

Chapter 2

Cognitive behavioural coaching

Gladeana McMahon

Origins of CBT

In the 1960s, US psychiatrist Aaron Beck noticed that his patients tended to engage in 'internal dialogue' as if they were talking to themselves. He realized that there was a link between thoughts and feelings and he created the term 'automatic thoughts' to describe these emotion-filled thoughts. Beck found that people were not always fully aware of such thoughts, but could learn to identify and report them. If people were feeling upset, their thoughts were usually negative and self-defeating. Beck discovered that, with help, individuals could identify these thoughts and were able to understand and overcome their difficulties. And so cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) was born, which would later spawn cognitive behavioural coaching (CBC).

Principles of CBT

Cognitive behavioural coaching owes its origins to CBT and is a non-directive form of coaching, which does not seek to give people the answers to their difficulties but rather, through a collaborative process, termed 'guided discovery', assists individuals to devise their own conclusions and solutions. Guided discovery is based on what is called Socratic questioning, in which the coach asks the person a series of questions that enable the individual to become aware of the

way he or she is thinking. The term derives from the method of philosophical inquiry originally developed by the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates. The practice involves asking a series of questions surrounding a central issue, that seek to assist the individual identify his or her ideas on the subject being explored. Questions such as, 'what do you mean by your difficulties relating to others?', 'what would be an example of your being overlooked?' or 'how does your relationship with your peers relate to your anxiety', are all examples of questions aimed at helping the individual uncover his or her own thinking on a particular issue. Socratic questioning promotes insight, thus allowing a more rational decision-making process to take place. For example, this type of questioning can move an individual from his or her limiting style of thinking to a more flexible system of identifying a number of problem-solving strategies (Curwen, Palmer and Ruddell, 2000).

CBC is time-limited, solution-focused and based in the present. Historical material is only sought when necessary in order to elicit information about the past that usefully highlights why and how past events have shaped the individual's way of thinking and behaving. Coaching aims to assist individuals achieve goals and devise action plans to improve performance. It does so by taking into account the need for self-awareness of moods and emotions and, in this sense, assists people to become more emotionally intelligent. It works on the principle that understanding one's own emotions, motivations and ways of being, as well as that of others, will assist in becoming more effective in all that one does.

CBC is 'psycho-educative' in nature, which means that the goal of this form of coaching is to help individuals develop the necessary skills so that they can become their own coach in the future. As the coaching client becomes aware of his or her own thinking style, its strengths and limitations, and of alternative ways of thinking and alternative ways of behaving, the individual becomes more adaptable and flexible. By using this newly acquired knowledge, the individual develops more effective and satisfying ways of dealing with challenges and goal attainment.

The CBC process

The number and length of sessions depends on the individual's circumstances. For example, a programme of six 90-minute sessions could be delivered as one session a week or fortnight for three sessions and then one session a month for the remaining three. Alternatively, it may be more helpful to engage in one 3-hour session in order to break the back of a particular issue, following this session with shorter sessions on a less regular basis.

At the beginning of the coaching process a 'Behavioural Contract' (McMahon, 2006; Skiffington and Zeus, 2003) should be drawn up which takes into account the needs of the sponsoring organization and the changes required from a corporate perspective, the needs of the coaching client and the changes that he or she wishes to make and the thoughts of the coach who synthesizes this information into a series of 'objectives' and their associated 'outcomes'. For example, the organization may wish to see an individual 'improve their communication skills in order to become a more effective leader' and the individual may want to 'gain confidence when dealing with superiors'. Both of these statements are regarded as overall objectives. However, neither of these objectives specifies what would need to be different in order for there to be a positive outcome or some sort of measurable change, or how the organization or individual will measure the aforementioned change(s). A series of further questions are used to elicit measurable outcomes such as:

If you were more confident, what would you be doing differently?

If you were a more effective leader, what behaviour would you be engaging in that would be different?

In addition to the questioning process used to elicit outcomes, consideration is also given to the key performance indicators already in use within the organization and how these can be used to measure change.

The role of the coach is to ensure that the outcomes are clearly stated, that all parties are on-board in relation to what is expected and that the number of desired outcomes can be obtained in the specified allotted time. In addition, during the contracting period, agreement is also reached regarding the type and method of feedback to be provided to the organization, the parameters of confidentiality and the terms and conditions related to the coaching assignment. Once all these factors have been agreed, the contract can be signed-off by all parties and used to evaluate the success of the coaching sessions at the end of the programme. There are, of course, occasions when the contract may need to be amended during the coaching programme, if new information comes to light or if circumstances change. In effect, the Behavioural Contract sets the agenda for change (Leimon, Moscovici and McMahon, 2005).

Sessions start with the coach ascertaining the client's current mood as well as what has happened to the client since the previous meeting. The coach then moves the client on to referring back to the behavioural contract to enable the client to choose one of the items listed to work on in the session. The session then focuses on the chosen item using whatever skills and/or techniques seem appropriate, and the client is then assisted to design his or her own homework assignment to take place

before the next session. Finally, the session ends with the coach eliciting specific feedback on how the client has experienced the session and what has been helpful. CBC is a collaborative process so it is important that the client takes control of his/her subject matter, and provides feedback to the coach on his or her approach to the client.

The coach also takes into account the learning style (Baker, Jensen and Kolb, 2002) of the individual. For example, some clients prefer more information about the concepts behind the coaching style being used and want to engage in what could be termed ‘bibliocoaching’, an adaptation on the term ‘bibliotherapy’ (Pardeck, 1998) where reading material is recommended to backup the programme. Other clients may want to engage in more experiential learning and may not be so bothered about the theoretical concepts being used. If the coach can work with the client’s learning style this can lead to more successful goal attainment.

Understanding thinking style

The individual is assisted to identify and understand the impact of his or her thinking style in a given situation (Neenan and Dryden, 2006). Negative Automatic Thoughts or NATs (those thoughts we engage that are self-defeating) are based on the ‘Life Rules’ or ‘Underlying Assumptions’ we have devised to function in our environment and, these in turn, are based on the core beliefs we hold about ourselves, others and the world in general (Figure 2.1).

An individual has been asked to spearhead a new project alongside a number of other complicated projects he is responsible for. The organization would like the individual to take on the project but it is not essential that he does as there are other people in the organization who could be approached.

Core Belief	I am a hard worker and success comes to those who work hard
Underlying Assumption or Life Rule	<i>If I am offered an opportunity then I should take it</i>
NATs	I can’t say no

The person holds a core belief that he is a hard worker and that success is dependent on hard work. This Core Belief leads the person to develop an Underlying Assumption that whenever he is offered an opportunity he should take it. This could be seen as a rule that has served him well during the early part of his career while he was becoming established. By accepting opportunity, he has raised his profile and created opportunities to expand his knowledge. However, now that he is of senior status with

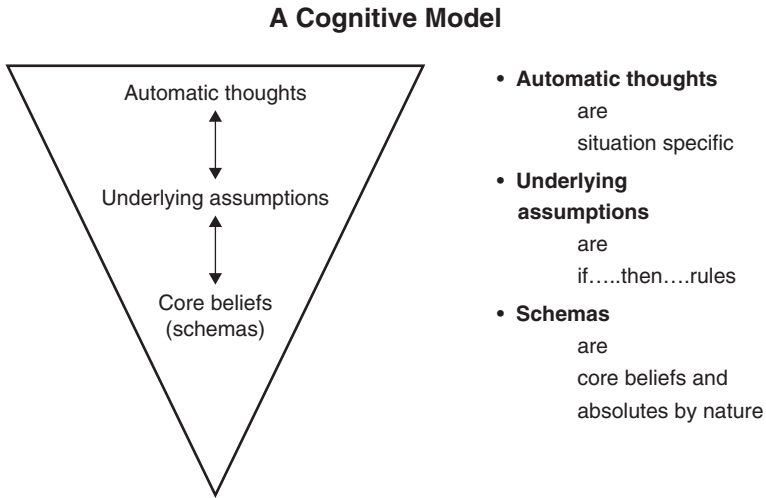


Figure 2.1 A cognitive model.

increasing level of demand being made of him, it is not practical or helpful to accept every opportunity. Continuing to accept opportunity could potentially lead to the loss of the good opinion of others by not being able to deliver on time, by producing less satisfactory outcomes, or by simply leading to personal burnout (Casserley and Megginson, 2008) and the subsequent decline of performance in all areas.

In this case the individual was aware that he always took on too much and that he was now reaching his personal and professional limits. However, when he considered turning down opportunities he felt anxious and found himself saying yes and then worrying excessively about how to manage his workload.

Once the relationship between his Core Belief(s), his Underlying Assumption(s) and the ways his thoughts were triggered in such situations were uncovered, he was able to stand back and see how such thoughts were unhelpful. It was now possible to develop an alternative Underlying Assumption of:

If I am offered an opportunity then I need to evaluate it and consider whether it is useful to me and the organization to accept it.

Creating a new Underlying Assumption together with a practical framework for evaluating opportunity such as asking for 'thinking it over time' so that he could work out the pros and cons of taking on anything new and developing a matrix to assist with decision making meant that he was able to take control of his workload ensuring that he was able to deliver what was needed when it was needed.

Problem	Self-defeating thinking	Emotional/ behavioural reaction	Healthy response	New approach to problem
A	B	C	D	E
Giving a public lecture	I must perform well or the outcome will be awful. Logical: Just because I want to perform well, how does it logically follow that I must perform well? Empirical: Where is the evidence that my demand must be granted? Am I being realistic? If I don't perform well will the outcome be really awful? Pragmatic: Where is it getting me holding on to this belief?	Anxious, inability to concentrate	Logical: Although it is strongly preferable to do well, I don't have to. Empirical: There is no evidence that I will get what I demand even if it is preferable and desirable. Pragmatic: If I don't perform well, the outcome may be bad, but hardly devastating! If I continue holding on to this belief, I will remain anxious and be even more likely to perform badly.	If I change my attitude I will feel concerned and <i>not</i> anxious, Also, I'll be able to concentrate and prepare for the lecture

Figure 2.2 Thoughts form.

Identifying thinking style

In CBC emphasis is put on identification of self-defeating thinking and thoughts are elicited by using tools such as a Thoughts Record Form where the individual is taught how to identify his or her thinking style (Figure 2.2).

In addition, the individual is also asked to begin to identify the types of cognitive distortions, as in Figure 2.3, he or she engages in which influences the way the person perceives situations (Neenan and Dryden, 2004).

Once the individual becomes aware of his or her ways of distorting reality they have the opportunity of putting in counter-measures. If an individual tends to see a mistake as something awful (*catastrophizing*), and the end of the world (*all or nothing thinking*), perceiving the situation as being all their fault (*personalization*) without taking into account others that may have contributed to the outcome, then this type of thinking rather than assisting the person do better next time, is more likely to make the individual feel stressed and anxious. However, if the person could stand back from the situation, thinking instead:

I am not happy about the error but it is not the end of the world and I was only responsible for part of what happened. What went wrong and what can I learn about this situation that will assist me the next time?

Distortion	Meaning
Discounting the positive	<i>'If I can do it, it doesn't count'</i>
All or nothing thinking	<i>'I pass or I fail', 'you win or you lose', 'it's right or it's wrong', 'I do it all now or do none at all'</i>
Labelling	<i>'I did something bad therefore I am bad', 'I said something silly therefore I am foolish'</i>
Mind reading	<i>'She didn't look at me therefore I have done something wrong'</i>
Fortune telling	<i>'I just know it will be awful'</i>
Catastrophizing	<i>'Oh my God this is SO terrible'</i>
Personalization	<i>'It's all my fault', 'I am the one to blame'</i>
Blame	<i>'It's all his/her/my fault'</i>
Generalization	<i>'All managers are the same', 'I never get what I want', 'it's always the same'</i>
Shoulds, Musts, Have tos and Oughts	<i>'I/you/she/he/they must..have to..ought to'</i>

Figure 2.3 Table of cognitive distortions.

It is likely that the individual will be better placed to correct the error, learn from it and devise systems and/or structures for the future.

In CBC there are three types of challenges that are used to help the client re-evaluate their thinking (Simos, 2002).

- *Empirical/evidence based* – ‘Where is the evidence that if you make a mistake you are a failure?’
- *Logical* – ‘Just because you would like never to make a mistake how does it logically follow that you must not make a mistake?’
- *Pragmatic* – ‘Even if it were true that making a mistake means being a failure, do you feel better or worse for believing it, and does it help you stop making mistakes?’

The above aims to help the individual engage in realistic thinking which is more likely to assist him in reaching sensible, informed and sustainable decisions.

A CBC coach recognizes that the types of demands we make of ourselves, others and the world, are likely to generate either positive or negative outcomes (Dryden, 1999). For example, if I demand of myself that:

I must do well, if I do not then it is awful, or I must be approved of by others, if I am not then I have less worth

These thoughts are likely to result in stress, anxiety, depression, shame and guilt.

Demands of others such as:

You must treat me justly, if you do not then it is not fair and you deserve to be punished

are likely to result in anger and passive-aggressive behaviour.

For those who believe that:

Life must be as I want it to be and if it is not then that's awful

The outcomes are likely to be self-pity, addictive behaviour, depression and a tendency to procrastinate.

CBC can be used as a main approach to coaching an individual or as part of another approach. A number of coaches who do not identify themselves as being cognitive behavioural use many of the skills and techniques from this approach in their work with clients due to their tried and tested and effective nature.

There are of course those who do not subscribe to the CBC approach, believing that CBC is too focused and directive in nature. For these individuals coaching is totally reflective in nature. There is also a belief that this model only works in relation to a psychological coaching model and cannot be applied in a strictly business coaching arena. For those who support CBC it is seen as a 'life skills' approach that can be used alone or integrated into a range of other approaches. These individuals recognize that technical skills do not exist without a person to apply them and that, on many occasions; it is not the technical skills that an individual is lacking but the experience of struggling with some kind of faulty thinking or perception that makes the task more onerous than it need be.

CBC interventions

There are many different types of strategies, tools and techniques used in CBC, three of which have been listed above in Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3. Interventions are aimed at either changing an individual's thoughts, feelings, behaviours and/or physiological reactions to situations. For example, a simple breathing exercise can be taught to a coaching client to help them manage the physiological fall-out of dealing with anxiety provoking situations. Alternatively, educating the client as to the cognitive model is in itself a strategy that can be used to provide the client

with a model for understanding how he or she may have developed their thinking style.

Four more interventions are discussed below.

The cost–benefit analysis

This is an exercise that is used to assist coaching clients to consider the consequences of their actions (Neenan and Dryden, 2002).

The client writes down the problem he or she is experiencing and then on the right-hand side of the form, writes down all of the benefits of continuing with the status quo. On the left-hand side he or she writes down all the costs (emotional, practical, financial, etc.) of continuing with the same course of action (Figure 2.4). The cognitive behavioural coach helps the client evaluate what has been said while using his or her skill to assist the client identify self-defeating thinking, unhelpful beliefs and alternative ways of reframing such thinking into that which could be termed self-enhancing. This exercise can be used in its written form or undertaken as a discussion piece alone. There are no real pitfalls in using this exercise. However, as is the case with any exercise undertaken with a coaching client, the exercise has to be positioned so that the client needs to see the relevance of it and want to engage in the process.

Name: *Sue Jones*

Date: 9th September

Problem: *Don't seem to be able to make decisions*

Cost	Benefit
• Worry a lot • Other people make decisions that I don't like • Feel weak • Don't get what I want	• Can't be wrong • Don't have to stand up for myself • Can avoid difficult situations

Figure 2.4 Example of a cost–benefit analysis.

Contingency planning

The contingency planning exercise owes its origins to the work of Arnold Lazarus and his PR Plan (Lazarus, 1981). When an individual faces a difficult situation that he or she may find worrying, the individual tends to overestimate the dangers and underestimate the resources available (both internal and external) to deal with the situation. By doing this, the individual makes the situation worse rather than better

and hampers the chances of a positive outcome. Even if a positive outcome is achieved it may have cost the individual dearly in terms of the stress and energy used to manage the situation.

Having identified the situation that is causing the individual concern, the coach asks the client to list all the concerns that he or she may be experiencing. The coach positively encourages the client to list as many things that could go wrong as possible. This part of the exercise is only complete when the client cannot think of anything else that could happen. The coach then encourages the client to come up with a series of contingency plans against each of the items listed (Figure 2.5). By doing this, the coach is assisting the client to recognize that all situations can be dealt with, that nothing is the end of the world and that the coaching client can cope. In addition, from a cognitive perspective, by engaging the client in contingency planning it has the advantage of tricking the brain into thinking that it has already dealt with this situation – in a sense it is a kind of ‘role rehearsal’ and this too can have a calming effect. This exercise does not have any real pitfalls providing the client finds it of benefit.

Situation: Giving a board presentation

Situation = What could go wrong?	Action = What will I do if this does happen?
A Experience IT problems	A • Arrive early to check equipment • Arrange for an IT person to be present • Take data stick and spare laptop even though one will be available
B Forget my words	B • Take a deep breath • Acknowledge I have lost my place (it happens to everyone at some point) • Ensure I have my cue cards/PP slide printout close to check
C Asked a question I cannot answer	C • Simply state that I do not have the answer but that I can get it

Figure 2.5 Example of contingency planning for managing difficult situations.

Responsibility pie

The responsibility pie is a tool used to assist an individual to recognize that he or she is only part of a much larger picture. Many people blame themselves or others for things that are out of their control and this exercise is a useful process for working out what part of the situation belongs to whom (McMahon and Leimon, 2008).

In this exercise the coaching client is asked to describe the situation, all parties involved and the sequence of events. He or she is then asked to draw a circle to represent the whole of the situation. The individual is told that the circle or pie equates to 100% and is then asked to ascribe a percentage to all of the parties or circumstances.

For example, an individual was asked to submit a report by a certain deadline and then discovered that he had missed the deadline as the date had been brought forward. The individual concerned is a perfectionist and, as such, blames himself totally for the missed deadline. However, it soon became clear that an IT issue meant an email bringing forward the deadline date was never received and although his manager did think it was unusual not to receive an acknowledgement to his email he did not check to see that the client had received the new information. The individual did hear something through the office grapevine that had made him wonder if there could have been a change, but because he was busy he did not follow this up.

As a perfectionist, the client is unhelpfully engaging in punishing self-talk, ruminating over his error. He is defensive and irritable with those around him. The coach uses the responsibility pie to assist the client to engage in realistic thinking and by talking through each of the component parts encourages the client to consider the ways in which his current attitudes actually hamper rather than encourage good performance (Figure 2.6).

There are no real pitfalls in using this exercise.

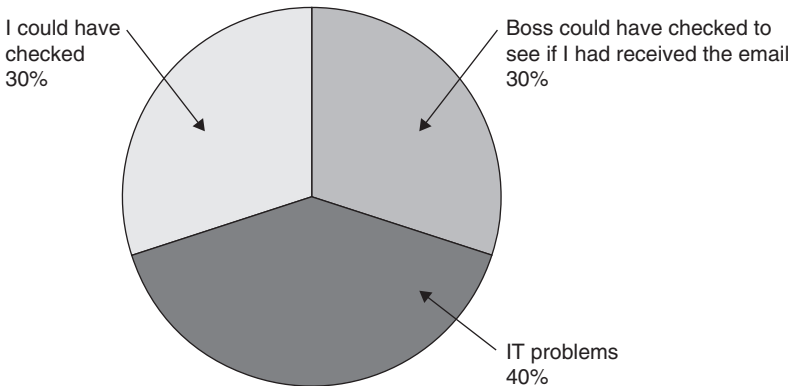


Figure 2.6 Sample responsibility pie to challenge faulty thinking.

Coping imagery to deal with negative emotions

According to research visualizing a positive outcome means the individual is more likely to achieve one (Hodges et al., 1979). Coping imagery is used as a way of preparing for events.

The client is asked to write out a 'problem list' of all the people, places and situations he or she feels uncomfortable with or in. Then, using a 0–10 scale as a way of rating the degree of discomfort felt (0 = no discomfort and 10 = maximum discomfort) the client rates each of the aspects listed.

The client is encouraged to choose something that has a rating of no more than 5, as choosing a higher rating would be akin to attempting to tackle the most difficult situation first and choosing a lower rating would not be challenging enough and unlikely to provide enough learning for the individual.

The coach asks the client to close his or her eyes and imagine being at the beginning of the task. The coach asks the client to use all of their senses to imagine the sights, the sounds and the smells associated with the situation.

As the coaching client will have been given a range of coping strategies from breathing exercises to different ways of perceiving the situation prior to this exercise the client is asked to imagine using these as part of the coping imagery exercise.

The client is asked to visualize the situation two or three times, each time seeing him- or herself coping with the situation. By doing so the client will find that the difficulty rating he or she ascribed to the situation at the beginning reduces even though the individual is only using imagination. It is as if the brain is fooled into believing that the individual has already successfully managed the situation (McMahon, 2008).

Maximum benefit is gained from the above technique when you practise it frequently. There are no real pitfalls to using this exercise unless the client is unhappy to engage in it. However, some clients have more ability to visualize than others and it would be useful to ascertain from the client whether they find visualizing easy.

Case study Communication

James, a senior director in an international financial services group responsible for structured finance execution, was referred for coaching by his line manager. Although he was seen as being technically able, he came across as cold and aloof and this had a negative impact on the people he met. One of the objectives of his coaching was to help James develop better interpersonal skills in order to make him a more effective marketer. A coaching contract of eight, one-and-a-half hour coaching sessions was agreed. His Behavioural Contract included the following two outcomes, 'to identify and develop relevant interpersonal skills associated with effective relationship building' and, 'to develop a framework for understanding my own thinking

(Continued)

processes and that of others to enable the recognition of the similarities and differences and associated possible outcomes’.

During his early sessions with his coach, James came to recognize that to progress further in the organization, he needed to develop his business organization skills. Psychometric profiling helped identify his personality type and James came to realize that his approach had a tendency to alienate individuals. By considering the impact he had on others, he was able to develop an awareness of his own ‘natural’ style of communicating and recognize that different people had their own preferences for communication.

The main hurdle James had to overcome was to appreciate that the organization of business was only partly to do with technical ability. He came to understand that a prospective client in the highly competitive banking market is going to rely on personal relationships in choosing the person and organization they wish to work with. The focus of his coaching sessions became the development of desired behaviours to improve personal relationships. A series of behavioural exercises was created in relation to networking and the social skills required for creating and maintaining effective relationships, in particular, the concept of using ‘small talk’ around non-technical subjects, such as finding out about the other person and looking for subjects of personal interest, were explored. To assist this process, James was helped to identify his thinking style. Two of his beliefs being ‘I am at work to work and not to socialize’ and that ‘other people will think well of me if I am technically able and I must demonstrate this at all times’.

By the end of the coaching contract, James had managed to modify his behaviour and communication style to one that placed more emphasis on building individual relationships. The feedback received from his manager and from others in the organization demonstrated a positive change in the way James related to people. In addition, James found that his more open personal style was securing a more positive pay-off in terms of securing business.

References

- Baker, A., Jensen, J., Kolb, D. (2002). *Conversational Learning: An Experiential Approach to Knowledge Creation*. Westport, CT: Quorum/Greenwood.
- Casserley, T. and Megginson, D. (2008). *Learning from Burnout: Developing Sustainable Leaders and Avoiding Career Derailment*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Curwen, B., Palmer, S. and Ruddell, P. (2000). In: Palmer, S. and McMahon, G. (eds), *Brief Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*. London: Sage.
- Dryden, W. (1999). *Rational Emotive Behavioural Counselling in Action*. London: Sage.

- Hodges, W., McCaulay, M., Ryan, V. and Stroschal, K. (1979). Coping imagery, systematic desensitization, and self-concept change. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 3(2), June, 181–92.
- Lazarus, A. (1981). *The Practice of Multimodal Therapy: Systematic, Comprehensive, and Effective Psychotherapy*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Leimon, A., Moscovici, F., McMahon, G. (2005). *Essential Business Coaching*. London: Brunner Routledge.
- McMahon, G. (2006). *Behavioural Contracting: Coach the Coach*. London: Fenman.
- McMahon, G. (2008). *No More Anger: Be your own Anger Management Coach*. London: Karnac.
- McMahon, G. and Leimon, A. (2008). *Performance Coaching for Dummies*. London: John Wiley.
- Neenan, M. and Dryden, W. (2002). *Life Coaching: A Cognitive-Behavioural Approach*. London: Brunner-Routledge.
- Neenan, M. and Dryden, W. (2004). *Cognitive Therapy: 100 Key Points and Techniques*. London: Brunner-Routledge.
- Neenan, M. and Dryden, W. (2006). *Cognitive Therapy in a Nutshell*. London: Sage.
- Pardeck, J. (1998). *Using Books in Clinical Social Work Practice: A Guide to Bibliotherapy*. London: Haworth Press.
- Simos, G. (2002). *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*. London: Brunner-Routledge.
- Skiffington, S. and Zeus, P. (2003). *Behavioural Coaching: How to Build and Sustain Personal and Organizational Strength*. Sydney, Australia: McGraw Hill.