

## Ingredients

*'Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler'* Albert Einstein

Systemic coaching is attracting substantial and sustained interest, for good reason. However, there are a number of different meaning and uses of the words 'system' and 'systemic', each valid in their own way.

## Systems

You will already have a sense of what a system is because you've belonged in several. Each is a relational group, a community, a tribe, a company, an organisation, a system of relationships held within a boundary. You can imagine all the systems in which you have belonged behind you, like a peacock's tail, where each 'eyespot' in the tail represents one system.

In each relationship system are explicit elements, people and things. Underneath those visible parts are the implicit, hidden, invisible dynamics. The patterns of behaviour, the unspoken loyalties, the impact of history, the unspoken rules – as well as many resources.

Together the explicit and the implicit make a field. A dynamic field of information. The whole is the sum of both parts and yet more: the emergent field that the combined parts generate. There is a system, a relationship system.

Look a little further into your tail feathers and you will see the educational systems in which you have belonged. Look further still and you will see the family system through which your life has emerged. Your family-of-origin system is the source of the deepest patterns for life and work, and where you first learnt to tune into the unspoken rules that govern whether your behaviours protect or threaten your sense of place, belonging and safety in that system.

Your family system is itself embedded in a social and cultural system. You come from somewhere and have a belonging in a land-of-origin system. Both will have a vivid history with multiple changes to their structure and rules of belonging and will have shaped you and how you belong in and travel through systems.

The interactions and interdependencies between the members of a system create a field, a field of information, dynamics and unwritten rules that define and protect belonging. Everyone and everything is held in that field and so it has a significant influence. Including the field is essential if you are to influence or change the dynamics in the system.

As your awareness of your own tail feathers develops you will start to see the connections, patterns, and hidden resources in them. You will see your own embeddedness, the multiple and sometimes overlapping belongings behind you. Actually, they are within you, an

embodied, felt sense or every system into which you have belonged. Your inner constellation of your relationship to all the systems you've belonged in.

This approach, imagining your 'tail feathers' is a useful and respectful way of starting to tune into the wider field of information you are held in and building your awareness of systems. It's the basis of systemic coaching and allows those who include this perspective a wider and deeply informed frame in which to think about themselves and then others.

As well as the system being created by its members, it is also self-organising in that it always attempts to stay whole by keeping what belongs to it within its boundary and balancing anything that disturbs its coherence. That balance is governed by consistent organising principles that generate forces in systems, ordering forces that recruit and entangle its members to protect the whole.

A system is made up of explicit elements including people, but also invisible dynamics and resources, unspoken rules that everybody follows even though they don't talk about them, hidden loyalties and allegiances, as well as the aftershocks of difficult events in the past

Systems are governed by a clear set of organising principles that if ignored or violated will entangle the members in conflict or create inertia and resistance to change. As many leaders, coaches, change and organisational development consultants are not aware of the organising principles of systems, they get ignored and violated in many, if not most, organisational systems.

So, we are born into a system, a family system, and then spend our lives travelling through multiple others. We tune in to the invisible fields and unwritten rules held in each. Life and life at work can be complicated and challenging as we try and find our place in each system of belonging.

## Systemic

A system is most natural and familiar thing you can possibly imagine. After all, we are all born into a system and we spend the rest of our lives belonging in multiple other systems. Everything we are, everything we do, happens in relationship to multiple systems, multiple fields of information.

So, we are systemic by nature.

Everything that a client could bring to coaching, whether it's an individual, group or team, is emerging from and connected back into systems and the invisible winds within them.

So, with everything in the interdependent relationship - nothing natural exists for or by itself - everything human is systemic.

*The major problems in the world are the result of the difference between how nature works, and the way people think.* Gregory Bateson

The important thing about that profoundly simple idea is that if you want to support change in something or somebody then you will, by definition, need a systemic perspective to see

what is really going on, and then a systemic methodology to make a difference that makes the difference.

What we now know from lived experience in leadership roles and from thousands of constellations is that there are clear organising principles that occur naturally. They are self-evident once you look within a systemic lens.

If coaches and consultants are not aware of these observable truths, they cannot bring them into the consciousness of the clients they work with and realign the system to effect lasting change. This is one of the several roles and functions of systemic coaching.

## Systemic Coaching

As a result of this several different uses of the phrase 'systemic coaching' there is perhaps some confusion in coaches, as well as those who commission coaching, over the meaning of the phrase. This is largely as a result of the rich diversity in systemic thinking and the different routes and sources of those different perspectives. Each has its place, and each can add real value.

What they share is a view of relationship systems as interconnected and interdependent wholes. They also share an understanding of embeddedness. Most include the phenomena of 'action at a distance', where an action that appears to have no connection to another action, pattern or behaviour, is seen to be connected.

What is difference about the kind of systemic coaching that we are exploring here and that is brought to life throughout this book is, in brief summary informed and underpinned by:

- an understanding of the natural but invisible organising forces - rather like gravity - that, once you are aware of them, are observable in all systems. These ordering forces are mostly out of conscious awareness and often only really understood by experiencing the effects of ignoring them;
- a focus on belonging in conscience groups, the unwritten rules and hidden loyalties that emerge, and the impact of those loyalties on motivation, growth and change;
- the methodology of representational mapping and of constellations which offer a practical way of accessing the hidden dynamics and identifying the source of the actions-at-a-distance, the systemic undercurrents and patterns;
- a particular use of resonant language which is designed to work beyond the story, illuminate truths and enable what is unspoken to be respectfully voiced;
- inclusion of and working with the field; the invisible region of influence created by the people, events, and other elements in a relationship system;
- feelings and somatic responses treated as recognized and reliable coordinates when finding balance and flow in human systems;
- a phenomenological attitude - a philosophical discipline which invites us to set all our value judgments, assumptions, and ideas about right and wrong to one side - combined with a trust in sensory experience and embodied processes. This is an empirical approach;
- the use of ourselves as representatives for others to access the field of other systems and the multiple parts of the extended mind. This is using self-as-instrument in a particular way; and

- a breadth and ease of application with self, one other, teams, groups, or whole systems.

These key qualities give systemic coaching that's informed by the process and experience of constellations its distinctive difference and benefit. It doesn't claim to be better than any other kind of 'systemic coaching', it is simply looking through a different lens at a different level and with a different methodology.

*The world is made in circles and we think in straight lines, Peter Senge.*

The first system to understand if you want to embrace the meaning of 'systemic coaching' as described here is yourself. The deep patterns, hidden loyalties and embodied experiences of belonging in each system you have passed through and how they inform your way of being in the world and the world of work. The relationship system that is you, your inner team, your inner constellation. This is the first field of systemic awareness.

The next system to focus on is the interpersonal, the invisible powerful field of dynamics patterns, and resources, held in the field between you and another (or several others). The first time you are likely to have experienced a system that felt very different to your family system would be at school. Then work.

Now that you are a coach you will spend your time with clients who are in and come from multiple systems. This is why systemic coaching resonates so deeply with people; it speaks directly to their lived experience, their own embodied truths.

Systemic coaching is coaching that prioritises the system and is informed by an understanding of the organising principles and deep patterns consistently observed in them. This information and perspective are embodied in the inner attitude or 'stance' of the coach and shared through the application of systemic questions, interventions, mapping and constellations.

This approach to coaching soon teaches us that every system is different and how to identify those differences quickly. It also shows us that all those differences are held within some universal organising forces which govern the coherence of all systems. The interplay between the members and the forces that influence them is where that systemic coaching can make such an impact.

Systemic coaching of the kind described here is built on an understanding of what sustains and what limits flow in relationship systems - our own inner relationship with parts of ourselves, the relationships we have with others in groups and teams, and then organisations, social and global systems. Not as context but as content.

The stance, principles and practices can be applied in coaching and supervision, in leadership development, team and group coaching as well as large group interventions, organisational design and development.

Working with a systemic perspective creates systemic awareness, and that awareness can lead to systemic intervention that creates the conditions in which a relationship system can flourish. It is an approach that nourishes and resources people to be human in their life and work by attending to the fields of belonging they are held within.

In this way systemic coaching constellations invite us to create the conditions for leadership and organisational health to emerge, flow and endure. In individuals, groups, teams, and whole organisations.

What this kind of systemic coaching and the philosophy that underpins it offers is an approach that can accompany the whole life cycle of an individual, a team, a group, or a whole organisation. The joining, the belonging, and the leaving.

This approach and this book are based on a simple premise. That whenever a group of people gather together to form a relationship system, a field of information and invisible dynamics emerge. That field soon becomes a force field for that system and influences its actions, behaviours, membership rules and ability to be productive.

Systemic coaching of the kind described here gives coaches and those that they work with a very practical and profoundly useful access to that field, so that systemic issues can be seen and addressed at source.

Every system is alive with hidden dynamics, the impact of the past on the present, unspoken rules as well as multiple people and other elements that belong. So, systems are complex, but there is a straightforward and profoundly useful way of accessing and then influencing them. Systemic constellations.

Constellations provide a way of exploring and clarifying any kind of relationship system because they enable respectful access to the field of information held within the system of the client and the systems they belong in.

To understand what's going on in the system - the invisible loyalties and dynamics, the repeating patterns or the real source of inertia or conflict - you have to be able to see it. To really see and understand the system you need a map. Once you have a map you can begin to see the deep patterns and dynamics, and the best place within the system, from which to lead, to coach, to be. Then all your talent, experience and skill can be brought to bear.

And map is a gift to give your clients as it provides distance and perspective, and always reveals fresh information and ensures that they are deeply connected to their developmental material and journey. It's for this reason that many coaches report that this way of working not only feels liberating for their clients but also for them.

A constellation begins with the creation of a three-dimensional map, made up of *representatives* of the members (people) and elements (events and abstracts like culture, money, etc.) in the system being explored. This spatial representative map reveals both the unconscious mental map of the client and the invisible system dynamics it is held within and influenced by. Facilitated by a systemic coach, the spatial relational map can then be used in a number of ways and contexts to illuminate new information, liberate fresh resources and show paths to resolution for apparently intractable issues.

Constellating – mapping a relationship system of following a facilitation process - is not just a practical methodology but a respectful way of surfacing what is really going on in the underlying architecture of a relationship system.

The combination of philosophy and methodology offers unique insights into the repeating patterns, inertia and resistance to change that hamper so many organisational, team and personal systems.

A constellation is a practical intervention that can illuminate the invisible and unspoken dynamics behind a relationship difficulty, a stuck issue or a persistent challenge. This could be the inner relational space in an individual, their relationship with other people or several peoples' relational dynamic in a team or group.

Constellations are also very useful when looking at your relationship with abstract elements like profitability, time, authority, values or purpose. In the past, the present or the future. They can be used to just look at what is, and that alone often delivers a significant breakthrough in understanding.

They can be used to diagnose, to resource, to find the best way of joining or belonging in a system and to support healthy leavings. They can also be used to disentangle, to say what has been left unsaid, to make requests to return responsibility, and to find meaningful parts to lasting resolution.

The facilitation of a constellation allows coach and client to work at the source, to see patterns, illuminate and disentangle difficult dynamics, and then find clarity and resolution for a wide range of issues and challenges.

Constellations work because we will all carry within us an unconscious and embodied inner map of everything and everybody we have been or are in relationship with. However, a constellation is more than simply an external expression of a pattern that shows the nature of the underlying relationship structures. A constellation is an event that connects coach and client to an invisible field of information held in the system and provides a way to realign the elements, giving each a place. By placing the individual in the field of the larger truths of the systems they occupy, constellations illuminate new information and fresh insights, restoring clarity and coherence.

Systems are also full of surprising and useful resources. Hidden just under something or someone the client has been trying to avoid often lies the richness source, the richest source of resource. For this reason, constellations affect 'heart and soul' as well as head, and so offer a profound connection to something beyond words. As a result, the process and benefits of a constellation remain with the client at an embodied level. This is somatic coaching that connects head, heart and brain into a coherent whole.

Inviting a client to create a three-dimensional map of their inner picture of a particular situation or challenge is relatively easy - after all, they are doing the mapping, not you. Knowing how to facilitate it in a way that illuminates and then releases systemic dynamics and resources takes knowledge of the organising principles that influence systems and practice with the methodology.

The first stage of a coaching constellation - mapping - can be used early on by coaches, while a fuller understanding and practice develops. The hidden depths emerge as your own journey with this methodology evolves and your understanding of the principles and practice develops.

Systemic coaching is coaching that prioritises the system.

The purpose of the constellation is to allow the system to reveal itself and then to catalyse the restoration of system coherence so that everyone and everything is given its right place. In the coaching context this enables the client to manifest their experience, talent and skills in the system in which they currently belong as well as disentangle themselves from the past and their repeating limiting patterns.

<b>Stance</b>
<b>+ Principles</b>
<b>+ Practices</b>
<hr/>
<b>= Systemic Coaching</b>

### From coaching conversations to coaching constellations

Constellations in coaching - whether used online or in individual face-to-face sessions, whether with teams or groups - can be used to diagnose problems, illuminate hidden dynamics, find resources and point towards fresh pictures of resolution. They support a movement from head-based thinking and talking to whole person, whole-body knowing, in a simple, practical and natural way.

Although constellations may, from the outside, appear to be simply a spatial representation, constellations catalyse a powerful embodied experience and enable a systemic awareness that is otherwise inaccessible to leaders and their coaches or consultants.

The purpose of constellations is to enable people, teams, and entire systems to find their place, to disentangle and to access fresh resources while building the integrity of the whole system. They restore systemic coherence that supports the flow of respectful leadership and organisational health through the system. In this way the approach also gives coaches and leaders the ability to get in touch with their own inner coherence and so enhance their presence and performance.

A coaching constellation encourages coach and client to move out of their heads, and work from their felt sense - at an intuitive level of knowing that opens a rich field of information and insight. This happens without the need to name or talk about it.

Constellations are unusual in that they allow the client or 'issue holder' to experience themselves as both a participant and an observer at the same time. This is true in both workshop and one-to-one settings. In a workshop the client is most often invited to choose a representative for themselves and in one to one coaching a representative object. This is in itself the beginning of the disentanglement process and leads to fresh information and greater clarity. By using representatives and tapping into the representatives' perception, coaches and leaders are given unique a unique insight into the dynamics of the systems they are exploring. This allows coaches to illuminate fresh information and sources of resolution that were previously unimaginable.

## When to apply this approach.

In order to know when a systemic intervention may be appropriate, it is important to develop the capacity to tune into information coming from the system. There are subtle signals that gradually become clear the more attuned you become at listening for them. Even if you don't move into a systemic intervention – a constellation - you will develop your ear for the kind of information that emerges, and what it may mean in the context of your client's developmental journey.

In a constellation workshop setting, the facilitator has an opportunity to 'interview' the client or 'issue holder'. before doing any work. The client has travelled especially to a workshop to look at issues through this particular lens. They will have read about constellations and prepare themselves for a day focused around this way of working.

In executive or team coaching on the other hand, you're working with clients who, even though they may have worked with you before and know a little about your systemic orientation, will not be expecting to do a constellation every time they work with you. Nor should they: constellations are not an intervention to use with such high frequency or for every challenging coaching situation. They will, however, talk, and after a while you will hear the system flags, the messages coming up from the system, and know when it's time to act.

There are many potential applications of constellations that come from the system-aware coaching stance and understanding of the ordering forces. The following summary is designed to provide an introductory overview of the context in which the principles and practices can be usefully applied:

- When there is a need to illuminate or clarify the coaching agenda.
- When as a coach you sense that one of the natural ordering forces or systems has been neglected or ignored.
- When there is something stuck or the same problem or issue keeps reoccurring.
- When you sense that there is too much talking, too many words, that rational analysis is not getting to the issue and/or that the client or team are stuck 'in their heads'.
- When there is something hidden, secret or taboo and you are given permission to look.
- When there is a recurring conflict in the relationships with or around the client.
- When a skilled and experienced person cannot fully occupy their role or authority.
- When as a coach you have a sense that there is something unspoken in your client's system that is affecting their ability to be present, or to perform; something that is distracting them and drawing their energy away.

**All systems seek coherence. Inertia, challenging group dynamics, unwelcome behaviours, 'politics' and difficult emotions in systems can be seen as messages that something is out of alignment and the system is attempting to re-establish coherence.**

- When the symptom is very clear but the cause is not.
- When there is lack of energy or focus.
- When there is a shock or trauma in the system.
- When individuals describe or interpret the same event differently.

- When there is conflict and the source is uncertain or doesn't appear to make sense.
- When your preferred coaching model or intervention doesn't seem to apply, or the benefits don't endure.
- When you need to support your client to get in touch with and align their resources.
- When you hear a frequent miscommunication.
- When your client needs to say something to another in their system but requires support to find their voice and speak their truth.
- When the client is holding or expressing something difficult on behalf of the system and needs acknowledgement or release.
- When the client is attached their own story and version of events and a wider perspective may be a useful step towards resolution.
- When your client is using words that includes strong judgments on another person within the system.
- When there is a requirement to guide choice choices between options that there is uncertainty, ambivalence or ambiguity.
- When you hear of apathy, ambivalence or resistance in a system.
- When you hear of conversations going round and round, which keep going back to the start, even though resolution has been offered and named.
- When people are defending each other as if against an invisible enemy.
- When there are rebels and 'black sheep'.
- When there are high emotions in response to rational statements.
- When people say one thing and do another.
- When there are conspiracy theories.
- When there is a lack of respect in the team or organisational culture.

## Messages from the system

The indicators of an issue for which a systemic perspective may be useful or the same whether you are only going into the initial mapping stage or into a full constellation. So, when you hear an issue that sounds muddled, mysterious or stuck, for example, it may be appropriate to open it up and offer your client the opportunity to explore it in a fresh way. Examples of the kind of language that might make you wonder if a map of the system may be a useful framework to introduce could include some of the following.

### Muddled or unclear issues

Issues that are influenced by some hidden system dynamics are often those that are hard to articulate. You may hear, for example, things like this:

'I'm not sure how to put this into words really, it's confusing...'

'I can't get this issue out of my mind it leaves me feeling very muddled... I feel in a bit of a mist'

Your client may simply be unable to find the words, may use their hands a lot to create their own spatial maps, or, after saying that they are struggling with something, then remain silent.

### Lots of detail and/or a long story

When you hear a lot more highly detailed account, sometimes along with judgments, beliefs or expectations, or when it seems to you that the coachee is becoming more attached to their version of their story and is likely to be getting lost in the detail, then this is often a suitable time to offer a different way of working. Clients are always relieved when the coach has the courage to step into the middle of the story and ask respectfully if a different perspective may be of interest.

These are good examples of messages from the system, system flags, and there are several ways of identifying them and bringing them into your own and then the clients awareness.

### Other 'system flags'

As you become more and more familiar with the underpinning principles and ordering forces that operate in systems, you may begin to 'translate' what your client is saying into possible other system meanings. On other occasions you will hear clients start to use language that is a direct expression of the system. Examples of both follow:

'We've looked at this several times before and just can't seem to fix it.' (Is there a hidden dynamic in the system that lies beyond the influence of the individual and/or the team?)

'I can't seem to get this sorted in my head, I just can't see my way out of this.' (Are they looking for their place in or with a system issue?)

'There is something holding me back on this issue.' (Is this about a hidden loyalty, an entanglement or another dynamic in a system that is beyond visibility?)

'My team have been working at the company for years and I'm struggling to persuade them to change their production methods.' (Is the order of time - as expressed in length of service - being acknowledged in this system, by this client?)

'Sometimes I think about leaving... but I don't really want to. Do I stay or leave?' (What might be pulling them out of the system, what or who might they be being loyal to, or what force might be trying to eject them?)

Often you may hear direct references to systemic issues as asides at the end of another comment or at the point when the client is tailing off. For example, you may hear something like: 'Yes, it's all a bit stuck here...' or 'Yes... but the last chief executive left nearly two years ago, so it can't be anything to do with him.' That's a common example of a clear and by now familiar system issue.

You will also start to hear the more obvious mentions of relationship systems as opportunities to offer an orientated coaching conversation or intervention. For example:

'We aren't close to the strategy in this team...' or even as clear as: 'I can't seem to find my place with this...'

Constellations or interventions that emerge from a growing system awareness in the coach and so are when there is a need to include a wider field of information, to open up the collective intelligence in a system and go beyond the individual in search of fresh information, insights and resolution.

## Benefits and settings

Another way of thinking about the right time to apply this approach is to consider the benefits offered in a number of different settings.

### Agenda setting

Supporting your coaching client to set an agenda of depth and breadth that reaches beyond the individual and leads to a transformational coaching journey:

- Mapping can help surface and set a powerful coaching agenda. This energises clients as it clarifies and simplifies complexity and connects them to their most pressing concerns and developmental needs.
- When setting or refreshing the coaching agenda, the first part of the constellation process, mapping, allows coach and coachee to see the individual challenges in the context of the wider system but will also often start to surface some of the information held in the field of that system. This enriches the coaching agenda and process. It's also very effective way of getting familiar with the building blocks of constellations.

## Diagnosing

Supporting your client to diagnose an issue and the source of resistance to change or growth:

- When your client is struggling to find the words to describe a situation or challenging relationship dynamic, a constellation may help to reveal the hidden information and dynamics.
- Constellations can quickly identify deep or hidden issues and so provide a powerful diagnostic in individuals, teams, and whole businesses at a refreshing pace. This energises coaches and clients alike, as it bypasses the story, focuses on facts and gets to the heart of the issue quickly, creating insight, energy and motivation for action without blame or judgment.

## Placemaking

Supporting your client to find their place in the system:

- Giving everything in the system a place will be useful when you sense it someone or something may have been excluded and needs to be remembered. The system settles and the coachee works with a systems perspective.

- A constellation is an effective way of supporting people to find their 'right place' in a system - an abstract quality that is often only 'felt'. Because constellations involve an embodied experience of right place, they offer a uniquely powerful way of internalising this 'felt sense' of place.

## Acknowledging

Supporting your client to face into what is, in their system and in them:

- In organisational life there is often a lack of respect for what is. A constellation will help individuals and teams to see what is in the whole system and face into that. Standing in the whole, in the truth of what's revealed, and then finding a better relationship to the elements allows an inner shift to emerge naturally, which leads to a clear and enduring resolution.
- Constellations and the languages of systemic coaching are designed to support leaders to face into their own truths too - their strengths and limitations, their responsibilities, their hidden loyalties and entanglements. This degree of authenticity and coherence releases fresh energy for change and progress.

## Relating

Supporting your client to ease challenging relationships:

- If your client is experiencing challenging relationship issues that seem beyond their understanding or resolution, a constellation provides a way of surfacing the hidden dynamics and entanglements that may be at the source of this issue.
- The language and methods of this approach have the potential to respectfully facilitate change in relationships that seem beyond redemption.

## Communicating

Supporting your client to have 'difficult conversations':

- When your client needs to say something that may be difficult to hear and needs support to find their respectful stance and voice, a constellation can help them ground their dialogue in a way that will be heard.
- Because constellations create living maps of systems and reveal the true relational model, they offer coaches and clients a cut-through and a new way of looking old or apparently intractable communication patterns.

## Leaving and joining

Supporting your clients leave and join systems:

- When your client is leaving one system and joining another, a constellation can help them to internalise what has been received from the first and what can be offered to the second.

- The way that people join and leave systems is key to enduring organisational health. The system perspective, systemic coaching and constellations can support clarity and a respectful balance of exchange.

### Resourcing

Supporting your client to find personal and professional resources within the system:

- When your client needs additional resources but the source or nature of the resources isn't clear, a constellation can show the location of existing resources available within the system.
- Sometimes the wider system needs resourcing and this approach offers ways of supporting that process, bringing renewed clarity and vitality to the flow of leadership and organisational health.

### Developing

Supporting your client in their personal, professional or leadership development:

- Systemic coaching, mapping and constellations are not only useful when illuminating challenges to do with relationships, team dynamics and the wider organisational system. They have a powerful application in professional development, as they offer a fresh way of looking at the deeper motivations and blocks to development.
- The difference between talking about leadership, feedback, developmental goals and behaviour changes and mapping them, illuminating the hidden blocks and resources within the unconscious relationship system in which they exist, is often significant. Systemic coaching and constellations provide a way of supporting deep developmental movement and change in the context of the wider system in which the client belongs.

### Resolving

Supporting your client to become free of limiting dynamics:

- When your client is stuck or there is inertia in their system, a constellation can show unexpected routes to release and movement.
- When an individual team expresses ambivalence or resistance to change in an individual or at team level, a constellation can provide clarity and energy for resolution.

Constellations also allow the coach and coachee to carefully experiment and test alternative solutions to issues and see the effects of alternatives. The approach is also useful where personal or family system issues overlap with organisational systems, as it can help to reveal and resolve entanglements and separate systems that become confused.

### Contraindications

It is also worth noting when systemic coaching and constellations may not be the appropriate route to follow. These situations include:

- Where a fixed and agreed outcome is required and there are no options needed or blocks to completion.
- Detailed action planning aligned to a schedule.
- When exploring relationship dynamics in a system that the client is not involved in and so does not have permission to explore.
- When your client doesn't think that a systems perspective or intervention is going to be useful because they believe that influence an individual is greater than that of the system.

## Map Making

*Maps are one of the oldest forms of human communication. Map-making predates written language. Okada.*

### Getting started

Most coaches, even those who spend most of their time working with groups and teams, seem to find that learning and practicing through one-to-one application is a useful context in which to understand and develop skills in using this approach. A few find it easier to start working in a workshop environment, though that's less common because the facilitator's role is so different from most other kinds of group facilitation. This book addresses both applications but takes as its starting point the application in one-to-one coaching.

Mapping, the first phase of a constellation, can be done without a comprehensive knowledge or long experience of constellations. When it is done within appropriate boundaries and the limits of the facilitator's experience, mapping can be a profoundly helpful stand-alone intervention in and of itself. You can work in a way that feels safe for you and the client by 'mapping what is' and agreeing to have a look at it and then stop, either by naming that this is all that you are offering - to take an initial look - or by agreeing a time limit. This kind of clear boundary-making is often a releasing experience for the client, allowing them to feel safe enough to make take a fresh look at a challenging issue in the knowledge of the limits you've agreed.

### Gaining permission to work

When you feel that you may be dealing with an issue that could benefit from a systems perspective and intervention, you can ask permission to look at it in a fresh way. This is more about inviting your client to look at that issue or question in 'a different way' than naming 'systemic constellations' or anything to do with you or this work. In fact, by not naming a constellation you create a space of expectation, and the client is taken to a heightened level of inquiry with their issue. In just a few words you've invited them to move into a new way of looking at old or apparently intractable issues.

For example, when your client is facing into a challenge, or very stuck issue, you could simply say something like: 'I can hear that you are really struggling to find resolution with this - would you like to look at it in a different way?' or 'How would it be for you if we looked at this in a rather a different way, a way that relies less on words and more

relationship patterns?’ or ‘What would it be like to explore your inner picture of this and take a look at it in a fresh way?’

Very often the client will agree to look in a new way and then hand the next step back to you. Occasionally they will tell you how many different ways they've already looked at it and explain why it's not possible to resolve. Again, you can offer to look at it in a different way, adding that you are inviting them to come out of their heads and into another way of knowing about things that they may not have explored before.

There is one other aspect of getting permission to work that's important in this approach to system health. That is, does the person you are working with have permission to access the system? The permission we are talking about here is the role and responsibility to action anything after the constellation. If the client doesn't have that role and responsibility then there is a chance that they are just looking at it out of curiosity, or out of frustration with the one who does. In those circumstances it will be more valuable to offer a constellation that illuminates and clarifies their relationship with the boss, rather than trying to do the boss's work.

One way of checking for permission, apart from your own sensing into the question, is to ask your client to take a moment to ‘go inside’ and reflect on whether they have the permission to explore this issue. Not only does that refine their sensitivity to somatic information and system dynamics, but it also usually creates a deeper contact with the real issue and clarity about permission levels. This generates respect and a deeper level of work, usually follows.

### Moving into the first stage

This first stage, mapping, provides a relatively easy way into constellations for the client, but also for coach who is at the early stages of learning about systems and needs to work within their own learning boundaries. Limiting the scope of your work with your client helps to make the opening up of the client's reference system safe enough for you both to step into the system and step out again before too long.

The mapping process is broken down into the ‘interview’, the ‘mapping’ itself and the ‘closure stage’, though in practice the flow from one to another is seamless. The first stage, the ‘interview’ may simply be experienced by your client is no different to any other questions you may ask, but you are feeding your way - and inviting your client to join you - into a broader system-wide perspective of their issue; into a different way of ‘knowing’.

### The interview

In this part of the process, when you are at the early stages of your learning journey simply ask three questions:

1. What is the issue in just a few words?

This helps people to get free of their stories, the judgments, and the attachments. By asking for the issue in ‘just a few words’, you emphasise that you are keen to get to the heart of it.

You also create a level of permission to ask your client to reduce the amount of words they are using if you feel they are reattaching to a familiar story.

The next question moves you and the client into a more solution-orientated space where the answer lies waiting - and will be briefly embodied in your client, (i.e., breathing out, sitting up and so on) as they describe the picture of resolution.

## 2. What would be different, for you, if this issue was more resolved?

The answer to this question will often contain the word 'feel', as in 'I'd feel much more able to do my work', 'I feel free and energised', or 'I'd feel clear and strong and safe in my role'. So you can modify the question to include that for example: 'How would you feel if this issue were resolved?'

The purpose of this question is to agree a destination, not the journey.

It provides an anchor to return to and to rest, the usefulness of the constellation at the end. By this stage the client has already created an inviting glimpse, a taste of the resolution, and is invested in finding a path towards it. But unlike in many coaching approaches, you are not about to set a goal or visualise a path to that resolution. You are going to do something else, something that simply starts with an acknowledgment of what is.

## 3. If we were to create a map of this issue, what would be the most resonant elements to include?

This is an invitation to list out the key elements (very often people) that are connected into the client's issue. You can invite them to start with themselves, i.e., 'So there's you... and who or what else?' Or you can invite them to list three or four most important elements or people around the issue. They may say something like, 'Well, there's my boss, the team objective and our main customer'. A mix of specific people and abstracts like 'purpose' is common and allows them to set up a useful relational map between the elements. In any case, you can now invite them to include themselves and notice the impact of that as it can often be part of the information in itself. Once you have agreed the most important elements- ideally no more than three or four, as you can add more later if needed – you are ready to begin the mapping.

## The mapping

In order to set up a map that's going to be useful and allow an exploration of the system, you will first need to set the boundary. Setting the boundary and selecting an object to represent the client or their issue can be achieved together. Start by simply saying something like this: 'How would it be if this tabletop represents the whole company and this sheet of paper is the leadership team...?'

Next, check for the client's own sense of meaning, relative size, position and so on. Continue your facilitation with something like this: 'Now pick up the representative for yourself and find the place in this map that feels true to your inner sense of what this is like for you... a place that embodies your inner picture of your place in this map. Just as it is, without

wishing it to be different or better'. Note that if your client struggles to find their place within the system boundary - also information in itself - you can invite them to set up the first two representatives, in relation to each other, at the same time. For example, 'self' and 'team purpose'.

This simple invitation often creates a powerful effective system map very quickly, and already the client is feeling their way into the core of their issue, their experience, their truth. The two things to highlight for a client who may be new to this way of working are *direction* and *distance*.

For direction you will need to help them indicate which way the attention is drawn in each object. With all of the available constellation stones, blocks and 'chips', a direction of attention is indicated by a notch or a point. If you're using post-its or objects like bottles of water, cups and other 'found objects', ensure that you are both clear about the directional aspect. Handles on cups or arrows on post-its, for example, provide a very effective way of indicating the direction of attention.

As for distance, you can guide your client in this aspect like this. 'Just notice as you place each object how close or far away they are from each other. Just notice that, without wishing it to be any different'.

As long as direction of attention and distance are attended to, the client will be dropping down into a deeper level of contact with their issue once they set up their first image. It's often useful to check with the client for the details by asking: 'So, in this spatial relationship map it appears that you're looking directly at the finance director; is that right?' or when they appear to be looking beyond the adjacent representative object: 'Does this indicate that your attention is drawn out to something else?'

**Think of yourself as the facilitator/coach not just 'a coach'. This methodology requires you to do something else as well as coach; in fact, it requires you to hold back on occasions from coaching.**

As a general rule of thumb, it's almost always best to start small. For example, start with simply the client and their place in a system in relationship to just one other element. If someone is talking about a team, try to encourage them, at this stage at least, to select one object to represent the whole team. This keeps things focused and helps both the coach and client to stay at the central point of contact with the issue or question. You can get more granular later.

At any stage you can check that the coachee has created something that feels true for them by asking: 'Do you recognise this?' That question usually elicits a positive response but also some more information. You can also check for more like this: 'OK, and is there anything else that's important here? Anyone or anything else that needs to be included at this stage?'

Articulating one of the core principles of this work - that everything has a place - in this way is often the point at which somebody or something that has been excluded by the client or the wider reference system emerges: 'Oh yes, I've just remembered there was a ...'

This way of working goes well when you take it slowly. The whole of the sequence above for example may take anywhere between five and thirty minutes with all the reflection, new information, adjustments and insights that came naturally when the map appears.

Very often mapping doesn't need go too much further than this. This stage is often enough to reveal fresh perspectives and insights, along with a range of new information for processing and exploration in the coaching relationship and process. As this is just an initial mapping exercise, it's important that you feel able to bring it to a close, to ensure that the observations and insights are captured and that it doesn't go into areas that you and/or the client are not yet ready to work with. However, more often than not, you will find yourself coaching from this new perspective and moving back into usual or preferred way of working, with this new information forming a fresh path forward. It's not so much an end as a start.

## The closure

A good way to bring this first part, this initial mapping, to an end (or at least a pause) is simply to ask: 'So, what fresh information or insights have you gained from looking at the issue like this?' Another thing you can do here is to suggest that your client stands up and walks slowly around the table that you've been working on to get different perspectives on their own map. Then you could simply ask: 'What do you notice as you look at this?'

You can also give the boundaries their place and name them. For example: 'We agreed that we just look at this, rather than going any deeper, [or 'We agreed we'd spend just 10 minutes of our time on this aspect'] so is it OK if we draw this to a close for now and spend a little time reflecting on what you've already got from this...?'

In these ways you can move back into a 'head space'. The client can start to make rational sense of the map they have just created and you can help them process this. This 'sense-making' is an important aspect to include, especially when working with clients who may not be so familiar with illuminating their inner picture of a relationship system or trusting their 'felt sense' of the issue.

This kind of approach to mapping 'what is' often creates a very much more focused and lively coaching agenda than if the client had simply told you the 'story'. This makes it a useful thing to do early on in the coaching process and relationship.

On occasion the client may experience real difficulty coming out of the mapping, because they are already in touch with the deeper forces in the system and are attracted to the idea of continuing. This may also be true for the coach. In these circumstances you may need to go via an alternative, slightly longer route to reach an acceptable closure. The closure needs to be done with sensitivity, as coming out too soon or too late can have a weakening effect on the client.

In situations where there is a difficulty in finishing, invite the client to simply move one of the representative objects to a 'better place'. For example, you might say something like this: 'We've agreed to limit this first look, but I can see that you'd like to move on a little further with this. So, choose one of the objects in this map that you've created and see if you can move it to a place that feels like it is a first step towards a better place, a first step

to resolution... 'This kind of invitation will often result in clarity and insight in which the client identifies what needs to happen next in order to start moving towards a more settled system. Whatever they identify will do will change something and allow you to bring it to a close and move back into coaching and/or processing.

It can also be useful, particularly when seeing a complex or stuck initial image, to invite your client to pause to revisit and examine their central question. Another way of doing this is to ask: 'If this the answer. What's the question?'

At a point that feels appropriate in the mapping process you can revert to your preferred coaching dialogue style and work with the information and insights that have emerged. You can then invite your client to return to the mapping if you sense that may be useful.

Mapping may soon evolve into fuller constellations, but you will feel more able to develop your scope and skills as a constellator if you feel secure in the knowledge that you can respectively close the process down and return to a more familiar style of coaching.