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MASTER'S THESIS

HELPING LEADERS GAIN CLARITY, INSIGHT, AND FIND CREATIVE SOLUTIONS: THE POWER OF METAPHORS

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ABSTRACT

This practitioner-led action research study explores metaphor-based intervention to help leaders gain clarity, deepen insight, and develop creative responses to professional challenges. Grounded in Adlerian and constructivist theory, the study draws on my work as a leadership consultant with leaders who often experience inferiority, isolation, inadequacy, and emotional paralysis despite extensive training and experience. To address these challenges, I adapted a metaphor-based intervention inspired by Kopp's. Eight leaders participated in this practitioner-led, action-research study that uses a mix of largely qualitative methods to examine the intervention's process and impact.

Key-words: metaphors, brief intervention, leaders, encouragement, Adler

INTRODUCTION

This practitioner-led action research study is situated within my professional context as a leadership consultant committed to fostering more democratic, encouraging, purposeful, and effective workplace cultures and to supporting leaders in creating environments that promote the well-being, development, and satisfaction of all concerned. It also reflects my observations of the feelings of inferiority, isolation, inadequacy, and emotional paralysis experienced by many leaders. In response to these challenges, I turned to metaphor as a potentially effective intervention for helping leaders move beyond stuckness while remaining by its length, compatible with their limited time. I therefore devoted considerable effort to defining and refining an intervention based on Kopp's protocol. The study involved eight leaders and used a primarily qualitative methodological approach to explore the intervention and its impact within an Adlerian and constructivist framework.

CONTEXTE AND RATIONALE

Creating life where stillness is, initiating movement by encouraging, bringing joy, lightness, and self-reflection has always driven me.

The importance of leadership

In the brief bio-sketch sent to prospective participants in this research, I wrote that in my work, I aimed to help develop encouraging cultures. As research demonstrates, leaders' reactions shape organizational norms (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Edmonson,2002). Helping leaders to feel more encouraged and to be more encouraging appealed to me because of the positive impact on the whole community. Indeed, leadership training produces cascade effects on educators' beliefs (institutional level), classroom practices (interactional level), and academic experiences (individual level) (Robinson and al., 2008; Brady and al., 2024). Consequently, I have chosen to work for the last 13 years mostly with leaders – school

leaders but also corporate executives from organizations such as Hermès, AXA, and Sciences Po Executive Education – where a single training maximized the impact and change on all levels. Culture change, as in the creation of an encouraging culture, is highly complex and difficult to achieve (Nagaishi, 2025). So, my colleague Nadine Gaudin and I designed a training program mostly based on self-created activities based on the theory and practice of Alfred Adler (1956) and some existing activities of Positive Discipline (Nelsen & Gaudin, 2021) to encourage leaders and help them spread an encouraging culture at all levels of their organization. This training is called "Create a culture of Encouragement" (CCE).

Results and observed limitations of CCE training

A quantitative action research study conducted in 2025 as part of a university degree in Mental Health, Relational Health, and SEL (University of Grenoble, under the supervision of Rebecca Shankland, Researcher and Head of the Department of Psychology) evaluated the CCE training's effects on 153 school leaders (inspectors and principals) (Gaudin & Roland-Riché, 2025). Using four validated scales (measuring acceptance and non-judgement, positivity, vitality, and well-being; Appendix 1), the results of the study were encouraging. Participants gave highly positive feedback, and the data indicated a shift toward less judgmental attitudes ($p=.04$ for Chime scale) and a greater tendency to view mistakes as opportunities for growth ($p = .025$). The program was repeated several times with similar outcomes, confirming that leaders readily engage with Adlerian ideas, as Karen John (2014) often observed when she introduced Adlerian ideas to leaders.

However, once the training is over, leaders often struggle to apply these concepts in their workplace. The leaders experience many challenges, including dealing with uncooperative behaviors (John, 2014). Nevertheless, I have also observed an increase in their feelings of inferiority: the new practices threaten established behavior designed to find security and significance, resulting in the leader feeling discouraged and stuck (Bennis, 2007; John, 2000, 2008, 2020). Additional CCE trainings might reinforce these feelings instead of alleviating them and might lead to stuckness.

Working with metaphors as a way forward

According to constructivist theory (Biscaro and al., 2025) and Adlerian psychology (Watts, 2003), individuals build their understanding of reality through experience, forming subjective interpretations that influence their behaviors. Within the constructivist paradigm, problems arise not so much because of objective circumstances but of how the leaders see these circumstances, themselves, and others. Working on these subjective conceptions with leaders—rather than providing additional modules of CCE training—may help them gain clarity and move forward in creating a more encouraging culture. But how?

Metaphors were first brought to my attention by Marina Blumstein, President of the International Association of Individual Psychology (IAIP), at ICASSI in 2018 in Bonn, Germany. Metaphors, which "create resemblance between different things" (Kopp, 1998, p. 480) help make complex situations more understandable through familiar images (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), Not only do metaphors enable counsellors and their clients to understand very complex concepts or situations, thanks to more familiar ideas or images (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) but I discovered that spoken metaphors could be a means of helping individuals to reconsider their responses and attitudes towards their challenges outside the therapist room (Bluvshtein, 2018).

Since metaphors play a key role in organizing our understanding of the world (Aragno, 2009; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), they can be mobilized when clarity is lacking for a better understanding of complex situations. Indeed, as humans live in a world of meanings and express their uniqueness through imagination, creating personal metaphors helps them make sense of their experiences (Adler, 1931). Mayer-Schönberger and Oberlechner (2002) asserted that "Metaphors often build a bridge from the known to the unknown, from the familiar to the unfamiliar. They help us understand and interact with phenomena that otherwise would be too abstract and too complex". Given that each leader’s challenges are shaped by their environment, beliefs, and lifestyle, metaphors provide a meaningful way to explore their experiences, regain clarity, and develop creative solutions. Furthermore, working on them suits leaders’ very limited time (Rodier, 2025), offering a focused and efficient tool for reflection and change.

Research confirms that leaders are highly discouraged

In normal times, in the working environment, relations among people can be far more complex than in other spheres of human life. (Dreikurs Ferguson, 2014). Leaders get discouraged if their accomplishments decline or their work is not appreciated by others (Dreikurs Ferguson, 2014). The French 2021 study on the morale of school leaders in lower and upper secondary education shows a high level of discouragement with a clear deterioration over five years (Djéhanne, 2023): 78% of the school management staff, including the head of schools, declared suffering from mental disorders. It was "only" 58% in 2017. In 2023, 14% of them were presumed clinical burnout (Djéhanne, 2023). French school leaders report a lack of recognition and encouragement. While discouragement is spreading in the school system, trust is collapsing: 8 out of 10 of them observe a deterioration in trust towards the institution. Relations are also affected with a clear deterioration, with 56% of the heads of school reporting a deterioration in interpersonal relations with students' parents, for example. The same viral discouragement spiral is found in France in the corporate world: 1 out of 3 CEO of small or medium-scale companies is suffering from a physical or mental disorder (Amit & Di Giandomenico, 2025). Researchers have shown that team members are particularly sensitive to the leader's behavior. (Tyler & Lind 1992), and leaders' responses to events and behaviors influence (in a way either beneficial or detrimental to the group) other members' perceptions of appropriate and safe behavior. Leaders definitely need help. Unfortunately, they have less and less time for it with an extremely full diary (Rodier, 2025), so whatever intervention to help must find a way to address this constraint.

Research supports the effectiveness of single-session therapy

Single-Session Therapy (SST) is not a recent innovation; more than three decades have passed since Moshe Talmon first conceptualized and implemented it (Talmon, 1990). Since then, numerous studies have been conducted worldwide to evaluate its effects on different populations (Ewen et al., 2018; Hopkins et al., 2017; Perkins, 2006; Perkins & Scarlett, 2008; Westwater et al., 2020). More recently, in 2025, a systematic analysis showed

that 83% of the 41 single-session interventions in mental and behavioural health reported positive outcomes in at least one of the following: anxiety, depression, externalising behaviours, eating-related difficulties, substance use, and treatment engagement or participation (Schleider et al., 2025).

Recent research not only demonstrates the efficacy of a single-session intervention but also underlines the essential role of a few elements, such as a structured intervention, a robust therapeutic alliance, and a high participant involvement (Fullen, 2019). The use of Richard Kopp's protocol (Appendix 2a for more), enriched with Mia Levitt Frank's one (Appendix 2b for more), enables meeting the first requirement: a structured intervention. Building a strong therapeutic alliance involves helping clients feel safe, listened to, and understood, while also creating a common goal for the counseling process (Flückiger et al., 2012).

Adlerian theory and psychotherapy, based on the Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler, offers a holistic approach to understanding human behavior and promoting positive change (Adler, 1956). So, wrapping this single session in the spirit of Adlerian counselling is intended to optimise the quality of the therapeutic alliance, the leader's involvement leading to greater effectiveness. Encouragement, a core principle of Adlerian psychology, can be understood as a key relational process underpinning the alliance as conceptualized by Watts (2003), and Wong and al,. (2015). By emphasizing clients' strengths, validating their subjective experience, and fostering hope, encouragement enhances the relational bond and supports collaboration on therapeutic goals and tasks. Adlerian theory also emphasizes the importance of subjective perception: Individuals interpret reality in their own unique ways, which shapes the approach they use to achieve a sense of belonging (Shifron, 2020). Adlerian counseling is conceived not only as a treatment for mental disorders but also as an intervention in a variety of contexts with non-clinical populations who face psychological challenges in their lives (Frekko & Oberst, 2026).

The under-estimated importance of metaphors

Because we cannot understand anything without comparing it to something else, people frequently create metaphors that compare two entities with mutual similarities (Sarig, in Levitt Frank, 2018). Steen and al. (2010) find that metaphoric language is used 18.6% of the time in academic writing, 11.8% in fiction, and 7.7% in conversation. Research also shows that metaphors tend to appear more frequently when people describe emotions or reflect on emotional experiences, highlighting the importance for counselors to notice and work with them (Fainsilber & Ortony, 1987; Samur and al.,2015; Smollan, 2014).

Richard Kopp and Daniel Eckstein (2004) have used metaphors to link abstract feelings of an individual facing a challenge to concrete images, helping participants gain insight into their inner world and identify solutions to their problems. Kopp and Eckstein shared a protocol to assist clients in developing awareness and insight by exploring and transforming their own metaphors. Working with a client's spoken metaphor is very much like working with early recollections as metaphors; it stresses the person's ability to search for and choose alternative methods for dealing with the situation (Lavon & Shifron, 2020). The transformation of metaphors by the leader is encouraging in itself as "engaging with creativity and self-responsibility through metaphor transformation is encouraging" (Levitt Frank, 2019, p. 287).

In addition, Kopp (1995) argued that as the process of exploring and transforming client-generated metaphors unfolds entirely within the client's own worldview, this approach is especially well-suited whatever the profile of the population. Furthermore, metaphors are everywhere, and we can find them in every language and culture people have studied (Gibbs, 2020).

Recently, there has been a rise in articles on the use and effectiveness of metaphors in the workplace, seeing the metaphor as a map to understand leadership (Biscaro and al., 2025), underlining that metaphors capture the essential reality of an organization, connecting metaphors to social constructivism (Biscaro and al., 2025). Working with metaphors is also seen as an alternative to the step-by-step analysis, and a way to gain knowledge quickly (Yu and al., 2024). Working with metaphor is already used in the workplace, for example, in career development or in coaching (Inkson, 2004; Hiltner, 2022;

Gautam, 2025). Kopp (2001), noted that "Helping executives, managers and employees explore and transform their metaphoric representations of organizational problems helps them create new actions they can take to implement organizational solutions that are consistent with their own beliefs and values »(p. 387). Nevertheless, I have found no Adlerian research on the use of client-generated spoken metaphors in a single session with leaders confronted with challenges.

OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED BENEFITS

Given encouraging results on the use of metaphors in the workplace and the lack of research on a single-session focused on metaphor in an Adlerian setting, I designed this exploratory study. My research objectives were to:

1) Explore the usefulness and extent of client-generated spoken metaphors to help leaders feel more encouraged in facing a current work-related challenge

2) Help leaders gain clarity and insight during a single intervention.

3) Help leaders find creative solutions and the next step in a single intervention

4) Assess each leader's emotional well-being in a single intervention

5) Assess the changes that occur in the leader's perceived confidence and (self-efficacy according to Bandura's theory (2012), Deci and Ryan's self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) theory, following Robert White's effectance motivation, and Crucial Cs in a single intervention.

Hence, choosing both leaders and metaphors as the focus of this intervention appears to be an effective way to: first design and deliver a practical intervention that makes a real difference — helping leaders experience immediate and meaningful movement from their sense of stuckness; second, take the training "Create a culture of encouragement"(CCE) to the next level by refining practice and finding an effective method to address the challenge described above, thereby marking a key milestone in the dissemination of a culture of encouragement; third, strengthen both my own capacity, and that of the leaders, to act as genuine agents of change, able to move beyond states of indecision or stagnation,

particularly when analytical approaches have failed to generate new perspectives; and finally, enrich my professional practice by incorporating a one-hour session dedicated to the use of metaphor, designed to help leaders gain clarity, insight, and creative strategies for navigating complex challenges.

Hence, this approach aims to make a difference for the leaders, the training offered, and my own practice.

METHODS

This is a practitioner-led, action-research study that uses a mix of largely qualitative methods. It is deductive in testing feasibility, inductive in exploring emerging insights, despite limited generalizability. The measure of the effectiveness of the single-session metaphor intervention is ipsative in tracking each participant's movement, relative to their self-identified leadership challenge.

Rooted in Adlerian psychology and the constructivist paradigm, the intervention is based on Kopp & Eckstein's structured protocol (Appendix 2a for more) enriched by Mia Levitt Frank's suggestion to incorporate bodily sensations for more impact (Appendix 2b for more). Early Recollections as metaphors were excluded from this research, as well as practitioner-generated metaphors. Only client-generated spoken metaphors were studied. As action research requires practitioners to investigate their own practice (McNiff, 2013), this study also includes a reflective component on my own practice.

PRE-STUDY :

The pre-study took place between the 2nd of December and the 28th of February, 2026. This preliminary pre-study was conducted with the help of seven leaders. It helped identify key challenges of a single session around metaphors outside the therapeutic room. For example, the fact that the pre-questionnaire and phone call could either build or undermine the alliance. The design of the seven versions of the prequestionnaire (V7 in Appendix 3) illustrates this iterative process, which was used in the prestudy. Each version of the pre-questionnaire was tested, refined through participant feedback, and adjusted

accordingly. Early versions revealed issues such as resistance to how metaphors were introduced (V1), confusion caused by irrelevant coaching questions (V2), and bias introduced by the 4Cs framework in the questions (V3). Later versions simplified the questionnaire a lot, removed biasing elements, and added strengths-based questions (V4). Other adjustments included removing mention of the small sample size (5) to preserve credibility in the corporate world (V5), and introducing a drawing task (Appendix 4) to enhance reflection (V6) (Woolford and al., 2013; Mizera & Krysta, 2025), leading to the final version of the questionnaire (V7).

In the same way, all stages were refined to contribute to alliance-building, trust, and self-reflection while also helping me avoid common practitioner mistakes. This iterative process also improved overall quality, both technically (as sessions moved online) and methodologically, such as a better integration of Kopp's protocol with Adlerian encouragement. I also understood that at the beginning, I spent too much time identifying their main challenges. As metaphors can help individuals articulate feelings that might be too painful or overwhelming to express directly (Kopp & Eckstein, 2004), asking a leader logically what is the most difficult is not as easy and quick as just asking them to point out where the strongest emotion is in their work context. This question in our pre-questionnaire enabled us to spend less time discussing the challenge logically with the leaders. I could go directly to the point and not waste time identifying the main challenge, as it was a short intervention. I also understood during this pre-study that even incomplete transformations provide valuable insight into the client's subjective perspective.

While trying to figure out the best way to generate insight and concrete steps right from the start, I have also added the drawing of the problem in the pre-questionnaire, which helps participants to externalize inner thoughts and enhance self-reflection (Koulidou and al,. 2020; Woolford and al; Lin and al., 2020). I carefully stimulate self-reflection and self-encouragement at every step, including by planning a post-intervention phone call that not only provides data on the lasting effects but also was an encouraging way to maintain the connection (Kutti, 2024), and increase the probability that a change of beliefs turns into

observable steps (Christensen and al. 2022). The evolving design of this prestudy reflects the complexities that exist in real life.

INTERVENTION

The intervention took place between the 9th of March and the 23rd of April 2026. Of course, it was a single-session intervention (Table 1) enriched by a pre-questionnaire a week before the single-session intervention (T1), a pre-phone call a day before (T2), a post-questionnaire the same day (T4), and a post-phone call a week after (T5). T1, T2, T3, and T4 became key elements of this intervention, each contributing to building and maintaining the alliance, and achieving the desired outcomes (clarity, insight, steps out of stuckness, increased well-being, and self-efficacy).

Table 1. Five Steps of the Main Intervention (80 mn)

Step 1 : Opening (20 minutes)	Reinforce the alliance by establishing guidelines Exploring strengths identified in the pre-questionnaire
Step 2 : Discussion of the challenge (10 minutes)	Description of the drawing Framing the problem as an overuse of strengths if applicable, Use of the SSBT exception question if relevant (Cabien et al., 2025) Looking for the part of the challenge that evokes the strongest emotion, if applicable. Selection of an issue
Step 3: Metaphor creation and exploration (10 minutes)	Generation of a corresponding metaphor (if one has not emerged naturally)

Step 5 : Exploration and transformation: 20 minutes	Exploration and Transformation of the metaphor using the leader's creative imagination. Hence, revealing their strategies.
5) Bridging the gap: 20 minutes	At this stage, participants are invited to reflect on possible connections between the images and their current difficulties, and to bridge the gap by exploring how the strategy used in the metaphor could be applied in real life.

The last 10 minutes are spent answering the post-questionnaire.

The 3 main ingredients were the application of Kopp & Eckstein's protocol (Annexe 2a for more), enriched by Levitt Frank's suggestion (Annexe 2b for more), encouragement, and self-awareness (Table 2)

Table 2. Main Ingredients of Intervention (Appendices 5 and 6 for the prompts)	
Kopp & Eckstein's protocol (Appendix 2a for more) • Do not use interpretation or external frameworks during exploration and transformation • "Walk alongside" the leader: follow the protocol while staying creative and non-linear. Mia Levitt Frank's (2019) suggestion to include elements of working with bodily sensations "as incorporating bodily sensations enables creativity, thus enhancing the potential experience of change "(p. 287), which is what we are looking for. (Appendix 2b)	T3

Use of Encouragement and empathy Special attention to creating and maintaining the alliance • Create a warm, safe, and collaborative atmosphere (Watts, 2003) check comfort and co-construct the process (especially at T3) by taking a few minutes to define together how the session will work (Cabie and al., 2025) • Highlight strengths to foster a sense of competence and belonging (Carlson & Englar-Carlson, 2017) • Practice active listening and reflect the client's own words (Kottman,2011) • Be empathic To facilitates interpretation (Clark, 2023) and therefore help us ask pertinent questions. He refers to this process as an integral model of empathy that encompasses subjective, objective, and interpersonal empathic modalities (Clark, 2023). • Metaphors could help us read the leader's language of distress (Bluvshtein et al., 2021) and be more empathic • Warm face, eyes, active listening, empathy, and show appreciation (during sessions and follow-up call at J+7) (Rogers, 1957)	T1 to T5
Use of elements to increase their insight • Ask participants to draw their problem in the pre-questionnaire • Use questionnaires to initiate self-reflection • Include a follow-up phone call (J+7) to deepen reflection and self-responsibility • Use Kopp's protocol to support new perspectives and understanding. • Encourages a holistic understanding. • Supports problem-solving and emotional expression. • Promote reflection at multiple stages:	T1 to T3

Population, Sample, and Recruitment

The recruitment started on the 1st of February 2026. The research was launched with 8 participants (there was no defection). The inclusion criterion for them was first being a leader, whether from the corporate or academic world, secondly having previously completed an Adlerian training, for example, Positive Discipline in the workplace or "Create

a Culture of Encouragement" (CCE), and lastly having at work a challenge that triggers a strong emotion.

I conducted eight interviews with eight leaders between March 9 and April 23rd. They came with very different emotions, from anger to stuckness, linked to very different challenges (Appendix 7a). Each 80-minute interview led to the creation of client spoken metaphors: "a dragon that spits fire," to "a heavy stone," "a small powerless baby", "a planet ready to explode with craters and sparks," "a heart in a prison cell," an anvil, or "a podium with a car champion on top "(Appendix 7b).

Each participant succeeded in transforming their metaphor into a personally meaningful image: "Totoro," "countryside with a blue sky," "himself as an adult holding the baby,""a smooth, luminous, whitish, crystal-ball-like sphere," "butterflies,""a field with his beloved grandmother," or "armor with a switch to loosen its grip."(Appendix 7c)

Data Collection

Data were collected from the 9th of March to the 23rd of April 2026. Data were collected through multiple sources: (a) 701 minutes of audio recordings, (b) full interview transcripts, (c) questionnaires to be filled by the participants including self-reflection and self-evaluation before and after the intervention, (d) my observational notes during and after the intervention (e) the tracking of insight, encouragement, clarity, and actions during the follow-up calls, and (f) my researcher's reflexive journal. The journal was a key tool for self-awareness and practice improvement (Appendix 8).

Using multiple data sources improves the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), even if no generalisation can occur with the very small scale of this research. Data were also collected through multiple yet interconnected phases corresponding to the 5 moments of the intervention (Table 3): T1, T2, T3, T4, T5.

Table 3. Composition of the Different Phases of Data Collection	
T1	8 pre-questionnaires (Appendix 3)
T2	8 phone-call (Appendix 5)
T3	Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted. (Appendix 4 for the prompts) All sessions were transcribed using Plaud's automatic transcription feature. (Transcripts available on demand) Duration: from 66 to 119 minutes Total duration : 701 mn
T4	Self-reflection, self-evaluation, observational notes, and post-questionnaire (Appendix 9). 15 minutes were dedicated to the post-interview questionnaire after the 80-minute intervention and just before saying goodbye.
T5	Post-Intervention Reflection and Follow-Up. This follow-up took place between J+3 and J+13. Participants provided brief oral or audio updates describing any actions undertaken that were linked to their new metaphors and the outcomes of those actions. These follow-up accounts contributed additional depth to the understanding of sustained transformation and integration. (Table 6)
From T1 to T5	Journal (Appendix 8)

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted with an Adlerian lens, examining whether the intervention helped individuals gain insight into their biased perceptions, observing whether the intervention enabled them to use their creative capacities to reconsider responses to their challenges. The data analysis was also aiming to capture unexpected elements. Part of the analysis also involved reflecting on my role as a practitioner, "trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 3).

Transcripts were generated from the eight audio recordings using Plaud, then corrected for transcription errors and anonymized. The transcripts were first examined inductively to identify all relevant elements, regardless of prior assumptions (Sundler et al., 2019). Particular attention was given to unexpected data, which was not much as most had already emerged during the pre-study.

The 8 transcripts were again analyzed more deductively to identify indicators of the feasibility of the adaptation of the protocol, and again from an ipsative perspective to track participant movement by comparing situations before and after. The same process was applied to the questionnaires and follow-up calls to confirm, refine, or extend findings. The same was also applied to the notes and observations taken during and after the interview (tracking their facial movements or any other physical movement, despite being on Zoom).

After analyzing the eight questionnaires, two additional participants were included to make sure nothing unexpected happened and nothing unexpected happened. I did not include them in this research.

Confidentiality and Ethics

This master's thesis research was conducted with full respect for participants' rights and feelings (Winter, 1996). To ensure their sense of control and security, I clearly explained the study procedures orally and remained available to answer questions before, during, and after participation. To preserve anonymity and ensure safety, all identifying details were removed, and pseudonyms P1 to P8 were used, as well as the pronoun he/him/his to quote them regardless of their gender.

Each participant signed a consent letter (Appendix 10) confirming that they had, among other things, given authorization for their interviews to be recorded (promising them to erase it as soon as the master was over). Consent for recording was again reconfirmed verbally before each interview. Participants could withdraw at any stage without explanation, as explained in the consent letter. They were reminded at the start of each interview that they could stop at any time during the interview itself if they felt like it. I agreed with P1 and

P6 on a non-verbal gesture to signal this if needed, as I knew that they might not dare: the other participants declined the non-verbal signal design offer.

Following the Adlerian principle of equality, I aimed to conduct the study *with* participants rather than *on* them by sharing parts of the research draft for feedback. All responded positively and suggested no major changes. Additionally, inclusion of other viewpoints, such as Mia Levitt Frank Marina Blumshtein's, was reviewed with them before inclusion in this report, as I asked them if I could quote her mail and an extract of our discussion.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Sample Characteristics

The sample includes two men and six women, ages 34 to 59. Four are the CEO and the founders of their company, 3 are education leaders, and 5 are from the corporate world (Table 4). They manage directly 0 to 12 individuals, and indirectly oversee 2 to 611 others.

Table 4. Recruitment, Birth Order and Position of Participants

Recruitment:	Via direct email campaign 2 out of 8 Personal phone call or email 4 out of 8 Social media 2 out of 8
Birth order :	Eldest 3 out of 8 Youngest 2 out of 8 Middle 2 out of 8 Only child 1 out of 8
Position :	CEO and founder (4) Inspectrice de l'éducation nationale (2) And General secretary (2)

Common Findings on Encouragement (see Appendix 11 for more)

Table 5 lists the emotions each participant reported at the end of the session, all of which indicate that my efforts to encourage them throughout the process helped them to relax and get their needs met.

Table 5. Participants' emotions at the end of this session	Intensity
P1: Well, relaxed, and pleased	8/10
P2 : Relaxed, comfortable	10/10
P2 : Calm and serene; intensity	8/10
P4 : Motivated and soothed; sense of progress	9/10
P5: Feeling good, confident, positive	8/10
P6 : Happy and at peace	8/10
P7: Gratitude	10/10
P8: Interested, curious, glad to have spent time on this topic	4/10

That is, all metaphor explorations led to a clear positive shift in participants' emotional states when asked at the end of the session: Overall, 100% reported calmer and more positive feelings. Seven of the eight participants stated feeling "more encouraged" with an intensity from 7/10 to 10/10. One responded to the intensity of emotion question that he felt no emotion, "Should it be positive or negative? »

When asked to reflect again on their challenge, 4 out of 8 experienced a completely different emotion, "I'm no longer angry" (P3), while some felt the same emotion but less intensely and one the same intensity but with greater openness or confidence: "Now I have resources to cope" (P2)

Insight and clarity (see Appendix 12 for more)

This intervention helped some of the leaders to move away from their habitual ways of viewing themselves, others, or situations. The intervention indeed provided them with clarity and insight. Post-questionnaire scores on self-learning were especially high, with rates from 8/10 to 10/10. Nevertheless, participants experienced very different types of clarity and insight: some gained a better understanding of their problems: "I understood my problems better" (P8), others developed self-awareness; "awareness of my place and my need to be in control" (P3) and some clarified their true priorities: "The process helped me get clarity on where I want to go" (P6).

Participants not only shifted perspectives but have all managed to enter a creative space, finding creative solutions to move forward. Nevertheless, as with clarity their forward momentum took different forms: some identified directions for action: "Have more trust… dare to act even where I feel under-equipped"(P1), or "try not always to be 100% in control" (P3), others saw the image itself as a new step further in tackling their issues which requires to be explored more with their ongoing coach or psychologist: "I have moved further down the road to tackling the problem; it's in my control "(P5, P8). Some participants said that the newly transformed image is a tool in itself—for self-soothing: "Totoro" (P2); or "reminding them of my strengths in challenging moments » (P1). Finally, some developed very concrete solutions, such as starting "meditation to refocus and cut out the noise" (P5), creating action plans with their teams (P1, P6), and using sensory cues, such as lavender on their wrist to manage better (P2).

Movement out of stuckness (see Appendix 13 for more)

"Adler's theory is a theory of movement, the goal of which is to enable change, growth, personal development, and flexibility, which are all needed to cope and deal with the demands of life" (Lavon & Shifron, 2020, p. 1). The work on metaphors indeed initiated movement in all 8 participants, generating a shift in participants' perspectives, transforming them from what Karen John (2008) describes as victims of circumstance into proactive

agents of change. In this creative space where transformation becomes possible, movement happened on several dimensions.

Movement spotted in the transformation could be a physical movement occurring in the image, as with P1: "I am no longer pulled downward; the anvil pushes me upward with my hair flowing under the effect of a cool breeze." Movement could also be seen in a passive image becoming active. P4 first watched the heart through the small window in the generated first image, then in the transformed image, decided to "open the door… and to go forward to take the heart in his hands and put it back in place. Movement can be a solution in itself: the rigid structures like the "cold, rigid, protective yet suffocating armor " of P7 give way to an armor with a switch to loosen its grip, allowing "pressure release and airflow". Of course, movement is less intense than with P5, who is running in the open, but there is a double movement: he activates a switch (movement in the action) that enables the air to flow (movement in the result). The movement could also be in perspective (linked to the physical small movement of the eyes), with P5 deciding to look to the sky rather than to the stones, and to start to notice the full surrounding environment rather than focusing on his challenges. Movement and change could also be symbolic, like a shift from external to internal focus: from " my need to be in command" to "my degree of influence is within me" (P3).

Movement is also evident in the emotion dimension, with transition from heaviness, "a weight that prevented me from moving" toward "serenity", "curiosity", "trust", or "wonder". Let's also keep in mind that as mind and body have " reciprocal relations" (Adler, 1931), the movement that unfolds on any of these levels can have physical, emotional, cognitive, and relational consequences.

The ease and effect of a one-hour session

All participants stated—both in the post-questionnaire and follow-up calls—that the exercise was effective. Participants rated the process highly useful (scores 7 to 10/10), with one noting, "the metaphor changes everything". They described it from "interesting and stimulating" (P3) to "very interesting but challenging for my personality type" (P8), and

"astonishing; incredibly effective in my case" (P4), and "very useful; should do it more often" (P5), and "great" (P6).

When asked whether a single session brought benefits, all participants—including the one who struggled—answered positively: Absolutely yes," "powerful and creative," "very meaningful". They described the process as powerful in allowing creativity to take the lead, creating space to overcome their challenges, and helping them visualize, feel, and find clearer, more direct answers than through words alone. Surprisingly, P1, who was really at peace once the interview ended, admitted that he found it very disturbing (mind-boggling) in the first 3 days after the end of the single session intervention, but since then, he has managed to introduce many changes in in his life: He is actively looking for another position, he dared to facilitate an out of her comfort zone training with managers…

Seven of the eight participants found "very easy" or "surprisingly easy" to generate an image. This supports previous research showing that leaders tend to use more metaphors when expressing intense emotions (Crawford, 2009; Fainsilber & Ortony, 1987). Seven out of eight participants also found it easy to engage with the images and associated emotions: "I see it unfolding in front of my eyes". Four reported being surprised by the speed at which the image appeared: "I was surprised by the speed and details of the emerging image through guidance" (P4). Indeed, many noted their surprise at how many details they could perceive and how clear the image was. While others were struggling more, one participant (P8) found it difficult all along not to revert to intellectual concepts. Nonetheless, he was "impressed" by how effective it was.

All participants were cooperative, willingly returning to the image when asked to and refining details if asked: « Ok. I'll try and stay in the image" (P6).

Although four participants raised concerns about long-term effectiveness: "to be seen over time"," time will tell", all agreed that the initial impact was positive, and reported that it remained meaningful in the post-phone call that took place a week later. One mentioned that he does not know how it will help, "but it would: To be monitored in the coming week ".

Some suggested that this single, dense, impactful session could be followed by a brief follow-up call to work on concrete steps, whereas others suggested that a longer work might dilute the initial insight.

Findings on self-development as a practitioner (see Appendix 14 for more)

In this exploratory practitioner action research, I have continuously tried to question and improve my way of being, my professional posture, my ability to use in a helpful way, and my ability to encourage participants at every step of the process, for example, with almost daily journaling (Appendix 8). I've also tried to incorporate all the more recently acquired skills, such as reflective listening and accepting whatever emerged: for example, a participant stating a preference for Freud or refusing to acknowledge that complexity could be simplified.

I truly enjoyed each session and working with each participant. I tried to convey empathy as much as possible. The participants' self-generated images helped me relate to them more easily than a plain and comprehensive analytical description of their jealousy, for example. It corroborates findings indicating that conventional metaphorical expressions are more emotionally evocative than literal expressions (Citron & Goldberg, 2014), hence making it easier to feel empathy. Connecting with a fire-breathing dragon or a weak and powerless baby was very easy. Throughout the intervention, I aimed to convey a respectful view of clients as capable individuals rather than problems to be solved, supporting their autonomy and agency. I therefore avoided imposing external frameworks. However, when P8 was dissatisfied with his transformation, He no longer wanted his mum to take the baby in her arms, as he had first described in his first transformed image, and was stuck. I suggested, "What about taking the baby in your own arms?" He accepted it eagerly and appreciated the suggestion. He said in the J+7 phone call that it is a powerful image. Nevertheless, he also underlined several times that the image was mine, not his. His experience of being a competent problem solver had been undermined by my suggestion.

After initial difficulties during the pre-study, I believe I was able to put participants at ease very quickly and build trust throughout the process (from T1 to T5). I have also become

better and better at spotting spoken metaphors, such as the pressure cooker with P2 (see Appendix 15). I become better and better at engaging with them as gateways to meaning and self-expression. After rereading the transcript, I could see that I did not ignore one during the live sessions.

I also noticed it became easier to speak the client's language. For example, when P5 said he had to stay a few days with a task, I added « and run straight with it," reflecting the transformed image he had just mentioned. I was also able to suggest connections, noticing that "freedom" emerged as both a guiding strategy and a reward for P5, or offering P6 the reconciliation of internal polarities—illustrated by "a rich soil that needs sun and rain"—as a balance between his high logic, analytical side, and his deep human and intuitive side, which he accepted.

When working online, I trained myself to remain fully present and engaged, ensuring that the quality of attention, warmth, and relational presence matched as much as possible that of in-person encounters. At the same time, as a researcher, I maintained a reflective stance by asking myself questions such as "What am I noticing?" and "What just happened?" For example, when P6 started crying or when P7 mentioned being in paradise, in both her images. This reflective stance helped me identify many areas for improvement, which I have summarized in the discussion chapter (Table 7) (see Appendix 14 for more).

What was surprising

I was very surprised by how 4 participants out of 8 were not satisfied with the first transformed image they had generated. When offered to continue the transformation, they all accepted and adjusted their initial images, sometimes slightly: removing the basilic scent and adding small details such as glitter around Totoro (P2), sometimes significantly: P7, after removing his armor entirely and placing it behind him for the piquenice, decided it was too much, and choose to have the armor on, with only an extra switch. (P7)

Another striking element was the multiple directions and dimensions that change took. Change happened with the 8 participants but on very different levels: from self-perception and better understanding of the challenge and strategies used, to emotional

changes, without forgetting the change of relationship with themselves (kinder, more indulgent). As metaphors are a holistic unit (Shifron & Bettner, 2017), a change in one direction might affect other directions even if it is not stated as such.

Even when the emerging metaphorical transformation remains incomplete or "less than ideal" (P8), it seems to provide valuable insight.

I was also surprised that the effects seemed to last. Indeed, the post-phone call, which took place a week after the main intervention, showed improvements in the emotional state of the leaders. They also reported a clearer understanding of their situation. Most participants reported increased energy, confidence, and a lasting memory of the metaphor (e.g., see last line of Table 6).

Table 6. Analysis of Phone Call (between J+3 and J+13)	
6 out of 8	...feel definitly more encouraged
8 out of 8	...gain clarity and insight
8 out of 8	...find creative solution to move out of stuckness
Concrete steps	" Reflect a lot on the image which as such a strong resonance with my life", " set up a meeting with my boss, " " managed to link my work issue with my marital issue as I thought it was 2 differents things", " spoke to my husband to tell him that I am going to change", " look for an other position", " accept to facilitate a challenging training that I would have normally refused ", " draw the images " (Appendix 15), "try to understand why the other can be acting the way he does (instead of taking it personnaly) ", I remember more all what I have already achieved rather than focusing on something I cant move", "more oxygene more gratitude most of the things are going on right »
To be noted	One of the participant expressed guilt because she had created problems for so many years where there was none (P1)

The extent of the effects of the intervention was notable, with 100% identifying testable ideas post-session, either the same as those identified in the post-questionnaire

(Appendix 13) or new initiatives such as buying books or looking for a new position in the same institution. The phone call at J+7 revealed that many steps were already taken (e.g., buying books, scheduling a meeting, managing to defer anger thanks to lavender perfume on wrist and ability to turn it into a polite email afterwards (Table 6). All of them acknowledge either clarity, insight, or creative steps, reinforcing their sense of self-efficacy. To my surprise, the participants seem to have internalized and applied the insights over time (+ 1 week), whether metaphoric understanding translates into ongoing reflective or behavioral shifts. They seem to have learned that even if something is uncomfortable, they can change it; they have it in themselves.

Finally, another surprise was how the work on metaphor aligns with the 3 types of goals in Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT, O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 2003). First, working with metaphors has helped all the leaders recognize and mobilize their strengths (the first type of goal in SFBT). For instance, P5 realized his ability to see the positive in any situation and considered practicing gratitude when facing challenges. Secondly, 3 out of 8 leaders shifted their goal (the second type of goal in SFBT). P3 chose to focus on those around him who value his skills rather than trying to convince his disloyal colleague, while P1 reframed the challenge he came with, the need to fight more, as something he did not have to do if he did not wish to. Third, many leaders decided on small, realistic behavioral changes (the third type of goal in SFBT), such as P2 deciding to use a perfume cue to manage impatience, frustration, and anger. Kopp's work is indeed very aligned with SFBT as both help the creation of small, realistic, and achievable changes and assume that the client already knows where they want to go and possesses the resources to get there, while the therapist's role is to assist in this process (Walter & Peller, 1992; Murphy, 2008). Indeed, in working with a Metaphor, Marina Bluvshtein states that the clarity and precision of the metaphor should be credited to the client because it is the client who is reaching the state of clarity and precision while generating a metaphor at the request of the therapist. (Marina Bluvshtein, email, 2026). The identification and strengthening of clients' strengths and resources constitute key ingredients of this approach (Vermeulen-Oskam and al., 2024).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this research on the use of metaphors in a single session with leaders outside the counselling room appear to confirm prior studies on their value, as Insight, clarity, encouragement, positive emotions, and creative solutions have emerged.

THE FINDINGS

The present findings of this research on the use, in a single session, of metaphors with leaders outside the counselling room appear to confirm prior research regarding the potential of metaphor use in counselling and other contexts (Wagener, 2017). The movement from discouragement to encouragement, from a state of stuckness to one of increased clarity and insight, the increase of activity linked to concrete steps, and empowerment are not attributable to a single factor, but rather to a constellation of interrelated processes activated through this 5-step metaphor intervention.

Shift in emotional experiences

There is a broad overlap between the results of this study and existing literature on metaphors, particularly with respect to their capacity to generate positive emotions and more encouraging states (Gibbs,1994; Tay, 2013; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Participants at the end of this work were indeed encouraged, corroborating previous research results in therapeutic contexts. "Metaphor-transformation work that includes transforming bodily sensations (from negative to positive sensations), and the opportunity to choose self-responsibility may enhance self-efficacy and well-being." (Levitt Frank, 2019, p.295). As such, the process itself can be understood as inherently encouraging and supportive.

A more detailed examination of the data also reveals a strong alignment with Wong's Anatomy of Encouragement (Wong and al., 2025), that is, facilitation of insight, enhancement of confidence, focus on potential, and expression of care and concern for others.

Indeed, the work on metaphor is encouraging in the sense that it facilitates insight, as the ability to perceive one's own resources with renewed clarity (Wong, 2015). Better awareness of their own resources and strengths occurred for the 8 leaders who participated in the ~~8~~ interventions, whether through the questionnaire (asking them to list their main strengths), my posture (pinpointing the strength I saw), the generated images themselves: "I am standing on the anvil, which is my family and friends who are always there for me ", "I am very sensitive to smell, I never saw them as a strength I could use"(P2). The second pillar in Wong's anatomy of encouragement is what helps reveal the « potential" of the participant. This is particularly illustrated in the transformation of images. P6's transformed image has a mountain at the end of the field, which he now feels capable of climbing, rather than focusing on the socially imposed career to reach the podium of his first image. The 8 leaders are no longer defined by their current difficulties but are instead positioned as individuals in movement toward growth and development. It is often physically manifested in a metaphor, such as in the case of P1, who is standing tall on an anvil that pushes him forward, positioning the leader as dynamically oriented toward development.

The third category of Wong's anatomy of encouragement is the enhancement of confidence. The use of metaphors has definitely facilitated a new perspective on their situation. The strengthening of self-efficacy happens through the recognition of one's concrete capacities. The 8 participants have managed to see connections between existing strengths and strategies used in the transformation of the images, reconnecting them with their sense of capability. "They feel empowered as they are their own problem solver" (Levitt-Frank, personal communication, 2026). The invitation to initiate self-responsibility and self-efficacy is aligned with Bandura's (2012) and Pomeroy & Clark's (2015) definition as belief in one's ability to surmount challenges and overcome obstacles. Telling them: "In the same way that you created the original image, I invite you to modify it and create an image that feels more 'right' or fitting for you" highlights their self-responsibility. The fourth pillar is linked to the care and concern of others, which has been done throughout the 5 steps through listening skills, creation of a safe space, use of kind eyes, encouraging them that they can handle what comes...

Clarity, insights, and creative power

Adlerian theory, individuals experience change holistically, "physically, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually" (Shifron, 2008); So as the 8 leaders feel more encouraged at the end of the session, it could be enough for them to experience more clarity. Indeed, changes in one domain of functioning appear to influence other areas of the individual's life, according to Adlerian theory's holistic perspective (Watts, 2013; Sperry, 1997). Secondly, metaphors simplify complex emotional and experiential material into a simpler image: dragon, rock, podium… By translating diffuse or overwhelming internal experiences into concrete and structured imagery, leaders experience them as more accessible and manageable. "I found that the metaphor created a new stage to revisit what I already knew, and on this new stage I have more space to manoeuvre and be creative" (P7). Clarity, as well as creativity, appear to arise from the transition between being immersed in complexity and stuckness and engaging with a representation that feels clearer, more contained, and workable. When leaders create an external image, "they shift their emphasis from anxieties and fears to merely observing the image that the metaphor conveys "(Bluvshtein et al., 2021, p. 422). While this simplification was reassuring to most participants, one individual (P8) resisted it, expressing difficulty accepting that their situation could be "that simple." This highlights the importance of considering individual readiness within metaphor work.

As metaphors are mirrors that reflect their inner image of self, life, and others (Kopp, 1995), they capture the leaders' presenting problems, symptoms, feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. Working on metaphors gives them a glimpse of their thoughts and beliefs. An invitation to change an early recollection "changes the metaphoric structuring of the problem" and may stimulate change in their thoughts, feelings, and actions, concerning the situation" (Levitt-Frank, 2019, p. 289). The same rationale works for client-generated metaphors. According to Bluvshtein, metaphors are even "more clear or better to say more precise" (Marina Blumstein, email, 2026)

The Crucial Cs

Amy Lew and Betty Lew Bettner's Crucial Cs (1993), based on Adlerian theory and practice wisdom regarding the need to belong, contribute to, and find significance and meaning within the human community, highlight that courage and psychological movement arise from **C**onnection, **C**ompetence, Mattering (**C**ount), and **C**ourage. A brief metaphor-based intervention supports the Adlerian concept of finding meaningful belonging and promotes movement toward greater functioning and well-being (Bettner & Lew, 1990; Bettner & Lew, 1996).

Indeed, the belonging (**C**onnect) was strengthened as participants reported feeling deeply listened to and not prematurely interpreted or corrected, which reinforced safety and feelings of encouragement. Connections in the transformed images (grandmother in the field (P6), baby held in arms (P8) reflected increased relational embeddedness and emotional safety, consistent with Adlerian emphasis on Gemeinschaftsgefühl (social interest). As Bluvshtein et al. (2021) note, metaphorising pain can support emotional regulation within a relational context. For example, P1 becomes aware of the importance of solid family and friends to overcome her challenge and pain.

The sense of Competency (**C**apable) of the 9 leaders increased through re-engagement with personal resources and perceived agency, as shown in statements such as "I have the keys within me…" (P3). The 8 leaders reconnected with their skills, for example, their gratitude-trait (P5) or their ability to hold polarities such as being logical AND intuitive (P6). Participants moved from passive reflection toward greater self-direction, consistent with Adler's view of lifestyle as a capacity for reorientation through insight and encouragement and directly linked to mattering. (The mountain of P6 being what he really cares about: making a life better for mothers and children alike)

Count emerged through expressions of contribution and usefulness to others: "I can concentrate on helping people around me who need help" (P3). Participants began to perceive themselves as meaningful contributors within their relational field. This aligns with Adlerian theory linking self-efficacy to social interest and cooperative engagement (Pomeroy & Clark, 2015).

Courage was expressed in Adlerian terms as movement despite discouragement: First, participants engaged with emotional vulnerability: "I might cry, don't worry" (P6). They shifted from socially prescribed success (the podium) to privately meaningful goals, "the mountain to climb with his grandmother on his side". Metaphoric transitions, from rigid armor to armor with a switch that allows air to flow and enable him to sit and attend the "piquenique", illustrate gradual movement from safeguarding strategies (rigid armor) toward greater relational engagement and show courage to take a step forward.

Overall, courage can be understood as Adlerian courage: the willingness to risk new relational and personal movement, strengthen social interest, and act in alignment with a more useful and connected lifestyle, and overall the ability to handle what comes in life (Lew & Bettner, 1996)

CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION ANALYSIS

(Appendix 14 for more)

This study is likely to influence my future practice. Several key insights emerged. First, while reading the transcripts, the principle of "less is more" became evident, highlighting the value of restraint and precision rather than over-repeating interventions. Second, I identified the need to adopt a more consistently encouraging stance throughout the interaction, not only during the main interview. I missed many opportunities to encourage them more, especially when they were criticizing themselves at the beginning of the 80-minute intervention. This involves not only supporting participants in recognising their capacities but also linking their values to their behaviours, reinforcing perceived strengths and enhancing their courage. As Shifron (2020, p. 112) states, "The most important information in the early recollection is the individual's strengths and creative abilities"; the same applies to metaphors that reveal leaders' resources.

I also became more aware that my I need to learn to spot more contribution to be able to highlight more expressions of social interest (Table 7) as actions for others in a prosocial logic develop well-being for the individual and their community (Myers, 1993;

Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990) For exemple during the strengths exploration, when P1 mentioned his ability to listen and delay speaking when angry, I could have highlighted that this contributes to group safety and is a valuable contribution to others. When P3 said he is good at adapting solutions so they work for everyone, I could have highlighted how valuable this is for those around him. During metaphor work with images like "the rock" or "the distance," I could have added contribution-focused questions, such as: "How does taking distance from the rock help your group or colleagues feel more supported?" This helps participants see their worth not as abstract traits, but as concrete contributions to others, strengthening belonging and purpose.

In addition, my application of Kopp's protocol can be improved by spending more time in the metaphoric preparation phase, exploring the image across its multiple dimensions, and remaining within it rather than moving too quickly to interpretation. I was afraid of not having the time but strengthening the anchoring of bodily experience also emerged as an area for development (Appendix 14 on Critical self-reflection for more details).

Finally, I recognised both the need to improve my ability to help participants to co-construct small, actionable steps or micro-actions and to more effectively anchor moments of transformation in their values and strengths.

CONCLUSION

Limitation and biases

The small sample size of only 8 participants makes generalization impossible. Replication with a larger, more unified sample and inclusion of a control group would be necessary for validation of the results. A potential bias may also have been introduced, as all but one participant had taken part in previous trainings or interventions. Their familiarity with me, the "practitioner", and willingness to contribute may have influenced outcomes, whereas neutral participants might have produced different results. For example, P7 stated that she "enters the interview with trust in the process and in me, as we already know each

other". In addition, as data are mostly self-reported and lack objective measures, further bias may be present. This bias is not only true for participants but also for myself as a practitioner; my deep involvement may also have compromised my objectivity.

Furthermore, if the "process of reconstruction needs to be repeated to create a gradual change in one's basic perceptions" (Lavon & Shifron, 2020, p.4), follow-up is essential to assess whether changes in leaders after a single session are sustained to avoid overestimation of the promising results of this exploratory study so future studies could benefit from a longitudinal design to determine whether this one-session metaphor fosters not only insight, clarity, and creative solutions, but also lasting behavioral change in the short, medium, or long term.

Future research

Leaders need to be steadfast, courageous, and creative in inspiring and developing a culture of encouragement in the workplace. Working with metaphors can help them find ways to address the many challenges on this path and feel encouraged, so they can also encourage others. It can help them realize that they might not change the whole system at once, but they have the power to change the way they react to it, avoiding feeling discouraged and discouraging others. It seems a promising way to stop the discouragement from spreading and help leaders find creative ways to move forward, and future research has the potential not only to help leaders but also all the organizations they work in.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1:

Scales used in previous quantitative research on 153 participants

The four validated scales used in our quantitative action research study conducted in 2025 as part of a university degree in Mental Health, Relational Health, and SEL (University of Grenoble, under the supervision of Rebecca Shankland, Researcher and Head of the Department of Psychology) to evaluate the training's Create a culture of encouragement (CCE) effects on 153 school leaders (inspectors and principals) were :

- **Acceptance and non-judgment**, as key elements in shifting perspective and mental posture (mindset): Comprehensive Inventory of Mindfulness Experiences Scale (Bergomi, Tschacher & Kupper, 2012)

- **Vitality**, understood as the energy of movement, is essential for initiating action and personal momentum: Subjective Vitality Scale (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). Courage is correlated with vitality, persistence, integrity, and bravery.

- **Positivity**, as the ability to adopt a constructive outlook toward oneself, others, and life situations: Positivity Scale (Caprara et al., 2012)

- **Well-being**, considered here as a factor in self-encouragement and emotional regulation: Mental Well-Being Scale (Tennant et al., 2007)

Appendix 2a :

Copy of Appendix B of Kopp's protocol (Kopp & Eckstein, 2004, p. 173-174)

EXPLORING AND TRANSFORMING CLIENT-GENERATED SPOKEN METAPHORS

Interview Protocol—Short Form
Richard R. Kopp, Ph.D.

I. Movement from general to personal (Find the Person in the Problem)
a. In what way is this a problem for you?
(1) Which part of this is most difficult for you? Or
(2) What's the biggest problem? Or
(3) Where in all of this are you most stuck?
II. Movement from facts to feelings (Find the feelings behind the facts): What are your feelings? or How do you feel? and/or What's this (it) like for you? or What's your experience of this—how does it feel to you?
III. Exploring and Transforming Client Metaphors
a. STEP 1. Notice metaphors! (Especially in the client's response to the above questions.)
b. STEP 2. "When you say [repeat the metaphoric image], what image/ picture comes to mind?" or "What image/picture do you see in your mind's eye?"
c. STEP 3. Explore the metaphor as a sensory image:
(1) setting [e.g., "What else do you see?" or "Describe the scene or an aspect of the scene (associated with the metaphoric image)"].
(2) action/interaction [e.g., "What else is going on in (the metaphoric image)?" or "What are the other people (in the metaphoric image) saying/thinking/doing?"].
(3) time [e.g., "What led up to this? What was happening (just) before (the situation in the metaphor)?"
d. STEP 4. "What's it like to be [the metaphoric image]?" or "What's your experience of [the metaphoric image]?" or "What are you feeling as you [the metaphoric image]?"
e. STEP 5. The therapist says, "If you could change the image in any way, how would you change it?"
f. STEP 6. "What connections (parallels) do you see between your original image that you explored and the original situation?"
g. STEP 7. "How might the way you changed the image apply to your current situation?"
Note. You should have these steps in front of you when you use this intervention with clients. Adapted from Kopp (1995).

Appendix 2b :

Mia Levitt Frank's protocol (Kopp & Eckstein, 2004, p. 173-174)

Table 1
Expanding Kopp's Protocol:
Exploring and Transforming Client-Generated Spoken Metaphors

Stage	Exploration
1	Movement from general to personal "In what way is this a problem for you?" "Which part of this is most difficult for you?" or "What's the biggest problem?" or "Where in all of this are you most stuck?"
2	Movement from facts to feelings "What are your feelings? How do you feel?" or "What is this like for you?" or "What is your experience of this? How does it feel to you?"
3	Exploring and transforming the client's metaphors Step 1. Notice metaphors (especially in the client's response to above questions)! Step 2. "When you say [repeat the metaphoric image], what image or picture comes to mind?" or "What image or picture do you see in your mind's eye?" Step 3. Explore the metaphor as a sensory image: Setting (e.g., "What else do you see?" or "Describe the scene or an aspect of the scene [associated with the metaphoric image].") Action or interaction (e.g., "What else is going on in [the metaphoric image]?" or "What are the other people [in the metaphoric image] saying, thinking, or doing?") Time (e.g., "What led up to this? What was happening just before [the situation in the metaphor]?") Step 4. "What is it like to be [the metaphoric image]?" or "What is your experience of [the metaphoric image]?" or "What are you feeling as you experience [the metaphoric image]?" **Step 5. "Where in your body do you feel that emotion?" and "Can you touch that place (e.g., the heart or chest) right now?"** Step 6. "If you could change the image in any way, how would you change it?" **Step 7. If the client did not initiate change in the image (e.g., the clouds moved away or became brighter, he or she was not there anymore), ask, "How did that happen?" and allow the client to introduce self-responsibility into the process.** **Step 8. Following the change in metaphor, ask, "What is the current emotion?" and "Where do you feel that in your body now?"** Step 9. "What connections or parallels do you see between the original image that you explored and the original situation?" Step 10. "How might the way you changed the image apply to your current situation?"

Note. Steps listed in bold signify steps the author added to Kopp's protocol (Kopp & Eckstein, 2004).

Appendix 3:

Pre-questionnaire

Sent between 10 days and 2 days before the main interview

Page 1
Introduction
Take part in a research study to unlock leaders' creative intelligence!
You will contribute to an academic research project aiming to measure the impact of using metaphors on leaders. As part of a Master's degree in psychology, I am exploring how metaphors—powerful, self-generated images (for example: anxiety seen as a black ball in the stomach) and your creative intelligence (nothing to do with cognitive logic but all with metaphoric logic)—can offer fresh perspectives on your challenges, help you gain insight and discernment, and support you in finding solutions.
This study invites you to engage in a reflective experience with the power to shake things up and possibly change the game. Engage in a 1h30 individual interview exploring your challenge through the power of metaphorical language.
I am looking for leaders (from business, associations, or educational organizations) willing to dedicate about 80 minutes of their time for a semi-guided interview (in-person or remote) focusing on one of their current challenges, + A short questionnaire one week before and one week after, + a brief 10-minute preparatory call the day before the interview

This approach is especially designed for you if:

- You're curious or enthusiastic about neuroscience and leadership psychology
- You encounter a small or big work challenge (= somewhere you are stuck) that triggers a strong emotion
- You are ready to try something different, not connected to logical analysis, that can help you find the first step to move forward.
- Being fully authentic is ok with you.
- Working with emotions and maybe going out of your comfort zone is ok with you

Page 2
Questonnaire :
I would like to get to know you by asking the following questions :

1. How old are you?
.....

2. What is your job? Your position? Your company?
.....
3. How many people do you manage directly and indirectly?
.....
4. It has been observed that leaders lead differently according to their birth order (only child, first child, second, last)... So, as it can influence the way we lead, could you please tell me your birth order (and how older or younger your siblings are, if any) :
.....

5. Please fill in: For you, a good day at work is a day where or when:
.....
6. Describe something you've done in the workplace that makes you " proud "(could be an attitude or the way you've solved a problem...)
.....
7. What are your 5 main strengths?
.....
Thank you for completing the first part of this questionnaire. Here is the second. During our next meeting, in our semi-guided interview, we will be working on a challenge you face.

8. Therefore, I would like you to point out where the strongest emotion is in your work context (it can be linked to a very small or a very big problem, whatever); what is important is the emotional reaction you get. It could also be where you feel the most " stuck" in your workplace.
.....
9. In case your big problem is made up of several small problems, pick the one you are the most stuck on, the one that triggers the biggest emotion
.....
.....
.....
.....
10. Try to draw the problem? (You can use an extra sheet if you wish)

11. What feeling (s) are associated with this problem?

.....

What is the level of intensity? (From 1 to 10)

.....

Optional question: Anything important you want me to be aware of?

.....

What do you hope might be different/ might evolve If we work on this problem together

.....

END

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Could you please take a few moments to photograph or scan your answers and send them back to me (06 63 26 28 18 or solenneroland@gmail.com)?

Next steps

1) Send me the filled-in questionnaire by WhatsApp, Gmail, etc. (a photo will do) ASAP
2) I will then call you to explain to you more about the intervention and the method, and answer any questions you have
3) Our semi-guided interview is planned for….It will last about. 70 minutes. It is a semi-structured interview, followed by the post-intervention questionnaire, to be completed on the same day.

Page 3

A few key points

Here are a few key findings on which our interview and research are based

- Feelings prepare the body to meet a situation with a specific response (Adler, 1933, p 42)
- Metaphor-transformation work that includes transforming bodily sensations (from negative to positive sensations) and the opportunity to choose self-responsibility may enhance self-efficacy and well-being. (Levitt Frank, 2019,p. 295)
- Metaphors are not decorative, but structure thought, inferences, and behaviors (Lakoff & Johnson, Metaphors We Live By)
- Experimental studies in psychology show that the choice of a metaphor (crime = virus vs crime = wild beast) changes the policy solution that people consider appropriate: systemic prevention vs repression (" Métaphors we think with the role of metaphor in reasoning) (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011)
- Research in neurocognition and brain imaging describes specific neural circuits involved in metaphorical understanding and reasoning, which reinforces the idea of metaphorical organisation of cognition (Lakoff, 2014)

Page 4
Presentation

Solenne Roland-Riché is a trainer specializing in psychosocial skills, mental health, emotional safety, and positive leadership. For six years, she and Nadine Gaudin developed a pilot project to develop psychosocial skills across a region (the Somme), reaching 9,000 people. This project was presented to the OECD. She has also conducted workshops:
at Sciences Po Executive Education on "Enriching Leadership with Neuroscience"
with companies such as Axa, Hermès, and Soufflet and with institutions such as the European Parliament, the French National Assembly, and UNESCO. She aimed at creating encouraging culture in diverse environnement.

Specializations

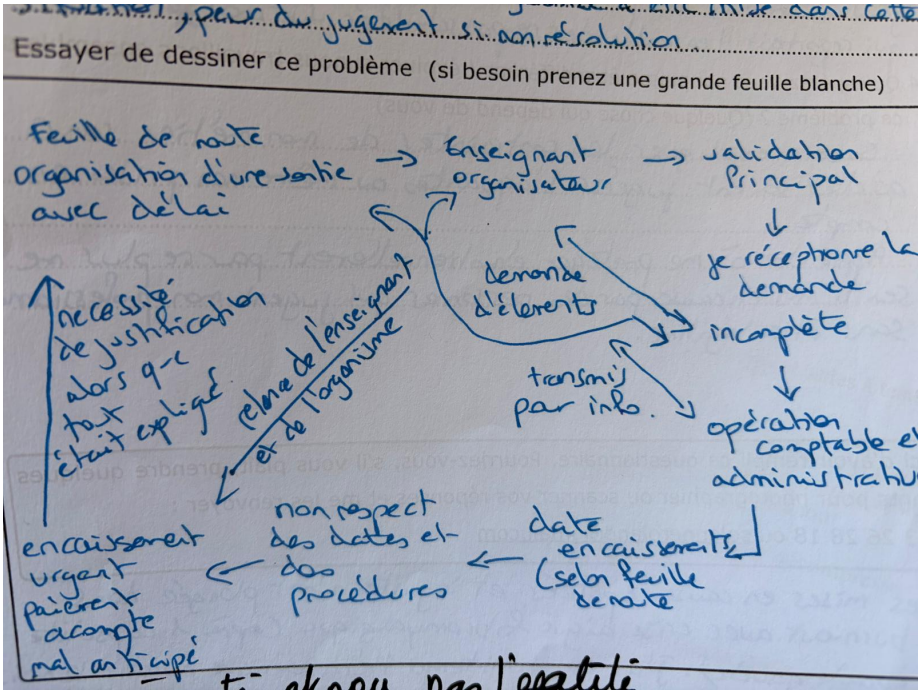
- University Diploma in Mental Health, Relational Health, and Psychosocial Skills (with honors), University of Grenoble, 2025
- Master's degree in Adlerian Psychology, Blanquerna University, (end of June 2026)
- Yoga Teacher (certification: 300-hour Vinyasa Krama Yoga Teacher)

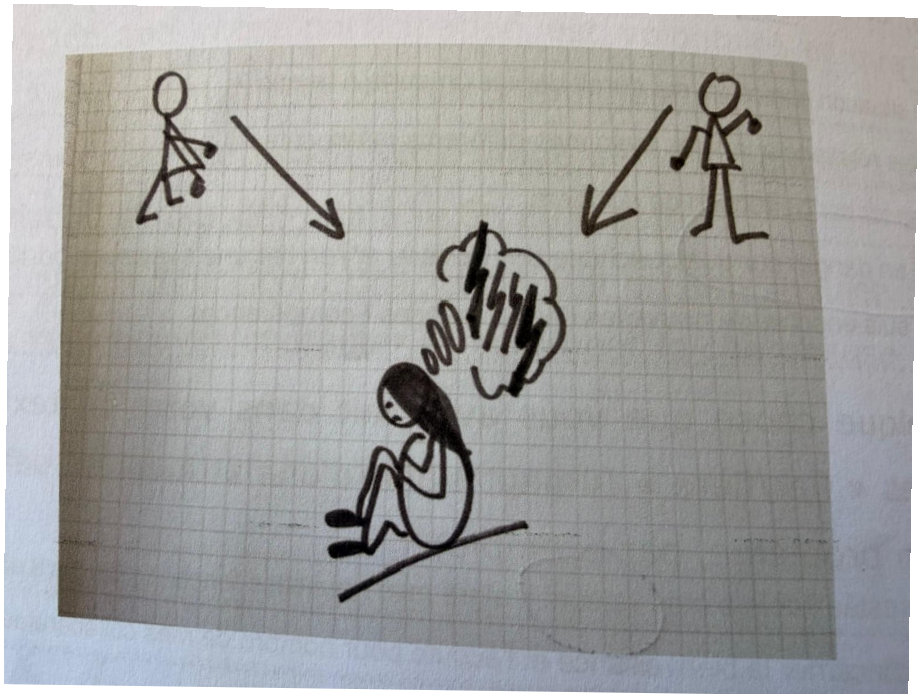
Publications :

- Les 100 règles d'Or du management positif et heureux (Larousse) (2025)
- Créer une culture de l'encouragement (en cours, parution estimée 2028)
- Rubrique Éducation dans Psychologie magazine 2021-2022
- Co-auteur de l'ouvrage collectif " former au développement des compétences psychosociales "sous la direction de Ludivine Lenoir, Rebecca Shankland et Damien Tessier, 2026, Dunod

Appendix 4 :

2 very different examples of drawings of their problems by participants





Appendix 5:

Prompt for the phone call

T2 Phone Call

- Thank you very much. I wanted to let you know that I have received and read your questionnaire. Thank you for taking the time to fill it out—that's very valuable. And thank you for being authentic.

- The purpose of this call is threefold: to explain tomorrow's session, to hear how it went for you while completing the questionnaire, and to answer any questions you may have.

- I've reviewed your responses—this is valuable work you've done. I have everything I need to begin tomorrow's session. Thank you. How was it for you to complete the questionnaire?

- Highlight any strength

- How it will go tomorrow: We will spend 1 hour and 30 minutes together, starting from your questionnaire. We'll begin with your strengths, then revisit the challenge you mentioned in the questionnaire—or another one if you change your mind by then. At some point, we'll use a metaphor.

- I will ask you questions; there are no right or wrong answers. Just say whatever comes to mind (letting go of logic or the need to make connections). If nothing comes, just tell me—that's perfectly fine.

- The idea is to temporarily set logic aside in order to access our metaphorical intelligence. Of course, once this stage is complete, we'll reconnect with the challenge and bring logic back in to create links.

- Do you have any questions? Is there anything else you'd like to know?

Appendix 6 :

Prompt for the main interview **T3**

Opening and Beginning of the Session (20 minutes)
Prepare: recording set + ending time

Create a warm and collaborative atmosphere using all the interventions learned to create a bond

1. How do you feel
2. Use a personal well-being scale (1 = I'm super stressed about this interview, 10 = I'm super happy to be here), where are you at? And if needed (if the score is low), what would you need (postpone the interview, move to another chair, etc.)?
3. Construct the modalities. Specifically agree on a simple hand signal upfront for an instant, discreet stop- let's make quick guidelines?
    - !! Remind them they are recorded and the confidentiality
    - !! Remind the max end timing (depending on our rhythm) and check if it is ok
    - Ask them if it ok to step out of the comfort zone?
    - Remind them they can stop at any time et trouver un signe
    - Pas de bonne ou mauvaise réponse, leur réponse est la réponse
4. Thank them for being part of the research, and whatever their answer it will help
5. Remind them of the goal of the research (Blanquerna)
    1. What to expect: agenda of the meeting (post questionnaire), not a magic wand
    2. Go back to the strength mentioned and ask them for examples in their work

Reinforce any strengths you observe or hear during this opening phase and in their questionnaire.
Listen skillfully, " I am very interested. I

Challenge
Tell them it would be nice to continue, but protocol means moving on

3. Remind him that they previously expressed a desire to work on a specific issue (during the phone call the day before), ask them if they want to change or if it is still the case
4. Ask them to tell you in person. Be ready to adapt if they choose to work on something else—respect for the client's autonomy is essential.
5. Ask them about their drawings
6. Reframe their challenges as an overdose of forces if the occasion arises
7. Ask them the exeption question if relevant

8. Ask "How can I help you with this problem? "Reformulate all that has been exchanged to be sure we have correctly understood and to give a chance to the participant to dare to say st or correct us. Make sure as much as possible that it is the central issue
9. Ask them if they are ok to try and generate a metaphor with their problem
10. Listen for a metaphor that pops in or ask for one following Kopp's protocol

Generation and Exploration

• Explore a metaphor following Richard K. Kopp's steps[1] or Levitt Frank (Appendix 3)

Short form R. Kopp

I Movement from general to personal (Find the Person in the Problem)

- In what way is this a problem for you?
- (1) Which part of this is most difficult for you? or

1. What's the biggest problem? Or
2. Where in all of this are you most stuck?

II. Movement from facts to feelings (Find the feelings behind the facts).

What are your feelings? (What are you noticing in your body? Where do you feel it?) Or how do you feel? and/or What's this (it) like for you? or What's your experience of this-how does it feel to you?

III. Exploring and Transforming Client Metaphors

- STEP 1. Notice metaphors! (Especially in the client's response to the above questions.)
- STEP 2. "When you say [repeat the metaphoric image], what image/ picture comes to mind?" or "What image/picture do you see in your mind's eye? »

- si rien ne vient "take your time, something will come "(attendre de 30 à 1 min)

- STEP 3. Explore the metaphor as a sensory image:

1. Setting [e.g., "What else do you see?" or "Describe the scene or an aspect of the scene (associated with the metaphoric image)"].
2. action/interaction [e.g., "What else is going on in (the metaphoric image)?" or "What are the other people (in the metaphoric image) saying/thinking/doing?"].
3. time [e.g., "What led up to this? What was happening (just) before (the situation in the metaphor)?"

[1]Kopp, R. R. (2015). Metaphor Therapy Using Client Generated Metaphors in Psychotherapy. Routledge.

- STEP 4. "What's it like to be [the metaphoric image]?" or "What's your experience of [the metaphoric image]?" or "What are you feeling as you [the metaphoric image]? »

Transformation

- STEP 5. "In the same way you have created the metaphor, you can also change it "mia 2019
- The therapist says, "If you could change the image in any way, how would you change it? »

Bridging the gap

- STEP 6. "What connections (parallels) do you see between your original image that you explored and the original situation? «

- STEP 7. "How might the way you changed the image apply to your current situation?"d'après Metaphors: Theory and Case Study Demonstration / International Florida Adlerian Society / 17th Annual Conference / Workshop Session C4/Daniel Eckstein, Ph.D. Nicole Russo, MS)
-

Add Mia's 2 steps about the feeling in the body (also to activate the link between metaphors and mindfulness)

Conclusion on the intervention

As we come to the end of this conversation, if you take away something from it, what would it be

1. Are there any useful ideas that you could use?
2. Did you learn anything about yourself?
3. What could be the first steps?
4. How do they feel leaving the room? + use of the same scale as in the beginning
5. What do you take away?

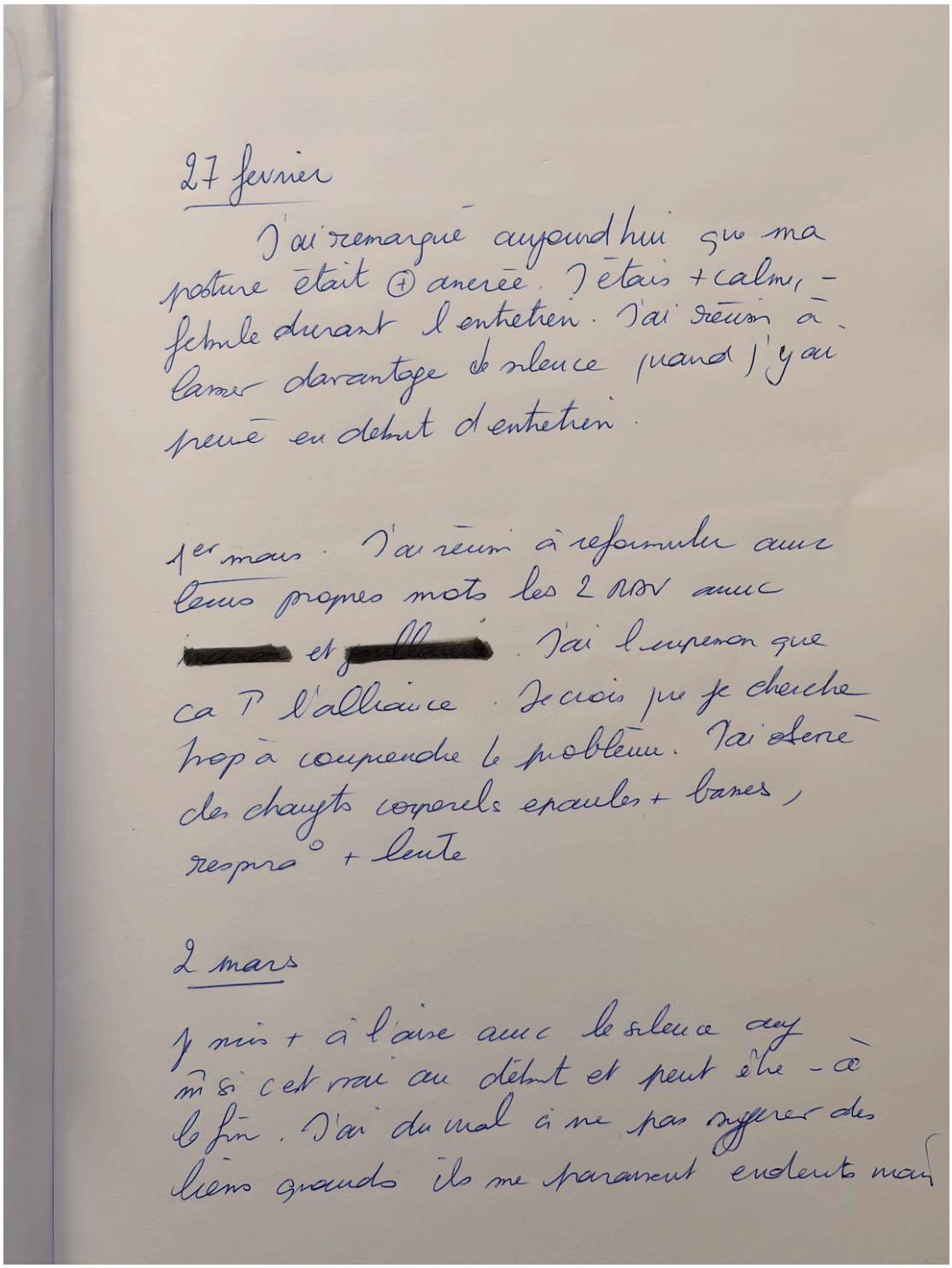
Appendix 7:

The challenges of the 8 leaders (7A), their spoken metaphors (7B), and their transformation (7C)

	7A : CHALLENGE	7B : GENERATED IMAGE	7C: TRANSFORMED IMAGE
P8	Procrastination	A small powerless baby	A small, powerless baby taken in my own arms. The baby is able to stand up, walk, and speak
P5	Emotional stance threatening decision making process and difficulty in letting go of the company he has created	a heavy stone	Nature, stone is there but far away, blue Skye, grass, I am running
P3	disloyalty and mistrust	a throbbling planet ready to explode with craters and sparks	A smooth, luminous, whitish, crystal-ball-like sphere
P2	Strong impatience	A cocotte minute replaced by a dragon that spits fire	Totoro, with smells of Lavender, and glitters around him
P1	Need to be more assertive to fight more	an anvil	I am standing on the anvil, that pushes me up, there are butterflies around, and my hair are moving
P4	Recovering from burn , stress and worries as I am challenged in a unfair way. I am	a heart in a prison cell	I open the door, take the heart, put il back and the veins connect, and blood flows
P7	Difficulty of communication with its manager, lack of process and amateurism drives him crazy	A Armor	An Armor with a switch to open it slighly
P6	When someone says something on me which is not true	a podium with a car champion on top	A countryside field with a blue sky and my beloved grandmother is here and in the distance a mountain that I am going to climb

Appendix 8:

Daily journal



27 février

J'ai remarqué aujourd'hui que ma posture était ⊕ ancrée. J'étais + calme, - fébrile durant l'entretien. J'ai réussi à laisser davantage de silence quand j'y ai pensé en début d'entretien.

1er mars. J'ai réussi à reformuler avec leurs propres mots les 2 RDV avec [redacted] et [redacted]. J'ai l'impression que ça T l'alliance. Je crois que je cherche trop à comprendre le problème. J'ai observé des changts corporels épaules + bases, respira° + lente

2 mars

J'ai mis + à l'aise avec le silence aujourd'hui si c'est vrai au début et peut être - à la fin. J'ai du mal à ne pas suggérer des liens grands ils me paraissent évidents mais

Appendix 9:

Questionnaire post interview

Thank you for your help :
Thank you so much for the precious time you've shared with us.
Here is the post-intervention questionnaire. It includes 18 questions and a blank page at the end to capture anything else you'd like to share.
Your feedback on the process—even critical—is valuable data for this exploratory qualitative practitioner action research.
Your honesty will greatly contribute to answering our research questions.

1. How do you feel at the end of this interview? What emotion
.....
What intensity? (e.g., 1-10 scale)
.....
2. When you think back to your challenge/problem now, what emotion do you feel? (Same or different?)
.....
And what intensity?
.....
3. If you were to translate this metaphor into 1 or 2 small observable actions to try in the coming weeks:
.....
What stood out for you?
.....
Did you learn (or re-learn) something about yourself? Your way of functioning? Rate from 1 to 5 (1 = nothing; 10 = major insight).
Rate: _____ / 10
Comments :
.....
4. Do you feel as "stuck" as at the start? Rate from 1 to 10 (1 = same as before; 10= much less stuck).
Rate: _____ / 10
Comments :
.....
5. Do you feel more encouraged? Rate from 1 to 10 (1 = same as before; 10 = much more encouraged).
Rate: _____ /10
Comments:.....
How useful was this process? Rate from 1 to 10, and explain why (regardless if yes/no).
Rate: _____ / 10
Comments:.....

6. What challenge might come back that you could handle differently now?

.....

7. We know metaphors can be effective. We're also exploring how a single session can already bring benefits. Do you think it did here?

.....

8. What did you think of the exercise?

.....

What surprised you the most?

.....

How did you experience this interview? And what could we make different that could be more useful for you

.....

Did you feel at ease, or do you think you weren't comfortable enough to fully follow the protocol?

.....

Is it okay if I call you in 3 days for a quick follow-up with 2 more questions?
Yes / no

9. Additional comments or anything else to share? (Blank space)

.....

Appendix 10:

Informed consent

Context

This study is being conducted as part of the second year of the “International Professional Master of Adlerian Counselling” at Blanquerna University (Ramon Llull University, Barcelona, Spain). It is supervised by Dr. K. John and grounded in recent findings in neuroscience, psychology, and social psychology. It belongs to the type " exploratory qualitative practitioner small-scale action research, » which means that I am both practitioner and researcher.

Goal of the research

This is a preliminary study designed to confirm (or not) that a single session focused on metaphors shows promise in helping leaders gain insights and identify their next move

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be ensured: I will be the only person with access to your questionnaires and the recording of the interview. Data shared further will be anonymized to protect identities.

By sending and signing this paragraph, you fully understand that you are taking part in research which involves :

- You understand that your participation is voluntary and that you can withdraw at any time without explanation
- You understand that you may withdraw from the study at any time.
- You understand that you will be recorded during the interview and that the anonymized transcript will be shared. The transcript will be destroyed at the end of the master.
- You know that if you have any questions or concerns about this study, you can contact the researcher directly at 06 63 26 28 18
- You know that the results will be shared with you

Name:.....

Date:.....

Signature :

Appendix 11:

Encouragement analysis: questionnaire post-intervention

Analysis of the questionnaire post intervention	
… f e e l m o r e encouraged	10/10 relaxed, more comfortable (02) 7/10 (P5) I feel hope that I can find a new to address it 10/10 Motvée et apaisée (9/10) Some anxiety remains but the perspective for change has widened (P7) I have reached a new stage, I have more space to manoeuvre (P7) More encouraged (10/10) P6 I feel more serene, light, (7/10) less guilty I don't feel angry anymore. I don't feel anything I almost feel like smiling, thinking back about the issue

12: Clarity and Insight :

Clarity and insight : questionnaire post-intervention

Questionnaire post intervention …gain clarity and insight	
	I knew I was sensitive to smell and hearing, but never thought these senses could help me cope with my emotions. (10/10) 8/10 8_ / 10I learnt more about myself, especially my string of behaviours and what derails me more I feel it is more an emotional problem than a real problem and thus solvable I review what I already knew and on this new stage I have more spacet to manoeuvre and be creative P7 Being aware of what built me up: I was loved and surrounded, and I can build on that I don't need to fight I learned that I need to be kind and indulgent towards myself Know that I want to be in the centre and that I need to be aware of it Create a meeting to decide the process with whoever is involved 10/10 I've the key inside myself, I just need to use the right one

Appendix 13:

Mouvement out of stuckness and creative solutions : Questionnaire post-intervention

Questionnaire post intervention : creative solution to move out of stuckness
- think of my armour and its actionable zipper next time - I have two pictures to help me cope with my emotions (10/10) - Review this picture when I feel stressed and choose to place my focus on the positive part. Also, focus on going through the transactional parts, which I have found more difficult - The idea of the grown-up adult taking the baby in his arms is the most interesting idea - Think about the calming Crystal ball - Make a step to the side when I become angry - Focus on those who want my help rather than on those who don't …

Appendix 14:

Critical self-reflection analysis

Here is the full critical self-reflection analysis

A- LESS IS MORE

Speak less

B- BE MORE ENCOURAGING

Showing the participants their own capacity and increasing their trust in their courage,

I could develop my ability to encourage more and better (with shorter sentences) the participants. For example, when participant P5 spoke about his past challenges, his emotions regarding his company, and his courageous decision to appoint a new director, I told him: "You've managed to take a few steps in the right direction, and it's no longer a big issue. Do you still want to work on that?" It might have been a good clarification at that point, but I missed an opportunity to encourage him first by saying something like: "I just want to emphasize something. You identified yourself as a "bottleneck », recognized that your fears and dreams were influencing your decisions, and dared to seek outside help and make the difficult choice to promote someone, even though your heart was against it. That's an incredibly courageous and responsible move."

Linking values to concrete behaviors

. There were moments when participants clearly expressed their values, but reading back the transcripts, I missed opportunities to anchor them into specific, recent behaviors that would have reinforced their self-efficacy. For instance, after participant P5 said, "I don't think I'm above anyone; everyone can teach me something," I could have immediately invited him to make it concrete by asking: "Could you give me an example of how you did that this week?" This type of question would have helped him experience himself as already competent and aligned with his values in daily life. I managed to do it with P8 when he states that his values were integrity. I've asked for an example, and he describes giving a share of his company even to the Indian developer based in India

Thickening their strengths,

I could thicken their strengths by asking more information about them. For example, with P1, she said that she was able not to "jump into the ring" but to defer when discussion was needed. I said: "I hear that you know what is important and what is not, and can defer." I could have emphasized that it's a great skill to step back, and asked: "Have you always had this ability? How did you build it? Can you give me an example?"

Transforming self-criticism into encouragement,
I noticed I was a bit embarrassed (even if it did not show), and I missed opportunities when participants expressed self-criticism (for example, P3). I now see how I could have reformulated in Adlerian terms to reduce feelings of inferiority. When P6 said, "I want to be appreciated... I need approval," I could have reframed it in terms of belonging and contribution: "I understand you're calling it a need for approval. Could it simply be a desire to contribute and belong, which are essential human needs?"
Similarly, when P2 said she was afraid of emptiness and was learning to accept empty time in his schedule when she does nothing, I could have reinforced that courage: "I hear a lot of bravery in your ability to face the fear of emptiness. Recognizing it and actively experimenting with moments of stillness shows real strength."

Be encouraging at every stage, not only during the core of the interview

I noticed that I tend to "put on my encouraging cap" during the exercise itself, but less before and after, missing great opportunities to encourage participants. I want to increase my ability to turn normal conversation into encouragement.
For example, at the very beginning, when setting guidelines, P1 said that she needed time to answer. Instead of only acknowledging his need and agreeing on a signal, I could have said: "Thank you for expressing your need. That's incredibly helpful for me to build a cooperative setting."
Or when P6 told me she could be very emotional, I reassured him and told him that we could stop anytime (I was the one offering the solution), but I could have encouraged him more first. "Thanks for sharing that. This ability to connect easily with your emotions is a precious asset for our semi-guided interview. It shows authenticity and courage to show yourself as you are. »

End of session

During a follow-up call (J+5), one participant said this method worked much better than hypnosis. I could have said: "Thanks for sharing that. I find it very courageous that, despite past insecurity, you chose not to stop trying."

C- LEARN TO SPOT SOCIAL INTEREST
D- BE MORE EFFECTIVE IN APPLYING KOPP'S PROTOCOL

Staying longer in the metaphoric preparation

Before creating metaphors, I should include a more systematic phase of somatic stabilization. Instead of moving too quickly into imagery, I could first guide 30–60 seconds of bodily attention, stating, "Stay with the sensation in your chest—observe its shape, temperature, edges, and movement." This grounding would strengthen the vividness of the

metaphor and prevent a premature cognitive shift, which had a tendency to happen. (Levitt Frank, 2019)

Exploring the Metaphoric Image in several dimensions.

Once the image is established, I could have explored all its dimensions, not just the main one, as often I had some time left at the end of the interview. For example, with P5, I focused mainly on the "podium" but could have asked: "You are under the balcony — what are you doing there? Hearing or seeing?"

I could also explore:

- The position of the self (far, close, above, inside)
- The ecology of the scene (light sources, surroundings)
- The temporal dynamics ("before/during/after the oppression")

These details would enrich the range of possible transformations for the participant.

Sometimes I missed the hint when P4 said that the heart is calling him, I could easily have asked him what it is telling you? Instead of switching immediately to the next move Transformation process: Let the image evolve by itself. What do you see? When reading the transcript, I realised how fast I was going sometimes, and lingering on each step might have been useful. With P4, the transformation was swift and powerful. In the first image, the heart was in a prison room, and she was watching through the small window. When asked to transform the image, she said: "Open the door," "receiving the heart, putting it back in its place") It was a goldmine. I could have taken the time to unpack the meaning of each gesture as it occurred. For example, when she said I open the door. I could have said: "Let's stay here for a moment. You open the door. How does it change for you, just by opening it? How do you feel about opening it? »

Staying longer inside the Image

I've improved in helping participants remain within the imaginal register when they start rationalizing, but I could do it in a more encouraging tone. For example, instead of saying "Stay with the image," I could say: "That's an interesting thought — let's set it aside for now. You said the rock was brown — what is its temperature?"

I could also do it when they use an expression attributing meaning outside the image: for example, when P5 stated "God put it there", I could reformulate within the image: "If God put it there, what gesture do you see when that happens?"

The goal is not to replace the current image but to transform it from within, so the participant becomes the active agent of change.

Anchoring Bodily Experiences

Although Kopp (1995) touched on the value of incorporating sensory processes and bodily sensations when working with early memories, he did not include it in his client-generated

metaphor protocol. (Levitt-Frank 2019) did. Once a helpful image emerges, I should anchor it physiologically and behaviorally. For instance, with P6, it would have been useful to reinforce the bodily sense of calm:
"Take a moment. Stay in that field, your hand in the wheat. Where exactly do you feel the calm in your body?" Or with P8, asked him he felt this way when he had the baby in his arms, and when does he experience this emotion in his life now?

Developing My Ability to Generate Small Steps/ micro actions

I need to first analyse how useful it is, as the results were already great
If I decide to work more on the generation of micro actions, I could add a first step at the very beginning, with a clarification of the process and the expectations, adding a 6th step to the process

1. Talking about strengths
2. Talking about a challenge
3. Creating a metaphor
4. Transforming the metaphor
5. Bridging: finding connections
6. Defining a specific small step to take within 24–48 hours

I also need to learn not to stop symbolic movements but turn them into small, concrete actions
. "What simple daily action corresponds to this change in image?"
Or for the "turnaround": "Next time you feel that mental overload or podium anxiety, imagine you're back at the bottom. What concrete thing could you do that would represent 'turning around'?"

When change occurs very suddenly (P5, P3, P2), help them explore the "in-between" stages: "In the first image, the rock is on your chest; in the final image, you're free. Excellent. Now, describe what happens in between—what's the very first small action that starts the shift?" If they don't see anything, I could reframe:
"If one small detail changed to make the situation 5% easier, what would it be? Lowering the flame a little? Adjusting the valve?"

Exploring Small Elements of the Transformed Image might help. Even when the main transformation is clear (e.g., P5 focusing on the blue sky and gratitude), other symbolic details can reveal strategies. For instance: "In your new image, you mentioned the brown mud or flat ground — it gave you space to run. In your daily life, what could represent that solid ground?" "You said you feel like running — what would it look like to 'run' this week?"

Question to help them find concrete steps

- User manual: if this new image were a user manual, what is the first micro-action you would perform within 24-72 hours? Note a specific experiment to try (and make it a scenario) and the corresponding date.
- Motto: What short anchor phrase will remind you of the image
- Gesture: What small gesture could sum up this image?

Appendix 15:

Drawing shared by one participant (P2) of her self-generated metaphor

P2 first had the image of a pressure cooker, which evolved into a dragon spitting fire. He decided to draw them at the end of the intervention as a reminder of what could happen. He sent them by mail, and I am sharing them with his consent.



DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

Solenne Roland-Riché hereby declares that this master's thesis, entitled Helping leaders gain clarity insights and find creative solutions: the power of metaphors is my own original work. It has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for any degree or qualification at any other institution. All sources of information and ideas used in this work have been properly acknowledged to the best of my abilities, and tried to cite according to the required academic conventions.

I used ChatGPT to help me find data (papers) linked with my research, help me with refining and correcting my English or translating transcripts, and help me sometimes shorten my paragraphs (I had 75 pages at the beginning for the main part)

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"I don't think it's a metaphor for anything. I think it's a bowl of fruit."