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COACHING – NARRATIVE-COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

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The *narrative-collaborative* practice described in this paper was first implemented for the Master Class at the Second European Coaching Psychology Conference at the Royal Holloway, University of London in the UK on 16th December 2009. This paper expands on the practice with a more in depth treatment on its philosophical and theoretical foundation. The authors would like to thank all the participants at the Master Class for their contribution and collaboration. As a result, an open discussion forum (Narrative Coaching Network) has been created to continue our stories on Linkedin (http://www.linkedin.com/e/vgh/2680307/). Readers are welcome to join and share their narrative experiences.

Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to provide both the theoretical foundation and formulation of practice for narrative coaching. We advocate that coaching as narrative-collaborative practice should form the new wave (third generation) of coaching practice and encourage coaching and coaching psychology communities to engage in its practice and research.

Methods: In providing the theoretical foundation for coaching as narrative-collaborative practice, we first draw on its societal and cultural foundation. We argue that narrative coaching can support self-created and reflective leadership, provide continuous development of coaching methodology as it focuses on values, gives opportunities for meaning-making and provides a reflective space for the unfolding of narratives in terms of the construction of reality and the concept of meaning.

Results: From the above foundations, we develop a general narrative coaching methodology by integrating the general characteristics of ‘externalising conversation’ and ‘re-authoring’ (two common forms of narrative methods) and highlight its collaborative properties including narrative coaching in groups.

Conclusion: We summarise the purpose of this paper and conclude that coaching as a narrative-collaborative practice can provide empowerment and social acknowledgments to coachees’ self-identity and re-iterate our call to promote coaching as a narrative-collaborative practice.

Keywords: coaching psychology, narrative coaching, reflective space, community of practice, collaborative, meaning making, Universal Integrative Framework

Introduction

In the following article we would like to present coaching as a narrative-collaborative practice. The evidence of our practice shall be based on a theoretical foundation of our approach and the concrete expertise of a related field of practice (i.e. narrative therapy). Some initial conceptualizations of narrative coaching were developed by David Drake (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009) in Australia, by Ho Law (2006, 2007) in the UK (Law, at al, 2006, 2007) and by Reinhard Stelter (2007, 2009) in Denmark. Although these practitioner-researchers ground coaching on narrative approaches, the developments have evolved partly independently. On integrating these sources of development, we follow the thoughts of Stober, Wildflower and Drake (2006) on evidence-based practice, who defined evidence from both coaching-specific research and related disciplines, their own expertise, and an understanding of the uniqueness of each client. In this article we would like to present an outline and methodology of this fairly new concept of coaching and base it on two central theoretical bedrocks which shall serve as an argument for the promotion of coaching as a *narrative-collaborative* practice. In that way we work towards an "intelligent and conscientious use of the best current knowledge in making decisions about how to deliver coaching to coaching clients" (Cavanagh & Grant, 2006, p. 156).

Theoretical foundation of coaching as a narrative-collaborative practice

To build our approach on a strong theoretical basis we will include two central pillars:

1. The societal and cultural foundation of coaching

   The socio-cultural context is regarded as essential in Universal Integrative Framework (UIF) for coaching and mentoring, as developed by Law, Ireland and Hussain (2007)

2. The learning foundation of coaching

87 Based on an understanding that coachees' self-awareness is fundamental for their
88 developmental path, the psychology of learning has great importance for the
89 understanding of the coaching process itself (Law, et al, 2007, Stelter, 2002).
90
91 In the following sections, these two theoretical pillars will be presented in greater detail.
92

93 *1. The societal and cultural foundation of coaching*

94 During the last 20 to 30 years, our society has transformed fundamentally and radically and in a
95 way that has had great impact on all its members. These changes – which will be described in
96 further detail later in this paper – have had a radical influence on people's professional and
97 private lives in general, and more specifically, on the way we generate knowledge, construct self
98 and identity and make sense of our lives. There are a number of societal implications that can be
99 considered as arguments that justify and even favor coaching as a narrative-collaborative
100 practice: We live in a world of 'globality' and in a hypercomplex society. Here the term
101 'globality' means that an event that happens on our planet is no longer just a limited local event
102 only. In other words, all inventions, victories and catastrophes affect the whole world; and thus
103 we must reorient and reorganise our lives and actions, our organisations and institutions, along
104 this 'local-global' axis (Beck, 2000, p.11). This social condition challenges the individual and
105 also specific organizations (e.g., a business, a school or an association) to find their own identity
106 and at the same time to relate to a multifaceted social reality (Luhmann, 1995; Stelter, 2009;
107 Qvortrup, 2003). In the next three sections we would like to highlight, how this societal
108 complexity has an impact on coaching, and why the coaching should be formed as a more open
109 dialogue:

110 ***Coaching as a reflective space***

111 The English sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) highlighted the importance of self-reflexivity
112 as a central prerequisite of the members of our late-modern societies. They have to handle “a
113 post-traditional order, in which the question, ‘How shall I live?’ has to be answered in day-to-
114 day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat – and many other things – as
115 well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity” (p. 14). Giddens regarded self-
116 identity as a kind of permanently running individual project where we suggest that coaching can
117 contribute in a positive manner, as a tool of self-reflection.

118

119 ***Coaching and meaning making***

120 To make one’s actions meaningful in specific situations, it is a quest that every member of
121 society has continuously to work on in different contexts and social organizations, at work or in
122 private life (Bruner, 1990) – a conduct that is no longer carried out on the basis of a commonly
123 accepted frame of reference (for example based on religious values or broadly accepted moral
124 standards). Bruner (1991) argued that the mind structures its sense of reality using mediation
125 through "cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems" (p. 3). He specifically
126 emphasized the idea of narrative as one of these cultural products. In regard to coaching we will
127 argue as follows: Coaching is a way of helping people to create new, alternative and more
128 uplifting narratives about their own life in different social contexts, narratives which are formed
129 in a self-reflective process and which help individuals or groups of people to create coherence
130 and shape meaning as an expression of their relatedness to specific others and contexts (Stelter,
131 2007). In coaching this process of meaning making can be enhanced by using the metaphors of
132 the coachee’s culture (e.g., Turner, 1967; Myerhoff, 1982).

133 ***Coaching supporting self-created and reflective leadership***

134 In regard to coaching in a business context we have to take some special and new challenges of
135 leadership into account (Schein, 1992). In the past, a person was usually placed in a leadership
136 position and automatically had authority and received indubitable respect. However, owing to the
137 growing level of autonomy in many job areas and high distinctive expertise of many employees
138 in various industries, these in turn increase the complexity as mentioned earlier. Thus,
139 increasingly leaders have to shape their leadership position in joint action with their employees
140 and other stakeholders (Walji, 2007, Ferdig, 2007). This calls for a new leadership approach.
141 Leaders have to generate their own leadership style. Leadership becomes a reflective project and
142 is self-created. As a result of these challenges leaders frequently search for assistance by
143 cooperating with peers (e.g., through mentoring programs) or they hire an executive coach who
144 can support leaders in their self-reflective process of their leadership development. To further
145 support leadership development, the focus is often put on values. The Danish management
146 philosopher Kirkeby (2000: 7) puts it like this:

> 147 There only exist normative criteria of management, no others. What is objective must be
> 148 considered as an untenable construction. An economical perspective, technical
> 149 perspective, or social perspective, is also able to be reduced to values … There is a
> 150 hidden normativity, including both good and evil, in the actions of the manager, whether
> 151 it is conscious or not.

152 This value-basis of leaders' decision-making can be one of the focal areas in reflective coaching
153 dialogues, where specific events are studied through the lens of specific value reflections.
154

2. The learning foundation of coaching

As the second theoretical pillar, we shall focus on learning and its importance for the understanding of the coaching process. Learning and continuous (professional) development is of central importance in our time. But learning has changed character during the post World War II period. The fundamental difference is: Central authorities in our society (e.g., school teachers, leaders, masters, medical doctors or priests) have lost their knowledge monopoly. In our post or late modern society knowledge is generated in specific contexts, in local communities of practice (a team at work, a school class etc.) (Wenger, 1998). We would like to understand learning as situated and formed in social discourses and actions in particular organizations (e.g., a company, school or hospital) or work relationship. Learning then is a process of co-creation of knowledge (Pearce, 2007). The emergence of coaching as a wide-spread phenomenon in our society is – on the basis of this new concept of learning – a logical consequence of these new societal preconditions. Accordingly, we classify coaching as a central medium in a focused learning process (Law, Ireland & Hussain, 2007). This understanding is consistent with a family of established learning theories that Law, et al. (2007) and Stelter (2002) identified as relevant to coaching (see Belenky, et al. 1986, Loevinger & Blasi, 1976, Perry, 1970; Kegan, 1982, 1994, Kolb, 1984, Mezirow, 1991, 2000, Freire, 1992 and Vygotsky, 1962).

Towards a continuous development of coaching practice

On the basis of this theoretical analysis we see a necessity of continuously developing the epistemology and practice of coaching as the main endeavour of this article. To elucidate this development we would like to present coaching as being divided into three basic and very

177 roughly distinguished "generations", where we mainly focus on the basic *intentional orientation*
178 of the coach, which only partly are represented by specific theoretical positions:

179 1. *Coaching with a problem or goal perspective*: These first generation approaches would
180 include sports coaching, the GROW model, NLP, and partly also psychodynamic coaching
181 and cognitive-behavioral coaching. The main perspective here is on taking the plunge from
182 specific and concrete problems the coachee has presented. The coaching session would be
183 mainly centered around these problems with a clear focus on a specific goal ("I would like to
184 solve this task more efficiently."). In this first generation coaching the coach can be in danger
185 to be pushed into the role of an expert and knower.

186 2. *Coaching with a solution and future perspective*: These second generation approaches would
187 include systemic and solution-focused coaching, appreciative inquiry coaching and positive
188 psychology coaching. The main perspective here is to create and shape possible new futures
189 with a strong focus on existing resources and the strengths of the coachee. The session is
190 oriented towards possibilities and not on struggles of the past. Therefore, a focus on goals is
191 less beneficial. A goal focus would evolve from a problem perspective and hinder looking at
192 different and new futures that might open the coachee's eyes towards new perspectives.

193 3. *Coaching with a reflective perspective*: These third generation approaches include social-
194 constructionist, narrative coaching, protreptic or philosophic coaching. The main perspective
195 is a further development of the second generation model. The focus is very strongly on the
196 dimension of co-creation and cooperation. Both coach and coachee are both experts and non-
197 knowers. The preferred issues of the coaching dialogue are around values and meaning-
198 making, on aspects that are really important in life and that put both coach and coachee in a
199 reflective space, beyond basic everyday challenges. Coach and coachee become *philosophers*

in regard to “the bigger questions of life”. The traditional asymmetry between both of them is then reduced. They are both equally wondering about the central human issues and find new ways to understand their existence.

These three perspectives are often integrated parts in specific coaching sessions, because the coaches make shifts in their intentional orientation towards the dialogue, but on the basis of our theoretical analysis we are convinced that the coaching should move towards a practice that is more dominated by second and third generation approaches. The main arguments for strengthening the third generation coaching are as follows:

(1) Coaching as a reflective space;
(2) coaching as a process of meaning making; and
(3) coaching supporting reflective and value-based leaderhip.

Therefore we find it useful to present some central criteria that will move our intentional focus as practitioners towards the third generation - *coaching as a reflective space*.

Coaching as reflective space

In the following we will present and discuss three aspects of the coaching dialogue that lead to the broadening of the coachee’s reflective space and shall be understood as practitioner guidelines of the third generation coaching (see also Stelter, 2009):

1. Focusing on values: In our society, which is characterized by a growing diversity in social and organizational values, we must encourage coachees to reflect on values as guiding markers to help them organize their private and professional lives. These values are no longer timeless and universal, but are rather grounded in the practices and events of the local

223 communities. The ultimate aim is to facilitate and improve leadership, communication and
224 cooperation, not by focusing on specific goals, but by reflecting on key values as a feature of the
225 human condition.

226 *2. Giving opportunities for meaning-making*: Meaning-making is considered as one of the
227 main purposes to facilitate the coaching dialogue (Stelter, 2007). Meaning is fundamental,
228 because we ascribe specific values to our experiences, actions, our interplay with others and our
229 life and work. Things become *meaningful* when we understand our own way of sensing, thinking
230 and acting by telling certain stories about ourselves and the world in which we live. Meaning is
231 far from being the same as "information" – as used in the concept of data processing. Meaning-
232 making is based on past experiences and expectations about the future, and holistically integrates
233 past and present experiences as well as ideas about what the future holds. Meaning evolves the
234 interplay between action, sensing, reflecting and speaking.

235 *3. Giving space for the unfolding of narratives*: Telling stories to one another and
236 developing and sharing narratives and accounts, either in a coach-coachee relationship or in a
237 group setting, is fundamental to the process of social meaning-making; the grounding of an
238 individual in a cultural context is always based on specific values and meanings. Narratives serve
239 to structure events and to join them together in a timeline. They make stories – the source of
240 meaning-making – coherent and as a result, life makes sense. Narratives establish temporal
241 coherence and shape how events, actions, other persons and ourselves can be experienced and
242 perceived as sensible and meaningful. The plot of every story is the basis for the development of
243 an inner structure and drama (Sarbin, 1986, an early psychologists with a narrative orientation).
244 By telling stories and listening to them, our lives become meaningful. Carr (1986) put it like this:
245 "Lives are told in being lived and lived in being told" (p. 61).

These three elements of coaching as a reflective space shall lead towards epistemological foundations that pave the way to the narrative-collaborative practice of coaching.

Epistemological foundations – bridging phenomenology and social constructionism

In the following section we will present a theoretical framework for a new form of coaching intervention, where we try to balance between an individual, experiential, embodied perspective on the one hand and a social, cultural, community-oriented perspective on the other. By doing so, we combine theoretical roots from phenomenology with social constructionism. Phenomenology casts a light on immediate embodied experiences upon which individuals can focus with regard to a specific situation in which they are involved. Social constructionism, on the other hand, deals with discourses between people, the social implications of relationships and the relational and cultural construction of reality. Although these two theoretical approaches differ in many ways, they share some connections which allow them to be used in an integrated model for coaching. These connecting concepts revolve around:

(1) The construction of reality and

(2) The concept of meaning.

The integration of these two aspects is the central basis for the understanding of our theoretical framework where phenomenology and social constructionism meet and can fuse in an integrated coaching model; a model which we finally synthesize by taking a narrative, community psychological approach. In the following two sections we will first discuss (1) the construction of reality and then (2) the concept of meaning.

The Construction of Reality

In both phenomenology and social construction, reality is not something definite and final. Reality is either constructed in the present moment of experiencing and will change from one situation to another (phenomenology); or is socially constructed in relationship with others (social constructionism). We further present these two approaches in depth.

Phenomenology has developed as a genuine “science of experience”, with its main focus on how individuals create their own world. Husserl (1985), the founder of phenomenology, spoke about a “descriptive psychology”, where the point of departure for psychological investigation is phenomena as *perceived by the subject* (Ihde, 1977). Phenomenologists have developed an empirical method for that open approach to phenomena called *epoché*, meaning suspension of judgement. In epoché, the individual attempts to grasp the pure subjectiveness of the world – the individual’s world in itself. In that sense we can speak about an *individual, experiential construction of reality*. There are a number of strategies that allow an individual’s perceived experience to be explored in depth (see Stelter, 2007, 2008). To counter the accusation of subjectivism, phenomenologists draw a sharp line between them and rational and empiricist traditions in philosophy and psychology, as represented through the method of introspection, a process of “looking within” one’s own mind, i.e., thoughts, emotions and sensations are explored through a method of reflective self-observation.

How do *social constructionists* regard the term “reality”? In social constructionism, the focus is on relationships and how social relations develop and form the individual and the social context itself. This relational perspective sees also the evolvement of emotions and thoughts as *socially*

292 constructed and not formed internally by the individual. Reality is constructed exclusively
293 though social discourse and interaction with others – in a workplace, family or team – and
294 thereby evolves in the *relationships* that people are part of (Gergen, 1994). What appears as
295 "reality" is, indeed, a social construction. From a sociological perspective, Berger and Luckman
296 (1966) set the stage by saying: "The sociology of knowledge understands human reality as
297 socially constructed" (p. 211).

298

299 As a consequence of this epistemological assumption, it becomes "possible" – as a strategy of
300 intervention – to de-construct and re-construct a specific social reality (e.g., in a sports team, a
301 group of exercisers or in an organisation) by influencing the way people talk to each other.
302 Gergen (1994) put it like this: "The degree to which a given account of the world or self is
303 sustained across time is not dependent on the objective validity of the account but on the
304 vicissitudes of social process" (p. 51). It is here intervention strategies such as Appreciative
305 Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003) are seen as valuable.

306

307 The AI process is jointly constructed by the participants, who through interaction are able to co-
308 create a new social reality for themselves. By choosing *positive* topics as the starting point for
309 their dialogue, by discovering and imagining possibilities, the participants have a chance of
310 creating a reality that furthers their development, both personally and as a group or team. AI can
311 easily be integrated into the coaching process, because it is often much more helpful not to focus
312 on the problems of the situation but on the possibilities and strength of the participants involved.

313

314 ***The Concept of Meaning***

315 The underlying assumption of traditional objective theories of perception and understanding is
316 that there is a reality *out there* in the world; we perceive the world while creating a *picture* of it.
317 This approach lets us understand the world through concepts that focus on internal
318 representations of external reality. This traditional view can be replaced by a definition of reality
319 as something that is constructed through the individual's interplay with a concrete environment.
320

321 From the *phenomenological perspective*, Husserl (1950) spoke about *constitution,* which he
322 regarded as a function prior-to-meaning and as part of transcendental intersubjectivity, which
323 offers the individual a set of prefabricated meanings embedded in culture through the medium of
324 language. In our world, we become conscious of meanings, which we receive through a cultural
325 originator as part of a transcendental intersubjectivity. Meaning is formed through the
326 experiences and (implicit) knowledge that an individual acquires in various social contexts. This
327 process is constitutional: the individual develops *meaning* by being in action in a specific socio-
328 cultural context. Hence the "outer" world becomes real – namely *meaningful* – through an
329 individual's reflection and interpretation of a situation. From a phenomenological point of view,
330 "meaning is formed in the interaction of experiencing and something that functions as a symbol"
331 (Gendlin, 1997, p. 8). This symbolisation often takes a verbal form, but can be expressed by
332 other means, such as painting, drama, dance or writing. By highlighting and giving space to
333 experiential meaning, the coach can establish a *contextual ground* for individuals as embodied
334 and settled in the cultural context of concrete situation.
335

336 In *social constructionism* meaning is negotiated between the participants in the specific social
337 setting. Gergen (1994) wrote:

338 > There is an alternative way of approaching the problem of social meaning:
339 > removing the individual as the starting point opens a range of promising
340 > possibilities. Rather than commence with individual subjectivity and work
341 > deductively towards an account of human understanding through language,
342 > we may begin our analysis at the level of the *human relationship* as it
343 > generates both language and understanding (p. 263; italic in the original).

344

345 Ideally, all participants realize that their position and opinion is only one of many possibilities,
346 only one world-view. Hence, open-mindedness and curiosity about whether others see the world
347 in different ways or how they regard a specific task, is extremely helpful in the negotiation
348 process or social discourse. The views of other persons should inspire an individual's personal or
349 professional growth. This would enable all members of a social group or organisation to grow
350 and mature in their perception of the world and ideally come to a form of agreement or
351 acknowledgement of differences.

352

353 In a community of practice such as in teams, where all participants take part in the process
354 of meaning-making, we observe that social negotiation often unfolds through personal accounts
355 and narratives. Narratives tie in with the concrete context and to actions and events which the
356 person either is or has been part of, and which are often related to other people (friends or
357 opponents, colleagues, team members, etc.). A narrative is formed with a specific "plot" which
358 gives the narrative coherence in terms of action and meaning and provides a basic orientation in

359 the form of a guiding clue in the story (Polkinghorne, 1988). Encouraging and uplifting
360 narratives strengthen cooperation in the community of practice. For example: An uplifting
361 narrative in a sports team could be shaped around the good experiences of playing together and
362 enjoying each others' company despite the defeat in last game. On the other hand, narrative
363 myths can be created about certain members of the group or team, and external relations or
364 events. For example: A myth can emerge when a mistake of one player in one specific situation
365 is unfolded as the reason for having lost the whole game. In this way narratives can create a form
366 of reality which comes into existence through the social discourse of the involved parties. But we
367 also have to be aware of power structures and boundaries, as well as opportunities that may
368 influence our ability to participate freely in dialogues (Foucault, 1972). There are organisations
369 and social contexts where it might be impossible to negotiate equally because of the dominance
370 of powerful stakeholders. Coaching is generally based on a form of *collaborative and egalitarian*
371 relationship (Grant & Stober, 2006). On the basis of this understanding it seems to be impossible
372 to build up a dialogue which is biased by the dominance of one part which is not willing to
373 negotiate and reflect on his/her own position.
374

375 **The coaching practice as meaning-making**

376 Based on the above epistemological foundation, coaching can be base on two central dimensions
377 of meaning-making:
378 1. Meaning is formed through the actual experiences and (implicit) knowledge the
379 individual acquires in different life contexts. This concept of experiential meaning making can be
380 linked to the concept of experiential learning.

381 2. Meaning is shaped through social negotiation and narratives that describe the focus of
382 the person's life practice. This process of meaning making is a process of co-creation between
383 coach and coachee and can be related to a form of social learning, aiming at understanding
384 relationships and the importance of others for creating reality. In the next section, we will
385 explain how the above theoretical foundations translate into the narrative coaching process and
386 techniques (also see Stelter, 2007; Law and Stelter, 2009).
387

388 ### ***Meaning Making as an Experiential Process***

389 In the first stream, the focus of coaching intervention is on *individual experience and*
390 *personal meaning-making*. Together with the coach, coachees strive to understand their
391 subjective reality or a subjective experience of the culture they live in. Their focus is on the
392 implicit and often embodied dimensions of their doing, a perspective which might throw light on
393 some ontologically essential experiences and values. As the starting point of the conversation,
394 the coachees study detailed descriptions of certain activities and explore their felt sense (Gendlin,
395 1997; Stelter, 2000) at the time in order to reach a deeper understanding of their thoughts,
396 feelings and behaviours. Gendlin (1997) as one of the leading practitioner-researchers in this
397 field defined the felt sense as a form of inner aura or physical feeling about a specific situation,
398 event or person. But this felt sense is often pre-reflective, namely pre-conscious and not
399 verbalised. The coach's sensitive questioning helps the coachees to get in touch with these
400 implicit, embodied and pre-reflective dimensions of their doing. I will discuss strategies of
401 sensitive questioning in a later section of this chapter. For now I will simply say that this form of
402 experience-based inquiry remains a challenge, because it is difficult to find words for
403 experiences that are basically personal and embodied. Stevens (2000) mentioned that it depends

404 on “how articulate, how skilled and expressive” (p.115) people are to speak about their
405 experiences. Another challenge for Steven is “that the words used relate to a diffuse network of
406 semantic assemblies both for the speaker and the listener” (p. 115), which means both speaker
407 and listener have to create their universe of meaning together.

408 From a narrative perspective, White (2007) spoke about revisiting the absent but implicit,
409 thereby describing the importance of personal meaning-making. His idea was to relate forgotten
410 experiences and episodes and join them with a storyline which is more uplifting than the training
411 story the coach might have presented in the beginning of the session. By revisiting the absent but
412 implicit reality, for example by remembering the importance of a teacher in one’s first school
413 years, the coachee has a chance to re-tell and enrich her story on the basis of her cultural
414 background and life history. This might allow her to modify story plots and couple events in a
415 new way, thus leading to the creation of a more uplifting storyline and a positive, encouraging
416 reality.

417

418 ***Meaning Making as Co-creation: The Narrative-collaborative Practice of Coaching***

419 In this second and central strategy for narrative coaching, the focus is on the cultural and
420 collaborative dimension of coaching. We take a closer look at how the coach can facilitate the
421 process of social meaning-making, a process that goes beyond the individual, experiential
422 perspective. Social meaning-making always involves several people, the minimum being the
423 dyad of coach and coachee or a group or team led by a coach. The collaborative dimension can
424 briefly describe as follows (see also Anderson, 2007):

425 • Both coach and coachee(s) are experts. Every participant contributes to the joint process of
426 meaning-making and knowledge production.

427 • All participants stay in floating and changeable positions, where mutual development is
428 possible and are able to redefine their own perspective and position.
429 • All participants value the knowledge that is co-created locally, but at the same time value
430 possible and remaining differences.
431 • ”Generous listening” is central for mutual inquiry, where interested and sometime naïve
432 wondering helps to develop generative conversations.

433 This fundamental conversational stance can be combined with various narrative techniques that
434 depend on the coaching context. The central property of any narrative process is that it is a form
435 of a collaborative practice. Integrating the narrative practice into the Universal Integrative
436 Framework (UIF) model, it allows coaches to link their practice to the four dimensions flexibly.
437 The UIF consists of four dimensions (1) Self; (2) Social; (3) Cultural; and (4) Professional (Law,
438 at al., 2007). For instance, the key characteristics of the narrative approach: ‘e*xternalising*
439 *conversation’* and *re-authoring*, are methods that help coachees to scaffold their learning from
440 their experience within the social and cultural dimensions onto the self dimension in terms of
441 their values and self-identity through a meaning-making process. We shall expand on this
442 process within the coaching context next.
443

444 During the externalising conversation, the coachees are invited to tell their story, very often we
445 notice that they have internalised their problem as if it were their own personal characteristic.
446 However in narrative coaching, the fundamental position is: The coachee as a person is not the
447 problem, the problem is the problem that is outside the person. Thus the externalisation provides
448 the coachee with a new perspective to view and talk about the problem differently (White, 2007).
449

In re-authoring, the coachee story is regarded as a ‘script’, and the coachee the ‘author’. As such the coachee should have power and freedom to re-author the story of their life. Here one can regard re-authoring as another form of externalisation – where the coachee is taking an externalised position to view their own ‘life story’ as an author. In this paper, we describe a general process of narrative coaching by integrating the re-authoring technique within the process of externalising conversation. There are two parts of the narrative coaching process. Part 1 consists of two stages: description and relation mapping. Part 2 consists of three stages: evaluation/re-evaluation, justification and conclusion/recommendation. The readers who are familiar with narrative therapy may notice that both applications share the same basic steps. This is understandable; as Law (2007) argues that epistemologically, narrative practice is grounded in cultural anthropology, which was concerned with non-clinical population, and therefore it should be re-located within the mainstream coaching practice. Many examples of those practices can be found in the case studies in Law et al (2007) and Law (2010 in press). Here, we shall summarise these steps as follows.

Stage One – Description

The coach invites the coachees to tell a story about life or work domain (depending on the topic of the coaching session, e.g. their business/work issues, relationships or work/life balance, etc). The story may consist of many themes or plots. As the coach listens to the coachee’s story, the coach tries to identify any ‘internalised problem’ that might have affected the coachee’s sense of self and identity. The coach encourages the coachee to externalise the problem by for example, giving it a name.

473 *Stage Two – Relation Mapping*

474 In the coachee's story, the coach attempts to identify the coachee's aspirations, values, hopes and
475 dreams that give the coachee's a sense of purposes that is more consistent with the coachee's
476 desirable self-identity. However the evidence that appeared in the story told might very often be
477 in thin traces. Borrowed from the anthropological theory of Geertz (1973) Michael White (1997)
478 spoke about 'thin description' as in contrast to the foreground dominant storyline ('thick
479 description'). The coach needs to identify any 'unique outcomes' that might have been
480 neglected by the coachee, and yet these neglected events and their unique outcomes may help the
481 coach and coachee to co-construct the alternative story lines. The coachee may give many
482 examples of failure (thick description) to support their negative story line. The coach may ask
483 the coachee to think about any *exceptions* in their experience that constitute a successful outcome
484 (counterplot). This counterplot provides 'a point of entry' (*rite de passage*) to the alternative
485 storyline that may lead the coachee to see new possibilities. The mapping between the coachee's
486 positive self identity and the negative description of coachee's action in a sequence of events
487 unfolding (thin and thick descriptions) would enable the coach to identify the 'learning gap' or
488 the 'zone of proximal development' (use Vygotsky's term) that the coachee needs to bridge.
489

490 *Stage Three – Evaluation/Re-evaluation (re-authoring)*

491 To bridge the learning gaps that have been identified in Stage two, the coach continues to focus
492 on those thin story lines that could strengthen the coachee's sense of identity; gather more
493 evidence to support the alternative storyline (thicken the plot). This stage provides 'scaffolding'
494 to bridge the coachee's learning gap by recruiting their lived experience. The coach asks the
495 coachee to re-evaluate the impact of their action upon their own sense of self identity, values and

496 belief, stretch their imagination and exercise their meaning-making resources. The coach also
497 encourages the coachee to map their aspirations, values and self identity upon their action in
498 terms of new future possibilities on their life's horizons. This stage is very often referred to as
499 'the turning point' where the coachee begins to change from re-iterating the old story line to start
500 discovering new possibilities and action.
501
502 *Stage Four - Justification*
503 The coach further thickens the plot of the story and consolidates the coachee's commitment for
504 change. The aim of narrative coaching is to develop a 'thick description' of an alternative
505 storyline "that is inscribed with…meanings" and finds linkages between "the stories of people's
506 lives and their cherished values, beliefs, purposes, desires, commitments, and so on" (White,
507 1997, p.15-16). At this stage, the coachees are asked to justify the above evaluation in terms of
508 their aspiration, belief, values and self identity and strengths.
509
510 *Stage Five - Conclusion/Recommendation*
511 The coach guides the coachee to draw conclusion by making valued statements about their self
512 identity in terms of their beliefs, values, hopes, and dreams. The coach may ask the coachee to
513 write these statements down in words on a piece of paper or in a form of letter, etc. Finally the
514 coach invites the coachee to make commitments for action by summarising an action plan for
515 change and how to achieve their hopes and dreams (the 'bridging tasks').
516
517
518

519 ***Community of practice and narrative coaching in groups***

520 The above process is described as a *narrative-collaborative* practice. It can be applied to
521 community and group situations. The technique is called 'outsider witness re-telling'. In group
522 narrative coaching, only one coachee at a time is at the 'centre' of the focus who acts as a
523 storyteller while the other members of the group act as 'witnesses'. After the coachee has told
524 the story, the coach asks the outsider witnesses to describe how the coachee's story resonates
525 with their own experience and the learning that they gained which are relevant to those aspects
526 that are most significant to the coachee's personal development. Thus both the coach and the
527 outsider witnesses are taking a 'de-centre' position and act as a support group with the objectives
528 to provide acknowledgements and further strengthen the coachee's new storyline about their life
529 and identity. When the outsider witness re-telling process re-iterates and applies to a very large
530 group or community, it is called 'definitional ceremony'- retellings of retellings. In a one-to-one
531 coaching session the coach might function as a kind of 'outsider-witness' by reflecting how the
532 coachee's story resonates with his/her own experience, values and identity. This brings a new
533 dimension to coaching where the usual asymmetrical dialogue develops into a more symmetrical
534 one: The coach becomes somehow a *fellow human*.
535

536 **Conclusion**

537 In this paper, we have provided the philosophical and theoretical foundation for coaching as a
538 *narrative-collaborative* practice, drawing from the post-constructivism and the psychology of
539 learning. We have described the general narrative coaching process and argued that it offers a
540 powerful approach to provide empowerment and social acknowledgments to coachees' self-
541 identity. It amplifies the coachee's aspiration and mobilises their hidden strengths and resources

542 for change. We encourage coaching and coaching psychology communities to actively promote
543 the narrative approach by engaging in its practice and carrying out further research on its
544 outcomes.
545
546
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549
550
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