Dialogical Self Approach

Travel in the landscape of mind

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The Dialogical Self is a travel in the landscape of the mind, with its multiplicity of I-positions, including their tensions and contradictions. There is an interplay of movement between emotions and stillness of awareness. In the self there are wars and friendships, like in a society. The landscape has its shadows and lights, its atmosphere and mysteries. Not everything can be discovered at the first glance, sometimes you need to explore this landscape to find its hidden treasures. The landscape of the mind changes, you cannot say that you know it. Rather, it is a constant process of discovering. The beginning of the journey starts when you can let yourself be surprised by your own self.

The dialogical self approach is a travel in the landscape of the mind. This book gives you an overview how such a travel can be facilitated by methods which allow self-explorations in close connection with explorations of your social environment.

The Dialogical Self Approach (DSA) is as an application of the internationally recognized Dialogical Self Theory, as developed by Hubert Hermans and colleagues from over 40 countries. The Dialogical Self Theory (originally rooted in work of William James and Mikhail Bakhtin) developed into a broad theory applied in many fields and disciplines.

The Dialogical Self Approach is itself a dialogue between science and practice. It allows to work both on identity and emotions and takes into account the spiritual dimension. It is a rich but coherent methodology which can be used in coaching, training and education. In this book you will receive an introduction to the approach and an overview of its methods. The methods are like musical instrument which you, as a Dialogical Practitioner, learn to play in flexible ways and in agreement with your own style.
Content

Introduction to the Dialogical Self Approach

1. What is the dialogical Self Approach
2. Scientific Basis

Methods in Dialogical Self Approach

3. Personal Position Repertoire (PPR) method.
4. Composition Work
5. Positioning Theatre
6. Emotional Coaching
7. Application of the Dialogical Self Approach: An Illustrative Example
1. WHAT IS THE DIALOGICAL SELF APPROACH

The Dialogical Self Approach (DSA) is a practical methodology used in coaching, training and counseling which invites clients to explore and understand entirely different sides of themselves (e.g. I as enjoyer of life, I as hard worker, I as child of my parents) and their important emotions. The approach focuses on aspects of oneself that have not only very different emotional meanings, but also imply conflicts and oppositions.

One of the most important life tasks is to build a relation between one’s most opposite sides and find a relative balance between them. In order to realize this, you have to find out what is the relation between them. Somebody who experiences a high level of stress may discover that he finds himself in a (one) position (e.g., I as always managing), while other important I-positions (e.g., I as looking for depth and meaning) are pressing from the background because they lack attention and fulfillment. The procedure brings such I-positions in contact with each other so that the one can learn from the other so that they can cooperate rather than fight.

What you are doing does not necessarily fit with you

Sometimes people can work or live many years from a particular I-position which does not fit to them. For example, a man is seen by others, but also by himself, as the successor of a family-company, but he has vague feelings of dissatisfaction which he never could understand very well. In such a case DSA helps the person to become aware of I-positions which are underlying, but, when evoked, can come to strong expression. This can lead the person to discover that an earlier, never fulfilled wish, was never realized: to start a study or to become engaged in art. Realizing this wish is for him a way to give new meaning to his life.
One person but different sides

The diversity of conscious but also unconscious I-positions and associated emotions are central in DSA. However, the basis of this approach is broader. The I-positions are not standing in isolation from each other but are able to become engaged in mutual dialogues (therefore the name ‘dialogical self’). Somebody can experience a conflict between two I-positions, for example, “I want a new challenge in my work, but I also want certainty and safety.” The first wish motivates the person to leave the organization in which she works and apply for a new job. However, at the same time she is afraid to make this step because she has to give up the safety of her present job. When the person starts a dialogical relationship between these positions, she has the opportunity to move back and forth between them, explore them profoundly, and then search for a ‘third position’ in which they converge. In this way, she arrives at the decision to contact her boss in order to discuss the possibility of new work in her own organization. This solution, in the form of a third position, offers her a new challenge whereas she does not give up the security which is important to her.

In his novel The Steppenwolf, Herman Hesse wrote about Harry who had two opposite characters: a wolf and a human. The wolf was wild and always in search for freedom, he was impulsive and chaotic. His human part was connected with thoughts, culture and sublime nature.

“The deepest faith pushes him to spirit, to God, the hottest longing: back to nature, to mother. His life is balancing between these forces, trembling anxiously”

His two sides where in fight, in a war, one wanted to kill the other

Harry wanted to get rid of one of them. When he felt the energy of the wolf, he wanted to forget the human, when he was in a position of a human, he wanted to remove the wolf from his life.

The problem was not in their differences but in their relation which was a constant fight.

Question for reflection:

Which are the most opposed sides in yourself?

Was there any situation in which they could cooperate with each other?
A special feature of DSA is that significant others are part of our dialogical self. A father, mother, sister, brother, teacher, friend or colleague become part of a self that is extended to the social environment. Somebody may be used to think, feel, and act like his father or mother always did. Without being aware of this, the person is always imitating the father in himself or fulfilling his wishes even after the father’s death. By doing a self-investigation on the basis of DSA, the person is confronted with the question what is his own position and challenged to make a distinction between what the father wants and what the person himself wants. In our research and clinical applications, we found that significant others often have a dominant place in somebody’s dialogical self and that this ‘external position’, as we call it, can suppress other positions which, as a result, do not come to sufficient expression, at the cost of one’s well-being. DSA does not only give attention to the dialogical relationships between I-positions, but also to their relative dominance and competition.
**In the shadow of yourself**

DSA gives attention not only to the I-positions which we see as positive and precious parts of ourselves, but also to I-positions and emotions which are less desirable or even entirely unacceptable. Somebody may define himself as ‘critical’ until he discovers that he is primarily critical of people whom he sees as successful. Closer scrutiny, however, shows that he is jealous but unable to openly confess this to himself. We describe this as a ‘shadow position,’ a side of ourselves which is clearly there and has influence on our evaluations and behavior. Because this position is not accepted and even suppressed, it will manifest itself in disguise, at the cost of our authenticity, not only in the relationship with others but with ourselves. Often such shadow positions have significant emotional consequences: emotions in the self are organized in different layers. Under a negative emotion, another deeper emotion can be hidden. Under irritation or anger, anxiety can reside or under sarcasm there can be pain or oversensitivity. Via deepening forms of investigation, DSA explores the different layers of emotions and brings them into dialogical contact with each other and other parts of the self.

**In the prison of your I-position**

The longer we devote ourselves, in our professional and personal life, to the realization of a particular I-position, the more established it becomes in our self. After some time we may notice that we become ‘imprisoned’ in such a position. A person who, in his professional life, used to be competitive or was living with high ambitions, may in the course of time feel that he is locked up in this position. It may be difficult for him to feel sincere compassion with other people or become engaged in a warm cooperation with another person. In such a case, DSA will provide methods which can be used to activate neglected or suppressed I-positions or to introduce new ones. A broadening of the position repertoire will then stimulate the flexibility of the person to change from an ambitious positions to other positions so that the rigidity of the self becomes reduced.
**Benefits and applications**

DSA is an approach which brings together one’s professional and personal live as two sides of the same coin. The diversity of I-positions and their mutual dialogical relationships are central points of attention. Conflict, contradiction and opposition in the self are normal phenomena and can even be a source of creativity. The purpose is to explore important I-positions which become part of ourselves in contemporary society with its many possibilities and uncertainties and relate them to each other in such a way that fruitful cooperations and coalitions may emerge.

DSA is particularly useful for reorientation in work and education, career questions, stress problems and burn-out, identity questions, and problems in social relationships.
2. SCIENTIFIC BASIS

DSA has a broad scientific basis. Every two years, an international conference is organized in another country. The 6th International Conference on the Dialogical Self, organized in Cambridge, UK in 2008, brought together 300 researchers and professionals from 43 countries.

In the course of almost 20 years several hundreds of articles and books have been published. The theory and its practical implications are published in the standard work of Hubert J.M. Hermans en Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka (2010). *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and counter-positioning in a globalizing society*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

**Reviews**

‘The ‘dialogical self’ is among the most important and original new theories in the social sciences in the past 20 years…The book should be welcome in all those fields as a major contribution to the understanding of globalization.’

*Jeffrey Arnett, Clark University, USA*

By far the most accessible and comprehensive statement to date on the Dialogical Self, this volume ranges across a set of problems that bring together the practical and theoretical, the local and global, positioning theory and emotion research, in a timely and important theoretical elaboration. The scope and promise of the authors’ work ensures that it will serve as a crucial reference for research and conceptual scholarship on the emerging conceptualization of the Dialogical Self.’

*Henderikus J.Stam, Chief-editor Theory & Psychology, Canada*
3. PERSONAL POSITION REPERTOIRE (PPR) METHOD

The Personal Position Repertoire (PPR) method is used by coaches, counselors and trainers and clients to investigate and understand better their identity, emotions and social relations. Imagine your own self as a stage where different characters come together and interact. From the left backstage, characters belonging to the internal domain of yourself come to the fore, for example, ‘I as a fighter,’ ‘I as an optimist, and ‘I as a pessimist’ (you can take your own examples). From the right backstage, characters belonging to your external world come to the fore, for example, ‘my colleague John,’ ‘my father’ and ‘my mother.’ As soon as these internal and external characters meet on the stage, they create particular combinations. These combinations are important patterns in which a person functions in his relations. For example, ‘I a fighter’ becomes particularly prominent in relation to ‘my colleagues,’ as I’m working in a very competitive organization. ‘I as an optimist’ is evoked primarily by my father, because he used to smile in the most difficult circumstances. On the contrary, my mother appeals to my pessimist side because she used to warn me for all kinds of risks and dangers. This example is quite simplified because in reality there are more internal characters (or internal I-positions) and more significant others (or external I-positions) than described here. But it shows that on this stage of the self, internal and external positions meet, form particular combinations and become engaged in different kinds of interactions.

I as fighter – *is activated in relation with my colleagues*

I as an optimist – *is activated in relation with my father*

I as a pessimist—*is activated in relation with my mother*

The same procedure can be followed when we consider emotions. My anger is particularly evoked in relation to my brother with whom I always disagree on political matters, while I often feel anxiety when I think of the future of my children. Imagine that there are more emotions and more significant others and you see a host of possible combinations and interactions.
Access to unconscious positions

Probably the most intriguing aspect of the PPR is its entrance to the less conscious layers of the self. Imagine that a particular internal position (e.g., I as creative) is stimulated very strongly by my colleague Frank with whom I cooperate in a challenging project; it is stimulated to some extent by my girl-friend Anita and not at all by my action-oriented sportmate Tim. This combination of ‘very strong’, ‘to some extent’ and ‘not at all’ represents a profile of an internal position across a larger set of external positions. As each internal position has its characteristic profile, the profiles of different positions can be compared with each other. The computer program does this by calculating ‘correlations’ between all the profile of the investigation. Precisely there, unconscious connections are to be discovered.

For example, in an extensive case study (Hermans, 2001), a client, Nancy, had a prominent position of ‘I as recognition seeker’ because she was striving for visibility in many social situations in her life. It was an important discovery to her to see that her need for recognition was originating from ‘the child in myself’ that always wanted to be in the center of attention in a very egocentric way. But there was more to discover. There was another position, ‘I as jealous,’ which showed a very low prominence because Nancy could not easily accept this side of herself. The more desirable recognition seeker had a much higher place in the prominence order. Apparently, undesirable positions like the child in herself and her jealousy which is attributed a low place in the prominence order, had high correlations with a desirable figure (the recognition seeker), which is high in the prominence order. This specific organization of the repertoire suggests that the undesirable positions function as a ‘shadow positions’. This means that these positions, although they are pushed to the background of the self-system (therefore receiving low prominence), accompany and even influence a more acceptable position (recognition seeker) that is assigned a place in the foreground of the system. From the perspective of authenticity, it is important to realize that, although shadow positions are less conspicuous and prominent, they may be very influential from a background of the repertoire.

The same procedure can be followed when one wants to investigate a particular external position in the context of other external positions. For example, it may be revealing and significant to a client to know the place of his ex-wife in the context of other external positions in his repertoire. When the highest correlation is found with his dominating mother, then this may result in the insight that he feels attracted to women who, on a lower level of consciousness, are associated with his dominating mother, to whom he always felt a stubborn resistance.
What is the benefit of the PPR-method?

The method has the following benefits:

It shows the relationships between your internal self and significant others so that you know the meaning of others from the perspective of the different sides of yourself. It reveals important patterns in which you relate to others.

It makes clear which internal positions are most prominent and which are least prominent so that a person gets an insight in his or her identity organization. The same with external positions. It shows what other people mean to you and what place you give them in your personal and professional life.

It gives access to the less conscious layers of the self and in this way deepens self-insight and stimulates self-discovery.

Knowledge about the organization of one’s position repertoire is particularly relevant in cases of identity and career questions, stress problems, burn-out, and dissatisfaction in social relations.
4. COMPOSITION WORK

Composition work belongs to the **dialogical self approach** and is inspired by **art** and a **scientific model** of the self: Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans, 2001). The client (self-investigator) is invited to take the position of an artist and to compose his own self-landscape. This method is relevant for coaching, training, counseling and education.

**Landscape of the mind**

The **Dialogical Self** has been described as dynamic multiplicity of I-positions in the landscape of mind (Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992). **I-positions** are understood as different sides of one’s personality, characters belonging to a person (e.g. I as anxious, I as strong, I as happy, I as a clown). I-positions are not only internal but also external ones, like significant others or external aspects of one’s self (e.g. my friend, nature, my father).

We ask a person to make a composition which represents a variety of I–positions and emotions. The relations between them are explored and a unique pattern becomes visible. This relational landscape of the mind can be expressed, like any landscape, in an artistic composition.
There are many possible materials to use in the compositions work. Composition can have more or less emphasis on nonverbal elements. We often use stones as nonverbal material accompanied with verbal labels and sentences. Stones are according to Jaffe universal symbols of psyche which are sacred and mysterious to a man. In Zen gardens they are “expressions of the most refined spirituality” (Jaffe, pp.259), and have also symbolic meaning for ancient and primitive societies. Famous Stonehenge is a prehistoric monument located in the English county of Wiltshire. According to Tomo thy Darvill it could serve a function of healing. Other researchers suppose it to have a meaning of transition between life and death. Symbolism and influence of stones on human psyche have to do with the combination between its abstract and realistic qualities. The colors, structures and shapes of stones are close to expressions in abstract art. They can influence human mind in a similar way as the abstract art does. As abstract art according to Kandinsky has a direct appeal on the soul, stones representing abstract forms have also potential of unmediated by words influence on human psyche. “The more abstract is the form, the more clear and direct is its appeal” (p.32) in view of Kandinsky. The forms and, pattern of stones having an abstract quality speak directly to the human mind.

We provide clients with a variety of stones, from which they choose those which represent their I-positions and emotions. They place them together so that they represent a composition which fits to their own experience. In choosing stones as material we were inspired by Japanese gardens called ‘mind-scapes.’

Other forms of artistic work are possible, like creating a composition of I-positions by placing words in a circle. This includes the possibility for clients to speak from the point of view of specific I-positions (e.g., ‘As an ambitious person I want….. but as an enjoyer of life I want…..’). Bodily movements and feelings as associated with specific I-positions are also part of such an exploration.
Variety of I positions and emotions

The stones placed below represent different I–positions. Stones can also represent emotions. The texture, colors, size, location in the space of the stones and other aspects can be discussed with the clients. Some examples are below.

I as leader

John: “I as leader of my team, has a warm color, it is about connection and energy.”

I as critical: Bob: “Critical is like a knife, is sharp, creates pain, I cannot have rest in myself. It is big, I feel it hits me.”

I as woman

Ana: I as woman: “I like to enjoy life, colorful, feeling this energy of being a woman, wherever I am”.

Patterns

The client explores the relations between different positions and is searching for important patterns. The essential quality of a composition is its pattern and as parts of this pattern positions and emotions can be viewed as receiving their place in a larger whole. The client gets an overview of his or her I-positions and emotions and insight in their organization.
Space

The landscape of the dialogical self consists not only of I-positions and emotions, but also of the space which surrounds them. The space is an integral aspect of the dialogical self. In work with composition we pay also attention to the transition between the positions and the broader experiential space.

Robert: “I experienced this space from which I can allow all my characters, they have enough space, I am looking from this space and I can be all, I can be much more, there are also unknown parts”.

The composition of the dialogical self can be understood and explored in terms of three aspects:

- **I-positions** create **patterns** which are organized in the landscape of the mind. These patterns show the dynamism of the self and give an insight in what is going on in the self, which I-positions are important, which are strong or rejected, which are in conflict, and which are in coalition, etc.

- The space in the composition allows understanding better the **relation between I-positions**, for example, the distances between I-positions evoke discussion about the relation between these I-positions. The way the positions are located in the space can reflect their importance and the power relation between them.

- **The space itself** is also a very important aspect of work with composition and can be seen as a door to the transpersonal level of the self. This allows to go beyond the content of I-positions and emotions in the direction of transcendentinal awareness.
Benefits

Composition work is about discovering the **potential and richness of one’s self** including the variety of emotions and sides of the self. There is much space to play with fantasy. Who could you possibly be? Inspired by possible positions (e.g., wizard, a hermit, a general) people can discover enormous hidden potential. In a playful space created by art they go beyond limiting and existing patterns.

Composition work allows exploring **relations within the self** (between different aspects of the self like, for example, the conflict between the dreamer and the pragmatic position or one’s artistic and business position) and **relations with others**. Relations with others can be understood better when a person has insight in what is going on in the self. When a person does not accept her sadness, for example, she can have difficulties to experience and accept the sadness of another person. When a person rejects some parts of himself it can have influence on the social relations in which these aspects come back (e.g., John cannot stand the anger of his colleague because he rejects his own anger).

Composition allows exploration of important **problems**, issues and questions from variety of perspectives. Making a composition, a person works with the **multiplicity** of his or her I-positions (e.g., I as spiritual, I as ambitious, I as weak, I as enjoyer of life, I as anxious). Contradictive and conflicting positions receive space in the same composition and a person can search for a constructive way to deal with these tensions.

This method uses the **integrative potential of art** and **insights** offered by a **scientific model**, in this way it brings together the power of art and science in one coherent methodology of coaching, counseling and training.

**Artistic vision on the dialogical self**

_Eli Siegel: „All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves“_

**Artistic vision** on the dialogical self helps to **go beyond splits** (positive versus negative, good versus bad) in the self and allows different aspects of the self. “Viewing and experienc-
ing the repertoire as a composition functions as a counter-force to the good versus bad, winner versus loser, pleasant versus unpleasant or in-group versus out-group dichotomies, so that it prevents the exclusion or devaluation of important parts of the position repertoire” (Hermans, Hermans-Konopka, 2010). In this way the richness and potential of the self can be more allowed.

**Every moment of experience** and **every aspect of one’s self** has its potentially artistic quality, when we go beyond categories: positive versus negative, and pleasant versus unpleasant. Art can even be created from difficult unpleasant feelings, they themselves can be artistic. You can feel your sadness in an artistic way and you can see a glass of water as a piece of art. You can compose a film; make poetry, paint, on the basis of short moments in everyday life. Every moment and feeling can be potential material for art. It is possible to develop this artistic position and to depict your experience as a composition.

**“I as an artist”: a promoter position**

**“Magic lies in the state of mind of the artist”**

*Trungpa*

When a person makes a composition he or she takes the position of an artist. He looks at his life with the eye of an artist who brings different sides of himself in one composition, for example, I as powerful, I as weak, or I as striving for recognition are placed in composition and transformed into symbols, stones or metaphors. A person as an artist can relate to his emotions is a new open way. All of them can become like art. Sadness, joy or anxiety become parts of composition which is fulfilling when all of them receive their place. A person starts to see that there is no need to struggle against negative emotions; they become important parts of an encompassing experience. This is a special kind of art, not art which is made to impress, but made to deepen, express, explore one’s experience and to realize a better contact with your own self.

The artist’s position can enrich life by allowing the broader spectrum of its colors. This position does not imply the necessity of becoming a painter or a singer. A person can be an artist in the way she relates to herself and to the world, in the way she experiences emotions, herself and others. By its enriching insight and by its provoking and integrative role in one’s life, an artist position can become a **promoter position**.
**Promoter position** is a position which has integrative functions in the self, it can reorganize the self towards higher levels of the development, protect its continuity but giving also space for some discontinuity (Hermans, Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

In work with composition, an artist position can receive a promoter function in the self.

*Some artistic sources of inspiration for work with composition.*

**Wabi**

Wabi: a value in Japanese aesthetics characterized by a shortage of forms, forms disappearing in the space, irregularities and imperfections. Wabi can be discovered in smoke disappearing in the space, a broken piece of wood, or footprints in the sand or mysterious fog. Wabi shows the transition from an object to its surrounding space, from a form into formless. Wabi celebrates imperfection of forms.

Some people find a magic fascination in Wabi objects. What is its source? It seems to *bridge* the world of form and formless, object and space. This transitional character can gives access to the transpersonal level of existence.

Wabi can become an artistic expression of a negative experience, of sadness, loss, impermanence and via this value such experiences can be respected in their unique qualities. They are lifted up to the level of art which goes beyond the dualism: positive–negative, pleasant-unpleasant.

**Wabi invites an artistic attitude** towards experiences of shortage, imperfection and sadness, which helps to accept them as important parts of experience rather that trying to get rid of them. In work with composition Wabi can inspire an *experience of transition between a form (I –position, emotion) and space*. Every experience evolves and disappears, it is a dynamic process. Every I-position is a dynamic process of positioning and this fluidity should be according to Rowan (2010) promoted in order to prevent rigidity of I–positions. It seems that wabi focuses attention on the process of disappearing and evolving and can teach us to pay more attention for these moments in work with
I–positions and emotions.
Wabi can also become an invitation to the **transpersonal** level of work in coaching. Coaching work is usually concerned about the content of experience, Wabi on the other hand focuses attention on space which transcends the content and reduces the dominance of this content in our minds.

**Japanese rock gardens**

Japanese rock gardens are called mind-scapes, landscapes of the mind, which creates a link with dialogical self depicted as a landscape of mind. In Japanese rock gardens the space is emphasized. The attention is focused not only on the rocks, but also on the spaces between: „One who looks, sees stones, but the one who perceives, notes the spaces in-between, called ma, which create the spatial pattern of the whole garden” writes Ching Yu-Chan (2008). Space in-between becomes also an important part of the work with the self as composition.

**Ritual mandalas**

Ritual mandalas in Buddhism or Hinduism represent a psychocosmos, they are like „small universes of mind”. Within these mandalas both monsters and friendly deities receive their place, like different I-positions including shadow sides. In order to move in the direction of the centre, a person needs to confront the monsters, symbolized by walking through their mouth. The same in work with composition, confronting/allowing shadow sides, walking through difficult emotions is seen as important for one’s developmental process.

The principle of mandala presented by Trungpa (1991) is called ‘orderly chaos.’ There is some order in the pattern of the mandala, but it is at the same time confusing to work with different aspects of a mandala. In composition work a person is confronted with a variety of states and positions, some of them can be problematic or evoke painful experiences, but they belong to the ONE composition.
The Positioning Theatre is a psychodramatic method for investigating, clarifying, and developing the relationships with others and with yourself. It promotes your potential of dealing with inner and outer conflicts and tensions. It allows to understand them better, find constructive solutions or new perspectives. Different versions of the Positioning Theatre can be devised but its basic structure is as follows. A group of people meet for a group performance. One of them is invited to act as client (self-investigator). The client is invited to select some of the group members to represent some of his most important external positions (e.g., father, mother, siblings, teacher, boss, colleague). Then, the client is invited to introduce some of his most important internal positions (e.g., ‘I as a loner,’ ‘I as dreamer,’ ‘I as an immigrant,’ ‘I as victim of violence’). All these external and internal positions receive their own place in the room as determined by the client. The external positions of the client are represented by different group members who participate in the play, whereas the internal positions are represented by the client him- or herself. That is, the client has the possibility to move back and forth between different places in the room that represent his internal positions, in this way experimenting with the distance and proximity between the (conflicting, opposing, or allying) parts of himself and between his internal positions and the group members who represent his significant others.

The structure of external and internal positions, their spatial representation, and possibility to make actual movements in the space provide ideal opportunities for the client to bring the positions of his self, including their contradictions, tensions, and conflicts, to embodied expression. The relationships between the positions can be analyzed with criteria that reflect the way a person organizes his position repertoire: the proximity and distance between the positions, their centrality and marginality, the existence of subgroups of positions, and the isolation of particular positions from the larger community of positions. An important distinction is that between accepted or owned and unaccepted or disowned of ‘shadow’ positions. The procedure helps clients to integrate rejected or disowned positions and to give them a place in the relationship with themselves and their significant others.

**Dialogical interchanges**

The method provides the possibility to stimulate dialogical relationships between different positions which is crucial for integration, innovation and development of the self. One position
can approach another position, address it, and ask a question so that dialogical interchanges may develop with the consequence that the intentions, needs, memories, desires, and emotions of a particular position can be explored, expressed, and shared. In these interchanges the participants representing the external positions of the client serve as particularly important innovators of the client’s self as they are permitted to take initiatives and challenge the client’s actions.

The client can change the organization of his I-positions in the space, and he can experiment with different places connected to his I-positions. When other people play the I-positions of the client, the guide helps him to take his own decisions, so that he himself can arrange the space of the play and is not dominated by the voices of others. He can recognize what are the voices of his own positions.

Dialogical interchanges can be of a verbal and/or non-verbal nature. The non-verbal realm can be explored by the posture and facial expressions that are typical of a particular position. The self-researcher can reveal the nature of a position by bodily movements such as walking, standing still, lying, touching, and closing or opening the body. The whole play can even receive the form of a pantomime or performed as a mixture of verbal and non-verbal elements.

**The importance of taking a meta-position**

A central place is devoted to the so-called meta-position, that provides an overview of the whole play, the positions involved and their mutual relationship. So, when the client is moving through the variety of his internal positions and from there addressing the external positions, he is invited by the leader of the play to return at some point to his *meta-position* as the place which provides an overview of the experiences emerging from the play and from which he can see and evaluate the nature of the relationships between several positions. Moreover, this is the place where the client can become aware of what he *learns* from the encounters between the positions. In this way, two movements, distinguished in the Dialogical Self Approach, are realized in the Theatre: *decentering* movements: our are distributed in very different positions in different situations and *centering* movement which makes that you hold them together and organize them into a workable whole.

The fact that the client has the possibility to select and define not only the external but also his internal positions, gives space to the expression of the *individual world of the client* with attention to its multiplicity, not only in his social environment but also in the inner dyna-
mism of the self. As the preceding exposition has demonstrated, the Positioning Theatre is gratefully inspired by psychodrama.

However, we believe that the Positioning Theatre gives, more than psychodrama, space to the differences, conflicts, oppositions, and tensions between the positions in the internal domain of the self. We do so on the belief that the developmental trajectories of the specific positions can follow their own specific path if the multiplicity of the self is fully acknowledged.

*What are the benefits*

The Positioning Theatre enables the participant to explore the apparent differences, oppositions, and conflicts which exist in the self and in one’s relations.

Multiplicity is central not only in the internal self but also in the external social environment. Internal multiplicity is connected with external multiplicity. The play invites the participant to move from the outside to the inside and, vice versa, from the inside to the outside, contributing to empathy, compassion, and the flexibility of the self.

The body and bodily experiences are a central part of the method. The emphasis is not on thinking but on experiencing and doing. It is a form of reflection-in-action, applied in such a way that internal dialogue is stimulated by the verbal and nonverbal reactions of the group members.

This method is particularly useful when a person experiences a split between his internal world and external environment. It gives a highly dynamic expression to inside emotions and imaginations and confronts them with external reality.

The method can be used as a means to explore one’s social aspirations and problems, the different sides of one’s personal or social identity, and possible obstacles to respond in an authentic way to other people.
6. EMOTIONAL COACHING

In usual education people learn how to think, to count and use words but they do not learn how to involve emotions in their personal and professional development. I remember that at school I had to study a lot about the lungs of a frog, legs of a spider but I never learned what my sadness, anger, or joy can signalize and how I could deal with them.

This gap can be filled by emotional coaching training, developed within the Dialogical Self Approach (DSA) (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) which is based on both research and practice (Greenberg, 2000, 2008). DSA offers a method of emotional coaching which aims to teach how to use the potential of one’s emotions in order to stimulate personal and professional development.

Emotions are powers of change

Research showed that emotions can transform the self (Hermans-Konopka, 2006, Hermans-Konopka & Hermans, 2010, Whelton, 2000, Levenson, 1998). Accessing new emotions can be a source of innovation and change on the level of experience, motivation and behavior. Emotions organize our cognition and perception and being influenced by them we see the world, others and ourselves, in a different way. Emotions not only create temporary changes, but deep emotional experience can be a turning points in one’s life.

How good is your relation with your own emotions?

People often lose energy fighting against their emotions, we try to transform these fights into a cooperation.

The development of a person is influenced not only by relations with significant others but also by the quality of relation with feelings. People often spoil their energy fighting against their own feelings, not allowing them or escaping them. As coaches and educators we can teach people how to make friends out of their emotions rather than enemies. In emotional coaching we work on the improvement of this relation.
Without contact with emotions people are not able to make decisions.

Even simple decisions cannot be made without contact with emotions. Research done by Damasio made clear that reason is not enough to solve problems and to take decisions. People who lost the contact with their emotions were not able to make decisions (e.g., on which day to make an appointment) and they were unable to estimate risks (e.g., what can happen when I do this?). They lost the emotional reference system which guides us every day in making small and big decisions, solving problems and estimating risks.

Potential of emotions

Emotions are a great source of connection with others and yourself, sources of motivation and authentic functioning. They activate energy and focus our attention on important goals. When a person lacks a good contact with feelings, he or she can be easily dominated by voices of others, not being able to feel what he or she really wants. People need to feel what they want and need embodied affective contact with themselves.

In order to use these adaptive qualities of emotions people need to develop good contact with them, and they need to be able to distinguish between authentic and instrumental feelings (I have to feel this), and between deeper and superficial ones.

Emotions as I–prisons

The constructive potential of emotion can be lost in rigid emotional patterns (e.g., always reacting first with anxiety and then with anger). They can become then like “I–prisons” limiting people’s functioning and acting like blockages. Rigid anxiety then colors the perception of the world and persistent anger is destructive for one’s relations. These emotions can become more adaptive in emotional coaching, but in clinical cases they need therapeutic interventions.

How to work with emotions?: Stage Model in emotional coaching
By following the steps in a **stage model of work on emotions** (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, published by Cambridge University), we stimulate emotional awareness, dialogue between emotions and expression of emotions by bringing them together in an artistic composition. Art with its integrative potential allows relating with emotions in a very open, non-judgmental way and negative emotions can be transformed without removing them. When we bring together art and emotions, we have a very strong tool of enrichment and change in coaching, counseling, training and education.

The stage model of work with emotions includes 7 stages which can be applied in flexible, not necessary successive way.

- Entering an emotion
- Leaving an emotion
- Entering a counter-emotion
- Leaving a counter-emotion
- Dialogue between emotions
- Making a composition of emotions
- Finding a promoter position

The first stages of the stage model are focused on getting in touch with a variety of emotions and their embodied experience (entering stage). This is like a travel through a variety of emotional landscapes, which stimulates emotional flexibility and richness. In this travel it not only important to feel an emotion, that is, to be *in* an emotion (e.g., in your uncertainty), but also to letting it go (leaving stage) and move to another emotion (e.g., strength). Contrasting emotions (e.g., uncertainty and strength) are brought in dialogue in order to provoke change and innovation (e.g., the person finds new ways of moving from uncertainty to strength without denying or suppressing the uncertainty). In the composition stage, the potential of art is introduced. This stage brings insight in emotional patterns: all emotions are brought together so that the person sees the relations between them. In the promoter stage we search for an emotion or aspect of the self (e.g., which aspect of yourself gives you most direction in your life?), or a person who is especially important for one’s total development (e.g., an inspiring figure who acts as a model for you).
The stage model as a basis for emotional coaching can be applied in training, coaching, counseling and education, whenever there is a need for developing emotional skills. Essential in the stage model is the question: how do emotions change the self, and how does the self cope with emotions.

What are benefits of emotional coaching?

- People learn to be in a better **contact with their emotions** and to build a constructive relation with the emotions of themselves and those of others.
- People may discover **enriching** qualities of their emotions or emotions that they were not aware of before.
- Clients learn how to better **deal with their negative emotions**, they will learn to use negative emotions as signs which needs to be understood.
- People who can better read their emotions will be able to be in contact with their **needs** and organize their lives by taking them into account.
- Leaders will learn how to act from their hearts in an **authentic and passionate way** and will learn how to deal better with the **emotion of others**.
- People in emotional coaching will learn to be rooted in their **deeper feelings** and are then less dominated by superficial positions and intruding voices and expectations of others.
- Connecting with one’s emotional depth is especially important in our time of globalization, when people are overwhelmed by complexity and too many options. Emotions help to find a **direction** which is rooted in one’s heart.

Questions for reflection:

*Do you, as a coach, trainer, counselor or educator, use the potential of emotions in order to*
stimulate the change, innovation and development of your client?

Do you know what is your own relation with your feelings?

How do you relate and deal with negative feelings of yourself and your clients?

What would you like to learn about emotions?

**Limitation**

This method is not prepared for a clinical group with serious emotional disorders. It is focused on the stimulation of the personal and professional development of people rather than being a form of psychotherapy.

**Conclusion**

Emotional Coaching can be applied in individual and group work and is a part of the Dialogical Self Approach. It offers for coaches and educators a scientific, research and practice based methodology focused on the development of emotions as powerful tools of self-innovation and development.
This example will show how can we work with a client during a first session. Such an interview provides a basis for a further coaching and gives relevant information. Andre, a 43-year-old man, worked some years abroad for several American companies. From 2007 he works as CEO for an European company in Asia. During the first coaching session (Ton Voogt as coach) André defines his important I-positions and places them in a circle. This circle represents his self space.

The coach leads the session asking the following questions:

Where is the tension in your space?
“Between the right under group and the upper group. The under group is the “restriction group” (I as son of my mother; my pain; I as vulnerable; I as anxious; I as pessimist) and the upper group (I as ambitious; I as self-confident; I as perfectionist) This group gives me power and energy.

Which group is most dominant?
“The upper group”
The coach asks more and more profound questions which allows for an exploration of the position repertoire of the client and the nature of its organization.
Dialogical Self is a dynamic process, which includes, oppositions, tensions, and multiplicity.
We developed a system of questions which allows to explore the dynamism of the self. The coach also asks about **voices** connected with different positions. The client gives following answers (examples):

Voice of ‘I as ambitious:’ “You must be a strong man. You must be above the level. You make efforts all the time.”

Voice of ‘I as sacrificing:’ You must be generous. Do not be afraid to be poor.”

This way of work with composition allows to explore the organization of the self (identity) and gives a basis for understanding relations between different positions (tensions, conflicts, undeveloped sides which are blocked by dominant positions, and power relations in the self).

In the case of Andre many positions have a “must voice” and they lead to a self with a “must composition”. In such a composition it can be important to distinguish between the dominant voices of culture and significant others on the one hand and voices connected with needs of the client and his personal positions on the other hand.

The client receives an overview of his own self which is like a map for further coaching. On the basis of such a map we can choose a further way of work and use the different methods of the dialogical self approach in flexible ways.
About the authors

Prof Hubert Hermans, creator of the Dialogical Self Theory, is author of approximately 200 scientific publications, mainly on the Self-Confrontation Method and Dialogical Self Theory. His work is translated into nine languages. He is author of *Self-Narratives: The Construction of Meaning in Psychotherapy* (with Els Hermans-Jansen), *The Dialogical Self in Psychotherapy* (with Giancarlo Dimaggio) and *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society* (with Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka). He developed internationally applied methods, among them the Self Confrontation Method (SCM) and the Personal Position Repertoire (PPR) method. The SCM led to the establishment of a professional association (300 members). For his merits Hubert Hermans received a decoration of Knight in the Society of the Netherlands Lion. His ideas were used in the formation of the government in The Netherlands in 2006. On the basis of his work, biennial International Conferences on the Dialogical Self are organized in different parts of the world.

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(info@dialogicalinstitute.com) did her dissertation on the relation between self and emotion. She is focused on work with emotions (as important sources of connection, authenticity and innovation), awareness (related to spiritual dimension of the self) and abstract art from a dialogical perspective. She gives trainings, lectures and individual coaching internationally (e.g. The Netherlands, Japan and Greece, Poland) on the basis of a scientist-practitioner paradigm. She is the leader of the global *Dialogical Practice Network*, author of articles on emotions, awareness and art and co-author of the book: *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society* published by Cambridge University press in 2010.
Ton Voogt integrates his 20 years of international experience as a chief executive officer in practice of training and coaching Management Top Talents based on his study in psychology (organization development, psychodrama, group therapy). He develops educational designs in the area of personal and organizational development and is specialized in leadership and cooperation. As a board member of Schouten Training, he is responsible for the development of a training institute in China. He teaches at Schouten University and in the International Institute for the Dialogical Self. He promotes the application of the Dialogical Self Theory in Management Development.

References:


About International Institute for the Dialogical Self

International Institute for The Dialogical Self gives training, education programs and coaching in the Dialogical Self Approach.

We offer a certification system for practitioners (in coaching, counseling and education) which allows to become a Dialogical Self Practitioner. The training for practitioners brings together personal and professional development.

We also offer programs for leaders and managers in the form of coaching and training.

More info: www.dialogicalinstitute.com

About Dialogical Practice Network

International Institute for the Dialogical Self developed an international Dialogical Practice Network which has in 2011 members from 33 countries.

Dialogical Practice Network (DPN) is a global network of practitioners, scientists-practitioners, managers and artists who are involved or interested in the application of methods based on Dialogical Self Theory

More info: www.dialogicalpractice.com