

Knowing before knowing I know

When an urge-to-act becomes alive in me, I have learned to get out of the way of myself and let what is becoming, come in and through me. When I find myself asking if I should or shouldn't do something (under the illusion that rational processing is possible) eventually, I realise that my answer is in what I am actually (not) doing. This 'should/shouldn't' debate arises when I am lost in my head or plagued by feelings I find uncomfortable. I get stuck, fretful or panicky and may become emotionally reactive. Yet when I find myself flowing into action with ease, my response comes as a manifestation of an inner coherence arising from a process of synthesis, born of attending^a to what is present and current, dissonant and resistant in and beyond, me. I know what to do without knowing why.

I liken this to the pattern of flow in and of the cosmos which, in centering in on itself, draws in energy and in the process, expands¹. I find resonance too with Freeman's² explanations about nonlinear sense-making based on complex adaptive systems theory and with Rayner's³ description of receptive-responsive presences and the fluid dynamics of Natural Inclusion. Polanyi⁴ refers to this non-verbal knowing as 'tacit'. His term does not quite capture this state of 'coming-to-know' which, for me, arrives sometimes suddenly and always unpredictably as a deep sense of recognition about what I shall do. It comes upon me as a coherent unshakeable, undeniable, embodied clarity. All within me comes into agreement and I find myself moving into presenceful-embodied action. My unknowing knowing had me say Yes to my Supervision Group...

Where endings begin

In 2010, I was invited to run a Coaching Supervision Group. Over the next two years, members of the group repeatedly requested that I teach them what I was doing. I listened but did not respond. At that time, I wasn't sure how I could. Eventually, I heeded their call, recognising this might bring us face-to-face with ethical⁵ dilemmas. *How would responding to their request change our relationship(s)? What would this mean about our future supervision contract? What might be the unintended consequences of attempting to do this?* I knew we could not answer these questions ahead of time – all I could do was bring them to the fore so that we, as people in relationship, could explore them as we lived through each next step together.

In responding affirmatively, I was called to consider what I was 'doing' with them in our supervision: *Could I conceptualise my approach in a way that would make it accessible, comprehensible and transferable?* I entered a period of deep introspection⁶, reflection, enquiry - a solitary exploration and synthesising of my life experience and learning. In summer 2012, a representational form revealed itself and it came to be known as the P6 Constellation[®]. Since then, I have been learning with and teaching others how to embrace it; and have been exploring the validity and efficacy of the approach within my doctoral studies.

Our emerging praxis has us experiencing and witnessing transformative shifts in ourselves, our clients and our families and friends. Our reach goes beyond Coaching Supervision into Executive and Life Coaching; community and

^a Attend: "by 'attending' is meant our overall experiencing of life – analysing, perceiving, relating, engaging, and embodying" (Hutchins, 2014:13)

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conflict mediation; across generations with children as young as five, teenagers, families and adults in their nineties! We are artists, musicians, psychologists, photographers, film-makers, teachers, consultants, peace activists. Along the way, whilst learning to apply the P6 Constellation in real-time in our own lives and in supporting each other, I and three **Pioneer Practitioners** found ourselves becoming a Community-in-Practice. As our capacities to attend to what was present within and beyond ourselves grew, we found ourselves struggling to name this distinctive new praxis and state of being. Finally, the words came to us: **Presence in Action^R (PIA)**.

So, what is PIA? How does the P6 Constellation work? We grappled with these questions – eventually recognising they are best answered through personal embodied experience, not words on a page. In March 2018, John Wilson of Onlinevents, offered a sound-bite we rather like: *“you are offering a new approach to human transformation!”*

What made it possible for this to emerge? We were willing to extend beyond existing constructs; and discovered that new ways can be found, fresh frameworks and models can emerge, and boundaries can be consciously and care-fully re-defined. We realised that daring to move beyond what others believe is right, reputable and relevant, meant risking feeling fear and shame; and potentially facing rejection and loss. And, for my unique part, I decided to embark on a PhD to bring a different kind of exploration and rigour to our praxis.

Below, I briefly mention my doctoral inquiry and the part it has played. I then set the scene by illuminating the paradigmatic assumptions, deeper dynamics and patterns influencing me as Coaching Supervisor. Later, as threads of our story unfold, I draw attention to significant developments that arose as we found ourselves in unfamiliar terrain within and beyond the originating Supervision Group. I share some ethical and boundary dilemmas we encountered and describe how we navigated them. None of what has evolved was predetermined.

Re-incorporating research

Since 2014, I have been examining our emerging praxis and weaving third-person inquiry⁷ throughout my doctoral research. This has afforded sufficient constraint and ample opportunity through which my embodied self could meet and extend unexplored dimensions of myself. I have experimented with a new epistemological approach - subjective empiricism⁸ - in which, amidst learning interventions and community-in-practice developments, I have been holding myself simultaneously as research subject, participant in the research; and holder of it. Some fruits of my Living Theory Action Research⁹ are evident herein. In the process of playing with visual and verbal ways of translating, describing, explaining and passing on to others what has emerged through me, I have come to realise my life-long quest: a simple re-incorporating¹⁰ way (the P6 Constellation and PIA praxis) to use the entirety of myself to transform how I engage in and with life. My most humbling insights about the nature of this learning are that: it is personal, relational and contextual; it needs me; it needs others individually and collectively; it needs our shared co-creating context; and that no One can make any Other learn on demand!

Paradigms and Patterns

As I recount aspects of our story, I refer to bodies of work that have a bearing on what follows, although I do not attempt to discuss them in any depth. In so doing, I also shed light on assumptions and practices that pervade the world of coaching, coaching supervision and other similar and associated people-supporting professions.

As you read this chapter, my words will interact with all that you bring; and together something will come alive – become current in you. I cannot know ahead of time what you might get from engaging with my offering. I make this explicit because your making sense of everything that unfolds hereafter depends on recognising how much not-knowing has made what we have done, possible. Our group process is held by a complexity-thinking paradigm¹¹, augmented by nature's principle of Natural Inclusion¹² (see later).

Shifting paradigms: why?

If we believe we can identify, control, manipulate and manage situations and people to achieve predictable, deterministic ends, then this is what we will try to do. If we believe we can set aside aspects of ourselves e.g. our emotions; or isolate our impact from endeavours in which we are involved e.g. as researchers claiming to be objective, then we will proceed as if we can. Both tendencies are typical of linear, reductionist, objectivist thinking – the paradigm that currently dominates traditional science, management and leadership practice, coaching and other domains. The all-pervasiveness of these assumptions is not always recognised, even in academic literature on systemic coaching approaches¹³.

In contrast, we experience the world as sometimes but not always **volatile**; often, yet not wholly **unpredictable**; certainly **complex** except when things are simple; and amidst some certainties, many **ambiguities (VUCA)**. Perceiving 'reality' in this way situates us in a complexity-thinking paradigm. But merely 'thinking' this of the world is insufficient¹⁴; there is a deeper knowing that we access through our bodies. Yet many systems thinking and complexity scientists suffer from two crucial tendencies rooted in the objectivist paradigm dominating traditional sciences. The first, is the common drive to leverage technology to identify more variables (assuming this is possible) to help us *to better predict, manage and control what happens*. The second, is to exclude the first-person experience and perspective.

Two questions had become increasingly alive for me in my coaching and supervision practice:

- *What does it mean to embody and dance with complexity?*
- *How could I re-incorporate and leverage my full Self: recognising that as a researcher, supervisor, coach, leader, human being - all of me is present, always?*

My tacit embodiment of complexity principles in my practice paved the way for the representational form of the P6 Constellation to materialise. Then, in 2016, I was delighted to discover through Rayner¹⁵ that the form, design

and process of the P6 Constellation appeared consistent with the principle of Natural Inclusion^b which illuminates the inseparability of self from our relational and wider world context. Now, let's rewind to consider what this actually means and what brought Presence in Action (PIA) and our Community-in-Practice into being.

Dancing with emergence

A colleague connected me to Sam who wanted a supervisor to run a supervision group. It would be easy to slide into the linear causality (cause-effect) mind-set of the reductionist paradigm by saying that Sam led, and I followed. Formal Ballroom dance convention has us believe that one person (usually the 'man') always leads, whilst the other (usually the 'woman') always follows. Such labelling carries us into a categorical cul-de-sac in which it is assumed that leadership resides (solely) in one person rather than in another. If we pause long enough to ponder how this assumption leaks into our social and organisational world, we can see that it rests on shaky ground. For if the caricature were true, then the world would be divided into those who initiate (leaders) and those who do not (followers). Yet the caricature persists and perpetuates through our language: *He is head of the family; she is Leader; he is the captain; he is the Head of the Church; she is Party Leader; a good leader sets direction for others to follow.* When we excavate this (il)logical conclusion, we reveal how nonsensical it is. It implies that those who follow have no endogenous agency. Now if this were true, they would forever be waiting for someone else to tell them what to do! We know from our own experience that this is not what happens – at least, not all the time. We all move to action of our own volition... or do we?

Let us return to the start of the Supervision Group: Did Sam lead and I follow? How we label people and their actions depends on what came before and/or what comes next. So, if I agree to Sam's request and start making arrangements, who then is leading and who is following? I might conclude I am leading only when or if another responds to me; and yet, the instant the other exercises their agency and I respond to them, our roles are reversed. Each action, preceded and followed by another, becomes simultaneously an act of followership **and** leadership. Welcome to dancing with emergence! Rayner¹⁶, through Natural Inclusion, illuminates how all of life is founded on this dynamical inter-relationality¹⁷ that manifests as a co-evolving reciprocal flow.

But who started the group? Let's expand the time container and widen the context: my colleague knew I was available and that I had experience Sam wanted. I could claim it was me. Perhaps, I opened a receptive space for Sam's responsive energy to flow towards me? Natural Inclusion transcends cause-effect thinking, enabling us to appreciate, without paradox, the reciprocal exchange between receptive-responsive presences. Thus, Sam and I responsively flowed into each other's receptive presence, simultaneously co-creating a space into which we and several others have repeatedly converged since 2010.

^b Alan reviewed my work and we met in August 2016.

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So, if we are in an endlessly iterative “co-creative, receptive-responsive relationship”¹⁸ with each other, then the use of labels such as ‘leader’ and ‘follower’ which imply a fixed function or quality of a person, becomes potentially irrelevant and ultimately redundant. **What might this mean for (y)our Supervisor-Supervisee relationships?**

Let’s dive a little deeper.

Nature’s invocational flow

Crucially, Natural Inclusion (Inclusionality) exposes another harder-to-reach assumption related to the conventional dance metaphor – amplified, for example, by how (in general) we perceive the sexual encounter between men and women; and indeed, the way in which we characterise the male sperm as the proactive

agent in relation to the female egg. At both human and cellular scales, there is a tendency to perceive the (male) gesture as the initiating force; they are perceived as the leading, active agent whereas the female is afforded the seemingly passive (less valued) role. Our modern world increasingly focuses on and favours thrusting, driving and controlling over receptivity. In the process we remain oblivious to nature’s principle: receptivity **invokes** inward flow. Once we *let this in* (allow ourselves to be receptive to the notion!), it changes our relationship to all that plays out within and between us as living beings in a natural world. The tendency to exert force upon another goes against the flow of nature – which, Rayner suggests, is evidenced by the scale of dysfunction and destruction reaped by man across the planet.

Focusing on the tangible evidence of the ‘action/reaction’ of the ‘leader/follower’ misses that space is receptive and energy responsive. How do we know this to be so? The water of a river flows into the space of the river bed; rivers flow from mountains into ocean beds; when we expel air from our lungs creating space, new air is drawn inwards to fill it; when our tummies are empty, we draw in food to fill them; when we have unmet needs, our energy flows to address them. *Receptive space influences^c i.e. invokes an in-flow of responsive energy*. Space is thus the sourcing, resourcing, recycling influencer in the flow of life drawing in energy that enforms^d the dynamically bounded (not hermetically sealed) entities of material form. Receptive space thus pervades all form and is neither closed nor passive! It is a generative, invocational^e presence.

Inclusionality

The space between defines the place of immateriality.

The thing you see is no such thing, as no such thing can be.

That which we see in time in space is concentrating energy that flows in form in place through space, informing receptivity.

For space imbues; embraces all without exclusivity.

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^c The Latin origins of the word ‘influence’ is *in-fluere*, referring to an inflow of matter or ‘ethereal fluid’^c. Between 13th-16th centuries this ‘direction of flow’ reversed to mean ‘affecting the course of events externally’. The original meaning is more aligned to nature’s inclusional dynamics.

^d **Enform** means to form or fashion

^e **Invocational** – act or form of calling in... or calling for...

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Responsive energy, therefore, is not a proactive driver exerting power over others, the idea of which is born of the mechanistic mindset that claims we can be masters over our dominion. So, when we let go of over-reaching and propelling our Selves into and onto what is beyond us (as if that is a mark of leadership), we return to being more in tune with the *in-fluencing* nature of Nature: receptive-responsive presences simultaneously centering, opening and inviting flow between other receptive-responsive presences.

Of all lenses I have explored, this comes closest to describing Presence in Action (PIA): being with not-knowing; letting go of attachment to outcomes and expectations; following what arises for/in the person in process; attending, moment-to-moment, to what is present and current within, between, through and around those gathered together. PIA is following what calls for our attention from the edges; it is flowing responsively into receptive space, to where what-is-becoming, beckons. It is opening ourselves - inviting, receiving and responding in mutual, natural sway unconstrained by mental constructs that would otherwise have us define, split and separate ourselves from each other and life. It is how we are when we are most coherently ourselves, aligned and attuned amongst others.

How is PIA different to 'mindfulness', 'relational presence' or 'Presencing'? Answers to this question arise through embodied experience within each of us as practitioners, when we enter the space between shifting paradigms, embracing nature's forgotten principle; attending to what is present and current, held by our congruent nonlinear representational form; upheld by our reciprocal praxis.

Surfacing knowing through interaction

Before I could know any of this, I needed to become it – to experience it from the inside; and before it could be named, it had to be experienced in and by others, so we could talk about it – find words together that resonated with our own felt-experiencing. I found my way to PIA through 50+ years of living and learning. I found my way to passing it on through the P6 Constellation¹⁹. That PIA is manifesting in others, is not because I forced my desires and assertions upon them but because I was living it and responded to their invitational call asking more of me... and they responded to the receptive space I then opened to them. Accepting such mutuality changes the nature of our engagements with each other. It means surrendering to how inextricably linked we are, knowing that none of us can make anything happen without others participating. To me this is the ultimate leveller. I may appear to lead, but only when others follow of their own volition; but to be a PIA practitioner I must follow in accordance with nature's principle. I may call myself a Coaching Supervisor, but this means nothing until or unless Coaches bring themselves to me. The Zulu principle of Ubuntu captures this. If I were to say to you *sawubona* I would not simply be saying *hello*. If you were Zulu, you would respond with *ngikhona*. What we would be conveying in our mutual

exchange, is that *because you see me, I exist*. In other words, **that** I am and **who** I am is made possible by who you are in relation to me^f. I believe this to be no less true for all of us – whether or not we are Zulu!

So, our Group Supervision container^g exists today. But it is no longer the only space in which we and others come together. What helps us navigate the increasing complexities that have called us into our many shared places in space? Through repeated receptive-responsive cycles over the last five years, I realised something more was materialising. It took a while to find the words to adequately convey what I believe we are learning with/through each other: *“Symmathesic^h Agency - the meta-conscious capacity to engage in mutual contextual learning through interaction in place, in space in time”*²⁰. Simply stated this means that through PIA we are consciously learning together to attend more coherently to greater complexity.

Making it personal

Sam leaned forward with a wide grin, asking for the third time in two years, *“So, when are you going to teach us what you are doing?”* I noticed a shift in the quality and tone of her request and the chorus from the others. The difference had me pause long enough to consider what was being asked of me. Something began to stir. I felt excited, having been tickled into what subsequently has become an enduring, playful, absorbing exploration. *How was I being and what was I doing when with them?* I began thinking more deeply about my praxis – delving into the roots and routes of my knowing and how this appeared to manifest in and through me.

Their invocation could carry us beyond our supervision container. *I could lose everything! It could all go terribly wrong! What if they discover I have nothing to teach them? They’ll think I’m a fraud. All will be lost... and I will have to run, hide... become a train driver (so one ever sees me at work again!).* I explored this in supervision and, yet, beyond all the noise in my head, one thing remained. I was compelled to respond. Beyond rational explanation and despite my fear of criticism from peers, I dived into this broader exploration with myself. Finally freed from constraint, I found myself attuning to a different question: *What are they calling for now and how may I best serve them?* I sought to respond responsibly and care-fully, holding above all else, an abiding intention – starting with me - to safeguard my own trustworthiness... to safeguard them and those we serve. With this as my guide, I followed and flowed into this unbounded space which seemed so full of inchoate potential.

^f This is made clearer in the Zulu folk saying “Umuntu ngumuntu nagabantu” meaning “A person is a person because of other people.”

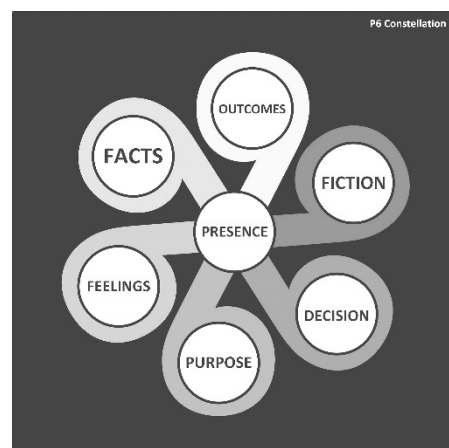
^g Container: catch-all term for different systems/context/situations. CAS theory applies to living systems including human beings. CAS are subject to nonlinear interactions generated by the conditions/context. In her CDE model, Eoyang (Eoyang, 2001) suggests there are only three conditions: Containers (similarities/reasons-for-being that hold us together), Differences (that create the potential for change), Exchanges (the ways in which differences/agents/individuals interact). Changes in any condition affects the other conditions in unpredictable ways generating patterns. In human beings, these manifest as patterns of thinking, behaving, doing etc. – See chapter 2.

^h Nora Bateson coined the term ‘symmathesy/symmathesize’ to refer to living, learning systems engaged in “mutual contextual learning through interaction”

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Embracing the challenge, I continued musing on my practice. Six 'elements' distilled from my MBA²¹ research were clear to me; yet there was something about the way I was working with those elements that was beyond my ability to articulate: I had knowing I could not tell²². This generative phase drew on my capacities for both **reflective** practice - looking back to learn from past situations and actions; and **reflexive**ⁱ practice - a responsivity that comes from attending, with acute awareness, to what is current and calling for attention in the present moment. After years of personal²³ and professional pondering and experimentation, the P6 Constellation framework^j (Figure 1) found its form^k. In 2013, seemingly, unrelated to these developments, I secured a place to undertake a PhD. By the time I started it in 2014, I sensed that the P6 Constellation would feature but was unclear how.

Figure 1: P6 Constellation comes into view



Ahead of the prototype training with my Supervisees, March 2013, I recognised that we were entering a new container. I prepared to contract a shift in relationship.

Entering new terrain

I was mindful that we as a group of practitioners were heading into unknown realms in which we were experimenting with an approach that had only just found visible form. Here was my synthesis – my way of expressing and attempting to pass on what for me, was embedded, embodied practice. The P6 Constellation was a manifestation and translation of my tacit knowing represented in visual, verbal, kinaesthetic, emotional, spatial dimensions. Recognising the nature of this experimentation, I wanted to put in place safeguards to support us all. As I saw it, we were faced with a dilemma. The scientific research

Figure 2: Extract of Complexity Aphorisms

What is, is not
There is no outside
No way is the only way
Everything is something
Best practice is fit or myth
Everything is in everything
Change is determined within
Certainly there is no certainty

method shaped by mechanistic assumptions requires permissions and uses criteria such as reliability and replicability to claim validity. Such criteria are fit-for-purpose in traditional science where variables can be isolated, and cause-effect tests can be instituted; in a VUCA world consisting of complex enmeshed living systems involving human beings, this is not possible. We need new ways to bring about clarity, consistency and coherence. I wondered

ⁱ I have found that by engaging in reflective practice, my capacity for reflexivity is enhanced.

^j I use 'framework' (not tool or model) to suggest an open, supporting structure like a child's climbing frame or builder's scaffolding rather than a rigidly bounded entity which presupposes specific contents. 'Framework' implies an open, holding space with minimal 'fixed' elements and connections with, within and around which people engage.

^k The P6 Constellation is proving consistent with propositions emerging in the disciplines of neuroscience (Pellatt, 2003; Brown & Brown, 2012; Ellis, 2013), systems thinking (Rajagopalan & Midgley, 2015; Hodgson, 2016) and embodied/enactive cognition (Maturana & Varela, 1980; Varela et al., 1991; Varela, 1992; Varela & Shear, 1999; Varela, 2000; Anderson, 2003; Depraz et al., 2003; Di Paolo & Thompson, 2014).

how, whilst being true to a complexity-thinking paradigm, I could uphold these intentions and yet also bring fit-for-complexity equivalence to what might emerge between us.

I realised we had to focus on generating **patterns** not protocols; embrace **commitments** not codes nor criteria. Informed by complexity and natural inclusion principles, I drew together my synthesis into a series of “Complexity aphorisms”¹ (Figure 2) and used these to shape a complexity-attuned alternative to conventional Codes of Ethics. I introduced the first iteration of our “**Principles of My Praxis (POMP)**”²⁴ document to the pilot cohort.

Patterns not protocols; commitments not codes

The POMP anchors our praxis. It describes the paradigm underpinning our approach and the nature of our learning exchanges. It conveys our psychological and relational commitments, expressed through Community-in-Practice behaviours that simultaneously manifest in and shape our exchanges. How these translate into day-to-day practice evolves with our shifting contexts (Appendix A).

Figure 3: PIA Community-in-Practice Behaviours

1. Safeguard my own trustworthiness
2. Engage in Presence in Action
3. Attend to the wellbeing of the whole, part and greater whole
4. Engage with courage, curiosity and caritas
5. Follow through on promises
6. Make more of what I and we have
7. Celebrate and share the best of myself and ourselves

How did our behaviours come to be named? I drew on CAS-based research called ‘Simple Rules’²⁵. I noticed four generative behaviours (nos. 4-7) in the originating Supervision Group. I included two (nos. 1 & 3) I had been consciously modelling in my supervision practice with them. Now, as insights emerge, we regularly revisit, revise and re-sign the document. This signals our renewed commitment

to safeguarding our own trustworthiness personally and collectively. By way of example, “2. *Engage in PIA*” was recently added once we found a name for our praxis; and later realised (!) that actually doing it was what supported us to access the best of ourselves.

Re-framing boundary-play

We could not have anticipated what was to emerge following the arrival of the P6 Constellation. Our Supervision sessions were affected after our initial training. The group’s desire to draw more from me ‘as teacher’ was as strong as my desire to pass on what I was discovering and learning! *Was it possible for me to hold these changing roles in a way that honoured their development, my own and whatever needed to emerge?* Time and again, I examined the ethical dilemmas in my own supervision. This helped me explore the tensions I was holding as our emerging context called us to delineate each new container; each marking an expansion and another shift in the focus, nature and dynamics of our exchanges: monthly Supervision, quarterly Community gatherings; Café Conversations, additional

¹ statements that distil the essence of something

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training sessions. With greater clarity and confidence in myself, I was able to open the conversation to include them: *How was our community space different from supervision ... and from our training space? What were the implications for us all? Could and would we cope?* I remember early on in this transition, one of my Supervisees said she did not want to hear about my personal experiences: “*Supervisors shouldn’t do that!*” she said. She had a rule, and I was breaking it! As a group, this prompted us to reflect again on our container distinctions, recognising that in our Community-in-Practice sessions, everyone including me, needed to be free to show up and share authentically; but in training and supervision sessions my focus needed to be on them and their processing.

By exploring these tensions, our interactions became clearer and more robust, helping us to settle into the rhythm, nature and flow of each container. The pattern we established in dealing with these tensions – being curious about our discomfort and using the P6 Constellation as our shared processing resource across all our containers - continues to serve us as our ecosystem evolves.

Our terrain became even more complex as new people attended trainings. We were engaged in something that was confronting us with an undeniable, intensifying reality manifesting in our daily lives: we were finding ourselves in myriad overlapping relational containers. We had a choice. Do we deny this reality, believing that we can keep our relationships and relationship containers separate; or do we embrace this reality and seriously commit to equipping ourselves to handle it? We chose the latter path, continuing our learning together whilst endeavouring to make the distinctions between our emerging enmeshed containers ever clearer – always starting with ourselves.

Starting with ourselves

“Safeguard my own trustworthiness^m” grounds our mutual ethical intentionality. In embracing this behaviour, we recognise that personal trustworthiness is ours to make or break. It is founded on how we are and what we each do in **all** the spaces and places we find ourselves. It is not determined by what others do in relation to us. And it is so much more than maintaining confidentiality. It starts with doing our personal work first – always. It means showing up transparently in our community and being supported by others. None of us is exempt, not even me as the founder of the material. Often, my part is to open the way for others to process what is going on for them by going there first. Our embodied approach has us illuminate our inner machinations using the P6 Constellation. We literally ‘**walk the mat**’ using a floor-sized

Figure 4: P6 Constellation - walking the mat



^m <http://potent6.co.uk/learning-opportunities/free-learning-resources/>

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representation. This simple frame enables the processing of complex unpredictable dynamics; and the experience is both revelatory and profound.

Newcomers sometimes feel wary, but they come to trust and value what this approach delivers. Experiencing their own transformative shifts first-hand and bearing witness to the swift changes in others, dissolves any resistance to their stepping into the P6 Constellation. Being released from stuck and destructive personal patterns more and more often in their personal/professional lives becomes too compelling a benefit to resist!

Community-in-Practice emerging

Over time, I began to express a crucial distinction arising in our work: that we were becoming a community **in** practice as distinct from a community **of** practice which usually refers to people who subscribe to a shared body of practice. Being part of our Community-in-Practice (CiP), means we are **in** it, practising together, centering in on our ourselves to 'clean' up, get unstuck and liberate ourselves into flow-ful PIA. As our membership expands and diversifies beyond coaching and coaching supervision, our POMP is proving crucial to supporting our co-evolution.

Living our practice, held and witnessed by each other has deepened our connections and delivered transformational shifts for all of us. My most painful learning came through losing an originating member. Those of us remaining, came to fully appreciate how the future of our community and the contributions we could make in the wider world, depend on all of us showing up, upholding our CiP Behaviours (Figure 4) and facing up to ourselves first. Through the pain of losing someone dear to us from our circle, our relationships, resolve and commitment to each other and to what we are growing was strengthened immeasurably.

Often those who come on our trainings, are people known to one or more of us. They come because they are bearing witness to changes in us - their friends and colleagues - and they want this for themselves. If ever there were a case for care-ful boundary-management, this is it! By accepting and acknowledging our complex reality - and working consciously with its enmeshed nature rather than in denial of it - we find ourselves continuously developing our reflexive muscles. Despite our inevitable human fallibilities, we each are becoming ever more trustworthy in our interactions and relationships.

Following unknowing knowing

I want to pick up one more thread from our pilot training. I made an unusual request. I asked for permission to audio record and photograph our sessions. I followed that familiar gently, insistent urge which I have come to trust and associate with my knowing without knowing why. I sensed it was important to capture our journey from the outset but could offer no rational explanation nor give any idea how we might use the data. I shared that I sensed I was moving towards undertaking a PhD but did not know when or if I would embark upon it. My inability, at that time, to verbalise my tacit knowing fits with Gendlin's²⁶ developments of Merleau-Ponty's²⁷ proposition:

"that the body knows before we have words and concepts to express it."

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We did not explicitly contract who would have access to the recordings. Our agreement to proceed was based on the foundations of trust between us, held by our individual and mutual commitment to each safeguard our own trustworthiness. Our decision about recordings has served us well. It also established a pattern of requesting permission to record and photograph sessions - which we follow to this day – substantiated and made more explicit by what follows below.

The unteachable nature of Learning

Through our CiP gatherings and supervision it became clear to us that we needed new learning opportunities to enable the Pioneer Practitioners to continue expanding the scope and efficacy of their practice. Once again, I responded to what was present, absent and current amongst them rather than reverting to defining a prescriptive curriculum. The fruits of our pioneering encounters inform the nature of the PIA learning process for those who follow, but content and focus always is generated by those involved and what manifests in the room between us.

Only once the Pioneer Practitioners declared they were ready to expand the scope of their learning (to Group Practitioner), did we appreciate what to do with our session recordings. I had been guardian to them, yet 'knew' without knowing why, that they were not 'mine' to process. I was, however, consciously guided by the autopoietic principle²⁸ distilled by Freeman²⁹

“the self can only know and incorporate what the brain has made within itself.”

This means that learning – like meaning-making – is a self-generated process and outcome. In other words, no one can make anyone else learn. No one can make meaning on someone else's behalf. This is entirely consistent with how we use the P6 Constellation – it is crucial we do not interpret what might be going on in another based on what we hear them say or see them do. Our practitioner role is as 'host' – to hold, notice, follow and reflect – with nothing added and nothing taken away. This practice illuminates the inner processing of a person **to themselves** simultaneously transforming what is going on within them. It facilitates an internal re-configuration or shift - through nonlinear, self-organising dynamics in the brain³⁰ and body. Whilst this is palpable to the individual, it may or may not manifest outwardly to others.

In 2016, my unknowing knowing revealed itself: a person's process(ing) is theirs to do (not mine)... which meant that the recordings of their past sessions belonged to them (not me). They needed the opportunity to make sense of their own historical material. I devised a developmental reflective process to enable each person to trace, recognise and reflect on their own meaning-making and learning across the years of their involvement. Useful though this seemed, at first, I did wonder about relevance. *Given that the premise of our approach was about equipping people to attune to what was manifesting in each present moment, how would having retrospective data serve them?* Engaging in this process delivered significant unanticipated benefits – the recording data (Facts)

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revealed the partiality and imprecision of each person's recall and directly challenged interpretations (Fictionsⁿ) they made of themselves and each other. These insights had the further effect of loosening their attachments to their own Fictions... recognising at a deeper, more embodied level that just because they (and sometimes others) think something does not make it factually accurate! This realisation supported their reflexive praxis when processing themselves and others on the mat.

For the Pioneer Practitioners, accessing their raw data triggered innumerable personal revelations and generative repercussions for us all. For me, it set in motion an avalanche of insights that affirmed my request to collect and hold this data until I/we knew what to do with it.

Additionally, by following through with this unknowing knowing (recording without knowing why) we have laid the ground for the first-ever longitudinal complexity-attuned Living Theory Action Research programme: tracing the creation and evolution of an approach whose reach now extends beyond its originating (Coaching Supervision) context. We make all this explicit with new learners when we request permission to record our sessions.

Acting with coherence – living trustworthiness

In a more traditional research project, securing permissions for non-deterministic, unbounded research purposes might have been seen to pose ethical concerns. Yet by the time we embarked on the pilot training, we had several years of trust-building behind us. We had already laid the ground and established patterns of engagement that worked for us. Each step we have taken has been incremental; in tune with the state of readiness of each person in the group; matching their pace and following their calls for progression. We acted coherently, responsively following nature's flow, engaging as receptive-responsive presences - attending and responding to what was becoming, not pulling or pushing towards what we thought 'should' be. Coherence, we have discovered, arises through engaging with what is current, awakening to past reverberations and responding to potentialities beyond conception – then welcoming what is Becoming! Coherence - PIA - is a state of internal alignment, embodiment and attunement that arrives unbidden when all that is in play comes into agreement with itself. This is living trustworthiness. As PIA practitioners, we find ourselves in an expanding, more inclusive relational space in which we become increasingly able to hold and navigate the complexities of our intertwined lives. We find ourselves redefining the places and ways we play; and needing to continually re-define who and what we are, to maintain coherence with ourselves, each other and the wider world. None of what has unfolded has been driven by prescription or design.

ⁿ Fictions – this means 'what our mind does with...' It is a catch-all term for conclusions, interpretations, metaphors, myths, judgements, beliefs, values etc

Scope not levels; embodiment not externalised assessment

From the outset, we have repeatedly revisited whether to seek external accreditation for this emerging body of work. Early on, I recognised that our approach did not authentically align to assessment protocols born of the reductionist paradigm. On this basis, I held a line: that I would not submit the training to measures and processes that seemed antithetical. The tension experienced by some coaches in our Community-in-Practice resurfaced intermittently amidst mounting exposure from the professional bodies encouraging practitioners to ‘prove’ expertise by submitting their practice to externalised competency-based checks. Towards the end of 2017, my understanding transitioned through another threshold: I committed to upholding the worthy intentions of such credentialing **and** to develop a complexity-attuned approach that would be a) congruent with our paradigm and emerging practice and b) consistent with the role/function of the Community-in-Practice. The concept of ‘Community Approved Practitioner (CAP)’ materialised after several years of intermittent tension-tipping exploration with the Pioneer Practitioners. We now think in terms of ‘scope of practice’ rather than hierarchical ‘Levels’. As our PIA practice becomes more embodied, we find ourselves able to embrace and navigate greater scope and complexity. Our nomenclature attempts to convey this i.e. CAP1 recognises Self-practice; CAP2 acknowledges those hosting one-to-ones; CAP3 for those hosting groups etc.

The question about external validation finally found resolution with the Pioneer Practitioners (PIPs) in April 2018. Together, we explored what was activated in each of us. We agreed that using our approach on ourselves was essential and inescapable. The PIPs acknowledged that until their own PIA practice had become sufficiently embodied, they had been unable to create the conditions for transformative shifts in others. They reflected on the time it had taken them (by initially resisting their own self-practice) to cross the threshold into this non-directive, new-paradigm approach i.e. to let go of their attachment: to driving or leading clients towards desired outcomes; to protecting themselves by ‘following the rules’; and to trying to ‘prove’ how good they were. We pondered on the challenge of trying to describe to the uninitiated, ‘**what** we are doing’ and ‘**how it works**’; and recognised we could not reduce PIA into discrete skills or competencies that could be meaningfully ‘measured’ in isolation or tested by those who had not submitted themselves to the experience. Our conclusion? There is only one meaningful indicator: people experience insights and shifts, or they don’t; and in terms of process, “no way is the only way³¹!” We realised that our legitimacy and efficacy as PIA practitioners comes from practising our practice together with others on the mat: i.e. being supported by others to process ourselves; experiencing and reflecting on our own transformational shifts; hosting others in process; and holding the space for those hosting and processing.

The penny dropped! We saw the added value of being a Community-**in**-Practice. Together, we were co-creating the context in which - through in-the-moment processing of real-life, current challenges - we were simultaneously developing and evidencing the efficacy of our PIA practice with each other. We delighted in recognising the inherent safeguards in our approach: it is simply not possible to be a transforming PIA Practitioner if we do not submit wholly and wholeheartedly to the process ourselves.

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Reflecting on the diversity of contexts and people in our community, revealed something additionally important: whilst our approach enhances the efficacy of those of us who are coaches and coaching supervisors, its reach and impact extends far beyond these fields of practice. We concluded that – for now at least – so as not to limit how far and wide PIA might flow, we as a community needed to take charge of our own CAP learning and credentialing.

As our insights fell into place, the concept of ‘Community Approved Practitioner (CAP)’ shifted from an abstract notion to an accepted, internally congruent context in which we all have agency. CAP status comes to members actively engaged in practising, serving and learning in our Community-in-Practice. Our mutual commitment to safeguarding the trustworthiness of this growing body of work, inspires us to attend continually to what is present, current and enforming within, between and beyond us. Here, we find resolution to the paradox – by centering on ourselves, held by each other, we simultaneously regenerate and extend our learning personally, collectively and contextually in place, in space, in time. Our artistry with PIA flourishes and our Symmathesic Agency extends.

Co-evolving ecosystem

This account shows how a small, established Coaching Supervision Group expanded beyond itself whilst retaining its core integrity. The receptivity of this group beckoned more insistently than my self-protective instinct to ‘follow the rules’. My responsivity made no rational sense. Yet nine years on, here we are: still together; attending to what calls for our attention; gently co-evolving our ecosystem. Our next challenge beckons: establishing our Community-in-Practice as a social enterprise – PIA Collective – to carry Presence in Action to people, places and workplaces who invite us in. *Will we successfully navigate our next transition?* I don’t know. But this I do know... PIA equips us better than anything else I know. *Are we up for it?* Well, as the idea came from the group not me, I guess so! *Am I up for it?* Blimey, YES! *Why?* Because working and playing alongside other PIA practitioners – all doing our personal work in real-time, held by each other, whilst engaged in real-life endeavours – profoundly enriches my life. It invokes a new kind of... BLISS... and I want more of it!

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Appendix A: Visual snapshot from POMP - detail of Community-in-Practice Behaviours

Community-in-Practice (CiP) Behaviours: our psychological and relational commitments

POPIA (4-day training) equips us to access Presence in Action in our own lives i.e. becoming a **Self-Practitioner (CAP1)**. Practising expands our scope³ and capacity to hold and facilitate increasing complexity. Those wanting to work professionally with others, can become recognised **Community Approved Practitioners (CAP)**: **CAP2: 1-1**; **CAP3: Groups**; **CAP4: Associate Supervisor**; **CAP5: Associate Trainer**; **CAP6: Lead Supervisor & Trainer**. Only participating members of the Community-in-Practice (CiP) may gain and retain **CAP** recognition.

As Community Approved Practitioners we commit to upholding the following CiP behaviours which have emerged amongst us in community. They illuminate how we engage, when at our best. Making them explicit enables us to express our psychological and relational commitments to ourselves, each other and the wider world. We use them to guide us in our personal and professional lives; trusting that, in so doing, we enhance our wholesome contribution to each other, to those we serve; and that we extend the reach and impact of PIA in the wider world.

By embodying these behaviours, we hope to co-create generative patterns that enhance and distinguish our praxis as a difference that truly makes a difference to the lives of those touched by it and us:

1. **Safeguard my own trustworthiness** [C⁴] : e.g. work within my **expertise & CAP status**; **uphold the Principles of My Practice** & align to relevant codes of practice; secure Personal/Professional **indemnity insurance**; credit those whose approaches/frameworks I use; practice my PIA praxis - 'go there first'; participate in at least **2 CiP Days per year**; CAP2-5 engage in regular **Supervision**; attend to **container shifts, confidences and conflicts**; do not share P6 Constellation worksheets with those not in PIA training.
2. **Engage in Presence in Action**⁵ [C, D, E] e.g. i) use the **metaphorm** of the **P6 Constellation** (implicitly or explicitly) – always situate the 3Fs **within** the whole; ii) **illuminate** what is present and *current* (**Acuity practice**); iii) **embrace a complexity thinking paradigm underpinned by nature's principle of Natural Inclusion – PIA praxis** (i.e. embodied knowing expressed through 'deep' behaviours).
3. **Attend to the wellbeing of the whole, part and greater whole** [C] e.g. **take responsibility** for my 'drops and misses'; engage in **mutual support** of/as PIA CiP members; support each other to **stay in relationship**; **partner** with PIA Trainers to deliver learning events; work in pairs/teams when using PIA in groups; attend to the implications of decisions/actions on myself, clients, my PIA CiP and wider realms.
4. **Engage with courage, curiosity and caritas**⁶ [D, E] e.g. process my 'stuff' i.e. illuminate my personal patterns using the P6 Constellation and CiP Behaviours before **sharing 'reflective contributions'**; support others to do the same; show up, open and hold the space for **generative engagement**.
5. **Follow through on promises** [E] e.g. take on only what I am **willing and able to fulfil**; embrace and uphold **our CiP Behaviours** inc. personal/professional responsibilities e.g. contracts, payments, time-keeping.
6. **Make more of what I and we have** [D, E] e.g. play an '**infinite game**'⁷; share and leverage knowhow, talents, time and opportunities; partner with other PIA Practitioners; proactively promote the POPIA training so we can seed Presence in Action in communities across the world.
7. **Celebrate and share the best of myself and ourselves** [D, E] e.g. speak from **first person**; **do my personal work** to liberate the best of myself; **acknowledge, celebrate and share** my and our (with permissions granted) stories of **learning, delight and impact** e.g. in case studies, blogs, social media, conversation.

³ By "scope" we mean developing our capacity to hold and facilitate situations of increasing complexity – starting with self, then one other (1-1); then with smaller and larger groups; then being able to attend to the wider system through 'associate' then 'lead' PIA Supervision and PIA Training roles

⁴ Letters in parentheses (C, D, E) refer to Eoyang's CDE model – C= container; D = Differences; E = exchange. Their relevance is shared in learning events

⁵ PIA delivers transformative shifts through the metalogically coherent **interplay** of its 3 constituent conditions (PhD, Gardiner, 2019)

⁶ Caritas = care and compassion

⁷ Infinite Game – download pdf of book by Jim Carse to grasp this concept: <http://wtf.tw/ref/carse.pdf>

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¹ (Swimme & Tucker, 2011)

² (Freeman, 2000; Piers et al., 2007)

³ (Rayner, 2017b; 2018)

⁴ (Polanyi, 1966; 1969)

⁵ (Varela, 1999)

⁶ (Varela et al., 1991; Varela & Shear, 1999)

⁷ (Fisher et al., 2003; Torbert et al., 2004)

⁸ (Gardiner, PhD pending publication)

⁹ (Whitehead, 1985; 1989; Varela et al., 1991; Marshall, 1999; Whitehead, 2000; Marshall, 2001; 2004; Whitehead, 2009; 2016)

¹⁰ (Merleau-Ponty, 1948[2008]; Polanyi, 1966; 1969; Bateson, 1979; Bateson & Bateson, 1987; Bateson, 2016)

¹¹ (Gardiner, 2018; PhD pending publication)

¹² (Rayner, 2004a; 2017b)

¹³ (Tomaschek & Pärsch, 2006; Kahn, 2011; Hsia et al., 2012; Resch & Tomaschek, 2012; Whittington, 2012; Wakefield, 2014)

¹⁴ (Rajagopalan & Midgley, 2015; Hodgson, 2016)

¹⁵ (Rayner, 2017a; 2017b; 2018)

¹⁶ (Rayner, 2004b; 2004a)

¹⁷ (Rayner, 2018:9)

¹⁸ (Rayner, 2018:1)

¹⁹ (Gardiner, 2014a; 2014b; 2016; 2017)

²⁰ (Gardiner, PhD pending publication)

²¹ (Gardiner, 2000)

²² (Polanyi, 1966; 1969)

²³ (McMaster, 2015)

²⁴ (Gardiner, 2013)

²⁵ (Reynolds, 1987; Eoyang, 2010; Patterson et al., 2013; Birch & Gardiner, 2019)

²⁶ (Gendlin, 1992)

²⁷ (Merleau-Ponty, 1945[2014])

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