

Ontological Coaching II

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Ontology is the study of being, in particular the investigation of the nature of human existence (Honderich, 1995). Ontological coaching focuses on the way of being of clients. Way of being is regarded as central to how people learn, function and change and is considered to be the underlying driver of behaviour and communication, for it is where an individual's perceptual patterns and attitudes exist, many of which can be deep-seated and out-of-awareness. Ontological coaching seeks to respectfully facilitate the transformation of being, which can include deep change, resulting in the client: (i) becoming a very different observer of themselves and the world, (ii) significant behavioural change, including relating more constructively with others and (iii) expanding what is possible in how they can create their future.

Ontological coaching has a robust theoretical basis consisting of four inter-related components. Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of being (Heidegger, 1962, 1971, 1999), supported by Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1994), forms a major philosophical cornerstone of ontological coaching. Maturana's biology of cognition (Maturana and Varela, 1980, 1987) comprises the second part of ontological coaching's theoretical basis, with the work of Wittgenstein (1958), Searle (1969, 1979) and Austin (1973) in the philosophy of language being the third component. The fourth component is provided by philosophical investigations of the body, in particular the writings of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Dewey (1929).

Flores integrated the ideas of Heidegger, Gadamer, Maturana and Searle (Winograd and Flores, 1986) to form an initial body of knowledge that has been further developed and is now known as Ontology of the Human Observer (Sieler, 2003).

Within the theory that underpins ontological coaching at least seven premises can be identified.

1. All learning and change happens in the nervous system and coaching seeks to constructively influence change in the structure of the nervous system.
2. Humans exist in three inter-related existential domains of language, emotions and body, which constitute their way of being; what takes place in people's lives occurs in these domains.
3. The dynamic interplay between the three existential domains of language, emotions and body shapes perception and behaviour, and can be equated to the dynamic structure of the nervous system.
4. Humans are self-referencing beings: how the world is viewed and engaged with is always relative to what is important or deeply matters in the world of the individual, i.e. his or her concerns.
5. Humans are relational and conversational beings interacting with the world from their existential domains to take care of concerns.

6. Change occurs through perturbation of the client's habitual ways of thinking and perceiving, which may trigger changes in the domains of language, emotions and body to generate new perceptions and behaviours.
7. Humans are biological-cultural beings with ways of being that always exist in a cultural context, which can be important to consider in the facilitation of change.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

The dynamic interplay between language, emotions and body is referred to as the *Way of Being*. The essential goal of the coach is to be a catalyst for change by respectfully and constructively perturbing the coachee to enable him or her to self-generate constructive new perceptions and behaviours that are consistent with what they want to gain from coaching.

The coaching engagement proceeds through five main phases: (i) the coach being in his or her most resourceful way of being for the client, which includes ensuring deep respect for the client at all times, (ii) conversation for clarity, (iii) conversation for exploration and possibility, (iv) conversation for action and (v) long-term follow-up.

Being in the most resourceful way of being for the client

A primary responsibility of an ontological coach is to manage his or her own way of being in the coaching conversation. The only place he or she can coach from is their own way of being, which will affect how (i) acutely they observe the specifics of the coachee's way of being and (ii) they facilitate potential shifts in the coachee's way of being. For example, prior to a coaching appointment with a senior executive in a major finance corporation, a coach recognized feeling intimidated by the coachee, being anxious and having negative thoughts about being equal to the task of coaching someone so senior in the organization. He could not shift feeling intimidated merely by changing his thoughts, so focused on his body and breathing, adopting a posture and breathing pattern from which he felt competent and confident, practising this as he walked to the appointment and maintaining it during the conversation.

A critical task for the coach is to create a safe environment for inquiry, learning and discovery through a deeply respectful professional relationship with the coachee. This means regarding the coachee as a legitimate other. Two challenges in maintaining a safe environment are:

- (i) respectfully initiating a different and potentially sensitive direction in the conversation; and
- (ii) the coach not being too attached to his or her ideas of where the conversation 'should go'.

For example, a coachee identified improving self-confidence as the key coaching issue. The coach assessed that the coachee had a negative view of herself (referred to as a core negative self-assessment) that she was not aware of. The coach said, 'Sometimes we get in our own way by having one or more negative opinions about

ourselves without knowing this. I'm wondering if you would like to explore whether you do have a negative view of yourself which is holding you back.'

Conversation for clarity

Developing a shared understanding with the client of the issue(s) to be covered and desired coaching outcomes is essential and is central to the contracting arrangement between coach and coachee. In organizational coaching the coachee's manager may also be part of the contracting and evaluation process, as illustrated in the following example. After a conversation with Stella and her line manager, the following coaching outcomes were identified.

1. first and foremost, greater self-confidence and an enhanced sense of self-worth
2. to be more able to deal with, and express, how she is feeling, rather than keep it inside and get to a breaking point
3. to not to take things personally, which is associated with becoming more resilient
4. to have a more strategic mind-set and not be as operationally oriented – to be able to stand back and observe the bigger picture
5. to express her point of view clearly and firmly in meetings, including having another perspective on senior people present at the meeting
6. to delegate and not be caught up in completing the details of various tasks – to know the deliverables required, where they fit in the larger scheme of things and to delegate to others in the team
7. through delegation to gain more from the variety of specialized expertise within her team.

The coach also ensured there was a shared understanding with Stella's manager about observable changes in Stella's behaviour that would be evidence of the fulfilment of the coaching outcomes. These were:

- 'doing less doing', with her team doing much of the detailed work
- asking the appropriate questions – ones that indicated a strategic focus, such as 'How does this relate to the business objectives?'
- being prepared to express well-thought-out 'push-back' or alternative opinions in meetings, especially where more senior personnel were present
- by coping effectively with setbacks, rather than getting down or despondent and dwelling on what 'went wrong', she would move forward to different issues.

After three 90-minute conversations, Stella declared she had gained what she wanted from the coaching, rating her self as 8–9 out of 10 on the issues she presented for

coaching, compared with 2–3 at the commencement of coaching. Her manager agreed with Stella’s assessments stating, ‘The coaching has been a very worthwhile investment’. The significant shift that occurred in Stella’s way of being was a combination of (i) eradicating a core negative self-assessment (self-belief), (ii) freeing herself from the debilitating effects of an ever-present mood of anxiety and (iii) developing a postural configuration in which she felt fully worthy and legitimate, and therefore confident, in herself as a person.

Conversation for exploration and possibility

Most of the coaching engagement occurs in this phase as the coach explores the client’s way of being. In doing so the coach seeks to respectfully and constructively perturb the client’s habitual ways of perceiving themselves and their circumstances to enable different and more helpful perceptions to become available as the basis for more effective behaviour. Important specifics of this phase are provided in the next section on methods and techniques.

Conversation for action

The main benefit of ontological coaching is enabling the coachee to observe and shift aspects of their own way of being beyond the coaching engagement and therefore enhance their behavioural flexibility for future challenges. Conversation for action is about orienting the client to application of what has been learned. For example, in supporting the coachee to confidently and constructively express her thoughts in business meetings, the coach asked three questions about future action.

How will you cue yourself to notice what is happening in your thinking, emotions and posture during the meeting? How exactly will you make the necessary adjustments that will allow you to say what you want to – will it commence with your breathing and posture or with different thoughts? How will you take the posture, breathing, moods and thoughts to other areas of your life?

Long-term follow-up

This final phase of the coaching engagement involves contacting the client 2–3 months after the formal end of the coaching to inquire about the sustainability of the coaching, specifically if the coachee has successfully applied different perceptions and behaviours, as well offering further support if appropriate.

ESSENTIAL PROCESSES AND DYNAMICS OF ONTOLOGICAL COACHING

An important part of the process of ontological coaching is how the coach uses his or her interpretations of the coachee’s way of being. Decisions are continually being made about what interpretations are likely to be most relevant and beneficial for the coachee. Part of working respectfully with the coachee consists of a combination of:

- asking questions to affirm if the interpretations are relevant; for example, ‘What would you say is your mood about this situation? Would it be fair to say that this is a negative mood?’

- offering distinctions for the coachee to consider; for example, ‘My guess is that you are experiencing a mood of resentment about this situation. Can I explain what I mean and see if you agree?’

An indispensable part of this process is the coach being open and flexible. Sometimes the conversation may move in a certain direction but not proceed far because it does not ‘connect’ with the coachee, or he or she does not give permission to proceed further. This is why it is essential that the coach is not attached to his or her interpretations and provides the emotional context for the coachee to decline to respond to the coach’s initiative. Ontological distinctions are only useful if they ‘hit the mark’ and speak to something significant for the coachee, providing a new insight or perspective.

The main features of the methodology of ontological coaching will now be outlined, with coaching examples in each of the three domains of language, emotions and body provided to illustrate a range of methods and techniques.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Ontological coaching goes beyond Descartes’ conception of being human as ‘I think, therefore I am’. From an ontological perspective, human cognition is more than thinking. To consider humans only as thinking beings runs the risk of focusing on the domain of language and not explicitly attending to the equally important domains of emotions and body in the facilitation of learning and change. Although other approaches to coaching are attentive to the importance of emotions (for example, psychodynamic and cognitive behavioural approaches, Gestalt, NLP, positive psychology) and the body (Gestalt, NLP), ontological coaching’s methodology is unique in the explicit integration of language, emotions and body.

Language

While all other coaching traditions work in the domain of language, ontological coaching is differentiated from other traditions by (i) the explicit premise that language generates reality and (ii) the unique techniques that operationalise this premise. The main linguistic techniques of ontological coaching are the:

- application of a unique approach to listening as a critical part of language and its central role in generating reality
- utilization of the model basic linguistic acts to facilitate shifts in speaking and listening
- application of a typology of conversations
- moving beyond the subtle, yet powerful, negative affects of cultural–historical narratives.

One of the premises of ontological coaching is that language generates reality. The coach listens for how the coachee is explicitly and implicitly using language, as well as how he or she is not using language. An ontological coach is specifically listening for the following aspects of language: underlying concerns; basic linguistic acts

(renaming of speech acts), including core assessments; types of conversations; and cultural–historical narratives.

Underlying concerns and core assessments are the hidden sides of coachees' language, that is, what exists in their listening that is not being articulated. Every issue for coachees is underpinned by something that matters to them – a concern. Heidegger emphasized that although we are always taking care of concerns, we rarely articulate what our concerns are. It can be especially revealing for coachees to understand what is behind their issue. Some specific questions can be helpful to assist them:

- What is at stake for you here?
- What is missing that is important for you?
- What is not being taken care of that matters to you?

The effect of such questions could be illustrated with an example of working with Helen. Her speciality in a pharmaceutical company is sales management; however, eight months prior she was transferred to an unfamiliar marketing management role, and provided with little support to learn the skills and knowledge for her new role. She seemed good-natured about the experience, saying that was part of corporate life, yet the coach assessed she had been putting on a 'happy face' to herself and the company. Asking how she felt about the way she had been treated by the company revealed that she was upset, as tears welled up. Exploration of underlying concerns through the question 'What wasn't taken care of that deeply mattered to you?' resulted in Helen recognizing that her dignity as a person had not been respected. The theme of taking care of her dignity was primarily explored through the domain of moods and emotions and is outlined in the next section.

The utilization of basic linguistic acts, derived from Searle's set of speech acts (Searle, 1969) is a major feature of the coaching methodology, these being: assertions, declarations, assessments (a subset of declarations), requests, offers and promises. An example illustrates the utilization of some of these acts in coaching conversations.

Jake's work team in the oil industry was consistently well short of meeting its weekly targets for the production of different lubricant products, resulting in delays in customer deliveries. Coaching with Jake and the planner who issued the weekly schedule enabled them to see that the weekly schedule was a request and that by not discussing the schedule Jake implicitly accepted it and was making a promise or commitment to deliver the weekly target. As a result of the coaching Jake and the planner met every week to discuss the forthcoming schedule to ensure explicit agreement about the weekly target, which is a particular type of conversation called 'conversation for the coordination of action'.

Core assessments are the fundamental beliefs and values people have about themselves, others, their situations in life and the world in general. They are central to how humans function as linguistic beings, providing an 'internal reality' from which the world is observed. A negative core assessment acts like a prison, closing off possibilities and restricting participation in different aspects of life. While these assessments do not 'announce themselves' the coach can discern their likely presence. The coach can offer an interpretation of their existence in the coachee's life and, if

there is agreement, through a process called grounding assessments assist the coachee to see if the beliefs have been lived as if they are factual (a very common occurrence) and if there is any substance to them beliefs (which typically there is not).

Moods

Moods are subtle, enduring and pervasive emotions, continually influencing perception and behaviour. Ontological coaching utilizes a framework entitled 'Some Basic Moods of Life' (Sieler, 2007), which provides interpretive structures of eight moods. These interpretative structures consist of four components:

- (i) how the mood can be created
- (ii) the typical linguistic or narrative structure
- (iii) the behavioural predispositions
- (iv) the likely postural configuration that reflects the embodiment of the mood.

The coach listens for the language of moods as well as observing their somatic manifestation in the coachee's postural configuration.

Returning to the coaching example with Helen in the pharmaceutical company, the coach noted that in the realization that her dignity had not been taken care of, Helen had mentioned that the situation was not fair, given her hard work and success in the sales role. An assessment of not being treated fairly is part of the language of the mood of resentment, which is often subtle yet persistent and pervasive anger. Helen was not comfortable with saying she was angry but she could see how she continually had this feeling of being 'put upon' that had not gone away, that she was resentful and her enthusiasm and energy for her work had been dampened.

In the previous example of coaching Stella on the key issue of lack of confidence, she agreed that she lived with a mood of anxiety, which is persistent background fear of things going badly and of not being able to deal with them. The behavioural manifestation of anxiety is consistently being alert for threats and engaging in protective behaviour to avoid the harm that accompanies perceived threats. For Stella, a consistent fear and threat was that others were making negative judgements about her work; consequently she worked long hours at the office and at home to 'cover all bases' in order to ensure she had anticipated and prepared a response to potential criticism.

The domain of the body

Nineteenth century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche captured the pivotal role of the body when he wrote, 'Our most sacred convictions are ... judgements of our muscles' (Nietzsche, 1968: 173). The importance of the somatic domain is that it is where the embodiment of change takes place. One procedure that can be highly effective in taking care of concerns and in diminishing the restrictive effects of core negative assessments is the use of the linguistic act of declaring, in which specific words are spoken from a body posture and with a voice tonality (indicative of emotional state) that are congruent with the words.

This can be illustrated with an example of coaching Stephen, a highly regarded manager who had been offered the role of Chief Operating Officer in a fast-growing telecommunications company. Despite his excellent record as a manager, Stephen lived from the core negative self-assessments of ‘I’m not good enough’ and ‘I’m not worthy’. After he realized there was no substance to these assessments he was invited to stand and make a declaration.

An important part of this procedure is for the coach to: (i) suggest and negotiate an appropriate brief statement that will be spoken, (ii) invite the coachee to notice how they speak, inviting them to assess and self-adjust whether there is congruence between their words, voice tonality and how they are holding their body and (iii) seek permission to make suggestions.

Stephen and the coach worked with the declaration ‘I am a legitimate, worthy and competent person, and I am a learner’. Stephen spoke his declaration nine times and despite his strong scepticism about the value of this process was surprised about the noticeably positive difference he felt about himself, which he described as being more solid and assured. He subsequently accepted the role of Chief Operating Officer.

Key considerations about the coach’s way of being

There are three important issues for ontological coaches to continually keep in mind if they are to maintain a constructive relationship with the coachee:

1. An emotional orientation of humility and not arrogance. The coach becomes arrogant by being too attached to his or her own ideas, forgetting that these ideas are interpretations and falls into the trap of ‘knowing’ the best direction for the conversation. The coach is always a learner, privileged by the coachee’s willingness to be coached and has the responsibility to be at his or her resourceful best, being flexible in how to use his or her expertise for the benefit of the coachee.
2. Recognizing that the coach does not directly cause change but is a catalyst for change. As was presented at the beginning of the chapter, a basic principle of the biology of cognition is that change primarily occurs from within the nervous system, as a result of the system being perturbed by an external agent. All a coach can do is perturb the coachee’s overall biological structure, which may trigger a shift in the nervous system and the development of a more resourceful way of being. The artistry of ontological coaching is to know how and when to constructively perturb the coachee’s way of being.
3. The courage to be ‘respectfully firm’. There may be occasions when coachees appear to avoid an aspect of their way of being that the coach considers important. In extreme cases, coachees may take over the conversation. It is essential that the coach respectfully maintains his/her authority and is not put ‘off balance’ by the coachees’ behaviour. The ontological coach needs to respectfully share his/her observation/interpretation of the coachees’ behaviour, seek his/her response and inquire if there is permission to explore the issue not being addressed.

APPLICATION

Ontological coaching is applicable to the entire range of coaching contexts and genres covered in Section II. In reflecting on the coaching engagements with Stella, Helen, Jake and Stephen it can be seen that the genres of skills and performance coaching, leadership coaching and developmental coaching were covered. The relevance of ontological coaching to the manager as coach, executive coaching and cross-cultural coaching is evident in the following examples.

Executive coaching

Working relationships between senior executives and members of the board are critical for the company's future. Sometimes decisions can leave a residue of negativity that persists and compromises relationships, with important business conversations not happening.

As Managing Director of a medium-sized, family-owned bus building company employing 200 people, Giovanni had experienced a significant breakdown with a decision by the Board of Management. They had overruled Giovanni and brought in consultants to look at the company's manufacturing process. Although the consultants had completed their work and the board's decision had been made more than eight months prior to the coaching conversation, Giovanni said that the decision 'still sticks in my gut'. Giovanni agreed with the coach's interpretation that he was still in a mood of resentment with the board. He did not want to leave the company, yet continually felt negative towards board members, which was 'not helping me or the company'.

Part of the structure of resentment is continuing to fight against, and not accept, what has happened and cannot be changed. Giovanni agreed this was exactly what he had been doing. He said, 'I was professionally slighted by that decision – it was as if I didn't know and all my experience counted for nothing. My thinking has been continually preoccupied with what was done and how I disagreed with it'. Through the conversation he began to more fully appreciate the damaging consequences of his mood and stated, 'It really is time I put this behind me'. The coach worked with Giovanni to facilitate small yet important shifts in his posture to ensure that he no longer held remnants of resentment. This allowed him, through requests, to initiate conversations with members of the board, including the future chair, that had not been happening. In a follow-up coaching session, Giovanni reported on a marked improvement in the quality of his conversations with the future chair, and how much more relaxed and better he felt within himself.

Cross-cultural coaching

The increasingly globalized world of business presents new challenges to ensure effective communication between personnel with diverse cultural backgrounds across different locations. Different cultures reflect different ways of being. Each culture provides a frame of meaning and associated assumptions about how to understand and behave in different situations. Business performance and productivity is built on people working together effectively (coordinating action) to reach objectives, which is underpinned by shared meaning. Ensuring there is shared meaning in business communication can make a significant difference to the operation of a team.

Susan leads a risk team in a major bank, with the members of her team being in Australia and India. Her communication with the members of the team in India is via email and telephone, the latter including phone conferences. Susan was frustrated that her colleagues in India seemed to agree about tasks to be done but did not complete them; i.e. they had made promises (commitments) that they did not keep, engendering lack of trust.

Working from the ontological perspective that listening is meaning and is the crucial factor in communication, the coach explored the general hypothesis that Susan had assumed a shared understanding that did not exist between herself and team members in India. Cultures can be viewed as forms of deep listening, consisting of core assessments, social norms and practices, and cultural narratives that subtly inform members of a culture how to perceive and respond to situations. Within the general hypothesis the coach tested the relevance of two specific hypotheses to the communication breakdown Susan was dealing with. The first hypothesis was that 'saving face' is a significant part of Asian cultures that can result in the cultural practice of saying 'yes' when the listener does not understand. The second hypothesis was related to the influence of gender relationships, specifically males regarding themselves as being superior to females, which in Susan's situation may be the male members of her team in India not accepting her authority as manager and therefore not accepting her ideas, suggestions and requests.

Susan's acceptance of the possible relevance of the above two cultural influences, which included not being resentful of their existence, was the basis for the inclusion of a communication strategy in phone conversations with her colleagues in India. The strategy was to ensure explicit shared understanding of tasks to be completed and the availability of relevant resources in a manner that was not offensive. Conversationally, the implementation of the strategy was as follows:

Thank you for our discussion. I'd like you to help me out here if you could – I'm not sure if I have done a very good job making clear what I'd like done. Could you please tell me your understanding of what you will be doing from our discussion and don't worry if it is not accurate because it was probably me not being clear enough in the first place?

This was followed by ensuring there was explicit shared understanding of the availability of relevant resources for the tasks to be completed. The coach emphasized the importance of being genuine in her requests, reflected in her voice tonality, which was indicative of her emotions and body posture being congruent with her words.

Health coaching

Juliette had been treated by a number of physiotherapists and chiropractors for significant pain and restriction in the movement of her neck and head. Recently she had been told that there was a problem with a disc in her neck. Intrigued that she didn't have pain and restriction all the time, Juliette was interested in exploring another avenue to complement the work of somatic practitioners. She was drawn to ontological coaching because of the inclusion of the domain of the body in the coaching methodology.

The coach ensured that Juliette understood he was not a somatic practitioner and was willing to do his best to see how an ontological approach could contribute to lessening the pain associated with the movement of her neck. After exploring when Juliette most noticed the restriction and discomfort in her neck, the coach asked what turned out to be the most significant question in the conversation (based on the notion of ‘concerns’), which was, ‘How does the discomfort and restriction in your neck take care of you?’

Juliette’s initial response was a lengthy silence, after which she said, ‘My first thought was that it doesn’t but then I think there is some purpose there. I think it protects me from being responsible.’ The coach and Juliette then explored the areas of her life where she considered she avoided responsibility, along with her moods, overall story and key assessments that accompanied this mode of being. Juliette was then invited to stand up and adopt the full body configuration that went with avoiding responsibility. Not surprisingly, she noticed the pressure she was putting on her neck. Juliette and the coach further explored the language and moods that accompanied the posture of not being responsible.

The coach ask Juliette to ‘shake off’ the unhelpful posture by gently moving her hips and shoulders, swinging her arms, taking some easy deep breaths and then to sit down again. She and the coach discussed the areas of her life in which she assessed she was responsible and she was asked to consider the difference in her language and moods from when she was avoiding responsibility. The coach invited Juliette to stand up again, move to a different spatial position from where she stood in the posture of avoiding responsibility and to adopt a full body configuration of being responsible. She was asked what specific differences she noticed in her posture compared with being ‘in a body of avoiding responsibility’.

The main self-observation for Juliette was that she felt so much freer in her neck, which was amazing to her. The coach asked her to move back and forth between the postures of avoiding and accepting responsibility in order for her to gain a clear somatic feel of the difference between each dynamic body disposition. Once this was complete Juliette was asked, ‘Which way of being in the body is preferable for you?’ She replied enthusiastically, ‘This one’, referring to the body of accepting responsibility. As a closing comment the coach reinforced that the coaching conversation complemented the work of Juliette’s somatic practitioners by saying, ‘Please continue to use the services of the physiotherapist and chiropractor to ensure that your neck does fully recover’.

EVALUATION

While ontological coaching has the capacity to provide significant value across all genres and contexts for coaching, it is important to be mindful of some key considerations that, if not attended to, can act as constraints and limitations of this coaching methodology:

- Some coachees may be reluctant to explore the domains of emotions and body. The essential task of the ontological coach is to respect the boundaries of the coachee and to work skilfully in the area of language to generate shifts in perspectives and behaviour, which may spontaneously produce emotional and somatic shifts.

- Ontological coaches are not psychotherapists or somatic therapists. The coach has a fundamental responsibility to know his/her own coaching boundaries and not go beyond these. This is a critical aspect of the coach managing his/her own way of being in the coaching conversation. Boundaries are defined by the coach recognizing his/her levels of comfort and knowing his/her competence.
- Technical proficiency in the coaching methodology is not sufficient. The coach always coaches from life experiences, which can provide an invaluable experiential 'feel' for the challenges the coachee is dealing with. For example, coaching in the business world requires a sound general understanding of the nature of organizations, the nature of leadership and managerial responsibility, and daily life in the workplace.

With the above considerations in mind, a number of strengths of ontological coaching can be identified:

- The coaching methodology is based on substantive and coherent theory of human perception and behaviour that provides a viable alternative approach to psychology for facilitating sustainable behavioural change.
- Working in the three domains of language, emotions and body provides the coach with the flexibility of multiple areas of engagement. The coach can recognize when the opportunities for learning and change have become exhausted in one domain and seek permission to focus on another domain. For example, new insights and behavioural shifts can open up for the coachee in the domains of moods and the body that are not possible while the conversation remains in the language domain.
- The role of the body in coaching ensures learning is embodied and consolidated.
- Ontological coaching offers a uniquely powerful way of intervening in organizational dynamics and culture. It provides an in-depth framework for positioning human interaction as a core business discipline and practice.

The general benefit of ontological coaching is that coachees experience shifts in their way of being, enabling them to become a different and more powerful observer of themselves, others and how they can constructively engage in the world. The coaching not only supports the coachee to deal with the problematic issues that were presented for coaching, but also positions them to be more resilient and adaptable for dealing with future problematic circumstances.

Ontological coaching is beneficial across a wide range of coaching contexts and genres because it deals with the fundamental ways people understand themselves, the world and what is possible for them in life. The coaching methodology facilitates the emergence of new perspectives as the basis for the development of expanded ways of thinking and increased behavioural flexibility, all of which have become so essential in increasingly unpredictable and uncertain times.

FURTHER READING

Sieler, Alan (2003). *Coaching to the human soul: ontological coaching and deep change*, Vol. I. Melbourne: Newfield-Australia.

Sieler, Alan (2007). *Coaching to the human soul: ontological coaching and deep change*, Vol. II. Melbourne: Newfield-Australia.

Sieler, Alan (2012). *Coaching to the human soul: ontological coaching and deep change*, Vol. III. Melbourne: Newfield Institute.

(Volumes I, II and III of *Coaching to the human soul* are the detailed exposition of the methodology and theoretical underpinnings of Ontological Coaching. Volume I covers the specifics of the linguistic basis of the coaching methodology. The focus of Volume II is the emotional domain, which includes an extensive coverage of the model Some Basic Moods of Life. Volume III examines the biological thinking that underpins Ontological Coaching as well as providing a philosophical basis for the domain of the body and an in-depth conceptual and practical framework for coaching to the body. All volumes provide a wide range of coaching examples and practical activities.)

Winograd, T. & Flores, F. (1986). *Understanding computers and cognition*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. (While the orientation of this book is the design of computer-based systems that facilitate human work and interaction, it provides a worthwhile introduction to the ideas of Heidegger, Maturana and Searle that comprise the theory behind ontological coaching. Winograd and Flores position ontology as a contribution to the emergence of a new intellectual paradigm that is new ground for rationality, which combines traditional rational thinking with intuitive–interpretive thinking.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When you consider current issues you are dealing with in your personal and professional life, what aspects of your way of being (language, emotions and moods and body) are helpful and not helpful?
- As a coach, how could you apply a way of being approach in your coaching that will be beneficial for your clients?
- As a coach, how could you benefit by paying attention to your mood and body posture when coaching?

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