Academic Paper

A narrative approach to coaching multiple selves

Paul Lawrence (Sydney Business School, University of Wollongong)

Abstract

According to many philosophers and psychologists, we are each not one, but many. The origins of multiplicity theories are briefly outlined before several contemporary theories are described in more detail. In this conceptual paper, it is argued that a multiplicity perspective of self, challenges us to think differently about coaching. Six specific implications are considered, and a pragmatic link between multiplicity theory and post-modernist principles explored. It is argued that a narrative approach to coaching may be particularly useful for the coach interested in experimenting with multiplicity theory, and some initial approaches to applying multiplicity theory in practice are suggested.

Introduction

The debate as to the nature of self is longstanding, complex and deeply philosophical (Bachkirova, 2011). The quest to understand the essential nature of self is ongoing, and it is not the purpose of this paper to resolve that issue. There is however, one aspect of the discussion that is particularly pertinent to the practising coach, and that is whether or not it is most useful to regard the self as a single unitary entity, or something more complex and multi-faceted. The prominent discourse in the western world is of the individual as a single, boundaried, self, interacting with other similarly boundaried individuals, making conscious, rational decisions and being accountable for those decisions. In the leadership literature, for example, we read about authenticity, usually expressed in terms of seeking to understand a true and singular self. In the psychological domain, we conduct personality tests and multi-rater surveys, most often interpreting the findings as if they reflect the operation of a single self. The coaching literature too, often depicts people as unitary entities defined by a single set of beliefs, motivations and experiences. While unitary theories of self may feel intuitively accurate, no single centre of self has been found in the brain. The only real evidence for the existence of a single self is our subjective experience of being. This sense of self may be helpful, but illusory (Lester, 2010; Bachkirova, 2011).

Theories of multiplicity date back more than 2,000 years, at least as far back as the time of Plato. Much of the literature is philosophical, with contemporary work on application being mostly limited to the domains of therapy and counselling. It is argued here that multiplicity theory is as important to the world of coaching as it is to therapy and counselling. If we comprise multiple selves, selves which manifest differently in different

contexts, then the way the coachee behaves in a traditional one-to-one coaching relationship, and the focus of their narrative, may have little in common with how they behave and what they pay attention to in other contexts. Accordingly, encouraging the coachee to focus on a single 'authentic' self, the self present in the coaching relationship, may remove coach and coachee from a meaningful consideration of the coachee's world outside that relationship. Through a multiplicity lens, to coach in this way may be to oversimplify the nature of the person sitting opposite, a perspective likely to hinder the effectiveness of the coach in helping the coachee become more self-aware, and more aware of self in relation to others.

This paper provides a necessarily high-level view of multiplicity theories, positioning them in the context of a wider discourse on self. Many contemporary theories of self are psychodynamic in origin, describing selves that are largely fixed, determined by previous experience, particularly childhood experience. These theories are compared to other theories that position the self as more dynamic, constantly evolving in response to ongoing shifts in the outside world. These latter theories posit the existence of a storyteller function, whose role it is to be forever making sense of self-as-experience, self-as-actor, and self-as-story. In the second half of the paper the implications of a multiplicity approach for coaching are broadly discussed, before the particular value of a narrative approach is outlined.

Theories of self

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed history of theories of self. People have been contemplating the question of self for centuries without yet getting close to aligning on one answer. Bachkirova (2011) picks out one strand of the story with reference to the history of psychology, beginning with an interest in the subjective experience of people, shifting to behaviourism and a focus on the clearly observable, to the emergence of the cognitive school of thought. We may consider the philosophical tradition, which Bachkirova (2011) suggests can be characterised with reference to three broad categories; the dualists, the materialists and the mysterians. The dualists see brain activity and the subjective experience of self as being separate and distinct, the materialists see them as the same thing, and the mysterians believe that the nature of self and consciousness is too complex for us to understand. One particular aspect of this ongoing debate, it is argued, is of particular relevance to coaches, and that is the extent to which we may each be said to comprise a singular, monolithic, self, or alternatively to comprise multiple selves.

Monolithic theories of self can be traced back to the age of Enlightenment (Hill, 1996) and indeed beyond. Bachkirova (2011) suggests that the dualist tradition begins with the 16th century writings of Descartes, who argued that the mind is distinct from the body. He also argued that the mind is singular in nature. "… when I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish any part within myself; I understand myself to be something quite single and complete." (Cunning, 2014). These first-person, phenomenological, perspectives variously describe the self as a robust, enduring, single entity, conscious of experiences, capable of agency, with a particular character or personality. Compelling though this perspective may be, consistent with how many of us experience ourselves, the evidence does not tend to support such a proposition. Neuroscientists would argue, for example, that there is no single part of the brain that represents this discrete thinking self. Moreover, it would appear that much of our functioning and decision making is unconscious not conscious. Libet et al. (1983), for example, compared the onset of cerebral brain activity preceding a voluntary act, with the time at which the individual reported the subjective experience of intending to act. They found that the onset of cerebral activity preceded the reported time of the conscious intention to act by several hundred milliseconds. This implies that many of the actions we take are decided upon by the subconscious, and yet labelled as conscious in retrospect. Conscious will would therefore appear to be an illusion, and the entirely conscious self a fictional, albeit useful, story (Bachkirova, 2011).

This monolithic theory of self is implicit to many coaching models, and indeed the broader philosophy of organisational development within which most coaches are operating. These are models that frame the task of the coach as being to establish the best possible relationship with the single self in service of

helping it to think differently about the challenges it faces. Such coaches may advocate the value of psychometric instruments that allow the coach to characterise the nature of this single self in service of helping it recognise how to think and behave differently. This perspective assumes a single entity with conscious free will. So, if the coachee comes to a coaching session without having actioned commitments made in the last session, this is something the individual must be held accountable for. If it happens repeatedly, this may be held up as evidence that the individual is not genuinely committed to the process. Such approaches, while sometimes appropriate, may other times overlook what is really happening for the individual, missing insights more visible viewed through a multiplicity lens.

Multiplicity theories

As mentioned, multiplicity theories can be traced as far back as Plato, who spoke of the psyche comprising three parts: the rational self, the appetite, and the spirit. St Augustine wrote of his dreams being invaded by his 'old pagan personality' (Rowan, 1990). More recently, Freud wrote of the ego, superego and id, and Jung referred to autonomous partial subsystems existing within the psyche (Rowan, 1990; Schwartz, 1995; Lester, 2010). There are multiple theories of multiplicity ranging from the early psychological theories of Edgar Swift, to the work of social psychologist Kenneth Gergen, to workers such as Mair, Martindale, Redfearn and Crabtree (Altrocchi, 1999). Rowan (1990) lists the work of Lewin (subregions), Perls (topdog and underdog), Balint (the child in the patient), Watkins (imaginal objects), McAdams (imagoes), Hilgard (hidden observer), Tart (identity states), Stone and Winkelman (energy patterns), Ornstein (small minds) and others. In this section we will review four of these theories, chosen because they enable us to notice the extent to which these theories position the self as being fluid and dynamic, and to see the presence of self-as-story in some accounts and not others.

Many contemporary theories of multiplicity are ultimately Freudian in origin. The psychoanalytic tradition is phenomenological in that it attempts to explain the experience of self but is to a great extent also theoretical. Freud's original theories posited the existence of the psyche, comprising id, ego, and superego. The adult psyche is relatively fixed in nature, the outcome of early childhood development, especially the influence of parents. Klein moved beyond the tripartite model, describing introjected representations of various significant others, and Jung took the notion further by suggesting that the unconscious comprises an indefinite number of fragmentary personalities (Schwartz, 1995).

Eric Berne's (1964) theory of multiplicity is one of the most well-known through the popularity of the book Games People Play. Berne followed in the tradition of Freud and Jung and built on the work of Paul Federn and Edoardo Weiss, in defining specific ego-states. He defines ego-states phenomenologically as a coherent system of feelings, and operationally as a set of behaviour patterns. According to the theory, we each have i) parental ego-states, reproductions of our parent's ego-states, ii) child ego-states, fixated in early childhood, and iii) an autonomous adult ego state, directing us toward a more objective appraisal of reality. Social interactions can be characterised in the form of 'games', patterns of interaction to which the individual is subject. The role of the practitioner is to help the individual become aware of the functioning of ego states and the nature of games, thereby facilitating the development of greater autonomy. Berne's self is multiple, not only in that the ego comprises different states, but in that some of those states may become separated to the extent of seeming to be different subpersonalities (Rowan, 1993).

Rowan (1990, 1993), a psychologist and psychotherapist, acknowledges the work of both Freud and Jung in pointing to one means by which a subpersonality may be created. He describes the process through which subpersonalities begin to develop, starting in infancy when the child starts with one unified self. Upon early experiences of feeling punished, the self splits into two; the 'OK' self and the 'not OK' self. The 'not OK' self then splits further over time, in response to further experiences of disapproval. Rowan suggests however, that parent figures are not the only people upon whom we may project and are therefore not the only source of sub-personalities. He suggests other sources, including the roles people play, their heroes and heroines, and society and culture more generally. Though Rowan's theories are

psychodynamic in origin, and therefore place significant emphasis on the childhood experience, new sub-personalities may emerge later in life, until in the second part of adulthood the individual may move once more toward a more unified sense of self. In service of that process, one role of the practitioner is to guide the individual though five phases. The first phase is recognition of the various sub-personalities, followed by acceptance, co-ordination, and integration. The final phase is synthesis, the outcome of which is the discovery of the transpersonal self, the 'final truth' of the person.

Schwartz's (1995) model of self also builds on the psychoanalytic tradition and in particular the work of multiplicity theorists including Klein, Jung and Berne. Many of these theorists, he says, argue that these internal entities are more than clusters of thoughts or feelings, but are instead distinct entities with their own ages, genders, and personalities. Schwartz (1995) agrees that it is useful to conceive of inner entities as autonomous because it is often of practical value to clients. However, to use his model, does not necessitate a belief in multiplicity. It may be sufficient to regard these separate parts as metaphorical. Schwartz's 'Internal Family Systems' model (IFS) is systemic, in that it places as much emphasis on relationships between parts as it does on the parts themselves. In a polarized system, for example, parts work against each other, such that the person feels fragmented. Schwartz suggests that all parts are valuable and well-intended and want to play constructive inner roles. They may however, be forced into destructive roles and self-perpetuating, repetitive, patterns by external influences. The IFS model is useful, Schwartz says, because it enables people to see that unwanted behaviours may not be pathological, but contextual. This approach enables people to recognise the influence of others in the story that they tell about themselves and enables them to feel more empowered. So, we see the emergence of a third aspect of self-theory, the story telling self, or self-as-story. In this sense Schwartz is explicitly more post-modern than some of his predecessors, focusing more on the pragmatic value of the theory than on the mechanics of the theory itself.

Bachkirova (2011) is the only author to have devised a theory of self specifically in service of progressing our understanding of coaching. Her theory features self-as-experience, self-as-actor and self-as-story as three explicit aspects of the overall self. The first aspect of self is the pre-reflective self, a primitive, inarticulate entity, immediate and dynamic. She refers to the writings of Damasio (2000) in defining it as a nonverbal consciousness that constitutes the beginning of knowledge and sense of self. The second aspect of self is the ego, an aspect of self that is both conscious and unconscious, mostly unconscious. The ego comprises a network of numerous mini-selves that translate the needs and functions of an individual into action. Some of these mini-selves are part of the conscious mind, while others form part of the unconscious mind. Some are simple, others are more complex. They engage with each other and may come into conflict. According to Bachkirova, there is no supervisory self, overseeing the activities of the various mini-selves. Rather the selves may become co-conscious over time, through collaboration. In a relatively unformed ego, levels of collaboration may be low, while in a mature ego, the mini-selves interact in a way that is most likely to satisfy the needs of the organism as a whole. While there is no supervisory self, there is the third aspect of self, the narrator. The narrator is a linguistic function of the conscious mind and its role is to make up a story that explains how the organism as a whole interacts with its environment. This story is ultimately fictitious, since the narrator does not have access to what is happening in the unconscious. The ambition of the narrator, Bachkirova says, is to create an overarching self, which means it has to work very hard to explain why sometimes self-as-actor doesn't behave in accordance with the expectations of self-as-story. Bachkirova's theory is more dynamic than many theories emerging from the psychodynamic tradition, in that she makes reference to developmental theory in positioning ego development as an ongoing journey. With reference specifically to Kegan's theory of adult development, she compares the unformed ego to the socialised mind, the formed ego to the self-authoring mind, and the reformed ego to the self-transforming mind. The coach ought therefore to recognise not only the complexity of the multiple self, but also the dynamic and evolving nature of that self.

In reflecting on the more recent of these theories, the influence of the neuroscientists is clear. All these theories are to some extent consistent with contemporary neuroscience theory, that suggests that neurological processing is distributed across the brain (e.g. Turk et al, 2003). Some studies suggest that aspects of self may be concentrated in the cortical midline structures (CMS) of the brain, medial regions of the cortex. Northoff et al. (2006) suggest that these regions appear to be selectively activated during self-

referential processing, a function that some neuroscientists suggest constitutes the core of sell. Other scientists suggest this view may be somewhat limited, and that a sense of personal agency may depend on processes located elsewhere in the brain besides, areas responsible for sensorimotor integration and homeostatic regulation (Christoff et al., 2011). Of particular influence is the work of Michael Gazzaniga, who is referenced explicitly by Rowan (1990, 1993), Schwartz (1995) and Bachkirova (2011). Starting in the late eighties, Gazzaniga and colleagues conducted a series of conducted a series of studies on split brain patients. These patients sought relief from epilepsy by undergoing surgery to sever the corpus callosum, the part of the brain connecting both hemispheres. Gazzaniga (2002) reports that personal narratives originate in the left hemisphere and postulated the existence of a Left Hemisphere Interpreter (LHI). When asked to interpret behaviours elicited by the disconnected right side of the brain, the LHI makes up stories and confabulates even though it doesn't have access to all the relevant data. The LHI, Gazzaniga says, works constantly to seek out order and reason and relates this story to the conscious self. This would explain, from a neurological standpoint, the existence of a single phenomenological sense of self operating in the midst of unconscious activity, seeking to make sense of the world around and claiming to have control over the actions of the unconscious.

Implications of multiplicity theory for coaching

Bearing in mind the above discussion, it is interesting to consider the implications such theories have for coaching:

1. If different aspects of self are more present than others in different contexts, then the self or pattern of selves that show up in the coaching room is unlikely to represent the full myriad of selves that operate in contexts outside the coaching room. Rowan (1990), for example, suggests that no one subpersonality can speak for the whole group. Coach and coachee then, must be careful not to assume that initial accounts of a coaching situation are always fully-formed, and nor should they seek to move to quickly to a single unified interpretation of events. Accordingly, if it may be unwise to move too quickly to a single version of the here-and-now, it may be equally unproductive to move too quickly to a single version of a desired future state. It may take time for the various selves to align to agreed versions of present and future.

2. A multiplicity perspective encourages coach and coachee to extend their professional relationship outside the coaching room, so that the coach can experience the coachee in different organisational contexts, demonstrating different aspects of self. Following the same line of thought, coach and coachee may seek to incorporate group coaching and/or team coaching sessions into the assignment. Coaching in the presence of other people may trigger the manifestation of different aspects of self that would not otherwise manifest in the one-to-one relationship.

3. Many coaches work with personality instruments and multi-rater surveys as part of assignments. The majority of these tools implicitly assume the existence of a single self. Evidence suggests however, that people don't behave consistently in different situations (Lester, 2010), and that people rate themselves differently on self-scored personality tests depending on social role envisaged. A multiplicity perspective encourages the coach to be more curious as to the nature of psychometric data, and to afford the coachee an ultimately authoritative role as to what the data means.

4. In the same vein, a multiplicity perspective leads the coach to reconsider the application of psychological theory more generally. Robert Kegan's popular theories of adult development, for example, may be interpreted through quite a simplistic lens, placing each of us somewhere on a spectrum from dependent, to self-authoring, to self-transforming (Kegan, 1994; Berger, 2011). Such a singular approach doesn't allow for the possibility that different selves may co-exist at different stages of development, and may show up in different contexts (Bachkirova, 2011).

5. A multiplicity perspective encourages the coach to explore a more systemic sense of self-awareness within him/her self. Schwartz (1995) identifies possible blockers to effective practice, including the presence of a critical, striving self within the practitioner, or an approval seeking self, anxious to demonstrate progress to the paying client, or a caregiving rescuing self, an angry resentful self, and various evaluating selves. A multiplicity perspective demands of the coach a sophisticated sense of

self, including not only an awareness of different selves, but an understanding as to how they relate to each other and to the environment.

6. Finally, and more generally, the multiplicity perspective may lead the coach to a more post-modern perspective, a perspective of not-knowing. If the self is as complex and dynamic as described here, then it is a brave or foolish coach that purports to speak authoritatively upon the personality of another. The quest for authenticity becomes a journey to understand all the various aspects of self and to help them become familiar with each other (Schwarz, 1995; Bachkirova, 2011). This may lead us to pay particular attention to the phenomenological, and 'hold lightly' the theoretical.

Narrative coaching

This last point provides a useful way into a consideration of narrative coaching. It is not being suggested in this paper that narrative is the only approach that can be used with reference to theories of multiplicity. Bachkirova (2011), for example, lists different modalities that may be usefully applied at different stages of ego-development, but it is suggested here that narrative may be a particularly interesting to consider in the light of multiplicity theory, for two reasons:

1. Some multiplicity theories specifically postulate the existence of a narrative centre, seeking to make sense of the world by coming up with stories. This is the self-as-story, and storytelling and the capacity to work with stories sits at the heart of narrative.

2. Narrative approaches to coaching are, to a great extent, post-modernist. The narrative coach may therefore engage 'lightly' with more modernist theories of multiplicity if these are meaningful for the person being coached.

The mysterious nature of self may be problematic to the modernist, seeking objective truth and empirical research in support of underlying theory. It is less troubling from a post-modernist perspective, with its emphasis on constructed meaning (Lester, 2010). The post-modernist practitioner is less concerned with objective/empirical evidence and more focussed on empowering people to create their own meaning, deciding for themselves whether to construe their minds as singular or plural. As Cooper (1999) puts it:

First there is the human Being; then there are theories, research, concepts – the latter cannot exist other than as a project of the former. Rather than our experiences, then, being mere epiphenomena, from an existentialist phenomenological perspective they are the very grounds from which all other knowledge emerges. What we know is what we experience, and to reflect on our lived-experiences is to return 'to the thing themselves': 'the ultimate court of appeal in our knowledge of things.' In this respect, the question is not whether self-plurality is objectively measurable from the standpoint of an objective measurer, but whether it is possible to experience self-plurality from the standpoint of a subjective experiencer. (p. 52)

In this sense we are returning to a phenomenological approach, though not a phenomenological approach attached to the existence of a single self. This version of the approach refers to the subjective sense of self that recognises the strong internal conflicts we experience at times. This is the discourse in which the individual disowns an action saying, 'that wasn't like me', or else refers to 'the devil inside me' or 'my conscience speaking'. Lawrence (2015) reports the following account from a leader transitioning into a new organisation:

I was the transformation guy, bringing a modern way of thinking to a bureaucratic organization. But the organization's mantra was 'we're a family' and I was treated like a drunken Uncle Fester, as an outsider. I was the 'firefighter' rather than the 'architect' or 'builder' and I created some of the bushfires without knowing it. In the second year, when people realized I was a 'glue-man' trying to make everyone successful, I tried to turn relationships round through the use of language (p. 124).

From a multiplicity perspective we can see in this account multiple selves in operation, including self-as-actor, (*I was treated like a drunken Uncle Fester*) and self-as-story (*I was the transformation guy, bringing a modern way of thinking to a bureaucratic organisation*). The extent to which this person experienced himself as multiple or one single self with multiple aspects would appear not to matter very much here. Of more pragmatic concern is the extent to which this person as coachee would find it useful to play with the idea of multiple selves, whether the concept is framed in definitive neuroscientific terms, for example, or as a useful metaphor.

The post-modernist perspective is consistent with the underlying principles of narrative coaching, as defined by both Stelter (2012) and Drake (2015). Drake (2015) defines narrative coaching as:

> *"...a mindful, experiential and integrative approach to being with people and working with their stories. It enables them to get to the crux of the matter, cross the next threshold in their development and bring their new story to life."* (p. 16)

According to Drake (2017), socially constructed narrative patterns determine our relationship with the external world, and the role of the narrative coach is to facilitate the process through which those patterns become conscious. The individual is thereby afforded the opportunity to re-narrate, de-construct and re-construct the story of self. This is consistent with Gergen & Gergen's (1988) and Gergen's (1991) social constructionist perspectives, in which identities are not thrust upon us, but are chosen through relation with others. Stelter (2012) also identifies social constructionist theory as a foundation to his version of narrative. He defines coaching as:

> *"...a developmental conversation and dialogue, a co-creative process between coach and coachee with the purpose of giving (especially) the coachee a space and an opportunity for immersing him/herself in reflection on, and new understandings of his or her own experiences in the specific context, and his or her interactions, relations and negotiations with others in specific contexts and situations."*

With post-modernist foundations and emphasis on story, both approaches lend themselves to exploring multiplicity. However, neither of these approaches foreground multiplicity theory. Weisel-Barth (2015), on the other hand, suggests that the narrative approach may be explicitly expanded to reflect the idea that people hold many stories at once, stories which may come into direct conflict. To illustrate, she tells the story of a patient who found herself experiencing multiple convictions with regard to her unfaithful husband. As therapist, Weisel-Barth saw her role as being to bring these different convictions to the patient's consciousness, and to help her resolve the conflict between these different aspects of self.

Narrative coaching in practice

From the perspective of a narrative practitioner, four themes emerge from the literature in terms of practice.

1. Determining whether or not a multiplicity approach is appropriate

Clutterbuck (2010) warns against using the same specific tools and models regardless as to what may be the best approach for the client. To introduce the notion of multiplicity to someone for whom this has little meaning is unlikely to be effective. There do exist various instruments for measuring multiplicity, but few of them have been subject to rigorous analysis, and it's likely that different instruments measure different aspects of multiplicity. Lester & Carter (2013), for example, found that Carter's (2008) multiplicity scale had good internal consistency, but only a weak association with Altrocchi's (1999) plural self scale, designed to measure the same concept. Campbell et al. (2003) used two measures of pluralism and four measures of unity. They found that the two measures of pluralism were unrelated to each other, and measures of unity were only moderately related to each other. The use of such tools and questionnaires may nevertheless be

useful in facilitating a subjective meaning-making process, so long as the measure is not positioned as being objective, valid or reliable.

2. Identifying and naming multiple selves

Several authors describe working with multiplicity discursively. Lester (2010), for example, suggests the practitioner simply ask the individual to identify multiple selves, and to hypothesise how they may interact. Opportunities to experiment with multiplicity frameworks may present themselves often quite naturally in coaching, for example when a coachee is contemplating internal conflict. As an alternative to, or complement to, techniques such as motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2002) or Immunity to Change (Kegan & Lahey, 2009), the coach may invite the coachee to frame internal conflict as a conflict between different aspects of self, each with its own personality, beliefs and motivations. Coach and coachee may then choose to characterise these different selves. Rowan (1993) describes a process of characterization very similar to that described by White (1988/89) and Epston & White (1990) to externalize problems. To externalize a problem, the practitioner characterises the problem, inviting the individual to describe its appearance, its personality, and its motivation for showing up in the person's life. Instead of feeling defined by the problem, the individual is thus able to hold it at arm's length, to objectify it, enter into relationship with it, and re-negotiate its impact. Rowan describes a similar process for characterizing different aspects of self. This is similarly empowering, in that the individual is able to reflect upon a particular aspect of self, rather than feel wholly defined by the thoughts, feelings and actions of that self.

Cooper & Cruthers (1999) differentiate between descriptive, projective and experiential ways of working with subpersonalities. Descriptive techniques are those in which people are asked to express different aspects of self directly, verbally or in writing. Projective techniques are those in which different aspects of self are imagined to be located in an object external to oneself. As an example, the authors describe a process in which individuals are asked to people are asked to consider aspects of self, close their eyes, and let images of that aspect of self emerge. The person is again then asked to characterise the image, give it a name, and ask it questions. Alternative techniques involve drawing, masks and storytelling. Experiential techniques are those in which people are asked to step into the role of a particular self and enter into that way of being. The authors describe various specific techniques designed to enable people to step into an aspect of self in service of gaining a better understanding of its purpose, intention and motivations. Experiential techniques are a particularly effective way of helping people to engage in dialogue between different aspects of self. Rowan (1993), Schwartz (1995), and Lester (2010), all suggest that it is useful to name different selves. Naming selves makes them less overwhelming, and makes it easier for them to interact.

3. Encouraging interaction between different aspects of self

Rowan (1990, 1993), Schwartz (1995), Carter (2008), Lester (2010) and Bachkirova (2011) all point to the role of the practitioner in facilitating a deeper relationship between different aspects of self. Examples of specific techniques include:

- Psychodrama (Rowan, 1993), in which different people assume the roles of one person's subpersonalities. Satir outlines the process for a 'parts party' (Rowan, 1990), a four-stage process in which i) each part is personified, ii) conflicts between different parts are witnessed, iii) parts are transformed through dialogue, and iv) the parts are accepted and unified.
- Internal team building (Carter, 2008), a set of exercises designed to encourage different personalities to talk to each other. One personality is invited to facilitate a dialogue, from which agreements and specific actions emerge.
- Empty chairs (Schwartz, 1995; Lester, 2010; Earley, 2012), in which different selves are invited to sit in a vacant chair. Using more than one chair, again different selves may be encouraged to relate to each other directly.

4. Encouraging interaction between different aspects of self and others

Many coaches already invite other stakeholders into the coaching conversation. For example, many organisations ask the coach to facilitate conversations between coachee and line manager as a standard component of a coaching assignment. The relationship between coachee and line manager is an example of a specific context, one in which particular aspects of self may reveal themselves. Experiencing such interactions through a multiple/narrative lens, provides further opportunity for reflection and insight. Indeed the narrative practitioner, working from a systemic perspective, may seek other opportunities to witness the coachee in interaction across multiple contexts, or at least encourage the coachee to solicit feedback from his/her behaviour in those different contexts.

Not all of these approaches are specifically narrative, but lend themselves to a narrative approach, with its emphasis on self as story.

Conclusion

Multiplicity theories are more evident in the practice of many therapists and counsellors than they are in the practice of most coaches. This may be because practitioners working with mental illness are more likely to be familiar with dissociative conditions, and to have had experience working with people showing extreme levels of dissociation. Nonetheless, many writers believe that people suffering from conditions such as Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) reflect the same basic construction of self as do 'healthier' people. Theories of multiplicity may be particular useful to coaches as a means by which to further explore their coachee's relationships with different people across increasingly complex environments. The model discourages coach and coachee from moving quickly to simplistic perspectives of people and their personalities, encouraging a more nuanced and context-specific sense of self. Whilst theories of self remain very much as 'works-in-progress', from a post-modernist perspective this doesn't really matter. From a post-modernist perspective, coachees are as they experience themselves, such that a multiplicity framework will be useful to some, and not all. Coaches may experiment with theories of multiplicity through any modality, but it is argued that a narrative approach may be particularly fruitful, given its emphasis on the ability to work with story, and underlying post-modernist principles that render less important the need to operate from a particular theory of self.

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About the authors

Dr. Paul Lawrence has been working as a coach, researcher and facilitator since 2007. He is an associate lecturer in coaching at the Sydney Business School, University of Wollongong, and runs the Centre for Coaching in Organisations.