

Coaching Today



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Editorial

Diane Parker
Editor, Coaching Today

When I took on the role of editing this journal three years ago, a major part of my remit was to represent the diversity of the coaching profession by giving voice to both the BACP Coaching membership and beyond. For instance, not every writer who features in the pages of this journal is a member of BACP or has come to coaching from a therapeutic background. Many of you are working in healthcare, education, academia, private practice, business, the arts or a combination of these fields. I have also always been conscious of following BACP's aims as an organisation to actively promote and encourage equality, diversity and inclusion, and to reflect that within the pages of this journal.

But in endeavouring to reflect the diversity of our profession, I am naturally led to ask - just how diverse is it? And what is the day-to-day experience of a coach or coach-therapist who is situated outside the dominant culture - ie white, able-bodied, cisgendered, heterosexual?

I'm honoured therefore that, for this issue's *Thinking Global* piece, Jackee Holder has bravely offered to share her personal perspective as a coach and a woman of African-Caribbean origin working in the UK. Jackee's experiences make for sobering reading. In her piece she challenges the notion that diversity is homogenous - that we are all in some way 'diverse' - and calls for more conscious conversations around issues of race, ethnicity and inclusion. Jackee's piece suggests that the quality of conversation and dialogue is

seriously lacking both in public and private debate and in our professional training and development. Reading her piece, I was particularly struck by her sentence: 'Yet it is the thread that truly connects us to the other and the other to us if we are willing to take the risk starting with the self.'

Conscious communication and connection is at the core of our work as coaches and therapists, and I publish Jackee's piece in the hope that it seeds further conversation and debate around the issue of diversity and difference in our profession.

Some of you may recall Jackee's feature in an earlier issue of *Coaching Today* on writing as a creative personal and professional development practice. This issue welcomes other writers back to the *Coaching Today* fold and sees the launch of a special three-part series on supervision by writing partnership Sarah Corrie and Jo Birch (whose piece on marketing and branding for dual-trained practitioners proved to be very popular with readers back in April). I am also delighted to welcome back Louie Gardiner who, in a follow-up to her fascinating article last year on human systems dynamics, continues her investigation into complexity sciences and introduces her new model for supporting clients through deep and lasting change and transformation.

As ever, I hope you will find some food for thought in the pages of this issue. Your feedback and comments are welcome. If you haven't done so already, please take the time to complete our online survey, which is still live. You can access this on our web page at www.bacpcoaching.co.uk/coachingtoday.php.

Also, look out for the new online edition of *Coaching Today*, which launches with our winter issue in January.



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Changing the game of change-making

How do we navigate complexity and support our clients through profound change? Human systems dynamics practitioner **Louie Gardiner** explains the P6 Constellation and how it is used in practice.

Complexity is our reality – past, present and future. Through the ages human beings have conjured up a plethora of tools, models and methods in order to tame and control the domains around, between and within us. Some have proved useful in particular circumstances. Many, though, have tended to approach complex issues rather simplistically, underpinned by an assumption that outcomes can be predicted and managed into being. This is possible to some degree with mechanistic systems. However, in complex adaptive systems (CAS) such as human beings – living as we do in a hugely volatile and variable world – it seems that the best we can do is to anticipate and influence.¹

I learned this the hard way. What started out as a personal survival-driven search for how to cope in this world turned into an intense fascination and curiosity with how we make sense of ourselves, others and the world, and how our sense-making affects the choices we make moment to moment and over a lifetime. Dissatisfied with simplistic tools, models and methods that neither matched nor supported my experience of working with reality, I found myself searching for something that worked *with* the emergent human condition, not in denial of it. In trying to understand my own internal processes, my enquiry turned into a broader question: how do I support others to helpfully work with complex human dynamics when what is happening in the intrapersonal space is largely in the realms of the intangible, unpredictable and seemingly unmanageable?

My search became the focus of my MBA thesis in 1999/2000. I sought to explore the roots of managerial behaviour and the implications for change management. My findings suggested there were no single root causes; rather there were multiple routes affected by shifting internal (personal) and external (relational and environmental) contexts.

My continuing exploration with intra- and interpersonal sense-making distilled what I was discovering into six elements, but their connections and interdependencies were only partially clear to me. At first, I represented them in a linear cause-effect format. My discomfort with this first representation held me back from

sharing it widely; yet I continued implicitly testing and experimenting with the six elements. Instead of forcing clients to engage in formulaic, beginning-to-end processes, I found myself meeting them wherever they showed up. When I followed their lead, we ended up travelling an emergent, unpredictable pathway that supported significant change.

Ten years later, I dived into the world of complexity sciences – entering through the field of human systems dynamics (HSD).¹ This gave me new lenses and a language that ultimately supported a literal re-framing of the six elements. On glancing at my logo, I saw its relevance in a new light – it had six ‘portals’ with coupled connections (see Figure 1). I knew there were useful pairings among the six elements but this image invited me to test them and their connections more explicitly. Elements became ‘portals’ that appeared to be interconnected – each holding relevant data that served to keep people’s helpful and stuck patterns in place. By metaphorically standing in and above the portals, enquiring into and illuminating what was actually present within and between them, people experienced surprisingly sudden transformational insights that accumulated into profound, sometimes subtle – and sometimes dramatic – shifts in their ways of ‘being and doing’ in the world. I could not predict when or what might make the difference but I became increasingly confident in the efficacy of this new format.

The P6 Constellation (P6C) was thus born through an emergent unpredictable process that catalysed dramatic insights and personal shifts that were previously out of my reach. How it came to be and what it now enables in others is explained by complexity sciences: self-organised criticality,² tipping point/butterfly effect, emergent evolution.³ All offer different ways of explaining the same emergent phenomenon: the progressive reorganisation/change in a system that comes about as more content enters it. Insights, ‘aha!’ moments and transformational (irreversible) change in thinking and/or behaviour are examples in human beings.

As I have taught, tested and deepened my understanding of the P6C, drawing on HSD¹

lenses and complexity sciences, I have increased my own understanding of how it works. Using further references, I hope to offer here some explanation of the P6C and give a taste of its power and potential.

A framework for transformational change

I believe that the P6C offers a simple, intuitive, non-linear framework, making it possible for people to engage safely and consciously in meaningful, transparent and supported internal exploration. It has the potential to help people to recognise and talk about what is seen/unseen and known/unknown, providing a catalyst for new insights and understanding.

The practitioner’s task is to help unbraided the complex and assist the integration and embodiment of each person’s transformational shifts. Paradoxically, as practitioners working with the P6C, we are called upon to relinquish the paradigm of control and surrender to following and inquiring into whatever is present for the client.

But how do we pass this on so that more people can do this for themselves? Uniquely, the P6C offers a frame that is both replicable (available to many) *and* scaleable (applicable to

Figure 1



individuals, groups and organisations) within human systems. It equips people to become conscious influencers (rather than unconscious reactors) of their own internal processes of change. Why does this matter? Chilean scientists Maturana and Varela⁴ offer their theory of *autopoiesis*, which combines principles of homeostasis and systems thinking. They argue that change is local (not global), internal and emergent and not an effect of external forces: ‘the Self can only know and incorporate what the brain [being] has created within itself’⁵ (p.28). Embracing this principle, individuals change from within; groups change from within; organisations change from within. The P6C facilitates change from within each of these human systems. Assuming that personal change starts with ourselves, in this article I focus on the individual container.

Portals and patterns

The P6C can be used implicitly as an internal frame of reference. Individuals enter at whatever depth and level of enquiry they are ready to handle. It has six interconnected and inter-dependent outer portals (see Figure 2). Whichever portal the client enters can be viewed as a presenting pattern that arises out of the conditions within the client. Different data show up within the portals in different contexts, resulting in different presenting patterns. In practice, only certain of our many patterns will show up as ‘live’ in any given situation. Eoyang¹ suggests that in complex adaptive systems patterns are generated by different ‘agents’ exchanging within literal or metaphorical containers. With this in mind, we can see how the P6C represents the individual as a container; agents are

represented by the data within the portals, and exchanges occur between the agents. It is both systemic and intuitively close to the reality of people’s experience. This is what makes it so powerful and so simple. Unlike many concepts that rely solely on the analytical, the P6C supports the rational (thinking) and non-rational (feeling) to be seen, heard and felt – accepting that they are inherently and inextricably interconnected. This is brought to life (visually, auditorily, kinaesthetically and spatially) when working in an embodied way, with the practitioner and/or client literally moving from portal to portal across the floor map. Working in this three-dimensional realm accelerates dynamical change and embodied integration. The practitioner’s role is to occupy the Presence portal and to stay open to where the client needs to go. In training sessions, practitioners dive deeper into the P6C, accessing additional complexity lenses and learning. This prepares them to work deeper on themselves and to grow their systemic acuity, agility and fluency when supporting their clients.

Presence

The Presence portal represents the place of awareness consciousness. This holds the key to illuminating an individual’s presenting (stuck) pattern and what is active in the outer portals, holding that pattern in place. In using the P6C, I pay attention to my own internal state, the wider external system and the client. I hold in mind two other lenses drawn from the human systems dynamics field. The first is called the Landscape Diagram,^{1,6,7} which helps me sense where the client may be on a continuum between ‘organised (stable), self-organising (emergent) or unorganised (unstable)’ states. The second is Adaptive Action.^{1,8} This acts as a meta-frame for the arc of the session, the overall contract and as a personal reflexive frame to support navigation through each engagement. Over time, I seek to enable my client to take over the place of Presence, so they become more aware, better able to work on themselves, and more discerning about when to adapt and when to stand firm: ie to enhance their Adaptive Capacity.¹

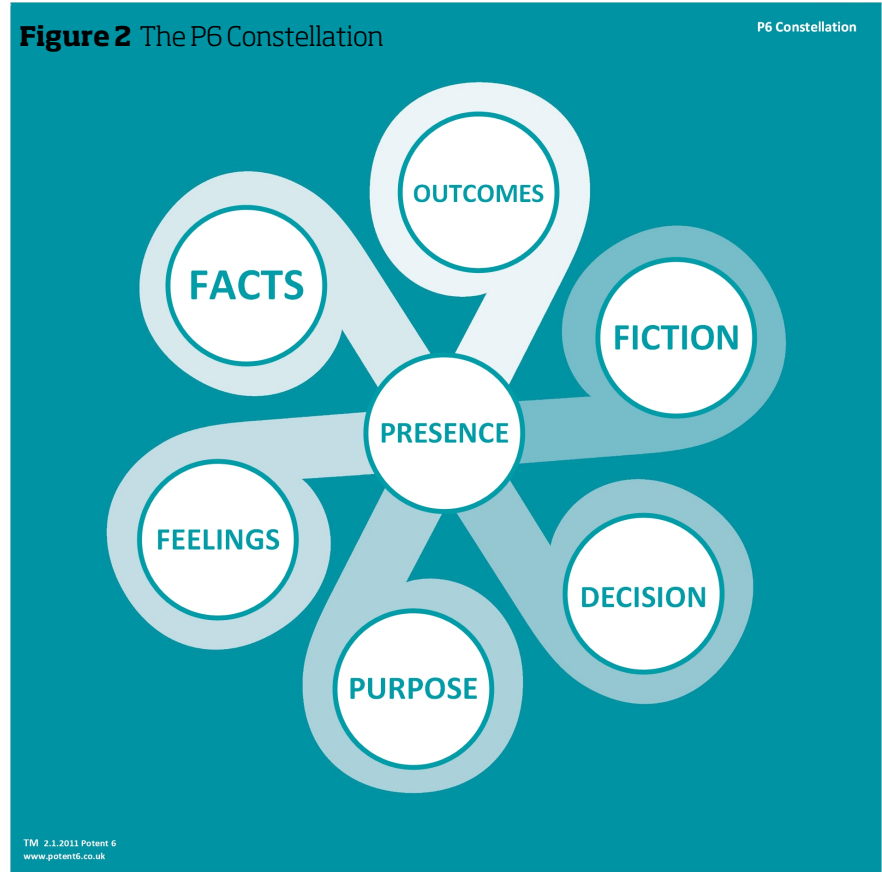
Purpose

We often hold Purpose as a conscious intention and believe that it will explicitly direct our choices and our lives. Yet enough of us find that, no matter how good our intentions, we fail to live up to them. This reveals to us that something else is going on that we can’t see. Myriad purposes rise and fall, take dominance or fade away moment to moment within us. This is part of an infinitely complex dance of patterns running internally and if we slow ourselves down sufficiently we begin to discover these invisible ‘purposes’. They are revealed in how we are *being* and what we are *doing*. Sometimes these prove to be helpful yet often they are not. Unhelpful undercurrent purposes are driven by narratives from the past, are self-protectionist in nature and run unconsciously until or unless we expose them. If they continue to play us, we become victims to or pawns in their ever-repeating dramas. Illumination – aided by the P6C – loosens the grip they have on us.

Outcomes

Outcomes are simply ‘future fictions’. Sometimes we have clarity about Outcomes (benefits or consequences) we do or do not want. However, as with all the portals, we discover there is more than the explicit in the mix. Whatever purposes are running, infinite outcomes will emerge. Many will be out of anyone’s awareness. When undercurrent purposes are rife, we find that the very consequences we are desperately trying to avoid begin to happen. We can do nothing to avert what seems terrifyingly inevitable unless we begin to notice and understand our underlying, internal conditions. So, as the P6C inquiry unfolds, we discover which portal(s) hold the key to unlocking and shifting stuck patterns. An overwhelming desire for specific Outcomes can indicate a skewed or stuck pattern. Intense desire points to strong influences from the Feelings, Fiction and Purpose portals. According to principles of non-linear causality, we hold that causes are effects and effects are causes: everything is connected to everything. Added to this, we hold that every intervention is simply an experiment with uncertain consequences. This reminds us that we can’t know for sure ahead of

time that the next portal we visit will be the key to change. Facts – Feelings – Fiction These three elements are strongly implicated in internal and relational conflict. Being able to distinguish between Facts (observable, evidenced data), Feelings (physical sensations and emotions) and the meanings (Fictions) our minds make of neutral events helps us to clarify and clean up our assumptions and interactions. This takes practice and that many people struggle to unbraid these elements is simply evidence of how our minds are hardwired to work quickly at memory recall, categorising and meaning-making to support quick reactions. I use the term ‘Fiction’ as an all-encompassing term referring to ‘what our mind “does” with the information it collects’. For example, in its fast thinking (automatic) mode it searches internal memory banks, categorises, judges, concludes, interprets, assumes, remembers, makes up stories/hypotheses etc. Kahneman⁹ refers to this as System 1 thinking. We know enough from social and behavioural sciences, psychology, neuroscience and neurochemistry to support the suggestion that this is a crucial survival mechanism. However, in many circumstances our rapid-fire assumptions can be unhelpful. We may conclude causality that is flawed, and assume intuitive responses magically to be ‘best fit’ when in fact they are simply born of repetitive practice. Imagine a tennis player: hitting the ball repeatedly forges deeper and deeper internal neurological, physiological, emotional, physical and kinaesthetic pathways and patterns that promise greater accuracy, *unless* we have developed a bad habit – a flawed pattern. Repetition drives a pattern deeper. The longer the bad habit goes unchecked, the harder it becomes to break it. In the same way, our minds can get caught in unhelpful patterns that repeatedly produce unwanted consequences. It takes conscious effort to discover what might be holding the pattern in place. One of the most powerful ways to disrupt the mind is to engage with the Feelings portal. Becoming present helps us to access ‘slow thinking’⁹ faculties, which in turn sharpen our



“My quest: how do I support others to helpfully work with complex human dynamics when what is happening in the intrapersonal space is largely in the realms of the intangible, unpredictable and seemingly unmanageable?”



abilities to notice stuck patterns and the internal conditions activating them. Practising extends us beyond usual frames of reference, opening us up to potential breakthroughs.

Decision

The flip side of the 'Decision' portal is 'Options'. Through a process of inquiry and engaging in a dialogue with the other portals, we soon discover if a presenting decision has arrived out of 'fast thinking' assumptions (unchecked and potentially ill considered). This signals the need to examine what is playing out in the other portals. Clarity emerges and often a person's decision changes. In many cases, it shifts from a one-dimensional, cognitive state into a self-evident, coherent, embodied move to action. With this degree of grounded coherence, there is no stopping the individual and usually there is no need to engage them in action planning – in fact, to do so can interrupt their liberated momentum. In the science of CAS (dissipative structures), a state of coherence emerges as a result of 'disorder' or a build-up of tension leaving/bursting out of the system. This can be a recycling tension release in a repeating pattern or a wholesale release heralding the arrival of a new pattern. It cannot be managed into being or controlled in its dissipation. When it comes, we need to get out the way and let it flow.

The P6 Constellation is radically different personal and social change technology. It enables us to work with the massively entangled web that is made up of our cognitive, emotional, physiological, physical and metaphysical states. It provides a simple, external container for an individual to work on themselves and their personal patterns, and to be partnered in this process. It offers replicability and scaleability for working with groups and organisations. It draws attention to what is present in the present, while taking account of what is present from the past and future. It helps to illuminate the unseen and unknown; and enhances one's capacity to handle the unpredictable and the confusing.

It uses simple, accessible language and draws on powerful lenses from the world of complexity sciences. Through this alchemy, it seeds

adaptive capacity, transferring the wherewithal from practitioner to client to navigate through and accelerate self-transformation.

And the answer to my question – my quest? How do I support others to helpfully work with complex human dynamics when what is happening in the intrapersonal space is largely in the realms of the intangible, unpredictable and seemingly unmanageable?

Perhaps the Potent 6 Constellation is it - at least for some, for now, for you?
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