto the formulation of the idea of the "mask of competency" of athletes. The common working experience of the group with the soccer team provided us with a further research context to examine the complexity of therapeutic conversation. During this period, we were confronted with our own group's functioning, thus triggering investigation into the area of therapeutic teams.

The research process is alive and dynamic, with the direction of investigation being dictated by how the previous

issue was resolved. The research process determines what next needs to be examined. There is a natural evolution from issue to issue (determined by the types of questions that are asked and the types of answers that are found). This process is self-propelled and depends on one's own cognitive structure and level of curiosity. Once an inner contentment with what has been found has been achieved, then the next relevant issue can be tackled.

In moving with an ever-changing and evolving process, I found that once I had satisfied my curiosity regarding a posed "hypothesis" or "curious question", new information emerged which set me on another course of inquiry. As old "problems" were being understood and possible solutions being given, new "problems" and areas of investigation were emerging over time.

Always More

Nothing ever seems complete and final in the action research process. There always seems to be more. Curiosity in the process seems to trigger further investigation and each little conclusion that is reached comes with a further question that needs to be examined.

Impossible to Replicate

An action research project is impossible to replicate. As previously stated, the direction of the research process could not have been pre-planned by me. The ideas (or data) that are shared in this project have a unique source. This source is my own "connective self" that integrates experiences over time into, what is for me, understandable chunks of knowledge.

> The creativity of living systems - at least that which has its roots in their quantum coherence - arises from their ability to create the kind of order that gives rise to "relational wholes", systems which are greater than the sum of their parts, and to do this spontaneously whenever a

> critical level of complexity is reached. Prigogine calls them "self-organising system". They are laws unto themselves. (Zohar, 1991, p.172)

This project is a unique study that was embedded in a certain time period (August 1993 to July 1997). Due to this, not even I can replicate this study again. It is more useful to think of this project as a personal journey that I have undertaken, drawing from it all the experiential value that I have personally needed.

Becoming More Sensitive

In adopting the reflective research stance, I became more sensitive to processes that were operating in interpersonal contexts. The action research process requires a sensitivity to others, since the researcher is not separated from that which is being investigated. In addition, the research process demands a level of interpersonal intimacy and honesty that can be unsettling. How to share and receive intimacy needs to be addressed in the process. There were times in the research process when my enthusiasm and openness (regarding the insights that I had had) may have been overwhelming for those with whom I was interacting.

Shared Inquiry and Feedback

Before embarking on this project, I had worked on projects only in isolation. My original topic of investigation (coupled with the proposed methodology) would have maintained this isolation. Traditional research projects can be tackled without the help of anyone else, since the process does not require a feedback loop from subjects to researcher.

Action research is fundamentally a shared inquiry which could not evolve without repeated feedback loops between those connected in the research process. The reflective interactive exploration process is totally dependent on feedback loops,

without which the research process will degenerate and wither. This puts demands on all those who are participating in the process. On an experiential level, the action research process felt as if some sort of healing process had occurred. While the process allowed me to enlist others in my research as a means of moving away from the isolated "expert position", I may have been indirectly dealing with my own inadequacies around the "expert theme" by contending that formal reflections should be shared.

The Human Research Instrument

> Aspects of the qualitative research process are inexorably intuitive and implicit - internal and integral to the human being as researcher - rather than rationally and explicitly standardised to be consistent across human beings....[The written thesis should] enhance the ability of others to assess the integrity of the interaction of the researcher in context, the researcher as the human instrument, and the researcher as writer. (Meloy, 1994, p.7)

The action research process seemed to expand my consciousness. As I broke into new territory, there always was the difficulty of capturing the meaning of what was being experienced. This was particularly apparent when it was impossible to quantify the exploration. In the process, I found that I was confronting a dilemma: how can one reconcile "what science expects of a researcher" and "what a researcher has found within himself to be a useful tool for understanding the complexity that he is examining"?

What does science expect of a researcher? During the research process, the researcher is called upon to make sense of the unfolding complexity in his/her own unique and personal way. A researcher is often confronted on a personal level when exploring complexity that cannot be fully grasped when utilising existing knowledge or understanding. This may challenge the personal integrity and philosophical value system of the researcher. In the action research process, no methodological

protection is offered to the personal core of the researcher. I found that I was continually being exposed to the influences and energies of what was being researched. According to Argyris et al. (1985, p.47):

> Human beings confronted with complex, ambiguous and puzzling circumstances must pose the problems they will endeavour to solve. Problem setting is a process in which interactively, we name the things to which we will attend and frame the context in which we will attend to them.

During the action research process, each experiment or topic of investigation has the potential to pull the researcher into the unpredictable, into the chaos of complexity. In the process, I found it impossible to draw a distinction between researcher and what was being researched, or between researcher and subject. While the human research instrument needs to continually make conscious decisions during the research process, the action research process requires that these decisions are embedded in respectful enquiry.

I am Unique

Besides looking at content issues that I was experiencing in the sports psychology field, the process became an inquiry into self in which I became more sensitive to my own unique internal energies, perceptual patterns and idiosyncracies. In one of our conversations, Gert warned me that I should not get seduced into believing that my unique way of learning and/or of gathering evidence about a situation (the driving principles that guide my action) is of universal value. While it appears that each individual may have guiding principles (dependent on their own evolutionary history and experiences) that direct the learning process, no one right way or truth may exist. For example, I needed to be careful in assuming that openness, co-operative sharing, and curiosity were universal values that would need to apply in all situations, with all people, for meaningful action research to take place.

Each individual will tend to emphasise his/her own unique principles in a learning context and may unknowingly assume that these principles are universal. When one individual meets another individual in an interpersonal context there is potential for clashing/colliding or connecting/integrating of these idiosyncratic realities, depending on what the focus of learning is. This links closely to Maturana's notion of structural coupling (Dell, 1985).

Being Ready

According to Cecchin et al. (1994), individuals are not very willing to reveal their beliefs and convictions (or prejudices) and put them up for discussion since it may threaten their most intimate relationships. "All of us are surrounded by others in whom we have a vital interest, and who, rather than viewing our own beliefs as prejudices, hold them as anchors to their identity, that is as 'truths'" (p.14).

One has to be personally ready to engage oneself in the self exploration process that action research demands of one. The timing for this needs to be right. While there were times during the group process when Lesley-Anne was clearly excluded, she did not give the impression that she wanted to deal with the issue. While this exclusion may have been because Paul and I were male, it revealed itself more prominently when epistemological issues surfaced in the discussion. During the group conversation, I always felt myself being sensitive to her difference, which triggered me into trying to get her to be more included in the group's wholeness (by engaging her with questions and supporting her ideas).

The action research process can free one from the bondage of one's personal theme. However, this necessities engaging the group process in an open way. A move towards more intimate talk is required. This is not as easy as has been written, since the move towards more intimacy implies "putting things on the table" or "talking about the unsaid". It is a move towards questioning

everything that one perceives, thinks or feels. This is what the action research process demands of the participants.

In order to detach from self so as not feel threatened by the intimacy that the process demands, Rosenbaum and Dyckman (1995, p.28) contend that:

> it is helpful to view self as empty: not a thing; not created; not destroyable...the self is not an accrual of experience but an ongoing, ever-changing manifestation of potentiality...self is self-in-action and as such is always contextual...self-in-context is a constantly changing process.

The Action Research Group

The original reason for our being together was to focus on sports psychology issues. We all seemed to be frustrated in this field. This frustration was primarily due to the way in which we were being defined by the sporting world in "how we should work". We were rejecting the common perception that sports psychologists needed to "impart", "prescribe", "impose" a variety of techniques to improve sporting performance.

As an alternative, we started to examine the therapeutic process between athlete and psychologist and our focus turned to "therapeutic conversation". Our group shifted away from a sports psychology focus to a psychotherapy focus. As our group ventured into the constructionist world of therapeutic conversation, co-evolved realities and epistemologies, there was more affinity between Paul and I regarding our ideas. Lesley-Anne did not seem to share the same epistemological perspective. Without our realising it at the time, our shift in content focus may have started to marginalise Lesley-Anne.

One needs to reflect on both the content and process levels of an action research group. While the content level posed some difficulties to us at times, it was always the process in our

group that needed monitoring and reflection. It was the process that challenged the flow of information.

When working in an action research group, one should take note of the following points:

1. How the group is formed may determine how the group functions. In our group, I had to deal with an underlying "belief" that this was my research group. Since I had originally set up the group, a definite "belief" (regarding the reason for existence) may have been created, even though I had overtly stated otherwise.

2. Every individual enters an action research group from his/her own unique standpoint (from an experiential and intellectual perspective). This uniqueness may be experienced by some members as being "unequalness".

3. Every individual may have his/her own ideas of what the group should become. Action research is a broad concept that does not stipulate how the group should function. It is worth spending time talking about what action research is about. Over-riding values such as respect, co-operation, sharing, curiosity and openness need to be encouraged through the actions of group members.

4. The diversity and complexity of each member will only start emerging over time. The group process (in its own unique way) will start exposing each member's unique epistemology.

5. How one shares knowledge in the group needs to be carefully considered. In addition, the way the group integrates the different perspectives needs to be spoken about. Someone in the group needs to capture the exciting ideas that emerge in discussion. The reflective interactive exploration process provides a methodology for doing this.

6. Working together added more complexity to the group

dynamics and highlighted the individual diversity that existed in our group. There were both benefits and disadvantages to our working together. While an action research group has the potential to become a work group, its effectiveness as a work team will depend on how the individual diversity has been integrated into a workable whole.

When people come together to share their experiences or perceptions regarding the issues that they are encountering, it can be expected that interpersonal issues within the group may start emerging. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p.45), the action research process is a dynamic interpersonal process where conflict and disagreement can occur within the action research group or between members of the research group and other institutional groups:

> The dialectical relationship of individual and cultural action in the context of the collaborating group (individuals creating the character of the group, and the group creating conditions for the expression of the individuality of its members) is concretely manifested in the expression of disagreements and agreements, misunderstandings and shared understandings, in clashes and agreements over the co-ordination of activities, in the eruption and resolution of conflicts of interest, in the formation and working through of power struggles and patterns of domination and resistance. These are the concrete face of the processes of contestation and institutionalisation.

Action research groups should not get despondent during times of interpersonal disagreement or conflict. While the action research process should move and gravitate towards consensus, resolution and/or harmony in the group, the process of this movement may involve conflict and discomfort. This is considered to be natural and can be likened to the birth process, where a healthy baby is born only after a period of painful labour.

CHAPTER 14

MOVING TOWARDS CLOSURE

> Life has a purpose, but a strange purpose. When you come to the end of the road and find perfect insight you will see that enlightenment is a joke - Zen master.
> (Van de Wetering, 1987, p.8)

Towards a Therapeutic Model in Consulting with Athletes

Historically, the study of sports psychology has been associated with academic departments of physical education, kinesiology or leisure studies (Petrie & Diehl, 1995). A survey conducted by Petrie and Diehl into "sports psychology in the profession of psychology" revealed that there was little or no specialised training in the sports psychology field. The field was full of professionals operating from a variety of theoretical perspectives. In addition, there were those who were operating in the field who had their theoretical backgrounds in physical education or human movement.

Goolishian and Anderson (1992, p.5) contend that different theoretical assumptions yield different conclusions regarding the nature of therapy and human problems:

> Passive listening and expert interpretations are consequences of psychodynamic theory. Active manipulation of social structure and strategic intervention into feedback are described as consequences of the mechanical assumptions of structural and cybernetic theory. Conversational participation and non-intervention are described as necessary consequences of hermeneutic and linguistic approaches to therapy.

While theoretical assumptions will always influence the types of conclusions that are arrived at when consulting, our

action group also felt that factors such as (a) past experiences in one's family (around issues of performance), (b) one's own unique experiences and achievements in sport, (c) one's own specific training (and theoretical orientation) in qualifying as a psychologist, (d) one's own epistemology regarding the helping process, and (e) one's unique personal issue regarding how one constructs relationships, will all impact on how the sports psychologist operates during the consultative process.

The majority of the sports psychology literature seems to be embedded in Newtonian philosophy, in which attempts are made to discover more sophisticated techniques to improve performance (Gill, 1992). Sports psychologists may be expected to implement "techniques" to help enhance performance. However, this may place restrictions on how the psychologist constructs his relationship with athletes and/or teams, thus reducing the therapeutic manoeuvrability of the psychologist (Fisch, Weakland & Segal, 1982).

In the sporting world, the expectations of both the athlete and the coach will tend to position the psychologist in the expert role. If the psychologist adopts the expert position, the nature of the relationship may become limited and restrictive, and with it, the possibilities for open therapeutic conversation may get reduced (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). The suggestion given by Anderson and Goolishian that "the client is the expert" and that the therapist should adopt a "not-knowing approach to therapy" runs contrary to the expectations of those involved in the sporting world. Our work experience with the soccer team highlighted the difficulty of trying to adopt a non-directive conversational stance with the team. It seemed that the team was suspicious of our stance. This suspicion, (together with our own diversity in the therapeutic team and our lack of previous experience to guide us) may have largely contributed to the conversational block that we had experienced. It seemed that the team was expecting something "different" from us.

For a psychologist operating from an ecosystemic paradigm,

the consultation with the athlete may be the meeting place of the "rules of mechologic" and the "principles of ecologic" (Auerswald, 1990). The meeting between the "language of sport" and the "language of psychotherapy". Sports psychologists who adopt a conversational stance with athletes need to (a) be aware of the expectations of athletes and coaches regarding the use of traditional types of interventions during the consultation process (like relaxation, hypnosis, visualisation, imagery, goal setting), and (b) balance therapeutic talk with nonverbal interventions.

An intervention technique cannot exist in a vacuum, it needs to be embedded in a relationship. Any intervention technique needs to fit into an interpersonal context that has been co-evolved in therapeutic conversation and meaning. Since using techniques becomes a closed process, the sports psychologist may run out of options over time if he is positioned to constantly prescribe interventions in an attempt to enhance athletic performance. As an alternative to only imposing a technique, the athlete may need an interpersonal context in which to share his/her concerns since the sporting world (coaches, selectors, fellow athletes) does not allow the athlete to acknowledge his/her doubts and concerns (see section on the "mask of competency" in chapter 4). As psychologists, we will be doing "more of the same" if we only impose techniques on the athlete in order to get him/her to perform better without opening up space for the athlete to explore his/her concerns (Watzlawick et al., 1974). The psychologist may need to balance the athlete's thinking and "give permission" to talk about concerns and doubts, if an athlete feels that he/she cannot acknowledge any weakness or negative thoughts to a coach (because a coach might not accept an athlete's insecurities).

An ongoing shift between traditional sporting techniques and conversational connections needs to occur. Since the use of techniques are embedded in an epistemology, how and when you use techniques will be determined by the way you are thinking about the situation. An intervention (be it technique or a period of

therapeutic conversation), needs to shift the system onto another level in order to introduce "news of difference" regarding the performance issues that the athlete may be having (Bateson, 1980; Jennings, 1993).

The discussions in our action research group, together with our work experience, had suggested that a sports psychologist who operates from an ecosystemic and constructionist framework should be sensitive to the following principles when consulting with elite athletes:

1. Mental preparation is a therapeutic process (Avis, 1994).

2. Psychotherapeutic realities are co-created through conversation (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, 1992; Hoffman, 1990).

3. One needs to join the client and understand the client or patient position through the language that the athlete uses (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981).

4. One needs to maintain one's therapeutic manoeuvrability when consulting with athletes or teams (Fisch et al., 1982).

5. Language or "how you talk about" can either limit mindsets or open up new possibilities for the athlete (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, 1992; White, 1989a, 1989b).

6. A respectful, co-operative relationship will provide the interpersonal context for an athlete to "drop" his/her "mask of competency" in order to talk about the inner "frailties".

7. A context should be created in which the athlete can reflect, and in the process become a researcher of self, regarding his/her performance and attitudes about his/her performance (Andersen, 1987, 1992; Hoffman, 1991).

8. The athlete should be connected to his/her own sporting performance through "curious" questions which challenge the

athlete's world view (Cecchin, 1987). An athlete should be encouraged to become more curious about him/herself in the context in which he/she operates, to become a scientist of him/herself and his/her performance.

9. One is not an outside observer (imposing techniques) separate from the unfolding therapeutic process (Keeney, 1983). How and when one intervenes will be determined by the theoretical philosophy and/or epistemology of the consultant.

10. Mind and body need to work harmoniously in an integrated way and that interventions on the body level need to be considered (Jennings, 1993). These nonverbal interventions should be made at critical times in the therapeutic process which shift the therapeutic system to a different level (Jennings, 1991, 1992).

Before embarking on this research project, I had developed an intervention model that used music to transcend the obstacle that a person was encountering (Jennings, 1991). This was a nonverbal, meditative process where little or no conversation occurred. After the research experience I find myself in a "diametrically opposite" position where a large part of the focus in this project was on therapeutic conversation. The action research process has completed the wholeness for me. I have now experienced and investigated both the nonverbal and verbal dimensions of my work.

The integration of the use of music to transcend difficulties (intuitive, nonverbal, meditative, wave-like approach) as was previously developed (Jennings, 1991), with the reflective interactive exploration methodology that examines obstacles from a written and/or language perspective (analytical writing, verbal, particle-like approach) is forwarded as a therapeutic model for athletes that integrates both the verbal and nonverbal domains of an individual (Jennings, 1997).

Addressing the Unique Personal Issue

The results from this study suggest that professional problems - be it on the part of either the athlete or the sports consultant - cannot be meaningfully resolved in a mechanical way. The reason being that such problems apparently emanate from the domain of personal identity. The ubiquity of the latter is inter alia confirmed by my "selection" of Gert as my supervisor (he had no "expert" knowledge in the sports field), as well as the fact that I experienced difficulty in avoiding taking the expert role even within the collaborative confines of the action research group.

Addressing issues at the level of personal identity seems to require special interpersonal/relationship conditions; a context of respectful, intimate and co-operative conversation appears to be a sine qua non (refer to the supervisor/student relationship). Of further interest is the serendipitous discovery that the said context of conversation could be optimised when the particular research methodology (reflective interactive exploration) was included as part and parcel thereof (in the action research group, with the hockey coach and in the supervisor/student relationship).

The reflective interactive exploration methodology became the vehicle in which I could (a) engage the client into becoming a "researcher-of-self" (thereby shifting more responsibility onto the client), (b) open up more conversational possibilities by posing tentative questions/reflections about the unfolding interpersonal process, and (c) in the process, relieve myself of the expert position in the consultative relationship. Reflective interactive exploration helped "re-define" and "balance" the nature of the athlete/psychologist relationship (see Table 4.1). The methodology had gone towards offering me a solution to my "expert issue".

Given both the particular research approach as well as the constructivist epistemology adhered to, the results obtained

cannot be generalised. It is not claimed that going about sports consultation in this particular way is the only way. Neither is it suggested that the use of specialised techniques is of little or no value in enhancing sports performance. The results of controlled experimental research cannot and should not be disregarded. Yet, what the present study does suggest is that (a) there appears to be a promising dimension which sports psychology (in general) has failed to explore until now, and (b) the naturalistic approach to collaborative action research holds a lot of promise in investigating such dimension.

Whatever the theoretical or philosophical stance of the psychologist when working with athletes, Lesley-Anne (July 1994) summed up the rather ruthless nature of working in the sports field: "Whether the sports psychologist dramatically changes his/her approach to athletes/teams or not, the end product is still going to be quantified in terms of success/fail [on the field]. How do you get away from that? Are you [Ken] hoping that a different approach will bring more success, or will success become less relevant because of greater 'fulfillment' in therapy"?

While the initial reason for embarking on this project may have been driven by my need to achieve more success in my work with athletes (in whichever way one wishes to measure this), the action research process seemed to neutralise this. As time went on, the phenomenon of success no longer seemed important to me. The focus went beyond the concern for success.

> Central to the many linguistic and socially derived narratives that operate in behavioral organization are those that contain within them the elements articulated as self-descriptions, or first-person narratives. The development of these self-defining narratives takes place in a social and local context involving conversation with significant others, including oneself....Individuals derive their sense of social agency for action from these dialogically derived narratives. Narratives permit (or

> inhibit) a personal perception of freedom or competency to make sense and to act. (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p.31)

The research process has given me a sense of freedom in which to continue my work with elite athletes. This freedom has been largely due to my being able to adopt a reflexive stance so that I was able to (a) make more sense of the interpersonal complexity that I am having to deal with, and (b) act with more sensitivity and awareness in such situations.

In developing a "model of mental preparation for elite sport", I had to seriously explore how I went about creating my own understanding when working with athletes. There was a power in the research process that would not let me escape from myself.

In my previous work on the use of music in therapy, I stated: "The process is an internal journey, with little or no verbal input from the facilitator. The 'attitude' of the facilitator should be non-prescriptive and non-judgemental. No external 'force' should be exerted, since external intervention may hinder the natural inner healing of the person. It is important to respect the autonomy of a person" (Jennings, 1991). As I move towards closure, my fundamental feeling is that the research process had provided music to my inner being. My own philosophical stance (when working with others), as I outlined in 1991, has not changed. If anything, my research experience has made me even more sensitive to those words and phrases that I wrote in 1991.

Moving into the Future

As I move towards closure, a number of areas for future investigation have opened up for me and/or for interested others to pick up on.

1. The action research process helped "expose" my own unique way of dealing with the demands of life. In my case, the "expert

concern" that I saw "outside of myself" changed to an internal focus of how I was responding/interacting in the action group. It became clear to me (because of the action research experience) that the problems we notice "outside" of ourselves are mere reflections of our own internal functioning. Will all action research studies confront the researcher with his/her own unique idiosyncratic behaviour or was this only a result of the way my study unfolded?

2. The reflexive stance in therapy that incorporates co-operative sharing implies that the therapist should be devoid of a "personal agenda". Adopting a reflexive, non-action philosophical stance in one's work with others will invariably require that the therapist address his/her own "personal issue or theme". This needs further examination.

3. Therapeutic conversation is a term that has many meanings. While the theory indicates that it is (a) a "philosophy of being" with the client in which the therapist adopts a "not knowing" position (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992), and (b) a therapy of language and reflection (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Hoffman, 1991); very little has been said about the "process issues" that a therapist may encounter when working with a client. I have attempted to introduce the phenomenon of "energy exchange", "intimacy and connection" and "therapeutic blockage" as concepts to add to the complexity of "therapeutic conversation". My tentative beginnings need to be expanded.

4. Viewed from a social constructionist perspective, reflective interactive exploration can be considered a research methodology that "captures" ideas that have emerged in free-flowing conversation. The written reflection of a conversational experience provides a "punctuation" or "extra substance" to talk about. Talking and writing spiral into each other over time. The value of this methodology in other projects needs to be ascertained.

5. Creativity seems to be an interactive process that is triggered in conversation. This conversation is wrapped up in a relationship. The results of this study suggest that the nature of the supervisor/student relationship is a very important element in stimulating ideas. Supervisor and student will be influencing each other in an ongoing way throughout the process. From a supervisory perspective, a set of guiding principles of how to go about such supervision may need to be formulated. Further investigation is recommended. Adopting a constructivist stance in doctoral research brings into question the whole process of evaluation.

6. The format of this project may provide a "research map" for those researchers who embark on action research projects that are embedded in conversational contexts. In essence, the process will require that the researcher navigates "through" research issues or blocks as he/she attempts to solve research questions. In the beginning, the researcher needs to draw up a proposal for the investigation. Starting from this point, the researcher will encounter some further problems as he/she tries to find some answers. These "research problems" now start forming the content of the investigation. Since this type of research is a unique exploration of the researcher as the "human research instrument", a chapter on the personal issues that have surfaced needs to be included in the project. The reflective interactive exploration methodology can be used to gather information about the topic under investigation. Throughout the research project, the researcher will be required to integrate process and content levels of information. This will be an intellectually challenging task, since a coherent whole needs to emerge. In action research, understanding follows doing. A direct result of this is that the chapters that are written for the project cannot be anticipated or planned for, before the investigation is completed. While the above reflects a "generalised" understanding of the research process that I had gone through, can the same "pattern" be used by other researchers who embark on naturalistic action research projects?

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APPENDIX A

A THESIS PROPOSAL FOR A DOCTORATE DEGREE

Possible Research Titles for the Project

1. Revisiting sports motivation : An intervention using music, tai chi and eye movement desensitisation reprocessing.

2. Mind, body and sports performance : An intervention model using music, tai chi and eye movement desensitisation reprocessing.

3. Mind and body in sport : A systemic intervention of music, tai chi and eye movement desensitisation reprocessing.

Introduction

The intention of this doctoral thesis is to investigate the impact of using music, tai chi and eye movement desensitisation reprocessing (referred to as EMDR) on the performance of athletes. From the research results, an integrated model for the enhancement of sport performance will be formulated.

Ecosystemic epistemology, Zen philosophy and Taoism will provide the framework in which ideas and concepts will be formulated in this project. It is important to acknowledge this, since results and conclusions drawn in any research project cannot be separated from fundamental assumptions that an observer may consciously or unconsciously make (Capra, 1982; Keeney, 1983).

"Sport offers one the opportunity to experience body and mind in motion. Understanding the body-mind link and the interaction between mind and body during performance is essential to enhance your quality and standard of performance" (Jennings, 1993, p.1).

The general thrust of the thesis is to explore new methods to enhance sports performance. Capra (1982, 1988) contends that a new vision of reality, with a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions, expectations and values is needed as we

evolve into the 21st century. In line with this movement, it is the intention to develop a new paradigm to examine the methods of sport motivation. The fundamental assumption that will be made in this project is that creative energy flow is at the core of successful performance. The concept of energy flow will be developed in this project.

Energy is the one commodity that distinguishes living organisms from inanimate objects. More specifically, it is suggested that through the use of music, tai chi and EMDR, blocked energy can be released on both the mental and physical levels to allow for improved performance.

Gallwey (1976, 1986) contends that sportsmen should "quieten the mind" during performance. According to Gallwey, poor performance is the result of the mind "telling" the body how to operate during activity. Inadvertently, this disrupts the natural movement in the body, resulting in lowered performance. The interventions being proposed are based on integrating mind and body before actual performance. It is believed that this is an essential first step in harmonising mind and body energy.

The ability to achieve goals on a sports field invariably results in winning. However, it is believed that a focus on winning may result in poor performance. The interventions being proposed in this project will provide the athlete with a focus that moves beyond winning. Focusing can be likened to a clearness of mind, where powerful energy is unleashed in a certain direction on the sports field. With this, performance reaches new heights without force or prescription.

Athletes are continually being confronted with a range of psychological difficulties regarding the quality of their performance. An athlete has to deal with a range of expectations concerning levels of performance. These expectations (from self, coach, media, public) could increase inner stress during performance. While the drive in elite sport is to constantly strive for higher levels of performance, it is imperative that

the athlete remain relaxed and spontaneous in action.

It is the contention that the intervention programme, as outlined in this project, is a powerful, yet natural way to develop focused energy during performance. The rationale for using music, tai chi, and EMDR for athletes will now be explored in more detail.

Intervention Methods

Music - A Relaxer and Arouser : Transcending Obstacles

According to Zdenek (1985), listening to music is a right-brain activity. Jennings (1993, p.165) states that "listening to music is a right-brain experience which links with sports movement and flow". It is the contention in this thesis that the utilisation of music together with a visualisation, as was proposed by Jennings (1991), can unleash powerful mental energy to improve performance. Further, the technique developed by Jennings can be used to resolve any psychological or emotional difficulty that the athlete may be encountering.

The technique that will be used in this project was developed by Jennings while consulting a rugby team for the 1990 Currie Cup final. This model was presented in an experiential workshop by Jennings at the Annual Congress of the Psychological Association of South Africa held in Pretoria in 1991. Further elaborations were added to the technique to include imagery. This was presented by Jennings in another experiential workshop at the Biennial International Conference of the South African Institute of Marital and Family Therapy held in Durban in 1992. A formal description of this technique has been outlined by Jennings (1993, p.169) in his book Mind in sport : Directing energy flow into success. When using this model with music, the subjects are taken through a 5 step process of working on an image that represents the problem that they wish to resolve. With regard to sport, this problem invariably is the cause or reason for poor performance. It is this problem or mindset that

blocks or disrupts the energy flow during performance.

The model was formulated using ecosystemic psychotherapy principles that focus on the paradoxical relationship between problem and solution (de Shazer, 1985; Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967; Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974). In addition, the Taoist concept of "no force" was introduced in order to allow subjects the freedom to explore ideas creatively, without having to feel pressured to resolve the difficulty that they were encountering. "The main idea is to focus on an image in the beginning of the music, and then to allow your mind to flow with the music. Move and flow with the rhythm. Lose yourself in the music" (Jennings, 1993, p.169).

According to Jennings, the successful Currie Cup rugby final results of the Natal team in 1990 and 1992 can be largely attributed to the effects of using this model with music in the mental preparation of the team. Unfortunately, no scientific research was conducted with the team during these consultations since Jennings was not involved with the team in a research capacity. However, the actual on-the-day performances of the team in 1990 and 1992 are available on video if any analysis of play is required.

This research project intends to formalise this model scientifically and to examine the impact of music on the performance of athletes. The actual research design will be outlined later.

Tai Chi

Tai chi is a Chinese martial art that is embedded in the philosophy of Taoism. Of particular importance is the concept of "chi" as is outlined in this philosophy (Dreher, 1990; Galante, 1981; Horwitz, Kimmelman & Lui, 1976; Lash, 1989; Page, 1989).

"Chi is generally translated as being 'vital energy'. It encompasses, besides other energies, psychic and unconscious

energy. In the process of moving, the vital energy divides into yin and yang chi. The yin chi, or energy of the feminine principle, is non-aggressive, yielding, quiet, intuitive, co-operative and receptive. The yang chi or energy of the masculine principle is strong, aggressive, active, dynamic, direct, competitive and outgoing. The yin and yang flow together to form objects. Everything is composed of a combination of yin and yang chi. Natural harmony and balance are sought and strived for in the dynamic interaction of yang and yin chi. Life is composed of interacting complementary opposites. The interaction of yang and yin chi creates pattern. It is important to also understand that the flow is cyclical. When yang attains fullness, yin is empty. Only for yang to recede and yin to emerge" (Jennings, 1993, p.50).

Tai chi offers the athlete the opportunity to experience the "dance" between mind and body while the body is in motion. "In tai chi, the body movements are executed slowly so that one can become aware of your body centre. During body movement, an inner balance of body is necessary. In addition, the slow execution of action ensures that you become highly tuned into the slight differences of sensation and feeling of the body as it moves. In the process, bodily awareness is enhanced" (Jennings, 1993, p.37). This body awareness is essential for high level performance.

Competitive sport is yang dominated. Tai chi is expected to incorporate more yin activity, which in turn should result in a more harmonious and balanced athlete during sports performance. Through tai chi, the chi energy is activated so that more natural energy will be available in performance.

A further aspect of tai chi is the emphasis that is placed on proper breathing and relaxed movement. According to Garfield (1985), a relaxed body and a calm clear mind are necessary if an athlete is to achieve peak performance. It is contended that athletes will benefit enormously by the introduction of tai chi. For this project, only the very basic tai chi moves will be

taught to the athlete. Coupled with this, there will be a strong emphasis on improving the breathing patterns of the subjects. Proper breathing ensures that the body is relaxed and allows one to handle stressful situations (Benson, 1975).

Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing

This technique was developed by Shapiro (1989). It has been used mostly with post-traumatic stress disorder subjects, with remarkable results being achieved in alleviating anxiety (McCann, 1992; Shapiro 1989). The EMDR method has created a stir in the professional field (Butler, 1993), with certain clinicians expressing reservations about the technique and its effectiveness (Herbert & Mueser, 1992). To date no logical rationale has been given as to why this technique works, despite its reported success (Butler, 1993; Shapiro, 1989).

The EMDR procedure requires that the subject obtain an image of the traumatic event that the person wishes to deal with, together with the negative self-statement or assessment of the trauma. In addition, the subject is to try and feel the physical sensation in the body that the trauma may evoke. While capturing this information on one or more of these levels, the therapist induces multi-saccadic eye movements by asking the client to follow the repeated side-to-side movement of the therapist's index finger (Shapiro, 1989). After this procedure, the client is asked to give feedback regarding any changes that may have occurred on any one of the three levels (visual image, self-statement, body sensation). The procedure is then repeated. This continues until the client achieves some relief from feelings of anxiety.

The EMDR technique has not been applied to the sports population. It is intended to apply this method to a group of athletes that may be encountering difficulties in their performance. It is contended that the EMDR method can be successfully applied to athletes. The method should prove to be effective in breaking rigidity of focus, restrictive mind-sets,

as well as to enhance awareness. It is believed that during stressful situations, the eyes become locked into a very narrow focus. In the process, the athlete may lose peripheral vision and awareness. Since all sport requires clear visual focus, it is essential that the eyes do not "freeze" into a rigid single focus.

Dealing with Stress

"Athletes have to deal with two levels of stress. Firstly, there is the stress buildup, as the important match draws nearer; secondly there are the stresses of the actual match that can surface during performance" (Jennings, 1993, p.145).

Stress in sport has an impact on both the physiological and psychological levels (Anshel, 1990; Leith, 1988; Madden, Summers & Brown, 1990). Rapid, shallow breathing and muscle tightening are the obvious physiological changes due to stress. On a psychological level, inner doubts, poor decision-making, lowered confidence and distractions are some of the obvious consequences of being under stress.

It is believed that all three intervention methods will prove to be effective stress reducers. For the control group in the study, it is anticipated that stress levels may inadvertently be heightened through the "traditional" motivational talk. This will be measured to ascertain whether this is in fact the case.

Aims of the Study and Hypotheses to be Tested

1. To examine the effectiveness of using music, tai chi, and/or EMDR as a means of improving sports performance. Statistical analysis will provide valuable information when comparing and investigating the effectiveness of these inputs.

2. To develop an integrated holistic model that links auditory, visual and physical (body) input in the nonverbal

domain. It is believed that verbal inputs (language) as given by a coach or observer is not fully understood by the body. Mind and body operate on different levels. In this sense, the project will be examining the nature of meaningful messages that the body and mind pick up so that these inputs can be incorporated into successful sporting action. It is assumed that the body learns best when the mind is calm and when there is mind-body harmony.

3. To re-examine the notion of a motivated athlete. Jennings (1993) contends that motivation has at its core the concept of mind-body balance. The incorporation of Eastern philosophy into Western competitive sport will be explored. In particular, the philosophy of Zen and Taoism lend themselves to sport.

4. To develop methods where the elite athletes can deal with the stresses of highly competitive sport in a creative and relaxed way. The ability to handle stress during competition is vital to ensure success. The interventions being proposed in this project are believed to be stress relievers, allowing the athlete to be calm and relaxed for competition.

Research Design

This section may need further refinement and should be further developed in consultation with the promoter of this thesis and/or a member of staff in the statistical department, if necessary.

Sample Size and Characteristics

It is envisaged that 60 athletes of provincial or near provincial standing will be incorporated in this study. In order to extrapolate across different sports, the subjects will be chosen from golf, tennis, field hockey and cricket, 15 subjects from each of the sports. In this way the results will not be restricted to the application of only one specific sport. According to Jennings (1993), these sports represent highly

interactive team sports (rugby, soccer, hockey), individual process focus sports (golf, swimming, running), one versus one interactional sports (tennis, squash, table-tennis), and a combination of one of more of the above where individual and group interact (cricket, baseball). In addition, all of these sports chosen for the project require a high level of visual skill acuity.

Method

This is a very important section of the project which will determine what types of conclusions can be drawn from the data. Alternatively, the method also limits or restricts the conclusions that can be drawn. Therefore, in order to ensure a clear, yet complex focus to this study, the method section as outlined below may need further refinement after discussion with the promoter.

As a starting point, two methods are outlined. A final decision as to which method to follow will be made sometime in the future.

First method. It is proposed to randomly allot subjects across the sports to five groups (12 subjects per group). Each group will consist of 3 cricketers, 3 golfers, 3 hockey players and 3 tennis players:

Group 1 : The control group where subjects will be verbally motivated to be positive and to continually strive to set higher goals in performance. The focus of the verbal input will be on winning. The thrust of the intervention in the control group will be to make the subjects more positive, confident and motivated.

Group 2 : This group will be introduced to the music and visualisation technique as was developed by Jennings.

Group 3 : This group will do tai chi.

Group 4 : This group will be subject to the EMDR technique.

Group 5 : All three interventions; music, tai chi and EMDR are given to ensure a holistic experience involving auditory, visual and physical input.

Groups 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 will receive the stated intervention programme twice a week for a four week period. Comparisons between group scores that are obtained on the measuring instruments (to be described in the next section) will be analysed.

Second method. As an alternative, this method only involves two groups (with more subjects in each group; 24 or 30 subjects per group).

Group 1 : This is the control group that will have the traditional motivation talk as outlined above.

Group 2 : All three interventions will be given; music, tai chi and EMDR.

Comparisons between group scores obtained on the measurement instruments (to be described in a next section) will be carried out in order to draw conclusions and test hypotheses.

Measurement

Actual performance. For the golfers, results of the rounds played four weeks prior to the introduction of the interventions will be obtained. This will offer a pre-test score for each individual. Two weeks into the intervention period to two weeks after the intervention, scores for rounds played will be obtained. This will offer a post-test score for each individual. Three months after the intervention, scores from four consecutive rounds will be obtained. This will provide a measure of the long-term impact of the intervention.

For the hockey players, a pre-test and post-test measure will be obtained for each of the different groups. The players will be required to perform a series of skills as was outlined in the research project by West, Calder and Bressan (1992). As with the golf subjects, a long-term effect measure will be obtained three months after the intervention.

For the cricket subjects, only batsmen will be included. This is intended to make the obtainment of results a little easier and more objective. Like the golfers, the batsmen will be asked to supply their scores four weeks prior to the intervention. Two weeks into the intervention period to two weeks after the period, scores will be attained (post-test). As with the other groups, a long-term measure will be obtained three months after the intervention.

For the tennis players, the total number of games won minus the number of games lost in each set played will be obtained. Like the golf, cricket and hockey players a pre-test, post-test and long-term effect measure will be obtained. This will be done in the same time periods for standardisation purposes.

Self evaluation questionnaire. A likert scale questionnaire will be designed by the researcher. This questionnaire will measure the athlete's own evaluation of his performance. The items will cover aspects on relaxation, dealing with pressure situations, ability to maintain concentration, handling inner doubts, levels of confidence. A pre, post and long-term measure will be obtained.

Dealing with anxiety and stress. Subjects will be required to answer the sport competition anxiety test (SCAT) that was developed by Martens (1977). Pre-test, post-test and long-term effect measures will be obtained for analysis. The long-term effect measure will be obtained three months after the intervention programme.

Statistical Analysis

t-tests and ANOVA will be carried out in order to examine the impact of the interventions in each of the groups. Results will be interpreted when comparing the different intervention groups, as well as to examine the changes that have occurred within each of the experimental groups.

Conclusion

The above interventions being proposed in this project have already been applied to elite sportsmen/woman in a clinical setting. The results have been very encouraging. This is based on the feedback of athletes, as well as the outstanding results achieved on the sportsfields by teams and/or individuals who have been introduced to one or more of these interventions. It was felt that a scientific project, however, needs to be conducted for three main reasons.

Firstly, it is considered necessary to formalise this holistic model so that the impact of each intervention can be studied thoroughly. In the process, possible refinements can then be made to the interventions in future dealings with athletes.

Secondly, it is vital that a model be developed to help our athletes perform more competently and consistently in the international arena. In addition, the ability to handle stress and competitive pressure is believed to be essential. It is often this ability that separates winners from losers, especially in closely contested situations (as is always the case in international competition).

The third reason for doing this project is to share this work with fellow professionals.

The above outline sketches a tentative proposal for a doctoral thesis. Refinements may be necessary as the process of

discussion evolves between promoter and researcher. The exact title of the thesis can be decided on after consultation with the promoter. Three possible titles were formulated by the researcher.

APPENDIX B

A FACSIMILE SENT TO THE PROVINCIAL HOCKEY TEAM

TRUE BLUE POWER: Giving Birth to a New Era
12 August 1995

Today is a special day. A day when the character of the team will be given new expression, where a new culture is born and given life.

Each one of you: Coach Craig (in his absence?), Manager H2O, Brad, Robbie M, Dean, Craig (capt), Jamie, Brenton, Brad, Goose, Robbie P, Greg, Peter, Paul, Chuck, Roger, and Fitz will all be called on in your own unique ways to contribute and participate in the birth process. Giving birth to a new Transvaal hockey culture will be a wonderful experience. A joyful experience. An emotional experience. A challenging experience.

At our last meeting before the tournament, I noticed that there was always one or other player who could not make the meetings. I made a comment about this and wondered whether it would become a pattern. In retrospect, I now know what the unconscious wisdom of the team was trying to tell us. Your coach had to leave you in the middle of the tournament for a very special reason, for the birth of his son Mitchell. Maybe, the whole team was unconsciously aware of the impending birth.

In our meeting, Craig Jackson felt that the team should always "carry on regardless". This is wise. You all have a job to do today. You will all be witness to the birth of your own individual determination and commitment. The birth process is not always an easy comfortable journey. Struggling to survive is also part of the emergence of new life forms.

Birth signals a new beginning. A beginning where the true blue character of your team is given expression. However, the birth process can never be controlled. Each one of you needs to trust in the unfolding process. You have all worked hard on the technical, physical and mental aspects of your game. It is now time to reap all the hard work that you have put into your game.

Your match against Natal is a one-off encounter. All your other matches during this interprovincial tournament bear no significance. This is the state of affairs. It is a clean slate. It is on this clean slate, however, that you all have the opportunity to imprint your mark during the match. Just like a baby imprinting his mark when he first yells when starting his journey into life.

Celebrate each minute in your match today and enjoy the moment. Synchronise your energy flow into a focused direction and create a mindset that is tough and resilient. Awaken the giant within you; today is the birth of true blue power.