Impacts of chemistry in executive coaching

by

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B.F.A., Rockford University, 1994
M.B.A., Pittsburg State University, 2021

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Staley School of Leadership
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Abstract

In executive coaching, the initial "chemistry test" between coach and client is widely acknowledged as a pivotal determinant of coaching effectiveness. This process assesses relational fit, and trust to shape the potential for depth, openness, and constructive challenges within the coaching relationship. While often described as "clicking," synchronicity, or rapport, the phenomenon of chemistry remains underexplored in coaching scholarship despite its apparent influence on coaching outcomes and team dynamics.

Drawing on my experiences in athletics, corporate training, and executive coaching, this study investigated chemistry as both an interpersonal attraction and a dynamic process of coherence. In athletic contexts, chemistry on the court demonstrates its power to create momentum and cohesion, while in corporate environments, neglecting chemistry in favor of skills and productivity limit team performance and growth. As a coach, I observe how chemistry accelerates trust-building, deepens dialogue, and fosters stronger outcomes, not only between coach and client but also within the teams they lead.

For this dissertation, chemistry is conceptualized as a strong mutual attraction or interaction between individuals, characterized by trust, rapport, genuineness, and positive bonds (Passarelli et al., 2023). Related constructs such as resonance, entrainment, and entwinement describe the rhythmic alignment that emerges when two systems interact in synchrony (Clayton, 2012; Sandra & Nandram, 2013, 2020). Extending beyond the dyadic coaching relationship, the study also considers coherence—the synchronization of rhythms over time that cultivates connectedness, alignment, and unity of purpose across teams and organizations (Sandra, 2022).

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the influence of chemistry moments within coaching relationships on the coachee, their immediate team, the

broader organization, and potentially on extended communities. Secondly, to look at whether the emergence of chemistry can be maintained or if it transfers creating coherence in teams, companies, cultures and communities.

The qualitative research data was collected via zoom of three session each of six coaching pairs. These sessions were recorded and transcribed. Those recordings were viewed and the transcripts read for guidance with choosing the video elicitation clips. All the participants were interviewed once then a second time after watching video elicitations.

The data revealed chemistry as a co-created, practice-based relational phenomenon rather than a function of rapport, personality fit, or emotional closeness. Across coaching pairs, chemistry emerged through inquiry, disruption, coordinated rhythm, and shared meaning-making, often intensifying in moments of adaptive tension. It operated asymmetrically, could be carried by one party, and functioned across multiple layers, producing identity stabilization, agency activation, and portable leadership impact. Chemistry was shown to accelerate insight and extend beyond the coaching pair into adjacent relationships and systems. Positioned alongside Social Penetration Theory, Ubuntu-informed Collective Leadership Theory, and Leadership-as-Practice, chemistry emerged as an enabling relational field condition, rather than a byproduct of closeness.

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The purpose of this research is to explore how chemistry influences the coaching relationship, impacts leadership development, and whether its effects extend into the broader

organizational system through coherence. By examining this phenomenon, the study seeks to contribute to coaching theory and practice by illuminating how relational energy can drive individual transformation, team alignment, and organizational outcomes.

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Dedication

This degree is dedicated to my husband, Travis, for all he has taught me about leading people and strategically developing my business and reputation. To my late parents, Bill and Judy Perkins, who believed in me and the power of higher education. To my sisters, whose work and education have always inspired me to achieve. To Asher and Giya, may you see this as an example of God's restoration, healing and strength and that nothing is impossible (at any age) with Him.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

INTRODUCTION

As an executive coach I am often required to pass what is commonly referred to as a "chemistry" test with prospective clients. This process allows the executive to assess whether there is a natural rapport and comfort level with the coach. The executive must decide if they can see themselves spending time with, opening up to and being constructively challenged by this person. Fundamentally, the chemistry test serves to assess the coach's relational fit and perceived approachability, which are essential for fostering the basis necessary for effective coaching outcomes.

This "chemistry" can be described in a variety of ways depending on the context. This chemistry can be seen as "clicking" or "synchronicity" at times between one or more persons, sometimes on the outside and sometimes internally. Drawing from my coaching practice, I observed recurring patterns of chemistry. When I built and coached teams in athletics, I relied heavily on how people played on the court in the right position with the right players – which was utilizing "chemistry". Corporately, I disregarded this understanding and built teams on skills, productivity and outcomes. As a corporate trainer and coach, I again see the importance of having "chemistry" with my executive so that we can get deeper and build trust faster. I watch as teams I train also can experience this phenomenon or not and how that affects their behaviors, outcomes and growth.

I began to wonder how studying this phenomenon of "chemistry" could help me be a better coach and help my clients improve their leadership. Would the "chemistry" positively or negatively affect the coaching outcome? If it produced positive outcomes, would that spread to

the adjoining team and create "coherence"? For the sake of understanding, the two words that will be used in studying this phenomenon are defined as:

Chemistry – a strong mutual attraction felt between two people or interaction between people working together (Merriam-Webster , n.d.). Often characterized by trust, rapport, genuineness and positive bonds (Passarelli et al., 2023). This concept is known as various pseudonyms such as resonance, entrainment or entwinement. It refers to a phenomenon where a person or system responds when interacting with another object or person at a specific rhythm (frequency) that essentially causing an entanglement or one common rhythm (Clayton, 2012) (Sandra & Nandram, 2013) (Sandra & Nandram, 2020).

Coherence – a process of synchronizing rhythms over time that drives connectedness within, between, and across rhythmic activities (Sandra, 2022) the state where members of a team or company are in alignment with a common purpose, becoming united in principles, relationships or interests (Merriam-Webster , n.d.).

Coach – the professional volunteer used in the research to do coaching

Coachee – the professional leader volunteer receiving the coaching

Participants – refers to both parties together that were interviewed

RATIONALE

The research aims to explore how chemistry impacts corporate coaching relationships and the possibility of positive outcomes transferring into coherence in teams. By leveraging the principles of chemistry and coherence through coaching, organizations might be able to create a more supportive, connected and productive work environment, impacting job satisfaction and performance.

Figure 1-1. Corporate Coaching "Chemistry" Phenomenon

Figure one point one deconstructs the phenomenon visually in four steps to show the sequence and overlay of the theories that will be used. The research is focused on step one and the transitions to step two and step three. The research will try to discern if there is any impact through the other stages. Beginning with the initial stage in which chemistry is established between coach and coachee, this research will examine how that connection is formed and what subsequent outcomes or processes it facilitates. Then in step two and three, the research will examine how and if the chemistry creates coherence into adjacent teams, the organization and beyond. Step one uses Social Penetration Theory (SPT) to frame and understand the chemistry of coaching and possibilities of the emergence of coherence. Step two and three use Collective Leadership Theory (CLT) and Leadership as Practice (LAP) to observe and understand the phenomenon, its impact and how it happens in practice between one or more people.

By integrating SPT, CLT and LAP, this study builds a multi-level lens to analyze chemistry in executive coaching. SPT will be used to illuminate the micro-level relational process of disclosure and bonding. CLT will be used to frame the collective and interpersonal imprint and impact of mutual transformation. LAP will be used to enable analysis of practice-

based emergence of chemistry in real-time interaction. Together, these theories allow me to see how chemistry evolves and emerges, from one-on-one intimacy to collective coherence, and to interpret participants' lived experiences across interpersonal, cultural, and practice contexts.

Historically, executive coaching is a one-on-one relationship engagement based on mindset or behavioral change and includes development (Allaho & Van Nieuwerburgh, 2018). Executive coaches help leaders have attributes associated with success or leadership to help their companies have more success (Vesso & Alas, 2016). Coaching includes formal contracting, relationship building, assessment, getting feedback and reflecting, goal setting and implementation, and evaluation (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). Coaching is a partnership relationship based on mutual trust that emphasizes both relationships and getting tasks accomplished while learning and transforming behavior (Vesso & Alas, 2016).

Core elements of executive coaching aim to enhance an executive's leadership skills, self-awareness, and overall effectiveness within their organization (Vesso & Alas, 2016). Executive coaching philosophy has deeply rooted itself in humanistic psychology like the solution-focused cognitive-behavioral framework (SF-CB). The SF-CB model ensures that coaching works toward the development of personal strengths and goal achievement, focusing on solutions not problem analysis (Grant & Hartley, 2013). It focuses on unlocking human potential and overcoming self-limiting beliefs. It emphasizes creating sustainable behavioral changes, enhancing learning, and fostering development. It focuses on the individual and their personal journey, skills, and talents (Ives, 2008).

The executive coaching model I draw on encompasses five fundamental elements combining these various factors above See Figure 1.1. (Dodson, 2023) (Ghosh, 2023) (*Narrative 360° Assessment and Stakeholder Analysis: How a Powerful Tool Drives Executive Coaching*

Engagements - Koonce - 2010 - Global Business and Organizational Excellence - Wiley Online Library, n.d.):

1. One-on-One Relationship – twice monthly or weekly sixty minutes coaching sessions are scheduled for 3, 6 or 12 months. The frequency provides accountability for the coachee. The progress of meeting creates an environment where trust can be built to heighten accountability and progress.
2. Goal Setting & Achievement– establish clear goals with the client (corporation) and the coachee for the coaching encounter. Using tools to break the goals down into action steps that can be achieved and tracking that success.
3. Assessment and Feedback – decides how the goals will be measured individually and collectively with stakeholders. Personality assessments can be used to provide insight into strengths and 360-degree stakeholders are done initially and at the end of the engagement to measure perception of growth.
4. Reflection and Learning – coaching sessions provide opportunities for reflection by using curiosity through powerful questions to create learning for the coachee and provide ways for them to continue learning and practice after the session is over.
5. Continuous Improvement & Transformation – the end of the coaching does not mean the end of growth or goals for the coachee. The coach works to set the coachee on a path of continued improvement and transformation.

These core elements of executive coaching aim to enhance an executive's leadership skills, self-awareness, and overall effectiveness within their organization (Vesso & Alas, 2016) .

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

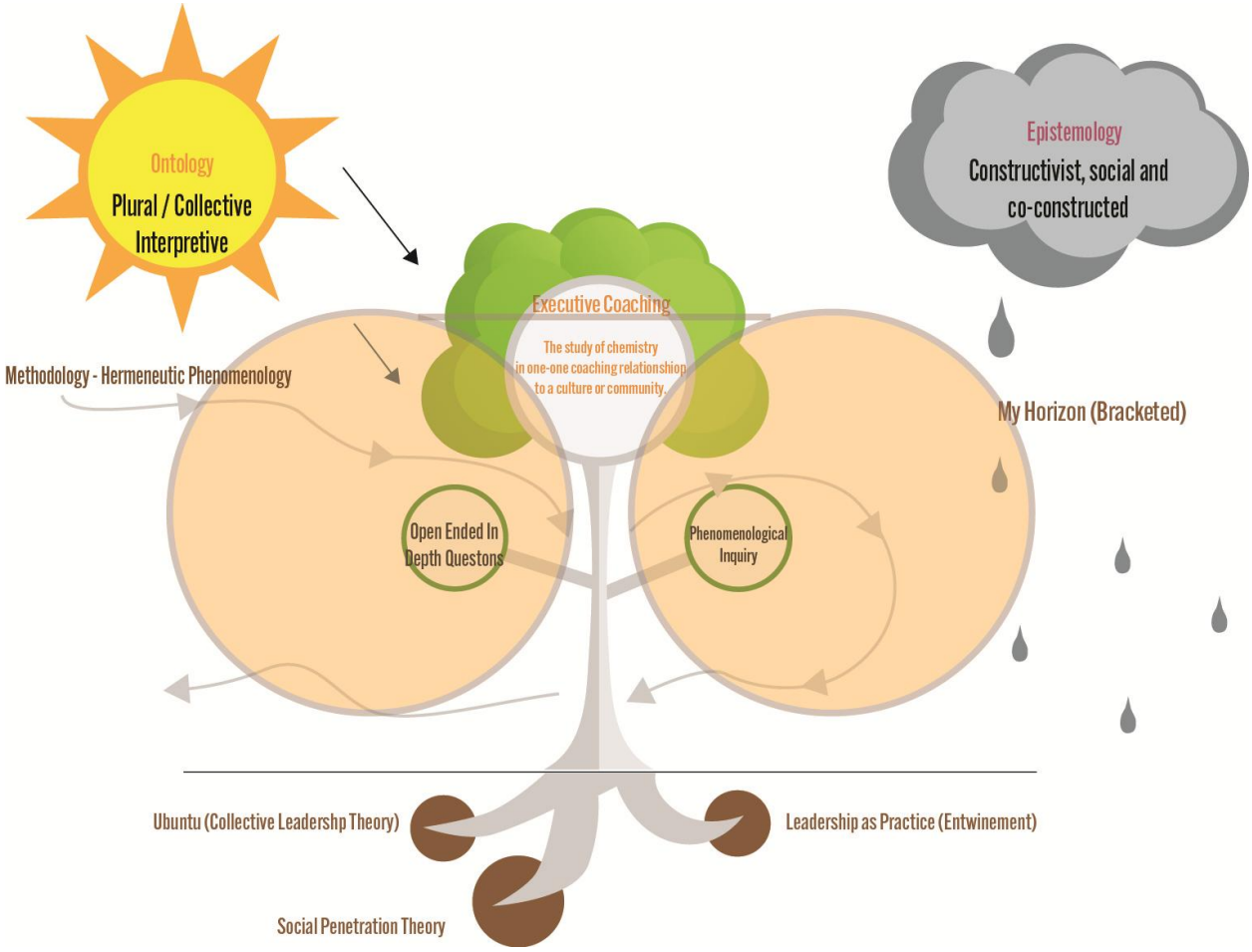
The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to explore the influence of chemistry moments within coaching relationships on the coachee, their immediate team, the broader organization, and potentially on extended communities.

The coaching relationships that will be analyzed will be specifically on the corporate side of coaching. The research seeks to understand the following from the research:

1. How is chemistry built between coach and coachee (SPT)? What is it and what impact does it have on coaching?
2. How can the experience of chemistry in a coaching encounter be maximized, harnessed or measured to build stronger communities and teams (CLT)?
3. How does the chemistry of executive coaching transfer from leader to others (LAP) outside of coaching?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1-2. Theoretical Framework Map Visualization



This Figure 1.2 shown here is the visual representation of my theoretical framework. The ontology is plural, collective and interpretive shown in the sun that feeds the tree. Interpretivism came out of the need "to have a way to understand the social world". It considers the "cultural and historical interpretations of one's social world when conducting inquiry" (Bhattacharya, 2017). The epistemology is constructivist, co-created and co-constructed that rains down to soak the soil that feeds the tree. Constructivism states that "truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (Crotty, 1998). Both are integral to the tree's survival. Constructivist ways of knowing are constructed from a personal interpretation of

the situation and their lived experience. Amounts of "knowledge are constructed and reproduced through communication, interaction, and practice" (Tracy, 2010).

The roots of the tree represent the working theories that will be used to create understanding. Social Penetration Theory, Collective Leadership Theory, Leadership-as-Practice are each a root of the tree. The research methodology is hermeneutic phenomenological represented as the wind moving through the tree. The phenomenon of chemistry is being observed from all around the tree. The tree itself is the subject of research – chemistry in coaching. On the tree are two branches that are the methods of research for looking at the tree. Using a phenomenological inquiry for method. The research question types are open-ended questions. The two giant pink circles represent the lenses that I look through at all the research and theoretical framework that are my positionality and subjectivity of the matter.

The first theory used to support this is Social Penetration Theory (SPT) which states that openness and vulnerability can lead to lasting intimacy and can affect future outcomes. The theory uses the layers of an onion to describe the layers of getting to know a person in relationship (Taylor, 1968). As you get to the deeper layers of a person, it creates more trust, relational bond, higher empathy and more disclosure (Mangus et al., 2020). Using this theory to examine the one-on-one coaching relationship can affect chemistry from coaching and beyond.

Collective leadership theory will be used related to what happens outside the coaching encounter or in a team or group coaching environment. Everyone shares the leadership. Building trust in collective leadership establishes co-creation of progress and work. Interactivity creates identity through conversation and shared work. Coaching is a one-on-one activity that happens collectively between leader and coach. The practice of coaching is also to impact through the leader after the coaching encounter. Collective leadership theory says the coach is still making

impact through the leader because they co-created change and growth. The leader can then collectively still learn and grow in the team, company and community.

These collective concepts are impacting leadership by entering the academic realm as Collective Leadership Theory (Ospina et al., 2020). The theory examines the pooled resources and relational aspects of leadership as well as how this impacts performance and outcomes. It examines the idea of leadership as existing in the system or in the group.

Collective leadership theory emphasizes shared leadership, where trust fosters joint progress and interactive communication forms identity. Coaching occurs collaboratively, with coaches influencing leaders through co-created growth. Leaders continue to learn and develop alongside their teams and communities (Ospina, Foldy, Fairhurst, Jackson, 2020).

Leadership as Practice (LAP) says that leadership occurs in practice rather than in the traits or behaviors of a leader (Raelin, 2019). The phenomenon of chemistry arises and evolves within the coaching process, manifesting through the dynamics of practice itself. LAP happens in collective co-created moments between two or more people. Participants engage and collectively reflect on their experiences together in real time (Raelin, 2020). This theory will help shape the application of the research looking in real time for those pivot points that "catch" people in their own practices that shape leaderful moments, development and initiate new trajectories and change (Raelin, 2020).

Together these frameworks reveal chemistry as a multi-layered phenomenon. Through SPT, it begins with interpersonal openness then expands through collective impact in CLT and finally manifests as a pivot point or shift in practice through LAP. The integration of these three theories moves chemistry beyond mere rapport to an understanding of the relational process that shapes leadership practice, team relations and organizational culture.

While each theory originates from distinct traditions from communication to collectivism to practice based leadership, they collectively illuminate chemistry as a relational process (see Figure 1.1) that unfolds across levels. This framework allows chemistry to be thought of as a mechanism to produce alignment, trust and transformation across human systems.

The integration of SPT, CLT and LAP creates a new analytical lens that extends beyond coaching or leadership models. The phenomenon of chemistry is not trapped in one trust bond or in collective action. This framework enables analysis of chemistry as a multi-level relational phenomenon that is felt, enacted and propagated. Together these perspectives make it possible to analyze chemistry as both intrapersonal and systemic, bridging the space between individual transformation and organizational coherence. This combination uniquely positions the study to answer how chemistry influences leadership practice and to identify the mechanisms through which relational energy moves across boundaries.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology I employed for research was hermeneutic phenomenology. It is the study of a phenomena, in this case chemistry and coherence in executive coaching. Hermeneutics allows humans to interpret their own experience (Asleigh & Coyne, 2021). Together, hermeneutic with phenomenology allows the participants in the research to frame the meaning from their perspective. As a research method, hermeneutic phenomenology is the "art of understanding and the theory of interpretation. It focuses on the human experience as it is lived" (Asleigh & Coyne, 2021). The hermeneutics phenomenology focuses on the reflection and interpretation of the subjective experience of each individual and group (Kafle, 2011).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology (HP) answers the nature of reality as plural (Kafle, 2011), and open to interpretation (Husserl, 1962). The person/s experiencing the phenomenon each

determines the reality of it in their lives. That ontology works in conjunction with the epistemology or nature of knowledge as subjective experience and insights (Kafle, 2011).

The lived experience of chemistry in coaching through HP would be allowing each person in coaching to determine the reality of the chemistry phenomenon in their coaching practice and determine their own experience and insights from it. Alongside the theoretical framework of ontological and epistemological views, HP stays true to the interpretative (SPT, SLT, Coaching) and plural (Ubuntu, LAP) natures.

METHODS

Methods utilized in the research were in-depth open-ended interviews. Participants as coachees and coaches were asked to describe the phenomenon of chemistry and its transfer into other relationships and the organization. Since the purpose was to generate "life-world" (Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009) stories from the research participants, using interviews was the methodological choice to execute research. This also flowed well within the theoretical framework where interviews and inquiry dominate.

Phenomenology research is regarded as a research process where methodological processes allow for openness and flexibility. It is "focused on richly describing the experiential essence of human experiences and capturing the present living moment" (Tracy, 2010). Edmund Husserl was the first to set this apart in the 1930s. He analyzed human intentions which he "refers to the way consciousness can stretch out or be directed toward objects internal (images, memories, etc.) and external (things, relations, and events in the world)" (Tracy, 2010). An example of how to go about phenomenological research is to "explore the subjective experiences of another person through lots of narrative interviewing" (Tracy, 2010). Utilizing the work of Kafle (2011) data

generation using tools like interviews to generate life world stories from the participants were employed.

It allowed participants to either answer questions or lead them into a narrative about the experience they saw the interaction become chemistry or coherence. The type of data collection used was in-depth open-ended questions like the one in the example below, “Can you describe a time when you felt chemistry in coaching?”

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. A coding system was used to analyze and create categories and subcategories for analysis and grouping. The types of questions varied between descriptive and grand tour and specific grand tour questions. Mapping was used to sort through the themes and subcategories and create a conceptual framework of the information.

SUBJECTIVITY STATEMENT

My identity as a white female in a white male dominated society have impacted my experiences both negatively and positively. On a secondary level, being a midwestern of Christian faith has impacted my professional and educational experience as well. In this academic program, my over 50 years in age as a single, entrepreneurial mom has also had a negative impact on my experience.

Aside from identity, my values as a person really are tied to hope. And I, through the trauma and crisis of my life and through my faith, I believe hope is a bedrock that moves us forward as people and allows us to overcome tough situations and persevere. Hope builds resilience. I believe in connections and relationships. These experiences inform my perspective that human connection creates cascading effects within organizations.

It's not just helping one person be a better person where they stand, but knowing that the ripples in the pond go out from us as people energetically. When we accept chemistry, we pass

on that chemistry and resonate it with other people and it creates momentum is a fascinating phenomenon that I really want to look at.

My experience professionally as a leader and my experience as an executive coach led me to do this research. When I have experienced high levels of chemistry with a colleague or leader, the trust is high, the outcomes are great, and it spreads like wildfire in an organization. In coaching, when the trust is established, the chemistry grows. Using vulnerability and shared understanding, the chemistry can be used to impact the organization and shift culture. Knowing and understanding how others make meaning from this phenomenon can help me to hone my coaching skills and create more lasting impact with leaders and their companies. Therefore, I have a positive view of chemistry as a phenomenon and have a lens of hope that it takes place and will benefit those involved and others.

Community Engaged Scholarship

CES is doing research that allows universities to collaborate with public or private sectors in activities (Kansas State University, n.d.). This research reflects the tenets of CES because the chemistry being co-created between the two actors, not imposed. The research then benefits the university, it also benefits people or communities involved in the research. Based on Gordon de Cruz (2017) list of necessary components for community engaged scholarship,

- Real life problems
- Scholarly investigation of problems
- Community-university partnership
- Generation of knowledge to improve
- Use of institutional resources
- Production of scholarship toward agenda

The study of chemistry checks all the component boxes above. The connection between this study and CES extends beyond transactional collaboration through the research itself. It points to the generation of knowledge to improve and the production of scholarship toward agenda.

The agenda of the research is to better understand chemistry in coaching so that leaders, communities and organizations can understand how to utilize it positively and productively and not get in its way. The usage of chemistry could positively affect engagement, productivity, mental health, culture, conflict resolution, problem solving, efficiency across varieties of communities and applications. It could be leveraging to improve culture or community engagement or retention.

The study contributed to CES by reframing leadership and transformation not as individual or authoritative but as emergent, relational and participatory. The study of chemistry in coaching is situated within CES as social, dialogic and embodied process that shares the same characteristics necessary for meaningful community – mutual participation, trust, shared reflection and co-creation. It hypothesizes that chemistry requires trust and engagement just like successful CES, it does not happen in a vacuum.

It sought to show that chemistry does not emerge from formal authority, but from shared understanding, engagement and attunement that are all central to CES. Using hermeneutical phenomenology allowed for the exploration of experience in chemistry that could be key drivers for future sustainable community interactions, initiatives and partnerships.

Chemistry in coaching builds on how leadership emerges through collective practices and reflection and learning in action. This has direct implications for CES where leadership needs to be distributed, emergent and embedded in situational context. This study of chemistry shows

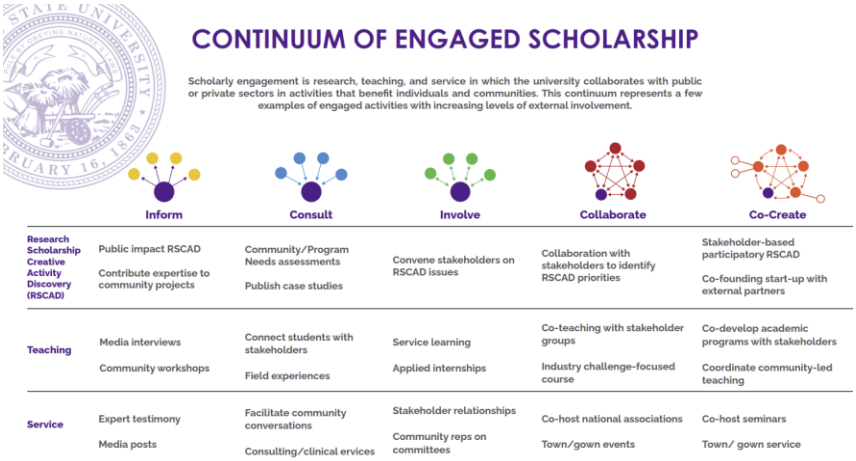
what is necessary to enhance and use it positively to catalyze engagement in communities. It also shows how interpretative practice-based learning in leadership can support CES by offering insight to the dimension the phenomenon provides.

This research on chemistry in coaching follows CES also because it is a collaboration with the potential for mutual benefit. The research discovered systemic impact going from a micro-level relational phenomenon to having possible macro-level implications. On the continuum of engaged scholarship, the research for this dissertation work will be at the "involve" position in the interviews themselves. Shown in Figure 1.3, the involve state of engagement because the stakeholders of coach, coachee and adjacent team members were interviewed. The phenomenon in question to be analyzed takes place at the "co-create" stage. The practice of chemistry takes place in the moments of coaching and interactions of leadership throughout the relationship, interactions over real time (Kansas State University, n.d.). The research was used to create a conceptual model that could be integrated into practice and create positive impact, another pillar of community engaged scholarship.

My community consists of non-profits organizations, companies, civic organizations, community and business groups. Through the work I do in coaching and leadership development training, I am getting paid to help either non-profits, companies or civic organizations build strong leadership and communication. Through my involvement in the community as a member and a leader, I serve on boards and in organizations and speak at a variety of other community groups across the state and region about topics related to leadership and communication.

I used my professional organizations in business, academics and coaching to ask for volunteers for this research study.

Figure 1-3. Community Engaged Scholarship – Kansas State University (KSU, n.d.)



CONTINUUM OF ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

Scholarly engagement is research, teaching, and service in which the university collaborates with public or private sectors in activities that benefit individuals and communities. This continuum represents a few examples of engaged activities with increasing levels of external involvement.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Co-Create
Research Scholarship Creative Activity Discovery (RSCAD)	Public impact RSCAD Contribute expertise to community projects	Community/Program Needs assessments Publish case studies	Convene stakeholders on RSCAD issues	Collaboration with stakeholders to identify RSCAD priorities	Stakeholder-based participatory RSCAD Co-founding start-up with external partners
Teaching	Media interviews Community workshops	Connect students with stakeholders Field experiences	Service learning Applied internships	Co-teaching with stakeholder groups Industry challenge-focused course	Co-develop academic programs with stakeholders Coordinate community-led teaching
Service	Expert testimony Media posts	Facilitate community conversations Consulting/clinical ervices	Stakeholder relationships Community reps on committees	Co-host national associations Town/gown events	Co-host seminars Town/ gown service

CONCLUSION

My aim was to study the phenomenon's effects in coaching and train an organization to leverage it across multiple settings. I was looking to understand if the breadth and depth of chemistry could create lasting positive impact on relationships, teams and cultures. I sought to avoid the roadblocks to chemistry in coaching and culture and increase and further its impact.

Comprehending the energetic phenomenon of chemistry and its impact on people and outcomes in our western corporations is shown here to have impact engagement, retention and higher outcomes with more agreeable working environments.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Most often, chemistry can be seen between two individuals or in a team environment. In athletics, you can see a team "click" on the court or field. You can see it in a professional environment when two people just seem to just hit it off as if they had always known each other. We call this phenomenon chemistry in our everyday vernacular (Sandra, 2022). High levels of engagement in groups, companies, communities or teams are sparked by chemistry or inspire chemistry (Ekert et al., 1998). Once chemistry between persons is alive, all interaction and engagement tend to increase (Chetty & Price, 2024; Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017; Dodson, 2023). This downflow of energy to others in the organization, the culture, and the community are multiplied into positive momentum (Malloy et al., 2023; Sandra & Nandram, 2013).

Chemistry is used in athletics to create positive results, progress and winning but are rarely utilized, leveraged or studied in corporations. Chemistry creates momentum that pushes to these positive outcomes. These factors seem to heighten bonding, teamwork and increase achievement (Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017; Smith & Jones, 2021). The concept and actuality of chemistry and coherence could be used to accelerate progress outside of the one on one executive coaching relationship (Malloy et al., 2023).

Executive coaches often have to pass "chemistry" tests with a client to be hired. This chemistry will result in better practice, energy and co-creation of behavior change, forward progress and success for the executive (Neitlich, 2016; Vesso & Alas, 2016). If the chemistry and resonance of athletic teams and coaching were studied to see how that could be transferred into a corporate setting, could that information be used to multiply executive coaching to practices within an organization? Studying these phenomena in athletics and executive coaching

in the workplace could produce resonance and momentum that create higher outcomes, increased engagement and higher job satisfaction.

Most of the research around chemistry in leadership is centered around mindfulness or organizational design and benefit, not practice theory of the energy transfer from a one-on-one relationship to collectively affecting the team (Dust et al., 2022). There is also a great deal of study around organizational dynamics for teamwork (Ammons, 2021). There are articles studying coherence and entrainment in organizations. These are defined as examining cycles and time related to social interaction in organizations (Danny et al., 2023). There hasn't been measured impact from executive coaching chemistry all the way through the coherence in a team, community, culture or organization. There hasn't been measured studies on how utilizing the benefits of chemistry could benefit coaching. The gap in research is in analyzing how chemistry impacts coaching.

Collective Leadership Theory

Collective Leadership Theory (CLT) was used related to what happens outside the coaching encounter or in a team or group coaching environment. Everyone shares the leadership. Building trust in collective leadership establishes co-creation of progress and work. Interactivity creates identity through conversation and shared work. Coaching is a one-on-one activity that happens collectively between leader and coach. The practice of coaching is also to impact through the leader after the coaching encounter. CLT says the coach is still making impact through the leader because they co-created change and growth. The leader can then collectively still learn and grow in the team, company and community.

These collective concepts are impacting the view of leadership by entering the academic realm as Collective Leadership Theory (Ospina et al., 2020). The theory examines the pooled

resources and relational aspects of leadership as well as how this impacts performance and outcomes. It examines the idea of leadership as existing in the system or in the group.

Their findings revealed that leadership is not an individual act but a relational feat, constructed through ongoing interactions among people with shared purpose, accountability, and influence. Rather than focusing on leaders as static roles, the study illuminated leadership as an interactive system of practices, shaped by diverse experiences and perspectives. This theoretical orientation challenges the traditional Western paradigm that equates leadership with positional authority or personal charisma and instead emphasizes mutual influence, interdependence, and collective sense-making as drivers of performance and transformation (Ospina et al., 2020).

CLT provides an important foundation for analyzing chemistry in coaching as a relational and systemic process. The Ospina et al. (2020) framework demonstrates that leadership is generated through the interactions where people connect and co-create meaning. These are precisely the kinds of exchanges where chemistry becomes visible. CLT can help reframe chemistry from being an interpersonal spark to being a collective force that can sustain performance and interactivity across teams and organizations.

Collective Leadership Theory is displayed here related to coaching in Ubuntu which states that "I am because we are" (Mwangi, 2023). Ubuntu teaches that a person is a person through other people (*Botho/Ubuntu*, n.d.). Founded in the collective practice of leadership between two people or in a group, it is about the journey of relationships and their impact on community (Chetty & Price, 2024). The individual is dependent on collective actions, behaviors and feelings in developing responsible leaders as citizens (Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024). Identity and humanity are co-created in the community and action like coaching is co-created between coach and coachee.

Ubuntu is fundamentally grounded in the collective exercise of leadership within pairs or groups (Chetty & Price, 2024). Individuals rely on shared actions, behaviours, and emotions. Identity and humanity are collaboratively constructed through community engagement and purposeful activity (Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024). Leadership, as practiced through Ubuntu, involves not only the co-cr*eation of le*adership activities but also the development of leadership identity. This collective perspective highlights the duality of serving simultaneously as leader and coach (Bryant & Development, 2024). Communication is both sent and received, and encompasses both actions and words along with their significance (Botho/Ubuntu, n.d.).

Chetty and Price – Ubuntu leadership (2024)

Chetty and Price published an article using Ubuntu to predict employee engagement. Through their research focusing on collectivism, they found six factors that if used in leadership would have a positive affect on engagement. First solidarity is important in that people need to accept others in the community despite differences. The leaders actively work on connectedness through acceptance. This create a shared sense of purpose and if one person is winning, the whole community wins (Chetty & Price, 2024).

Next factor they found was survival. They found that resilience and adaptability underneath survival indicates a collective environment that would be able to overcome adversities together. Relationships was third and an extension of solidarity. The leaders and members maintain connectedness with intention and priority. This encourages that members are valued and important. Empathy is fourth as a fundamental principle. Leaders who activate empathy make members feel supported and enables them to be seen and heard. Collaboration is fifth and deconstructs traditional organizational structures and promotes innovation and openness between members. Lastly, the researchers identified respect. It is not surface level courtesy, but

people being valued for their inherent worth. Giving dignity to their humanity deepens the interconnectedness, making sure all community members have a contribution and are valued (Chetty & Price, 2024).

Entwinement

Sandberg and Dall'Alba in writing about practice based approaches are inspired by a life world perspective. They argue that the "performance of organizational practices can be more closely examined by bringing to the fore of manner in which practice is constituted through entwinement of life with world" (Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009). From their life world perspective, a person doesn't just act in relative to the world, but actually acts in ways of being that give meaning for us. We are not just a body, but our body reaches out into and interacts and incorporates things and people in our world. Similar to Ubuntu, the authors say that "we become human beings by taking over ways of being from other humans" (Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009).

Entrainment

The research articles that Sandra has contributed to link leadership to inner consciousness. Leadership is "inspiration and upliftment where the individual is inspired to become self-actualizing" (Sandra & Nandram, 2013). Integral is describing all aspects of a person. Their physical, emotions, mental and soul aspects all together as one. He defines integral in leadership as "a holistic understanding of consciousness and human potential" (Sandra & Nandram, 2013). He describes entrainment as a key element of this process happening in integral leadership.

Entrainment is an application of quantum physics that can be easily seen in music (Clayton, 2012). If two guitars are tuned to the same and one "G" string is plucked nearby the other tuned guitar, the "G" string on the second guitar will vibrate with it. Schiavio, Witek and

Stupacher research the expansion of creativity musically with entrainment (chemistry) (Schiavio et al., 2024).

Sandra describes entrainment as the

> …synchronization process over time whereby two or more autonomous rhythmic processes – such as the heart beat of two people – interact with each other in such a way that they adjust towards and eventually lock-in to a common phase and/or periodicity, most often to the rhythm being more powerful or dominant and finally maintaining a consistent relationship (Sandra & Nandram, 2013).

In physics, entrainment is called coherence whereby two waves are phase locked.

Similarly in phsysiology, coherence describes two systems like the body's oscillating systems become entrained and oscillate at the same frequency (Sandra & Nandram, 2017). In organization behavior, entrainment speaks more of time, pace, rhythm and cycles in business. There is research that supports a relationship between organizational entrainment and organizational performance (Perez-Nordtvedt et al 2008).

Entrainment has been studied as a phenomenon since the 17th century. It has been used to examine the importance of cycles in business (Ancona and Chone, 1996; Khavul, 2010; Shi and Prescott, 2012; Dibrell, 2015), physics (Sreenivas and Prasad, 2000), neuroscience (da Silva, 1991), physiology (Goldberger, 2002), biology (Aschoff, 1979) and music (Clayton, 2012).

Kelly and Barsade (2001) and Goss (2007) have written about entrainment from an emotions standpoint. The former speaks of people adjusting in a nonconscious way in behavior to coordinate or synchronize with another person (Kelly & Barsade, 2001). Goss leans into the Ritual Chain Theory to explain that people are attracted or detracted to emotional energy of others. This energy sets the level of entrainment that takes place (Goss, 2007). The authors

describe dispositional affect which consists of a person's predisposition toward the world around them in a positive or negative way. This inner disposition has been shown to have strong affects on individual behavior in groups. Emotions, though, more than disposition and mood have shown to have more impact to shift beliefs (Kelly& Barsade, 2001).

The bulk of research on the corporate side is done on just coaching or just teamwork or just liminal spaces or pivot points (Moritz, 2024). All four of these things are progressive and lead to positive momentum and higher results and success (Neitlich, 2016). The study of the energy transfer that I call chemistry, and what helps it succeed or what kills its movement would be very beneficial to organizations and to coaches.

Theoretical Framework

The figure in 1.1 is the representation visually of the steps of chemistry in coaching and its possible coherence into teams, organizations and communities. The three theories are shown how they overlay the phenomenon steps of chemistry in the research above those steps. Together these frameworks reveal chemistry as a multi-layered phenomenon. See Table 1 below, through SPT, it begins with interpersonal openness then expands through collective impact in CLT and finally manifests as a pivot point or shift in practice through LAP. The integration of these three theories moves chemistry beyond mere rapport to an understanding of the relational process that shapes leadership practice, team relations and organizational culture.

This combination of theories offers a novel interpretive lens for understanding chemistry as a dynamic, multi-level phenomenon that can positively impact leadership and culture. As it evolves from an interpersonal connection (SPT) to impact and identity (CLT) to collective emergent practice in real time (LAP), the chemistry can become a framework for replicating momentum instead of just a mere experience of a phenomenon.

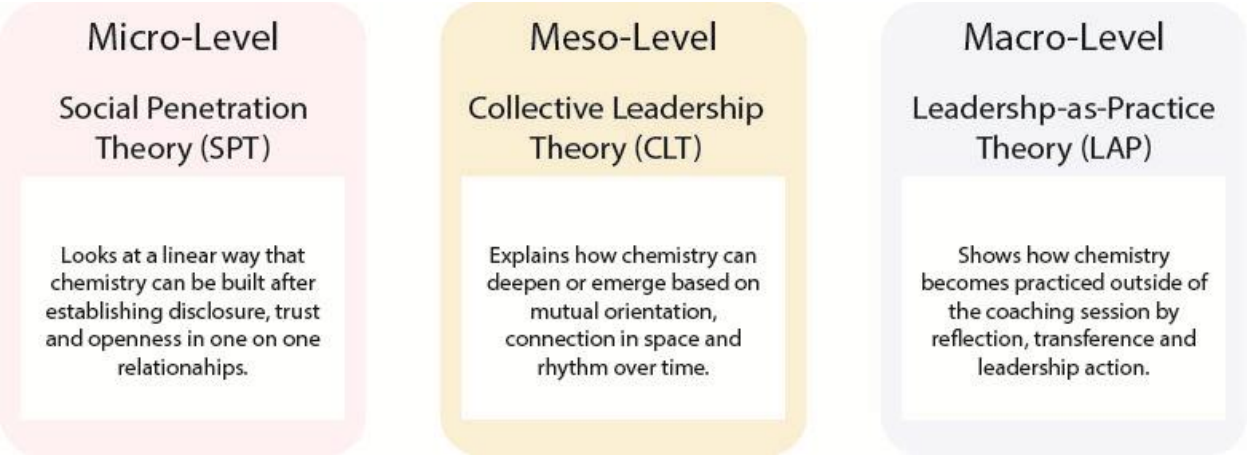
While each theory individually explains a part of the phenomenon, together they construct a continuum that will make it possible to build a model to be replicated and practiced to enhance leadership and culture. It allows chemistry to be traced from inner experience to outer enactment. This integration allowed the study to analyze how chemistry is felt, but also practiced, multiplied and sustained in relationships, teams and organizations. This combination gives me a unique way to see chemistry as both a relational energy and a organizational and leadership practice.

Table 1 – Connections of Theories in Theoretical Framework

Theory	Level of Analysis	Key Constructs	Application to Chemistry
SPT	Dyadic/Micro	Openness, self-disclosure	Depth of relational exchange and bonding to find beginning point of chemistry
CLT	Collective/Meso	Empathy, mutual transformation and impact on identity	Interprets how chemistry leaves an imprint on relationships to elongate bonding and impact across groups
LAP	Practice/Macro	Emergence, co-action and co-creation	Identifies pivot points where chemistry becomes practice and can be replicated

Integrating these three theories produces a theoretical continuum that is greater than the sum of its parts. Together, they provide a unified lens for exploring chemistry across scales of human interaction, not just as a phenomenon that happens and is over. This synthesis allows chemistry not only as a subjective experience but also as a social process that can create lasting positive change for communities and cultures. By engaging all three lenses together, the analysis gains the ability to connect micro-level connection to macro-level teamwork (see Figure 4).

Figure 2.1 - Multi-Level Theoretical Lens



Social Penetration Theory

Social Penetration Theory (SPT) suggests that openness and vulnerability lead to lasting intimacy and influence future relationships. The theory uses an onion model to illustrate how deepening understanding strengthens bonds (TAYLOR, n.d.). Applying SPT to one-on-one coaching highlights the impact of vulnerability, trust, and openness on chemistry and positive outcomes (Mangus et al., 2020). Using this theory to examine the one-on-one coaching relationship hoped to show how vulnerability, trust and openness can affect chemistry and positive outcomes from coaching and beyond (Mangus et al., 2020).

SPT identifies how the deepening of the bond and the intimacy of the relationship can affect outcomes and the relationship as a whole. The amount of openness can deepen relationships as SPT proves, but can it also impact chemistry in the relationship and the downflow of that chemistry into the organization. SPT and the reality of experiencing vulnerability and the benefits of that relationship bond to in turn create more open relationships and deeper bonds (Mangus et al., 2020).

Figure 1.1 deconstructs the phenomenon of chemistry in coaching visually through four steps to show the sequence and overlay of the theories that will be used. Beginning with the

initial stage in which chemistry is established between coach and coachee, SPT was used to examine how that connection is formed and what subsequent outcomes or processes it facilitates. SPT explains how the chemistry begins through self-disclosure, vulnerability and openness. It was used in the analysis to guide identification of the moments of disclosure, trust formation and emotional reciprocity in the transcripts. It focused on answering the research question, "How is chemistry built between coach and coachee? What is it and what impact does it have on coaching?".

SPT is the communication theory of choice because its basis is in the initial relationship and how it is constructed and deepened. Without establishing trust through vulnerability and intimacy deepening the relationship, the coaching relationship might not last or produce the same level of results, thus, chemistry would not take place. The bond in the coaching relationship is co-constructed in real time in the sessions. The methods of coaching serve as the outcomes of exchange in SPT that satisfy rewards for the coachee to continue to disclose more and go deeper. Deepening of the relationship has shown to advance relationships in business sales (Mangus et al., 2020). Coaching is an exchange, a sharing, a vulnerable disclosure. The highlights of this theory are shown below in Table 1.

Table 2. Social Penetration Theory Highlights

Social Penetration Theory	(Mangus, Bock, Kones, & Folse)	
	Uses disclosure to develop interpersonal relationships	
	exposing personal characteristics	sharing beliefs, values, needs
	outcomes of exchange	satisfying reward in exchange for disclosure - confidence/competence - external rewards
	situational context	length of coaching, confidentiality

Coaching in SPT

The coaching relationship and its outcomes are highly related to trust to gain benefits (Vesso & Alas, 2016). When looking for communication theory, SPT stood out related to

coaching because the relationship between client and salesperson appeared to be a close match. Both the studies listed above could easily have been done to examine the coach/coachee relationship to see if the phases of SPT affected the outcomes.

Self-disclosure lines up with the one-on-one relationship of coaching (see Table 2). Exploratory affection and affective exchange line up with the assessment and feedback part of coaching. In these two steps the participants explore reward/exchange patterns that decide to disclose and deepen the relationship. The construction and reconstruction of the relationship at each stage relate to the reflection and learning of coaching. Finally, stable exchange as the final step shows the transformation of the relationship by establishing the deepest layer of trust in the exchange of the relationship.

Table 3. Theories Related to Coaching

	Social Penetration Theory	Ubutu - Collective Leadership Theory	Leadership as Practice
Coaching			
One on One Relationship (trust and accountability)	Self -Disclosure (Altman & Taylor)	Connectedness, respect and relationships (Chetty & Price)	Social interactions, relational aspects of life (Raelin), entwinement (Sandberg & Tsoukas)
Goal Setting & Achievement		Overcome challenges, collaboration (Chetty & Price)	Agenic collaboration, collective capacity (Raelin)

Assessment & Feedback	Exploratory Affection & Affective Exchange (Koponen & Julkunen)	Empathy & Collaboration (Chetty & Price)	Reflective discourse, collaboration (Raelin)
Reflection & Learning	Construction and reconstruction of relationship (Koponen & Julkunen)	Resilience, adaptation, continuous learning (Chetty & Price)	Reflective discourse, collaboration (Raelin)
Continuous Improvement & Transformation	Stable Exchange (Koponen & Julkunen)	Solidarity (Chetty & Price)despite difference, social responsibility & citizenship (Sachikonye & Ramiogan)	Compassion, dignity (Raelin), entwinement (Sandberg & Tsoukas)

Issues/Topics/Trends SPT

SPT has been applied in recent years to observe and learn from the salesperson to client relationship. The studies done look at relationship selling through the lens of SPT as an approach. Mangus et al look at customer felt relationship empathy which shows customer perception about discerning sales thoughts and feelings (Mangus et al., 2020). The quantitative surveys showed that disclosure of business-related information advanced the relationship with their business partners. They further showed that disclosure of information related to their personal lives served to develop the relationship and positively affect sales results (Mangus et al., 2020).

The SPT study by Koponen and Julkunen show self-disclosure and relational cost/benefits for salespeople. The qualitative interview showed that all customer relationships do not have to evolve through all phases of SPT to be successful or profitable. They did find that different phases of SPT were identified by different self-disclosure. In order to deepen the

relationship, mutual understanding and reciprocal self-disclosure were needed (Koponen & Julkunen, 2022).

Community Engagement in SPT

In both research studies of SPT mentioned above, those same premises and learned outcomes could help positively impact many community-based relationships. There are applications for teacher-student, mentor-mentee, leader-follower, coach/coachee, and civic leader/community, for examples. Both studies in the continuum of engaged scholarship are consulting with customers, involving customers and salespeople and using the information to inform the salespeople how to succeed in building those relationships (see Figure 1.3). Other aspects of the study seem to check the boxes of CES shown in Table 3 shown below. What is not included in Gordon de Cruz's lists is potential applications. Meaning, most research is meant at its core, to improve and add value with the knowledge gained. The intent of that new information to inform others is based on how the content is applied and to what purpose. Those ethereal subjects are not included in the published work and harder to determine. As mentioned, a person could apply the knowledge gained to a variety of community engagement to add value.

Critically speaking, neither study showed collaboration and an ability to inform the customer on how best to perceive authenticity from the salesperson to validate trust. In order to fully represent Community Engaged Scholarship (CES), the studies would have needed to collaborate with both groups and inform broadly the study's findings. Overall, though, SPT's main purpose seems to understand relationship building and trust. In CES, trust is paramount in bridging gaps, building collaboration, gaining understanding and resolving conflict. SPT could benefit CES in understanding how to build these initial bonds between people, regardless of power, background or skills.

Table 4. Theories related to Community Engaged Scholarship (Gordon de Cruz, 2018)

	Social Penetration Theory	Ubuntu (Collective Leadership Theory)	Leadership as Practice	Entrainment (Spiritual Leadership Theory)
Community Engagement (Gordon de Cruz, 2017)				
Real Life Problems	x	x	x	x
Scholarly Investigation of problems	x	x	x	x
Community-University partnership	x	x	x	x
Generation of knowledge to improve	x	x	x	x
Use of institutional resources	x	x	x	x
Production of scholarship toward agenda		x	x	x
	Koponen & Julkunen	Chetty & Price	Robinson Renshaw - ba	Sandra
	Mangus, Bock, Jones, Folse			

Limitations in SPT

One of the biggest limitations of applying Social Penetration Theory (SPT) in interpretive qualitative research lies in its historical reliance on quantitative data and empirically measurable variables. Originally developed within a positivist framework, SPT tends to emphasize structured stages of relational development and often assumes a level of predictability in self-disclosure and relational progression (Altman & Taylor, 1973). There are places where SPT can be seen as objective versus open to interpretation. Although there are stages to SPT to deepen the relationship, each stage does not have to be followed, and each relationship might open up or not. The reward and exchange between two people does not have an exact formula. Although self-disclosure could be loosely viewed through the lens of interpretivist ontology and

constructivist epistemology in this application, most applications of SPT remain anchored in objectivist paradigms.

Collective Leadership Theory

CLT states that everyone shares the leadership. Building trust in collective leadership establishes co-creation of progress and work. Interactivity creates identity through conversation and shared work. Coaching is a one-on-one activity that happens collectively between leader and coach. CLT says the coach is still making impact through the leader because they co-created change and growth. The leader can then collectively still learn and grow with the team, company and community (Ospina, Foldy, Fairhurst, Jackson, 2020).

CLT provides the relational impact or imprint of a person to another person. It frames the transformation that occurs when two individuals co-create meaning and identity, allowing chemistry to become "set" or stay in "sync". Using CLT analytically to inform the interpretation of themes related to empathy, mutual transformation and the extension of relational energy beyond the initial encounter that SPT documents. If there is a bond made through SPT, does the impact or meaning of it extend or leave the coaching encounter? Does it return the next coaching encounter and remain in the bond? I am seeking to answer the research question, "How can the experience of chemistry in a coaching encounter be maximized, harnessed or measured?"

Table 5. Collective Leadership Theory as Ubuntu Highlights

Ubuntu (Collective Leadership Theory)	(Chetty & Price)	
	solidarity	despite difference act as a whole
	survival	adapatable, learning, resilient
	relationships	collaboration, mutual support
	empathy	facilatate emotional resosonance
	collaboration	dismantling hierarchal boundaries, social responsibility
	respect	dignity, active listening, citizenship

Ubuntu leadership encapsulates the core structure of collectivism that recognizes that an individual and their growth are inextricably bound to the whole of the community. The concept

of Ubuntu defines that a person is seen not as an individual but as part of a collective society. In Africa, a sense of community is critical for managers as they navigate organizations. (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019). Shown below in Table 6 are the keys points of Collective Leadership Theory from Peter Kuenkle laid beside the key tenets of Ubuntu to show the connection brought out by Chetty & Price (2024).

Table 6 – Ubuntu as an Example of Collective Leadership Theory

Chetty & Price - Ubuntu	Kuenkel - Collective Leadership Theory
solidarity	wholeness
survival	innovation/future possibilities
relationships	engagement
empathy	humanity
collaboration	collective intelligence
respect	humanity

Looking at Table 5, the key points of Ubuntu are highlighted. Ubuntu's very foundation is in the collective practice of leadership between two people or in a group (Chetty & Price, 2024). The individual is dependent on collective actions, behaviors and feelings. Identity and humanity are co-created in community and action (Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024). The humanity of the leader in practice is not just co-creating leadership activities but co-creating leadership identity. Collectively through Ubuntu, we see the both/and of being a leader and a coach (Bryant & Development, 2024). We are a sender of communication and a receiver of communication. We are both actions and words and their meaning (*Botho/Ubuntu*, 2013).

Chetty and Price (2024) published an article using Ubuntu to predict employee engagement. Through their research focusing on collectivism, they found six factors that if used in leadership would have a positive effect on engagement. First, solidarity is important in that people need to accept others in the community despite differences. The leaders actively work on

connectedness through acceptance. This creates a shared sense of purpose and if one person is winning, the whole community wins (Chetty & Price, 2024).

Next factor they found was survival. They found that resilience and adaptability underneath survival indicates a collective environment that would be able to overcome adversities together. Relationships were third and an extension of solidarity. The leaders and members maintain connectedness with intention and priority. This encourages that members are valued and important. Empathy is fourth as a fundamental principle. Leaders who activate empathy make members feel supported and enable them to be seen and heard. Collaboration is fifth and deconstructs traditional organizational structures and promotes innovation and openness between members. Lastly, the researcher identified respect. It is not surface level courtesy, but people being valued for their inherent worth. Giving dignity to their humanity deepens the interconnectedness, making sure all community members have a contribution and are valued (Chetty & Price, 2024).

Coaching in Collective Leadership Theory (Ubuntu)

Ubuntu was chosen because of its philosophy about identity being forever transformed by an identity in our encounter with another identity. This is a beautiful picture of how the coach and the coachee are transformed by the engagement. There is an imprint or an "knowing" that can't be unknown after an encounter with another person. The encounter and the relationship are co-created between the two people. Rather than viewing the coachee as a passive recipient of the coaches' guidance, Ubuntu frames the coaching process as a co-creative partnership, where both individuals collaboratively shape the direction and outcomes of the engagement.

Ubuntu's additional tenets—connectedness, mutual respect, and interdependence—are essential for cultivating trust, a foundational element of effective coaching. Collectively working

together to overcome challenges means that this theory brings in the goal setting and achievement of coaching, particularly within corporate contexts that require demonstrable return on investment. Ubuntu resilience, adaptation and continuous learning also follow along with the coaching practices of feedback and reflection. Ubuntu's commitment to solidarity, social responsibility, and ethical citizenship resonates with coaching's broader aim of nurturing ongoing personal and professional transformation (See Table 5). With the right and privilege of leadership comes with it the responsibility of the community. The leader fulfills obligations of resources as a responsibility of citizenship to the community. The leaders are to act a certain way to ensure belonging within the group (Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024).

Community Engagement in Collective Leadership Theory (Ubuntu)

Collective Leadership Theory as the basis for Ubuntu has two key factors that tie is most fully to CES. Through Kuenkel's compass (see Figure 2.2), two of the steps are Humanity and Wholeness (Kuenkel, 2016). Humanity states that we must reach into one's personhood and wholeness states that we see a larger picture and stay connected to the common good. Both principles echo Ubuntu in being a part of the community, collaborating and being good citizens. Citizenship and belonging depend on seeing humanity as individuals but acting as a whole. Ubuntu is in Involve and Consult Stakeholders, Collaborate with Stakeholders, Co-Create Solutions and Inform Community and Others – which is all the stages of CES on the continuum (see Figure 1.3).

Figure 2-1. Peter Kuenkel's Collective Leadership Compass (Collective Leadership Institute, n.d.)

In the study done on employee engagement through the Ubuntu lens (Chetty & Price, 2024), all parts of CES were shown in acknowledging a problem with employee engagement, a scholarly investigation of the issue, a partnership between the academic researcher and the South African workforce. The study sought to position itself with other reputable study about Ubuntu and employee engagement to continue to learn and improve its application in the workforce. The production of the research was toward the initial agenda and intent of the research (see Figure 5).

The underlying intent of Ubuntu aligns with the ethical and moral view of CES. Ubuntu removes authority and title and sees the person and the community as a whole. It gives voice to each member of the community and how they impact one another. Relationship, empathy, collaboration, respect and adaptability are all key factors that help CES to thrive in a variety of applications.

Issues/Topics/Trends in Collective Leadership Theory (Ubuntu)

Ubuntu is used both as an ethical foundation for practices (*Botho/Ubuntu*, 2013) and for a foundation for leadership (Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024). Ubuntu is researched as a way of improving employee engagement in company culture (Chetty & Price, 2024).

Ubuntu is used as a model for various types of leadership. It is used in transformational (Ncube, 2010), relational leadership (Chetty & Price, 2024) and servant based leadership (Muller et al., 2019).

Its tenets of belonging, connectedness, respect and empathy make it useful for these other types of leadership theories. It is used as a critical comparison for typically western leadership philosophies that are individually driven and based on character traits (Ncube, 2010). It is used to teach decision making in management (Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024) and even reconciliation or conflict resolution (Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024). It is used as a moral tool (Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024) in leadership and community work.

Limitations in Collective Leadership Theory (Ubuntu)

The limitations of this theory in this application lie in how Ubuntu represents citizenship. The coach is under no obligation to be a citizen of the organization with the coachee. The coaching outcomes for the coachee could be considered about resilience or overcoming challenges which entails solidarity, social responsibility and citizenship for one party but not for

the coach itself, but each case determines goals. This theory is much more beneficial in the second step of chemistry analysis that sees into the impact to the team, company and community.

Conceptually, however, the idea of "I am because you are" does help the coach realize the partnership of the relationship and the duality of roles. Impact drives both directions through the Ubuntu lens and begins at the first moment of the first encounter.

Ethics are a commonality from coaching via contract to Ubuntu values but coaching does not necessarily involve citizenship at large in the collective community for the company or outside in the world. For the modern western corporate world, the collective nature of Ubuntu is already a stretch in our individual driven society. The concepts of human dignity, empathy, collaboration, and relationships are a stretch for a typical western coaching philosophy and outcomes, let alone collectivity.

Also, Ubuntu sees the leader as responsible for belonging in the community. The coach/coachee relationship allows the coachee to establish goals and issues to work through versus putting demands on them.

Leadership as Practice Theory

According to Raelin (2019), Leadership as Practice (LAP) posits that leadership is manifested through practical activities rather than being attributed solely to the characteristics or actions of individual leaders. Chemistry in coaching emerges through collective practice dynamics. LAP occurs when two or more people co-create moments and reflect together in real time (Raelin, 2020). The theory identifies pivotal moments that influence leaderful development, initiate change, and shape new trajectories (Raelin, 2020). Richard Barker contends that leadership only occurs when there is a "change in deviation from convention" and that it is a

process of "energy, not structure" (Robinson & Riddell, 2022). The key tenets using Raelin's lens of LAP are listed in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Leadership as Practice Key Tenets

Leadership as Practice	Raelin (leaderful practice)
	people may accomplish together
	affecting leadership at any given time
	emerges and unfolds in day to day experience
	embedded within it
	not in characteristics of a person but embedded in a situation that takes place
	duality of structure (Heideggers)

LAP can help analyze the practice taking place in coaching, observing chemistry and coherence and the resulting benefits. LAP examines how chemistry becomes visible in action. It seeks to identify how it materializes in real-time collaboration, shared reflection, and pivot points. In the analysis, LAP will guide the search for practice-based evidence of the lived experience of the participant's chemistry phenomenon. Looking for pivot points, shifts in action or dialog, co-constructed meaning and emergent patterns of shared narratives. LAP is based on the social construction of leadership in action while it is happening. Leadership and success is seen as a collective phenomenon rather than individual attributes and actions (J. Raelin, 2011).

In physics, resonance is defined as "one object vibrating at the same natural frequency of a second object forces that second object into vibrational motion". Much like the resonance that occurs in music. The instruments tuned to the same note vibrate at the same frequency. Two players tuned to goals that have high engagement in practice and play vibrate or resonate at the same frequency then it spreads. An instrument can be forced into vibrating at one of its harmonics (with one of its standing wave patterns) if another interconnected object pushes it with one of those frequencies (The Physics Classroom, ND). Schatski speaks of this concept that he calls entwinement in practice theory. It is the togetherness that happens in practice and action

within people. The energies connect and entwine to collectively change moments. (Tsoukas, 2019). This is *Ba* that Robinson and Renshaw (2022) refer to – which is the "existential space in which leadership groups weave together to create and ripen collaborative agency". Ba becomes not just a place but an abstract and/or literal space that provides an opening for human experiencing (Robinson & Renshaw, 2022). In LAP, it is the action between and in between people that create leadership. A study done by Fujii in 2012 showed Japanese students working together and "resonating off each other's and creating *Ba*" and becoming entrained (Robinson & Renshaw, 2022). LAP through the concept of Ba comes close to understanding the phenomenon of chemistry as something that happens in the space between people and because of them.

Moments of leadership have begun to be defined outside of an individual's traits and into the "turning points…moments when the trajectory of attention, work and coordination shifts" (Larsson et al., 2025). They are evidenced in speech, actions, forms of co-action and negotiation of authority. This research aligns with this contemporary LAP viewpoint of going beyond the observation of the phenomenon, to how the participants make sense of the situation and how that aligns with the research interpretation (Larsson et al., 2025).

Leadership as cultural practice identifies leadership as a part of culture. It cannot be studied in practice apart from the culture it is embedded in and is made up of. The practices in leadership refer to the undercurrent of guiding principles and unconscious and automatic thoughts that drive behaviors (Vilas-Boas et al., 2018). The leadership as an action or practice is held inside the context where the actions take place and are shaped by inner beliefs. Though connected to the inner self, the leadership takes place as LAP when the beliefs of actors happen in the collective environment (Vilas-Boas et al., 2018). These are the moments where chemistry takes place.

LAP is about change since leadership creates turning points in practice that lead to change in trajectories with the flow of future practice. This change takes place as actors interact with and are sculpted by other actors and the surrounding contexts (Raelin et al., 2025). The sense making of this type of leadership practice happens in everyday social situations and interactions, especially through "collective reflection" (Raelin et al., 2025). In analyzing the phenomenon of chemistry through experience, observation and reflection, this research contends that it is not separating the actors from their beliefs or culture, but allowing them to remain whole.

Sandberg and Dall'Alba in writing about practice-based approaches are inspired by a life world perspective. They argue that the "performance of organizational practices can be more closely examined by bringing to the fore of manner in which practice is constituted through entwinement of life with world" (Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009). From their life-world perspective, a person doesn't just act in relative to the world but acts in ways of being that give meaning for us. We are not just a body, but our body reaches out into and interacts and incorporates things and people in our world. Similar to Ubuntu, the authors say that "we become human beings by takings over ways of being from other humans" (Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009).

Heidegger writes about his opposition to the underlying ontology of scientific rationality which assumes disconnection – that we are entwined or ever connected as beings to the world (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2019). It is our engagement, or our entwinement with certain practices that enable us to better make meaning of ourselves. Giddens (1979) built upon this and created a "duality of structure" suggests that agent and things do not oppose but "presuppose" each other in social practices (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2019).

Table 8. Comparison Coaching and Chemistry to Practice Theory, LAP and LAPD

Dimension	Chemistry Phenomenon	Leadership-as-Practice (LAP)	Coaching	Leadership-as-Practice Development (LAPD)	Practice Theory
Ontology/Epistemology	Plural & interpretive/co-created	**Plural & emergent/social process**	Interpretive/social constructed	**Participatory/Reflective & Inquiry**	**Embodied interconnected/Discursive Engagement**
Focus of Inquiry	Collective emergence and lived experience	**Leadership as emergent in collective, real-time interaction**	Individual lived experience and transformation	**Development of leadership capacity in shared practice contexts**	Social practices as basic units of analysis
View of Leadership/Agency	Co-created and relational	**Leadership as enacted through shared activity**	Relational, co-creative, developmental	**Leadership cultivated through reflection-in-practice and dialogue**	Agency emerges from practice arrangements

Looking at Table 8, if we were looking for an alignment in coaching research itself, LAPD would be a better fit. The reflection, inquiry and participatory affects of LAPD align perfectly with the practice of coaching. The coaching relationship challenges the leader to go back to practice and develop in shared situations with direct reports and colleagues what they are developing. The research itself will require dialog and discursive engagement combined with reflection which would be more like LAPD, but the phenomenon itself, chemistry, lands in LAP. If I were researching the benefits of coaching in an organization, then LAPD would be the best fit. The nuance difference is that I am researching the potential benefits of the phenomenon of chemistry in coaching emerging and impacting others, this is where the alignment to LAP becomes succinct.

Chemistry in coaching is plural and emergent like the ontology of LAP. It happens between two or more people and emerges from interaction, situations, reflections or dialogue (J. Raelin, 2011). Chemistry in coaching and beyond is co-created and interpretive like the epistemology of LAP leading to a social process that shows up in company culture and community (J. A. Raelin, 2020). Chemistry in coaching is a collective experience that is lived and interpreted emerging in real time. It happens in relationships, and is co-created and develops over time in shared activity or shared space (J. A. Raelin, 2023).

The benefit of using LAP to support the research of coaching lies in the alignment in ontology and epistemology. The participatory notions of each of them is perfectly aligned with coaching. Without participation, the coaching process does not work. It requires dialog, willingness, deep reflection and engagement. The coaching process itself is one on one, but the work done in coaching is also done outside the session in reflection and practice. It is an active engagement and a social process that is ongoing. For practice theory, dialog, activity, social engagement, inquiry and embodiment are all woven into the fabric of what makes them a theory category.

Chemistry overlays as a phenomenon on the foundational principles of LAP. For instance, chemistry can take place in real time and is emergent and embedded in the situation, not the person (Raelin, 2011). Chemistry can create a turning point in practice where things shift (Raelin & Robinson, 2022). It is interpretive in nature and dynamic, where many people in a group engaging in practice might all experience chemistry differently or not at all (Raelin, 2019). Chemistry can open up space for people to encounter each other and create resonance (coherence) (Robinson & Renshaw, 2021). Chemistry can mold identities into mutual adjustment with others and their surroundings (Raelin, 2023). Chemistry cannot happen alone, it happens only when two or more people are engaging in action or dialog somehow (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2019). Chemistry happens in situ (Larsson et a., 2025). Understanding chemistry in coaching and leadership can give us the "how" understanding (Vilas-Boas et al., 2018). Chemistry in coaching can be defined by the turning points that lead to change in trajectories of leadership within the flow of practice (Raelin et. al, 2025).

The view of leadership in coaching related to LAP is centered around co-creation or shared learning and practice emergence. All see leadership as developing and progressing, some through dialog or practice but always involves two or more people together.

Studying the literature review shown in Table 9, finalized the conclusions drawn in the chart in Table 8. Although, there are philosophies of entwinement and life-world through Sandberg and Dall'Alba they also involve discursive engagement (Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009). Thus, the ontology and epistemology of practice theory do not align as closely as LAP. Even though coaching itself involves dialogue, the phenomenon of chemistry does not require dialogue or discursive engagement. It only requires plurality (two or more people) and a social process. Sometimes that emergence can happen in an activity, reflection or in just being together. The life-world and embodiment of practice theory was the hardest thing for me to decide to abandon as a theory in my framework for research. I love the alignment of life-world to the phenomenon of chemistry. Chemistry is embodiment but in plurality with another, not just embodiment of myself in the world. Chemistry is more about the embodiment of two or more people and how their individual embodiments can be entwined. Because of this, it is a stretch to apply practice theory even if I wanted to try, I think it wouldn't support as well in the research. It's possible after this initial research that understanding the embodiment of each participant related to a coaching session might illuminate how chemistry is formed or how fast it is formed and how long it can be utilized or what benefits come from it.

It is also possible that practice theory could be used to research more of the coherence that happens in practice arrangements throughout the organization outside of the coaching relationship and the second tier professional relationships. How does the practice of chemistry become a social practice of the culture or community or can it? How does dialog or discursive

engagement allow chemistry to transfer to coherence with others might also be LAPD. Doing this comparison and analysis of these three theories is helping me break the research down into chunks and narrowing the scope of the research in a way that is more feasible.

Coaching in LAP

Utilizing LAP and Ubuntu allows the phenomenon of chemistry to come into the leadership theory space stepping out of physics or biology or even psychology. The concepts of *Ba* and entwinement give language where chemistry has entered the leadership theory space and can be studied in coaching.

LAP's social interactions and relational aspects of life including entwinement directly align with coaching's one-on-one relationship standard. LAP also insinuates through its agenic collaboration and collective capacity that goals and achievement are happening and there is improvement to them. Feedback in LAP is done through reflective discourse and collaboration. Those two things also drive reflection and learning in LAP. For continuous learning and transformation of coaching, LAP leans into compassion, dignity and again with entwinement (see Table 7).

Chemistry can unfold in the coaching session, but can also unfold outside this boundaries of time. Chemistry is not constrained by a session of coaching, and the emergence of it can happen anytime anywhere in day to day practice.

Community Engagement in LAP

The study done by Robinson and Renshaw (2021) about *Ba* is aligned with all areas of CES shown in Figure 5. On the continuum of CES in Figure 4, this study of LAP was collaborative and co-created. At each point of analysis after extracting small video sections for the participants to evaluate, they readjusted the next step based on the results and coding from

that step. Allowing the participants to sculpt the next form of analysis based on their understanding and meaning making of the first one. Thus, LAP uses the full continuum of CES.

LAP also strips away power and position because it looks to the action generating change in the moment it takes place in engagement, anytime, anywhere by anyone. This particular attribute speaks to chemistry that can spread to coherence. It is something that happens between people but not by a person. It is in between the people not an action from one to the other necessarily.

Limitations for LAP

Practice theories like LAP are best researched from observation, case study or action-based studies to catch the practice happening in real time by seeing it happen. Sometimes chemistry is felt and not seen by outsiders to the phenomenon. Chemistry happens in practice but is sometimes internally felt before it is seen. That part of the practice is still creating a pivot point but not able to be observed by an actor in the engagement, only to be felt and understood.

The second limitation is that the practice unfolds in regular day-to-day action. The coaching session has a limited time boundary in which the coach is present to observe action changes. Sometime there is a delay in benefit due to reflection, reorientation and application of learning. The coach relies on the coachee to "feel" or remember those action practices that were altered and relate them back. The researcher will also rely on reflection and remembering from the participants for these moments of practice that shape new understanding or meaning.

Issues/Topics/Trends in LAP

LAP is on the cutting edge of the trend that pulls the power out of the individual hands of a leader with certain leadership traits and skills. It aligns with Ubuntu trends in that LAP is growing into other arenas outside of just leadership. It shifts the power from the hands of one

into the hand of many. It allows leaders to be anyone and anywhere. A new branch of LAP is emerging called LAP Development (LAPD). LAP is advancing now so that it knows enough about practice tendencies to further improve the future practice and any ongoing leadership practice (Raelin & Robinson, 2022). Participants engage on a mutual problem and then do a collective reflection on their experience at the time to be immediately useful to them, similar to a meeting or project debrief.

Robinson and Renshaw (2023) have applied its lessons into a new leader-who-coaches definition. So, the practice is being applied to a specific role of a leader as an actor in the workplace. This could benefit managerial roles in the workplace as well as mentors and supervisors. They take the concept of Ubuntu and lay it inside of LAP and coaching simultaneously.

Contribution of Chemistry in Coaching, Community Engagement and the Emergence of Leadership

Coaching

SPT provides a way to understand how chemistry develops through self-disclosure in the coaching relationship through reciprocal openness. These things foster trust as a foundation for chemistry to emerge in coaching.

Ubuntu adds a philosophical dimension, showing that both coach and coachee are forever transformed by their relational encounter through entrainment. Their identities are altered by the other's impact on them. Out of Ubuntu's dignity, compassion and interdependence comes mutual exchange of chemistry.

LAP allows chemistry to emerge as a dynamic phenomenon that arises in action and dialog. Chemistry is not a feeling but an emergent property from collaboration and interaction in coaching.

Together these theories allow the study to trace chemistry from its origin in personal interaction (SPT) to its consistency and repetition (CLT) to its collective manifestation in relational practice (LAP). This multilevel approach enables analysis of the felt experience and the observable enactment of chemistry so that the learning can be taught and replicated, illustrating how relational energy becomes an organizing force within leadership practice.

Community Engagement

SPT looks to explain the relational barriers that happen in communities and how trust and openness happen over time that would allow chemistry to thrive. Vulnerability and emotional disclosure are foundational for authentic community engagement.

Ubuntu sees people not as individuals but as a collective whole. They are an entire network of interdependent relationships who care, respect and use dignity to see other people's humanity. Chemistry would be seen in the solidarity of the community and its ability to advocate for and create innovation, initiative and progress.

LAP brings engagement into the practice process and away from the hands of one leader. Community engagement is seen as a series of co-created actions not outcomes. It removes the role from the individual identity. Chemistry would be part of the observable, interpreted experience or a catalyst of the practice progress or moments of pivot.

Emergence of Leadership

SPT shifts leadership from positionality or authority to relational influence. People build emotional connection through reciprocal disclosure and vulnerability. Leaders are authentic and

foster trust with others. This trust and openness are the fertile soil in coaching where chemistry first blooms in coaching with leaders.

Ubuntu sees leadership emerging as communal, not individual. There is no status or authority or title, but in act of service for the community. It would be seen in advocating for citizenship, resources and creating belonging for its people. The production of innovation and progress would trace back to the catalyst of chemistry.

LAP emerges from anyone, anywhere in everyday practices. It comes from groups, not individuals who act collaboratively in dynamic situations. Chemistry would be seen here when pivot practices are enhanced it and shifts the flow and gives meaning and application to the action and output of chemistry happening.

Conclusion

These three theories offer a framework that is emergent, relational, in motion and collaborative. They challenge objectivity, realism and purely individualistic models.

By integrating these perspectives to investigate chemistry, executive coaches, organizational leaders, and community developers can design interventions that are more human-centered, context-responsive, and transformational in nature. This theoretical framework proposes that chemistry in coaching functions as a proverbial bridge between the way trust is built to the commitment of trust and the emergent collective output of trust. By applying these lenses to participants' lived experiences, this study seeks to theorize chemistry not as a feeling, but as a mechanism for coherence across levels of leadership practice.

The final picture of all three theories shown in Table 9 beside Coaching the visual alignment in ontology and epistemology of the framework is evident. Seemingly complicated, each theory was chosen for a reason. Going back to the original tree drawing depicting the

theoretical framework (Figure 1.2), all three theories have ontological alignment in being plural and interpretive. The stretch in SPT allows for an objective interpretation of the social bonding process. Since the chemistry in coaching originates in that relationship where trust is also born, having this framework to understand the origin in this way is a great foundation for the understanding of the phenomenon.

The integration of SPT, CLT and LAP support a plural, interpretive ontology aligned with hermeneutic phenomenology. This means that it is co-constructed in relationship and embodied in shared practice. It allows for the interpretation of chemistry not just as a psychological state but as an emergent process of connection and co-creation that drives transformation in leaders, teams and organizations.

The epistemology also aligns with constructivist as a social process with co-creation of meaning. Chemistry in coaching happens in a moment, any moment between two people constructing reality. It is a lived experience and the understanding I want to gain through the research is in the participants hands. See Table 9.

Table 9. Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology of theories.

	Ontology (nature of reality)	Epistismology (nature of knowledge)	Methodology (of research)
Social Penetration Theory	objective (interpretive)	positivist (constructivist)	empirical observation (survey, interview and observation)
Collective Leadership Theory (Ubuntu)	collective (plural)	co-created constructivist (cultural and social contexts)	community based research/collaborative
Leadership as Practice Theory	processual and plural	Social process	interpreted inquiry - praxis oriented approach
Coaching	interpretive (ways of being)	socially constructed	ex. GROW model or TIME model, interview and inquiry
Hermeneutics Phenomonology	interpretive (plurality)	subjective experience and insights	hermeneutic phenomonology - interviews, storytelling, bracketing, hermeneutic cycle, hermeneutic circle

SPT provides a relational progression framework or how the coaching relationships deepen and chemistry emerges. *It is the origination point of chemistry.*

Ubuntu supports the abstraction of chemistry happening and that experience impacting or changing the identities of the actors involved through embodiment, which could then progress to coherence. *It "sees" if chemistry becomes coherence into community.*

LAP shifts chemistry away from being in the hands of one person's trait, behaviors or skills. Chemistry happens in the space between two or more people embodying dialog, action or practice spontaneously, dynamically and unpredictably. *It "sees" the pivot points that create development and shift flow that is the outcome of chemistry in action.*

Ultimately, this theoretical synthesis provides the scaffolding for analyzing how moments of chemistry become moments of leadership that can create more permanent and long lasting positive relationships, teamwork and culture. It shows how one on one chemistry can scale into collective coherence, showing chemistry both as the catalyst for transformation and the structure through which it sustains itself in continued practice.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The methodology approach this research used was hermeneutic phenomenology. It is the study of a phenomena, in this case chemistry and coherence in executive coaching. Simplified, it allows participants to recall experiences of a phenomenon and interpret how they make meaning of them. It is both a philosophical movement and a range of research approaches (Kafle, 2011). Philosophically it is about the conscious understanding of a phenomenon (Kafle, 2011).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology (HP) views reality as plural and open to interpretation (Kafle, 2011; Husserl, 1962), shaped by each individual's experience. HP enabled the participants to define the chemistry phenomenon based on their unique experiences. This approach maintains interpretative and plural perspectives, as shown in Table 10.

Advantages

The advantages of using HP are in alignment with coaching and with my methods of coaching. My philosophy and mantra for coaching is “Helping executives and executive teams see things they can't see and remove obstacles to become better leaders” (Perkins, n.d.). I am an intuitive coach. I listen to the actual words and stories from my clients while I simultaneously listen to what’s underneath the stories. I listen to the part and to the whole. During a coaching session I am going back and forth between the understanding of the person, the situation and other actors being described. I am moving between what is happening in the moment and what has happened in the history of moments. I am listening to the words of the person and detecting their emotions and the state of their consciousness and personhood. There are moments of understanding that I gain that “illuminate details and seemingly trivial aspects that are taken for granted to create meaning and understanding” for the coachee from this movement that happens

in coaching (Kafle, 2011). I want to lean into my strengths, the way I process information, and the flow of my style of coaching by finding a framework that fits those things.

Phenomenology stood out because chemistry is a phenomenon, it helped direct the methodology of choice. The interpretive lens of phenomenology fits plurality and plurality of insight from each actor in the coaching session. Combined with hermeneutics, it becomes the perfect pairing to align with the lens of coaching and with the coaching field. See in Table 11 below, the bolded words from phenomenology and HP fit coaching and my personal coaching philosophy. There is an ongoing cycle of interpretation, in and out, back and forth to create understanding. This describes the coaching relationship between coach and coachee.

The words are bolded that show this alignment:

- Interpretive
- Intuition
- Ways of being
- Subjective experience
- Attune
- Essence
- Parts and whole
- Illuminating things taken for granted

Table 10. Phenomenology and Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Phenomonology	Husserl	**interpretive, intuition**, bottoms up, plurality, features of being	Poli & Seibt,2010
Phenomonology	Husserl	concept of **being in consciousness, interpretative**, ongoing work replaces observation, how the sense of being is disclosed in and to human existence	Husserl, 1965 (1913)
Hermeneutic phenomonology	Heidegger	there are **ways of being** by us and this enactment is itself disclosive of what it means for us to be	Poli & Seibt,2010
Hermeneutic phenomonology	Heidegger	focused on the **subjective experience** of individuals and groups	Kalfe, 2011
Phenomonology	Heidegger	lived experience for researchers to **attune** toward the ontological nature of the phenomenon while learning to **see essential understandings** through their lens of pre-understanding and prejudices	Kalfe, 2011
Phenomonology		researching the **essence** or essential meaning of a phenomenon	Kalfe, 2011
Hermeneutic phenomonology	Cohen	aim to create a deep account of a phenomenon through **intuition**, focusing on **uncovering and amplification**	Kalfe, 2011
Hermeneutic phenomonology	Kalfe	commitment to an **abiding concern**, oriented stance toward the question, **investigating the experience as it is lived**, describing the phenomenon through writing and rewriting, and consideration of **parts and the whole** (6 steps)	Kalfe, 2011
Hermeneutic phenomonology	Wilson & Hutchinson	human experience as it is lived, **illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects that are taken for granted normally to create meaning and understanding**	Kalfe, 2011
Hermeneutic phenomonology	Manen	producing rich tetual descriptions of the experiencing of seleted phenomena in the **life world**	Kalfe, 2011
Hermeneutic phenomonology	Langdridge	our experiences can be be understood through the **stories** we tell of the experience	Kalfe, 2011
Hermeneutic phenomonology		rigorous **back and forth** intentional, reflective movement **between part and whole to unfold meaning**	Suddick, et al., 2020

Phenomenology research promotes openness and flexibility, aiming to capture the essence of human experience (Tracy, 2010). A common method is narrative interviewing to explore another person's subjective experiences (Tracy, 2010).

Table 11. Comparison of In-depth Interviews, Narrative Interviews and Phenomenological Inquiry

Feature	In-Depth Open-Ended Interviews	Narrative Interviews	Phenomenological Inquiry
Purpose	Explore broad themes and experiences	Understand stories people tell about their lives	**Explore lived experience and meaning**
Orientation	Flexible technique, method-agnostic	Narrative inquiry	**Phenomenology (descriptive or hermeneutic)**
Interview Style	Open-ended, improvisational	Eliciting stories or life episodes	**Deep reflection on specific experiences**
Focus	Content and emerging themes	Narrative structure, identity, temporality	**Meaning-making and interpretation**
Data Analysis	Thematic coding, constant comparison	Narrative analysis (structure + content)	**Thematic + interpretive/horizonal analysis**

Limitations

I found there to not be many limitations to using HP for the research. Zooming in and out throughout the data analysis worked seamlessly and successfully to understand the vast amounts of results the data set produced. Bracketing out myself but keeping the experience of the bracket always in mind while looking at the data proved to not be as challenging as I thought it could be. Listening and reading the nineteen sessions and twenty three (one coach did both interviews in one session) interviews multiple times proved the most challenging of the hermeneutic circle's requirements because of the sheer amount of time it required.

Bracketing in HP involved setting apart the natural attitude and adopting an openness in questioning about how something is (Suddick, et.al, 2020). In coaching, bringing myself to the

encounter is part of the benefit, even though it involved an understanding of my lens, perspective and biases. Bracketing in HP required me to use inquiry outside of these things that could inhibit, not just be aware of them. This represented my assumption of the researcher role in a new capacity.

Using the hermeneutical cycle of analysis (see Figure 3.1 below) was a great fit to the coaching cycle and the way my brain processes information to find meaning. Using only inquiry to gain information in one single setting and transversing the hermeneutic circle on that initial information alone was also not as challenging as I thought earlier. Again, this was an adjustment and work for me to make as the researcher.

Researcher Positionality and Relational Context

This study was conducted within an existing professional relational ecosystem. All participants had a prior professional relationship with me. While none were current coaching clients at the time of data collection, each participant knew me through professional engagement and agreed to participate in support of my doctoral completion. This relational context is an important interpretive condition of the study.

The presence of pre-existing professional relationships likely elevated baseline trust, reduced relational hesitation, and increased willingness to engage deeply in video elicitation and reflective dialogue. Participants may have experienced an implicit sense of mutual commitment grounded in professional goodwill and shared investment in the my scholarly work. This unseen mutual commitment may have amplified engagement levels, disclosure comfort, and motivation to contribute meaningfully.

At the same time, such relational proximity introduced potential sources of bias. Participants may have:

- Minimized criticism or negative feedback.
- Felt implicit loyalty that shaped interpretation of chemistry.
- Approached participation with a desire to be helpful rather than neutral.
- Elevated positive interpretations of relational experiences.

Power dynamics were also considered. Although no participant was under supervisory or evaluative authority of the researcher at the time of the study, my professional reputation and prior relational history may have influenced participation tone. To mitigate undue influence, participants were reminded of voluntary participation, confidentiality protections, and the importance of candid responses, including disconfirming perspectives.

Rather than positioning relational familiarity solely as a threat to validity, this study acknowledges that executive coaching rarely occurs between strangers. Coaching engagements are often preceded by referral networks, reputation, or prior professional familiarity. Thus, the relational field present in this study may reflect ecological realities of executive coaching practice rather than artificial contamination.

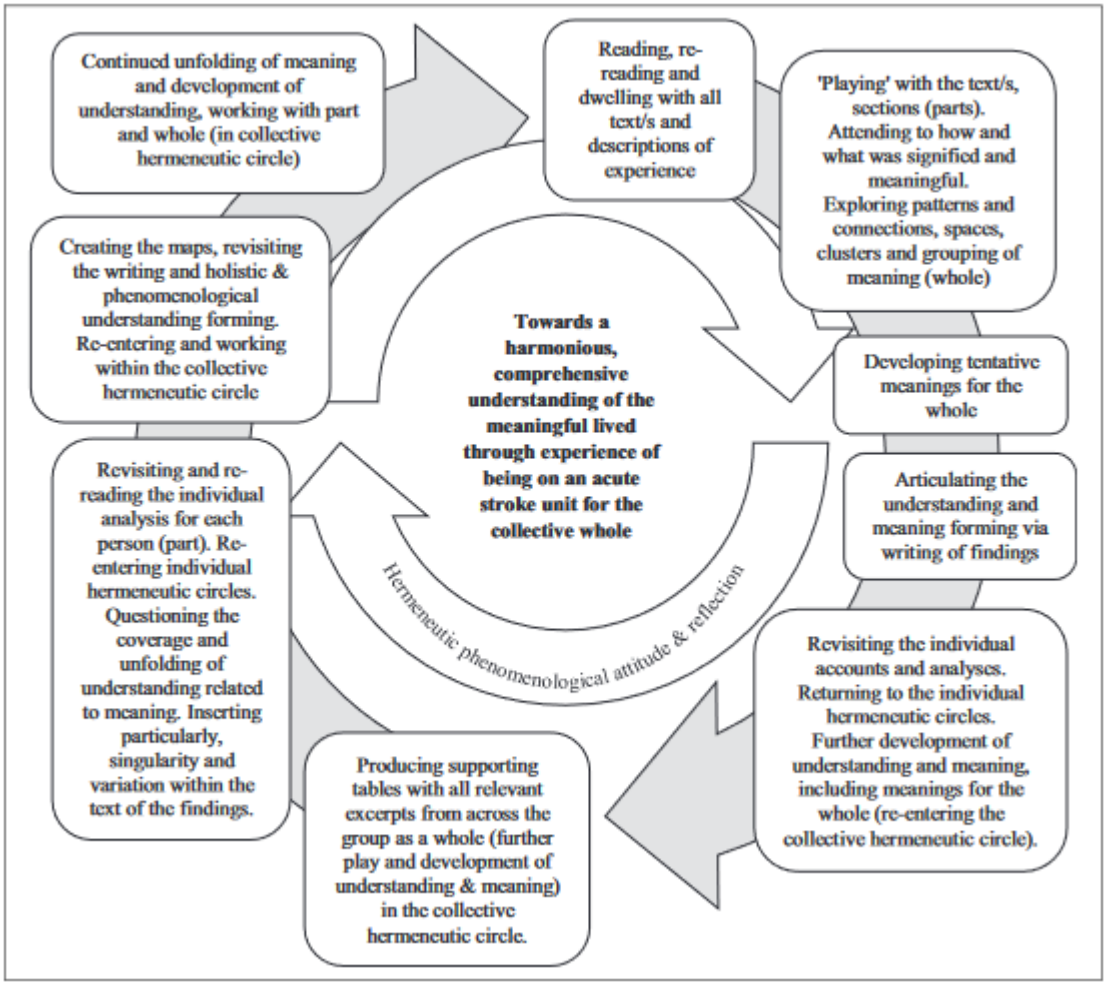
Importantly, one of the central findings of this research is that chemistry emerged within relational fields that precede explicit awareness and may operate asymmetrically. The pre-existing professional relationships between researcher and participants mirror this broader conceptual insight: relational conditions shape interaction before they are fully articulated.

Throughout the interpretive process, I engaged in reflexive bracketing, journaling, and analytic memo taking to identify moments where prior knowledge of participants might shape interpretation. Themes were grounded in transcript and video data rather than assumed relational familiarity. Disconfirming cases and asymmetrical perceptions of chemistry were preserved and analyzed to avoid bias.

In this sense, the relational context of the study is both a methodological limitation and a phenomenologically coherent condition aligned with the phenomenon under investigation. Transparency regarding this context strengthens the trustworthiness of the study and situates its findings within the lived ecology of executive coaching practice.

Part of the reflexive bracketing included the things about chemistry in coaching that I believed to be true. From these beliefs, I had to bracket out my experiential understanding to be able to arrive at my research questions without bias. First of all I believed that moments of chemistry in executive coaching relationships increase trust-building, intimacy and deepen disclosure between coach and coachee, resulting in more effective coaching outcomes and positive leadership development. Secondly, I believed that the experience of chemistry within executive coaching extends beyond the coach–coachee relationship, creating coherence that positively impacts the coachee's immediate team and organizational culture. Lastly, I believed that higher levels of trust and psychological safety in the coaching relationship increase the chemistry that emerges from it.

Figure 3-1. Hermeneutical cyclical process in ongoing dialog work toward understanding (Suddick, et.al, 2020)



Research Design

An interview protocol entailed a description of the research project simplified for the participants understanding but thorough, so they understood. This description was given in person or via email to the potential participant with a conversation that enabled them to ask questions and accept or decline participation by signing a consent form. In this conversation, it explained the ethics or standards of research including anonymity, data storage, data collection and privacy protection. This same procedure was used for each of the stakeholder groups. This

time was used to build trust and assure the participant of the value of their participation and the ability of them to relax.

They received the purpose of the study, a story telling example of chemistry happening in sports or in society that would enable them to create shared understanding of the phenomenon in question with the definitions of chemistry and coherence included here:

> **Chemistry –** a strong mutual attraction felt between two people or interaction between people working together (Merriam-Webster , n.d.). Often characterized by trust, rapport, genuineness and positive bonds (Passarelli et al., 2023). This concept is known for various pseudonyms such as resonance, entrainment or entwinement. It refers to a phenomenon where a person or system responds when interacting with another object or person at a specific rhythm (frequency) that essentially causing an entanglement or one common rhythm (Clayton, 2012) (Sandra & Nandram, 2013) (Sandra & Nandram, 2020).
>
> **Coherence –** a process of synchronizing rhythms over time that drives connectedness within, between, and across rhythmic activities (Sandra, 2022) the state where members of a team or company are in alignment with a common purpose, becoming united in principles, relationships or interests (Merriam-Webster , n.d.).

To ensure participants could articulate their experiences in-depth open-ended questions were used that allowed them to explore the lived experience of the phenomenon without interruption. Follow up questions were used that were open and emergent in the same format to draw more layers and understanding from their story and experience focusing on interpretive probing to discover meaning making. It was context sensitive and used bracketing of the researcher.

In HP, bracketing does not eliminate subjectivity, it only brings it into consciousness so that meaning can emerge through the dialogue between the researcher and participant. Bracketing was an act of "setting apart the natural attitude" and taking on the "openness in questioning how something is" (Suddick et al, 2020). As both a coach and researcher, my professional and academic lens includes deeply held beliefs about trust, bonding and revelation. Instead of trying to suppress this, reflexive bracketing was used to remain continually aware of how my assumptions and my lens might influence the interpretation. This involved:

1. Pre-interview reflection – defining chemistry and coherence the way I see it, including my view of trust, building trust and my coaching techniques shaping perception
2. Active awareness during interviews – monitoring language, tone, and reactions to avoid steering participants
3. Using my conviction biases – During transcription and coding, reviewing my reflections that created my conviction bias as a key to see where interpretation might have been influenced in my questions
4. Return to the data – using the hermeneutic circle to balance the parts and the whole, asking repeatedly, "what is being said here beyond my own experience of coaching". Zooming out and notating themes and insights, then coming right back to the details of the transcripts.

Thus, bracketing became a cyclical process of awareness not just exclusion, enabling the essence of the lived experiences to surface with authenticity. Specific research brackets that I took into consideration from the beginning:

1. I am an executive coach and I think I know how to build chemistry and that the higher the chemistry the more benefits to the coaching outcomes.
2. I believe that trust and psychological safety ensure chemistry can be present.
3. I have experienced that a coach can "control" or "create" chemistry for the encounter.
4. As an athletic coach, I have seen chemistry be portable to others outside the initial eruption of chemistry and suspect that is true in executive coaching as well.
5. I believe that chemistry is energetic and people can feel and perceive it.

Research Questions

1. How is chemistry built between coach and coachee (SPT)? What is it and what impact does it have on coaching?
2. How can the experience of chemistry in a coaching encounter be maximized, harnessed or measured to build stronger communities and teams (CLT)?
3. How does the chemistry of executive coaching transfer from leader to others (LAP) outside of coaching?

SETTING

The twelve participants were recruited through coach training groups, professional organizations and clients. The six coach participants were located across the US from three different sources of professional coaching organizations. The six coachee participants were located across the US from academic programs, professional training programs and from clients. All the participants were sent the introduction letter (Appendix A) and signed the informed consent (Appendix B). The coaching pairs were sent an availability poll and were paired according to that availability poll. Names were randomly entered into an Excel file and given anonymous coach or coachee identifiers by pair. There were six numbered pairs, each with

one coach and one coachee. The file recordings and transcripts were saved according to this naming convention.

The initial recorded coaching sessions were done and recorded on zoom with an otter note taker. They were interviewed individually on zoom after the coaching sessions were complete then again after the video elicitation clips were chosen. Both sets of interviews were done individually and recorded via zoom with an otter note taker. The settings were the boardrooms, offices or facilities of the organizations that are available to use. The interviews were transcribed using transcription services with Zoom and Otter and coded.

After the initial interviews, the Zoom recordings were watched for moments of chemistry emerging. To use video elicitation as part of the interviews, I chose my view of moments of chemistry emerging. I looked for shifts in openness, vulnerability, increased trust and bonding, shifts in energy, breakthrough moments (spoken and unspoken), pivot points, reflections, deep learning moments, other emotions. Two clips each were used in video elicitation second interviews with both participants using the second set of questions.

The data was collected via zoom recordings and transcribed with otter.ai. Five of the coaching pairs completed three sessions each, while one pair participated in three and a half sessions. Those recordings were viewed and the transcripts read for guidance with choosing the video elicitation clips. The interviews were also done in zoom, recorded and transcribed. The coaching sessions were watched from the recordings and notes were taken. These transcripts, notes and observations guided the choice of video elicitation clips for the final twelve interviews. Those final interviews were done via zoom, recorded and transcribed and notes were taken. Transcripts and observation notes were first coded. All data was compiled, and answers were organized by question in Excel to identify themes. Codes and themes were then consolidated. In

vivo codes, codes and themes were compiled by question then sorted by research question in excel.

From notes, observations and themes, that information was further synthesized into subcategories, findings, other findings, disconfirming evidence. The research questions served as a filter alongside the theoretical framework and potential impacts. Key insights were reviewed and reorganized.

This chapter will initially go through the themes with findings under each one. Then a secondary findings section of insights and a summary will conclude the chapter.

Participants

1. Six trained, certified and experienced executive coaches from one of my professional coaching organizations.
2. Six volunteer leaders at VP positions and above from local organizations, professional acquaintances and previous clients to be coached.

Matching of leader and coach happened randomly. The total participant quantity of 12, is defended by HP's concern with the depth of understanding and richness of meaning in research, not statistical generalization (Kafle, 2011). The goal was to illuminate the phenomenon through deep, reflective engagement with the participants lived experiences. A smaller purposeful study allowed for extended dialogical interviews, emotional depth with each participant's account and the use of the iterative interpretation through the hermeneutic circle. Based on various accounts from Smith (et al, 2009) to Giorgi (2009) that vary from three to six participants or from four to ten interviews, Bartholemew et al says that "it appears one person is sufficient if it adequately answers a research question" (Bartholemew et al, 2021). The real answer lies in the nature of the research problem and the potential yield that could be derived from the findings.

The participants were randomly matched and put into an excel spreadsheet with their names. Name one coachee will be called “coachee 1” and name one coach will be called “coach 1” and so on. Their zoom recordings, interviews and notes will be saved as such to protect anonymity.

IRB Acceptance Letter – See Appendix C

Interview protocols

Trustworthiness

There are four standards from Max van Manen developed for ensuring trustworthiness in hermeneutic phenomenological research (Ajjawi, et al, 2007) (Kafle, 2011), which are distinct from traditional notions of validity and reliability in quantitative research. These standards—orientation, strength, richness, and depth (Kafle, 2011)—were used to ensure validity. Orientation means that I was present and embodied the purpose of the research. I remained in the conversation with the participants, bracketing myself, my lens, perspective and bias, remembering throughout the research process who the information is for and remain ethically aware of my obligations to the participants.

Strength meant that in the research truthfulness was reflected in the experience in a way that feels authentic to the participants. Emotional language was used to help the readers resonate with what was felt by the participants. This allowed the readers to relate to the experience by thinking of a similar one they have had and the impact it had on them. Richness ensured that it stuck to purpose by being thick with meaning, allowing the reader to fully enter the participant’s world. This is done by using vivid examples, metaphors and quotations from participants. Triangulation across coach, coachee and researcher through sessions, interviews, observations and video elicitation perspectives provided a rich multidimensional understanding of the

phenomenon through both convergence and contrast. Depth relied on going beyond surface-level description and exploring the deeper layers of meaning under the surface or woven in the experience.

Qualitative research standards of rigor in hermeneutic phenomenology was established through the continual process of reflexivity, engagement and interpretation that honors participant's lived experiences while maintaining the integrity of meaning (Kafle, 2011). Traditional standards of credibility were ensured through the iterative interpretation of the narratives and multiple phases of research through the hermeneutic cycle. Reflexive bracketing through memo writing to identify and set aside assumptions, ensuring openness to participants meanings.

To ensure transferability, the thick rich descriptions allow the readers to determine relevance in their own contexts. The detailed contextual descriptions of the participants' environments, structures and relational experiences are provided in their own words. Quotations are used to convey the felt sense in the participants' voices. The findings are situated within the theoretical framework to demonstrate conceptual application beyond the immediate study sample.

Dependability addresses the stability of the research process over time. An audit trail of notes, memos, coding iterations and interpretive decisions was maintained to support dependability and transparency across the research process. Debriefing with the academic committee members can ensure consultation concerning coding decision and interpretive themes.

Confirmability emphasized the extent in which findings reflect the participants' meaning rather than the researcher bias. Using the hermeneutic circle validates the data through the

movement from parts back to the whole. The faculty advisor oversight included reviewing transcripts and emergent coding to confirm consistency between data and interpretation.

Data Analysis

The first step in data analysis was in deciding on the HP type of analysis. I chose Gadamerian method of the hermeneutic circle to work through the data processing shown in Figure 16. The next step after the interviews was the pre-understandings. As an active coach, I have assumptions and pre-understandings of the phenomenon and my internal biases and prejudices. I needed to remain open, being aware of it and bracket these things away from the interview and research itself. These things in the brackets can limit the participant's horizon. Following bracketing, then was the immersion of the text and understanding the data. To gain a deep understanding of the data, multiple reading and listening to audio recordings were completed to go deeper into the participant's horizon each time.

The beginning of the researcher's horizon involved immersion, synthesis, coding and theme development. Immersion in the reading of the transcripts was done to remember being in the research and combining the transcripts with notations, clues and my narrative feedback added. This is the unique and interesting part of HP, the researcher is encouraged to use their experience, insight and perspective in the analysis – their horizon becomes part of the research analysis (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). The vocal interviews were listened to again with more observations added. Staying true to HP looking at the whole before breaking into parts. Understanding of the individual parts happened next using in vivo codes which represent the participant's ideas expressed in their own words or phrases (See Figure 8). Using the variety of discourse in the phrase itself becomes an important part of the analysis.

The following themes were initially discovered and noted from observation notes, coding, and in vivo coding. (See Appendix D)

- Generative
- Asymmetry
- Distributed
- Portable
- Safety
- Disruption
- More than one level
- Affirmation
- Co-created
- Collective
- Dignity
- Efficiency
- Identity
- Readiness
- Choices
- Tension
- Structural
- Ongoing Coordination
- Practice Based
- Felt – Somatic
- Accelerants

- Enablement
- Diagnostic indicator
- Language
- Sustained openness
- Reciprocal meaning making
- Presence and authenticity
- Diagnostic indicator of other things taking place
- Dialogic and discursive
- Can be destroyed – low emotional reciprocity, avoidance or refusal, agenda control, power, no mutual inquiry, judgement
- Chemistry can precede or follow trust or not need it at all
- Does not include emotional intimacy
- Productive without being verbally named or consciously noticed
- Not mutually experienced or visible
- Doesn't require identical interpretation
- Shared humanity
- Signals
- Mutual orientation
- Continuity
- Not necessarily rapport
- Amplifier
- Deepens disclosure

These themes and insights were broken into secondary themes and grouped into three main themes. Initially, because I thought in terms of application of insights directly into leadership and coaching, I pulled out the insights and themes that I saw as tools. Chapter 5, Practical Applications, covers these tools. It outlines the essential skills coaches need when using chemistry in their work, as well as the key abilities they should encourage or expect from their coachees. I immediately was drawn to the things that collapsed chemistry for the benefit that would be to leaders concerning their cultures.

Secondly, I started playing with the idea that there were entry gates for chemistry to emerge or conditions which wouldn't cause it but could allow chemistry to emerge. Along with gates, I saw accelerants, levels and signals. These were analytical ways to see the phenomenon that through the data I could see taking shape to help leaders shape relationships, culture and organizations. Doing this extraction and re-evaluation was also a successful way to bracket out my coaching hat and put back on my researcher hat. The direct applications were easy for my coaching mind to see then I had what was left for my researcher mind to compile. After I pulled out these tools from the themes and findings, I was left with a shorter list of themes.

- Generative
- Asymmetry
- Distributed
- Portable
- Disruption
- More than one level of
- Co-created
- Collective

- Identity
- Choices
- Tension
- Ongoing Coordination
- Practice Based
- Felt – Somatic
- Diagnostic indicator
- Reciprocal meaning making
- Diagnostic indicator of other things taking place
- Dialogic and discursive
- Chemistry can precede or follow trust or not need it at all
- Does not include emotional intimacy
- Productive without being verbally named or consciously noticed
- Not mutually experienced or visible
- Doesn't require identical interpretation
- Shared humanity
- Mutual orientation
- Continuity
- Not necessarily rapport
- Deepens disclosure

I created a new page in my remarkable tablet for themes, insights, secondary insights, each research question within the same document (See Appendix D). As I read through the

transcripts a second time, I began putting research into each of those different buckets (pages in my remarkable) so I could see the picture it was starting to create.

Looking for direct application is how my corporate coaching mind works. This was more of a challenge for me as a researcher to look at data and not try to find application but just to find meaning related to my theoretical framework. Putting all the findings into these separate remarkable pages allowed me to see the research visually versus in a giant mountain of information or the excel document. Having a page for the research questions helped me see the new data through the lens of the initial questions and reasons I sought to do the research in the first place.

I had made a page in my notes for how the research had changed what chemistry could be defined as, how does it work and what it created based on the research questions. (see Appendix D). Thus, I took the remaining list and re-examined my notes to see if all the remaining themes could be put into three meta themes of defining chemistry, understanding chemistry and outcomes of chemistry.

- Safe container
- Co-created
- Assymetry
- Presence
- Multiple levels
- Generative
- Coordination
- Practice Based
- Mutual Orientation

- Productive Disruption
- Rhythm and continuity
- Identity stabilizer
- Agency and choice
- Acceleration
- Portability
- Embodiment
- Energy Shifts
- Efficiency

First attempt at meta themes from this list looked like the following table 12:

Table 12: First iteration of meta themes and sub themes of data

Themes	Defining Chemistry	Characteristics of Chemistry	Benefits of Chemistry
	What it is	***How it operates***	***What it produces***
sub-themes	Safe container	Practice Based Through Inquiry	Identity Stabilization & Confidence Amplification
	Co-Create	Mutual Orientation	Agency and Choice Activation
	Assymetrical	Productive Disruption	Acceleration/Temporal Compression
	Presence	Rhythm and Continuity	Portability/Distributed Spread
	Multiple Levels	Relational Conatiner	Energetic shift
	Generative		Embodiment
	Coordination		Efficienty

After seeing it in these three categories and comparing to my original notes that were similar looking through the lens of what the research was attempting to understand, I added the "what it is" to defining chemistry category, "how it operates" to the second category that I

changed the name to characteristics of chemistry and the third category called benefits of chemistry I added “what it produces”.

These three meta themes group the data into categories that help me answer the three initial research questions better. As I reviewed notes and data, I continued to revise the meta theme and sub themes based on the amount of data I had to support these separate insights. I also began to realize that some of the subthemes were in the wrong meta theme based on how the data supported the idea.

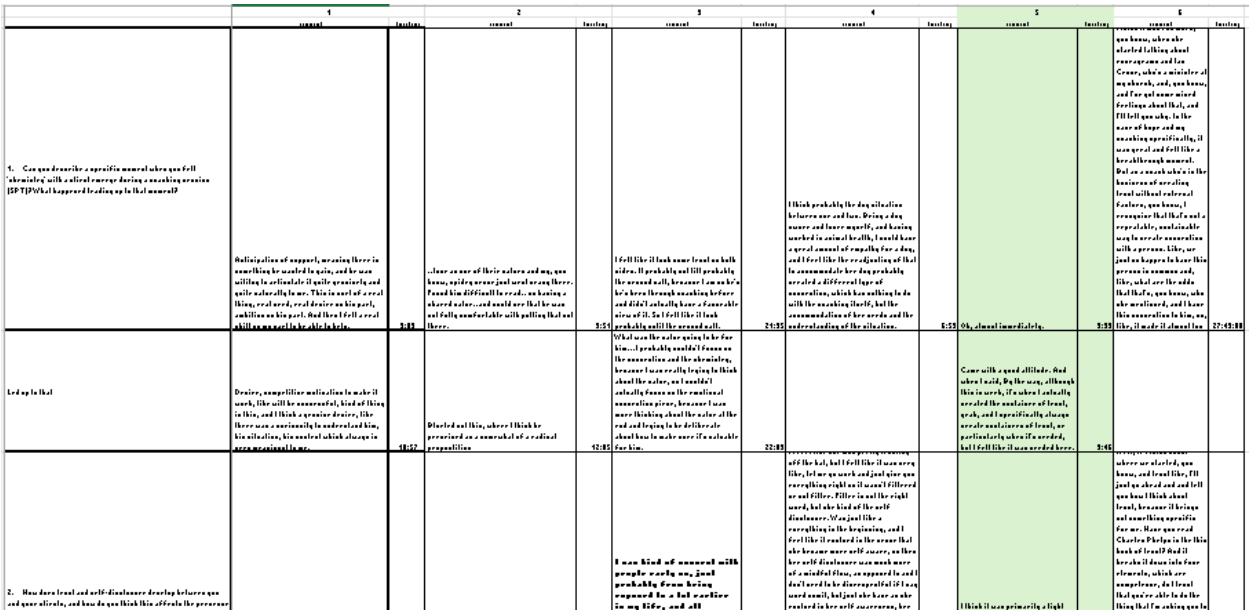
These themes were finalized to be in the final state presented below.

Table 13: Themes and Sub-Themes of Research

Themes	Defining Chemistry	Characteristics of Chemistry	Benefits of Chemistry
	What it is	***How it operates***	***What it produces***
sub-themes	Generative	Productive Disruption	Identity Stabilization & Confidence Amplification
	Assymetrical Awareness	Relational Container	Portability/Distributed Spread
	Multiple Levels	Practice Based Through Inquiry	Embodiment
	Co-Created and Coordination	Mutual Orientation	
		Rhythm and Continuity	

In order to fill each of these subthemes with supporting information, the in vivo codes from the transcripts were entered into a spreadsheet by question. This complex spreadsheet with coach and coachee questions on different spreadsheet tabs, was used to find supporting data in the research participant’s own words. A snapshot of part of this excel document is shown below in Figure 8. Using excel and entering excerpts used as in vivo codes allowed for searching by question or by word or phrase to support each sub theme and insight in the research.

Figure 3-2 Snapshot of in vivo coding of quotes from transcripts per interview question separated by coach and coachee

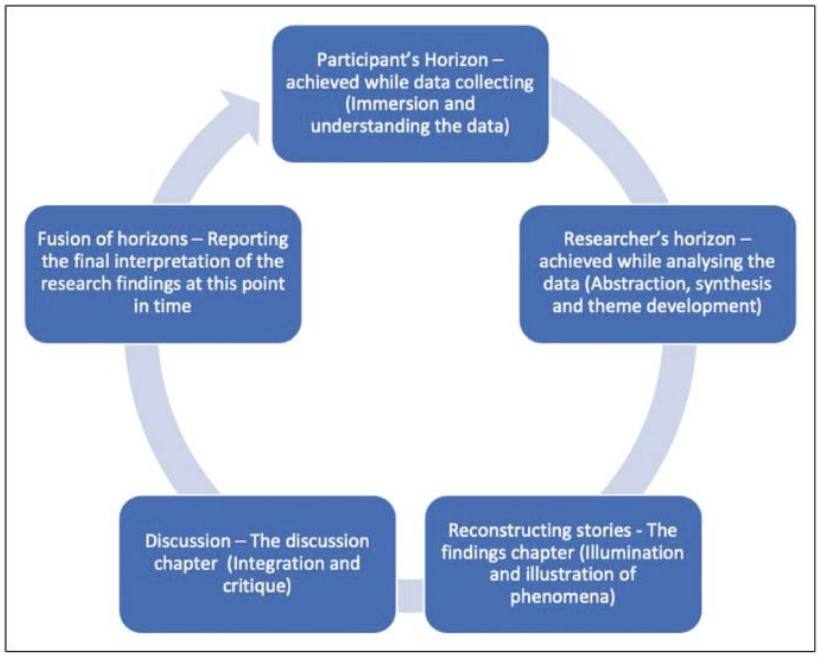


As the following two chapters were written, the themes and subthemes and insights were tightened, adjusted and combined. When there was not sufficient data in the excel document of in vivo codes, I went back to the transcripts and interviews once again to make sure that themes belonged in the data and looked for more supporting information in quotes to support it.

The next step was the meshing of the horizons began. Synthesizing data of these themes and subcategories and zooming back out to look at the whole (see Appendix E for audit trail). Understanding developed through repeated movement between parts and whole, with successive interpretive cycles deepening insight across interviews, sessions, and cases. (see Figure 3.2). Part of this process was deriving meaning and compilation from the ways people describe the phenomenon of chemistry and coherence because they used varied language. Each theory was used in part of the iterations of understanding in reading, listening and developing coding. Specifically deciphering chemistry from coherence involved seeing chemistry in coaching and coherence as the same phenomenon that happens outside of coaching with the coachee and any other actor in their network.

Illumination happened when these categories were related back to the literature. This is the step where looking at the keys and perspectives from each theoretical framework was added to the process of analysis. Utilizing the visual frameworks and key tenets from this exercise reminded me the different lenses being used and what that means for the data and perspective. Reviewing the literature was another step that kept the theoretical framework close to the research. After this, integration and a critique of the data to produced a fusion of horizons which is the final interpretation of the data at that moment in time.

Figure 3-3 Gadamer's phenomenological circle of research analysis (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021)



In the analysis of the chemistry in coaching, the integration of the three theories was done with questions to keep in mind while analyzing the data. Following initial coding, the data was synthesized through three levels that integrated findings with each theoretical perspective. Following with HP, it moved between the parts and the whole comparing each to one another through analysis.

For SPT, was there anything described that illuminates the disclosure, vulnerability, outcomes of exchange or context of time that show up? For instance, how long into a coaching session before chemistry emerges? Or how many sessions in coaching before chemistry emerges? How would the client and coach describe the levels of trust established and the disclosure it took to reach that trust before chemistry emerged?

At the micro-level of the interpersonal dynamic, SPT guided how chemistry begins. Using its concepts of self-disclosure, reciprocity, and relational depth, transcripts will be coded for language and behaviors that illustrate trust formation, emotional exchange and openness. This lens highlighted the layered nature of relational development, from surface conversation to deep connection, and helped identify patterns of interaction that spark chemistry.

For Collective Leadership Theory (Ubuntu), was there resilience and adaptability in chemistry? Does the chemistry build respect and collaboration to others? Does empathy increase in chemistry? Does it allow for differences to remain a whole or does it segment them? How does the intimacy of coaching spread to others? Does it create trust, entrainment to others? Does citizenship or responsibility of leadership role affect chemistry? Is there an awareness of the imprint of others in changing ourselves?

At the meso-level of analysis, CLT informed how chemistry made an impact outside of the initial encounter. It answered whether the chemistry "locked" in the relationship until the next meeting. It looked for shared empathy, mutuality and shared identity. Chemistry was interpreted in CLT not as a personal connection, but as an interdependent process that shapes belonging, respect and collaboration long term and long lasting outside of the initial encounter. It helped to trace the energy of the coaching relationship.

For LAP, did the chemistry of coaching affect the coach or coachee or what they may accomplish? Did the chemistry emerge and unfold in other day to day experiences outside coaching? Can the chemistry remain embedded in a situation or does it remain with a person? Did the location or place matter? Was the leader capable of "pacing" chemistry into the organization with or without intentionality? Did it create pivot points of positive growth and change?

LAP provided the analytical means to examine how chemistry becomes enacted in practice. Transcripts were reviewed for pivot points, or instances where relational energy translated into action, changing dialog, reflection, breakthroughs or behavior change. This approach enabled interpretation of chemistry as a lived, dynamic process rather than a static condition.

See Appendix F and G for questions used in the interviews. After analysis phase, when moments of chemistry erupted in the practice of coaching were identified, then clipped and replayed for video elicitation. The second stage of the interviews involved video elicitation let participants reflect on the lived practice of chemistry rather than only recalling it from memory. The following questions were used.

Post Perception Indicators of Trust, Expectation and Belief

Upon reflection, I recognized an underlying assumption embedded in the selection of participants. All twelve actors knew me in some professional capacity either as a coach, consultant, colleague, or doctoral candidate. This prior familiarity may have influenced the timing, expression, or even the perceived emergence of chemistry within the coaching pairs. Participants were not only entering a coaching engagement; they were also participating in

research led by someone with whom they already had relational history. Their willingness to contribute may have included an investment in supporting the study itself, advancing coaching insight, or extending professional goodwill toward the researcher.

In light of this, I incorporated a brief pre- and post-interview perceptual scaling measure consisting of four indicators: expectations of the coaching, trust in the partner, belief in the process, and belief that something would be gained or learned. These informal indicators were not intended for statistical inference, but rather to provide contextual insight into participants' relational orientation at entry and at exit. I added these scale questions at the beginning of the first interview and at the end of the video elicitation interview.

Patterns within these pre- and post-perception scores suggest movement in trust, belief, and expectation across several pairs, including instances where initial scores were notably low. While these measures cannot establish causality, they align with the qualitative findings in suggesting that chemistry may precede or accompany shifts in perceptual trust and belief, rather than function solely as an outcome of pre-existing relational depth. Future research employing more structured quantitative design could examine these relationships with greater methodological rigor. These results can be found in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 - Findings

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the influence of chemistry moments within coaching relationships on the coachee, their immediate team, the broader organization, and potentially on extended communities. Secondly, to look at whether the emergence of chemistry can be maintained or if it transfers to create coherence in teams, companies, cultures and communities.

The coaching relationships were analyzed specifically on the corporate side of executive coaching. The research seeks to understand the following from the research:

1. How is chemistry built between coach and coachee (SPT)? What is it and what impact does it have on coaching?
2. How can the experience of chemistry in a coaching encounter be maximized, harnessed or measured to build stronger communities and teams (CLT)?
3. How does the chemistry of executive coaching transfer from leader to others (LAP) outside of coaching?

Primary findings (see Table 13)

Table 13: Defining Chemistry, How it Operates and What it Benefits

Themes	**Defining Chemistry**	**Characteristics of Chemistry**	**Benefits of Chemistry**
	What it is	***How it operates***	***What it produces***
sub-themes	Generative	Productive Disruption	Identity Stabilization & Confidence Amplification
	Assymetrical Awareness	Relational Container	Portability/Distributed Spread
	Multiple Levels	Practice Based Through Inquiry	Embodiment
	Co-Created and Coordination	Mutual Orientation	
		Rhythm and Continuity	

Meta theme – Definition of Chemistry (what it is)

Theme 1 - Chemistry is generative. Chemistry can produce something. Chemistry produced new thinking, reframed identity, and emergent action. Chemistry emerges through shared inquiry and meaning making, not through technique or relational performance. Moments of chemistry coincide with reframing, contradiction or challenge that unsettle existing narratives. It emerged between participants as a shared practice, rather than being generated by one individual's relational skill. Rapport may coexist, but chemistry functioned as an enabling condition for shared leadership and collective agency whether rapport was present or not.

The quotes illustrate that chemistry operated not as a relational "feel" but as a generative mechanism that reorganized how individuals understand themselves, their situations, and their available actions. In Pair 3, the coachee's realization demonstrated chemistry's capacity to collapse previously unlinked constructs into a new, integrated meaning structure. Similarly, Pair 2's reflection that the coach "was able to flip that narrative" reinforces that chemistry coincides with moments where dominant self-narratives are disrupted and reconstructed. These are not moments of rapport-building or emotional closeness alone; they are instances where meaning itself is re-authored. In this way, chemistry functioned as an enabling condition for reframing, where new interpretations are not delivered by the coach but co-constructed through shared inquiry.

From the coach perspective, the data revealed that this generative process is observable through shifts in rhythm, energy, and discursive patterns, signaling that something new is forming in real time. The Pair 4 coach's observation of a coachee becoming "like a Cheshire Cat… on a roll," accompanied by changes in pacing and energy, points to chemistry as a somatic and rhythmic phenomenon that coincides with epiphany. Likewise, the shift from "word vomit"

to “mindful flow” reflects an organizing of thought and expression that emerges through the interaction itself, not prior to it. Importantly, these generative moments extend beyond the coaching conversation into action, as evidenced by Pair 5’s behavioral change in asking more open-ended questions with their team. This demonstrated that chemistry produced not only insight but emergent action, reinforcing its role as a shared practice condition that enabled distributed leadership and collective agency rather than a technique enacted by one party.

“This imposter syndrome and the question of self worth were connected so closely, and I didn't know it.” (Pair 3 Coachee)

“The animation, the the smile. I remember, I remember when she was just like a Cheshire Cat, you know, like when she said, I'm on a roll here, I because she was, she is quite self aware, and, yeah, I just noticed the energetic shift again, how she but then she started speaking fast, you know, Like the previous time, she slowed down, whereas this time she she started to speed up, because she said she was on a roll. So it was a different type of Epiphany, a different type of epiphany.” (Pair 4 Coach)

“And she was able to flip that, flip that narrative for me, and had a huge impact on that…” (Pair 2 Coachee)

“Over the last month, I asked my team in their one-on-ones more of an open ended question.” (Pair 5 Coachee)

Yes…And so therefore that catch myself moment when I was what I felt was happening, I was becoming more sympathetic versus empathetic.” (Pair 1 Coach)

Was just like a everything in the beginning, and I feel like it evolved in the sense that she became more self aware, so then her self disclosure was much more of a mindful flow, as opposed to and I don't need to be disrespectful if I say word vomit…(Pair 4 Coach)

Let me see change after the three sessions. Maybe, maybe confidence comes to mind. You know, I was probably very unsure. Is starting out. And then towards the end, I think I felt more confident, not just in what direction I wanted to go, but in my approach to getting there. And then I also think I had I probably was very linear in my thought process, initially, of kind of one line or a straight line. And I think my interactions and through this coaching experience, kind of broaden my perspective of, you know, there's more than one way to achieve what you want to achieve. And then I would also say too. It did require me, just because of the types of questions she asked it once again, it required me to reevaluate my intentions. (Pair 3 Coachee)

Coachees experienced it as reframing, clarifying, and emergent action. Coaches experience was sensing narrative shifts, holding adaptive tension, being challenging and recognizing rhythmic changes. In both perspectives, chemistry functioned as a practice condition that enabled new meaning to form rather than as a performative technique.

Theme 2: There was an asymmetry of experience and awareness. Chemistry was not always mutually recognized simultaneously by both the coach and coachee. The awareness of one individual was sufficient to influence the dynamic, as attunement from either party alone could initiate the resulting impact.

One person may feel chemistry even if the other does not, and mutual recognition is not needed for its benefits. Relational impact can occur without both parties being aware. One person may feel chemistry even if the other does not, and mutual recognition is not needed for its benefits.

The data across pairs demonstrate that chemistry does not require synchronized awareness to be operative, rather it functions through partial attunement that is sufficient to shift the relational field. In Pair One, the coach's early recognition of engagement suggests that

chemistry can be initiated through one party's attunement before it is consciously registered by the other. Similarly, in Pair Five, the coach's immediate sense of chemistry contrasts with the coachee's more tentative "he might get me," indicating that chemistry may first be experienced as a subtle signal rather than a fully formed awareness. Even in Pair Two, where the coach reported difficulty reading the coachee, the coachee clearly experienced the interaction as "personable" and "not transactional," highlighting that the absence of perceived reciprocity on one side does not negate the presence or impact of chemistry on the other. These examples reinforce that chemistry is not dependent on mutual confirmation; instead, it can operate asymmetrically, with one individual's orientation shaping the conditions for connection and meaning-making.

The quotes further reveal that awareness of chemistry can emerge at different points and through different modalities without diminishing its generative capacity. In Pair Three, the coachee's early vulnerability contrasts with the coach's delayed recognition of connection in the final session, suggesting that chemistry may be felt somatically or emotionally before it is cognitively named. Pair Six reflects a similar divergence, with the coachee experiencing immediate connection based on perceived kindness, while the coach's recognition is anchored later in shared meaning around a specific reference point. Even in Pair Four, where both participants identified a clear moment of chemistry, the triggers differed from situational interaction ("the dog situation"), to the other in a moment of unfiltered expression that signaled psychological safety.

***Pair One* – Coach Early and Coachee Later and Cognitive**

"…he was, he was engaged, and, you know, I could tell that from the very beginning…" (Coach)

"A couple of times…kind of the feed forward…he was discussing the, I guess, the concept of the theory of feed forward, and just, you know, it resonated almost immediately."(Coachee)

***Pair Two* - Coach Felt Missing, Coachee Awareness**

"Found him difficult to read…" (Coach)

"I mean, it was personable. It wasn't transactional. I think it was pretty clear, you know, the first session, or maybe even two, there was a connection and different examples or different tidbits of suggestions or coaching."(Coachee)

***Pair Three* - Coachee Recognized Early, Coach Session Three**

"I think I was probably the most vulnerable I've been in a long time." (Coachee)

"I found the connection with the coach to kind of elevate closer towards the end of the sessions. I just remember the sense of feeling the connection at the end of the last session…" (Coach)

***Pair four* – Instant Mutual Awareness in Different Places**

"I think probably the dog situation between one and two."(Coach)

"I can tell you the exact moment when I felt like it, it was, it was going to be a solid chemistry. And that's when I accidentally said, shit...But somehow she made me feel comfortable enough where it I just said it ... I somehow felt comfortable enough to say, the attorneys don't give a shit."(Coachee)

***Pair Five* - Coach Early; Coachee not as sure**

"Oh, almost immediately." (Coach)

"I think there was a moment in the first session where It was like, he might get me...I think I had like a sense, I maybe it was like a sense that he cared specifically about me" (Coachee)

***Pair 6* – Coach Delayed, Coachee immediate**

"I think it was when, you know, when she started talking about enneagrams and the guy who goes to my church…" (Coach)

"I feel like when we first started talking, we connected immediately. She's a very kind person". (Coachee)

These variations show that chemistry is a dynamic process, not a single shared moment, and can emerge at different points for each person. Observations revealed mismatched perceptions in two pairs: one where only the coach felt chemistry initially, and another where only the client did. This was determined by comparing interviews and video responses. The other four pairs reported varying levels of chemistry at different times.

Below is a summary of the asymmetrical experiences of the coaching pairs in the research based on the speed and recognition of chemistry.

Table 14: Participant Recognition Chart of Chemistry by Pair

12 Participant Recognition Chart		
Participant	**Recognition Speed**	**Recognition Mode**
Coach 1	Session 1	Reciprocal
Client 1	Session 2	Cognitive / Outcome-based
Coach 2	Early Session 1	Somatic/Mutual Understanding
Client 2	Session 1-2	Reflective / Mutual Situation
Coach 3	Session 2	Evaluative / Professional lens
Client 3	End of Session 3	Authentic Exchange
Coach 4	Between 1 -2	Somatic
Client 4	Session 1	Mirroring Language
Coach 5	Immediate	Adaptive tension recognition
Client 5	End Session 1	Mutual Goals/Empathy
Coach 6	End Session 1	Mutual Value
Client 6	Immediate	Somatic/Kindness

Theme 3 – Multiple Levels of Chemistry. There are multiple levels of chemistry identified in this research. Participants vary in their descriptions of the kinds of chemistry experienced. Some were more transactional. Some described conversation or partnership. Others used deeper, emotional words and lastly, some even described embodiment. These multiple levels are dissected further and identified in Chapter 5.

In Pair 2, the coachee's reflection below that the interaction was "more of a free flow conversation" but "wasn't as deep… not like a deep trust or deep vulnerability" highlighted a transactional or early-stage level of chemistry characterized by fluid exchange and conversational ease without deeper identity work. This level still reflected coordination and rhythm, but its impact remained primarily within the bounds of dialogue rather than

transformation. In contrast, statements such as Pair 4's "common understanding of shared experience" point to a meaning-making level, where participants experienced resonance that extended beyond conversation into shared interpretation. The shift became more pronounced in Pair 3, where the coachee described being "the most vulnerable I've been in a long time," signaling movement into a deeper, affective level of chemistry where identity, emotion, and self-perception were actively engaged.

From the coach perspective, the quotes further revealed that these levels are not static but dynamic, with participants moving between them across sessions and even within a single interaction. In Pair 6, the coach's observation of "frenetic" initial energy that later "settle[s]" and evolves into reflective reporting demonstrated how chemistry can regulate interactional rhythm and deepen over time. Similarly, the emphasis on "permission to interrupt" in Pair 2 reflected a more advanced, distributed level of chemistry where power is shared, and the interaction becomes a co-owned space for inquiry rather than a coach-led process. This level enabled real-time adjustment, mutual influence, and increased efficiency in meaning-making. Even seemingly simple descriptors like "natural" and "smooth" (Pair 5) signal an embodied level of chemistry, where coordination became intuitive and less cognitively effortful.

"It wasn't a you talk, I talk. I think we just kind of were in the moment… having more of a free flow conversation." (Pair 2- Coachee)

"It wasn't as deep. It wasn't like a deep trust or deep vulnerability." (Pair 2- Coachee)

"There was just a common understanding of shared experience that kind of resonated from the beginning all the way through." (Pair 4- Coachee)

"I think I was probably the most vulnerable I've been in a long time." (Pair 3- Coachee)

"It feels kind of natural. It feels kind of smooth." (Pair 5 - Coachee)

"It certainly caused us to have to talk through it a little bit further and make additional connections." (Pair 2 - Coach)

"I felt like in the first session, the energy was frenetic, just wanting to get it all out and then settle towards the end of the session…And then in the third session, she was reporting back, you know, on on how a meeting had gone…" (Pair 6 Coach)

"One of my favorite things is, especially in the AI world, is permission to interrupt. And in a when there's chemistry present, you both have it so a client, your partner can can say to me, can I stop you? You know, I don't think this is productive, or can we go in an opposite direction? And I don't feel like, well, that he's not respecting me. I just feel like, okay, yeah, I I'd rather you say that then I waste, you know, a day or week or month of your time" (Pair 2 Coach)

Theme 4 – Chemistry is co-created and coordinated. Chemistry is not a singular activity, even when it is asymmetrical in experience, it cannot be created alone. The research shows through the dialog, engagement and description of the conversations and sessions that chemistry is co-created and not based on individual traits or participation. It is practice showing up in answers like reflection, conversation patterns, storytelling, finding common ground and exercises of teaching to make meaning. Chemistry emerged between people and is not owned by one person or produced unilaterally. It was not driven by charisma. The data indicates that chemistry between coach and coachee resulted from coordinated interactions, leading to a sense of alignment in both parties, distinct from alignment based on shared values, purpose, or familiarity.

Coach Quotes

"You know, the other thing I hadn't considered, and your question cause provokes me to think about is to what degree it encouraged my level of engagement, my level of almost

excitement in having coachee reveal or ponder or think about something that clearly was helpful to him and there's a bit of a catch yourself moment there where you want to engage as a co creator, as opposed to maybe a facilitator of that process" (Pair 3)

"as I said in the second session, it was really exciting, because we were actually working with something that could be helpful to her, you know, and working with some of her reports." (Pair 6 Coach)

"...what I think in the first session happened was, if I remember correctly, he had an anticipation of support, meaning there's something he wanted to gain, and he was willing to articulate it quite genuinely and quite naturally to me. And so he granted me some very clear need. He granted me a clear need. And the way he sort of framed. It sort of tuned me into, very, very quickly. Tuned me into, he's willing, and I can, I'm able, he's willing, I'm able. It was, it felt like territory that I could get him further faster, because I have to say, I anticipated my anxiety. What created my numbers when you asked me initially about chemistry and or anticipation of the process, was my feeling that I didn't quite know when to expect." (Pair 1 Coach)

"...because it's again, the fact that I was flexible, she was so appreciative. And when she started out the session today, she was clearly energized. And so she showed up, like on a scale of one to 10 in terms of energy, she was probably at, you know, nine. So she was clearly starting in a good place, from a very different perspective than the first session where she wasn't, and I feel that because she was so energized, it really shifted the chemistry, because it put us very much on a positive. I was able to build on the positive and enhance that her. I think she used the word epiphany, epiphanies, but yeah, and I feel like the chemistry, what could the chemistry have been in there? Because she had her own energy going on. So instead of, like, trying to bring it down

or whatever, I was like, Yeah, that's great. No, I feel like I'm I tried to match her energy. And today, that really helped her stay in a positive minds" (Pair 4 Coach)

The quotes illustrate that chemistry emerged through coordinated interaction rather than individual effort, with each participant's actions shaping and amplifying the other's contribution in real time. In Pair 1, the coach's reflection—"he's willing, I'm able"—captured this reciprocal activation, where the coachee's clarity of need and openness directly enabled the coach's engagement and responsiveness. Rather than simply imparting knowledge, this process involves both parties adjusting their preparedness and abilities together. Similarly, Pair 3's "catch yourself moment" reveals the coach actively shifting from a facilitator stance to that of a co-creator, indicating that chemistry requires an adjustment in role orientation toward shared ownership of the process. The excitement described in Pair 6 where they were working on something, further reinforces that chemistry is generated through joint engagement with meaningful content, not through personality or charisma alone. Across these examples, chemistry is shown to arise from the interplay of willingness, responsiveness, and attunement, where each party's participation becomes a necessary input into the evolving dynamic.

Coachee Quotes

"I found the connection with the coach to kind of elevate closer towards the end of the sessions. I just remember the sense of feeling the connection at the end of the last session, and it was in relation to maybe how she either showed up or kind of it was, it was a sense of authenticity that came from our interaction." (Pair 2)

"She saw me being very sincere in my answers, and maybe getting tripped up sometimes and so, but she kept with it. So I really respected the fact that she didn't let me just say I don't know. And she really dug for more because she could see that I was I was trying, yeah." (Pair 4)

From the coachee perspective, the data further confirmed that this coordination is experienced as authenticity, persistence, and mutual investment in meaning-making. In Pair 2, the coachee's sense that the connection "elevate[d]" over time and was tied to "a sense of authenticity" reflected how chemistry strengthened as both parties aligned in how they showed up, rather than what they brought individually. Pair 4's account of the coach "not letting me just say I don't know" demonstrated how coordinated tension, produced deeper exploration and respect within the interaction. This aligned with the coach-side observation in Pair 4 of matching and building on the coachee's energy, showing that chemistry was sustained through moment-to-moment adjustments in pacing, tone, and intensity. These quotes show that chemistry is collaboratively built through interaction, not possessed by one party. It emerges from shared actions rather than being a fixed trait of an individual.

Chemistry Re-Defined

With these key themes in mind, the new operational definition of chemistry has been redefined as follows:

> *Chemistry is a co-created relational coordination experienced as felt alignment between individuals. It may occur without mutual awareness, operate across multiple levels of interaction, and generate shifts in identity, meaning-making, and distributed leadership. Chemistry is not a static bond but an emergent pattern of coordinated engagement that produces generative outcomes.*

Taking the Koonce (2010) five elements of coaching listed in chapter 1 and compare them to the definition of chemistry, how it operates and what it does, you can see that chemistry is an enabler or amplifier or indicator of many of the successful functions of coaching.

Table 15: Comparison to Coaching and New Definition of Chemistry

Elements of Coaching	Chemistry
One-on-One Relationship	Co-created, Relational Container
Goal Setting & Achievement	Coordinated, Mutual Orientation
Assessment & Feedback	Rhythm and Continuity
Reflection & Learning	Productive Disruption, Practice Based
Continuous Improvement & Transformation	Generative, Identity Stabilization, Confidence Amplification

Meta theme 2 – Characteristics of Chemistry

Theme 5– Chemistry thrived in disruption not stability. Chemistry could intensify during challenge, disruption and contradiction not harmony. Chemistry destabilizes existing narratives, identities and comfort zones in productive ways. Chemistry grows in tension that is in a container of safety. Chemistry intensifies when adaptive tension is held within a dignified and protected relational container. In line with Leadership-as-Practice (LAP), adaptive work requires productive tension sustained through inquiry (J. A. Raelin, 2023). Ubuntu dignity allows challenge without social injury (Chetty & Price, 2024).

Coach Quotes

"You cannot let the chemistry get in the way of making sure that you have the tough discussions… it's kind of a delicate balance." (Pair 3)

"…not not willing to put their part of the work in and I loved her willingness and receptivity in session one to say, okay, you've equated this, you know, my value in my work to my self worth. And then she entertained that, and I just felt like for me, her willingness to listen, digest, and then do. Uh, stay. It's very hard for me not to stay in the game as a coach, because that's what I do. But nonetheless, I felt very much like I wanted to be on her team. You know, if

you think about the glue, I felt like I wanted her to be the glue, the glue person, and see how I could support her." (Pair 4)

Coachee Quotes

"That may have just set the conversation back slightly in the moment." (Pair 2)

"…and I don't think I would have, I wouldn't have brought that up if I didn't feel like, although it was really uncomfortable to talk about for me, like that, I could that she would get it… (Pair 4)

"… it was it was challenging. , this is where I think you could could benefit and as a leader and earning trust and from Team and again, it ultimately ended up being what I was looking for to be able to internalize some of that and think on it that like… I'd say it all the perspective for both probably changed more in that third session, where we got deeper and it was really getting to the heart of the issue, or more urgent situations, and in which actual coaching and feedback seem a little more direct or maybe more tangible, not as theoretical." (Pair 2)

"I think that was a kind of a pivot point over the couple of weeks in between our time together that I was like, Okay, maybe that's, I don't know that that's not the right path, but it definitely made definitely makes me think about it" (Pair 3)

"She saw me being very sincere in my answers, and maybe getting tripped up sometimes and so, but she kept with it. So I really respected the fact that she didn't let me just say I don't know. And she really dug for more because she could see that I was I was trying, yeah." (Pair 4)

"I think that she did a great job to you know, it reminded me that I need to do, and I've been trying to help my team do this too. We need to take more time at work to reflect and to process what we did, because we try, and like you were saying before, high performers, and I'm trying to have everyone, I truly am trying to have everyone on my team be a high performer, because I think they all are." (Pair 6)

The quotes demonstrate that chemistry was not diminished by disruption but was often activated and intensified through it, particularly when challenge was held within a container of safety and dignity. In Pair 3, the coach emphasized that chemistry should foster honest, productive conversations, not just preserve harmony. This was further illustrated in Pair 4, where the coach described the coachee's willingness to confront the linkage between self-worth and work as a moment that deepened engagement. The emphasis on staying with discomfort underscores that chemistry thrived when participants did not retreat from tension but instead remained in inquiry. These moments aligned with the theoretical framing of adaptive tension, where disruption becomes the site of meaning-making rather than a barrier to it.

Across pairs, disruption is consistently linked to pivotal shifts in thinking, perspective, and action, reinforcing its role as a catalyst within the chemistry dynamic. In Pair 2, the acknowledgment that a moment "set the conversation back slightly" coexisted with the recognition that deeper, more direct coaching in later sessions "got to the heart of the issue," suggesting that temporary destabilization was often a precursor to more substantive progress. Similarly, Pair 3's "pivot point" and Pair 6's reflection on the need for greater processing and reflection indicate that challenge interrupted habitual patterns and opened space for reconsideration and growth. Together, these examples show that chemistry was not a byproduct of ease or alignment but was strengthened through the disciplined maintenance of productive

tension. When disruption was held within a respectful and supportive relational container, it enabled participants to question assumptions, reframed identities, and engaged in more meaningful and actionable learning.

Theme 6- Chemistry operates in a relational container, not emotional closeness.

Across the coaching pairs, chemistry was not consistently described as emerging from prior trust, intimacy, or deep emotional disclosure. Participants indicated that chemistry often preceded trust-building and did not require vulnerability at the start. Breakthrough moments occurred without extensive personal disclosure and without a linear progression of intimacy. Rather than following a gradual Social Penetration pattern, alignment sometimes emerged rapidly through rhythm, perceived competence, structured inquiry, or shared orientation. Trust and openness often deepened after chemistry was experienced, rather than serving as its prerequisite. Chemistry, in this sense, functioned as a relational container that enabled meaningful work before emotional closeness was established.

Coach Quotes

"I become very aware of everything they're doing saying… and if the rhythm is positive…" (Pair 4)

"I perceived that he did not respond the way that most people I interact with respond, and I didn't go directly at that in a significant part because of the setup of this, you know and because I didn't want to appear, you know, either make him defensive or appear defensive myself." (Pair 2)

"I think it was primarily a light switch, but there was a dimmer that got a little bit brighter over time. Okay, I think, I think what happened in the first session, I'm not convinced she knew she was going to get a lot out of it, and what happened between session one and

session two. That first night, she said out loud, or she see, responded to me an email and said, Hey, Coach, I had an epiphany. Oh, and that's when I knew I had her…" (Pair 5)

"So what, what I always try to do when I'm going into a coaching session is ground myself, so I'm showing up sort of solidly with a field of acceptance and invitation around me." (Pair 6)

The data demonstrated that chemistry operated as a relational container that preceded, and often enabled, the development of trust and emotional closeness rather than resulting from them. In Pair 5, the coach's description of a "light switch" moment illustrated that meaningful cognitive and perceptual shifts can occur before any established depth of disclosure. Similarly, Pair 1's reflection that "after the first few minutes, I felt comfortable sharing" suggests that the conditions for openness were rapidly established through the interaction itself, not through a gradual buildup of intimacy. Coach-side observations, such as Pair 4's focus on rhythm, "if the rhythm is positive", and Pair 6's intentional grounding to create "a field of acceptance and invitation," further reinforced that chemistry was constructed through interactional conditions like pacing, presence, and perceived competence. Even in Pair 2, where the coach intentionally avoided pushing too directly to prevent defensiveness, the coachee still experienced the interaction as committed and valuable, indicating that chemistry can be sustained through calibrated restraint rather than emotional depth. Together, these examples show that chemistry emerged from how the interaction is structured and experienced, not from how much is disclosed.

Coachee Quotes

"After the first few minutes, I felt comfortable sharing…" (Pair 1)

"I found the connection with the coach to kind of elevate closer towards the end of the sessions. I just remember the sense of feeling the connection at the end of the last session, and it was in relation to maybe how she either showed up or kind of it was, it was a sense of authenticity that came from our interaction." (Pair 3)

"So I think that it was positive energy, but it was, it was not just, like, I said, challenging, or a little bit just kind of, you know, digging in. It was like, I think he felt a commitment to you offering, offering some some input, and offering some some coaching and guidance. So I think that was good." (Pair 2)

"…it just it just felt very genuine too. It was just it was blessed, even about my need and more about just being genuine and and connecting on a human level.but that third session, and I think we were able to have an open dialog, maybe I didn't, maybe frame it like that, but we were able to have a more broad, open dialog". (Pair 3)

"You could tell in just the way, like her mannerisms, the way she talked, she was very, you know, she not that she was gonna, like, raise her voice at me, but she was very natural on the phone, her voice, you know, she has a nice, not a customer service, but a sweet voice, you know, tone." (Pair 6)

From the coachee perspective, the quotes further highlight that emotional closeness was often an outcome of chemistry rather than its starting point. In Pair 3, the coachee describes the connection "elevat[ing] closer towards the end of the sessions," tied to the coach's authenticity and way of showing up, suggesting that relational depth developed after chemistry had already been established as a working condition. Similarly, Pair 2's emphasis on "positive energy"

combined with challenge and guidance indicated that chemistry can coexist with tension and directive input without requiring vulnerability or intimacy at the outset. In Pair 6, tone, mannerisms, and naturalness suggest that subtle relational cues play a significant role in creating chemistry, rather than direct disclosures. Across pairs, these findings challenge traditional assumptions aligned with Social Penetration Theory, where trust and intimacy are expected to build linearly through disclosure. Instead, chemistry appeared to function as a container that makes trust-building possible, allowing participants to engage in meaningful, and sometimes challenging, work before emotional closeness was fully formed.

In Table 13 below, the information from the quotes and observational data were compiled to show how chemistry emerged relative to trust and openness across the pairs. The white boxes under vulnerability and trust were the only ones where there was more of a sequence in building trust based on some of the values in SPT. All the other boxes, including chemistry were asymmetrical and either sudden, backwards or relied on other factors not considered in SPT.

Table 16: Cross Pair Sequencing of Chemistry, Trust and Openness

Cross-Pair Sequencing of Chemistry, Trust & Openness					
Pair	**Chemistry Recognition Timing**	**Vulnerability perception coach**	**Vulnerability perception coachee**	**Coach perception of trust**	**Coachee perception of trust**
Pair 1	Assymetrical - Session 1 coach, Session 2 Coachee	Judgement free zone creates freedom	Sharing and vulnerability right away	Vulnerability to disclosure to trust	Connected early, trusted right away
Pair 2	Assymetrical - Session 1 coach, Session 2 Coachee	Commitment and continuity	Connection, trust then vulnerability	Transactional, no vulnerabiity or trust	Feeling more comfortable with personal stories, connection to trust
Pair 3	Assymetrical - Session 2 coach, Session 3 Coachee	New perceptions, thoughts, chemistry then more trust	Connected on common ground, most open or willing to be vulnerable	Connect to trust	Familiarity and accomplishing work built trust by session 3
Pair 4	Assymetrical - Session 1-2 coach, Session 1 Coachee	Epiphany, chemistry, trust, vulnerability	Thought she would get it, so I opened up	Willingness to work, disclosure, strategic	Second session deeper questions and being invested in me built trust
Pair 5	Assymetrical - Immediate coach, Session 1 Coachee	Ephiphany, progress, vulnerability	Excited to get to solutions, next steps and make progress	Trust a light switch with a dimmer brighter over time	Open but not trusting, did not believe he could harm
Pair 6	Assymetrical - Session 1 coach, Immediate Coachee	Empathy, working on something, progress	Curiosity created openness and sharing	Competence, relabiliity, sincerity	Interested to talk to her, came ready to go to get something out of it (common goal not trust)

Other descriptors that show the relationship between trust, openness and chemistry in the coaching sessions.

" You mentioned, like the energy or the trust between the two of us. There was a few moments in there, and that was probably one where it was clear that, like, Oh, he's, he gets it, or he, you know, he's, he's, you know, I don't want to be like, woo, woo, but we're kind of on the same length, same wavelength. Like he was completely understanding, kind of in sync in that respect. So just in terms of, like, like a good conversation, regardless of coaching, like, you just have that kind of feeling where it's like, oh, this is, this is a there's a lot of good back and forth here, so yeah…" (Pair 1 Coachee)

"I do think familiarity helps. I think familiarity breeds quite a bit of opportunity, if you will. And in that opportunity is an opportunity for deeper vulnerability, if the trust continues to build. But you know, and that was a wave of positive forward momentum. Familiarity breeds more trust. . I think he was actively in flow. We had a very, very positive connection, I think, right from the beginning. So that really helped. I think it's not surprising that the sequence of events ended up in some form of a rainbow. I guess, you know, there's some form of you end up in a really good place, because there's a momentum every sort of builds towards that, you know, where there's some really powerful learning moments." (Pair 1 Coach)

"Yeah, I feel like there was a high level, very high level of trust and vulnerability at that point. I think at that point we had probably talked about some shift in perspective from from first session to third session at that point. So, yeah, so very, very high level of trust." (Pair 3 Coachee)

"Respect is earned and not given in general. And I certainly had respect for her going in, because you chose her to be there, and then, you know quickly when I heard how she thinks and how she conducts herself and her story that translated from, like, transitive respect, because you

have it so, and I trust you so I have it to, like she really showed up in a way that I respected. But you know, in some ways, like as a coach, it doesn't, it shouldn't matter if I respect the person or not, right? I mean, I guess I sort of wrestle with this one, like, okay, so respect is the type of judgment, and one's job as a coach is not to judge. And so in some ways, I feel like that's almost a better question for her, because whether she respects me matters a great deal, because she's trusting me to help solve things that are important to her, and I would imagine that it'd be hard to do that with someone you don't respect." (Pair 6 Coach)

"I felt that for him to say that was, you know, for early in the first conversation, you're pretty trusting and pretty willing to be vulnerable. I think later in the conversation, he continued to be willing to talk about that So, but, but I don't think we actually had any, any trust other than, you know, kind of was like, you were the trust, not you know, We hadn't, we hadn't done anything yet…Well, I in that moment, I don't think he was at all vulnerable, like being vulnerable and he, he, I think maybe after the fact and in retrospect, like I thought about our previous com, your my previous conversation, maybe there was more trust there than I thought, but I don't really think, you know, outwardly, there was much there. I mean, he was, he had agreed to do this, and he was following through on his agreement" (Coach Pair 2)

These additional descriptors further clarify that trust, openness, and chemistry were not linear or dependent variables, but dynamically intertwined within the interaction itself. Participants described moments of "being on the same wavelength," flow, and strong back-and-forth exchange as early indicators of chemistry that often preceded trust or vulnerability. In several cases, trust appeared to build as a byproduct of this coordinated interaction rather than as a prerequisite for it. For example, the sense of familiarity and momentum described by Pair 1 reflected how chemistry created forward movement that naturally deepened trust over time. At

the same time, accounts such as Pair 2's coach noted little observable trust or vulnerability early on, then demonstrated that chemistry could still be present and influential even when traditional markers of trust were not. This reinforces that chemistry operates at an interactional and experiential level that is not fully captured by conventional definitions of trust or openness.

Across perspectives, trust and openness appeared to evolve in response to the quality of engagement rather than being conditions that had to be established in advance. Participants described trust and vulnerability increasing alongside moments of alignment, insight, and shared momentum, suggesting that these constructs were outcomes of effective coordination rather than entry requirements. The tension expressed by Pair 6's coach around respect that balanced non-judgment with the importance of being trusted, further highlights the complexity of these relational dynamics. Ultimately, the data suggest that chemistry creates the conditions under which trust and openness can emerge, deepen, and sustain the work. Rather than building trust first to enable chemistry, the coaching interactions showed that chemistry itself often initiated the relational shift, allowing trust, openness and vulnerability to follow and expand as the engagement progressed.

Theme 7 – Chemistry operates in practice through inquiry and is not performative.

Chemistry develops through coaching and leadership practices, both within and outside coaching sessions. In coaching, activities such as inquiry, reflective listening, vulnerability, and storytelling help create an environment where chemistry can flourish. This process is not performative because the focus remains on authentic exploration and understanding rather than on presenting answers or impressing the other person. It encourages genuine curiosity and growth, free from the pressure to deliver a perfect result.

Coach Quotes

"She just she didn't know how to be curious previously. She knew how to tell people what to do and, you know, twist herself into, you know, different pieces and shapes to get people to do things" (Pair 4)

"Well, first of all that I fumbled to find words the first time when I was like, I have a hypothesis. I just one of the things that I'm always working on. But she had a little breakthrough, which is what you always want as a coach. So I wanted to sort of fade back and let her lean into that breakthrough and guide her through it. But I really wanted it to be led by her so she could take it the direction that she wanted to take it, and she did that." (Pair 6)

"And the answer is yes, she gets excited about the view of the world that she saw. So for instance, you'll notice after her epiphany, one of the things that she did is she she already had talked to three different people on this outside podcast…" (Pair 5)

The quotes illustrated that chemistry was enacted through practice rather than through performative displays of expertise or relational skill. In Pair 4, the coach's observation that the coachee "didn't know how to be curious previously" but instead defaulted to directing others highlighted a shift from control to inquiry as a condition for chemistry to emerge. This transition reflected a move away from performative leadership toward a practice-based engagement centered on discovery. Similarly, in Pair 6, the coach's intentional decision to "fade back and let her lean into that breakthrough" demonstrates that chemistry was sustained not by inserting insight but by creating space for the coachee to generate it. The emphasis on letting the process be "led by her" reinforces that chemistry was co-constructed through inquiry rather than

delivered through performance. Pair 5 further supports this, where the coachee's excitement following an epiphany led to immediate external engagement, indicating that chemistry produced momentum through lived exploration rather than scripted interaction. Across these examples, chemistry was shown to arise from disciplined presence, curiosity, and responsiveness that enabled meaning-making without the need to impress or control the outcome.

Coachee Quotes

"Yes, for sure…like yesterday, for example, we were talking about, and he used the term instigator…there was a situation that came up and so it just prompted me to like think about it in that term and actually take action, or probably in the past, I wouldn't have" (Pair 1)

"You have to be present and be visible…so I took it to the meeting the next day with a champagne toast…I've tried to internalize his feedback to me, it has been in my mind, whether it's top of mind in the moment or back of mind, at the very least…" (Pair 2)

"So yeah, like, I took little gems with me into those different interactions." (Pair 5)

From the coachee perspective, the data demonstrated that this practice-based chemistry translated directly into action, internalization, and behavioral change beyond the coaching session. In Pair 1, the coachee's use of the term "instigator" to reframe a situation and prompt action illustrates how inquiry-based insights became embedded in real-world decision-making. Pair 2's reflection on being "present and visible" and carrying feedback into a meeting the very next day further underscores that chemistry operated through ongoing practice, not isolated moments of insight. The description of feedback remaining "top of mind…or back of mind" suggests that chemistry embeds itself cognitively and behaviorally, influencing actions over time. Similarly, Pair 5's notion of taking "little gems" into other interactions highlights that the outcomes of chemistry were portable extending into broader leadership practice. These quotes

show that chemistry extends beyond the session, continuing through inquiry, reflection, and application.

Theme 8 – Chemistry operates within mutual orientation.

The chemistry happens together within the partnership or co-creation of coach and coachee in the session when mutually oriented toward a goal. Both parties are aiming at something with shared directionality. They have alignment toward a goal. Making an agreement and setting the agenda are coaching practices that ensure the mutual orientation. The coaching session is seen as accomplishing something as a "we" and "being on the same wavelength". Even though the coach was oriented toward inquiry at times and the client was oriented toward growth, there was still shared purpose and directionality to deliver something new either in action or thought or behavior from the goal the client sets at the beginning of the session. Seen as both parties seeking a benefit with the sessions framed as accomplishing something.

Coach Quotes

"Anticipation of support, meaning there is something he wanted to gain, and he was willing to articulate it quite genuinely and quite naturally to me. This is sort of a real thing, real need, real desire on his part, ambition on his part. And then I felt a real skill on my part to be able to help." (Pair 1)

"But for chemistry, that you hear them and that you understand their values, you understand their motivations, their ambitions, and what they think is right and wrong, which i would say is a value." (Pair 1)

"I think it helps, it helps build the chemistry and the connection right away, which helps improve, improve the process and people. Because, you know, we all like people to think like us.

It's who we are, no matter, what we say, we like people who have the same values and think like we do" (Pair 3)

Okay, once we're in the same Yes, once, once, once she recognized that I'm there for her. We have a shared we had shared values and shared purpose. (Pair 6)

"Yeah, I just think I was more willing to continue to work with her, not that I wasn't willing to work with her, but it gave me a because I didn't know her. I hadn't chosen her, and she hadn't chosen me kind of thing, and so that it was at that point, I thought, yeah, maybe you are my kind of person, because I usually check for coaching readiness before I accept to have someone as a client. And I hadn't come up to check her readiness, you know, at all. And then I felt at the end of the session, I was like, Oh yeah, you are willing to entertain a different perspective." (Pair 4)

The quotes demonstrate that chemistry was anchored in a shared orientation toward purpose, where both coach and coachee are aligned around achieving something meaningful within the session. In Pair 1, the coach's recognition of the coachee's "real need, real desire… ambition" alongside their own "skill… to be able to help" reflected a convergence of intention and capability that established directional alignment. This is not merely relational compatibility but a mutual commitment to progress. Similarly, the emphasis on understanding values, motivations, and ambitions highlighted that chemistry was strengthened when both parties were oriented toward what mattered to the coachee, even if their roles differed. In Pair 6, the acknowledgment of "shared values and shared purpose" signals a moment where this orientation becomes explicit, reinforcing the idea that chemistry was sustained through a sense of "we are working toward something together." These examples show that chemistry was not just about interactional quality but about coordinated movement toward a shared aim.

Coachee Quotes

"…value of gratitude and not having additional kind of pressure on that holiday..kind of spun into that conversation about values..I could tell we were both really aligned on why we enjoy this time of year. I could tell we had the same, we were kind of on the same value structure." (Pair 1)

"I felt we were aligned with the goal of what we were doing, but I don't think that. I didn't even think about whether we would be aligned in any other values…" (Pair 3)

"But again, some of that also goes back to, why are you here, right? The two people that are here, do they want to be here? And are they trying to do something? And does the does each person care about where that goes from here, you know" (Pair 6)

"I think, you know, again, just earning that trust and feeling more comfortable that through his use of examples or experiences. Again, I don't know I can pinpoint an exact moment, but it was just kind of built over time where, and some of it was, again, that personal connection and saying, Okay, well, Coach is a, he's a real guy. He's a can relate with. Or when the first experience I'm going to get anything out of it, better put something into it. So like you said, you know me, I'd be open book and spill it" (Pair 2)

From the coachee perspective, the data further illustrated that this mutual orientation was experienced as alignment in purpose rather than necessarily in identity or values. In Pair 3, the coachee explicitly notes being "aligned with the goal of what we were doing" without needing broader value alignment, suggesting that chemistry can be grounded in task-oriented directionality rather than deeper personal congruence. Pair 6 reinforces this by emphasizing the importance of both individuals wanting to be there and "trying to do something," indicating that shared intent and investment were critical conditions for chemistry to take hold. In Pair 1,

moments of value alignment enhanced this orientation but were not strictly required. Instead they served to strengthen an already present directional focus. Meanwhile, Pair 2's reflection on needing to "put something into it" underscored that mutual orientation involved active participation, where both parties contributed to advancing the work. Chemistry in coaching stems from a shared sense of direction, aligning effort, focus, and goals to enable coordinated progress toward insight or change.

Theme 9 – Chemistry operates with rhythm and continuity. Across the pairs, participants described chemistry not as a single spark or isolated breakthrough, but as something that moved with cadence across sessions. The consistent practices of coaching, including setting expectations, clarifying agreements, returning to goals, and following through from one conversation to the next, created a rhythm that strengthened the relational field. Each session did not stand alone. Instead, it built upon what had been named, explored, or committed to previously. This continuity allowed tension to be revisited, ideas to deepen, and patterns to surface over time rather than being resolved in a single moment.

The structure of the engagement, which consisted of three sessions in relatively close sequence conducted over Zoom, did not appear to limit the emergence of chemistry. In many cases, the awareness of time compression appeared to intensify attentiveness and focus. Participants entered sessions prepared to continue the work rather than to reestablish rapport. The rhythm of showing up, reengaging inquiry, and extending prior insights into new thought or action created momentum. Chemistry, in this sense, was sustained through consistent practice and follow through rather than dependent on physical presence or extended duration. It functioned as an interactional continuity, a carried thread across sessions, rather than as a fleeting emotional event.

Coach Quotes

"And the way he sort of framed it sort of tuned me into, very, very quickly." (Pair 2)

I felt a very open and interesting energy, not necessarily excited, but very open to learn more. (Pair 3)

She's very, you know, she's very animated. I think is probably the best way to describe Client. She's generally, she speaks fast, she you know, and then she slowed down. And so for me, that was like, I say, she became very deliberate in what she was saying. You know, like you want to interrupt. I sometimes I struggle with her, because she does talk a lot, and I hesitated to interrupt, but, but, but I'd already detected in that first session that she's a talker and a let me put it all on the table kind of person. And then, then she literally slowed down. (Pair 4)

The quotes illustrate that chemistry unfolded as a rhythmic, ongoing coordination rather than a singular moment of connection, with each interaction building on prior exchanges to create continuity and momentum. In Pair 1, the coachee's description of a "volleyball back and forth" dynamic reflects this cadence, where meaning is refined through repeated cycles of expression and reflection. This rhythm was not accidental; it was structured through practices like reframing and inquiry, which sustained engagement across time. Similarly, Pair 6's depiction of "feeding off of each other" while still returning to the original focus demonstrates that chemistry allowed for exploratory divergence without losing coherence. The coach-side observation in Pair 4, where a coachee shifted from rapid speech to deliberate pacing, further highlights that rhythm was not static but evolved within and across sessions, signaling deepening awareness and intentionality. These examples illustrate that chemistry built through repeated, structured

interactions, maintaining continuity and deepening relationships over time rather than starting anew with each session.

Coachee Quotes

Maybe it spilled over into the second one too, as we got to know each other…" (Pair 2)

"I could tell the energy was was stronger during those moments, um, once it kind of felt like a light bulb came on, or, you know, whatever the case might be, okay." (Pair 2)

"…but that second meeting, I think we both felt like to keep to keep the energy, to keep the epiphanies rolling. We had to keep up the momentum of what was happening. And so that meant that we had to maybe interrupt each other every once in a while to, like, say something exciting, or to ask a question, or to wait, let's revisit that." (Pair 3)

"Well, I think there was the, you know, in the rhythm, there was, I think there was a lot of back and forth where, you know, but it was really, like, I said earlier, was really Coach kind of, not really pulling things out, but like, you know, talking reframing what I said back, you know, basically I would say something, and then he would say, This is what I this is what I heard. Is that, you know, I can't remember the phrase that he would use, but, you know, this is what I heard. And then maybe even put a little bit of his color on it, and then say, you know, kind of put it, put it back on me. So there was kind of a, almost like a volleyball back and forth type of thing. Yeah, there was, I think at that point there was, there started to be a really good rapport between the two of us." (Pair 1)

"I think all the calls were really like that. We hit it off. She would kind of say something, and then we would just keep feeding off of each other, I don't feel like, and maybe when you listen or listen or read sometimes, yes, we would kind of go off on a tangent, but we would kind of, we

would both go on that journey. Like we'd both be like, Oh, this, okay. Then that, okay, but let's come back to what we were originally talking about." (Pair 6)

From the coachee perspective, this continuity was experienced as sustained energy, momentum, and the ability to build on prior insights rather than starting anew. In Pair 2, the sense that chemistry "spilled over into the second [session]" and intensified when "a light bulb came on" indicates that breakthroughs were not isolated but accumulated through repeated engagement. Pair 3's emphasis on "keeping the epiphanies rolling" by maintaining momentum across sessions further reinforces that chemistry depended on continuity of effort and attention. Even moments of interruption or revisiting prior topics were not disruptions but mechanisms that sustain the rhythm of inquiry and deepen understanding. Chemistry served as a connecting thread across sessions, with ongoing practice fostering depth, alignment, and sustained progress.

Observation notes revealed that coaches who consistently established agreements and used inquiry developed a stronger session rhythm over time. In pairs where coaches followed up regularly, coachees noted this provided continuity within the engagement. The chart shown below came from the coding taken from observational notes of the nineteen coaching sessions. This observational information enforces the rhythm continuity showing structure and consistency. Observation notes were taken during sessions and the initial coaching sessions were coded and marked. These notes were entered into excel by coaching pair and session. A snapshot of this spreadsheet is shown below in Figure 9.

It shows that in most pairs, the consistency of how they opened sessions, set the agenda, used inquiry and reflective listening and debriefing at the end to close created the rhythm and the continuity. These are basic skills and characteristics taught by ICF and other certifiable coaching

agencies when training coaches. This research and coding per session show the value and affirm its contribution to the session.

Figure 4-1: Snapshot of session coding excel spreadsheet

			timestamp
Opening with Small Talk	P1 S1	Example "How's your week been"	0:46
Opening with Disclosure	P1 S1	Example " full weekend of kids sports"	0:56
Warm greeting	P1 S1	Terrific to Meet you	2:36
Setting Agenda/Agreement	P1 S1	What are things on your mind, or things you'd like to solve f	2:36
Vulnerability	P1 S1	Client - anger staying in that comfort zone	3:15
		feel stagnant	
Common Ground/Understandin	P1 S1	Know enough to be dangerous	5:31
Vulnerability	P1 S1	that wouldn't be very comfortable right now	7:12
Warm ask	P1 S1	would that be nourising for you	8:27
Vulnerability - goal	P1 S1	goal at some point to be a college president	10:03
Challenge	P1 S1	What would be a gap in your decision making	11:21
Vulnerability	P1 S1	gap in my knowledge and experience in public policy	11:40
Vulnerability	P1 S1	be more assertive	13:48
Challenge	P1 S1	how important is that to you	14:05
Vulnerability	P1 S1	makes me a little uncomfortable	14:47
Reflective listening	P1 S1	Reflecting on what sounds like concern around complacency	15:53
Challenge	P1 S1	how motivated are you to do them?	15:53
Clarity	P1 S1	What are the best experiences for you to grow in that woul	19:23
Reflective listening	P1 S1	You're feeling like you are actively pushing	24:53:00
Disclosure	P1 S1	Financially pushing, calculated risk, healthwise	25:13:00
Acknowledgement	P1 S1	I appreciate you sort of sharing	26:32:00
Pause and debrief moment	P1 S1	where do you think we are now in the conversation. Where a	26:32:00
highlight and mirror	P1 S1	I think you hit on something that's worth maybe saying out l	30:02:00
Affirm	P1 S1	Where you should be	30:02:00
Vulnerability	P1 S1	what can I do now to prepare myself for that opportunity if	32:03:00
Reflective listening	P1 S1	Continuing to research the competence necessary	34:25:00
Challenge	P1 S1	Is there a way to close the gap, to make it a little bit more ol	35:56:00
Affirm	P1 S1	they are lucky to have you	40:09:00
Recap and closing	P1 S1	Did I miss anything that I've said that maybe is not as clear a	43:28:00
Permission to advise	P1 S1	Editorialize for a minute from my own perspective	43:38:00
Gratitude coach	P1 S1	privilege for me	45:06:00
Gratitude client	P1 S1	thank you for your time	45:31:00
Check In small talk	P1 S2	Did you have a good week	1:32
Setting Agenda/Agreement	P1 S2	I wanted to get a sense from you what would be a helpful to	3:06
recap follow up	P1 S2	pulled through from last time	5:13
affirm	P1 S2	I love it	9:09
Reflective listening	P1 S2	Understanding the competencies truly means in a lived expe	9:13

Meta Theme 3 – Impacts of Chemistry

Theme 10 – Chemistry impacted the identity of the coachee.

Chemistry stabilized identity and dignity for the person being coached. Coachees reported being seen as capable rather than emotionally affirmed. Being seen, named, or mirrored catalyzed confidence, legitimacy and progress. Coachees experience respect and worth even when they are challenged. It reshapes self-concept, their professional stance and their perceived authority. It restores choice where people feel stuck or constrained. Coaching chemistry gives permission to claim expertise, authority, or a new stance.

Coach Observation Quotes

"The strength of her voice, the conviction in her voice, like she says, I'm going to think about that, but, but it was, it was the way she took ownership of it. I see that differently now. I feel like I thought she was thinking about it, and she said, I'm going to think about it, but I think she was think she was already thinking about it, and I think she'd already owned it and was taking on board." (Pair 4)

"I think over time, the more they learn about themselves, I feel like it changes the process in the relationship. The more they learn about themselves, the more they're willing to be vulnerable."(Pair 3)

The quotes demonstrated that chemistry contributed to shifts in how coachees understood and positioned themselves, particularly in relation to competence, authority, and self-worth. In Pair 4, the coach's observation of the coachee's "strength of voice" and ownership of new thinking reflected a transition from consideration to internalization, where insight had already been claimed rather than merely explored. Similarly, Pair 3's reflection that increased self-understanding led to greater vulnerability suggested that identity development altered not only the individual's self-concept but also how they engaged in the coaching process. From the coachee perspective, statements such as recognizing the connection between "imposter syndrome and self-worth" (Pair 4) and having existing beliefs "confirmed" and reframed (Pair 1) indicated that chemistry stabilized identity by naming and organizing previously fragmented or uncertain self-perceptions. These moments were not about affirmation alone but about legitimizing capability and reframing how individuals interpreted themselves and their experiences.

Coachee Experiential Quotes

"This imposter syndrome and the question of self-worth were connected so closely, and I didn't know it." (Pair 4)

"I think it confirmed…a lot of the things I knew, but he helped me confirm that…it was true, and gave me some different ways to approach it. Yesterday, a light bulb came on with his help of seeing her in that way, like as someone to emulate in that fashion." (Pair 1)

"I feel as I I have work to do as a leader, recognize that is kind of never ending, continual improvement, something I should really take to heart" (Pair 2)

"So, for example, I thought I was having this I was mis- I was misreading the impressions other people had about me, their perception of me, and my values at, you know, at the firm and things like that. And she was able to flip that, flip that narrative for me, and had a huge impact on that, um, I think without her, if everything stayed the same, and if I got invited to that second meeting, which was a huge win that we talked about, I got invited to that second meeting, I don't think that I would say that that second meeting was because of something great that I did. She gave she's the one that highlighted or maybe help me again switch that narrative to that second meeting with those attorneys is because their perception of me is is different from what I thought it was going to be" (Pair 4)

"…Oh yeah, good idea, even if I've already thought of it before, or even if it's not that good of an idea, like I would say this might not be the intention of your project at all, but it did make me realize again and more, more, like, deeply, how much I people please it" (Pair 5)

"Um, let me see here, meaning is relates to, I will say, incredibly valuable. Like I said, it was, it was an opportunity to dedicate time to to reflection, personal reflection that I probably wouldn't have taken if I did not have this, have this experience, at least at this point in this time, it allowed me to kind of expand my perspective around, not just my career path, but then also, then it kind of went into, like some personal things. So as far as maybe once again, this wasn't a part of the conversation, I don't think, but maybe even how I show up for my family and what my priorities are, kind of where my value sits. So I just think it was a intentional, dedicated time for personal reflection that allowed me to kind of reevaluate, kind of my my once again, my values, my priorities and my intentions, which was really helpful. And then once again, I could see this also blossoming into a further professional relationship, or at least just some, in some way, following up on kind of where we were and kind of building forward." (Pair 3)

Across pairs, chemistry also restored a sense of agency and expanded how coachees saw their role and impact. In Pair 4, the coachee's realization that others' perceptions were more positive than assumed marked a significant identity shift, moving from self-doubt to recognized credibility. Pair 2's acknowledgment of ongoing leadership development and Pair 5's awareness of people-pleasing tendencies further demonstrated that chemistry enabled individuals to confront and re-evaluate ingrained patterns without diminishing their sense of worth. In Pair 3, the extended reflection on values, priorities, and personal presence illustrated that these shifts were not confined to professional identity but extended into broader self-concept and life orientation. The data demonstrated that chemistry helped coachees establish their identity, assert authority, address limitations, and approach leadership and personal challenges with increased confidence and purpose.

Theme 11: Chemistry creates distributed leadership and is portable.

Chemistry did not remain contained within the coaching pair. Across multiple participants, the effects of chemistry extended beyond the coaching session and became embedded in how the coachee led, decided, and interacted with others. The shifts were not limited to insight in the moment. They carried into meetings, team facilitation, and other conversations. In several cases, participants described using language from the sessions, hearing the coach's inquiry voice internally, or intentionally entering conversations differently because of what was practiced in coaching.

The portability of learning that was facilitated by chemistry was evident in changed decision-making patterns and relational dynamics outside the coaching context. Coachees did not simply remember insights; they enacted them. The inquiry became internalized. The stance shifted. Leadership behavior moved from reaction to intention. Chemistry, therefore, functioned not only as a relational experience within the coaching pair but as a distributed influence that shaped broader practice architecture in teams and organizations.

Coach Observation Quotes

"That's almost a duh." (Pair 5) [When asked the question about observing chemistry leading to a stronger sense of collaboration or collective identity between you, the client, and others in their workplace]

"…more enthusiastic to try a new approach, massive adjacency to how chemistry there was in belief that this is working." (Pair 1)

"She knew how to tell people what to do and, you know, twist herself into, you know, different pieces and shapes to get people to do things. But yeah, yeah, the chemistry that she saw

developed with the two of us has helped her become a more, I think the word she used was open" (Pair 4)

"I was actually just was excited for her. I was happy for her. Was thrilled that she had a breakthrough. That because it was weighing on her so much when we first met, she really felt like her self worth was impacted by what was happening at work. I mean, that was the reality she was. She was not miserable, but she was unhappy with what was going on, and she just was struggling. So for me to see her suddenly have this epiphany and say, you know, like all those emails, I don't know, the fact she realized the emails she can send by an email she doesn't have to waste their time. I mean, it was, I was just really happy for her that she had an answer to to the question. I feel like, in a way, it shifted the problem from her self worth to her communication style, and that I which is, you know, at the end of the day, it's it was never about her. It was never about her in the sense, it wasn't about her value. It was how she was communicating her value, and what I loved about that point and her epiphany was how she realized that it was what she was doing, not who she was and who she was being, it was what she was doing that that was important" (Pair 4)

The quotes show that chemistry extended beyond the coaching interaction and became embedded in how coachees enacted leadership. In Pair 4, the coach's observation that the coachee shifted from questioning her self-worth to recognizing her communication patterns reflected a critical reframing that enabled behavioral change outside the session. This shift from identity to action illustrated how chemistry translated insight into application. Similarly, Pair 1's observation of increased enthusiasm and belief that "this is working" suggested that chemistry reinforced confidence in trying new approaches, which then carried into leadership behaviors.

Across these examples, chemistry functioned as a bridge between reflective insight and applied leadership, enabling coachees to transfer learning into action.

Coachee Experiential Quotes

"Over the last month, I asked my team in their one-on-ones more of an open ended question." (Pair 5)

Yes, for sure…like yesterday, for example, we were talking about, and he used the term instigator…there was a situation that came up and so it just prompted me to like think about it in that term and actually take action, or probably in the past, I wouldn't have. But there was an opportunity to kind of set the tone and be a leader and kind of help the conversation along...defintiely think there is an impact" (Pair 1)

I think in collaborate…the word perform better, but collaborate better…how I can help the group. Just trying to be more conscious and more intentional about how I interact with the group and might help move them along. (Pair 1)

"I thought I was having this I was mis- I was misreading the impressions other people had about me, their perception of me, and my values at, you know, at the firm and things like that. And she was able to flip that, flip that narrative for me, and had a huge impact on that…" (Pair 4)

"Yeah, for sure. I mean, I think, you know, just like yesterday, for example, we were talking about, and he used the term instigator, you know, like we were talking about, talking about, like, actual leadership, not necessarily working on a specific thing you know, or specific project or specific issue, but like, just general leadership, like, how can we make our leadership team meetings run better? And he, you know, he used the term instigator, and so even yesterday afternoon, like it might have just been recently biased, but like, there was a situation that came

up, and so it just prompted me to, like, think about it in that term, and actually take action, or probably in the past, I wouldn't have, you know, I just would have, because it really did something that didn't even really involve me that much. But there was an opportunity to kind of set the tone and be a leader and kind of help the conversation along. So, yeah, I definitely think it's there was an impact." (Pair 1)

From the coachee perspective, the data indicated that this portability was experienced through internalization of inquiry and intentional shifts in behavior. In Pair 5, the coachee described asking more open-ended questions with their team, while Pair 1 highlighted using the concept of "instigator" to reframe situations and take leadership action where they previously would not have engaged. These examples indicated that the coaching dialogue became internalized as a way of thinking, influencing decisions and interactions beyond the session. Additionally, reflections on becoming more intentional in collaboration and improving group dynamics demonstrated that chemistry contributed to distributed leadership, where influence extended across the team rather than remaining centered in the individual. The repeated application of reframed perspectives, such as in Pair 4's shift in understanding others' perceptions, further reinforced that chemistry was not confined to the coaching relationship but reshaped how coachees engaged with others. The data revealed that chemistry acted as a portable, practical influence, redistributing leadership by altering language, mindset, and actions across organizations.

Theme 12 – Embodied Experience – Chemistry showed up to be energetically somatic. The felt sense of attunement was prevalent, of being "on the same wavelength" that preceded trust, insights and momentum. Participants describe changes in tone, posture, confidence, or emotional charge before cognitive insight appears. Chemistry functioned as a somatic and embodied

experience, characterized by a shift from instrumental "doing to" interactions toward relational "being with" where presence itself became a catalyst for meaning making.

Chemistry is felt, somatic, rhythmic and interactional, not narrative. Participants described chemistry as felt, embodied, and patterned in interaction rather than constructed through narrative storytelling. It is sensed in pacing, tone, responsiveness, and coordinated momentum.

Coach Quotes

"He was more animated. I had, I hadn't actually realized that, you know, there was that uptick in his engagement, far more vulnerable, and it's almost as if there was an aha moment or some kind of spark that he realized that, wow, this is something that I could own. "A certain amount of rawness… caused a little bit of a rift in that, a ripple in the chemistry trust that was happening." (Pair 1)

"One, you know, in my memory, that was the first time that I felt like a connection to him." (Pair 2)

I feel like he's like, yeah, yeah. Like, can I get out of the room? And I also noticed that, and I feel internally watching this like, Damn, it's bouncing off of him, you know…" (Pair 2)

"I would say in that one I noticed one his shift from the first one, he was actually making jokes, right? And so I noticed a shift in his energy, and also that he was definitely becoming more open and being more reflective." (Pair 3)

"so much easier because I'm probably more relaxed and it's probably more natural for me, which makes them more comfortable, right? But I feel I'm probably more confident, and it's a lot easier when there is chemistry (Pair 3)

"I always feel a little bubbly and champagney When a client has one of those moments. It's like excitement, and then it's like, cue the popcorn. I can't wait to see what's gonna happen next." (Pair 6)

The quotes demonstrated that chemistry was experienced first as a somatic and energetic shift before it was cognitively understood or articulated. In Pair 1, the coach's observation of increased animation, vulnerability, and a visible "uptick in engagement" indicated that something shifted in the coachee's presence prior to the articulated "aha" moment. Similarly, in Pair 3, the coach noted changes in energy, humor, and openness, signaling that chemistry was detectable through tone, pacing, and affect rather than through explicit narrative. Even moments of disruption, such as the "rawness" described in Pair 1 or the sense of energy "bouncing off" in Pair 2, highlighted that chemistry operated as a felt, interactional phenomenon that could intensify the relational field. Coaches also described their own embodied responses, such as feeling "bubbly and champagney" (Pair 6), reinforcing that chemistry was not only observed but physically experienced within the interaction. In these cases, chemistry acted as dynamic coordination that came before and facilitated meaning.

Coachee Quotes

"I mean, that was in a light, enlightening thing, but it wasn't exciting like that. It made me sad." (Pair 4)

Like, my excitement, I think, is the thing that Comes forward the most….I was feeling… hopeful and… creative… And…(Pair 5)

"Very jovial. It sounds like, I mean, obviously there was a lot of positive energy. I think both come both directions. I think we were, it sounds like we were getting closer to the end. So it was more of a kind of reflection timeframe, and kind of a, I don't know how to describe it, but definitely felt like there was some great synergy in that, that conversation, as we were starting to wrap up that third session." (Pair 3)

"She was smiling a lot. I didn't, I don't think I noticed it that much like I think she was enjoying it. Um, I mean, I remember her smiling a few times and stuff, but just watching it back, I'm like, Oh, she's proud of me, or she's enjoying this…" (Pair 4)

"Yeah, for sure. Yeah, maybe even a little earlier than that, too. I mean, I I remember after that first session, kind of feeling really energized and like, Oh, I think we were on the same way, same way, same wavelength, you know, I just felt like we clicked towards the end of that first one, and that carried over into the other two. But yeah, we were definitely, I think the energy level got, got pretty good at the end there." (Pair 1)

From the coachee perspective, the data further illustrated that these somatic experiences signaled alignment, momentum, and relational depth before insight was fully formed. In Pair 1, the coachee's feeling of being "energized" and "on the same wavelength" after the first session demonstrated that chemistry was recognized through felt alignment rather than through explicit understanding. Similarly, descriptions of excitement, hope, and creativity (Pair 5), or even sadness (Pair 4), indicated that emotional charge, no matter if it was positive or negative,was part of the embodied experience of chemistry. Observations of smiles, tone, and shared "positive

energy" (Pairs 3 and 4) further reinforced that chemistry was communicated through nonverbal and affective cues. These experiences often preceded or accompanied later cognitive shifts, suggesting that chemistry functioned as an embodied precursor to insight. Together, the data showed that chemistry was not constructed through storytelling or explanation but sensed through coordinated presence, where "being with" created the conditions for new understanding and action to emerge.

Defining Chemistry

Chemistry is a generative, co-created relational phenomenon marked by asymmetrical awareness and multiple levels of engagement, emerging not from personality alignment but from coordinated practice between participants.

Characteristics of Chemistry

Chemistry operates as a relational container sustained through productive disruption, mutual orientation, rhythmic continuity, and inquiry-based practice that holds adaptive tension long enough for new meaning to form.

Benefits of Chemistry

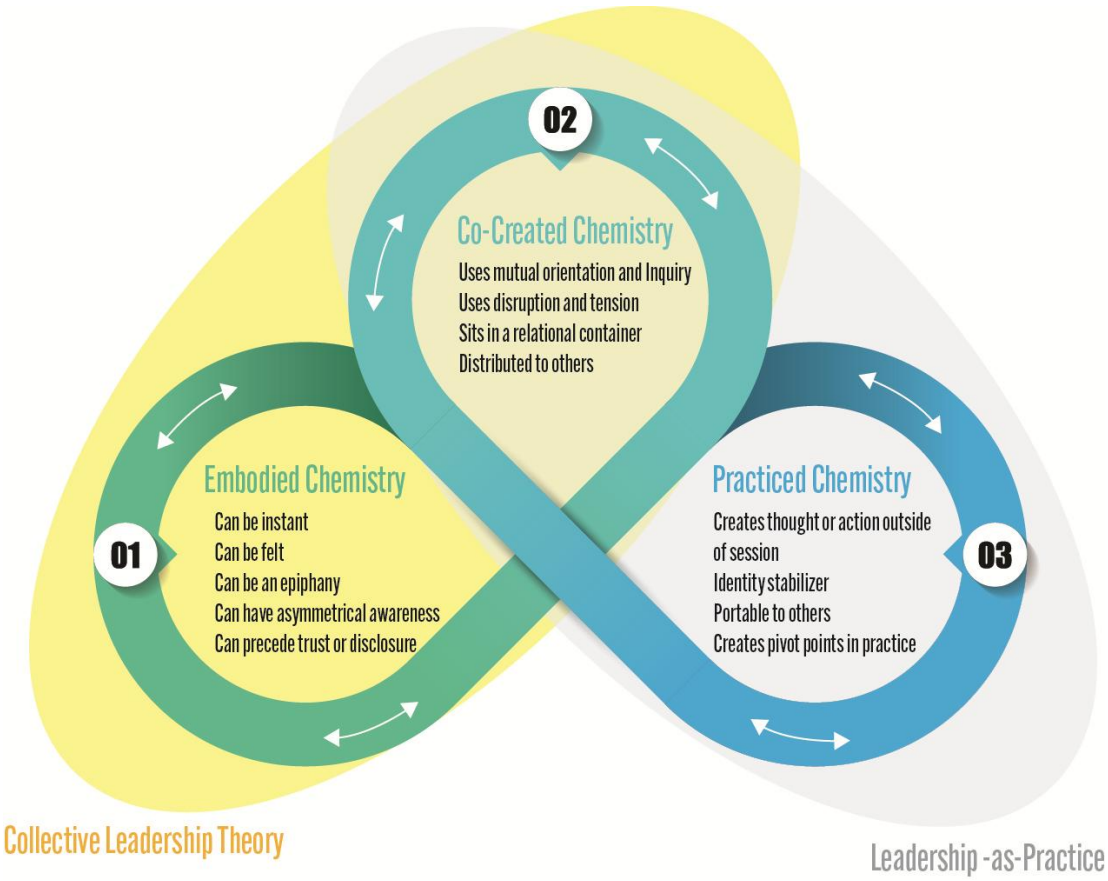
Chemistry produces identity stabilization and confidence amplification, activates agency and choice, embeds insight somatically, and spreads portably across contexts.

Taken together, these findings position chemistry as a relational accelerator and adaptive mechanism within executive coaching. It is not dependent on symmetry, disclosure volume, or comfort. It can be initiated by one party and intensified through disruption. It can enables identity stabilization, decision clarity, and distributed leadership effects. Chemistry therefore represents a practice-based phenomenon that bridges individual development and collective leadership processes. These descriptions suggest that chemistry is not merely a byproduct of

effective coaching, but a catalytic mechanism through which leadership practice becomes generative, operable and transferable.

Taking these insights into account, the original Chemistry map was reviewed and updated shown below in Figure 10. The steps are unique but not necessarily linear. The coaching pairs revealed that for some of the individuals skipped step one then came back to step two or did step two then three then one. They are ordered numerically in the Figure below, but the arrows indicate that the pattern can flow from any of the directions. The first step of Embodied Chemistry does not line up with SPT as originally thought. Although there is a smattering of evidence for one or two participants that there was a slow methodical building of the relationship before chemistry emerged, I show SPT as an arrow going linearly from one to three as the original figure showed. I'm not sure it belongs on the figure at all, because the building of trust seemed not to be dependent on chemistry building and vice versa as a whole. Collective Leadership Theory is shown to support both steps 1 and 2, from embodiment to shared leadership. Leadership-as-Practice Theory is shown to support both steps 2 and 3 from distributed leadership to practiced leadership.

Figure 4-2 – New Chemistry Map with Theories



Negative Findings

Disconfirming cases were evaluated to determine whether the chemistry operated as anticipated. Instead of undermining the construct, these instances contributed to clarifying its boundaries. Although the unexpected negative data challenged prevailing theories, assumptions, and potential researcher coaching bias, it ultimately reinforced the principal themes and provided meaningful insights. Negative case analysis revealed asymmetry, non-synchronicity, and instances where trust, disclosure, or skill did not predict chemistry. These disconfirming patterns suggest chemistry operates as an emergent relational coordination phenomenon rather than a linear outcome of intimacy, reciprocity, or competence.

Perception Was Not Always Shared. Disconfirming Pattern: Chemistry was not always mutually perceived. This further strengthened the asymmetry theme and finding. Chemistry does

not require mutual awareness to generate impact. That is disconfirming to traditional relational reciprocity model (Molm, 2010).

- In at least one pair, the client reported strong chemistry early, while the coach did not recognize it until later.
- In another pair, the coach perceived chemistry, but the client did not describe the session as particularly catalytic. In a third pair, the reverse was true.

"So I don't know that it changed my sense of connection, because connection, I don't know, connection, wasn't really in the mix for, for what I was thinking. I mean, it's a, I don't know it's, I'm not saying that she felt connected to me and I didn't feel connected to her, but I just, I suppose, I wasn't focused on the connection. I was really present with, like, the content of the thread, of what was happening." (Coach Pair 6)

Trust did not always correlate with disclosure volume.

Disconfirming Pattern: Some participants reported high trust without deep personal disclosure. This contradicts Social Penetration Theory that assumes depth/breadth disclosure as markers of relational closeness. Chemistry is not incremental depth-building, instead it may be punctuated, practice-based, and meaning-driven rather than intimacy-driven or a linear pattern (Mangus et al., 2020).

Participants described:

- Feeling aligned without vulnerability exposure
- Experiencing confidence shifts without emotional intimacy

"I mean, from that clip, he seems, you know a little bit but, but I don't think if you, if you take the context of the whole session. I mean, to his credit, I thought that he was willing to have these to engage, you know, it wasn't like he was, you know, it more was, so he was open, but he wasn't

necessarily, I would say he was open, not necessarily comfortable and not necessarily self aware." (Coach Pair 2)

"So she leaned in. So the trust factor I talked about, I feel like she decided to trust me, and then the vulnerability. I don't know that it was just like, as if she was going to think about that. So that was going to be the next step. Because I feel like the trust was the precursor to the vulnerability…" (Pair 4 Coach)

Table 17: Chemistry, Trust and Vulnerability Recognition Pattern Asymmetry

Cross-Pair Sequencing of Chemistry, Trust & Openness					
Pair	**Chemistry Recognition Timing**	**Vulnerability perception coach**	**Vulnerability perception coachee**	**Coach perception of trust**	**Coachee perception of trust**
Pair 1	Assymetrical - Session 1 coach, Session 2 Coachee	Judgement free zone creates freedom	Sharing and vulnerability right away	Vulnerability to disclosure to trust	Connected early, trusted right away
Pair 2	Assymetrical - Session 1 coach, Session 2 Coachee	Commitment and continuity	Connection, trust then vulnerability	Transactional, no vulnerabiity or trust	Feeling more comfortable with personal stories, connection to trust
Pair 3	Assymetrical - Session 2 coach, Session 3 Coachee	New perceptions, thoughts, chemistry then more trust	Connected on common ground, most open or willing to be vulnerable	Connect to trust	Familiarity and accomplishing work built trust by session 3
Pair 4	Assymetrical - Session 1-2 coach, Session 1 Coachee	Epiphany, chemistry, trust, vulnerability	Thought she would get it, so I opened up	Willingness to work, disclosure, strategic	Second session deeper questions and being invested in me built trust
Pair 5	Assymetrical - Immediate coach, Session 1 Coachee	Ephiphany, progress, vulnerability	Excited to get to solutions, next steps and make progress	Trust a light switch with a dimmer brighter over time	Open but not trusting, did not believe he could harm
Pair 6	Assymetrical - Session 1 coach, Immediate Coachee	Empathy, working on something, progress	Curiosity created openness and sharing	Competence, relabiliity, sincerity	Interested to talk to her, came ready to go to get something out of it (common goal not trust)

Emotional Closeness Was Not Required

Some pairs experienced transactional chemistry seen as rhythmic, fast cognitive alignment without warmth, emotional vulnerability or affection language. It further reinforces the framing of chemistry as a felt alignment in coordinated meaning-making not in closeness.

This disconfirms:

- Rapport-centric coaching literature (Bluckert, 2005)
- Emotional bonding as prerequisite for transformation (Mangus et al., 2020)

"I mean, just again, the trust, the I didn't have anything to lose. I wanted to get something out of this, and right or wrong, knowing that our time was relatively short or coming to an end, He was able to deliver in pretty short order." (Pair 2 Coachee)

Distributed impact was not always immediate. While many reported portable impact, some participants described delayed integration, subtle shifts rather than dramatic epiphanies. It does support chemistry as both catalytic and gradual.

This disconfirms:

- The researcher's assumption that chemistry always produces visible breakthrough moments as it does in athletics and more intimate relationships.

"Good question. These are questions that I think are somewhat subconscious, you know, all the things that you're not thinking about, but it's probably very, you know, very real in the moment. So I probably wasn't at a point where I felt comfortable talking about the full context of my where I was in my or where I have been in my career path and career journey. So I probably wasn't overly transparent around, maybe my full perception around the work environment. You know, some of these things that have happened, at least in my career trajectory happened within the last, let's say, six months to a year. So I probably wasn't transparent about maybe how I felt about some of the things that have happened up to this point, and then maybe what led me to some of these thoughts and conversations that we were having" (Pair 3 Coachee)

Safety was sometimes retrospective and not consistently a precursor for chemistry or the relational container. Several participants identified feeling safe only after reflecting on the session, not during. Some recounted not having trust but going all in anyway to get something out of it. The research shows that felt alignment may precede articulated safety or at least be

loosely correlated and not connected. Chemistry did not consistently require articulated trust or consciously experienced psychological safety prior to its emergence.

This challenges:

- The assumption that psychological safety must be consciously perceived in real time and that it leads to trust (Yin & Zhou, 2023)

"I would describe it as potential energy. You're not, you know, I didn't, I don't think we, you know, yeah, it was, it was just like, Oh, here's a possibility." (Pair 2 Coachee)

"Well, I was aware that there's a pattern to what he was telling me, yeah, and that he didn't see it. Mm, hmm. I mean, he's an interesting again, I feel like I don't I don't know him well, but he's an interesting mix, because he comes across as a person who you would think would be pretty good at this, who then, when you, when you talk to, he doesn't seem like he's comfortable just and, and you kind of Look at me like eloquent, good looking guy, you know, engages in active, plays golf, you know, things that are social in nature and you know, and you think, like, why does he seem uncomfortable? That was really what I was wrestling. Why does he seem uncomfortable?" (Pair 2 Coach)

Video Elicitation

Video elicitation strengthened the hermeneutic circle by allowing participants to re-enter lived experience, enabling tacit, embodied, and interactional dimensions of chemistry to become consciously articulated. The information from the video elicitation did not show up in the original interviews. Some of the information not only deepened the previous themes, it surfaced different kinds of knowing. Clients noticed how they spoke, coaches noticed what they missed or

did not signal. Video elicitation activated reflexive consciousness, not just recollection. This indicates that chemistry is operating below conscious awareness until it surfaces through reflection.

Embodiment of the experience of chemistry was almost entirely in the video elicitation interviews. Being able to watch themselves enabled the memories how they felt to be described as they saw the feeling for themselves, the coach and what passed between them (see Ch. 5).

Interpretation of findings by research questions

Question 1 - How is chemistry built between coach and coachee (SPT)? What is it and what impact does it have on coaching?

Coaches and coachees vary in their experience with chemistry and how it emerged. The data shows asymmetrical appearance of successful chemistry. Chemistry overall was given the benefits of accelerating coaching and creating efficiency in the coaching process. The findings demonstrate that chemistry is not "built" in the traditional sense through disclosure or emotional bonding. Instead, it emerges through:

- Inquiry-based practice rather than performance
- Rhythmic conversational coordination
- Attentive presence and attunement
- A safe relational container grounded in dignity
- The holding of adaptive tension

Chemistry intensified when coaches disrupted contradictions, mirrored language patterns, and sustained inquiry long enough for meaning to reorganize. Most importantly, chemistry did not require mutual recognition. In multiple cases, one party (often the coach) perceived

chemistry emerging before the coachee did, or vice versa. The following impacts were recorded as key insights from the research shown in chapter 4:

- Accelerated meaning-making
- Identity stabilization and confidence amplification
- Greater portability and distribution of leadership beyond the session
- Chemistry functioned as embodied experience

Coach Examples

Chemistry Clicks When Need Is Articulated (Pair 1)

"You have a need and I now have just articulated and understand your need back to you. That's when I think chemistry really starts to click."

Adaptive Tension & Discomfort (Pair 3)

"After something hard… that discomfort… is the beginning of it."

Safe Container & Non-Judgment (Pair 3)

"It was really about listening, asking questions and being free of judgment."

Effortless Flow When Present (Pair 1)

"Effortless… easier to pause… easier to be comfortable with silence."

Coachee Examples

Immediate Resonance & Rhythmic Back-and-Forth (Pair 1)

"It resonated almost immediately… there was just kind of a real we were on the same wavelength… a back and forth." (Pair 1)

Immediate Ease & Mirroring

"We connected immediately… she would take it in and then kind of summarize more generally… it was very easy." (Pair 6)

Breakthrough Through Language Mirroring

"Until she said, 'So you're saying that they don't give a shit.' … Yeah, thanks for hearing me." (Pair 2)

Structured Rhythm that Slowed Thinking

"She kept me on this really linear path… the rhythm was really effective because it made me slow down… it was really more like reflection of what is." (Pair 4)

Identity & Confidence Shift

"It has shifted my confidence… I've gone into discussions… with a new belief that I am… the expert." (Pair 2)

The chemistry was shown to accelerate the benefits of the coaching into impact. Once chemistry was noticed and acknowledged, these are the kinds of comments from coaches and coachees related to things that followed. In particular related to the video elicitation moments that chemistry caused a pivot point and what followed those moments after watching them back.

*"It's a testament to familiarity, trust, flow. So I think there was a certain chemistry that was built over time, short amount of time, which allowed for a conversation at that sort of level of depth and level of revelation for him, just in terms of his own self awareness and self opportunity for self regulation, and how that could be meaningful for him." (*Coach Pair 1)

"I feel like the meaning I make of it is the success of the coaching assignment, the accomplishment of the goal that the person came with. From my perspective, or at least a part of it, there was a definite progression towards the stated desired outcome of coaching." (Pair 4 Coach)

"It was a great reinforcement that she was on the she was on the right path. It was helping build chemistry, incremental, bonding moment." (Coach Pair 6)

"Obviously there was a high level of trust, but I felt comfortable. I think this was probably maybe the most vulnerable I was in any of the three sessions…the right word is broke through to be really vulnerable." (Coachee Pair 1)

"I feel like there was a high level, very high level of trust and vulnerability at that point. I think at that point we had probably talked about some shift in perspective from from first session to third session at that point. So, yeah, so very, very high level of trust." (Pair 3 Coachee)

The findings indicate that chemistry did not emerge as a product of traditional relational building, such as disclosure or emotional bonding, but instead arose through coordinated practice within the interaction. Chemistry was enacted through inquiry, rhythm, attunement, and the holding of adaptive tension within a safe and dignified relational container. It appeared asymmetrically across participants, with one party often sensing or activating it before the other. This suggests that chemistry functioned more as an interactional condition that shaped how the coaching unfolded. Moments of disruption, mirroring, and sustained inquiry were also generative, allowing meaning to reorganize versus just exist in discussion. As a result, chemistry accelerated the coaching process, creating efficiency by putting participants into insight, clarity, and forward movement without requiring the long term relational setup.

The impact of chemistry extended beyond immediate insight, shaping identity, confidence, and leadership behavior in durable ways. Coachees experienced shifts in self-concept, often moving from uncertainty to a stronger sense of legitimacy and authority, while also internalizing the coach's inquiry as an ongoing practice. Trust and vulnerability, while present, often followed these moments rather than preceding them, reinforcing that chemistry functioned as a precursor to deeper relational engagement. Additionally, the embodied and somatic nature of chemistry contributed to its impact, as participants felt alignment, momentum, and connection before fully articulating insight. Ultimately, chemistry operated as a portable and distributive force, extending beyond the coaching session into broader leadership practice, where it influenced how individuals engaged with teams, made decisions, and enacted change.

Question 2 - How can the experience of chemistry in a coaching encounter be maximized, harnessed or measured to build stronger communities and teams (CLT)?

The research demonstrates that chemistry within coaching relationships has a positive, measurable impact on strengthening communities and teams (see Ch. 4). Specifically, the data indicates that chemistry can be assessed through the felt experiences of both the coach and the coachee. Despite these findings, important questions remain regarding the extent to which chemistry can be maximized or deliberately harnessed. While it is clear that chemistry is measurable, the current data does not reveal whether it can be intentionally increased or optimized within coaching partnerships.

The chemistry gates and accelerators shown in Chapter 4 (p. 118) are the only evidence of maximization. They are indicators of openings to chemistry and are another way to measure its existence. Greater understanding of these and the signals of chemistry shifts and levels of chemistry could indeed establish better claims of maximization.

Harnessing chemistry, as defined in this context, refers to making it replicable, teachable, and sustainable. To determine whether chemistry can be harnessed in this way, further research is required. This includes examining the characteristics of chemistry, the conditions present in coaching interactions, and the profiles of coaches and coachees. Systematic measurement of chemistry levels across various coaching pairs is needed to understand if specific factors such as levels, gates, and accelerants of chemistry, do in fact facilitate its maximization or enable it to be replicated or taught.

Future research should employ longitudinal studies to observe coaching pairs over extended periods and assess the sustainability of chemistry. Additionally, training interventions

should be developed to teach coaches, coachees, and even leaders and teams about the principles of chemistry. These interventions could then be evaluated in practice to determine whether chemistry is indeed teachable, sustainable, and replicable.

Coach Examples

Chemistry as Measurable Through Scaling (see Table 16)

"Six… and on a scale of one to 10, where was your belief in the process? … 9–10… belief that something would be gained? … nine for 10."

Shared Values Build Early Trust and Speed and Mutual Orientation (Pair 3)

"I think it (shared values) helps build the chemistry and the connection right away, which helps improve the process."

Chemistry Transfers to Leadership Behavior (Pair 3)

"It could definitely influence the way they show up and the way they lead."

Coachee Examples

Collaboration Improved Immediately (Pair 2)

"Yes… quick, immediate benefit was that I am collaborating better with one of the attorneys. 100%.

Alignment in Values & Shared Experience (Pair 4)

"There was some alignment… kind of resonated from the beginning all the way through."

Self-Evaluation and Values Clarification (Pair 4)

"The coaching experience required me to self-evaluate and to kind of level set with what is really most important."

Core Values Operationalized in Leadership (Pair 5)

"I've injected each one of those core values into just about every conversation I'm engaged in now."

Observable Confidence and Attainability (Pair 5)

"I felt solidified… maybe more affirmed… it felt more attainable."

Chemistry Defined (Pair 1)

"It's a testament to familiarity, trust, flow. So I think there was a certain chemistry that was built over time, short amount of time, which allowed for a conversation at that sort of level of depth and level of revelation for him, just in terms of his own self awareness and self opportunity for self regulation, and how that could be meaningful for him. I think the other sort of piece there is how much, how much could be gained when the space is created for someone to sort of tell their own narrative and story around something with structure, we veer off often in telling ourselves stories to protect ourselves or to reinvent something, to make ourselves feel better, or to reassert our values. You know, all of those things are happening, I think, when we're telling stories, but when you have someone with you who's objectively attempting to structure your stories in a way that you can make them coherent, but do that in a very, very transparent and vulnerable way, that's where I think true change can happen, transformational change"

The findings suggested that chemistry could be observed and measured through the lived experiences of coaches and coachees, particularly in how it accelerated alignment, collaboration, and progress toward goals. Participants described chemistry through indicators such as belief in the process, perceived value, and immediate behavioral shifts, suggesting that it was not abstract but experientially measurable. However, while chemistry was clearly identifiable and linked to positive outcomes, the data did not confirm that it could be intentionally maximized or engineered. Instead, the presence of "gates" and "accelerators" functioned as indicators or

conditions that opened the possibility for chemistry rather than guarantees of its occurrence. This positioned chemistry as measurable and observable, but not yet fully controllable within coaching practice.

The research further indicated that chemistry had implications beyond the coaching pair. Coachees reported immediate improvements in collaboration, clearer alignment with core values, and increased confidence in applying those values in practice. These shifts suggested that chemistry could be harnessed in its effects, even if not fully in its creation, as participants carried forward new ways of thinking and interacting. At the same time, the question of whether chemistry could be made replicable, teachable, or sustainable remained unresolved, pointing to the need for further study.

Question 3 - How does the chemistry of executive coaching transfer from leader to others (LAP) outside of coaching?

Research Question 3 revealed one of the most significant contributions of this study: chemistry does not remain contained within the coaching pair. Participants described chemistry as portable, re-emergent, and generative across contexts.

Research indicates that chemistry transfers from the coaching pair to other relationships, but there is a lack of clear data on its distribution and portability. Further study of levels, gates, and accelerants in adjacent relationships is needed to pinpoint how this transfer occurs. While limited information exists, the coaching pairs did demonstrate that chemistry is practice-based, productive during disruption, rhythmic, continuous, and mutually oriented. These factors will be useful for future understanding related to the portability of chemistry.

Three primary patterns emerged related to the portability.

1. Participants described carrying forward characteristics from co-created learning with the coach:

    - The rhythm of questioning
    - The discipline of staying in tension
    - The experience of feeling seen
    - The confidence gained in meaning-making

Coachee Examples

"I do consider that little exchange a pretty big breakthrough for myself…helped illuminate some of those things even more about, how I can really just come down to being who I am as a leader and not trying to…is pretend to be someone else, because that's what made them successful." (Pair 1)

"I said, might need you to send me that clip so I can save it and refer back to it on a on a regular basis. I've thought about it numerous times since then, in the way in which I approach folks around the workplace, but even listening to it a second time, thinking about it from a relationship standpoint, part of a group that we try and reflect on business, family and personal…" (Pair 2)

"Maybe, maybe confidence comes to mind. And I think my interactions and through this coaching experience, kind of broaden my perspective of, you know, there's more than one way to achieve what you want to achieve. And then I would also say too. It did require me, just because of the types of questions she asked it once again, it required me to reevaluate my intentions…" (Pair 3)

"I do remember feeling again, if my job is not that hard, why am I making it hard? And I felt like grateful that I felt like I had a teammate, actually, I felt like I had a friend that was like, Dude, your job is not that hard." (Pair 4)

Coach Examples

"…she was at the stage where coaching was great. I got an answer. Leave me alone. I gotta go. I'm gonna execute. And so she needed the the rest of the conversation so that she could look at the bigger picture of of all the sponsors in her life…" (Pair 5)

"I was trying to so for me, coaching is helping people learn by themselves, as in not telling them, but facilitating their learning. And so that was what was happening in that moment, was me trying to because my belief is that…" (Pair 4)

"Chemistry means that we understood each other, and she understood that I was there for her, and I presented a framework that allowed her to see the world in a different way. And the answer is yes, she gets excited about the view of the world that she saw. So for instance, you'll notice after her epiphany, one of the things that she did is she she already had talked to three different people on this outside podcast, which was going to bring the value that didn't have that she wasn't getting from her current job… So that's the cool part. Is we, if you have the if you can develop the chemistry, I'm going to use your terms now, if you get to develop the chemistry to have a rapport that you're you're seeing the client where they are today. Then, by definition, as a coach, you have frameworks that will allow the client to take themselves somewhere else, and you can share the different places they can go …" (Coach Pair 5)

Chemistry continued not as an emotional memory, but as a patterned way of interacting. Leaders began replicating inquiry structures within team conversations, one-on-one meetings, and decision-making forums.

2. Transformation into distributed leadership practice. Participants describe:

- Facilitating conversations differently
- Inviting dissent rather than controlling it
- Holding ambiguity longer
- Distributing sense-making

Here, chemistry shifted from coach to coachee coordination to become distributed coordination.

Coach Examples

"It could definitely influence the way they show up and the way they lead. If that is not there, I don't know how effective the relationship can be." (Pair 3)

"It certainly caused us to have to talk through it… and make additional connections." (Pair 2)

"They drive the conversation, they drive the relationship." (Pair 1)

"I mean, it was the presence, like holding space for somebody...Like they just put everything on the table, and you have to figure out what bits you run with and which bits you're going to just let go. And I feel like that was the moment when I decided to zoom into it." (Pair 4)

"…and I think the most immediate part there awareness and concurrence are two. So the fact that was in the room when she saw it herself, and I was able to agree with her, allowed her

to cement in the the fact that, yes, this could be one of the couple things that is stopping from her from being who she wants to be." (Pair 5)

Coachee Examples

"*I'm 100% bought in… I'm going to take this torch and I'm going to carry it myself." (Pair 5)*

"I definitely had a great amount of respect… and built from there." (Pair 6)

"The energy was stronger during those moments… once it kind of felt like a light bulb came on." (Pair 4)

"…questions that she would ask or the affirmations to my responses, or maybe even sometimes the challenges to my responses." (Pair 3)

"And maybe that brought something important up on her, up on our agenda. Basically, she thought it was important enough to bring up before we left for the day." (Pair 4)

"I don't remember how she asked me to do it, but I remember thinking, I need to keep track of what happened so I can report back on it" (Pair 5)

The findings indicated that chemistry extended beyond the coaching pair as a transferable, practice-based phenomenon rather than an isolated relational experience. Participants described carrying forward specific interactional patterns developed in coaching, including inquiry, comfort with tension, and the experience of being seen and understood. Coachees reported increased confidence, expanded perspective, and a stronger sense of authenticity in their leadership, suggesting that chemistry reshaped how they interpreted

situations and responded to others. Coaches reinforced this by describing their role as facilitating learning rather than directing it, which enabled coachees to generate their own insights and apply them independently. In this way, chemistry transferred not as a memory of the relationship but as an embedded pattern of practice that influenced future interactions.

The data further showed that this transfer manifested as distributed leadership, where the coordination initially experienced within the coaching relationship extended into teams and organizational contexts. Coachees described facilitating conversations differently, inviting input, holding ambiguity longer, and engaging others in shared sense-making. This reflected a shift from individual problem-solving to collective leadership practice. Coaches observed that when chemistry was present, coachees were more likely to take ownership, drive conversations, and sustain momentum beyond the session. Statements such as "I'm going to take this torch and carry it myself" illustrated the internalization of both responsibility and approach. Chemistry, therefore, functioned as a mechanism for redistributing leadership, moving from a dyadic interaction to a broader relational practice that shaped how individuals led, collaborated, and created meaning with others.

Secondary insights and observation

While the primary findings established chemistry as an emergent, practice-based, asymmetrical and generative relational phenomenon, several secondary insights further illuminate its architecture. Dialogic rhythm types like interruption, storytelling, conversation, teaching and advise were contributors to the felt experience. These findings suggest that chemistry is not merely a moment of felt alignment, but a structure that is diagnosable and capable of being intentionally cultivated. Rather than existing as an emotional byproduct of

connection, chemistry appears to operate as a patterned relational field condition shaped by skill, environment, tension, and dignity. The data suggests that this byproduct could be mapped into a construct that might be replicated.

Chemistry operates as an infrastructure with levels, modes, and requirements. Chemistry may not be singular or static. It showed to function across identifiable modes (transactional, meaning-making, distributed, somatic) independent of other factors and requires specific relational preconditions from both coach and coachee. From observation of the researcher, these modes can be observed, diagnosed, and intentionally engaged depending on the context. (see Ch. 5).

Coaches or leaders may function as carriers or pacers of chemistry. In several pairs, one participant recognized or sustained chemistry before the other identified it. Attunement, rhythm regulation, and the intentional holding of tension by one party appeared sufficient to initiate or maintain the relational field until mutual recognition emerged. Chemistry did not require symmetrical awareness to function, though mutual engagement strengthened it. Further research is required to verify these indications.

The following separate roles were indicated and not explored by the research but were observed and implied. A pacer initiates rhythm or sets tempo in the session. A carrier holds adaptive tension long enough for transition. A co-carrier reflects distributed holding capacity in higher levels of chemistry. Carrier behavior appears to sustain safety without over-reciprocity, maintain inquiry under tension, prevent collapse during disruption, and enable movement toward distributed meaning making.

Chemistry has other accelerants. Certain relational practices intensify chemistry, including humor, mirroring, shared meaning-making, adaptive challenge, continuity over time,

and consistent follow-through. These accelerants amplify rhythm and perceived relevance. Some of the actors were aware in practice or in reflection in the video elicitation and others were observed. Certain practices of these accelerants coincide with heightened energy and engagement. These are observable and repeated behaviors in coaching practice. They amplify the existing rhythm and the perception of relevance in meaning making. (see Ch. 5).

Chemistry has entry gates. Chemistry might not arise indiscriminately. Across pairs, participants described certain relational conditions that appeared to function as entry thresholds. These included perceived competence and credibility of the coach, mutual respect, psychological safety, readiness or willingness of the client, appropriate boundaries, attunement, and shared sense-making. Chemistry often emerged if at least one of these relational conditions was sufficiently present. These gates functioned less as linear prerequisites and more as thresholds of relational alignment. Through different entry points across pairs, chemistry became possible. (see ch. 5). More research would need to be done here to verify.

Chemistry appeared to function as an environmental condition rather than a personality trait. Across pairs, its emergence was not attributed to charisma, likability, or relational performance, but to structured inquiry, rhythm regulation, mutual orientation, and sustained engagement. In this sense, chemistry reflected what Leadership-as-Practice describes as practice architecture, identified as one of three different kinds of arrangements (Mahon et al., 2017). Chemistry seems to fit the category of cultural-discursive arrangements, which are the resources used like language and discourse as the intentional shaping of relational space through agreements, pacing, inquiry, and adaptive tension (Mahon et al., 2017) . When these field conditions were present, chemistry emerged as an interactional property of the space rather than as an attribute of either individual. In several pairs (1 and 2), chemistry appeared to precede or

enable the distribution of leadership, suggesting that it may function as a precursor condition for LAP to occur.

In several pairs, chemistry intensified after the session structure was established. In one pair in particular, structural redirection was more evident and pacing recalibration. (Pair 6)

In another pair, chemistry emerged after an explicit agreement was negotiated about how challenge would function in the session. The coach asked whether the coachee would like direct or reflective feedback. The coachee chose directness. (Pair 2)

In one pair, tension rose when the coach confronted an inconsistency in the coachee's identity level narrative. It was not described with any relational rupture language. (Pair 2)

In another pair, chemistry strengthened in a session with minimal personal disclosure. The interaction centered on strategic decision-making. However, the turn-taking became crisp, overlapping less and landing more precisely. (Pair 3)

One pair described chemistry as building only after consistent follow-through between sessions. The coach referenced prior commitments and tracked behavioral experiments. The coachee began arriving with written reflections. The field became cumulative. Chemistry would be described here as building momentum over time. (Pair 1)

Chemistry functioned as an enabling condition rather than an outcome in itself. Across pairs, participants did not describe chemistry as the goal of coaching. Instead, it appeared to operate as a catalytic relational condition that facilitated identity stabilization, cognitive reframing, distributed leadership behaviors, and sustained change. Chemistry intensified or accelerated these shifts, but it was not described as an end state. It functioned as a medium through which insight deepened and action became possible.

In pair 6, chemistry appeared strongest during sessions focused on transactional elements like delegation. The coachee had been centralizing decisions. Through structured inquiry and reflective mirroring, the coach maintained steady pressure around control patterns. As chemistry deepened, the coachee began experimenting with transferring ownership of projects to team members. In follow-up interviews, the coachee reported increased initiative among direct reports. The chemistry was not described as something achieved; rather, it coincided with the coachee's willingness to release control.

Chemistry may serve as a diagnostic indicator of CLT signaling the presence of relational conditions for CL to emerge. Chemistry may function as a diagnostic indicator of collective leadership conditions. Across pairs, moments of chemistry coincided with increased distributed sense-making, ownership, and dignified participation. When chemistry was present, interaction shifted from unilateral direction to shared engagement. In this sense, chemistry appeared to signal relational field conditions in which collective leadership could emerge. It did not guarantee distributed leadership, but it marked an environment in which leadership began to move beyond hierarchical control toward shared enactment.

In pair 2, chemistry intensified during a session focused on strategic planning. Initially, the coachee described decisions in strongly individual terms using "I" terminology. As the conversation deepened, the language began to shift organically toward "we," including team members in both responsibility and solution formation. The coach did not prompt this linguistic change directly.

In pair 3, chemistry intensified when the coach resisted offering advice and instead positioned the issue as a joint inquiry by reframing. The coachee mirrored this stance, moving

from seeking directive answers to co-constructing interpretations. The problem was reframed collaboratively rather than solved hierarchically.

Summary of Secondary Findings

Taken together, these secondary insights position chemistry not as a fleeting spark but as a relational field phenomenon with structure, thresholds, accelerants, and developmental levels. Chemistry is neither synonymous with trust nor dependent upon intimacy; rather, it is a patterned coordination that enables leadership to distribute, identity to stabilize, and meaning to amplify. These secondary findings clarify beyond the primary findings to how it operates and how it may be intentionally cultivated. In this way, chemistry occupies a distinctive theoretical space. It can bridge micro-interactional rhythms with macro leadership outcomes through practice architecture, dignified tension, and field conditions that allow collective leadership and LAP to emerge.

Post Perception Indicators of Trust, Expectation and Belief

Upon reflection, I recognized an underlying assumption embedded in the selection of participants. All twelve actors knew me in some professional capacity either as a coach, consultant, colleague, or doctoral candidate. This prior familiarity may have influenced the timing, expression, or even the perceived emergence of chemistry within the coaching pairs. Participants were not only entering a coaching engagement; they were also participating in research led by someone with whom they already had relational history. Their willingness to contribute may have included an investment in supporting the study itself, advancing coaching insight, or extending professional goodwill toward the researcher.

In light of this, I incorporated a brief pre- and post-interview perceptual scaling measure consisting of four indicators: expectations of the coaching, trust in the partner, belief in the

process, and belief that something would be gained or learned. These informal indicators were not intended for statistical inference, but rather to provide contextual insight into participants' relational orientation at entry and at exit. I added these scale questions at the beginning of the first interview and at the end of the video elicitation interview.

Patterns within these pre- and post-perception scores suggest movement in trust, belief, and expectation across several pairs, including instances where initial scores were notably low. While these measures cannot establish causality, they align with the qualitative findings in suggesting that chemistry may precede or accompany shifts in perceptual trust and belief, rather than function solely as an outcome of pre-existing relational depth. Future research employing more structured quantitative design could examine these relationships with greater methodological rigor.

Seen below in Table 16, the qualitative questions that were added to the beginning of the first coach and coachee interviews and the qualitative questions that were added to the end of the final video elicitation interview.

Table 18: Post Perception Indicators of Trust, Expectation and Belief

		Pair one - Coach	Pair one - Client	Pair two - Coach	Pair 2 - Client	Pair three - Coach	Pair 3 - Client	Pair 4 - Coach	Pair 4 - Client	Pair 5 - Coach	Pair 5 - Client	Pair 6 - Coach	Pair 6 - Client
Before Scores - Coach question	**Client question**												
Scale of 1-10, how high were your expectations of the coaching?	Scale of 1-10, how high were your expectations of the coaching?	7	6	7	7	5	3	8	4	6	6	0	0
Scale of 1-10, how high was your trust in the client?	Scale of 1-10, how high was your trust in the credibility of the coach?	8	7	5	8	7	0	6	4	9	4	10	8
Scale of 1-10, how high was your belief in the process?	Scale of 1-10, how high was your belief in the process?	8	5	8	7	8	4	9	9	9	7	10	8
Scale of 1-10, how high was your belief that something would be gained/learned?	Scale of 1-10, how high was your belief that something would be gained/learned?	9	0	10	7	10	3	9	7	7	8	10	10
After Scores													
Scale of 1-10, how did you meet the expectations of the coaching?	Scale of 1-10, how were the expectations of the coaching met?	8	10	7	8	9	9	9	9	9	5	8	9
Scale of 1-10, Where was your trust in the client?	Scale of 1-10, Where was your trust in the coach?	9	10	5	7	9	9	8	8	9	4	9	10
Scale of 1-10, Where was your belief in the process?	Scale of 1-10, Where was your belief in the process?	9	9	7	8	9	10	10	10	9	6	10	8
Scale of 1-10, Where was your belief that something was gained/learned?	Scale of 1-10, Where was your belief that something was gained/learned?	10	9	8	9	10	7	9	9	9	6	10	10

The Added Data Shows Clear Directional Movement

Across pairs, what we now see more clearly that trust generally increases or stabilizes high. The belief in the process increases or stabilizes high. Belief in gain and learning increases noticeably. Expectations were met or exceeded. Even pairs that began low, moved upward. The questions were asked in perception not analytically. Perceptual alignment interpretively strengthened over the course of the engagement.

Further Supports Chemistry Model

Chemistry does not require high entry scores. Pair three client went from zero to 9 in belief in the gain and zero to 8 in trust in the coach. This aligns with chemistry being emergent and not dependent on initial trust.

Asymmetry is Still Visible

In multiple pairs, coach and client start at different levels but still travel upwards. This supports the carrier or pacer dynamic, asymmetrical awareness and distributed chemistry over time.

Movement Toward Coherence

There is convergence in the second scores, not just increase. Belief in process and belief in gain cluster around 8–10. This is not proof that coherence is possible but support and indication that it could be.

Perceptual shifts occurred alongside reported chemistry experiences. Initial trust, expectation, and belief varied significantly across the pairs. In most cases, perceptions strengthened over the engagement. Some pairs demonstrated substantial movement from low initial readiness. Coach and client perceptions were not symmetrical at entry. Perceptual convergence appeared by the end of the three sessions by the time the interviews took place. It also helps support the disconfirming evidence about trust as a prerequisite and rapport first coaching. It holds up the statement that chemistry can function as an enabling condition rather than the outcome of prior emotional depth.

Summary of Findings

Chapter 4 presented the findings of this hermeneutic phenomenological study examining how moments of chemistry within corporate coaching relationships influence individual leaders, their teams, and broader organizational systems.

Chapter 5 - Discussion, Implications, and Contributions

Introduction

At the beginning of this research, I questioned whether six pairs of coaches and coachees across only three sessions each could truly yield enough data to explore a phenomenon as nuanced as chemistry. The scope felt small compared to the complexity of what I was studying. I wondered if the window was too narrow.

Yet once the data was compiled and I moved deeply into analysis, I found myself overwhelmed, not by a lack of material, but by its richness. The transcripts were dense with movement, contradiction, rhythm, tension, and meaning. What initially appeared limited became layered. What felt contained began to unfold.

Using hermeneutic phenomenology helped me recognize and intentionally bracket my own horizon as a coach. I entered the data aware of my professional experience and assumptions about chemistry, entrainment, and relational dynamics. I watched the recordings and read the transcripts both as a coach and as a researcher. As a coach, there were moments where I noticed technique, skillfulness, restraint, success, or even missed opportunities. But as a researcher, I found myself far more curious than evaluative. I became attentive to patterns rather than performance. I leaned into observation rather than judgment.

What surprised me most was how often the data contradicted or complicated my own expectations. There were themes that emerged strongly that I had not anticipated. There were elements I was certain would appear that simply did not. That experience of being caught off guard became its own confirmation. The bracketing was working. The data was not merely affirming what I already believed. It was challenging, stretching, and reshaping it.

By the time analysis was complete, I no longer questioned whether the data was enough. The phenomenon had revealed itself with depth and texture. What follows in this chapter is an interpretation shaped by disciplined reflexivity, sustained curiosity, and a willingness to allow the findings to speak beyond my prior understanding.

This study explored the phenomenon of chemistry in executive coaching through a hermeneutic phenomenological design supported by video elicitation. Rather than treating chemistry as mutual attraction, rapport, or emotional closeness, the findings revealed chemistry as a generative, practice-based relational phenomenon that emerged through patterned coordination within a dignified relational container. Chemistry was shown to be asymmetrical in awareness, multi-layered in function, portable beyond the coaching pair, and intensified in moments of disruption rather than stability.

Chapter Four presented the thematic findings organized around defining chemistry, characteristics of chemistry, and benefits of chemistry. Chapter Five interprets those findings in light of the research questions, integrates them with Leadership-as-Practice (LAP), Collective Leadership Theory (CLT/Ubuntu), and Social Penetration Theory (SPT), proposes a revised conceptual model, and articulates practical and methodological contributions.

Research Findings

Construct – Potential Entry Gates for Chemistry

Across pairs, participants described certain relational conditions that appeared to function as entry thresholds. These included perceived competence and credibility of the coach, mutual respect, psychological safety, readiness or willingness of the client, appropriate boundaries, attunement, and shared sense-making. Chemistry often emerged from at least one of these relational conditions was sufficiently present. These gates functioned less as linear prerequisites

and more as thresholds of relational alignment. These gates were organized and categorized so that further future research can be done to look at each individual quality and each gate.

1. Legitimacy Gate

- Perceived competence
- Credibility
- Relevant experience

"He was engaged, and, you know, I could tell that from the very beginning." (Pair 1)

"If it had been lacking, I would have sensed it and probably engaged quite a bit less." (Pair 5)

"I have profound respect for her and what she's been able to do and accomplish." (Pair 3)

2. Dignity Gate

- Mutual respect
- Genuine care
- Recognition

"I think there were some alignment in the sense of maybe shared experience… there was just a common understanding of shared experience that kind of resonated from the beginning all the way through." (Pair 4)

I'm gonna go back to when she repeated the curse words, like, I almost called you after that and was like, I wasn't sure if this was gonna work or if I was gonna get a whole lot out of it, until she said, So you're saying that they don't give a shit. Yeah, thanks for hearing me. That's perfect. (Pair 4)

I mean, I would love to talk to her every week. (Pair 5)

"I did notice something by that third by that third meeting, I was getting a lot more validation than what I expected, and where's my notes here, it became okay to interrupt each other. She does a real she's a great listener, and she takes great notes, and she repeats things back to me, and she didn't interrupt me in the first couple meetings, but that second meeting." (Pair 4)

3. Containment Gate

- Psychological safety
- Clear boundaries
- Professional structure

"And but what I appreciate about her is that she was very clear, and she was in certain modes of interaction. So when it was a coaching mode, that's kind of what the most expect. When she was in a consulting mode, and she was a little bit more willing to engage in kind of what she thought or what her perception was, or what she was willing to contribute to the conversation. So So anyway, I did appreciate that. So I think when we were in maybe those small moments of consulting mode, it felt like the rhythm was a little bit more free flow. The coaching mode was more of kind of feeling put on the spot of let me see what do I need to do to drive the conversation to where this can be meaningful for both of us." (Pair 3)

"After the first few minutes, I felt comfortable sharing, you know, being vulnerable with him, sharing things." (Pair 1)

"She was very good to put it back to me in different words… 'Okay, this is what you're telling me.'" (Pair 6)

"There was just a common understanding of shared experience that kind of resonated from the beginning all the way through." (Pair 4)

4. Agency Gate

- Client readiness
- Willingness to engage
- Desire for movement

"If I wasn't engaged and ready to really connect…" (Pair 6)

"I locked in a little bit more at that point, and was and was like, okay, like, we're actually going to talk about some potential next steps or solutions or ways to go forward." (Pair 5)

"I had a high level of, higher level of trust after the, probably, after the first session going into the second session." (Pair 4)

" Maybe it spilled over into the second one too, as we got to know each other…" (Pair 2)

5. Attunement Gate

- Mirroring language
- Follow-up tracking
- Deep listening

"He started talking about, like, he brought up what we talked about the time before, and was like, kind of checking in on it, and like, let's get back to that… he readily remembered or like was tracking this stuff… I locked in a little bit more at that point." (Pair 5)

"I could tell early on that he cared… he was engaged… he did a good job of just listening and kind of understanding, but asking, asking really good questions." (Pair 1)

"I think familiarity helps. I think familiarity breeds quite a bit of opportunity, if you will. And in that opportunity is an opportunity for deeper vulnerability, if the trust continues to build." (Pair 4)

"What did I have to lose? I mean, to if I want to better myself as a leader… I better push my chips into the table and say, Here, this is my challenge. This is what I need help with, this is what I'm up against." (Pair 3)

6. Orientation Gate

- Shared purpose (not necessarily shared values)
- Alignment on goal
- Mutual commitment to growth

Alignment Present

"Yeah, I don't I… I didn't have any reservations or concerns that we weren't." (Pair 2)

"The connection of him being in New York to help out his daughter… kind of like an experience, you know, me with a young family, could relate to that." (Pair 3)

Alignment Absent — Yet Coaching Effective

"You guys are very different in personality, but yet both of you have this really high intellectual processing." (Pair 5 observation)

"Yes… for the purpose of the experiment." (Pair 4)

A summary of these gates is shown in Table 20 below and can be compared to Table 14 of the opening and closing patterns and rhythm of the coaching sessions. Table 14 reinforces the data from the entry gate charting from the transcripts of the sessions and questions.

Table 19: Chemistry Entry Gates

Chemistry Entry Gates – Quick Reference Summary Chart			
Gate	**Core Components**	**What It Regulates**	**Evidence Across Pairs**
1. Legitimacy Gate	• Perceived competence • Credibility • Relevant experience	Whether the coachee cognitively trusts the coach enough to engage	Present in Pairs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6
2. Dignity Gate	• Mutual respect • Genuine care • Recognition of humanity	Depth of engagement and willingness to share challenges	Present in Pairs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6
3. Containment Gate	• Psychological safety • Clear role boundaries • Professional structure	Emotional risk-taking and vulnerable disclosure	Present in Pairs 1, 3, 4, 6
4. Agency Gate	• Client readiness • Willingness to engage • Desire for forward movement	Speed and intensity of chemistry emergence	Present in Pairs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
5. Attunement Gate	• Language mirroring • Follow-up tracking • Demonstrated listening	Momentum, rhythm, and relational investment	Present in Pairs 1, 3, 4, 5
6. Orientation Gate	• Shared purpose	Sustained generative flow regardless of value similarity	Alignment present in Pairs 2, 3
	• Goal alignment		Alignment absent yet effective in Pairs 4, 5
	• Mutual commitment to growth		Pair 1, 6

Research Construct - Multiple Kinds of Chemistry

There are multiple levels of chemistry identified in this research. Participants vary in their descriptions of the kinds of chemistry experienced. Some were more transactional. Some described conversation or partnership. Others used deeper, emotional words and lastly, some even described embodiment. From the descriptors in the lived experience of the phenomenon by the actors in the study, the following four categories were created so that further research can be done.

Transactional chemistry marked by rhythmic conversation and activity that drives altered decisions and understanding. It is emphasized by tempo over depth, rhythm over emotion. Cognitive clarity and problem solving take place at this level with structured inquiry versus disclosure with minimal friction.

Coach:

"I become very aware of everything they're doing saying… and I try not to interrupt… and then I usually try to understand or validate… and if the rhythm is positive, I like to then acknowledge the positivity and the shift." (Pair 4 – Coach)

"He granted me some very clear need. He granted me a clear need. And the way he sort of framed it sort of tuned me into, very, very quickly. Tuned me into, he's willing, and I can, I'm able, he's willing, I'm able." (Pair 2 – Coach)

Coachee:

"He readily remembered or like was tracking this stuff and like checking back in and wanting to see something happen with it and move with it." Pair 5

"He did a good job of just listening and kind of understanding, but asking, asking really good questions." Pair 1

"It didn't take long… 15–20 minutes into the first session… I felt comfortable sharing." Pair 1

"She asked tons of open ended questions." Pair 4

Meaning making chemistry that is marked by immediate or over time exposure to deepening altered change with increased trust, disclosure and emotional awareness. There are more identity-level change, deeper internalization, and altered self-perception.

Coach:

"There's a definite correlation between level of vulnerability and engagement, energy, engagement and therefore, co ownership in the effort." (Pair 3 – Coach)

"He just was so open to you. It was just beautiful." (Pair 3 – Coach reflection)

"I think it helped… it certainly caused us to have to talk through it a little bit further and make additional connections." (Pair 5 – Coach)

Coachee:

"Yeah, and that's what I meant by like, this imposter syndrome and the question of self worth were connected so closely, and I didn't know it…" (Pair 3)

"After the first few minutes, I felt comfortable sharing." (Pair 1)

"and I think it those, those types of questions and our conversations did then led me to, um. Hmm, kind of a shift in perspective around, okay, I can see maybe how that path could be a valuable path, but I'm not necessarily sure that's the path for me. You know? I mean, so I think, from that standpoint, I think that was a kind of a pivot point over the couple of weeks in between our time together that I was like, Okay, maybe that's, I don't know that that's not the right path, but it definitely made definitely makes me think about it." (Pair 3)

Distributed chemistry that is a higher level of co-creation marked by epiphanies inside or outside the coaching pair and with more portability to teams and decisions. These quotes show a transition to self-activation of the insight and a move into action. Leadership moves from discussion and prompts from the coach to internal thoughts, decisions and actions. The inquiry voice of the coach becomes part of the decision making and thought patterns.

Coach:

"I suspect that some of the tools and approaches that we did really did have an impact in how he might manage his time, how he might grow and drive both his capability, but also maybe reorient himself to how he sees that relationship and how he sees his succession possibilities." (Pair 5 – Coach)

"This is something that could make a difference in activity, at action after this call." (Pair 3 – Coach)

Coachee:

"Over the last month, I asked my team in their one-on-ones more of an open ended question." (Pair 5)

"Just by nature, it just kind of felt like it was spilling over into other areas, and actually so that was Thursday the 20th when we had our third session. The very next morning, we already had our executive leadership team meeting scheduled, but actually went into that meeting, and the last thing that Coach had told me was needing to make more genuine connections and taking the time. And I'm like, Damn how the hell am I supposed What are you talking about? How am I supposed to find time? Like, what? How Good luck. What were we like? It was a challenge, but it's not all that different than what I've been telling my SVP and other leaders on my team. You have to be present and be visible. And his message back to me was largely the same thing that

I've been telling others…basically the first hour and a half to two hours of the meeting, it was a reset with my team. I brought in couple bottles of champagne. I said, Hey, listen, I don't say thank you enough. I know we've all worked our tails off this year. I think we are all up against it. We're running a little hot. I think that we just need to level set and let's talk through, through some stuff, because we're, we're all nose to the grindstone. But, you know, when we look at the big picture, we're doing okay? I mean, it's work. We're going to have our challenges, day in and day out, but we continue to grow. We have great profitability. We've got we've been able to navigate so many different things in 2025 whether we knew about them or we didn't, all is not the sky is not falling, that all is not lost here, like I need to do a better job of celebrating the wins, and so we just take a pause to reset. So again, just as an example, whether or not I it was a direct influence from Coach, I would say that he probably played a part in that type of a pause…" (Pair 2)

Somatic Chemistry is embodied transformation. It is seen in energy shifts, felt experiences, physical metaphors, and epiphany moments. There are immediate punctuated shifts, non-linear movement, and physical identity coherence.

Coach:

"I look at what I see and hear and then sense the energy… people's eyes, their hands, their face, the sound of their voice…" (Pair 6 – Coach)

"For him, absolutely, like, definitely, a big uptick in energy." (Pair 3 – Coach)

"I was actually just was excited for her. I was happy for her. Was thrilled that she had a breakthrough." (Pair 6 – Coach)

"You could tell in between each session how much he was like, really resonating… it was like lifting him." (Pair 5 – Coach reflection)

Coachee:

"It made me sad… the more that we had that conversation like kind of the more sad I got." (Pair 3)

"Did that create for me? Ease… it was just an ease of like, oh, shit, that worked out." (Pair 2)

"Once again, very much synergistic… the flow is very, very natural." (Pair 2)

In Table 20 below, these four levels of chemistry are summarized with observational data to show the description, primary markers, actor/owner and the scope of impact.

Table 20: Four Levels of Chemistry

FOUR LEVELS OF CHEMISTRY				
Level	**Core Description**	**Primary Markers**	**Who Can Carry It**	**Scope of Impact**
1. Transactional Chemistry	Rhythmic interaction producing clarity and altered decisions	Back-and-forth tempo, rapid alignment, structured inquiry, cognitive clarity, momentum	Often coach (can be asymmetrical)	Immediate decision-making and understanding
2. Meaning-Making Chemistry	Deepened interpretive shift that reframes identity and perspective	Reflection, language shifts, trust growth, openness, internalization	Coach or pair	Identity stabilization
3. Distributed Chemistry	Co-created insight that redistributes leadership practice beyond the dyad	Epiphany enacted in teams, behavioral replication, system ripple	Coachee/system	Portability to select relationships
4. Somatic Chemistry	Embodied coherence marked by energetic shift and mindset reorganization	Physical relief, posture change, breath shift, silence before insight, felt alignment, tension release	Emerges in pair but embodied by individual, sometimes also the coach	Presence-level transformation; massive behavioral reorientation

Integration with theory LAP, CLT, SPT

Social Penetration Theory –

Social Penetration Theory (SPT) suggests that openness and vulnerability foster lasting intimacy and influence future outcomes. SPT identifies how the deepening of the bond and the intimacy of the relationship can affect outcomes and the relationship as a whole. The amount of openness can deepen relationships as SPT proves, but can it also impact chemistry in the relationship and the downflow of that chemistry into the organization. SPT and the reality of experiencing vulnerability and the benefits of that relationship bond to in turn create more open relationships and deeper bonds (Mangus et al., 2020).

This theory was used to examine the one-on-one coaching relationship with hopes to show how vulnerability, trust and openness can affect chemistry and positive outcomes from coaching and beyond (Mangus et al., 2020). Regarding this examination, questions were asked to consider timing to emergence, awareness, disclosure, vulnerability and trust related to chemistry's presence.

Comparing back to Table 2 showing the SPT highlights (Mangus, et. al 2020), there are a few key points where chemistry aligns with SPT, just not as expected. The disclosure of SPT to develop the relationship is similar to the sharing, problem solving and storytelling of the coaching relationship, but it is one sided. Many of the coachee participants did not feel that they were disclosing per se, but sharing and co-creating solutions. The outcomes of exchange in SPT however did line up with the competency gate and the mutual orientation of chemistry.

While SPT provides a useful framework for understanding disclosure-based relational development, the findings of this study suggest that chemistry in executive coaching operates through mechanisms that are not adequately explained by this linear disclosure model. The

research showed the following statements in its findings which are not in line with SPT as a communication theory.

- Chemistry can be asymmetrical with trust not mutually visible
- Chemistry is not necessarily incremental or linear
- Trust and openness are not synchronous or dependent
- Breadth of disclosure does not equal trust
- Chemistry can occur without emotional risk or depth
- Familiarity reduces friction but does not produce chemistry
- Chemistry is felt alignment not emotional closeness
- It is not a function of rapport, likeability or personality match
- Openness does not imply vulnerability
- Timing is not progressive

The limitation of SPT was evident here in the contradictions found. Originally developed within a positivist framework, SPT tends to emphasize structured stages of relational development and often assumes a level of predictability in self-disclosure and relational progression (Altman & Taylor, 1973). There are places where SPT can be seen as objective versus open to interpretation. Although self-disclosure could be loosely viewed through the lens of interpretivist ontology and constructivist epistemology in this application, most applications of SPT remain anchored in objectivist paradigms. This distinguishes chemistry from this more predictable, stepwise relational development, as it reflects ongoing, responsive interactivity rather than progression through structured stages.

There is one contribution that this research makes for SPT. This research offers a modest insight into SPT by highlighting how chemistry embodies rhythmic coordination between actors.

Chemistry, although not a linear coordination, does involve a dynamic interplay between two actors where their actions are mutually responsive and adaptive, creating a rhythm unique to their interaction.

Future inquiries in research could illuminate that if a longitudinal study on coaching pairs would show more of a linear progression related to trust over time through disclosure as it related to chemistry.

Collective Leadership Theory

Collective Leadership Theory states that everyone shares the leadership. Building trust in collective leadership establishes co-creation of progress and work. Interactivity creates identity through conversation and shared work. Coaching is a one-on-one activity that happens collectively between leader and coach. Collective leadership theory says the coach is still making impact through the leader because they co-created change and growth. The leader can then collectively still learn and grow with the team, company and community (Ospina, Foldy, Fairhurst, Jackson, 2020).

Ubuntu informed CLT reframes chemistry as a relational presence in service of the collective, not interpersonal intimacy. It is a felt alignment not closeness. Chemistry reflects shared orientation toward the work and the collective, not personal bonding. The asymmetry shows that responsiveness matters more than reciprocity. Chemistry may be carried by only one party at times and still generate collective benefit. Leadership can be enacted by one actor in service of the whole.

The findings align with Ubuntu in several ways:

- Chemistry emerges through dignity and mutual recognition

- Leadership becomes distributed when relational safety allows shared sense-making
- Chemistry intensifies during disruption when collective meaning reorganizes
- Chemistry is co-created
- Interactivity creates identity for the actors

Chemistry reflects shared orientation toward the work and the collective, not personal bonding. Chemistry is more of an indicator that CLT conditions are present, not a cause of performance nor a guarantee of harmony. Chemistry supports agency, it does not override it.

The Table 21 below shows what chemistry is, how it operates and the benefits of chemistry related to the six factors of Ubuntu. The contradictions shown in purple in Table 22 below between the two is summarized in the following bullet point list:

- Chemistry does not guarantee connection or agreement
- Chemistry does not address citizenship but does address dignity and humanity through potential gates
- Chemistry does not rely on ethics but confidentiality or safety were shown to be one possible entry gate
- Chemistry can emerge without trust, disclosure, intimacy or vulnerability
- Chemistry challenges assumptions that collectivity requires emotional closeness or synchronized awareness
- Chemistry can be carried by one party long enough for distribution to occur

Table 21: Ubuntu and Chemistry Integration

Ubuntu (CLT) and Chemistry Integration Matrix			
Ubuntu Factor (CLT – Chetty & Price, 2024)	**Defining Chemistry *(What it is)***	**Characteristics of Chemistry *(How it operates)***	**Benefits of Chemistry *(What it produces)***
Solidarity (acceptance despite difference; shared purpose)	**Co-Created & Coordinated** – Chemistry is jointly constructed through interaction	**Mutual Orientation + Rhythm & Continuity** – Participants orient toward one another	**Portability / Distributed Spread** – Shared meaning extends beyond the pair
Survival (resilience & adaptability in adversity)	**Generative** – Chemistry produces new thinking rather than preserving comfort.	**Productive Disruption** – Tension is held safely; challenge activates adaptive identity work.	**Acceleration / Temporal Compression** – Change processes accellerated
Relationships (intentional connectedness; people are valued)	**Asymmetrical Awareness** – One actor may carry or pace chemistry; mutual recognition is not required.	**Relational Container** – Safety exists without emotional intensity; dignity and boundaries hold the interaction.	**Identity Stabilization & Confidence Amplification** – Individuals feel anchored and capable in broader relational contexts.
Empathy (being seen, heard, supported)	**Multiple Levels** – Transactional, meaning-making, distributed, somatic.	**Practice-Based Through Inquiry** – Attunement occurs through questions, mirroring, reflective disruption, not emotional performance.	**Embodiment** – Insight becomes felt experience; shifts move beyond cognition into lived behavioral alignment.
Collaboration (deconstructing hierarchy; innovation through contribution)	**Co-Created & Coordinated** – Leadership emerges through patterned coordination.	**Mutual Orientation** – Focus shifts from authority to shared direction and relevance.	**Agency & Choice Activation** – Participants experience expanded decision capacity and distributed responsibility.
Respect (Dignity) (inherent human worth; valued contribution)	**Generative + Entry Gates** – Chemistry requires perceived competence, credibility, readiness, and dignity to emerge.	**Relational Container + Boundaries** – Respect operates as a threshold condition that permits safe challenge.	**Portability / Distributed Spread** – When dignity is preserved, chemistry travels beyond the initial interaction.

Looking back to Table 5 and the Chetty and Price (2024) highlights, you can also notice that chemistry uses empathy in a one sided arrangement versus mutual. Chemistry appears to

have many similar qualities to Ubuntu (CLT) in the way that it uses coordination, dignity, co-creation, no hierarchical boundaries, active listening and mutual support. Through the co-created activities they establish leadership identity which was shown to be a powerful by product of chemistry in the coaching pairs.

The contribution of this research to Ubuntu's Collective Leadership Theory is that chemistry could serve as an early diagnostic indicator of collective emergence before formal distribution is visible. In this context, 'chemistry' refers to the interpersonal dynamics and mutual understanding among group members, while 'collective emergence' describes the process by which leadership naturally arises within a group. By identifying chemistry early on, organizations can proactively nurture collaborative environments and anticipate the development of collective leadership structures.

Leadership As Practice

Leadership as Practice (LAP) argues leadership happens through practice, not through a leader's traits or actions (Raelin, 2019). The phenomenon of chemistry arises and evolves within the coaching process, manifesting through the dynamics of practice itself. LAP happens in collective co-created moments between two or more people. Participants engage and collectively reflect on their experiences together in real time (Raelin, 2020). This theory looks in real time for those pivot points that "catch" people in their own practices that shape leaderful moments, development and initiate new trajectories and change (Raelin, 2020). Richard Barker contends that leadership only occurs when there is a "change in deviation from convention" and that it is a process of "energy, not structure" (Robinson & Riddell, 2022).

LAP conceptualizes leadership as emerging in practice rather than residing in individuals. This research extends LAP by demonstrating that chemistry links micro-level interactions to

wider leadership outcomes. LAP defines chemistry through collaborative coaching, not as a feeling or personality match. It involves joint action and a common approach to the task, placing chemistry at the heart of LAP. The coach functions not as a source of leadership but as a contextual architect who shapes the relational field where leadership can emerge. Chemistry operates as:

- A coordination mechanism
- A container for adaptive tension
- A field where leadership distributes
- Co-created moments between two or more people

While Leadership-as-Practice conceptualizes leadership as emerging within relational practice architectures (J. Raelin, 2011), the findings of this study suggest that chemistry serves as a micro-process indicator of when those architectures are effectively generating adaptive leadership practice. Chemistry is not a mutual or collective reflection, but more of a relational container where the coachee is partnered in their reflection and learning in real time. The epiphanies described by a few of the pairs seem to be an identical interpretation of pivot points in practice where there is a change from convention (Robinson & Riddell, 2022). Many of the things that chemistry produces are key tenets of LAP according to Raelin (2011) like identity stabilization and confidence amplification. Even the duality of structure from Heideggers could be linked to the emodiment described in chemistry.

Chemistry provides a phenomenological explanation of how leadership is experienced, organized, and generates outcomes in practice, thus contributing to LAP. Shown in Table 23 below. The purple square indicates the only place of tension between chemistry and LAP. The

asymmetry of chemistry for a period of time is not directly mentioned in Raelin's description of LAP.

Table 22: Leadership-as-Practice and Chemistry Integration

Leadership-as-Practice (LAP) and Chemistry Integration Matrix			
LAP Construct (Raelin)	**Defining Chemistry** ***(What it is)***	**Characteristics of Chemistry** ***(How it operates)***	**Benefits of Chemistry** ***(What it produces)***
Co-Created Moments that Shape Action	**Co-Created & Coordinated** – Chemistry arises in interaction, not from authority or personality.	**Mutual Orientation** – Actors orient toward shared relevance rather than hierarchical control.	**Agency & Choice Activation** – Leadership distributes across participants rather than residing in the coach alone.
Emergent at any time	**Co-Created & Generative** – Leadership energy emerges between actors.	**Mutual Orientation + Coordination** – Shared meaning enables joint direction-setting.	**Agency & Choice Activation + Distributed Spread** – Leadership extends beyond the dyad into broader contexts.
Engage & Collectively Reflect	**Practice-Based Through Inquiry** – Chemistry is enacted through questioning, mirroring, reframing.	**Asymmetrical Awareness** – One actor can carry the adaptive rhythm while the other processes.	**Identity Stabilization & Confidence Amplification** – Discursive shifts reshape self-perception and leadership capacity.
Practice not a Person	**Co-Created & Coordinated** – Chemistry arises in interaction, not from authority or personality.	**Mutual Orientation** – Actors orient toward shared relevance rather than hierarchical control.	**Agency & Choice Activation** – Leadership distributes across participants rather than residing in the coach alone.

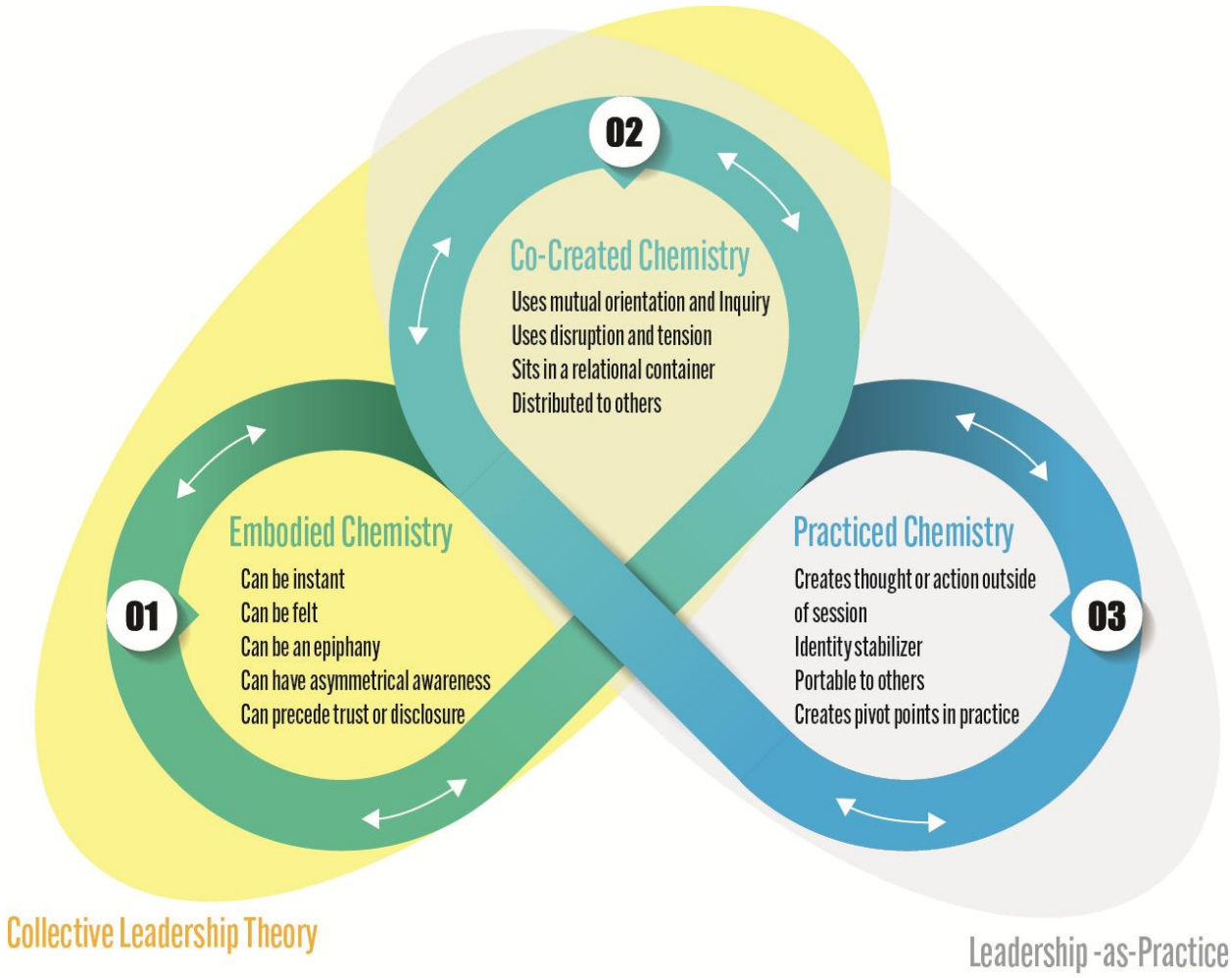
- SPT explains how disclosure may occur, but not when chemistry emerges. Chemistry's varied emergence patterns are mostly oppositional to this theory.
- CLT through Ubuntu allows for the understanding of chemistry's portability, stabilization, acceleration and multiple levels and gates.

- LAP explains how chemistry becomes visible in coordinated action. It explains how the coach and coachee conditions serve as the field architecture for the condition to emerge.

Taken together, these findings suggest that chemistry in executive coaching is less a product of reciprocal self-disclosure and more an emergent condition of recognition, alignment, and ethical relational presence consistent with Ubuntu informed CLT and observable through LAP.

Visually, I began looking at the phenomenon of chemistry as a three step process with each of these theories relate to a different step on the process, see Figure 1.1. Now, I see the phenomenon in three steps seen in Figure 10. Chemistry is embodied, co-created and practiced. I have removed SPT as an overlaying theory but kept it above showing the linear path is one that can potentially take place, but was rare in this research. The chemistry co-created step is best aligned with CLT and chemistry practiced by LAP. The chemistry embodied step could be further analyzed to see if CLT alignment creates the best understanding or if another theory would be best used to make sense of this step. The first Figure 1.1 was adjusted to create a new theory overlays just described. Although the steps are shown in numerical order, the arrows show that the steps could flow in any direction and there seems to not be an exact starting point or need to flow through them all.

Figure 5-1 – New three step process to chemistry – embodied, co-created, practiced



Practical implications for coach, for leadership development, for community engagement

Practically speaking, tools or conceptual models are guides that can be used to help coaches and leaders know ways they can learn to help build and harness chemistry for their clients, teams and organizations. Although this guide is not a guarantee that chemistry will emerge, it can increase the potential for its emergence. The following simplistic guide for future coaching could be used to teach and train coaches and leaders to "set" the environment where chemistry could emerge. It is directed at the coach and coachee but could be experimented with in other roles like leader/team and leader/community.

5 Core Competencies of Chemistry-Based Coaching

Based on observations, coding and in vivo answers, the following short list was compiled for core competencies that could be taught for chemistry based coaching.

1. **Credibility & Safety** – Can the coachee or team trust the container?
2. **Attuned Presence** – Are we rhythmically coordinated?
3. **Shared Ownership** – Is power distributed?
4. **Generative Tension** – Can we hold discomfort long enough for insight?
5. **Continuity & Field Impact** – Does it sustain beyond the session?

Through credibility and safety, the coach is taught to demonstrate competence and skill fluency that are visible. Correct usage and the professional judgement of appropriate tools and models used in each session, noting correct application, timing in engagement, timing in session and how it is applied. The coach demonstrates the ability to create a safe, ethical container. Coachee is treated with dignity, and the sessions are established with confidentiality, restraint and boundaries.

Through attuned presence, the coach demonstrates the use of deep listening, curiosity without an agenda, energy matching and mirroring in emotion, pace and cognition. The coach uses partnership in the dyad to establish shared ownership of the sessions, through mutual respect, partnership language, distributed leadership and no hierarchical power dynamics.

The coach learns how to set the generative embodiment initially for the pair. Through powerful, non-leading questions, Contextual reframing, storytelling with ego control and well-placed humor. Tension is held by the coach in tolerance for ambiguity, not being rushed, allowing silence or pausing and discomfort without rescuing. The coach can contain their emotion and regulate outside of the session's needs. They know when not mirroring would be a

disservice and how to ground when energy escalates. They are taught to be non-performative and non-dominant in personality or charisma.

Continuity is built by the coach through follow up and follow through techniques. They bring forward past insights when necessary and track macro or micro patterns over time. They are not afraid to name growth or name observation. The coach is taught how to shape the relational architecture, host conditions for distributed leadership and how to "carry" chemistry until it emerges for the coachee. The coach can design the interactions not just the conversations by thinking beyond the dyad to adjacent relationships and affect.

A simplistic guide for future coaching shows how executive leaders could be trained to be the best coachees to receive maximum impact from the sessions. These implications could be worked into contracts or agreements at the beginning of the coaching encounter so that chemistry could emerge.

5 Client Competencies That Enable Chemistry

Just as with the Coach competencies, these five things were observed, coded and in the in vivo responses enough to display here. This list could be part of the agreement in coaching and preparation for client engagement to ensure chemistry is enabled.

1. **Willingness to grow**
2. **Readiness for change**
3. **Openness to challenge**
4. **Ability to engage reciprocally**
5. **Ownership of outcomes**

Initially the coachee must display a willingness to participate and grow. They must have a voluntary "yes" to growth and an acceptance of discomfort. They must verbalize the rules of engagement for the coach dynamic and be open to experimentation.

Coachees must have psychological bandwidth and emotional maturity. They must have an understanding for change and an emotional capacity for reflection and integration. The coachee must be available and attend sessions.

The motivation of the coachee needs to be manifested in a personal reason to engage with a desire to change that outweighs the cost of making the change.

The coachee must be receptive to feedback, curious about other interpretations in regard to themselves and others and be able to suspend premature reaction and judgement. The coachee demonstrates readiness through active dialogue participation, inquiry and shared energy. They have a willingness to extend entry level trust with less need for excessive proof.

Coaching guide and coachee guide including presence, attunement, and language as a discursive practice of mirroring and coordination rather than a direct expression of empathy. Coachability shows that the coachee has the ability to receive challenge, does not respond with defensiveness and can translate insight into action.

The coachee can sit in ambiguity and be able to sit in the uncomfortable of exploration and inquiry. They must show the capacity to feel before needing to resolve. Self-observation, pattern recognition and meaning integration are all helpful skills.

The ownership requirement for the coachee should be a clear understanding that the agenda and the work are theirs. They show no dependency on the coach but have personal accountability for action. They need to demonstrate the use of safe space when it exists and move toward vulnerability rather than away.

Summarizing the qualities as:

- Willingness

- Readiness
- Motivation
- Openness
- Coachability
- Psychological safety-seeking
- Reflective capacity
- Emotional risk tolerance
- Reciprocal engagement
- Ownership of change
- Trust propensity

Chemistry Collapse – silent killers

Across coaching pairs, chemistry deteriorated not because of incompetence or lack of structure, but because of relational collapse in one of three domains: reciprocity, co-creation, or relational field integrity. These breakdowns were at times, bi-directional, reinforcing the finding that chemistry is a co-created relational condition rather than an individual performance variable.

From the coachee's perspective the chemistry killers the coach's engaged in were agenda control, over identification, resume verbalization, judgement, advice dominance and emotional avoidance or unacknowledged gaps. The coach's perspective of the chemistry killers that the clients engaged in were vulnerability refusal, emotional avoidance, power assertion, low reciprocity, disengagement, or performance orientation. Chemistry collapsed when inquiry becomes hierarchical, a power struggle, critical or ego-driven. The following three categories were created to simplify chemistry collapse. All of these are listed below with evidence and summarized in Table 23.

Reciprocity Collapse was shown in low emotional reciprocity, emotional avoidance, and refusal of vulnerability. The result were energy drops, signals stopping and chemistry fading.

"I did interrupt… I see that on the second one." (Pair 6 – Coach)

What I noticed was that I was not feeling good. And… It felt like he was…Pressing on the thing that didn't feel good. And that I just had to find a way to… (Pair 6 – Coachee)

"Well, I mean, when I'm watching the video, and he's actually both of us did that, you know, like when you're accessing your brain, you look up inside and and I thought for both of us, that that was a flaw and a missed opportunity to connect. It would be, it would have been much better on my side had I been, you know, looking him in the eye and, and, and, you know, giving him some reason to trust me…" (Pair 2 – Coach)

Co-Creation Collapse was shown in agenda control, lack of mutual inquiry, and performative identity. The results were a downgrade to transactional instead of generative.

"It wasn't as deep… it wasn't like a deep trust or deep vulnerability." (Pair 2 – Coachee)

"I monopolized it looking back." (Pair 2 – Coachee)

"I was very open, but not necessarily very trusting." (Pair 3 – Coachee)

"I thought that he was willing to have these to engage, you know, it wasn't like he was, you know, it more was, so he was open, but he wasn't necessarily, I would say he was open, not necessarily comfortable and not necessarily self aware. No point. Did he get mad? Did he say, Look, I don't want to talk about this, you know? He did push me back." (Pair 2 – Coach)

"The belief that he would not get it. If I tried to explain it to him, I do not think he would have gotten it." (Pair 5 – Coachee)

Relational Field Collapse was shown in power over enactment, judgement, unacknowledged gaps. These results in the field feeling unequal or unsafe, even if "polite."

"It certainly caused us to have to talk through it a little bit further and make additional connections." (Pair 2 – Coach)

"I mean, it didn't feel like coaching. It felt more like being interrogated...A bit patronizing, and a bit, like, he assumes he knows" (Pair 5 Coachee)

"I was very open, but not necessarily very trusting." (Pair 3 – Coachee)

"It wasn't as deep. It wasn't like a deep trust or deep vulnerability." (Pair 2 – Coachee)

"Very much naked in a field, alone, yeah. Not the good one... An attitude just of, like, His attitude is more blase about all of it...Poor little girl over here, like, some great advice." (Pair 5 Coachee)

Table 23: Chemistry Collapse

	Simple Diagnostic Chart				
Chemistry Collapse	**Killer Symptoms**	**What Breaks**	**Coach Signal**	**Client Signal**	**What to Restore**
Reciprocity	Low Emotional Reciprocity	Energy, depth and risk	Emotionally flat	Emotionally flat	Mirror tone, pace, intensity
	Emotional Avoidance		Redirects too quickly	Intellectualizes	Stay with discomfort
	Refusal of Vulnerability		Over-neutrality	Answers indirectly	Someone initiates risk
Co-creation	Agenda Control	Co-creation, shared exploration and presence	Pushes outcomes	Pushes solutions	Slow for shared meaning
	Lack of Mutual Inquiry		Questions without shaping	Answers without reflecting	Invite co-direction
	Performative Identity		Leads with résumé	Leads with status	Shift from doing → being
Relational Field Integrity	Power Over-Enactment	Relational equality, dignity, openness	Expert stance	Compliance	Re-negotiate partnership
	Unacknowledged Gaps		Assumes universality	Withholds identity	Name lived experience gaps
	Judgment		Evaluative reframes	Defensive posture	Suspend evaluation

Across the twelve participants, collapse did not present as conflict or destruction. Instead, it appeared as the flattening of energy, narrowing of outcomes, reduced reciprocity, or subtle asymmetry in presentation. Chemistry did not abruptly disappear; it downgraded or slowed progress. When reciprocity thinned, signals stopped. When co-creation narrowed, generativity reduced to transaction. When the relational field destabilized, the felt sense of safety or equality diminished, and chemistry receded accordingly.

Chemistry Accelerators

Similarly to the gates of chemistry, there are accelerators that speed up the benefits or affects of chemistry. They are not a guarantee of chemistry acceleration, but were shown in the research as indicators of it. Rather, once relational gates are open, these accelerators were shown in the research as indicators that chemistry was intensifying, deepening, or moving levels.

Chemistry accelerates when dignity and legitimacy open relational gates, rhythmic coordination stabilizes interaction, productive disruption introduces safe tension, and client readiness converts that tension into embodied insight and action.

1. **Legitimacy & dignity open the gate**

"I have profound respect for her and what she's been able to do and accomplish." (Pair 3 – Coachee)

"So I think that was a positive." (Pair 3 – Coachee)

"I think her having that direct experience… I think there was some alignment from that standpoint." (Pair 4 – Coachee)

"He was engaged, and, you know, I could tell that from the very beginning." (Pair 1 – Coachee)

"If it had been lacking, I would have sensed it and probably engaged quite a bit less." (Pair 5 – Coachee)

2. **Rhythmic mirroring stabilizes the interaction**

"It wasn't a you talk, I talk. I think we just kind of were in the moment… having more of a free flow conversation." (Pair 2 – Coachee)

"Once again, very much synergistic… the flow is very, very natural." (Pair 2 – Coachee)

"I become very aware of everything they're doing saying… and then I usually try to understand or validate… and if the rhythm is positive…" (Pair 4 – Coach)

"It feels kind of natural. It feels kind of smooth." (Pair 5 – Coachee)

"He was engaged, and, you know, I could tell that from the very beginning." (Pair 1 – Coachee)

3. Productive disruption introduces adaptive tension

"There's a bit of a catch yourself moment there where you want to engage as a co-creator, as opposed to maybe a facilitator of that process." (Pair 3 – Coach)

"It certainly caused us to have to talk through it a little bit further and make additional connections." (Pair 2 – Coach)

"I think I was probably the most vulnerable I've been in a long time." (Pair 3 – Coachee)

4. Humor/lightness regulates threat

"When we laughed, it made it okay to admit it." (Pair 1 Coachee)

"The lightness kept it from feeling heavy." (Pair 4 Coach)

"It broke the intensity just enough." (Pair 5 Coachee)

"When we laughed about it, I could actually see it differently." (Pair 2 Coachee)

Shared laughter immediately followed a difficult leadership admission; client visibly relaxed and continued exploring. (Pair 5 Video Observation)

5. Readiness and Continuity

"He just was so open to you. It was just beautiful." (Pair 3 – Observation)

"He granted me some very clear need… he's willing, I'm able." (Pair 2 – Coach)

"He readily remembered or like was tracking this stuff and like checking back in and wanting to see something happen with it and move with it." (Pair 5 – Coachee)

"You could tell in between each session how much he was like, really resonating… it was like lifting him." (Pair 5 – Coach reflection)

Table 24: Chemistry Accelerators

Chemistry Accelerators Construct		
Six Conditions That Intensify and Speed Chemistry		
Accelerator	**What It Looks Like in Practice**	**What It Produces**
Dignity & Legitimacy Signals	Demonstrated competence, credibility, lived experience, genuine respect	Opens relational "gate"; lowers defensive scanning; speeds trust formation
Rhythmic Mirroring & Coordination	Matching pace, tone, energy, language patterns; smooth turn-taking	Synchrony; interactional stability; shared momentum
Productive Disruption and Tension	Timely reframes, interrupting stuck narratives, challenging identity assumptions, holding discomfort	Adaptive stretch; deeper inquiry
Humor & Lightness in Difficulty	Appropriate laughter or levity inside hard conversations	Threat reduction; increased bandwidth; continued exploration
Continuity + Client Readiness	Referencing prior sessions; visible willingness; sustained engagement	Accelerated insight; temporal compression

Signals of Level/Mode Transition

This study identifies five observable signals of chemistry level transition: disruption moments, rhythmic shifts, epiphany language, and somatic change. These markers indicate movement between interactional modes of chemistry and provide a diagnostic framework for identifying when relational dynamics deepen, distribute, or become embodied. These are moments that can be measured.

As a theoretical contribution to LAP, these signals indicate shifts in practice where leadership begins to distribute differently. For CLT, these signals mark conditions where collective sensemaking deepens. For SPT, the transition signals coincide with depth layer movement like the layers of an onion, although they are not dependent on trust or disclosure.

For some of the markers that were observable and not dialogic. For instance, audible silence following challenge, or well placed pausing or slower cadence or lower tone to speech pattern. At times there was a shift from a narrative description to reflective processing. Interruptions became synchronized rather than competitive. Overlap increased or decreased suddenly. Observable impacts also included audible exhale, tear formation, posture shifts/release, prolonged silence and softening of speech or tone. Participants described experiences of accelerated clarity and shortened decision-making cycles following chemistry moments.

Disruption moment

"… trust with the coach, he started to ask a question, then said let me check in with you, where it was more of an open ended…almost like talking out loud or thinking out loud that kind of led to that." (Pair 1 Coachee)

"A certain amount of rawness… caused a little bit of a rift in that, a ripple in the chemistry trust that was happening." (Pair 2 – Coach)

Rhythmic shifts

"It wasn't a you talk, I talk… we just kind of were in the moment… having more of a free flow conversation." (Pair 2 – Coachee)

"Once again, very much synergistic… the flow is very, very natural." (Pair 2 – Coachee)

"I become very aware of everything they're doing saying… and if the rhythm is positive…" (Pair 4 – Coach)

I think there was a lot of back and forth where…talking reframing what I said back. And then maybe even put a little bit of his color on it, and then say, you know, kind of put it back on me…(Pair 1 Coachee)

Epiphany language

"That's the dopamine moment… that's what we live for." (Pair 4 – Coach)

"This imposter syndrome and the question of self worth were connected so closely, and I didn't know it." (Pair 3 – Coachee)

"Did that create for me? Ease… it was just an ease of like, oh, shit, that worked out." (Pair 2 – Coachee)

I remember after that first session, kind of feeling really energized….same wavelength, you know, I just felt like we clicked towards the end of that first one and that carried over into the other two. (Pair 1 Coachee)

Somatic change

"For him, absolutely… a big uptick in energy." (Pair 3 – Coach)

"It feels kind of natural. It feels kind of smooth." (Pair 5 – Coachee)

"You could tell in between each session… it was like lifting him." (Pair 5 – Coach)

Time evaporation

"It was very quick that we were able to get to…" (Pair 2 – Coach)

"Maybe it spilled over into the second one too, as we got to know each other…" (Pair 2 – Coachee)

"He readily remembered… tracking this stuff… checking back in and wanting to see something happen with it." (Pair 5 – Coachee)

Contribution to Leadership-as-Practice (LAP)

These signals indicate shifts in practice architecture which contributes to LAP. When rhythm reorganized and disruption was sustained, leadership activity began to distribute differently within the interaction shown in Table 26 below. Practice moved from individual sensemaking to co-constructed meaning. Related to CLT, the signals marked moments when collective sensemaking intensified.

Distributed insight was visible in co-completion of thoughts, shared metaphors, and mutual orientation. Unlike SPT's emphasis on disclosure and trust progression, these signals in chemistry transitions did not require extensive vulnerability. Although they did often coincide with movement toward depth layers. However, the difference is that the chemistry signals depth

occurred through disruption and rhythm synchronization, not necessarily only disclosure.

Table 25: The Transition Signal Model

The Transition Signal Model		
Signal	**Observable Marker**	**What It Indicates**
1. Disruption Moment	Reframe, interruption of narrative, cognitive jolt	Entry into adaptive tension
2. Rhythm Change	Slowing, speeding up, overlap, altered pacing	Increased coordination or intensity
3. Epiphany Language	Light bulb moments or instant awareness	Identity-level cognitive restructuring
4. Somatic Shift	Posture change, breath shift, tears, visible release	Embodied integration
5. Temporal Compression	Seemed to go fast within sessions	Accelerated coherence and processing

Methodological contributions

Value of video elicitation

Video elicitation allowed participants to re-enter moments of interaction and surface tacit awareness. It did not only deepen prior themes but it brought to light a different kind of knowing. There was more of an awareness of self. The first interviews were at the story level about what happened or how they felt. Video elicitation introduced a new level of self-awareness.

- Coachees noticed *how* they speak (pace, hedging, looping, certainty)
- Coaches noticed *what they did not signal* (missed enthusiasm, muted connection, over-containment)

This reflexive layer — *I didn't realize I did that* — does not appear in the original interviews. The significance is that video elicitation activated reflexive consciousness, not just recollection. This shows that chemistry does operate somewhat below conscious awareness until it is inquiry surfaces it through reflection.

- Asymmetrical perception of chemistry
- Somatic memory markers
- Micro-coordination shifts invisible in transcripts
- Discrepancies between felt and verbalized experience

Without video, chemistry could have become just retrospective storytelling instead of pattern recognition. This methodological approach strengthened trustworthiness by triangulating lived, observed, and reflected experience.

Asymmetry of chemistry becomes even more visible in video elicitation.

- Coaches identify a moment of connection that clients did not experience as meaningful
- Clients describe trust or vulnerability that coaches did not perceive until later (or at all)

This misalignment comes to light when both parties independently review the same moment. Chemistry does not represent dyadic awareness; rather, it signifies dyadic potential. Awareness is uneven, delayed, or asymmetric.

Embodiment and energetic cues emerge more in the language or descriptors from the interviews with video elicitation. These cues are mostly absent from original interviews, which relied on cognitive recall. This is strong empirical grounding to argue that chemistry is embodied, energetic, and sensed, not purely relational or emotional. Clients and coaches begin naming:

- slowing down

- facial softening
- posture shifts
- head and body breakthroughs

Coaches tend to be more critical or evaluative of near misses or different pathways they could have taken in the session. They see the responsibility of outcome and the weight of progress for the pair. They carry a hidden risk that coachees are unaware of. There is also an asymmetry in responsibility that only emerges here. Coachees tend to attribute chemistry to how they felt. Coaches on the other hand, attribute chemistry to how carefully they worked. Several coaches explicitly recognized moments where:

- they *almost* pushed too hard
- they worried an insight would land badly
- they consciously restrained themselves

Coach Examples:

"I did interrupt… I see that on the second one…" (Pair 6 – Coach)

"I would say in that one I noticed one his shift from the first one, he was actually making jokes, right? And so I noticed a shift in his energy, and also that he was definitely becoming more open and being more reflective." (Pair 3)

"I just noticed the energetic shift again, how she but then she started speaking fast, you know, Like the previous time, she slowed down, whereas this time she she started to speed up, because she said she was on a roll. So it was a different type of Epiphany, a different type of epiphany." (Pair 4)

"…and I think I might have, I might have spoken too quickly, but that was just me personally" (Pair 5)

Clients in turn became more clearly articulate about the portability in video elicitation. Original interviews referenced outcomes; elicitation revealed mechanisms of transfer. They described in storytelling about:

- how insights traveled into meetings
- how language from coaching reappeared later
- how *ways of seeing* (not solutions) transferred

Client example:

"I monopolized it looking back." (Pair 2 – Coachee)

"I was very open, but not necessarily very trusting." (Pair 3 – Coachee)

"It's fun to watch it back in a way, and in a way, it's not again. I think I was just taken back a little bit by by by his analysis. I don't think he's off base." (Pair 2)

I well, I mean, in a little bit I tried to watch myself. I really saw myself. Like, really, like thinking, You know what I mean, like reflecting and really thinking about, okay, she asked me this question, what do I think people What am I, what am I trying to get to, and how do I think people felt in those in the situation? (Pair 6)

The biggest contrast from the original interviews was answering *"What was the experience?"* to answering *"How did the experience come into being?"* in the video elicitation. It activated reflexive consciousness rather than retrospective storytelling in the interviews. Participants moved from describing what happened to identifying how interactional patterns came into being. The replay of moments revealed implicit awareness, asymmetry of perception,

somatic embodiment, and micro-coordination shifts not accessible through cognitive recall alone. This triangulation of lived, observed, and reflected experience strengthens trustworthiness and supports the argument that chemistry operates partially below conscious awareness until inquiry surfaces it.

Limitations

The limitations to this research begin with the selection of participants. Each actor had some prior connection to the researcher, whether as coach, consultant, colleague, or doctoral candidate, which may have influenced the emergence, timing, or expression of chemistry. Familiarity may have increased baseline trust, goodwill, or motivation to contribute, thereby shaping both entry conditions and the willingness to remain in discomfort. While this relational proximity strengthened access and depth of disclosure, it also complicates claims of neutrality and transferability to unfamiliar coaching pairs.

The sample itself, though professionally diverse, was small. Six coaching pairs provided rich phenomenological depth, but the limited number constrains generalizability. Additionally, observing only three sessions per pair restricted the ability to track longer term emergence, acceleration, plateau, or collapse of chemistry across extended engagements. Chemistry may operate differently over six months or a year, particularly in cycles of rupture and repair, which were not fully observable within this timeframe. Some findings suggest that chemistry can emerge rapidly and remain influential beyond a single encounter; however, longer-term studies could more fully explore how chemistry interacts with organizational culture, leadership outcomes, and sustained practice over time.

The coaching pairs did not select one another. In most professional contexts, chemistry is preceded by mutual choice, preliminary conversations, or referral based alignment. Removing that element limits validity and may have altered both entry gates and early acceleration patterns. Likewise, participants did not determine engagement length. Standard coaching practice often includes negotiated duration, pacing, and renewal decisions, all of which influence relational dynamics and commitment structures. The fixed session design may have compressed or artificially stabilized chemistry in ways that differ from organic engagements.

Cultural homogeneity was also a limitation. Although there was professional diversity, the pool was less culturally and demographically varied than originally intended. Volunteer availability narrowed representation, and age diversification was constrained by the nature of executive coaching itself, as most executives and experienced coaches in this study were over the age of 40. Broader cultural, generational, and industry representation may produce different chemistry configurations.

The study could have indicated more about the characteristics of the people involved in the study than the phenomenon itself. Due to past experiences around hero complexes and power dynamics with leadership in organizations if not examined and eliminated could cloud and affect the nature of the experiences of the phenomenon. As a result, this study does not attempt to categorize participants by leadership style, power orientation, or prior experiences with coaching. Future research could more explicitly examine how factors such as positional authority, organizational power dynamics, or prior leadership experiences interact with the emergence and interpretation of chemistry in coaching contexts.

As with all hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher lens is both instrument and limitation. While bracketing was intentionally practiced, the cyclical nature of interpretation means that assumptions may have been reincorporated at unintended moments. Tone, prior relational history, and interpretive proximity may have shaped data emphasis. The use of video elicitation mitigated some bias by allowing participants to independently reflect on shared moments; however, complete removal of researcher influence is neither possible nor claimed.

Finally, the structured research design may have altered natural coaching rhythms. Participants knew they were being recorded for research purposes. This awareness may have amplified performative tendencies, heightened attentiveness, or increased reflection beyond what would occur in unobserved sessions. While this may have strengthened data richness, it also introduces the possibility that chemistry was at times intensified or restrained by observational context.

The study offers insight into how chemistry operates within structured, short term executive coaching relationships among mid-career professionals with some prior familiarity to the researcher. Broader samples, longer engagements, culturally diverse dyads, and mutually selected coaching relationships would strengthen future investigation and deepen understanding of chemistry's distributed, embodied, and practice-based nature.

Recommendations for future research

Future research should explore chemistry longitudinally across extended coaching engagements in order to observe how it stabilizes, accelerates, plateaus, or collapses over time. The three-session structure in this study allowed for the identification of emergence and

transition, but longer arcs would clarify whether chemistry compounds, cycles, or erodes under sustained pressure. Chemistry should also be examined within intact teams rather than pairs alone, particularly in group coaching, team dynamics, and community organizations where leadership is already distributed. An important question remains whether chemistry requires direct participation to be activated or whether it can propagate observationally within teams and cultures. Participants in this study suggested portability beyond the pair, but systematic inquiry into observational or second-order chemistry would deepen understanding. Comparative studies across coaching, mentoring, therapy, athletics, and other group-based performance contexts would also clarify whether chemistry functions similarly across relational domains or whether it is uniquely structured within coaching practice.

There is a chance to investigate how neurobiology relates to what participants referred to as somatic chemistry. The consistent references to breath shifts, posture changes, felt lightness, and energetic alignment suggest that chemistry may have physiological signatures that could be measured through heart rate variability, synchrony metrics, or other biometric indicators. Additionally, future work should quantitatively analyze rhythm, conversational pacing, interruption patterns, and linguistic mirroring to determine whether measurable coordination precedes or predicts level transitions. Cultural variation in the perception and expression of chemistry warrants focused attention as well, as this sample did not provide wide demographic diversity. It is possible that chemistry is interpreted, tolerated, or signaled differently across cultures, ethnicities and generations.

From a leadership theory perspective, chemistry may warrant development as its own construct rather than remaining embedded implicitly within relational or practice theories. This

study suggests that chemistry functions as an enabling condition that influences the distribution of leadership. A testable hypothesis emerging from these findings is that carrier strength moderates the transition from transactional to distributed chemistry. Across pairs, specific interactional roles appeared to emerge. Future studies could operationalize role behavior and examine whether its presence correlates with observable level shifts.

Further analysis should also examine whether there are consistent observable markers preceding level transitions, whether disruption reliably precedes distributed chemistry, and whether there is a felt or rhythmic signal that emerges before it stabilizes. If session coding consistently demonstrates that disruption, rhythmic shifts, epiphany language, and somatic change prior to leadership distribution, then these patterns extend beyond interpretation and belong firmly within empirical findings and theoretical discussion. Collectively, these future directions position chemistry not simply as a descriptive phenomenon, but as a measurable, testable, and potentially predictive construct within leadership studies.

Conclusion

This study reconceptualizes chemistry in executive coaching as a generative, asymmetrical, and multi layered relational phenomenon rooted in practice rather than attraction. Across the twelve participants, chemistry did not present as personality fit or emotional similarity. It emerged through rhythmic coordination within a dignified relational container and intensified during moments of productive disruption. Chemistry was most visible not in comfort, but in adaptive tension safely held. It accelerated meaning making, stabilized identity, amplified confidence, and in several cases distributed leadership beyond the coaching pair into teams and organizations.

Chemistry is not rapport. Rapport may accompany it, but it does not define it. Chemistry is not emotional closeness, though it may feel warm. It is not reciprocal disclosure, nor is it dependent upon progressive vulnerability. Participants moved into deeper levels of chemistry without necessarily increasing personal disclosure. What distinguished chemistry was the felt coordination that allowed leadership to emerge in practice. It was visible in rhythmic shifts, epiphany language, somatic release, and distributed inquiry. The experience was characterized by a sense of density, rather than being marked by dramatic elements.

This research positions chemistry as a construct that bridges micro interactional rhythms and macro collective outcomes. At the micro level, chemistry reorganizes pacing, language, attention, and embodied presence. At the macro level, it influences distributed leadership, portable insight, and collective sensemaking. In doing so, this study contributes to Leadership as Practice by identifying observable signals of practice reconfiguration, extends Collective Leadership Theory by articulating conditions under which leadership distributes, and complicates Social Penetration Theory by demonstrating that depth transitions are interactional and embodied rather than solely disclosure driven.

Chemistry operates partly below conscious awareness until surfaced through inquiry and reflection. It is unevenly perceived, asymmetrically carried, and dynamically stabilized. By naming its gates, accelerators, collapse patterns, and transition signals, this study opens a new domain for leadership and coaching scholarship. Chemistry is not an accessory to coaching effectiveness. It is an enabling condition through which leadership becomes generative in practice.

Appendix A

4.6.1 Introduction to the Study (for Participants)

Study Title: *Impacts of Chemistry in Executive Coaching*

Researcher: Janice Perkins, Doctoral Candidate, Staley School of Leadership, Kansas State University

You are invited to participate in a research study about **chemistry in executive coaching**. Chemistry is often described as "clicking," rapport, or synchronicity that occurs between coach and client. This study explores how moments of chemistry emerge in coaching sessions, how they affect leadership growth, and whether they extend beyond the one-on-one relationship into teams and organizations. These are the two ways that chemistry and the passing of chemistry to others (coherence) are defined:

Chemistry – a strong mutual attraction felt between two people or interaction between people working together (Merriam-Webster , n.d.). Often characterized by trust, rapport, genuineness and positive bonds (Passarelli et al., 2023). This concept is knows as various pseudonyms such as resonance, entrainment or entwinement. It refers to a phenomenon where a person or system responds when interacting with another object or person at a specific rhythm (frequency) that essentially causing an entanglement or one common rhythm (Clayton, 2012) (Sandra & Nandram, 2013) (Sandra & Nandram, 2020).

Coherence – a process of synchronizing rhythms over time that drives connectedness within, between, and across rhythmic activities (Sandra, 2022) the state where members of a team or company are in alignment with a common purpose, becoming united in principles, relationships or interests (Merriam-Webster , n.d.).

What Participation Involves

You will be asked to take part in **one recorded coaching session** and two follow-up **interviews (60 minutes each)**.

The first interview will be about your experience concerning chemistry in the coaching session. The second interview we may replay short clips of the session with you for further reflection.

Questions will invite you to share your experiences of connection, trust, and relational flow with your coach or client.

Potential Risks

Some questions may feel **personal or reflective**, requiring you to recall sensitive experiences.

You may feel temporary discomfort in discussing trust, vulnerability, or organizational challenges.

There are no anticipated physical risks.

Potential Benefits

You may gain insight into your own coaching/leadership practice.

The study will contribute to advancing coaching theory and practice.

Your participation is **completely voluntary**. You may stop at any time or choose not to answer specific questions.

Appendix B

4.6.2 Confidentiality & Informed Consent Document

Kansas State University – Staley School of Leadership

Purpose of the Study

This study examines how chemistry in executive coaching relationships emerges, influences the coaching experience, and may extend into organizational settings.

Confidentiality

- Your identity will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will replace your name in transcripts, reports, and publications.
- Only the researcher and research advisor will have access to raw data.
- Audio/video recordings and transcripts will be stored on password-protected, encrypted devices.
- Data will be kept for one year after study completion and then permanently deleted.

Voluntary Participation

- Your participation is **voluntary**. You may withdraw at any point without penalty.
- Declining participation will not affect your professional standing, your organization, or your relationship with your coach.

Risks and Benefits

- **Risks**: Possible emotional discomfort when reflecting on sensitive experiences.
- **Benefits**: Opportunity for self-reflection and contributing to broader knowledge on coaching effectiveness.

Rights of Participants

- You may ask questions at any time.
- You may refuse to answer any question.
- You may request that portions of the recording not be used in the study.
- You may withdraw consent without consequence.

Consent Statement

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information above, have had your questions answered, and voluntarily agree to participate.

Participant Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher: Janice Perkins

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

4.6.3 IRB Approval Letter

Kansas State University – Staley School of Leadership

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Office of Research Integrity, Compliance and Security

TO: Andrew Wefald
School of Leadership Studies
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number: IRB-13326

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 10/23/2025

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Impacts of Chemistry in Executive Coaching Dissertation for PhD."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written – and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §104(d), category:Exempt Category 2 Subsection ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 10/23/2025 5:43 PM ET

Appendix D

Working notes for coding, themes, insights and research questions.

2/3 THEMES

#1 — inc TRUST
INTIMACY
DEEPER DISCLOSURE
EFFECTIVE COACHING OUTCOMES
LEADERSHIP DEVEL.

★ PROF RESONANCE
PERSONAL OVERLAP

— NOT ALL CH
— DOES NOT HAVE TO HAVE EMOTION ★
INTIMACY
— FELT B/4 TRUST
★ — SAFETY THEN CHEMISTRY THEN ★
DISCLOSURE — MUTUALITY / — TRUST
— ASYMMETRICAL.
— NOT DYADIC
— CHEMISTRY BRIDGE CONSTRUCT
FOR COACH PROCESS CLIENT
VULNERABILITY & IDENTITY SHIFT
SUSTAINED CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP PRACTICE
— IDENTITY/
CONFIDENCE

H2 → CHEMISTRY EXTENDS COHERENCE TO TEAM & CULTURE

- COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP EMERGES AS THE COACH NEW STABILIZES
  - RELATIONAL SHORTCUT
  - PERFORMED IN PRACTICE
  - TRANSFER ACROSS CONTEXTS NEW LEADERSHIP MOMENTS LAP
  - CONFIDENCE STABILIZER BEYOND COACHING SPACE
  - LEADERSHIP CAPACITY IS REAL RECOGNIZED NOT ASPIRATIONAL
  - IDENTITY BECOMES STABILIZED THRU RELATIONAL CONFIRMATION

H3 - ↑ TRUST PSYCH SAFETY/ INC CHEMISTRY

- COACHES CHEMISTRY IS RETROSPECTIVE (PATTERN) FOR CLIENTS IT IS EPISODIC (PERFORMANCE)
- VULNERABILITY - PERMISSION FROM CLIENT - UNILATERALLY
- SHARED VALUE & PURPOSE INF CHEMISTRY BY SHAPING CONDITIONS RELATIONAL SAFETY, MORAL SENSEMAKING, PERCEIVED CO-AUTHORSHIP

Q1 – How is it built
what impact

★ Perceived co-readiness
client readiness
coach attunement

(★) emergent conditional

★ Felt before named

– temporal dynamic
– not all chemistry is methodology legit
– coaches interpret & regulate
– non judgemental
– presence
– clients safe
– interactional chemistry,
– mutality
– multiple entry points
– interdependent not
★ – felt b/4 trust – !
– perceived attentiveness & intentionality
– competence, investment safety
– familiarity & structure
– relational stance
– adaptive coordination lap
– revealed in what one repeatedly chooses to do

Q2 - CHEMISTRY MAXIMIZED
HARNESSED OR MEASURED

MAX - I BECOME MYSELF B/C YOU
STAY W/ ME WHILE I AM
BECOMING -

MEAS - COACH ENERGY & RELAX (OPEN)
CLIENT CARE ENGAGEMENT

ENTERED - PSYCH SAFETY
FEELING SEEN W/O BEING FIXED

SPT ACCELERATES RAPIDLY UNDER
CONDITIONS OF PSYCH SAFETY &
RELATIONAL ATTUNEMENT -3

INTERRUPTION - PATTERNS OF
CONVERSATION BACK/FORTH

PRACTICE SUSTAINS RHYTHM RESPON
SIVENESS AND MUTUAL ORIENTATION

- HOW IT UNFOLDS NOT ON PREF
CONDITIONS
- REPAIR, ADAPTATION STRENGTHEN
CONSTRAINTS RECONFIGURE IT NOT
SUPPRESS IT
- PERFORMATIVE LANGUAGE - LAP

Q3 – HOW DOES IT TRANSFER

- REDUCES FRICTION IN COORDINATION
- ACCELERATES INOV TO CONNECT
- STRENGTHENS INT CONFIDENCE TO OPENNESS TO COLLABORATION
- CONDITIONS SYSTEMS FOR COLLECTIVE IDENTITY/ TO FORM
- CATALYZES THE CLIENT'S AWARENESS OF THEIR ROLE W/ SYSTEM
- SENSITIZING MECHANISM FOR ADAPT W/IN GROUP
- RELATIONAL SPILLOVER LAP
- FOSTERS BELONGING
- RECIPIENTS EXPAND GROUP
- ACTIVE PARTICIPATION DECISION MAKING – MORE DELIBERITATIVE LAP
- MICRO PRACTICE AWARENESS
- PRACTICE EXTENDER
- B/C THEY LEARNED SOMETHING TRANSFER NEW WAYS ENGAGING
- PERMISSION TO INTERVENE

INSIGHTS

- CHEMISTRY THEN TRUST
- " DOES NOT INCLUDE INTIMACY ELLOT
- PRODUCTIVE WHEN UNNAMED
- NOT ALL LEVELS OF TRUST PRODUCE CHEM / EPH
- CAN BE PERCEIVED UNILATERALLY
- NOT MUTUALLY VISIBLE OR EXPERIENCED
- DOES NOT REQUIRE IDENTICAL INTERPRETATION
- SHARED HUMANITY / - UBUNTU
  WHY DEPTH MATTERS
  TRUST / CONCEPTUAL CHART
  DIVERGENCES SHARED HUMANITY /
- CHEMISTRY IS A RELATIONAL GATEKEEPER
- SHARED SENSEMAKING
- CHEMISTRY IS GENERATION NOT JUST CONNECTIVE
- DISRUPTION STRENGTHENS
- CHEMISTRY SIGNALS MOMENT
  CLIENT ISN'T LED BUT FEELS ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING

INSIGHTS

- CHEMISTRY IS PRACTICE BASED THRU INQUIRY NOT PERFORMANCE
- MUTUAL ORIENTATION NOT HIERARCHICAL CONTROL
- TIME DISRUPTION NOT STABILITY
- RHYTHM SUSTAINED — CONTINUITY OF PRACTICE
- NOT EMOTIONAL CLOSENESS IT IS FELT EXPERIENCE OF SAFE RELATIONAL CONTAINER (CLT)
- HUMAN PRESENCE OVER CLT RELATIONAL AUTHENTICITY
- CO - CREATED CLT
- OUTCOME OF DISTINCT LEADERSHIP NOT RAPPORT
- FELT ALIGNMENT, NOT EMOTIONAL CLOSENESS
- RELATIONAL SHORTCUT
- IDENTITY
  - CONFIDENCE STABILIZER TO SPREAD SUSTAINED CHANGES
- AMPLIFIER FOR RELATIONSHIPS
- ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE
  - MICRO INTERACTIONAL

INSIGHTS

- DISRUPT CONTRACT CHALLENGE FROM COACH
- COACH BECOMES CARRIER OF ADAPTIVE TENSION, NOT SOURCE
- TASK

SECONDARY –

CHEMISTRY IS SOMATIC
BEING W/ NOT DOING TO

OPENNESS WAS AN ACCELERANT
FOR RELATIONAL DEPTH

OPENNESS IS WILLINGNESS TO
REMAIN IN RELATION WHILE
MEANING IS FORMING

NOT THRU PROLONGED INTERACTION
BUT FROM RECIPROCAL MEANING
MAKING

HOW THE COACH SHOWS UP MATTERS
AUTHENTICITY & SHARED HUMANITY

CHEMISTRY PLATEAUS WHEN OPENNESS
HAS NO RELATIONAL INVITATION INTO
SHARED LEAD / INQUIRY

CHEMISTRY IS ENABLER – NOT GOAL

CHEMISTRY COULD BE A DIAGNOSTIC INDICATION
IF CLT IS PRESENT –
– LANG IS DISCURSIVE PRACTICE IN MIRRORING
NOT NECESS EMPATHY

KILLERS – LOW ENOT RECIPROCITY
ENOT AVOID
VUW REFUSAL
– AGENDA CONTROL
POWER
LIVED EXPERIENCE
RESUME
– NO MUTUAL INQUIRY
– JUDGEMENT

SECONDARY

– FROM FIXED IDENTITY TO
VALUES – ANCHORED LAP
SHAPED THRU EVERY DAY INTERACTION

– AMPLIFIES CLIENT'S
CAPACITY TO REINTERPRET
EXPERIENCE SAFELY
– CONDITIONS FOR INSIGHT

DEBUNKED -

- ASSYMETRICAL - 1, 8
- NOT INCREMENTAL LIKE SPT BUT SUDDEN / PUNCTUATED
- CHEMISTRY & TRUST ARE NOT SYNONYMOUS W/ DISCLOSURE VOL
- TRUST / OPENNESS - NONSYCHNCTH MISALIGNED
- NOT RECIPROCAL OR SYNC LIKE TRAD SPT.
- BREADTH OF DISCLOSURE DOES NOT EQUAL TRUST - W/O EMOTIONAL RISK
- TRUST IS NOT MUTUALLY VISIBLE
- FAMILIARITY REDUCES FRICTION BUT DOES NOT ALONE CHEMISTRY
- NOT A MOMENT / SPARK BUT ONGOING COORDINATION
- FELT ALIGNMENT, NOT END CLOSENESS
- OUTCOME OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP NOT RAPPORT / PERSONALITY
- DOES NOT GUARANTEE CONNECTION OR COMPLIANCE

COACHING MODEL

SEEN	REFLECT LISTEN
HEARD	CLARIFY/ QUES
GUIDED	CONTAINER OF TRUST
CREDIBLE	AGREEMENT
RESPECTED	ETHICS
SAFE	CONFIDENT
VALUED	MIRRORING
	ENERGY
	WORDS -
	DIALOGUE
	FOLLOW UP - THOUGHT
	FOCUSING TRAIN
	AFFIRM - FELT RECOGNITION
	EMPATHY/

BEING WITH NOT DOING TO - PARTNER
HELD ACROSS SESSIONS

COACHING SKILLS

- CREDIBILITY
- SKILLS
- APPROPRIATE/USABLE TOOLS
- BREAKING RULES IN RIGHT PLACES
- ADVICE/STORYTELLING W/O EGO CONTROL
- LISTENING
- QUESTION QUALITY W/O AGENDA
- CURIOSITY
- ATTENTIVE PRESENCE
- CONTINUITY - FOLLOW THRU

PRIVACY CONFIDENTIALITY

PARTNERSHIP - DISTRIBUTED

CONTEXUAL ARCHITECT - SHAPING RELATIONAL FIELD SO LEADERSHIP CAN EMERGE - 5

MUTUAL RESPECT ENTRY DOOR

- MIRROR

SHARED INVESTMENT WITH NOT TO

ACTIVE INTEGRATION

MATCHING ENERGY

RESTRAINT

CORRECT TOOL - OB HUMOR - OB

CHEMISTRY DEFINED –

HOW PEOPLE COME INTO BEING THRU EACH OTHER IN MOMENTS OF GUIDED REFLECTION (COUNTON)

- HAPPENS AT THE MOMENT OF ACCURATE UNDERSTANDING AND REFLECTED MEANING
- IT IS EARNED – HAPPENS AFTER STRUGGLE / TENSION / DISCONN

– GENERATIVE
- DISTRIBUTED
- COLLECTIVE (PATTERN) SHARED SENSE MAKING
- STRUCTURAL MECHANISM THAT SHIFTS LEADERSHIP FROM INDIV. CONTROL TO COLLECTIVE CAPACITY
- ONGOING COORDINATION
– PRACTICE BASED INQUIRY INTO PERFORMANCE
- FELT EXP OF LEADERSHIP B/COMING COLLECTIVE

CLIENT

- WILLINGNESS
- OPENNESS
- COACHABILITY
- MOTIVATION / VALUE = READINESS

DEFINITION OF CHEMISTRY

ASYMMETRICAL
SAFETY → CONTAINER/SPACE
CO-CREATION
PRESENCE
LEVELS
CREATES SOMETHING GENERATIVE
COORDINATED
FELT

HOW DOES IT WORK?

PRACTICE
TAKES 2 PEOPLE MUTUALLY COMMITTED
TENSION / CHALLENGE / DISRUPTION
RHYTHM
CONTAINER?

BENEFITS / OUTCOMES

IDENTITY

CONFIDENCE

AGENCY

ACCELERATION / EFFICIENCY

PORTABLE

ENERGY → ENGAGEMENT

DISTRIBUTED

RELATIONAL DYNAMICS

~~INTERNAL STATES~~ & COACHING / COACHES FRAMEWORK SUGGESTIONS

PROCESS CONDITIONS

OUTCOMES ← BENEFITS

HOW DOES IT WORK?

WHAT IS IT?

ENTRY ~~BEING~~ GATES

MUTUAL RESPECT

SAFETY/

PARTNERSHIP — SHARED SENSE MAKING

DISCLOSURE + ENGAGEMENT

ATTENTIVENESS

DISTRIBUTED

ARE THEIR ALSO SIGNALS?

MAPS B/W LEVELS?

OBSERVATIONS

HUMOR – 1, 3, 4, 6

FOLLOW UP FOLLOW THRU – 1, 2, 4, 5, 6

APPROPRIATE TOOL TO NOURISH – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

QUALITY QUESTIONS – 1, 3, 4, 6

REFLECT LISTENING – 1, 3, 4, 6

THEY OBS ENERGY SHIFTS – 2, 4

VULNERABILITY – COMFORT MISSED – 3, 4, 6, 5, 2

– CONVERSATIONAL – 1, 3, 6

INQUIRY – 1, 3, 4, 6

SHORTENING – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

TEACHING – 1, 2, 4, 5, 6

ADVISING – 1, 3, 5, 6

INVESTMENT – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

ENGAGEMENT – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

INSTINCT – 1, 6

INTUITION – 1, 2, 6

DISRUPTION 2, 4, 5, 6

RELIEF – 2

MAKING MEANING, 1, 2, 4, 6

MISSED OPPORTUNITY 2, 5

AFFIRMATION – 3, 1, 6

PERMISSION 2, 4, 6

EPIPHANY – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, ?

INTERRUPTION – 4, 5

CONFESSION – 5

WRONG COMMUNICATE – 5

DISMISSED – 5

INTERRUPTION – 5

Appendix E

Audit trail of research process.

Audit trail of notes
Recorded coaching sessions
Watched recordings and took notes in remarkable
Marked sections for video elicitation
Recorded interviews with coaches and clients
Took notes while interviewing
Video elicitation interviews
Took notes while interviewing
Transcribed all coaching sessions and interviews
Read all transcriptions and began coding
Marked significant answers or quotes while coding
Entered coding information into excel
Entered open coding per each question and interview into excel
Looked at coding and made a list of themes
Looked at observation notes and added or adjusted themes
Put list of themes into groups and into meta themes and sub categories
Contrasted coach and coachee themes across the data per each question (zoom in)
Read through transcripts again and solidified themes, sub themes, insights and ways to apply insights
Looked at overarching themes and sub themes compared to each individual question (zoom out)
Compared these themes and findings to my original list of themes
Looked at these themes through the theoretical framwork and theory questions
Compare to original chemistry definition to the experience of chemistry by participants - restructure definition of chemistry
Put themes in AI to group. Rejected these 3 out of 4 of these suggestions. Revisited notes and created three meta-themes
Compared data to theory for support and debunking
Application for coaching or leadership - coaching skills, coachee skills, coaching model and levels of chemisty
Listed out significant findings from themes, secondary findings, chemistry killers and chemistry entrance points (zoom in)
Entry points and gates and signals lists after looking back over observations and transcript notes
Tighten lists for characteristics present for coaches and coachees that enhanced chemistry (zoom out)
Listed off the levels of chemistry present in the study (zoom out)
Used the research, my notes to hone in on the best way to define chemistry through the lens of the research data (zoom in)
Read transcripts again and re-verified notes
Looked at notes again to verify these findings and definitions (zoom out). Another iteration of themes and sub themes
Put findings into outline for Ch. 4 and 5, relooked at ch. 3
Pull important quotes to support this layout together, look at observation notes to support info
Write draft of Ch 4 and 5
introduce data from short qualitative leveling questions and how to benefit findings - make chart
Notate gaps in research quotes already compiled. Delete subthemes or insights with less data support. Look for gaps in supporting data.
Listen to coaching sessions and interviews again (zoom out) and take notes and look for content to support findings and validate
Read over all observation notes and compile to add volume and value to sections
Take notes and compare to draft chapters
Submit draft to committee
Make adjustments to Ch. 4 and 5
Submit to committee

Appendix F

Interview Questions

Coaches Questions
1. Can you describe a specific moment when you felt 'chemistry' with a client emerge during a coaching session? What happened leading up to that moment?
2. How does trust and self-disclosure develop between you and your clients, and how do you think this affects the presence or strength of chemistry?
3. Have you noticed a typical point in your coaching engagements when chemistry seems to emerge (e.g., first session, third month)? What might explain this timing?
4. How would you describe the rhythm or flow between you and your client when chemistry is present?
5. In what ways do you think shared values, vision, or purpose influence the level of chemistry you experience with a client?
6. Have you noticed that chemistry in coaching can cohere/entrain or spread to other relationships the client has? Can you share an example?
7. How does your relationship with the client change you as a coach?
8. In what ways does empathy or mutual respect play a role in creating or deepening chemistry in your sessions?
9. Have you observed chemistry leading to a stronger sense of collaboration or collective identity between you, the client, and others in their workplace?
10. Can you recall a practice or activity during coaching where chemistry seemed to catch or shift the trajectory of the conversation or relationship?

11. How does the environment or context (location, setting, organizational culture) influence the emergence of chemistry?
12. Have you seen clients carry the chemistry from coaching into their everyday leadership practices? How so?

Clients Questions
1. Can you describe a time in coaching when you felt a strong connection or 'chemistry' with your coach? What made that moment stand out?
2. How did your level of trust and openness with your coach change over time, and what impact did that have on your coaching experience?
3. Was there a specific turning point when you felt more willing to be vulnerable with your coach? What happened?
4. When you think about times when coaching felt most impactful, how would you describe the energy or flow between you and your coach?
5. Did you feel that you and your coach were aligned in values, vision, or purpose? How did that alignment affect the coaching relationship?
6. Have you noticed that the connection you had with your coach influenced how you work with your team or organization?
7. How has your coach influenced or changed how you see yourself or others?
8. What role did empathy or mutual respect play in your willingness to engage deeply in coaching?
9. Did you feel a greater sense of belonging or collaboration as a result of your relationship with your coach?

10. Can you describe a specific coaching session or activity where the connection with your coach seemed to shift your perspective or actions?
11. How has what you experienced in the coaching relationship shown up in your day-to-day leadership or work practices?
12. Do you feel the setting or circumstances of your coaching sessions affected the chemistry you experienced? How?

Appendix G

Video Elicitation Questions

Coach
What do you notice as you watch this moment again?
What were you feeling internally at that time?
What stands out to you now that you didn't notice in the moment?
At this point, what level of trust or vulnerability did you feel? (SPT)
What could you have done differently here?
Were you aware of this at the moment?
Do you sense alignment of purpose, values, or energy in this clip? (CLT)
How did this interaction affect your sense of connection or respect for the other? (CLT)
In what way were you changed by the other person in this moment? (CLT)
Do you think this moment influenced how you showed up in relationships with others afterward? (CLT, LAP)
What was happening in the practice of coaching here that shifted the conversation or direction? (LAP)
Do you see this as a "pivot point" where something new was co-created? (LAP)
How did the setting, activity, or interaction contribute to chemistry emerging here?
If this moment had not occurred, how might the session or relationship have been different?

Do you think the other person experienced this moment the same way you did? Why or why not?
What meaning do you make of this moment now that you've revisited it?

Coachee
What do you notice as you watch this moment again?
What were you feeling internally at that time?
What stands out to you now that you didn't notice in the moment?
At this point, what level of trust or vulnerability did you feel? (SPT)
What were you holding back, if anything, and what allowed you to go deeper here? (SPT)
Looking back, do you see this as a turning point in your willingness to disclose more? (SPT)
How would you describe the rhythm or flow between you here? (LAP)
Do you sense alignment of purpose, values, or energy in this clip? (CLT)
How did this interaction affect your sense of connection or respect for the other? (CLT)
In what way were you changed by the other person in this moment? (CLT)
Do you think this moment influenced how you showed up in relationships with others afterward? (CLT)
What was happening in the practice of coaching here that shifted the conversation or direction? (LAP)

Do you see this as a “pivot point” where something new was co-created? (LAP)
How did the setting, activity, or interaction contribute to chemistry emerging here?
If this moment had not occurred, how might the session or relationship have been different?
Do you think the other person experienced this moment the same way you did? Why or why not?
What meaning do you make of this moment now that you’ve revisited it?

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