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Value Creation in a Coach Developer Social Learning Space: Stories of openness and making a difference.

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Abstract

Previous studies concerning Coach Developer learning have demonstrated notable deficiencies in the provision offered to practitioners, commonly reporting what they experienced was prescriptive instruction of how to deliver coach education courses – a practice starkly in contrast to the espoused theoretical underpinnings of the courses themselves. This Participatory Appreciative Action and Reflection investigation (PAAR; Ghaye et al., 2008) aimed to better understand the value created for, and through, 10 participants recruited to a 9-month Coach Developer professional development programme that was designed not to prescribe, but to guide, their learning. Data were collected through individual and group interviews, field notes and professional discussions. Additionally, this study aimed to investigate the extent to which the identification of short and long value flows could provide insight into Coach Developer learning. Two main themes were constructed, namely; (a) Openness to finding new ways of developing others, and (b) Making a difference. Embracing the concepts of value creation, as well as short and long value flows, illuminated the importance of the consideration of Coach Developers' predispositions, non-prescribed guidance by programme facilitators, and the power of value creation stories. These findings illustrate how value creation concepts can potentially help to understand Coach Developer learning.

Keywords: Participatory Appreciation Action and Reflection, Social Learning Spaces, Communities of Practice, Wenger-Trayner, Landscapes of Practice

Value Creation in a Coach Developer Social Learning Space: Stories of openness and making a difference.

Research concerning Coach Developers has steadily increased in volume over the last decade (e.g., Kraft et al., 2020; North, 2010; Stodter & Cushion, 2019). A small number of studies have explicitly investigated how Coach Developers learn and have sought to inform the field as to how such practitioners might be best supported (e.g., Campbell et al., 2021; Culver et al., 2019). These studies have demonstrated notable deficiencies in the learning provision offered to Coach Developers, commonly suggesting their training amounted to little more than prescriptive instruction of how to deliver coach education courses – a practice starkly in contrast to the espoused theoretical underpinnings of many of the courses themselves (Culver et al., 2019; Stodter & Cushion, 2019). Furthermore, the vast majority of previous research has focused on broad definitions of the role of the Coach Developer, that is, encompassing all functions relating to supporting the learning of sport coaches including mentors, coach education tutors, and assessors (International Council for Coaching Excellence, 2012; Partington et al., 2022). Insightful research on broad function of coach development has been conducted in numerous countries around the world including New Zealand (Fyall et al., 2023), the USA (Kuklick & Mills, 2023) and Brazil (Ciampolini et al., 2022). However, the role of the Coach Developer has, in some UK contexts, been defined quite differently. For example, through a collaborative partnership including UK Sport, Sport England, the English Institute for Sport, and UK Coaching, the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA), was commissioned to publish a Professional Standard for Coach Developers (Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity, 2021) that offers a much narrower perspective on the role. The Professional Standard identified Coach Developers as “expert support professionals who plan for, implement, and sustain strategies and interventions in support of skilled performance in sport coaching” (CIMSPA, 2021, p. 4). Such a definition distances the role of Coach Developer from that of coach educator or assessor and implies more longitudinal and, crucially, *in-situ* support. Inevitably, very little of the research investigating Coach Developer learning has

considered the role from this narrower perspective thus highlighting the lack of underpinning empirical work relevant to this investigation. Resultantly, the first aim of this investigation was to better understand the value created for, and through, participants recruited to a Coach Developer learning programme founded on this narrower perspective and delivered by the second author in his capacity whilst a Senior Coach Developer at UK Coaching. The second aim of the present study was to investigate the extent to which the identification of short and long value flows could provide insight into Coach Developer learning.

Value Creation in Social Learning Spaces

It is first important to outline the theoretical constructs on which the study is based. We will then discuss some of the core components of this theoretical perspective, offering definitions where needed, before introducing how the present investigation will address some of the gaps identified by recent research that has sought to apply these ideas. For the purposes of the present investigation, we adopted Wenger-Trayner et al.'s (2015) social theory of learning. Building on previous iterations of their thinking (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020, p. 34) proposed their social theory of learning to feature "value creation in social learning spaces" as the central construct. A social learning space is a group of practitioners who come together because they care to make a difference in a particular context, engage their uncertainty, and pay attention to data (Kraft & Culver, 2021). This is a discrete concept from a Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998), which is a more distinct, stable, and abiding social structure. Within social learning spaces, value creation is the negotiation of meaning assigned by an individual to either explicit or tacit phenomena (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Therefore, individual practitioners determine what is of value. Such phenomena could be, for example, a promising idea, getting to know a useful contact, or adopting a new tool that fundamentally re-shapes their practice (Culver et al., 2020). Social learning is ultimately concerned with the becoming of the person within the context of the difference they care to make (Vinson et al., 2023). For Coach Developers, becoming refers to learning that transcends the accumulation of knowledge and

qualifications, embraces all social interactions, and is concerned with the fulfilment of their human potential (Jarvis, 2009). In proposing an approach for constructing such valuable learning communities, Gilbert et al. (2009) offered five elements to facilitate successful collaboration, namely; (a) stable settings dedicated to learning and instruction, (b) job alike teams, (c) protocols which guide but do not prescribe, (d) trained peer facilitators, and (e) working on student learning goals until there are tangible gains in student learning. Taken together, all these theoretical constructs illustrate that value creation should not be seen as an individual or introspective process but as one that takes investment, time, planning, and, most importantly, collaboration (Culver et al., 2020).

Numerous studies have been conducted investigating the effectiveness of learning communities through the concept of value creation. Several of these studies have utilised the Value Creation Framework (VCF) to help frame their respective investigations (e.g., Bowles & O'Dwyer, 2021; Duarte et al., 2021). First published by Wenger et al. (2011), the VCF was intended to assist stakeholders in better understanding the contribution social learning experiences have in helping a practitioner to make a difference in their chosen context. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020) extended the underpinning theoretical justification for value creation and confirmed the extension of the framework from five to eight value cycles (see Figure 1). The cycles are listed here with an illustration of what each might include in the current context: (1) Immediate value: Relates to Coach Developers' experience within a social learning space; (2) Potential value: To what extent do Coach Developers gain knowledge, networks, and/or resources that they might apply at some stage?; (3) Applied value: Do the Coach Developers use any of the potential value in their current practice?; (4) Realized value: Demonstrable change in their coaches' practice; (5) Enabling value: What has helped Coach Developers become better at supporting their athletes' learning? (6) Strategic value: The extent to which the programme has helped Coach Developers to better understand and influence the motivations of stakeholders connected to the organizations with whom they work; (7) Orienting value: Relates to how a Coach Developer perceives their place within

their broader professional landscape; (8) Transformative: Has the programme helped the Coach Developers to think very differently about their practice or about what they consider to be success?

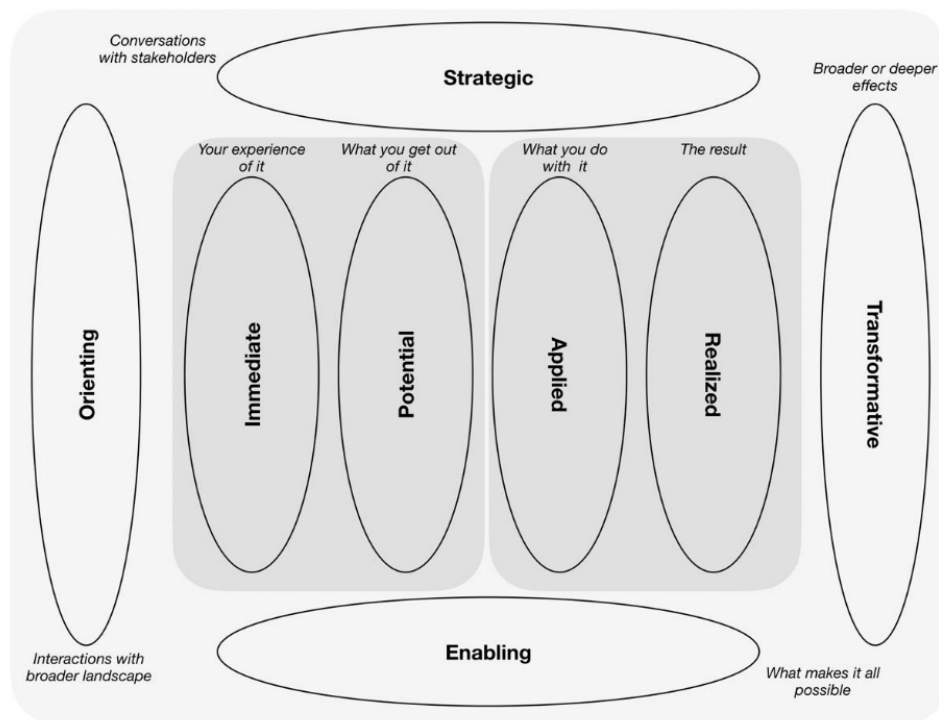


Figure 1: *The Value Creation Framework* (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020, p. 75)

Research utilizing the VCF to date has generally affirmed the usefulness of the tool, although the authors of each study reported their own respective significant limitation. For example, Kraft et al. (2020) investigated a training programme for women Coach Developers and identified a range of support factors at micro, meso, and macro levels that enabled the creation of value. However, Kraft et al. (2020) focused only on part of the VCF – namely, immediate, potential and applied value. Similarly, Duarte et al. (2021) focused primarily on strategic and enabling value in studying the creation of a social learning space for wheelchair curling coaches. Bertram et al. (2016), Bertram et al. (2017), Rodrigue et al. (2019), and Vinson et al. (2019) all identified value across the first five cycles of the VCF. However, in all four studies, less realized value was reported than was apparent in other cycles. Additionally, although all four studies acknowledged that data should not be considered in isolation, they predominantly reported the elements separately – for example, presenting immediate value as distinct from all other cycles. It is beyond the scope of this

investigation to address all these gaps and so we have delimited this study to specifically address the issue of isolated value cycles by further exploring the concept of short and long value flows.

Short and Long Value Flows

Central to Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2020) evolution of their theory was the concept of flow through value creation cycles. Learning activities, and the value created, should not be seen in any way as isolated occurrences, but as part of a flow across more than one cycle. Flow is evident when a particular insight can be shown to demonstrate further value in a different cycle (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). For example, a Coach Developer who is introduced to a new idea (i.e., potential value) by another member of the social learning space and subsequently tries-out that idea in practice (i.e., applied value). This example is of a short flow - just two cycles; however, flows can also feature many more cycles, can demonstrate value in the same cycle more than once, and can occur in any order (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Longer flows can be told as Value Creation stories and are common ways in which the value generated through engagement with a social learning space is reported. Value creation stories have been utilized in research spanning the fields of leisure (Hanley et al., 2018), educational technology (Booth & Kellogg, 2015), financial governance (Wenger-Trayner, 2017), and adult education (Guldberg et al., 2021), and have been shown to demonstrate potential to capture short and long flows. Value creation stories, represented as longer value flows, have not yet been utilized in sport research. Additionally, flows that are presented back to other members of the social learning space have the potential to become what Wenger-Trayner et al. (2019, p. 323) conceptualized as a learning loop. For example, a Coach Developer receives some advice from another member of the social learning space regarding how to help the coach they are supporting deal with conflict between athletes. The Coach Developer applies this advice to good effect and so perceives value in the practice (i.e., a short flow is created). Subsequently, the Coach Developer shares how they applied the advice, and the good effect, with the other Coach Developers in the social learning space – and thus a loop has been created. Therefore, flows are where value has been derived in one cycle and has fed another. Loops

are where the flow has been re-presented to members of the social learning space. These learning loops can be short or long. Such is the importance of these concepts that Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020, p. 133) stated “the question for cultivating a social learning space is how to systematically transform flows into loops” (see Figure 2).

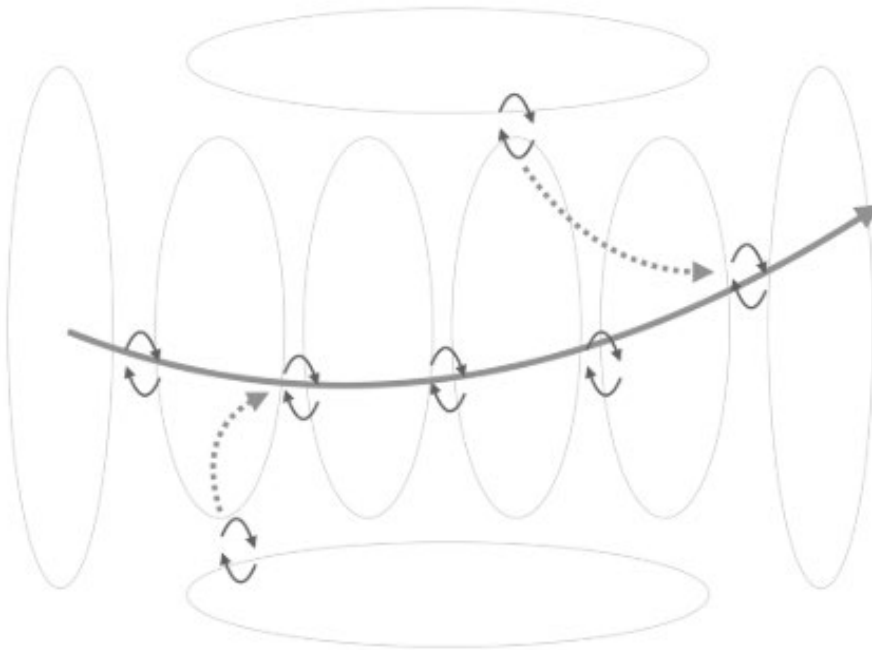


Figure 2: Short loops propel the flow (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020, p. 138)

This conceptualization of loops differs from other learning models (e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1974; Kolb, 1984) because they are not necessarily cyclical and the starting point can be any cycle in the framework. Argyris and Schön’s (1974) model was applied by Partington et al. (2022) to help understand the distinction between Coach Developer’s espoused theories of practice and their everyday application of learning principles. While related, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020, p. 149) contended their conceptualization of loops was distinct from such models because of the focus on “paying attention to value flows as a way to facilitate social learning” – frequently through value creation stories. Value creation stories are a narrative of what, and how, value has been generated. Stodter and Cushion (2014, p. 75) identified a “double-loop” learning process which they applied to coaches and, subsequently, to Coach Developers (see Stodter & Cushion,

2019). Stodter and Cushion's (2014) use of loops is largely focused on the individual's discernment and reflection, albeit acknowledging sociocultural influences. This is, again, quite different to the present conceptualization where a loop is considered to be a mediating device that is part of the collective learning trajectory of the social learning space. Therefore, these ideas potentially offer insights to help fulfil the second aim of the present investigation – that is, to investigate the extent to which the identification of short and long value flows could provide insight into Coach Developer learning.

Methodology and Methods

Consistent with an epistemological perspective embracing Deweyan Pragmatism (Dewey, 1938) and contemporary constructivism (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2019), a Participatory and Appreciative Action and Reflection (PAAR) methodology (Ghaye et al., 2008) was implemented over the course of a year comprising the nine-month duration of the learning programme and a subsequent three-month period to complete the final reflective stages. PAAR investigations have been prominent in the care industry (see, for example, James et al., 2014; McKeown et al., 2016), although have also featured in recent sport research (Navin et al., 2020). PAAR methodology is participatory. As researchers in the current investigation, we were actively involved in the life of the programme including attending face-to-face and online workshops, leading discussions about the value being generated, engaging in informal discussions with programme participants, in addition to the more formal data collection methods described below. PAAR is appreciative in terms of the overt focus on the elements of the programme that were positive and brought life to group; this is in stark contrast to the focus on deficits and problems-to-fix so often apparent in programme evaluation (Cushion et al., 2022). Ghaye et al. (2008) described PAAR as an evolved form of action research but one that retains the participants' contribution as workers who dynamically adjust and enhance their practice throughout the process. Finally, PAAR is reflective in its commitment to four processes; namely (a) developing an appreciative gaze, (b) reframing the lived experience, (c) building practical wisdom, and (d) demonstrating achievement and moving forward (Ghaye et al.,

2008). Whilst these processes may well be deployed chronologically, they are not intended to warrant distinct phases; indeed, Ghaye et al. (2008) explicitly distanced PAAR from the stages, spirals and cycles which action research normatively features.

Programme and Participants

Ten UK-based Coach Developers (three female, seven male) were recruited to the learning programme having been recommended by a member of their respective National Governing Body of sport. All participants had some experience of being a Coach Developer although varied considerably in this regard from relative novices to those who had been supporting coaches in various capacities for many years. The second author was the programme designer with ten years' experience of delivering this type of learning experience. The second author conducted an informal interview with each participant prior to their enrolment on the programme to ensure their suitability including a willingness to learn and to engage in discussion with peers. This interview was also used to identify between one and three coaches with whom the Coach Developer worked and that they would commit to supporting over the course of the programme. The Coach Developers were drawn from a variety of sports including netball, rugby union, boxing, swimming, judo, para swimming, rowing, and canoeing. The programme comprised four face-to-face workshops of one or two days, supplemented by two online webinars, all coordinated by the second author (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Programme timeline

The programme curriculum was relatively flexible and highly discursive. It also included introducing the group to several models and thinking tools that the participants could use. Typical

learning activities included Action Learning sets (Revens, 1982), peer interviews, and whole group discussion. The models included the Coaching Planning and Reflective Practice Framework (Muir et al., 2011), the “Who, What, How” coaching framework (Muir et al., 2011; Till et al., 2019), the Behavioral Change Stairway model (see Vecchi et al., 2005), the Johari Window (Luft & Ingham, 1955), as well as a range of reflective approaches. Selecting which elements of the curriculum to use was left to each Coach Developer. Each participant was allocated a Senior Coach Developer to support their learning away from the programme in whatever capacity they both considered appropriate. Finally, an online virtual learning environment was utilized as a repository for information and to generate further discussion between events. The first and third author were invited to contribute to the programme from the first face-to-face event; the theoretical tenants of social learning spaces were not considered by the second author (programme designer) until that point, although he had previously engaged with the VCF on other projects.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Data were generated via a series of individual and group interviews, professional reflective discussions, and field notes collected by the first author. Four group interviews were conducted by the first and third author during two of the face-to-face days; two at the midpoint and two on the final day. These group interviews each featured four or five Coach Developers (duration $M=37.50 \pm 10.52$ mins), asking the participants to discuss their experiences of applying forms of value they had derived from the course to their everyday practice. These group interviews immediately followed a short workshop task relating to the VCF led by the first and third authors. Each Coach Developer was also interviewed individually following the conclusion of the programme regarding their learning experiences (duration $M=47.12 \pm 11.44$ mins). One Coach Developer chose to be interviewed face-to-face; the others opted for an online video interview. A formal reflective discussion between the three authors was held following the completion of all the interviews focused on the value derived through the programme, the accumulated practical wisdom, and how our collective practice could move forward (duration 101 mins). This meeting supplemented the frequent, informal, professional

reflective discussions that had been held throughout the programme. Field notes were collected by the first author throughout the workshops, webinars, and professional reflective discussions. All interviews and the formal professional reflective discussion were transcribed verbatim whilst the field notes were written-up into text. In total 42,891 words spanning 318 double-spaced A4 pages were included in the analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed following reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022) organized via NVivo 12 Pro (QSR International, 2020) and comprised six stages. Reflexive thematic analysis was chosen due to the theoretical fit with the epistemological position of this investigation – namely Deweyan Pragmatism (Dewey, 1938) and contemporary constructivism (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2019). Furthermore, reflexive thematic analysis allowed us to adopt both inductive and deductive processes; the latter enabled the critical consideration of how the eight value cycles of the VCF illuminated the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2020; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2019). Finally, our active involvement in programme delivery and data collection sits comfortably alongside the requirement of reflexive thematic analysis to acknowledge and problematize the researcher's influence in the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The first stage comprised developing a deep familiarity with the data; each element was read three times and notes were attached to relevant files and others written in a notebook. Stage two comprised systematic data coding and featured line-by-line allocation of initial meaning units based on the judgment of the first author as to the most important elements (Robson & McCartan, 2016). During this phase, flows were identified as being as short or long (i.e., value creation stories). Some lines were allocated several meaning units; others none at all. The third stage, namely generating initial themes, remained inductive and involved considering how the initial meaning units might be meaningfully grouped together. As a result of this process, 51 initial themes were created. Stage four, developing and reviewing themes, comprised considering whether the 51 initial themes could be aligned deductively to the eight cycles of the VCF; 49 were allocated in this way. Some

themes were placed relatively exclusively against one value cycle, others straddled two or three. Stage five – “refining, defining and naming themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 331), comprised examining the relationship between the deductive themes to identify flows and loops. Names were assigned to the most pertinent themes considered to best represent patterns of shared meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The first round of analysis was completed by the first author in isolation before the third author was used as a critical friend to interrogate the outcome. As a result of this critical friend reflexive conversation, a small number of identified flows were removed because the relationship between the elements of value was not considered to be sufficiently strong. Stage six comprises writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Finally, following feedback from the reviewers of this paper, we reflected on the names we had allocated to the themes and made some adjustments to the language we had used. The new names aimed to enhance the immediate comprehensibility of our findings although the substantive underpinning ideas were not changed.

Rigor

Ghaye et al. (2008) proposed the concepts of inclusivity, emotional engagement, understandability, mutualism, transformation, communicative freedom, and moral courage should be considered when evaluating the rigor of PAAR investigations. This investigation will have demonstrated inclusivity if the reader considers that the appreciative nature of this project is the result of the consideration of perspectives from a wide range of participants. We will seek to show something of the emotional labor involved as the Coach Developers wrestled with new perspectives – this will demonstrate emotional engagement. Understandability, mutualism, and transformation will be shown through an interdependent narrative that enables the development of practice to be based on new insights. Rigorous PAAR investigations require such progress to be ethical, sustainable, and courageous; for the participants to be committed to different ways of doing that are more than mere tinkering at the edges. The interdependent nature of the PAAR process acknowledges our own involvement in every aspect as a positive element of the research design. In terms of our own positionality, we are aware that aligning with PAAR enhances the likelihood of

finding value creation stories that are positive. Whilst this is a limitation of the study, we do not consider it to be a weakness. Rather, as with other strengths-based methodologies, we consider that focusing on what gives life to a social learning space provides a much stronger platform for facilitating courageous, ethical and impactful forward journeys (Sargent & Casey, 2021). Except for our own, all names reported are pseudonyms. Finally, as Wenger-Trayner et al. (2019) make clear, the flows presented here are not considered to be causal in a positivistic sense. Rather, following the process of rigorous analysis and appreciative reflection, they are proposed as plausible generative relationships that provide the foundation for learning.

Results and Discussion

Two main themes were constructed and are offered to best illustrate the patterns of shared meaning evident within the data and are underpinned by the central organizing concept of value creation (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2019). The first main theme is: Openness to finding new ways of developing others; the second is: Making a difference. Each main theme is presented with the most illustrative flows in the form of quotations from Coach Developers that address the aims of the investigation; (a) to better understand the value created for, and through, participants recruited to a Coach Developer non-formal learning programme and (b) to investigate the extent to which the identification of short and long value flows could provide insight into Coach Developer learning. The quotations are discussed in relation to the flow of value evident and are critiqued with respect to related literature. The intent here is primarily to show how the lenses of value creation, and of short and long value flows, can illuminate the largely familiar substantive accounts of Coach Developer learning – and so meet the aims of the current investigation.

Openness to finding new ways of developing others

This first main theme demonstrates how the theoretical concepts encapsulating value creation can help illuminate something of the Coach Developers' (pre)disposition to learning and how this led to an enthusiasm to apply some of the tools to which they were introduced with the coaches they were supporting. For several Coach Developers this open disposition, and a willingness

to experiment with original ideas, helped them reach new understandings of their role. For some Coach Developers this learning reframed their understanding of the purpose of their role and so also demonstrates transformative value (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2019). The quotations presented in relation to this theme illustrate relatively short flows. Nonetheless, because they capture flow, it is necessary to present several sentences at a time to demonstrate how value cycles are connected. For example, several Coach Developers recognized that the nature of this non-formal programme was different from other professional development they had experienced. Ian (Boxing) said:

The programme was vulnerably awkward for me, very much, and still was on the very last day when I'm lying on the floor thinking, "What am I doing here?" Every time I went there, I was made to feel vulnerable. When I went away, I felt really grateful for what I'd just done. As much as I openly say I don't enjoy that vulnerability, it made me better. I know how much that developed me, how much that took me out of my comfort zone, how much that made me interact. If we hadn't had that encouragement to be more open and put ourselves out there, to be vulnerable, I think we wouldn't have developed. That definitely, for me, was what the course was all about. Every time I went, I came away excited with something new. The programme, totally, has developed me in how I develop coaches.

Ian's testimony demonstrates a short flow from immediate to potential value. Immediate value is evident in his acknowledged emotions – vulnerability and gratitude. For Ian, these emotions were positive and helped to shape his disposition to the learning environment. This finding is consistent with Bruner's (2004) suggestion that learners' inclinations may well be one of the most powerful factors influencing value generation. Furthermore, both Partington et al. (2022) and Vinson et al. (2023) identified that cultural and political factors played an important role in shaping the (pre)disposition of Coach Developers and so required considerable skill on the part of the respective course designers to successfully navigate through the ensuing challenges. For Ian, vulnerability and gratitude led to an openness to learn, stimulated interaction, and underpinned an excitement about

the impending application of new ideas – thus demonstrating potential value. Ian’s perception of vulnerability may have been accentuated because he had a strong expectation of what to expect from the programme built on many years of experience. On entering the room on the first day Ian said he was thinking “here we go again; coach education”; yet his expectations were immediately challenged. Indeed, Cushion et al.’s (2003) assertion that most coach learning programmes insufficiently consider prior experiences remains a pertinent challenge to educators.

For the Coach Developers who entered the programme with a positive disposition to learning, several were keen to find ways to apply new ideas with the coaches they were supporting. For example, Thierry (Para swimming) said:

I actually took the “Who, What, How” model to use ... Simply; who am I coach developing? What do we need to develop them in? How am I going to do it? From that, I built a framework. Who? It’s the national programme. What? As in topics, areas of development, such as technical or behaviours or whatever they are. How? How it’s going to be delivered, whether it be workshops, presentations, one-to-one. ... I’ve also applied that model on a one-to-one basis, trying to get to know them [coaches] a little bit better. That was the first thing I did. I took that model and applied and built a framework around it. It was really good.

Thierry’s work with the “Who, What, How” model (Muir et al., 2011; Till et al., 2019) demonstrates the short flow of potential to applied value. In this example, potential value is represented by learning about the model and applied value is represented by its use in both his national programme and at an individual level. It is important to note that while the application of these ideas resides in Thierry’s applied role away from the programme, the value created relevant to this investigation is considered through the lens of the Coach Developers’ social learning space (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). In contrast to the Coach Developers in Partington et al.’s (2022) investigation, Thierry appeared to find the application of theory to practice relatively straightforward and did not appear to be encumbered by the political landscape in which he worked. This is an

example of “boundary permeability” (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011, p. 144), where working practices have been negotiated to be relatively seamless in their application from one context to another. Akkerman and Bakker (2011) suggested that such a desirable situation required aligned investment from stakeholders within both contexts. In this case, Thierry was able to operate in this way because of the strong support he received from his line manager; he was not subject to the scepticism that has been identified in other investigations (e.g., Armour et al., 2016; Townsend & Cushion, 2017). The acceptance and application of theoretical models has not always been reported so smoothly. For example, Redgate et al. (2020) examined how a postgraduate diploma enhanced the practice of Coach Developers working for the (English) Football Association, and also highlighted the importance of introducing practitioners to models, yet discovered such theories were often not used by participants if they did not align with their own beliefs or micropolitical contexts.

Our findings also illustrate a plausible relationship between applied and transformative value. For example, Sarah (netball), said:

I think in the first workshop we had some models to help us to plan our observations and discussions when we met with coaches. I found those quite simple to understand and apply so, it's that model when you meet a coach, you don't just think how you are going to develop but to really seek to understand who they are and what they need to develop before you get to the how. I am such a pragmatic person I would usually get to the how first; I would want to get to the solution you know rather than slowing down that pace and spending more time on the who and the what. So that was a bit of a revelation for me a bit of an eye opener of how I had been operating and how I could change the way I operate when I meet coaches ... So that really helped me, and it is something I have been using when I am meeting coaches and when I am starting to form these relationships.

Similar to Ian and Thierry, Sarah's open disposition to finding ways to develop others is evident here – apparent in the speed with which she applied some new ideas. Whilst Sarah is also discussing the

“Who, What, How” model (Muir et al., 2011; Till et al., 2019), she describes the impact of its application in more transformative terms. For Sarah, adopting a person-first approach represented a significant reframing of her professional practice as a Coach Developer. This revelation is commensurate with Wenger’s (1998) conceptualisation of learning as much more than the acquisition of knowledge (i.e., practice). Indeed, Sarah is beginning to appreciate the importance of the becoming of the coaches she is supporting (Vinson et al., 2023), where they belong, and the meaning they ascribe to their experiences (Culver et al., 2020). Furthermore, the element of Sarah’s learning that was transformative to her practice as a Coach Developer was not prescribed but was undeniably guided. The model was introduced through the programme; however, the decision regarding whether or not to use it was left to each Coach Developer. Additionally, Sarah’s deployment of the model was supported by her Senior Coach Developer. This finding resonates strongly with Gilbert et al.’s (2009) proposition that programmes should feature protocols which guide but do not prescribe.

Research into coach learning has been critical of formal education programmes – often because the participants said they learnt relatively little when compared to their experiential learning outside the confines of course delivery and that curriculum content often did not fit the coaches’ practice context (Dempsey et al., 2020; Piggott, 2012). A strength of the social learning approach is that non-prescribed value is celebrated and would likely be downplayed or ignored by programmes built on constructively aligned curriculum content or rigid competencies (Lyle, 2021; Nelson, 2018). Indeed, much of the value presented in this investigation is founded on interactions away from the collective gathering of the social learning space. Nonetheless, the value we are ascribing is considered through the lens of the programme social learning space. In this section we have shown that applied value was closely associated with the Coach Developers’ positive disposition to finding new ways to develop others. These applications sometimes created a flow to transformative value from the perspective of the Coach Developers because they recognized, they had triggered a significant reframing of their understanding of the purpose of their professional

practice. In each case the value creation concepts have been useful in illuminating aspects of the Coach Developers' learning.

Making a difference

This section features four value creation stories. These are four examples established through the data analysis process as being the most meaningful to convey. The stories feature an extended quotation that is augmented by patterned underlining that illustrates the value cycle represented by that element of the story. The patterns are (1) Immediate; large dots, (2) Potential; short dashes, (3) Applied; long dashes, (4) Realized; thin continuous line, (5) Enabling; dash-dot-dot, (6) Strategic; double line, (7) Orienting; large dots, (8) Transformative; thick continuous line. To the side, arrows indicate short flows that, taken together, comprise the long flow represented by the story. Learning loops are indicated to the side of the quotation where applicable. Each value creation story should be understood as an example of how the Coach Developer in question derived value from their interaction with the programme.

Mark's value creation story (Figure 3) is a relatively smooth journey through four cycles akin to what Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020, p. 253) would call "classic flow" – moving from left to right across the VCF. Mark's opening statement, relating to the recognition of his "bias", reflects orienting value because it represents a shift in his thinking concerning his interaction with his broader landscape – in this case, the coaches he observes and supports. Mark recognized that he needed to find a way to approach interactions with the coaches he develops differently – and this led to him embracing the Behavioral Change Stairway model (known to the group as the "FBI" model - see, Vecchi et al., 2005) as a prospective vehicle for change (i.e., potential value). Mark then describes the application of the model (i.e., applied value), before highlighting his perception of the positive effect it had on the coach in terms of her positive teaching review founded on her enhanced ability to manage difficult groups, as well as her heightened confidence and happiness (i.e., realized value). Whilst relatively simple, Mark's story represents an unusual piece of empirical evidence in that it directly connects the potential value of a model discovered through a non-formal learning

programme to both applied and realized value (Lyle, 2021). In particular, Mark’s testimony extends previous research utilizing the VCF (e.g., Bertram et al., 2017; Vinson et al., 2019), as it presents potential evidence of the improved practice of the coach.

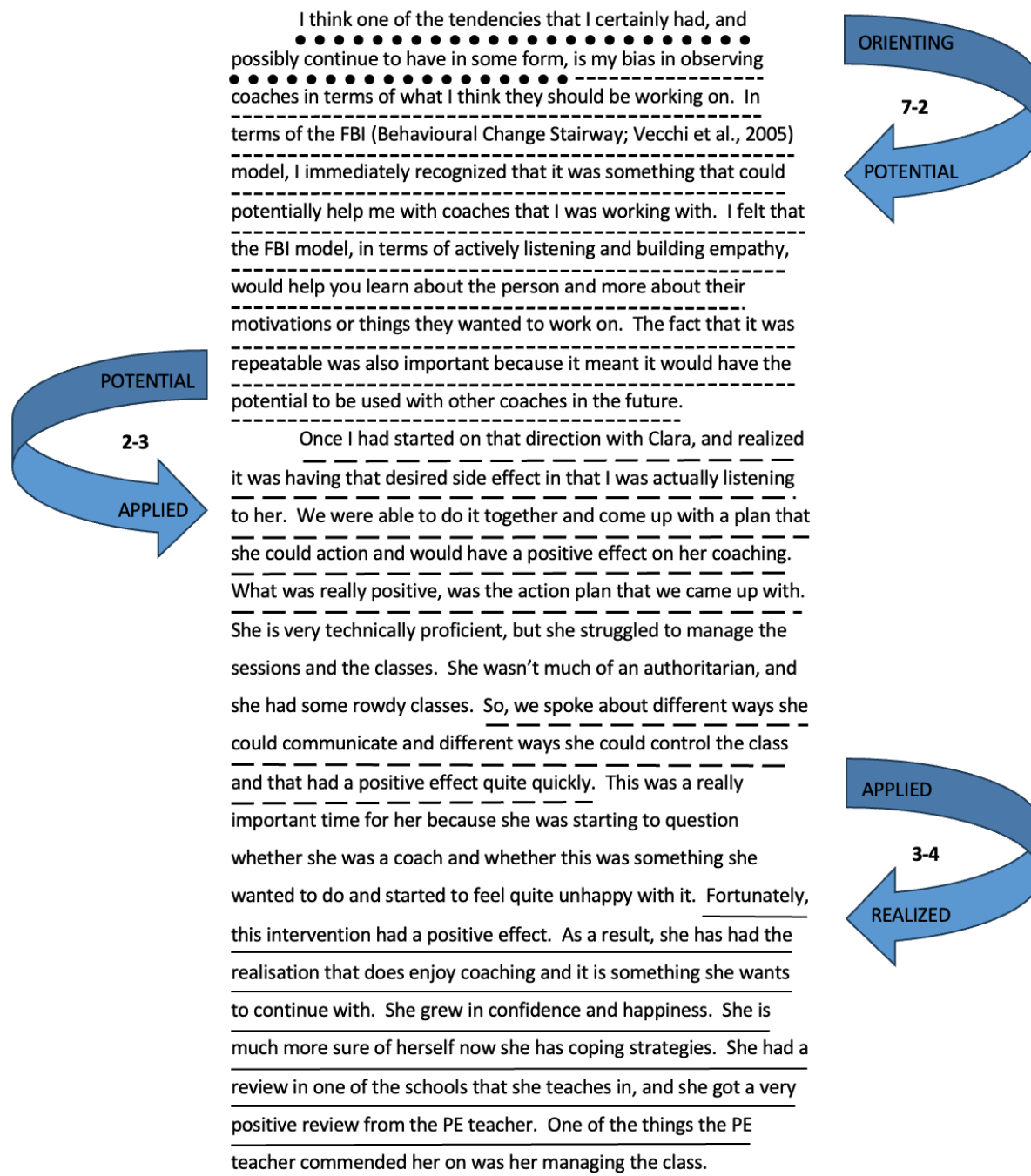


Figure 3: Mark’s value creation story

For example, Bertram et al. (2017) reported that coaches recruited to a university Community of Practice perceived improved relationships with their athletes (i.e., enhanced practice). The positive

teaching review cited within Mark's story, alongside enhanced confidence and happiness, represent outcomes – albeit the latter elements are only perceptions and would be strengthened through, for example, triangulation of data (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Furthermore, Mark's value story addresses Phelan and Griffith's (2019, p. 120) concern relating to situated learning theories which insufficiently consider the balance between a social world that "writes itself onto individual persons" and the agentic actors in the field. Whilst undoubtedly situated, Mark, and the coach, are agentic actors in their developmental stories (Mallett & Coulter, 2016). These findings also resonate strongly with Griffiths et al. (2018) who posited that effective professional development required both legitimacy and the construction of a personal experience. Toby's value creation story also touches upon legitimacy as well as experiential learning.

Toby's first value creation story (Figure 4) is a more complex, longer, flow because several cycles are revisited through the journey. At the outset of the story, Toby related how he shared a problematic situation with the group. This represented immediate value because Toby felt the process of sharing was valuable in and of itself – that is, he felt he was able to discuss his professional practice challenge with a group of supportive others who were sympathetic to his situation. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2021) contend that such forms of immediate value are important although are not commonly acknowledged as such within professional development research (Lyle, 2021). In this case, forming positive prosocial foundations among the group was important to facilitating the flow to potential value. Toby felt better disposed to accept the perspectives of the other group members because of the time they had taken to share their problems and form a degree of social bond. The importance of these strong interpersonal foundations reflect numerous other investigations founded on the constructions of social learning spaces (Bertram et al., 2016; Kraft et al., 2020; Trudel et al., 2022). Toby's journey then quickly flows through to applied value (i.e., he tried out the suggestions), to realized value (i.e., he perceived he made progress with the problem coach).

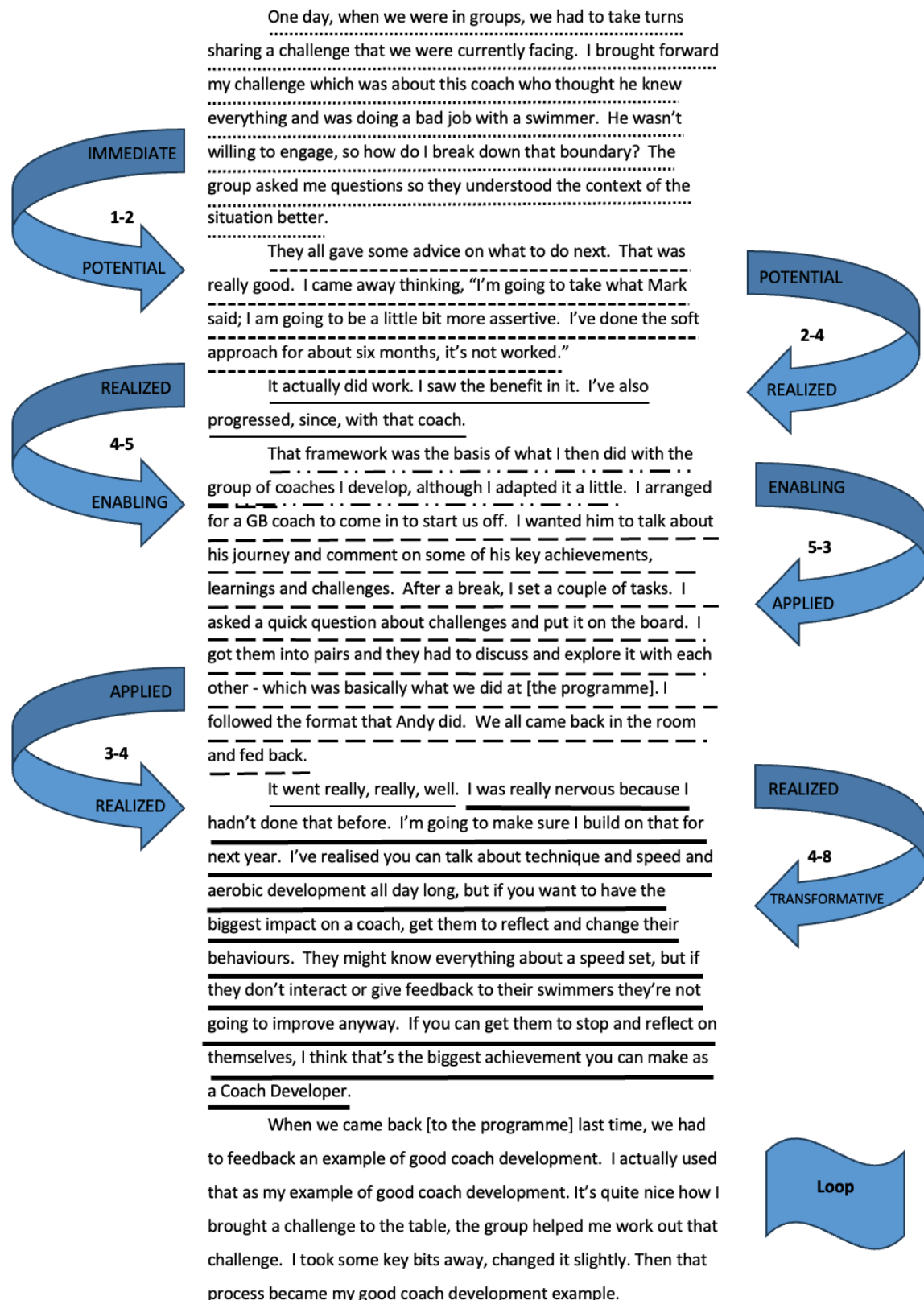


Figure 4: Toby's value creation story 1

Because Toby perceived this process was successful, he stored the method for future use. In this way enabling value was demonstrated because he had learnt how to better facilitate social learning. These findings contribute to the nascent body of research investigating the effective facilitation of social learning spaces and further affirm the importance of such mediators in generating broader social learning capability (Duarte et al., 2021). Toby then describes his application of the amended method (i.e., applied value), briefly notes its success (i.e., realized value) before outlining how the whole flow had led to a significant shift in his perception of quality Coach Developer practice (i.e., transformative value). In this instance, Toby highlights that he has come to believe the process of effective coach development is more strongly aligned to engaging practitioners with reflective practice than it is to the delivery of technical and bioscientific knowledge – a position that comfortably aligns with a wide range of coach learning research (e.g., Ciampolini et al., 2022; Cushion et al., 2022; Fyall et al., 2023; Partington et al., 2022; Trudel et al., 2022). This was transformative for Toby. Finally, Toby discusses how he relayed this example back to the group of Coach Developers – an example of a learning loop enriched with the added value of having been applied and adapted in practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Whilst Toby's story features a series of small flows, Emma's value creation story (Figure 5) is unusual in that it features a considerable jump from immediate to transformative value before flowing through applied to realized and then back to applied value.

Emma's story begins with a description of her interaction with Andy and with other members of the programme. This interaction demonstrates immediate value in that it served to create a positive relationship between her and the group. The exchange also radically altered her perspective of Coach Development. The interaction resulted in transformative value because she realized that she was legitimately allowed to offer a point of challenge to push the coaches she supports beyond what they found comfortable. Recently, Culver et al. (2021) sought to counter some aspects of social learning practice that they considered to constitute common misconceptions – such as that positive interpersonal foundations can lead to a lack of challenge and criticality.

Culver et al. (2021) argued social learning spaces should be places where participants could challenge both knowledge and applied boundaries in their practice.

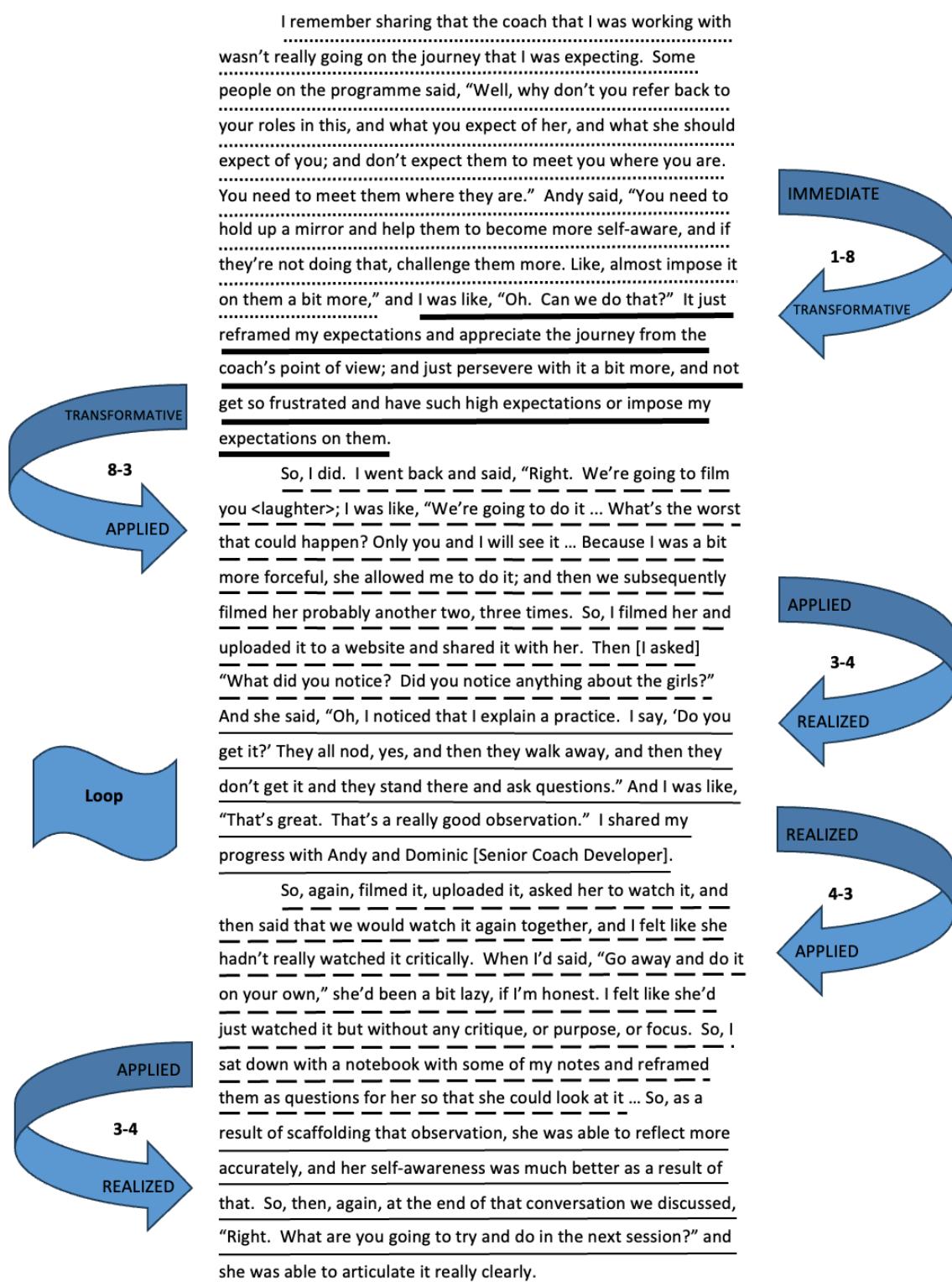


Figure 5: Emma's value creation story

Emma's story offers a small contribution to recognizing the place of challenge within social learning spaces. After each application of the reflective video task, Emma described realized value in the form of the coach's accurate assessment of her practice, greater self-awareness, and her articulation of an actionable way forward.

Toby's second value creation story (Figure 6) relays an array of value derived from his interaction with his Senior Coach Developer. In their particular relationship, Toby's Senior Coach Developer operated in a largely mentoring capacity in that it did not involve the direct observation of practice or close involvement with the learning programme (Jones et al., 2009; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). The Senior Coach Developer's approach to questioning Toby's practice built a considerable volume of potential value as Toby constructed numerous tools and perspectives that he intended to apply to his future work. This potential yielded transformative value in that he came to the realization that his support of coaches was founded on an inefficient and unsustainable balance of labor. Unique to Toby's second story is the Senior Coach Developer's ability to generate strategic value by extending Toby's professional network (Duarte et al., 2021). By facilitating connections to professionals to whom otherwise Toby would not have had access, the Senior Coach Developer enabled him to broaden the range of stakeholders aware of his work. This finding reinforces the importance of the role of mentors and Senior Coach Developers in furthering strategic relationships (Vinson et al., 2021). That very few examples of strategic value were evident in this investigation supports Duarte et al.'s (2021) findings that not only is this one of the scarcest forms of value, but may also take considerable experience and expertise to facilitate.

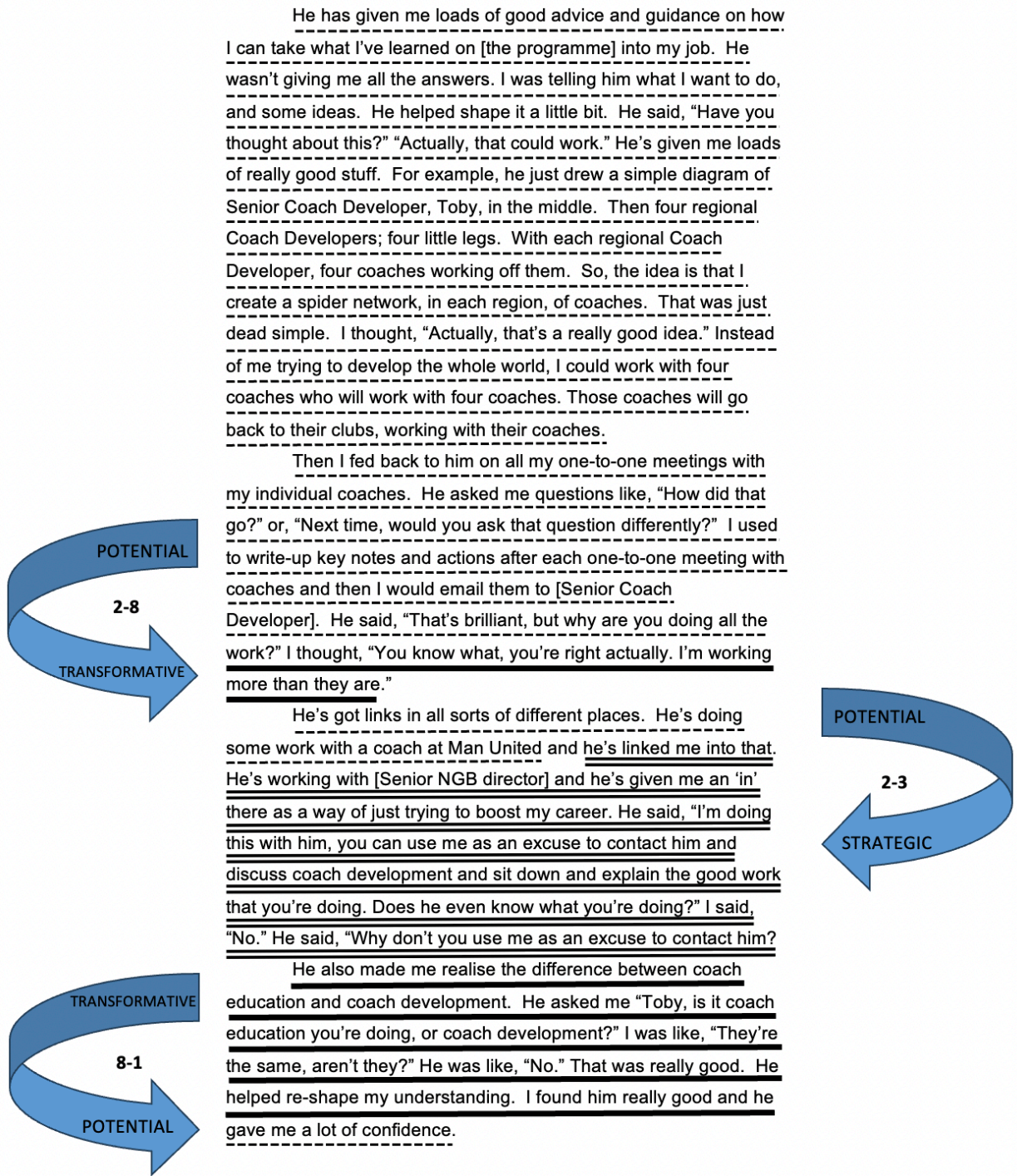


Figure 6: Toby's value creation story 2

Conclusion

The aims of this investigation were to use Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2020) social theory of learning to help better understand the value created for, and through, participants recruited to a Coach Developer professional development programme. Furthermore, we aimed to investigate the extent to which the identification of short and long value flows could provide insight into Coach Developer learning. Many of the stories we have reported will feel familiar to those with experience of coach education and development. Our aims reflect the intent to show how such stories can be viewed, and further illuminated, through value creation concepts. Therefore, in concluding this investigation, we assert four pertinent insights generated by our findings; (a) considering short and long learning flows has illuminated the importance of Coach Developers' (pre)dispositions to learning; (b) transformative value is often not prescribed but is guided; (c) value flows are generated through strong interpersonal relationships that provide important foundations for critical discussion; (d) Value Creation stories provide powerful learning insights.

Firstly, for the Coach Developers featured in this investigation, their learning was meaningful and, in some instances, transformative. This was particularly true for the Coach Developers who entered the space with an openness to learn (e.g., Ian, Thierry, Sarah). This predisposition, which manifested in this investigation partially as orienting value and sometimes as potential value, fed a willingness to apply ideas generated from within the programme to their work with the coaches they were supporting (i.e, applied value). The designer's work prior to the start of the programme included overt consideration of the Coach Developers' disposition to learning and how they would action ideas discussed within the programme social learning space, was extremely valuable.

Secondly, whilst there were some aspects of the Coach Developers' learning that derived from curriculum content, the nature of the space also enabled unprescribed (but guided) value to be generated, and acknowledged, as meaningful (e.g., Ian, Sarah, Toby). Social learning encourages practitioners to embrace unprescribed, but guided, experiential learning and to acknowledge it as a

legitimate and important part of the life of any learning journey (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020).

Thirdly, this investigation has underlined the importance of facilitating strong interpersonal relationships among the group in order to provide a platform for generating value flows (e.g., Sarah, Toby). The strong interpersonal relationships, introducing curriculum content with a light touch, and encouraging participants to try-out the elements that appear interesting, also provided the potential to create a learning loop – that is, for Coach Developers (e.g., Toby and Emma) to share aspects of their practice on which they have been working with the group for further discussion. The power of learning loops has only been touched-upon through this investigation. While the identification of learning loops from this theoretical perspective represents an original contribution to Coach Developer research, we have not been able to report much about the way in which they subsequently helped the group to derive further value, nor the nature of the learning potential generated by having been applied and brought back to the group. Future investigations should consider the nature and influence of learning loops much more profoundly.

Finally, the use of value creation stories has proved an effective way to connect the broad spectrum of value that was demonstrated by the participants. Every participant inevitably told a different story, but also illustrated a distinctive flow of value. Some participants demonstrated relatively simply flow (e.g., Mark), others had journeys that were much more complicated (e.g., Toby). All the Coach Developers illustrated their agentic role in generating value and effecting change, albeit acknowledging the sociocultural influences on their practice; this social learning space was no benign echo chamber (Culver et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the stories we have reported are consistently emotive, demonstrating empathy, care, and curiosity. Whilst this investigation has demonstrated some realized value, this remains something that should be considered more extensively in the design of future projects. Furthermore, there remains little evidence of strategic or enabling value in Coach Developer social learning spaces and this warrants further research.

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