

**Henley Business School  
University of Reading**

**The dynamics of underlying tension and energy in  
organisations. An investigation into how CEO's/C-suite hold  
true to self and the organisation system.**

**By**

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Management Challenge submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Science in Coaching and Behavioural Change.

## **Executive Summary**

This research contribution set out to investigate the CEO/C-suite's level of both awareness and impact of the hidden tensions, anxiety and energy that could reside in organisation systems. It was particularly interested in exploring how these dynamics were perceived by the CEO/C-suite and in understanding the impact experienced when it comes to leading business performance and managing self. The investigation went on to identify the resources currently relied upon by the CEO/ C-suite when navigating these dynamics and especially when faced with unhealthy energies and tensions in the organisation system. This would then lead on to what could be drawn from these findings as key learnings for both the CEO/C-suite and the executive coaching profession.

The setting for this investigation was qualitative research. An inductive approach was pursued, to best capture an exploratory design. Twelve CEO/C-suite level participants were identified and took part in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Participants were representative of a very diverse range of both global and local perspectives. All participants were known to the researcher as both highly respected and regarded in their respective industries. The rich phenomenological data yielded was collected and coded to identify themes and patterns relevant to the research investigation. The analysis was primarily informed by the model developed by Miles and Huberman.(1994)

Key findings suggested that all respondents had acknowledged awareness and perceptions of tension and energy. Tensions, both positive and negative, were more widely reported across respondents in comparison to the impact of energy. This is in keeping with the review on current thinking where the study of energy at work does remain a relatively young field of research.

There were key recommendations put forward in this investigation:

First, that CEO's/C-suite could benefit from increasing their personal knowledge in these topics when leading for both self and their organisations. In particular, enhancing their own development to reflect, talk openly and work actively with these hidden dynamics could unleash stronger business potential. This could also create environments where emotions, thoughts and actions contributed to maximising business performance. The review on current thinking confirmed that many businesses 'do lose their competitive advantage, or suffered crippling inertia, because of the hidden dynamics working through the system'. (Whittington, 2012) For the world of tomorrow, there needs to be a far more noticeable shift in leadership that could incorporate these intangible forces as key factors in leading. This was also confirmed in the extensive review on current academic thinking.

Second, it was clear from the research that stressed people are simply not available and that whilst quick 'stress' responses could result in quick and meaningful fixes, the clarity and steady calm required for the bigger picture thinking could be compromised. Therefore, it would be considered worthwhile for the CEO/C-suite to consider the merits of adopting mindfulness practices when faced with the daily challenges of leading in a complex and dynamic world.

Finally, the research investigation had highlighted that the hidden dynamics in organisation systems are both a complex and under-researched phenomenon. Whilst the tangible areas of leadership and the business challenges of the CEO have been researched and published quite extensively, there is less academic work on the skills and knowledge required to successfully navigate and harness the intangible dimensions of energy and tension for business performance. It is recommended that further work be conducted to inform these important topics.

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**Word Count = 17,521 (including Figures and Tables)**

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## Chapter One - Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction and Aims.

There are intangible forces at work that impact both a leader's experience of and ability to make the best use of tension and energy to maximise performance in the workplace. Internally, there is rich context and contextual layers contributing to the intangible forces in the organization system. (Whittington, 2012) Externally, there are market pressures and an explosion of books on leadership that could help make some sense of these intangibles. With this backdrop, the life of any leader nowadays could be described as a recipe for anxiety. For the CEO/C-suite, this relentless complexity could point to the notion that an individual's mental stamina could be struggling to keep up with the complex demands at this leadership level.

This investigation was primarily designed to present a research-based project investigating the CEO/C-suite's level of awareness of these intangible forces and dynamics at play in the organisation system. This investigation set out to understand how these forces are both interpreted and influencing their personal impact when navigating for both self and the organisation system. Unravelling the leader's awareness of the emotional system in the organisation was of key interest in this research. Fox and Baker (2009) coined it as 'the silent buzz you feel in the air when you get off the elevator' and created what they called 'the hidden challenges of leadership because people are so rarely aware' of its impact.

It was clear when reflecting on both personal corporate experience and academic literature that leaders 'do experience the ebb and flow of different states of energy in their organisations.' (Bruch & Vogel, 2011) However, could these intangible forces be viewed and interpreted as separate to the tangible and



traditional drivers of business performance? Bruch & Vogel (2011) concluded that leaders do 'intuitively feel the energy and emotions in their companies and sense its impact on productivity.' However, it could be argued that those leaders with a limited understanding of how to harness this energy could 'leave a key resource to languish, the company's human resources.' (Bruch & Vogel, 2011)

What could this mean for the executive coach in the service of leaders? How could the coaching practice best equip them to appreciate the demands on leaders to lead in a changing world? The secondary aim of the investigation was to understand the appetite for executive coaching at this level and what this could specifically mean for a coach when coaching at the professional boundaries, especially as it pertains to anxiety. According to Stossel, (2014) 'coaching in the sphere of anxiety can be a riddle.' In this context, one must ask what would be the most appropriate psychologically-minded approaches for coaches to draw upon in facilitating behavioural change and self - development. Stossel (2014) noted:

"To grapple with and understand anxiety is, in some sense, to grapple with and understand the human condition. For many leaders grappling with anxiety, it would be fair to say that there could be a good deal of hiding it, which could result in a disconnection between the public self and the private self."

On the other hand, Rosen (2008) argued that leaders were responsible for 'creating the right level of anxiety for both business growth and performance.' Insights from this research investigation would enable executive coaches to appreciate the dynamics of intangible forces in the workplace, their impact in a changing world and the importance of working at the boundary when it comes to coaching.

This was considered an important research issue because it is incumbent on leaders to ensure they are creating and role modelling strong interpersonal relationships and building high-functioning teams to meet business challenges. (Whittington, 2012) It is critical that leaders at this level find their voice and learn to influence others in effective and motivating ways. It is true that creating value as a leader also depends on many skills that are intangible and therefore hard to measure when it comes to performance – areas such as authenticity, empathy and strategic vision.

## **1.2 Personal areas of interest in this topic**

Over the years as an HR professional, making sense of the impact of underlying dynamics of energy and tensions in organizations had evolved into a personal passion. There has been constant curiosity about the emotional life of an organisation, where it comes from and how it can be harnessed. From a personal perspective, it is fair to say that the intangibles and their impacts on the performance of the organization are fairly obvious to read and interpret. Intangibles could be construed as the ‘big pink elephants dancing on the table’ that do not get addressed, mentioned, nor discussed at the leadership table. And on occasions throughout my career, discussions have been held on what might this intangible energy be about and what clues could this provide to harness this energy in a more productive and positive manner.

As per the Myers Briggs Type Assessment, the typical ENTP profile (comprising a preference for extroverted intuition and introverted thinking) does lend itself to the reading of the intangibles and seeing all the possibilities in organizations. On occasions, leaders would say ‘well you are in HR, so just do something about it.’ This response over time got me thinking. Was this an easy way to sidestep issues,

which could not be comprehended beyond the bounds of their capacity in dealing with their tangible responsibilities? Are leaders of today aware or interested in the impact of intangibles on business performance? And, from experience, those leaders who could read the intangibles would in some cases resort to 'quick-fixes' and single out certain disruptors in the system for rounds of coaching. Those 'disruptors' would also be the very same people hailed as the future talent needed to stir the mediocre in the workplace into productive action. Notwithstanding the above experiences, have also seen leaders who could successfully harness both anxiety and energy to 'stoke the engine and move full steam ahead'. (Rosen, 2008)

The development of interest in these topics also stemmed from seeing leaders using stress as a badge of honour in dialogue. Whilst many leaders would openly talk about the stresses of their job, over time it was noticed that they were reluctant to use the word anxiety and the suspicion was that 'some would see it as a sign of weakness.' (Rosen, 2008)

Rosen (2008) argued that 'the reluctance to use this word could be stifling a leader's ability to lead the human side of change.'

### **1.3 Personal objectives**

My three personal objectives for this challenge are summarised:

1. I want to develop my expertise in carrying out qualitative interviews with composure. Composure for me is about not being excessively and inappropriately challenging and stimulating about a topic that genuinely excites me. Given what I think is the challenging nature of this topic, I also want to develop ease in responding to issues that will emerge in the course of interviews and explore the

perspectives of the participant in the topics under investigation. I want to develop some impactful talking points around this subject with senior executives as I think these will definitely be key topics in the future of leadership.

2. With an ENTP profile, (as per the Myers Briggs Type Assessment) I want to embrace my less preferred sensing part. As an ENTP, I am always more inclined to 'intuitively direct energy outwardly to scan for new ideas, interesting patterns, and future possibilities.' (Briggs Myers et al: 2009, 23). I want to embrace my less preferred sensing side and acquire information by focussing on a detailed, accurate accumulation of sensory data as experienced in the present. (Briggs Myers et al: 2009, 23) In practical terms, this means leveraging my project management skills in staying on top of the immense detail and in adopting a more methodical approach to implementing and structuring my insights for the reader.

3. I want to further my knowledge in the fields of organisation energy, the role of anxiety in organisation settings and the impact of systems thinking. I have selected these particular topic areas as they are either relatively young in the fields of academic research or generally under-researched. When it comes to systems thinking, according to Lee (2003, 94) a coach trained in systemic thinking will construct the coaching challenge more in terms of the social and cultural factors that are shaping the leader's capacity to change. This is definitely an area of personal interest and passion in my journey as a coaching professional.

#### **1.4 Structure of this investigation.**

The overall strategy of this investigation was to carry out qualitative research via empirical investigation and adopt an inductive approach. As mentioned, the topics in this investigation represented "the pink elephants dancing in the room" that

would seldom get discussed at the leadership table. The fieldwork adopted a flexible design reflecting the fact that, as a researcher, one would be closely involved in and mirroring the attributes of flexibility in the research process. The fieldwork method consisted of conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the primary data source. The unit of analysis is the individual CEO /C-suite.

The focus of the research investigation was to uncover how participants felt about tension and energy in self and organisations and to explore how this would impact their leadership from that particular vantage point. This would be interpretative research; and as stated by King & Horrick's (2010) is generally idiographic, which literally means 'describing aspects of the social world by offering a detailed account of specific social settings, processes or relationships.' This would be primarily cross-sectional research representing a snapshot in time and the interviews would endeavour to cover and uncover the following key data:

- What could be the level of awareness and interest in tension, anxiety and energy in self and the organisation system? Research showed that understanding all of the pressures and demands of a leader's role in the system could impact the setting and measurement of goals and business performance. (Lee, 2003)
- What resources do CEOs (C-suite) currently rely on when faced with potentially disruptive energies and tensions in the organisation system? Appreciating whether executive coaching was raised as a resource in their current repertoire of support, without prompting or alluding to

executive coaches during the interviews, was of key interest.

- What conclusions and recommendations could be drawn as key learnings for the coaching profession in a changing world, especially when coaching at the boundary (when it comes to anxiety) and the preference for coaching versus mentoring.

An interview guide was developed (Appendix D) which allowed for flexibility, as this was understood to be a key requirement of qualitative interviewing. This would enable the researcher to respond to issues that emerged in the course of all the interviews and to explore the perspective of the participant in the topics under investigation. The initial plan was a combination of face-to-face interviews and remote interviewing via Skype.

The topics in this Management Challenge were considered important to contributing to a global, exploratory research effort in getting to the core of what matters for the CEO/C-suite when navigating the 'intangible' requirements of their role. In the past decade, the world has changed dramatically, 'affecting organisations, communities, and the people who work and live within them. '(Freed, 2011) Also, it is clear that CEOs/C-suite simply have much more to gain from intelligent counsel than any other person marked out on the organisation chart. This would lead to a set of actionable recommendations for what matters for the CEO/C-suite and the executive coach in the service of others.

The investigation is structured as follows:

**Chapter 2** provides a review on current thinking in the literature and reflects on current developments in the topics for investigation.

**Chapter 3** comprises the methodology of the research investigation. This includes details on the design used and steps taken for the analysis of the data.

**Chapter 4** details the findings of the research and in the context of current thinking.

**Chapter 5** proposes how these findings provide insights into the topics for investigation and what this could mean for the executive coach.

**Chapter 6** captures personal reflections in carrying out this work. In particular, the theoretical, practical and personal learnings gained as a result of conducting this research process. Consideration was also given to the limitations of this current investigation.

## **Chapter Two - Review of current thinking**

### **2.1 Introduction.**

The review on current thinking was organised into three sections. Section 2.2 started with a commentary on the comprehensive search into the academic literature that held relevance to the research investigation. Section 2.3 detailed a critical assessment of current thinking which had all been drawn from academic and practitioner literature. A full review of the literature identified six key topics:

- The work of Robert Kegan and theory of adult cognitive development.
- Locating emotions/energy in the organisation system.
- Leadership and Anxiety.
- System dynamics.
- CEO/C-suite and the challenges of change.
- Executive Coaching and the boundaries.

Current thinking for the above topics mainly dealt with each one separately, with not many notable and strong linkages found in the current literature. Section 2.4 summarised and established the ways in which the current thinking, when brought together, contributed to the research investigation.

### **2.2 Conducting the literature search**

The literature search initially started with a broader perspective encompassing many divergent angles, including how the brain responded to anxiety and the relevance of brain science to the management topic. Whilst it was acknowledged that neuroscience could be very relevant to the research investigation, it became



clear over time that adopting a more focused view on the topics at hand would be much more effective. Various avenues were taken to locate current thinking:

- Amazon.com searched with the key words 'tension', 'energy', 'anxiety', 'organisation dynamics', 'leadership' and 'CEO'. A selection of books from the search have been read and summarised. In addition, references from these books were used to identify additional areas for academic thinking and research.
- University of Reading resources, the EBSCO and ProQuest databases – combining key search words. All articles that looked relevant from the abstract were reviewed in relation to the topics.
- Google and Google scholar were used with the above key words. Abstracts were reviewed and considered.

## **2.3 Context, frameworks and setting the scene.**

### **2.3.1 Work of Robert Kegan and theory of adult cognitive development**

Looking first at the research on adult development, Kegan's (1994) theory stood out as the most impactful source of empirical research. Kegan, (1994) as quoted by Garvey Berger, (2006) believed that the constantly changing demands of modern life may be developmentally inappropriate for many – perhaps even most adults. Kegan argued that most adults today are basically 'in over their heads':

"The expectations upon us demand something more than mere behaviour, the acquisition of specific skills, or the mastery of particular knowledge. They make demands on our minds, on *how* we know, on the complexity of our consciousness" (Kegan: 1994, 5)

Kegan and Lahey, (2009) highlighted the implications for the CEO:

“This notion has implications for the CEO/C-suite in dealing with growing complexity. They argued that through this complexity, they may have learned, but may have not necessarily developed themselves personally. Coping and self-managing are valuable skills, but they are insufficient for meeting today’s change challenges.”

It could be argued that the compelling piece of Kegan’s research can be found in what he called the orders of the mind and what he described as the different ways of constructing reality. According to Garvey Berger, (2006) this is a constructive-developmental theory because it is concerned with ‘the construction of reality, and with the development of that construction to more complex levels, over time.’ Garvey Berger (2006) summarized the theory on what was described as the five orders of the mind, ranging from a two year old to a person (mostly theoretical) well into the second half of life. Each order apparently represented a shift in the meaning-making and the more added complexity than compared with the previous Order. Whilst there were five orders outlined in Kegan’s theory, this review draws on three of the orders for the purposes of the research investigation:

- Third Order (older adolescents and the majority of adults). According to Garvey Berger, (2006) people at this order no longer see others as simply a means to an end and have developed the ability to subordinate their desires to the desires of others:

“They internalise the feelings and emotions of others and are guided by those people or institutions that are most important to them. They are able to think abstractly, be self-reflective about their actions and the actions of others, and are devoted to something that’s greater than their own needs.”

The major limitation of this order was that when there was a conflict between important others, people at this order could feel 'torn in two'. A 'third order' person can hold nearly any position that does not require independent leadership.

- Fourth Order (some adults). This order stated that whilst adults have achieved all of the third order; they now have created a self that exists outside of its relationship to others. Garvey Berger (2006) noted in the analysis:

“The opinions and desires of others which they internalised and which had great control over them when they were making meaning at the Third Order are now object to them. They are now able to examine those various rule-systems and opinions and are able to mediate between them”.

Adults at this order are guided by an internal set of rules and regulations which they would use to make decisions or mediate conflicts. 'Adults at this order do feel empathy, though don't feel torn apart by the conflicts of those around them.' (Garvey Berger, 2006)

- Fifth Order (very few adults). The theory states that adults in this order have achieved all of the other orders and have now learned the limits of their own inner systems. (Garvey Berger, 2006)

What emerged from Kegan's work was a theory of evolving ways of viewing adult development, much as one would view a child's development. Mehegan, 1994, in commentary on Kegan's theory, noted adult development as 'an open-ended process born of the dynamic interaction of cultural demands and emerging mental capabilities.' Research into adult development confirmed that being a leader was tough; and especially when sitting at the 'third order.' Somehow development

must allow for one to understand how to effectively modulate their own anxiety, whilst being aware of alleviating the anxiety of those in the organization system. Peltier (2010) stated that, with the support of executive coaching, 'leaders need to be able to grow as a result of their developmental difficulties.'

### **2.3.2 Locating emotions/energy in the organisation system.**

It was clear from reviewing the literature that the study of energy at work does remain a relatively young field of research. More recently, Whittington (2012) took the view that many businesses do lose their competitive advantage, or suffer crippling inertia, because of the 'hidden dynamics' working through the system. Why would organisation energy be so important? Because leaders need to understand organisational energy, especially in economically tense times, and leaders do need to find ways to engage every potential resource and advantage to its fullest.

Dutton, 2003 as cited by Bruch & Vogel, (2011) maintained that energy was the 'fuel that makes great organizations run,' describing it as a renewable resource that benefits both organizations and its members. Lykken, (2005) as cited by Bruch & Vogel (2011) noted that an 'energetic focus allows employees to think constructively about work-related problems and concentrate on the tasks at hand.' Quinn, 2007, Quinn and Dutton, 2005, and Schwartz, 2007 as cited by Cole et al, (2011) asserted that 'an individual's energy in the context of work has only recently emerged as a focal topic.' Barsade, (2002) as cited by Bruch & Vogel (2011) observed in their research that when people interacted, they do 'catch' the emotions, thoughts and even actions of others. Cole et al (2011) noted that the existing literature on energy at work shares a 'common constraint, namely, a prevailing assumption that energy is solely an individual-level phenomenon.'

Following years of research into organization energy, Cole et al. (2011) found that the dynamics of organization energy were measurable and therefore manageable. They noted in their research findings that a company's collective dynamic force could be much stronger than the sum of its individual forces or motivation.

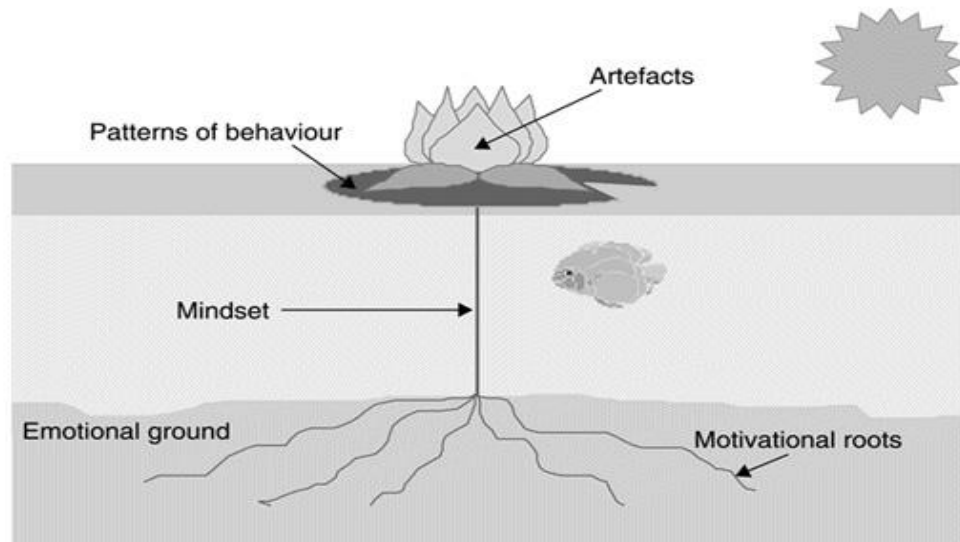
Cole et al. (2011) empirically set out to demonstrate that the 'energy collectively experienced by individuals could have a measurable impact on organisationally relevant criteria.' Through the development of a new survey instrument - the productive energy measure (PEM) - and through the process of conducting four independent studies, they introduced 'the notion that the energy of individuals could manifest as a higher level, collective construct.' The findings of their research had acknowledged this was a start. Locke, (2007) as cited by Cole et al (2011) observed that 'to have lasting value, a concept must gradually develop from an accumulating body of evidence.'

Cole et al (2011) research had acknowledged the impact of energy in the workplace and that 'being positively engaged at work has far reaching implications for employees and offers organizations a competitive advantage.' Bruch and Vogel (2011) also concluded that executives must learn to 'unleash the company's collective human potential to create an environment where emotions, thoughts and actions can flow and spread in the organisation.' It is fair to say that whilst this was a start, much more empirical research needed to be conducted into this phenomenon and its impact on organization and business performance.

Hawkins (2012:35) recently built on the work of Ed Schien (1985) to develop a 'five-level lens through which to view where emotions sit within the internal constructs of organisational cultures.'

**Figure 1** depicts the emotional ground in the culture of an organisation:

**Figure 1      The five levels of culture.**



Hawkins (2012) set out to link and name the emotional ground with organisational culture, where one would find the energy, personal engagement and the responsibility. A key component of this model was in identifying where the energy and emotions resided and their impact on the culture of the organisation system. Whilst there was ample literature on organisation culture, it was fair to say it was often quite subtle and elusive. (Hawkins, 2012) The reality is that organisations are embedded with a culture and comprised of social systems and people that have identities, relationships, communities, attitudes, emotions and differentiated powers. For the purposes of this investigation, organisation culture was simply 'not a thing that you could take out and measure, but a connecting pattern that pervades all organisations.' (Hawkins, 2012)

Hawkins (2012) found that although culture 'may manifest itself through patterns of behaviours in an organisation, the culture was so more deeply rooted in the shared meaning making and emotions of an organisation.' Whittington (2012) also noted that organisation systems were 'ever changing, full of visible and invisible forces in between the parts, forces that create the dynamics and behaviours.'

Walter and Bruch (2008) revealed that people imitate and follow other people around them to a certain extent, becoming both inspired and infected by them:

"The dynamics-contagion, spill-over effect, or self-reinforcing spirals, go far beyond the sum of people's individual energy. People caught in these dynamics become more in sync, sharing the same energy on a more intense level." (Bruch & Vogel, 2011:7)

Finally, it could be argued that personal development for leaders could 'be impacted by the intangible dynamics of the work environments they find themselves in.' (Childress: 2013)

### **2.3.3 Leadership and Anxiety**

If the world of leadership development is a billion dollar industry, one begs the question - where are all the leaders? It can be said that the world today is certainly a pressure cooker for leaders. The Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends Survey (2014) of 2,500 business and HR leaders in 94 countries revealed that the quality of leadership was their most pressing concern, regardless of industry or country. According to the report, 86% of respondents reported that leadership was 'urgent' or 'important' and that a lack of leadership talent was constraining company growth. Peltier (2010) stated that most organizations are poor teachers of leadership, and few are really organized to grow real leaders.

Freed (2011) noted that many of today's management practices came from the Industrial Age and were based on the command and control model:

“As organizations move from Information to the Knowledge Age, people need to be inspired from within by the meaningfulness of work and living for a purpose beyond oneself.”

According to Freed, (2011) the leadership required now in these changing times called for ‘today's leaders to be developing all aspects of their being at all times: physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual.’ In doing so they are more equipped to motivate and support their people, and build an engaged and productive workforce.

Whittington (2012) explained that it could be useful to consider leadership essentially as a role that is serving a natural system and over which a leader had minimal control. He coined the term systemic leadership and stated that leaders ‘needed to be alert to the energies across the whole system, working in service of the purpose and coherence of the whole system’. He goes on to state that ‘attempts by leaders to ignore or change the ordering forces of systems quickly manifests itself as inertia, complex leadership challenges or a feeling of stuckness.’

There were small yet significant research links with leadership and anxiety. Fox & Baker (2009) confirmed in their findings that anxiety was observable and palpable and was expressed in a ‘variety of automatic behaviours that become ingrained in workplace relationships.’ They argued that all organisations developed some level of chronic anxiety over time. Fox and Baker (2009) referred to it as the ‘background noise in a restaurant’ and for leaders addressing the underlying sources ‘required a high level of maturity, courage and thoughtfulness.’



Rosen (2008) found that as a leader, you are the steward of anxiety inside your organisation:

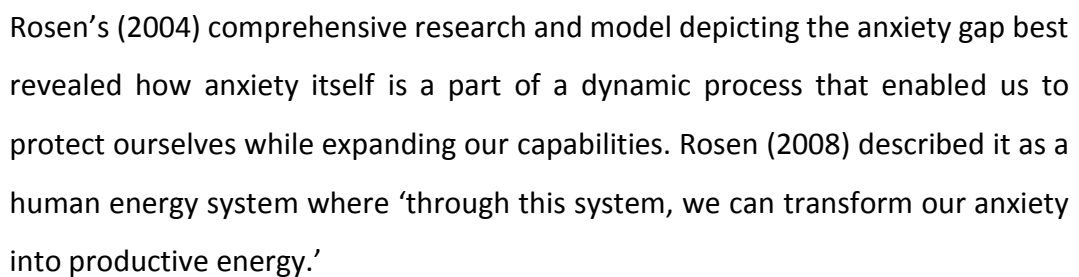
‘Your ability to manage your own anxiety directly affects your ability to help others manage theirs. It determines how effective you are in unleashing and mobilising the creative energy inside your organisation. Anxiety is contagious.

Rosen (2008) also noted:

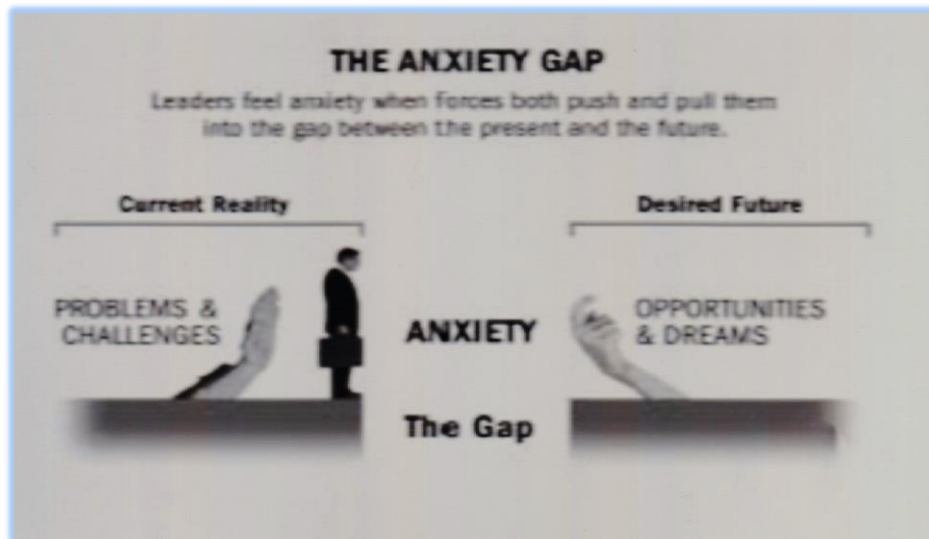
“Our brains are hardwired to pick up cues in our environment - including other people. We unconsciously monitor tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, eye contact, attentiveness and other non-verbal cues.”

Senge (1999) argued that effective leaders learn to recognise growing anxiety ‘as an indicator of progress (or otherwise) and how they learn to acknowledge and deal with it, both within themselves and within others.’ Senge’s (1999) illustration in **Figure Two** depicted where the dynamics of anxiety would lie in the organization system. This diagram showed that regardless of how it is expressed, anxiety could affect people’s enthusiasm.

### Senge's location of anxiety in the system



**Figure 3 Rosen model - the Anxiety Gap**



Rosen (2008) concluded that we differ in our ability to manage our energy in the 'anxiety gap':

"Some of us have an extraordinary capacity to live with tension, pain, discomfort and disequilibrium. Others are just too busy or too scared to look inside ourselves – shackled by past experiences, traumatic circumstances or old habits, we can resist or reject our anxiety and spend as little time as possible in the gap."

Rosen (2008) argued that most of us lie between these two extremes. He also concluded that leaders who knew how to navigate 'this gap' were better able to live with and lead with '*just enough anxiety*.' He described those leaders as being able to imagine the future, whilst assessing the present, without getting too attached to either one. These leaders operated successfully at 30,000 feet, able to look dispassionately at both themselves and their organisations. As Rosen (2008) stated 'They are participant observers.'

Could one be friends with anxiety? Rosen (2008) argued that one could use both anxiety and uncertainty to close the gap between where you are and where you needed to be and 'start seeing it as a source of energy that propels you forward.'

Kets de Vries (1995) concluded that 'few organisations have a reputation for being places where emotional expressiveness is widely encouraged.' It takes a lot of energy, however, 'to keep emotions under lock and key for long periods of time, and eventually, this will take its toll on the individual.'

#### **2.3.4 System dynamics**

Hawkins (2011) confirmed that 'business challenges were happening in a systemically complex web of interconnecting forces and at an exponentially accelerating rate.' It could also be argued that this is where the energy and emotions reside. As noted by Hawkins (2011):

'No longer do the main challenges in organisations lie in the people or in the parts but in the interfaces and relationships between people, teams, functions and different stakeholder needs.'

It could be fair to say that the answers are often out there in the organisation system. Whittington's (2012) research revealed that the dynamics that surface in systems do present themselves in many ways such as 'difficult behaviours, dysfunctional teams, people being stuck, repeating patterns, conflict and difficulties in occupying roles.' Whittington (2012) also stated that a business or 'organisation system' could be looked at as a 'continuously changing mass of relationships, hierarchies, loyalties and motivations.' Whilst it is clear that awareness and intention were a start, this was simply not enough for leaders in

this world of complexity. The dynamics, as described above, were often an expression of something wider in the system that needed to be addressed.

### **2.3.5 CEO/ C-suite and the challenges of change.**

It could be said that the underlying dynamics of a company are clearly not a static position. Research had confirmed that leaders do impact the state of energy in an organisation. Part of this research investigation would be about finding out whether CEO's/ C-suite have an awareness of this as they conduct themselves in their role. Keller & Price (2010) came to the conclusion that the CEO's role was unique and 'provides cues for everyone else in the organization' as to what really matters:

"CEO's who take the time to personalize a transformation story can unlock more energy for a transformation than those who dutifully present the PowerPoint slides their working team has created for them." (2010, 159)

Childress (2013) stated that:

"The job of the CEO and business leader calls for heavy lifting and the moving of some pretty stubborn and immovable objects. Not only does the CEO have to devise a winning strategy, but has to align and launch the human energies of hundreds to thousands of individuals, each with multiple agendas, towards a common objective."

For the CEO / C-suite, leading in any organisational environment could be like 'trying to guide a shoal of fish and there are multiple theories and ideas on how to do it.' (Whittington, 2011) Add to this mix 'doses of competition, speed of change,

team behaviour and personal confidence and one has a good breeding ground for anxiety in both self and the organisation.’ (Whittington, 2011)

A CEO must think about building robust and resilient organisations. According to the Korn Ferry Institute, CEO’s today ‘face unheralded pressures as their organisations are met with enormous changes in general business conditions and more demanding stakeholder expectations.’ ([www.kornferryinstitute.com](http://www.kornferryinstitute.com)) For today’s CEO, creating the right organisation would have to be less about structures and rules and more about capabilities in their talent and the culture. It was clear from the current thinking that for the world of tomorrow, there needs to be a far more noticeable shift in leadership skills and to incorporate more of the importance of the intangibles forces as a key player in their overall responsibilities.

Finkelstein (2004) found that whilst CEO’s can seem so much apart from the rest of us, it turned out that they have ‘the same weaknesses and character flaws and could make the same kinds of mistakes, though on a grander scale.’ Finkelstein (2004) also revealed that some executives expressly chose not to respond to changes in their organisation system, even when they knew it was happening and concluded: ‘One can draw the parallel with people who deal with the same challenges of facing unwanted truths in their everyday lives.’

Bruch and Vogel (2011) cited recommendations for the CEO. In particular, rather than relying solely on motivating the individual employee, executives must learn ‘to unleash the company’s collective human potential to create an environment where emotions, thoughts and actions can flow and spread in the organisation.’ Sutton, (2010) found that ‘the most effective bosses devote enormous effort to understanding how their moods, quirks, skills and actions affect their follower’s performance and humanity.’

### **2.3.6 Executive Coaching and the boundaries.**

The MSc in Coaching and Behavioral Change clearly highlighted, amongst other things, the need for greater regulation in the coaching profession. Given the unregulated nature of the industry, practitioners basically do decide for themselves the 'boundary' between coaching and therapy. (Maxwell, 2009) The topic of anxiety in this research investigation pointed to what this could mean when it comes to the boundaries in a coaching relationship. Garvey (2004) noted that coaching had become something of a power struggle between the psychologically and the non-psychologically trained. Maxwell (2009) concluded that 'coaches must therefore be prepared to work with the whole human whilst maintaining a focus on the agreed contract.' Coaching does definitely risk being superficial when it cannot work with the whole human and therefore 'coaches must be equipped to explore the territory safely and at appropriate depth, or refer on to those who can.' (Maxwell, 2009)

Hawkins (2012) explored the implications of these dynamics for the coaching profession and proposed an urgent need to rebalance the whole profession with a focus that approached the work from the 'outside-in' and from 'future-back.' In other words, you would start with the systemic and organisational context in which the coaching was taking place. Hawkins (2011) summarised as follows:

“One starts from the challenges currently facing the world and explores what this requires of organisations; then what organisations will require from their leaders and managers; and then what development is therefore required.”

Notwithstanding the above, Hernez-Broome & Boyce (2011) acknowledged the general lack of a comprehensive agenda that could guide and focus the leadership coaching research. They stated that 'a solid research agenda would also provide a

common foundation by addressing fundamental issues, such as a shared definition, accepted standards and requirements, as well as methods and models to elevate executive coaching as a profession.'

Dumont (2010) noted that mentoring was beyond coaching and stated 'it is the passing along of knowledge, wisdom, and lessons, some learned the hard way.' Dumont's observations confirmed:

"CEO mentoring is not necessarily new, but given that it is a discreet relationship and activity, it is not widely discussed. The CEO must often act with limited information among scores of hidden agendas.

Dumont (2010) concluded that:

"CEO mentoring required a blend of experience, relevance, confidentiality, qualities, and values to affect positive outcomes. Relevance comes from applying lessons from the past to current situations."

Therefore, it could be seen that the mentoring role, as stated by Hawkins & Smith (2006) was:

"Less about creating precise and focussed behaviour change and more about helping the mentee to construct a relevant larger picture that would animate their career choices into the future".

In conclusion, Nagel (2014) stated that:

"Although business coaching has been in existence since the early 90's as an organised profession, it's still in its infancy. This newness makes it more challenging to find a good fit when looking to engage a business coach."

The researcher was interested in testing this in the course of the interview proceedings.



## **2.4 Summary and links to research investigation.**

The implications for exploration emanating from the review on current thinking pointed to reasonable fields of research and evidence relating to the presence of the intangible forces of tension and energy in organisations. No specific literature was found on the direct impacts of tension and energy on the CEO / C-suite and their role in managing this for themselves and the organisation system. There was no academic nor practitioner literature on CEO's personal and demonstrated experiences in harnessing the hidden energy in organisations to maximise business performance. This research investigation would therefore aim to address this gap by understanding:

- What would, for the CEO/C suite, be the perception, level of awareness and interest in tension, anxiety and energy in both self and the organisation system?
- What would be the resources CEOs /C-suite currently relied on when faced with unhealthy energies and tensions in the organisation system?
- What could be drawn from the research as key learnings for the coaching profession?

**The above considerations underpinned my research objectives.**

## Chapter Three - Investigation

### 3.1 Objectives of Investigation

The objectives of this investigation were to identify how CEO's/ C-suite made sense of and navigated underlying tension, anxiety and energy in self and the organisation. How could this awareness best equip executive coaches to be in the service of leaders in a changing world? This investigation would set out to understand the extent to which leaders are aware of the emotional system in the organisation. Fox and Baker (2009) coined it as 'the silent buzz you feel in the air when you get off the elevator' and this created what they would call 'the hidden challenges' of leadership because people were so rarely aware of it. This investigation also sought to understand CEO/C-suite practices for dealing with these intangible forces. It could be lonely at the top for the CEO/C-suite and especially where there may have been collaborative reassurances from their peer groups in the past.

The single, key research question at the heart of this investigation was as follows:

'What is the level of awareness, interest and impact of hidden tensions, anxiety and energy in organisations for the CEO / C-suite when managing self and the organisation?'

This key question was based on other questions that are found sitting within this:

- How would you describe your perception of tension and energy in self and the organisation system right now?
- In your experience, what role does tension and energy play and what is its impact in influencing people and business performance?

- What clues could these factors provide in making sense of how to enable high performance in self and the organisation?
- What are the resources you currently rely on when faced with unhealthy tensions / energy? How do you stay true to yourself?
- How could you leverage that awareness for yourself and your organisation? What would the individual and business benefits be?

These questions provided the foundation for identifying the research objectives:

- To gain insight into the CEO/C-suite level of awareness and interest in tension and energy in self and the organisation system.
- To understand the resources CEOs (C-suite) relied on when faced with unhealthy energies and tensions in the organisation system.
- To examine and consider what could be drawn from the research as key learnings for the coaching profession and especially when coaching at the boundary when it comes to anxiety.

The setting for this investigation issue was qualitative research. An inductive approach was pursued, which was more of an exploratory type design, comprising in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a total of twelve CEO/C-suite leaders. This provided the context in which to address the above areas of the research investigation. This research design was to enable more of an exploration into effective ways of perceiving anxiety and energy and how leaders would put it to the best use. The outcome of this investigation was about combining the review on current thinking and the CEO/C-suite responses to the research questions (as above) to answer the research objectives.

As can be seen from the review of current thinking, this commenced with the presentation of a couple of ideas and from there allowed the theory to emerge from the data. The research investigation was therefore about looking for data and evidence to contribute towards the answers to the research questions that were then formulated.

### **3.2 Investigation Design**

In terms of research strategy, a qualitative approach was clearly the preferred methodology. A quantitative approach was not considered for the design due to the lack of flexibility in getting closely involved as the researcher. King & Horrick's (2010) concluded that, generally speaking, 'quantitative research subscribes to a realist ontology with qualitative research having its foundations in more critical and realist approaches.' A qualitative approach was clearly better suited to analyzing the language and words, the attainment of my personal objectives and for the opportunity to probe particular areas in more detail. King & Horrocks (2010) stated that quantitative measurement is concerned with measurement and precisely and accurately capturing aspects of the social world that are then expressed in numbers. This approach would rely on numbers as the unit of analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) explained the qualitative method as drawing valid meaning from qualitative data, with the validity being based on the notion of whether the researcher involved could give a true picture of reality. Having appreciated this, it was recognized at the outset that the main analytic challenge in conducting qualitative research would lie in 'finding coherent descriptions and explanations that still include all of the gaps, inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in personal and social life.' (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014)

In preferring a qualitative approach, it was anticipated that responses from participants would be far more in-depth, rather than deploying fixed quantitative questioning. In adopting open-ended questions, it was considered that greater depth and insights could be achieved and also that more observation of the participants during the interviews could be achieved.

As the main objective of this investigation was to explore CEO/C-suite thinking and experiences, a phenomenological approach was developed to gain these insights. This was deemed most suitable for appreciating phenomenological experience, thereby providing a comprehensive and interesting set of narratives for exploration. This approach also allowed for a focus on obtaining actual experience rather than general opinions and belief. (Spinks, 2011:43) As per the personal objectives, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee was central to deploying this method. (Spinks, 2011:43)

It was planned that the research strategy would employ a cross-sectional approach and the unit of analysis was the individual. After much thinking about the merits of abductive versus the inductive approach, the decision was to go with the inductive approach. Abductive reasoning typically begins with an incomplete set of observations and proceeds to the likeliest possible explanation for that set of data. The abductive mode characterises more of an intuitive and creative approach to researching the problem. The inductive approach, on the other hand, was about building theory in this field and the aim is to contribute to the theory, where it was possible.

It was also recognized that any research strategy employed would be subject to specific limitations. This could occur in both data gathering and analysis and

therefore was mindful of these within the specific categories of validity, reliability and generalizability.

In terms of validity, consideration in the sampling method was 'given to multiple perspectives and the sources of evidence used.' (Henley Module Notes, 2012) With reliability, there would be 'transparency in how the data was collected and analyzed.' (Henley Module Notes, 2012). With generalizability, it was about 'engaging with the appropriate literature in a critical way.' (Henley Module Notes, 2012).

With regard to ethics, it was important to stress at this point that the research investigation was carried out in accordance with all the principles that are set by the Henley Business School. As mentioned before, informed consent was obtained and maintained at all times. Personal assurances were given to the participants that all would remain anonymous in the report so as to uphold confidentiality.

The design of this investigation was about exploring a collection of leadership experiences through an interpretation of their situations, both past and present. It was expected that by drawing on the leader's experience, that common themes could be achieved. This design would enable the researcher to embark on individual conversations and to create a richness in the data, especially in the language that was being used and the focus on specific topics to best achieve the answers to the questions being asked.

The fieldwork approach was flexible design. This approach best reflected the likelihood that the initial design would also be subject to changes as the findings emerged. (Spinks, 2011:3) The data to be generated would reflect an interpretivist perspective, as the interest was in appreciating multiple versions of reality. This approach would also support flexibility in either adapting or adding questions as

themes emerged and to fully probe the answers given. This would achieve the focus on what the participants perceived in terms of their personal meaning and experience.

### **3.2.1 Sampling method:**

The sampling method was based on non-probability and use of the snowball technique, as there was a reliance on personal connections in the corporate world to find the most suitable respondents. The main criteria proposed for sampling was diversity in three areas. First was gender diversity, second was to be operating at this level in at least two different countries and the third was to have held either a CEO or C-suite level role for a minimum of two years. All participants were from the private sector, representing a range of industries and organization size.

This approach resulted in the identification of twelve participants and the criteria had ensured that there was no need to de-select anybody who came forward to participate. This criteria had achieved the variations in gender, demographics and international experience needed. For those who had agreed to take part in the research, all were called in the first instance to explain the purpose and intent and then sent an interview consent form and accompanying introduction. (Appendix E) All were asked to read and sign before the interview.

### **3.2.2 Developing a research instrument for the interview**

An interview guide was developed and designed for the research investigation. (Appendix D) In designing this, there was an understanding that flexibility was the key to qualitative interviewing and this meant having the ability to respond to the issues that could emerge during the course of the interview. It was clear that

designing the study could have a major impact on the outcomes, so there was flexibility regarding the phrasing of questions and the order in which they were asked. This allowed for the participant to lead the interaction in unanticipated directions. (King & Horrocks, 2010) The interview guide was not too comprehensive, being mindful of what was stated in King & Horrocks (2010):

“There is a danger that you do not allow sufficient opportunity for the participants to bring up perspectives that may be unanticipated but actually are of real interest to your research.”

The questions designed were reflective of what King & Horrocks (2010) described as opinion/values questions. These ‘types’ of questions were considered most appropriate as they focussed on what the participant was thinking about on the topics at hand and how their thoughts would relate to their values, goals and intentions. (King & Horrocks, 2010) It was expected that the questions would elicit the participant’s accounts of aspects of their experience, rather than merely collating answers to specific questions, as if they were variables in a survey. (King & Horrocks, 2010) Whilst the researcher understood that piloting the interview was good practice, it was considered at that time that the open-ended and exploratory nature of the questions devised would capture the insights from the respondents. Additional prompt questions were also designed to support the interview proceedings. The researcher was also aware that quality rapport established with the respondents would greatly enhance the richness of the phenomenological data.

### **3.2.3 Conducting the interview proceedings.**

Given the physical distance of living in Finland at that time, the use of remote video interviewing via Skype was the primary means of gathering data. To maximise the



benefits of this method for gathering data, a lengthy explanation was held with participants to clarify the intentions of this type of interaction. This was because it was acknowledged that one of the threats to the quality of telephone interviews was the potential for participants to have misunderstood the nature of the interaction. (King & Horrocks, 2010) This was important because participants may perceive that you wanted certain factual information from them, or they may see the conversation as simply an informal chat. (King & Horrocks, 2010)

As mentioned, in the role as the researcher/interviewer, importance was given to establishing good rapport with all participants throughout the process. Time was also taken to reinforce the importance of ethics and confidentiality and to match energy levels and non-verbal cues with the respondents. As these were qualitative interviews, the major concern was with the content of what participants had to say. (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Each interview lasted in the expected timeframe of between 30 minutes to 1 hour. Some of the participants commented on how valuable they thought the topics were and that on reflection they found the interview to be very beneficial. These comments from participants were personally transcribed from the audio recordings. At the end of the interview, all were again reminded of how the data would be kept confidential and that they would be sent a summary of both the transcript and the findings, should they request it.

It was noted that whilst most of the questions were asked of all the participants, it was clear from the transcripts that no participants were asked exactly the same questions, nor in the same order. Some of the questions were not asked during the course of the interview as they did not feel appropriate to the flow of the interview discussion. Smith & Osborn (2008) described semi-structured interviews

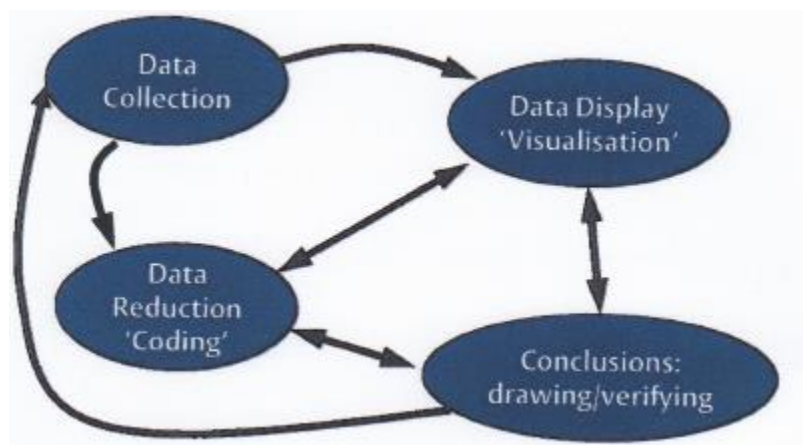
as the 'exemplary method for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, because the emphasis in this approach was on exploring how people interpreted their experience.'

A full transcript for each interview was achieved through the use of audio recording equipment and all participants agreed to this approach. During this process, notes were also taken to support the audio recording.

### 3.2.4 Preparing the data for analysis.

It could be said that there are a number of approaches to qualitative data analysis. This study was primarily informed by the model developed by Miles & Huberman (1994) in order to draw conclusions and comprises four iterative elements, (Henley Study Guide: 2009, 117) as shown in **Figure 4**:

**Figure 4** Miles & Huberman (1994) model.



This was useful for inductive analysis and typified both an iterative and non-linear approach. The main interest for the researcher was in looking for the patterns and the themes that emerged; and from these would emerge further ideas and

findings to build on the understanding related to the key research question. This model also typified illustrative matrices and diagrams for further analytic work and described by Saldana (2009) as 'the visual representation and presentation of qualitative data and their analysis through illustrative summary.'

Audio files were downloaded to the researcher's computer and all interviews were personally transcribed. (Appendix F) Effort was initially invested in getting familiar with how the audio recording equipment operated prior to interviewing. The recordings were considered several times in conjunction with the transcripts and research diary notes as the start for scanning content related to the research investigation. A considerable amount was factored into transcribing and was included in the project plan. A research diary was kept to note the personal reflections of the researcher and notes of the contextual features for each of the participants beyond the immediate words spoken. (King & Horrocks, 2010)

### **3.2.5 Coding techniques used in the data analysis.**

Prior to commencing the analysis, it was important to review the research objectives and be mindful of Miles & Huberman, (1994) as cited by Henley, (2011) that stated 'it is easy to get caught up in your material and forget that you are carrying out the research process.' Staying focused on the detailed task formed part of the researcher's personal objectives. The key research question was grounded in the current thinking and literature and was considered to be an 'epistemological question' where Saldana (2009) stated 'these types of questions suggest the exploration of participant actions/processes and perceptions found within the data.'

The hard copy interviews were read a couple of times and analysed for the First Cycle coding using the following methodologies that were deployed manually - Thematic Analysis, Descriptive Coding, Simultaneous Coding and Magnitude Coding. As the researcher was relatively new to the art of qualitative studies, descriptive coding was initially employed to help with what was going on in the data. This was described as an elemental method, which was about using basic codes and organising the data for further coding cycles. Turner (1994) called this cycle 'the development of a basic vocabulary of data to form bread and butter categories for further analytic work.' Charmaz (2001) described coding as the 'critical link' between data collection and their explanation of meaning. For the Second Cycle, Pattern Coding and frequency counts were then used for further refinement of the coded data. As the researcher primarily thinks visually, the data would also then be thematically displayed through matrices and tables, following the normal conventions. (Miles and Huberman, 1994)

Drawing conclusions could be described as an art grounded in the facts presented in the data. To enhance the quality of the conclusions reached, several tactics would be employed to "flesh" out the specifics in the data, including noticing patterns, clustering, making contrasts/comparisons, looking for relationships and themes. There would be very basic arithmetic procedures applied to specific data to highlight the frequency and interrelationships to further enhance the findings.

## Chapter Four – Findings and Analysis

The research instruments described had captured and yielded fruitful data relevant to the research questions. The collated data was assembled according to the methodologies described and examined according to the key objectives of the investigation. It was these key objectives and identification of the main codes that provided the structure for the findings.

### 4.1 Participant details

A total of 12 participants had taken part in the research investigation. There was a clear and balanced mix in diversity and as depicted in **Table 1**:

Gender	Role	Working Country	Industry	Company size	Expat or Local
Female	C-suite	Australia	Banking	Multi-national, >10,000 employees	Local
Female	C-suite	Australia	Mgt Consulting & Author	Global consulting, < 100 employees	Local
Male	CEO	Australia	Pharmaceuticals	Global consulting, > 1,000 employees	Local
Male	C-suite	Singapore	Entrepreneur and Mgt Consulting	Global consulting, < 100 employees	Expat
Male	C-suite	Thailand	Telecommunications	Multi-national, > 10,000 employees	Expat
Female	C-suite	UK	Mining	Multi-national, > 10,000 employees	Expat
Male	C-suite	Hong Kong	Telco/digital wireless	Multi-national, > 10,000 employees	Expat
Male	CEO	Singapore	Media	Multi-national, < 100 employees	Expat
Male	CEO	India	Mgt Consulting	Global Consulting, < 100 employees	Local
Male	CEO	UK	Pharmaceuticals	Multi-national, > 10,000 employees	Local
Female	CEO	Singapore	IT	Asia Pac Region, > 1,000 employees	Local
Male	CEO	Australia	Telecommunications	Multi-national, > 1,000 employees	Local

**Table 1 – Summary of Participant details.**

Most of the invited participants were either known to the researcher or introduced to the researcher via a mutual connection. The participants represented a fairly wide range of variation in order to capture diverse perspectives in response to the research questions.

Whilst the small sample size limited the transferability of findings, it did allow for in-depth exploration within the context and limitations of this research investigation. The findings in the research investigation cannot be tested as to whether they are statistically significant.

#### **4.2     Analysing the qualitative data.**

For the data reduction phase, a rigorous process of diving into the data was conducted to identify themes relevant to the key research question. There was also awareness that the common themes must be coded and grounded in what was actually presented in the data. It was recognised in an inductive process that the themes do come from two sources – the data and the academic literature. As stated in the Henley Guide (2009) ‘even in inductive research it is not unusual to take some themes or topics from the literature to guide initial investigations.’ Thematic analysis was conducted from both these sources and a close eye was kept on establishing the link between thematic structure and data and this is shown in **Table 2:**

Template Analysis Process	
<b>1. AWARENESS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Impact on organisation</li> <li>1.2 Impact on self</li> <li>1.3 Reference to CEO focus</li> </ul>
<b>2. STRESS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 Causes</li> </ul>
<b>3. TENSION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Creating Conflict</li> <li>3.2 CEO and Organisation</li> <li>3.3 Impact</li> <li>3.4 Negative Tension</li> <li>3.5 Tension from peers</li> <li>3.6 Coping</li> <li>3.7 Benefits</li> <li>3.8 CEO and Board members</li> <li>3.9 Positive Tension</li> </ul>
<b>4. ANXIETY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1 Fear of unknown</li> <li>4.2 Emotional Intelligence</li> <li>4.3 Recognition of existence</li> </ul>
<b>5. ENERGY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5.1 Energy and change</li> <li>5.2 Unhealthy energy</li> <li>5.3 Healthy energy</li> <li>5.4 Acknowledging existence</li> <li>5.5 Benefits</li> <li>5.6 Impact on organisation</li> <li>5.7 Impact of Chairman/Board Influence</li> </ul>
<b>6. ORGANISATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6.1 Structures and energy</li> <li>6.2 Hierarchies</li> <li>6.3 Gender bias</li> <li>6.4 Organisation Culture</li> <li>6.5 Engaged employees</li> <li>6.6 Expressing emotions</li> <li>6.7 Lack of communication</li> </ul>
<b>7. RESOURCEFULNESS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7.1 Responding faster</li> <li>7.2 Using conflict</li> <li>7.3 Energy in right place</li> <li>7.4 Networks</li> <li>7.5 Internal Change Programs</li> </ul>

	7.6 Mindfulness 7.7 Like-minded energy in peers 7.8 Collaboration 7.9 Self – protection 7.10 Help from peers 7.11 Trust in peers 7.12 Exercise 7.13 Confidantes you can trust 7.14 HR Support 7.15 Chairman/Board influence 7.16 Self 7.17 Direct Reports 7.18 Work/Life Balance
<b>8. CHANGE</b>	8.1 Resistance to change 8.2 Uncertainty 8.3 Inertia 8.4 Middle management 8.5 Self-protective actions 8.6 Transformation
<b>9. BUSINESS PERFORMANCE</b>	9.1 Respect for CEO / Leadership 9.2 Setting goals and expectations 9.3 Reflective practices 9.4 Impact on business
<b>10. COACHING</b>	10.1 Mentoring 10.2 Coaching embraced
<b>11. CEO</b>	11.1 Mental demands 11.2 Adult development 11.3 Role in positive/negative energy 11.4 Dealing with Tension 11.5 Personal pressures 11.6 Understanding mood of organisation
<b>12. TRUST</b>	

**Table 2        Thematic Analysis.**



The next consuming task was the process of data reduction through the use of coding. As mentioned, all interview transcripts were read a couple of times to formulate the main codes as outlined in **Table 3** (below):

Research Objectives	Main Codes	Abb.
1.To gain insight into the CEO/C-suite level of awareness and Interest in tension and energy in self and the organisation system.	1. AWARENESS 2. STRESS 3. TENSION 4. ANXIETY 5. ENERGY 6. ORGANISATION	AWA STR TEN ANX ENE ORG
2.To understand the resources CEOs (C-suite) rely on when faced with unhealthy energies and tensions in the organisation system.	7. RESOURCEFULNESS 8. CHANGE 9. BUSINESS PERFORMANCE	RES CHG BP
3.What could be drawn from the research as key learnings for the coaching profession and especially when coaching at the boundary when it comes to anxiety.	10. COACHING 11. CEO	COA CEO

**Table 3 - Main Codes for the Research Investigation.**

For the hard copy interview transcripts, Main Code abbreviations and colour coding was then used to capture relevant text. The next step in the analysis was to capture the top three Main Codes from each of the interview transcripts. This task was conducted manually and was denoted by frequency used. Descriptive Codes and Simultaneous Codes were then assigned to allow more discrete sifting of common content, data and various narrative. **Table 4** (below) outlined the top three main codes for each interview and their Descriptive Codes.

Participants	Top three MAIN CODES (Ranked in order of spoken frequency).	Descriptive Codes	Abbr./Code Num
Interview One	1. CHANGE 2. RESOURCEFULNESS 3. ENERGY	Resistance Uncertainty Networks Mindfulness Unhealthy Energy	Re / 8.1 Un / 8.2 Ne / 7.4 Mi / 7.6 UE / 5.2
Interview Two	1. AWARENESS 2. TENSION 3. RESOURCEFULNESS	Self Impact Negative Tension Mindfulness Peers	Se / 1.2 Im / 3.3 NT / 3.4 Mi / 7.6 P/7.10,7.11
Interview Three	1. TENSION 2. AWARENESS 3. ENERGY,RESOURCEFULNESS, COACHING	Conflict Impact Negative Tension Self Unhealthy Energy Peers Exercise Mentoring	Co / 3.1 Im / 3.3 NT / 3.4 Se / 1.2 UE / 5.2 P/7.10,7.11 Exe / 7.12 M / 10.1
Interview Four	1. TENSION 2. ENERGY 3. COACHING	Conflict Impact Negative Tension Existence Coaching	Co / 3.1 Im / 3.3 NT / 3.4 E / 5.4 C / 10.1
Interview Five	1. TENSION 2. ENERGY 3. ANXIETY	Conflict Impact Negative Tension Existence Existence	Co / 3.1 Im / 3.3 NT / 3.4 E/5.4,5.5,5.6 E /4.1,4.2,4.3
Interview Six	1. TENSION 2. CHANGE 3. ENERGY	Impact Negative Tension Uncertainty Unhealthy Energy	Im / 3.3 NT / 3.4 Un / 8.2 UE / 5.2
Interview Seven	1. TENSION 2. ENERGY 3. ORGANISATION	Negative Tension Unhealthy Energy Structures	NT / 3.4 UE / 5.2 ST / 6.1
Interview Eight	1. ANXIETY 2. TENSION 3. ENERGY	Existence Conflict Negative Tension Energy and change Unhealthy energy Healthy Energy	E/4.1,4.2,4,.3 Co/3.1 NT/ 3.4 E/5.1,5.2,5.3,5.4
Interview Nine	1. TENSION 2. ENERGY	Impact Negative Tension Existence	Im / 3.3 NT / 3.4 E/5.2,5.3,5.4

	3. RESOURCEFULNESS	Mindfulness	Mi/7.6, 10.1,10.2
Interview Ten	1. TENSION  2. ENERGY 3. BUSINESS PERFORMANCE	Conflict Impact Negative Tension Peers Existence Business Impact	Co/ 3.1 Im / 3.3 NT / 3.4 P/ 7.10,7.11 E / 5.4,5.2 BI/9.4,9.2,9.3
Interview Eleven	1. TENSION 2. AWARENESS 3. RESOURCEFULNESS	Negative Tension Impact Networks Peers	NT/ 3.4 Im / 3.3 N / 7.4 P / 7.10,
Interview Twelve	1. CHANGE 2. TENSION  3. RESOURCEFULNESS	Transformation Negative Tension Impact Peers Exercise	T /8.6, 8.2 NT / 3.4 Im / 3.3 P/7.10,7.11 Exe/7.12

**Table 4 – Top three MAIN CODES and Descriptive Codes**

Coded information was then transferred to tables that the researcher created. Where there was relevant narrative linked with the above main codes, this was extracted and organised into clusters. The top three main codes were created from the volume and frequency of comments made in discussion during the interviews. The three top main code “themes” were ranked based in order of the frequency discussed and theses were Tension, Energy and Awareness/Change (both ranked equally in third place).

The next step was to ‘make sense of those main themes and how they interrelated’ (Henley, 2009) through the use of data display matrices to visually capture emerging themes. The assembling of like-minded comments from the interviews was considered a critical part in getting to the point of completing the research as per the research questions proposed. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) noted

that 'displaying your condensed data in a systematic way has immense consequences for your understanding'.

These matrices showcased the findings extracted and drawn from interviews and would focus on the research questions to provide comprehensive data to support the provision of meaningful conclusions.

#### **4.3 Results of the investigation.**

In keeping with the approach of Miles and Huberman (1994), each research question was prepared for coding by organising and categorising the data as described above to produce the insights and themes. This ensured that each question was reported and analysed. The review on current thinking also presented a variety of answers. The respondents have confirmed some of them and had also shared new insights.

##### **1. How would you describe your perception of tension and energy in self and the organisation system right now?**

All respondents acknowledged both awareness and perceptions of tension and energy. Overwhelmingly, 100% of respondents had detailed their perceptions, experiences and impacts of tension in and on the organisation system. 100% of all respondents had identified sources of negative tension in the organisation system. When it came to tension in one's self, only 33 % of total respondents openly discussed this part of the question. 75% of females did not openly discuss their perceptions of tensions in self. Of particular note was that the majority of all participants could articulate that tension had an important place in the organisation system. These results were set out in **Table 5**:

<b>Research Objective 1 - TENSION</b>				
<b>Interviewees GROUP ONE</b>	<b>Level of awareness in self</b>	<b>Level of awareness in organisation</b>	<b>Personal interest in impact on both self and organisation</b>	<b>Verbatim Examples - sources of negative tension in the organisation system.</b>
1. AUB1	Not discussed	Very high	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. 'Trying to move away from hierarchical to new, fast and flexible structures'. 2. Resistance to and fear of internal change. 3. Culture.
2. AUB2	Very high	Very high	Yes	1. Financial stress. 2. Technical logistics. 3. Colleagues undermining each other. 4. Managing self.
6. UKB1	Not discussed	Very high	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. Uncertainty due to external and internal pressures. 2. Lack of org communication. 3. Leadership Denial.
11. SGB1	Not discussed	Very high	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. Internal individuals. 2. Executive Team.
<b>Interviewees GROUP TWO</b>	<b>Level of awareness in self</b>	<b>Level of awareness in organisation</b>	<b>Personal interest in impact on both self and organisation</b>	<b>Verbatim Examples - sources of negative tension in the organisation system.</b>
3. AUR1	Very high	Very high	Yes	1. Corporate HQ. 2. Managing self.
4. SGR1	Very high	Very high	Yes	1. Corporate HQ and Board. 2. Colleagues undermining each other. 3. Clarity in purpose and vision.
5. THR1	Not discussed	Very high	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. Cross-cultural challenges. 2. Colleagues undermining each other.

7. HKR1	Not discussed	Very high	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. Corporate HQ. 2. Culture. 3. Corporate politics. 4. Leadership Denial.
8. SGR2	Not discussed	Very high	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. Huge organisation transition.
9. INR1	Not discussed	Very high	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. Match between level of internal capability and business challenges.
10. UKR1	Not discussed	Very high	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. Culture. 2. CEO promoting confrontation. 3. Colleagues undermining each other.
12. AUR2	Very high	Very high	Yes	1. External business environment. 2. Internal restructuring challenges.

**Table 5 Research Objective 1 – TENSION**

The descriptive codes in Table 4 identified the situations and themes that were the main sources of tension for the CEO/C-suite. Some significant verbatim examples of these were set out in **Appendix A**.

In response to the second part of the question regarding ‘energy’, 92% of respondents detailed their perceptions, experience and impact of energy in the organisation system. 92% of respondents identified sources of negative energy in the organisation system. Only 50 % of total respondents openly discussed their perceptions of energy in self. 25% of females and 62% of males openly discussed their perception of energy in self. When compared to the tension category, the intensity of perceptions of energy in organisations was lower. Findings were set out in **Appendix B**.

Of particular interest in the findings was the awareness of the role of positive tensions in the workplace and their impact on business performance. 33% of these respondents went further and actively described their preferences to ignite and create conflict to produce these positive tensions to drive business and people performance. A significant majority qualified these responses in **Appendix C**.

## **2. In your experience, what role does tension and energy play and what is its impact in influencing people and business performance?**

All respondents 100% agreed that tension played a role in impacting people and business performance. 92% of respondents cited the importance of energy in people and business performance. The reasons provided for the latter were assembled, coded for themes and compared with the current literature. These findings are presented in **Table 6** (below):

### **THEME – ENERGY**

<b>Description of main theme</b>	<b>Review of current thinking</b>	<b>Results from respondents</b>	<b>Quotes from respondents</b>
Recognition of hidden energy/dynamics in organisation system	Whittington (2012) took the view that 'many business do lose their competitive advantage, or suffer crippling inertia, because of the 'hidden dynamics' working through the system.'	92% - yes 8% - no	AUB1 - 'Energy is also like water in that it is looking for the path of least resistance.'
Recognition of linkages between organisation change and energy.	Whittington (2012) also noted that organisation systems were 'ever changing, full of visible and invisible forces in between the parts, forces that create dynamics and behaviours.'	42% - yes 58 % - no	AUB1 - 'People inside an organisation are either sub-consciously or consciously very aware of the energy in an organisation.'

			AUR1 - 'Because the underlying energy can then be...keep your head down because we know there is a potential headcount cut coming...where mediocrity becomes the key for survival.'
Recognition of importance of harnessing energy to impact performance.	Whittington (2012) stated that leaders 'need to be alert to the energies across the whole system, working in service of the purpose and coherence of the whole system.'	67% - no 33% - yes	SGR1 - 'My perception of tension and energy is that the key things you are always trying to do is that you are trying to harness that sense of purpose. Usually tension and energy is borne around sense of purpose. So clearly the tension and energy if harnessed is a massively positive thing.'
			UKR1 - 'I do personally think that women leaders would make a big difference to bringing down the negative tensions and to harness the energy and passion of the organisation.'
Recognition of linkages between anxiety, leadership and energy.	Rosen (2008) stated 'your ability to manage your own anxiety directly affects your ability to help other manage theirs. It determines how effective you are in unleashing and mobilising the creative energy inside your organisation.'	75% - no 25% - yes	SGR2 - 'It is important that we turn that anxiety into positive energy and then paint a positive picture of how that positive energy can help that individual and the company.'

**Table 6      Thematic analysis of energy.**



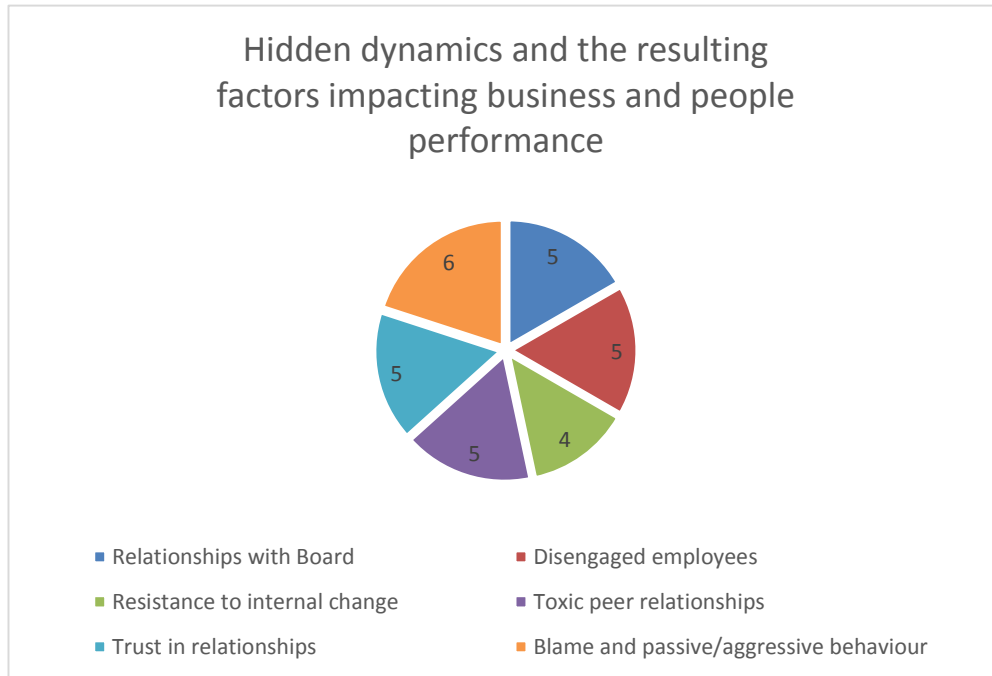
### **3. What clues could these factors provide in making sense of how to enable high performance in self and the organisation?**

There was an overwhelming 100% agreement of either tensions and/or energy impacting high performance in the organisation. Specific factors impacting business performance are highlighted in **Figure 5**. Pie charts were considered visually impactful in showing the percentage and range of proportional data in the respondent's answers.

What was revealed as the main theme impacted by both tensions and energy lay predominantly in the business relationships. These findings were supported by an excerpt from the review on current thinking – as noted by Hawkins (2011):

‘No longer do the main challenges in organisations lie in the people or in the parts but in the interfaces and relationships between people, teams, functions and different stakeholder needs.’

**Figure 5 Factors impacting business and people performance.**

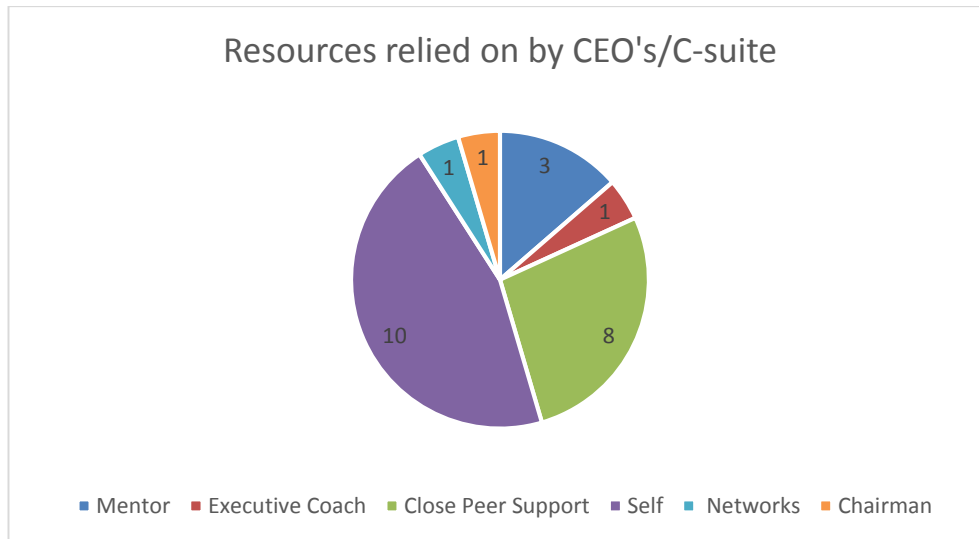


**4. What are the resources you currently rely on when faced with unhealthy tensions / energy? How do you stay true to yourself?**

Only 1 respondent raised and reported on the benefits of having an executive coach for specific personal development. An overwhelming 83% of respondents primarily relied on their own self as their primary resource when faced with unhealthy tensions and energy. 92% of respondents also reported on having more than one resource that they currently relied on. The breakdown is revealed in

**Figure 6:**

**Figure 6**      **Resources utilised by CEO/C-suite.**



The data revealed that 25% of the respondents had relied on mentors for confidential career advice and guidance. Some of these respondents had confirmed that relying on mentors was “dictated more by the mentee’s needs for future career development than specific issues in the present job” (Hawkins & Smith, 2006). One respondent relied on executive coaching to focus on achieving immediate objectives and on perceived developmental areas.

##### **5. How could you leverage that awareness for yourself and your organisation?**

###### **What would the individual and business benefits be?**

There was an overwhelming 100% agreement of leveraging the awareness. All respondents were varied in what the individual and business benefits could be and this was showcased in **Table 7** (below):

Interviewees GROUP ONE	Acknowledgement of leveraging awareness for self	Acknowledgement of leveraging awareness for organisation	Examples of resourcefulness reported	Verbatim examples
1. AUB1	Very high	Very high	7.19 Lead by example 7.1 Responding faster 7.7 Like-minded energy in peers	1. 'You have also got to try and set clear expectations in an ever changing landscape, you have also got to try and understand your people.' 2. 'I still think you have to lead by example. You still have to be faster and better than your own team.' 3. 'Organisations talk about it's OK to fail gracefully but none of this is practiced in organisations. This is the real hypocrisy...or the real energy destroyer.'
2. AUB2	Very high	Very high	7.19 Lead by example 7.7 Like-minded energy in peers 7.13 Confidantes you can trust 7.6 Mindfulness	1. 'When your people don't come to you as a leader, you're not leading anymore. And I have this saying...if you are leading and nobody is following you, then you are out for a walk by yourself.'
6. UKB1	Not mentioned	High	7.6 Internal Change Programs	1. Uncertainty due to external and internal pressures. 2. Lack of org communication 3. Leadership Denial
11. SGB1	Not mentioned	Very high	1.1 Impact on organisation. 3.4 Negative Tension 7.17 Direct Reports	1. 'There will always be ups and downs in being part of an executive team and there will always be tension and these things happening. As long as we can manage them and talk about it freely, then we can be a stronger team.'
Interviewees GROUP TWO	Acknowledgement of leveraging awareness for self	Acknowledgement of leveraging awareness for organisation	Examples of resourcefulness reported	Verbatim Examples

3. AUR1	Very high	Very high	7.6 Mindfulness 7.16 Self	1. 'When I was a younger CEO, it really felt like it was all about me...but in the last 4 years I have started getting better at realising it's actually what I cause others to do is actually what I am meant to be doing every day.'
4. SGR1	Very high	Very high	9.2 Setting goals and expectations 9.3 Reflective Practices 9.4 Impact on business	1. 'The other classic symptom I always watch out for is when you get too many disputes, like lower down the chain. This is a classic where objectives at this level didn't cascade to this level. So these guys are managing the message and the others are living the nightmare of how they are going to do it. When you see lots of disputes at that level, then something is wrong. There is a sense you have the wrong tension going on.'
5. THR1	Not mentioned	Very high	9.4 Impact on business 7.8 Collaboration 7.11 Trust in Peers	1. 'It really is around providing an environment where the employees trust you and you have to provide an extremely consistent interpretation of the tension and challenging the construction of that.'
7. HKR1	Not mentioned	Very high	7.8 Collaboration	
8. SGR2	Not mentioned	Very high	9.2 Setting goals and expectations 7.19 Lead by example	1. 'And as a leader you need to have the tools, the EQ and the IQ to get things done...and so you need to have one heck of a toolbox!'
9. INR1	Not mentioned	Very high	7.19 Lead by example 7.16 Self	1. 'Ask yourself this simple question - is what I am doing really aligned with my purpose in life? And if it is not, then what am I doing?'

10. UKR1			11.4 Dealing with tension	1. 'And I say business critical because positive energy obviously brings the creativity, the innovation, the entrepreneurship, risk taking...and they are the positive sides of that energy. But the tension, that toxic tension or that negative tension...even there is a positive part to that negative energy as people are thinking outside the box all of the time...coming out with solutions that are unthinkable in most other organisations.'
12. AUR2	Very high	Very high	1.1 Impact on organisation. 7.17 Direct Reports 7.8 Collaboration 7.19 Lead by Example	1. 'For me, the most important part of the organisation is the people. I rely very heavily on those in my Executive Team and they all really co-operate well with each other. For me, they are my sounding board and they are all the guys that are delivering all the strategy that we locked in and are close to the grassroots level in the organisation.'

**Table 7      Leveraging awareness to create benefits for organisation and self.**

In summary, the research investigation found in the sample population there was predominantly a very high level of awareness of both tensions and energy in the organisation system. There appeared to be less interest in discussing the perceptions of tension and energy at the level of individual self. Only 33% of respondents openly discussed personal aspects of self-awareness and self-regulation when it came to understanding their impact on the organisation. This is in keeping with the review on current thinking, where Sutton (2010) found that

‘the most effective bosses devote enormous effort to understanding how their moods, quirks, skills and actions affect their follower’s performance and humanity’. Whilst the in-depth interview processes did garner valuable insights into the experiences of respondents, the researcher was aware that the nature of these topics relating to self could be sensitive. As stated in the Manager as Investigator Guide (2009):

“It may be difficult for the respondent to discuss these issues either because of social sensitivity or because of lack of internal awareness of them or their relevance.”

When it came to the resources relied on to deal with the hidden dynamics, there was an overwhelming reliance on self as the primary resource. Only one respondent noted the use and benefits of an executive coach as a primary resource. 25% of respondents relied on mentoring as a primary resource. This was an unexpected outcome for the researcher and made for a poignant and interesting observation in itself, especially when thinking about how this impacted the researcher’s ability to respond fully to the stated third research objective:

3. What could be drawn from the research as key learnings for the coaching profession and especially when coaching at the boundary when it comes to anxiety.

These findings confirmed the review on current thinking, where Dumont (2010) noted that mentoring was beyond coaching and stated ‘it is the passing along of knowledge, wisdom and lessons, some learned the hard way.’ Dumont’s observations also confirmed:

“CEO mentoring is not necessarily new, but given that it is a discreet relationship and activity, it is not widely discussed. The CEO must often act with limited information among scores of hidden agendas.”

The one respondent that reported the benefits of quality executive coaching did point to what was covered in the review on current thinking. In particular, Maxwell (2009) concluded that ‘coaches must therefore be prepared to work with the whole human whilst maintaining a focus on the agreed contract.’

In summary, the key findings for the research objectives are outlined below and are to be discussed in the next chapter.

1. That the CEO/C-suite does possess a level of awareness and interest in both tensions and energy as hidden dynamics in the organisation system.
2. Tension – both positive and negative – could be harnessed to drive higher performance in people and the business.
3. There was less awareness and discussion on energy as a hidden dynamic in both the organisation system and impact on self.
4. That the overwhelming majority of the CEO/C-suite relied primarily on self as their primary resource for dealing with unhealthy energies and tensions in the organisation system.
5. Mentoring, for a small number of respondents, was relied on more than executive coaching. Only one respondent discussed in detail the benefits of executive coaching.



## **Chapter Five – Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Implication of findings to the research investigation.**

This chapter aims to provide clarity to the reader around the insights, themes and patterns that emerged from the findings and analysis presented in Chapter Four.

The researcher will re-visit the five interview research questions and reveal how this investigation had enabled the questions to be answered. Whilst the researcher had started to draw conclusions at the beginning of the data collection, it was also held from the start that the role of personal opinions and biased experiences would be kept top of mind; in not influencing both the results and the recommendations. Having said that, this was clearly not a purely objective analysis as it was based on the experiences of the respondents, all of which would have garnered their own personal biases. The non-scientific recommendations revealed there was much more empirical research to be conducted in these topics and the exploratory nature of the topics would lend themselves to confirming their importance in the future world of business.

The researcher believed there were no reasons to assume that the study sample was not representative of the general CEO/C-suite population. Finally, the merits of the transferability of findings could be considered minimal given the sample size and this is left to the reader.

To recap, this investigation had three research objectives:

Research Objectives
1.To gain insight into the CEO/C-suite level of awareness and Interest in tension and energy in self and the organisation system.
2.To understand the resources CEOs (C-suite) rely on when faced with unhealthy energies and tensions in the organisation system.
3.What could be drawn from the research as key learnings for the coaching profession and especially when coaching at the boundary when it comes to anxiety.

**Table 8    Research objectives**

This investigation also set out to answer the following five questions. The conclusions that can be garnered from these questions were summarised below:

**1. How would you describe your perception of tension and energy in self and the organisation system right now?**

All respondents acknowledged with a very high degree of consistency both their awareness and perceptions of tension and energy in the context of the investigation. With regard to tension, whilst all respondents noted it played an important role in the workplace, only two respondents could articulate how it was raised and dealt with as an agenda item at the leadership table as a regular discussion. Findings confirmed there was more comfort in addressing organisation tension than at the personal level of self.

Expression and intensity of awareness was predominantly higher in the organisation system than in one's self which suggested to the researcher there is also less vulnerability in referring to the wider organisation system.

50% of the respondents had reported their views on anxiety and 25% articulated what this had meant in the organisation system. None of the respondents delved into the impact and perceptions of anxiety in self.

There was clearly more interest in articulating tensions in the organisation system as a hidden dynamic and less interest in seeing this through the energy lens. As outlined in the findings, 100% of all respondents were able to describe the sources of negative tension, without prompting from the researcher. 42% of respondents were able to cite sources of positive tension, without prompting from the researcher. There was clearly a marked difference in expressing tension and energy as a manifestation of the organisation system and less of impact on self and therefore how to self-manage. 75% of females did not openly discuss their perceptions of tensions in self.

In contrast, 33% of males were interested in creating conflict and articulated this as a necessary source of achieving high performance. On reflection, whilst the researcher appreciated the pros and cons of creating both positive and negative tensions to drive people and business performance, there did indeed seem to be an interesting correlation here between how successful this 'creating conflict' could be manifested and the CEO/ C-suite's capacity (as in their adult development) to achieve this with maturity, mindfulness and self-awareness in their actions. This is in keeping with the literature on adult development. As noted by Mehegan (1994) in his views on Kegan's theory:

“Research into adult development confirmed that being a leader was tough; and especially when sitting at the ‘third order.’ Somehow development must allow for one to modulate their own anxiety, whilst being aware of alleviating the anxiety of those in the organisation system”.

The findings also confirmed for the researcher what was found in the review on current thinking – namely that the study of energy at work does remain a relatively young field of research. Whilst there was an acknowledgement of the working of energy in the organisations system, the majority of respondents did not describe how this could be harnessed in a positive way to ignite business performance.

## **2. In your experience, what role does tension and energy play and what is its impact in influencing people and business performance?**

Verbatim examples from some of the respondents certainly confirmed what was presented in the review on current thinking. What was interesting in these findings though was that when it came to energy, only 33% of respondents acknowledged/stated the importance of harnessing energy to impact business performance. Of particular interest was a respondent quote:

“My perception of tension and energy is that they key things you are always trying to do is that you are trying to harness that sense of purpose. Usually tension and energy is borne around sense of purpose. So clearly the tension and energy, if massively harnessed, is a massively positive thing. “

This was in keeping with the current literature where Dutton, (2003) as cited by Bruch & Vogel, (2011) stated that energy is ‘the fuel that makes great organisations run’, describing it as a renewable resource that benefits both organisations and its members.

### **3. What clues could these factors provide in making sense of how to enable high performance in self and the organisation?**

Perhaps the most striking feature of this research question was the wide variety of responses that respondents shared in making sense of these hidden dynamics personally as a leader. This led to the conclusion that addressing the hidden dynamics is not a neat, 'one size fits all' scenario. Again, current literature also supported this notion and the importance of linking adult development with the complexities of an accelerating world and the respective view of how one sees themselves and their contribution in the business world. With regards to adult development, it was noted that only 2 respondents reflected and commented on what these hidden dynamics could mean for their own self-development. The majority of respondents spent little time articulating their own development needs to support personal and business performance.

### **4. What are the resources you currently rely on when faced with unhealthy tensions / energy? How do you stay true to yourself?**

Whilst it was clear that every CEO/C-suite experience would inevitably have differences (and as evidenced in the template analysis process), what was most striking was that a clear majority of respondents all relied on themselves as the primary resource when faced with unhealthy tensions and energy. This result was very telling for the researcher – and for the Executive Coaching profession – particularly where one of the aims for this research investigation was to explore what could be drawn from the research as key learnings for the coaching profession. This part of the research objectives therefore could not be answered as the majority of the sample size relied on both self and other forms of resource. Only one respondent reported on the actual benefits of executive coaching. It was clear from the data that executive coaching as a chosen form of executive resource

was still in its infancy. This is in keeping with the review on current thinking where Nagel (2014) stated:

“Although business coaching has been in existence since the early 90’s as an organised profession, it’s still in its infancy. This newness makes it more challenging to find a good fit when looking to engage a business coach.”

## **5. How could you leverage that awareness for yourself and your organisation?**

### **What would the individual and business benefits be?**

Whilst there was overwhelming awareness of what business benefits could be internally in the organisation, what was interesting was that there were only 33% respondents that articulated its impact on both the external market and their competitors. The researcher was left with a strong felt sense of the overwhelming internal organisation demands faced by the CEO/ C-suite, as there was much less shared on how this impacted their role and influence as a leader in the external market. Whilst the awareness was there, it was clear from the data that there was much attention being paid to the dynamics of internal organisation structures, roles and rules. This supported the review on current thinking where the Korn Ferry Institute ([www.kornferryinstitute.com](http://www.kornferryinstitute.com)) stated:

“For today’s CEO, creating the right organisation would have to be less about structures and rules and more about capabilities in their talent and the culture.”

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The topics of hidden dynamics and their impact on organisations and people in business was still very much in its infancy as a body of research. Therefore, the

researcher could see great potential and opportunity in further investigations into highlighting and creating stronger linkages into these relatively unexplored territories. It was clear that research that could build beyond this current exploration and into building theory based on further empirical evidence would be invaluable for both the CEO/C-suite and the Executive Coach in the service of others.

The following five key recommendations are put forward from this investigation:

1. CEO's / C-suite would benefit from increasing their personal knowledge in these topics, in particular enhancing their abilities to work actively with, reflect on and talk openly about the hidden dynamics in organisations, so as to 'unleash' business potential and create an environment where 'emotions, thoughts and actions can flow and spread in the organisation.' (Bruch&Vogel,2011) As confirmed in the review on current thinking, the world of tomorrow needs a far more noticeable shift in leadership skills that incorporated these intangible forces as a key factor of success in the overall CEO's / C-suite responsibilities.
2. The practice of mindfulness was quoted by only a few of the respondents in the sample as a means of being present, staying anchored in the "here and now", thereby allowing them to reflect and pay more attention as a leader to what was actually in front of them in their roles, i.e. the tangibles and the intangibles. For the researcher, staying with mindfulness in the service of others was key to both strong and sustainable leadership in these challenging business times. It was clear from the research that stressed people are not available and that whilst quick 'stress' responses can result in quick fixes, the clarity and steady calm in thinking and reflecting about

the bigger picture could be put to one side. Therefore it would be considered worthwhile for the CEO / C-suite to adopt mindfulness practices when they are faced with the daily challenges of leading in a complex and dynamic world. This could be something explored personally with the expertise and guide of an Executive Coach.

3. The CEO/C-suite could benefit from thinking about the merits of securing an executive coach and especially for engaging in those sensitive developmental conversations that they cannot have with peers or family. Whilst it is acknowledged from the research investigation that executives could lead quite lonely lives at the top, the CEO/C-suite cannot afford not to think about and manage their own personal development, whilst navigating the daily tsunami of issues being faced. Working with an executive coach equipped to build both a safe environment and a trusted relationship could facilitate focussed learning in specific capabilities and a better understanding of the social awareness and self-management that is required as a leader in organisation settings. This was indeed highlighted in the literature review on current thinking, where Keller & Price (2010) came to the conclusion that the CEO's role is unique and 'provides cues for everyone else in the organisation' as to what really matters.' Being successful in a CEO/C-suite role nowadays should be about working closer with employees to better understand the intangibles operating in an organisation. Taking time to really understand the value of people, communicating in their environment, thereby appreciating what matters. People are the brands, deliver the ideas and face the customers. Peltier (2010) also stated that with the support of executive coaching, 'leaders needed to be able to grow as a result of their developmental difficulties.'



4. That the findings of this research investigation be made available to executive coaches to raise the awareness of the ongoing challenges faced when working at this executive level. In particular, the challenge of working with both the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of the CEO/C-suite role and the organisation goals. Executive coaches should note that working at meeting the objectives of the latter (i.e. the interpersonal aspects) often requires working with the former. (i.e. the intrapersonal aspects)
5. Whilst the hidden dynamics in organisations system are both a complex and under-researched phenomenon, it is recommended that further academic and exploratory investigation in these topics be carried out. Whilst the tangible areas of leadership and CEO business challenges have been researched extensively, there is much opportunity to further explore these topics. In particular, the skills and knowledge required to successfully navigate and harness the business benefits of the hidden dynamics.

## **Chapter Six – Reflection**

### **6.1 Personal reflections on conducting the research process**

This chapter provides a critical reflection on key learnings and observations from completing this investigation. This research investigation set out to understand the impact of underlying tensions and energy on the CEO /C suite and how they best kept true to both themselves and the organization system. Had the objective of what I had set out to do been achieved? The evidence for this question will draw on both the professional and personal experiences of the researcher and the findings produced from the phenomenological data.

On one level, the researcher had gained a lot of new knowledge in these fields and interest in the topics had grown exponentially as the researcher progressed. On another level, what was revealed in the review on current thinking were both the cross-connections and complexity in the literature that definitely would warrant future academic interest and investigation on the part of the researcher.

The research was primarily concerned with uncovering themes and patterns and not solely concerned with testing specific research hypothesis. The research was designed to enable the creation of a fresh and different view on the impact of the intangibles and underlying dynamics in organizations. As mentioned, the long-held personal beliefs of the researcher into the underlying dynamics in organization systems was based on previous corporate experience with CEO's / C-suite where, quite frankly, the majority were not interested in acknowledging these dynamics. This meant that the researcher had to work very hard at making sure those opinions and personal bias were strictly contained and not playing a part in the interpretation of findings. Whilst this was a small sample size, the researcher was pleased that a significant majority of CEO's/ C-suite were genuinely interested in

the underlying dynamics, concerned about their personal roles in influencing and that it was not the sole domain nor handed over to the HR department to 'go and fix it '. Having said this (and as previously mentioned) it must be noted that this flexible, unstructured approach and small sample size does increase the likelihood of less objective interpretation by the researcher. The researcher was confident though that the findings do provide some indication of patterns and themes emerging from the topics and upon which to base future investigations. Therefore, these factors clearly prevent the outcomes from this investigation as being purely conclusive.

In addition to enhancing knowledge and appreciating the academic linkages in the topics, the project also provided new technical learnings in the art of qualitative research. From the outset, the researcher's exposure was confined to the content presented in the introductory learning modules of Stage 3 of the MSc. Having acquired a distaste for statistics, courtesy of secondary school, this had led to the initial limiting assumption that the researcher would not enjoy the likelihood of diving into detailed statistical applications and techniques. This notion very much then determined the appropriateness of a research topic that would best support the gathering and analysis of rich phenomenological data. Given the researcher's strong creative streak and passion for both words and people, this chosen qualitative research simply felt more achievable and thus more enjoyable at the time. Interviewing was a preferred option because 'the researcher feels most at ease with this technique.' (King & Horrocks, 2010) Apart from being purely driven and motivated about the topics that have quite literally both fascinated and bewildered the researcher for many years, the overall research investigation required an incredible deal of effort in time management and discipline at every stage of the investigation. The surprising finding from all of this was that elements

of the investigation certainly played to the researcher's more spontaneous, curious and creative side.

What started out as a determination to complete the MSc had culminated in a completely unexpected outcome – the determination to pursue even further opportunities to conduct qualitative research. The researcher is also convinced from this rigorous process that these are both valid and valuable topics for corporate workplaces of the future.

The main value of this research project lies in the outcomes of the project, where linkages in topics reveal the bigger picture of the impact of the underlying dynamics in organization systems that are rarely brought together in current literature and rarely discussed seriously at the leadership table. The review on current thinking took an incredible and considerable amount of time to complete and revealed topics that were both complex in nature and representative of relatively young fields of research. Having said that, the review on current thinking presented definitely supported the findings. This definitely ignited the researcher's interest to stay on top of the topics as an area of continued professional expertise. The initial wider approach adopted in the literature review allowed for a number of deviations from the core themes and had contributed significantly to the understanding of the topics areas.

As mentioned, the literature search initially took a very broad view in the beginning as the researcher (with an ENTP Myers Briggs profile) was constantly sidetracked and excited by all the other possible angles to be pursued. One particular area of interest in the beginning was the relevance of brain science and how the brain responded to anxiety. The enthusiasm for everything based on discovering new angles, minus the focus, led the researcher to spend months in

scoping the project and formulating the appropriate research investigation. The researcher was always interested in nailing a topic that was both intellectually stimulating and matching my passion for people and energy in organizations. As mentioned, the researcher was adamant from the start that qualitative research would be the preferred option, as this would lend itself to the researcher's passion for words over numbers. The process of the research investigation could be best described as a disciplined and rigorous exercise that really demanded the researcher's constant attention on the project plan and in delivering robust outcomes at each chapter. There was an enormous sense of achievement derived from each step in the research process.

The project has no doubt enhanced the confidence in the researcher's personal identity and stance as an executive coach. There was a renewed and heightened awareness gained of the sensitivities in coaching at senior leadership levels and new awareness when faced with the unspoken anxieties and underlying dynamics that are inherent in organization systems. The researcher is better equipped at this level and in the service of others.

As mentioned briefly, a key learning from this investigation was completely unexpected. A new found interest and genuine curiosity for conducting research was gained and has sparked a potential interest in conducting an exercise of this nature further down the track. The research project had eliminated some personal bias in the beginning where the researcher was convinced it would be quite arduous, bland and scientific. The analysis of the data did lend itself to more creative and exploratory endeavors on the part of the researcher and played to the researcher's strengths – namely in generating meaning via noticing patterns and themes, seeing plausibility, making contrasts and comparisons and in finding

intervening variables. There was much gained in realizing that thoughtful creativity had a place in the research process.

Am satisfied with both my methods and approach employed to conduct this research investigation. With the benefit of more personal time to pursue, I would definitely have pursued a larger sample size. Having said that, the sample size did warrant a considerable amount of time in transcribing and the researcher would have had to pursue a larger sample on an even longer, full-time basis. At this stage, it must also be noted that the objectivity of the researcher is a factor for consideration. What this means is that the nature of the flexible interview design, the data gathering process, the considered choices made in both coding and thematic analysis and the subsequent selected themes all reflect some of the hallmarks of the influence of the researcher.

Whilst the study of energy and tensions in organizations is a relatively young field of research, it is definitely the way of the future and this has really generated much future anticipation and curiosity for the researcher.

## **6.2 Commentary on achievement of personal objectives**

And so how did I go on the personal objectives that I had set myself? As expected, I did find the rigor and discipline required to keep on top of the details and achieving the academic flow quite draining. Having said that, I did start to enjoy it immensely once I completed the review on current thinking and could see the light at the end of the tunnel. My reflections on the extent to which the objectives were achieved are outlined:

**Objective 1: Developing expertise is carrying our qualitative interviews with composure.** This objective was achieved. Participants had noted how much they

had enjoyed the interview, the nature of the questions asked and this is reflected in the interview transcripts. Some had commented that it had heightened their own personal interest in the topics under investigation.

Having said that, clearly, the main challenge in this investigation was in getting the focus for the review on current thinking. There is a period in the beginning where it is a challenge to stay on topic as new academic literature and thinking comes to light. If I reflect on what I would do differently, I would get even more focused on the objectives of the investigation at the outset. The lack of clear focus in the beginning as a researcher was initially of considerable personal concern, though my passion and genuine curiosity in the intangibles of working life and the leaders' impact definitely kept me going. Putting a stake in the ground when it came to thinking about the intangibles and the hidden dynamics sometimes felt like I was trying to nail jelly to a wall. Perseverance and patience were my constant companions throughout this process.

**Objective 2: With an ENTP profile, wanting to embrace my less preferred sensing part.** This objective was achieved. The researcher was pleasantly surprised in the opportunity to work quietly and in isolation for many lengthy periods of time to complete the requirements. Initially, new career demands and a new location at that time meant that the researcher had to defer and complete Stage 3 requirements on her own and after all the researcher's MSc cohort had graduated. I think the best outcome personally was in getting connected with my introverted side and liking it and realizing that it is a very important aspect of my personality, which needs to be honored and better balanced with my extroversion. Whilst there was growing enjoyment in the solitary nature of the reflections, there was a realization of the value of the unwavering support of the researcher's MSc supervision group and the inherent joys of all being together in the same boat at

a point in time. This aspect was definitely missed during the completion of the research investigation.

**Objective 3: Further knowledge in the fields of organization energy, the role of anxiety in organization settings and the impact of systems thinking.** This was definitely achieved. Now sitting with the contentment of having completed this research investigation, the researcher is left with a felt mixture of relief, excitement and a small amount of frustration, all at the same time. The relief emanated from completing an extensive review conducted on current thinking and how it both informed and confirmed the key research objectives. The excitement was simply about completing the investigation. The frustration lies in knowing there is so much more empirical research and evidence required in these topics to garner the attention of those who truly need it most – the leaders of today who are leading. With this extensive body of knowledge, there is a passion in further exploring how this knowledge can truly help leaders have a crisis before they have a crisis.



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## Appendices

## Appendix A – Sources of Tension

MAIN CODE – TENSION		
Interviewees GROUP ONE	Descriptive code	Verbatim Examples
1. AUB1	1. Negative Tension	1. 'So there is a fundamental conflict between the CEO wanting faster and more urgent momentum, particularly towards change, and that means productivity improvements, increased efficiency.'
2. AUB2	1. Impact 2. Negative Tension	1. 'And I know what is going on inside of me, and I know whether the tension is positive or negative. ' 2. 'And I think that is another important point, that tension can be good and can drive energy and drive productivity, but it can also be negative and destructive. And when it is negative and destructive and coming from within, it manifests itself externally and I've seen it myself...when I'm under stress and negative tension, it actually permeates the team...and we all end up not having such a great day.'
6. UKB1	1. Impact 2. Negative Tension 3. Business Performance	1. 'Tension and energy, as you describe it, probably exists at many, many levels of the organisation. Some of them are more explicit, and some of them are more implicit.' 2. 'What I do believe is that it is very important to try and understand where those tensions come from and where those energies come from.' 3. 'So, I just think that the tensions that probably exist everywhere, if not addressed, are going to directly impact the results of an organisation, people's engagement and the possibility for quality collaboration and you have a bad impact on the results.'
11. SGB1	1. Negative Tension	1. 'But on the other hand, tension can be negative. And negative tension needs to be dealt with very quickly before it comes divisive and disruptive.'
Interviewees GROUP TWO	Descriptive code	Verbatim Examples

3. AUR1	1. Conflict 2. Impact 3. Negative Tension	1. 'The underlying tensions are really important and to be honest with you...I actually cultivate them...I like cultivating them and burning platforms'. 2. 'Underlying tensions if well managed, are the lifeblood of cultural growth.' 3. 'If I look at other parts of US headquarters, the suppression of underlying tensions is actually leading to big dysfunctions.'
4. SGR1	1. Conflict 2. Impact 3. Negative Tension	1. 'In terms of leadership style, at times I will inject tension into the leadership team and not in a destructive way, but more in terms of - hey, this is what this really means.' 2. 'So clearly the tension, if harnessed, is a massively positive thing.' 3. 'There are always tell-tale signs when stress and negative tensions are creeping into the organisation.'
5. THR1	1. Conflict 2. Impact 3. Negative Tension	1. 'I enjoy confrontations and I really enjoy conflict because this for me shows the passion and the energy.' 2. 'I encourage tension and admire whether we can argue and whether we can debate in a constructive manner from a position of trust and respect.' 3. 'It is essentially not good if members of my leadership team are at loggerheads with each other.'
7. HKR1	1. Negative tension 2. Positive tension	1. 'I think there is a fair bit....I mean tension...and this is an interesting company in terms of the culture.' 2. 'It was also interesting too because in lowering some of that tension and in opening yourself up with these barriers, you actually get more co-operation from elsewhere.'
8. SGR2	1. Conflict 2. Negative Tension	1. 'I basically work as a CEO for a private company, where the owner of that company is my boss and ....many people on the leadership team are his old friends.....his most trusted people. So taking them on this journey and offering in cases where they don't want to be part of this to go is what I am in the middle of right now.' 2. 'Getting people out of the defensive mode into proactive mode, supportive mode, from B to C is a pretty tough undertaking.'



9. INR1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Impact</li> <li>2. Negative Tension</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 'I think in terms of the tension I would say that there are tensions which are really opposing forces but opposing forces which can actually contribute to business roles as well as people's roles. But the trick there is that you can hold those opposing forces together.'</li> <li>2. 'I think there is always going to be sort of ups and downs over a period of time, and issues with stability...and what a sense of tension and energy allows you to do is to live through your ups and downs cycle and pick things up when required and then to a high level when you are already on a high.'</li> </ul>
10. UKR1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conflict</li> <li>2. Impact</li> <li>3. Negative Tension</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 'The CEO made a public statement that he liked confrontation and challenge by design, and would offer no apology about it.'</li> <li>2. 'But the tension, that toxic tension or that negative tension...even there is a positive part to that negative energy as people are thinking outside of the box all of the time...coming out with solutions that are unthinkable in most other organisations.'</li> </ul>
12. AUR2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Negative tension</li> <li>2. Impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 'Outwardly, in terms of how you portray yourself, how you communicate and how you socialise with the team, you work very hard not to show any negative signs of the pressure.'</li> <li>2. 'If I take our example, the more people have tension, stress and uncertainty...there are a number of things that can potentially happen. You can have people going into protectionist, bubble-type mode around their teams.'</li> </ul>

## Appendix B – Research Objective 1 - ENERGY

<b>Research Objective 1 – ENERGY</b>				
<b>Interviewees GROUP ONE</b>	<b>Level of awareness in self</b>	<b>Level of awareness in organisation</b>	<b>Personal interest in impact on both self and organisation</b>	<b>Quotes detailing sources of positive and negative energy</b>
1. AUB1	Not discussed	Very high	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. 'People put their energy into either resistance...or actively getting on board the new regime.' 2. 'Resistance is the tummy factor of an organisation...the hardest thing to move.'
2. AUB2	Very high	Very high	Yes	1. ' Your team at a subconscious level do tap into your energy. So if your energy is positive, they embrace it. When you are in a bad space and your energy is negative, I can see how the whole team ends up being grumpy, the day drags and you are not enjoying yourself.'
6. UKB1	Not discussed	High	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. 'Negative energies that are unhealthy for an organisation, have the possibility to create a lot of waste and therefore if not addressed can be really damaging for an organisation.'
11. SGB1	Not discussed	Not discussed	Not expressed or mentioned	N/A
<b>Interviewees GROUP TWO</b>	<b>Level of awareness in self</b>	<b>Level of awareness in organisation</b>	<b>Personal interest in impact on both self and organisation</b>	<b>Quotes detailing sources of positive and negative energy</b>
3. AUR1	Very high	Very high	Yes	1. ' The underlying energy can then be...keep your head down because we know there is a potential headcount cut coming...where mediocrity becomes the key for survival.'

4. SGR1	Very high	Very high	Yes	1. 'Quite often, when things are really moving and you have this vibrant energy around you, what you can sometimes find is that the people above you can get quite destabilised and nervous because they are not really in tune with what is happening day to day'.
5. THR1	Not discussed	High	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. 'What I think separates really good employees from the rest is that passion and energy.' 2. 'And when you do find them you have to polish them and embrace them and showcase and role model their behaviours rapidly throughout the rest of the organisation.'
7. HKR1	High	High	Yes	1. 'There is not much around organised process from an HR standpoint and that tends to drive the way people act; which to be perfectly honest is driving the energies in the wrong sort of place.'
8. SGR2	Not discussed	Very High	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. 'It is important that we turn that anxiety into positive energy and then paint a positive picture of how that positive energy can help that individual and the company.'
9. INR1	Not discussed	High	Expressed interest in impact on Organisation only	1. 'When the pressures are too great, there can be problems in leaders getting the balance right in taking themselves along and the organisation along with it. And that imbalance often causes, in a way, actions or errors of judgement which can be of a liability, particularly when you are trying to create a positive side of energy.'

10. UKR1	Very high	Very high	Yes	1. 'And I say business critical because positive energy obviously brings the creativity, the innovation, the entrepreneurship, risk taking....and they are the positive sides of that energy.'
12. AUR2	Very high	Very high	Yes	<p>1. 'Outwardly, in terms of how you portray yourself, how you communicate and how you socialise with the team, you work very hard not to show any negative signs of the pressure.'</p> <p>2. 'It is trying to come across as business as usual, we have got some challenges. Let us move forward and let us be positive about this as an organisation. And this has been a part of my work as well as that of the executive team.'</p>

## Appendix C – Research Objective 1 – Tension and the awareness/role of conflict.

Interviewees GROUP ONE	Examples (verbatim) detailing the acknowledgement of creating conflict to drive positive tensions.	References to current thinking in literature.
1. AUB1	1. 'You have to like a little bit of conflict and occasionally you have to call it out'.	
2. AUB2	1. 'As the CEO I have realised that any tension within myself - and I'll make reference to what that kind of tension is - actually has a significant impact on the organisation.'	Sutton (2010) found that 'the most effective bosses devote enormous effort to understanding how their moods, quirks, skills and actions affect their follower's performance and humanity.'
6. UKB1	1. 'And facing any issues regarding tension is a step to being successful. Not only facing what is going on, but actively and positively addressing things together with the team.'	
11. SGB1	1. 'Positive tensions are necessary to drive performance and to keep people engaged. You so need a certain sense of restlessness for push performance.'	
Interviewees GROUP TWO	Quotes detailing the acknowledgement of creating conflict to drive positive tensions.	
3. AUR1	1. 'The underlying tensions are really important and to be honest with you...I actually cultivate them...I like cultivating them and burning platforms...though I did use to overdo it a lot. But nowadays, I make the burning platform not about my relationship with the direct report...I keep my burning platform now more focussed on the market...and that is easy to do.'	Bruch & Vogel (2011) concluded that executives must learn to 'unleash the company' collective human potential to create an environment where emotions, thoughts and actions can flow and spread in the organisation.'

4. SGR1	1. 'I'm a former sportsman that played sports at a very high level. And the one thing I knew was that unless there was tension and unless you had butterflies in your stomach you could never get that zero focus. So, in terms of leadership style, at times I will inject tension into the leadership team and not in a destructive way, but more in terms of - hey, this is what it really means.'	Bruch & Vogel (2011) - as quoted above.
5. THR1	1. 'I enjoy confrontations and I really enjoy conflict because this for me shows the passion and the energy. And so am a big supporter of tension and conflict in the organisation.'	Bruch & Vogel (2011) - as quoted above.
7. HKR1	1. 'I guess some of those tensions could drive a person into trying to perform better...in terms of trying to prove themselves...not just to themselves but perhaps to their own team or of course to their management.'	
8. SGR2	1. 'First of all, you need the tension. Without the tension and energy I don't think you can make the transformation happen at all, because otherwise the organisation goes into status quo which is never a state of progress at all.'	Keller & Price (2010) - 'CEO's who take the time to personalise a transformation story can unlock more energy for a transformation than those who dutifully present the PowerPoint slides their working team has created for them.'
9. INR1	1. 'I think the role of both tension and energy is important and it's best described as having the butterflies in your stomach without being too disruptive. And if you do not have that sense of tension, then the level of performance would be mediocre.'	

10. UKR1	1. 'In fact, the CEO made a public statement that he liked confrontation, he wanted confrontation, and that gets the best answers and the best solutions. The results were outstanding and the results continued to be outstanding, bit the tension....and people were being stabbed...left, right and centre.'	Bruch & Vogel (2011) - as quoted above.
12. AUR2	1. And I think if you involve many people earlier on, then it allows issues like tension and anxiety to be at the table because everybody is in a different state of consciousness when it comes to the issues and they are coming at it with their brains and they are very passionate.'	According to Freed, (2011) the leadership required now in these changing times calls for 'today's leaders to be developing all aspects of their being at all times: physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual'.

## Appendix D – Interview Guide.

### INTERVIEW GUIDE.

#### Introductory points to cover prior to interview

Thanks for your time today. This interview should take no longer than an hour. Kindly remind that the session will be taped because you don't want to miss any of their comments and also that I can capture your meaning as well as your words.

Although I will be taking some notes during the session. I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down. Please be sure to speak up to ensure I can capture all your comments. As noted in the consent form, all information will be kept strictly confidential as per the ethical guidelines of the *University of Reading Research Ethics Committee*. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time. **You can also receive a copy of the interview if requested.**

#### Research objectives for investigation.

1. To determine whether there is a specific CEO/C-suite perception or self-awareness of underlying tensions and energy in self and the organisation.
  2. To understand where tensions are present, what factors are deemed to be contributing to this and what is the impact on business performance?
  3. What clues could these factors provide in leveraging this tension / energy to enable higher performance in self and the organisation system?
- And if so – what needs to happen to best leverage these dynamics?

**QUESTIONS – BASED ON LIKELIHOOD THAT PARTICIPANTS ARE PREPARED AND WILLING TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND DISCUSS TENSIONS.**



1. How would you describe your perception of tension and energy in self and the organisation system right now?
2. In your experience, what role does tension and energy play and what is its impact in influencing people and business performance?
3. What clues could these factors provide in making sense of how to enable high performance in self and the organisation?
4. What are the resources you currently rely on when faced with unhealthy tensions/energy? How do you stay true to yourself?
5. How could you leverage as a leader this awareness for yourself and your organisation? What would the individual and business benefits be?

**Some other questions to consider as prompts:**

1. How much time does the C-suite / you personally spend time in “kicking the leaves” i.e. protected time to analyse and reflect on issues of strategic and operational importance.
2. Do you think tension/anxiety can impact your decision making?
3. Is it cooler to talk about stress than to talk about anxiety at the leadership table?
4. In your recent experience, have you observed times when worry gets in the way of picking up all the important signals in your organisation?
5. How do you keep a finger on the company’s pulse?

## **Appendix E**

### **INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM.**

#### **INFORMED CONSENT FOR MASTERS PROJECT**

**Project title:**

**“The dynamics of underlying energy and tensions in organisations. An investigation into how CEO’s/C-suite hold true to self and system.**

Thanks for responding to my request regarding your participation in my Masters Research project. As mentioned, I am a student in the Masters of Science in Coaching and Behavioural Change at the Henley Business School, University of Reading, UK. The purpose of this e-mail is to explain the research process and purpose.

#### **Research Process**

1. As mentioned, this is an independent study. This study constitutes fulfilment for the Master’s Degree.
2. The research has been approved as per the strict requirements of the University of reading Research Ethics Committee.
3. This will involve being interviewed once and will last no longer than one hour.
4. I propose that we agree on a date and time convenient to you.
5. Your participation is voluntary. However your input will be greatly appreciated as research is vital for our profession and the quality of this research depends, in part, on the number of leaders who participate.

6. Your answers and comments are **strictly confidential**. Your name will be separated from the interview notes and will not be used or referenced in any way in the study. All interview data will be treated with the upmost respect and will be stored securely. Please note that information ONLY from the interview data will be shared with my academic supervisor.
7. You are free to withdraw at any time until 15 January 2013. After this time, I will be at the point of writing the research paper.
8. A summary of the research results will be available in April 2013 to those who request it. The final research paper resulting from this Masters project will be publicly available through the Henley University Library.

### **Research Purpose**

As mentioned, I am interested in interviewing CEO's / C-suite on the topic of the dynamics of underlying energy and tensions in organisations. In particular, how leaders make sense of the tensions in both self and organisation and then capitalise on the awareness of these dynamics for improving business and people performance.

Really appreciate you giving time to this research and if you have any questions please call me on +358401624364 or [ann.calman@e-motionglobal.com](mailto:ann.calman@e-motionglobal.com). You can also contact my academic supervisor Dr. Lynn Thurloway at [lynn.thurloway@henley.reading.co.uk](mailto:lynn.thurloway@henley.reading.co.uk)

Kind regards, Ann.

**If you are willing to participate in the Master's project outlined above please sign below.**

**Signature:**

**Print name:**

**Date:**

## **Appendix F**

**AUDIO RECORDING      (AVAILABLE ON REQUEST)**

## **Appendix G**

### **Example transcription of interview.**

**SGR1**

Thanks for your time today and I will start with the questions.

I. How would you describe your perception of tension and energy in self and the organisation system right now?

R. At the moment it is quite strange as I have moved on to do different things, and I will share how I feel about when you are running a division of several hundred people. My perception of tension and energy is that the key things that you are always trying to do is that you are trying to harness that sense of purpose. Usually tension and energy is borne around sense of purpose. And sometimes you can end up as a destructive influence in the organisation and that is when fear creeps in – fear and frustration. But tension and energy can also be extremely driving and you can build momentum when it's actually borne of passion from vision and that people feel they are contributing to something that is going forward. And quite often you have to pulse check quite a lot. And you have to get incredibly honest with what gets reflected back to you. The reality is that you will have someone above you that is on a board level or in the senior executive like a Chairman who

perhaps is a little bit detached. So quite often, when things are really moving and you have this vibrant energy around you, what you can sometimes find is that people above you can get quite destabilised and nervous because they are not really in tune with what is happening day to day. And as a consequence, if they are not really skilled in the art or took the time to tap into why things are being driven the way they are and why there is a buzz about the place, they can pick it up as nervous energy, which translates into fear for them because they don't understand it. So intriguingly I call that edginess. You can have real positive energy flying beneath you and that gets met above by a real sense of fear because they don't quite get each micro move that is happening and giving people below the sense of purpose to move along the path. So that is one interesting way you can look at that it. By the same token, one of the other things you are always having to try and do as a leader is to try and tap into what is really the source of the energy because as soon as it is fear, it is incredibly destructive. And the thing that you become very aware of is that if you are presenting yourself and the message badly, or if you can see the way forward, then that tension can still become frustration. And so one of the roles of a leader in that situation is to always make sure that you are directing it and harnessing people to go in a certain direction. And that can be as simple as always making sure that you are on message, always on cue. And when going into a meeting or discussion, you use a good-old fashioned trick which is you decide who you are going to be when you are in that meeting. And no matter

how you feel, like having an awful day at home, you really have to decide who you are going to be. And one of the things I have gotten into trouble for previously, to be honest, is when you have people above you on a board level on executive committee that get it, this becomes quite straight forward. My recent experience is where you can have founders or owners of the company who were acting as a pseudo board and they really didn't get the whole leadership thing. So, whenever something would bubble up in the organisation that seems in conflict with their own view, they would jump in two feet, blast off from the hip and they didn't seem to understand the ripple effect that it has across 600-700 people. It is quite devastating. And so what I found myself doing most of the time was try and manage the link between harnessing people's enthusiasm on the vision and the plan and almost acting as blocker to the fear above you and the fear around you. And that weighs really heavily. Am sure you are getting this description from others as well. You can feel isolated because on the one hand you can really see what is going on and you becomes energised by the guys around you. But then, the system necessitates that you are answerable to a board, founders, chairman and who may feel very differently. I have made a mistake in my career in actually not managing them that I would manage the people that work for me. And that is one of my key learnings. And this point introduces more tension for a senior executive other than anything else that I can think of.



I. And if fact you have already answered part of my second question which is – in your experience what role does tension and energy play and its impact in influencing people and business performance ?

R. So clearly the tension and energy if harnessed is a massively positive thing. I come from the school of thought that in some instances people will take the view that any tension is a bad thing. I don't. I'm a former sportsman that played sports at a very high level. And the thing I knew was that unless there was tension and unless you had butterflies in your stomach you could never get that zero focus. So, in terms of leadership style, at times I will inject tension into the leadership team and not in a destructive way, but more in terms of – hey, this is what this really means. Why can't we push to obtain this rather than just settling for that? The trick is doing it in a way that they own it and with the money they can feel that it is theirs. And the point here is that they must never feel that you have just dumped it on them. Am sorry this is a personal thing, but the worst thing you can do in that senior leadership situation is have the situation where you have inherited some goals and you never really signed up to them because you feel you are set up for failure. If you can introduce the tension in such a way that the person owns it and really wants to drive to it, they will get it and galvanize the teams around them and the teams supporting them. And sometimes if you have people around you that are not particularly skilled at that, you act as a sort of double hitting team to

move that forward. And again you have to be very aware, because some people are great at execution and then become very poor leaders. Or some people are incredibly conceptual and then can be very poor managers. And you are always trying to strike that balance and fundamentally what you are trying to do is stoke up a bit of tension to actually get that momentum. I strongly believe that unless people understand the need for change and the need to move forward, it never really happens. And we are all human so in a sense having that slight move out of one's comfort zone, will actually bring the right tension. You can't actually take them so much out of their comfort zone so they are debilitated. You can only do it in small steps, baby steps. And so if someone is really risk averse, there is no point giving them a big hairy goal because they are never going to get there. If you can get them to change their own thinking over a period of time, to stretch themselves so they become the centre of the objectives and you end up with the formal objective and the informal objective. It depends on the personalities around you. But I think tension is a good thing if it is introduced for the right reasons to go the right way. But the worst thing is where fear and frustration are introduced into the system. Fear and frustration is always destructive. And maybe this is a style thing with me, I don't know, I just do not understand how people believe they can achieve things by either dictating or making people think that they can't reach, I don't understand that. In my experience, that kind of absolute fear of failure brings levels of tension that just impede progress.

I. You have already answered my next question – though I do have a prompt question for you at this time – do you think it's more cooler ( for want a better word) to talk about stress at the leadership table than it is to talk about anxiety ?

R. That is a very good question actually. Bizarrely, people think it is easier to say I'm stressed than anxious. Anxious is an admission to things you know and what you are not sure of. Whereas if you are stressed, there is then a whole kind of macho thing that comes along with it....in that I live through stress. I personally think that people who talk about their levels of stress... and this will sound awful....but they are not team players. They are too ego driven because they are trying to mask what they see as an inadequacy. They are not understanding that the role of the leadership team should be to get those things out there and to really leverage people around you to help solve that problem. And in fact I can give you a very good example of this in the States where we were having some difficulty in getting traction on some strategic deals that we needed to commit to make the numbers. I went to the Executive leadership team and the founders and I was very upfront about it and I said – this is what we expected, this is what we have seen, this is the gap and you can check from here that in terms of the current course and approach we are taking, we are not gonna get there. And this was on a pivotal part of the business that could kill the numbers. In other words, we have done the full year and not made the numbers. And I was actually ostracised for being so

open about it. Whereas if someone comes to the table and says – I am having difficulties with a certain member of my management team because they are causing me a lot of stress, people kind of talk around the problem. And so it is like a diversionary conversation. Whereas I think that is always a bullshit conversation. You know, what is it that is stressing you? All of this comes from a feeling of inadequacy and inadequacy may mean that you don't feel adequately positioned, or well equipped, for whatever the reason is. But I think it's better to be in a situation where you can really describe your anxiety before it comes stress. Saying you are stressed is kind of like an anathema to me, I don't understand it. And that was my fundamental problem when I was working in the States because when I was the COO of Barclays , it was perfectly acceptable to say I am really not sure how we are going to do this....I have tried all sorts of different ways...has anybody got ideas. This was perfectly acceptable. If you say that in the States, people would want to literally hang you in the environment that I was in. You become painfully aware that you are in a very poor leadership situation. And interestingly, I would argue that running global markets in Asia for Barclays, where we were in a very good leadership situation, the results that we created, the dynamism and the way we harnessed that business was just astounding. And truly astounding. Whereas, while I had great results from the States, when I walked away from them, I knew it was not sustainable because there was too much personal cost for myself in leading the group to get there. So it was funny because when I left I had this awful

feeling that as soon as everyone around could see what I was really dealing with , there would be a hugely negative effect, unless the person that replaced me was extremely skillful at that buffering role. When people allow themselves to bottle things up and get to the stage of stress, then you start to exhibit some extremely poor behaviour , it's like trying to manage information because the reason you got to the state you are in is that you feel inadequate and you don't know how to deal with it. Trying to manage information, trying to deflect blame and trying to revise targets and alignments after the fact, are all extremely destructive things in organisations. I find it amazing how many organisations allow that to happen. There needs to be a way of managing that or capturing that. It is like we are all in denial and I think that the more firms that do really kind of get this, really don't want stressed executives. I hope that people want to move into a world where it's OK to define the problem and you should be judged on how you try to solve it; not how the problem arose. For example, if you made a series of very bad decisions or judgement calls well then that is a different question. But generally if you have done this transparently and have taken enough feedback in how you put things together, there's no reason to get that stressed because everybody owns part of the outcome.

I. Thankyou, you have answered that question and my next question as well – the flow is just incredible here. What factors here could be clues in making sense to enable higher performance in self and the organisation?

R. In my experience, the most successful period I have even seen is where we had a true vision and mission. We had a very clear strategy. Everybody owned and understood their part in the plan. And as you were moving along that, we had very open communication about where we really were and there was no bullshit in the discussions. If someone was struggling, they would say – I am struggling. There are always tell-tale signs when stress and negative tensions are creeping into the organisation. The classic ones are where you feel that someone is managing the message. It is just an anathema to me that people seem to judge the quality of executives by how well they can spin things. That is bullshit. You make judgements on their ability to handle things in a crisis management. I am more interested in people that don't get to crisis. The other one is where people want to start to overly control. If your organisation boundaries and the functions are clear, then another thing I see is where people want to take control because they say – if I don't have control, how can I make my targets. The classic symptom is where they aren't focussing on their problem but focussed around their problem. So again, here is the big hairy goal, and if I make enough noise, then I already have enough excuses as to why I am not going to get there. And don't people realise that this is

the message they are giving here. The other one is the personal tensions. I am very sensitive to what is the norm on personalities. And when I start seeing varying behaviour, you have to ask the question – what's going on? Because unless you understand the people and how they feel and why they are feeling the way they are feeling, then you are always in danger of failing then in some way or they're hiding something. And if it is personal, you still have to react to that because it is always likely that the person will overspill. There is no point in making a judgement call for that thing. The right thing is to just be aware of that and work it out – well is there a way I could flex this to an extent that the pressure is taken off that person. I had a situation a few years ago where one of the guys that worked for me found out his wife was diagnosed as terminally ill. And he was a key part and a critical element of when we were trying to establish a business in India. And in that situation, you actually have to find something else for him to do where he didn't become on the critical path. Because I think you can get to the situation where people fall down because they couldn't deliver due to their situation. And at other times where I have detected abnormal behaviour and it's because basically – well in one example, it was where the guy had flat out lied to me as to where they were. You started noticing other things in behaviour – certain things getting left out or not being reported. I then took the process of skip-level meetings and so I talked to people that reported to him and quite often you re cross-referencing what he was saying and his behaviour to what they are saying and about his behaviour. You

can detect an anomaly. And as soon as you detect that anomaly you have to find what is causing it. Sometimes the causes are set because it is a personal issue. Other times, that inconsistency is because there is fundamentally something wrong. On this particular example, he was saying something and the actions of his team were saying something else. So, in other words you always end up with symptoms of things going on. The other classic symptom I always watch out for is when you get too many disputes, like lower down the chain. This is a classic where objectives at this level didn't cascade to this level. So these guys are managing the message and the others are living the nightmare of how they are going to do it. When you see lots of disputes at that level, then something is wrong. And disputes can happen in many different ways. There is a sense that you have the wrong tension going on. Another one I always look for is to walk the floor in the morning and at the end of the day. I do this because I want to know what people are thinking and feeling and another thing is if people are turning up late and then leaving early, then you have a problem. And it may not be their own problem, as a lot of people pass that off as them being lazy or whatever, but to me that is always a function of motivation. There is always going to be some pay checks in the team but if you have that as a general symptom in the group, again it means that you have got the wrong kinds of tensions. You have tension, but you have got the wrong type of tensions. So no tensions are just as bad as the wrong tensions. I always look for tell-tale signs and generally I try to build a team where you get a



lot more openness about these things, where they will tell you what is really going on. And I am kind of a bit ruthless about it. I don't like people in my team that are always negative. Maybe this is a style thing for me, but I can't stand the 100 reasons not to do something people because god only knows what they are saying below them. I don't like people who talk about other people in the group because again that is always a source of tension. So you think that is what you say about them, so what is it that you are saying about me? Whilst there are symptoms, what you are looking for is the system breaking down in a way or friction in some parts in the system because when things are properly organised and everyone is on the same page and they feel their own objectives you don't tend to see any of those things.

I. Again – what you share feeds beautifully into my next question, which is – what are the resources you currently rely on when faces with unhealthy tensions and energy? How do you then stay true to yourself?

R. It varies in the situation, so I try to get very clear feedback from the group out there on what's happening. If you don't listen, I don't know how you can lead. In the States where I was running the new funds, my assistant had a very heavily developed EQ and she was someone that everyone in the company knew and loved and so I actually sent her on coaching courses because people found that sometimes they had difficulties in admitting their own situation. It took them a

while to get used to saying what they liked to me. I gave the assistant a sense of responsibility around management cadence. And they found being able to talk to her was a safe place. So she was also the ideal person to give them some coaching. The other thing I did was employ an executive coach as well. Although in theory he was for my team, in reality I also used him for myself because fundamentally you are human and I'm a very driving, objective, rational person. While I know what empathy is, how do you wire yourself to know what is really important for that person. And so the Exec Coach's role was to understand their teams and my teams. The Exec Coach also focussed on me and my exec leadership team. My assistant focussed also on the leadership team and their direct reports. What I used the exec coach for was when I was particularly frustrated. He would always help me to step back and just remind me who I was, that was his first thing. He guided me on how I wanted to be before any confrontational meeting I had. Whilst the US reputation was incredibly toxic, I ended up with the reputation of being the best leader in the firm. And a lot of that was down to the executive coach because I didn't get this passive aggressive Pacific Northwest type of behaviors thing. It was fantastic coaching. We managed to get a sub-par team and get them to a pretty high performance state. And with that experience, whilst I also have some very negative memories of that experience, I do have some positive ones as well. And one of the positives was that in Barclay's capital, I would have put out fires and half of them in the first 12 months. Because of this Executive Coach, I didn't do

that. You get to know people better and it taught me that you can make decisions too early on people. Coming from an investment banking background, you tend to make quarterly judgements. What this exec coach taught me – there is one example with one person who is now a great friend of mine. He was an under performer and I tried all the right things. Anyway, he opened up to the Exec Coach more than he opened up to me. The Exec Coach never disclosed the nature of the conversations but he had pointers to make me realise that I was approaching a conversation the wrong way. The problem was not my friend, the problem was me. My friend was a very creative guy that needed autonomy. And what I was doing was overlaying too many of my requirements and not enough of his requirements. I then got into a space where I asked my friend – how does he want to do it. We then agreed on a way it would be judged. Six months later, my friend's team were the most productive in the company by a factor of 75%. And that was a big lesson for me because I had always been very good at getting into people's head and helping them. What this has showed me is that you always need third party input because there are always blind spots.

I. And again, you have answered my very last question – how did you leverage this self-awareness for yourself, as you have clearly outlined what the individual and business benefits can be. Is there anything else you would like to wrap up before we end today?

R. Am a big believer in coaching. The only thing I am not that convinced about is behavioural change. I think that behavioural change can be part of the problem because we all want to be who we are. Though the key thing to me is not behavioural change, but it is to understand who you are and developing strategies where you are making those decisions and making statements with awareness of what it looks like. Whereas people in behavioural change who are coaching you to act like a robot, you need to do it like this. Sometimes the process means that you just switch off. Because I was doing and saying the right things because I was coached behaviourally in my time at Barclays, I just couldn't see my way through. But it was only when you get someone like the Exec Coach in the US who said – this is who you are, this is who he is, you need to do what you do in this way. I didn't have to compromise in my dealings with my friend, my friend did not have to compromise in dealing with me. You can both modify the way in which are doing this and then you can overlap and then everything is fine. I think behavioural change is good when the system allows you to be who you are. When behavioural change is trying to fix someone's prescribed pattern, I just don't believe in it. When you get properly coached, you start to realise you can say things in a way that it is constructive.

I. Yes – and for me the key for being a successfully coach is for me to help people deploy more of who they are.

R. Yes – and that is exactly right.

I. Thankyou for your time today.

R. I would also advocate to any senior executive to take a three month period in your life to reflect and think about what you have been doing.