Liz Hall expertly intertwines relevant theory, the latest thinking of leading academics and real-world practice to provide coaches with an essential guide for working with people facing challenging transitions. Compelling, timely and inspiring!

Dr Christian van Nieuwerburgh, Associate Professor in Coaching, Centre for Coaching and Behavioural Change, Henley Business School

“The generosity in the material that is shared, the power in the stories, the vulnerability and honesty in the case studies makes this book an exciting and compelling read that brings you face to face with your own learning edge of working with crisis. This book stretches the assumptions of what it is to coach.”

Dr Alison Whybrow, Chartered Psychologist and Coach

“To connect with so many real and relatable stories of people’s triumph in almost impossible experiences caused me to wonder – what would I do in this situation? Liz’s research and references are comprehensive and it’s an inspiring read I think most coaches would get something from.”

Julie Starr, Director, Starr Consulting and author of The Coaching Manual

Coaching in Times of Crisis and Transformation takes an in-depth look at crisis and discusses its impact on both individuals and organizations. Covering coaching in any time of crisis and change, it offers a complete, practical resource for managers and coaches to tackle the challenges effectively. This book can help turn a crisis, whether personal or systemic, into an opportunity for transformation. Coaching in Times of Crisis and Transformation covers definitions of crisis from both the individual and organizational perspective and includes insights on: adapting to change and finding opportunities in crisis, what neuroscience tells us about our reactions to change, transformative coaching, change models, supporting organizations in crisis and how coaching and mentoring can act as preventative measures against crises.

Liz Hall is the editor and co-owner of Coaching at Work magazine. She is an award-winning journalist and coach with accolades including the Periodical Training Association’s Journalist of the Year award and the Association for Coaching’s Award for Impacting (Leadership/External Focus) Service to the Wider Community for 2010-11. She has written and worked for publications including the Guardian, Financial Times, Observer, Daily Mail, People Management, Personnel Today and Training Magazine and is the author of Mindful Coaching, also published by Kogan Page.
Coaching in Times of Crisis and Transformation
CONTENTS

Dedication ix
Acknowledgements x
Foreword by Tatiana Bachkirova xi
About the contributors xiii

Introduction 1

01 Definitions 5
Liz Hall
Crisis 6
Transition 9
Transformation 10
References 11

02 Shared territory 12
Liz Hall
Natural life transitions 13
Mid-life crisis 18
Typical transitions and crises at work 24
References 27

03 Models and frameworks for exploring change and transition 29
Liz Hall
Bridges’ Transition Curve 29
Prochaska and DiClemente’s Transtheoretical Stages of Change 35
The Kübler-Ross Change Curve, or the Five Stages of Grief 36
Dilts’ (Neuro)logical Levels of Change 41
References 48
04 No mud, no lotus? Crisis as a catalyst for transformation  50
   Liz Hall
   Crisis sparks transformation  50
   Coaches’ perspectives  53
   Crisis and transition in organizations  61
   Conclusion  67
   References  68

05 Coaching for compassionate resilience through creative methods: the case for a ‘turn to autoethnography’  70
   Margaret Chapman-Clarke
   What is autoethnography and why is it important in coaching?  72
   The inspiration behind the ‘call for an AE turn’ in coaching  75
   Beyond mastery: creative methods in coaching for resilience  77
   Healing the split: art and science  79
   Value of creativity in coaching for compassionate resilience:
   lessons from neuroscience  81
   Resilient individuals or resilient organizations?  83
   Compassionate resilience: the 21st-century ‘take’ on
   bounce-back-ability  85
   Conclusion  92
   References and further reading  92
   Useful resources  95

06 Insights from neuroscience  96
   Paul Brown and Helen Leeder Barker
   Individual and professional transitional opportunities  98
   So what do we know about the brain?  98
   The coach’s brain is where the client’s change starts.
   So start, perhaps, with the coach’s brain  105
   States of mind  113
   And not forgetting the organization too can be in crisis  117
   Conclusion  118
   References  119
07 Executive coaching in times of organizational change: a vital support and developmental mechanism 121

Anthony M Grant and Sean A O’Connor

Overview of the literature on executive coaching and organizational change 122
The cognitive and behavioural mechanisms of executive coaching 124
So what? Reflections on the outcomes of the case study example 131
How to work with leaders during times of organizational change and turbulence 136
Summary 140
References 141

08 Leaders in crisis: attending to the shadow side 144

Erik de Haan and Anthony Kasozi

Supporting leaders in crisis or transition 146
The nature of the leadership role (its attending shadow) and tendencies to derailment (overdrive and hubris) 149
Descriptive typology to gain greater insight into the behaviours and patterns of leaders 156
Coaching 165
Regaining balance: you do not have to do it alone 170
References 171

09 The role of coaching in supporting organizations to address mental health issues 172

Andrew Kinder and Tony Buon

Workplace mental health 173
Delineating coaching from other interventions 174
The similarities between coaching, mentoring and counselling 180
Workplace conflict 184
Workplace change 188
Conclusion 189
References 190
## Contents

### 10 Nourishing the lotus flower: turning towards and transforming difficulties with Mindful Compassionate Coaching 192  
*Liz Hall*

- Background, definitions and research 193
- Delving deeper 196
- ABC: Awareness, Body wisdom and Compassion 201
- Turning towards difficulty: using MCC 205
- Feeling our way through crisis and transformation: the FEEL/FELT model 207
- Pandora’s box: working with difficult emotions 210
- Other useful models, practices and exercises in MCC 213
- Conclusion 216
- References 217

### 11 Self-coaching 222  
*Rachel Ellison*

- Not a replacement 223
- Definitions 224
- Coaching buyers 226
- The impact of self-coaching 227
- Developing self-coaching 237
- Future research 243
- Conclusion 244

### 12 Legacy Thinking: an approach for a better now, and a better future 246  
*Neil Scotton and Alister Scott*

- Exploring Legacy Thinking 247
- Inspirations and lessons 252
- Where to begin 255
- Practicalities 261
- Is it worth it? 266
- References 268

*Index* 269
ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

The editor

Liz Hall is the Editor of Coaching at Work magazine and a Senior Practitioner coach, specializing in work–life balance, crisis/transitions, stress management/resilience, and happiness. She is also a mindfulness teacher, running programmes for coaches, the general public, and businesses. She is the author of Mindful Coaching (Kogan Page, 2013) and has contributed chapters on mindfulness to Mastery in Coaching (Association for Coaching/Kogan Page, 2014); Mindfulness in Organizations: Foundations, research and applications (Cambridge University Press, in press), and Developing Mental Toughness in Young People (Karnac, 2014). As well as winning the Association for Coaching’s Award for Impacting (Leadership/External Focus) in 2010–11, she’s an award-winning journalist, with almost 30 years’ experience, writing for publications including the Guardian, the Observer, the Financial Times, and People Management. She divides her time between the United Kingdom and southern Spain, where she lives with her husband, son, two daughters (she refuses to accept they’ve left home even though they’re away at university), and three rescue dogs.

The chapter contributors

Dr Paul Brown is Faculty Professor, Organizational Neuroscience, Monarch Business School, Switzerland; Honorary Chairman of the Vietnam Consulting Group, Saigon and International Director of SIRTailors, Saigon. A clinical and organizational psychologist and executive coach, his main fascination is in creating a General Theory of the individual and the organization based upon mapping how energy flows or gets blocked in the pursuit of profit or other outcomes within the organizational system. He has recently co-authored Neuropsychology for Coaches: Understanding the basics (2012); River Dragon (a novel, 2014); Neuroscience for Leadership: Harnessing the brain gain advantage (2015); and The Fear-Free Organization (2015).
About the Contributors

Tony Buon is a workplace psychologist, speaker, mediator, executive coach and author. He is presently the Managing Partner of Buon Consultancy based in London. He has previously been a Lecturer at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Scotland and a Senior Lecturer at Macquarie University, Australia. His areas of expertise include workplace psychology, leadership coaching, workplace mediation, and cross-cultural communication. He is the author of Communication Genius: 40 Insights from the Science of Communicating (2015), The Leadership Coach (2014) and over 100 book chapters, academic papers and journal articles.

Margaret Chapman-Clarke is a Chartered and Registered Psychologist, Gestalt practitioner and Mindfulness Facilitator and Researcher. She’s co-founder of the British Psychological Society Special Group in Coaching Psychology, she designed the United Kingdom’s first Psychology of Coaching programme for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, co-developed the first Business School Coach Referral Service at Manchester University as a Senior Fellow in Leadership, and was the only British presenter at the first Australian conference on evidence-based coaching. She is author of The Emotional Intelligence Pocketbook and the forthcoming Mindfulness at Work Pocketbook and Organizational Applications of Mindfulness (published by Kogan Page). Margaret serves on the editorial boards for Coaching at Work; Coaching: An international journal of theory, research and practice and the International Journal of Evidence-Based Coaching and Mentoring. Margaret is passionate about advancing the use of qualitative methods in coaching research and her own doctoral work employs an autoethnographic approach to explore advanced coaching practitioners’ experiences of mindfulness training using poetic inquiry.

Rachel Ellison MBE trained as an internal coach at the BBC, where she was a news reporter and international project director. She was awarded an MBE for her human rights and self-empowerment work with women in Afghanistan. Her team won BBC Team of the Year. Rachel launched her own coaching business in 2006, working with commercial and public sector clients in banking, retail, electronics, international diplomacy and health. Specializing in complex multinational organizations and coaching across multiple different cultures, Rachel is becoming a thought leader on cognitive diversity, self-coaching in crisis and how to lead ethically for higher profit.

Dr Anthony M Grant PhD is widely recognized as a pioneer of Coaching Psychology and evidence-based approaches to coaching, with more than 100 publications in this area. Leaving school at 15 with no qualifications he trained as a carpenter and ran his own contracting business, beginning tertiary studies in 1993 as a mature age student and commencing a third
career as a coaching psychologist. In January 2000 he established the world’s first Coaching Psychology Unit at the School of Psychology at Sydney University, where he is the Director and an Associate Professor. He is a Visiting Professor at the International Centre for Coaching and Leadership Development, Oxford Brookes University, UK, a Senior Fellow at the Melbourne School of Business, Melbourne University, Australia, and an Associate Fellow at the Säid School of Business, Oxford University. In 2007 he was awarded the British Psychological Society Award for outstanding professional and scientific contribution to Coaching Psychology, and in 2009 the Vision of Excellence Award from Harvard University for pioneering work in developing a scientific foundation to coaching. He is the 2014 scientist in residence for the ABC – the Australian national broadcaster. He also enjoys playing loud (but unfortunately not very good) blues guitar.

**Professor Erik de Haan** is Director of the Ashridge Centre for Coaching and Professor of Organization Development and Coaching at the VU University in Amsterdam. He has an MSc in Theoretical Physics, a PhD in Psychophysics, and an MA in psychodynamic psychotherapy. He has published some 140 professional and research articles, and ten books, covering his main fields of expertise as a leadership and organizational consultant, facilitator and coach. He focuses on organization-development consulting, supervision, action learning, politics and power, leadership hubris, and emotional aspects of working in teams and organizations.

**Dr Anthony Kasozi** is Director of Quilibra Consulting (UK) and an Associate with Ashridge Consulting (UK). He is an experienced executive coach, and an organization development and management consultant, who has coached senior executives and leaders from across different work sectors in Europe, the United States, Africa, Russia and Asia. A social scientist with degrees in financial economics, institutional economics and international relations, Anthony has a keen and active interest in the roles organizations and leaders in science and public service play in shaping responses to developmental, health and change issues relating to Sub-Saharan Africa. Anthony is married with close family in Europe and Africa.

**Andrew Kinder** is a British Psychological Society Registered Coach and a Chartered Counselling and Occupational Psychologist. He was recognized by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy with a Fellowship for his contribution to workplace counselling. He has published widely, particularly in the areas of work-related stress, trauma and stress management, and is currently clinical director of a large Employee Assistance Programme (www.helpeap.com). He is active as a coaching practitioner.
with his own caseload of clients. Further information is available from his website, www.andrewkinder.co.uk.

**Helen Leeder Barker** is an Organizational Psychologist and Coach with 15 years’ experience. Formerly based in the United Kingdom and Australia, she now lives and works in Singapore. She’s the Director and owner of Leeder Consulting, providing coaching and leadership development to individuals/organizations in the Asia-Pacific Region. Her background includes consultancy, banking and fast-moving consumer goods. She’s fascinated by how our background and story makes each of us unique and feels very lucky to be working at a time when we’re on the cusp of a huge leap in understanding how our brain enables us to create the changes that we seek. As such she is a strong advocate for the movement that is bringing applied neuroscience into the heart of coaching. She also has a strong interest in mindfulness, and she encourages each of her clients to learn to meditate. Her own ability to be mindful is challenged daily through her gorgeous children and when she isn’t coaching she’s usually playing with them.

**Dr Sean O’Connor** is a practitioner, researcher, and academic within the fields of coaching, organizational development and positive psychology. Sean’s PhD explored the influence leadership coaching has on the wellbeing of others within organizational networks. His coaching specializes in applying complex adaptive systems and relational dynamics to intervention. He has worked across a broad spectrum of industry leadership. Sean is a lecturer and researcher at the Coaching Psychology Unit, University of Sydney in Australia.

**Neil Scotton** and **Dr Alister Scott** are co-founders of The One Leadership Project. They support those taking on big, systemic change. Clients include forward-thinking businesses, educational bodies and charities. Their work, with the Project’s growing team, blends coaching, consultancy, training, event design, convening collaborations, building communities, working with partners and writing. The goal is 1 billion positive impacts by 2020. Both based in South-East England, they love their families, the natural world, and people taking on enormous, well-intentioned challenges. Neil has received the ICF President’s Award for ‘evolutionary leadership’ and ‘contribution to the global profession’. Alister was instrumental in Antarctica receiving World Park status for 50 years. Together they received the Best Thought Leadership article award 2013 from Coaching at Work magazine, with the editorial board saying ‘Neil Scotton and Alister Scott provoke us to higher thinking... Their commitment to bringing leadership to life and making the world a better place is evident in their writing and their work.’
Introduction

The seed for this book was sown in 2008–9, when the reality of the extent of the financial crisis began to strike home. Many coaches reported feeling ill-equipped to work with those clients most impacted by the crisis, who perhaps were losing their jobs, their homes, their security, certain relationships, even their mental wellbeing, particularly where there were parallels in the coaches’ own lives. One high-profile coach shared later how she’d gone through a four-year-long financial crisis from 2009, feeling as if her life ‘had imploded’ and ‘everything I’d worked for in my whole life was slipping through my fingers – very scary’. Unsurprisingly, she found it very hard to keep her coaching practice on track. Career coaches shared how it felt irresponsible and unrealistic, cruel even, to encourage clients to create their dream job at a time of job scarcity and insecurity.

As well as serving to highlight that in highly challenging times there needs to be more depth and breadth in our coaching approaches, I was reminded by these shared experiences and my own crises that there can be diamonds to be mined from the muck, even though they may take time to appear. The coach who struggled financially says she has ‘no regrets’ and has ‘learnt far more than I would have done otherwise’. She’s ‘more contented and more resilient’, more able to ‘let go, to hold the not-knowing space, quietness, letting the emotions come through’. For her, ‘that’s where the juicy bit of coaching is’.

I’ve wondered how widespread this growth post-crisis is, whether we might even need crisis to spark true transformation, and what implications there might be for coaching. Does it enhance our coaching if we’ve been through our own crises? How can coaching support individuals, organizations and even the wider system to emerge from crisis transformed? This book explores these and other questions.

The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) highlighted the recklessness of over-promiseing as coaches and burst the bubble that many inhabited, one of more, more, more. Some remain in that bubble, of course, with the number of billionaires doubling by 2014 (Oxfam, 2014), and the world’s richest
1 per cent set to own more than the other 99 per cent combined by 2016 (Hardoon, 2015). And whilst the landscape has shifted since 2008–9, we continue to face challenging times; individually, organizationally, societally, environmentally. As I write this in April 2015, another natural disaster has occurred – an earthquake in Nepal causing more than 5,500 deaths. Meanwhile, in business circles, the term VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) is ubiquitous. Originally coined by the US military, it’s become a ‘trendy managerial acronym... and a catchall for “Hey, it’s crazy out there!”’ (Bennett and Lemoine, 2014). Coaches and coaching sponsors I interviewed for this book report seeing more clients having difficulties. Louise Buckle, Lead Coach, KPMG UK Advisory Practice, reports: ‘we do have individuals struggling more as a result of the VUCA world that we live in and increasingly high performance expectations... my personal view is that we’re seeing deeper psychological issues starting to show up more at work’, while Grant and O’Connor (Chapter 7 of this book) argue that ‘organizational change and the resultant turbulence have become part of the everyday experience in organizations in the contemporary commercial world’.

Whether it’s actually ‘crazier’ than before out there perhaps doesn’t matter. The fact is that it seems and feels tougher to many of us. And just as we remind our clients that they can choose how they respond, so too can we as coaches choose how we respond to this seemingly crazier climate. Exploring what even more depth and breadth look like. Becoming better able to get to the ‘juicy bit’ of coaching, whilst respecting boundaries.

This book doesn’t claim to be able to equip coaches to charge in to save the world in its hour of need, although they may want to play their part in tackling bigger issues, and Chapters 10 and 12, for example, offer some pointers for doing so. But it does seek to support coaches generally to have a clearer idea of the terrain of crisis and transformation, including potential obstacles. It explores potential treasure to be found in this territory, and offers ideas for how coaches might help clients be better ‘mapmakers’ and ‘map readers’. It highlights the value of being more courageous and ‘turning towards’ difficult territory such as vulnerability, ‘negative’ emotions, and our ‘shadow’ sides, rather than charging off in the other direction. It argues that it behoves us as coaches to get more in touch with our own humanity and vulnerability, so we are better able to bring more of ourselves into our coaching, which in turn opens up the potential for more transformative coaching.

With these aims in mind, this collection first maps out some of the territory, with chapters written by myself (Liz Hall) on definitions of crisis, transition
and transformation; on some of the territory commonly shared across humanity, including natural life transitions; on frameworks and models for understanding and interpreting crisis and transition; and on the potential for post-crisis growth. It also features chapters which set out useful compasses and approaches for VUCA times. These include Ellison’s chapter on self-coaching, which argues that coaches should explicitly set out to develop clients’ self-coaching capability; Brown and Leeder Barker’s chapter on neuroscience, which highlights the importance of understanding how the brain operates, and of working with all emotions in facilitating change; de Haan and Kasozi’s chapter on working with leaders’ shadow sides; mine (Liz Hall) on Mindful Compassionate Coaching, which argues that drawing on mindfulness, compassion, and the body’s wisdom helps us turn towards, safely be with, and transform difficulty; and Chapman’s on compassionate resilience, reflecting the rising acceptance of autoethnography, a form of self-reflection that explores personal experience and connects autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings.

The book features original research, case studies and stories, with some from coaches including chapter contributors, reflecting these trends of turning towards difficulties, and exploring our own experiences in relation to our practice and bringing more of ourselves into our practice. Working with turbulence does of course carry a mental health warning, and Kinder and Buon’s chapter looks at this from the organizational perspective. Grant and O’Connor argue that in times of organizational turbulence and change, executive coaching is a vital support and developmental mechanism. And we end on a note of inspiration, speaking as does Ellison to the theme of sustainability, with Scott and Scotton’s chapter on their legacy thinking approach.

Essentially, this book seeks to help us be much more than solely ‘fair-weather’ coaches who struggle when the outlook is highly stormy – our own or others’. It aims to play a role in helping us support clients in all sorts of climates, whether that be their own micro-climate or not. And to remind us that struggling individuals are often like pit canaries, highlighting with their own difficulties problems in the wider system, as Dr Anton Obholzer pointed out in an interview for this book.

Beat poet Anne Waldman (1996, p xxi) says that the beat writers empowered themselves through their writing at a time when the rest of the culture was under a ‘collective hallucinatory yoke’. It sometimes feels to me that we are still under that yoke, and that the answer to waking up lies in part in being prepared as coaches, as human beings, to turn towards all that lies within. As the mystic poet Rumi reminds us: ‘Keep your gaze on the bandaged place; that is where the light enters you.’
References


Words have power. I was reminded of this during the research for this book. Words trigger such varying responses and reactions in people; they can destroy, and also inspire, acting as catalysts for transformation, as portals into new realities.

Take the word ‘crisis’, which has peppered so many conversations in recent years, often in relation to the Global Financial Crisis. It’s not a word that some individuals, and most organizations, want to be associated with, at least not publicly. ‘Change management’, ‘transition’ and ‘transformation’, absolutely. But not crisis. For individuals too it can be a heavy, difficult, or emotive word. Sports and CEO coach John Blakey says:

I typically work with senior business leaders who are confident and robust, and I don’t think the word crisis is one they’d use. But they might talk about ‘difficult times’. I worked with one client who didn’t use the word crisis but they wanted to talk to me at short notice, and I would have described what had happened as a crisis.

Who we are as the observer, and our choice of label, impacts how we relate to something. Bridget Farrands, a coach and organization consultant specializing in transition and identity, agrees:

How we name something is how we relate to it, so if we’re not encouraged to think of something as a crisis, it’s not necessarily a crisis; the name gives us a cultural reference point. For example, to leaders in Mali, rain coming after months of drought is ‘earth food’, for me, when it’s a holiday, it’s a ‘crisis’.

Interestingly, the idea that we’re all increasingly required to operate in VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) times is widely accepted. VUCA in some ways has become shorthand for everything that might be
interpreted as challenging and crazy (Bennett and Lemoine, 2014). However, there’s usually a sense that the VUCA climate isn’t our doing, it’s ‘out there’. Scotton and Scott pick up further on this theme in Chapter 12.

Although some of the coaches I interviewed at first struggled to bring to mind clients in crisis, once they’d had a chance to reflect, they usually had many examples. Transitions coach and author of *Essential Career Transition Coaching Skills*, Caroline Talbott, says, ‘My first thought was that I’ve not coached anyone in crisis. [My clients] are always OK and then I thought about it and I couldn’t think of anyone not in crisis.’

Clearly as coaches we need to be prepared for our clients being in crisis, however they describe it. Denial of being in crisis may mean us and our clients missing out on all sorts of riches, as we explore in Chapter 4. First, let’s explore what we actually mean by crisis, and two other terms which can come with the territory – transition and transformation.

**Crisis**

*Oxford Dictionaries Online* defines the noun crisis as:

- A time of intense difficulty or danger.
- A time when a difficult or important decision must be made.
- The turning point of a disease when an important change takes place, indicating either recovery or death.

James and Gilliland (2001) describe crisis as a perceived or experienced event or situation as an intolerable difficulty exceeding the person’s current resources and coping mechanisms. Caplan (1961) describes it as a state when people face an obstacle to important life goals, one which is for a time insurmountable by using customary methods of problem solving. This failure of one’s traditional problem-solving approach results in disorganization, hopelessness, sadness, confusion, and panic (Lillibridge and Klukken, 1978). It threatens the high-priority goals of the decision-making unit, restricts the amount of time available before the decision is transformed, and surprises the members of the decision-making unit by its occurrence (Hermann, 1972). The element of threat is highlighted by Lerbinger (2012), who says a common denominator for most organizational crises is that an organization’s reputation is endangered. He lists the following elements common to definitions of organizational crisis:

- the event is sudden, unexpected and unwanted;
- decisions must be made swiftly;
Definitions

- It’s a low-probability, high-impact event;
- It has ambiguity of cause, effect and means of resolution;
- It interrupts the normal operations of an organization;
- It hinders high-priority goals and threatens an enterprise’s profitability, growth, and survival;
- It may cause irreparableness and degeneration of a situation if no action is taken;
- It creates significant psychological stress.

Coaches

Themes which emerged from my research among coaches, and my own reflections/experience, included the following:

- A breaking down of what was before;
- Feeling not good enough/being wrongly equipped/insufficiently resourceful/insufficiently knowledgeable/ill-informed to respond;
- Sense of stuck-ness;
- Uncertainty and sense of being lost;
- Clash between exterior/interior world;
- Element of surprise;
- Things not going to plan and not going to sort themselves out;
- Dependent on context.

Below, some of this book’s contributors and other coaches share how they see crisis:

Rachel Ellison, chapter contributor:

As a grandchild of refugee holocaust survivors and one of three children born to their only son, I’ve had significant exposure to people with heightened and sometimes inappropriate levels of fear, anxiety, pessimism and even paranoia. This is sometimes diagnosed as ‘annihilation anxiety’. It’s a familiar way of life and can be experienced as if passed on somehow, by subsequent generations in a family, even if they haven’t actually been through a trauma such as a war or an earthquake. So for me, crisis translates as fear; running, hyper-vigilance, taking of risk or conversely, risk aversion; the normal can be misinterpreted as something enormous and overwhelming. Another person might just stay optimistic. My definition of crisis is informed by this underpinning existential
part of my inheritance, upbringing and exposure to human beings who have suffered colossal loss. Crisis means a collapsing or a crumpling; a potential tsunami of destruction – be it emotional, psychological, physical, environmental, organizational or systemic. But arguably, it is unidimensional to assume crisis can only impact negatively. In my view, crisis can also present positive impacts such as the opportunity for renewal, innovation, reinvention of self and circumstances, heightened personal resilience, depth of character, wisdom and self-resource.

Margaret Chapman-Clarke, chapter contributor:

It’s where there is an absolute overload of demands on us or the client, perceived as not having the resources to deal with this multitude of demands, almost as if a number of things come together that challenge the sense of who you are. A good metaphor to describe it is a mirror that shatters in thousands of pieces.

Bridget Farrands describes crisis as ‘a period of uncertain turbulence where your familiar/personal compass offers very few bearings to help you know what to do and where to go’, while Professor Ernesto Spinelli describes crisis from an existential stance as comprising any or all of three focal points:

- Sense of continuity: ‘being confronted with death would be an extreme version; someone could no longer have a job, or it could be how an organization recognizes its own sense of continuity, such as being taken over by a rival’.
- Around dispositions (meanings, values, beliefs, biases that the person/organization holds): ‘so it’s a crisis in that they thought they had those values etc but the reality is that they don’t, or there is a conflict of values. Organizationally speaking, there might be a conflict between different levels in terms of what the organization stands for.’
- Identity: ‘this is quite often expressed as, I don’t know who I am any more or I’ve lost all sense of myself’.

As recovery coach and coach trainer Anthony Eldridge-Rogers points out, crisis is a relative term:

Cultural reference, context and the way people deal with things are so different in Soweto, Johannesburg (where I was running a recovery and wellbeing coach training programme) to the West. It can be very humbling and quite shocking because of all the things we take for granted [in the West] and when we run into other people’s experiential paradigms... It was a very warm community and we’d all become quite connected, and at the end when we were all wishing each other well, one coach trainee said, ‘You’re so lucky, you can leave, you
have choices.’ Suddenly I got it; none of them can leave, all they can do is walk home, they have nothing with which to leave. Elsewhere, someone shared in a [recovery] group how her crisis was when her dad sold her favourite racing horse. She had a terrible heroin problem and used to hide her syringes in a saddle bag on her horse, and finally knew things had to change when she lost the horse. [Her story] triggered others in the group, [some of whom] had been in prison. Her crisis wasn’t deemed worthy but her spiritual suffering had been very acute and that was difficult for people to understand.

**Transition**

It isn’t the changes that do you in, it’s the transitions. (Bridges, 2009, p 3)

*Oxford Dictionaries Online* defines transition as follows:

> The process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another.

Sometimes, when we talk about crisis, we actually mean transition, although transition is not easy. According to Bridges (2009), many people use the words change and transition interchangeably too; however, change is situational (such as the move to a new site) while transition is psychological and trickier.

Linley, Biswas-Diener and Trenier (2012) define transition as a period of change from one stage to another, stressing too that transitions are notoriously difficult.

**Coaches**

Themes that emerged from interviews with coaches included:

- transition and crisis are linked – crisis sparks transition;
- transitions can be planned, unlike crisis;
- you can’t go back but you don’t yet know how to go forward;
- transition implies movement, a journey, a shift;
- it can take time;
- it can bring choices;
- transitions are an ongoing part of life;
- they’re not easy... but can be times of growth;
- they’re the threshold between old and new.
Deborah Price, leadership and ‘menopause’ coach, says:

Transition is accompanied by a sense that you can’t get back; you know you can’t go back to your old ways but you haven’t yet got new strategies in place. You have a sense of being all at sea, a sense of ‘whatever I do doesn’t make a difference’, of not being able to go backwards, which can be quite disturbing and quite scary.

Transformation

Oxford Dictionaries Online defines transformation as follows:

A marked change in form, nature, or appearance.
A sudden dramatic change of scenery on stage.
A metamorphosis during the life cycle of an animal.

Coaches

Themes that emerged from my research and reflections in relation to transformation included:

- marked change in form, nature, or appearance;
- metamorphosis;
- there really is no going back;
- transformation and transition go together;
- you have to be ready.

With transformation there is more of a sense of something or someone becoming something or someone different, of a deeper more marked change, perhaps one that is irreversible even. As executive coach and psychologist Dr Alison Whybrow says:

Transition is a systemic opportunity for transformation to take place...

With some clients I’ve coached who were in a bit of a crisis, there has been an absolutely huge shift from one phase to the next; they can’t go back as they’ve grown so much. There is a threshold that people step over and see the world in a different way as a result.

Now we have started to describe the territory, let’s start to map it out.
References


Bridges, W *Managing Transitions: Making the most of change* (3rd edn), Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London


"Liz Hall expertly intertwines relevant theory, the latest thinking of leading academics and real-world practice to provide coaches with an essential guide for working with people facing challenging transitions. Compelling, timely and inspiring!"

Dr Christian van Nieuwerburgh, Associate Professor in Coaching, Centre for Coaching and Behavioural Change, Henley Business School

"The generosity in the material that is shared, the power in the stories, the vulnerability and honesty in the case studies makes this book an exciting and compelling read that brings you face to face with your own learning edge of working with crisis. This book stretches the assumptions of what it is to coach."

Dr Alison Whybrow, Chartered Psychologist and Coach

"To connect with so many real and relatable stories of people’s triumph in almost impossible experiences caused me to wonder – what would I do in this situation? Liz’s research and references are comprehensive and it’s an inspiring read I think most coaches would get something from."

Julie Starr, Director, Starr Consulting and author of The Coaching Manual

Coaching in Times of Crisis and Transformation takes an in-depth look at crisis and discusses its impact on both individuals and organizations. Covering coaching in any time of crisis and change, it offers a complete, practical resource for managers and coaches to tackle the challenges effectively. This book can help turn a crisis, whether personal or systemic, into an opportunity for transformation. Coaching in Times of Crisis and Transformation covers definitions of crisis from both the individual and organizational perspective and includes insights on: adapting to change and finding opportunities in crisis, what neuroscience tells us about our reactions to change, transformative coaching, change models, supporting organizations in crisis and how coaching and mentoring can act as preventative measures against crises.

Liz Hall is the editor and co-owner of Coaching at Work magazine. She is an award-winning journalist and coach with accolades including the Periodical Training Association’s Journalist of the Year award and the Association for Coaching’s Award for Impacting (Leadership/External Focus) Service to the Wider Community for 2010-11. She has written and worked for publications including the Guardian, Financial Times, Observer, Daily Mail, People Management, Personnel Today and Training Magazine and is the author of Mindful Coaching, also published by Kogan Page.